

Guests of the sheik
by elizabeth warnock
fernia essay sample



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In the book "Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village" by Elizabeth Warnock Fernia, (Fernia, 2008), a newly married woman describes what life was like for her while living in a tiny, tribal village in Iraq, for two years, where she assumed the dress and sheltered life of an Iraqi harem woman while waiting for her new husband to gather his information for his doctoral dissertation.

In the tribal villages, the people are always helpful and offer help, willingly for relatives. Elizabeth Warnock Fernia tells us. (Fernia, 2008) "The ancient practice of giving other special privileges to Sayids-plowing their land free, grinding their grain without payment-was less observed now than before. But, the Sayids still received alms on religious festivals, and Laila, the local seamstress, later told me she always sewed without charge for Mohammad's sister."

Polygamy is a normal and accepted way of life for the Iraqi men and women and they believe strongly in the relationship tradition that was passed down to them from their ancestors very unlike the customs of the women who live in America.

Elizabeth Warnock Fernia describes how the Iraqi Arab Islamic culture is so different from the American culture, where women are masked by long veils in order to fit in with the local conservative Islamic community. Prior to coming to El-Nahra, Elizabeth agrees to wear the abaya, a long black garment covering her whole body, whenever she goes out, to fit with the customs of Iraq at the time. She wants to try to understand life in an Islamic society where men more than often have more than one wife, and where

women have no part in public life. It would be a terrible shame for an Iraqi woman to be seen in public without her covering but the little girls aren't made to wear the veils, like their mothers and grandmothers.

The Sheik is essentially a tribal leader, and is the most respected person in the village by the Iraqi women, although their husbands are responsible for taking care of their families, financially and the women work very hard within the communities and due to a bad economy there are few jobs and there is not enough food for them or their children.

The people in the tribal villages live in mud huts with no indoor plumbing which is very inconvenient for the women, men and children who live in Iraq. Their living conditions would be unacceptable to most Americans who are not accustomed to living in such impoverished communities, where the men who reside in the tribal villages are treated like royalty by their women. The women routinely cook, clean and take care of their daily necessities which always include tending to their children, as well as pleasing their husbands which is always encouraged by tribal community members.

Middle Eastern life is different from our culture in many ways including the way women are perceived by men, as Mrs. Fernia tells us. Women in Iraqi tribal villages are treated like second class citizens. Many think that it is a great injustice to the Iraqi women when the Iraqi men treat them with little respect as they watch them wait on them hand and foot, a tradition looked down on, in American culture.

Religious beliefs and cultural concerns are very important to the Iraqi women and the constitution being proposed for Iraq clearly makes it possible for <https://assignbuster.com/guests-of-the-sheik-by-elizabeth-warnock-fernia-essay-sample/>

their people to remain faithful to their religion and traditions. Their influences and social values will be affected by the changes that are in progress for the Iraqi government's revision and time will tell just to what extent the Iraqi people will make the changes toward a better way of life for their tribal villages.

In order for Iraqi people to succeed, they must learn to live in harmony with each other. They will have to stop fighting each other over oil reserves and use it for their people's benefit of the nation. They will have to come together as a nation and look beyond their religious beliefs in order to become a united group of people working toward the same goal.

Maybe one day, women will be allowed to show their faces in public in the tribal communities and it will be possible with all the changes that are taking place in that nation but still today, the women living in Iraq still take side roads to avoid being seen in public, even while being fully covered in their abayas.

It would seem unreasonable to most of us, since people who live in America as Elizabeth Warnock Fernia explains how the women are repressed as she carefully observed how they were so unlike American women, who are so free in wearing little clothing whenever they please or speaking out against unfairness because of their gender. Today, we might raise the issue of whether the women were oppressed, and whether social customs should change. The women will most likely continue in their hiding their faces behind the veils and wearing their abayas, due to the long history of themselves and their ancestors wearing the garbs as an Iraqi tradition and

religious custom. The author shows tremendous contrast between Iraqi women and American women.

Iraqi prayer will always be important to the tribal communities and their religious beliefs have stood the test of time and shouldn't be altered during the many changes that will come for the Iraqi people, but some modern changes are beginning to blossom concerning certain Iraqi standards and traditions.

Changes for Iraq are sure to develop with the help of others, if they can be taught to make some major changes concerning the way their government was previously ran and accept ideas which will help them to further develop into a more modern society where women will be free to show their faces in public and be treated as equals.

Fernia, Elizabeth Warnock, (2008), *The Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village*, Anchor Publishers, p. 8