

Living in a Pluralistic World: Class 5
Fernea - Guests of the Sheik - Intro and Ch. 1-4

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- Quiz
- Reminder: first one-pager due Tuesday, "How cultural difference made a difference"
 - Details on the class web page
- Guests of the Sheik background
 - set in 1956-1958, mostly the year 1957
 - ie. one year before a revolution, land reform, dismantling of the feudal system of landed sheiks
 - El Nahra: mostly Shia, or Shi'ite
 - Spelling details
 - today the preferred spelling is "Muslim", not "Moslem"
 - Arabic uses a different alphabet, so many Arabic words and names are written in a multiple ways in the Latin alphabet
 - Diwaniya, Diwaniyah
 - Abayah, abaya
 - Id, eid, id, 'id (feast)
 - Id al fitr, id el fitr, id ul fitr... (feast at the end of Ramadan)
 - And many more...
 - Maps
 - Aerial views (why are the doors blue?)
 - suq
 - abayah
 - dishdasha
 - kaffiyeh (and agal)
 - aba (cloak)
 - mudhif
- Intro
 - "I am not an anthropologist" no?
 - 1st two years of marriage to Robert (Bob) Fernea, social anthropology grad student from U of Chicago
- Chapter 1, Night Journey: Arrival in the Village
 - El Nahra
 - Guests of Sheik Hamid Abdul Emir el Hussein, chief of the El Eshadda tribe
 - Arrive at station in Diwaniya
 - BJ is the only woman without an abayah
 - "Why should I have to wear that ugly thing? It's not *my* custom"
 - "They say an uncovered woman is an immoral woman"
 - "If they can't take me as I am - if we have to make artificial gestures to prove we are human beings too - what's the point?"

- "my principles were weakening before my embarrassment"
- "my principles were not as strong as my desire to be inconspicuous and well thought of in my new home"
- Um Hassan = Mother of Hassan; Abu Hassan = Father of Hassan
 - does this suggest anything about the importance of having children?
- culture shock - p. 10
 - "I knew what I should do... But I couldn't do it. I felt only a flood of irrational resentment against my new husband for bringing me here..."
 - "I was still clutching the despised abayah tightly under my chin..."
 - p. 22, food details: "boiled potatoes, sliced tomatoes, and canned corned-beef hash with fried eggs...angel-food cake...Nescafe..."
- Mohammed is as uncomfortable ("scared") of her as she is of him p. 14
- cold, rainy
- high wall around the garden gives them complete privacy
- "doors painted blue, the color to ward off the evil eye" p 16
- Mohammed mortified that people might learn that he was washing dishes – woman's work
- BJ saves the "extra" lunch, instead of leaving it for children, servants, etc; the man (Ali, the sheik's gardener) who brought it assumes she ate it all - news travels!
 - *they* are observing *her*
- Chapter 2: The Sheik's Harem
 - each of Hamid's 3 wives has own, separate block of rooms for her and her children
 - notice the crescent and star flag... and the crescents and stars on Selma's dress...?
 - Kulthum and Selma refer to "Haji Hamid"
 - A Haji (or Hajji) is someone who has made the haj (or hajj), a pilgrimage to Mecca
 - Hamid's father: Abdul Emir, famous warrior against British-backed government, head of a confederation of tribes
 - Hamid inherited his position at Abdul Emir's death
 - later we learn that succession was not simple
 - rivalry with uncle Urthman (brother of Hamid's father) (p 118)
 - Hamid's older brother Abdulla is second in command (p 126)
 - various other brothers are more or less favored
 - 3 day's hospitality at mudhif for any traveler
 - strained silence - no common ground?
 - Selma starts asking where clothes and jewelry came from (family or husband?, and costs
 - lots of heavy gold: insurance
 - Selma is wearing at least \$1000 in gold, in 1957 dollars
 - In 2006 dollars, that is at least \$7,194
 - Selma and Alwiyah eat with BJ when she insists (p. 34)
 - Selma amused
 - Alwiyah uncomfortable
 - haranguing to eat more
 - wives of Hamid: one deceased, now Kulthum (oldest), Bahiga, Selma
 - "where is your mother?"

- they assume she is lonely without her mother
- "To be alone without any of one's womenfolk was clearly the greatest disaster which could befall any girl."
- Kulthum: "Children are gifts of Allah... When you have children, you will not feel so alone without your mother"
- They don't wear the abayah in America... "Why not?"
 - Just as reasonable a question as "why *do* they wear it in Iraq?"
- Bob assumes Selma is beautiful because Hamid gave 1500 pounds to her family when he married her
 - "I couldn't help laughing at his male naiveté."
 - [why is this naive?]
- Chapter 3: Women of the Tribe
 - Mohammed (servant) is a Sayid, descendent of Mohammed (the Prophet)
 - not members of El Eshadda tribe
 - but treated with respect, act as mediators
 - in financial straits since 180 of their 200 acres were too salinized to farm
 - BJ spends many evenings with them, conversation is relaxed and happy
 - She is making friends and contacts already
 - sister Sherifa: abandoned by husband
 - "neither widow, virgin, nor divorcee, and hence had no future"
 - "kept chickens and sold eggs; she raised lambs in the spring and sold the meat and wool. She helped keep her family alive."
 - Fadhila, wife of Mohammed's older brother
 - "had no children...it was always the wife who was at fault in these matters...was judged inadequate as a woman and as a wife."
 - Ali and Sheddar want to marry off their son and daughter
 - paternal first-cousin marriage is preferred (p. 44)
 - ideal: marry father's brother's child
 - payment: groom's father to bride's parents
 - if brothers exchange children in marriage, saves bride price
 - visits strain hosts' resources
- Chapter 4: Women of the Town
 - Old pontoon bridge at mosque replaced by American engineer
 - "Point Four" engineer: Point Four was a foreign technical assistance program run by the US during the 1950s to encourage less developed countries to side with the US and not with the USSR
 - a new, modern bridge
 - build to cement bridge - hard to get onto from dirt road
 - at village center, joining taxi stand and coffee shops
 - now women can't cross without being observed; crossing to the suq or to visit now a major foray
 - women now went out much less
 - Aliyah started school for girls, won trust, got good enrollment

- in part by having common acquaintances among teachers in Diwaniya
- her younger sister, Hind
- Sitt Aliyah: Sitt a term of respect for educated woman
- Abu Saad (mayor) educated, rational, but can't overcome family history and allow his wife Um Saad to go without the abayah
- A good woman, in tribe or town:
 - reputation for fidelity unreproachable
 - hard-working
 - devoted wife and mother
 - good cook and housekeeper
 - quiet, obedient companion to her husband
- yet influenced men a lot
 - husbands
 - especially sons
 - who sons and daughters marry
 - whether they would go to school or university

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