

An ethnography of an iraqi village assignment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

You are Fatima, a middle-aged, middle-class woman in El Naira, Iraq in 1954. You have met an American woman for the first time in your life, and have come to know her pretty well. But you just cannot understand how she can be happy. Miming according to the American customs she has described to you. Construct Fatima's argument for why the customs of Iraq, especially as they relate to gender roles and gender relationships, are vastly superior to those of the United States. It is difficult for Fatima to comprehend the American way of Miming especially from a woman's perspective.

She sincerely believes that her way is better. For an Arabic woman, particularly in the rural Iraq in Sass's, marriage is the only goal and accomplishment. The husband takes care of a woman and her children, so she doesn't need to work outside of the house. In return, she will be a hard-working devoted mother and wife, a good cook and housekeeper, and a quiet, obedient companion to her husband (p. 56). She also wouldn't even imagine "a horrible fate" of being married to a stranger and "sent to live away from the family" (p. 158).

In this culture, the ideal husband would be a father's brother's son: someone she would know since her childhood. Then, there is a question of beveling herself. In this society, a woman's sexuality is considered a danger to herself and a whole community. So, a baby is seen not as an enforced item, but as a protection. It also helps to preserve family honor. The woman's fidelity doesn't only determine her own fate, but affects the whole family. Her siblings might not be able to get married; even business might get affected and the family will become outcasts.

Then, Fatima doesn't understand why a man cannot take several wives in the American society. According to her view, if a man decides to marry another woman, instead of divorcing the first wife he will just marry the second one as well, still providing for the first wife and her children while, ideally, treating them equally. And nothing can be worse than a divorced woman. So, this way is "better for a woman." Also, Fatima wouldn't understand why Elizabeth does not have much gold since gold is the only insurance a woman has in a case she gets divorced.

Otherwise, it leaves a woman with no means for existence. Also, these women had a different point of view in regards to the sexual life. They learn to love and be passionate about their husbands. Passion is important to them since they don't spend much time with their husbands otherwise. That was probably not the case with most American women in the past when husbands and wives didn't even share a bed. And, finally, Fatima is shocked to learn that some older women in American culture get sent to the retirement centers away from their families (p. 185).

First of all, lives of Iraqi women are centered on their womenfolk. Fatima feels sorry that Elizabeth is so far from her mother and all on her own in a foreign country. And then, the older age is off and respect as members of their children's households." (p. 185) Mothers pick wives for their sons. And, as in case of Laic's friend, they can really spoil lives of their daughters-in-law if they choose to. "In spite of the relative obscurity in which these women lived" they had an incredible influence on men, their husbands and especially their sons. (p. 6) So, Fatima genuinely feels sorry for Elizabeth with her inferior American customs. 2. Although veiling and the seclusion of

women are presently associated in Western minds with Islam, these phenomena were present in the Middle East centuries (probably millennia) before Islam gave them new meaning. Explain some of the NONRELIGIOUS reasons that veiling and seclusion of women could develop in the area. Why did veiling and seclusion NOT develop among the (protection) Gung? NOTE: climate is not an issue (it gets to be 120 degrees in El Naira in the summer); property and subsistence are.

As we learn from the book, El Naira is predominantly an agricultural society. Most of the fellatio work on the tribal lands (at least until the soil started becoming socialize). And agriculture is predominantly male labor. Men toil in the fields while women cook, clean and grow children at home. This is quite the opposite from the Gung society where women are responsible for almost 70% of the subsistence by collecting and gathering. First of all, Gung women enjoy relative freedom in planning their trips.

Second, they are the only ones responsible for distribution of what they have collected. This makes them more or less equal to men. And it will be almost impossible to gather food while wearing a veil or baby which has no hooks or buttons and has to be held in place by hands, elbows or even a chin. On the other hand, women of El Naira are most of the time impolitely depended on their men for sustenance. They spend almost all of their time inside their houses, waiting for their husbands to come home while taking care of the household.

Another reason would be the presence of property ownership. Most Gung can carry everything they own on themselves. It is some beads, tools, arrows and

pots, but not much else. In El Naira, people own land, houses, gold and other valuables. And this brings us to the difference between these two cultures: Gung calculate the folks their related to based on a kindred principle while El Naira live by the lineage one. And in engage principal, it is extremely important to preserve inheritance within the family. This means that the children should be definitely children of their father. And it's not the case with Kings. As we remember, NASA has a child which is not her husband's.) And how can you guarantee it better than restricting access of strange men altogether? Besides women's fidelity, there is also a question of inheritance. El Naira folks usually marry their first cousins, the father's brother's child, so the land wouldn't be divided and everything will stay in the family. Which brings us to the next question. 3. Explain the Brahmins problem in general terms. How does the Brahmins problem operate in El Naira?

Why is it particularly severe during the time described in Guests of the Sheik? There are at least two reasons. The term " Brahmins problem" originated in India and is connected to the women of the higher casts who are not been able to get married because they don't have a suitor. The same problem existed in the Middle East. The point is that a woman obtains status through marriage. So, Marrying her to someone of the lesser status would drop her own status as well as her family's. The only exception would be to marry someone much richer than her.

Or, as a solution, a family might adopt an orphan and later marry him to one of the daughters. In this book, the Brahmins problem is raised with the daughters of the sheiks brother, Mousse. He has 9 daughters and no sons. So, the first reason would be that, by chance, this particular generation had

more girls than boys. Another reason would be that all of the girls were supposed to marry their cousins. But at this period of time, most boys started going off to Baghdad to get an education. But there they had a chance to learn the new ways and didn't want a traditional marriage.

Instead, they wanted a wife to be not just a sexual partner but a companion as well; as a result, they wanted educated girls in spite of the stern objections from the sheik. So, one of the sheiks sons eloped with Salaam's sister thus leaving Fatima, who was intended for him, with no suitor. This situation brings along several problems. First, there is an issue of unassigned female sexuality which presents danger to society. There are no monasteries in the Muslim culture, so these women have to be somehow appropriated. And second, there is a question as to who will be providing for them.

Initially, her father will do it at first, but, naturally, he will probably die before her. Then it might become her brother's responsibility. But her brother will have his own wife and children to take care of. And if a woman is of a high enough status, she can't even work since that is considered below her (except perhaps as mullah). So, as solution, these women might enter into polyclinic marriages even though it won't be their first choice. Also, as an alternative, they might find work as Mousse's daughter did. For example, Leila is a seamstress and her sister wants to become a teacher.