

ship except ties of kinship. ...the most important requirement for a 'good' child is respectful behavior in front of adults. Children must greet adults with a handshake ...and refrain from interrupting or talking back."

Religion and Society — *"Arabs identify strongly with their religious groups, whether they are Moslem or Christian and whether they follow religious observances or not. A foreigner must be aware of the pervasive role of religion in Arab life in order to avoid causing offense by injudicious statements or actions."*

Communication with Arabs — *"Eloquence is emphasized and admired in the Arab World far more than in the West ... how you say something is as important as what you have to say. ... words have power; they can affect events A careless reference to bad events can lead to misfortune or make a bad situation worse. Arabs avoid such references as much as possible and use euphemisms instead."*

The book is obviously written by someone who has had close and personal involvement with Arab countries and peoples. While acknowledging that Arab world culture is far from monolithic, Ms Nydell does an excellent job of identifying features and characteristics which are common. I identified again and again with her analyses.

The book closes with two appendices, the first giving an overview of the Arabic language, the second an overview of each of the countries of the Arab world. The latter especially helps put in perspective the common factors which have been dealt with in the body of the book.

Reviewed by Editor

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS: Women's Oral Narratives in Tunis by Monia Hejaiej

UK: Quartet Books Limited, 1996, 369 pages, £11

Monia Hejaiej provides a perceptive account of the personal lives of three women story-tellers from the medina (old city) of Tunis. These Beldi women are members of a historic and highly civilized community, the city's traditional elite. Through her family ties to that society, Hejaiej was able to enter the intimate world of these women tale-tellers. She interviewed them between December 1989 and April 1990 in their homes in Tunis and recorded their tales.

The primary intention of this book is to deal with the relationship between teller, tale and society. The author was able to focus on the role and importance of tale-telling in the lives of three Beldi women, Ghaya, Sa'diyya and Kheira. The first part of the book centers on these women and the world of the Beldi community. In the second and major part the author presents the forty-seven tales themselves.

From the description of the Beldi women and their world, it is easier to see the significance of certain points stressed in their stories. For example, Ghaya is concerned that women exhibit the traditional values of patience and resignation, so she reinforces this value system in her story, 'Sabra'. Hejaiej notes the unusual parallel between the life story of Ghaya and the tale of Sabra. The tale, which offers a creative depiction of Ghaya's suffering, becomes a cathartic ritual dramatization of her own life.

This book is of interest to all who want to understand the women of the Beldi

community and the place of tale-telling in their lives. The stories themselves serve to inspire creativity in communicating spiritual truth to women of the Arab world. When a Tunisian woman says, "ahkee" (tell me) to her foreign guest, why not go prepared with a story that leads to the discussion of spiritual truth? This book serves as a resource for creating or recounting such tales.

Reviewed by Donna Smith