

Abu-Lughod's 'Shifting Politics in Bedouin Love Poetry'

What society is Abu-Lughod studying? In what position are they to the state of Egypt?

The Awlad Ali society is rapidly changing. What is being changed according to the anthropologist? Find examples in the text!

“The Awlad Ali view sexual bonds and the bonds of agnation [relatives] as competing.”

What does it mean? How does she explain it? (p.145)

“Women often told me that love matches always ended badly for the women because she would not have the support of her male kin if her husband mistreated her.” (p.145)

According to this proposition, what benefits did women gain from arranged marriages?

Compare the “modesty code” (p.145) with the concept of shame in Rosaldo's article!

According to Abu-Lughod, in what way is love a subversive sentiment (of defiance, resistance)?

What role do love songs (registered on cassettes or sang on weddings) have in resisting the power (economic dominance and absolute authority) of the elders?

p.148 “The relationship between love and freedom in this song is complex...”
Why is it complex if not even paradoxical?

p.149 “‘Discourse’ is a concept that recognizes that what people say, generously defined [...], is inseparable from and interpenetrated with changing power relations in social life.”

Focusing on the discourse means that this article does not study WHAT love

(or romantic sentiment) is for the Awlad Ali. The question is thus not WHAT emotions are - whether they are universal or culturally specific - but rather how emotions are *talked about*, what practices and institutions they are affiliated with, what power strategies they are attached to, how they act as vehicles of larger socio-economic changes. So could you now summarize what the cassette story revealed about the Awlad Ali society?

p.150 “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 [...].”

The author is suggesting that rather than trying to isolate particular features as characteristic of a culture, we might need to see how, for example narratives about romantic sentiment, make a part of the complex shifts within the society. At the same time, stories might be used strategically just like in the case of the father of the host family trying to prevent Abu-Lughod from departing by telling her an exaggerated story of the cassette.

So how is Abu-Lughod's perspective on emotions different or similar to that of Evans, Dixon, Seligman, Ahmed, Solomon and Rosaldo? Examine and compare it with each of the studied authors and see how they understand emotions, what they suggest we should study when we study emotions, what methods they use to study them, what approach and classification they propose, where they locate emotions etc.

The extended version:

See the introductory pages for a good example of a literature review (the author does not just list works and paraphrase the main arguments, she shows how these arguments build on each other and lead towards her position on the study of emotions).

=> emotions *cannot* “be detached in meaning and consequence from the flow of social life” (p.25)

=> p.25 “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.”

=> considering emotions as constituted by social processes in which they are

embedded => various forms of society produce various emotion contracts (remember Eskimos, Tahitians in regard to anger?) => “what individuals *can* think and feel is overwhelmingly a product of socially organized modes of action and of talk [Rosaldo]” => emotion as discursive practice:

“how emotion discourses are deployed in social practice”, “how discourses on emotion, or emotional discourses [...], are implicated in the play of power and the operation of historically changing systems of social hierarchy”, “to study the ways emotions are used, to focus on practice rather than meaning, and to examine discourses rather than their putative referents [...]”

=> the question is thus NOT what are emotions, whether they are universal or culturally specific BUT RATHER how emotions are talked about, what practices and institutions they are affiliated with, what outcomes they manifest in regard to power distribution in the society.