

## **Exploring racial and gender discrimination: A sociological study of Leila Simani's *In the Country of Others***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*One of the prominent social issues today is discrimination, depicted in various literary works. This study examines the forms and causes of discrimination against female characters in Leila Slimani's novel, employing Pettigrew's discrimination theory and a sociology of literature approach as well as Wellek and Warren's literary sociology approach. Those theories are utilized as a method of sociology-focus approach to analyze some quotes which depicts the discrimination. In the end, this study found that female characters in the story face direct discrimination through citizenship status and race. Besides, the characters also suffered physical attacks, as well as gender and indirect discrimination through property ownership restrictions and marriage regulations. Pettigrew's theory attributes these discriminatory acts to prejudice and stereotypes.*

**Keywords:** *racial discrimination, gender discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, sociology of literature, Leila Slimani*

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the social issues that is circulating quite widely now is discrimination. Discrimination is still a debate in social life. According to data from the National Commission on Abuse against Female in the last 12 years, discrimination against female has increased by 792%. Not only that, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been recorded that case of discrimination against female have also increased to 63%, of which 59.82% of the cases are domestic discrimination that makes adult female the victims. The National Commission on Abuse Against Female also reported an increase in online gender-based discrimination to 940 cases in 2020, compared to just 241 cases in 2019. Women are discriminated against in many aspects. Women are not free to do any things they want. It is caused by system that works in the society. They are regarded as the subordinate of men. They can't do anything like what men do. There are many activities that they do such as being active in politics, having carrier outside are regarded as taboo. Besides, they are not permitted to get along with anybody freely (Syamsuddin, 2007).

The large number of cases of discrimination that occur in various parts of the world, especially those that have been included in literary works. Therefore, literature plays an important role to realize cultural practice. It is literature that makes readers aware of many social issues such as slavery, racism, and feminism. In other words,

literature somehow sells a lifestyle (Kusuma, 2021). That is what makes it interested to conduct research on acts of discrimination that occur in novels, especially in the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani. Apart from that, this novel suit to be used as study material because it is full of multiculturalism as a basic correction of the single domination carried out by the majority group over minorities, which is often found in the dimensions of society in general. Through her work, Slimani presents an in-depth picture of complex social dynamics. Such as discrimination, moral issues, and other challenges. With the right storyline, this novel becomes a form of mirror for readers to think more deeply about and understand various social conflicts that are sometimes difficult to express in the context of everyday life.

This study analyzes the discrimination against female characters contained in the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani. The analysis was conducted to identify, classify and analyze discrimination in the novel. By using Pettigrew's theory of discrimination and the sociology of literature approach, this study aims to describe the types of discrimination contained in the novel. However, this study is not the pioneer study to examine Pettigrew's theory of discrimination using the sociology of literature approach. Hence, this study aims to emphasize the analysis by adding the sociological approach of literature from Wellek and Warren's theories. It will be used to analyze the provide details and in-depth analysis of how this discrimination is reflected in the narrative, including understanding the author's intentions and identifying things that are implied and related to the social issues raised in the novel. Therefore, another aim of this research is to examine the discrimination experienced by female characters using Pettigrew's theory of discrimination and to look at the causal factors experienced by victims of discrimination through Pettigrew's theory in the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE**

Sociology and literature both focus on the study of literature in society, yet they differ fundamentally in their approaches. Sociology confines itself to the present situation without prescribing what should happen, while literature is evaluative, subjective, and imaginative. The sociology of literature posits that literary works reflect the society at the time they were created (Didipu, 2018:91). Swingewood (1972, p.18) outlines three approaches in his study of literary works: literature as a reflection of the times, literature viewed through the authorship process, and literature in its historical context. Swingewood asserts that literary works are sociocultural documents that can reveal societal phenomena of the time they were written, a concept he terms literary documentation. He quotes Luis De Bonald, who suggests that closely reading national literature reveals the state of society, and Stendhal, who describes novels as mirrors

traveling along the road (Swingewood, 1972, p.13). This concept aligns with literature as a mimesis (imitation) of its time to depict social phenomena.

Wellek and Warren's classification in *"Theory of Literature"* (1948, p.91) divides the sociology of literature into three types: author sociology, which examines the social background, status, and ideology of authors; sociology of literary works, which focuses on the content and social implications of the works themselves; and sociology of readers, which investigates the influence of literature on society and vice versa. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between literature, humans, and society, examining both objective and subjective dimensions of social phenomena.

Sociology of literature considers literary works as products of their social environment, reflecting the social conditions and experiences of their time. Swingewood (1972) emphasizes the scientific study of humans in society, analyzing social institutions and processes to understand societal dynamics. This perspective aligns with Soerjono Sukanto's definition of sociology as a science focusing on general aspects of society and seeking to identify general patterns in people's lives. Swingewood (1972) distinguishes between two types of sociological investigations using literary data: one that examines the social environment and its influence on literature, and another that links the structure of literary works to specific genres and societies. This method, termed sociology of literature, analyzes the social factors that produce literary works and the social context in which they are created.

In analyzing the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani, this study uses a sociology of literature approach to this novel according to Wellek and Warren's second point. Namely the sociology of literature works, this approach focuses on the content of literary works, aims, and other aspects implicit in the literary work itself and which are related to social problems.

## **DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION**

The term discrimination, derived from the Latin *"discriminant,"* has evolved since its initial use in the 17th century to describe negative prejudicial attitudes, particularly against black people during the American Civil War. Today, discrimination encompasses all forms of prejudice and negative actions against various social identities. Banton (in Sunarto, 2004: 161) describes discrimination as differentiated treatment of individuals based on group membership.

Pettigrew (1982: 4) explains that discrimination is closely related to institutional racism, functioning at the societal level to exclude out-groups based on race or culture. This process often involves institutional policies that indirectly or directly restrict certain groups' access to opportunities and resources. Pettigrew identifies two main

types of discrimination: direct discrimination, which explicitly limits access to areas like housing, employment, and public facilities for certain racial or ethnic groups; and indirect discrimination, which involves policies that systematically disadvantage these groups without explicit intent to discriminate.

According to Theodorson & Theodorson (1979, p.258), a minority group is identified based on characteristics such as race, religion, or ethnicity, and experiences discriminatory treatment due to negative stigma. This unequal treatment often involves actions by a dominant majority against a weaker minority, reflecting immoral and undemocratic behavior. Newman defines discrimination as any act of differential treatment intended to create disadvantage based on group membership. Forms of discrimination include verbal expression, avoidance, exclusion, physical abuse, and extermination, as identified by Newman (in Miharso, 2009: 88).

Pettigrew's theory of discrimination is used to analyze the various forms of discrimination experienced by female characters in *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani, providing a deeper understanding of the social issues presented in the novel.

## **TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION**

Pettigrew in *"Prejudice"* (1982) differentiates discrimination into two types:

### **1. Direct Discrimination**

Direct discrimination involves actions that explicitly limit access to certain areas, such as housing, employment, and public facilities, based on personal characteristics like citizenship status, race, physical attack, region, and gender. For example, higher caste individuals are respected, while lower caste individuals face discrimination. The forms of discrimination are as Citizenship status can lead to unfair treatment, affecting employment, public services, and political rights. Racial discrimination manifests through social structures and institutions, creating systemic inequities. Physical attacks motivated by prejudice harm individuals and instilled fear within affected communities. Regional discrimination restricts citizens' ability to reside in certain areas, limiting their freedom of movement. Ageism, or discrimination based on age, affects employment, healthcare, and other critical areas. Lastly, gender discrimination, rooted in societal and cultural constructs, results in unfair treatment and inequality.

### **2. Indirect Discrimination**

Indirect discrimination occurs through policies or rules that indirectly restrict certain racial or ethnic groups from interacting freely with others. These rules may seem fair but contain hidden discrimination that systematically disadvantages certain groups. Such as government regulations prohibiting property ownership, government

regulations limiting property ownership, government regulations restricting work, and legal limits for immigrants, strict regulations on marriage to immigrants.

## **FACTORS OF DISCRIMINATION**

Thomas F. Pettigrew (1982) identifies two main factors causing discrimination: prejudice and stereotypes. Prejudice is a negative attitude towards an out-group, often based on stereotypes and reinforced by social learning and situational factors. It involves negative emotions and expectations towards certain groups, formed through competition, social learning, and influence from parents, media, and social environment. Stereotypes are overgeneralized beliefs about a group, contributing to prejudice and discriminatory behavior. They simplify complex social realities and perpetuate negative attitudes towards certain groups.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Data and data source in this research is the dialogue and narrative in novel "*In the Country of Others*" by Leila Slimani, publisher Éditions Gallimard, 36.8 pages, first printing, March 2021. This novel reveals how differences in cultural background, religion and identity produce subtle and overt forms of discrimination.

Data collection techniques in this study are reading techniques and note-taking techniques. Reading techniques used in this study were reading the novel "*In the Country of Others*" by Leila Slimani for several times. The first reading aims to understand and explore the problem of discrimination that occurred in the novel. Then, the second reading aims to focus on types of discrimination and causes of discrimination based on Pettigrew's theories. Afterwards, the note-taking techniques were carried out to note any types and causes of discrimination found in the novel. The data collected during reading steps are used as a data source in this study.

The analysis step is conducted through classifying data on identified narratives and dialogues that are related to the forms and causes of discrimination. The analysis is carried out by employing Pettigrew's theory of discrimination of types, forms, and causes. In the final step, conclusion was made based on the results of data analysis from the novel "*In the Country of Others*" by Leila Slimani using the perspectives of sociological approach of literature from Pettigrew's discrimination theories.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **THE FORMS OF RACIAL AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

In the novel "In the Country of Others" by Leila Slimani, various forms of racial discrimination against female characters are analyzed using Thomas F. Pettigrew's perspective on discrimination. This analysis revealed several forms of direct and indirect discrimination.

#### ***Direct Discrimination***

##### **a. Citizenship status**

Direct discrimination based on citizenship status is depicted in scenes where Moroccan characters face demeaning treatment from Europeans. For example, Mouilala and her children experienced overt insults and degrading physical acts from French women on the train. This action stemmed from the belief that Arabs were considered inferior and did not deserve first-class facilities. Aggressive actions, such as forcefully removing makeup from a child's face, demonstrate the emotional and psychological impact of such discriminatory actions. This is in line with Pettigrew's theory that discrimination involves visible and subtle acts of degradation that reinforce social hierarchies.

##### **b. Race**

Racial discrimination in the novel is depicted through negative assumptions and distrust towards Arab characters. For example, an Arab man is immediately considered a terrorist by a French individual simply because of his ethnicity. This shows how racial prejudice is embedded in societal attitudes and can lead to significant social divisions and inequalities of power, reinforcing Pettigrew's assertion that racial discrimination is deeply embedded in cultural and institutional norms.

##### **c. Physical attacks**

This novel also depicts physical attack as a form of direct discrimination. Mathilde, a French woman, experiences physical attack from her Moroccan husband, Amine. This attack is not only an expression of personal conflict but also reflects deeper cultural and social tensions, showing how physical attacks can be the most obvious form of prejudice.

##### **d. The relationship of discrimination forms with gender discrimination**

Gender discrimination is seen in the experiences of the characters in the novel. Mathilde faces resistance from her husband when fighting for women's rights, and Aïcha, their daughter, experiences teasing at school because of her appearance. Additionally, the traditional gender roles imposed on Mouilala by her husband further

demonstrate how gender-based discrimination limits women's opportunities and reinforces their subordination.

### ***Indirect Discrimination***

#### **a. Government regulations on property ownership and marriage**

The novel highlights indirect discrimination through systemic barriers that prevent certain groups from fully participating in society. For example, Moroccan government regulations on property ownership and marriage create significant barriers for foreign women like Mathilde, limiting their economic independence and reinforcing their marginalization. These regulations are an example of Pettigrew's concept of systemic discrimination, where policies and social norms maintain inequality and limit opportunities for minority communities.

#### **b. Government regulations on the property ownership prohibition**

In this narrative, Mathilde, a French woman who marries Amine, a Moroccan man, faces systemic obstacles that discriminate against her indirectly due to her status as a foreign woman in Morocco. The Moroccan government and broader social norms are responsible for this discrimination. The existing legal and social framework limits women's autonomy and economic opportunities, especially for foreign women. Although Mathilde works hard and is dedicated, her role is constrained by prevailing norms and regulations that prioritize male dominance and restrict women's involvement in property ownership and economic activities.

## **THE FACTORS OF RACIAL AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

Based on the book "*Prejudice*" by Thomas F. Pettigrew, discrimination in society is often caused by prejudice and stereotypes. Stereotypes can give rise to prejudice. Prejudice can make someone distance themselves from certain groups and tend to behave discriminatorily towards those groups.

### ***Stereotypes***

A stereotype is an assessment given to someone based on perceptions of the group into which the individual can be categorized. This causes deviations in assessing someone negatively just because of the characteristics possessed by other group members (generalization). As a result, a person cannot differentiate between the character possessed by individual members of the group and the character of the group itself. Stereotypes that are maintained over a long period of time will lead to prejudice and

discrimination. In the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani, it shows that stereotypes can trigger acts of discrimination.

In the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani, it is found that stereotypes can trigger discrimination in various social and cultural contexts. For example, Mathilde, as the main character, displays a stereotypical attitude towards Moroccan traditions and cultural values, describing them as "*scarf celebrations*" and "*cruel rituals*," without understanding the meaning and cultural values behind these practices. This attitude reflects views influenced by cultural bias and a lack of deep understanding of other cultures. On the other hand, Amine also shows stereotypes towards European women, considering them weak in facing reality and unable to control their emotions. These stereotypes may lead to discriminatory behavior towards Mathilde, reducing appreciation of the individual's perspective and experiences. Apart from that, in the educational context in this novel, there is cultural polarization at school which strengthens negative stereotypes of ethnic identity, as experienced by Aïcha who feels alienated because she does not belong to existing stereotypical groups. These illustrate how stereotypes can lead to social isolation and injustice in educational environments. This novel illustrates how stereotypes can influence social and cultural interactions, exacerbating disagreements and injustice, and highlights the importance of understanding and appreciating cultural diversity to avoid discrimination.

### ***Prejudice***

Prejudice is a view that is formed within a person based on negative perceptions, without having sufficient knowledge of the actual facts about a social group. This is a manifestation of attitudes, unfriendly feelings, or hostility and discrimination towards members of that group, simply because they are part of that group. In the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani, it is described how prejudice can trigger discriminatory actions. Given the great diversity among various groups in society, prejudice also has various forms and types such as sexism, racial injustice, and ageism.

#### **a. Sexism**

In the narrative, Amine's statement, "That's how things are here," was delivered in a cold tone and an attitude that showed his power in determining the norms that Mathilde had to obey as a wife. This suggests that there is gender prejudice inherent in him, where he feels he must always be in a higher or superior position than his wife. With a cold tone of voice and eyes fixed on the floor, Amine shows an authoritarian attitude and the complete power he has in managing their relationship. This shows that he considers himself to be the one who has greater control and influence in their lives, while Mathilde must submit to the rules set by her husband.

## **b. Racial injustice**

Aïcha's Prejudice Against Her Grandmother: Aïcha has prejudice against her grandmother, including her physical appearance and cultural habits. Aïcha underestimated her grandmother's physical appearance and cultural habits, which were considered different or inconsistent with her own preferences. This kind of prejudice often arises due to a lack of understanding or inability to accept cultural differences and appearances that do not conform to one's own norms. Aïcha seemed bothered by her grandmother's distinctive features that reflect a cultural identity and age different from her own. This reflects ageism or prejudice against older people because of differences in appearance and habits associated with old age.

## **THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH: A DISCUSSION**

Findings from the *"In the Country of Others"* analysis emphasize the pervasive nature of discrimination in its many forms and the significant impact it has on individuals and society. The depiction of direct discrimination through explicit acts of hostility and physical attack shows how deeply ingrained prejudices can manifest in everyday interactions, reinforcing social hierarchies and maintaining inequality.

The novel also depicts the subtle but damaging effects of indirect discrimination through systemic barriers and cultural norms that limit opportunities for minority groups. This analysis highlights the importance of understanding discrimination not only as an individual act of prejudice but also as part of a larger social and institutional framework that maintains power imbalances. The significance of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of the multifaceted nature of discrimination, providing a deeper understanding of how various forms of prejudice intersect and impact individuals differently. By exploring these themes through the lens of Pettigrew's theory, this research contributes to the broader discourse on social justice and the need for systemic change to address and eliminate discriminatory practices and policies.

The findings in this study support Pettigrew's theoretical framework that discrimination is a systemic problem involving cultural norms and institutional structures. The examples of discrimination in *"In the Country of Others"* demonstrate how discrimination occurs in everyday interactions, reinforce social injustice, and demonstrate the need for more in-depth and contextual interventions in efforts to address discrimination. By understanding these dynamics, this research provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and activists working to combat discrimination, providing concrete and contextual examples that can be used to inform more effective strategies and interventions.

Based on Pettigrew's discrimination theory, the above discrimination is caused by stereotypes and prejudice from the community around them. Such as stereotypes, as

generalized and often oversimplified perceptions about a group, play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards individuals. In the novel, Mathilde's characterization of Moroccan traditions as without understanding their cultural significance exemplifies how stereotypes are formed from a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity. This myopic view not only misrepresents the traditions but also diminishes the cultural values associated with them. Such stereotypes can foster an environment where discriminatory actions are justified based on perceived cultural superiority. Similarly, Amine's stereotypical view of European women as emotionally weak and incapable of handling reality showcases how ingrained biases can shape interpersonal dynamics.

This perspective leads to a lack of appreciation for Mathilde's individuality and her distinct experiences. It underscores how stereotypes can distort perceptions and result in unfair treatment, as individuals are not seen beyond the generalized characteristics of the groups they belong to. The educational context in the novel further highlights the detrimental effects of stereotypes. The cultural polarization at Aïcha's school, where students are divided into "*whispering natives*" and "*hopscotch-playing Europeans*," reinforces ethnic stereotypes and fosters social isolation. Aïcha's sense of alienation due to not fitting into these stereotypical groups demonstrates how stereotypes can marginalize individuals and perpetuate injustice in social settings. This underscores the broader societal issue where stereotypes contribute to segregation and hinder social cohesion.

Next is prejudice, as an unjustified and typically negative attitude towards an individual based on their membership in a particular group, often manifests in various discriminatory behaviours. In the novel, several forms of prejudice are depicted, including sexism, racial injustice, and ageism. Sexism is evident in Amine's authoritative and condescending attitude towards Mathilde, where he believes in maintaining a superior position within their marital relationship. This reflects deep-seated gender prejudice, where male dominance is culturally reinforced, and women's autonomy is undermined. Amine's belief that Mathilde must adhere to his norms without question exemplifies how gender prejudice can lead to discriminatory and oppressive behaviours within intimate relationships.

Racial injustice is starkly portrayed through the societal reaction to Mathilde's interracial marriage. The derogatory comments about her pregnancy by an Arab man highlight the pervasive cultural biases against interracial relationships. This prejudice stems from xenophobic attitudes that view such unions as transgressive, thus subjecting individuals to social ostracism and moral judgment. This form of racial prejudice reveals the broader societal resistance to cultural integration and acceptance. Ageism, as depicted through Aïcha's prejudice against her grandmother, illustrates how age-related stereotypes can lead to discriminatory attitudes. Aïcha's disregard for her grandmother's physical appearance and cultural practices reflects a generational

divide where older individuals are undervalued, and their cultural identities are dismissed. This prejudice not only alienates older individuals but also perpetuates a lack of respect and understanding for cultural heritage.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis described in the previous chapter, this study concludes that there are several types of discriminatory treatment towards female characters in the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani. reveals that racial and gender discrimination against female characters is multifaceted, encompassing both direct and indirect forms as per Pettigrew's perspective. Direct discrimination manifests through citizenship status, race, physical attacks, and gender biases, vividly depicted in scenes where characters like Mouilala, Selma, Mathilde, and Aïcha endure demeaning treatment and prejudice. Indirect discrimination is evident in systemic policies, such as restrictions on property ownership and stringent marriage regulations, which perpetuate social inequalities and reinforce cultural norms that marginalize minority groups. This study found that the several factor female characters experienced various types of discrimination in the novel *"In the Country of Others"* by Leila Slimani because of prejudice and stereotypes that existed in society.

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