

Fernea - Guests of the Sheik – Part VI, postscript, The Veil

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- Quiz
- Chapter 25, Back to Baghdad
 - Mohammed comes with them to Baghdad
 - Depressed because no one knows him, he doesn't know the suq...
 - Abdullah's son Ahmed and Hamid's son Hadhi both at college in Baghdad
 - Both have quarreled with their fathers, are being supported by their mothers
 - These women are not completely powerless
 - Hadhi considers marrying Hamid's daughter Sabiha
 - BJ says no, must be Samira
 - Samira is beautiful, warm, smart
 - Sabiha is "silly"
 - But Sabiha has the lighter skin: more prestigious
 - Maybe Bob was not so naïve to assume that Selma was beautiful because Hamid made a large bridewealth payment
 - Lunch with Jabbar, his fiancé Suheir, and his dim sister Khadija
 - None wearing abaya
 - Khadija is uncomfortable
 - Suheir is to "educate the women of El Nahra away from the abayah"
 - Khadija is terrified at the thought
 - Is it likely to work?
 - BJ and Bob accompany Sayid Muhsen, his wife, and five male relatives to the American Hospital to see a female doctor about birth control
 - Previous doctor told her to wear an examination instrument!
 - Awkwardness with thanks and goodbyes as they leave
 - Hamid invites Bob and BJ to a reputable nightclub with him and Nour
 - BJ impressed that he would consider their foreign ways, even though he would never take his own wives to such a place
 - Nour uncomfortable eating with his father and with a woman, and with western table etiquette
 - Hamid assumes the dancing women in cocktail dresses are prostitutes ("that tart")
 - BJ suddenly sees them as ridiculous
 - Hamid assumes that Bob and BJ would never do such a thing
 - Can't introduce a couple that they know because Hamid would only think worse of Bob and BJ, not better of the couple
 - He respects BJ because she has followed his culture's rules
 - Not because he is a cultural relativist
 - He has not decided that western practices are understandable and OK, but only that some westerners do not do them
 - He would never believe that the dancing women were faithful wives or respectable single women

- Just as BJs friends at home would never believe that the women of El Nahra were not living in against their will in near-serfdom
- Bob and BJ have not brought understanding and tolerance to El Nahra
- Only personal ties... a small first step
- Chapter 26, Leave-taking
 - Laila doubted that BJ would return
 - BJ tries to say she is speechless because she is touched by their kindness
 - They don't comprehend the concept at all
 - Laila teases about the bird story
 - “who, me? I'm not even married.”
 - She obviously doesn't believe it was really a bird...
 - “God willing, you will have a boy” “you don't want Mr. Bob to divorce you” “when she is with her mother, she'll have a boy”
 - “Ask Mr. Bob to bring your mother and then you'll never have to leave us”
 - The women never envied BJ, just made her fit into their ways
 - Discussion about Basima going to school in Diwaniya
 - Will she wear an abayah?
 - Is wearing the abayah in the Koran?
 - Most can't read, so they don't know
 - Tension between Selma (Hamid's wife) and Fatima (Moussa's wife)
 - Hamid's son Ahmar wanted to marry Moussa's daughter Sanaa
 - But Hamid was opposed
 - In the postscript, we learn that Ahmar married Sanaa anyway
- Postscript
 - Six years later, 1964
 - The revolution did not change much; Hamid is still sheik
- Fernea and Fernea: Symbolizing Roles: Behind the Veil
 - Most variants of Islam see gender identities as explicitly established by Allah (God)
 - the two genders are a fundamental feature of existence
 - adherence to the gender roles is required by God
 - some Christian sects take this position, too
 - In many Muslim societies, modesty is essential to female identity
 - **Purdah**: seclusion of women
 - **Hijab**: literally means barrier; modest clothing
 - marks women as devout, respectable Muslims
 - Hijab is a minor issue to some Muslim women, a big deal to others
 - Purpose or meaning of hijab
 - expression of male power over women?
 - modesty, same as US women not going topless
 - warns others to treat her with respect
 - in some cases, indicates a degree of wealth and independence
 - protection outside - from dirt and men

- protects men from sights that could cause them to become impassioned and misbehave
- anonymity in public
- protects family honor
 - the honor of an entire family is based on the behavior of each member
 - one person's loss of honor affects everyone
 - male honor is based on bravery, piety, and hospitality
 - can be regained if lost
 - female honor is based on chastity outside marriage
 - cannot be regained if lost
- Culture as meaning; cultural relativism:
 - We can't understand
 - why women wear hijab
 - how it affects them
 - how it fits into their culture
 - without understanding the meanings that women and men place on it
 - we must be cultural relativists in order to understand
 - applying our own values first would keep us from ever really getting it
- Revival of popularity of hijab: two theories
 - men asserting their male identity (as having power over women), which is threatened by
 - women increasingly going to work and earning money and respect
 - women asserting their female identity (as being pious and respectable), despite their
 - increasingly having to go to work and be exposed to vulgarity, profanity, and disrespect
- Both illustrate all three of Middleton's approaches to understanding cultural practices
 - both are about communicating meaning
 - specifically, the identity that men and women want others to attribute to them
 - both are about culture as a system of interrelated parts
 - both bring in economic forces and work practices to explain a choice of clothing
 - both are about culture as an adaptation (this may be the weakest of the three)
 - both show how hijab solves a practical social problem that men or women face
 - it is unusual to find an explanation that embodies all three approaches; usually an explanation basically applies just one
- Recent conflicts over hijab
 - 2005/2006 in France: banned wearing obvious religious symbols in public schools
 - mostly aimed at hijab
 - supposedly to encourage equality and solidarity
 - England: allowed wearing hijab in public schools
 - to permit free exercise of religion
- October 2006 in England:
 - Jack Straw, leader of House of Commons, ex Foreign Secretary
 - asked that women remove **niqab** (full face veil) to speak with him
 - said it is a "visible statement of separation and of difference" (BBC News, 5 Oct. 2006)
 - said he feared that "wearing the full veil was bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult". (BBC News, 5 Oct. 2006)

- Tony Blair, Prime Minister, called Straw "perfectly sensible" on this
 - BBC headline: "Bilingual [elementary school] support worker Aishah Azmi, 24, was asked to remove the veil after pupils found it hard to understand her during English language lessons." (BBC News, 5 Oct. 2006)
 - a court found that the school had "victimized" her and awarded her a fine
 - but did not order that she be re-hired
 - October 2006 in Australia
 - "Australia's most senior Muslim cleric ... Sheikh Taj el-Din al-Hilali said women who did not wear a hijab (head dress) were like "uncovered meat".
 - "If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside... and the cats come and eat it... whose fault is it, the cats' or the uncovered meat?" he asked. ...
 - "If she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred," he added.
 - Sheikh Hilali also condemned women who swayed suggestively and wore make-up,
 - implying they attracted sexual assault.
 - "Then you get a judge without mercy... and gives you 65 years," he added."
 - This sermon was immediately condemned by many Muslims
 - Al-Hilali said that his statements had been taken out of context
 - He said he was referring to infidelity, not assault.
 - "I unreservedly apologise to any woman who is offended by my comments. I had only intended to protect women's honour," the statement published in The Australian said.
 - An extreme example of hijab being interpreted as both
 - protection for women from men
 - and protection for men from temptation that they cannot resist
 - (BBC News, 26 Oct. 2006)
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