Rewriting alterity: The self and the Other in Leila Aboulela's The Translator

إعادة كتابة الغيرية: الذات والآخر في رواية "المترجِمة" لليلى أبو العلا

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Abstract:

Often depicted as conflicting and antagonistic, the cultural encounter between the East and West comes to occupy a significant space in postcolonial literature. Postcolonial writers allocate a considerable space for writing back to the imperial misrepresentations of the cultural Other. However, some prominent Anglophone novelists opt for a rhetoric of mediation. The present paper aims at investigating such an encounter in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* in the light of the postcolonial concepts of the self-Other's encounter as well as the interplay between alterity and identity.

Keywords: encounter; the self; the Other; representation; alterity.

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ملخص:

تحتل المواجهة الثقافية بين الشرق والغرب مساحة كبيرة في أدب ما بعد الاستعمار أين يتم تصويرها غالبًا على أنها متضاربة وعدائية. يخصص كتّاب أدب ما بعد الاستعمار مساحة معتبرة لإعادة كتابة ما حرَّفه التمثيل الامبريالي للآخر المختلف ثقافيا. ومع ذلك، يفضل بعض الروائيين الناطقين بالإنجليزية البارزين خطاب الوساطة. يهدف هذا المقال إلى استقصاء مثل هذه المواجهة في رواية "المترجِمة" لليلى أبو العلا في ضوء مفاهيم ما بعد الاستعمار للقاء الذات والآخر وكذا التفاعل بين الغيرية والهوية.

كلمات مفتاحية: المواجهة، الذات، الآخر، التمثيل، الغيرية.

1. Introduction

The encounter between the West and the East/the North and the South has often been characterised by conflict. Literature, in general, and postcolonial literature, in particular, has been a fertile ground for such confrontations. Further still, travel writing, as being primarily a Western genre, has gained a notorious history stained with its involvement, intentionally or otherwise, in the imperial discourse. More especially, through the exploitation of cultural differences and the practice of radical othering, travel writers have been contributing to the promotion of the imperial propaganda to justify the political and military intervention in what is loosely identified as the 'Third World'. By the same token, various voices from the two sides of the conflict either partake in widening the cultural rupture or attempt to bring them together. Furthermore, it should go without saying that postcolonial literature has been an open arena for the employment of different strategies of counter-discourse.[1]

The refore, postcolonial writers allocate a significant space for writing back to the imperial misinterpretations, misconceptions, and misrepresentations of the cultural Other. Nevertheless, some prominent Anglophone novelists choose not to engage in an overt confrontation with the agents of the dominant culture. Rather, they opt for a rhetoric of mediation. In this regard, *The Translator* (1999), by Leila Aboulela, makes a special case in which this encounter creates scenes whereby the interaction between the self and the Other[2] is portrayed differently. As the events unfold in the novel, the agents of the cultural encounter, namely the traveler and the travelee, turn into couriers of the dialogue between the two cultures especially when they exchange their roles. Eventually, they come to positively alter the ethnocentric perception of cultures and, thus, to reconcile the civilisational clash. Therefore, the present paper investigates such an encounter in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* in the light of the postcolonial concepts of travel-travelee's encounter as well as the interplay between alterity and identity.

2. The Notorious Legacy of Western Travel Writing

Travel literature is an interdisciplinary genre that encompasses a wide range of different modes, forms, and itineraries. Carl Thompson (2011) argues that the genre gains a high popularity thanks to the spread of postcolonial studies. Essentially, maintains Thompson, it was Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) that ignited the academic inquisitiveness about the genre. In fact, travel writing is considered to be one of the best resources that offer postcolonial scholars a better

understanding of the process of cultural interactions and portrayal of one another (Thompson, 2011).

Moreover, the genre is known to be historically involved in the Western imperialist discourse about the East or, in the words of Edward Said (2003), in the *'Orientalist discourse'*. In this respect, Orientals and the Orient, in general, are seen as *"an "object" of study" that "will be ... passive, non-participating, endowed with "historical" subjectivity"* (p. 97). Hence, the orientalist positions himself as the spokesperson for the Orientals. What is interesting is that *"the only ... Oriental or "subject" which could be admitted ... is the alienated being ... that is, the other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined—and acted—by others"* (Said, 2003, p. 97). Thus, the Oriental is not only rendered voiceless and passive, but s/he is estranged and alienated from herself/himself as well. In effect, Orientals are no longer able to recognise their true identity nor can they aptly connect with the Other in a wider cultural nexus. In a word, the Oriental's sense of selfhood is shaken.

Furthermore, pertinent to the orientalist discourse is the concept of otherness. Thompson (2011) defines it as the *"process by which one culture constructs its sense of another culture as different and 'other' to itself"* (p. 203). He maintains that othering is a term applicable to recent travel literary studies, but it is often employed in two more or less different meanings. On the one hand, othering basically designates the practice of identification and emphasis of the dissimilarities between a given culture by members of another culture. On the other hand, othering comes to refer to the procedures and techniques by

which cultural differences are not only accentuated but also employed to suggest the inferiority of other cultures to the Western one (Thompson, 2011). Seemingly, Thompson asserts, otherness is an inevitable theme in travel literature given that every travel narrative is an account that essentially tells stories of other places and peoples who are unknown and whose culture is relatively unfamiliar to the audience (2011). Therefore, othering lies at the heart of travel literature.

It is worth noting, however, that portraying the different other, one might assume, is inescapably subjective; thus, biased to a certain degree. George Lau (2013) states that *"interpretation of others can never be truly objective; it is always locally situated and the result is always a compromise"* (p. 5). That being said, representation of the Other is, by definition, an act of othering to all that is not identical to the self, to that which fails to conform to the cultural norms of the observer, and to that which may disappoint the expectation of the one who represents. Accordingly, the result is often a deformed version of the real image of the cultural Other. In effect, Western travel writing often looks at cultural difference through ethnocentric lenses. Consequently, the Western representation of the Other is definitely myopic. Likewise, the danger of othering lies in its inherent potential to turn the Other into an antagonist, an enemy to subdue, and an imminent threat to the Western culture. In this sense, in his introduction to Eagleton, Jameson, and Said's *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (1990), Seamus Dreane defines otherness as *"the degree to which others can be persuasively shown to be discordant with the putative norm, provides a rationale for conquest"* (p. 12).

Indeed, travel writing depicts the Other as exotically alien and this conceptualisation reinforces the imperial claims regarding the backwardness, inferiority, and futility of other cultures. In a similar vein, Thompson (2011, p. 148) admits that the genre *"carries a troubling legacy, being deeply implicated, at both a practical and an ideological level, in the imperialist enterprise."* More recently, however, travel writing comes to construct the Other in a way that ensures Western audience not only of their supremacy, but it also grants them the moral right to such an entitlement over other cultures (Thompson, 2011). In so doing, Thompson argues, travel literature continues to play a significant role in the maintenance of the neo-colonial ideology by which the West asserts its international hegemony (2011). In this respect, postcolonial travel writings come to reveal the untold episodes of their own stories.

3. Postcolonial Counter-discourse

There is perhaps no postcolonial literary work that escapes the involvement of the concept of encounter. Since postcolonial literature is basically a sort of writing back to the ethnocentric depiction of the Other, it emerges as a reaction to the stereotypical assumptions that the colonial discourse propagates. The West introduces its culture to the world as the norm so as to underpin its centrality. On the other hand, it represents the cultural Other as alien, mysterious, and exotic. Such an ethnocentric superiority triggers postcolonial writers who engage in a cultural and ideological confrontation to re-conceptualise the notion of the Self as opposed to Western fallacious accounts. In essence, postcolonial literary works have come to constitute a form of counter-discourse that aims at subverting such

hegemonic representations. Postcolonial writers, therefore, seek to restore a sense of cultural equilibrium between their culture and that of the West. Cultures, however different they may appear to be, still have a legitimate and an indisputable right to be viewed as being equally important.

If truth be told, though, not all Western travel writers contribute in the intentional deformation of the image of the Other. In fact, some of the Western travelers do attempt to challenge the prevalent misrepresentations. Yet, they fall prey to another sort of misinterpretation of the Other. In *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (1988), Mary Campbell asserts that those travel writers who discard dominant portrayals of the aboriginal people of America as uncivilised and barbarians, they replace such derogatory stigmatisation with a condescending rhetoric of the indigenous inhabitants as simple-minded naives and *"sweet lambs"* (p. 207). Still, what is surprising is that they represent these people as being desperately in need of Christian salvation (Thompson, 2011). The problem with these philanthropic writers is that they misunderstand the Other. They fail to recognise how it looks like to be reduced to certain derogatory images. In a similar vein, the British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie asserts in his travelogue, *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1987), that most of the contemporary travelers whose cultural backgrounds do not belong to the 'mighty' North or West probably share a collective sense, be it individual or communal, of imperial suppression. Hence, they tend to share *"some knowledge of what weakness was like, some awareness of the view from underneath, and of how it felt to be there, on the*

bottom, looking up at the descending heel" (Rushdie, 1987, p. 12). By the same token, postcolonial travelogues emerge to inverse the travel trajectory and to provide a counter-image to the prevalent conception about them in Western travel writing.

However, it is worth mentioning that the distinguishing feature of the more recent postcolonial Anglophone writing is its employment of retranslation and appropriation as an efficient method of *""engagement" with otherness"* (Abdel Wahab, 2014, p. 222). The act of engagement rather than resistance or aggressive opposition to an outer dominant power allows for *"a much more proactive stance"* (Tymoczko, 2010, p. 11). Accordingly, engagement, as seen by Maria Tymoczko (2010), entails greater and more resilient aspect of power. By means of translation, therefore, recent postcolonial texts embark on a process of inversion of the existing Orientalist cultural metaphors about the Other and, in so doing, they delve into a process of rewriting the self on its own terms (Abdel Wahab, 2014). Having said that, *The Translator*, as it navigates the cultural borderlines manifested in the encounter between the traveler and the travelee, it offers a space for the reconstruction of the selfhood as well as a chance to rethink the relationship between the self and the Other. In so doing, Aboulela's novel creates an opportunity to re-link the two cultures via engaging the traveler and the travelee in a cultural dialogue through a process of cultural translation.

4. Encountering Difference in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*

The Translator chronicles the journey of a Sudanese widowed immigrant, Sammar, to Scotland and back to Khartoum. Besides, it narrates Rae Isles' journey to Africa.

Sammar and Rae meet in Aberdeen, Scotland, where they work together as a translator and a professor respectively. Sammar translates texts from Arabic to English to Rae who is also a lecturer in Third World Politics and a historian of the Middle East (Aboulela, 1999). Rae is an academic who endeavours to transmit an impartial portrayal of Islam. Still, he is depicted as being a modern Orientalist who romanticises the East (Aboulela, 1999). For her part, Sammar questions his stance as being impartial towards her culture and religion.

In accordance with the aforementioned description of Rushdie, Sammar discloses her feeling as being looked at from above, *"[d]on't you realise how much you hurt me saying objective and detached, like you are above all of this, above me, looking down ..."* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 126). Sammar and Rae meet occasionally and converse about cultural issues, religious beliefs, and the West and Africa. The relationship between them develops into a romance. The cultural dialogue in the novel reflects the negotiations of the two cultures over cultural differences; more specifically, it investigates whether these differences will eventually lead to inevitable divergence or to a potential convergence.

To begin with, the concept of difference in the novel is manifold. At the very beginning, Scotland and the Scottish weather are depicted as being different, even opposite, to that of Sudan, Sammar's homeland. Then, there comes Rae who is different from other Scottish people, *"[h]ere with others, he looked to her to be out of place"* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 6). In fact, it is not Sammar's knowledge of the Sudanese weather that enables her to detect difference in the Scottish weather. Rather, it is the

exposure to a different environment which makes her aware of that difference in the first place; such an awareness increases her appreciation of the Sudanese weather. By the same token, Sammar's sense of selfhood is intensified by the encounter with a different culture. In this regard, the theme of de-familiarisation, namely articulating difference, is crucial to the concept of alterity in relation to identity; the two key concepts with which the relationship between the self and the Other is forged.

Moreover, as the events unfold, images of contrasting home and exile become more and more frequent. The narrator describes the journey of Rae to Africa (Morocco) as an encounter between the traveler and an exotic place. A place which is eternally haunted by the disgraceful legacy of colonialism. In the words of the narrator, Rae's *"every arrival to Africa was similarly accompanied by loss or pain, a blow to his pride. ... As if from him the continent demanded a forfeit, a repayment of debts from the ghosts of the past"* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 55). Rae's sense of estrangement is accentuated by the fact that his foreignness is unnoticed (Aboulela, 1999). On the other hand, the narrator describes the weather in Scotland in a way that it reveals Sammar's sense of alienation in that remote land. Throughout the novel, description of the weather is recurrent. In a nutshell, Sammar could not come to terms with the differences which surround her in Scotland. She unveils her feelings to Rae,

> [s]he said that colours made her sad. Yellow as she knew it and green as she knew it were not here, not bright, not vivid as they should be. She had stacked the differences; the weather, the culture, modernity, the language, the silence of the

> muezzin, then found that the colours of mud, sky and leaves, were different too. (Aboulela, 1999, p. 44)

The sense of dislocation, alienation, and estrangement are, in a way, a result of encountering difference. Articulating difference in *The Translator*, however, is not correlative with radical otherness prevalent in Western travel writings. Rather, it serves as a driving force that helps raising Sammar's awareness of alteration; thus, her different identity. In this respect, Geoffrey Nash, in his book *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English* (2007), asserts that the sense of displacement and solitude brought about by the experience of immigration together with the unsettled incompatibilities with the immigrant's identity and ideals all of which prompt the urge for *"the construction of a quietist but none the less assertive religious frame of mind that functions as an antidote to hegemonic materialism and existential emptiness"* (p. 136). As regards Aboulela's novel, Nash (2007) maintains that the spiritual frame offers not only a source of solace and relief against solitude and seclusion, but it also develops a growing recognition of difference and helps enunciate 'an alternative' to Western values. Henceforth, the concept of alterity comes to be of crucial significance in the construction of Sammar's selfhood.

5. The Interplay between Alterity and Identity

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2013) and Thompson (2011), alterity is sometimes used as an alternative term to denote difference and otherness. In

Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts (2013), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, argue that the coloniser's self-identity, and certainly the identity of the colonial culture, is inseparable from *"the alterity of colonized others"* (p. 10). For Gayatri Spivak, this identity is informed *"by a process of othering"* (cited in Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 10). Nevertheless, it is the potentiality of initiating a dialogue between different cultures and races that remains a distinctive feature of the employment of the term. This potentiality, according to Ashcroft et al. (2013), is what makes it distinguishable from its alternative usages.

Ironically, the concept of identity may sometimes be more problematic to fathom than the concept of alterity. To put it differently, it is easier to discern what one is not than what one actually is (Lau, 2013). Therefore, the notion of alterity cannot be completely understood beyond the notion of identity and vice versa. They function dialectically with one another; thus, they are complementary to each other (Lau, 2013). Besides, Thompson (2011) distinguishes between otherness at a personal level, which refers to *"whatever is beyond and different from oneself,"* and otherness as viewed at a cultural level, which denotes *"whatever seems alien and strange in another culture"* (p. 199). The latter sense of the term is the one employed in the postcolonial context.

Thus, the concept of alterity, one might assume, is anchored in travel literature since the act of traveling inexorably entails an encounter with otherness and difference (Thompson, 2011). As such, any movement in the space is, in a way, a 'negotiation' of alterity. In other words, any act of travel requires us to ponder an intricate and a convoluted interaction between

identity and alterity, similarities and differences (Thompson, 2011). Within a postcolonial framework, it should be noted, encountering difference either leads to otherness or dialogue. In this respect, perhaps the most striking aspect about the notion of alterity is the impact that is left on the self upon encountering the different Other to ignite both a sense of uniqueness and mutual-completion (completing each other rather than competing with one another).

That being said, the presence of the Other is vital for the completion of identity construction. As individuals, people do not possess an absolute recognition of the self at birth. The awareness of selfhood, therefore, is raised by the experiences one goes through via interacting with the external environment. In effect, individuals continue to update their 'personal statuses' by means of connecting to others in the social networks (Lau, 2013). This interaction strengthens the sense of individual identity as being different from others, but also as being part of that difference. At a cultural level, the term used for that interaction is 'contact-zone'. In her book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2008), Mary Louise Pratt, as cited in Thompson (2011), employs this term to refer to the zone or space wherein the encounter and interaction of two cultures take place.

In *The Translator*, the cultural encounter takes place in two different spaces or contact zones. The first one is envisioned in the experiences Rae has in Africa. These experiences frames his personality and helps shaping his academic carrier as a modern Orientalist and a lecturer in the politics of the Middle East. By the end of the novel, Rae not only transcends his myopic

conception of Islam, but he converts to it as well. His conversion, if it means anything at all, reflects the impact of the encounter between the traveler and the travelee or the interplay between alterity and identity. As such, Aboulela inverses the rhetoric of the Western as the epitome of civilisation while the Oriental as being passive and voiceless.

Still, and more importantly, it is Sammar's collegial relationship with Rae that eventually emerges as a reciprocal interaction between the two cultures. As mentioned earlier, Sammar is estranged and this estrangement becomes all the more evident with the employment of the 'de-familiarisation' and the 'logic of differentiation', to use Thompson's words, against the Scottish landscape. Sammar has been unable to escape this sense of alienation for four years after the death of her Sudanese husband, Tarig. The constant confrontation with difference bewilders her sense of the selfhood, *"[b]ut this was Scotland and reality left her dulled, unsure of herself"* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 21). Besides, Sammar's sense of deracination continues to haunt her until she meets Rae. She finds him to be different from other Scottish people. She finds in him certain vague familiarity. Though Rae is, in fact, the antithesis of Sammar: he is an Orientalist lecturer who happens to be agnostic. This stark contrast between the two protagonists of the novel could have come to broaden the gap between the two cultures. Yet, it only brings them together as the two agents of dialogue have been ready to negotiate and, more importantly, willing to listen.

Indeed, the traveler-travelee reciprocal understanding is best projected in the fact that Sammar is used to be constantly on her guard lest she acts foolishly (Aboulela, 1999). However, she

can effectively converse with Rae who *"was not like [others]. He seemed to understand, not in a modern, deliberately non-judgmental way but as if he was about to say, 'This happened to me too'"* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 6). The potential reason for such mutual understanding is that Rae has been a traveler himself and that he actually *"lived in her part of the world"* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 6).

In addition to that, Sammar endures an existential void after the death of her husband. The five prayers were *"the last touch with normality, without them she would have fallen, lost awareness of the shift of day into night"* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 16). As such, prayer becomes her compass that orients her life in a world of difference; a difference without which she could have never known the value of praying for she would have taken it for granted. Further still, Rae's presence in her life marks a significant shift in the way she perceives herself. Nevertheless, her religious principles remains intact. To put it into the words of Nash (2007), *"Sammar's relationship with Rae is in fact a means for her acculturation to the West, in which her fear is overcome without her needing to yield an iota of her own religious identity"* (p. 140). As their relationship develops, their conversations include discussions on Islam and the East-West relationship. These conversations invite Sammar to ponder her faith. Accordingly, her exposure to otherness only results in her adherence to her faith. Sammar grows stronger and, eventually, she does not compromise her faith for love. Encountering the Other, therefore, plays a significant part in strengthening Sammar's religious allegiances. Ultimately, she returns to Sudan but she has successfully left an enduring effect on Rae.

More to the notion of exerting an everlasting impact on the Other, Sammar has always wanted from Rae to convert so as to be able to marry him. However, she does not want his conversion to be a sort of formality. She really hopes he would believe in Islam as a faith. Rae does know Islam for it is at the heart of his field of expertise. Yet, he knows it as a religion not as a faith because the academic objectivity requires him not to be personally involved into what he studies. Rae refuses to convert to Islam and Sammar realises that she has been selfish to ask him to convert for the sake of such a mundane matter as marriage (Aboulela, 1999). Hence, Sammar starts to question her egocentrism. She ponders her stance, *"[i]f she could rise above that, if she would clean her intentions"* (Aboulela, 1999, p. 175). Ultimately, she starts to think as a good Muslim and to pray for him to convert for his own spiritual and religious salvation. Sammar's transcendence of egocentrism is at the core of knowing the self as an outcome of questioning its own drives and intentions. Such a knowledge is the fruit of rethinking the relationship between the self and the Other.

6. Transnational Identities: Towards Mutual Understanding of the Other

As aforementioned, not only that Sammar becomes more confident and more attached to her identity, but she also exerts an authoritative power over Rae who eventually coverts to Islam. Though the narrative does not provide a detailed account of the process of conversion as to convince the reader of the seemingly prompt shift in Rae's spiritual change; yet, as Lana Beth Ayres (2014) asserts, *"[i]t seems legitimate to affirm that Rae's conversion to Islam is the outcome of a process that took place*

during his contact with Sammar" (p. 172). Meanwhile, the interaction between the dominating culture and the dominated culture, personified in the characters of Rae and Sammar respectively, yields a cultural connectedness that is, in turn, a result of navigating meanings of Arabic words and their synonyms in English. Sammar admits the difficulty of the translator's task particularly when it comes to the sacred texts as in the case of the Qudsi Hadiths (Sacred Hadith) (Aboulela, 1999). Ayres (2014) refers to such a strategy in *The Translator*, she asserts that, *"it is not the dominated element who translates the dominating one in order to assimilate the former's culture; it is the dominated who translates its own culture for the dominating to comprehend it"* (p. 165). This image of the dominating one willing to listen the Other rather than interpreting them all by himself opens new horizons for understanding the Other.

The refore, the employment of translation as a strategy of transcending ethnocentric misrepresentations can be viewed as an implication of the potential misunderstanding even upon encountering the Other. For a comprehensive and a complete understanding of the Other, Aboulela's novel suggests, one must avoid prejudice and listen instead of constructing one's own viewpoint of the cultural Other based on ethnocentric interpretations. In this regard, suffice is to say that travel alone is often insufficient for representing the Other. Otherness is more likely to take place when one faces difference. In fact, otherness is a natural mechanism that one employs upon exposure to difference. However, it is the negative othering which renders the encounter between the self and the Other, the dominating and

the dominated, futile and confrontational. In *The Translator*, both Rae and Sammar know about each other's culture; they even live in each other's part of the world before meeting one another. Still, travel does not affect their identities in the sense that they transcend their egocentric conceptions. Rather, it is the cultural dialogue that they engage in which leaves an impressive effect on their personalities. Thus, if this means anything at all, it tells of the importance of the dialogue between cultures that promotes mutual understanding and respect.

Furthermore, it goes without saying that not all postcolonial texts share an overtly postcolonial perspective. Indeed, *The Translator* offers an alternative aspect of depicting difference. In the novel, difference is not introduced in the traditional sense of the term which infers the presence of an imminent threat. Accordingly, there exists no hierarchical scale on which cultural differences are measured and sorted out according to their cultural worth. In an age of transnational identities, Aboulela's fiction comes to employ cultural translation so as to promote integration rather than collision. In a word, Aboulela's novel plays the role of a text as a medium to alleviate the tension between the West and the East and to reconcile the conflict instigated thereupon.

7. Conclusion

Fluctuating between attachment and detachment in the postcolonial travel writing, both the traveler and the travelee's view points of the other oscillate and overlap. In *The Translator*, nevertheless, one can clearly see the shift in the characters of Sammar and Rae that is manifested by the end of the novel. The title character, Sammar, for instance, opts for self-seclusion in

her room for several years. She has been weak and fearful of the Other and thus she avoids direct contact with the Scottish people. However, once the encounter with Rae takes place and when the two engage in a process of cultural translation, they become more sensitive to cultural difference and, eventually, they come to change the way in which they see themselves and the cultural Other. Further still, difference is employed in the novel as to bring cultures together and to complete each other rather than to compete with one another.

In sum, *The Translator* investigates the cultural encounter between the East and West. Herself an immigrant and a traveler, Aboulela revisits this challenge and finds a way out of the dilemma of misunderstanding and misrepresentation that take place whenever the two cultures meet. Within the transnational ground that allocates a considerable space for negotiating the cross-cultural borderlines, Aboulela effectively reconstructs the East-West/South-North relationship through the employment of the strategy of cultural dialogue.

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9. Notes

[1] Counter-discourse is a term coined by Richard Terdiman to refer to *"the theory and practice of symbolic resistance ... against the 'capacity of established discourses to ignore or absorb would-be subversion'"* (Ashcroft, 2013, p. 50). Postcolonial critics have adopted Terdiman's term to illustrate the convoluted techniques by which the *"challenge to a dominant or established discourse ... might be mounted from the periphery, always recognizing the powerful 'absorptive capacity' of imperial and neo-imperial discourses"* (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 50). For more details see Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2013). *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2nd ed.). (B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & H. Tiffin, Eds.) New York: Routledge.

[2] Laila Aboulela destabilises the imperialistic cultural stereotypes by reversing the portrayal of the dominant culture as the Other. In this paper, the term 'Other' is used interchangeably to refer to both the Other in the dominating culture and the one in the dominated culture.