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progress and civilization as mere super-myths to be superseded by authentic Islamism.

6. See Aboulela's *Interview with University of Aberdeen Students* at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sll/complit/leila.shtml>.

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Notes

1. See Marwan Bishara's *The Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolutions* (2012).
2. The theoretical section of this paper was presented in the workshop "Women, Culture and the 25th January, 2011 Egyptian Revolution", held in Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt, on 25th – 27th March, 2013.
3. See, for instance, the workshop organised by the Max Weber Programme affiliated to the European University Institute (EUI) on 'Identity and citizenship in the new Arab world' on 14 November, 2012, which focused on the evolution and outcomes of uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen (<http://www.eui.eu/SeminarsAndEvents/Index.aspx?eventid=83977>), and see the two workshops "Women, Culture and the 25th January, 2011 Egyptian Revolution", held by University of Manchester and Ain Shams University in 2012 and 2013, respectively, focusing on the role of women in political activism and resistance in the revolutions of Egypt and the Arab world: (<http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/middleeasternstudies/events/seminars-2012-13/2011-egyptian-revolution/>).
4. Said's role model of cultural translation is exemplified by the humanistic philological scholarship of Vico (1668 - 1744) and Goethe (1749 - 1832). Vico's *Scienza Nuova* and Goethe's ideas about *Weltliteratur* are both grounded in a subtle criticism of all attempts to privilege homogeneity over heterogeneity. It is no wonder that Vico condemns nationalistic feelings which motivate the heroic duels waged by Christians and Turks, respectively, in the eighteenth century (463-4), and that Goethe's interest in Islam and the Orient led to the composition of the *West-östlicher Diwan* that was inspired by the Persian poet Hafez.
5. Most of Sayyid Qutb's religious views advocate a monolithic fundamentalist and culturalist ideology that disavows Western

Aboulela rewrote Islam, the Sudan and gendered relations in regard to authentic tradition and cultural modernity.

Espousing an epistemically liminal and translational perspective, Aboulela's *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley* dramatize ambivalent constructions of identity in regard to the binary spaces of past and present, tradition and modernity, home and exile, Arabic culture and Western culture, the sacred and the secular, and the feminine and the masculine. Focusing on the complex dimensions of the female characters' personal and communal locations in both works, this article has explored the role of ethnic, gendered and linguistic politics in retranslating the Arab in *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley*.

Adopting retranslation as a key mechanism of rewriting in new immigrant literature, counter-Orientalism can be viewed as a double process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Deeply informed by a liminal counter-Orientalist discourse, such new immigrant writing employs retranslation to abrogate the fictitious constructions of Arab inferiority and reformulate a new pluralism that can relink home and abroad and tradition and modernity..

words as magical, capturing anyone's imagination in a full trance regardless of age or gender: "But for Soraya, words on a page were seductive, free, inviting everyone, without distinction. She could not help it when she found words written down, taking them in, following them as if they were moving and she was in a trance, tagging alone. A book was something to hide, the thick enchantment of it, the shame, almost" (8). Soraya's reading spectacles are thus turned into a metaphor of gendered resistance against her patriarchal father Idris who shouts at her whenever she bends over his newspaper and whenever he finds her wearing glasses. Finally, writing journals is another trope of gendered agency that allows the heroine to critique the traditional mores of her family and society. Identifying herself with her sister Fatma who is married to her traditional cousin Nassir, Soraya writes a journal in English entitled "*How I would have escaped marrying Nassir, had I been Fatma*" (7) to escape the inspection of her father and sisters. Both reading and writing thus function as tropes critiquing the received masculine image of women and retranslating them as paragons of progress and empowerment.

5. Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the issues of identity and gender have featured as problematic concepts that incited countless heated arguments over the relation between the sacred and the secular, the national and the transnational, the past and the present and the traditional and the modern. The tension caused by the media discourse of binarism and segregation in terms of identity and gender is mitigated in Laila Aboulela's modern romantic narratives by her translational politics and migration. Aboulela succeeded in rewriting the "invisible Arab" according to a new hybrid construct that accommodates tradition and modernity. Both migration and translation are represented as processes that help their agents deconstruct the traditional borderlines of a naturalized cultural identity. To retranslate the "invisible Arab",

of course": (369). Aboulela creates a new language to give voice to the development aspirations of her young female characters. The basic metaphors used by Aboulela to retranslate her characters' new female personhood are based on professional and creative production: translation, reading and writing. Throughout *The Translator*, translation is depicted as a metaphor of agency, polyphony and transparency. Translation is the sole medium that empowers Sammar after Tarig's death and blurs the cultural barriers between her and her hosting society. Most important of all is that translation helps Sammar establish a cosmopolitan attachment to Rae by domesticating her parochial loyalty to "distant places" and "voices in a language that was not his own" (29). In addition to mitigating her sense of alienation in Scotland, translation helps Sammar domesticate her source language and culture to others. When asked by Rae how far she approves of a translation of a Sacred Hadith, she recommends an alternative translation which seems to capture the original meaning of the text. Instead of "*I am as My servant thinks I am*", she recommends the following translation of the Arabic "zan ظن": "another possible rendering of the Arabic is, *I am as My servant expects Me to be*. And I feel this is closer to the Arabic word which means expects, thinks, even speculates" (41).

By the same token, Soraya's intellectual attachment to reading and writing is portrayed as inseparable from her personal struggle for survival in *Lyrics Alley*. In a patriarchal society that shuns reading as inappropriate for women who are supposed to be more sociable and ready to chat with others, Soraya relishes reading as a source of enchantment and delight. Soraya is hence motivated to read many romantic novels such as *Lorna Doone*, *Rebecca*, *Liza of Lambeth*, *Emma*, and *The Woman in White* featuring beautiful and high-spirited heroines and to listen to Nur's enthusiastic narration of Shakespearian plays. In contrast to a patriarchal mother who was illiterate and never read the newspaper and two sisters who read very little, Soraya highly estimates

women who might attract Rae's attention while she was away in the Sudan (Aboulela 168). To her aunt, marriage for widowed wives is a concrete means to the end of protection, an advantage that Sammer does not need as long as she can support herself and her son. In Aboulela's two feminist narratives, forced celibacy and circumcision are examples of social and physical abuse that represent "institutionalized political oppression", enforced by the violent hand of societal control and the family (Christopher Larkosh 5). In *Lyrics Alley* Nabilah, Soraya and Mahmoud Abuzeid severely satirize the Sudanese habit of female circumcision. Nabilah's six-year-old daughter Ferial's forced and secret circumcision by Waheeba is translated in the narrative as a physical abuse or "barbarity" that is handled by backward women and therefore might cause endless nightmares to the female victims. Nabilah, along with Mahmoud Abuzeid, condemns such process of mutilation as an act of barbarity that is characteristic of the uneducated and keeps recalling horror stories of Sudanese brides "whose wedding nights were a disaster because of too tight an infibulation" and the story of a baby's head damaged during labour and other endless complications (188). Such societal and patriarchal violence is hence disavowed in *Lyrics Alley* as a cultural habit typical of the old ethnic tribalism of the Sudanese society according to Nabilah, who believes that a progressive, liberal man might not even want to marry Ferial in the first place because of being a victim of such gendered violence.

Feminist writers like Aboulela attempt to critically rewrite patriarchal language that negatively associates Arab women with either eroticism or unsexed reproduction. The feminist tropes inscribed in Aboulela's narratives are a definitive example of how women can be retranslated in terms of intellectual and psychological maturity rather than mere erotic and physical sexuality. According to Gayatri Spivak, "[t]he task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency. The writer is written by her language,

The personal dilemma of Nur's fatal swimming accident and his final success as a poet are allegorically reflected in the political turmoil of Sudan's colonial past and its ethnic and tribal divisions and the final birth of a postcolonial Sudanese nationhood. Such conclusion might spotlight the potential of a future that could accommodate all forms of cultural heterogeneity. Nur's success as a popular poet writing both colloquial and classical Arabic lyrics and poems is represented as an act of oppositional politics that helps destabilize the traditional and conservative Sudanese culture of Umdurman that demonizes artists and poets as debauched. He assures Hamza Al-Naggar, a popular radio singer who changed his last name to avoid defamation, that "Sudanese society has to change ... It has to give poets and musicians, all artists, the respect they deserve" (232). As a new Sudanese young woman, Soraya likes to piece up the traditional desire for marriage along with the modern one for self-reliance and intellectual and cultural improvement. Soraya's awareness of Nur's chronic incapacity and injury motivates her to join Kitchener's School of Medicine to achieve at least self-reliance and a real sense of personhood: "If she was not going to marry Nur, she told herself, she would have a vocation where she could be passionate and useful, respected and more reliant on herself" (237). Soraya's final engagement to Nur's friend Tuf Tuf and Nur's consequent reluctance to speak directly of his love in his lyrical poetry helps stabilize the translational link between the modern focus on self-expression and the traditional more of family honour and keeping the reputation of his cousin unblemished.

Aboulela's gendered politics of resistance is thus depicted through feminist heroines who strive to retranslate their private experience of agency against the institutional violence of society and the family. In *The Translator* Sammar disavows the celibacy option dictated by her patriarchal aunt after her husband's death and insists on articulating her feminine sexuality and feeling jealous of "lighter"

autonomy/dependence. This is a positioning which dictates that, ideally, women must be assertive, autonomous, and self-determining, but they must also retain aspects of traditional femininity, including heterosexual desirability and emotional sensitivity to others. (Budgeon 54)

Soraya is therefore depicted as a migrant character who loves travelling and greedily dreams of adventure in new cities. One reason she loves travelling to Cairo is that she can wear new dresses and skirts and abandon wearing the national tobe. She looks to Nabilah, her uncle's second wife, as a model city lady who looks like cinema stars, whose elegant clothes are modelled on the latest European fashions, whose rooms are filled with flowers, ornaments, a gramophone, books and magazines, and who had the only white wedding Soraya had ever attended. However modern her aspirations are, Soraya is deeply rooted in her family and Sudanese traditions that are represented through family gatherings such as weddings, birth parties and funerals.

Both Soraya and Nur are translational figures whose culture is marked by fluidity and culture crossing. They are educated at foreign schools, the Catholic Sister's school administered by Italian nuns in Umdurman and the prestigious Victoria College in Alexandria, and can hence deftly read and write English and Arabic. Through Nur, Soraya can enjoy following the updates on discussion forums, poetry recitals, political lectures and the outside world that was not made for girls according to the Sudanese tradition. Furthermore, on the issue of union with versus independence from Egypt, the young Sudanese generation, including Soraya and Nur, has a strong political stance that is different from the one held by the old generation represented by Mahmoud Abuzeid: "the younger generation carried a strong sense of their Sudanese belonging. Their glittering future was here, here in this southern land where the potential was as huge and as mysterious as the darkness of its nights" (12).

than as an orientalist interested in the religion of terrorists as assumed by Yasmin, her Pakistani colleague. In Part II Sammar misses Rae who is partly translated as her own original home from which she is exiled; this shift of belonging marks the main transformation Sammar encounters in her translational relation with Rae: “[t]his was the exile from him then. Never hearing his name. Living in a place where no one knew him. And when weak from the dreams, needing to speak of him and not being able to” (160). The novel concludes Rae and Sammar’s relationship by foregrounding their shared readiness to be in voluntary exile and migration: he decides to remember the bleak and delicate aura of Khartoum and to raise more queries about Umdurman, while she decides to leave Khartoum and go back with Rae and her son to Aberdeen.

Nur Abuzeid and his cousin Soraya are liminal figures who finally succeed to overcome the ironic tension between past and present and provide provisional alternatives to the traditional, fixed unitary concept of authenticity or modernity in *Lyrics Alley*. In other words, both manage to retranslate the traditional domestic frame of love and marriage into a new one that willingly embraces deviations and modifications. Unlike the traditional marriage of her sister Fatma that forced her to drop out of school to get married to her cousin Nassir, Soraya’s engagement to Nur Abuzeid empowers her creative skills of reading and writing and consolidates her sense of independence. Soraya is represented as an icon of the new generation of Sudanese young women who embrace the modern ideals of independence and self-determination and yet cling to the traditional ethics of the big house and the familial mores of solidarity and intimacy. Like the young women of her post-colonial generation, Soraya is placed in an in-between locus that is typical of third wave feminism; where women are ideally located in-between binaries that

were neatly and clearly gendered – such as subject/object; assertiveness/passivity; self/other; individuality/relationality; and

Sammar's love relationship with Rae is thus translational in both individual and cultural terms. Brendan Smyth writes, "The relationship between Sammar and Rae provides a model for cross-cultural exchange, conversation, love and translation which resists the stagnant binaries of East and West, the residual ideologies of colonialism" (180). Before meeting with Rae, Sammar is portrayed in the narrative as a traditional patriarchal daughter and niece, deeply attached to her aunt's family and dreaming of the day when she can move to their house as the wife of their only son Tarig. In other words, Sammar is represented as a passive female to be constructed by her patriarchal aunt Mahasen. Sammar's deep thoughts always focalize her own personhood in terms of her larger family affiliation and dependence; she wants to tell Rae how she made a gift of herself to her aunt's family, "a child to be moulded.... An obedient niece, letting Mahasen decide how you should dress, how you should fix your hair. You were happy with that, content, waiting for the day you would take her only son away from her" (7). After Tarig's death, the aunt expects her niece to sustain the same compliant stance of the obedient niece and the unsexed widowed mother who is supposed to just concentrate on her career and her son and never fall in love again. Sammar's love for Rae however subverts the aunt's patriarchal hegemony and rewrites Sammar and Rae's relation in terms of translation and migration.

Like all translators, both Sammar and Rae are accused by their fellow citizens of being potential cultural traitors: he for telling the truth about Arabs and Islam and she for cherishing a desire to marry a foreigner. In Part I Sammar is first introduced to Rae and the readers as a translator endeavoring to literally translate Islamic groups' manifestos from Arabic into English and simultaneously trying to familiarize Rae with the meaning and pronunciation of names in Arabic and Sudanese Arabic. In addition, Sammar attempts to individually retranslate Rae's identity as someone "familiar, like people from back home" (21) rather

country's progress and keeping his love for both wives and their discrepant worlds. Thus, both Nabilah and Mahmoud finally succeed to reconcile their different translations of the Sudan; they reconstruct a contact zone that links together tradition and modernity.

4. Retranslating gender

Generally speaking, women writers are usually represented in many theoretical contexts as acknowledged translators who attempt to articulate their own experience by adopting the more familiar forms of patriarchal discourse. "Translation has long served," Luise von Flotow pinpoints, "as a trope to describe what women do when they enter the public sphere: they translate their private language, their specifically female forms of discourse, developed as a result of gendered exclusion, into some form of the patriarchal code" (12). While Lindsey Moore reads Aboulela's female protagonists in terms of "individual religiosity" (Moore 76), Shirin Edwin defines them according to an "Islamic feminist consciousness" (Edwin 62). However, Aboulela's gendered narratives can be read as translational texts, in which heroes and heroines work on retranslating traditional gendered relations of love and marriage, rewriting women's private experience and finally reframing traditional female stereotypes and tropes.

Like most classical patriarchal narratives, Aboulela's two novels are therefore basically romantic Bildungsromane whose female protagonists gain maturity and ultimately love and marriage through a series of blunders and reforms. However, Aboulela's novels write back to the patriarchal model of traditional Arab marriage norms that dictate the young woman to get married to her cousin or to one of her family acquaintances. Both Sammar and Soraya Abuzeid transgress the traditional Sudanese norms of their families by first getting engaged or married to their male relatives, and then getting married to strangers or foreigners.

Umdurman and realizes that she could have been a native paragon of the civilizing mission in Sudan:

Life in Sudan would have had a meaning if Nabilah had been able to make a difference, if she had thrived as a role model, as a champion of progress, as a good influence. She could have taken a younger person's hand and guided them.... She had not been able to rise and fill that leadership position. She had allowed Waheeba, the dust, the heat, the insects, the landscape and customs to defeat her. She had not fought back. (286-7).

She thus acknowledges the potential of the Sudanese youth for future progress and development and hence decides to re-embrace Mahmoud and Umdurman at the end of the novel. After such crisis of identity formation, Nabilah recognizes the potential of translating her identity across different geographies and cultures. In other words, she acknowledges the perception of translation as "a mutable mobile" that contests traditional perceptions of translation as "loss, deformation, poor approximation and entropy" (Cronin 28).

In the same manner, Mahmoud strives to reconfigure his sense of home and identity. After Waheeba's forced circumcision of Nabilah's daughter and Nabilah's insistence that Mahmoud divorce Waheeba and leave Umdurman, Mahmoud feels that his cultural identity is threatened. Like Sammar, Mahmoud first admits the backwardness of his Sudanese society and then attempts to contribute to its reformation and modernization processes. Mahmoud recognizes that he cannot leave Umdurman in spite of its underdevelopment, because it is simply where he belongs, and that he cannot divorce Waheeba regardless of her faults, because she is simply Nur's mother. Although the "modern-to-traditional ratio" (268) shifts in Mahmoud's life after Nur's accident, he succeeds to renegotiate a balance between the two worlds by contributing to his

Khartoum in terms of their contrastive modernized capitalism and natural beauty, Sammar finally succeeds in drawing a plural picture of a homeland that is replete with opportunities and setbacks.

Unlike the monolithic translation of the Sudan in Alan Moorehead's *The White Nile*, the Sudan is retranslated as a Januslike land reconciling the opposite qualities of the modern and the traditional in *Lyrics Alley*. Mahmoud Abuzeid has the potency of gliding from one side or subculture to another in his personal life. Though he has two wives who belong to different worlds and live in two different parts of the same saraya in Umdurman, he manages to swiftly glide between his two worlds or selves: "They belonged to different sides of the saraya, to different sides of him. He was the only one to negotiate between these two worlds, to glide between them, to come back and forth at will. It was his prerogative" (43). In other words, the gap between the Waheeba's hoash that is modeled after the open, spacious Sudan and Nabilah's wing in the saraya that is designed as a modern Egyptian home stands for the rift between the traditional communitarianism of Sudanese tribal society on the one hand and modern Western liberalism that highly esteems individual freedom and privacy on the other. Whereas the hoash is filled with traditional beds, angharaibs made of rope, and large round trays of food, the wing is replete with modern armchairs, a settee, a gramophone, and a proper dining room with knives, forks and serviettes. Therefore, Nabilah keeps oscillating between her image of the hoash as primitive and the Sudan as "an exotic wilderness, soporific and away from the momentum of history" (24) and her translation of Egypt as civilized, grand, energetic and fresh. The text is however ambivalent requiring its implied readers to reconfigure their vision of the hoash and the Sudan in general.

Realizing how her two children are deeply attached to their Sudanese family and culture, Nabilah revises her relation to Sudan and

westernised but day in day out I saw that sight he had described, I lived it all around me, lived in it, was part of it and understood that it was independent of the 'little enough to thank God for,' knew that it was of value and of dignity in itself, that it was something beautiful, something nice. (Aboulela, "Moving away from Accuracy," 204)

In her self-narrative article "Moving away from Accuracy", Leila Aboulela demonstrates how far she was shocked by Alan Moorehead's inability to translate the outstanding natural beauty of Sudan in *The White Nile* (1960) and was hence motivated to retranslate the Sudan as a place of value and dignity in her own writing.

Like Aboulela, Sammar holds a pluralistic stance towards her homeland. While she is well aware of the gloomy atmosphere of Khartoum at night, she is sure that it is still beautiful and cozy. What Sammar prizes in the Sudan more than anything else is its historical grandeur and sense of wholeness and unity. Both Sammar and Rae thus keep discussing the sense of natural connectivity that is found in Khartoum: "Khartoum, where the blue and the White Niles met under the bridge, under the sun, and across the bridge Umdurman, where saints were buried and something old and whole was in the air. Above the sand and the sound of the wind, everything held together, connected" (204). In contrast to Sammar's aunt and brother who translate Sudan and Khartoum as utterly ugly and backward because of power cuts, strikes, poverty and unemployment, Sammar holds a double vision that simultaneously hybridizes the lack and excess of home: "What was life like? Deprivation and abundance, side by side like a miracle. Surrender to them both. Poverty and Sunshine, poverty and jewels in the sky. Drought and the gushing Nile. Disease and clean hearts." (157) Like most translators, Sammar feels deeply attached to her homeland and fully motivated to render an accurate translation of its various contours. Although Sammar keeps contrasting Scotland to Sudan and Aberdeen to

The multiple textual and linguistic levels of Aboulela's two narratives bear the literary and linguistic markings of her translational and cosmopolitan literary style. The concern for translation and bilingualism in both narratives is significant. The deep connection between cultural identity, ambivalence and bilingualism take precedence over linguistic essentialism in postcolonial and translational texts in general (Ashcroft 96, Gilmour 210, Mehrez 130). This recurrent shift from standard and colloquial English into standard and colloquial Arabic permeates the different segments of the two narrative texts. Discursive and linguistic shifting is demonstrated by the multiple references to standard Arabic sources such as the Qur'an, the authentic hadiths, sufist teachings and literary works as well as to colloquial Arabic sources such as common sayings, lyrics and proverbs. What is significant about translated literary quotes is that they express a strong sense of nostalgia for roots and the homeland. Tayeb Salih's quote about the palm tree and its roots in *The Translator* (129) and the poem "I am Umdurman" by the young Sudanese poet Abdallah Zein in *Lyrics Alley* (12) highlight a high sense of Sudanese belonging and patriotism.

3.2. Retranslating the Sudan

But I am more realistic now about what I can achieve. To prove that Khartoum is nicer than London, more beautiful than Edinburgh ... I don't think so. Not to prove, but to express, to show that it is a valid place, a valid way of life beyond the stereotypical images of famine and war, not a backward place to be written off. In *The White Nile*, Alan Moorehead writes this about North and Central Sudan: 'It would seem that there is little enough to thank God for in these appalling deserts, and yet the poorest and most wretched of the inhabitants will be seen throughout the day to prostrate themselves upon the sand . . .' I remember reading these words in Khartoum when I was sixteen. I remember the shock, the first inkling that the West is wrong, that the West doesn't know. For yes, I was neither poor nor wretched and considerably

Islamic values with the global ethics of pluralism, individualism and pragmatism.

The deep structure of *Lyrics Alley* is founded on a semi-plural translation-migration model. The migration paradigm of *Lyrics Alley* is however different from that of *The Translator*, because in the first case, migration is conducted across discrepant geographies and subcultures that are affiliated to the same culture, namely Arab Sudanese culture in post-colonial time, while in the second migration is carried out across dissimilar geographies and cultures. Retranslation is consequently rendered across different levels of the same source text to rewrite the modern and foreign via the traditional and familiar in *Lyrics Alley*, whereas it is administered across the heterogeneous strata of the source and target texts and cultures in *The Translator*. The members of Abuzeid family, namely Mahmoud Abuzeid head of the family, Nur his son, Nabilah his young Egyptian wife, and Soraya his niece, along with other characters such as Ustaz Badr, are all portrayed as voluntary cultural translators/migrants attempting to reconcile the modern and the authentic, the secular and the sacred, and the foreign and the native. To highlight the plurality of retranslation and the fluidity of migration within, multiple narrative points of view are adopted in *Lyrics Alley* in contrast to the single point of view in *The Translator*. The structure of the novel is moreover segmented according to the multiple focalizers/translators enlisted, each chapter of the twenty two featuring a different focalization and hence a new translation. The main focalizers, whether Sudanese or Egyptian, strive to retranslate Sudanese and Egyptian cultures as essentially modern and pluralistic. The other characters such as Hajjah Waheeba, Mahmoud's Sudanese wife, Idris, Mahmoud's younger brother, and Nassir, his elder son, are all represented as mere objects of focalization and agents of tradition, deeply rooted in the parochial norms of their provincial society and culture and strongly reluctant to welcome the cultural transformations of modern retranslations.

regardless of her cognizance of the acute pains of exile in Scotland and of the intolerable difficulties at home.

In *Lyrics Alley* Mahmoud Abuzeid is similarly portrayed as a cosmopolitan merchant who clings to his Sudanese traditions, ancestors and family while taking pride in the Egyptian origin of his grandfather and mother, enjoying commercial ties with foreign investors and English bankers in the interest of free, fair trade, and investing his money in building high modernized, Egyptian-like buildings in Khartoum. Though of an Egyptian origin, he translates his identity as a Sudanese citizen since the early 1800s rather than as an average immigrant who migrated from Egypt to Sudan fifty-five years ago with the Anglo-Egyptian force to avenge Gordon's death. A cosmopolitan citizen and a self-made businessman, Mahmoud is depicted as a person who seeks to rewrite his religious tradition in accordance with the value system of globalized culture. He reveals his cosmopolitan vision of free and fair trade in both secular and sacred terms to his English friend Mr Harrison:

While other men fight and hate, we give and take. We negotiate with everyone, Christian, Jew, pagan. Money and goods are what makes men equal. That is my creed. And true righteousness is not in taking a political stance or on serving slogans. It is in fair trade. I am not a religious man by any means, but there is one saying of the Prophet Muhammad that I cling to. He said: "The truthful and honest merchant will be with the prophets, affirmers of truth and martyrs. (196). What Mahmoud simply does is to retrieve what is compatible with modern reality from the religious reservoir of the past. Shunning politically naive slogans, Mahmoud strongly supports the Sudanisation of administration, the termination of the colonial policy of indirect rule and the modernization of Sudanese agriculture, irrigation and industry. Aboulela's characters actually attempt to foreground the compatibility of

By the same token, both Sammar in *The Translator* and Mahmoud Abuzeid in *Lyrics Alley* can be defined in terms of "cultural cosmopolitans" who, like all translators, initiate a journey to the other text, the other language, the other culture and are hence voluntarily displaced from "the location of one's birth, language, upbringing" (Cronin 11). Adopting the role of the translator, both characters are voluntarily displaced from their native culture to obtain a broader view of the target text or the foreign culture. They eventually succeed to restructure a cultural synthesis that compromises the requirements of the source and target texts.

Sammar, the heroine of *The Translator*, is a traveller/translator who is driven by her sudden widowhood to work as a professional translator in Scotland, her host country. Though a translator, Sammar rarely succeeds to positively translate her being and sense of exile into the target text of Aberdeen. Sammar's sense of exile, in other words, is magnified due to her sense of permanent loss of her husband and temporary loss of her home and son. Sammar's first dream in the text demonstrates how far she feels alienated by the foreign Scottish rain, fog, mist, snow and wind. Scottish people are accordingly depicted as superhuman giants or simply different. Although she acknowledges some common traits with Rae that make him less modern and ironically closer, Sammar still contests that both she and Rae belong to two different worlds divided by high barriers of religion, race and nationality. In "Part One" home is articulated as the foundational chronotope according to which she judges different norms, lifestyles and cultures as merely foreign. To Sammar, home is like "a chandelier on the ceiling of her life, circles of lights" and the main source of her stability and safety (32). After leaving for her homeland in "Part Two", Sammar finally succeeds in reconstructing a balanced sense of identity and belonging. She maintains an intimate relation to her roots and family, and at the same time feels nostalgic for Scotland, Rae and her job as a translator

Middle East is supposed to be hindered due to the politicization of religion and the fabrication of super-myths of authenticity and "fascist and hyper-nationalist ideology" (Al-Azmeh 71). In opposition to such fundamentalist parochialism, Aboulela proposes cultural cosmopolitanism and religious plurality as fundamental strategies of cultural conflict resolution. That cosmopolitan stance is well represented by Sammar's and Mahmoud Abuzeid's relation with the foreign in *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley*, respectively. Although both find difficulty in hybridizing their parochial and cosmopolitan stances, they finally manage to retranslate the foreign and the national and deconstruct their cultural identity to accommodate both worldviews.

Aboulela's central characters are generally portrayed as travellers attached to personal and public worlds marked by fluidity and border crossing. Mobility and migration are two foundational features of Aboulela's religious philosophy, as well documented in the title of her autobiographical short story "Travel is Part of Faith" (2000). Other than being an intrinsic part of faith, travel and migration provide the writer and her characters with a sense of potential "transformation" that motivates her to retranslate her "safe and predictable" life at home and to rewrite her endangered and unbalanced life abroad. Her phobias about the Scottish weather and coldness and "Scots who hated the Arabs because of Lockerbie" (41) have been retranslated as signs of possible amicability between self and other owing to the help of her Scottish neighbours who taught her how to protect herself from cold weather by wearing thermal underwear, gloves, tights and using electric blankets (42). Though emotionally attached to two different homelands and affiliated to different generation immigrants, both the writer and her baby son are portrayed as potential travellers who share their strong belief in migration and translation as a sort of "a mental transformation" in Rainer Schulte's words (2).

is, for instance, directly retranslated in *The Translator* in terms of resisting corrupt governments and speaking "the truth before a tyrant ruler" (105). The concept of fate is however indirectly retranslated as based on two sub-theories: intelligent design and purgation. Whereas Sammar keeps reminding herself that Allah Almighty chooses whom she will marry, what kind of job she will take and what time she will die in *The Translator*, the concept of suffering and endurance is retranslated according to the teachings of the Turkish Sufi Sheikh Maulanna Abdullahi Ed-Dagestani in terms of purification in *Lyrics Alley*. Badr is portrayed as a religion teacher who attempts to employ the Islamic vision of fate to cope with his hard life conditions: expatriation, his father's aging illness and the unfulfilled social demands of his family. Badr therefore advocates the bearing of misfortune and pain without complaint as basic to every believer's faith in Allah:

Why do things happen? For pedagogical reasons, so that we can experience the power of Allah, catch a glimpse of Hell and fear it, so that we can practice seeking refuge in Him and, when relief comes give thanks for his mercy. Darkness was created so that, like plants, we could yearn and turn to the light. Badr had observed this in himself whenever one of the children were ill, or when he faced difficulties at work, or when his plans suffered a setback, or when he was thwarted or in pain. (217)

Thus, fate is retranslated in terms of the psychological strength of endurance and the implicit value of pain rather than with regard to passive submission or reckless persistence.

The relation between Islam and ethnic, national and religious pluralism is usually translated as problematic. Religion is generally associated with cultural identity politics that might generate tension in the post-bipolar politics of globalization (148-9). Cultural change in the

lived reality in *The Translator* or as manipulating the mob in the name of religious mottoes such as the Mahdi's dream of universal jihad in the colonial Sudan in *Lyrics Alley*.

Aboulela's main contribution to the translation of the sacred and the religious in her novels is to be placed in the domain of the spiritual rather than the political. She retranslates the sacred through a female character like Sammar in *The Translator* and a male character like Ustaz Badr, the Egyptian teacher of Arabic and private tutor to the Abuzeids, in *Lyrics Alley*. In an interview with the students of the University of Aberdeen in 2007, she even admitted that she had to make up a new language to chart such free spiritual space that could blur all the borderlines of the political, the cultural and the secular.⁶ Aboulela's translation of the spiritual is moreover linked with her sense of migration within and without.

Both Sammar and Badr speculate on the question of the brevity of worldly life which is described as temporary and fleeting by Sammar, while it is compared to a journey by Badr. Both focalize Sudan as a space that has a distinguishing spiritual atmosphere; praying under the Sudanese sky, Sammar feels a different glow in her spirit, whereas Badr translates Sudan in a more Sufistic manner as "a place of wayward spirituality, a place where the impossible and the romantic pulsed within reach. A place where intangible, inhuman, forces still prevailed, not yet tamed and restrained by the rules of religion and men" (60-1). Both are similarly portrayed as practicing believers who function as spiritual mentors to other characters and who perceive faith as their main source of stability and security home and abroad.

Moreover, religious quotes are presented as either direct or indirect non-narrative comments that attempt to retranslate what the West deems to be controversial Islamic concepts such as jihad and fate. Jihad

3. Retranslating identity

3.1. Retranslating Islam

**“Political Islam poised to dominate the new world
bequeathed by Arab spring”**

(Peter Beaumont, *The Guardian*: 3 December 2011)

Featured as a possible threat to Western liberal democracy and secular tradition in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab revolutions, Islam has been translated in the Western media discourse in terms of political radicalism, religious fundamentalism, global jihad, intellectual extremism and new Islamism. In contrast to the Western translation of Islam in the post-revolution period, Aboulela's retranslation is much more focused on Islam as a faith that directly affects personhood and worldview. Religion-based identity is of central significance in Leila Aboulela's fiction. According to Lindsey Moore, she is “the most high-profile advocate of the Islamic revival in English-language literature” (75). However, Aboulela's translation of such religious awakening is absolutely different from both Western Orientalism and Eastern reversed Orientalism that simultaneously attempt to either foreignize or domesticate Islam in terms of radical and essentialist Islamism. An extreme example of the radical Islamist thinkers who spent their whole careers trying to essentialize Islamic teachings regardless of their historical context is Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the fundamental ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood in the sixties of the last century.⁵ To Aboulela, faith is broader than political ideology or cultural politics. According to Shirin Edwin, “In using a wide-angle lens to examine the presence of Islam in the lives of Muslims, Aboulela also broadens the discussion on the religion to include aspects beyond the political and doctrinal, and throws much needed light on the personal and palpable aspects of the lives of Muslims as Islam translates into their day-to-day lives” (2013: 76). In *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley* Aboulela severely critiques extremists and terrorists who are portrayed as either living in a time warp that is totally divorced from

tastes and lifestyles: the European one represented by Nabilah, Mahomud's young Egyptian wife, and the parochial one by Hajjah Waheeba, Mahomud's Sudanese wife. Whereas most of the elder Abuzeids conform to the popular Western stereotypic translations of the immutable Arab or the "frozen camel" (Zogby 105), the younger generation breaks the overused image and goes with the modern flow of change and development.

Projecting geographic, ontological and linguistic in-betweenness of immigrant writing, most of Aboulela's novels portray high rates of geographic mobility and cultural exchange across different contact spaces in the West represented by England and Scotland and in the East exemplified by Egypt and Sudan. As a member of immigrant writers, Leila Aboulela's hybrid locus is well represented by her typical merging of Eastern and Western locales, characters, styles, forms, tropes, modes, languages, norms and cultures in her own texts. Retranslation is greatly represented by both Aboulela's personal life and her fictional world. Daughter of an Egyptian mother and a Sudanese father and educated at a westernized environment of a private American school, Aboulela has always been tuned to cultural negotiations across heterogeneous geographies, ethnicities and languages in her travels through Cairo, Khartoum, Jakarta, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, London, and Aberdeen. By comparison, the constant touchstones for Aboulela's female characters are cultural displacement and relocation, alienation and rebirth, and cultural translation and retranslation.

the Gulf War in 1991, 9/11 in 2001 and the Arab Spring through 2011-13. *The Translator* depicts how the deterioration of Sammar into disappointment and alienation in Aberdeen due to her sudden widowhood is transformed into improvement by her disillusioned return to Khartoum and her final emotional reconciliation with Rae Isles, the Scottish lecturer in Middle-Eastern History and Third World Politics who has converted to Islam. The historical weightiness of *The Translator* is explicitly reflected in the many references to Third World and Middle East politics, protest movements, radical Islamism, regional conflicts and wars, popular anger and finally in how such political crises bear upon the media representation of Arab immigrants in the West. The Gulf War is, for instance, alluded to with reference to how Sammar is translated by the Scots as a Muslim Arab woman associated with the Gulf War and Saddam Hussein in Aberdeen (96). A Scottish pro-Arab Orientalist, Rae himself is translated as a non-white foreigner (97) by his angry television and radio audience for his anti-war stance. Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) similarly spotlights how the British generally translated bearded Arab young men as terrorists in 2003. Najwa, the Sudanese veiled heroine, focalizes Tamer, her employer's younger brother, according to Londoners' perspective as "Tall, young, Arab-looking, dark eyes and the beard, just like a terrorist" (100).

Lyrics Alley is a family saga that portrays a narrative cycle of the deterioration and survival of the semi-modern Sudanese clan of the Abuzeids, as they endeavor to cope with domestic and political instability in the process of transition from a colonial to a post-colonial Sudan in the 1950s. The novel depicts the Sudanese setting of Umdurman and the saraya of the rich national self-made businessman Mahmoud Bey Abuzeid in the 1950s. The ramifications of the demise of the British colonial rule in Sudan influence the social fabric of the whole Sudanese society in general and that of the Abuzeids in particular. The Abuzeids are hence represented as divided between two assumedly incompatible

culture for their readers. However, they do not stand outside the "Orient," like the European or American Orientalist, since they are of the "Orient" by virtue of their background; but they are also of the "Occident" by reason of immigration and acculturation. Therefore, their position represents merger of the two classic stances of the native informant and the foreign expert. Many Arab immigrant writers have seen this position as a privileged one insofar as it affords them a unique insider's perspective not only on the Arab world, but also on their adoptive country. (28-9)

Hassan, however, misses referencing the potential significance of counter-Orientalism as a concept that can allow Anglophone Arab literature a more proactive stance towards contemporary Orientalism and its hegemonic frames of reference. Moreover, in defining Arab immigrant writing as a subset of minor literature that is produced by a minority group, Hassan seems to narrow down the revolutionary potential of immigrant writers by associating them with resistance from below rather than with broader engagement or solidarity with the other. Immigrant writing that is founded on counter-Orientalism and retranslation must have at least two characteristics: historical weightiness that involves East-West political engagements on the one hand and geographic, ontological and linguistic in-betweenness on the other. The affinity between translation and migration can be accordingly predicated upon their common association with mediation and in-betweenness. That is why both travelers and translators, according to Loredana Polezzi, have a potential "to deceive, confound and betray, as well as to act as reliable guides, mediators and witnesses" (171).

From a historical standpoint, the counter-Orientalism of new Arab British literature was developed throughout the last two decades in reaction to an intensified Western media coverage of major historical junctures that engaged West-MENA international relationships, namely

twentieth centuries and by *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* in the twenty first century has to be retranslated differently by Francophone and Anglophone writers in post-colonial times. In sum, retranslation represents the core of the creative and painstaking attempts of immigrant writers to willingly rewrite their own history and culture, because their implied Western readers are assumed to be doubly removed from local reality by means of Western translations. Employing such technical strategies of hybridization and rewriting, new immigrant literature dispenses with the value of 'originality' adopted by Romanticism-based approaches to literature and espouses an approach that facilitates the evolution of the literary system by "refractions". Through such refractions "a work of literature produced outside a given system takes its place in that "new" system" (Lefevere, "Mother Courage's Cucumbers," 252). Thus, new immigrant literature recombines the generic elements and stereotypes of the English literary canon along with the non-canonized content and language of Anglophone writing to suit the alternative context of post bi-polar politics and culture. In that sense it is a literature that is fundamentally translational, interweaving several discourses, texts, literatures, and cultures. Immigrant literature can be thus considered as a "translational project" in which "translation is no longer a one-way flow from the source to the target culture, but a two-way transcultural enterprise" (Vieira 106).

2. Leila Aboulela, immigrant writing and retranslation

In his recent study *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*, Wail S. Hassan underscores the privileged position of Arab immigrant writers as hybrid cultural translators who can identify with both Orient and Occident or home country and hosting country:

By writing in English, Arab immigrant writers have found themselves placed in that position, often expected to interpret their

the Arab 'mind', 'psyche' or 'essence' and 'Islamic Orient' or 'Islamic Republic' (232-237).

What distinguishes new immigrant writing as a postcolonial subgenre is its appropriation of retranslation as an effective medium of 'engagement' with otherness, whether in the form of Orientalism or reversed Orientalism. The conceptual affinity between retranslation and political engagement can be spotlighted with special reference to Maria Tymoczko's notion of translation as a panoptic form of activism and engagement, that is broader than a mere top-down resistance concept. According to Tymoczko, engagement is much more proactive than oppositional resistance, and it hence demonstrates a wider range of commitment to principles and solidarity with other people (2011). As a textualized form of engagement, retranslation can therefore provide Arab immigrant writers with ample opportunities for rewriting the frames of their identity and gendered relations in opposition to the essentialism manifested by either Ontological Orientalism or Orientalism in Reverse. The prefix 're' in 'retranslation' then can signify the double process of critical revision of Western cultural translations of the non-West and of the actual rewriting of Oriental culture on its own terms. Thus, the locus of enunciation is theoretically supposed to be linked to the West in the first case, whereas it is assumed to be located in the non-West in the second. In theorizing how reality is constructed to the Western reader through incessant cultural translation processes, Andre Lefevere stresses how "Western cultures 'translated' (and 'translate') non-Western cultures into Western categories to be able to come to an understanding of them and, therefore, to come to terms with them" ("Composing the Other" 77). Although Lefevere opts for "re-education/re-socialization" of Western readers to facilitate their understanding of non-Western cultures on their own terms, retranslation that is conducted by native informants or immigrant writers sounds like a more viable option. An Orient that was culturally translated by Flaubert, Forster or Burgess in the nineteenth and

It similarly seeks to destabilize cultural stereotypes of Arab women at homeland and abroad.

1. Counter-Orientalism and retranslation

In his article "Orientalism Once More," Edward Said articulates the urgent need for embracing cultural translation and counter-Orientalism in the post-9/11 political discourse that is basically concerned with the mis/representations of Arabs and Muslims in Western media and political communities. Framed in response to the apocalyptic events of 9/11 and the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, Said's article attempts to conceptualize the significance of reconstructing revisionary and oppositional spaces that could stand against unverifiable fictions about Arab backwardness and Islamic menace. He pinpoints that such counter-discourse must be produced by cultural translators or what he calls "independent intellectuals," who can "provide alternative models to the reductively simplifying and confining ones based on mutual hostility that have prevailed in the Middle East and elsewhere for so long" (Said 875). In other words, Arab intellectuals and writers are recommended to follow Said's intellectual stance that attempts to relink two incompatible worlds by forging a new humanistic space comprising a historical knowledge of both self and other.⁴ Such an alternative humanistic model of counter-Orientalism adopts a critical universalism that implies the double process of deconstructing canonical myths of self and reinscribing potential solidarity with the other. Founded on a liminal structure that befits times of transition, counter-Orientalism stands at the medial position between what Sadik Jalal Al-'Azm calls "Ontological Orientalism" and "Orientalism in Reverse" or "reversed Orientalism". According to Al-'Azm's definition, the first concept represents the ideologically reductive mythification of the Orient exemplified by the works of some Orientalists such as Gibb and Lewis, whereas the latter endorses an essentialist view of supposedly authentic categories such as

Retranslation is of special importance to the aesthetics of pluralism and translatability in new immigrant writing, a literary subgenre that pieces together the dialogic potential of translation and postcolonial writing. Thus, a theoretical study of Arab British immigrant narratives and their representation of Arabs against a long history of invisibility and exclusion can be inextricably linked up to the politics of retranslation, rewriting, relocation and cultural repollination that are abundantly featured in the post-colonial era. This article examines the politics of retranslation in Arab British literature as represented in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) and *Lyrics Alley* (2010).

The article examines how new immigrant writing employs retranslation according to the postcolonial paradigms of identity and gender. The question of identity and gender has gained a wide currency in the post-Arab-Spring political and cultural discourse due to the escalating tensions among the different Arab social strata that resulted from emerging identitarian politics and gendered exclusion. Many post-revolution workshops and seminars, for instance, focused on the risk of identity- and gender-based marginalization, the concept of citizenship in relation to diverse identities (religious, ethnic, tribal and familial) that sometimes interfere in the expectedly direct relationship between the citizen and the state and the problematic relationship between religion, identity and democracy.³ The identity paradigm offered by Aboulela foregrounds relocation and retranslation across different cultural zones. It seeks to deconstruct how the classical identitarian and essentialist grids of region, nation, religion, race, ethnicity and class are rewritten according to the new politics of what Bassam Tibi calls "post-bipolarity" (1), fundamentally a political ideology that is grounded in cultural dialogue and transnational exchange as viable tools of the resolution of cultural tensions and international conflicts. The gender paradigm spotlights the mechanism through which gendered memory reinforces self-empowerment and the construction of selfhood in migrant societies.

Counter-Orientalism: Retranslating the 'Invisible Arab'¹ in
Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley*²

Abstract

Retranslation is a foundational postcolonial metaphor that might highlight the new horizons of transcultural and transnational relations and their political backdrop: By the same token, Arab British migrant narratives are of special relevancy to both translation and cultural studies, since migrant identity and writing are closely associated with the politics of translation, rewriting, relocation and cross-cultural pollination. This contribution explores the role of counter-discourses in general and counter-Orientalism in particular in the contemporary fiction of Arab British writers. In particular the paper focuses on the textual representations of invisible Arab men and women and the East-West cultural exchange in the writing of the Sudanese feminist and Scottish immigrant Leila Aboulela (1964-). Drawing on the counter-traditional concept of translation as engagement rather than transfer, this article attempts to spotlight the aesthetic and political parameters of cultural translation in Arab British literature represented by Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) and *Lyrics Alley* (2010). Many studies have examined the mis/representation of Arabs in Western Orientalist narratives, but very few have probed how Arab émigrés have deftly attempted to engage with Orientalist narratives by restructuring new identities and critically hybridizing unexampled cultural models. In other words, counter-Orientalism implies appropriating Orientalist stereotypes of space, history, identity and gender in counter-narratives that seek to retranslate, demythologize and therefore de-Orientalize Arab subjects.

Key words: Counter-Orientalism - Leila Aboulela – Immigrant writing – Postcolonial literature – Retranslation.

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روايتي ليلي أبو العلا "المتترجمة" و"حارة الأهازيج"

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