Moral Confusion in Ahdaf Soueif's *in the Eye of the Sun*

Zahra Al-Saqqaf
Associate Professor
Department of English, Faculty of Education
University of Aden
Aden, Yemen

Abstract

The individual's morality is the result of interpersonal interactions out of which the individual organizes understanding of virtues, rules and norms and integrates them into choices and actions. Cultures transmit values and the person who is exposed to different cultures in an early age may have moral confusion because of cultural differences in moral judgments and cultural variability in the priority given to moral considerations. In Ahdaf Soueif's In the Eye of the Sun (1992), the novel of coming of age of Asya al-Ulama, the protagonist, Asya, harbors the values of two different cultures; Arab culture and western culture and cannot integrate them into a coherent whole. Raised and educated in both Egypt and England, Asya has contradictions in her moral knowledge especially on issues that are perceived differently by the two cultures. This paper aims to illustrate Asya's moral confusion by illuminating the contradictions in her moral knowledge and behavior, highlighting the changes in her moral reasoning and exploring the different integrating factors that direct and influence her decisions and actions. Before and after she gets married, Asya has undefined moral perspective on issues related to marriage and sex. She believes that the Muslim Arab woman must not have sexual relationships outside the confines of marriage but she wants to be the librated, fulfilled, sensuous woman, the defiant femme de plaisir so she adopts doublethink in her moral concepts and exercises a willful blindness to contradictions in her ideas and actions which swing between the values of Arab culture and western culture. After she commits adultery with an Englishman in England, her marriage collapses. In crisis Asya makes her developmental transition and develops concerns about her connection with her societal environment. Kohlberg's theories of cognitive moral development and Gilligan's theory of women's moral development have been crucially useful to understand the processes of the individual's moral development and to identify the features and aspects of the individual's moral reasoning in spite of the differences in the content of morality between Arab culture and western culture.

Key Words: moral development – moral confusion – Arab culture – western culture – Gilligan – Kohlberg

Introduction

Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), is the novel of coming of age of Asya al-Ulama, the daughter of the academic parents who teach at Cairo University. It portrays the life of this middle class Egyptian Muslim family, al-Ulama, from 1967-1980 which is defined and colored by the complicated Egyptian and regional political situation. Asya, raised and educated in both Egypt and England, seems to share many aspects of Soueif's life. Many studies emphasize the autobiographical elements in the novel.[1] Soueif herself in an interview with Manjunath (2003) says, "Asya al-Ulama think the way I thought when I was her age. She has the same questions, the same ambitions."

Asya loves Saif Madi and wants to marry him before she finishes her university when she is eighteen years old but her parents refuse. Immediately after her graduation she and Saif get married. The couples are socially and culturally compatible and financially secure but they are uncomfortable in their sexual relationship which dramatically affects their emotional closeness. Asya is always "afraid of the pain" while Saif thinks "she's young, she's fragile" (628)[2]. Asya seems to be one of those women who have a thick elastic hymen which causes great pain in the process of defloration. That kind of woman may get pregnant even though her hymen is still intact.[3]

Asya gets pregnant but loses the fetus in a natural miscarriage. Strangely enough, before getting married, Asya confides to her nanny, Dada Zeina, what she and Saif do in her secret visits to his home on Sunday afternoons and the experienced woman gives her some teachings in this regard but after getting married, when she has that big problem threatening her marital life and making her unhappy, she does not talk about it with any of the ones she trusts. The Madis' five years marriage collapses when the twenty-six years old Asya, alone and lonely in England while studying for her doctorate, commits adultery with an English man.

Committing adultery underpins the plot of the novel. Some studies have read the novel to find an answer to the question: "Should or can the [Arab] married woman feel only for her husband even if she feels lonely and sexually unsatisfied or should she suffer in silence to uphold a socially sanctioned marriage?" (Shihada 2010, p.158) Soueif, in an interview with Ahmad, states that Asya's frustrating and hopeless marriage and her problematic relationship with Saif are to be read as "a specific individual issue and specific and individual in the characters' lives as well." (Ahmad 2010, p.227) She asserts that Saif does not represent general characteristics of the Arab man or the Egyptian man. Likewise, Asya, as described by Said, is "decidedly not a symbol or allegory of the Arab woman, but a fully realized, if impossibly situated, Egyptian sensibility in, but not totally of, the west" (Said 1992, p.19). Asya, in her singularity as an individual, makes her choices in her own context with her own complexities and contradictions. When Saif asks her about committing adultery:

'When did you decide to do it? *How* did you decide to do it?'
Asya says, 'I was lonely.'
'You were lonely?'
'I was – '

'So what's the big deal? *I'm* lonely. Everybody's lonely. My mother's mostly lonely; she doesn't go round picking up strangers –' … 'I could have done but I didn't . Because I chose not to. And I want to know how you chose, actually *chose,* to do it.'

'It just happened,' Asya says.
'It just happened? Just like that?'
Asya says nothing. (629 original emphasis)

For an Arab woman who internalizes the values of Arab culture, committing adultery means not only infidelity and disloyalty to her husband and disgrace to her family's honor but also distortion of her selfhood and inner integrity as an individual who has autonomy and agency to decide her moral being and stand solid against challenges, temptations, loneliness, deprivation, etc. The Arab woman's sense of self is inseparable from her sense of her body which is the source of her beauty, dignity and honor . Her self-perception in relation to her body influences her sense of self-respect and self-confidence. The individual, consciously and unconsciously, internalizes her culture's mores and standards by which she judges other people and herself as well and when she breaks her culture's rules, her self-respect is threatened, her self-image is distorted and she feels shame and guilt. When a Muslim Arab woman is involved in a situation in which her morality is functioning in relation to her body (namely having a sexual relationship outside marriage), she operates both individuality and connectedness. She is an individual who functions morally as an autonomous unit of action, responsible for all her choices and deeds before God, perceiving her body as a basic element of her selfhood and simultaneously connected to her family and relatives: can maintain or harm their dignity and honor and bring them pride or shame by her deeds as she is affected by theirs likewise.

Connectedness, or "connectivity" as Joseph[4] puts it, in human relationships is a prominent quality in men and women in Arab societies. Each culture reserves for its members the potential to act directly, without the hesitation that unlimited choice would require. Egyptian culture, as Rough argues, provides overarching principles for human interaction, a "pattern for familial and other personal relations that is part of every Egyptian's conscious knowledge." (Rough 1984, p. 89) Asya is typically Egyptian in her familial relations and connectivity within the Egyptian geographical space, almost morally directed and protected by that space, but outside Egypt her moral confusion discloses as she harbors the values of the Arab culture and the western culture and cannot integrate them into a coherent whole. The perspective of Arab culture on adultery is derived from the morality of Religion and almost all religions prohibit fornication and adultery and condemn its committers equally: both men and women. Discussing adultery from the religious perspective, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. Committing adultery in this paper represents the climax of Asya's moral confusion in the midst of the interaction between her morality and her culture(s).

The paper illustrates Asya al-Ulama's moral confusion by illuminating the contradictions in her moral knowledge and behavior, highlighting the changes in her moral reasoning and exploring the different integrating factors that direct and influence her decisions and actions. Kohlberg's theories on cognitive moral development and Gilligan's theory of women's moral development have been crucially important to understand the processes of the individual's moral development and the features of the individual's moral reasoning.

The paper understands culture as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor 1871, p. 1, quoted in Hallpike 2004, p. 20) It does not deny the fact that Arab culture is highly patriarchal, permissive with men and harsh to women regarding committing adultery, yet does not discuss it as it is beyond its scope. It is also likely to be noted that the postcolonial perspective[5] is not considered when analyzing Asya's situation so that the discussion does not expand and be limited to the theoretical domain of moral development psychology.

A *note on Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories on moral development*

For cognitive moral development theoreticians, reasoning underlies morality. Their interest is in the qualitative form of the individual's moral reasoning and in the developmental changes in that reasoning. Following Piaget, they try to uncover stages in the development of moral understanding. In Kohlberg's theories, the exercise of moral judgment is a cognitive process that allows individuals to reflect on their values and organize them into a logical order. The development of moral judgment depends on cognitive development and advancing in skills of taking perspective. Kohlberg (1976) has formulated three levels and six stages in his theory of moral development: pre conventional, conventional, and post conventional. These three levels represent three different ways of relating the self to society's moral expectations. At the first level (Stages 1 and 2) moral judgments are based not on respect for authority and rules but on the fear of punishment and the unpleasant consequences of one's acts. The individual pursues his own aims as long as he is not caught. Moral decisions in the pre conventional stages are egocentric and concrete. Reward and punishment are the typical bases of reasoning in these stages. At the second level (stages 3 and 4) there is an orientation toward maintaining the rule of social groups and society. The conventional stages are based on the person's ability to decenter his moral universe and take the moral perspective of his parents and other important members of society into account. Then, at the final level (stages 5 and 6) moral judgments are based on principles that are universal principles of justice: the equality of human rights and the respect for dignity of human beings as individual persons. The post conventional stage is based on the person's ability to base morality on the logic of principled decision making based on standards that are thought to be universal and not dependent on culture. Kohlberg later has "abandoned the 6th stage Universal ethical principles" being unattainable by his longitudinal subjects. (Kohlberg 1984, p. 270, quoted in Hallpike 2004, p. 122) Moral development in Kohlberg's theory proceeds from a selfish desire to avoid punishment (personal), to a concern for group functioning (societal), to a concern for the consistent application of universal ethical principles (moral) and it is cognitive capability that fuels the transition between the stages of moral development.

Kohlberg believes that "stage sequences are not only invariant across individuals within a particular culture or subculture but are also culturally universal" (Colby, Kohlberg, & Kauffman 1987, p. 9). He does not deny the moral diversity among cultures but he asserts that individuals in every society pass through the same sequence of moral development. For Kohlberg, "the differences lie in the stage of moral development of individuals and cultures and in the meaning, use, and hierarchical ordering of value concepts. These cultural divergencies are not only found in the knowledge base but in the principles used in moral evaluations" (Rich & DeVitis 1985, p. 93). Kohlberg's stages are not characterized by lists of specific acts (e.g., hitting a playmate is wrong). Those are content issues each culture identifies in terms of concrete rules. Kohlberg does not define the moral stages in terms of specific prohibitions or prescriptions. Rather, he defines the stages "in terms of the fundamental rationale for what makes an act moral or immoral" (Rest 1997, p. 425). For Kohlberg, "cultural factors may speed up, slow down, or stop development, but they do not change its sequence" (Colby, Kohlberg, & Kauffman 1987, p. 6). His concern is the form of reasoning rather than the specific and culturally variable content of the moral decisions as he thinks that it is the form that shows developmental regularity and generalizability within and across people. Contemporary moral development scholars argue for some universal elements of moral development leaving aside the issue of whether there are any cultural universals in the content of morality:

Kagan posits a universal developmental sequence for the separate components of morality: an initial concept for prohibited acts; an ability to infer the thoughts of another; the acquisition of the value of semantic concepts *good* and *bad*; the ability to relate past to present; and a recognition of social identity categories to which self belongs. Likewise, Staub, Eisenberg, Narvaez, and Hart claim that there are general cognitive *mechanisms* and emotional *processes* that underlie moral development around the world. (Edwards & Carlo 2005, p. xvii)

Critics of Kohlberg's theory however argue that "the theory has originated from a specific cultural background, and that, therefore, we should expect basic moral principles to differ substantially from one culture to another." (Lind 1986, p. 12). It is a matter of fact that people in different cultures build different conceptions of the world, including different moral realities. Lotfabadi (2008) points out that Kohlberg's theories do not consider the innate and eternal moral foundations, moral motive and feeling, moral belief and culture, and moral behavior and reaction. In the same vein, Ahmed and Gielen (2002) in a critical review of studies on moral development in Arab countries conclude that:

Kohlbergian theories and research methods attempt to identify the universal features of moral reasoning and moral judgment processes, and how these might develop throughout a person's lifespan. These features are of crucial importance if we are to understand those more or less rational aspects of morality which are shared (or could be shared in the future) by humanity. At the same time, Kohlbergian theories and research methods are less suitable for discovering the more culture-specific aspects of morality. As psychologists we are at present far removed from understanding either the more universal or the more culture-specific aspects of moral development in the various Arab countries. (p. 281)

Gilligan (1982) focuses her studies on women's development considering "the relation between experience and thought and the role of conflict in development." (p.3) she asserts that there is a difference between men's and women's moral reasoning. Grounded in her theory is the proposition that women's "intimacy goes along with identity, as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others." (p.12). Women value behavior and emotions such as caring for others, having interdependent relationships, being responsive to the needs of others, sympathy, compassion, and love therefore they give preference to such behavior and emotions in moral issues, instead of justice. Gilligan thinks that women use care reasoning as the guide for moral decisions."Women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" (p.17).

According to Gilligan (1982), the woman's experience of self and the understanding of morality changes with the growth of reflective thought. Questions about identity and morality converge on the issue of interpretation. As interpretation centers on describing the mode of connection, the individual ties her experience of self to activities of care and connection and ties her despair to her sense of disconnection. Women perceive the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules. The development of their moral thinking is tied to changes in their understanding of responsibility and relationships. The inflicting of hurt is considered selfish and immoral in its reflection of unconcern, while the expression of care is seen as the fulfillment of moral responsibility. Thus selfishness and responsibility define the moral problem as one of obligation to exercise care and avoid hurt.

In Gilligan's theory of women's moral development, mature reasoning is a three-level progression from an egocentric through a societal to a universal perspective. In the first level, the woman focuses on caring for the self and self-serving relationships in order to ensure individual survival. The self's needs, not the other's, are given priority in decisions. There is inequality between self and other in this level. When the satisfaction of one's own needs is criticized as selfish, a new understanding of the connection between self and others emerges under the concept of responsibility. The individual leaves the first level when this responsibility is oriented to the needs of others and enters the following transitional phase that provides the path to the second level. In the second level, the good is equated with caring for others. When those others are legitimized as recipients of her care, the exclusion of herself gives rise to problems in her relationships with others creating disequilibrium between self and others. The illogic of inequality between other and self and being responsive to others' needs instead of the self's leads to a reconsideration of relationships to sort out the confusion between self-sacrifice and care for others. When the individual realizes she is responsible to herself as much as to others, she leaves the second level and enters the following transitional phase providing the path to the third level. In the third level, the tension between selfishness and responsibility is resolved through a new understanding of interconnection between other and self.

A progressively increasing differentiation of self and other and growing comprehension of the dynamics of social interaction inform the development of an ethic of care; central to it the insight that self and other are interdependent. The individual realizes that caring for others is not possible without caring for self. Therefore, in this level, she "strives to encompass the needs of both self and others, to be responsible to others and thus to be good but also to be responsible to herself and thus to be honest and real." (Gilligan 1982, p. 85)

According to Gilligan (1988), the perspective individuals use in their lives changes according to what type of self they develop. Woman attains herself by staying attached to others (relational self), and this forms the basis for the care perspective. As morality and selfhood are intimately linked, modes of self-definition affect modes of moral judgment. Gilligan argues that thinking takes a conventional form during adolescence; girls are affected by the dominant moral voice of the society. In this period, justice reasoning takes importance in girls' moral judgments. Adolescent girls base their moral decisions on justice instead of care, even though their moral voices are rooted in emotion, particularity, and connectedness. Gilligan (1995) sees the justice and care perspectives independent from but complement each other. They do not negate one another, but represent two distinct ways of perceiving and responding to problems, conflicts, and dilemmas in relationships. The care perspective "draws attention to the fact that one's own terms may differ from those of others. Justice in this context becomes understood as respect for people in their own terms" (p. 36-37).

Critics of Gilligan's theory argue that she "derives [her] female model of moral development from the moral reasoning of primarily white, middle-class women in the United States." (Stack 1986, p. 324) However, Gilligan herself acknowledges that race and culture also influence moral reasoning but she thinks that justice and care orientations are basically linked to gender. Miller argues that "variations in judgments about interpersonal obligations and justice reflect cultural, and not gender, differences" (cited in Turiel 1998, p. 895). Many researchers, however, believe that "Gilligan insightfully identified a missing voice in Kohlberg's theory, but inappropriately primarily linked it to gender rather than culture" (Kurtines & Gewirtz 1995, p. 24). This paper uses Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories of moral development to understand the processes of the individual's moral development. It acknowledges that what constitutes the western culture's understanding of morality in some issues is different from the Arab culture's and that people of Arab and western cultures may hold different beliefs about the effects of actions therefore their judgments about the harmfulness or fairness of behaviors differ.

Moral confusion of Asya al-Ulama in Ahdaf Soueif's In the Eye of the Sun

Asya al-Ulama's moral knowledge is constituted through an attachment to her parents, systematic schooling: public and private and social contact with the ethical and religious issues retained in her Egyptian society. She is also exposed to different social contacts with the western culture and educated in English. A child, according to Kohlberg (1963), internalizes the moral values of his parents and culture and makes them his own as he comes to relate these values to a comprehended social order and to his own goals as a social self. The more personally important aspects of the self are likely to be bases on which the person locates himself in terms of collective categories. Through the interaction between the individual and the environment, the individual cognitively constructs his own interpretation of values over time.

Asya sees her parents as her moral ideals and draws some of her abstract principles from their behavior. She sees that her father presents to the outside world an image of an educated and open-minded man who holds the position of Head of Department of Psychology at Cairo University then the Minster of Culture. But at home, he turns into what Joseph (1993) calls the "cold connective patriarch"; a term that refers to a patriarch who is aloof in his relationships with his household members and makes them depend upon his wisdom, experience, and judgment. Professor Mukhtar al-Ulama lets his wife and children discuss abstract things, theoretical stuff, politics or anything with him, but when it comes to something real he does not allow them to decide or change anything. He listens and talks but his position is fixed from the start. He does not give reasons for his stand or opinion and he silences them by saying "This is emotionality". (146) His wife always plays the role of a mediator between him and his children and if they want to talk to him, she should get them his permission first. Asya also realizes that her mother shows to the world an outwardly happy marriage and notices that at home her mother is someone and outside she turns into someone else. Professor Latifa Mursi is the first Egyptian head of department of English in Cairo university. She is the successful, empowered woman who has a leadership position at Cairo University. But behind the closed doors and unseen by the rest of the world, she is the submissive wife who never stands up to her husband, always appeases him, avoids confrontation with him, and maintains peace at any price.

Asya's contradictions though are more complicated than her parents' as she harbors the values of two different cultures and cannot integrate them into a coherent whole. Said (1992, p.19) discerns that she is "capable of accepting and living in both halves (Arabic and English) of her life, were it not that each of them also rejects a great deal of her". Asya behaves conservatively with and before Egyptians in Cairo and in England, like Mahrous and the Arab community in England, and retains the western values and behaves as a westernized woman with and before western and westernized people. She develops doublethink in her ideas and concepts deliberately forgetting the contradictions between her two opposing opinions and actions. She knows very well the ideal code of conduct and belief in Arab culture and is aware that committing adultery is a transgression of an important moral rule in the Arab culture. She believes that she must be faithful and never betray her husband and that a Muslim who commits adultery deserves to be "stoned to death" if the law of her people is applied. Simultaneously, she wants to be a westernized "modern woman" (541); "the librated, fulfilled, sensuous woman, the defiant *femme de plaisir*" (543). Thus she exercises a willful blindness to contradictions in her ideas and actions which swing between the values of the Arab culture and the western culture.

Asya realizes that she can do anything; she should only worry about people knowing about what she is doing and expects no scorn, criticism or punishment as long as other people do not know what she has done. In her premarital relationship with Saif, for three years, she manipulates her family and spends secret time with him in his home every Sunday afternoon and stays with him four days in Beirut. In her relationship with the Italian youth, Asya does not think of Saif, the man she loves and wishes to marry nor does she consider any restrictions. She thinks only of others' judgment of her as one who has "lent herself to a cheap, a vulgar situation" (167). She knows that "she would never ever be able to talk about [what happened between her and the Italian youth] … to anyone, not to her mother, not to Chrissie, not even to Dada Zeina" (168). And when she commits adultery in England, she expects no problems as long as the Arab communities in England do not know about it.

Accepting doublethink in concepts and actions and trusting that the unseen passes unpunished direct Asya's behavior before and after getting married: She sleeps with Italian men in Italy before getting married and is about to lose her virginity though she is deeply in love with Saif. She wants to have sex with Saif before they get married but he refuses. She is ready to commit adultery with Mario but he decides not to betray his friend, Saif, and travels far away. Eventually, she invites the Englishman to her bed. Asya's egocentric perspective, her inability to look beyond her own self-interest and her choices which are only for getting in touch with what she wants make her fit in the first level of Gilligan's theory of women's moral development: the selfish caring for the self that does not consider the other nor acknowledges the responsibility of the connection between the self and others (Saif and her family).

In her moral confusion and doublethink, Asya simply thinks that committing adultery "would not matter so much" (647) to her husband and that sleeping with a stranger is a "private" issue, "her business" (568) which no one, even her mother, has the right to question her about. However, that she lives with a stranger on her husband's money is the matter that makes her judge her behavior. She disapproves it and blames herself: how could she spend the money of her husband on a stranger and live with him in her husband's house and how could the Englishman accept this for himself? She feels guilty (on this matter) and decides consequently not to take any more money from Saif. Interestingly, this behavior, which illustrates the functioning of the ethic of care in Asya's moral, reasoning, is evidential of her moral confusion. Saif's money should not be spent on a stranger but the stranger can easily sleep in Saif's bed with his wife?!!

Arab culture dictates that a woman, single or married; her husband is incompetent or absent, must not have sexual relationships outside the confines of marriage. This rule certainly shapes or at least influences the selection of the moral perspective of any woman operating in this culture. Asya knows this moral rule very well. So as not to feel guilty of committing adultery and violating her moral commitment as a Muslim to her position as a "muhasanah"[6] (541), she blames Saif and holds him responsible for her action:

You've committed adultery, you've done it, you've joined Anna and Emma and parted company for ever with Dorothea and Maggie – … Dorothea was, after all, Victorian – and you, what are you, a modern woman? You are an Arab, a Muslim, if the law of your people were applied you would be stoned to death – but would she? You are only stoned to death if you are a *muhasanah,* is she truly a *muhasanah*? What is the fort that protects her within its walls? How has she been secure? How much care has her husband devoted to making her secure? No, she would not be stoned – and anyway, where are the four witnesses? The birds, the cows two fields away? And besides, the door of repentance is always open. (540-41)

Asya needs to have such self-argument to justify to her self what she has done. Gilligan explains that women impose a distinctive construction on moral problems, seeing moral dilemmas in terms of conflicting responsibilities. This perspective represents a complex understanding of the relationship between self and other and involves a critical reinterpretation of the conflict between selfishness and responsibility.

Before committing adultery, Asya has had a sense of responsibility of being unable – or to some extent sharing the responsibility – to attain happiness and satisfaction in her marriage. She thinks that she could have done something to save her love and marriage:

Was it because things had gone wrong in bed that he had sort of retreated from her? Or had things gone wrong, in part, because they were already separate? Were they really, finally, irrevocably separate, or can she still do something about it? She'd used to. No, she hadn't used to. He had always gone in and out of moods as it suited *him*. Had he ever been truly accessible to her? Think of the best times: think of Beirut, think of the Omar Khayyam, think of London – well, apart from the one thing – but think of all those Sunday afternoons, three years of Sunday afternoons. Yes. Yes, he *had* been. And she had been happy. But when she'd been *un*happy – when *they'd* been unhappy – had she ever been able to do anything about it? Had she ever been able to influence how he was? (Original emphasis, 264-5)

Before committing adultery, Asya, as an intellectual person, constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs concepts and ideals in her moral reasoning. Those processes do not directly generate actions but serve to appraise her moral landscape. When she is asked by the English phonetics lecturer to demonstrate for the MAs some Arabic sounds by giving examples of Arabic words which have sounds that do not exist in English, the words that she chooses are: "Haraam" (forbidden by Islamic law), "Khiyana" (betraying trust, disloyalty, infidelity), Antar (the name of a famous Arab poet, fighter and lover from the pre-Islamic period), and "Qur an" (the Holy Book of Islam). (353-4) that Asya chooses these words particularly among all the words in her lexicon is not insignificant. It indicates that she is undergoing a process of sorting out of principles and ideals but the structural change in her moral reasoning has not been realized yet for these concepts that come from her reservoir of values in Arab culture are not considered when she makes her decision of committing adultery. Gilligan (1982) emphasizes "the existence of a distinct moral language whose evolution traces a sequence of development. This is the language of selfishness and responsibility, which defines the moral problem as one of obligation to exercise care and avoid hurt." (p. 73) Gilligan thinks that the ways in which women use moral language and the way they reflect on and judge their thought indicate the change and shifts in their thinking.

After committing adultery, Asya disrupts the established bases of her life; does not want her husband and her job, does not want to go home and does not want to finish her Ph. D. She experiences what Gilligan calls "moral nihilism" (1982, p. 124). A woman in crisis, who finds no answer to the question 'why care', according to Gilligan, may have a period of depression, and may abandon herself. The nihilistic position signifies the ultimate stance of self-protection and concern with survival. But in attempting to survive without care, that a woman returns in the end to the truth about relationships. Rather than excluding others and abandoning feelings and care, she becomes more honest about relationships and more responsive to herself and begins to search for the truth of her own experience and to take control of her own life. Gilligan stresses the role of crisis in transition and the effect of despair and defeat in the possibilities for growth.

Critical experience makes it possible to discover the effect of actions on others as well as their cost to the self. Saif divorces Asya. She returns to Egypt after she completes her doctorate and gets herself involved in community activities. Asya makes a transition from selfishness to societal responsibility. According to Gilligan (1982), such a transition requires a conception of self that includes the possibility for doing the "right thing" (p. 78), the ability to see in oneself the potential for being good and therefore worthy of social inclusion. In the move toward social participation, the woman validates her claim to social membership, adopts societal values and her survival depends on acceptance by others.

Kohlberg (1964) explains that there are two aspects that constitute the individual's moral development: the person's affection for certain moral ideals or principles and his ability to reason and act according to these ideals and principles. Asya, after coming back to Egypt, finds herself affective moral ideals and chooses to identify with her roots: her grandmothers and the Pharaonic princess. In her formative years, Asya spends all day long with her aunt, Soraya, and her grandmother, Fadeela, and is sent home only for bed-time to her mother who is working and studying. Grandmother Fadeela and aunt Soraya are Egyptian women who understand the conflicts and responsibilities in their lives and seriously consider the consequences of their choices.

Asya identifies with her grandmothers when she wears the silver belt that belonged to Fadeela's grandmother. Fadeela passes the belt to her second daughter, Soraya, and Soraya passes it to her niece, Asya, who "slips it on and it fits her waist perfectly" (778). Asya also identifies with the Pharaonic princess. She sees in the statue of the Pharaonic princess, who could be the wife of Rameses the Second, a woman who holds her head up in pride, grace and serenity, who was "in complete possession of herself" and who "always had known who she was" (785). It is not without significance that Soueif has named her heroine after 'Asya', the virtuous wife of Pharaoh[7].

Conclusion

The values of the culture that dominates in the geographical space Asya dwells in influence the selection of her moral perspectives. When she is in Egypt, before and after getting married, she does not betray Saif, does not think of any other man and does not think of committing adultery even in the most disappointing times in her married life. When she is in Italy and England, before and after getting married to Saif, she wants to be a sexually librated woman and get herself involved in sexual relationships with non-Arab men. The differences in the moralities of the two cultures between which she is continually moving since an early age cause her moral confusion on issues related to marriage and sex. She cannot determine and control what she should want, cannot tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong or rather she is unsure of what is right and what is wrong. Asya harbors Arab culture's value of chastity and western culture's value of sexual freedom; contradictions that hardly can integrate into a coherent moral system. With experience and age Asya makes her moral transition and chooses to identify with her roots that approve the morality of responsibility and care in human connections and relationships which generates and protects intimacy, trust and love among people. Since the beginnings of human civilizations there have been diversity and difference in the moralities of cultures because each culture "has its own logic, and the behavior of its members can only be understood in terms of the standards set by that culture." (Rough 1984, p. 275)

Notes

1. The autobiographical elements in the novel have been identified in many books and articles. For example, in Jeoffrey Nash's *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*, Chapter 2: 'Ahdaf Soueif: England, Egypt, sexual politics', 2007, pp. 65-86, in *Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography*, Vol. 2, 2005, p. 392, in Emily Davis's 'Romance as political aesthetic in Ahdaf Soueif's The Map of Love', *Genders On Line Journal*, Issue 45, 2007, and in Joseph Massad's 'The politics of desire in the writings of Ahdaf Soueif', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Summer, 1999). pp. 74-90.

2. Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun.* London: Bloomsbury, 1992. All references are to this edition. Page numbers are noted parenthetically in the text.

3. See the chapter "The very fine membrane called 'honour'" in *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World.* By Nawal El-Saadawi, London: Zed Books Ltd., 1982, pp. 25-32.

4. Suad Joseph in her studies 'Connectivity and Patriarchy among Urban Working-Class Arab Families in Lebanon' in *Ethos* (1993) and 'Brother-Sister Relationships' in *Intimate Selving in Arab Families* (1999) uses connectivity, rather than connectedness, as it indicates to an activity or an intention rather than a state of being. She uses connectivity to depart from western-centric notions of relationality that are associated with judgments of dysfunctionality. Joseph means by 'connectivity' psychodynamic processes by which one person comes to see himself or herself as part of another. Boundaries between them then are fluid and one needs the other to complete the sense of selfhood. The security, identity, integrity, dignity, and self-worth of one is tied to the actions of the other and they are together involved in shaping their emotions, desires, attitudes, and identities.

5. It can be argued, from Bhabha's perspective of the "third space of the in-between" (1994, p. 148), that Asya is a cultural hybrid continually moving between East and West preventing her identities at either of the primordial polarities from setting into one of them. It is her "interstitial passage between fixed identification [that] opens up the possibility of [her] cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy." (Bhabha 1994, p.6) It can also be argued that Asya's case is that of transculturalation. According to Taylor transculturalation is "not merely an uneasy fusion of two belief systems held simultaneously, a mosaic. Rather it accounts for the historic specificity and artistic originality of the new cultural phenomena. Hence it goes beyond the cyncretic model that emphasizes the co-existence of two cultural systems. The transcultural model simultaneously notes the coexistence of elements, but just as importantly, underlines the element of loss of the two systems in a creation of a third."

(Taylor 1991, pp. 91-2) From this perspective, Asya's position can be discussed as being the space of a constant interaction of two cultures; the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, and of crossing cultural boarders, this cultural mixture has produced for her a third culture simultaneous with the change then loss of her two original cultures.

6. Most probably Soueif means 'muhsanah', the singular form of the Qur'anic word 'muhsanat' which literally means protected women. Some interpretations say it refers to married women who get (sensual) security and protection in marriage therefore cannot be accused of adultery unless four eyewitnesses assert it.

7. Asya bint Muzahim was the wife of Pharaoh who reigned during Moses' time. The Qur'an chronicles her as a person who remained steadfast in belief and never lost faith in God. Tabari, the famous Muslim scholar, reports that Prophet Mohammed said that the best women of Paradise are Khadija (first wife of Prophet Mohammed), Fatima (daughter of Prophet Mohammad), Maryam (mother of Jesus), and Asya (wife of Pharoah). Amin Malak stresses the significance of the name, Asya, in the novel which he describes as "multilayered hybrid". He argues that in one of the stories in Soueif's *Sandpiper* entitled 'Mandy', whose events and characters interlink with the novel, the following explanation of the Arabic name is given to Mandy: "it actually means ASIA in Arabic ..'the Cruel One' and 'she who is full of sorrow.'" (p. 93) Apart from the duality in emotions that the name suggests, the fact that an Egyptian, whose country is situated in Africa, is given a name that recalls another continent while the explanation is given in a third continent suggests that Asya's feelings, experiences, and worldviews extend beyond her geographical borders. Also Asya, in the Muslim tradition, is the name of pharaoh childless wife who saved and adopted the baby prophet Musa (Moses) … a name that integrates Pharaonic Egypt with Judaism and Islam. (Malak 2000: p.130)

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