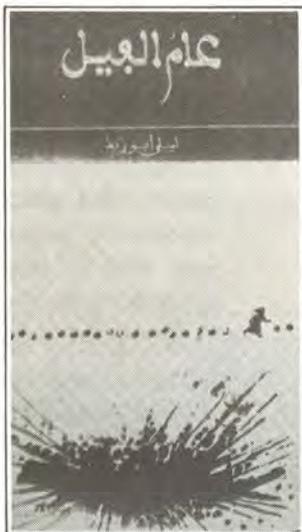


Leila Abou Zeid

Morocco



Leila Abou Zeid is a new name in the feminine literary circles of Morocco.

Journalist, radio broadcaster and writer, she has already published three books.

The first «**Bid'u Sunbulatin Khodr**» (Few Green Wheat Stalks) was a mixture of testimonies, travel reports and stories. It was written during her stay in England where she studied journalism.

Her second book was a biography of the late Moroccan king Mohammed the Fifth.

«**Aam al-Feel**» or the Year of the Elephant is her last novel. In it, she tells the story of the last years of fight against French colonialism in Morocco, through the eyes of a young woman, Zahra.

The novel tells the story of a disappointment, that of Zahra's with her life and with the newly won independence of her country. For after 20 years of marriage Zahra receives her divorce papers from her husband with whom she had fought side by side during the resistance years. After being a committed resistance fighter, he secures himself a high position in the new independent state and forgets the high ideals he fought for. He moves into a luxury home, buys a car and decides to find a new wife, one that would suit his present life style.

As for Zahra, she remains the same woman who learnt to read and write in literacy classes. She goes back to the city that she had left as a youngster, and finds that people have changed.

In the country she helped build, she finds herself

without a job and after begging for one she ends up being a maid in the French Cultural Centre! This irony of fate makes her declare: «there is no escape from the French».

Leila Abou Zeid says about her novel: «Independence for Moroccans was the door of paradise. They believed it would solve all their problems, that it would bring everything: health, work, education and even money for everyone. People used to say that the income from the phosphate will give every Moroccan 10 dirhams per day without he/she having even to work! But reality was very different.

After 26 years of independence many unexpected problems appeared: inflation, bribery, theft.... so the hopes of the majority of the people vanished.»

Leila adds, «Zahra was a symbol of these crushed people, who are sought after only when needed to be sacrificed.»

She states that because she is a woman, she is better at depicting a woman's, rather than a man's, internal world in her stories.

As for those who claim they can write about men and women's internal worlds alike, she believes them to write «from the outside» and says: «It is impossible to write about a world one ignores. Therefore only women can genuinely write about women; thus the validity of talking about women's literature.» However, she points out that in the Arab world, there are not enough women writers yet to be able to truly differentiate between feminine and masculine literature.

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