

**THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN AHDAF SOUIEF'S
THE MAP OF LOVE**

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Abstract

Souief in this novel shows that men and women are equal to each other; they work hand in hand to prove that they are equal to each other. They have same struggle and suffering. She succeeded to present women in a positive through her experience particularly Anna defying her request for her marriage approval with Sharif Basha and her insistence to make her love successful. She also shows women as a trusted partner that we can depend on in our life i.e. when Anna tries to correct the false portrait of Easterners in England through her writings to Sir Charles, Lord Cromer, and others. She also presents the female body as a powerful mean, and makes her effort to improve the status of women; she also works for representing the portrait of Arab women in any country through her novel translation into another languages. Souief doesn't criticize the male dominance, or protesting against male standards and values, but she presented women in a new module that women become at end aware of their selves and identities.

Keywords: Identity, Arab Women, Muslim women, Feminism, Arab Feminism, portrait of women, Women Identity.

Introduction:

Ahdaf Souief is an Egyptian novelists and short story writer. She was born in Cairo, March, 23, 1955. She educated in Egypt and England. She obtained PhD in linguistics at the University of Lancaster. She wrote three short stories collections; *Aisha* (1983), and *The Sandpiper* (1999) and her latest work is a s collection of short story, *I Think of You*. She also wrote two novels; In *The Eye of The Sun* (1993) and *The Map of Love* (1999). She wrote also a book, *Mezzatera* in 2004.⁽¹⁾

The map of love could be a bridge the gap between warring cultures to bring them together and it opens a window for each culture and cultural coalition. It is a window of closeness and openness between the west and east cultures.

The term '*culture*' was coined from the word '*cult*', and it associated with the intrinsic need of people to deal with other people in groups and adopting their living and cultures. The

term 'culture' was first used by Mathew Arnold in mid- Victorian period. He said in his famous article, *Culture and Anarchy*, that culture is " a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world" (qtd. In Johnson 2). He also adds that culture" conceives of human perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as general perfection, developing all parts of our society."(C&A, 8).

William Raymond in his book *Culture and Society* argued that culture is "a general state or habit of the mind" (16). Culture also gives us an exact portrait of people life in each distinct place.

The novel also is a study of '*Transculturation*' between two emerging cultures and the emerging cultures in this novel are Eastern and western cultures. The term ' Transculturation' was first used by Fernando Ortiz 1940, Cuban anthropologist, to describe the process of emerging two culture. Ortiz argued that Transculturation "Transculturation encompasses more than transition from one culture to another; it does not consist merely of acquiring another culture (acculturation) or of losing or uprooting a previous culture (deculturation). Rather, it merges these concepts and additionally carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena (neoculturation) Ortiz also referred to the devastating impact of Spanish colonialism on Cuba's indigenous peoples as a "failed transculturation." Transculturation can often be the result of colonial conquest and subjugation, especially in a postcolonial era as native peoples struggle to regain their own sense of identity.⁽²⁾

Discussion of the research

Souief's novels are about the English woman and Egyptian man. Her first novel, *In the Eye of The Sun*, is about the lives of Egyptian women who lived in Egypt and England. She goes to England to pursuit her postgraduate studies. Her second novel is *The Map of Love* which tells us two love stories one happening at the beginning of the century and at the end of century (contemporary to the time of writing the novel around 1997).

The first story is about love story between an Egyptian man nationalist, Sharif Basha Al Baroudi and English woman, Anna Winterbourne who leaves England in 1901 to Egypt. They fell in love with each other. They challenged their societies to let their love be successful and at the end they married. After on hundred years ago, the second story takes place at the end of the century. The story is about love affair between an Egyptian man, Omar Al Gamrawi, and an American woman, Isabel Parkman. Omar met Isabel in New York and they fell in love together. Isabel is the descendant of Anna and Sharif Basha ; she emptied her parents house and she found a trunk which is full of letters and dairies in Arabic and English. She showed the trunk to Omar. He advised her to take the trunk with her since she went to Cairo and they will interpret the letters to her. He told also her to go to his sister Amal and she will interpret to you because she interested in such matters. She went to Cairo and took the trunk with her to Amal. Amal translated the letters and dairies to her and reveals the love story of Anna and Sharif Basha with facts and incidents.

The examination of female experience in this novel shows that women at the end gained their identity. The novel shows that it belongs to the third phase of showalter where women reject both the imitation and protest and turned into autonomous art which resulted in the self discovery of women as stated in the history of feminist writings by showalter. We see in this novel a differed way of writing from that of men. Showalter says that" women reject both the imitation and protest- - two forms of dependency and turn instead to a female experience as the

source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature."

There are three women in *The Map of Love* whom are writing, narrating, and reading stories throughout different centuries. The story of Anna Winter Bourne, the narrator is Layla Al Baroudi, the sister of Sharif Al Baroudi, and the reader is Amal Al Gamrawi, sister of Omar Al Gamrawi . The novel is about the stories of Anna and Sharif, Isabel, Omar and Amal.

Souief in her novel stated that religion, culture, and politics play main roll in the life of men and women. This novel is an attempt to build abridge that helped to bring the western and eastern cultures together without looking at the negative side of the two cultures. Anna in this novel makes a big effort to bring the two cultures together through her writings to Lord Cromer, sir Charles and others.

Anna had a negative image of Eastern in general and Egyptian in particular. She heard for along time about women at the agency that women are boring, suppressed, and sitting silent for a long time, but she changed her view after coming to Egypt and made several visits with Sharif sister, Layla.

Anna finds Egypt different from England. However, she doesn't find it negatively different as mostly described at the agency. So Anna writes to correct the false view of westerns about Egypt to sir Charles:

" I do confess, I found the company and conversation mostly pleasing and quite contrary to the prevailing view of life of the harem being one of indolence and torpor"(237). So she tries to help women in Egypt to fight and struggle for their rights as she said "In England society displays itself in public, so the stranger, even with no entrance to it knows it is there. Here , I have come to see, society exists behind closed doors—but it is no less society for that"(160).

Anna love affair with Sharif Basha brings her to know Egypt well. She made several visits with Sharif's sister; this broadens Anna understanding of Eastern culture. Anna and Sharif fall in love. They have to face challenges that they have to overcome to make their love successful. Each of them is afraid of understanding because understanding is the key to make their love successful. Her willingness to understand him leads her to look for the similar points that meet together. Sharif Basha comments" How can he permit to think that an understanding might be possible between them"(262).

Anna and Sharif communicate in French because both of them can speak French well. They discovered that French is a common ground and language of harmonization, so their conversations are conducted in French. Souief uses French as a third language between Arabic and English to be strategic tool of communication. Souief uses French to mean that the two are equal away from the colonial concepts.

Sharif and Anna feel a mutual feeling of otherness with the use of French in their conversation. Sharif said" it [French] makes foreigners of us both. It is good that I should have to come someway to meet you,"(157). Anna comments "there is a problem of language. I have conducted my friendship in French, but I am now resolved to really learn Arabic."(160). She makes many efforts to learn Arabic because the language is the suitable way to understand and communicate with Sharif and people around her. Sharif asks her" does it troubles you that you can't speak to me in Arabic" Anna replied for his question" French makes us foreigners of us both"(152). Anna described him in term of foreignness because they don't use their mother tongue: Arabic and English. Layla narrates that" But she can't see her own people....and they cannot or will not see her"(465).

In addition to the use of French language as a logistic tool of communication, Souief tends to use Arabic in her novel to refer to the dynamic of Arabic and how it works in English to let the reader how Arabic works in English. When Anna joins Layla, Zainab Hanim, and their Egyptian servant as they discuss the New women issue:

-Al – mar' ah al- Jadidah, "The New Women"

'Well done!' cries layla, clapping her hands. 'See how well she is Learning Mama?'

'She is quick, the name of prophet guard her'(374).

Souief said in her interview with Joseph Massad that "in The Map of Love there is a constant attempt to render Arabic into English, not to translate phrases, but to render the dynamic of Arabic, how it works, into English. So there is this question of how to open a window into another culture"(qtd. In Luo 78)

She had to learn Arabic to understand the Islamic culture that formed the eastern society and Egyptian in particular. She also has to adopt herself to Islamic culture while she is Christian. She also has to go against her country wish with getting married to an Egyptian Muslim nationalist. She had to challenge everything round her to make their love successful. Sharif told her "our ways are so different. Let's be patient with one another"(353). They have to face serious challenges that imposed upon them by their societies and they have to emancipate from these restrictions by challenging them.

Sharif has to challenge the accusation of betrayal of his government if he gets married to a western lady. Anna as a British lady should encounter the decision of her country representation for the denial of her marriage to an Arab nationalist so she should face this challenge to make her love successful. So each of them has to face his/ her challenge to be together.

Their experience would be a bridge for cultural understanding between their countries. When Sharif and Anna went to register their marriage, they received a severe objection from the representation of her country. The denial for the marriage approval is apparent in Lord comer interview with them. He expressed his belief that Anna is making a big mistake and she is unaware of her decision to marry Sharif. He said " Lady Anna,' he said ' do you realize what you are doing?'(321)." He also that he has to converse with her alone and he said" my dear, you are making a mistake, the lord said, and his voice was sorrowful now, and anxious. 'My staff will tell you of the young women, we find wandering about, having contracted, such marriages"(321). He insisted that if she gets married to Sharif she will lose her rank and position. Sharif replies on him vehemently " she is aware of great honor the lady does him. If she loses her position in your society because of this marriage will be your society fault- and its loss"(322). He also adds that" the circles she will be moving in will give her all the consideration due to both to her rank and to her position as his wife"(322).

In addition to lord comer refusal for their marriage, she also confronts opposition from her close maid and her friends at the agency, but this objection didn't hinder Anna to be commitment in her marriage with Sharif. Similar to Anna, Sharif was accused of betrayal of his government due to his marriage with Anna. This falls within the phase of identity or self awareness (self discovery) for her self. She becomes like men she shares same challenge, suffering, struggle and she should defy her society like Sharif who would be accused of betrayal of his government due to his marriage. As showalter said " women reject both the imitation- and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of

literature"(New, 139) . She seems to have no time for worries. She has to find herself among this world because she is now simply equal to men.

Anna affair with Sharif helped him in translating the news of England to him and she invested her relation with Sharif to correct the false portrait of Arabs in western world through her writings to her country men like Sir Charles and others to help her husband because he loved his country too much. Anna said "for his purpose, his vacation is Egypt "(382), which means that Sharif loved Egypt and it occupied the biggest part of his life. Layla comments that " with Anna at his side he met foreign visitors and hoped to influence them"(473).

Through Anna experience in Egypt discovered that Egypt society is not less than English society. She said that " I fancy it is somewhat coming to England and meeting the servants and the shopkeeper and forming your ideas of English society upon that. No, it is worse for in England society displays it in public, so the stranger, even with no entrance to it, knows it is there. Here, I have come to see society exists behind doors—but it is not less society for that (160).

Anna affair with Sharif leads her to open the door for a better understanding between the two cultures. She encourages the westerners not to trust of what is said about the Arabs through her personal experience in Egypt because she found them vastly different from what she heard about them at the agency.

Anna resistance to overcome the challenges makes her husband happy and his family too. Layla described Sharif relation with Anna and how they were too happy with her: "I can say in all truth that my brother and Anna found happiness joy in their marriage. And Anna lived among us in genteelness and mercy. She bought companionship to my brother and loves to my son and even enjoy to the heart of my poor father. And for me, she became my close friend; for she had none of the arrogance or the coldness we were used in imagining in her country-men"(372-373).

The characters in *The Map of Love* search for their identities this is why they sacrificed their life to achieve their identities by challenging the society around them to make their love and life successful. Anna here in this novel sacrifices the prestigious life in England to be with Sharif. Souief in this novel uses Anna to reject the old verities that restricted her like her challenging the denial of her country representation for her marriage with Sharif to give us an impression that women challenge everything in searching for their identities. She uses her characters to prove that they are insistence on their quest to achieve their identities.

Souief makes her characters looking for something real and fight for it. Anna discovers many things through her tour in Egypt. The most important thing she discovered is that her identity and self awareness which is the main principle of feminism.

Women should write from their experience and they form their through their bodies. They have to be aware of their identities. Anna gets her experience through her body, she described her first night with Sharif that her body was absent, but this is the first time that thought her body is present. Souief uses the female body as powerful mean for women. she said" I have had as the late queen said so famously half a century ago a most bewildering and glorifying night. And now, today, I feel as I hardly know how to describe it as if my body had been absent and now it is present. As though I am for the first time present in my body (335 my emphasis).

The characters in the novel play an essential roll to contribute in improving women status in Egypt through their experience. Anna discovered many things through her visits with Sharif sister layla. Anna visits helped her to understand the people and culture round her and helped her to make various relationships with Egyptian women on personal and public levels that reach her

understanding of herself that lead her to be content of her stay in Egypt. She says that: "I am content. If I look at myself with my old eyes, I see an indolent woman. A woman content to lie on a cushion in the garden, in this miraculous October sunshine.... Each thing that happens—and there are things that happens; small things—adds to my contentment, until I would say as they do her, May God bring this to a good end.... My baby stirs on the cushion beside me.... Nur al- Hayah, light of our lives. I think of her father and feel that melting of my limbs as I sense again the warmth of his hand gentle on, "me... I murmur, ' please.' Please what?" he whispers "kiss me"(401).

The issues of veil and education were questioned in this novel. Qasim Amin talked about women education and how it is important for them because it is crucial for their life. He said that "to take, the simplest, how can children be brought up with the right outlook by ignorant mothers? How can a man find support and companionship with an ignorant wife?"(381). Sharif supports women education and gave them the right to wear the veil or not" women will decide for themselves about the veil. But if we can agree that girls should be educated"(381). Sharif friend, Ahmad, supports women education and he demands that education should be compulsory for girls. He said "if we are to have a law that makes education up to a certain age compulsory then that should apply to girls as well as to boys. We must start in the right way.'(381).

Sharif encouraged Anna to support women education too. She knows that her husband wants to educate women in Egypt and he can make a change in women life. Anna said "Later that night my husband said to me, ' yes, the laws should be changed.' And if I had my way they would be changed tomorrow."(381).

Sharif and Anna played an essential role in supporting women education. Sharif wants to know what women want to decide for themselves" women will decide for themselves"(381). Anna wants to know what women want through visits with layla to women gatherings. She said" let's go and listen"(377). She wrote about what women want and her husband effort in working for women rights in Egypt.

In addition Anna and Sharif call for women rights in the novel, we have also Zainab Fawwaz, the first Arab female novelists. Anna met Fawwaz in one of harem gatherings. She called for women rights through her articles on women issues. Ann said "she is originally Syrian and is very well thought of and has published several articles on the women questions."(233). Also Anna said that "madam Fawwaz has published a collection of short biographies of ladies"(237).

Anna wrote to Sir Charles about women that she met in women gatherings." dear Charles, that you would find these ladies congenial. They uphold the idea that a woman's first duty is to her family, merely arguing that she can perform this duty better. If she is better educated. They also write articles arguing against the enforced seclusion of women and point out that women of the fellah class have always worked side by side with their men folk and no harm has come to society as a result.

Souief uses of her female characters to focus on women issues. She shows that her male and female characters fight for women rights. Souief novel tells us that Egyptian men and women worked hand in hand against the injustices of British colonization.

What makes the novel unique? Souief makes her novel unique through her successful way of exposing the idea that women and men share same suffering and pains. So they worked hand in hand to overcome the injustices of British colonization in their quest and search of freedom.

One hundred years later, the second story in the novel takes place between the descendant of Anna and Sharif, Isabel, and Omar Al Gamrawi whom they met in New York. Isabel is an American journalist who comes to Egypt to study and explore the idea of millennium. She chose Egypt because it is older and it has big record of history. Isabel says " I think may be the millennium only matters to us.....yes, but Egypt is older. It is like going to the beginning. Six thousand years of recorded history. (19). She met Omar in New York, and she told him that when she emptied her parent's house; she found a trunk which is full of dairies in Arabic and English. She shows the trunk to Omar and he advised her to take the trunk with her since she goes to Egypt and they will interpret the dairies to her. He said to her since you go there go to my sister, Amal she will interpret them to you because she interested in such translation.

When Isabel met Omar, she falls in love with him, but he didn't share Isabel in her feeling. He said that he cant love with her because he sees her as his daughter because he is old enough to her and he had sexual affair with her mother when he was young so may be he is her father. He told her "I am old enough to be your father" (180). Omar sister, Amal, notices that Isabel and Omar are eager to be together, but Omar is unwilling to commit him to her. She said "I know she was waiting for him to go back. When he speaks to her his voice shifts into a deeper and more resonant pitch: the pitch of sexual tenderness. But he is unwilling to commit himself."(391).

The female experience through Isabel experience with Omar is not rewarding enough. Omar wants to be away from the issue of marriage with Isabel because he is old enough to be with her and due to his sexual relation with her mother, so he may be her father. Isabel does not mind if he had such relation, she just cares about her love with him. Isabel said " I doesn't matter" (180) because her love is stronger than any idea, so she to him and his family and to have a child from him but he rejects the idea of marriage with her for his personal experience and reasons and she respects that. Souief makes her characters respect each other decisions through their experience

Isabel does not sure if Omar loves or even share her feelings. She said "I don't even know if he shares my feeling. I think he likes being with me. We've been out together and the chemistry is there and it could not be there if he didn't feel it too. May be he thinks the age difference is problem. He is fifty-five. It's hard to believe. It sounds so old, but if you didn't know, you'd think he was forty, forty-five, wouldn't you? I mean, he is so young." (183). Isabel said " But I just wish, he would- God, I just want him so much... if he was in love with me as I am with him." (183). Amal responds that " Ya ha bibti. He is old enough to be your father"(184).

Isabel is like Anna sacrifices everything to be close to her man. Anna faces many challenges even losing her rank in her society to be with her husband, Sharif Basha. They work hand in hand together to make their love successful, while Isabel and Omar are different. Isabel sacrifices everything to be close to Omar, but Omar does not make her close enough to him because he believes that he may be her father, so they never get married.

Anna went to Egypt and she found Arab patriot, Sharif Basha, and they struggled and get married at then end, their relation ends dramatically; Sharif Basha was murdered due to particular reason like his support to women rights and his marriage to an English woman. Amal said " They say it could be Muslim fanatics for my brother's position on women's rights and because he married Anna and was known to wear her image on a chain round his neck" (505). Since Sharif is dead she is unable to continue living in Egypt Basha said to her has found Omar, but they never get married. Omar did not marry Amal because he thinks that he may be Amal's father due to his sexual relation with her mother.

Conclusion:

Souief in this novel shows that men and women are equal to each other; they work hand in hand to prove that they are equal to each other. They have same struggle and suffering. She succeeded to present women in a positive through her experience particularly Anna defying her request for her marriage approval with Sharif Basha and her insistence to make her love successful. She also shows women as a trusted partner that we can depend on in our life i.e. when Anna tries to correct the false portrait of Easterners in England through her writings to Sir Charles, Lord Cromer, and others. She also presents the female body as a powerful mean, and makes her effort to improve the status of women; she also works for representing the portrait of Arab women in any country through her novel translation into another languages. Souief doesn't criticize the male dominance, or protesting against male standards and values, but she presented women in anew module that women become at end aware of their selves and identities.

The Map of Love is a kind of making a new fruitful language between civilizations, two cultures, and all human beings and everybody is welcomed as what Sharif said about his hope of unity without taking in consideration the cultural gap differences just unity, but no impossible to see the means by which such a unity can be affected.[and] it is in its support that these words [and this work] are written (*The Map of Love* 484) which means that the novel is a window for openness on the other.

End notes:

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