

Living in a Pluralistic World: Class 7
Fernea - Guests of the Sheik - Ch. 9-14
© Copyright Bruce Owen 2007

- Quiz
- Chapter 9, Ramadan
 - A holy month
 - Dates are approximate
 - For many, they depend on actual lunar sightings, which can be affected by local conditions
 - Last year, September 23- October 20
 - This year (1428 in the Islamic calendar), September 12-October 11
 - Fast all day, not even water
 - So eat before sunup and after sundown
 - Krayas for men, others for women
 - Women's krayas led by female mullahs
 - Highly esteemed and profitable
 - How does this fit with the rest of women's roles here?
 - Fadhila, Sherifa, other girls don't wear face veils on "tribal" side of the canal, but do for crossing the bridge and walking on the other side
 - What does this suggest about their concept of veiling, etc.?
 - A woman arrives in makeup and a green and white over yellow hashmiya
 - Clearly being rebellious, looking for responses
 - Most of the older women ignore her completely
 - What does this say about the rigid rules of female behavior in this culture?
 - Why do most women follow them?
 - Kraya is the retelling of the betrayal and death of Hussein
 - We will look at this story next time
 - Everyone gets very emotional
 - What is the purpose or effect of the krayas?
 - When did they originate?
 - 1500's, when Ottoman (Turkish) Empire oppressed Iraqis
 - Ottomans were Sunni
 - Krayas were assertion of religious difference, and protest
 - Might Sunni/Shiite relations be different in former provinces of the Ottoman Empire than they are elsewhere?
 - What sort(s) of explanation(s) does this suggest?
 - Urban Baghdad Shiite says krayas aggravate splits within Islam
 - Make Arab unity impossible
 - Why go?
 - Social contact
 - Childhood memories
 - Enjoys the ceremony
 - Does this remind you of anything in your own culture?

- Chapter 10, The Feast (Iid el-Fitr)
 - Feast at end of Ramadan
 - Sheik's household feeds 200-800 men at the mudhif
 - The women do all the work
 - Urthman, Sheik Hamid's uncle, wanted to be sheik but lost to Hamid
 - Even some of the children's dances are about Hussein's betrayal and death
- Chapter 11, Moussa's House
 - Laila has chosen BJ as her friend
 - Qanda the beautician/tattooist
 - Tattoos will help you keep your husband
 - What assumptions are implied by that?
 - Why is BJ so adamantly against what they think is a fine idea?
 - Why was she accepted?
 - Her Arabic got better
 - Instead of smiling and nodding, she could talk back to sarcastic remarks
 - They had thought she was deaf or stupid, but she became better company...
- Chapter 12, Weddings
 - Ali has arranged to swap daughter and son with a brother in marriage
 - An efficient, first-cousin marriage
 - Ali's daughter Sahura, no beauty
 - BJ hopes her husband is not hard on her when he sees her for the first time...
 - Mother and other women wail as she leaves
 - Different reactions by different brides
 - The Sheik's guards are looking the other way so the women can go out and see the dancing p.143
 - Man dances the "bride's" part
 - Apparently reluctant at first
 - Men ritually wash in canal, with mullah
 - Then groom and bride sign agreement
 - Groom goes in to the bride's home to consummate the marriage
 - Tension as it takes a while
 - Bride's mother as a witness
 - Show the bloody sheet to all, proving her virginity
 - Congratulations all around
 - Bride can be killed or ruined for life if she does not appear to be a virgin
 - Why?
 - Is this a good system?
- Chapter 13, Salima
 - Tribe endogamy preferred
 - First cousin marriage preferred
 - But Moussa's daughters don't have enough male cousins
 - They love their expected husbands; grew up with them as children

- Laila does not expect to marry
 - Has to care for her mother
- The higher-status men all go off to study, want to marry more modern women they meet there
- Fernea says they will have meaningless lives “for reasons which they would never be able to understand” p 160
 - Is that fair?
- Best option: become a teacher
- Closed to older girls – school for girls became acceptable too late for them
- Chapter 14, One Wife or Four
 - Hussna thought to be a poor wife; husband Abad considers taking as a second wife a recent widow with two small boys
 - Even women who oppose multiple marriages approve
 - Hussna goes to a wise woman in Samawa
 - Widow’s son gets sick, Abad gives up the marriage
 - People say they don’t believe, but they do notice...
 - Un Khalil and women mullahs visited about illness, barrenness, to make cruel husbands kind, but especially to prevent him from taking another wife
 - Only 9 of 104 households had ever been polygamous
 - 4 divorces in just the last 18 months!
 - Second wife is expensive
 - “Isn’t our way better?”
 - Bob can divorce you and leave you penniless
 - But if he takes a second wife, he still supports the first
 - Mothers have final say in sons’ marriages while alive
 - Second wife is often the man’s choice
 - Mohammed’s rules of polygamy were intended to stop female infanticide
 - Often the only option for women
 - no place for them outside a family
 - her children will have relatives to support them and to marry
 - Fernea says the practice is rare in cities
 - Multiple wives needed to cook and care for children
 - Abdulla treats Khariya and Bassoul equally, and they get along well