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ISLAM AND THE GENDERED DISCOURSES OF DEATH

On a bright day in January 1987, my host in the Awlad ʿAli bedouin community in Egypt in which I had been doing research invited me to accompany him on a condolence call. He knew how enthusiastic I was about visiting people who still camped in traditional tents in the desert, and this set of families, he assured me, lived in a beautiful area. The group's patriarch had died twenty days ago, but my host had been too busy to go so only his younger brothers had paid their respects. He had just heard, though, that the bereaved family was upset he had not come himself. So we drove off in his car, with his two cowives in the back seat, stopping at the market town nearby to buy a fat sheep to take with us. As they loaded the beast into his car, my host complained about how expensive sheep had become. The sound of its bleating in the trunk reminded me of trips to weddings, when sheep are also obligatory gifts.

We drove on tracks through the desert until we saw their tents in the distance. As we drew near, my host asked his wives if they planned to wail. "No, no, no!" they exclaimed, adding that the deceased was an old man, and he had already been dead for twenty days. My host dropped us off at one end of the camp and drove off to the other where the main men's tent was. As we walked toward the camp, three women emerged from one of the tents and headed toward us. Suddenly the three approaching women and the two I was with started wailing and when we met, each woman from the camp hugged one of us and squatted down with her and began the formulaic heartrending "crying together" (*yatabākō*) that is their funeral lament.

I felt myself gripped by the back of the neck and pushed down to a squatting position. The woman's black head cloth smelled of cloves and smoke and I could feel her tears through the cloth. My discomfort was absolute. Paralyzed and silent, I waited while she went through her loud and seemingly endless lamenting close to my left ear. Then we stood up, I in embarrassment, and all of us walked to the tent. We greeted the other women in there, sat down and began a long afternoon of desultory chatting and gossip until the sheep we had brought was butchered, cooked, and served to us on a bed of rice.

When we returned home, the story of my encounter with the lamenting woman was told and retold. Everyone laughed about the woman who had presumed I

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wanted to lament with her, but several women angrily suggested that they should never have let me get out of the car until after the woman had cried. When I was sick the next day, people asked me, “Did it give you a shock (*infajaʿti*)?”

This was to be my most intimate experience with these powerful funeral laments during my various stays in this small community of Awlad ʿAli bedouins in Egypt’s western desert. Those with whom I was living usually discouraged me from going to funerals, warning, “It’s an ugly sight.”¹ Lamentation by women is common across Egypt and other parts of the Arab world but the genre has received little scholarly attention.² Because I was discouraged from attending funerals and hesitated bringing up the subject of death, I did not record laments or collect texts that would allow for a study of their poetics. However, I can pursue an analysis of the social and discursive place of laments in the context of a single Muslim community in the hopes of contributing to two central questions in the anthropology of Muslim societies: How to treat the relationship of local practices to “Islam” and what to make of women’s greater participation in practices frowned upon as unorthodox or even non-Islamic.³

I will pursue these questions by exploring, first, the ways in which laments articulate with other Awlad ʿAli discourses on death and, second, the social significance of their performance only by women. Awlad ʿAli bedouin women respond to death with more than laments. Equally important as the formulaic laments and ritual wailing that greet any death are the songs of loss in which women detail in a soulful and reflective way the sentiments associated with bereavement, the Muslim religious discourse on faith that seems to conflict with these other genres, and the multifaceted narratives told about particular deaths. To isolate one of these discourses for analysis would be to lose sight of the complex way death is lived by those it leaves behind.

The first set of issues to be explored, therefore, is where laments fit in a system of meaning constituted by these various discourses on death. The discourses gain their meaning, I argue, through their juxtaposition, and are distinguished by a series of binary oppositions. I do not seek to establish the structural logic of an Awlad ʿAli cultural system but rather to determine how this configuration gives significance to the practices of individual mourners as they move through the various activities that deaths provoke. I examine how these multiple discourses define each other, mark contexts, and structure individual responses to death as certain sorts of statements.

Perhaps the most interesting question raised by this consideration of the discourses of death is the role played by Islam. It is a truism of functionalist theories of religion that religion helps people cope with death. Yet in this bedouin society, as I suspect in nearly all communities of Muslims, religiously inspired beliefs about death and appropriate religious responses are not the only ones invoked. Religious discourse may not even be the dominant discourse on death even though Muslim practices such as the recitation of the profession of faith, modes of preparing the corpse for burial, and prayer over the deceased are similar across societies.⁴ When one considers the uses of religious talk in Awlad ʿAli conversations and narratives, two things become clear: the religious discourse is always in tension with others, and it accomplishes complex ends in the narratives and conver-

sations into which it is inserted. These ends include, on the most mundane level, dampening speculation about human culpability and, on a more abstract level, establishing or asserting the superiority of faith in God over personal attachments, especially to kin.

Like the self-proclaimed orthodox themselves, scholars of world religions often artificially separate localized practices such as ritual lament from the official religion, and then devalue them.⁵ Distinctions are drawn between popular and orthodox religion, local and universal belief and practice, the so-called little tradition and the great tradition, or, in the worst case, between ignorance and the knowledge of the true religion. Practices disapproved of by learned religious authorities may be dismissed as superstitious vestiges of the past or corruptions. In more socially grounded analyses, the orthodox and “universal” versions of religion might be recognized as the ideology of certain social groups or the world religions themselves as the impositions of dominant outsiders. Anthropologists have, on the whole, become wary of such distinctions and normative claims and have insisted on examining without judgment the interaction of the complex of practices in any Muslim community.⁶

What has not been sufficiently recognized, however, is that in any community of Muslims, individuals say and do a vast number of things, sometimes drawing on or invoking recognizable Islamic traditions and concepts, sometimes not. What we need to examine is how people deploy the various discourses at their disposal, knowing that it is often the same people who will one moment be talking about God’s will and the next be lamenting a loss or angrily accusing a neighbor of causing a death.

After establishing the field of meanings constituted by the multiple discourses on death in this bedouin community, I turn to a second question: What are the social effects of the way women use them? Any study of how people respond to death must also be a study of how they create their lives. Thus, a study of laments must include an inquiry into how the social practices of bereavement may contribute to maintaining a particular form of social life. As in many societies, the responses to death among the *ʿAwlad ʿAli* bedouin are gendered. Lamenting, as in many parts of the world and other parts of Egypt, is strictly a woman’s activity.⁷ I explore in the final section of the paper how the sexual division of the discourses of death works with a set of principles of moral differentiation to produce and reproduce a hierarchical social order in this society that prides itself on its egalitarian ethos.

VOICES OF LIFE AND DEATH

We can begin interpreting the significance of laments by exploring their relationship to the other major emotionally charged and gendered verbal genre in bedouin society, namely songs. In some ways, laments are diametrically opposed to songs (*ghinnāwas*) of the sort I have discussed at length elsewhere.⁸ They are chanted at funerals while songs—although recited in everyday life where they can, as I will discuss later, express loss—are in their sung form especially associated with weddings and circumcision celebrations. This contrast between funerals and weddings

has other verbal expressions. Ritual wailing (*ʿayāṭ*), which either takes the form of a special sort of screaming on first discovery of a death or a high-pitched moaning as women approach other mourners, is the opposite of the ululating (*zaghārid*) with which women celebrate good news and guests announce their arrival at weddings.

The opposition between death and life that structures the relations between the ritualized verbal genres of funerals and the formulaic genres of celebrations is also enacted in a range of social practices.⁹ Laments, wailing, and a repertoire of conventional nonverbal practices of grief that include tearing one's clothes, throwing off all jewelry, scratching one's cheeks, and throwing dirt on one's head, all belong to the confined time and place of the funeral or mourning ceremonies (*ʿazā*). The reentry of a mourner into the world of ordinary life is marked with practices that suggest the dangers of crossing the threshold between the spaces of death and life. When a woman returns from a funeral she tries to collect on the way a small live twig or a bit of branch with leaves on it ("something growing, something green") to carry with her into her own community. She is greeted always by those left behind with the phrase, "May no one come to you with bad tidings."

Death is threatening to fertility. Someone who has just been to a funeral should not enter the room of a woman who has just given birth; people say that it will "block" (*kabs*) the new mother, either drying up her milk or preventing her from conceiving again. Once I saw an old woman returning from a funeral stand outside the courtyard of the house to wait for her daughter-in-law who had just had a baby to come out and greet her. Only then did she follow her back in.¹⁰ The dangers to fertility are also suggested by the refusal to let pregnant women help wash the corpse and such beliefs as that children who had died may, if they turn over on their faces in the grave, "block" their mothers from conceiving.

Life for Awlad ʿAli is also associated with sexuality, with its own close relationship to fertility.¹¹ This accounts for the strong opposition they draw between weddings and funerals. Weddings (*afrāh*), the word for which in Arabic also means celebration or happiness, are the epitome of joyous celebrations. What they celebrate is sexuality and fertility. It is considered an affront to hold weddings within the forty-day mourning period that follows the death even of someone in a neighbor's family.

Red is the color of fertility and sexuality, the color of the henna women and girls put on their hands on the eve of a wedding celebration, the color of the belt every married woman wears, the color of the blanket draped on the old bridal litter or the current bridal Peugeot, the color of the blanket draped on the tent to mark where a circumcision celebration (likened to weddings in a variety of ways) is taking place.¹² It is removed in mourning. When someone in her family dies, a woman replaces her red belt with a white rag. No one near a person in mourning can dye wool red. Women in mourning do not color their hair with henna, the old ones going gradually grayer as the months wear on.

The strict opposition between weddings and funerals is apparent in bedouin dream interpretations. Many consider dreams to be messages sent by God or the saints about the future. Their meanings are interpreted as the opposite of what they would be in ordinary waking life. For example, when a girl reported that she had dreamed of the government, her father's wife assured her that meant good

news. When a woman dreams of a funeral, people likewise say that is good. When she reports, however, that she has dreamed of a wedding, their faces darken and they tell her to be quiet. When she says she dreamed they were eating rice and meat (the traditional wedding feast) they interrupt her with phrases like, “God forbid evil” and “[God come] between you and me [and misfortune].” These everyday expressions always mark discussions of bad things.

SONGS OF LOSS

Although on one level, and in the most obvious sense, laments and songs, like death and life, can be treated as mirror opposites, in other important ways they are structural equivalents. Of all the discursive genres in this community, laments and songs sound most similar, even if people rigorously deny the similarity. The closeness is sometimes betrayed, as when a woman mimicking the lamenting of someone she did not like commented, “You’d think she was singing!” The songs of loss that women sing, often to themselves, outside the contexts of funerals or weddings, are especially close to funeral laments in sound and sentiment. Just as funeral laments ritually invoke a relationship of kinship, always beginning with phrases like “O my father,” or “O my brother,” these songs assert attachment to those who have gone, whether absent or deceased.

A sense of the range of sentiments these songs of loss express emerges from the songs one woman sang as she sat washing clothes, just after having been reminded of the recent death of her brother. He had been shot by a guard as he was trying to steal some machinery from a government store. She sang in a peculiar, deliberately quavering voice as the string of songs flowed from one theme to another. These songs of loss were laments of a different sort, ones that detailed the effects of her loss. The first suggests a wish that she were not so helpless in fighting the loss.

lū kān yā ^ʿ azīz il-yās	If only despair were human,
bnādam ndrīrūlu fzā ^c	my beloved, we could frighten it . . .

The second hints at the problems of knowing that her brother brought on his own death. After all, he was the one who was committing a robbery.

lū kān lī sabāb ^ʿ azzēt	Had I cause, I would have mourned
khaṭā ^ʿ azīz dārō bghāytu	but the beloved’s error he chose himself . . .

The third suggests that no one knows what grief she is experiencing.

juwwā l- ^ʿ agl shāṭat nār	Within the heart a fire blazed
kalātu wlā bān ḍayha	burning up but giving off no light . . .

Next she sang a song that expressed something rare—an anger at what God has willed in this case.

^ʿ tibī mā ^ʿ alē makhlūg	I blame no living creature
^ʿ al-Imōla illī rād hukkidhī	but the Lord who intended this . . .

Then she sang a song about what happens when she remembers him, a song I had heard years earlier from someone else who had recited it about a relative of his who also had been killed.

khṭūra ^ᶜalē ghaffāt Caught by a memory unawares
bakkā l-^ᶜēn fī wān iṭ-ṭarab bringing tears in the hour of pleasure . . .

Like the last one, the series of songs that followed described how terrible her sadness was by using one of the most common of the poetic conventions of sorrow, the image of weeping.

naṣrānī glīl id-dīn The Christian, for all his lack of faith,
shkēṭlu ^ᶜalē ḥālī bkā when told of my condition, cried . . .

khaṭar ^ᶜazīz thānī lēl Reminded of her loved one late at night
smurat nīn sāl wsāḏha she lay sleepless until her pillow ran with tears . . .

A final song suggests the tension between the quasi-religious virtue of “patience” and what she is going through—a tension that I will argue is important. She sings of the difficulty of accepting this fate.

zlūma ^ᶜalēh iṣ-ṣabr Patience is a tyranny
jarḥā jdīd mā zāl khāṭri for my heart so freshly wounded . . .

Only a few days later, the same woman sang another series of songs. The themes were similar but the vivid physical language was different.

yā ^ᶜazīz kusrī fik O loved one what you’ve broken in me
sittīn alf ^ᶜām wmā jabar sixty thousand years will not mend . . .

ḥaṭṭōk bēn yāshum wnār They shoved you between despair and fire
tammētī hafā yā kbēdtī you turned to ash my little heart . . .

showa twārfuk yā ^ᶜēn He took away those around you
il-yās fik mō dāyra shway O eyes, despair hasn’t been easy on you . . .

tamwiḥ dār mō sā^ᶜb ^ᶜalaya I could take distance
lū kān ghēr yās ^ᶜazīz anything but this final despair of him . . .

Where feelings about death are less complicated, as in the natural deaths of older people, one poignant theme is abandonment, being left with nothing. One woman who asked if she might recite a few songs about her situation included what she called a hymn to her mother and several others that she admitted were also about her mother, who had died a few years earlier. As we talked about the songs she said quietly of her mother, “She died, and I had no one but her. Now I’m all alone.” It did not matter that she had a husband and five children and her father often came to stay with them. Her songs were of empty places, black nights, and again, tears.

knissō gā^ᶜat l-awlāf They swept clean the loved ones’ threshing room
dharrōha wshālō tibnha scattering [the grain], carrying off even the straw . . .

khallō l-^ᶜagl kēf id-dār The heart was left like the camp,
illī rḥīlhā shāl wbṭal its nomad moved on, abandoned . . .

lēlat frāg ^ᶜazīz The night the beloved departed
zalmā ṭlis mā fiha gamar pitch darkness, no moon . . .

gbī ḥarām dam ^c il- ^c ēn	A pity, the eye's tears
kamal nađīḥ mā dār fāyda	spilled to no avail . . .
tiskībik khafā y ^c amīk	Weeping in secret will blind you
bki bṣōṭ ^c ālī khērlik	cry aloud, for your own sake . . .

RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

As expressions of deep attachment, laments and songs of loss share an uneasy relationship to Islamic piety. This is fundamental to understanding the meaning and social effects of Awlad ^cAli discourses on death. Evidence of the tension between these two genres and the ideals of religious faith abounds. For example, people often said that it was wrong (*ḥaram*) for women who had been on the pilgrimage to Mecca to lament. This may be an acknowledgment of hadiths condemning lamentation and extravagant shows of grief.¹³ I also heard that it was wrong for such women to sing at weddings, although their silences can be awkward. When one woman I knew refused to sing at her nephew's wedding because she had just returned from the pilgrimage, her cousins and sisters were offended. This religious discipline was taken to show a lack of feeling and an unwillingness to share in celebration. Whether any women who had been on the pilgrimage failed to lament at funerals I do not know. The problem was usually the reverse; such lamenting women would be restrained, by others seeking to calm them, with admonitions that it was wrong.

More generally, religious faith is spoken of as a counterpoint to laments and sometimes even to grieving. For example, a woman who was despondent and mourning "excessively" for her son was told by her sister-in-law to wash up and return to her religion. Her niece also told her to pull herself together and to ask God's forgiveness (*istaghfari!*). Her nephew sat with her and, taking her hand in his, asked her to repeat after him, "In the name of God the merciful and the compassionate" (the opening of any prayer). He then made her recite after him the *tawhīd* (the short verse from the Qur²an in which God's uniqueness and power are affirmed). Then he told her to ask God's forgiveness several times and to recite the profession of faith (*shahāda*) followed by other verses from the Qur²an.

The closeness to God and commitment to proper Islamic practice that concern the Meccan pilgrim or the pious person go along with a serious devotion to prayer and faith, to which a concern with this world and social ties should become subordinate. Most essential to faith is acceptance of God's will. Since all Muslims, including the Awlad ^cAli bedouin, hold that a person's time of death is determined in advance by God (some say written on his or her forehead), to wail and lament in grief might be seen as a kind of public defiance or protest against God's will. Bedouin men, who are considered more observant than women, are expected not to lament or sing. Even women must stop lamenting while the men pray over the corpse before burying it.

This opposition is expressed in other ways. There is some suggestion that there even can be a trade-off between lamenting a loved one and having special religious powers. This is illustrated by the story people told about how one particular woman from a saintly lineage became a healer.¹⁴ As her neighbors put it, she had

been an ordinary woman, just like them. Then one day when she was away visiting her maternal relatives, her ten-year-old son was hit by a car at dusk while walking with her.

In one version I heard, she was reported to have said that when she wanted to cry out two apparitions came before her, one with a beard (a sign of religiosity). He put his hand over her mouth and sprayed her with water to stop her from crying or lamenting the boy. After that, all she would say about the death was, "His life came from God." A year later she fell ill. They took her to doctors and local healers and finally to a *mrābiṭ* woman healer who diagnosed her as having been possessed by a saint. To cure herself, she should begin drumming and trancing to become a healer.

In another version a woman explained that after the woman's son was killed, she got sick and started going to doctors and going here and there but she didn't get better. Finally she went to a woman healer. And when she went to her—this after what? After she had gotten worn out from going to all the doctors—she talked about what had possessed her. He said [the saint possessing her], "I came to her because I was afraid for her. She would have gone mad if I had not. I have long forbidden her . . . to cry over her son." He said, "She should build me a tomb and make me a place." What he said, the woman told her to do. And she did it. Then when she started to hold trance sessions, the saint would come to her. Her voice becomes the voice of an old man.

In both versions, the saint prevented her from crying over or lamenting her son, and in the end she became a healer through whom God, via the saint, could work.

The lore about funerals among the pious saintly lineages helps clarify the tension between lamenting and Muslim piety as one between human attachments and faith. People said that at the funerals of certain families of those particularly saintly tribes known as the "*mrābtin* with blessings" (*mrābīṭin bil-bruka*), women are not supposed to lament. They are stopped from doing more than weeping silently, "crying tears," as women put it. Among the most religious of these families women are actually exhorted, "If you love the Prophet, ululate!" Drums are played, the same drums that put people in trances for curing. It is also said that the corpses of holy men dance as they are being carried toward the grave (in the manner of the saint's followers' trance dancing at ceremonies to honor the saint or to heal people). One of the manifestations of piety and God's grace for the saintly lineages is precisely the special ability and willingness they have to actually celebrate deaths as acts of God's will. Since the saints and holy people of these groups perform miracles mostly after death, it is also as if in death they come to life, but a life close to God.

The tension between the ideals of faith—especially as promulgated by the more educated religious authorities in Egyptian cities (rather than the local saintly lineages)—and traditional bedouin practices of lamenting and their interpretations is especially clear in talk about corpses. In excited tones one woman explained to her mother-in-law what she had heard in a religious program on the radio. The religious teacher, she said, had argued that it was wrong to mourn for someone who dies. But he also talked about cases in which the corpse makes himself heavy and hard to carry and stubbornly refuses to head toward the grave. She said, "You know how we say he's worried about those he's leaving behind—that he doesn't

want to part from them? Well, the radio says not at all!” According to the religious authority on the radio, such a person is actually afraid of his deeds; he sees the angels before him and is afraid to go. He who has lived a good life and only done good deeds is not afraid to go to the grave.¹⁵

The official language of learned Islam thus speaks of eschatology; the bedouin discourse on corpses is about the bonds between people, usually close relatives. For example, when an old neighbor, a pitiful man who had been blind half his life and partially paralyzed for the past year, died, I and all the younger members of our large household watched from afar as the men of our community carried his shroud-covered body toward the cemetery. Several people pointed out that his little granddaughter could be seen running underneath the bier. This eleven-year-old had been his most constant companion in the past months, bringing him his cigarettes and food and even holding cups of water to his lips so he could drink. A woman who had been there when the pall bearers had first tried to pick up the corpse later explained what the girl was doing there. She reported that the corpse had at first refused to go forward, circling around and around. The little girl was crying because she was not to be allowed to accompany the men. Only when her father took her hand in his did the corpse let them move forward in the direction of the cemetery. “He [her grandfather] was waiting for her,” she commented.

Stories like this work to reaffirm the bonds between the deceased and those close to him or her in life; the laments themselves reinforce the nature of this bond as one of kinship. Though they vary in the wording of the second half, the opening words of a lament are always the same. A woman chants, *yāna* (which means something like “Oh me” or “Woe is me”), followed by a possessive kinship term like *yā būya nā* (O my father), *yā yummi nā* (O my mother), or *yā wlad khūya nā* (O son of my brother). In discussing funerals, women report what other women have chanted in their laments, often seeming moved by the very way the relationship is invoked—as, for instance, “O my father’s son.”

Not everyone who laments, of course, is a relative of the deceased. But even in these cases kinship is stressed because the lamenter instead invokes the closest member of her own immediate family who has died, usually a father. As I have written elsewhere, one woman explained this unusual behavior by saying, “Do you think you cry over the dead person? No, you cry for yourself, for those who have died in your life.” This interpretation is corroborated by another incident: commenting on how much I had cried at her brother’s funeral, the old matriarch of our community marveled, “And your loved ones are still alive!” I also argued that this invocation of one’s own relatives may enable people paying condolences to share grief by reexperiencing, in the company of those currently bereaved, their own grief over the death of a loved one.¹⁶

No one laments alone. But the community that lamenting, as a practice and a verbal genre, creates and affirms is one of particular relationships between pairs: pairs of mourners and pairs of living and dead. Insofar as these specific attachments may be seen as competing with an individual’s attachment to God, and the wider community feeling that being fellow Muslims should generate, it makes sense that lamenting would be considered religiously wrong.

It seems plausible to suggest that this opposition set up between laments and piety inflects the meaning of lamenting so as to intensify its message. When a woman laments, sings songs of loss, or throws dirt on her head, people must interpret that as an assertion that the massiveness of her grief has overwhelmed her ability or desire to maintain the ideals of faith—to worship God and accept His will—that are so central to definitions of the good person, male or female, in Awlad ʿAli society. Lamenting should not, however, be read only as a personal expression with consequences for evaluating the individual women who lament. As I will discuss later, as a gendered discourse it is powerfully implicated in the reproduction of gender hierarchy in bedouin society.

NARRATIVES OF DEATH

Women lament and wail during the confined period of the few days, and sometimes weeks, immediately following a death. They occasionally sing to themselves. Much more often, however, they talk about the particular death—at the site of the funeral after they finish lamenting, after they return to their homes and communities, and whenever they see someone who wants to talk about it or find out more. The narratives of death they recount, like most of their narratives, are dramatic. I tape-recorded five discussions among women following the death of a young man of some concern to the community; an analysis of these can provide further insight into the social meaning of lamenting and the place of Muslim discourse in Awlad ʿAli responses to death. The women's narratives were structured by four themes: details of the death; how the narrator and/or the woman most affected by the death first learned of it; how people reacted; and finally, how the death can be explained.

The Details

All deaths are different and few deaths ever welcome. This one was especially tragic because it involved a young man of about twenty who was accidentally killed by a ricocheting bullet from a gun fired by his first cousin at another cousin's wedding. The young man was dancing at the time, just outside the room where the groom had gone in to his bride. Men often fire guns into the air at celebrations, just as women ululate. At weddings this happens at the arrival of the bride from her family's household, at the arrival of the groom, and at the jubilant moment just after the successful defloration. Unfortunately, in this case the wedding was being held in a house and there was a cement pillar in the courtyard. The bullet bounced off it, striking the young man in the neck.

The specifics of the accident formed a central part of the women's narratives. The stories were full of details about what happened, what the young man was doing at the time (dancing with his arm around another young man in front of the bride's room), how the bullet struck him in the neck, how he reacted (like a slaughtered animal he ran toward the men's wedding tent and fell in front of them, leaving a flowing stream of blood behind him), who held him, how they transported him to a doctor in a nearby town who referred them to a hospital in Alexandria but then informed the

authorities, how the hospital had probably cut him up and taken his organs, what the reactions in his community were, and so forth. Again and again, women remarked on the terrible reversal of a wedding that had turned into a funeral. One vivid image they called up was that of the wedding tents knocked to the ground.

From Ignorance to Discovery

It is perhaps the way death comes suddenly that makes it so terrible at first. In focusing on the moment of discovery, the narratives capture the way death turns life upside down. Every narrative included some mention of how the person speaking, others whom the speaker and listener knew in common, or those family members most concerned (e.g., the mother, sister, or daughter of the deceased) found out about the death and what they did. This aspect of the narratives can be seen as providing commentary on the meaning of death and reflections on personal attachments.

There is often a lag between the time nonfamily members know of a death and the moment they break the news to the female relative. When the woman whose songs were discussed above lost her brother (the man killed stealing machinery), the news spread quickly within the community. I heard about it in one household and rushed home to my own to find that the bereaved woman's sister-in-law knew, as did her husband and his brother. Yet the men determined that she should not be told that night. We spent a long, uneasy evening, the adolescent girls worrying that later she would ask them, "How could you sit and laugh with me when you knew my brother had died?"

Early the next morning, her husband hired a car to take her home. Only then did they tell her. Her response was immediate—shrieking and wailing and tearing her head scarf as we all tried to restrain her and calm her down enough to gather together a few things to take with her on the trip. It was a terrible moment and I sensed that everyone in the household was as shaken as I was. When I asked her mother-in-law why they did not inform women right away, she asked, "What could they do at night? They wouldn't be able to take her right away." Often they would tell a woman only that the person was ill.

In the narratives of the accidental shooting at the wedding, much of the dramatic tension came from the disparity between what people knew and the sister's ignorance of the death of her brother. The day after the shooting, one of her sisters-in-law recounted:

I thought she had already gone [to the wedding]—it didn't occur to me that she hadn't. I knew only that the invitations that had come said the wedding was Thursday, today, and that yesterday was the evening celebration. The women had gotten all the stuff to take—syrup drinks and all. . . . Each of them had her stuff and was planning to go to the evening celebration. They were waiting for H., waiting for him to wake up so he could take them.

The women could hardly believe the car was finally going! . . . They came by our house to pick me up. They said to my girl, "Has your mother gone?" She said, "Yes, she left with my uncle." They said to the poor woman, "Hey! She beat you to it. She got to your family's wedding before you did!"

She laughed softly at the irony as she repeated this phrase about the woman's envy. Then she confided that the man driving had informed his mother-in-law and

his wife, both riding in the cab of the truck with him, about the death. But the women riding in the back of the pickup truck did not know. She continued,

When they got close, he headed away from the house of the wedding party. When he went the other way, your Aunt N. said, "What's this, Uncle? Why are you avoiding the wedding?" She turned her head like this and lifted it and then she saw the tents knocked down. She started wailing, "Misfortune! Misfortune! . . . What's the trouble? What's happened to them? What's happened to them?" Someone who saw her from the doorway said, "Your brother is dead! May it only happen to enemies." She jumped down and hit the door and tore her clothes.

The woman's mother-in-law told another version of her discovery of the death. This stressed the drama of reversed fortunes.

The women were ready to go to the wedding. They were dressed up and wearing their gold. The boy came to H. and told him that there had been a fight in N.'s family and that one of them shot another and killed him. H. said to his wife, "Where do you think you women are going—taking candy and fruit drink and cookies? They say that N.'s family have fought amongst themselves but I don't know exactly. You want to go to the wedding? Well, there is no wedding." His wife said to him, "We'll go whether or not there is a wedding."

N. was wearing her gold, though, ready for the wedding and when they got there she said "Hey, we've passed the wedding party! They're the ones toward the east. Why have we passed them? Why are you going the other way?" He said to her, "Misfortune." . . . They told her, "Your brother M. is the one who's been killed." Oh black night! What a night!

The woman herself had her own narrative of discovery, more detailed and different from theirs in a key element: she stressed that she had had premonitions of misfortune. What she told her sister-in-law and other women can be read as an affirmation of her closeness to her brother. She was agitated as she told it.

Myself, when I came, may it only happen to enemies, my eyes—I still feel there is a fog over them. I can't see with them and I throw up all the time. When I got there I said, "Hey Uncle! Why aren't we stopping at the family's?" From that moment, I tell you, the torrent that flowed in front of my other brother! . . . "The whole world [knew]?" I asked. "The man was shot at ten o'clock in the morning and no one came to get me? . . . Not a single man comes by?"

In her narrative, the woman explained how others had delayed her from going to her family's to attend the wedding. It was a hot day and after she bathed, her daughter asked her what was the matter—why had she put on a dark dress? She continued:

I said, "Sister—from the day I buried my father I don't really feel them, weddings." I just said this. And I had wrapped an old kerchief around my waist. . . . I wore an old rag! I'd never done it before for a wedding. And my dress, dark and down to here, with a big print . . . From the day I buried my father I haven't worn a red dress. And then S. said to me, "Take off that rag! Take it off! What's the matter with you?" "Take it off," she said, chasing after me. I said, "I won't take it off. I feel, I don't feel well. . . ."

As if to suggest a premonition, she described what happened as she walked to her neighbors' to catch a ride:

Suddenly it was as if there was something in my legs. And I couldn't see. Something carried me. A little later I was sitting at your aunt's and they came to me and looked at me. They asked, "What's the matter with you? Why are you wearing that bit of rag?" I said, "The world is empty. I don't feel well." I hadn't eaten and I hadn't drunk. I just said that, just like that.

Since replacing the red belt with a white or light kerchief is one of the signs of mourning, and wearing less colorful dresses also suggests a refusal to celebrate things, her narrative suggested that she had sensed that something was wrong. The effect of this was to attest to her listeners her closeness to her family, despite the distance marriage created for her and her actual ignorance of what had occurred in her family's midst. Thus, while the other women's narratives of discovery stressed the suddenness of knowledge and the way death turns life horribly upside down, hers stressed the attachment to family and played down the ignorance.

How Much They Did!

A third theme in these narratives is the description and evaluation of what in particular other women did and said at the funeral or the period of mourning immediately following. Even men's reactions were discussed, although in less detail. By approvingly or disapprovingly evaluating reactions, the narratives at once reinforce the conventional practices of grief as appropriate and, even more important, reproduce the bonds between community members that kinship is believed to generate. They do so by differentiating between those who react to the loss and those who do not. One of the people who provoked interest was the young man who had fired the shot at this wedding-turned-funeral. One woman commented that the whole family was in bad shape. Another added that death would be better than knowing you had killed your own cousin. A third confirmed, "He was cutting his face and tearing his hair and his cheeks."

Mostly women discussed the women who were there, what they were wearing, how they addressed their laments, and what else they did to mourn. There was something judgmental in these comments. Those who were discussed disapprovingly were those who showed none of the signs of mourning. For example, one long interchange included the following kinds of remarks: "Didn't you see so-and-so's women? Thieves. Those in-laws—not a headscarf tossed, no eye-makeup (*kuhl*) removed, and the bangs across their foreheads came down to here!" "Not a tear came out of her, God be praised!" (This is an expression of wonder or surprise.) "She was wearing a gold brooch on her chest, I swear by Saint Dmayn—a huge yellow button, gold, from here to there across her chest. What rot! Her kids are almost as old as we are!" "A thief, she didn't get up to greet anyone, didn't wail, didn't lament, didn't raise her voice." Those mentioned with approval were those about whom they could say, "How much she did!" (*yāma dārat*). To "do much" includes wailing, lamenting, tearing one's clothing, scratching one's cheeks, and throwing dirt over one's head. These are the conventional gestures of mourning, the recognizable practices of grief.

The person whose reactions were most often discussed in the narratives I taped was the young woman from our own community who had married the young man's brother. For example, her aunt reported,

Our little B., she threw off her necklace, she wanted to die. She was trying to bury herself, she wanted to die. And she'd say, "He was kind to my little daughters, he was kind to my little daughters. He was so loving with them." She really lamented.

In another version, a different aunt asked where the young woman had been when they arrived at the funeral. Her cousin answered, "She was putting dirt on her head, putting dirt on her head. I told her 'Enough! Your children are crying.' I

put her headscarf back on. I told her, "There are lots besides you who are throwing dirt." Another woman interjected, "She wanted to die herself, poor thing."

Making Sense

The fourth and most elaborate theme of the narratives was how to make sense of the death. What is remarkable about much of what the women discussed amongst themselves and many of the details they chose to report is how inconsistent their explanations were. The women's substories and commentaries implied, on the one hand, that blame for the death could be traced to human decisions or actions, and on the other, that all that happens, especially death, is God's will. In the structure of the narratives, the religious discourse seemed to have the last word, putting a kind of temporary stop to speculations about responsibility in the same way that religious discourse was used, as I described earlier, to put a stop to laments.

In the course of the particular narratives of the death I have analyzed, women criticized a number of participants, thereby implicitly suggesting their responsibility for the death. On the most practical level, the stupidity of firing a gun anywhere near a house was the subject of a couple of heated exchanges. Another small whispered conversation criticized the whole family as a bad family where people were always getting into fights. Most of the critical discussion, however, centered on the wedding at which the boy was shot. The effect was to suggest that the wedding had been ill-fated from the start. Wednesdays, it was remarked, were not auspicious days for weddings. Some women criticized the family for suddenly holding the wedding a day earlier than planned and for not, therefore, having the proper evening of prewedding celebration. This was unheard of, and the deviation from accepted practice was condemned. Two other stories about the wedding were repeated, often in hushed tones of condemnation. The first was the story of the angry fit the old woman, mother of the groom, had thrown when the men setting off to fetch the bride said there was no room for her daughter in the cars. She was reported to have shouted, "She's your aunt, she's your aunt. If she doesn't go I'll shit on the cars. Your aunt!" She started throwing dust and wailing. Finally she fainted, frightening everyone. I sensed they thought it was inauspicious to have such negative goings on at a wedding since some women muttered, "If only she'd been the one to die."

The second story concerned what had happened a couple of weeks earlier when the engagement had been decided. A young man who had hoped to marry the bride, and was actually a cousin, was devastated when her family agreed to give her in marriage to a closer cousin who had claimed her. Women described how he had been throwing dirt on himself since he heard the news. His mother too, it was reported in another conversation, had wailed because she wanted the girl for her son. She wailed, as one woman put it, "until her liver wore out" (the liver is used metaphorically the way we use the heart). A final comment on this, by the woman whose brother had been killed, was "If only they'd given her to them." Was she implying that none of this would have happened if they had?

The final form of human agency occasionally put forth as an explanation of the tragedy was "the eye"—the eye of envy that falls on those with good fortune or new things. One woman said explicitly about the boy's mother, "She said it was the eye—the eye that shot him. The wedding tents were so beautiful!" Later in the

conversation two women interrupted each other with praise for the tents. "Hey what tents they were!" "Whose tent was the old one? It was beautiful." "She [the boy's mother] had made it herself. I swear by Saint Dmayn an eye fell on it." Another day, the same woman said, as she explained to me what was meant by "the eye," "It's like what happened to those people." As if it were obvious she said, "Didn't a wedding turn into a funeral?"

The various forms of blame, however, were put to rest by another kind of explanation often raised just at the end of one of these narrative episodes. This interpretation invoked God's will and seemed to bring closure to a discussion. Women often ended conversations with comments like, "everyone and his fate (*naṣīb*)," "his life span was short (*ʿumru gāsir*)," and "when a person's life is up." Sometimes, when women were describing decisions the family made (such as the decision to hold the wedding early), a listener would remark, "They said one thing and He [God] said another." Women reinforced this interpretation by telling stories about others who had scolded the mourners, "Be quiet, be quiet! Everything is by God's will!"

Along the same lines, certain stories seemed to take on significance either as premonitions of what was to come or as evidence that God works in strange ways to bring about what must come to pass. For example, some stories about what the young man had done in the last few days of his life seemed heavy with meaning. He was reported to have gone on several visits where he asked people to take his photograph. Another story seemed to confirm the belief that fate cannot be escaped. One woman reported on what a cousin had told her about how the young man had almost missed the wedding. On the morning of the wedding his older brother had told the young man to wait until he got back from delivering some people to the airport before going to the wedding. This was the boy's cousin's story. "The day of the wedding, we were watering the fig trees, he and I. Suddenly he said, 'Hey it's late, I'm not going to stay here. Hurry, hurry!' He ran off and left me behind. I was still watering the figs when. . . ." At this point another woman interrupted to add a detail. The boy had said, "I want to go help out at the wedding. By God I won't stay here!"

The women's narratives explored the various ways to make sense of a senseless death. Why did the people decide to have that particular wedding, why did they move it a day earlier, what made him go to the wedding when he might easily have missed it? There seemed so many ways that the death might have been avoided—but the fact was that the young man did attend, they did fire the gun in the courtyard, and he was killed. That killings can occur unintentionally or by mistake is recognized; there was no talk of revenge. But that death could be an accident, a matter of chance, was not part of the discourse. People could act badly and in the end a person's time of death is God-given or "written." Death's universe of meaning for the Awlad ʿAli was defined in women's narratives by these two sorts of explanation.

CONCLUSION

What is the advantage of approaching Awlad ʿAli laments, as I have, by way of the multiple genres of talk about death? It could be argued that one obvious advantage of the method is that in covering the range of responses to death one is

approximating more closely the experiences of the individuals involved.¹⁷ After all, they move from one context to another and produce a variety of forms of talk from highly formalized funeral laments and ritual wailing to everyday discussions. Yet greater inclusiveness does not guarantee insight.

I have argued that what we actually gain through this method is the capacity to grasp the complex ways in which juxtaposed discourses on death in a Muslim community work to give each other special meaning. In particular, I have been concerned with the place of explicitly Islamic discourses and practices. Elsewhere I explored why the contradictory bedouin discourses of poetry and ordinary language, in which people voice radically different sentiments about interpersonal relations, had to be understood in terms of each other.¹⁸ Each discourse marked a particular kind of social context—one public and the other more intimate (and involving equals). But each discourse also made sense only in terms of a dialectic between acceptance of the official ideology of honor and modesty (the basis of the Awlad ʿAli moral system which justifies a particular configuration of power), and resistance to it by the women and young men least served by it.

I analyzed, in one case of death, the contrast between the family members' vulnerability, as conveyed in songs of loss, and the anger and revenge they expressed in ordinary public discourse.¹⁹ I argued that the anger that was a perfect demonstration of adherence to the ideals of honor (including independence and refusal to be dominated) may have been given even greater weight by being juxtaposed with the sadness expressed in the private poems. The very ability to overcome the vulnerability revealed in poetry in order to achieve the ideals of honor in everyday life enhanced honor by showing it to be voluntarily sought and hard to achieve.

In the material on the discourses of death presented in this article, a similar contradiction was shown to exist: between the laments and other generally sad songs of loss, on the one hand, and the apportionings of blame that were such a regular feature of the narratives about the death, on the other. However, ordinary language conversation, which in my earlier analysis of Awlad ʿAli social life I had treated as relatively undifferentiated, turned out to be quite complex. When I began to look carefully at the ways people talked about death, the crucial role of one new element—religious faith—became apparent. Like the discourse of honor, religious discourse is in tension with laments and songs. Most importantly, it opposes acceptance of God's will to the human attachments, especially between kin, that the laments and songs commemorate. Faith in God for the Muslim Awlad ʿAli had to be seen, for men and women, as another moral register in which to read people's practices.

This construction of Islam's place has two consequences. First, it enables lamenting to become a special sort of statement about the meaning of death. When women lament and wail, knowing all the while that people talk about how the pious accept God's will, how Meccan pilgrims remain silent, and how saintly lineages celebrate at funerals, they suggest to those around them that death is so terrible that it prevents them from maintaining faith. It is interesting that another of the things women do in grief is to tear their clothes and go out unveiled in front of men. This is a transgression of the modesty essential to moral standing. Bereavement, they assert through such practices in a field of meaning defined by the differences between faith, independence, and attachment, makes you forget both

God and honor. This is not to say that they do forget God and honor but rather that their actions can serve as a general commentary on the power of death.

Second, this configuration makes people's responses to death significant for their social standing. This is where the gendering of the discourses of death becomes significant. Like the code of honor, religious faith provides for the *Awlad ʿAli* *bedouins* a principle of social differentiation, a standard by which people can be ranked. Some social groups benefit from the ways these principles compete. Among *Awlad ʿAli* men, for example, there is a widespread recognition that pride and tribal loyalty, the two defining characteristics of the honorable "free tribes," go against Islamic ideals of community and equality. This gives the saintly lineages, who are peaceful and pious, some sort of edge. In enacting their greater religiosity through celebrating deaths, these lineages compel members of the "free tribes" to respect them.²⁰ Through such enactments of piety they offset some of the negative effects of their inability (because of their economic and political dependence) to enact the ideals of independent action that justify the authority of the honorable.

In gender relations, however, the two systems of moral differentiation seem to be working in tandem. Women, by lamenting, singing songs of loss, and emphasizing in their stories the intensity of their reactions to loss and their personal involvements in mourning, simultaneously assert the weakness of their faith and the greatness of their vulnerability and attachment to others. It is tempting to treat these women's moving discourses on death as counterdiscourses that affirm the positive value of human ties and resist the imposition of either the honorable ideals of autonomy or the pious ideals of acceptance of loss. The problem is that women also invoke the other discourses; expressions of Muslim piety, references to God's will, recitation of the profession of faith, and participation in the preparation of the corpse (when female) are not the monopoly of men.²¹ *Awlad ʿAli* women cannot be considered less committed to being Muslim, more ignorant of Islam, not fully "Islamized," or sheltered preservers of pre-Islamic survivals. They value Muslim identity and piety as much as men do. Precisely because men and women in this community participate in producing for themselves a single, if complex, moral universe, the traditionally gendered rituals of mourning—where women lament the people they have lost and men instead invoke God's will as they tell each other "Pull yourself together" and pray over the body—become an important means by which women publicly enact their own moral, and ultimately social, inferiority.

These conclusions suggest that those studying Muslim societies who are interested in understanding the place of Islam in the everyday lives of particular communities should proceed by attending to where recognizable and acknowledged Muslim religious discourses fit in the universe of discourses and practices of a given community and by asking how these articulate with the organization of social hierarchies and solidarities.

NOTES

Author's note: An early version of this paper was presented at the conference on "Lament" at the University of Texas at Austin, April 1989. I am grateful to Steven Feld, the organizer, and to the other conference participants for questions that helped me reformulate the central arguments of the paper. I

also thank the anonymous reviewers for IJMES and Nadia Abu-Zahra for their suggestions. The translations of the songs of loss would have been more wooden without Timothy Mitchell's good suggestions. Transcriptions of these songs as well as all phrases and Arabic words approximate the Awlad 'Ali dialect. A Fulbright Award under the Islamic Civilization Program enabled me to complete in 1987 much of the research in Egypt on which this paper is based.

¹For a description of a funeral, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986), 21.

²For exceptions see Nadia Abu-Zahra, "The Comparative Study of Muslim Societies and Islamic Rituals," *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies* 3–4 (December 1991): 7–38; Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1842), 474; Elizabeth Wickett, "For Our Destinies: The Funerary Laments of Upper Egypt" (Ph.D. diss. in progress, University of Pennsylvania). By contrast, the literature on laments in Greece is substantial, including the classic by Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, 1974) and more recently, Anna Caraveli, "The Bitter Wounding: The Lament as Social Protest in Rural Greece," in *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, ed. Jill Dubisch (Princeton, N.J., 1986), 169–94; Loring Danforth and Alexander Tsiraras, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton, N.J., 1982); C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word* (Chicago, 1991).

³The literature on these issues is vast. For recent discussions, see Nadia Abu-Zahra, "The Comparative Study of Muslim Societies" and "The Rain Rituals as Rites of Spiritual Passage," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 20 (1988): 507–29; Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World* (Princeton, N.J., 1989); Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" (Washington, D.C., 1986); Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits* (Madison, Wisc., 1990); Ladislav Holy, "Gender and Ritual in an Islamic Society: The Berti of Darfur," *Man*, n.s., 23 (September 1988): 469–87; Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper, "The Birth of the Prophet: Ritual and Gender in Turkish Islam," *Man*, n.s., 22 (March 1987): 69–92. For a review of some earlier literature on the anthropology of Islam, see also Lila Abu-Lughod, "Anthropology's Orient," in *Theory, Politics, and the Arab World: Critical Responses*, ed. Hisham Sharabi (New York, 1990), 81–131.

⁴See Abu-Zahra, "The Comparative Study of Muslim Societies" for discussion of burial practices in urban Egypt and rural Tunisia.

⁵Caraveli, "The Bitter Wounding," 185, notes a similar antagonism between the church and women's lamentation in Greece.

⁶Good examples are Michael Gilson, *Recognizing Islam* (New York, 1982); William Roff, ed., *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989). But see Abu-Zahra, "The Comparative Study of Muslim Societies" and "The Rain Rituals," for criticism of anthropologists' lack of familiarity with the Islamic textual traditions that inform many local practices and Asad's, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," for a criticism of anthropologists' tendencies to exaggerate local differences and to deny any universality to Islam by failing to acknowledge a common discursive tradition involving reference to the founding texts of the Qur'an and sunna.

⁷For evidence of the gendered nature of death rituals in an agricultural community in Egypt, see El-Sayed El-Aswad, "Death Rituals in Rural Egyptian Society: A Symbolic Study," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, 16 (1987): 205–41.

⁸Abu-Lughod, cf. *Veiled Sentiments*.

⁹For a more complex, subtle, and profoundly evocative reflection on the symbolism of life and death in a Moroccan community, see Stefania Pandolfo, "'The Angel of Death Replied': Absence and Longing in a Moroccan Space" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1991).

¹⁰See Winifred Blackman, *The Fellāḥin of Upper Egypt* (London, 1927), 121, for a report of a similar belief in Upper Egypt.

¹¹See Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, chap. 4, for a discussion of this relationship between sexuality and fertility.

¹²On the relationship between weddings and circumcisions, see Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 136; Vincent Crapanzano, "Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society*, Vol. 9, ed. W. Muensterberger and L. B. Boyer (New York, 1980).

¹³Abu-Zahra has explored the social development (in Cairo and the Sahel of Tunisia) of the hadiths that condemn lamentation as *makrūh* (disliked) but not *ḥarām* (forbidden) in her "The Comparative Study of Muslim Societies."

¹⁴The place of saintly lineages, collectively known in the western desert as the *mrābīn* is complex. They are clients (euphemistically called “brothers”) of particular Awlad ‘Ali tribes; at the same time, many of them are considered religious figures. All of the holy men whose shrines dot the western desert come from these groups. Healers who work by trancing at a *ḥaḍra* come only from these tribes. See Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*; Michael Meeker, *Literature and Violence in North Arabia* (Cambridge, 1979); Emrys Peters, *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica* (Cambridge, 1990).

¹⁵The refusals of corpses to let themselves be carried to the grave was also reported by Blackman, *The Fellāḥin of Upper Egypt*, 113, who was given a similar explanation.

¹⁶Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 67–69.

¹⁷The question of personal experience is especially thorny because of the problems of “authenticity” raised by the conventionality of laments, formulaic songs, and even the structure and content of everyday narratives. I argue in “Shifting Politics in Bedouin Love Poetry,” in *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, ed. Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod (New York, 1990), 24–45, for a strategy of analyzing discourses of sentiment as they are pragmatically deployed in social interactions rather than as reflections of inner states. Catherine Lutz and I show in “Introduction: Emotion, Discourse, and the Politics of Everyday Life” (*ibid.*, 1–23) how modern western ideologies of emotion as natural and individual make the conventionality of sentiment trigger charges of artifice or inauthenticity.

¹⁸Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, chap. 8.

¹⁹Lila Abu-Lughod, “Honor and the Sentiments of Loss in a Bedouin Society,” *American Ethnologist* 12 (1985): 245–61.

²⁰I show in *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), chap. 5, how their religious status is currently undergoing change due to greater influence of urban Islamists who condemn many of their religious practices.

²¹I am grateful to Nadia Abu-Zahra (personal communication) for drawing my attention to women's participation in burial practices.