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honor and the sentiments of loss in a Bedouin society

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Şafiyya, a middle-aged Egyptian Bedouin woman, talked about her divorce from the man to whom she had been married for 20 years.

My youngest daughter was nursing in my arms when he left me. I was sick and tired. "The man" came up to me one afternoon as I sat by the oven. He said, "You're divorced." I said, "Thanks, that's just fine by me." I didn't want him. I don't want anything from him except to build me a house to live in with my son—a place where I can feel at home. I didn't care when he divorced me. I never liked him. He had taken another wife but that didn't bother me. I never fought with her. Why should I? These things don't bother us.

Yet two days later, when a conversation between Şafiyya and several other women in her household turned to the whereabouts of her ex-husband, away on a trip at the time, she suddenly recited the following short poem:¹

Memories stirred by mention of the beloved
should I release, I'd find myself flooded . . .

*khaṭarhā sirib ʿazīz
kef nashā nsil bih . . .*

The first time I had met her I had been with another young woman, an Egyptian university student. Şafiyya had asked if either of us was married. Both of us replied in the negative. She leaned over and advised us earnestly, "Don't ever get married. What would you want with marriage? Men are just sons of bitches. They do you no good." A few months after I had begun living in the community, I showed my taperecorder to a group of women for the first time. Some volunteered to sing, including Şafiyya. The song she offered was the following:

Oh eyes be strong
you cherish people and then they're gone . . .

*yā nzār dīrun ʿazm
tghāli ʿarab wyfārgū . . .*

Beginning with the observation that among the Awwlād ʿAlī Bedouins of the Egyptian Western Desert individuals respond to personal loss with two contradictory sets of sentiments, one expressed in ordinary language and public interactions and the other expressed in a form of poignant lyric poetry spontaneously recited in intimate contexts, this paper explores the significance of the coexistence of discrepant discourses on emotion for understanding the relationship between the self and cultural ideals. For Awwlād ʿAlī, like others in circum-Mediterranean societies, the cultural ideals are those entailed by the honor code. Analysis of the links between this code and the two discourses reveals the complexity of the relationship between cultural ideology and individual experience and its articulation. [self and emotion, ideology, honor code, poetry, Middle East Bedouins, loss]

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There was no doubt in the minds of all who subsequently heard this song on tape that it referred to her ex-husband.

The incongruity between what Şafiyya said in ordinary language and what she expressed in poetry was striking. In her ordinary statements, she alternated between denying concern about the loss of her husband and his rejection of her and expressing bitterness and anger. Yet both of her poems conveyed the impression of sadness. The tears connoted by images of flooding and the reference to eyes are indices of sadness and suffering. The warnings to herself about the consequences of letting go and the exhortation to her eyes to be strong suggest the vigilance and effort required to control this sadness.

Şafiyya's case was by no means unique. The incongruity between the sentiments² communicated in the poetic and mundane discourses seems to be characteristic of the expression of sentiment among the *ʿAḷī* Bedouins of the Egyptian Western Desert among whom I did fieldwork.³ The constellations of sentiments people expressed in the two discourses overlapped little. When confronted with personal loss, poor treatment, or neglect (among the most frequent elicitors of poetic responses in those with whom I lived), individuals usually expressed hostility, bitterness, and anger in their ordinary verbal and nonverbal statements. Alternatively, especially in matters of loss in love, which I discuss elsewhere,⁴ they professed indifference or denied concern. In their poems, however, they conveyed sentiments of devastating sadness, self-pity, and a sense of betrayal, and, in the case of love, deep attachment.

This coexistence of discrepant sentiments raises a number of intriguing questions which this paper seeks to answer. How is the fact that individuals express radically different sentiments in poetic and nonpoetic discourse to be understood? Is one discourse a more authentic expression of personal experience than the other? What is the significance of having two cultural discourses on loss available to individuals to articulate their experiences, and how are these related? LeVine (1982a:293) in arguing that "interpersonal communication is the medium through which we discover how individuals experience their lives and how cultural beliefs shape that experience," notes the difficulties presented by the fact that such communication takes place in multiple arenas and media, and that the messages may not be consistent. That poetry is a vital and expressive medium whose messages cannot be ignored in Arab Bedouin societies has been made clear by Meeker's (1979) brilliant and complex exposition of the relationship between *Rwala* Bedouin thought, values, and experience and their poetry.⁵

I will argue that consideration of the messages conveyed in the two discourses and the relationship between them reveals much about the "self" in Bedouin society and ultimately about the relationship between culture and individual experience. The obvious psychological interpretation of the phenomenon described above would be that individuals' psychological defenses against loss are expressed in ordinary discourse while the poetic discourse reveals their genuine inner responses. This interpretation ignores the embeddedness of emotional responses in cultural contexts which differentially value certain sentiments, a factor whose importance has been demonstrated in the recent work of interpretive and psychological anthropologists (see Geertz 1973; Lutz 1982; Riesman 1977; Rosaldo 1980, 1983). That for *ʿAḷī*, the distribution of types of sentiment in the two expressive forms follows a regular pattern, that the sentiments of the ordinary discourse have cultural meaning, and that the medium in which individuals express their "nondefensive" responses is a form of conventionalized poetry suggest that such interpersonal communications may be linked in another way which close analysis of content and context can uncover.

The *ʿAḷī* patterning of emotional expression can best be understood in terms of a set of culturally specific ideals. The ideals are those entailed by what could be called the honor code, the moral code that anthropologists have shown to be fundamental to social life in Mediterranean societies (see Bourdieu 1977; Friedrich 1977; Gilmore 1982; Meeker 1976; Peristiany 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1977) and on which the social order and hierarchy in Bedouin society

hinge. In the case of *Awlād ʿAlī*, only sentiments that create the impression of autonomy are appropriate to self-image and self-presentation in terms of the honor code. What analysts have failed to recognize is that the honor code structures individuals' aspirations and guides interactions only in certain social contexts, specifically in public interactions between non-intimates. In the culturally valued but formulaic medium of poetry, individuals can express to their intimates sentiments in response to loss which betray their vulnerability without forfeiting their claims to being honorable. This suggests that the ideology of honor, perhaps like any other cultural ideology, neither exists alone nor completely determines individual experience, a conclusion whose implications for the study of the relationship between culture and personality and culture and emotions are far-reaching.

The genre of *Awlād ʿAlī* poetry that will be considered here is the highly valued *ghinnāwa* or "little song." Reminiscent of Japanese haiku in its brevity and condensation of language, and the blues in its emotional tone, it can be classified as either poetry or song.⁶ Unlike longer rhymed poems, composed and recited primarily by specialists, most of whom are men, these poems can be composed and recited or sung by anyone. Individuals do so with varying frequency depending on their talents, their social circumstances, and the vicissitudes of their personal lives and interpersonal relationships. Most often, poems are recited in the midst of ordinary conversations between a small group of intimates, as in Šafīyya's case. They usually relate to the topic being discussed or the personal situation of the recitant and seem to serve as a commentary.⁷

Everyone shows great interest in the poems of others. They are anxious to hear them and listen intently whenever they are recited. They often commit them to memory. Special weight is attached to the messages conveyed in this medium and people are moved, often to tears, by the sentiments expressed. Comments of a number of individuals corroborate my observations that people turn to poetry when faced with personal difficulties. One person explained, "Those who sing feel something strongly in their hearts." An old woman remarked, "I sing when I feel depressed/frustrated (*mtdhayga*, literally, pressed in upon). An old man claimed, "I sing to soothe myself. Especially in times of trouble—that is when you sing."

To show how thoroughly the two discourses pervade social life and to illustrate the pattern of the distribution of sentiments, a few cases of responses to loss will be presented. The pattern revealed through these cases will then be analyzed in terms of the Bedouin ideology of honor and the social contexts of the discourses to suggest some answers to the questions posed above about the meaning of individual expressions of contrasting sentiments and the significance of having two discourses on loss.

sentiments of loss

A case of rejection in love illustrates the pattern of dual responses and introduces the tension between the ideals and emotional entailments of the honor code and the separate set for poetry. Rashīd, a man of about 40, decided to take a second wife. He reacted in two ways when, less than two months later, his bride ran away. Almost immediately after the woman fled, he looked for someone to blame. In the community, the question on everyone's lips was, "Who ruined her?" (*man kharrabhā*). By this they meant something like, who made her unhappy or poisoned her thoughts. Rashīd, along with his brother, undertook an intensive investigation of the events preceding her departure. When they had eliminated the possibility of some woman or child in the household having upset her, they began toying with the explanation of sorcery. Rashīd was convinced that his senior wife must be responsible. A visit to the local holyman (*fgīh*) to divine the reason behind the bride's act confirmed this suspicion. The hushed accusation sped through the community. In the face of the opposition of many of the women in the camp, the man

persisted in blaming his first wife. He angrily refused to talk to her or visit her. He slept alone in the men’s guestroom.

Rashīd’s kinsmen, who had taken matters into their own hands since they viewed this as a family crisis rather than a personal one, also reacted with anger. Although some suspected the senior wife and shunned her, others directed their anger at the bride. They took her flight as an insult to the lineage, and many echoed the sentiments of Rashīd’s paternal first cousin who defiantly sang a traditional wedding song to the effect that there were many more women where that one had come from. The men blustered, “if she doesn’t want us, she can just have her divorce, and we won’t even ask for the brideprice back.”

After some negotiation and pressure from her family, the bride agreed to return. A day or so later, I was talking privately with Rashīd. I asked him how he felt and he answered with a statement about how everything was all right because “the woman” knew that she had done something wrong. I then asked disingenuously if he ever recited poetry. He looked embarrassed, since I had mentioned something that was not appropriate in conversations between men and women, but offered the following poems on the assumption that I would not realize their significance.

Cooking with a liquid of tears
at a funeral done for the beloved . . .

Her bad deeds were wrongs that hurt
yet the beloved fills my heart . . .

blūḥum ghēr dmū^c
il-khāṭr^c azā dār fil-salam . . .

‘aziz dīli kḥā mā hān
sayyātha khata wāḡātnī . . .

Any doubts I harbored about whether these poems expressed his personal sentiments regarding the situation were put to rest a few days later. It was evening and Rashīd sat with his returned wife. He asked me to join them, requesting me to bring my notebook. He instructed me to read to them “the talk of the other day.” I realized he was referring to the poems he had recited for me. As I read them aloud, he seemed embarrassed and acted almost as if he had never heard them before. He looked blank when I asked him to explain them. The next day his wife confided that these poems were about her. He had used this indirect means to communicate his sentiments to her.

The poems revealed sentiments of grief and pain caused by the loss. These were a far cry from the sentiments of anger and the wish to attribute blame communicated by the sorcery accusations in which he had indulged publicly. When I shared these poems with some of my women confidantes, they were touched. Yet these were the same women who had condemned Rashīd as foolish or unmanly when he had earlier betrayed some sadness over his bride’s departure and had expressed his desire to have her back. Their differing attitudes towards statements made in poetry and those in ordinary interaction suggest that poetic revelations are judged by different criteria than nonpoetic expressions, a fact that will be taken up later.

The same dual pattern characterized Rashīd’s senior wife’s responses to the events of this marriage. Mabrūka responded angrily when she got wind of the allegations of sorcery. She threatened to return to her kinsmen and to demand a divorce. She also made bitter jokes. For instance, when she sent a special pot of food to one of the other women in her co-wife’s household, she sent it with a message warning them to beware—the food might have “something” in it, a reference to magical potions. She also joked about where she obtained her magic and how powerful it was. Two poems she recited later referred to this incident. The first indicated how wronged she felt by the accusation. The second conveyed her sense of isolation and loneliness in the community, since visiting is both essential to maintenance of social relationships and one of life’s great pleasures.

They slandered me then found me innocent
now the guilt must fall on them . . .
I could not make my visiting rounds
the married man’s house was full of suspicion . . .⁸

ithimū khāṭrī bagwāl
ṭala^c barā wdhnūb ākhadhū . . .
‘alēh mā gdirt njūl
tammāt birībtuh bēt il-ghanī . . .

A clearer illustration of the dual patterning of the expression of sentiment was her early reaction to the news of the marriage. Mabrūka's immediate response was to blame her brother-in-law for putting her husband up to the deed, and to be angry. She justified her anger in terms of the blame she placed on her brother-in-law, some material injustices, and violations of conventions in the way the marriage was being handled. For example, she refused to accept her wedding gifts because they were not identical to those given to the bride. A bone of contention was a pair of western-style sandals the bride had received while she had not been offered any shoes. She refused to attend the wedding because the new bride was not going to be brought into her household but would be set up in a house with her husband's brother and his wives. This was not customary procedure, as she pointed out to everyone. When I asked how she felt about the wedding, she remarked on these injustices and claimed that she was only angry because things were not being done correctly.

Shortly before the marriage took place, I was sitting with her and a group of her daughters and nieces, when, with an initial prompt from me, she began to recite poems, one after another. These indicated a rather different set of responses to the event and another emotional tone. The following sample, only a few of a long string, represents a range of sentiments she expressed that day. In the first, she described the sensation of being overwhelmed not just by anger but by "despair" (*yās*), the sentiment of extreme despondency that figures heavily in *ghinnāwas*.

Held fast by despair and rage
the vastness of my soul is cramped . . .⁹ *msāk yās wghēz*
barāh khātrī dhayyigibhun . . .

Another poem expressed her sense of abandonment through metaphors of nature:

Long shriveled from despair
are the roots that fed my soul . . . *shjirat khātrī min il-yās*
zamān māwta ʿurūghā . . .

In another she appealed to her absent husband for some consideration in response to all that she had given him. This poem made use of imagery of ships and harbors, which I was not able to carry into the translation:

I took upon myself your love
kindly make me a place to rest . . . *shahanit khātrī bghalāk*
bifūlak marāsī dirī . . .

Related to this was another suggesting she was being neglected in her suffering by someone who had the power to cure her. Her husband could have relieved her by paying attention to her and trying to please her.

They left me to suffer
wise ones, they had but withheld the cure . . . *tarāku ʿalē mashkāy*
ʿaggāl lū bghaw dāy māsakun . . .

These poetic responses to the prospect of her husband's second marriage expressed not so much the anger and blame of the refusals and her constant threats to leave, but misery and vulnerability.

There is one alternative to anger in cases of loss, namely a show of indifference or defensive denial of concern. This is particularly characteristic in matters of love, but also applies in the most trivial of loss situations. For example, long thick hair is one of women's most treasured assets and a mark of beauty in this culture. Its loss would thus not be insignificant. Someone observing a woman combing her hair might remark that she was losing a great deal of it, a common enough occurrence given women's generally poor health. She would probably respond with a phrase (*in shāllah mā yawwīh*) whose literal translation is "God willing it won't return," but whose idiomatic translation would be, "Good riddance" or "May it never come back." The same phrase greets a child who disobeys or who defiantly refuses to come when called. People also speak of misplaced objects and memories of past pleasures in the same way.

A show of indifference can be a sign of stoic acceptance of a situation over which an individual has little control. Separations represent the type of loss to which stoic acceptance is the rule. The poems of separation, however, were among the most numerous and poignant people sang. The poems expressed the sentiments of sadness and longing, and, through metaphors of illness, the effects of the loss. A few examples suggest the range. The following one implies that the natural world mirrors the dark inner state of the person left behind:

The night of the beloved's parting	<i>laylát frāg °aziz</i>
cloudcover, no stars and no moon . . .	<i>ghāt lā njūm wā gmar . . .</i>

Another describes through metaphors drawn from physiological experience the painful effects of separation. Blindness comes from excessive weeping.

Separation from intimates is hard	<i>frāg ish-shgīg sa°ib</i>
the heart weakens and the eye goes blind . . .	<i>il-galb sāf wil-°ēn ghāwanat . . .</i>

A third alludes directly to the effort to be stoical in partings.

Strong-willed in the send-off	<i>shdīd °azm fit-tasmīl</i>
the self did not cry until they parted . . .	<i>il-°agl mā bkā nīn fārū . . .</i>

A more defensive denial of concern is a possible response to rejections or slights, as the case of one woman's visit to her natal community illustrates. Migdim was a woman in her sixties, the favorite paternal aunt of the agnates who formed the core of the community in which I lived. The old woman often came to visit, staying a week or two or as long as she could be persuaded. She would spend a few days in each of the core households, dividing her time between her many nieces and nephews. One night she came to stay in the household in which I was living. Here lived her niece, married to her nephew, and another nephew and his wife. Her niece, always solicitous and happy to see her, invited her to sleep in her room since her husband was away. Just as they were bedding down for the night, the man returned unexpectedly from his trip. Feeling uncomfortable ejecting the man from his room and wife, the old woman insisted she would move. I offered her my room, which was next to the room of her other nephew and his wife of several months. I stayed behind to speak with the man while the aunt and her grandnieces went to my room. There the other man's wife offered them the use of her blankets and pillows. But then her husband returned and complained about the missing blankets. He was irritated by the idea that the children would be in his section of the house. So Migdim moved again, this time to an empty room where she spent an uncomfortable night with practically no bedding.

The next day, Migdim was unusually silent. She said nothing about her trials of the night before. But then she recited some poems which showed how she felt about the disgraceful mistreatment she had received at her young nephew's hands. These poems convey surprise and pain at his inconsiderate behavior.

I never figured you'd do	<i>mā nīhībūk tdir</i>
wrongs like these, oh they hurt . . .	<i>sayyāt kef hādhēn yas°abū . . .</i>
Forced by drought in the land	<i>rmāna jḏab l-awṭān</i>
to seek refuge among peoples of twisted	<i>°alē nās °āwja lghāthum . . .</i>
tongues . . .	

She explained the last poem to me. In search of pasture, people had to go to a new area where they found alien tribes whose language they could not comprehend, "people who weren't people." She was referring to her expulsion of that evening, and the incomprehensibility of her nephew's disrespectful and inhospitable response. By drawing attention to it in ordinary social interaction she would have admitted her humiliation. Instead, she had appeared to ignore it or not to care, while in her poems she confessed how wounded she felt.

Bedouin responses to the situations of loss described in the cases above suggest a clear pattern. In the ordinary discourse of everyday conversation and public social behavior, Awlād ʿAlī individuals reacted with anger, blame, or denial of concern. In poetry, they expressed poignant sentiments of weakness in such forms as sadness, "despair," and illness. Rather than assuming that these sentiments have universal meaning, being in the first case ego defenses and in the latter, "natural" responses to loss, let us look to the cultural meaning of these sentiments for Awlād ʿAlī. From this perspective it becomes apparent that individuals articulate the sentiments of loss in two ways, which correspond to two ways of presenting the self: as invulnerable and independent from others, and as vulnerable to the effects of others.

The sentiments of invulnerability expressed in ordinary public interaction are those appropriate to what could be called a discourse of honor. Consideration of the organization of social life, in particular Bedouin notions of hierarchy or inequality, clarifies the significance of the honor code in Bedouin society as the powerful social ideology that structures individual aspirations.¹⁰ Although Awlād ʿAlī hold egalitarian ideals, these apply only on the level of tribal groups in interaction with other tribal groups. They recognize and accept status distinctions among individuals but view them as the result of differential demonstration of a set of moral virtues, which I subsume under the heading of the honor code. Thus, they see social privilege as achieved by individuals through their embodiment of honor-linked ideals of the person.

Broadly speaking, the ideals or moral virtues of honor in Awlād ʿAlī society are those associated with autonomy. The ideal person among Awlād ʿAlī is the "real man," the apogee of control who manifests his independence in his freedom from control by others, and his strength or potency in his unwillingness to submit to others. Both are demonstrated through self-mastery or self-control (physical and emotional), active responses to slights or injuries, and the willing assumption of responsibility for upholding the social order. These ideal characteristics are valued by all Bedouins and associated with themselves as a cultural group in contrast to others, specifically the Egyptians of the Nile Valley who serve as a conceptual foil for their collective self-definition.

These ideals are, however, differentially realized and realizable by individuals and members of social categories within Bedouin society. Social dependents are handicapped in their ability to act autonomously. Even women, by virtue of their stock, are thought to embody these ideals more closely than their non-Bedouin neighbors, male or female. Like poor men, young men, sons, or nephews, they face limits but can achieve honor through careful negotiation of the line between defiance and servility in their interactions with superiors. The first part of the strategy involves giving the appearance of voluntary (never coerced) deference to the more honorable persons. The second part requires the assertion of independence, assertiveness, and self-control in contexts that do not directly involve superiors. Thus, in several ways women can have honor too.¹¹

Only certain sentiments would be appropriate to self-presentation in terms of these ideals. Since weakness and pusillanimity are anathema, individuals strive to assert their independence and strength through resistance to coercion, or aggressive responses to loss. The prime sentiment of resistance is anger. Blaming others provides a focus for anger and is a response to hurt learned early in life. When young children come crying to their mothers, they are more likely to be asked "Who did it?" than "What's the matter?" An alternate strategy for asserting honor is defensive denial of concern, hence of the very existence of an attack. As Bourdieu notes in his discussion of the rules of honor among the Kabyles of Algeria, "non-response can also express the refusal to riposte; the recipient of the offence refuses to see it as an offence and by his disdain . . . he causes it to rebound on its author, who is thereby dishonoured" (1979:108). In

our examples, this response arose only in cases of offenses by social inferiors, as with Migdim, or in love. Like outer-directed defenses against the imposition of the will of others on the self, the third alternative of stoicism is consonant with the ideals of honor. To admit that one is wounded or deeply affected by the loss of others is to admit to a lack of autonomy and self-control. The Bedouins associate attachment to others with dependency, a quality antithetical to autonomy, which characterizes the young, the poor, the weak, and the female and legitimizes their lack of social status.

By responding to loss with anger and blame or denial of concern, individuals both live in terms of the honor code and dramatize their claims to the respect accruing to the honorable. Through their responses people disavow experiences of helplessness, vulnerability, passivity, or weakness which would compromise their images as strong and independent.

Yet, as the various cases above illustrate, the sentiments of hurt and sadness that signal vulnerability are precisely those sentiments people expressed in poems about situations of loss. Those individuals who so energetically presented themselves as invulnerable and assertive in loss situations portrayed themselves differently through their poems. In their poems and, as we shall see below, in their ritualized "crying" in mourning, they expressed sentiments of sadness and confessed the devastation they felt. Tears and ailments signal the impact of the losses. Constant references to "despair" betray a sense of helplessness. Helpless passivity in the face of assaults by others is a mark of impotence. Vulnerability to the pain inflicted by the loss of others suggests attachments which, in the language of honor, translate as dependency and weakness.

Why the Bedouins express through poetic discourse the sentiments of vulnerability, weakness, and dependency that seem to violate the code of honor, and why such expressions do not carry the social opprobrium of similar revelations in ordinary discourse are questions we must now take up.

the contexts of discourse

One key to the puzzle lies in the social contexts in which the two discourses come into play. Except at ritual occasions, individuals share poems only with close friends, social peers, or lovers. Men share them with close kinsmen of the same generation or with lower status men. They do not sing before senior agnates or patrons. Women recite them to close kinswomen, women with whom they share a household, or neighbors. Because the women's world is less stratified, the range of categories of women with whom poems are shared is greater, sometimes including those with greater authority, like mothers-in-law, and strangers.

The persons with whom one is most likely to share poetry are those individuals from whom one does not *tahashsham*. *Tahashshum* refers to a state of embarrassment or shame, and the acts of modesty or deference which correspond to this experience (Abu-Lughod in press). *Tahashshum*, as the experience of shame, arises in interpersonal interactions between social unequals or strangers, is conceptualized in the idiom of exposure, and manifests itself through a language of formality, self-effacement, and the cloaking of the "natural" weaknesses or sources of dependency. This includes anything having to do with bodily needs, sexuality, and so forth. It is the correlate of social distance, being both a response to the recognition of such distance and a means of maintaining it.

Poetry is the discourse of intimacy. Sharing poems, like exposing natural weaknesses, marks the absence of *tahashshum* between individuals. Poetry indexes social distinctions by following the lines of social cleavage. It usually does not cross the boundaries created by differential power and status, or gender. People are extremely discomfited if non-intimates inadvertently hear their poems. The firmest barrier is between men and women. Women were reluctant to

share their poems with me until given assurance that I would never reveal them to any men. Mentioning the very word "to sing" in mixed-sex company embarrasses everyone present, as I discovered when I innocently made the mistake of doing so. The only exception to this merely proves the rule. The exchange of poetry between men and women is not only acceptable but mandatory in the special circumstances of courtship and romance. In romance, the gap between the sexes is being deliberately breached and intimacy declared through this sharing of poetry. Here, poetry indexes intimacy between those most distant in normal circumstances.

Ordinary discourse is public, not intimate and personal. It is intended for general audiences composed of any number of categories of individuals with varying types of relationships to the self. This is the arena in which self-presentation is judged. As Goffman puts it, this is where the individual "goes about constrained to sustain a viable image of himself in the eyes of others" (Goffman 1971:185). Routine interpersonal encounters have also been described as "dramas of social censorship involved in the maintenance of the public order" in which people conceal "from public attention facts about themselves (including their emotional reactions and intentions) which they experience as too dangerous to disclose" (LeVine 1982a:297). Insofar as *taḥashshum* can be understood as deference to those who represent the social order, it is not surprising that if ideals are breached, as they are in poems, it will not be in the presence of the people from whom individuals *taḥashsham*.

For Awlād ʿAlī, the discourse of honor belongs in this public arena of everyday, ordinary language interactions. In this sphere individuals strive to portray themselves as conforming to the generally held ideals of the person. They seek to appear potent, independent, and self-controlled. The only sentiments appropriate to this image are anger, attribution of blame, and denial of concern.

Other analysts have emphasized the social dimension of the honor discourse in Arab societies but have failed to note that it is bound by context. Abou-Zeid (1966:258) argues that, for Awlād ʿAlī, honor is related both to conformity to prevailing social norms and to the realization of social ideals. Bourdieu notes, "The sense of honour is enacted in front of other people. *Nif* [point of honour] is above all that which leads a man to defend, at all costs, a certain self-image intended for others" (1979:111). And Eickelman, speaking of propriety ("*theshsham*") says, "The locus of propriety is not so much the inner moral consciousness of a person as his public comportment with respect to those with whom he has regular face-to-face relations" (1976:138). However, none of them makes note of any discourse outside the public realm.

We might be tempted to conclude from the context-bound nature of the discourses that even if the expressions of anger, blame, and denial of concern are not merely ego-defenses but are meaningful sentiments within the context of Bedouin culture, that for individual Bedouins there is a split between public and private which corresponds to self-presentation in terms of cultural ideals versus revelation of "inner reality." We might want to interpret the honorable and modest self-presentations in the public sphere as structured masks worn for social approval, while viewing the poetic discourse of weakness as a simple reflection of personal experience, of real feelings shown to friends.

Before accepting this interpretation, we must consider a number of factors related to the form and character of this so-called "private" discourse. The poetry through which individuals express to intimates those personal sentiments that seem to violate the cultural ideals is itself culturally constituted—in fact a highly conventional and formulaic idiom.

the forms of discourse

Bedouin responses to bereavement, the ultimate situation of loss, provide further illustrations of how the sentiments conveyed in ordinary public behavior differ from those expressed in the

formulaic medium of poetry in ways consonant with notions of honor. More importantly, the similar conventionality of form of poetry and ritualized mourning laments, the two vehicles for the expression of vulnerability, makes clear that such sentiments are both culturally constructed and bound by social context.

In the following three cases the typical cultural patterning of reactions to death among Awlād ʿAlī is apparent. The ideology of honor can be seen as providing the concepts that guide Awlād ʿAlī responses to death just as it does for the less radical loss situations described above. The concern with autonomy and pride causes individuals to interpret and respond to death as an affront or attack rather than a tragedy or, as they admit good Muslims should, as God's will. In everyday language and behavior, people react to death with anger and blame. The impulse to avenge deaths, mirrored in and buttressed by the institutionalized complex of vengeance and feuding described in detail by Peters (1951, 1967) and Black-Michaud (1975), is closely associated with these sentiments. Yet again, in poetry and in the structurally equivalent and technically similar ritualized funeral lament called "crying" (*bkā*) the same angry individuals communicate sorrow, and describe the devastating effects of the loss on their personal well-being.

The first case concerns a family's response to the fairly sudden illness and death of a girl of about 17. Although a physician pronounced the cause of death as cancer, the family accused a man who had frightened her of having caused her death by firing his rifle into the air while she was grazing some goats nearby. It was after that incident, her family claimed, that she had sickened. Their angry dispute with this man wore on for months until it was finally brought to a tribal court where the girl's family demanded blood-indemnity from the man's family. This is the traditional recompense for a killing within a tribal segment (see Peters 1967).

Yet, at her funeral, and for over a month after, her death was met with much "crying," the quintessential act of ritual mourning. At the news of a death, Awlād ʿAlī women begin a stylized high-pitched wordless wailing (ʿayāt). Then they "cry." This involves much more than weeping. "Crying" is a chanted lament in which the bereaved women and those who have come to console them express their grief. Beginning with a phrase whose English equivalent is "woe is me," the bereaved bewail their loss in "crying." In tandem, the condolers bewail the loss of a deceased person dear to them, usually a father or mother. Like the singing of poems, the chant takes the form of a short verse of two parts, the words repeated in a set order following a single melodic pattern. The special pitch and quavering of the voice, more exaggerated than in singing, along with the weeping and sobbing that often accompany it, make this heart-rending. The Bedouins do not equate "crying" and "singing" but they recognize the resemblance when questioned. The two are structurally equivalent, both being expressions of sadness which draw attention to the sorrow and bereavement of the mourner.

That in this case even the girl's brother was said to have "cried" attests to the uncontrollable grief of her family because, generally, men do not "cry," although they sometimes weep silently. Men offering condolences greet the bereaved with a somber embrace out of which others must pull them. Men counsel the bereaved relatives to "pull yourself together" (*shidd ḥēlak*) and console them with pious references to God's will and goodness. The only exception to the general avoidance of "crying" by men is the ritual lamenting that the descendants of local saints undertake at the annual festivals at the tombs of the saints or holymen. Men of the saintly lineage sing "poems" as they move from tent to tent, blessing those who have come to pay their respects and cursing those who cross them. They sing of their forefather in a quavering voice. People describe this as "crying" over the saint.

Another case, this time the death of an old woman, also provoked a heated response among her kin. Shortly after returning to her husband's camp after an extended visit with her kin, the old woman died suddenly in the middle of the night. Her paternal relatives rushed to the camp where they wailed and "cried" for two days, consoled her daughters, and were consoled for their loss.

They returned to their own community angry, furious that her husband had behaved rudely to the mourners and blaming him for her death. Some were convinced that the shock of hearing the news that he planned to marry another wife had brought on her death. Others insinuated that the man had actually strangled her. The most vivid description of the old woman's death was recounted by one of her nieces, a dramatic storyteller. In animated tones, she described how she had arrived in the aunt's camp to find that her aunt's body lay where she had fallen, the legs exposed and the face barely covered by her veil. No one had prepared her in proper Muslim fashion, placing drops of water in her mouth and tying her jaw shut. Throwing herself on the floor of the tent, letting her tongue hang out and saliva drool from the side of her mouth, the niece mimicked the awful state in which she had found her aunt. She recounted how she had scolded the people there, "What is the matter with you? Haven't you ever seen a corpse before? At least you could treat her as decent human beings would. You could have covered her, shown her a little respect!" She then told how she had assisted the women in preparing the corpse for burial, and how she had ordered her kin to provide a decent shroud to replace the inferior one the husband's kin had provided. She personally was absolutely convinced that her favorite aunt had been strangled, and that the husband was the culprit.

The senior agnate (and informal leader) of the community in which her paternal kin lived had been traveling when the news of the old woman's death arrived. By the time he returned, everyone else had already come back from the funeral. Informed of the death, he interviewed the men and women who had attended about what they had witnessed. At the descriptions he kept exclaiming, "Damn him!" and muttering, "We'll make him swear the oath!" He was referring to the ultimate recourse in determining guilt, the swearing of an oath at a saint's tomb by the accused and his kin. He went to question the old woman's daughters and other witnesses in the husband's camp. There he determined that there had been no trouble between her and her husband, and was satisfied that she had died of natural causes. The furor subsided, people beginning to concede that she might have died of a broken heart caused by the recent death of her only son. Nonetheless, the initial reaction had been one of angry accusation, balanced by the mournful "crying" of the funeral.

The third case is the most telling. This reaction to a homicide shows explicitly how the manifest anger and desire for revenge of the murdered man's kin are counterbalanced by the terrible sense of suffering revealed not just in "crying" but in singing or reciting poetry. This case differs from the other two in that there was genuine cause for anger, and someone who deserved blame. The incident of the killing had occurred seven years before my arrival in the community. The youngest adult man in the group of agnatic kinsmen who constituted the core of the community had died from wounds inflicted by a couple of men from another tribe. They had provoked a fight in retaliation for an earlier beating this man had dealt a kinsman of theirs. The event was described to me in vivid detail numerous times by various members of the group. The initial reaction to the news of the fight was always described in the same way. Everyone, women and children included, rushed towards the camp of the hostile group, throwing rocks and wailing. The young man was still breathing when they found him. The men took him to the hospital in Alexandria, where he died a few days later. By all descriptions, the grief and ritualized mourning that followed were extraordinary and prolonged.

Along with grief, a great deal of anger was directed not only at the family of those responsible, but at others. For example, two subsections of the tribe of the murdered man officially split over this incident. The ties were severed because one group urged a peaceful reconciliation and the acceptance of blood-indemnity three years after the killing. Hostility still flared up between these groups on various pretexts while I was in the field. The murderers' group had escaped to Libya where the victim's group tried to track them and had even made one unsuccessful attempt to avenge the murder. After the attempt, the avenging group let themselves be persuaded to undergo the reconciliation procedure. They declared their forgiveness publicly, but this was

only a tactic to flush out the offending subsection. They were biding their time, hoping the other group would let down its guard and allow them the opportunity to take their revenge. People cursed whenever the name of the offending group was mentioned.

The poems these same close relatives of the murdered man sang revealed another set of sentiments besides anger and the desire for revenge. All suggested the suffering caused by the death. Three themes characterized the poems: sleeplessness, associated in traditional Bedouin poetry with weeping and sorrow; illness, a consequence of any negative affect in folk psychology; and "despair," the word connoting apathy, hopeless misery, or extreme sadness.

The first poems I heard about the death were two by the elder paternal cousin of the victim. While the first suggested restless search, perhaps for the object of revenge (and thus some anger), the second evoked only sad memories that intruded.

Until he reaches his target's border no happy sleep is his . . .	<i>ytmulāḥdūd mnāh wīā bāt fī nawm hanī . . .</i>
Caught by a memory unawares brought tears in the hour of pleasure . . .	<i>khtūrā °alēh ghafīāt bakkā l-°ēn fī wān it-°arab . . .</i>

The victim's mother recited a poem that alluded to her inability to forget and the sleeplessness her memories and grief brought.

Dear ones deprive me of sleep just as I drift off, they come to mind . . .	<i>in-nawmḥarraḡaw °izāz in jāna yjūna fawwaluh . . .</i>
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Metaphors of illness abounded in the poems of various other kinsmen and kinswomen. The victim's sister sang a poem referring to her ill health resulting from the loss:

You left me, oh loved one unsteady, stunted and unhealthy . . .	<i>khallēt yā °aziz il-°ēn tmūj lā nimā lā °āfyā . . .</i>
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His widow recited several poems late one night. Her closest friends were surprised, saying that they had never heard her recite poetry before. These were two of her poems:

Ill and full of despair show me what medicine could cure this malady . . .	<i>illī marīd fih yāsāt warrūnī duwā dāhā asmuh . . .</i>
Drowning in despair the eye says, oh my destiny in love . . .	<i>il-°ēn ghārga fil-yās tgūl yā naṣībī fil-ghalā . . .</i>

The despair to which she referred also appeared in the poem of a close kinswoman:

Forgotten not a single day just a patient mastering of despair . . .	<i>il-°aḡl mā nsihum yawm ṣabrā mghēr dālī yāshum . . .</i>
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These poems gave voice to the anguish and pain caused by the death. People described symptoms of physical distress, crying, disrupted sleep, brooding, and sensing of the presence of the dead, as well as apathy and despair. These bear a close resemblance to the affective and behavioral responses reported in studies of bereavement (Marris 1974; Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson 1976).¹² These studies also indicate that hostility is an element of bereavement. Marris mentions hostility, and Rosenblatt et al. anger, as part of the range of reactions commonly expressed. While the Bedouin poetic or ritualized discourse rarely carried bellicose threats and sentiments of anger, their expression in ordinary discourse suggests that Awlād °Alī expressed the range of sentiments associated with bereavement and loss but in a culturally regulated and nonhaphazard way.

This distribution of types of sentiments into distinct discourses seems culturally specific, putting into question psychological theories which assume the universality of human reactions to death and account for variation only in terms of individual differences arising from the nature (for example, ambivalent or nonambivalent, intense or weak) of the interpersonal relationship before the death. The Bedouin response provides support for the anthropological position es-

poused by Huntington and Metcalf (1979:43), among others, that "cultural difference works on the universal human emotional material. . . . The range of acceptable emotions and the constellation of sentiments appropriate to the situations of death are tied up with the unique institutions and concepts of each society." LeVine (1982b) looks specifically to funerary rituals as cultural narratives which shape sentiments in culturally specific ways, but we have argued that these, like the poems, constitute only one of several discourses on loss.

Even more importantly, it is clear that the form and content of the discourse of vulnerability are more thoroughly circumscribed by tradition and more rigidly structured than the discourse of everyday life. Neither poetry nor the highly ritualized mourning laments could be characterized as spontaneous, original personal expressions in the strict sense of the term. When individuals recite poems, they either appropriate them whole from the cultural repertoire, or compose them by drawing on a common stock of themes, metaphors, phrases, and structures. They combine these formulaic elements or elaborate on themes within traditional constraints, considering questions of authorship immaterial. "Crying" is even more fixed and ritualized. Thus it would be hard to label these discourses of vulnerability as *less* cultural or *less* social than the ordinary public discourse of invulnerability.

conclusion

We are still confronted with the issue of how, if not as mask to inner reality, culture to nature or psyche, or social to individual, the two discourses are related. For this we must turn to the rhetorical function of the interplay of the two discourses which, for the individual and his or her intimates, always exist side by side. The two juxtaposed discourses can be seen as commenting on each other, as Simmel observes, the secret comments on the manifest world (Simmel 1950:330). Ironically, the poetic discourse seems to comment on the ordinary discourse of everyday life in ways that ultimately enhance the meaning of the latter and the honor of the person reciting.

The poetic revelations of weakness and attachment to others seem to give dimension to the tough independence affected in ordinary social interactions in at least three ways. First, the measure of self-mastery and control demonstrated by channeling such powerful sentiments into a rigid and conventional medium and delimited social contexts contributes to honor. Those who feel deeply but lose control, like the tragic characters who die of broken hearts or go mad from grief, are held in awe but not considered social beings. Along with the loss of self-mastery, they have lost their honor and forfeited their positions as members of society. Mad people, idiots, and children who also express the experiences of loss in an uncontrolled way are considered outside society in some sense—they are not fully social beings or proper members of society. Ineffectual and dependent, they have no honor. They express their sentiments of weakness and vulnerability idiosyncratically and with no reference to social context. This has a very different meaning than would expressing them only in specific social contexts and through conventional forms. Those who express strong sentiments of attachment and vulnerability in the culturally approved way can still claim to embody the cultural ideals.

Second, admitting the existence of an attitude toward others and a range of sentiments which lie outside the confines of those recognized by the system of honor may demonstrate the voluntary nature of an individual's conformity to the code in everyday actions. Coercion strips acts of their meaning in the system of honor. As Riesman argues for the meaning in Fulani society of men's flouting of official morality in their continual quest for women:

This defiance enhances the value of the individual, both for his own sake and as a member of society. By acting against the moral code the individual is demonstrating that he is a free being and that his actions are not automatically determined by social rules and social pressures. But if the individual is free to

disobey, then he is free to obey too and the value of his adherence to the society is thereby enhanced [1971:611].

Third, by exposing this other side of experience, individuals impress upon others that their conformity to the code and attainment of the cultural ideals of personhood are neither shallow nor easy. Bourdieu argues that in the Kabyle system of honor, the person who is particularly exposed to outrage but who nevertheless manages to secure respect is especially meritorious. He also argues that honor is only meaningful for the man who has "things worth defending" (Bourdieu 1979:119). Following this logic, we might suggest that the greatest respect is accorded the person who struggles with powerful vulnerabilities and passions to be a proper member of *Awlād ʿAlī* society, a person with honor. Poetry may be so cherished by the Bedouins precisely because it allows people to express, and their intimates to appreciate, the profundity of that which must be overcome to conform to the values of society. In sum, the revelation of weakness and dependency in poetry may actually increase the value of the strength and independence individuals do display. One might consider it integral to honor.

Thus in complex ways the expression of sentiments of loss among the *Awlād ʿAlī* Bedouins is related to the ideology of honor and cannot be understood without recognizing the entailments of the honor code for individual self-image and self-presentation. Even the coexistence of two sets of contradictory sentiments expressed in different media and social arenas, a phenomenon which may be far more common cross-culturally than anthropologists have suspected, can better be interpreted with reference to cultural ideals than to psychodynamic processes.

The question that remains, however, is why the poetic genre which articulates the sentiments of vulnerability antithetical to the ideals of autonomy is so highly cherished. It seems to represent a second cultural ideology with attendant values and ideals for personhood. This suggests that rather than a monolithic cultural ideology shaping sentiment and determining experience, multiple ideologies inform individual experience. Poetry as art may be a special sort of ideology. Although this is not the place to take up the formidable problem of the relationship between art and society, one idea may help. Bateson (1972) argues boldly for a view of art as a corrective to a too-limited and ultimately destructive understanding of the world provided by ordinary consciousness (read culturally constructed consciousness). He sees art as having "a positive function in maintaining . . . 'wisdom,' " which in his terminology is the recognition of "interlocking circuits" in contrast to short-term, goal-oriented views that make everyday life efficient (Bateson 1972:147). Setting aside his grandiose perspective and cybernetic vocabulary, one could make the more modest but related proposition that *Awlād ʿAlī*'s poetic expressions of self may be a corrective to an overzealous adherence to the ideology of honor which, if taken to an extreme, would foster defensive and belligerent attitudes. Poetry reminds people of another way of being and encourages as it reflects another side of experience in situations of loss.

notes

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¹My transcriptions of *Awlād ʿAlī* poems and words conform, by and large, to the standard system for the transliteration of Arabic followed by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. I have made certain alterations to preserve the following peculiarities of the dialect: *Awlād ʿAlī* pronounce the q as g; in poems

they elongate some vowels; they pronounce the initial vowel of the article al as il or elide, dropping the vowel altogether; they drop medial and final hamzas; they often nasalize the long a and lose the diphthongs, marked in these transcriptions by the use of ē rather than ā or ay. Although they pronounced d and z almost identically, I have not indicated this in the texts.

²I prefer the term "sentiment" to related ones like "emotion" or "affect" because it carries connotations of cultural and even artistic shaping while the latter two suggest psycho-biological states.

³I conducted fieldwork in a small hamlet of about 15 households in the vicinity of Burg el-ʿArab between October 1978 and June 1980. To protect their identities, I have used pseudonyms for all the individuals in the cases presented.

⁴I discuss responses to loss in love and Bedouin attitudes toward romantic love and sexuality in my forthcoming book, *Veiled Sentiments* (Abu-Lughod in press).

⁵Some of the best early ethnographic studies of Arab societies like Granqvist (1935) on Palestinian villagers and Musil (1928) on the Rwala Bedouins are replete with poems and songs associated with every major and minor life event, suggesting the importance of poetry. Arabists like Lichtenstadter repeat the conventional wisdom, "To this day the Arabs take particular delight in reciting and listening to poetry" (1976:5). Yet, until anthropologists like Meeker (1979) and Caton (1984) began studying poetry not as a decontextualized art form but as fundamentally tied to cultural values and social institutions, it was difficult to understand why. Even Zwettler (1976, 1978), who considers classical poetry in the light of what we know about oral literature, does not have contextual material to complete his analysis of poetry.

⁶The *ghinnāwa* is linguistically distinguished from the longer rhymed verses known formally as poetry (*shīʿr*) and from other types of rhyming songs and is a vital form of oral literary expression for all members of the Bedouin tribal groups of the Egyptian Western Desert and Cyrenaica, whence Awlād ʿAlī are said to have migrated. I have chosen to refer to the *ghinnāwa* as a poem rather than a song in order to distinguish it clearly from the songs with rhyme and melody that more closely fit our own conception of songs. For support of this position, see Smart (1966). I should add a note on the translations of the poems. I have tried to convey the sense of the poems without drifting too far from the literal meanings of the Arabic, but in some cases, the full meaning could not be captured in English. The connotations of the words in Arabic are not those of the English, nor do the images resonate for us in the same way they do for Awlād ʿAlī who are aware of a large corpus of poems that play on similar themes.

⁷Individuals also sing when alone, and on certain ritual occasions like weddings and circumcisions sing a special type of *ghinnāwa*. This paper is only concerned with personal poems.

⁸I have translated *al-ghanī* (literally the rich man) as "married man" because it is a common poetic euphemism for a polygynously married man. This is not surprising, since generally it is the wealthy men who take more than one wife.

⁹In this poem I have translated as "soul" the Arabic word *khātr*. The usual term for soul is *rūh*, which can also be translated as "spirit" but I have taken liberties with the translation to convey the sense that this is the essential being of a person. The Bedouin term does not have any metaphysical connotations, however. I should also note some other ambiguities in translating parts of what we could consider "the self." I often translate ʿagl as "heart" although it is usually translated as "mind" and thought of as the seat of reason or social sense. Awlād ʿAlī use this term in poetry to refer to the seat of emotion or that which is affected by troubles. They rarely use the Arabic word for heart (*qalb*) in poetry. From what I could gather, the Bedouins seem to use ʿagl, *khātr*, and ʿēn (eye) interchangeably to refer to the self. I suspect that the actual word chosen for each poem depends on sound and rhythm rather than meaning, which is why I am not consistent in translations.

¹⁰This is an extremely important but complex argument which is supported in detail in Abu-Lughod (in press), in which I show precisely how the code of honor structures individual behavior in such a way as to maintain hierarchy. I also show how modesty (associated with women) is merely the honor of the weak.

¹¹For a discussion of the ideal personality traits of Bedouin women and the ways in which women manage to have honor, see Abu-Lughod (1985).

¹²Marris (1974:26) calls attention to the following symptoms: "physical distress and worse health; an inability to surrender the past—expressed, for instance, by brooding over memories, sensing the presence of the dead, clinging to possessions, being unable to comprehend the loss, feelings of unreality; withdrawal into apathy. A cross-cultural survey of reactions to death based on data from the Human Relations Area Files (Rosenblatt et al. 1976:6) notes that in addition to strong emotions, death provokes changes in patterns of behavior including "loss of appetite and consequent weight loss, disruption of work activities, loss of interest in things ordinarily interesting, a decrease in sociability, disrupted sleep and disturbing dreams."

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