

## Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*: A Reexploration Case from a Postcolonial Lens

Saif Al-Deen Al-Ghammaz \*

Department of French and English Language and their Literature, Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan,  
Jordan

Asad Al-Ghalith

Department of English, Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Jordan

Received on: 8-9-2024

Accepted on: 19-1-2025

### Abstract

Of the continually rising facts about postcolonial literature is that it makes efforts to control the concept of self-representation, alongside creating a new world and uprooting the cultural and social leftovers of the colonial age. Conversely, it is found that postcolonial literature may reestablish plenty of the key stereotypes already established by the colonial discourse together with recreating a destructive and gloomy discourse that contributes to deteriorating the fabric, consolidation, and image of the colonized societies. Accordingly, this paper aims to reconsider Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* (1980) utilizing a postcolonial thematic narrative analysis. The methodology makes use of a postcolonial perspective and textual analysis, along with the incorporation of secondary sources. By addressing *Year of the Elephant* in this way, the piece of research not only is an invitation to rethink conventional perceptions relating to postcolonial issues and concepts but also aims to foster our understanding of Moroccan fiction's legacy as a pivotal figure in contemporary Arab literature.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Discourse, Moroccan Literature, Postcolonialism, Self-representation.

### 1. Introduction

Literally speaking, discourse is an approach adapted to organizing ideas, knowledge, and experience established in language and its various linguistic contexts. Yet, Foucault (1972) offers a more expounded definition of the discourse concept, as it can construct the subject instead of only speaking of it. According to Foucault, discourse also outperforms the traditional definition and scope of the concept of discourse being simpler utterances. This is also shown in Foucault's words related to language, "language (*langue*) exists, and, with that language, a collection of signs defined by their contrasting characteristics and their rules of use" (Foucault 1972, 85). With that being said, Gana (2024) asserts that discourse mainly relates to statements and is abstractly used for the area of statements, and concretely as a count noun for groups of statements governing such a group of statements.

---

© 2025 JJMLL Publishers/Yarmouk University. All Rights Reserved,

\* Doi: <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.17.4.19>

\* Corresponding Author: [s.alghammaz@zuj.edu.jo](mailto:s.alghammaz@zuj.edu.jo)

Constructive discourse always triggers positive changes and brings about new transformations in the world. On the other hand, the discourse that spreads the seeds of misery, hopelessness, and frustration in life and underlines its weaknesses adds no benefits to any society (Laboudi 2024; Qutami, 2022). Simply put, discourse has much more power, as its user may use it to construct the life and world as he or she dreams of it to be. Hereafter, instead of appropriating the colonial discourse and unconsciously recreating it in the postcolonial narrative style, the last shall concentrate on the positive traits of a certain society, demonstrating its high values and positive aspects (Williams 2024). Importantly, it shall shine light on the lost desired aspects; attempting to show them the way people strive to make them part of their genuine world.

Moroccan literature is a major tributary of Arab culture and one of its beacons that illuminate the sky of thought and literature, as there is no talk of cognitive and cultural formations in Arab literature without mentioning the Moroccan figures who guided thought towards embracing modernity. The actual connection to historical turning points in monitoring the most important intellectual phenomena that made Moroccan thought occupy an important position in the Arab cultural fabric makes the Moroccan literature industry an entity used to get rid of old and classical thought to embrace modernity in its most beautiful forms.

Moreover, when studying Moroccan literature, Leila Abouzeid is considered one of the most important novelists in Moroccan as well as Arabic literature, as she wrote novels, novellas, short stories, and translation. Abouzeid's poetic language and critical literary tendency contributed to her work being translated into several languages. She has also recently published a book that chronicles the biography of the Prophet Mohammad in Arabic, English, and French. The novella, *Year of the Elephant* is considered the most complete Moroccan novel written by a woman, as it was celebrated by Anglo-Saxon and Moroccan criticism alike. Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*, as a case of postcolonial reexploration, is also a depiction of a less-than-ideal situation in this respect. Alongside the depressed and melancholic atmosphere demonstrated by the novella's lines, the novella finds it a more-than-difficult situation to proudly speak of the Moroccan oppression and resistance to the colonizer. As put by the protagonist Zahra, the entire story is reflected in some experienced resistance leaders' and opportunists' attempts to lead inexperienced people who find themselves equal with other Moroccans' social and political outcasts of the independence deal which opportunists have mainly taken advantage of. Taking everything into account, each world perspective or stance is reflected by a discourse different from others. As put by Gana (2024, 1), the discourse theory enables examining whether the subjectivity of the discourse's subject is partially or completely constructed by enacting certain representations and views on it and the world through the said discourse's powers.

The history of colonialism in Morocco is represented by Morocco living in harsh conditions during the period of colonial protection that lasted for decades. The colonial period was full of events and conflicts that negatively affected the social, political and economic conditions in Morocco (James 2010). After colonialism and the historical event linked to the independence of Morocco, Morocco is facing a new stage in the history of Morocco, where this stage remains the most difficult compared to the subsequent stages because Morocco is still under the influence of colonialism, which requires a radical

Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*: A Reexploration Case from  
a Postcolonial Lens

change that includes all the determinants of Morocco. This seems to be very difficult, as breaking away from colonialism imposes a new beginning represented in reviving the components of Moroccan identity and culture and leaving as much as possible of the culture of the colonizer (James 2010). Accordingly, with a detailed look at the Moroccan literature, Leila Abouzeid as a literary figure, and resistance in literature, and the history of colonialism in Morocco, the aim of the paper is to reconsider Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* using a postcolonial thematic narrative analysis.

Research studies have documented that Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* has been considered from various perspectives, issues, and arguments to address its key themes. Appropriating a sociological perspective, Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* is inundated with sociological concepts such as negativity and gloominess. It is found that among the key points about literature written in the seventies and eighties is that it may rebuild several key stereotypes already achieved by the colonial discourse, along with recreating a negative and miserable discourse that helps in deteriorating the solidarity and harmony of colonized societies.

From a feminist perspective, Rashed (2021) asserts that as several Afro-Arab women story writers have continuously tackled feminist issues while masculinizing homeland-based subjects, Leila Abouzeid's academic work and research interests cover various issues related to her country, men, and women. The novella-based analysis demonstrates the fact that even though colonization and patriarchy dominate woman, she can be an executioner. The analysis also shows her resistance and struggle against imperial powers and patriarchy without ignoring her fixed obligations to her religious and national identity. Contrary to secular feminism, Abouzeid confirms religion as an exclusive source of solace and relief, hinting at the argument that the men opportunely embrace the colonial culture and ideology while their women resist them.

Appropriating a critical analysis and reading to Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* and Hanan Al-Shaykh's *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, El-Batran (2020) centers on demonstrating how the women in the said novels strive to voice their sufferings to enact their rights and societal stance to fight all attempts to deprive them of their rights. Like other critical pieces of literature, Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* has adopted using brief accounts of individual women's efforts to defy the stereotypical image of Arab and Muslim women depicted in the various contemporary forms of media, including the translations of contemporary Arabic literature. Within the textual analysis of this research study, a similar focus adding new models and stories of Arab and Muslim women as substitutes for the stereotypes of oppressed and weak women is also incorporated. This research study also furnishes key readings of the texts demonstrating the protagonists' individuality, while employing the said literary work in a cultural context that gives a better insight into the individual experiences of these heroines.

From a different creative lens, Boullata (2010) points out that Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* is an autobiographical reflection of her life since childhood memories. This research study asserts that the novella, through the story of its heroine, Zahra, provides a model for thousands of women like her throughout the country plagued by unjust colonialism, where the injustice against them is more severe and cruel in many ways. *Year of the Elephant* bitterly monitors how many male and female activists, immediately after independence, turned into seeking positions and rushing towards gains, which is

considered a sign of a failure of principles, ethics, and values. The Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* is a significant historical document and a living testimony documenting other types of injustice inflicted on women, which is rarely covered by analysis and study.

With this literature review in mind, it is noticed that most previous research studies have highlighted the Moroccan novella by Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, from various Western lenses and perspectives, i.e. literary, sociological, historical, cultural, and autobiographical. The current research, however, is of high significance differing from the previous research studies in that it appropriates a postcolonial approach to furnish evidence that Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* is a postcolonial novella demonstrating the impact of colonialism on the beliefs, cultures, and traditions of the people in the Moroccan society, being regarded as a pivotal work of postcolonial literature, as it effectively reveals the cultural clashes occurring during the colonial era, alongside the marginalization and oppression experienced by the oppressed from the oppressor. With placing *Year of the Elephant* in broader postcolonial and feminist discussions, the research offers valuable insights. However, it could benefit from a more extensive engagement with secondary sources and a clearer articulation of the relationship between narrative structure and thematic content. The significance of the research is mirrored in exploring critical postcolonial, feminist, and cultural issues. By revisiting themes such as identity, colonial legacies, and gender, this article deepens academic discussions and introduces fresh perspectives through its interdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, the paper's engagement with contemporary concerns enhances its relevance to both scholarly audiences and broader social contexts.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Appropriating the French philosopher Paul-Michel Foucault's concept of discourse, Edward Said has introduced the notion of colonial discourse to demonstrate how a certain system can exist within an array of colonial practices (Fox 2002). Said's conceptual addition is intended to prove how the European representation of the 'other' has been established since the Age of Enlightenment or the 18th century as a mark of European cultural dominance. Orientalism, a new term coined by Said to explore the schemes employing colonial discourse as a tool of power, paves the way to the so-called 'colonial discourse theory', demonstrating colonial discourse as its study area (Fox 2002). According to Douglas (2022), the said theory illustrates the approach in which this discourse obfuscates the core economic and political ambitions of colonizers alongside describing the intentional ambivalence of the colonial discourse and its method to construct both colonizing ambitions and subjects and colonized subjects.

On a parallel line, Spivak, a key advocate of the colonial-postcolonial theory, contends that the context involving colonial discourses continually assumes a focal point guaranteeing a point of presence, meaning, and origin. Therefore, the significance of the concept of the critical analysis of the colonial discourse is always on the rise in her writings, labelling her task as a deconstructive mission reflected in lifting the lid on the false and fake image established by the West about the true nature of the East. In other words, she simply aims to construct a sort of pure East as a pure universal institution to define herself as the marginal Easterner (Spivak 2014). Accordingly, Spivak articulates the colonized Easterners

will deconstruct the already established image of the 'East' built by Westerns so that a new image of 'a pure East' is easily constructed.

From a different angle, postcolonialism refers to the historical state and period of issues and affairs demonstrating the aftermath of European colonialism. With the end of World War II, the adoption of the postcolonial state as a term to represent the chronological meaning and describe the post-independence period is always on the increase. Conversely, from the beginning of the 1980s, literary critics use the said term to put the various cultural and political effects of colonization on the table. What is more, postcolonialism is viewed as the extension of colonialism, as the colonies are only politically and militarily freed in a systematic approach, igniting postcolonialism's complex process reflected in self-imposed colonialism (Douglas 2022). This demonstrates why the term 'post' refers to 'after the beginning of colonialism' rather than to 'after the end of colonialism' because the cultural and social struggles between dominated societies and imperial powers still exist. This is in line with Said's words describing the period of the colonizer's official leave of the country: "The nations of contemporary Asia, Latin America, and Africa are politically independent but in many ways are as dominated and dependent as they were when ruled directly by European powers" (Said 1994, p. 20).

One key pillar of the postcolonial theory is also reflected in constructing and developing perceptions about the political and cultural impact of European hegemony on the colonized societies, and the nature of the responses of the said societies (Abd-Rabbo, 2019; Alkam, 2023). In consequence, postcolonial theory drawn from politics, cultures, and ethics explores issues relating to racism, ethnicity, and identity (Al-Khayyat and Abu Amrieh, 2023). It also discusses the challenges to construct a postcolonial national identity on how the world-based knowledge of the colonized people is produced under particular relations to finally serve the imperial interests of the powerful states rather than powerless ones (Aissat 2024). With that being said, appropriating and adapting prevailing languages, narratives, and discourses, postcolonial theory touches on the colonized people's responses related to three key struggles: a struggle for self-representation control and a struggle of local place-, ethnicity-, and history-based representation in a global reality.

### **3. Textual Analysis**

With the birth of *Year of the Elephant* as the first novella by a Moroccan female writer translated from Arabic into English, several new aspects are created in cross-cultural literary history. Moreover, *Year of the Elephant* has a deep place in contributing not only to the Eastern evolving feminist agendas but also to the queries of coast-to-coast liberation struggles. The novella revolves around the heroine Zahra who strongly bears two different independence journeys. First, it is the political and economic independence of a colonized country, while the second is reflected in the personal and social independence from Mohammed, 'her ruthless husband'. Completely devastated and penniless, Zahra has no choice left except to head back to live in the only room inherited from her family. Having been far away from her hometown, Zahra cannot handle the new circumstances she now experiences. Unaided, Zahra, therefore, decides to return to the city to rebuild her life fortified with a deep faith and strong will.

Zahra also has to live the second journey days recalling everything related to the days of the first journey equal with her husband and companions towards the independence of her colonized country, Morocco.

*Year of the Elephant* is a manifestation of the genre of the postcolonial narrative, demonstrating the worries and fears of the people about the pre-independence of Morocco and the dissatisfaction and hopelessness of the people about the post-independence of Morocco, as zero positive transformations and additions are witnessed by the Moroccan society after the supposed independence. Moreover, *Year of the Elephant* is not only an illustration of the hard times experienced by the Moroccan women in the post-independence of Morocco but also a representation of the religious and cultured men and their false and fragmented identities. *Year of the Elephant*, more importantly, is a wake-up call to create 'a hierarchy of narrative voices' to defy patriarchal ideologies and question 'political and individual identities. Notably, *Year of the Elephant* is always viewed as a three-pillar narrative construction opening up a discussion on the struggles of women, identity crises of men, and socio-political, economic, and religious upheavals in Morocco in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (El-Batran 2020).

Instead of using technological and military abilities and powers to achieve triumphs, contemporary colonialism now relies on producing hierarchies unsuitable for the traditional order. The new hierarchies create novella scenes for various advocates chiefly for those activists who always take the lead in the resistance movements (El-Batran 2020). Therefore, with the colonizer's final departure, these activists dominate key positions in various ranks, change their principles and lives, and embrace a system that maintains the colonizer's same methods, and sometimes uglier and much more horrible, to oppress their people. This is evident in Zahra's words addressing her husband, Mohammed: "We are waiting for reform to come from the likes of these, as you're more dangerous than the colonizers" (65).

Among the themes in the context of the postcolonial era is the focus on the struggle for independence (Dellali and Maoui 2024). However, the new reality looks like an unprecedented shock for ambitious and striving people who have strongly struggled for the feeling of freedom and independence and delight in their rights. The disappointment and distress resulting from the incomplete independence are manifested in the broken voice of Zahra, saying "At the beginning of the Resistance, the struggle would wash away all spite and malice, Independence would relieve our cares and heal our sores like miracle cures sold in the market. In fact, we loaded Independence down with a burden it could not bear" (78). The said situation inundated with frustration and disappointment leaves Moroccans in a state of distrust and loss. This has also been exemplified in Abouzeid's work through the protagonist's relationship with the surrounding people and association with the place.

Right from the start, we are aware of the fact that Zahra broke her ties with her birthplace a long time ago. As a result, she decides to sell her room, the only thing inherited from her parents, ignoring her grandma's advice, saying "and from my earliest consciousness, I remember my grandmother's constant admonition; the woman has nothing but her husband and her property, and that husbands cannot be trusted" (15). Zahra also utters "No woman sells her property, so tradition dictates, as I grew up among such words and deeds" (15). Thus, traditions stand behind her decision not to sell the only room inherited from the deceased parents. Later on, the shocking events happening with Zahra confirm the accuracy of

Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*: A Reexploration Case from  
a Postcolonial Lens

her grandma's speech about men. Having learned that her ex-husband is dishonest, Zahra is appreciative of her grandmother's advice to keep her room for relaxation and recovery.

In the same vein, the experience of living in a humble room leads Zahra to a situation of uneasiness (Abushihab, Awad, and Abushihab, 2021). On the grounds that she is used to living in cities, the new place 'the old inherited room' looks very low. With the passing days, Zahra recognizes that town life is unbearable and demanding and therefore, she whines about the whole kit and caboodle, saying "It is a house that never knows peace" (27). Zahra adds that the surrounding climate impacts the house, as is evident in her words "The gloom of the day casts sadness over the house and a chill unrelated to the cold weather seeps through it" (27). Additionally, Zahra wonders about the condition of the house, asking "Was that written in my destiny as well?" (62). Zahra, therefore, describes the town as "a dying town, trying to fight off death with hope and miracles" (62). The protagonist once again, reminds the readers of the inability of the town and its dried streams, saying "What happened to this town? They have marginalized it and sentenced it to death, like me" (63).

As gleaned in Zahra's words, readers are left with a case of alienation as the town, which was bright, is now deserted. Zahra's family members either died or left the town. For example, the terrible condition of the house with the possibility of collapse due to its residents' weight is another sign of alienation and loss. Nonetheless, it looks as if the one who has changed is Zahra, not the town. Thus, Zahra's miserable image of her town is only an expression of a feeling of devastation and gloom. Taken together, it is found that the town is unchangeable and is still the same even with Zahra's departure or re-arrival. More notably, the just-arrived Zahra is no longer the first Zahra. Husband-related problems such as disrespect, abandonment, and betrayal, alongside her suffering during the resistance period, have transformed Zahra into an elder, lonelier, and gloomier woman, looking at the storm as a sign of death that symbolically demonstrates her miserable future, as gleaned from Zahra's words:

From the bus window, I had surveyed the impact of the storm, recognized its ominous signs. Trees lay in the middle of the road amidst the rubble of uprooted shacks. The scene reminded me of the flood seven years ago that had swept away everything and left our town in ruins. What the forces of storm and flood destroy is enough to build entire cities. My heart contracted, knowing that this storm was but a warning of worse to me, but I could not worry about that. (Abouzeid 1980, 1).

As gleaned from Zahra's previous lines, nature erupts to devastate the whole things that meet in its path. To put it simply, it is a depiction of the anger and mess inside it, as if nature replies back on behalf of Zahra. The moaning voice of Zahra's broken heart is represented by the said storm that loudly screams with no noise made or heard. Thanks to the significance of this meaningful scene, an allegorical picture demonstrating the internal eruption inside Zahra is incorporated into Abouzeid's literary work. Zahra's internal eruption severely impacts her, as she neither perceives things nor admires her previous likes, leading her to raise a question about her identity saying:

I cross the square, breathing in the smell of the town, a mixture of moist earth and dung, and walk through the gates. In the past, I had felt intoxicated every time I

passed through those portals, but now as I look beyond the town walls at the dilapidated rooms with their rows of arched windows lining the riverbank, I feel nothing. Have I lost my identity? (Abouzeid 1980, 2).

With the first step to enter the town, a sense of security overcomes Zahra's feelings of alienation, negativity, and loss, especially once she sets foot in a small mosque to meet the Sheikh 'faqih'. The faqih was the only choice left from the past that has never changed thanks to his talent to make Zahra feel safer, more relaxed, and better, as these feelings are evident in her words, saying "As soon as I see him, I feel reassured. I had feared that he, like Rahma, might have passed on. But nothing about him has changed, as if in his world, time does not exist" (9). The repeated incorporation of religion alongside the highly positive attitudes held by Zahra towards the faqih is a confirmation of Abouzeid's trust in religious beliefs and doctrines on one hand. Zahra, on the other hand, asserts that with the presence of the faqih, she is surrounded by an atmosphere filled with comfort, purity, and oblivion, demonstrating that prayer has put a happy end to her problems with sleeplessness.

With these unexpected social conditions, no more choices are left for Zahra except to live a short time in her native place, strive to handle the new circumstances, and make efforts to get the required money to manage everyday matters. With this in mind, the returning-home Moroccan heroine makes up her mind to abandon the whole place in quest of a better and livable life and place. With Zahra's act of leaving the town, she feels completely intoxicated by her liberation. Away from her good personal and social relationships or 'Human Relationships' with Roukia, her grandmother, and the faqih, pessimism and uncooperativeness characterize her relationship with other characters. Zahra's father, for example, who shall be her safe and restful haven, is no longer the safe and restful haven, as this is evident in Zahra's following words:

I never saw him, may God have mercy on him, without a furrow on his brow. If laughter slipped from his mouth, he would rein it in again and scold us as if the fault were ours. When he lost his temper, he would curse my brothers and sisters, but spare me. I was always the favorite, ever since I had gathered olives, albeit reluctantly, in the cold chill of the Atlas which even the grown-ups could not stand. He also favored me because I didn't live with him though I probably only realized that later in life. I used to panic at the sound of his voice, I suppose out of solidarity with my siblings and would not feel safe again until he had gone or I had returned to my grandfather's house. (Abouzeid 1980, 15).

Like Zahra's deceased father, her sister and brother-in-law left no chance for Zahra to love them, as Zahra always expresses negative feelings about them. For example, when Zahra's sister shows up to see her, Zahra says: "Somebody had passed the news on to her. What could she want? Clearly, she expects that like other divorced women, I will abide by custom and live with her" (76). Once again, when Zahra's sister asks Zahra to go with her, she replies "I am not going with anybody". In the same vein, once her brother-in-law adds "You have a family and have no reason to drag yourself from one place to another" (76), Zahra harshly replies "I am not anyone's inheritance, and I am not leaving Casablanca" (76). It is worth mentioning that a quick analysis of Zahra's attitudes toward family members demonstrates that

what irritates them is not Zahra's reaction to her sister's invitation to live with her. Nevertheless, Zahra is now in search of dignity, freedom, and independence, alongside the fact that Zahra's attempts to avoid being under others' mercy are crystal-clear.

On the subject of the spousal relationship, Zahra's spouse was imposed on Zahra, ignoring her thoughts as a rational person and depriving her of any rights such as selecting the right man as her future husband. Depriving Zahra's rights in marriage is evident in her words, saying "The family decided to marry me off without ever asking for my thoughts" (20). Zahra's second miserable stage of the marital relationship begins with the moment of living in the father-in-law's house, as she receives a cold welcome, leading her to go through hard times, mostly after Zahra's big failure to be a pregnant woman. About the failure to show pregnancy signs, Zahra says:

I passed a year in my in-laws' house without venturing outside even once. Finally, when I still showed no signs of imminent childbirth, I was sent off to make the rounds of shrines, burn incense, wear charms, and drink various herbal mixtures. I would have drunk poison if they had given it to me. When they give up hope, their treatment of me worsened considerably. In the face of their unceasing reproaches, I became convinced that I was indeed the guilty party and labored under that burden ever after. I'm not so sure now that it was my fault. (Abouzeid 1980, 21).

With the passing of days, and away from the problems instigated by her father-in-law and mother-in-law, the two spouses "Zahra and her husband" began a new life; a life, according to Zahra, is emotionally dry, motionless and with zero enthusiasm. Zahra, however, has gone into pain and grief once her husband is indicted with arranging for a strike, saying "I went to visit him and couldn't recognize him. His emaciated cheeks looked as if a hammer had beaten them in, and every time I looked at him, I saw the hammer in my head and felt sickened by pain and nausea" (23). In Arab world countries in general and Morocco in particular, it is a normal act that people are used to founding families based on companionability and honesty instead of voiced emotions. Zahra's husband, conversely, is a different story, as he differs from people. To put it simply, Zahra's husband not only is an unappreciative person who never appreciates Zahra's sacrifices but also overlooks her efforts and struggles with him amid the resistance period. More notably, he closes your eyes to her work with him during the period they lived together experiencing all the ups and downs of life.

More shockingly, Zahra's spouse 'Mohammed' has left her behind divorced though he knows that Zahra is now powerless and incapable of resuming life again, intentionally disregarding all her previous work and support for him because she is in disagreement with his new political and societal position. In other words, Zahra, who is a traditional woman, has deep roots in her original skin, refuses to adopt the enemy's skin, fights the colonizers for a while, and is an eyewitness of the looting acts of the colonizers in her country, is no longer the viable woman that can stand with him shoulder to shoulder to achieve his future aspirations. Thus, Zahra confirms that this atmosphere of treachery and treason has resulted in eliminating "the roots of trust from her soul and sow unending wariness and suspicion in their place" (61).

Prior to the big loss and frustration resulting from her husband's acts of betrayal, Zahra has previously discovered the end of her illusion during the first few years of independence. During the attendance of an item-based auction symbolizing commitments to the Moroccan national movement, she noticed that Safia, a close friend, had taken one of the best pieces to keep it for herself, saying "Safia had helped herself to some of the donations" (61). Like other close friends, Zahra says "She met Safia on the long trek to independence and grew to love them all" (42). Also, among the people taking advantage of their work as supporters of the resistance movement are Hajj Ali, Faqih, Rahal, Roukia, and Walter. With her home return, Zahra told her husband about Safia's story, where he responded with a mysterious question: "Have they already started?" (61), demonstrating that he was fully aware of how these members would act, given that these acts are expected from them.

Hajj Ali, a close friend of Zahra, is also another key member who took advantage of the winds of change that stormed Morocco. Known as a loyal pro-independence, Zahra describes Hajj Ali, saying "He is a husky and enduringly cheerful blacksmith whose skill at his craft fueled his happiness and glowed like live coals under the bellows of his forge. His love for his work was matched only by love for his country" (36). Alongside handing out brochures and arranging means for prisoners in the central prison, Hajj Ali did several secret activities, as Zahra says "After Independence, they appointed him *caid* in one of the southern provinces" (37). According to Zahra, a *said* (lit. Mr.), a job title related to power during colonialism and continued after independence, is awarded to several supporters of independence 'pro-independence', saying:

In the colonial period, the *said* was head of a tribe and lived regally. He was a member of the feudal class that controlled people's lives and property in collusion with the protectorate authorities. The latter had hoped in this way to create numerous pockets of diluted power, thereby weakening national unity and frustrating the central government. The *caid* was a distinguished personage, associated in the people's minds with wealth, power and fear. The word now denotes a position in the Ministry of Interior, which is equivalent to that of mayor, but in the early days of independence, the title was still surrounded with prestige (Abouzeid 1980, 37).

All of Zahra's colleagues and members such as Hajj Ali and Faqih were unprepared to handle the new job positions due to the sudden and quick occurrence of these changes in Morocco. Later on, having visited Hajj Ali in the southern area of Morocco, Zahra notices that he has experienced an unstable and unbalanced condition, saying "Hajj Ali was tense and dispirited as if his fairy-tale happiness had died like the fire in his workshop furnace in the old city of Rabat" (37). With that unexpected situation, Zahra wonders "Where had his good cheer, energy, and determination gone?" On the same day, she recognized one fact, saying "Man's spiritual health, like his principles, is the most fragile possession" (37).

Similar to Hajj Ali, Zahra's close friend, Roukia, and her husband have also profited from independence in Morocco, as Fakih questions: "Did you know I have been appointed *caid*?" Zahra replies: "Let me congratulate you," adding "It seems everyone's being appointed *caid* these days." (72). Faqih also replies, "I did well by choosing to be *caid* in Azilal, isn't that true, Roukia?" Later on, with Zahra's question about his decision to be *said*, Faqih replies "At least in Azilal, one can enjoy some

Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*: A Reexploration Case from  
a Postcolonial Lens

advantages. I tell them I want it for health reasons, but don't think they believe me". Faqih also added, "There one has plenty of eggs and chickens" (73). A thorough analysis and reading of the above excerpts demonstrate that the author 'Abouzeid' almost asserts that with the colonizers' act of leaving the country, most nationalists in Morocco had shown their hunger for authority, supremacy, and wealth by gripping the viable opportunities to ease their future lives and jobs, ignoring their principles, alongside the highest common interests which they pretended to protect and fight for during their resistance movements.

With the end of the colonial period in the last century in the Arab world, a case of chaos, negativity, pessimism, and the collapse of morals and values among people and nationalists is on the rise (Asi 2022). More importantly, the end of the colonial period in the Arab World should have produced the so-called the concept of neocolonialism represented by the national independence and the opportunity for sovereignty and self-rule in most countries in the Arab world in general and the Middle East in particular, except for Palestine. Its end, however, has not necessarily led to true liberation and self-determination, as several countries have not transitioned to democratic governance systems on the one hand. On the other hand, many countries still lack representative, credible, and responsive governments due to the powerful impact of colonial systems of domination left in the whole aspects of society.

As argued by Sartre (2001), colonialism and neocolonialism are regarded as oppressive systems aiming to exploit colonized people and take advantage of their land resources. Within the concept of colonialism, the colonizer designs a model of power dynamic to control the entire forms of power and reduce the colonized people to objects of exploitation. Regarding neocolonialism, it retains both the same oppressive system and works under the guise of cultural and economic dominance. At the same level, the intellectuals' role is also critiqued, for they justify and perpetuate the oppressive system. Despite the various approaches a country can take concerning the lands it colonizes, the huge majority of colonial positions and situations include numerous overlapping features that help in understanding how the legacies of colonial powers still persist, particularly in education, health, economy, and politics (Asi 2022). Also, Sartre (2001) also asserts that the role of intellectuals shall be manifested in confronting this system by siding with themselves with the oppressed ones and promoting their role as critics. Accordingly, Sartre's calls act as a wake-up call to reevaluate the dominant ideology and reclaim agency by colonized people.

Accordingly, most characters, including Zahra, live in an atmosphere inundated with negativity and terrible feelings. Therefore, they cannot appreciate anybody, or anything related to the form of life in the postcolonial era. With that, even Zahra could not cope with the people around her including her neighbors, saying:

Now, I seclude myself in this room, as contemplation is the want of the intelligent slander and gossip. I know these people. Poverty has imposed the lowest of morals on them. Some of them say I've heard them say she's unsociable, aloof, a miser even with words. They understand nothing. Some women come to visit me, but their merciless gossip about other households nauseates me I feel disgust rising in me and my stomach tightens. (Abouzeid 1980, 18).

In the same vein, like other characters, Zahra with her positive-negative feelings has often felt that she stands behind the prevailing negativism in the countries living in the postcolonial period, saying “I despise everyone, including myself. There seems to be such a malaise and feebleness permeating everything. What’s wrong? Is it black magic spell?” (11). Apart from Zahra’s destructive position of common people in Morocco, she still has a positive stance toward Western institutions and people. On one occasion, Zahra and her husband have been warmly and generously hosted by a Moroccan woman whose husband is from Germany working as a guard in Morocco. Later on, with the chance of being well-received and well-fed in their house, Zahra says:

A sense of warm familiarity enveloped us. The man came in with his two small daughters in hand and sat down cross-legged, putting one girl on each knee. Watching him, I felt a strange mix of emotions, a new kind of affection tinged with the dregs of years of looting and misunderstanding. Everything I had heard and seen since childhood only served to confirm my belief that Westerns were an entirely separate species; I even wondered what they ate. (Abouzeid 1980, 52).

Likewise, in the context of Zahra’s attempts to find a job in any Moroccan corporation, her attempts completely failed, and Zahra is given no chance to work at all. With this in mind, the “We have no jobs available” drives Zahra to conclude “We will never prosper with the likes of people belonging to the colonizers” (25). On the other hand, once Zahra is given a job as a cleaning woman at the French Cultural Center, she refuses the whole idea saying, “I am waiting for an answer from the factories to which I have written” (77). However, when Zahra finally realizes no more jobs offered by the national companies in Morocco, she says “I come face to face with the basic fact that we can’t do without the French after all” (78). As previously gleaned, Zahra, like other Moroccans, intentionally or unintentionally, compares Moroccans’ and Westerners’ attitudes and behaviors and valorizes the latter.

#### **4. Conclusion**

To conclude, Leila Abouzeid provides a subjective view of Moroccan history pre- and post-colonization era or the so-called ‘postcolonial era’, as the author’s mission is to utilize their literary, cultural, and imaginative discourse to shed light on the various common issues daily experienced by Arabs. The deep analysis conducted in this article demonstrates that the injustice of some natives ‘Moroccans’ is crueler than the colonizers’ injustice in several life aspects. Another important point is that prioritizing, alongside appreciating the colonizers’ stand in the Moroccan case is based on the fact that the colonizers left behind vital and effective transformations at the infrastructure, health, education, and political level. Another key concluding mark is that Abouzeid is not only the voice of the lion’s share of the passive Moroccans who continuously pretext to justify their inaction and corruption but also is a mirror of the whole gloomy picture prevailing among the passive Arabs in the Arab world. Her self-reflexivity in depicting her experience and others in Morocco in a valid historical and literary narrative sets this literary piece as a benchmark in postcolonial literature in general and the genre of modern novella in particular.

عام الفيل للكاتبة ليلي أبو زيد: حالة من إعادة الاستكشاف من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار

سيف الدين الغماز

قسم اللغة الفرنسية والإنجليزية وآدابهما، جامعة الزيتونة الأردنية، الأردن

أسعد الغليظ

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الزيتونة الأردنية، الأردن

الملخص

من الحقائق المتزايدة باستمرار حول الأدب ما بعد الاستعماري أنه يبذل جهوداً للسيطرة على مفهوم التمثيل الذاتي، إلى جانب خلق عالم جديد واقتلاع الموروث الثقافي والاجتماعي للعصر الاستعماري. على العكس من ذلك، نجد أن أدب ما بعد الاستعمار قد يعيد تأسيس الكثير من الصور النمطية الأساسية التي أسسها الخطاب الاستعماري بالفعل، إلى جانب إعادة خلق خطاب مدمر وكئيبي يساهم في تدهور نسيج، وتضامن، وصورة المجتمعات المستعمرة. في ضوء ذلك، تهدف هذه الورقة إلى إعادة النظر في رواية ليلي أبو زيد عام الفيل (1980) باستخدام تحليل سردي موضوعي ما بعد الاستعمار. تعتمد المنهجية على منظور ما بعد الاستعمار وتحليل النصوص، إلى جانب الاستعانة بالمصادر الثانوية. ومن خلال تناول رواية عام الفيل للكاتبة ليلي أبو زيد بهذه الطريقة، فإن هذا البحث لا يشكل دعوة لإعادة التفكير في التصورات التقليدية المتعلقة بالقضايا والمفاهيم ما بعد الاستعمارية فحسب، بل يهدف أيضاً إلى تعزيز فهمنا لتراث الأدب المغربي كشخصية محورية في الأدب العربي المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعمار، الخطاب، الأدب المغربي، ما بعد الاستعمار، تمثيل الذات.

## References

- Abd-Rabbo, Muna. 2019. Overlapping Character Variations in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Journal of Narrative Theory* 49 (1): 55-81. <http://doi:10.1353/jnt.2019.0002>
- Abouzeid, Leila. 1980. *Year of the Elephant*, trans. Barbara Parmenter. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Abushihab, Ibrahim, Enas Awad, and Esraa Abushihab. 2021. Nostalgia and alienation in the poetry of Arab-American Mahjar poets (Emigrant Poets): Literary criticism to stylistics. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 11(9), 1101–1108. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1109.17>
- Alkam, Sabha. 2023. Poetry and the novel in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's critical blog. *Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan Journal for Human and Social Studies* 4 (1), 238-254. <https://doi.org/10.15849/ZJHSS.230330.11>
- Al-Khayyat Amal, and Yousef Abu Amrieh. 2023. Islamic Identity and Weather Conditions in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and *The Kindness of Enemies*. *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10 (1). <http://doi:10.1080/23311983.2023.2222452>
- Aissat, Karima. 2024. The Franco-Algerian War: Narrating the Failure of the French Imperialist Project in Norman Lewis's *Darkness Visible* (1960). *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages & Literatures* 16 (2):523-42. <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.16.2.14>
- Asi, Yara. 2022. *The Colonial Legacy in the Arab World: Health, Education, and Politics*. Arab Center Washington DC. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-colonial-legacy-in-the-arab-world-health-education-and-politics/>
- Boullata, Issa. 2010. Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman's Journey toward Independence, and Other Short Stories. (Rev. *Digest of Middle East Studies* 19 (1): 169-1989. <http://doi:10.1111/j.1949-3606.2010.00028.x>
- Dellali, Rahil and Hocine Maoui. 2024. Postmodern Feminist Amnesia: De-Centering Trauma and Re-Defining Subalternity in Elizabeth Nunez's *Bruised Hibiscus*. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages & Literatures* 16 (1): 253-68. <http://doi:10.47012/jjml.16.1.14>.
- Douglas, Roxanne. 2022. Buried in the Desert and Lost in the City: Gothic Spaces in Egyptian Feminist Writing. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 59 (1): 57–71. <http://doi:10.1080/17449855.2022.2130002>.
- El-Batran, Mariam. 2020. An Unsilenced Text: The Literature of the Female Voice in Hanan Al-Shaykh's *Women of Sand and Myrrh* and Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*. [Published Master's Thesis]. The American University in Cairo, Egypt. <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/802>
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. AM Sheridan Smith: Pantheon Books, New York.
- Fox, Rachel. 2022. Narrating Horrific Refugee Experiences in Hassan Blasim's Short Fiction. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 59 (1): 43–56. <http://doi:10.1080/17449855.2022.2150090>.
- Gana, Nouri. 2024. Melancholy Acts: Defeat and Cultural Critique in the Arab World. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, July 1–3. <http://doi:10.1080/17449855.2024.2376393>
- James, Sater. 2010. *Morocco (The Contemporary Middle East): 1st Edition*: Routledge. London.

Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*: A Reexploration Case from  
a Postcolonial Lens

- Laboudi, Hesna. 2024. Re-Mapping the Postcolonial Heritage of Exile in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages & Literatures* 16 (2):543-55. <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.16.2.15>
- Qutami, Mais. 2022. Countering normalized violence in Aboulela's —The Museuml and El Guindi's —Trading in my Arabl. *Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan Journal for Human and Social Studies* 3 (3): 224-235. <https://doi.org/10.15849/ZJHSS.221130.13>
- Rashed, Redhwan. 2021. Double Colonization: A Voice of the Voiceless in Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*. *Review of Middle East Studies* 55 (1): 91–109. <http://doi:10.1017/rms.2021.33>.
- Said, Edward. 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 2001. *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, translated by Steve Brewer, Azzedine Haddour, Terry McWilliams; republished by Routledge France. ISBN 0-415-19145-9.
- Spivak, Gayatri. 2014. *The Post-colonial Critic, Interviews, Strategies, and Dialogues*: Routledge. <http://doi:10.4324/9780203760048>
- Williams, Jeffrey. 2024. Thinking-with-Others: David Scott, the Stance of Criticism, and the Interview. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, July, 1–12. <http://doi:10.1080/17449855.2024.2371366>.