

Cultural Theme Paper  
Anthro 340

While reading Guests of the Sheik, I realized that there was a central theme displayed throughout the Iraqi culture. The theme was that family is much more important than the individual and that the wants and needs of the family unit come before those of the individual person. Take the example on pages 35 and 36. The women are appalled to find out that B.J. has left her mother behind in the U.S. The breaking of the family unit is quite unimaginable in their minds and they feel very sorry for B.J. The second example, on page 185, has Basima asking B.J. whether or not it's true that in America we often put older people in care facilities away from the family. B.J. realizes how this must look and I think the paragraph at the end of page 185 sums up her feelings on the subject and also has B.J. realizing how important family is to this culture and gets her thinking about how our elders often play a pivotal role in the family unit (a role that's often missing in America). The final example, on page 159, shows Laila sacrificing marriage to fulfill her duties to her family. This would be almost unheard of in American culture where individualism is often at the forefront of the culture. Laila values her family so much that she agrees to follow through with her father's wishes and stay with her mother once her father is gone. Often, these "sacrifices" are not even seen as sacrifices, but rather a fulfillment of an honorable task. This book really sheds light upon the differences between the two cultures in regards to family and what it means to be a part of that unit. The idea of family and honor is ingrained throughout the Iraqi culture and it really defines the culture itself. This book really helped me understand why the Iraqi culture is structured the way it is and how that structure is conducive to the family.