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Decoloniality in Leila Aboulela's the Translator

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Abstract

This paper examines Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) through a decolonial lens, highlighting how the novel challenges Eurocentric perspectives on knowledge and culture. By depicting the life of Sammar, a Sudanese Muslim widow living in Scotland, Aboulela amplifies the voice of a Muslim female subjectivity often silenced or stereotyped in Orientalist discourse. The novel reinterprets translation as more than just a language act; it serves as a metaphor for navigating unequal cultural exchanges, where Islamic and Arabic knowledge are frequently mediated through Western academic frameworks. Rather than portraying Sammar as a passive figure, Aboulela centers her faith and worldview in the story. Through her relationship with Rae, a Western character, the novel portrays him as the one who undergoes transformation, thereby reversing the colonial gaze. In this way, the novel makes a decolonial gesture: it diminishes Europe's dominance, affirms the value of Islamic knowledge, and supports the idea of hybrid identities and cross-cultural dialogue that resist assimilation.

Keywords: Culture, Colonialism, Decoloniality, Eurocentrism, Orientalist Discourse