Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society Study Guide

Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society by Lila Abu-Lughod

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Lila Abu-Lughod, author of Veiled Sentiments, traveled to the Western Desert of Egypt to study ghinnawa poetry of the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin tribe. The daughter of a Caucasian American woman and an Arab American father, Abu-Lughod was introduced to the Awlad 'Ali by her father. She lived with the tribe as an adopted daughter for two years between 1978 and 1980.

Part One of the book explores Bedouin culture so that the poetry can be examined in context. Abu-Lughod writes extensively about Bedouins' identity in relationships, the Bedouin code of honor, and romantic relationships. Bedouin culture demands that individuals keep their feelings to themselves and not show weaknesses or sentiments. There is also a large emphasis on honor, both individual and especially family. Marriages are arranged by families to retain and enhance honor. The effect of a marriage on an entire family is more important than the effect on an individual.

Independence is another important aspect of Bedouin culture. Women and children are dependent on men, but they can assert themselves in small ways, even if only by offering their submission willingly. This allows them to be honorable in their position in life. The more financially independent a man is, the more wives he can have. Supporting many dependents signals respect and honor.

Part Two of the book discusses ghinnawa poetry, the poetry of everyday interactions. Ghinnawa poetry allows Bedouins to express their feelings in a traditional, condoned way without breaking the code of honor. Ghinnawa poetry can be spontaneous, or it can be the recitation of verses handed down from generation to generation.

The main themes of ghinnawa poetry are sadness, longing, and romantic love. These are topics that are not sanctioned for everyday talk. Those who speak of their sadness or romantic love draw shame on themselves, but if they recite poetry along these themes, they elicit empathy or sympathy. Therefore, ghinnawa poetry provides an outlet for the Bedouins to show human frailties and still abide by their code of honor.

Chapter 1, Guest and Daughter

Chapter 1, Guest and Daughter Summary and Analysis

The author introduces the reader to a Bedouin community in western Egypt. The tribe is called Awlad 'Ali and is settled in an arid, rural area south of the Mediterranean Sea. The author arrives in the area as an anthropology graduate student studying the Bedouin culture. She lives with the Awlad 'Ali tribe for two years, from October 1978 to May 1980.

At the time that the author, Lila Abu-Lughod, lives with the Awlad 'Ali, the tribe consists of 53 adults and over 100 children. The largest household in the tribe has 25 people living in four rooms. Previous to this time, the Bedouins were largely nomadic, and the configuration of their tents described their relationships with one another. The tent ropes of kin would cross, and the central tent belong to the senior kinsman. However, the Egyptian government purchased their traditional land and assisted them with building houses and planting trees. Now, most Bedouins live in houses.

The author gives a summary of her fieldwork. She arrived in Cairo and familiarized herself with the city near the American University. Her father, an Arab, realized that she would need an introduction by a male relative in order to be welcomed into a Bedouin society, so he explained to the elders of the Awlad 'Ali that his daughter wished to improve her Arabic and needed a good family to look after her. This introduction served her well, and she was taken into the tribe as an adoptive daughter.

At first the author is treated as a guest, but she becomes a part of the family and takes on familial roles such as greeting guests and helping with the housework. It is difficult at first for the author to handle the restrictions on females in the tribe. She doesn't want to be outspoken or disrespectful, but she worries that she will not be fulfilling her role as an anthropologist if she doesn't ask pointed questions and try to understand both the men and the women.

She finally feels fully accepted at the funeral of the Haj's wife's brother (the Haj is the patriarchal leader of the group). The author goes with the family to visit this mourning wife. When she squats down in front of the old woman and sees the grief on her face, the author begins to cry as she thinks about the death of her grandmother. The older woman is touched by this display of seeming compassion and tells the other women how much she likes the author. From this point on, the author is seen as a member of the household.

After her Arabic improves, the author notices that poetry is an important part of everyday life among the Awlad 'Ali. The women especially use poetry to communicate with women in other households and other camps. The author finds that the poems often reveal sentiments that the women do not feel comfortable expressing in regular conversations. Bedouin poetry will be examined more fully later on in the book.

This first chapter of Veiled Sentiments serves as an overview for the book. The author explains the background for the book and why she has written it. Although the tone of this chapter is scholarly, the author includes personal anecdotes and vivid descriptions to help the reader understand the culture and people she is discussing. The story about the elderly woman at the funeral and the opening description of the Western Desert create wonderful imagery that serves to integrate the reader into the text.

Despite the anecdotes and descriptions, Veiled Sentiments is clearly a scholastic book. The vocabulary is rife with words common to the social sciences such as "lacunae" and "ethnographic." The vocabulary can be distracting for readers unfamiliar with the social sciences. It would be helpful for such readers to keep a short list of words on a bookmark that have simple definitions.

Chapter 2, Identity in Relationships

Chapter 2, Identity in Relationships Summary and Analysis

"Asl" is the blood of ancestry, and it is one of the key components of identity for the Awlad 'Ali people. The Awlad 'Ali have never been integrated with the Libyans or Egyptians who are their closest neighbors. Much of their identity comes from the differences they have from these neighboring groups. In large part, the Awlad 'Ali account for these differences by citing asl, their ancestral blood. Although they live in Egypt, they never refer to themselves as Egyptians, although they do refer to themselves as Arabs.

The Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouins prize several virtues above others. These virtues include generosity, fearlessness, courage, and modesty. They have an Honor Code, and these virtues are an essential part of the code. The Bedouins consider themselves to be a manly wife, and they despise groups where men wait upon women. In order to preserve modesty and strength, the Awlad 'Ali often segregate the sexes and are very formal in regards to modesty and social customs. For example, when a Bedouin family stays with another Bedouin family, husbands and wives do not sleep in the same rooms. Men stay in the men's quarters and women stay in the women's quarters.

"Garaba" is identity with a tribe. The Bedouins are extremely social people, and their family and tribal relationships are essential to their well-being. Another word for "garaba" is kinship. The paternal lines are especially strong among the Awlad 'Ali. If a woman gets divorced from her husband and returns to her family, her children typically stay with her husband's family because they "belong" to them. The Awlad 'Ali practice polygamy, but the most ideal marriage a man can make is to his father's brother's daughter, a paternal first cousin. Often, a young Bedouin man will marry his father's brother's daughter first and then get other wives as the years go on.

Nevertheless, visits to maternal relatives are also very important and looked forward to with much anticipation. Maternal line doesn't carry the weight of identity as much as the paternal line, although a person may gain social status if his or her maternal line has earned respect from the community at large. In general, relationships between mothers and children are very affectionate among the Awlad 'Ali.

Visits among kin tell a lot about the relationships among the Awlad 'Ali. It is expected that kin will visit those who are ill or distressed or when a celebration is in order, such as after a birth. The failure to visit after a death is almost unforgivable among the Awlad 'Ali. The custom is for relatives to visit the immediate family of the deceased to deliver condolences and to grieve. This grieving consists of wailing and crying along with the mourners.

Giving gifts and sharing do not necessarily establish relationships, but they show that a solid relationship already exists between two people or two families. As mentioned earlier, generosity is an important virtue among the Awlad 'Ali. New levels of wealth have changed the ways in which the Awlad 'Ali make their livings and share their goods. They now use a cash economy instead of a barter economy, and this has changed the status of women, who do not contribute to the household's finances as directly as they did under a barter economy. The new cash economy also has affected women's lives in regards to modesty and rules of veiling. Because communities are more often exposed to men who are there for business, they are not as free to walk around unveiled as they were when only their kinsmen were around.

In Chapter 2, the author includes a passage from Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" to give an example of a romanticized Bedouin community. This passage was written in the 1950's and represents some of the misconceptions the author had about the Awlad 'Ali before she went to live with them. The chapter is also sprinkled with quotes from members of the tribe the author lived with, and these quotes add validity to her narrative. There are also several pictures of the Awlad 'Ali, which helps readers to visualize the people about whom they're reading.

The author includes a short poem to illustrate how modern technology has changed the details of the Bedouin's lives without taking away from their traditions. The poem reads, "Welcome driver of the jeep/I'd make you tea with milk if not shameful/ Toyotas when they first appeared/ brought life's light then disappeared." This poem is very enlightening. It expresses a young woman's desire to speak with a man, but she knows she cannot speak to a man in this way. The poem allows her to say what she would say to him if she could. Also, the words "Jeep" and "Toyota" seem so foreign is such a poem, but they go together perfectly in the modern Bedouin culture.

Chapter 3, Honor and the Virtues of Autonomy

Chapter 3, Honor and the Virtues of Autonomy Summary and Analysis

Bedouins determine status and social hierarchy based on autonomy and freedom. People who do not depend on any other households, tribes, or outside groups are the most autonomous, and therefore they have the highest status. This principle is also seen within households as women try to minimize their dependence on men by asserting themselves in appropriate ways and hiding their weaknesses and emotions.

Clients are people who are often without resources or from a poor lineage who attach themselves to a more powerful tribe or household. In exchange for work, socialization, and good society, clients and their families serve the household by herding sheep, building houses, caring for crops, and helping out with social functions. Patrons provide clients with a place to live, money for food, and clothing for special occasions.

Autonomy is an important part of the Bedouin's definition of ideal manhood. The ideal man is strong, tough, unafraid, and capable. Girls are taught to want to marry a man who will not be pushed around. They are taught to want an assertive man who will run his household with authority. Stoicism is another important aspect of the ideal Bedouin man. Girls, too, are taught to be stoic. Weeping or complaining about pain is not tolerated in the Bedouin culture.

"Agl" is the term for self-control. Children are assumed to have no agl. They cry, are dependent on others, and wear diapers. They don't have any privacy. The disabled and mentally ill also do not develop agl as they age. Men who become overly attached to a wife or who do not seem to have control over their households lose status among their tribe or community, even if they come from good families and are prosperous.

Those in positions of power in the Bedouin community are expected to treat their inferiors, even young children, with respect and to draw as little attention as possible to the inequality between them. This allows dependents to feel a measure of autonomy, even if they are physically dependent on someone else. There are ways for dependents to escape abusive or tyrannical superiors. Some women and children call on supernatural means to escape unwanted or abusive situations, such as an unwanted arranged marriage.

"Hasham" is the term for honor of the weak. Women's submission to men is worthless and demeaning unless their submission is freely given. This freely-given submission is another way to describe "hasham." Women who are held in high regard show a healthy amount of assertiveness along with hasham, and they are generous and honest. Stinginess is one of the most abhorred offenses among the Bedouins.

This chapter does not contain any poems, but it does contain anecdotal stories to explain some of the terms used to describe Bedouin honor and virtues. For example, when the author describes "agl," she tells the story of a man named Zariba who becomes overly attached to his second wife. The wife runs away and goes back to her family, and Zariba despairs. He buys her gifts to get her back. His family and tribesmen are so disgusted by this display of weakness that he never regains the status he enjoyed previous to this experience.

Chapter 4, Modesty, Gender, and Sexuality

Chapter 4, Modesty, Gender, and Sexuality Summary and Analysis

The Bedouins value males above females in several important ways. First of all, they prefer sons over daughters. When a male child is born, there is much celebrating, shouting, and congratulations. When a female child is born, there is mourning. The death of a male infant is also more disturbing to the tribe than the death of a female infant.

Even so, girls are treated with affection as they grow up because of the natural ties that bind children to parents. The unabashed preference for boys over girls comes from sociological reasons. The tribal structure of the Bedouins is based on paternal lineage. Therefore, a family with many daughters is weak in family connections and strength. Boys also bring social security to a woman because she will be better provided for in her old age.

Besides the sociological inferiority of girls, the Bedouins view females as having a "natural" inferiority as well which is based on their physiology. The Bedouins believe that as soon as Adam and Eve left the garden, Eve began menstruating, a sign of her moral inferiority. Women are associated with fertility, and fertility often has good connotations, especially in regards to crops and rain. But women's fertility is also associated with pollution. A menstruating woman is considered polluted and is not allowed to pray. Her fasts do not count, and she is not allowed to touch sacred objects, such as the Koran.

Men are associated with purity and the sacred. They often dress in white and green, especially during religious ceremonies, as a symbol of their purity. Woman, associated with uncleanness and pollution, wear red and black. Women never wear white. Animals may only be killed by men. If a man cannot be found when an animal needs to be killed (for dinner, for example), a postmenopausal woman may be permitted to kill the animal if she puts the knife in the hand of a circumcised boy.

Sexuality and pregnancy are considered shameful, and women bear the brunt of this shame because pregnancy is an obvious sign that sex has taken place. Many Bedouin women hide their pregnancies as long as possible using wide belts. Sexuality is a threat to the patrilineal social order that Bedouins live by, and therefore weddings are not celebrated by tribal elders. When a man marries, he suddenly has allegiances to someone other than his father and grandfather, and this is threatening. Divorce is common among Bedouins, but premarital sex is not.

The meaning of veiling among Bedouin women is complex. It is related to deference, modesty, and sexual shame. Bedouin women do not veil for men who are younger than

they or for their husbands (who share in their sexual shame). They do veil for older men, their fathers, non-Bedouins, strangers, and for men of higher social status. They also veil when inappropriate sexual comments are made or when a man and woman speak intimately to each other and other women are around. The more modest a woman is, the more esteem she has in the tribe. Therefore, a very modest woman who veils often or stays away from men completely, brings honor to herself and to her kin.

This chapter includes several photographs. One of them shows several women cleaning rice in front of several men who are working. The men are dressed in white and seem oblivious to the women. The women in the foreground are wearing large black veils over their heads that completely obscure their heads and faces. They seem to be in a separate world from the men, who about15 feet away from them.

Chapter 5, The Poetry of Personal Life

Chapter 5, The Poetry of Personal Life Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 5, the author begins a new section of the book. This last half of the book examines Bedouin poetry and its function in the everyday lives of the Awlad 'Ali. The first half of the book has explained the cultural background of the Awlad 'Ali, giving readers a context in which to place the poetry that will be dissected in this section.

The author tape recorded a few wedding parties during her stay with the Awlad 'Ali. Although the tapes are full of background noise, such as babies crying and multiple conversations, there is one particular tape that became a favorite for the tribe to listen to. This tape includes a conversation between two of the household women. One of the women, named Aziza, has had a very difficult and frustrating life. She has dealt with a failed marriage, the constant threat of losing custody of her son, the death of father and a difficult relationship with her brother, and a painful skin disease that had never been fully cured.

Aziza has always dealt stoically with her problems, as a Bedouin would be expected to do, but in this tape she expresses her sorrow through poetry. The poem is formatted as a spontaneous conversation between Aziza and her friend. Aziza expresses her despair, and her friend advises her to forget those who have caused her pain. Aziza then talks about patience and how she doesn't feel she can be patient with this sorrow.

The author argues that there are several reasons why this tape was so appreciated by the Bedouins. First of all, the poetic conversation elicits sympathy, especially because the women were familiar with Aziza's trials. Secondly, the words and metaphors used are rich and wonderful. And last, the conversational poem flows beautifully and the women have lovely voices.

The Bedouin word for these poems is "ghinnawas." The ghinnawa is a readily identifiable form of poetry among the Bedouins. It is usually a one-line poem, about 15 syllables long, with a breath in the middle. In conversation, ghinnawas are usually spoken in a sort of monotone voice that stresses the long vowels. The speaker pauses in the middle of the poem.

Ghinnawas are oral poems that draw from a traditional pool of themes and metaphors. A German explorer by the name of J.C. Ewald Falls published about a hundred ghinnawas in 1906 after conducting research in the same area. The author of Veiled Sentiments noted that seventy-five years later, many of the ghinnawas bear a striking resemblance to those in the Falls volume, and several of them are identical.

Ghinnawas are not unique to the Awlad 'Ali. Libyans also use ghinnawas in their everyday interactions. There is significant overlap with the Libyan ghinnawas despite a

distance of hundreds of miles and a closed national border. The Awlad 'Ali used to recite ghinnawas at public celebrations, but today they use them mostly in intimate, informal interactions.

Chapter 6, Honor and Poetic Vulnerability

Chapter 6, Honor and Poetic Vulnerability Summary and Analysis

The Awlad 'Ali must hide many of their feelings in order to abide by their honor code. Complaining, weeping in public, expressing devotion to inferiors, and expressing self-pity are not socially acceptable, and yet there is a human need to express these feelings at times of sorrow or grief. Poetry fills this need for the Bedouin people, and in Chapter 6, the author explores different times when people use poetry to retain their honor when they are feeling vulnerable.

The author returns to the story of Rashid, the man who was distraught over his second wife's departure. The author spoke privately to Rashid several days after his second wife left, and the man spoke to the author with a poem: "Cooking with a liquid of tears / at a funeral done for the beloved. . ." The author suggests that men do not use poetry nearly as much as women do in their conversations, but Rashid used it at this moment because he felt vulnerable.

Rashid's first wife, Mabruka, also found herself under great strain and distress during this period. In order to shift the blame away from themselves, members of the tribe blamed the second wife's departure on sorcery, saying that Mabruka used sorcery on the second wife because she was jealous. These allegations hurt Mabruka, who had always been a devoted wife to Rashid. The poems used by Mabruka to ease her pain not only dwell on her sadness but also express anger: "They slandered me then found me innocent / now the guilt must fall on them."

Death is the ultimate loss, and the Bedouins have their own customs surrounding death. One of them is "crying," which is ritualized mourning. "Crying" involves a high-pitched wordless wailing followed by a chanted lament. The chant resembles ghinnawa poetry with a short verse divided into two parts. Men normally do not participate in the "crying," although the author recounts a time when a young man joined in when he was distraught at the death of his seventeen-year-old sister.

Weaving through Chapter 6 is the idea that honor is paramount to Bedouins, and honor must be preserved at all costs. There are several strategies for preserving honor. One is to pretend that the situation doesn't bother the offended person. This is most commonly seen in unrequited love. The slighted person acts as if he or she doesn't care at all about the lost love, even if this assertion is obviously false; it is a way to save face. Another way to retain honor is to blame others for the problem. The author notes that this is taught to very young children. When a child runs to his mother crying, instead of asking the child what happened, the mother will ask, "Who did it?"

Chapter 6 is shorter, like Chapter 5, but it includes several photographs and poetry laid out in poetic form. The background information included in the first half of the book help the reader to place this poetry in a cultural context, which is very helpful, especially to western readers who are not as familiar with the symbols and metaphors used.

Chapter 7, Modesty and the Poetry of Love

Chapter 7, Modesty and the Poetry of Love Summary and Analysis

As previously mentioned, romantic relationships pose a threat to the patrilineal social structure that the Bedouins hold dear. Because these romantic relationships are considered somewhat subversive, they are a common topic for ghinnawa poetry. One of the most common themes in poetry about love is thwarted love. Arranged marriage is the culturally accepted model of marriage among the Awlad 'Ali. Families have the right to arrange marriages for their children. Many of these marriages end up being long lasting, but some arranged marriages are miserable.

Oftentimes, the reason for misery in arranged marriages is that one or both partners wanted to marry somebody else. This, therefore, is a topic often mentioned in ghinnawa poetry. The author talked with the Haj about this, and he told her that there were three women he wanted to marry before he married his current wife. The first woman was prevented from marrying the Haj by her cousins. This is very typical among the Bedouins. The same story repeated itself with the other two women. Finally, at the age of thirty, he decided that any woman would do.

The author then goes back to the story of Rashid, the man whose second wife left him and left him distraught. The author has previously told the story from the views of Rashid and Mabruka, Rashid's first wife. This time she talks about Fayga's point of view. Fayga is the second wife who ran away. It turns out that the reason Fayga was so miserable in this marriage is because she wanted to marry somebody else. This story comes out in her poems. If she had just explained in regular prose that she wanted to marry somebody else, her story would have been shameful, but by using poetry, she could express her feelings without retribution.

Divorce is not uncommon among the Awlad 'Ali. Many Awlad 'Ali divorce their first spouse and then stick with the second. This is attributed to the youthfulness of first-time spouses, many of whom are teenagers. These young spouses usually recover quickly from the divorce and remarry within a year or two. When a divorce occurs after many years of marriage, however, the emotional effects are more severe. The author tells the story of Safiyya, a woman who behaved as if she didn't care that her husband had left her, but her poetry revealed quite tender feelings about the event.

Polygamy also elicits tender feelings among women. It would not be honorable for them to complain about this arrangement or express sadness when their husbands take another wife, but through poetry they can express these feelings. The author returns to the story about Rashid, Mabruka, and Fayga to show that Mabruka felt very hurt through the whole ordeal. Some of her poems are included in the chapter.

This chapter is divided by the following sub-headings: Discourses on Love; Star-crossed Lovers; An Arranged Marriage; and Marriage, Divorce, and Polygamy. Each section is filled out with analysis, stories, and poetry from the Awlad 'Ali. The use of the story about Rashid, Mabruka, and Fayga is masterfully done as multiple facets of the story are told from several points of view. The tender feelings of all three people are displayed in their poems.

Chapter 8, Ideology and the Politics of Sentiment

Chapter 8, Ideology and the Politics of Sentiment Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 doesn't necessarily introduce new ideas, but it assimilates all the material that has previously been presented and analyzes the function of poetry within the Bedouin culture. The author begins this final chapter by asking why the Bedouin people seem to be able to express "sentiments of weakness" through poetry when such sentiments are strictly forbidden by the code of honor by which they faithfully live.

One reason she believes that sentimental poetry is acceptable is because the social contexts wherein the poetry is heard are confined. Women share their poetry with other women, relatives, and neighbors. Women use poetry more widely than men because their world is less stratified. They are on equal footing with more people, and therefore they have more people to recite their poetry to. Men, on the other hand, share poems with close relatives of the same generation or men with lower social status. This limits the number of people with whom men can share their sentiments.

There is really only one exception to the above rules, and that is romance. Poetry is the language of romance among the Bedouins, but recent generations have not used poetry as much in romance as they used to. Part of the reason for this is that young men and women don't have as many opportunities to be together as they used to. Most boys go to school during the day, and social celebrations are fewer in number than they used to be.

Ghinnawa poetry is a highly stylized form of communicating. Often, Bedouins will use standard poems to express personal feelings, much in the same way that westerners might choose a greeting card that expresses their feelings without having to invest the personal emotions it would take to write it. This distance preserves the Bedouins' honor while still allowing them to express their most sensitive feelings to their loved ones.

The author explains the function of poetry in several ways. In regards to romance, couching one's romantic feelings in poetry frames them in culturally-acceptable terms. In general, by using culturally-accepted poetry for framing one's feelings, Bedouins can escape the criticism that generally accompanies expressions of weakness or sentiment. Lastly, using poetry encourages social closeness and identity with the past, especially when traditional ghinnawas are used.

In the Bedouin culture, the experience of poetry is a shared experience. The interplay of what is said in poetry and what is said in ordinary life exist side by side. The poetry affects life and is affected by it. Poetry gives depth to the tough independence espoused

by the Bedouins. It allows them to conform to a cool, hardened exterior while providing an outlet for emotions.

Poetry also symbolizes freedom to the Bedouins. It allows them to subvert the code of honor while still retaining their honor. Freedom and independence are highly-valued ideals among the Bedouins, so poetry actually helps individuals to attain more status if used wisely. Nonetheless, the ideology of honor is first and foremost, always perched above individual's sentimental feelings. The author ends the book by saying that perhaps the reason that ghinnawa poetry is cherished among the Bedouins is because they sense the limits their honor code places on the human experience "are just too high."

After this final chapter in the book, the author includes an extensive appendix, note section, bibliography, and index. The appendix lists formulas and themes of ghinnawa poetry. The notes section provides details about ideas presented earlier in the book. Many of the notes review literature previously published about the same or similar ideas.

Characters

Lila Abu-Lughod

Lila Abu-Lughod is the author of the book. The analysis and anecdotes contained in the book are based on her personal experiences as she lived with the Awlad 'Ali for nearly two years in 1978-1980. Abu-Lughod's father is Arab, and her mother American. She grew up in the United States and went to live with the Awlad 'Ali as part of her anthropological graduate studies.

The fact that Abu-Lughod is half Arab helps her to integrate more fully into Bedouin culture. With the introduction by her father, she is treated as an adopted daughter within the tribe. Because she is a woman, she gets firsthand accounts of nearly all aspects of the Awlad 'Ali society. A male anthropologist would be severely limited in the information he could obtain because he would not be permitted to access the female areas of the household. A woman has more freedom to move among the tribe; therefore, her gender and racial heritage make her an ideal candidate to perform this anthropological fieldwork.

The Haj

The Haj is the head of the household where Lila Abu-Lughod resides during her stay with the Awlad 'Ali. Besides being the head of the household, he is also the head of the tribal community and, therefore, is held in very high regard. He takes his paternal responsibilities very seriously but has a friendly, trusting personality. The Haj feels comfortable enough with Ms. Abu-Lughod that he shares with her the details of his first three failed courtships.

On the surface, the Haj seems to fit a stereotype. He is the most successful man in his community. He is wealthy, well-respected, and confident. Because he has been so successful, he can afford to support several wives and many children. He can also support various clients who serve him and give him greater status. However, as the author elaborates on the life and character of the Haj, it becomes clear that the Haj is more than the stereotypical successful Bedouin man. He has suffered because of his failed courtships, and these courtships failed because of the very system that has given him great status. Although he enjoys great status, he deals with loneliness as the man at the top of his community.

Zariba

Zariba is a distinguished-looking man in his sixties. He had inherited a large herd to begin with, but under his able stewardship, he accumulated great wealth. Despite his social standing, Zariba lost all respect from his inferiors because of his disregard for the

Bedouin code of honor. He spent money frivolously, chased women, and didn't seem able to control his passions or behavior.

Rashid

Rashid is a handsome man, a brother of the Haj. His first wife, Mabruka, bears him six children. He marries a second wife, Fayga, and this second marriage doesn't work out as well. Fayga seems very unhappy after the wedding takes place, and after a few weeks she runs away. Rashid is distraught and goes to find his bride and bring her back. His kinsmen are insulted and upset about his behavior. They think his behavior is unmanly and that he shouldn't show his feelings so openly.

Nafla

Nafla is an older woman in the camp who tells the author about her first marriage. A marriage was arranged for her by her family. She was to marry her paternal cousin, but she was very young and didn't want to get married. Her family didn't tell her about the wedding until after the singing and dancing had begun. Her relatives had to drag her from her tent kicking and screaming. They forced her to marry the boy anyway, but then she started acting like she was possessed. She told the healer that this all began when she had to get married, so the family allowed her to get out of the marriage.

Aziza

Aziza is a woman in the camp who has had a very difficult and frustrating life. She has dealt with a failed marriage, the constant threat of losing custody of her son, the death of father, a difficult relationship with her brother, and a painful skin disease that had never been fully cured. Aziza deals with the hardships facing her by expressing herself through ghinnawa poetry.

Mabruka

Mabruka is the first wife of Rashid and mother of their six children. When her husband takes another wife, she feels great sadness that Rashid so openly wants to spend time with his new wife. When the new wife runs away, rumors spread that Mabruka used sorcery to send away the second wife. She is doubly insulted by this rumor because first she had to deal with her husband's preference for his new wife and then she gets blamed for the scandal.

Fayga

Fayga is Rashid's second wife. The marriage between Rashid and Fayga was arranged by their families, and in her heart, Fayga had wanted to marry another man. She is so

distraught by this new marriage that she cannot find any happiness. She complains that she misses her family and nieces and nephews, and after several weeks with Rashid, she runs away. She is persuaded to return, but the transition is very difficult.

Migdim

Migdim is an elderly woman and the favorite aunt of many of the adults in the Haj's community. She comes to visit for a few weeks and is slighted by her newly-married nephew who doesn't give her a proper place to sleep. The first night she spends in her nephew's house she sleeps on the floor with practically no bedding. Migdim is very offended by this treatment. She doesn't say anything, but she recites a poem that expresses her true feelings about the situation.

Gatifa

Gatifa is Migdim's niece. Gatifa invites Migdim to sleep in her own room while she visits, but Gatifa's husband, the Haj, returns early from a trip, so Gatifa's plan doesn't work out.

Objects/Places

Alexandria

Alexandria is a large Egyptian city where the author spends some time before she goes to the Western Desert where the Awlad 'Ali live.

Western Desert

The Western Desert is a desert west of Cairo and east of the Libyan border where many Bedouins live. The Western Desert gets about 2" of rain each year, and the vegetation is low and scrubby.

Marsa Matruh

Marsa Matruh is the biggest city in the Western Desert. Most of the Awlad 'Ali men have traveled to Marsa Matruh.

Tents

Although most Bedouins now live in houses, tents still are very visible and much used in Bedouin culture. In former times, the placement of tent stakes helped outsiders to know the hierarchy of the family.

Veils

Married women wear veils most of the time. The way in which a woman wears her veil shows her modesty and level of comfort with those around her.

Cairo

Cairo is the largest city in Egypt. The author gets to know the Haj well during long car rides to visit Cairo.

Vehicles

Bedouin men take great pride in their vehicles, which are status symbols. They like to be seen with their cars and trucks and even like to be photographed with them.

Quran

The Quran (Koran) is the Islamic book of scripture studied by Bedouin holy men. Women are not allowed to touch the Quran while menstruating.

Mariut Extension

The Mariut Extension is the site of a Bedouin land reclamation project in the Western Desert.

White Clothing

Bedouin men traditionally wear white clothing, especially during rites and ceremonies, to symbolize purity.

Themes

Honor

The theme of honor is very important in Veiled Sentiments. The Bedouin code of honor is very strict in regards to modesty, sentiment, and weakness. It is a matter of honor to the Bedouins to not show sentimentality, emotions, or passions. Women wear veils to honor themselves and their families. Men and women keep their feelings to themselves in order to not show weakness. Defying the code of honor is very risky. Once shamed, it is difficult to regain social standing in the Bedouin community, and most Bedouins will live their entire lives among the same group of people.

Ghinnawa poetry allows Bedouins to express themselves without losing their honor. Through this everyday poetry, Bedouins can express disappointment, love, sadness, affection, or any other sentimental or seemingly weak emotion without the opprobrium that mere talking would bring them. Poetry allows them these human traits without subverting their honor or the honor of those about whom they care.

Several of the anecdotal stories included in the book deal with the theme of honor. The story of Zariba is a perfect example. In every aspect of his life and social standing, Zariba should receive honor. He is an older man in the tribe. He is distinguished looking and has successfully built his wealth over the years. However, he is not honored because his behavior does not conform to the Bedouin code of honor. He chases women and acts immaturely, and therefore, he loses the honor he should receive. "Inferiors" no longer take him seriously once he breaks the code of honor.

Independence

Independence is a core value of the Bedouin people, and it is an important theme in the book. Although women and children cannot be financially independent in this society, they can retain a semblance of independence by freely giving their submission to authorities instead of being coerced to submit. Forced submission is an insult both to the authority figure and to the dependent.

Although Bedouins profess to admire submission in women and children, the author contends that independent girls gain a great deal of respect in the tribes. This is because independence is a highly valued trait. It shows spirit and a sense of self. As long as a girl is still modest and obedient, she can show her independence. Independence is associated with a strong spirit, and obviously, strong-willed people will do well in life.

Bedouins try not to show emotions such as fear or despondency, but their ghinnawa poetry allows them a measure of independence from such stringent ideals. Within the poetry's structure, they can create sounds, rhythms, words, and meanings that portray

their current states of mind. Conversely, they can choose to use one of the traditional poems that have been handed down to them from their ancestors.

Kinship

The Awlad 'Ali look down on other cultures that do not value kinship as highly as they do. In the beginning of the book, the author tells about an Egyptian family that comes to visit the Haj. In general, Egyptians live in nuclear family units, not tribal communities as the Bedouins do. The Awlad 'Ali think that the Egyptian way of living is degenerate, a far cry from their own kinship traditions.

In order to keep strength within the family, Bedouins often marry their cousins. The most highly preferred marriage arrangement is through paternal cousins. Boys are taught to desire a marriage with their father's brother's daughter. This keeps authority and wealth within the tribe, and women are automatically protected if something should happen to their husbands because their father and brothers are nearby.

In addition to strengthening ties to their paternal relatives, Bedouins also take care to stay close to their maternal relatives. Women often go home to visit their own families, and mothers maintain close, affectionate relationships with their children throughout their lives. Because the Bedouins find such great comfort and satisfaction within their own families, they do not often leave tribes to find work or look for a new living situation. This closeness builds strength in several ways. Wealth stays within families; identity is strong, and oral traditions and stories are passed down from generation to generation.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of the book is largely first person, written from the author's viewpoint. Since this is a scholarly work, an ethnography in the anthropological tradition, much of the text is also written in the third person point of view, especially when the author describes the fieldwork done by other anthropologists on the same topic. Fieldwork is cited within the text, but the endnotes that follow the appendix give additional insights into others' work among the Bedouins.

The author lived with the Awlad 'Ali tribe for several years, so it's important for her to write about her experiences while there. Her first person point of view writing is humble and honest. She recognizes that she is an outsider but does her best to portray the events, people, and culture as honestly as she can. In order to do this she has to talk about her own background, her perceptions, her foibles, and even her feelings.

The relationships formed between the author and the members of the Awlad 'Ali tribe give the reader an intimate view of social relations. It's easy to see how integrated the author became as she uses point-of-view words such as "our," "we," and "ours" to describe neighbors, household objects, and kin. The point of view is particularly insightful in this manner. The perspective also seems a little different between the first half of the book and the second half. The first half is more third-person, more objective. The second half, perhaps because it was written when the author was more fully integrated into the Awlad 'Ali, is more personal and more first-person.

Tone

The tone of the book is scholarly, but the stories about individuals and their poetry soften the scholarly tone and illustrate the concepts described in anthropological terms. Many words are difficult to understand without a social sciences background, but the author takes the time to define most of the Bedouin terms and concepts.

Unlike some scholarly works, this book has a very open and humble feel to it. This feeling stems from the author's approach to the people who she interviews and about whom she writes. Instead of a doctor/patient type relationship, the author integrates herself into their community as an adopted daughter. She realizes she has a lot to learn from them and she does her best to listen to them and be prepared for revelations as they come.

Although the author tries to always be objective, at times it is clear she does not agree with something or feels that an aspect of the Bedouins' culture should be changed. This is especially apparent when she discusses the lack of education for girls and women, the difficulties young girls face when they don't want to submit to arranged marriages, and double standards about sexuality.

Structure

The book is divided into two main parts: Ideology of Bedouin Social Life and Discourses on Sentiment. The first half of the book consists of chapters about identity in relationships, honor and autonomy, and modesty, gender, and sexuality. This first half of the book provides the reader with a cultural context in which to place the poetry that will be examined in the second half of the book. These chapters are much longer than the chapters in the second half of the book, but they are essential reading. Without them, the poetry would not make sense to the reader.

The second half of the book deals directly with ghinnawa poetry. The chapters are divided as follows: "The Poetry of Personal Life," "Honor and Poetic Vulnerability," "Modesty and Love," and "Ideology and the Politics of Sentiment." There are more personal stories in this half of the book because stories are necessary for explaining different types of poems and how the poetry helps individuals deal with their sentiments.

There are eight chapters in total, and the author includes an appendix, a notes section, a bibliography, and an index at the end of the book. The notes correlate with items in the chapters that could use more explanation. The appendix lists formulas and themes found in ghinnawa poetry. The back matter is very complete and would be an excellent springboard for someone interested in learning more about Bedouin culture, lifestyle, and poetry.

Quotes

"And yet, despite their appreciation of the desert's natural gifts, the Bedouins think of the territory in which they live primarily in terms of the people and groups who inhabit it. Theirs is an intensely social world in which people's activities and relationships are riveting, and solitude so abhorred that no one sleeps alone; those who spend time alone are thought to be vulnerable to attack by the evil spirits (afarit) who thrive wherever there are no people." Page 40

"There are signs of integration into the state: most Beouin men are aware of events in the world political arena, some hold opinions on the relative merits of the superpowers, and most have some knowledge of Egypt's internal political situation as well as its international involvements. But their passions are aroused only by tribal affairs—intra-Bedouin disputes, reconciliations, alliances, and hostilities." Pages 43-44

"Visits home are anticipated with excitement, suffused with warmth, and remembered nostalgically. Women always return from such visits reporting how happy, pampered, and well fed they were. They bring back gifts, dresses, jewelry, soap, perfume, and candies. Their hair is freshly braided and hennaed, smelling sweetly of expensive cloves—kinswomen's grooming favors." Page 55

"A household's men and women now spend less time together, know fewer people in common, and have divergent experiences in daily life. This gap will widen as education becomes more universal, since boys are increasingly enrolled in school but old values keep girls at home. Soon men will be literate but women not." Page 74

"The stoic acceptance of emotional pain is another aspect of self-mastery. To weep is a sign of weakness, so man of asl do not cry, regardless of the intensity of their grief." Page 90

"Supernatural sanctions, which seem to be associated with the weak and with dependents, provide the final check on abuse of authority. Supernatural retribution is believed to follow when the saintly lineages of Mrabtin are mistreated, their curses causing death or the downfall of the offender's lineage." Page 103

"People feel embarrassed in front of their elders not just because the latter control resources and currently have authority, but also because the elders may have known them in an earlier state of extreme weakness and exposure." Page 113

"The unequivocal purity of maleness per se is clear: even a nonpraying boy is considered more pure than a praying, nonmenstruating woman." Page 132

"But, as I suggested in the introduction, one cannot talk about Awlad 'Ali personal life without talking about poetry, that vital and highly valued expressive form that carries such moving messages about the life of sentiment." Page 171

"More than anything else, the subject matter of this much-loved genre distinguishes it from other genres of poetry and song and accounts for its special place in Bedouin society. The ghinnawa is the poetry of personal sentiment. It is about feelings people have, feelings about situations and human relationships." Page 181

"Resistance is the honorable response to an attack, and anger is the sentiment, whether perceived as motivation or concomitant, compatible with resistance. By responding with anger to the pain of loss, people assert their strength and potency—their refusal to succumb passively to the impositions of others. Blaming others is an aggressive act that focuses anger." Page 206

"It was 1950. I was in love with a girl from a Mrabit tribe. Her father and mine were best friends. She was tough but beautiful. I loved her and she loved me. We would arrange meetings through friends, who took messages back and forth. We only managed meetings of a few minutes. We recited poetry to one another. I never touched her; we met just to talk. I swear it was not for anything else. We are humans, not animals. This was God-given love, true love." Pages 211-212

"Poems are vehicles for the expression of attachments to sweethearts or spouses that, if communicated in everyday social interaction, would damage reputations and jeopardize claims to respectability and, at the individual level, would ordinarily undermine self-image and self-presentation." Page 232

"Belonging is essential because there is no life outside the group, no alternative social group other than the community of agnates into which one is born or, in some cases, another community to which one attaches, composed nevertheless of other Bedouins." Pages 237-238

"Poetry as a discourse of defiance of the system symbolizes freedom—the ultimate value of the system and the essential entailment of the honor code." Page 252

Topics for Discussion

How does the author integrate herself into the Bedouin culture? What adjustments would an educated western woman need to make in order to feel accepted into this culture?

Consider the story about Rashid, Mabruka, and Fayga. Do you pity one of these people above the others? Why or why not?

Discuss the theme of Honor. Does the desire for honor interfere with normal human relationships among the Awlad 'Ali tribe?

Chapter 4 discusses differences in clothing for men and women. Men traditionally wear white and green, and women wear black. What do these colors symbolize, and how do their clothes affect their behavior and identity?

Look for metaphors in the sample ghinnawa poetry. What do these metaphors say about the Awlad 'Ali?

Modern life has further isolated women and girls in Bedouin communities. What changes could give women and girls a more enriched social life?

Explain how veiling is both voluntary and situational in the Bedouin culture.