

## Shifting Politics in Bedouin Love Poetry

*Lila Abu-Lughod*

I focus, in this chapter, on the emotions or sentiments associated with relations between men and women in a Bedouin community in Egypt's Western Desert, especially the discourses of "love." My argument proceeds by way of a Bedouin love story. The community of Bedouins about which I write are part of a group known as the Awlad 'Ali who inhabit the area along the Mediterranean coast of Egypt west of Alexandria into Libya.<sup>1</sup> I lived in this community from 1978 to 1980, visited once for a month five years later, and went back for five months of fieldwork in 1987. Until about thirty-five years ago, those still living in the Western Desert made a living mostly by herding sheep, growing barley, and organizing camel caravans to transport dates from the oases to the Nile Valley. Now they are involved in all sorts of activities, supplying construction materials, and speculating in real estate. They used to live in tents. Now most of them live in houses, although they still pitch their tents next to their houses and prefer sitting in the tents at least during the day. They used to ride on horses, camels, and donkeys; now they prefer Toyota trucks. Although sedentarizing, they still proudly distinguish themselves from the settled peasant and urban groups of the Nile Valley—the Egyptians—by their tribal organization and what they see as their superior morality. But, as I will discuss, even this is beginning to change.

Here is the love story. I was back in Egypt in 1985, visiting for the first time since my initial fieldwork the families I had lived with for almost two years. It was early in the morning of the last day I was there. My host, the head of the family, with whom I had lived as a sort of adopted daughter, was getting ready to drive me to Cairo to catch my plane. He rummaged around in the pockets of his various robes and vests, looked in his briefcase, and finally in exasperation asked his children, who were all standing around, if they knew what had happened to the cassette of Fathalla Ajj-behi. His eldest daughter sheepishly went and got it from the cassette player she and her sisters often secretly listened to when he was away. The kids put my suitcases in the trunk of his new Mercedes, I said my goodbyes, and we set off. As soon as we were on the desert highway, he turned on the tape deck and said that I had to listen to this

tape. We listened. A man chanted, in a moving and pained voice, poem after poem of the type called the *ghinnāwa*. My host listened raptly, interjected exclamations of sympathy at the end of some of the poems, and elaborated, with intense and obvious admiration, on some of the references in the poems. Among the poems were the following two:

Patience is hard,  
for my heart, so freshly wounded ...  
wa' 'alēh is-ḡabr  
janāh jū'd māzāl khārti ...  
I'd figured, oh beloved, that distance  
would be a cure but it only made it worse ...  
mihṣāb yā 'azīz il-mōh yabgā il-dwā nādh zādni ...

My host explained that Fathalla, the young man reciting the poems (whose kinship relation to one of our neighbors he identified) had been in love with his paternal cousin and wanted to marry her. Their fathers had first agreed to it but then got into an argument with each other. The young woman's father decided to refuse to give his daughter to the young man. In despair and thinking that he might get over this more easily if he put distance between them, the man set off for Libya (where until recently many Bedouin men went looking for work). Some time afterward, the girl's father arranged to marry his daughter to someone else. When Fathalla heard the news, he composed and recorded these poems and sent the tape to the girl's brother, a cousin with whom he had grown up. Fifteen days after the wedding, when the bride came back to her family's household for the ritual postmarital visit, her brother played her the tape. She listened to it and when it was over, she gasped for air, fainted, and then fell over, dead.

This story tells us a great deal about the politics of emotion discourse in Bedouin society. The Awlad 'Ali are tribally organized. For them, common descent through the male line and shared blood provide the primary and the only legitimate basis for binding people together. Paternal kin live together, share some property, pass it on, and go to social functions together. They are also expected to feel close. If blood bonds between paternal relatives, male or female, are privileged as the only basis of social relationships, then heterosexual or romantic love, even in its legitimate guise of marriage, although necessary for the reproduction of society and the perpetuation of lineages, is hard to deal with. It does not rest easily within this framework for social relations and is in fact a threat.

Love and the bonds it might establish between individuals are not just threats to the framework that orders social relations, but are also talked about as threats

to the solidarity of the paternal kin group, something often noted in the literature on patrilineal societies from traditional China to Zmaccanian (Collier 1974; Wolf 1972). The Awlad 'Ali view sexual bonds and the bonds of agnation as competing. Even more importantly, sexual bonds are seen as threats to the authority and control of elder male relatives who represent the interests of the agnatic family group, control its resources, and make its decisions. At marriage, sons begin to have a small domain of authority of their own, and daughters leave the domain of authority of their father and kin.

The threat marriage represents is counteracted at every point by social and ideological strategies. The marital bond is undermined in numerous ways: Women retain close ties to their paternal relatives, senior male relatives control the choice of marriage partners, and sexual segregation ensures that husbands and wives spend little time together. Divorce is easy and polygyny possible. And the married couple is rarely economically independent. Love matches are actively discouraged. One man told me that the only way people who loved each other would be allowed to marry was if their elder male relatives or the girl's paternal cousins did not know. Women often told me that love matches always ended badly for the woman because she would not have the support of her male kin if her husband mistreated her.

I have argued that the cultural preference for patrilineal parallel cousin marriage is another such strategy (Abu-Lughod 1986). The Awlad 'Ali frequently marry first cousins or other cousins on the father's side and the male even has legal claim to his paternal uncle's daughter. This type of marriage may be upheld as the cultural ideal, because it provides a means of defusing the threat of the sexual bond in this social system; it *subsumes* the marital bond under the prior and more legitimate bond of kinship.

The moral code that prescribes modesty is the most effective means of undermining the sexual bond. If the threat to the social order can be made to seem a threat to the respectability or moral worth of the individual, then that order will be reproduced by the actions of individuals in everyday life. The modesty code ensures that even individuals who do not have as much stake in the system—like young men and especially women—will help perpetuate it, because their virtue or their standing as moral beings, as good persons, depends on denying their sexuality. As I hinted earlier, these sentiments of sexual modesty are situational. They are important to display only in front of certain people—the elder male agnates. So, sexual modesty must be seen as a form of deference to them. The moral sentiments of modesty are part of a discourse that sustains and perpetuates the particular social system and the power of certain groups within it.

Conversely, then, the inmodest sentiments of "love" are subversive. To express them is subversive of the social order and defiant of those whose interests are served by this order. This element of defiance is made concrete in the story of Fathalla. In singing about his feelings of love, he was, in a sense, defying the authority of his paternal uncle, who had thwarted his desires and prevented him from marrying his cousin.

Because it carries subversive sentiments of love, one could consider the *ghimāwa* the Bedouin discourse of defiance. There is plenty of evidence that poetry is in general associated with opposition to the ideals of normal social life. This type of poetry is considered un-Islamic. The pious shouldn't recite it or show any interest in it. It is also considered unrespectable. Even the term "to sing" can't be said in mixed-sex company without causing all-around embarrassment. People say that they are ashamed or embarrassed about singing in front of nonintimates, especially elders. Women told me never to share their poems with the men. And in the past, older men avoided public settings like weddings and sheep-shearing parties where young men usually recited this type of poetry. The most persuasive evidence of the oppositional character of poetry is who recites poetry and who avoids it. Although older men occasionally recite them, *ghimāwas* are most closely associated with youths and women. These are the disadvantaged dependents who have least to gain in the system as structured.

### The Cassette

One aspect of Fathalla's story I want to take up is the somewhat surprising fact that his love songs were on a cassette. I had thought, when I left Egypt after my first period of fieldwork in 1980, that the Bedouin *ghimāwa* was dying out. The adolescents I knew did not sing or recite this type of poetry, nor did they seem particularly interested in it. They were beginning to listen to Egyptian radio, and it was from their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, and sometimes from their fathers and a few young men, that I collected poetry. These adults offered one explanation for why poetry was dying out: They said that there were no longer any occasions for singing. There is a certain truth to their deceptively straightforward explanation to which I will return.

If, however, it was the ideology of the political system, with its value of autonomy, that lent positive valence to expressions of love as defiance, even when they came from below, then one would not be surprised to find such discourses dying as the Awlad 'Ali Bedouins' political autonomy was undermined. This has been going on for quite a while as the Egyptian state has sought, over the last 35 years, to introduce its authority into the Western Desert, a process that has been underway in Bedouin areas closer to the Nile Valley for 150 years or more. The Awlad 'Ali have developed an impressive array of strategies to resist, subvert, and circumvent the authority of the state, which they consider illegitimate. Since they are not fazed by guns, and prison sentences carry no stigma, it is even hard to intimidate them into good citizenship.

There is, however, one process that began in their region in the 1970s that more effectively than government efforts to disarm them, school them, put them in the military, license and register them, is progressively undermining their resistance to the state: the gradual shift in their economic life from herding and commercial

By the government are transforming some of the desert into agriculture and they are increasingly buying and relying on for a livelihood, if not actually farming themselves. Land along the coast, on the other hand, has become valuable for tourists development, and many of them are doing quite well selling beachfront property. They are also fighting with each other over this land, which was formerly tribally held rather than individually owned. With this involvement in land, the Bedouins have become enmeshed in the state's legal system, since they need to get titles and make claims through it.

This shift in the Bedouin political economy can be connected with what I see as a shift in the dialectic of deference and defiance in which love songs are deployed. As the economic basis of the tribal system erodes, and with it the political underpinnings of the value of autonomy, the older reality of mutual responsibility within the family and lineage is changing. There used to be a complex division of labor, with resources managed by elders but not owned. Now private ownership puts tremendous control in the hands of patriarchs. Young men suffer, as I will discuss, but those most dramatically affected are women. They are now economically dependent on men, having little access to money, and their work is increasingly confined to housework. With the moral value of modesty still in force, these women who live in the new circumstances of sedentarized communities, where they are surrounded by neighbors most of whom are nonkin, must be *more* secluded, more often veiled, and less free to move around.

Older women comment on these changes, reminiscing about things they used to do that young women today cannot get away with—like having rendezvous with sweethearts and exchanging songs with men at weddings and sheep shearings.<sup>2</sup> But they are also convinced that they were more modest, a perception that I think relates to a sense that it was more self-imposed. They often complain that their sons, husbands, nephews, and grandsons harshly restrict the girls, not letting them go anywhere. Girls, for their part, are beginning to complain that they feel imprisoned. The domestic political divide now runs along gender lines, whereas it used to be between elders on one side and women and young men on the other. All men have access to the market and increasing freedom of movement; all women do not.

This shift in political economy has implications for traditional love poems, which, as I have discovered, are not, after all, dying out. Bedouin love songs are taking on different meaning and force, having been given new life by the advent of the cassette. The Bedouins had said that songs were dying out because there were no occasions for singing. In a sense, they were right. By the time I first met them, in 1978, they were reciting love poems only in intimate social situations. As I later learned, however, the most important forum for love songs had been weddings, at which young men and women had sung within earshot of and sometimes to each other.<sup>3</sup> Those kinds of celebrations had stopped by then, and the weddings I attended were sexually segregated. The women sang only songs of blessing, congratulation, and praise, and

the men did nothing but sit around. Today, locally made cassettes—copied, re-copied, and sometimes sold for money—provide a new occasion for song, as does a new kind of wedding celebration coming into fashion. At this new wedding, attended by invited guests but also attracting a growing group of somewhat rowdy young men, the small-time stars of these low-budget commercial cassettes perform. Because of the public nature of these occasions, where, unlike in the past, "public" includes a wide range of nonkin and complete strangers, women are made. They make of modesty, absent from the recording sessions where tapes are made. They make no tapes and no longer sing in public. No longer having as much social and political support for defiance, the women also seem to be losing one of the means for it—love poetry.

The poems sung on cassettes and at *mikrofon* weddings seem now to be part of a discourse of defiance by young men against the more absolute authority and economic control of their fathers and paternal uncles. This is a period when, at the same time, young men are beginning to have more possibilities for independence from the kin group through wage labor and more knowledge than their fathers about the ways of the state through their experiences in the army and school. A new sort of generational conflict produced by these transitional circumstances is being played out partly in the language of love.

I had unexpected confirmation of the new use of "love" on my visit in January 1987, when I was listening with friends to one of the latest cassettes of popular Bedouin songs of a different genre. There was a long and somewhat humorous song about the tribulations of a young man whose father and uncle had arranged three terrible marriages for him with women he'd never met. The first woman turned out to be bald, the second dumb, and the third insane and violent to boot. In the final verse of his song the poet, speaking on behalf of all young men who have suffered the tyranny of such fathers and uncles, sings:<sup>4</sup>

My warnings are to the old man  
who imprisons the freedom of youths  
who's forgotten a thing called love  
affection, desire, and burning flames  
who's forgotten how strong is the fire of lovers  
how strong the fire of lovers who long for one another  
What's exquisite is that they're afraid  
they say, any minute my prying guard will turn up  
oh my father's about to catch us

The relationship between love and freedom in this song is complex—because, although he does not want the elders to force loveless marriages on their children, the poet recognizes that what makes love exquisite is that it is stolen—it is against the authority of elder agnates. In other words, he wants the freedom to defy the elders a

as a whole or want to have to be easy or open. The community of form in love songs is consistent with this attitude. Unlike rock and roll, which some would argue played and plays a similar role in our society, the protests occur in an idiom that the elders can appreciate: the poetry they themselves love and must respect, given their own values. This is true even though they disapprove of the young men's bare heads, occasional long hair, experimentation with drugs and liquor, and general loss of *kasham*. Everyone comments on this now—the new brand of young men aren't modest in front of their fathers. According to the girls I talk with, in front of their fathers these young men not only smoke cigarettes but, worse, they shamelessly play love songs on their cassette recorders.

This is only a partial analysis of the shifting politics of Bedouin discourses on love, a complex subject on which I do not want to impose a false coherence. Yet it should be sufficient to make clear my larger analytical point regarding the anthropology of emotion. As long as emotions remain the object of study, we cannot break with the idealism and mentalism of the interpretive approach.<sup>5</sup> These assumptions keep making it difficult to see how, for us, emotions serve as tokens in the construction of our subjectivity, how they bolster our belief in the truth of our individuality, and how all of this might also be political and specific to our place and time—that is, something worth analyzing critically rather than universalizing.<sup>6</sup>

If instead we take discourses as the object of analysis, we can get at something more interesting. I am not making a narrow plea for sociolinguistics or the ethnography of communication, although they are also involved. "Discourse" is a concept that recognizes that what people say, generously defined (which is, after all, what anyone is dealing with in the anthropological study of emotions), is inseparable from and interpenetrated with changing power relations in social life. There is a double movement implied in this notion. First, social and political life is to be seen as the product of interactions among individuals whose practices are informed by available discourses; second, language and culture are understood pragmatically rather than referentially. They are understood as part of social and political life. Analyzing emotion discourses as discourses rather than as data for our own "scientific" discourses on emotion provides us with a technique for avoiding the false attribution of the project of psychologizing to others as it reminds us relentlessly of the social nature of emotional expression.<sup>7</sup>

### A Discourse Redeplayed

If any further evidence need be offered for the critical importance of retaining a sense of the always social character of emotion discourse, consider the final aspect of this Bedouin love story: the context in which it was told. Fathalla's story was told to me,

as I recounted, by my host, the man whose household I had lived in for two years. He played me the tape of those poignant love songs as I was about to depart again for the United States. I had been absent for five years the first time, and they did not know when I would next return. I promised it would be soon.<sup>8</sup> Although my host and his family had begged me to stay, and my host had gone as far as to offer to set up a job for me directing a private school he would finance, I insisted that my life was in *amrika* and that it was not likely that I would come to live permanently in Egypt. When he played this tape for me and told me its sad tale, he was not interested in explicating Bedouin emotion concepts or in understanding himself, but rather in impressing on me the force of poetry. Wasn't he, in a way, using the force of poetry on me? Of course, he knew I was writing a book about poetry, and we often discussed poems. Was there more? Did he wish to move me, to resist my departure by these songs and by telling me what effect they had had on another woman?

I sensed that this may have been part of his intent when, two years later, as I went over Fathalla's love poems with my host's wife, a woman I always talked with about poetry and who was good at explaining poems, I heard something surprising. She knew the poems and knew Fathalla's story, but said she had not heard that the girl had died. In fact, she was fairly certain that she was alive and living with the husband of her arranged marriage.

This incident can serve as a reminder that the emotional discourses we might want to use for our anthropological discourse on emotion are hardly inert. They may indeed have a cultural context, but the more important thing about them is that they participate in social projects—whether the larger ones of generational contests over power in an eroding tribal system or the local and particular ones of a conversation between a Bedouin man and a youngish female anthropologist driving to Cairo in a Mercedes.

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**Notes**

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1. For a fuller discussion of the Awlad 'Ali, see Abu-Lughod (1986).
2. They talk about an institution called the *mijlās*, in which a young unmarried woman would entertain all the eligible young men in a tent, challenging them to respond to her songs.
3. Like the dissolution of the discourse of women's weaving in North Africa, argued by Messick (1987) to be related to the capitalist transformation of domestic weaving, with the disappearance of one occasion for song have died the songs appropriate to it among the Awlad 'Ali. Sheep shearings, which used to be occasions for groups of young men to go from household to household shearing the sheep, no longer occur, as professionals, mostly from Sinai, have taken over this work. The songs that accompanied sheep shearing were more explicitly sexual than the *ghinnāwa*, couching in immundo their references to relations between men and women. These are no longer heard, and I heard of no equivalently sexual genres.
4. The Arabic original, as sung by 'Awadh al-Malkī, is as follows:

naṣba minnū lish-shāyib  
 illi ḥābis ḥurri' ish-shab  
 wnaṣī nāja ismāḥā hub  
 w'atf wshōg wnaḥ thib  
 yā magwā nār il-ghāwī  
 yā magwā nār il-'ajūn  
 illi ba'dhun mishāgin  
 simāḥitā yagbō khāyūn  
 yḡūl in-nāgīr sā'a yī  
 yḡūl in-nāgīr sā'a yūg

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# Language and the politics of emotion

*Edited by*

Catherine A. Lutz

*State University of New York at Binghamton*

Lila Abu-Lughod

*Princeton University*

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## 2. Shifting politics in Bedouin love poetry

LILA ABU-LUGHOD

One morning in New York, I turned on the radio and happened to catch a call-in therapy show in which listeners telephoned the station and spoke to a psychologist about their problems. The first caller was an older housewife who presented her predicament as an inability to stick to a diet. She was distressed that she kept bingeing. The psychologist skillfully questioned her until it emerged that she did this eating at night, after her husband had gone to sleep, and that she was "really" angry with him because he always came home late and tired from the office and never wanted to do anything with her in the evenings.

What struck me most about what I heard was that the psychologist kept asking over and over, "How did you feel?" – How do you feel when this happens, what did you feel when he said that, what did you feel when he did that? She took for granted this mode of getting at the truth, this focus on emotions as touchstones of personal reality. And I suspect that the poor caller, had she later gone into therapy, would have learned to populate her narratives about herself and her relationships with a legion of emotions too. She would have learned to practice on herself and on others, to adapt a notion from Foucault (1985:5), a hermeneutics of feeling.

The Bedouins I lived and worked with in Egypt would find the command to confess one's feelings strange – on the one hand improper and undignified, and on the other, as will become clear, nonsensical. Nonsensical not just because they never ask each other the question "How did you feel?" and because I cannot think of how it could be said in their dialect. And not just because they are more likely to ask each other "What did she do?" or "What did you say?" It is nonsensical, first, because it implies that there is a satisfying explanation to be had by resorting to the inspection of emotions and, second, because it presumes that the sentiments one would talk about in this publicly broadcast confessional

would be the same as those in other social contexts and in other forms or media. In short this question assumes that emotions could be detached in meaning and consequence from the flow of social life.

In anthropology, the last decade or so of work on emotion, associated as it has been with a growing interest in such notions as the person, the self, and experience, has radically questioned such assumptions.<sup>1</sup> Many anthropologists have become skeptical of Western academic and popular ideas about emotions – about their naturalness and thus universality, their internal location, and their personal or individual quality. Lutz (1986) has brilliantly mapped the shared cultural terrain of philosophical, psychological/psychiatric, and lay Euro-American middle-class discourse on emotions, showing how "emotion" plays into a double-edged system of signification as the opposite of both reason (or thought) and estrangement. One important contribution of her analysis is, as she puts it (Lutz 1986:304), that "by demonstrating the nature and extent of the Western cultural construction of emotion, it is possible to contrast these conceptions to the ethnopsychological premises upon which the emotional lives of people of other cultures are based, premises which we might now only gingerly term 'emotional'." By beginning to deconstruct the concept of emotion itself through showing its specific cultural meaning, she undermines the certainties that guided traditional psychological anthropology, as it borrowed from psychology and philosophy, and articulates a position that is implicit in much of the work on emotion that falls under the rubric of interpretive anthropology.

Nevertheless, exposing the ethnocentrism<sup>2</sup> of our scientific and ordinary discourse on emotion does not guarantee that basic and pervasive cultural notions about emotion cannot slip back into our work or that we may not draw instead on other cultural notions in our reformulations. That emotions are somehow already there or that they have some ontological being is slipped back in by their very designation as the object of disciplinary study: "the anthropology of emotions."

There are also more serious problems that arise in precisely that work that offers the most sustained critique of psychological, psychobiological, or psychoanalytic conceptualizations of emotions and their human carriers. Interpretive and cognitive anthropologists argue that emotions are embedded in cultural contexts that give them meaning and thus have explored the cultural variability of emotional configurations and vocabulary. In work on what could be labeled the "cultural construction of emotion," they have set themselves the tasks of cultural translation, mapping the conceptual domains of emotion words in various cultures,

human sciences and what he calls, following Nietzsche, our modern Western "will to truth" are part.

As Lutz and White (1986:420) point out, more attention is now beginning to be paid to the relationship between emotions and social structure.<sup>4</sup> In many cases, this turn to the social is found within the interpretive paradigm. Myers (1986:107), for instance, who argues for a concern with emotional constructs' "place within a larger cultural system of meanings," adds that "if the emotions are relational, the relationships they constitute are given meaning and value by the social process in which they are embedded." Rosaldo too, in the latter part of her article, begins exploring the notion, with regard to shame, guilt, and egalitarian versus hierarchical societies, that "notions of the person, affective processes and forms of society itself are interlinked" (1984:148). She concludes by arguing that we are "social persons" (1984:151) and that what is needed is to relate "lives of feeling to conceptions of the self, as both of these are aspects of particular forms of politics and social relations" (1984:150). In suggesting, as do many whose work on emotions considers the realm of the social, that there might be some correlation between emotion constructs and forms of society, she raises the somewhat troubling possibility of a new brand of national character studies.<sup>5</sup> This can be avoided only if society is not conceptualized as a unitary body but rather as composed of individuals and groups with competing interests involved in relations of power, and if politics is not reified in the notion of a polity.

I prefer to follow out a more dynamic strand of Rosaldo's argument, one that carries more sociolinguistic assumptions, as a promising direction for the anthropological study of emotion. She writes that "what individuals *can* think and feel is overwhelmingly a product of socially organized modes of action and of talk" (1984:147). I would use this aspect of her argument against her interpretive bent to argue that instead of enriching our concept of culture (1984:138), we need to break with it by pressing harder on the question of social action and talk. In other words, we need to examine emotion as discursive practice (see Abu-Lughod and Lutz, this volume, for a critique of the culture concept). This brings up the third problem with much cultural analysis, a problem that has received a good deal of attention in this volume and elsewhere: It generally models itself on theories of language as referential and communicative. This promotes a lingering concern with meaning, which always implies that it is the referents that are the object of study rather than the speakers (see also Rosenber, this volume). I would argue that

tracing the cultural systems in which these related concepts participate, and considering the situations to which these emotion constructs are tied.<sup>3</sup>

Although I am sympathetic to the intent of this work, have contributed to it myself (Abu-Lughod 1985, 1986), and believe it begins the important task of relativizing, there are at least three aspects of it that I find problematic. I will take up the first two here and the third later in my discussion of discourse. First, for many involved in this work of demonstrating the emotions to be cultural rather than natural, the Western thought-feeling dualism has been seen as a key to our mistakes. As a solution, however, the stress on the inherently cultural character of emotions risks assimilating emotion to thought. Myers (1986:106) makes the point that "emotions are not simply reactions to what happens, but interpretations of an event, judgments [about situations]." Lutz and White (1986:428) conclude that in the new work on emotions, "emphasis is shifted away from the question of whether a somehow decontextualized emotional experience is 'the same' or 'different' across cultures to that of how people make sense of life's events." Rosaldo (1984:137-8) argues that "thought is always culturally patterned and infused with feelings, which themselves reflect a culturally ordered past," and suggests that feelings must be understood as "embodied thoughts" (1984:138). In privileging in their theories of emotion activities such as understanding, making sense of, judging, and interpreting, these theorists may be inadvertently replicating that bias toward the mental, idealist, or cognitive that Lutz (1986) points out is such a central cultural value for us.

A second and related problem with the cultural approach is that it assumes that all humans are primarily engaged, like social scientists or philosophers, in the project of interpretation and understanding rather than other practices. Rosaldo (1984:139) outlines a trend in the social sciences that has at its center the desire to grasp "how human beings understand themselves and [how] to see their actions and behaviors as in some ways the creations of those understandings." It strikes me that, without in any way denigrating their philosophical inclinations or consciousness, the people we study are just as likely to be interested in other aspects of living as in interpreting or understanding. Thus, rather than relativizing Western psychology by calling it "ethnopsychology," thereby attributing the essentially contemplative project of psychologizing, or for that matter anthropologizing, to everyone, we might want to bring into question, as Foucault (1970) does, the very peculiar and historically specific developments of which the enterprises known as the



the first step must be to ask how emotion discourses are deployed in social contexts. This would shift the concern from what Foucault has argued is characteristic of and widespread in the modern West – a focus on what is *said* in discourse – to the more interesting and political questions of what discourse is, what it does, and what forms it.<sup>6</sup> What we need to know is how discourses on emotion, or emotional discourses for that matter (see Abu-Lughod and Lutz, this volume), are implicated in the play of power and the operation of historically changing systems of social hierarchy (see also Trawick, this volume).

One can look at the relationship between emotion, social life, and power as Lutz (1986) does by noting the ideological functions of emotion attribution (e.g., the labeling of women, children, primitives, and lower classes as emotional "to justify the exclusion of these individuals from positions of power and responsibility" [Lutz 1986:294]) or by looking at the actual social contexts in which emotion discourses are deployed. To study the ways emotion discourses are used, to focus on practice rather than meaning, and to examine discourses rather than their putative referents are, it seems to me, the projects shared by the contributors to this volume.<sup>7</sup>

I focus, in this chapter, on the emotions or sentiments associated with relations between men and women in a Bedouin community in Egypt's Western Desert, especially the discourses of "love." My argument proceeds by way of a Bedouin love story. The community of Bedouins about which I write are part of a group known as the Awlad 'Ali who inhabit the area along the Mediterranean coast of Egypt west of Alexandria into Libya.<sup>8</sup> I lived in this community from 1978 to 1980, visited once for a month five years later, and went back for five months of fieldwork in 1987. Until about thirty-five years ago, those still living in the Western Desert made a living mostly by herding sheep, growing barley, and organizing camel caravans to transport dates from the oases to the Nile Valley. Now they are involved in all sorts of activities, from the old one of raising sheep to the newer ones of tending orchards, smuggling, supplying construction materials, and speculating in real estate. They used to live in tents. Now most of them live in houses, although they still pitch their tents next to their houses and prefer sitting in the tents at least during the day. They used to ride on horses, camels, and donkeys; now they prefer Toyota trucks. Although sedentarizing, they still proudly distinguish themselves from the settled peasant and urban groups of the Nile Valley – the Egyptians – by their tribal organization and what they

see as their superior morality. But, as I will discuss, even this is beginning to change.

Here is the love story. I was back in Egypt in 1985, visiting for the first time since my initial fieldwork the families I had lived with for almost two years. It was early in the morning of the last day I was there. My host, the head of the family, with whom I had lived as a sort of adopted daughter, was getting ready to drive me to Cairo to catch my plane. He rummaged around in the pockets of his various robes and vests, looked in his briefcase, and finally in exasperation asked his children, who were all standing around, if they knew what had happened to the cassette of Fathalla Aj-jbēhi. His eldest daughter sheepishly went and got it from the cassette player she and her sisters often secretly listened to when he was away. The kids put my suitcases in the trunk of his new Mercedes, I said my goodbyes, and we set off. As soon as we were on the desert highway, he turned on the tape deck and said that I had to listen to this tape. We listened. A man chanted, in a moving and pained voice, poem after poem of the type called the *ghinnāwa*.

My host listened raptly, interjected exclamations of sympathy at the end of some of the poems, and elaborated, with intense and obvious admiration, on some of the references in the poems. Among the poems were the following two:

Patience is hard  
for my heart, so freshly wounded . . .

wa'r 'alēh is-ṣabr  
jarhā jdīd māzāl khātrī . . .

I'd figured, oh beloved, that distance  
would be a cure but it only made it worse . . .

niḥsāb yā 'azīz il-mōh  
yabgā lī dwā nādh zādni . . .

My host explained that Fathalla, the young man reciting the poems (whose kinship relation to one of our neighbors he identified) had been in love with his paternal cousin and wanted to marry her. Their fathers had first agreed to it but then got into an argument with each other. The young woman's father decided to refuse to give his daughter to the young man. In despair and thinking that he might get over this more easily if

he put distance between them, the man set off for Libya (where until recently many Bedouin men went looking for work). Some time afterward, the girl's father arranged to marry his daughter to someone else. When Fathalla heard the news, he composed and recorded these poems and sent the tape to the girl's brother, a cousin with whom he had grown up. Fifteen days after the wedding, when the bride came back to her family's household for the ritual postmarital visit, her brother played her the tape. She listened to it and when it was over, she gasped for air, fainted, and then fell over, dead.

This story tells us a great deal about the politics of emotion discourse in Bedouin society. I will take up four aspects of it. First, there is the matter of the poignant love poems and their relationship to other Bedouin discourses on "love." Second, there is the import of the reactions to the young man's poetry and its apparent power. Third, there is the fact of the cassette. In the conclusion, I will consider a fourth issue: the context of the particular telling of this story to the anthropologist.

When Fathalla wanted to express the sentiments of love, he did so in the traditional and formulaic medium of poetry. The way he expressed these feelings and the medium in which he expressed them could be said to be distinctively Bedouin. One could easily say that they were shaped by the culture in which he lived. Fathalla expressed his painful feelings in a genre of oral lyric poetry that is so much a part of everyday life and so cherished by the Bedouins that on my first field trip I had ended up studying it. Reminiscent of Japanese haiku in its length and condensation of imagery, but more like the blues in emotional tone, this is the poetry of personal life. It is by no means the only kind of poetry the Bedouins recite. They have many distinct genres of long rhyming verse, usually composed by men, often specialists, and recited at formal gatherings. They also have special types of wedding poems and songs. But poems of this genre, the *ghinnāwa*, can be composed and recited by anyone, male or female. Although the poems can be changed or sung, sometimes at weddings, and as you could tell from my story, now even into cassettes passed from person to person, most often as I heard them they were just recited in the middle of ordinary conversations with intimates.

The poetry is rich in sentiment, so one might be tempted to explore the language of poetry in order to get at the cultural construction of Bedouin sentiment. But there would be a problem with this project. As I began to pay attention to the way people used this form of poetry, I discovered an intriguing pattern: There was a discrepancy between the

feelings individuals expressed in their poems and the ones they expressed in their ordinary language communications about the same situations.<sup>9</sup> This is not apparent from Fathalla's case, because his poems were out of context. But it is obvious from a more typical case I have written about, that of a middle-aged woman I called Safiyya.

When she told me about her divorce from the man she'd been married to for almost twenty years, she showed the aggressive nonchalance I'd come to expect as the typical attitude toward love and marriage. She explained that she had never liked him and didn't care when he divorced her. But two days later, when a conversation between Safiyya 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 a poem that everyone knew was about her husband. In it she expressed a very different set of sentiments, especially her sadness at losing him. This and several other poems she recited suggested a feeling of attachment to her husband and were recognized as doing so by all the women who heard them.

Like Fathalla, Safiyya expressed the sentiments of love in poetry – but she denied those sentiments in her ordinary conversation. There she expressed the more characteristic sentiments of everyday male–female relations in this society – which involved the denial of concern about the husband. In general, male–female relations among the Bedouins are marked by distance. Sexual segregation characterizes daily life. People deny interest in love or sexual matters and avoid members of the opposite sex except close relatives. An important goal of the socialization process is to teach children, especially girls, to do this. I heard a girl confide in her uncle's new wife. "To tell you the truth, I don't even know what this love is. I hear about it in songs and hear about this one giving some guy her necklace, that one her ring, but I don't know what they are talking about." The older woman responded approvingly. "That's my girl." Even married women deny any interest in their husbands, not to mention other men. Women rarely use their husbands' names, referring to them as 'that one' or, if affectionate, 'the old man'; if they are being formal, they refer to him politely as 'the master of my household.' At least in front of others, they are formal and distant with husbands, showing no public affection.

By the same token, men do not spend much time with their wives and rarely talk about them. They are ridiculed if they show too much concern. When one man's new bride ran away and he sulked and seemed miserable, his relatives all teased or scolded him. His mother said, "What,

You worry about a woman? You're an idiot. Fathalla, the man who recorded the poetry on the cassette, had probably rarely spoken to his beloved, and there is little doubt that he had been unable to broach the subject of love or marriage with his own father. For the marriage arrangement he had probably relied on an intermediary. The extremity of the avoidance of the subject, especially in front of elders, is well illustrated by an incident described by Peters (1952), who worked with a related group of Bedouins in Cyrenaica. She was sitting in a tent with a group of Bedouin men and brought up the topic of marriage or women. She suddenly noticed that all the young men had fled the tent, in their haste leaving their shoes behind.

This avoidance is said to be motivated by a sentiment, called *hasham*, which can be translated as "modesty," "embarrassment," or "shame." *Hasham* refers both to what we might think of as an internal state of shyness, embarrassment, or shame and to a set of behaviors associated with these "feelings," although the Awlad 'Ali do not make that distinction. The cultural repertoire of such behaviors includes dressing modestly for both sexes (which means covering the hair, arms to the wrists, and legs to the ankles) and aspects of demeanor such as downcast eyes, formal posture, and refraining from eating, smoking, talking, laughing, and joking. It is also marked, for married women, by veiling in certain circumstances. Very importantly, as I have described, it involves sexual propriety. What is clear is the *hasham* is the moral sentiment. The person with social sense, the good person - *tahashshams* - feels shy and acts modestly in the appropriate situations. Children, idiots, and the insane don't. Nor do bad people.

The question that comes up at this point is what one should make of this disjunction between the two sorts of sentiments Bedouins express about "love." As I have argued elsewhere (1986), several obvious types of explanation do not seem satisfactory. The first, that people are being hypocritical or engaging in acts of self-presentation, underestimates the commitment to morality among the Awlad 'Ali, attributing to them Euro-American ideological notions about the opposition between individual freedom and social restraint. A weaker version of this argument, but one no less steeped in our cultural assumptions, is that we are dealing with moral (i.e., social) constraint versus personal expression. Related to these interpretations is the safety-valve argument that sees the poetry as providing release from the pressures of moral conformity, a theory that has the added drawback of conceiving of society as a machine. All of these theories about the contradictions between the two discourses on senti-

ment privilege the poetic sentiments as in some sense the true ones. As this because, as Foucault (1985:5) has argued and the radio therapist demonstrated, in the modern West we have come to search for the truth of our being in desire, or more broadly, in feelings?

I prefer a different argument, one that does not mistake discourses on sentiment for emotion and one that pays close attention to the place in social and political life of what is said. Going back to the issue of modesty, I want to show how, if modesty is tied up with morality, morality, in turn, is tied up with power in a specific way. Modesty has two aspects, which are easier to grasp if we look at the negative case - the bad person, the immoral person who lacks *hasham*. Where women are concerned, such persons are described as either 'willful' (*gāwiyā*) or 'slutty' (*qhabā*). The first term describes someone who talks back or disobeys her elders. The word itself comes from the root meaning to be strong or powerful but in this form suggests excessive assertiveness. Such assertiveness is inappropriate for those in positions of dependence or social inferiority. This suggests that modesty is about deference to others. *Hasham* can refer to a general attitude of propriety, but most often it is thought of as operating in the context of particular relationships. *Hasham* is such a good index of hierarchy that when a young woman married into the community in which I was living, one of the first questions she asked her husband's young kinswomen was who was modest in front of whom. The girls responded by telling her which women veiled for which men and which men did not smoke in front of other men. Through this outline of deference patterns, the bride determined the hierarchy in her new marital community.

The second term for someone without *hasham* - slut - refers to sexual propriety. I have already described the elements of sexual modesty as they play themselves out in daily life. Here I want to show how sexual modesty as the denial of love interests is actually another form of deference. To make this argument, I will talk not about Islam - that totalizing concept to which everything that happens in Middle Eastern society tends to be reduced - but about the Bedouin social order.

The Awlad 'Ali are tribally organized. For them, common descent through the male line and shared blood provide the primary and the only legitimate basis for binding people together. Paternal kin live together, share some property, pass it on, and go to social functions together. They are also expected to feel close. If blood bonds between paternal relatives, male or female, are privileged as the only basis of social relationships, then heterosexual or romantic love, even in its le-

legitimate guise of marriage, although necessary for the reproduction of society and the perpetuation of lineages, is hard to deal with. It does not rest easily within this framework for social relations and is in fact a threat.

Love and the bonds it might establish between individuals are not just threats to the framework that orders social relations, but are also talked about as threats to the solidarity of the paternal kin group, something often noted in the literature on patrilateral societies from traditional China to Zinacantan (Collier 1974; Wolf 1972). The Awlad 'Ali view sexual bonds and the bonds of agnation as competing. Even more importantly, sexual bonds are seen as threats to the authority and control of elder male relatives who represent the interests of the agnatic family group, control its resources, and make its decisions. At marriage, sons begin to have a small domain of authority of their own, and daughters leave the domain of authority of their father and kin.

The threat marriage represents is counteracted at every point by social and ideological strategies. The marital bond is undermined in numerous ways: Women retain close ties to their paternal relatives, senior male relatives control the choice of marriage partners, and sexual segregation ensures that husbands and wives spend little time together. Divorce is easy and polygyny possible. And the married couple is rarely economically independent. Love matches are actively discouraged. One man told me that the only way people who loved each other would be allowed to marry was if their elder male relatives or the girl's paternal cousins did not know. Women often told me that love matches always ended badly for the woman because she would not have the support of her male kin if her husband mistreated her.

I have argued that the cultural preference for patrilateral parallel cousin marriage is another such strategy (Abu-Lughod 1986). The Awlad 'Ali frequently marry first cousins or other cousins on the father's side, and the male even has a legal claim to his paternal uncle's daughter. This type of marriage may be upheld as the cultural ideal, because it provides a means of defusing the threat of the sexual bond in this social system; it *substitutes* the marital bond under the prior and more legitimate bond of kinship.

The moral code that prescribes modesty is the most effective means of undermining the sexual bond. If the threat to the social order can be made to seem a threat to the respectability or moral worth of the individual, then that order will be reproduced by the actions of individuals in everyday life. The modesty code ensures that even individuals who do

not have as much stake in the system as the young men and women will help perpetuate it because their virtue or their standing as moral beings, as good persons, depends on denying their sexuality. As I hinted earlier, these sentiments of sexual modesty are situational. They are important to display only in front of certain people — the elder male agnates. So, sexual modesty must be seen as a form of deference to them. The moral sentiments of modesty are part of a discourse that sustains and perpetuates the particular social system and the power of certain groups within it.

Conversely, then, the immodest sentiments of "love" are subversive. To express them is subversive of the social order and defiant of those whose interests are served by this order. This element of defiance is made concrete in the story of Fathalla. In singing about his feelings of love, he was, in a sense, defying the authority of his paternal uncle, who had thwarted his desires and prevented him from marrying his cousin.

Because it carries subversive sentiments of love, one could consider the *ghinnāwa* the Bedouin discourse of defiance. There is plenty of evidence that poetry is in general associated with opposition to the ideals of normal social life. This type of poetry is considered un-Islamic. The pious shouldn't recite it or show any interest in it. It is also considered unrespectable. Even the term "to sing" can't be said in mixed-sex company without causing all-around embarrassment. People say that they are ashamed or embarrassed about singing in front of nonintimates, especially elders. Women told me never to share their poems with the men. And in the past, older men avoided public settings like weddings and sheep-shearing parties where young men usually recited this type of poetry. The most persuasive evidence of the oppositional character of poetry is who recites poetry and who avoids it. Although older men occasionally recite them, *ghinnāwas* are most closely associated with youths and women. These are the disadvantaged dependents who have least to gain in the system as structured.

### Dialectics of deference and defiance

The existence of defiant or subversive discourses by those not in power is probably fairly common in the world. We must take care not to romanticize this rebellion by taking it out of the context of social and political relations in particular societies. This brings me back to my second general point: We need to consider Bedouin reactions to this poetry. What may be specific to the Awlad 'Ali Bedouins is that even though

this resistant emotional discourse goes against the system and makes the groups with power nervous, it is both culturally elaborated and positively sanctioned. Poetry is a highly developed art and the Awlad 'Ali cherish and privilege it, in certain contexts listening intently to poems, memorizing, repeating, and being moved by them. Most of the adults I lived with suggested that poetry was the best thing they had to offer as a cultural group. They thought of poetry as distinctively Bedouin, associated with their noble past when they were politically autonomous, tough, and independent.

Similarly, those who recite poetry, expressing those sentiments that challenge the social system and the authority of elders, are not just tolerated or *not* disapproved of but actually admired. This is apparent in my host's reactions to Fathalla. He and the many who wanted to hear this tape over and over clearly admired this young man for his passion and for his ability to express it in poetry. They were moved by his poems and awed by the power of his words.

I have argued that this ambivalence about love poetry – the discomfort surrounding it on the one hand, and its glorification on the other – reflects a fundamental tension in the organization of Bedouin social and political life. It may be related to an uneasy recognition of the way that the system of hierarchy within the lineage and family, the one to which the sentiments of deference apply, violates the tenets of tribal politics, where the paramount ideals are autonomy and equality. Day-to-day politics, however, puts in the hands of elder male agnates control over resources and power over dependents. This domination contravenes the ideals that sustain the wider tribal system. It may be rationalized through the elaboration of a moral code that justifies the privilege of elders and dignifies the deference of dependents. But it is a contradiction.

Love poetry, as a discourse of defiance, is seen as a discourse of autonomy and freedom. Recited mostly by those slighted in the system – that is, women and young men – it is exalted because a refusal to be dominated is key to their tribal political ideology and so a key value, even for these individuals. To love, or to express the sentiments of love, then, also signifies one's freedom. But to talk about sentiments or the discourses on sentiments as signifying something – in this example, freedom – is misleading in that it suggests something too static and too idealist. Love poetry as a discourse of rebellion is used to assert this freedom and is credited by others with tremendous power.

This is the other sense in which sentiments should be seen as political and reciting love poetry as a political act.<sup>10</sup> Fathalla's poems challenged

his uncle's authority and ended up undermining the old man's control over the lives of his daughter and nephew and thwarting his attempt to deny them what they wanted. Others, including my host, who was an older head of a lineage and a paternal uncle to many, were awed by the fatal power of this poetry. Partly this was because they recognized that the uncle had abused his authority, but partly it was because, in Bedouin eyes, the legitimacy of authority is always in question. Resistance has positive valence, and Fathalla's love poetry was a kind of resistance. Of course, it is sadly telling that all Fathalla could do with his poems was to thwart his uncle. He was not able to get what he wanted. The story's tragic end – the death of the woman Fathalla loved – suggests the ultimate power of the system and the futility of resistance. Perhaps that is what made the tale so compelling and poignant. It may have captured people's imaginations because it so vividly portrayed the complex relationship between love poetry and power in Bedouin society.

### The cassette

The third aspect of Fathalla's story I want to take up is the somewhat surprising fact that his love songs were on a cassette. I had thought, when I left Egypt after my first period of fieldwork in 1980, that the Bedouin *ghinnāwa* was dying out. The adolescents I knew did not sing or recite this type of poetry, nor did they seem particularly interested in it. They were beginning to listen to Egyptian radio, and it was from their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, and sometimes from their fathers and a few young men, that I collected poetry. These adults offered one explanation for why poetry was dying out: They said that there were no longer any occasions for singing. There is a certain truth to their deceptively straightforward explanation to which I will return.

If, however, it was the ideology of the political system, with its value of autonomy, that lent positive valence to expressions of love as defiance, even when they came from below, then one would not be surprised to find such discourses dying as the Awlad 'Ali Bedouins' political autonomy was undermined. This has been going on for quite a while as the Egyptian state has sought, over the last 35 years, to introduce its authority into the Western Desert, a process that has been underway in Bedouin areas closer to the Nile Valley for 150 years or more. The Awlad 'Ali have developed an impressive array of strategies to resist, subvert, and circumvent the authority of the state, which they consider illegiti-

mate. Since they are not fazed by guns, and prison sentences carry no stigma, it is even hard to intimidate them into good citizenship.

There is, however, one process that began in their region in the 1970s that, more effectively than government efforts to disarm them, school them, put them in the military, license and register them, is progressively undermining their resistance to the state: the gradual shift in their economic life from herding and commercial activities, including smuggling, to investment in land. Land reclamation efforts by the government are transforming some of their desert into agricultural land, which they are increasingly buying and relying on for a livelihood, if not actually farming themselves. Land along the coast, on the other hand, has become valuable for tourist development, and many of them are doing quite well selling beachfront property. They are also fighting with each other over this land, which was formerly tribally held rather than individually owned. With this involvement in land, the Bedouins have become enmeshed in the state's legal system, since they need to get titles and make claims through it.<sup>11</sup>

This shift in the Bedouin political economy can be connected with what I see as a shift in the dialectic of deference and defiance in which love songs are deployed. As the economic basis of the tribal system erodes, and with it the political underpinnings of the value of autonomy, the older reality of mutual responsibility within the family and lineage is changing. There used to be a complex division of labor, with resources managed by elders but not owned. Now private ownership puts tremendous control in the hands of patriarchs. Young men suffer, as I will discuss, but those most dramatically affected are women. They are now economically dependent on men, having little access to money, and their work is increasingly confined to housework. With the moral value of modesty still in force, these women who live in the new circumstances of sedentarized communities, where they are surrounded by neighbors most of whom are nonkin, must be *more* secluded, more often veiled, and less free to move around.

Older women comment on these changes, reminiscing about things they used to do that young women today cannot get away with — like having rendezvous with sweethearts and exchanging songs with men at weddings and sheep shearings.<sup>12</sup> But they are also convinced that they were more modest, a perception that I think relates to a sense that it was more self-imposed. They often complain that their sons, husbands, nephews, and grandsons harshly restrict the girls, not letting them go anywhere. Girls, for their part, are beginning to complain that they feel

imprisoned. The domestic political divide now runs along gender lines, whereas it used to be between elders on one side and women and young men on the other. All men have access to the market and increasing freedom of movement; all women do not.

This shift in the political economy has implications for traditional love poems, which, as I have discovered, are not, after all, dying out. Bedouin love songs are taking on different meaning and force, having been given new life by the advent of the cassette. The Bedouins had said that songs were dying out because there were no occasions for singing. In a sense, they were right. By the time I first met them, in 1978, they were reciting love poems only in intimate social situations. As I later learned, however, the most important forum for love songs had been weddings, at which young men and women had sung within earshot of and sometimes to each other.<sup>13</sup> Those kinds of celebrations had stopped by then, and the weddings I attended were sexually segregated. The women sang only songs of blessing, congratulation, and praise, and the men did nothing but sit around. Today, locally made cassettes — copied, re-copied, and sometimes sold for money — provide a new occasion for song, as does a new kind of wedding celebration coming into fashion. At this new wedding, attended by invited guests but also attracting a growing group of somewhat rowdy young men, the small-time stars of these low-budget commercial cassettes perform. Because of the public nature of these occasions, where, unlike in the past, "public" includes a wide range of nonkin and complete strangers, women are absent. They are also, out of modesty, absent from the recording sessions where tapes are made. They make no tapes and no longer sing in public. No longer having as much social and political support for defiance, the women also seem to be losing one of the means for it — love poetry.

The poems sung on cassettes and at *mikrofon* weddings seem now to be part of a discourse of defiance by young men against the more absolute authority and economic control of their fathers and paternal uncles. This is a period when, at the same time, young men are beginning to have more possibilities for independence from the kin group through wage labor and more knowledge than their fathers about the ways of the state through their experiences in the army and school. A new sort of generational conflict produced by these transitional circumstances is being played out partly in the language of love.

I had unexpected confirmation of the new use of "love" on my visit in January 1987, when I was listening with friends to one of the latest cassettes of popular Bedouin songs of a different genre. There was a

long and somewhat humorous song about the tribulations of a young man whose father and uncle had arranged three terrible marriages for him with women he'd never met. The first woman turned out to be bald, the second dumb, and the third insane and violent to boot. In the final verse of his song the poet, speaking on behalf of all young men who have suffered the tyranny of such fathers and uncles, sings:<sup>14</sup>

My warnings are to the old man  
who imprisons the freedom of youths  
who's forgotten a thing called love  
affection, desire, and burning flames  
who's forgotten how strong is the fire of lovers  
how strong the fire of lovers who long for one another  
What's exquisite is that they're afraid  
they say, any minute my prying guard will turn up  
oh my father's about to catch us

The relationship between love and freedom in this song is complex – because, although he does not want the elders to force loveless marriages on their children, the poet recognizes that what makes love exquisite is that it is stolen – it is against the authority of elder agnates. In other words, he wants the freedom to defy the elders a bit, a freedom he reminds them they used to want, but he does not reject the system as a whole or want to have love easy or open.

The continuity of form in love songs is consistent with this attitude. Unlike rock and roll, which some would argue played and plays a similar role in our society, the protests occur in an idiom that the elders can appreciate: the poetry they themselves love and must respect, given their own values. This is true even though they disapprove of the young men's bare heads, occasional long hair, experimentation with drugs and liquor, and general loss of *hasham*. Everyone comments on this now – the new brand of young men aren't modest in front of their fathers. According to the girls I talk with, in front of their fathers these young men not only smoke cigarettes but, worse, they shamelessly play love songs on their cassette recorders.

This is only a partial analysis of the shifting politics of Bedouin discourses on love, a complex subject on which I do not want to impose a false coherence. Yet it should be sufficient to make clear my larger analytical point regarding the anthropology of emotion. As long as emotions remain the object of study, we can break with neither the idealism and mentalism of the interpretive approach nor the assumptions that

animated our radio therapist's project.<sup>15</sup> These assumptions keep making it difficult to see how, for us, emotions serve as tokens in the construction of our subjectivity, how they bolster our belief in the truth of our individuality, and how all of this might also be political and specific to our place and time – that is, something worth analyzing critically rather than universalizing.<sup>16</sup>

If instead we take discourses as the object of analysis, we can get at something more interesting. I am not making a narrow plea for sociolinguistics or the ethnography of communication, although they are also involved. "Discourse" is a concept that recognizes that what people say, generously defined (which is, after all, what anyone is dealing with in the anthropological study of emotions), is inseparable from and interpenetrated with changing power relations in social life. There is a double movement implied in this notion. First, social and political life is to be seen as the product of interactions among individuals whose practices are informed by available discourses; second, language and culture are understood pragmatically rather than referentially. They are understood as part of social and political life. Analyzing emotion discourses as discourses rather than as data for our own "scientific" discourses on emotion provides us with a technique for avoiding the false attribution of the project of psychologizing to others as it reminds us relentlessly of the social nature of emotional expression.<sup>17</sup>

### A discourse redeployed

If any further evidence need be offered for the critical importance of retaining a sense of the always social character of emotion discourse, consider the fourth and final aspect of this Bedouin love story: the context in which it was told. Fathalla's story was told to me, as I recounted, by my host, the man whose household I had lived in for two years. He played me the tape of those poignant love songs as I was about to depart again for the United States. I had been absent for five years the first time, and they did not know when I would next return. I promised it would be soon.<sup>18</sup> Although my host and his family had begged me to stay, and my host had gone as far as to offer to set up a job for me directing a private school he would finance, I insisted that my life was in *amrika* and that it was not likely that I would come to live permanently in Egypt. When he played this tape for me and told me its sad tale, he was not interested in explicating Bedouin emotion concepts or in understanding himself, but rather in impressing on me the force of poetry.

Wasn't he, in a way, using the force of poetry on me? Of course, he knew I was writing a book about poetry, and we often discussed poems. Was there more? Did he wish to move me, to resist my departure by these songs and by telling me what effect they had had on another woman?

I sensed that this may have been part of his intent when, two years later, as I went over Fathalla's love poems with my host's wife, a woman I always talked with about poetry and who was good at explaining poems, I heard something surprising. She knew the poems and knew Fathalla's story, but said she had not heard that the girl had died. In fact, she was fairly certain that she was alive and living with the husband of her arranged marriage.

This incident can serve as a reminder that the emotional discourses we might want to use for our anthropological discourse on emotion are hardly inert. They may indeed have a cultural context, but the more important thing about them is that they participate in social projects - whether the larger ones of generational contests over power in an eroding tribal system or the local and particular ones of a conversation between a Bedouin man and a youngish female anthropologist driving to Cairo in a Mercedes.

Notes

This paper was completed while I was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study, a unique institution to which I am grateful for many things, including support, through the National Endowment for the Humanities, for writing. Earlier versions were presented at the Anthropology Department Colloquia at New York University and the City University of New York Graduate Center, where questions from the audience helped sharpen my arguments. Several people, including Timothy Mitchell, Catherine Lutz, and Buck Schieffelin, carefully read and commented on drafts, and their suggestions, sometimes taken, sometimes not, are gratefully acknowledged. As always, my greatest debt is to the Bedouin families in Egypt who let me participate in their lives and learn from them. Funding from NEH, Williams College, and the Fulbright Commission enabled me to spend more time with them in Egypt in 1985, 1986, and 1987.

1. For a comprehensive review of this literature, see Lutz and White (1986).
2. This ethnocentrism is expressed beautifully in the title of one of Lutz's (1985) articles, "Ethnopsychology Compared to What?"
3. For extensive references to this work, see Lutz and White (1986:417-20). Also, for a wonderfully insightful and playful reflection on some of the thorny problems shared by philosophers and anthropologists engaged in the cultural translation of feelings, see Rorty's (1979:70-127) discussion of the Antipodeans (persons without minds).
4. They cite my work, that of Myers (1979, 1986), Appadurai (1985), Keeler

5. Both Buck Schieffelin and Ward Keeler, in personal communications, have voiced these sorts of worries even about their own exemplary work.
6. I am paraphrasing Foucault on discourse (1972:218, 229).
7. I am using "discourse," that admittedly slippery and overused term, not just as linguists do, to refer to the speech of individuals, but also in the Foucaultian sense of a range of culturally available and historically specific statements. See our introduction to this volume.

For a fuller discussion of the Awlad 'Ali, see Abu-Lughod (1986). Much of the argument in this section was developed in Abu-Lughod (1986). In other words, to have certain feelings or at least to express particular sentiments becomes a political statement, if not a political act. Although in the story of Fathalla, the poems seem to have the power to kill, Bedouins usually just say that it moves people or causes them to change their actions. That is, they see it as persuasive.

11. When I was there doing fieldwork most recently (in 1987), every Bedouin I knew seemed to have a lawyer. They still tried to resolve disputes through their own tribal mediation system, and my host, who is a mediator, was strained to the limit with the number of tense cases he was asked to help resolve. What was happening, however, was that they had to work both through their own system and through the courts.
12. They talk about an institution called the *mijās*, in which a young unmarried woman would entertain all the eligible young men in a tent, challenging them to respond to her songs.
13. Like the dissolution of the discourse of women's weaving in North Africa, argued by Messick (1987) to be related to the capitalist transformation of domestic weaving, with the disappearance of one occasion for song have died the songs appropriate to it among the Awlad 'Ali. Sheep shearings, which used to be occasions for groups of young men to go from household to household shearing the sheep, no longer occur, as professionals, mostly from Sinai, have taken over this work. The songs that accompanied sheep shearing were more explicitly sexual than the *ghinnāwa*, couching in innuendo their references to relations between men and women. These are no longer heard, and I heard of no equivalently sexual genres.

The Arabic original, as sung by 'Awadh al-Mālkī, is as follows:

14. The Arabic original, as sung by 'Awadh al-Mālkī, is as follows:  
 nṣūha minnī lish-shāyib  
 illī ḥābis hurrit ish-shab  
 wnāsi ḥāja ismā ḥub  
 w'atf wshōg wnār thib  
 yā magwā nār il-ghāwī  
 yā magwā nār il-'ajīn  
 illī ba'dhum mishtāgīn  
 simāhithā yagbo khayfīn  
 yḡl in-nāgr sā'a yī  
 yḡl in-nāgr sā'a yṡg

15. For a critique of the idealism implicit in interpretive anthropology, see Asad (1983).

16. Lutz (1986) makes some of these points, but I think that three further sets of questions about the Euro-American emotion concepts she outlines need to be researched. First, which cultural concepts are most salient, and does this pattern differ by subcultures? Second, when do certain ways of think-