



Sade's Gradual Growth in Beverly Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth*

Nurah Abdul Wahid Abdullah Siddik

English Language Department, Kiai Abdullah Faqih University, Indonesia

Received: 14 May 2025; Received in revised form: 09 Jun 2025; Accepted: 13 Jun 2025; Available online: 19 Jun 2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— Upon reading Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* (2000), it is not difficult to see that Sade and her brother Femi survive their physical journey through lies. This indicates how the face of children's fiction has changed dramatically from one that is designed to instill morality to one that is more ambiguous, even contradictory in its moral teachings. Along her journey, Sade struggles with her parents' dictum to always do the right thing 'when doing the right thing can lead to awful consequences' (Giles, 2009, p. 349). This paper examines Sade's moral and emotional growth by examining first its main catalyst, which is fear. It also discusses the stages of Sade's moral growth by referring to the works of the American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg on moral development. Finally, it examines Sade's memory, which prepared the ground for her to grow rather than to decline. For each point of discussion and to sharpen the focus on Sade's growth, her actions will be compared with those of other characters she deals with in the novel.



Keywords— Sade, Moral Development, Children's Fiction, Fear, Memory

Fear is one of the unpleasant emotions Sade experiences in her growing up, and it plays a major role in determining her actions. As Lisa Fritscher (2018) argues, fear induces the physical response known as the 'fight or flight' response. To put it in psychological terms, the 'fight' response would be confronting the dangerous situation. Sade 'fights' from the start when she courageously accepts the fact that she and Femi must leave the country immediately. Her emotional response to fear contrasts with that of Femi as he keeps whining about not wanting to go to London, attempting even to run away when they are at the airport. Papa the adult who is usually 'brimming over with words' (p. 3) and argument becomes paralyzed and mute right after Mama's death. This paralyzing effect of fear thrusts into Sade as well after she 'steals a lighter from the store owned by the family of her friend' (Giles, 2009, p. 350). The effect is intense to the degree that her temperature increases above normal and she could not go to school the next day, as she fears that everyone knows about her stealing the lighter. Interestingly, it is fear again that restores her health and bravery to air her father's

story. Sade fears for him being deported back to Nigeria. The image of her father 'being bundled on to a plane by [the British Police]' (p. 239) keeps haunting her until she comes up with a plan to help him. So, in such a paradox, Sade's moral growth is developed, as fear both propels and hinders her from doing the right thing. However, every decision Sade makes seems to be the right one, starting from when she decides to print their mother's family name 'Adewale' instead of 'Solaja' as their surname when asked by the Social Worker although it is a lie, until she decides to take matters into her own hands to save Papa when the efforts of Mr. Nathan, the refugee lawyer, fail to release him.

Sade's decisions are governed mainly by the need to maintain the expectations of her family as a good daughter by being truthful. She understands this when she constantly evaluates her actions, causing her moral conflict every time she is forced to oppose their expectations. In Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Sade is at stages three and four, in which young people perceive themselves

as members of a conventional society with its values and expectations that they need to maintain (Kohlberg, 1971). Sade's conventional society is her family; yet, it is when she opposes their expectations that her moral growth is stimulated and she moves beyond conventional morality and enters morality based on reason, surpassing even the adults in doing the 'right' thing. As Kohlberg (1975) argues, the only way to encourage growth through the stages of moral development is by encountering views which challenge the children's thinking and stimulate them to formulate better arguments. Indeed, Sade's view of her parents' dictum is challenged since it has led to the death of her mother. As a result, Sade begins to formulate better arguments -or rather better solutions- to adjust and fend for Femi as well as for Papa. Her stealing of the lighter is an effort of adjustment, and although it marks her moral downfall, it is based on the reasoning that Femi will be hurt if she does not steal the lighter for the bullies, and that even if she reported their threat, Femi would get hurt even more likely. Reasoning is the underlying mode of behavior for individuals at stages five and six, in which the right actions are governed by the decision of conscience in accordance with self-chosen moral values that appeal to logical comprehensiveness (Kohlberg, 1971). The moral development of Sade is striking when comparing the action she takes with that of her father upon hearing the news that he might be deported back to Nigeria. Papa is so concerned with telling the truth it blinds him from being reasonable when he decides to go on a hunger strike causing his own health to decline. Sade, on the other hand, makes a clear plan to save Papa though publicizing his story. An action that would be unreasonable if they were in Nigeria.

At the heart of Sade's rational plan is the arbitrary nature of memory of the English lesson about the TV program called Making News, which she randomly tells her father about in her letter. It is right after she had dreamt of Mr. Seven O'Clock that an idea hazily began to enter her mind, and eventually turned into a plan. While this time memory aided her in the subconscious state of dreaming, consciously recalling memories of her life in Nigeria and Mama's sayings have always kept her hopeful and courageous. Sade's memory acts as a solid ground for her to stay intact and emotionally grow. This is significant when comparing her emotional growth with that of Femi. While less is said about Femi's state of mind in the novel, he too seems to be lost, and relies on Sade a lot. In other words, Femi is emotionally dependant on Sade as a sibling who shares him the emotional state of being a child. When Sade begins to mould a character of her own acting sometimes as a mother to him, Femi begins to shut her out. One striking scene in which Femi disapproves of Sade's emotional growth is during their execution of the plan to

save Papa. Sade insists that they wait for Mr. Seven O'Clock outside the television studio when it is freezing, thinking that 'when he sees that [they] waited in the cold, he'll listen to [them]' (p. 253). Femi, in a serious protest, thinks that his sister is mad and that she has crazy ideas 'like Papa' (p. 253). Not only her memory helps her grow, but it also keeps her connected to her home back in Nigeria, 'now that Papa [is] with them, [and that] England might become their new 'home' (p. 323).

Finally, It should not escape our notice that Naidoo treats her child protagonist not just as an equal to the adult, but as an example that even adults can learn from. In the globalized twenty-first century, the conception of the child has gone from that of a 'blank slate', as John Lock (1996) argues and cited by Montgomery (2009), who could not be expected to develop rational and reasoning mind on their own to one that can surpass the adults in their way of thinking and attitudes, making the best out of the worst experiences.

REFERENCES

- [1] Blatt, M. M. & Kohlberg, L. (1975) The Effects of Classroom Moral Discussion upon Children's Level of Moral Judgment. *Journal of Moral Education*. 4 (2), 129-161. Available from: <https://philpapers.org/rec/BLATEO-3> [Accessed 13th March 2019].
- [2] Fritscher, L. (2018) *The Psychology of Fear*. Available from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-psychology-of-fear-2671696> [Accessed 9th March 2019].
- [3] Giles, J. (2009) What is *The Other Side of Truth*?. In: Montgomery, H. & Watson, N. J. (eds.) *Children's Literature: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom, Palgrave Macmillan.
- [4] J. J. (1886) The Psychology of Fear. *American Association for the Advancement of Science*. 8 (193), 351-352. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1761352> [Accessed 8th March 2019].
- [5] Kohlberg, L. (1971) Stages of Moral Development. *Moral Education*. 1 (51), 23-92. Available from: <http://ericmazur.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Kohlberg-Moral-Development.pdf> [Accessed 9th March 2019].
- [6] Montgomery, H. (2009) Instruction or delight?. In: The Open University (ed.) *EA300 Children's Literature*. Walton Hall, United Kingdom, The Open University, p. 23.
- [7] Naidoo, B. (2000) *The Other Side of Truth*. London, A Puffin Book.