

Gender, Sickness, and Healing in Rural Egypt

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This study begins with the historical development of the village of Fatiha in 19th century Egypt, including the ethnographic setting of the community, and the evolution of power relations that characterizes the present. Fatiha, located about 130km northwest of Cairo in the Egyptian Nile Delta is home for some 3,200 inhabitants. Rain is confined to the winter months, in a climate characterized by two seasons, resulting in a low average of precipitation. Consequently agricultural production involves perennial irrigation with extensive use of canals. Almost all of the inhabitants are cultivators.

Yet class differentiation between the old masters and the sub-servient peasants remains evident. Villagers rank holders of large amounts of land and their families higher than others with smaller areas.

Both boys and girls labor. Children under the age of ten help plant seeds, weed, or carry lunch to the field. Some girls are taken away from the village to work in urban homes, others practice their domestic skills in their own families. Boys, in general, do not engage in domestic chores. Gender roles are very clear and boys are warned from exhibiting 'womanly' behavior.

Hence, Part one of **Gender, Sickness and Healing in Rural Egypt** discusses the social structure of the village and the cultural organization of its inhabitants. Part two, dealing with gender differentiation, presents illustrative accounts of distressed individuals and their families. Cultural understanding of ill-health, popular definitions of suffering as well as the 'social' consequences of person-centered symptoms or conditions are exposed and emphasized through these accounts.

Part three of **Gender, Sickness and Healing in Rural Egypt** analyzes so-

cio-medical concepts within the cultural perspective of Fatiha. Hence, the impact of sickness and health on existing power relations and mediation of powerlessness are examined through local/indigenous knowledge of the body, and the relationship between people's physical or mental health and their natural and social environments.

This section shows how sickness and healing are interwoven in local social processes and linked to national power asymmetries by the people of Fatiha. The last part summarizes the main theoretical issues of the study. It relates conclusions to analytical concerns surrounding the comparative study of gender, and to the anthropological analysis of sickness and healing. It discusses Body Concepts, the cultural construction and social meditation, Medical Taxonomy, the centrality of emotion and social causation, Health Care, prevention, response to illness, and the social context of healing.

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