INTRODUCTION

Every book tells tales, some intended, some not. This is a book of stories by and about some women in a small Bedouin community in Egypt. It is made up of conversations, narratives, arguments, songs, reminiscences, even an essay, that these women shared with each other or with me. I recall them here in a certain order with a very different audience in mind. In the way I have retold these tales and the very fact that I have chosen to keep them as "just stories" lies a tale meant for my professional colleagues—the anthropologists, feminist scholars, and students of the Muslim Middle East to whom this introduction is largely addressed.

In one sense, of course, the unusual form of this ethnography owes much to the remarkable women in the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin community with whom I lived. During my first stay in this small hamlet on the northwest coast of Egypt, a stay of nearly two years in the late 1970s, I rarely felt comfortable tape-recording. After I returned to the United States, I wrote a book based on eighteen tattered notebooks in which I had scribbled notes. In it I tried to present a general analysis of social life, morality, and poetry in this community, with a special focus on gender relations (Abu-Lughod 1986).

I felt, however, that there was so much more richness in people's conversations and complexity to their lives than I had managed to convey in that book that I had to try again. I shared with many a sense of the limitations of the standard anthropological monograph, however sophisticated, sensitive, or well written, and wondered if there could be a style of ethnographic writing that would
Writing Women's Worlds

better capture the qualities of "life as lived" in this community. A crucial aspect of this way of living was the way it was caught up in stories. The vividness and style with which women recounted stories of everyday life impressed me. The rhythms of their conversations, the voices dropping to a whisper then rising to dramatic pitches in enactments of reported speech, the expressions, the exaggerations, the detail—all lent intensity, even urgency, to the tellings. Those of us for whom newspapers and television define what is news and books and films constitute our imaginative spaces may find it hard to grasp what stories about life and people mean in such a social world—a world in which everyone is known (or is related to someone one knows) and the only events that matter are ones that happen to them.

I returned to Egypt several times between 1986 and 1989 with the hope that if I could manage to tape-record these expressive narratives, the qualities of life that I had sensed when with these women would not so easily elude me or those for whom I wanted to write. I did not expect that just because I would work from recorded speech, some directed at me, some uttered with scarce awareness of my presence, that I would be able to represent more faithfully the realities of life in this community. We have learned to be suspicious of claims about the transparency of texts and the capacity of representations to mirror reality. No less than any other sort of ethnography, this book of stories involves analysis and is shaped by the questions asked and the point of view taken. It presents, as Clifford (1986a) argues all ethnographies do, a "partial

1. The phrase "life as lived" comes from Riesman (1977). For recent and interesting expressions of dissatisfaction with the gap between the written monograph and life as lived in the field, see, among others, Jackson 1989, on the body; R. Rosaldo 1989, on emotion; and Stoller 1989, on the senses.

2. By then, needless to say, I knew people well; more important, they knew me. I began to tape-record in the presence of those who did not mind, thus gathering most of the material out of which this book has been constructed.
Introduction

truth." But I like to think that this book, with its fuller use of narrative and its greater reliance on recorded speech, conveys something that my first book could not.

Intersections

My vague longing for some way to write differently about the experience of living in that particular community in Egypt initially seemed to find legitimation in the debates about women's writing and feminist method. Sympathetic to feminist critiques of scholarship in various fields (including my own), I began to wonder if what I was seeking to do was write an ethnography "in a different voice" (to borrow Gilligan's [1982] phrase). In my early formulations of the project, I argued that this book would be written in the voice of Bedouin women (not men); more important, it would be in the voice of a woman ethnographer.3 This framing of the problem seemed especially apt given the ferment in anthropological circles about ethnographic writing. In his introduction to Writing Culture, Clifford (1986a, 19) made the controversial claim that feminist anthropologists had not been involved in textual innovation, a statement that only later gave me pause.4 At the time, I simply proposed that my project would fill this gap.

Over the years I became increasingly skeptical of my initial conceptions. First came a discomfort with the notion of a specifically female voice in writing. Any attempt to isolate what was specific to women writers eventually foundered on false essentialism and culture blindness.5 Feminist anthropologists had done too

3. For a summary of this position, see Abu-Lughod 1988a.
4. My critique of this position can be found in Abu-Lughod 1990a. Other feminist anthropologists were working on compelling critiques at the same time; see Gordon 1988; Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen 1989; and Visweswaran 1988.
5. See Echols 1984 for a good critique of cultural feminism. Haraway's (1985) cautions about a false organicist association with women are
much excellent work on the variety of women’s experiences and the variability of gender systems for anyone to imagine that there might be some universal “woman’s experience” or “woman’s style,” even if in many societies men and women did live in somewhat different worlds. Feminist scholarship in the 1980s itself was shaken by self-critiques brought about by the realization of how many groups of women (lesbians, African-Americans, “women of color,” Third World women, and others) had been excluded from consideration or participation in the development of theory. However attractive the prospect of associating certain positive qualities such as sensitivity, care, attention, embodiment, or egalitarianism with women and their projects, one finally had to confront the fact that these “feminine virtues” belonged strictly to a contemporary Euro-American subculture.

If there was not “a different voice” for women, how should I define what I was aiming for? The next formulation for the book I wanted to write was as feminist ethnography. This raised a second set of problems, the most basic and tendentious of which was what it meant to be “feminist.” A minimal definition might include a concern with women’s conditions and with the political, economic, social, and cultural implications of systems of gender for them. But if feminism also implied some sort of emancipatory project applied to the subjects of the ethnography, it would not fit. Ong (1988, 90) was correct to insist that feminists should “recognize other forms of gender- and culture-based subjectivities, and accept that others

important, and Butler’s (1990) critique of essentialism is especially lucid. The literature on women’s writing is vast. I discuss some of it in Abu-Lughod 1990a.

6. Feminist anthropology or the anthropology of women, as it is variously known (with different implications), is now a major field. For recent guides to the field and the issues, see Collier and Yanagisako 1987; di Leonardo 1991; Moore 1988; Morgen 1989; and Sanday and Goode-nough 1990.

7. Lutz’s (1988, 1990) explorations of the associations between gender and emotion in Western ideology are especially interesting.
often choose to conduct their lives separate from our particular vision of the future."

The ethnographic project could, however, be feminist vis-à-vis the world of scholarship in which it was embedded; it could direct itself meaningfully to assumptions of anthropology in general and the anthropology of the Arab world in particular using feminist insights. In an important article, Strathern (1987) characterized as awkward the relationship between anthropology and feminism. As I have argued elsewhere (Abu-Lughod 1991), she was right in her assessment but wrong in her analysis of the source of the tension. She located the tension in the differing relations of self and other of the feminist and the anthropologist, recognizing the power dynamic in the first relation but not in the second. By underplaying the inequality inherent in the anthropological self’s position as (usually) a Westerner studying non-Western others, she disregarded the first lesson of feminist analyses from Simone de Beauvoir on: relations—or, more accurately, constructions—of self and other are rarely innocent of power. To be feminist entails being sensitive to domination; for the ethnographer that means being aware of domination in the society being described and in the relationship between the writer (and readers) and the people being written about.

Also relevant to my project was the lively concern of feminist scholars in the social sciences, the history of science, and philosophy with questions of method. Building on the apprehension of how much knowledge had been generated with no attention to women and scant attention to gender, these writers had reexamined the implications of the claims to objectivity that accompanied this knowledge. Some sought to undermine these claims by showing the partiality of various kinds of knowledge; others exposed the

8. Further sophisticated discussions of the relationships among Western feminism. Third World or “Eastern” feminists, and other non-Western women can be found in Lazreg 1988; Mohanty 1984; and Spivak 1987.
9. The alternative and increasingly popular tradition of studying one’s own society or European societies requires separate treatment.
gender-related associations in the West of the binary distinction between objective and subjective (Keller 1985) and analyzed the power effects of assertions of objectivity (MacKinnon 1982; D. Smith 1987). Many proposed alternative ways of knowing or seeking knowledge based on “women’s experiences” (variously described as the experience of being subalterns, mothers, sexual beings or objects, daughters, and so forth), proposals sensibly criticized as unworkable (Harding 1987; Stacey 1988). These efforts have made one important contribution: they have sharpened our awareness of the charged nature of claims to objectivity and the situatedness of all knowledge (Haraway 1988). Positionality, feminist theorizing teaches, not only is not a handicap but must be made explicit and explored.

Feminist work thus encouraged a heightened consciousness of two issues—standpoint and the power dynamics of self and other—that dovetailed with anthropologists’ increasingly sophisticated attention to reflexivity in fieldwork and writing. Critiques of anthropology were emerging from various quarters prodding us to question what we worked on, how we wrote, and for whom we wrote. Relations of self and other were central to the dilemma of cultural difference; the question of method and its connection to stance were critical to the politics of representation (in ethnographic texts), if not the politics of anthropology as a discipline. In this convergence between feminist and anthropological theorizing during what Marcus and Fischer (1986) called an “experimental moment,” I began to see more clearly what issues I wanted to engage with in my second ethnography of this small community in Egypt’s Western Desert.

Writing Against Culture

Why would an anthropologist trained in the professional analytic language of social science choose to compose an ethnography
of narratives and conversations? There are, after all, only certain things such a book can do. Speaking of modes of writing about societies, Jackson (1989, 186) has noted that “the value and place of different discursive styles have to be decided by the situation we find ourselves in and the problems we address.” A book of stories cannot present in a systematic fashion or in the theoretical terms in which anthropologists usually work the logic of social life in the community I studied. For that, the reader should turn to other discussions of the Awlad ‘Ali (e.g., Abou-Zeid 1966; Abu-Lughod 1986; Mohsen 1975).

This book of tales can, however, speak to a set of theoretical concerns about the politics of representation. What became for me the most troubling aspect of ethnographic description was that it, like other social scientific discourses, trafficked in generalizations. Whether “seeking” laws of human sociality or simply characterizing and interpreting ways of life, our goal as anthropologists is usually to use details and the particulars of individual lives to produce typifications. The drawback, as I will argue, for those working with people living in other societies is that generalization can make these “others” seem simultaneously more coherent, self-contained, and different from ourselves than they might be. Generalization, however useful for other projects, helps make concepts like “culture” and “cultures” seem sensible. This in turn allows for the fixing of boundaries between self and other.

My concern about the generalizing mode of social scientific discourse is thus not that it abstracts and reifies, although I am responsive to critiques like D. Smith’s (1987) that make this

10. Taussig (1987) has argued that the very horrors of colonial terror in Latin America forced him to write in a different style. Pandolfo (1991) has worked to mimic in her writing the concepts, Moroccan and other, she was trying to explore.

11. See Herzfeld 1987 for a very interesting discussion of what he calls the “theory-practice conundrum” in which he argues that the opposition between ethnography and theory is symbolic.
point. Nor am I arguing for particularity versus generality as a way of privileging micro- over macro-processes. Analysts of everyday life who examine micro-interactions are just as fond of generalization as social scientists analyzing social movements or global interactions. In any event, attending to the particulars of individuals’ lives need not imply disregard for forces and dynamics that are not locally based; the effects of extralocal or long-term processes are always manifested locally and specifically.

Anthropologists do, however, have two reasons to be especially wary of generalization. The first is that as part of a professional discourse of objectivity and expertise, it is inevitably a language of power. It is the language of those who seem to stand apart from and outside of what they are describing. Again, D. Smith’s critique of sociological discourse is relevant. She has argued (1987, 62) that this seemingly detached mode of reflecting on social life is actually located: it represents the perspective of those involved in professional, managerial, and administrative structures, and its origins lie in the management of internal social groups like workers, women, blacks, the poor, or prisoners. It is thus part of what she calls “the ruling apparatus of this society.” This critique might apply as easily to anthropology, with its inter- rather than intrasocietal perspective and its origins not in domestic political problems but in the exploration and colonization of the non-European world. Furthermore, the very gap between the professional and authoritative discourses of generalization and the languages of everyday life (our own and those of others) establishes a fundamental separation

12. Speaking of sociological discourse, D. Smith (1987, 130) notes, for example, that “the complex organization of activities of actual individuals and their actual relations is entered into the discourse through concepts such as class, modernization, formal organization. A realm of theoretically constituted objects is created, freeing the discursive realm from its ground in the lives and work of actual individuals and liberating sociological inquiry to graze on a field of conceptual entities.”

13. These ideas about the relationship between academic disciplines and social management are explored more fully in Foucault 1978, 1980.
between the anthropologist and his or her readers, on the one hand, and the people being written about, on the other, that in turn facilitates the construction of these others as simultaneously different and inferior.

For the anthropologist, the second and more serious problem with generalization is that by producing the effects of homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness, it contributes to the creation of "cultures." In the process of generalizing from experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a community, the anthropologist may flatten out their differences and homogenize them. The effort to produce general ethnographic descriptions of people's beliefs or actions risks smoothing over contradictions, conflicts of interest, doubts, and arguments, not to mention changing motivations and historical circumstances. Besides being theoretically unsound, this erasure of time and conflict is misleading because it makes what is inside the external boundary set up by homogenization seem essential and fixed. The appearance of a lack of internal differentiation makes it easier to conceive of groups of people as discrete, bounded entities, like the "cultures" of "the Nuer," "the Balinese," or "the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin," populated by generic cultural beings who do this or that and believe such-and-such. Although we have come to take this notion of separate cultures for granted, there are good reasons to consider such entities dangerous fictions and to argue for what I have called writing against culture (Abu-Lughod 1991).

This stance might seem surprising. As the replacement for the scientific concept of race, popular in the nineteenth century but now discredited as a means of establishing essential differences between groups of people, culture was a positive concept. It seemed at first to solve the moral and analytical difficulties inherent in "race" by removing difference from the realm of the natural or innate. Whether conceived of as a set of behaviors, customs, traditions, rules, plans, recipes, instructions, or programs (to list the range of definitions Geertz [1973a, 44] furnishes), culture was something that was learned and therefore could change. More
important, unlike race, and unlike even the earlier concept of “culture” as a synonym for civilization (contrasted to barbarism), the modern idea allowed for multiple rather than binary differences. The shift to “culture” (“lower case c with the possibility of a final s,” as Clifford [1988a, 234] puts it) thus immediately checked an easy move to hierarchizing and, indeed, had a relativizing effect. The hallmark of twentieth-century anthropology, then, has been its promotion of cultural relativism over evaluation and judgment. In many cases, as Marcus and Fischer (1986) have argued, anthropology has even used its knowledge of others as a form of self-critique.\footnote{14}

Despite its anti-essentialist intent, however, the culture concept retains the tendency to make difference seem self-evident and people seem “other.”\footnote{15} Many anthropologists have expressed concern

\footnote{14. See Stocking 1989 for an interesting analysis of the meanings of “culture” in the 1920s.}

\footnote{15. Said (1978) has shown how the scholarly discourse of Orientalism, in mapping geography, race, and culture onto one another, fixes differences between people of “the West” and people of “the East” in ways so rigid that they might as well be considered innate. Some anticolonial movements and present-day struggles have worked by what could be labeled reverse Orientalism, where attempts to reverse the power relationship proceed by seeking to valorize for the self what in the former system had been devalued as other. A Gandhian appeal to the greater spirituality of a Hindu India, compared with the materialism and violence of the West, and an Islamist appeal to a greater faith in God, compared with the immorality and corruption of the West, both accept the essentialist terms of Orientalist constructions. While turning those constructs on their heads, the appeals preserve the rigid sense of difference based on culture.

A parallel can be drawn with feminism. It is a basic tenet of feminism that “women are not born, they are made.” It has been important for most feminists to locate sex differences in culture, not biology or nature. While this approach has inspired some feminist theorists to attend to the social and personal effects of gender as a system of difference, for many others it has led to explorations of and strategies built on the notion of a women’s culture. Cultural feminism (see Echois 1984) takes many forms, but it has many of the qualities of reverse Orientalism just discussed.}
Introduction

about how the notion of culture tends to make difference into something solid and timeless. Appadurai (1988b), in his radical argument that "natives" are a figment of the anthropological imagination, shows the complicity of the anthropological concept of culture in a continuing "incarceration" of non-Western peoples in time and place. He argues that by not looking to their histories, we have denied these people the same capacity for movement, travel, and geographical interaction that Westerners take for granted. The fluidity of group boundaries, languages, and practices, in other words, has been masked by the concept of culture. E. Wolf's (1982) work on "the people without history" has similarly uncovered massive movements of people and transformations in local life under the impact of Western expansion and the ensuing interactions with European economies—all this in communities that anthropologists often treat as representing untouched or enduring cultures. R. Rosaldo (1989) has argued not only that the "myth of the

For French feminists like Irigaray (1985a, 1985b), Cixous (1983), and Kristeva (1981), masculine and feminine, if not actually male and female, represent essentially different modes of being. Anglo-American feminists follow a different tack. Some attempt to "describe" the cultural differences between men and women—Gilligan (1982) and her followers (e.g., Belenky et al. 1986), who elaborate the notion of "a different voice," are popular examples. Others try to "explain" the differences, whether through a socially informed psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Chodorow 1978), a Marxist-derived theory of the effects of the division of labor and women's role in social reproduction (Hartsock 1985), an analysis of maternal practice (Ruddick 1989), or even a theory of sexual exploitation (Mckinnon 1982). Much feminist theorizing and practice seeks to build or reform social life along the lines of this "women's culture." There have been proposals for a woman-centered university (Rich 1979), a feminist science (H. Rose 1983, 1986), a feminist methodology in the sciences and social sciences (Meis 1983; Reinhart 1983; D. Smith 1987; Stanley and Wise 1983), even a feminist spirituality (e.g., Christ and Plaskow 1979) and ecology. These proposals nearly always build on values traditionally associated in the West with women: a sense of care and connectedness, maternal nurturing, immediacy of experience, involvement in the bodily (versus the abstract), and so forth.

II
Writing Women’s Worlds

Lone Ethnographer” and his product, the classic ethnography, produce the myth of separate and timeless cultures, but also that we would do better to focus on the border zones.16

Others have suggested as well that cultural theories tend to overemphasize coherence within these self-contained entities (Abu-Lughod 1990c). Clifford notes that “the discipline of fieldwork-based anthropology, in constituting its authority, constructs and reconstructs coherent cultural others and interpreting selves” (Clifford 1988b, 112). Ethnography, he says, is a form of culture collecting (like art collecting) in which “diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, detached from their original temporal occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement” (Clifford 1988a, 231). Organic metaphors of wholeness and the methodology of holism that characterizes anthropology both favor coherence, which in turn contributes to the perception of communities as bounded and discrete—at some fundamental level cut off from one another and different.

The problem with the concept of culture, therefore, is that despite its positive intent, it seems to work as an essential tool for making “other.” As a professional discourse that elaborates on the meaning of culture in order to account for, explain, and understand cultural difference, anthropology ends up also constructing, producing, and maintaining difference. Anthropological discourse helps give cultural difference (and the separation between groups of people that it implies) the air of the self-evident.

Does difference always smuggle in hierarchy, as the feminist theorists have suggested? Anthropology seems to have high stakes in sustaining and perpetuating a belief in the existence of cultures that are identifiable as discrete, different, and separate from our own.17 It has been argued that otherness and difference may have

16. For an earlier and more celebratory view of the way ethnographic writing exaggerates cultural differences, see Boon 1982, 26.

17. Arens (1979), for example, has asked the provocative question of why anthropologists cling so tenaciously to the belief that in some cultures
assumed for anthropologists "talismanic qualities." Whether its goal is to engage in cultural self-critique or to assert enlightened tolerance through relativism, anthropology needs others that are different from the self. Yet a difference between self and other will always be hierarchical because the self is sensed as primary, self-formed, active, and complex, if not positive. At the very least, the self is always the interpreter and the other the interpreted.

Anyone interested in working against this hierarchizing must seek ways to undermine the essentialized notion of "cultures" different from ours and peoples separate from us. There are surely many ways to do this, but in this book I have sought to "write against culture" by working against generalization. Telling stories, it has seemed to me, could be a powerful tool for unsettling the culture concept and subverting the process of "othering" it entails. Anthropologists commonly generalize about communities by saying that they are characterized by certain institutions, rules, or ways of doing things. For example, we can and often do say things like "The Bongo-Bongo are polygynous." What if one refused to typify in this way and instead asked how a particular set of individuals—three women and their husband in one community, for example—in fact live the "institution" that we call polygyny? Societies of the circum-Mediterranean have often been characterized as "honor and shame" societies. What if one asked how an Egyptian schoolgirl waiting for her marriage to be arranged by an important family in the 1980s lived this "cultural" complex?

By stressing the particularity of that girl's experiences or of that single marriage and by building a picture of polygyny or honor cannibalism is an accepted ritual practice when the evidence (in the form of eyewitness accounts) is so meager (if not, as he argues, absent).


19. I have referred elsewhere (1901) to some of the powerful alternative strategies scholars have adopted for writing against culture, in particular the study of global interconnections, historical transformation, and theoretical explorations of notions like "practice" and "discourse."
from individuals' discussions, recollections, disagreements, and actions, one could make tangible several larger theoretical points. First, the refusal to generalize would highlight the constructed quality of that "typicality" so regularly produced in conventional social scientific accounts. Second, description of the actual circumstances and histories of individuals and their relationships would suggest that such particulars, which are always present (as we know from our own lives), are also always crucial to the constitution of experience. Third, reconstruction of people's arguments about, justifications for, and interpretations of what they and others are doing would allow clearer understanding of how social life proceeds. It would show that, within limited discourses (that may be contradictory and certainly are historically changing), people strategize, feel pain, contest interpretations of what is happening—in short, live their lives. In one sense this is not new. Bourdieu (1977), for example, theorizes about social practice in a similar way. The difference here is that one would represent through textual means how this happens rather than simply assert that it does so.

By focusing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships, one could also subvert the most problematic connotations of "culture": homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness. In the face of the complexity of individual lives even in a single family, a term like "Bedouin culture" comes to seem meaningless, whether in the sense of rules that people follow or of a community that shares such rules. Individuals are confronted with choices; they struggle with others, make conflicting statements, argue about points of view on the same events, undergo ups and downs in various relationships and changes in their circumstances and desires, face new pressures, and fail to predict what will happen to them or those around them. Particular events always happen in time, becoming part of the history of the family, of the individuals involved, and of their relationships. In the events described in the
women’s stories I retell, one can even read the “larger forces” that made them possible.  

**Storytelling**

If one merit of the textual technique of storytelling is that it draws attention to, even as it refuses, the power of social scientific generalization to produce “cultures” (with their differentiation of selves and others), the other merit has to do with feminism’s second lesson: the inevitability of posisionality. A story is always situated; it has both a teller and an audience. Its perspective is partial (in both senses of the word), and its telling is motivated. The Bedouin women’s tales presented here are no exception. While these stories may seem to reveal to us a great deal about the social and emotional dynamics in this Bedouin community in the 1980s, it must be remembered that in the original context each was told with a purpose. I have not tried to reproduce those contexts, nor have I undertaken an analysis of the role of these stories in the life of the community, although both would have been interesting projects.  

20. Even ritual, that communal practice for which time seems to have such a different (perhaps cyclical) meaning and which in anthropological discourse so perfectly marks the (exotic, primitive) cultural other as different, turns out to be particular and anything but timeless. A glance at Bedouin weddings (chapter 4), when one does not filter out the participants and sequences of events, reveals unpredictability to be a central feature.  

21. The rich possibilities of the analysis of storytelling itself are apparent in the many excellent studies by folklorists (see Bauman 1986 for a discussion and Mills 1991 for an example) and in recent work by anthropologists such as Gilsenans’s forthcoming *Lords of the Lebanese Marches*, which explores the complex role of telling tales in the construction of men of honor (and dishonor) in a Lebanese village; Narayan 1989, analyzing the role of stories in a Hindu swami’s religious teachings; and  

15
Instead, recognizing that with the inclusion of these stories in this book the tellers and audiences, as well as their purposes, have fundamentally shifted, I have tried to use these tales to construct what could be called a critical ethnography. I selected the stories and wove them into a pattern on the basis of a conjunction between Bedouin women's interest in and attention to certain issues and the salience of these issues for specific audiences in the West. Initially, I was guided in my selection by the subjects that excited, moved, and concerned the women I knew, the subjects most often discussed. In that sense, the stories represent women's voices in Awlad 'Ali society and their perspective on many matters that have generally entered the anthropological literature through men's voices. But I have excluded neither men's stories nor stories about issues that concerned men and women equally (like land disputes, fights between families, or the past) because despite day-to-day sexual segregation, women define themselves in terms of their families, speak often with their husbands, brothers, fathers, uncles, nephews, and cousins, and are interested in all matters that concern those to whom they are close.

Most important, I do not pretend that these stories "lift" or get "behind" the veil, as reviewers of books on Middle Eastern women frequently say. As Bruner (1986) reminds us, ethnographies are themselves narratives. I have therefore sought, by crafting, reconfiguring, and juxtaposing these women's and men's stories, to make them speak particularly to my concerns and those of my audience. As the new teller of these tales, I wanted to draw out the ways they challenged simultaneously three sorts of constructions:

K. Stewart 1988 and 1991, which do wonders with the narratives of men and women in the Appalachian coal mining camps of West Virginia. Natalie Davis's *Fiction in the Archives* (1988) is a wonderful example of the use to which tales can be put for historical understanding of another time and place—in her case, sixteenth-century France.

22. I have discussed elsewhere the way the anthropological literature has treated tribalism primarily from a male perspective (Abu-Lughod 1989).