

**CLIMBING ON A SPACE**  
**IN THANHHA LAI'S NOVEL *INSIDE OUT AND BACK AGAIN* (2011)**

**THESIS**

*Submitted As a Partial Requirement to Achieve Strata 1 (S1) Degree*



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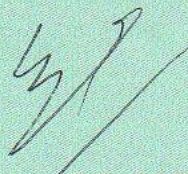
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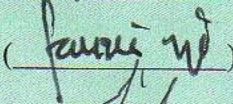


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## ABSTRAK

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Skripsi ini merupakan hasil analisis novel *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) karya Thanhha Lai. Topik yang dibahas adalah bagaimana usaha perempuan sejak masa kecil dalam mencapai ranah untuk menunjukkan keberadaan dirinya di tengah lingkungan sosial. Masalah yang diangkat ialah sejauh mana tokoh protagonis mengungkapkan proses pencapaian ranah untuk menunjukkan kemampuannya, serta seberapa besar fungsi elemen-elemen fiksi seperti seting dan konflik berpengaruh untuk memperlihatkan usaha tersebut. Hasil dari kajian ini adalah untuk menemukan sejauh mana usaha protagonis mencapai ranah dalam menunjukkan kemampuan dirinya, serta untuk mengetahui peran seting dan plot dalam membantu mengetahui usaha-usaha tersebut. Teori yang digunakan dalam analisis ini ialah konsep feminis dari Trinh Minh-ha dan konsep psikososial dari Richard Lazarus dan Susan Folkman. Metode pengkajian yang digunakan adalah *text-based interpretation* dan *context-based interpretation*. Hasil dari analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa perempuan dari usia dini dapat mencapai ranah yang lebih luas untuk menunjukkan kemampuannya dengan cara memiliki kesadaran akan perbedaan dan mewujudkannya dalam usaha-usaha konkrit dan memacu dirinya untuk belajar lebih banyak.

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Give thanks to The Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever! Let all the praise and glory be lifted up for God alone for His abundant grace and blessing and for everything He has given to me.

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Padang, February 4, 2017

Yesmawati Zai

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Most cultures have distinguished the space between males and females in most assertive ways. Males have commonly been viewed as dominant and in charge whereas females as those people behind the scene, submissive, and therefore, powerless. This gender stereotype is started from the childhood stage when children are taught that boys and girls have significant differences on position and treatment. Gender-related rules are applied since the childhood age. For instance, boys are given toy tools and building blocks for they are considered physically strong, active, and aggressive. Meanwhile, miniature kitchen and cleaning toys are prepared for young girls. Girls are viewed as the ones who cannot show up in society since they are regarded weak and powerless and responsible for the domestic sphere only. This reality shows that development of gender roles often begins as early as childhood and it is gradually established as socially constructed term. However, for some females or girls, this situation does not let them down. Their understanding and awareness of the gendered space imposed on them and prompted them to make efforts to go further and higher—climbing on a space to make they be visible, presentable and exist.

The act of climbing on a space is done with the intention of going to a higher level or position. This is a process and effort that females do with



awareness that they are not different from males and believe that they have same capability to show up in the society. Rights and chances to show up are only given to males or boys. Females are restricted and limited to show their ability in public. This awareness leads them to look up for every chance in their life to express what they want to do, what they want to be and to get what they deserve to. The purpose of this struggle is not to outrun the man position, yet it is to be accepted and acknowledged in public with a proper hierarchy.

Culturally history has shown us how females have successfully fought and won public space against men's domination. These females realized that with the more limited spaces left for them to live, they must stand up and fight for their rights through their own efforts. In American Heritage Dictionary (2015) it is explained that space is simultaneously the medium and the outcome of social practices; the public sphere. The space that is referred to be climbed is the public sphere or the space which is assumed belongs to the men only. This big wall restricts females to show their ability and to get what they deserve to. The consciousness of this gap encourages some females or girls to climb on the space in order to obtain their place in the public sphere and then enhance it to show their potentials. This struggle is done in a various ways by females with their own background.

The issue of climbing on a space is common to find in daily life. One of the great examples is Malala Yousafzai, an outstanding young girl who knows how to keep moving forward in spite of unfair circumstances. She was born into a culture where women were predetermined to a life of obedience and servitude and



had very limited freedoms. At the age 17, she became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize winner for her struggle on standing in opposition to misogyny in Pakistan and suppression of children, and for the right of all children to education. One of her powerful quotes is about her view about the importance of education for young people. In her memoir *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by The Taliban* (2013), she states “*Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.*” From the very young age she already stood up against the Taliban that banned girls from attending school. She spoke up for freedom for girls and young people. She determined to go to school with a firm belief in her right to an education. She showed that she could broaden the space from the restricted and limited sphere since she has a great awareness of her existence as a girl who deserves to be free and educated and has meaningful and better life.

The issue of climbing on a space is not a new thing, but the way females or girls aware that they need to struggle for their place will be always interesting as each girl has her own and different sorts to fight in a public space. Novel, as one of the example of literary works, has effectively revealed this topic. The novel *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) by Thanhha Lai denotes the issue of a girl in the act of looking up for every chance in her life process to be better. Through the protagonist, the novel reveals us how she puts her great endeavor to climb on a space during her childhood age in order to set herself free from her early environment that was fully dominated by men’s authority. Moreover, she also climbs for chances to show her ability in her surroundings. This work portrays



about a sensible ten years old girl who deals with the gender inequality and difficult condition she gets in the new place as her family move as immigrant to the United States.

#### **1.1.1. Climbing on a Space**

There are two key words to form the terminology in this study. They are *climb* and *space*. In Merriam-Webster (2015), to *climb* is defined as the act or process of going to a higher level or position. It refers to how someone struggles to achieve something better in his or her life by moving upwards and forwards in society.

The next term is *space*. In American Heritage Dictionary (2015) *space* is simultaneously the medium and the outcome of social practices; the public sphere. Fenster (1999) views space is relevant to an understanding of gender and human rights violations, given its relationship to public/private constructs, cultural norms, and social and power relations. It refers to the right or chance to show up in the public society.

Thus, *Climbing on a Space* in this analysis refers to the act of someone to look up for every chance in her life to be better in order to get place in the society. It is done by the protagonist of the story by showing reluctance to the inequality and the awareness to bridge the gap. It is the way the girl protagonist believes she can break the gender stereotype in society, whereas awareness to bridge the gap helps her to deal with people and even pressing situation around.



### 1.1.2 A Brief Explanation of the Author's Biography

Thanhha Lai is a Vietnam-born American author of children's literature. She was born in Vietnam in 1965. Lai fled Vietnam during the Vietnam War. She then moved to Alabama and graduated from University of Texas, Austin with a degree in Journalism and from 1988 worked about two years for the Orange County, California Newspaper *The Register*, covering Little Saigon, the local Vietnamese community. She earned a Master of Fine Arts from New York University and settled in New York City, where she taught at Parsons, the New School for Design.

Lai's writing career began when she decided to quit from her job and write fiction. *Inside Out and Back Again* was her debut novel that she wrote by getting inside the mind of a 10-year-old girl who feels as much as any adult but cannot express the emotions yet. Through a series of poems with its childhood perspective, the novel portrays about a Vietnamese young girl who must flee to America with her family at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 to escape themselves from the Communist persecution. Then they must learn to live in a new world. It is inspired by the childhood of Lai on fleeing Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and immigrating to Alabama. From then Lai wrote another children's book. It entitled *Listen, Slowly* that was published February 17, 2015.

Her first work, *Inside Out and Back Again* was released in 2011. It has won several prestigious awards. They are *National Book Award for Young People's Literature* (2011), *Booklist Editors' Choice, Books for Youth in Fiction for Middle Reader* (2011), *Kirkus Reviews Best Children's Books of 2011*,

*Publishers Weekly Best Children's Books 2011 in Fiction, SLJ Best Books of 2011 in Fiction, Newbery Honor (2012), Jane Addams Children's Book Award Honor for Older Children (2012), ALA Notable Children's Book (2012), Booklist Lasting Connections in Social Studies (2012), CCBC Choices (2012), Notable Children's Book in the English Language Arts (2012) and Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People in World History & Culture (2012).*

In an interview for the School Library Journal (2012), Thanhha Lai shared her thought. “If someone is different from you, go stand next to her and observe. That person just brought another world to your door without you having to travel.” Her statement implies that everybody can learn anything from their surrounding for people have different experiences in life. It is reflected in her literary work. For her, it was important to add humor to the experiences lived by Ha, the protagonist of the novel, inspired by her own life. What a refugee experiences and loses when she was transplanted from her own land to a host country is incredibly painful, affirms Thanhha Lai; however, even in such circumstances, there is always room for laughter and hope, and she did make the readers laugh with her talk sharing personal and humorous stories from her own family.

There are some comments about Lai’s novel *Inside Out and Back Again*. *Publishers Weekly* (2011) praises *Inside Out and Back Again* s one of good novel to be read:

“The taut portrayal of Hà’s emotional life is especially poignant as she cycles from feeling smart in Vietnam to struggling in the States, and



finally regains academic and social confidence.  
An incisive portrait of human resilience.” –  
*Publishers Weekly*

It states that the character that Ha exposed is the one who is struggling a lot in order to be accepted. She is not afraid of change; instead, she faces the problems by her own. Kirkus Reviews (2011) also stated:

“An enlightening, poignant and unexpectedly funny novel in verse. In her not-to-be-missed debut, Lai evokes a distinct time and place and presents a complex, realistic heroine whom readers will recognize, even if they haven’t found themselves in a strange new country.” – *Kirkus Reviews*

The quotation above confirms that Lai’s concern about the children and young life. This is the moving story of one girl's year of change, dreams, and healing as she journeys from one country to another, one life to the next. She wants to tell the readers about the struggle of young refugee girl to get place in the new society with all the limitation and restriction she has to go through. It is related to the way the character can deal with every situation to show her existence as a girl who has willingness to always learn and be better.

### **1.1.3 *Inside Out and Back Again***

*Inside Out and Back Again* (2011), written by Thanhha Lai reflects a girl who makes effort to look up for every chance in her life to be better in order to get place in the society. This is done by the girl protagonist by climbing on a space. The way the protagonist voices her thoughts is expressed by lyrical poems or verses, which is the uniqueness of this novel. Climbing on a space in this analysis

refers to how a character does some acts to break the narrow view imposed as a girl and to reach the possible chances for herself. In this novel, the female protagonist is presented by the narrator Kim Hà, a 10 year old girl who deals with lots of challenging in her life; however she shows her ability in the process in dealing with the limitation she faces in her surroundings. The protagonist and her family live in Saigon, South Vietnam in 1975 during the Vietnam War. During that time the South is trying to protect the nation from the North, which is communist. Her father was arrested by communists on a navy mission when she was still a baby. The family gets struggle by day to day. After the end of the war they make a harrowing journey to the United States and end up being sponsored as refugees in Alabama. The Eastern patriarchal culture and culture shock post-Vietnam War aside encourage the protagonist to climb on a space to become much higher than before. In this analysis, climbing on a space can be seen through her reluctance toward inequality and the awareness to bridge the gap.

The protagonist shows her reluctance toward inequality. She starts to show her ability to be considered in family. She resists the different treatment from family to show that she is not different from her male siblings. She deals with inequality in society by dealing with the bullies and mockery that she gets in her new school. She learns to understand the situation by preparing herself with abilities. She has willingness to learn and improve herself to become a better person.

The protagonist has a great awareness to bridge the gap, both in her family and the society. She starts to build a good relationship with her family first by



learning to appreciate life that is influenced by her mother's way of thinking. She also reconciles the bond siblings between her and the brothers. In the society, she adjusts with cultural difference. She commences to be more opened to people by making friends. She changes to be better. She also has a big heart to deal with the past and move on to climb on a space in the new place with new hope.

## **1.2 Problem of the Study**

This study is going to reveal the act of climbing on a space in Thanhha Lai's novel *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011). Thus, there are some research questions used to analyze the effort of climbing on a space which are formulated as follow:

1. How far does the protagonist in Thanhha Lai's novel *Inside Out and Back Again* reflect the efforts of climbing on a space?
2. To what extend do fictional devices; plot (conflict) and setting in the novel *Inside Out and Back Again* contribute in revealing the efforts of climbing on a space?

## **1.3 Purpose of Study**

This study is intended to disclose the acts of climbing on a space done by the protagonist in *Inside Out and Back Again*, a novel written by Thanhha Lai. This study is also going to investigate to what extent fictional devices, which are plot (conflicts) and setting, give contribution in disclosing the acts of climbing on a space.

#### 1.4 Previous Study

The analysis about *Inside Out and Back Again* that focuses on the acts of climbing on a space has not been found yet. However, there are two studies that have given contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel. They are from Rachel Carnell that focuses on women's effort to enhance their rights in the act of seeking the public good and Frisca Arum Indriani that concerns on women struggle to against the patriarchal oppression.

The first study is from Rachel Carnell (1998) entitled: *Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Carnell in her article discusses the analysis of Anne Brontë's work based on Victorian gender roles refer to the stereotypical distinction between a female domestic and a male public sphere. It is mainly focused on character and setting. The analysis related to the concept of feminism by Jurgen Habermas (1962) that shows the distinction of terms "public" and "private" in the public sphere. The result of the analysis is the female or girl that is represented by the character refuses the gender role dictated to her by her culture and insists on her status as a professional worker to pursue an affective and humanistic bond between herself and other woman.

The second study is written by Frisca Arum Indriani (2013) entitled *Maggie's Struggle in Placing Her Existence at the Patriarchal Society in The Mill on The Floss by George Elliot*. In this study she analyzes the struggle of the woman character in placing her existence in the patriarchal society. It is conducted by using feminism approach of literary work by Eline Showalter. The struggles of the woman character appear in her effort against the oppression in



education on women by learning secretly and her rejection toward patriarchy society rule about marriage. The result of this analysis is women have right to get a space by struggling on it in order to show their existence in the society.

The two studies above have given much contribution and inspiration in analyzing the character in my study. They have similarities in the concept of female or girl spaces in society. This study focuses on how far the fictional devices such as setting and plot (conflict) in this novel reflect the efforts or the acts to climb on a space.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

This study reveals how someone with great desire suit herself in the difficult situation and even fight for what she thinks worth by making efforts to move from inferior side to the equal position as anyone around her. The purpose is to broaden her space more to move forward to be existed and presentable. It relates to the feminism concept by Trinh Minh-ha, a Vietnamese-American theorist. Minh-ha (1989:528) views feminism as a response to dominant streams of patriarchal thought it often reifies the category of "woman" through defining women as "not men". She argues that it is ridiculous to define "women" in contrast to "men" because women are so many more things than simply "not men". Thus, women, or girls, cannot be compared to men or boys, since they have their own uniqueness.

Climbing on a space is the actions carried out by women to show that they have power or quality in society. Bressler (1980:180) states that females are precious mankind possessing the same privileges and rights as every male and this

leads them to think they are not a "nonsignificant other". It assertively means that there is no difference between males and females when it comes to right and chance. Although society places women in the burdened system, the fact that both of male and female have equal authority cannot be denied. Moreover, Bressler argues that women must define themselves and assert their own voices in the arenas of politics, society, education, and the arts by personally committing themselves to fostering such change, they hope to create a society where the male and female voices are equally valued. Females need to speak out their position to be equal. The effort of female to climb on a space to be wider is to break the existing perspective toward them. In order to obtain the space, females or girls need to let their ability shown before the public society.

Inequality is linked to particular social constructions of gender relations. According to Massey (1994:3) the question of space includes matters of gender and power, such that the spaces are encoded differently for males and females. It means, inequality happens to divide the spatial place for male and female based on the gendered space. It restricts women to move and even explore their space. This treatment distinction is the effect of culture or the social relations which define human existence as gendered individuals. Consequently, a change in society is needed before any significant change in gender relations can be brought about. The act of reluctance toward that inequality of the gender is showed by Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir (1952:267) states that:

“Individuals are born sexed but not gendered; they have to be taught to be masculine or feminine. One is not born; but rather becomes a woman; it is civilization as a whole that



produces this creature, which is described as feminine.”

Beauvoir believes that females or girls are not born inferior but made to be so by the society rule. She calls for women to break out of being the "other" and realize their possibilities. In other words, women can be able to escape from the restricted place to a broader sphere by realizing that only they who can stand up to set them free and help themselves. The females' struggle to attain the possibilities is exposed by the way they improve themselves to be better. They need to realize that they are the instrument to change themselves and even the conditions.

Another conceptual framework that is used to conduct this analysis is from psychosocial theory related to cultural adaptation since the protagonist, in her effort to climb on a space, lives as young refugee in the asylum. In order to reach a space in the new surroundings, someone needs to deal or cope with the situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984:141) describes coping as: ‘the constantly changing cognitive & behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.’ It refers to cultural adaptation, which occurs through migrants' learning of culture-specific skills that would enable them to negotiate their ways in the new cultural environment.

Migrants or refugees have to surpass the cultural adaptation stage. Berry (1997:46) views acculturation or cultural adaptation as an inevitable process human species undergo in an effort to manage and cope with stressors and changes brought upon by migration and by being in a prolonged contact with a new, host culture. He also noted that cultural adaptation of migrants can be

hypothesized through two distinct perspectives: the 'cultural learning/shedding' model vs. the 'stress, coping, and adaptation' model. Under this framework, the emphasis is placed on teaching and training migrants or newcomers new knowledge and new language. In contrast, the stress, coping, and cultural adaptation model has been argued to be a more flexible explanatory framework to discern acculturation because it can address acculturating individuals' responses to conflicts and stresses arising from intercultural contacts. In this study, both of the adaptation models are used by the protagonist to adjust and deal with new surroundings.

In facing adaptation challenge the protagonist uses personal or external coping resources as the key factors that help her to lessen the effects of stress in overcoming difficulties. She copes with the cultural difference by improving her ability in learning language, accustomed to habit and observing people. She also tries to regulate distressful emotions, for by seeking support from others. It is done with the intention to bridge the gap in new and foreign surroundings. She starts to let go of everything she had lost and become more accepted by having friends and allies in society.

It is interesting to realize that the protagonist shows her point of view and effort against the rule set by society from the childhood age. She is smart girl and has a great awareness about the differences that society put on girls. Only those girls who have intelligence that can be aware of the distinction put on them. She is sensible to move out from the lower position, to be regarded as the one who is not left behind. She shows her ability and proves that she can stand up with all the

difficulties. The protagonist demonstrates it on each possibility she has. It denotes that she climbs on a space for her goodness and even more, for equality. Furthermore, she has willingness to learn new culture in order to fit in the new place she lives. She copes with new things and adjusts with the new things.

The analysis of this novel is supported by text and context based interpretation. Glenn and Gray (2007:298) assert text-based interpretation is the approach that tends to focus on the literary work itself and pursue the meaning within the things contained in the text. According to Klarer (2004:94) context-based interpretation is the approach which considers literary texts is not only self-contained and independent works, but it tries to place them within a larger context that depends on the context of history, social and political background, literary genre, nationality, or gender. Thus, this analysis is not only focused on the text itself, yet it also exposes the phenomena which exist in the real world since it relates to the issue of gendered space.

There are three fictional devices that are needed to conduct this analysis; they are character, plot and setting. Character is important element to reveal the meaning of this novel. Abrams (1999:32-33) defines character as follows:

“Character is persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it as the dialogue and from what they do as the action.”

In literary works, the characters help reader to understand and catch the meaning of the works. The protagonist who presents climbing on a space in this novel is a



ten years old girl who is quite thoughtful about gender inequality in her social culture environment. In her young age she is well concerned about the treatment that society set for boys and girls which she finds unequal. She confronts that inequality by proving that she can be the first and even better than any man include her older brothers and peers. She does not let herself be put in the second place after anyone.

Another fictional device in order to analyze this novel is plot (conflict). Conflict plays an essential role to make up the plot. Robert and Jacobs (1995:88) states that conflict is authorizing force related to causes and effects form which is faced by a character in a society toward people or circumstances and it takes energy of the character to involve in the decisions, actions, responses, and interactions. In this novel, there are internal conflicts and external conflicts. As Guerin (2005) states that internal conflicts are the conflicts which occur within a character itself, meanwhile, the external conflicts are the conflicts which occur as the result of the interactions of the character and his or her surroundings. This analysis is mainly focused on the external conflicts faced by the main character. The conflicts the character face are coming from her first circle which is her family. The protagonist is raised in a patriarchal society that marginalizes women. This condition leads her to prove that girls have a great potential to be considered. People around her treats her as inferior due to her gender. The terrible treatments attack her in new surrounding as she and her family being refugees during the war. The conflicts give contribution in identifying and examining the analysis about climbing on a space.

The last device that gives contribution to reveal the meaning of this novel is setting. According to Klarer (2004:25), setting includes the location, historical period, and social surrounding in which the action of a text develops. It means characters and conflicts in a story are influenced by setting. The setting that contributes in exploring this analysis comes from the situation of social surrounding the character lives, which are the eastern patriarchal culture and culture shock after moving to America. The pattern of behavior in the house of the character is influenced by the culture in society. The treatment the protagonist gets is based on how society prioritizes men. The story takes place in Vietnam and California, United States of America during the Vietnam War. In those hard times, the character chooses to find a space for herself and also her family.

## **1.6 Methodology**

The analysis of novel *Inside Out and Back Again* is done through text and context-based interpretation. It is done by analyzing other fictional devices, such as; plot (conflicts) and setting. Conflicts are used to evoke the way to climb on a space by analyzing character's reactions toward the conflict. Then, the setting deals with the circumstances and atmosphere. It gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. Plot and conflicts in this novel give important role to reveals the meaning. These elements are analyzed based on how someone climbs on a space. These elements are analyzed based on the concept of feminism by Trinh Minh-ha and psychosocial by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman.