

Cultural Hybridity in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of
Love* (1999)

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Abstract:

Because western schemes are equated with universal political power association or by economic exchanges, ideological and cultural dependence, cultural hybridity serves as a bridge across postcolonial communities in an attempt to create decisive social conversions and cultural connotations. The apparent simplicity of cultural hybridity is the cunning indirect policy of dominance in which assimilation remains the endless side which is closely related to hybridity. In Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*(1999), Amal al-Ghamrawi reveals different cultural and social backgrounds and her hybrid identity helps in achieving reconciliation between the western foreign norms and the authentic Egyptian culture. In other words, Amal's cultural hybridity advances the idea of cultural harmony forming a bridge between her acquired cultural norms and the authentic cultural discourses which have been rooted in her as an Egyptian woman who was born and raised in an Egyptian society with different cultural inheritance. England, to Amal, becomes the cross-cultural and hybrid space which confirms her cultural conversions. In fact, Amal articulates her cultural hybridity affirming her integration into the English society as her new host land. Thus, significant moments and daily life stories of Amal and her cultural attitudes with Fellaheen (peasants) in her village indicate the different modes of cultural hybridity and integration patterns: recalling and recording memories, experiences, disputes and conflicts. Cultural hybridity has been shaped over many years and within generations in spite of life crises and traumas. Therefore, the internal dynamics of cultural hybridity is manifested by coping with cultural differences and social diversities.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the cultural hybridity depicted in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999). Hybridity is, in fact, the innovative scheme to originate cultural bonds between different cultures creating practices and experiences of new strategies of identification. The hybridity process turns to be influential when it is concerned with culture focusing on cultural conversions as the real essence of hybridity. In fact, hybridity carries culture and culture carries authenticity of any society preserving its formal identity. The power of culture delineates a line of thinking about how hybridity permits in-between space which is highly problematic mainly by hybrid mimics. In the course of time, native cultures are marred with the effect of hybridization process causing the disappearance of local cultures and the waning cultural differences. Therefore, the superlative perspective of cultural replacement deepens the mechanism of how the content of culture is intermingled and has converted to be hybrid expanding the awareness of the hybrid cultural domination across the globe.

Cultural hybridity is the most powerful agent to reinforce the counterbalance of resistance in postcolonial societies eliminating the prolonged categorizes of superior/inferior, developed/barbaric and advanced/ primitive. In other words, cultural hybridity is the mutual fulcrum among subalterns, discriminated immigrants, minorities, small states and inferior cultures. Edward Said interprets the function of culture as:

Culture is an instrument for identifying, selecting, and affirming certain "good" things, forms, practices, or ideas over others and in so doing culture transmits, diffuses, partitions, teaches, presents, propagates, persuades, and above all it creates and recreates itself as specialized apparatus for doing all those things. (176)

Most of postcolonial countries have coped with new hybrid impacts which are the real power to change the world without utilizing military control. The cultural boundaries imply an incursion of the native identity achieving a global hybrid cultural sovereignty and accomplishing social practices with subversive cultural and political consequences. It is important to note that hybrid identities have been burdened with the same load of responsibility towards their native cultures practicing different new aspects of hybridity in social and political schemes. May Joseph states that, "the modern move to deploy hybridity as a disruptive democratic discourse of

cultural citizenship is a distinctly anti-imperial and antiauthoritarian development” (1).

The supremacy of cultural hybridity creates a global identity which has the ability to cope with the consequences of the mingling cultures and societies. In fact, the hybrid identities are deprived of practicing their rights in the social and political interactions in the host societies if they have connections with their roots. They stand somewhere in-between condition feeling confused and alienated from either cultural norms or social bonds. Edward Said categorizes the negative psychological torture of the hybrid personalities as, “being a sort of permanent outcast, someone who never felt at home, and was always at odds with the environment, inconsolable about the past, bitter about the present and the future” (46).

Distinctively, cultures, habits, languages and arts elaborate the different appearances of the dominant hybrid influences. Cultural hybridity has become the source of trendy music, art, literature, painting, sculpture, dance, language, science, economics and governmental schemes which have been most powerfully encoded and constructed the most applied apprehensions of hybridity trends. On the other hand, the unparalleled mobility of the Internet, satellite, different kinds TV channels, and international air travel have enriched the discursive prominence of hybridity. Robert Young is a distinctive scholar who debates the ambivalences of hybridity analyzing: “You encounter a new world, a new culture to which you have to adapt while trying to preserve your own recognizable forms of identity. Putting the two together is an experience of pain”(12).

Cultural hybridity is the measure of the success or failure of being able to make things change or fade creating the contemporary concept of power and cultural dynamics. Frederick Calhoun defines power as, “the ability to make things happen” (31). In fact, culture and power are bound together designating an imaginative line between those who have the power and those who suffer from subjugating to it. Celeste Olalquiaga describes the impacts of the imported hybrid culture when the, “fantasy and reality have become indistinguishable, and where abandoning the self to become another is among the most valued forms of gratification” (173). Therefore, cultural hybridity have turned to be more integrated, merging with international cultural environment and categorizing the western culture as culture of superiority and supremacy.

The postcolonial dynamics have permitted the emergence of innovative cultural ideologies which fuse culture with hybridity. In fact, cultural hybridity becomes the mediator to frame the global contemporary imperialism spreading new paths into labeling different cores and forms of western culture challenging the immense change of eastern culture. The West has extended their cultural influences through imposing their cultural foreign policy which is generated out of the past colonial division of the world into East and West. In fact, cultural hybridity reflects the pursuit of the East for acquiring western identity and then accusing the West of savage imperialism. The existing cultural hybridity represents the current dynamic transformations in the cultural equations as perplexed global circumstances in the course of events and the influences of prevailing cultural powers.

America, as a popular culture, declares its cultural superiority intertwining into the non-Western world by liberal and universal Western values. In fact, the United States of America is the exporter of the global circulation of cultural hybridity in categorization of societies encouraging the whole world to adapt its cultural identity and American concepts, notions, rules, regulations and above all language. Thus, the American culture offers itself as an incomparable cultural power which is intersected more closely with the notions of justice and freedom. Ella Shohat and Evelyn Alsultany explain how the United States becomes the ultimate imperial cultural power in the early twentieth century because America, “inherits significant traits of the Old World empires like France and Britain” (5).

American culture is configured in international imported cultural terms: galleries, music, graffiti, street performances, clubs, malls, market brands, urban fashion, hair style and body piercing. On the other hand, the American culture is the common vital representation of global power arguing the issues of justice and efficiency of rights and duties of human being particularly when identification on bases of new cultural identities are converted to be indefinite because of cultural and social hybridity. For example, Arab, Asian and African men can be mistaken to have American identities especially with no beard, no Sikh clothing, no veil, no turban and no Arab American accent.

Still, the hybrid cultural discourse in the host society generates confusion state between the original cultural bonds in the native homeland and the acquired norms in the host society. Edward Said believes that the diasporic immigrants restore the nostalgic reminiscences:

You can spend a lot of time regretting what you lost, envying those around you who have always been at home, near their loved ones, living in the place where they were born and grew up without ever having to experience not only the loss of what was once theirs, but above all the torturing memory of a life to which they cannot return. (62)

In Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*(1999), Amal al-Ghamrawi reveals different cultural and social backgrounds and her hybrid identity helps in achieving reconciliation between the western foreign norms and the authentic Egyptian culture. In other words, Amal's cultural hybridity advances the idea of cultural harmony forming a bridge between her acquired cultural norms and social patterns which become subtle and essential perspectives in her hybrid identity and the authentic cultural discourses which have been rooted in her as an Egyptian woman who was born and raised in an Egyptian society with different cultural inheritance. England, to Amal, becomes the cross-cultural and hybrid space which confirms her cultural, political, social and personal conversions. In fact, Amal articulates her cultural hybridity affirming her integration into the English society as her new host land. Thus, significant moments and daily life stories of Amal and her cultural, social visions and political attitudes with Fellaheen (peasants) in her village indicate the different modes of cultural hybridity and integration patterns: recalling and recording memories, experiences, disputes and conflicts.

Primarily, Amal combines many cultural affiliations experiencing life between two different cultures because she belongs to the multicultural al-Baroudi family as she is the granddaughter of Sharif Pasha's sister Layla. However, Amal identifies herself within the English cultural context which constitutes a strong part of her identity dealing with the circumstances of her life through the lens of European culture as she lives the western life with her British husband and children in England of the early-twentieth-century for, "twenty-odd years" (38).

Amal is the confused hybrid symbol between West and East. In fact, Amal's cross-cultural affiliations disperse her to the extent that she obliges herself taking the complete chance to determine her true identity and overcoming the conflict between her hybrid identity and Egyptian cultural heritage. In other words, Amal loves the western culture and the English society for more twenty years adoring her life and family: "For her it has been different. She has not had a public life. She has concentrated on the boys" (515). Still, Amal fluctuates between the two conflicting cultures, the English western culture and the original Egyptian norms wishing to retreat from the foreign hybrid forces in the western culture and reconstructing the missing parts of her lost Egyptian identity.

Amal's work as a translator of novels increases her sense of hybridity because it has woven her into other cultures particularly Amal has the complete tendency to accept and merge into the new cultural norms. Amal adores translation not only as her carrier and work but also as a new cultural horizon confirming her western cultural tendencies. In fact, translation opens a wide path before Amal to improve her cultural hybridity confirming her acceptance of the different cultural hybrid forces believing that, "she has translated novels-or done her best to translate them" (515). She trusts her hybrid identity because it enables her to, "translate from one language into another, from one culture into another" (515). Therefore, Amal's cultural hybridity helps her absorb the different aspects of cultures and languages.

Amal cannot escape her responsibility of being a member of al-Baroudi family. That is to say, she has not any difficulties to admit her cultural hybridity and infatuation with western life style but her inner psychological clash is between her settled happy life with her family in England where she enjoys her cultural hybridity and freedom and her obligations towards her people in Egypt as a true inheritor of social, cultural and political responsibilities of al-Baroudi family. Amal's family commitments in Egypt oblige her to abandon the civilized English society where she accepts to be located for twenty years and agree to take the difficult mission to be relocated in her Egyptian society once more. It is her decisive battle: "Feeling that if she has any responsibility now, it is to her land and to the people on it" (297). Therefore, Egypt becomes Amal's host society and new cross-identity identification with new family; the Egyptian people:

“But this woman who had in some way belonged to him [Ramses], and who now lies here in the sand ... delivered back into the sunlight still is in complete possession of herself” (787).

Amal welcomes her new responsibilities which are huge and challenging in Egypt as the place of her cultural rebirth determining to reconstruct her hybrid identity once more. She accepts all risks to grant herself a complete chance to determine her true cultural identity which will be through the lens of her original Egyptian culture. The hybrid and civilized Amal who spends most of her life living and coping with western culture opens a wide path to succeed in her re-hybridization challenge. She is fascinated with the life style in the countryside where her ancestral property in Minya in the Upper Egypt starting to be one of fellaheen indulging in their traditions, customs and cultural norms. Amal lives their life to the extent that she feels as if she spends her whole life among them adoring the Egyptian sense of humor and laughs when she listens to the jokes of ordinary people and learns to make fresh peasant bread. She is attracted to every tiny detail in Tawasi and is fond of the unique dialects of the Upper Egyptian fellaheen believing that, “she can learn the land and tell its stories” (298).

Amal is proud that her experience among the local fellaheen which has transformed her life and even her occupation as a translator of novels because she feels that she may reconceive her true identity starting to write about her reaction of the meaning of the actual impact on rural people in Tawasi: “We’re a bunch of intellectuals who... write for each other. We have absolutely no connection with the people. The people don’t know we exist” (224). In fact, Amal applies her highly hybrid experience on fellaheen in Tawasi attempting to modify the traditional Egyptian cultural perspectives and trying to improve their cultural identity within the respectable Egyptian norms. She stands beside fellaheen in her village defending them against the brutality of colonialism, reflecting the excellence of women’s role in political life and trying to release the fellaheen who are jailed by the colonial government. Amal constantly tries to support the Egyptian fellaheen around her and never hesitates to confront the government and political laws. Richer and Valsiner add: “Politics is a social game—played differently in different societies and at different times. Politics is a game that is too serious to be considered seriously” (277).

Amal's challenge, as an upper-class urban educated woman, is to open a school that will educate the illiterate wives and children believing in the necessity of women's education: "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?" (380-81). Amal exerts a huge effort to provide a suitable standard of education for children believing that education is the right path to improve Egyptian culture and identity: "Extra classes were added for the children to try to make up for the plummeting level of education they were getting" (123). In fact, Amal believes that Egyptian rural women become victims of certain traditional social schemes of the Egyptian society. Shirin Rai explains how submission and humility are interwoven into a multifaceted pattern to create women's naïve identities: "Both the state and the civil society form the boundaries within which women act and are acted upon" (33).

Basically, Amal believes that lower-class rural peasant women are affected by prevalent backwardness, illiterate ideologies and discriminating policies confirming that the absence of education, economic weakness and fragility of social support convert women to be more dependent upon their men or any other power resources. Ayse Circir comments:

It is important to note that earlier debates about the improvement of the status of women dangerously advocated to replace the misogynistic practices of the native culture with the values of another culture and the link between the Question of Women and nationalism was established in this context. (149)

Amal is a mature and self-assured woman who appreciates the significance of her charismatic character and western way of thinking which increase her persistence to be more active participant in Egyptian social and cultural environment defending Egyptians' political rights. In fact, Amal's western cultural hybridity helps her change the common backward and illiterate background about women's effective roles in changing their societies and challenging the traditional cultural norms, Georgina Waylen adds: "Individual citizens active in the public sphere were assumed to be male heads of household, and women were relegated analytically to the private sphere, subsumed within the household headed by the individual male" (9).

Cleverly, the hybrid and civilized Amal is an intelligent practical woman who knows well the right way to communicate with fellaheen preferring to be an observer and a listener more than a speaker. In fact, Amal's relocation in her Egyptian society deepens her understanding of the cultural particularities and tiny social details of Egyptians. Therefore, she archives children songs and grasps the moral lessons of the old man who mimics the Aragoz while playing Sanduq-el-Dunya. At the same time, Amal's cultural hybridity grants her a better valuation of her support for lower-class rural peasants who are neglected and ignored.

Unfortunately, Amal doubts the possibility or even the actual fact of the Egyptian hybridity because the political, social and cultural conversions seem frustrating. Amal suspects her transfer to the Eastern Egyptian society doubting her persistence to spend her whole life living among Egyptian cultural norms. In spite of her fatigue, anguish and despair for being away from her sons, Amal deploys her multicultural and hybrid background in the United Kingdom to affect the core of Egyptian's cultural, social and political conditions. However, she is disappointed to improve the social and cultural modernity in Egypt admitting her failure to re-involve herself in Egyptian authentic cultural heritage and their notions of nationalism and independence from colonialism which have been fostered for generations.

Gradually, Amal seems aware of her displacement and temporary relocation even if she is in her birth country Egypt doubting her permanent residence in the Egyptian society. She tries to be equal to her family responsibilities but she does not have the strong determination or the required confidence which enables her to create the persistence to have her own fingerprint on the cultural hybridity in Egyptian society: "We have now fifty years, fifty-six years of our own, of national government, and what have we done?" (223). It appears that Amal intends to go back to England admitting her impotence to cope with her traditional Egyptian cultural norms: "We always know how the story ends, what we do not know is what happens long the way" (74). Amal is eager to regain her cultural balance and western life style. In short, Amal's hybrid identity revives her tendency to the prestigious hybrid western culture assuring her doubts of the future. It seems that Amal takes her

decision and she, “made up her mind... she will close down her flat and move to Tawasi. Not for ever, but for a while” (297).

Isabel Parkman is an American journalist who lives in New York City in 1997 and Anna’s great granddaughter. In fact, there are parallel events between Anna’s and Isabel’s lives and the similarity of life conditions between them highlight their displacement and relocation in the same cultural experiences which are completely different from their western backgrounds. Inspired by the characters from her past, Isabel Parkman is greatly influenced by Anna’s character even there are more than ninety years of time between them. Isabel cannot deny that she is highly connected and united with Anna’s soul feeling as if she lives in all tiny details in Anna’s life. Isabel identifies Anna’s experience more closely with her doubting that Anna’s diaries are directed to her personally and Anna means to send her messages across time. Isabel assumes that she has the same destiny and responsibility of Anna feeling her real existence, hearing her voice in each line Anna writes in her diaries and merging herself in all Anna’s daily details.

Isabel and Anna have almost the same paralleled events and the only difference between them is that Anna’s story is narrated at British colonial time while Isabel experiences the present-day of postcolonial events. Isabel compares the realistic power of the colonial authority of Lord Cromer’s colonial government with, “the officials of the American embassy and agencies today . . . driving through Cairo in their locked limousines with the smoked-glass windows” (70). In the 1990’s, the imperial domination takes the shape of postcolonial corporations where the United States of America plays the typical role of the British colonialism over the Egyptian economy. Simply, a farmer woman in Tawasi village states the control and domination of the United States of America saying: “Isn’t Amreeka the biggest country now and what she says goes?” (176). Frank Ninkovich comments on the American power: “They differ on the nature of power, its source, and its functioning—but in one crucial respect they share a common assumption: that power is the paramount feature of human society” (260).

Isabel is the white Western woman who is fascinated with Omar al-Ghamrawi; Amal’s brother regarding him as an idol reference of Arab men and willingly accepts to live in Egypt. Omar al-Ghamrawi is an active nationalist in Egyptian and Palestinian

politics reflecting another symbol of liberal thinking as Sharif Basha al-Baroudi. He discards Arafat's policy arguing that, "he uses torture and bone-breaking just as much as the Israelis" (356). Omar cannot see Hamas as a practical alternative despite the fact that they have the most credibility among Palestinians: "They're intelligent. They certainly have a case. But one cannot approve of fundamentalists-of whatever persuasion" (357).

Primarily, Isabel differs in her Western cultural references which reflect many of western customs and traditions of the native country even if she lives in modern and postcolonial Egypt. Omar encourages his wife to cope with the Eastern culture and Egyptian society as her new cultural background. In fact, Isabel has the eagerness to merge into the Egyptian society with its cultural traditions and norms and her love to Omar is the main reason to accept and live among Egyptians. In fact, Isabel is too fragile to do anything effective to cope with the Egyptian society as her new host environment living her western American life style inside the original essence of the Egyptian culture and society as a way to overcome her displacement and relocation in an entirely different culture.

Basically, Isabel's native language increases the imposed gap between her and her relocation in the Egyptian society feeling that her native English language regards as an essential barrier that challenges her social and cultural conversion inside the Eastern Egyptian culture. In other words, English alone as her only mother tongue increases her sense of displacement and estrangement blocking her attempts to be merged into the Egyptian culture and social norms. Thus, Isabel decides to learn Arabic language and grammar determining to grant her cultural adjustment a chance to re-estimate the Eastern cultural norms which she accustoms to evaluate from her Western perception only. Ghalya F. T. Al-Said adds: "The English and Americans are not in general well-known for their ability to learn or adapt to using other languages or recognizing the value of other cultures" (143).

Isabel eagerly takes Arabic lessons by Amal who explains to her how Arabic is structured and its derivation system clarifying how the balance between language and content needs further concentration to crystalize the Arabic language as the identity of culture: "You've got a dictionary. Everything stems from a root"(81). In fact, Isabel exerts a huge effort to understand the concepts of

Arabic language because she is confident that it is the gate which facilitates her cultural hybridity and opens a space for a mutual compromise between her rejection and acceptance from Arab world and Eastern culture and society.

The actual love between Isabel and Omar proposes a hope and a possibility of a hybrid compromise between Eastern cultural norms and Western foreign ethos. However, Omar's assassination for his opinions and Middle East political interpretations may highlight the gloomy future of the whole Eastern and Western compromise. Omar's death in Sarajevo is a direct message to Isabel of the dangerous implications that may threaten her life in Egypt. It becomes self-evident that Isabel has to move back to her motherland because she has lost the link of hope to remain in Egypt after Omar's death. Isabel is confident that she cannot survive the Eastern cultural, social and political conditions without Omar as long as she admits her failure to be a part of the Egyptian cultural schema and there will not be a hope to succeed to feel sheltered considering Egypt her homeland and society after the number of years she spends living in the Egyptian cultural environment.

Finally, Isabel is certain that her Western cultural origins encounter with the Eastern traditional norms admitting that she is not Anna and she does not have the same power and determination of Anna's personality to be a hybrid active part in the Egyptian society. In other words, Isabel is scared to be a part of a culture that rejects her origins, native homeland and cultural background. In fact, she feels inharmonious with the Egyptian Eastern cultural experiences, conditions and practices. Isabel cannot be able to see any hope for more progressive and promising future in the East deciding not to raise her son Sharif to be a part of the backward traditional Eastern culture. Therefore, she returns to the United States erasing any hope of a happy ending.

Amal and Isabel abhor conservative principles and traditional ideas of the Egyptian society which contradict their modern and westernized life style. As for Amal, she is portrayed to be a more open-minded, westernized and hybrid cultured Egyptian woman who is granted her elite-status because of her cultural hybridity and western identity. In fact, Amal witnesses that the Egyptian identities are neither support the way of handling the cultural, social and political conversions nor practice the different aspects of cultural

hybridity which are basically constructed through her western life experiences. Amal changes when she abandons her fearless and stubborn nature regretting her indulgence in the Egyptian society and culture and sacrificing her English life in order to reunite with her original Egyptian culture. For Isabel, she has the positive energy which encourages her to accept her relocation in the Egyptian society hoping to obtain the happiness and self-reconciliation she lacks in western culture. She recognizes that she will remain the American Isabel to the Egyptian society feeling the urge to go back to where she originally belongs. Isabel will not let herself be taken by her curiosity and concern in Eastern and Egyptian culture. Both Amal and Isabel are proud of their cultural hybridity, authentic origins and genuine heritages declaring that their hybridity is an undivided part of their identity.

The findings of the paper can be summarized as follows: 1) cultural hybridity has changed some aspects of the authentic core of the native cultural features liberating the complicated articulation of wrestling divergent counterparts of native identities; 2) assimilation is the mediator between the traditional culture and the new host society is viewed to be perplexing because it has revolved largely around the authentic culture and issues of restrictions upon the mobility of their native roots; 3) new cultural forms have emerged as the sign of cultural and social ambivalences and they are accepted, adopted and absorbed as social, political and cultural phenomena and 4) cultural hybridity is proposed as a future standard code shaping the experiences of more than three-quarters of the postcolonial societies.

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