

“For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in celestial places” (Ephesians 6:12).

These principalities and powers, these cosmic forces of darkness, are at the same time intangible spiritual entities **and** concrete historical, social, and psychological structures harmful to life. These destructive powers are structural as well as personal, and are expressed in institutions, laws, traditions and rituals that taken together create a sense of bondage to a “dominion of darkness.”

Leïla Slimani tells the story of Mathilde, determined to slip the bonds tying her to bourgeois France and bet all on an exotic life in Morocco. She marries Amine, a Moroccan soldier stationed in her town after its liberation in WWII. Mathilde goes with Amine as he returns to his home and life on the family farm.

All the characters in the story struggle to forge a life in alien territory, all operating in terrain—physical, psychological, imagined—that has been seized by others. Amine’s younger brother, Omar, wants his country back from French invaders; their sister, Selma, craves freedom granted to American teenagers, not the constraints of conservative Islam.

Even Mathilde and Amine find themselves bewildered by each other’s expectations of marriage. Mathilde, twenty years old, has moved from her father’s house to her husband’s house, from having to obey her father to now having to obey her husband. Moroccan society is more patriarchal than where she grew up in Alsace.

When they arrive in Morocco Mathilde meets Amine’s family for the first time. Her mother-in-law is a traditional, typical Moroccan woman who has never travelled outside her home town and cannot read or write. Mathilde, who reads Tolstoy like the Bible, is in shock and tries to explain to her husband that it is not possible to live like this.

Amine doesn’t understand. He tells Mathilde “That is our tradition, our culture. You have no right to judge it. You should just adapt to it.”

In an interview about her book, *The Country of Others*, Slimani says the stories that happen in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the nursery, have long been dismissed as places where nothing important happens. She, however, believes these stories are of critical importance because in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the nursery, lies the origin of every violence, of every domination.

The source of every domination? Patriarchy, colonialism, racism, sexism, nationalism, and any other “ism” that subjugates one group of people to another, are forces of cosmic darkness that are intangible spiritual entities inimical to life *and* are embodied in concrete historical, social and psychological structures.

These forces of darkness cannot be defeated with the sword, with bullets, with atomic bombs. However, swords, bullets and bombs must be employed from time to time to restrain concrete historical expressions of these forces of darkness, but the war against these forces can never be won by violent means. White supremacists must be restrained from blowing up the capital and igniting another civil war, but white supremacy will never be defeated by force.

The way to fight cosmic forces of darkness is, according to the author of Ephesians, to stand firm. We are not to flee nor to attack, but stand firm. How? By pursuing truth in a world enamored with gaslighting; by righteous living (living in right relationship with others) in a world governed by prejudice; by working for peace in a world that protects its privileges by exercising power over others; by faith in the ultimate triumph of justice in a world that justifies abuse and manipulation on the altar of security; by staying alert, always persevering no matter the odds.

Every piece of armor used to fight against the cosmic forces of darkness is for defensive purposes except one: the sword. The sword is a metaphor for the word of God. Our only “offensive” weapon is persuasion.

His employer instructed him to write a bill of sale for a slave. Despite being troubled by this, John Woolman wrote the bill of sale. At the executing of the sale, Woolman was so afflicted in his mind, that he said before his employer, “I believe slave-keeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion.”

In 1746 Woolman and Isaac Andrews traveled through Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina observing slavery first hand. Woolman wrote an essay titled, “Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes,” protesting slavery on religious grounds. In 1754, at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, he approved its publication.

Unlike many of Woolman’s predecessors in the antislavery movement, Woolman took a gentler approach more accepted by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. He does not directly attack slave holders but stresses equality. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Friends published their own antislavery paper, “Epistle of Caution and Advice,” urging against the buying and keeping of slaves.

Woolman again traveled to Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, but this time to visit with families of slaveholding Quakers. By 1758 there was a ban on buying and selling slaves, and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting required members who bought slaves to be removed from positions of authority.

As early as 1762 Woolman and others refused to purchase goods produced by slave labor. It was not until 1826, that “Free Produce” caught on as a movement. Benjamin Lundy of Baltimore opened a store that sold only “free produce” and in 1827 the “Free Produce Society” was founded by Thomas M’Clintock and others in Philadelphia, PA.

On a trip to England in 1772 John Woolman died of smallpox. Four years after his death (1776), eighty-five years before the outbreak of the Civil War, slave ownership among

Friends was finally prohibited. No Quaker owned slaves after the Declaration of Independence.

The Civil War defeated slavery as an institution in this country, but it did not defeat the ideology of white supremacy any more than Title IX, ending institutional discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities, defeated patriarchy.

The way to defeat these cosmic forces of darkness is, first, to be persuaded of the equality of all people regardless of race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, and then, to persuade others of the self-evident truth that all men, women, and children, are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

## BENEDICTION

Know that the God who  
    commands you to stand firm  
    holds you firmly in the palm of his hand.  
Know that the Christ in whom  
    there is neither east nor west  
    Greek nor Jew, male nor female,  
    calls you and the person most unlike you  
    sister, brother, friend.  
Know the Spirit who breathed life into Adam and Eve  
    is the same Spirit who is the breathe of life  
    in you, in your neighbor, in your enemy.

PRAYER: Walter Brueggemann

God of all truth, we give thanks for your faithful utterances of reality.  
In your truthfulness, you have called the world "very good."  
In your truthfulness, you have promised,  
    "I have loved you with an everlasting love."  
In your truthfulness, you have assured,  
    "This is my beloved Son."  
In your truthfulness, you have voiced, "Fear not, I am with you."  
In your truthfulness, you have guaranteed that  
    "Nothing shall separate us from your love."

And yet, we live in a world phony down deep  
    in which we participate at a slant.  
Ours is a seduced world,  
    where we call evil good and good evil,  
    where we put darkness for light and light for darkness,  
    where we call bitter sweet and sweet bitter,  
    where we call war peace and peace war,  
so that we rarely see the truth of the matter.

Give us courage to depart the pretend world of euphemism,  
    to call things by their right name,  
    to use things for their right use,  
    to love our neighbor as you love us.

Overwhelm our fearful need to distort,  
    that we may fall back into your truth-telling about us,  
    that we may be tellers of truth and practitioners of truth.

We pray in the name of the One whom you have filled  
    with grace and truth. Amen.