




**SPECIAL FOCUS: SPOTLIGHT ON PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND
THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION**

Double Colonization: A Voice of the Voiceless in Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant*

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Abstract

Many Afro-Arab women novelists, if not all, have been addressing feminist issues for ages while homeland issues have been masculinized. Against this trend, Leila Abouzeid's academic interests span not only women's issues, but also those of men and of her country as well. Her book shows how a woman is dominated by patriarchy and colonization and how she herself appears to be an executioner. It also shows her struggle and resistance against patriarchy and imperial power, without sacrificing her commitment to her national and religious identity. In contrast to secular feminism, Abouzeid views religion as a source of relief and solace. The study also argues that the men happily adopt the colonial culture whereas their women resist it. Tackling the experience of double colonization in *Year of the Elephant* captures the experiences of millions of women in both the eastern and western hemispheres who rebel over the laws that govern their lives.

Keywords: Colonization; emancipation; identity; Leila Abouzeid; patriarchy; resistance

Historically, women have experienced different kinds of oppression from both patriarchy and colonization because of socially constructed roles that view them as occupying an inferior social status. Such subjugation is mirrored in literature, particularly in women's writing that often testifies to the pain of living under the shadow of patriarchy and colonization. This victimization is examined in *Year of the Elephant* (2011), which looks at the efforts of Moroccan females to resist both patriarchy and western colonization. "Empire and patriarchy act as analogous to each other and both exert control over female colonial subjects, who are, thus, doubly colonized by imperial/patriarchal power".¹ In fact, Abouzeid "gives Voice to ordinary women who contributed in the

¹ B. Ashcroft, G. Gareth, and T. Helen, *Post-colonial Studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.) (London: Routledge, 2007), 66.

multi-faceted struggle against patriarchal hegemony inside and against the French colonial domination from outside.”²

Year of the Elephant is a protest against victimizing Moroccan women. It investigates the interrelationships between patriarchy and colonialism and analyzes how the patriarchal system supports colonial power and vice versa. Colonialization strengthens patriarchy by encouraging men to oppress women. “Colonialism and patriarchy reinforce each other as systems of domination. Mechanisms of domination developed for patriarchal control could be applied in a colonial context and vice versa.”³ “Colonial domination has produced ideologies and cultural practices which buttress patriarchy.”⁴ Thus, the oppression of women begins when men are marginalized. In spite of the contest between the colonizer and the colonized man, both share the same mentality of oppressing whoever is subordinate. Moane points out that the systems of oppression and domination adopted by colonization are identical to the strategies men use to dominate women. The colonizer justifies occupying the state to tame the nations that are savage. This mentality is then adopted by the men of the colonized country to dominate women, who are seen incomplete. The strategy of using all forms of violence against the colonized countries are used by men. A fourth strategy is the seizure of economic resources. Similarly, abusive men control women’s economic resources. While the colonizer controls the culture of the whole colonized society, men control public images of women in every walk of life. Those strategies of colonial domination are employed by patriarchy to continue male domination over women.⁵ While the colonizer oppresses the whole colonized society, the patriarchal society oppresses women. In short, there is no colonization without patriarchy; they go together hand in hand. However, awareness of this dynamic among people, and especially women, enable them to resist the inhumane treatment and psychological torture of both the patriarchal system and French colonization.

For a long time, patriarchy has been a stumbling block to progress in expanding women’s rights. Colonization enhances the repression, sacrifice, and dehumanization that women face as a result of patriarchy. The situation of Moroccan women is thus far worse than that of Moroccan men. They encounter many more domestic difficulties.

Abouzeid eloquently reflects on the twin impact of patriarchal authority and colonial dominance on women’s status and on her protagonist’s rebellious attitudes. It highlights how Zahra, the heroine, radically challenges and resists patriarchy and colonization. It also reveals how women can be responsible for their own humiliation, downfall, and disruption and, finally, how they can achieve survival and freedom.

² Leila Abouzeid Bukari, “Pioneer Moroccan Woman Writer,” *Journal of the African Literature Association* 2.2 (2008): 224-51, 247, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21674736.2008.11690088> doi:10.1080/21674736.2008.11690088.

³ G. Moane, *Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression* (New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ Moane, *Gender and Colonialism*.

A textual analysis of *Year of the Elephant* through the lens of postcolonial feminism, this study is primarily concerned with the representation of women who suffer from “Double colonization”⁶ in colonized countries. The female characters “experience double colonization due to their race and gender and are therefore silenced.”⁷ This paper analyzes the female character in this context and her state of double marginalization. Exploitation and profiteering of the female is the outcome of a colonial heritage and patriarchy where the colonialists and males are always taking advantage of females.

A key concept in postcolonial studies is that of double colonization. In Post colonialism, Young points out the double exploitation of the native women:

For women, the problem centered on the fact that the conditions against which they were campaigning were the product of two kinds of oppression which put the antagonists of the nationalist struggle in the same camp: patriarchal systems of exploitation were common to both colonial regimes and indigenous societies. Women therefore had to fight the double colonization of patriarchal domination in its local as well as its imperial forms.⁸

This paper will discuss Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism in relationship to the concept of double colonization – the occident stands for men and the orient for women. This study argues that women are dominated and suppressed in colonial societies twice. In the first instance, she embodies the concept of the Other for the colonial power, and in the second, she represents the Other to the patriarchal power (father, husband, and society). In this respect, patriarchy and colonization share a similar role in dominating women. In fact, colonization enhances existing social inequalities. Thus, by collaborating with patriarchy, colonization subdues and controls one half of the population in a colonized society, the half which is presented in *Year of the Elephant* through the character of Zahra, a victim of patriarchy and colonization.

Leila Abouzeid (1950)

Abouzeid, an outstanding Moroccan woman novelist was born into a patriarchal society, not long before Morocco gained independence in 1956. Thus, her work is influenced in a way by her own experience of patriarchy and colonialism and their immediate consequences. Topics such as double colonization and marginalization are the leitmotifs of Leila Abouzeid’s postcolonial works.

⁶ Double colonization is a term coined in the mid 1980s and usually is identified with Holst Petersen and Rutherford’s “A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women’s Writing” which deals with the question of female visibility and struggles of female writers in a male-dominated world. The term refers to women who are oppressed by both patriarchy and colonization.

⁷ S.M. Ahmed, “Double Colonization: A Postcolonial Feminist Study of Sia Figiel’s,” *Scholaria: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* 9.1 (Winter 2019): 1–10. Retrieved June 25, 2020, <https://ejournal.uksw.edu/scholaria/article/view/2062/1083>.

⁸ R.J. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 379.

Yet, her literary concerns are not limited to the world of feminism only but extend also to politics. The relationship with the Other / the West and the question of identity comprises another set of salient issues in her narratives. Her interest in politics is grounded in the fact that her social situation is inseparable from the general political situation. Though she pays attention to the special problems encountered by Moroccan women, any local problem that is honestly addressed is highly qualified to have global applications because human experiences have many commonalities. In this respect, Shaban states that nothing highlights these denominators better than the sincerity of expression.⁹

A Moroccan figure to the core, Abouzeid remains faithful to her national identity and linguistic memory. She rejects the need to separate that from her identity. Audaciously, she declares that Moroccan women are more conservative than men. Though fluent in English, she writes in Arabic. She thus “claims independence from an oppressive power and allows herself to write as she wishes.”¹⁰ She “also wants to retain ties to her Arab, Muslim heritage.”¹¹ This is manifested by Zahra, the heroine of *Year of the Elephant*, who represents millions of women experiencing the same fate and resist both patriarchy and colonial influence.

Analysis of *Year of the Elephant* (1984)

Year of the Elephant, published in Arabic in 1983, originally appeared in episodes in a newspaper in the capital city of Rabat. It was published in its full form in 1984 in Morocco and later translated into English, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Maltese, French, Turkish, and Urdu. It is penned in the aftermath of the struggle for liberation from colonization and patriarchy (seen as a part of colonization). It “is a tale of one woman’s struggle against the inequalities and injustice of her situation: an intensely personal story of a small victory with large implications.”¹² The story revolves around a Moroccan woman’s journey toward independence from patriarchal power and colonization. It chronicles the courage and endurance of Zahra, the heroine, as she returns from Casablanca to her hometown to recover from a divorce after a 20-year marriage. Zahra “questions society’s valuation of women, while her hardship leads to a reappraisal of the meaning of independence at both the national and the individual levels, as well as the nature of societal change.”¹³

⁹ B. Shaban, “Qalaq Al-Madhee: Qira’a fi A’am al fil [Past Anxiety: Reading in Year of the Elephant],” *Works of the Women’s Writing Seminar - Imagining and Receiving*, (2005) 253–257. Retrieved September 5, 2020. <http://search.mandumah.com/Record/515648>.

¹⁰ R. Strohman, *Literature in the Language of Life: The Importance of Writing in Colloquial Moroccan Arabic* (2011), 13. <https://dra.american.edu/islandora/object/1011capstones:118>.

¹¹ T. Islam Khannous, “Gender, and Identity in Leila Abouzeid’s The Last Chapter: A Postcolonial Critique,” *West Chester University* 37.1 (Winter 2010): 174–89. 76.doi:10.1353/lit.0.0088

¹² N. Greg, “Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman’s Journey Toward Independence,” *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 10.2 (Summer 1991): 3. Retrieved November 12, 2020. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/218800453?accountid=35493>.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

The heroine's "philosophy is a progressive and rebellious one that challenges the oppressive aspects of her society and at the same time affirms her identity as both a Muslim and a Moroccan."¹⁴ Zahra's dilemma seems to be her desire to keep her identity as a Muslim Moroccan woman. Through Zahra, Abouzeid presents an example of a female that resists and fights the patriarchal system and the colonial ideology simultaneously; with resistance being seen as the only way to conquer patriarchy and colonization.

The narrative remains "a stark example of resistance narratives that foreground women's experiences in postcolonial and patriarchal societies."¹⁵ Many critics read it as a reaction to colonialism and patriarchy. The novel, however, shows that independent Moroccan society is not better than colonialism. Abouzeid intends to stage a "protest of women in her contemporary society and to destabilize the prevalent male hegemony."¹⁶ Abouzeid, who was subject to French Powers, "is also enmeshed in the dynamics of colonial discourse that portrays native women as mere objects of sexual desire."¹⁷ She sheds light on the strength of the Moroccan woman and refutes the image that portrays women as powerless and men-reliant in everything.

The novelist attacks the treatment of women in a patriarchal society in which women are treated as objects as Zahra says: "How worthless a woman is if she can be returned with a receipt like some store-bought object! How utterly worthless!"¹⁸ Zahra felt like a commodity when her divorce paper arrived. She is in the possession of her family or her husband and thus has no control over her fate. This is reflected throughout Zahra's life. For example, in her childhood her father declares that she belongs to her grandfather, saying "She is yours till you bury her or she buries you,"¹⁹ as if she were an object without any sentimental value. Zahra is brought up in a way that complies and fears of patriarchy. "I've been a lot of compliance since I was a child. . . . It makes me feel afraid if his voice rang out. I don't feel safe until he goes."²⁰

As Zahra gets older, her future husband sees her, and wants to marry her only because she is beautiful. He bases his "choice on my long hair and dark eyes."²¹ This means his choice is built on her outward appearance which states that woman is an object of sexual and carnal desires. Moreover, the head of the family is decisive in the future of the girls. The identification and choice of the husband is not the right of the woman and there is no room for negotiation. Zahra is not asked about her opinion on her marriage. Her family "decided

¹⁴ H. Frances, "Briefly Noted: Arab Writers," *University of Texas* 6.4 (Summer, 1991: 1–4. Retrieved October 10, 2020. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/222399305?accountid=35493>.

¹⁵ S. Moukhlis, "A History of Hopes Postponed: Women's Identity and the Postcolonial State in 'Year of the Elephant,'" *Research in African Literatures* 34.3 (Fall 2003): 69. Retrieved October 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3821250>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁸ L. Abouzeid, *A'am Al Feal* [Year of the Elephant] (Beirut: Arab Cultural Center, 2011), 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

to marry me off without ever asking for my thoughts.”²² This indicates the suppression and silence of women’s voice; women have no say in their own marriage and have no control over their destiny within marriage. “Zahra has to realize her social conditions as a woman with no rights whatsoever and entrapped by social, cultural and religious constraints.”²³ In this respect, Edward Said in *Orientalism* says: “She never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination.”²⁴

In fact, Zahra’s personal destiny, as she herself confesses, is linked to her gender. “All this because I’m a woman. . . I mean our return to the shadow after all that has happened.”²⁵ She may find herself repudiated at any time. She may only know about it when her husband finalizes the divorce process. So instead of feeling happy on the day of her marriage, Zahra describes fear and disgust that consume her on her wedding day. She says: “My wedding procession passed along this street, and ending in that house over there, the house of my bondage. . . I hadn’t known him before the engagement.”²⁶ Upon wedding, Zahra seems to be in a painful situation. She blames her traditional parents for her marriage. She “saw a dead body on a wood in a white cloth with a black cover and I felt awed and disgusted.”²⁷ With such a quote, she dies in her marriage.

The journey of her suffering does not stop her. She is brought up to be wary of the husband and the future. Her grandmother repeatedly points to the issue of legal ownership of women: “a woman has nothing but her husband, or her property and husbands are not trustworthy.”²⁸ Zahra’s grandmother undoubtedly knows the future that awaits Zahra as a housewife and as a woman: she must follow her husband’s will. She has to put his needs and desire above everything else. By and large, a woman “is not measured by the virtue of her intelligence and kindness but in her ability to put her husband’s needs and desire above others in life”²⁹. She is internalized to believe that blind obedience to her husband is a gateway to heaven. The tragedy is that women cannot trust men, but they must depend on them. Abouzeid also notes that this patriarchal ideology is enshrined in Moroccan law, as Zahra recalls that “The law does not authorize anything” to protect women.³⁰

During her marriage, Zahra is forced to fulfill her husband’s desires to the extent that she has no right to leave her husband’s house under any circumstance. She spends one year at her in-law’s house without venturing outside even once.³¹ It can be said that wives in patriarchal societies have to tolerate

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ Bukari, “Pioneer Moroccan Woman Writer,” 233.

²⁴ E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 6.

²⁵ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 106.

²⁶ Ibid., 31

²⁷ Ibid., 31

²⁸ Ibid., 24

²⁹ Pakri & Anandan, *A Feminist-Postcolonial Analysis of Power and Ideology in Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Infidel* (Elsevier Ltd., 2015), 200. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.196.

³⁰ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 29.

³¹ Ibid., 32

all types of agony at their husband's houses because if they try to rebel, they will be punished or rebuked. Zahra says: "For our people, divorce is a catastrophe, an absolute disaster."³² Divorce is one of the biggest problems that women experience in a society that is ruthless, and that views women with great suspicion. Divorce, in Maghreb and Arab society in general, is associated with sin and immorality. This society does not seek to discover who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed; it deals automatically with the stereotype of a repudiated woman, whose features are summed up in prostitution.³³ The psychological agony experienced by the repudiated Zahra is expressed in her words which the narrative begins with and which intimates a tone of despair. "I come back to my hometown feeling shattered and helpless. Yesterday, anxiety was tearing me apart, but today despair is tormenting me even more."³⁴

Moreover, Abouzeid shows how the identity of women in a patriarchal society is always linked to men. This means women are unable to support themselves financially. Zahra's grandmother points out the issue when she says: "a woman has nothing but her husband, or her property and husbands are not trustworthy."³⁵

According to Abouzeid, this patriarchal ideology is grievously enshrined in Moroccan laws. These laws do not protect women because women have no role in establishing the laws. The absence of women from the organs of decision-making means that their destiny is constantly being decided by males. Fatima Mernissi agrees that "the Moroccan Family Law was drafted solely by men."³⁶ Therefore, women should participate in decision-making to free themselves from the bondage of men.³⁷

The pervasive discrimination against women in Morocco's legal system weighs heavily on Zahra, as her husband brusquely tells her "Your papers will be sent to you along with whatever the law provides."³⁸ This phrase recurs in Zahra's mind and is repeated eight times throughout the narrative (1, 10, 22, 41). The repetition reflects the psychological frustration experienced by Moroccan women. Yet, it is the law to be blamed more than Zahra's husband, a persecution that is permitted and expressly provided by the law, a matter that deepens Zahra's agony. Such laws strip women of basic liberties like the freedom of expression, the freedom of travel, and the freedom of deciding one's course in life. The domineering influence of the patriarchal system reaches basic social institutions such as schools and the family as well. However, it must be noted that "These crippling laws did not reflect the spirit

³² Ibid., 15

³³ Ben Bouza, "Al-haweea wal-Ikhtilaf fi alriwaya alneeswaea fi Maghreb al arabi [Identity and difference in the feminist narrative in Morocco]" (PhD diss., Haji Al-Khader University, 2007/2008), 110. Retrieved April 11, 2020. http://theses.univ-batna.dz/index.php/component/docman/doc_details/3097-----

³⁴ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 7.

³⁵ Ibid., 24.

³⁶ Moukhlis, "'A History of Hopes Postponed,'" 73.

³⁷ C. Afif, "Al nedham Alabawee wadwar Al-muthqaf [Patriarchy and the role of the intellectual]," *Philosophical Papers* 7.7 (Winter 2002): 152. Retrieved May 6, 2020. <http://search.mandumah.com/Record/625450>.

³⁸ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 7.

of Islam and were in reality a product of the new secular modern state.”³⁹ This has been supported by Fatima Mernissi who “states that the message of Islam was one of radical equality.”⁴⁰ Witnessing the hardship of the daughter of Rahma, her old neighbor shows how Abouzeid articulates the experience of the voiceless women in their societies. Salah Moukhlis explains that:

The main problem facing women in Morocco is that the laws governing marriage and family life were put together in the total absence of women and without taking them into consideration. Since women are mostly debarred from political life, their fate is constantly being decided by a male legislative body.⁴¹

Upon her divorce, Zahra has no say on her fate. This means she has neither say in her marriage nor in her divorce. Instead, her husband hands her the papers, effectively making the decision for her. “Your papers will be sent to you along with whatever the law provides.”⁴² The repetition of the statement asserts that the violence and social degradation that women are subjected to are totally legal and performed within the provision of the law. The employment of the technique of repetition makes the reader realize the extent of Zahra’s tragedy. As a symbol of the plight of Moroccan women, her rights are strangled by the law.

Zahra is physically abused, too. Her husband cheats on her and beats her such that she realizes he is worse than colonization. “At the bedroom door, he turned around and slapped.”⁴³ In fact, while trying to rebuild their self-confidence from the wound of colonization, men attempt to oppress women. “The strengthening of patriarchy within the family become one way for colonized men to assert their otherwise eroded power.”⁴⁴ Abouzeid here exposes how Moroccan women (after independence) are still objectified and commodified by patriarchy. Zahra notes “Misfortunes are not racist. If I were a man, I would now be a leader or at least Sheikh.”⁴⁵

Zahra resists her husband’s abuse, which shows that her struggle against male domination starts much earlier than her divorce. “Holding my face with one hand, I pointed at him with the other and shouted with all my strength as if addressing an imaginary crowd. . . . You’re more dangerous than the colonizers.”⁴⁶ The violence of the colonizer is thus equated with the violence of the patriarch. Implicit in this scene is Zahra’s rejection of

³⁹ Khannous, “Gender and Identity in Leila Abouzeid’s *The Last Chapter*,” 176.

⁴⁰ Z. A. Rani, “What Is Islamic Feminism?” (Proceeding of the 2nd International Conference on Management and Muamalah, 2015, 252. Retrieved January 25, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309661059_WHAT_IS_ISLAMIC_FEMINISM_PROMOTING_CULTURAL_CHANGE_AND_GENDER_EQUALITY).

⁴¹ Moukhlis, “A History of Hopes Postponed,” 73.

⁴² Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 7.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁴ A. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 184.

⁴⁵ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 106.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

outdated notions about women's identity. Salah Moukhlis states that "one of the main problems facing Zahra in *Year of the Elephant* is the fact that she has to struggle against such archaic notions of women's identity."⁴⁷ She refuses to be a burden on anyone. When her sister insists that Zahra comes to live with her after the divorce, Zahra rejects the offer, preferring to find a job and to support herself on her own. She declares: "I'm not anyone's inheritance. . . and I'm not leaving Casablanca" (109). Bukari adds:

Refusing to be someone's appendage, Zahra rejects the offer of the brother and sister in law to provide her a temporary shelter after staying a whole year without going out. This rebellious reaction will lead the protagonist to develop not only resistance survival strategies based on hard work, friendship, and religious faith.⁴⁸

Zahra's decision to obtain her own living is a brave step toward independence. It also reflects her maturity and personal growth. "Even though she finds employment only as a cleaning woman, she is opting for financial and social autonomy."⁴⁹ Afif supports the argument that women must be free from their bondage to men on all levels. If given the opportunity to be financially independent, she would get rid of her economic slavery to men. In this way, she will gain her full rights in all areas of life, from marriage and divorce, to pursuing the profession she chooses.⁵⁰ That is what Zahra accomplishes by refusing to follow the traditions that would have her live in her sister's house. Instead, she starts looking for work in Casablanca, where she begins a new life. Here, Abouzeid highlights the strength and determination of Moroccan women who wish to overcome their social and economic disadvantages and to conquer the outside world and create opportunities for themselves.

Zahra's desire for change in life and economic self-sufficiency are symbolic of her maturity as a responsible woman, and personal growth which contradicts her loss of identity and confusion after being repudiated as if a woman's value only resided through her marriage or relationship with a man.⁵¹

The heroine defies both the social norms that relegate women to the house and the ignominy visited upon women who have been repudiated by their spouses – even if she is blameless. "Instead of quietly effacing herself, Zahra hoes her own row."⁵²

⁴⁷ Moukhlis, "A History of Hopes Postponed," 71.

⁴⁸ Bukari, "Pioneer Moroccan Woman Writer," 235.

⁴⁹ E. Hunter, "Feminism, Islam and the Modern Moroccan Woman in the Works of Leila Abouzeid," *African Studies* 65.2 (Winter 2006): 147. doi:10.1080=00020180601035567.

⁵⁰ Afif, C. Al nedham Alabawee wadwar Al-muthqaf [Patriarchy and the role of the intellectual]. *Philosophical Papers* 7, no. 7 (Winter,2002): 149–54.152. Retrieved May 6, 2020. <http://search.mandumah.com/Record/625450>.

⁵¹ Bukari, "Pioneer Moroccan Woman Writer," 235.

⁵² Hunter, "Feminism, Islam and the Modern Moroccan Woman," 147. 7

Sadly to say that a woman in a patriarchal society is treated as a passive object of sexual desire, a piece of property or a machine whose purpose and duty in life is to bear children. Edward Said points out “the oriental woman is no more than a machine.”⁵³ In a society that does not investigate causes, an infertile wife is a sufficient reason for divorce. Hence as Zahra struggles to conceive children, her husband’s family disowns her. This is an obvious indication of how patriarchal men like raising children to ensure their inheritance. Having many children is a symbol of strict men and virility. As Zahra does not show any sign of childbirth, her in-laws turn on her and urge their son to divorce her. This plotline demonstrates how women can also play a role in reinforcing patriarchy, as seen with Zahra’s mother-in-law who treats Zahra like a slave. She hews to the same authoritarian moral laws, executing them faithfully, without question or review. The decision of divorce depends on the will of the mother-in-law – showing a complicated power dynamic in which a female exercises ultimate authority within sensitive and important domestic matters. “If he listened to his mother, he would have divorced me in the second year of marriage. Her rule in my life is like the rule of feudalism.”⁵⁴ One can truthfully say that in a patriarchal society, women are not only oppressed by men, but by women themselves as well. In a state of degradation, Zahra would not hesitate to commit suicide rather than live with the ignominy of infertility, of having failed to perform her primary duty in life. “If they gave me the poison, I would drink it.”⁵⁵ From the above scenes, it can be said that many women internalize patriarchal values and will even victimize other women to achieve those ends.

Zahra is blamed for her infertility even if she is not responsible for it. “Due to many repetitions, I have become convinced that I am responsible for infertility, till today. Do you think I am infertile?”⁵⁶ Zahra feels guilty in front of her husband, her in-laws, and society as a whole for her childlessness. Her suffering consumes her to the extent that she no longer recognizes herself. “The mirror reflected to me a face on which I do not know. It has the traces of tragedy that is crashing inside me.”⁵⁷ Sharabi believes that the reason behind the backwardness that prevails in Arab communities is the patriarchal system. It is a system of chaos, irrationality, and impotence, where the mind shuts down and stops questioning and researching the affairs of society, where free and independent thinking is absent.⁵⁸

Another feature of patriarchal society is that woman is viewed as a weak creature. This is obvious when Zahra rejects the idea of murder, saying, “No, I will not kill,” to which her husband replies, “Murder for men.”⁵⁹ Such a response reinforces the idea that women are the weaker sex. Abouzeid herself has given vent to the frustrations of living in a society that does not allow

⁵³ Said, *Orientalism*, 187.

⁵⁴ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 32.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁸ Afif, “Patriarchy and the role of the intellectual,” 149.

⁵⁹ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 62–63.

women to have valid public opinions: “I am a woman, and women in my culture don’t speak in public, let alone speak about their private lives in public. When I published my first article in a Moroccan newspaper in 1962, I did not even sign it with my real name, but used the pseudonym of Aziza.”⁶⁰ Sadiqi confirms that Abouzeid “started her career as a journalist in the early 1970s and wrote under a man’s name.”⁶¹

Women and Colonization

Women are either victimized by the colonialists directly or by the males of their own relations who have adopted the colonizing culture that stands behind the divorce of Zahra. Moukhlis states that “Zahra’s predicament is not only conditioned by traditional life in Morocco, but it is also directly related to colonial society and the changes it has wrought in the natives.”⁶² It is evident that people are strongly influenced by Western colonialism without knowing it. According to Said, colonization is “A western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient.”⁶³ Colonization maintains authority over the “other” through the imposition of new, re-defined norms in the “Orient,” which has lasting effects on the colonized. The colonized favor a new culture over theirs and integrate to it as the colonial system requires. In this respect, Edward Said adds that “cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures.”⁶⁴

What is made explicit in *Year of the Elephant* is that people are greatly affected by colonial culture yet totally unaware of it. Edward Said supports the argument, writing, “The orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers and judges.”⁶⁵ It can be said that colonization is not always the physical presence of a colonizer in a certain place, but rather a rooting force. We can also see through the novel that Zahra is deeply victimized by the colonial culture. She is repudiated not only because she has not given childbirth, but also because she is too traditional and resists the colonial influence that has become the yardstick of modernity and civilization. For Zahra, accepting modernity or the identity of the colonizer means loss of identity. Thus, “Rather than attempting to transform herself into a modern woman to try to win her husband back or find another man, she remains true to herself and her faith”⁶⁶. However, this is not true for Zahra’s husband, who humiliates Zahra for not embracing modernity and not opening her eyes to the demands and anticipation of modernity. He wants his wife to blindly assimilate to French culture. In this regard, Zahra’s

⁶⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁶¹ F. Sadiqi, “The Central Role of the Family Law in the Moroccan Feminist Movement,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35.3 (2008): 327. Retrieved January 23, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20455613>.

⁶² Moukhlis, “A History of Hopes Postponed,” 74.

⁶³ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁶ Strohman, *Literature*, 34.

divorce is attributed not only to her infertility, but also to her reluctance to absorb French culture. She addresses her husband, "This is what independence has led to. I don't eat with a fork. I don't speak French. I don't sit with men. I don't go out to fancy dinners. . . . I'm nothing but an old coin fit only for the museum shelf."⁶⁷ Abouzeid fiercely criticizes colonialism and its impacts, the most obvious of which is the poor state of education, and the supremacy of the French language as a result of colonialism in education, which affected proficiency in the Arabic language. In fact, colonialism, "operates by persuading people to internalize its logic and speak its language; to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonisers as regards the ways they perceive and represent the world."⁶⁸

It is noted that language is an essential issue in the postcolonial theory. The policy of colonization in Morocco has resulted in French becoming the dominant language connected with power and prestige whereas the position of Arabic language becomes secondary. In Ashcroft's words, "One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities."⁶⁹

What is remarkable about Zahra is her persistence in following traditional ways, such as speaking Arabic, eating with her fingers, etc. She takes a stand on her customs in resistance to the orders of her high-flying husband who wishes her to internalize colonization. Yet her persistence "is contrary to conventional Western notions of what independence constitutes for women."⁷⁰

Ironically enough, the independence that is supposed to grant women chances for equality bestow upon men new resources for suppression. "The post-independence family law denied women basic rights and thus fueled the disappointment and anger of the female intellectual elite."⁷¹ The novelist depicts the former nationalist leaders who absorb the French culture and then need a new woman, shaped according to Western patriarchal notions: "Their positions in society now call for modern women."⁷² Zahra's husband divorces her because she does not conform to the model of the "new woman" fitted to the new type of man he wishes to be. She refuses to carry out the new demands of her husband, who "needs a wife who will offer cigarettes to his guests and help pave the road to the top for him by any means necessary."⁷³ According to Bukari, Zahra "should have been appreciated for being conservative and not mimicking the Western European ways deemed modern as they are different and attractive or imposed by the colonizer's culture."⁷⁴ However, she finds herself thrown into the street without remorse.

⁶⁷ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 18.

⁶⁸ J. Mcleod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 24.

⁶⁹ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 7.

⁷⁰ Hunter, "Feminism, Islam and the Modern Moroccan Woman," 146.

⁷¹ Sadiqi, "The Central Role of the Family Law," 332.

⁷² Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 90.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁴ Bukari, "Pioneer Moroccan Woman Writer," 234.

What the Moroccan people achieve from independence is not freedom, but a distorted image of modernity. The reasons that prompt Zahra's husband to divorce her are an example of the continuing dominance of French colonialism. Zahra's husband is now in dire need of a wife who smokes, entertains guests, speaks French, etc. In this respect, women are the victims of colonization and patriarchal society. They are controlled by their husbands inside the house and by the colonial power and its influences outside the house. In fact, during and after French colonization, Morocco was suppressed by western doctrines and authority, but the situation of women was worse than that of Moroccan men as they were marginalized twice. Afif argues that if the Arab community wants to be truly liberated, it should stop marginalizing women and asserting the superiority and authority of the man on every occasion.⁷⁵

Zahra resists the colonial influence and accepts a job at the French Cultural Center in Morocco as a cleaner. This indicates the continuing dependence of Moroccans on the French. She sadly admits: "I come face to face with the basic fact that we can't do without the French after all."⁷⁶ Abouzeid uses the ending as a metaphor of the fact that even after independence, Moroccans still need to clean up after the French. Abouzeid finds that she must clean up the bourgeois ideologies and colonial practices that the French left behind because they ruined lives, particularly those of women. In this respect, John McLeod says, "So, freedom from colonialism comes not just from the signing of declarations of independence and the lowering and raising of flags. There must also be a change of minds, a disputing with the dominant ways of thinking. This is a challenge to those from both the colonised and the colonising nations."⁷⁷

Women are not only physically abused by patriarchal men, but also tyrannized by colonization. In fact, the brutality of the French forces makes no distinction between men and women, as Zahra describes. "How long our lives are and those shots are in my ears. In front of my eyes men, women and children are falling out. The incident began with one soldier teasing a Moroccan woman."⁷⁸ "One of them slapped her and said in Arabic. . . ."⁷⁹ The French policeman "kicked her back, and the pots fell down and the oranges rolled to the auto path. . . . She left the place while cursing France."⁸⁰ The French colonial violence destroys the concept of the civilized European due to its brutality toward the Moroccan people in general and women in particular. Gandhi states that "Third world women are victims of par excellence – the unforgotten victims, from two ideologies of imperialism and patriarchy."⁸¹

⁷⁵ Afif, "Patriarchy and the role of the intellectual," 152.

⁷⁶ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 112.

⁷⁷ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 26.

⁷⁸ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 35.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸¹ R.R. Wulan, *Analysis of Postcolonial Feminism Theory: Note of a Woman's Struggle in Novel "Panggil Aku Kartini Saja"* (2015), 7. Retrieved December 4, 2020. https://repository.telkomuniversity.ac.id/pustaka/files/...f/article_f.pdf.

The colonial legacy that distorted the homeland, its identity, and its sons, is still exercising its power in the independent Maghreb. Zahra addresses her husband: “you no longer admire to see me eating with my hand? How did we eat in Pushentov? Is this independence? You do not admire to see me sitting with the servants? In their name, we fought colonialism, and you are now acting like it.”⁸² She is surprised by this change in her husband after independence. She is shocked to observe the effects of colonialism coloring the life of Safia, her partner in the resistance against colonialism. Safia, an exceptional case, “cuts her hair and goes out in European dress.”⁸³ Zahra understands well that independence is not enough to build a better Morocco, because colonization has hit the minds of the people, and this is what they do not understand well. They sing happily about victory and think that it is the end, but it is the real beginning of a new colonialism with a new weapon. This means “Abouzeid’s work does not provide explicit ideological instruction for improving women’s rights in Morocco, but instead reveals pervasive themes that cause and perpetuate such problems.”⁸⁴

In her job at the French cultural center, Zahra “is in a subservient position to the French as a maid, [but] she is at peace because she maintained integrity and is living her own life.”⁸⁵ “The females of the third world also should be given equal kinds of education and opportunities. Then only they can be self-reliant and can prove their personal efficiency and can compete with the colonizer women.”⁸⁶ A woman cannot enjoy her independence unless she is given an opportunity for financial independence that saves her from economic dependence on men. To achieve it, women should participate in decision-making along with men to enjoy their full rights.

Zahra’s Resistance against Patriarchy and Colonization

Women who resist patriarchy and colonialism share an equal role as men. They both work together to achieve common goals. This participation is obviously manifested in Abouzeid’s dedication in the narrative to “all those women and men who put their lives in danger for the sake of Morocco and did not expect to be rewarded or thanked for it.”⁸⁷ Women’s resistance against colonialization is also a resistance against the patriarchy that is embedded and preserved within colonial power. Unfortunately, while ordinary people, housewives, truck drivers, and women risked their lives for Morocco, the official history only talks about men. *Year of the Elephant* is one of the few texts in Arabic literature that etches the faces of simple people into our minds. The pictures of their sacrifice remain with us for a long time. What is also new here is

⁸² Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 90.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁴ Strohman, *Literature*, 9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁶ R.P. Adhikary, “Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck*: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading,” *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 8.4 (Summer 2020): 140. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.20200804.13>

⁸⁷ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 6.

that Abouzeid recognizes the women who risked their lives for their country even though it had not granted them basic rights and independence. Moane rightly says: "Resistance to colonization was often undertaken by a minority whose efforts were undermined by apathy and betrayal."⁸⁸ It left them vulnerable to the whims of men, and the law does not respect the humanity and dignity of women.

Women, as represented by Zahra, collected donations, led demonstrations, and burned warehouses, seeming to be more capable and braver than their husbands.

Missions came to me one after the other, missions carried out alone. If my grandmother had returned from the dead and seen me setting shops ablaze, delivering guns and smuggling men across borders, she would have died a second death. Had all that even been in my own imagination, let alone my grandparents? May God have Mercy on them! They prepared me for a different, but fate made a mockery of their plans.⁸⁹

This is the woman who gives up everything she has and embraces arms in defense of her country and the identity of her people. "Zahra was risking her life for the sake of liberating the land, she was also under the assumption that she was fighting for her own freedom which she expected to attain after independence."⁹⁰ Shaban says that Abouzeid finds a reciprocal relationship between women's liberation and national affairs; Zahra herself is deeply absorbed in the national struggle for independence, but political victory does not always mean the victory of women over oppression and injustice.⁹¹

Women's resistance stems from their patriotic sense, the spirit of struggle, and the ability to withstand and challenge. Thus, Zahra asserts herself and proves to be the equal of men. She transported weapons and transmitted information, served as a medic, provided supplies and shelter, contributed with her money and tricks at times, and acted in the field at others. She becomes one of the most important rebels. Her husband tells her: "they've assigned you a new mission. Your last success has proven you're ready."⁹² She prides herself in her patriotism and recollects how pleased she was to sacrifice her own possession and property for the national cause. "I happily," she recollects, "sold my olive trees, my jewels, everything worth selling for the cause. Resistance took the place of emeralds and rubies in my life."⁹³

Zahra, Roqia, and Safia take part in the resistance movement and challenge gender discrimination. Zahra says: "The resistance shook me, and I thought that the struggle is the struggle even after tens of centuries, and that

⁸⁸ Moane, *Gender and Colonialism*, 11.

⁸⁹ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 62.

⁹⁰ Moukhlis, "A History of Hopes Postponed," 72.

⁹¹ Shaban, "Qalaq Al-Madhee," 254.

⁹² Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 62.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

women are always present in it.”⁹⁴ She resists illiteracy by fighting it and resists French colonialism in multiple operations brimming with adventure, daring, and challenge. After her divorce, she is not negative. On the contrary, she encounters life and its difficulties bravely and seeks an honorable way to earn a living until settling into her role as a maid for the French, cleaning their offices. Her arc reverses the stereotype that portrays women as a powerless and incomplete creature.

Ironically enough, women’s struggle for emancipation continues even after statehood because the patriarchal system remains or because the men take on the role of brown masters as well.⁹⁵ The situation does not change as traditions and customs continue to be influential; the men think just like the colonizer. This means the national movement that promises freedom and equality is mastered by a few male elites. “The majority of Moroccan women have a very limited involvement in political life. Women’s political participation, in whatever form, still involves only a small elite and, as the election results documented above imply, is still seen with great skepticism by most men and some groups of women.”⁹⁶ The movement fails due to its association with the cultural invasion of the West. Colonial education leads to dispersion and alienation on the personal and national levels.

As Zahra attempts to maintain her original values and principles, she finds herself humiliated by her husband, who throws her out into the street. The divorce awakens her to a harsh reality and sets in motion her journey of self-discovery. She “realizes that she has been no more than a commodity, that can be bought, used and discarded.”⁹⁷ The bitterness of disappointment increases with Zahra’s transformation from a suicide bomber in the past to a cleaner in the French Cultural Center after independence. The irony of Zahra’s employment by the French reveals the “shortcomings of Moroccan men in terms of providing domestic freedom after demanding national liberty.”⁹⁸ Yet Zahra does not surrender. On the contrary, she establishes new independence within herself and sheds her earlier grief and animosity. “She has a strong desire to rise up, go and start again.”⁹⁹ Through Zahra, Abouzeid employs marginalized female social figures as a critical tool to expose social weakness, hypocrisy, vice, and crimes against women as well as social injustice. She emphasizes that changing the status of women and achieving their dignity lies in liberating society from manifestations of backwardness and imitation.

Year of the Elephant also suggests that women around the globe must unite and work together in order to better themselves. This can be observed in Zahra’s response to seeing a female South African surgeon on a magazine

⁹⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁵ W. H. Malik and T. A. Umrani, “A Post-colonial Reading of Muneeza Shamsie’s *That Heathen Air*,” *International Journal of English and Education* 4.2 (Winter 2015): 400. Retrieved December 4, 2020. https://www.academia.edu/11760633/A_Postcolonial_Reading_of_Muneeza_Shamsie_That_Heathen_Air

⁹⁶ M. Rausch, *Bodies, Boundaries and Spirit Possession: Moroccan Women and the Revision of Tradition* (Wetzlar, Germany: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 68.

⁹⁷ Moukhlis, “A History of Hopes Postponed,” 71.

⁹⁸ Strohmman, *Literature in the Language of Life*, 30. 8

⁹⁹ Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant*, 101.

cover. She remarks “How alike people are. And how I understood that woman! No one could understand her better than I. As if I were looking at myself, as if God creates many copies from one mold.”¹⁰⁰

Despite the novelist’s criticism of Moroccan society, she does not aim to challenge religious laws. This can be attributed to her conviction that Islam embodies equal rights and freedom between the sexes. Abouzeid’s strong faith is represented in the relationship between Zahra and the Sheikh. Strohan supports Abouzeid’s vision, writing that “women can find independence through hard work and religious faith.”¹⁰¹ The sheikh represents security and comfort for Zahra. He uses religious language to address Zahra “The believer knows neither fear nor anxiety. In Dar al-Islam, no one dies of starvation.”¹⁰² The Sheikh supports Zahra in her efforts to empower herself. He advises her to be financially independent as follows:

In the town, there is a plant for carpet.
I’m not good at weaving.
Embroider the necklace of caftan.
My eyesight is weak
You will speed up your ending, if you are idle.¹⁰³

He exemplifies the kind of men who support women and do not try to control them, his character indicating that not all aspects of society are patriarchal and that not all men subjugate women. However, through Zahra, Abouzeid criticizes the way that men use an Islam-based system for their own interests. “It is not Islam itself that is the source of women’s afflictions but distorted interpretations of what fidelity to religion entails.”¹⁰⁴ In Zahra’s opinion, women’s afflictions are due to mere earthly human weakness and not Islamic religion.¹⁰⁵

Zahra constantly turns to the Sheikh because she finds relief and solace in spirituality. This manifests that Abouzeid’s views are more in accordance with Islamic feminism than secular feminism. Fatima Al-Muraisy supports Abouzeid’s idea. “We Muslim women can go on life because we know that talking about dignity, democracy and human rights, full participation in the political affairs of our country is an inseparable part of this Islamic tradition.”¹⁰⁶ The novel closes with Zahra’s celebration of the spiritual change she has undergone. The end suggests that a similar path of society-wide change is possible through hard work and faith. Fernea recapitulates the uniqueness of Zahra’s unceasing quest for independence:

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 40

¹⁰⁴ Hunter, “Feminism, Islam and the Modern Moroccan Woman,” 150. 7

¹⁰⁵ H. Michael, “A’am Al Fil Qira’a Binatheria Ma-b’ad Al-Istimar [Year of the Elephant: A post-colonial reading],” *Works of the Women’s Writing Seminar - Imagining and Receiving* (2005): 273. Retrieved December 4, 2020. <http://search.mandumah.com/Record/515651>.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 271.

Zahra becomes an independent, self-sufficient woman, but in a narrow limited way few feminists East or West would totally accept. And Zahra's experience clearly does not conform to that of most Western feminists. She is not a Western woman, but a Moroccan woman, a Muslim woman who finds comfort in her religious faith. She is the product of a different history, a different expectation.¹⁰⁷

However, it is important to state that Zahra is not totally different. On the contrary, she is also similar to women of different cultures and different histories in that victimhood of oppression transcends cultural, historical, religious, and geographical boundaries. This necessitates the deconstruction of hegemonies that objectify and dehumanize, and the establishment of discourses that liberate and humanize.

Conclusion

Year of the Elephant stands in contrast to other female fictional writings. The dilemma of the Afro-Arab woman in general and the Moroccan woman in particular is put as an objective secretion of historical data, and not as a personal problem. Through Zahra's resistance, the narrative draws attention to the importance of reform in women's condition not only in Morocco, but everywhere. It urges women to realize their inner strength, which comes from the realization of oppression and from the will to act against it. Women are urged to unite in order to commence change and progress. Abouzeid calls on her society to realize that the culture of inequality and violence against women is a major obstacle in achieving progress and development. Her message is that a woman's duty is not merely to produce children and give pleasure to men. On the contrary, she should rather be viewed as an equal partner in all areas of life, during war and peace, hardship and prosperity, and not as a junior partner at the whim of men. Abouzeid tackles the family fractures and pain of divorce, paving the way for the Family Code that will enhance the status of women in Moroccan society. She exposed the reality of the conflict between traditional culture and modernism, Islamic and Western values, and denounced the image of women that Moroccan society creates, calling for liberation at the national and personal level.

This essay portrays the condition of the postcolonial Moroccan woman who is twice victimized by colonization and by patriarchy, rendering her economically and politically powerless. Zahra raises her loud voice and combats these powers. Her struggle for personal freedom cannot be seen independently from her struggle against French colonization because there is a reciprocal relationship between women's affairs and national issues. She rejects any kind of opportunism or hypocrisy as null and corrupt. She believes that political resistance must lead to moral liberation from all kinds of selfishness and psychological distress. To her, woman's liberation is for the well-being of her society and for her country in general. This changes the stereotype of women's

¹⁰⁷ Moukhliis, "A History of Hopes Postponed," 79.

vulnerability and dependence on men. It can be said that Abouzeid introduces a positive image of a powerful Moroccan woman, which inverts the stereotype of women as a feeble creature dependent on men for everything. Yet political emancipation does not always mean social emancipation. The narrative also reveals women's longing for intellectual fulfilment and their inclination for freedom.

The novelist sheds light on a dark area of Moroccan reality and legislation. She succeeds in making her readers feel the tragedy of Zahra. Her heroine suffers not only from the oppression of patriarchy, but also from the consequences of colonialism. The narrative indicates the influence of colonization on changing native customs and thoughts about women, as well as the causes behind masculine tyranny and gender discrimination.

Throughout the novel, Abouzeid emphasizes a positive image of Islam as a force for justice. She calls for women's freedom within the framework of Islam. She remains faithful to herself and to her faith. As a matter of fact, Abouzeid is not a feminist in the Western sense because of her conviction that Islam embodies equality and freedoms for women and that emancipation for women does not necessitate turning against Islam or men. Such views oppose secular versions of feminism, which often blame religion for the woes of women.

Abouzeid supplies strength to the voiceless to speak out against injustice. Zahra's character development is a melody that sings the refusal of patriarchy. By creating such a strong feminist character, Abouzeid characterizes the kind of woman who wants to resist persecution without losing her natural identity. Despite decolonization, there is still a strong French presence in the country, in the education and legal system, which needs to be cleaned up. Without true education, financial independence, and the participation of women in decision-making, to speak of a triumph over patriarchy and the legacy of colonization would be a fallacy.