



## Arab Hospitality as a Rite of Incorporation

### The Case of the Rashaayda Bedouin of Eastern Sudan

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**Abstract.** – Arab hospitality has long been viewed as an expression of the high value placed by Arabs on generosity, while the spatial separation between female hosts and male guests has been held to express an Arab “honor and shame” value complex. These views obscure the use of hospitality for incorporating a guest into the hosts’ household and also lead us to overlook the role of Arab women in hospitality. This analysis treats hospitality as a ritual which instantiates a mediated opposition between the senior woman of a household who gives food and shelter and a guest who receives it. [*Eastern Sudan, Rashaayda Bedouin, ritual, hospitality, household structure, cross-cultural comparison, reciprocity, Arab gender*]

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Hospitality is a ubiquitous component of life in the Arab societies of the Middle East. Its importance for social relations has been well documented for every region in the Arab world.<sup>1</sup> The Rashaayda Bedouin of Sudan<sup>2</sup> are no exception. Among the Rashaayda guests are greeted, fed, and entertained in accordance with a detailed and elaborate set of rules. Generous hospitality is highly valued and the quality of a household’s hospitality contributes to its reputation and social standing.

Three aspects of Rashiidi<sup>3</sup> hospitality, however, are unexpected and puzzling. First, among the Rashaayda a household cannot make a complete offering of hospitality unless the senior woman of that household is present. If visitors approach a tent whose female household head is absent,

- 1 For descriptions of hospitality among the Al Murra Bedouin of Saudi Arabia, see Cole (1975: 49 f., 66–68); for the Rwala Bedouin of Saudi Arabia, see Lancaster (1981: 82 f.); for northwestern Arabia generally, see Doughty (1979/I: 287) and Sowayan (1985: 41); for agriculturalists in Jordan, see Antoun (1972: 110, 112, 136); for Syrian agriculturalists, see Sweet (1960: 128–132); for Palestinian agriculturalists, see Rosenfeld (1974); for agriculturalists in Asir, see Dostal’s comments on the reception room (1983: 82); for Yemen, see Dorsky (1986: 68–71) and Meneley (1996); for Oman, see Eickelman (1984: 67–79); for Iraq, see Fernea (1969: 116–125); for Egyptian Bedouin, see Abou-Zeid (1966) and Abu-Lughod (1986: 13, 15, 46, 49, 66, 92, 111, 116); for urban Egypt, see Lane (1871: 13, 183) and Berque (1957: 48 f., 63, 68); for Tunisia, see Demeerseman (1944a, 1944b, 1944c) and Lanfry (1938); for the Bedouin of Algeria, see Naphegyi (1868: 127, 132, 138–140); for the Arabs of Chad and Darfur in the nineteenth century, see Nachtigal (1971: 11 f., 116, 245, 251–253, 362).
- 2 Fieldwork was carried out among the Rashaayda Bedouin in northeastern Sudan from January 1978 to December 1980.
- 3 The adjective “Rashiidi” and the name of the Rashaayda itself are derived from the name of the Rashaayda’s eponymous ancestor, *rashiid*. “Rashaayda” is the plural form of *rashiid*. I have omitted the underscore for /sh/ when I write the Rashaayda’s name to simplify the spelling for comparative ethnographers. Other writers have spelled the name differently: Rashaida, Rashāyda, etc.

they are sent to another tent whose “female guardian” (*raa’iya*)<sup>4</sup> is at home. In no case are guests allowed to stop at a tent where no woman is available. Second, after staying in a Rashiidi tent for three days, a male guest stops accepting hospitality and becomes a resident, assisting the other household members in their work and even, if the household’s senior men are absent, appropriating one of their goats or sheep to offer as hospitality to new guests. In other words, the guest himself may become a host. Third, Rashiidi hospitality seems to be much more strongly ritualized than hospitality in most other Arab societies, in which host and guest are not so much bound to obey the rules of hospitality – or, as one writer puts it, the “law” of hospitality (*qaanun iD-Diyaafe*) (El-Barghuthi 1924) – as they are simply expected to observe its etiquette.

These three features are unexpected because they are not reported in the ethnographic literature. Most descriptions of rural Arab hospitality stress that the women of a host’s household have no contact with male guests,<sup>5</sup> although there are a few indications that in unusual, very informal contexts women hostesses do offer food

to male guests more directly.<sup>6</sup> Judging from the ethnographic record, Arab women do not seem to have a central role when hospitality is offered to men.<sup>7</sup> Further, there are no reports of male guests in Arab homes offering hospitality in lieu of an absent male household head, although an account is available of a female guest becoming a household member (Abu-Lughod 1986: 15). Andrew Shryock (2004: 36), writing about central Jordan, reports that guests become “provisional members of the house” who must be protected from harm and who share in the inviolability (*ḥurma*) of the household’s space. But he makes no mention of the possibility that such a provisional household member may himself offer hospitality to strangers. Finally, descriptions of home hospitality are usually phrased in terms of etiquette rather than ritual. This gives the impression that any failure to follow the rules of etiquette does not disrupt or prevent the performance of hospitality – even though it can have serious negative impacts on the reputations of host and guest (cf. Shryock 2004: 36). In my experience, however, hospitality among the Rashaayda is a ritual that must be conducted in definite stages, so that if any mistakes are made during the course of hospitality, the stages that follow must be abbreviated or omitted.<sup>8</sup>

4 In this article terms in Rashiidi Arabic appear in italics (ex. *raa’iya*) and analytical glosses for these terms appear immediately ahead of them or after them. More literal translations of these terms appear in quotation marks. Compare, for example, *il-ḡiraa* (ritual hospitality) with *shaahi* (“tea”). The key word, *il-ḡiraa*, could be translated as “hospitable reception, entertainment, or meal given to a guest” (Wehr 1979: 891). The gloss, ritual hospitality, draws attention to the formality of this offering and links it with the conception of ritual upon which this paper is based.

The phonemes /k/ and /g/, which are affricated when contiguous with high front vowels, are transcribed phonetically as [č] and [ǧ] where appropriate; otherwise they appear as /k/ (as in *karam*, “generosity”) and /g/ (as in *garaf*, “a large leather bag for storing household objects”). Long vowels are indicated by double letters (ex. /aa/, /ii/) and the emphatic consonants are represented by capital letters (/S/, /Ḍ/, and /T/). Note that the distinction between emphatic /D/ and the emphatic voiced interdental fricative /Ḍ/, which is present in classical Arabic, has disappeared from Rashiidi Arabic; /Ḍ/ is used for the reflexes of both classical /D/ and classical /Ḍ/. The sounds called *khaa’* and *ghayn* in classical Arabic, which are voiceless and voiced velar fricatives, respectively, are transcribed as /kh/ and /gh/. Ordinary English “h” is written as a lower case letter /h/, while the voiceless pharyngeal “h” of Arabic is written /ħ/. Arabic *‘ayn*, a voiced pharyngeal fricative, is transcribed as a left single quotation mark /‘/. The consonants found at the end of “bathe” and “bath” in English are written /ð/ and /θ/.

5 Abu-Lughod (1986: 31, 47); Cole (1975: 49 f., 68); Eickelman (1984: 59–80); Fernea (1969: 117 f.); Meneley (1996: 4, 39–41, 58, 94).

6 Lancaster (1981: 68); Lewando-Hundt (1984: 121); Naphegyí (1868: 140). – Nachtigal reported that women of the “Nawaibe” (Nawaa’iba?) Arabs in central Chad welcomed male guests themselves even when their husbands were absent (1971: 116). This could be another example of Arab women offering hospitality without the mediation of their spouses. Nachtigal’s description is too brief, however, for us to claim that hospitality among the Nawaa’iba is comparable to the Rashaayda case.

7 Buitelaar (1993) and Meneley (1996) are exceptions to this generalization, since they both describe Arab women’s important roles in hospitality. However, they focus on the offering of hospitality by women to other women. Buitelaar’s account of Ramadan hospitality in Morocco makes it clear that Moroccan men regard women’s offerings to visiting women as secondary to the offering of hospitality to visiting men. Meneley shows that the spatial separation of the sexes during hospitality is normative in Zabid (Yemen), preventing women hosts from interacting directly with male guests. Hence these two ethnographies tend to reinforce the impression that Rashiidi hospitality is exceptional, since among the Rashaayda male guests and female hosts do interact directly.

8 I should point out that the strictness of the hospitality etiquette in central Jordan seems to approach the rigidity of the Rashaayda’s rules for host and guest. Shryock quotes a saying by Jordanians according to which guests are “. . . ‘prisoners of the host’ (*usira al-mu’azzib*). They are boxed in by the etiquette of the visit. They are seated in special areas of the house . . . and things are brought to them. Guests do not move around the house, nor are they expected

How are we to account for this divergence between the author's findings about the Rashaayda and the ethnographic literature? We could say that the ethnographic record itself is incomplete and that the roles of a household's women in hospitality – and the roles of guests who have become incorporated into the household – have simply been missed by other ethnographers. Alternately, we could argue that the ethnographic record is basically correct but that the Rashaayda represent an exception to the general pattern. These solutions are unsatisfactory, however, because they are phrased too absolutely. There is no reason to insist that all Arab societies must have exactly the same traditions as the Rashaayda. That admitted, the discovery of divergent or unfamiliar traditions among the Rashaayda does not compel us to think that descriptions of other Arab societies are necessarily deficient. At the same time, we cannot be certain that the Rashaayda are truly exceptional when no systematic survey of hospitality across a wide range of Arab societies has been done. It might very well be that in some Arab societies hospitality truly is only a stylized performance which does not make guests into household members and from which women are excluded, while in other Arab societies hospitality is a rite of incorporation which requires the participation of a hostess and which reclassifies guests as household members. It is only after establishing what the ethnographic facts are across a wide range of cases that we can proceed to the most significant task: to explain variation in Arab hospitality. If we conclude, at the end of our research, that the Rashaayda actually are a deviant case, we still must try to explain why they are deviant.

## 1 The Established Views of Arab Hospitality

Ethnographers of Arab societies have tended to divide hospitality into two sets of practices: those which separate the women of the host household from the male guests and those which demonstrate the hosts' desire to feed their guests properly and earn a reputation for generosity (cf. Meneley 1996: 4). Most anthropologists have viewed these two sets of practices as unrelated phenomena which each have a separate explanation. The spatial distance between hostess and male guest is

understood in terms of Arab concepts of family honor and sexual shame, while the special attention given to guests (which, presumably, might involve making them temporary members of a host's household) are explained as instances of Arab generosity (Patai 1983: 85–87, 132–134; Bates and Rassam 1983: 205). A number of writers repeat stories – exemplified by the tale of the pre-Islamic Arab hero Haatim al-Taa'i – of how Arab men won lasting fame and respect by dispensing all of their wealth in order to feed their guests.<sup>9</sup>

The “honor and shame” explanation of spatial distance between Arab women and the male guests in their homes is a useful first step, because it links data about hospitality with Arab concepts of space and gender, but it does not permit us to understand cross-cultural variation. It is certainly true that in many Arab societies the sexes are often spatially separated. Moreover, it is “shameful” (*'eyb*) for a woman to socialize with unrelated men in various contexts (for example, in coffee shops or crowded streets) and is harmful to her “honor” (*'irD*) and that of her family.<sup>10</sup> However, if it is generally “shameful” for Arab women to interact with unrelated men, why is it permissible for Rashiidi women to greet guests, despite the fact that the Rashaayda also have the familiar Arab notions of “honor” and “shame”?

The extent to which women are visible to male guests during hospitality varies somewhat from one Arab society to the next. Rashiidi women meet male guests when they arrive and later prepare and serve coffee to them directly; they need only refrain from speaking to the men while doing so. In central Jordan, girls and women prepare coffee and serve it to female guests only, not to men; only male hosts pour coffee for male guests (Shryock 2004: 47). In the Syrian village of Tell Toqaan women do not serve either beverages or food to guests but are present in the same room where the guests eat (Sweet 1960: 128, 131 f.). Women among the Awlad 'Ali of western Egypt “don't greet the guests” at all. They stress that this separation is one of the traits that distinguish them from Egyptian agriculturalists, whose women do greet male guests upon their arrival (Abu-Lughod 1986: 15, 47, 116). Among the Al Murra Bedouin, women do not serve coffee to male guests and remain out of the guests' sight completely. However,

to serve themselves . . . . When released, guests spread news of the house” (Shryock 2004: 37). Shryock's report conforms closely to my own experience while doing fieldwork in Jordan in 1991–1993 and 1999.

9 Cf. Malā'ib (1993: 23–28); Shryock (2004: 48); Thesiger (1980: 71).

10 Abu-Zahra (1970; 1974: 123, 137); Antoun (1968); Meneley (1996: 25, 88); Mernissi (1975).

the senior woman of the tent gives the ingredients for the coffee to a young man and he serves the guests. He calls for each ingredient (coffee beans, cardamom, and so forth) by name and she passes it over the tent divider (Cole 1975: 49 f., 66–68). There is nothing to prevent the Al Murra from keeping these ingredients in the guests' side of the tent, but they do not; coffee is actually provided by the women's side, even though women do not make or serve it.

The fact that in some Arab societies a guest can be incorporated into his host's household and even become a host himself could be explained as a consequence of the high value which Arabs place on generosity (Patai 1983: 133 f.). This explanation, in turn, leads to a description of hospitality as an aspect of a system of generalized reciprocity (Lanfry 1938: 60 f.; Rosenfeld 1974). Explaining such a specific custom in terms of this very general principle is not satisfactory, however. Most societies value some form of generosity and hospitality; the question is: why do some Arab societies, such as the Rashaayda, have this particular form? Like the "honor and shame" approach to sexual segregation during hospitality, the "generosity" explanation of a guest's transformation into a member of the host's household does not take cultural variation among the Arabs into account.

Two other objections can be made to both the "honor and shame" and "generosity" explanations of Arab hospitality. First, they are wholly based in Arab concepts and values and do not transcend the narrow framework of culture-specific ideals; thus they do not contribute to a comparative perspective. Second, they foster a one-dimensional view of Arab women who, by being portrayed as the objects of an "honor and shame" complex, are relegated to only one level of social relations (that of sexuality and the exchange of marriage partners). Their roles at other levels (the exchange of food and shelter) are overlooked. Only men seem to be dispensers of generous hospitality; the women are portrayed as mere bystanders.

Yet among the Rashaayda, at any rate, an Arab hostess is not simply a bystander; even though she is spatially separated from her guest, she is related to him socially through the offering of food. Among the Arabs it is "shameful" (*'eyb*) for a woman to speak at length with unrelated men when unaccompanied by husband or male relatives (Antoun 1968) but it is also *'eyb* for a hostess to neglect a guest (Abu-Lughod 1986: 111); she cannot avoid "shame" simply by keeping her distance. Keeping a proper balance between separation and generosity is what is at stake here.

In reality the two apparently unrelated phenomena (the separation of female host from a male guest; the possible transformation of a guest into a host) are closely related among the Rashaayda. When the male host of a Rashiidi household is absent and a new male guest arrives, it is not the woman of the house who offers hospitality to the stranger; rather, the former guest does this, taking the place of the male host. If the senior woman were able to serve the new visitor herself, there would be no need for the former guest to offer hospitality in her stead.

All of this implies that we should not invoke native concepts of the relations between the sexes when explaining particular features of hospitality without also mentioning reciprocity and debt. Further, when we analyze relations of exchange between hosts and guests, we cannot neglect relations between female hosts and male guests or, more generally, between men and women. The Arab code of "honor and shame" should not be separated analytically from the Arab ethic of "generosity."

How are we to deal with both gender separation and exchange when analyzing Arab hospitality? Meneley (1996: 37–42, 102) has argued that the continual renewal of gender separation coupled with the institution of competitive exchanges of hospitality has created two public spheres in the Yemeni city of Zabid. She shows that the women's public sphere is equivalent to but separate from the men's public sphere. Both the women of an elite household and the men struggle separately to enhance their household's social standing, with men offering food to men and women offering food to women. Her argument that there are two public spheres in Zabid is persuasive but cannot, I believe, be extended to Arab societies outside of Yemen. The reason is: the complete separation of the two public spheres among elite households in Zabid is only possible because of the existence of a servile class of men and women, the *akhdaam*, who provide the labor needed for entertaining guests. Men could not be completely independent of their wives when entertaining guests if they could not hire *akhdaam* to cook and clean for them (cf. Meneley 1996: 14, 69, 107, 127). Other Arab societies may represent the hospitality given to male guests as if it came only from male hosts, but unlike the Zabidis they must also acknowledge that the labor involved was provided by female hostesses, not hired servants. Hence in societies such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, or Sudan the public activities of married men cannot be completely separated from the activities of their wives.

To arrive at an alternative analysis of Arab hospitality, the author will argue that Rashiidi hospitality is a unitary institution – that is, a ritual – through which household membership is defined and redefined and by means of which relations of reciprocity among households are established and sustained. The segregation of the hostess from the guest and the transformation of the guest into a household resident are inseparable aspects of a single, integrated phenomenon. The complementary roles played by men and women in hospitality vary from one Arab society to the next. Nevertheless, at a deeper level three elements are everywhere present: the categories Senior Woman of the House, Senior Coresident Male, and Guest, which are combined to represent, in a culture-specific form, the more abstract structure<sup>11</sup> Giver < Mediator > Receiver.

A detailed description of Rashiidi hospitality is presented in this article. The only comparable description is El-Barghuthi's ethnography (1924); other ethnographers have made incidental references to Arab hospitality but none have given complete descriptions of the procedures followed. In light of this lacuna in the literature no general analysis of Arab hospitality can be definitive. The author's intention is to present an analytical description of one case and encourage ethnographic research about hospitality in other Arab societies so that significant variation in hospitality can be more easily detected and so that explanations of this variation may be tested through cross-cultural comparison.

11 The concept of structure employed here owes as much to recent works by structural anthropologists (de Heusch 1981; Sahlins 1976) as it does to the earlier writings of Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson. Although this concept has been most frequently applied to the analysis of myth, it also appears in accounts of ritual (ex. Bloch 1986; Keesing 1982). The task of developing a general, structural theory of ritual has occupied the attention of many ethnologists (de Heusch 1981; Lévi-Strauss 1981: 668–675; Smith 1982; Valeri 1985: 193) but so far has not resulted in any definite consensus. In this paper, the “structure” of ritual hospitality is a mediated binary opposition. For discussions of the concepts of structure, opposition, mediation, and binary oppositions in culture and language, see Boon and Schneider (1974); Copi (1982: 185–189, 319 f.); El Guindi (1972: 79; 1982: 182 f.); El Guindi and Selby (1976: 184); El Guindi and Read (1979: 761–764); Giddens (1979: 19); Hage and Harary (1983: 1–9, 122–124); Holenstein (1976: 122–127); Keesing (1982: 67); Lévi-Strauss (1963: 33, 128–160, 275; 1966: 51, 89, 67–70, 95, 150, 246 f.; 1969: 3–25, 136; 1975: 2–6, 11); Lorrain (1974); Rubel and Rosman (1978: 286–290).

## 2 Ritual Hospitality among the Rashaayda

Four features of Rashiidi hospitality are not aspects of ordinary meals; they mark it as a ritual. These are: 1) ritual hospitality takes place in its culturally designated *locale*;<sup>12</sup> in the Rashiidi case this locale is the tent (*beyt*); 2) ritual hospitality consists of a hierarchical sequence in which activities of short duration are *systematically* combined to form a series of longer activities; 3) ritual hospitality is conducted by people who *instantiate cultural categories* (such as Guest, Senior Woman of the Household, and Neighbor) rather than personal identities;<sup>13</sup> and 4) ritual hospitality is *structured*, in that the categories in terms of which ritual is carried out (e.g., Senior Man of Host's Household, Senior Woman of Host's Household, Senior Male Guest, Senior Female Guest) are always combined to form three abstract sets: Giver, Mediator, and Receiver. These sets of categories are terms in a mediated binary opposition at the level of abstract thought. At the level of behavior and interaction, the three sets are instantiated in a series of transactions between giver and receiver in which a specified third party plays an intermediary role. These points will be illustrated through an examination of two phases in the ritual: the offering of tea and coffee and the offering of cooked meat.

### 2.1 The Locale of Ritual: The Tent (*beyt*)

The nomadic Rashaayda offer “hospitality” (*il-giraa*) to guests in their tents (*buyuut*), which are also the culturally designated locales for all of their life-crisis rituals (such as childbirth and marriage). Food that is offered elsewhere is not ritual hospitality. When the Rashaayda are migrating, for example, they often carry bread with them and eat it as they ride. Herdsmen also eat and drink in the open desert. Many of the elements of ritual

12 We use Giddens' term “locale” in a restricted sense as the setting “within which systemic aspects of interaction and social relations are concentrated ... Settings ... are everywhere involved in the reproduction of institutionalized activities across wide spans of time and space” (Giddens 1987: 11–16). El Guindi and Selby have also stressed the centrality of locale for the correct performance of ritual (1976: 187 f.), and Bloch has pointed out how locale distinguishes ritual from mundane activities (Bloch 1986: 51–53). The close connection between appropriate locale and appropriate ritual performance has been noted by many ethnographers (Dietler 2001: 71; Keesing 1982: 58–74).

13 El Guindi (1972: 20) makes the same point about ritual among the Zapotec.

hospitality, however, are specifically designed to stress the distinction between the space within the tent and that outside of it. When food is eaten outside of the tent these ritual elements are absent.

The Rashaayda instantiate three spatial boundaries whenever they welcome nonresident men and women into their tents. In fact, a Rashiidi campsite (*daar*) can be modeled as a series of concentric boundaries that every visitor crosses when he enters a Rashiidi home. The first, outermost boundary separates the open desert (*aS-Sagii'a*)<sup>14</sup> from the campsite (*daar*) of the people whom the traveler wishes to visit. It is jurally defined<sup>15</sup> and is called the *guTr* (perimeter) of the campsite. The second boundary separates the outer portion of the campsite, which is men's space, from the area occupied by the tent itself, which, in many respects,<sup>16</sup> is under the supervision of women. This boundary is conceived as an invisible line connecting the wooden tent pegs on which the ropes that support the tent are tied. It is labeled *il-aTnaab* ("the tent ropes") a metonymic reference that identifies the invisible line by means of the most clearly visible objects that are connected with it. The third boundary divides the eastern section of the tent (where male guests are received) from the western section (where female guests are received). When Rashaayda offer hospitality to guests they refer to all three boundaries by word or gesture, as the following description of the greeting given two male visitors<sup>17</sup> illustrates.

### 2.1.1 Greeting the Visitors

When riders come near the tent which they intend to visit, they are "reluctant" (*mithashshidiin*) and do not approach it abruptly. They ride slowly to give household members a chance to see them and prepare for the visit.

The senior woman of the house (*raa'yit il-beyt*, literally "female guardian of the house") makes the most elaborate preparations. First, she quickly takes out her decorated *ginaa'*, which is a coif-cum-face mask that is worn by married women, and slips it over her head. She removes the plain, undecorated version of the mask that she wears when no nonresidents are present and replaces it with the decorated form. The senior woman and the adolescent girls of the household also cover their heads, using the wide, brightly decorated sleeves of their dresses. Next, the senior woman of the household hangs up a long, thick piece of cloth with which she divides the tent into an eastern section (for the guests) and a western section (where women and small children sit). The other women or girls throw blankets over the central tent rope that stretches out in front of the tent. This provides the visitors with more shade and extends the physical division of the tent into an eastern area and a western area. Finally, she orders another member of her household to bring out a clean, brightly colored spread (*firaash*) and lay it out for the visitors to sit on.<sup>18</sup>

When the people of the house see the visitors approach they all stand up to wait for them. They may not call out to them in greeting, however, until one of them speaks. When the visitors are definitely within the outermost boundary (*guTr*) of their campsite they address the people of the house. One says *saloom 'aley-k* ("Peace upon you") and the most senior man in the tent replies with *yaa marhab* ("Welcome").

The men of the household respond to the guests' salutation by putting on their turbans and

14 Literally this word means "the place of extreme, dry cold" and may be grounded in a contrast between the warm and sheltered hearth of a Rashiidi tent and the exposed and windy desert.

15 The perimeter is defined operationally by having a man stand near the tent pegs and throw a herding stick (*aSaa*) outward into the desert as hard as he can. The place where it falls is taken to be the outer limit of the campsite. This has legal implications. The "male guardian of the tent" is legally responsible for protecting his household from attack and is also expected to try to halt any conflict that erupts in the vicinity of his home.

16 The tent itself is woven, erected, and ritually purified through the use of incense by the married woman who owns it. When a Rashiidi household is migrating, the tent, in which household members reside, is struck by the female household head. A woman's supervision of her tent is one aspect of her work. The men who reside in it, on the other hand, are responsible for defending it against attack; their authority with regard to the tent is derived from this responsibility.

17 The author's decision to use two guests in this illustration is deliberate; it stresses that the conventions that are instantiated during hospitality can apply to any number of guests and hosts. Thus these conventions are not to be understood as emergent patterns in a microsociological context. This is in response to Anthony Giddens' comments about the

usefulness of the distinction between microsociological and macrosociological contexts. As this writer reads him, in the first case the individual stands alone in contrast to either another individual or a group; in the second case the individual acts as a group member in response to other groups. The rules invoked and resources used in the first case would necessarily be different from those invoked and used in the second case. See Giddens (1979: 76 f.).

18 The Kroumir Arabs of western Tunisia, who are transhumant pastoralists, also spread out a special carpet for their guests; see Lanfry (1938: 63, 64, 70). The same custom is found among Palestinian agriculturalists (see El-Barghuthi 1924: 188) and among the Harb Bedouin tribe of Arabia (Doughty 1979/II: 257).

moving out of the tent to greet them. They embrace each visitor and inquire about his health (*čeyf ħaal-k? 'asaa-k Tayyib!* – “How are you? Would that you were well”). Next, the female household head (*raa'yit il-beyt*) welcomes them; she does not embrace them but only touches each one on the shoulder.<sup>19</sup> After her come the young boys and then the girls, who are the last to greet the visitors.

On occasion visitors approach a tent whose female household head (*raa'yit il-beyt*) is absent. In such a case one of the men of the household walks up to the approaching riders, explains the situation, and guides their camels to another tent whose “female guardian” (*raa'iya*) is present. This is not simply a matter of the sexual division of labor. Although most cooking is done by women, all Rashiidi men know how to make coffee and do so frequently; they also cook occasionally, during weddings and other large celebrations, when a great many people must be fed.<sup>20</sup> The real reason why men never cook food for guests is that this would be an affront to the women of the camp. For a man to prepare food for a guest implies that food cooked by neighboring women is not good enough to offer as hospitality.

### 2.1.2 Granting the Visitors Shelter

Next, the visitors and the men of the household move toward the tent, pausing before they enter it to step out of their sandals (which they leave at the edge of the tent on the uncovered ground). They go into the eastern section of the tent, which is now furnished with the soft and comfortable *firaash* that belongs to the female household head. Meanwhile the female household head and girls move into the tent's western section.

This first phase of hospitality establishes the three spatial contrasts that persist for as long as the guests are present. First, there is the distinction between the area within the host's campsite, which is *diira 'umraana* (“inhabited territory”), and the area outside of it, the open desert. The second distinction is that between the uncovered earth of the campsite and the clean floor of the tent, which is partly covered by the brightly colored

*firaash*. This area, the entire interior of the tent, is kept clean by the female household head. Finally, there are the two sex-specific sections of the tent, each of which is a segment of the tent's interior space. One is the locale where the guests remain and behave formally, while the other is open to all household residents and is not associated with formal behavior. These three distinctions (desert/habitation, furnished interior/unfurnished exterior, and formal/informal) are manifest in every Rashiidi ritual.

## 2.2 The Sequential Organization of Hospitality

Greeting visitors and granting them shelter does not necessarily make the visitors into guests. To be reclassified as a guest, the visitor must accept food and drink. Every visitor is offered water. Some visitors remain only long enough to drink it, but in most cases visitors stay to drink tea and coffee and are reclassified as guests. The full sequence of offerings in hospitality, then, is as follows: 1) the guests are greeted; 2) beverages (water, then tea, and finally coffee) are served; 3) an animal is slaughtered and the bloodied knife is formally displayed to them; 4) broth from the cooked meat is served; 5) the meat itself is served and when it has been eaten the guests pronounce the formula which brings this phase to a close; 6) cooked grain is served and the guests formally terminate this phase, as before; and 7) the guests praise the hosts for their generosity and depart.

Not every offering of hospitality includes all of these phases; food may be left out of very abbreviated offerings. However, water is always offered at the very beginning and the rite is invariably terminated by a standard exchange of words. The departing visitors say *čirimtuu* (“You [pl.] have given generously”) and the host replies *'asaa-haa bi-l-'aafiya* (“May it be in good health”). The three indispensable components of the rite (greeting, offering, and departure) always are present, and additional components are inserted according to a fixed sequence. One of the first phases in ritual hospitality, the serving of hot beverages, may serve as an illustration of the sequential organization of the rite. It begins as soon as the initial greeting phase is over.

### 2.2.1 The Offering of Beverages

The senior woman of the house fills a bowl with water for the visitors to drink. She chooses

19 Women greet guests more warmly if they are close kin. This is identical to the pattern of greeting found among Saudi Arabian Bedouin (Cole 1975: 76 f.).

20 Men never cook inside a tent, however, but build cooking fires outside. Men's cooking, then, cannot be a part of ritual hospitality because it is done in an inappropriate locale. See note 11.

the coolest and best-tasting water available<sup>21</sup> and sends the bowl over to the eastern section of the tent. Any of the men or boys who are there may pass it on to the visitors.

### 2.2.2 Organizing the Work

After this the senior male present gives orders to the junior household residents that are designed to anticipate the needs of the visitors. He sends a child to take the reins of the visitors' camels and tie them to the tent pegs in front of the hostess' tent. Once the camels are couched on the ground, the child hobbles them, removes their saddles, and brings the saddles inside.<sup>22</sup> Next, the "male guardian of the tent" (*raa'yi il-beyt*) calls to his wife: *yaa mara, sawiy li-naa shaahi* ("O mara,<sup>23</sup> make us tea"). With her sleeve still thrown

over her head, the senior woman enters the eastern half of the tent, bringing coals in an iron pan, a teakettle, and glasses, and proceeds to do just that. The visitors may protest that this is not necessary with varying degrees of sincerity but she proceeds with her preparations unless the senior man tells her to stop.

### 2.2.3 Incorporating Neighbors in Hospitality

While the tea is being made, men from neighboring tents who have seen the visitors arrive may come to greet them. Neighbor women may not come to the tent for this purpose, since they may not show concern for or interest in unrelated men. However, they may already be in the tent for other reasons and need not leave when visitors appear; they simply stay in the western section. All of the men in the eastern section sit side by side, in a circle; it is considered impolite for anyone to sit in front of another. The woman of the house sits silently to one side, near the hearth. She washes the glasses, sets them on a tray before filling them, and then hands the tray to the men without speaking.

### 2.2.4 Sanctifying the Offering of Tea and Coffee

Before he drinks each visitor must say, "In the name of God" (*bism illaah*). When the visitors, the men of the house, the boys, and whatever neighbor men who have arrived to greet the visitors have had their tea, the kettle is passed over to the other side of the tent where the women finish it off. After this the *raa'iyit il-beyt* makes coffee. The initial steps of roasting and grinding the coffee beans, boiling the water, and adding sugar and ginger involve no ritual acts, but when pouring the finished coffee, the maker must invoke God or one of the Muslim saints (*awliyyaa' allaah*). She says:

*al-faatiha li-llaah fi- sabiil illaah  
allaah yiftah il-naa al-kheyir wa abwaab-ah  
wi yighalliġ 'an-naa ash-sharr wa nishaab-ah*

("The Opening<sup>24</sup> is for God, for the sake of God; may God open to us the doors of goodness and plenty and shut away from us evil and its traps.")

<sup>24</sup> The Opening (*al-faatiha*) is the opening verse of the Qur'an. The reason for referring to it here is not completely clear; nonetheless, it is not altogether inappropriate to invoke the first lines of the book before pouring the first cup of coffee.

<sup>21</sup> The quality of the water depends on the quality of the leather bag in which it was stored. If the bag has been properly tanned, the water will cool due to slow evaporation through the porous water skin and yet will be only minimally contaminated by the taste of the tanning agent. The water containers are both the property and the responsibility of the household's senior woman. She tans them, oils them to keep them supple, and sends her children to the well to fill them with water. Even a sip of water can reflect on the reputation of the household's senior woman. Thus the woman's domestic work is guided by the goal of offering hospitality to guests.

<sup>22</sup> Among the Bedouin of Palestine the guest's horse is tied, relieved of its saddle, and fed as a sign of respect for the guest; see El-Barghuthi (1924: 187).

<sup>23</sup> The word *marā* has the meanings "adult married woman" and "wife." The same equation of married status with adult status can be found in the vocabularies of other languages; for example, French *femme* ("wife, woman") and German *Mann* ("husband, man"). Due to this equation it is impossible (and unnecessary) to decide whether the stereotypical order cited above is an aspect of the conjugal division of labor or a manifestation of authority based on gender. It should be noted that this impersonal form of address, which sounds rude to an English speaker, is considered appropriate by the Rashaayda. A man addresses his wife as *marā* when male guests are within earshot so that they will not discover what her name is. This does not depersonalize her but demonstrates her husband's jealous care not to share her in any sense with outsiders. In other words, it is (or, at least, may be taken as) a sign that he values her as a wife. The same polite reluctance to let unrelated men hear a married woman's name has been observed elsewhere in the Arab world, e.g., in Yemen (Meneley 1996: 25). In this connection it is interesting to note that speakers of central Najdi Arabic – who are culturally quite similar to the Rashaayda – use the term *il-m'azzibah* ("the hostess") as a polite euphemism for "woman/wife" (Ingham 1994: 33). This underscores the importance of a married woman's role in hospitality, even in a society where the hostess is never seen by male guests.

Alternately she may address a saint to ask for his intercession with God, especially al-Shāḏīlī, whose name is associated with coffee:

*yaa ash-shaaḏili yaa abu ḥasan wa al-anbiyaa wa al-mursaliin*

(“O al-Shāḏīlī,<sup>25</sup> father of Hasan, and the Prophets and the Messengers [of God].”)

These data support the second point of this analysis. Rashiidi hospitality always has a standard beginning and ending and may include many long intervening phases. Each phase itself consists of many small steps that follow one another in a prescribed order. These steps and phases constitute a hierarchically organized sequence of transactions.

### 2.3 Categories

The ethnographic data also support the third point of this analysis: that ritual hospitality can be described in terms of sociocultural categories such as Senior Woman of the Household (*raa`yit il-beyt*), Senior Man of the Household (*raa`yi il-beyt*), and Visitor/Guest (*Ḍeyf*). The manner in which the Rashaayda serve coffee to guests illustrates the categorical nature of ritual hospitality.

The first pouring of the coffee is called *raas il-jabana* (the “head” of the coffee-pot). Coffee is given first to the most senior visitor, next to the other visitors, and finally to the adult male residents of the camp who have come to greet them. Serving coffee gives the host an opportunity to silently honor the guest he considers most praiseworthy by giving him the first cup.<sup>26</sup> The visitors

accept it without hesitation, because to refuse the coffee would be an antagonistic act, tantamount to a declaration of enmity.<sup>27</sup> But the neighbors are “reluctant” (*mithashshidiin*) and may attempt to refuse it. Their refusal causes no surprise or irritation for the people of the household. However, the man of the house (or, if he is not present, the woman of the house) should attempt to persuade the “reluctant”: *xuḏ min ar-raas* (“Take some of the first pouring [that is, from the best-tasting serving]”). Once the guests have had their first cups of coffee, the neighbors accept their shares of it.

After this the senior woman returns the coffee-pot to the fire and adds more water to it. When this second pot of coffee has been boiled she pours a cup for each visitor and asks the others if she should “give them a second serving” (*athannii-kuu?*). At this point the neighbors may refuse; if there are too many people present for a single pot of coffee to suffice, some neighbors are likely to forgo their cups.<sup>28</sup> If this happens, the men of the

<sup>27</sup> Sowayan notes that, in premodern Najd, the “refusal to partake of a man’s hospitality is a sign of bad intentions. When a nomad sees a stranger approaching his camp, he will run after him and force him to turn around and stay for supper or at least have some coffee or milk. If the stranger refuses to turn around, he is taken for an enemy and may be shot at” (Sowayan 1985: 42). Refusal to drink a host’s coffee can also be a strategy in negotiations; the guest asserts that he will not drink the coffee unless the host also grants him what he wants (cf. Ingham 1982: 257).

<sup>28</sup> At first glance this aspect of Rashiidi hospitality – during which the household’s senior woman offers coffee to male guests directly – seems to be at variance with the customs of Najdi Bedouin. Sowayan, citing Doughty and Musil, reports that the senior man of the household makes coffee and pours it for the guests, not the senior woman (Sowayan 1985: 42; see also Doughty 1979/1: 287; Musil 1928: 102). Later in this article, we suggest that the visibility of a woman’s role in hospitality might be correlated with her prominent economic role in a subsistence economy. However, both the Rashaayda and the Bedouin of Najd had similar subsistence economies, in which women’s production was quite important. This would lead us to expect that women in both the Rashiidi and Najdi cases would have visible roles in hospitality. This could still be the case. Because Doughty and Musil describe only one phase in the offering of hospitality – that is, preparing and serving coffee – in detail, we really do not know whether Najdi Bedouin women have any other roles in the ritual. Furthermore, as we pointed out when discussing the Al Murra case, it could well be that some of the coffee implements are kept in the “women’s section” (or western section) of the tent, thus making it necessary for women to initiate the serving of coffee by passing these implements over to the men’s side. So the travelers’ accounts offered by Doughty and Musil are not adequate ethnographic descriptions, since they fail to describe all of the elements of Bedouin hospitality in Najd.

<sup>25</sup> One rare name for a metal coffee-pot is *ash-shaaḏiliya*. Although the Rashaayda mention the name of the Muslim saint al-Shāḏīlī when pouring coffee, most of them know little about him. They may have acquired this reference to al-Shāḏīlī from followers of the Shāḏīliyya Sufi order who live on the Red Sea coast of Sudan and who are said to be “of Hijazi or Hadramauti origin” (Niblock 1987: 101). On the other hand, the connection between al-Shāḏīlī and coffee may be from a more general tradition which is also found among Palestinian Bedouin (El-Barghuthi 1924: 183 f.) and which the ancestors of the Rashaayda may well have acquired when they lived in the northern Hejaz.

<sup>26</sup> In premodern Najd the host could humiliate one of his guests by passing him by with the coffee-pot, letting more worthy guests drink first before giving him a turn. It was an insult to say to someone *yaa m’aggib al-finjaal* (“O, you who are bypassed when the cup goes round”) (Sowayan 1985: 43 f.). Thus the Rashaayda are not the only Arabs who use hospitality to differentiate between most honored guests and least honored guests. See also Meneley (1996: 105).

household are served instead and then the surplus of coffee is drunk by the women.

Each category of participant in hospitality is given a place in the sequence of servings. When only male visitors and neighbors are present, the visitors drink first, then the neighbors, then the men of the household, and finally the woman who made the coffee. When visitors of both sexes are served they drink first, followed by the neighbors, then by the male residents of the house and last by the women of the house. The same sequence applies to offerings of tea, except that the category “Neighbors” is not included.

## 2.4 Structure

### 2.4.1 Offering Meat to Guests

Offering meat to the guests, the phase that immediately follows the offering of hot beverages, provides us with evidence of how hospitality is structured. The Rashaayda’s descriptions of this phase usually stress the responsibilities of “the guest” (*aḌ-Ḍeyf*), “the female guardian of the house” (*raa’yit il-beyt*) and “the male guardian of the house” (*raa’yi il-beyt*). Any male coresident, however, can be considered the “male guardian of the house” for the purposes of the ritual. If the husband of the *raa’yit il-beyt* is absent, her unmarried son, her married son (who would reside near her in his wife’s tent), a male neighbor, or even a former guest may take over his responsibilities.

(a) *Formal recategorization of visitors as guests.* While the three servings of coffee are made and drunk, the male head of the household chats amiably with the visitors. He tries to determine whether they are planning to leave once the coffee has been finished or hope to stay longer. He also may leave the eastern section of the tent briefly to consult with the women of the household and decide whether the visitors are “worth slaughtering an animal for” (*yistaahilu ḍabiiḥa*). In other words, the people of the house prepare to augment their hospitality if the situation justifies this.

At some point the *raa’yi il-beyt* may succeed in getting his “reluctant” visitors to admit that they have no plans for an immediate departure. He makes no mention of food but may suggest that the visitors remain until later in the day. For example, if the visitors have arrived at about noon, the *raa’yi il-beyt* remarks that the time for the midday nap (*al-gaayla*) is near and says to them, “If you had intended to nap at our house, welcome” (lit. “may God grant you life” [*allaah*

*yiḥayyii-ku*]). The visitors reply, “May God grant that you remain [alive]” (*allaah yabgii-k*). By employing the formula *allaah yiḥayyii-ku* the man of the house has initiated the reclassification of the visitors as guests and the visitors have completed it with their response. From this point on the people of the house are obligated to provide food for the guests.

Rashiidi codes of hospitality do not specify what type of food is offered to a guest. There is a wide range of dishes from which a selection may be made. If meat is to be offered, the animal chosen for slaughtering may be a kid, a goat, or a sheep. In this analysis the author will describe a relatively expensive offering of goat’s meat and rice.

(b) *“Reluctance,” envy, and the host’s responsibilities.* The act of slaughtering for the guests is hedged with prohibitions that indicate the social and ethical qualities of the host/guest relationship. When the people of the household decide that “the guests are worth slaughtering for” one of the men goes behind the tent and cuts the goat’s throat there, out of the guests’ sight. If the guests were given direct evidence that a goat was to be killed, they would be bound to try to prevent it, owing to the etiquette of “reluctance” (*at-taḥashshud*).<sup>29</sup> The guests might even “swear by God” not to touch the meat of the animal, whereupon the host would not be allowed to slaughter it.

The goat is killed according to Islamic rules; it is sacrificed by having its jugular vein cut (cf. Chelhod 1955). As its blood gushes from the wound in its throat, the man who has slaughtered it catches this blood in a pan. After partially filling the pan with blood he walks around to the front of the tent, where the guests’ camels are tied. Standing in the guests’ line of sight, he raises the bloodied knife for them to see and says, *allaah yiḥayyii-ku ‘ala ḍ-ḍabiiḥa* (“May God grant you life for [the sake of] the slaughtered animal”). The guests reply, *allaah yabgii-k* (“God grant that you remain [alive]”). He then places his right palm in the blood-filled pan and presses his open hand against the shoulder and thigh of each guest’s mount, leaving two bloody handprints. Each handprint, with its five fingers, forms a *khums* or five-sided sign, which is believed to ward off the envious eye. By affixing this sign to the guests’ property, the host is reassuring them that their camels will be safe from supernatural dangers.

<sup>29</sup> There is a comparable ethic of *khajal* in Oman; see Eickelman (1984: 70 f.).

(c) *The division of labor and the division of the meat.* Once the goat has been slaughtered it is skinned, butchered, and cooked. The first two steps are done by the males of the household under the direction of the senior man. They hang the carcass from the protruding end of a tent pole or from a tripod that some households have for butchering. They take care that the animal's blood drips outside of the tent and does not pollute their furnishings or their clothes.<sup>30</sup> The men work quickly out of consideration for the guests; they do not want them to wait, hungry, for a long time.

Although the guests do not see the butchering, it is spotted by the hosts' neighbors, who interpret it, moreover, as an unspoken invitation. The nearby members of the camp are not "reluctant" because they know that there is more meat in a *ḍabīḥa* than a single household can consume. Men from neighboring tents arrive, then, while the butchering goes on.

The women, meanwhile, are busy breaking up firewood and starting a pot of salted water to boil. They work inside the tent or in its immediate vicinity, outside of the guests' line of sight. After the men remove the skin and cut up the flesh, they pass it on to the women. The women begin cooking the meat and also start to prepare the grain dish, which is to be served later.

The first taste of the *ḍabīḥa* that the guests are given is the *mirīgga*, a salty broth which the women ladle out of the pot and pour into tea glasses. They slide a tray full of glasses under the tent divider and one of the men of the household passes it around. After each of the men has had a glass, the tray is passed back to the women. They drink some of the *mirīgga* and then transfer the cooked meat to two bowls. The woman of the house puts the best cuts of meat (such as the liver and haunch) into a large wooden serving bowl (*saḥāfa*). She puts the bony parts of the animal in a cheaper enamel bowl and sends a boy into the eastern section of the tent to summon the *raa'yi il-beyt*.

The senior man of the house immediately fills a container with water and asks the men present to hold out their hands to wash them. After sprinkling some water over his guests' and neighbors' hands, the host goes into the western section, slices the choice cuts into small pieces, takes the filled

*Saḥāfa*, and goes back to present the meat to the guests.

In order for the man of the house to serve the meat correctly, it must be sorted into two different portions, each of which should be placed in a separate bowl. Three of the legs are separated from the body and the meat is sliced off of them; the fourth is left whole with some ribs still attached. The liver and heart are cleaned of the fat that adheres to them and the liver is cut in two. One half of the liver is placed in the *Saḥāfa* along with the boneless slices of meat, one-half of the goat's head, and the uncut leg, which is often the hindquarter.<sup>31</sup> The remaining ribs are separated into hand-size sections and placed in the second, enamel bowl along with other bony pieces. When the host crosses over into the eastern section to serve the meat, he leaves the enamel bowl (containing the bony cuts of meat) behind and takes only the wooden serving bowl (containing the boneless meat, one-half of the head, the uncut leg, and half of the liver). After setting the *Saḥāfa* down in front of one of the guests, he sends for a second enamel bowl which he places, empty, next to the meat.

(d) *Selecting a senior from among the guests.* By setting the wooden dish down in front of one particular guest, the host has "made him senior" (*ḥābbar-ah*). Now this senior guest must allocate the appropriate portions of meat to the men and the women who are present. He takes out the hindquarter, part of the head, and one-half of the liver and puts these pieces in the empty bowl that the host has provided. Sliding it back to the host, he says "This is for the woman of the house."<sup>32</sup> A boy picks up this bowl and takes it into the western section of the tent. This portion of meat, called *lahmat il-mugraa* ("the piece of meat for the hospitable"),<sup>33</sup> is eaten by the senior woman and her daughters.

30 A person with blood on his clothes is ritually impure and cannot perform the Muslim prayer (al-Jazā'irī 1976: 180 f.). If blood drops on a Rashiidi's clothes, he immediately rinses the spot with water.

31 The Bedouin of Palestine also give meat from the leg to their most honored guests first and give meat from the shoulder to those who eat later; see El-Barghuthi (1924: 196; n. 2).

32 The same custom is found among the Palestinian Bedouin (El-Barghuthi 1924: 197), the Bedouin near Madina in Arabia (Doughty 1979/II: 232, 258) and among the Al Murra Bedouin (see Cole 1975: 50). For another instance of a guest addressing the women of a Bedouin household even though he cannot see them, see Sawayan (1985: 22).

33 The word *mugraa* ("hospitable") is grammatically masculine but need not be translated as "host"; from the context it is clear that it refers to the senior woman of the house. The Rashaayda have no terms for "host" or "hostess"; the closest equivalents are "male guardian of the house" and "female guardian of the house," as we have seen.

The guests gather in a circle around the wooden bowl but remain seated for a moment without eating. They are all too “reluctant” to take the first bite. The host urges them to say “In the name of God” (*guul bism illaah*) and begin. Often the guest who has been singled out tries to refuse this minor distinction by sitting motionless and silent, attempting to defer to one of his companions. Thus they all hesitate until the host has called on the one whom he wishes to honor. After a brief pause his “reluctance” is overcome and he picks up a morsel. The senior man of the household eats with the guests from the same bowl, to encourage them.<sup>34</sup> After the guests have begun to eat, the second bowl (containing the bony cuts of meat) is offered to the neighbors, who sit around it a few feet away from the guests.

In sum, the guests and the senior men of the household eat together and are given the choicest cuts of meat.<sup>35</sup> The neighbors and the other members of the household are given a mixture of excellent (liver), medium (haunch), and poor (head) quality meat.<sup>36</sup> The guests are uniformly well treated, regardless of sex, age, or status; the men of the household are differentiated into senior men (who eat with the guests) and junior men (who eat with the neighbors); and the female members of the household are differentiated into senior and junior categories.

At the beginning of the meal, the guests clustered around the serving bowl eat rapidly, without

talking. Guests and neighbors can be identified by their “reluctant” manner of eating; each takes only from the spot directly in front of him and makes no effort to find the most appetizing morsels.<sup>37</sup> The host tries to tempt the guests with pieces of liver or haunch, which he searches for in the pile of meat and places in front of them. At first he is able to overcome their smiling protests and decorum but as they are satiated they gradually slow down and reach for new mouthfuls more and more infrequently. They watch their fellow guests to check their pace and search for signs that all are satisfied. The host admonishes them: *laa tarfa’u, kulu, ishba’u* (“Don’t lift [your hands away from the bowl], eat, satisfy your hunger”). He may speak to an individual guest: *kul; anta maa a’calt* (“Eat; you haven’t eaten [anything]”). The guest replies, *a’calt, kul anta* (“I have eaten; you eat”). With this the other men at the bowl know that the guests are satiated and that the first course may be brought to a close.

(e) *Terminating the first course.* Just as the meal is initiated by a guest (who took the first bite), so does a guest end it. Moreover, the first course of the meal, during which meat is served, must be terminated before the second course (a grain dish) can be offered. For the guests to bring these events to their proper conclusions, they select a man to utter the proper ritual phrases. One of the junior guests addresses his senior counterpart by name: *gawwim-naa, yaa himeyd* (“Make us get up, Himeyd”). The senior guest thus singled out says:

*ðibaħat a’daa-ku wa ‘asaa ar-rudyaan fadaa-ku*

(“May your enemies be slaughtered, and would that the spineless [fall in battle] in your stead”).

The host responds with a similar rhymed answer:

*hanaa-k man jaa-k wa shaan allaah man shaanaa-k*

(“May all who come to you wish you good health, and may God hate all who hate you”).

Once this exchange has taken place, both the guests and neighbors raise their hands from their bowls and lick the grease from their fingers. This signifies that they are satisfied and will not touch the food again.<sup>38</sup> The same senior guest may con-

34 Among the Kroumirs of Tunisia, “the oldest or the most dignified [guest] then begins to eat, encouraging his companions to follow his example with the formula, *ħayya bism allaah*.” For the host to eat with a guest “. . . is an encouragement for him; he is ashamed [French text: *a honte*] and does not dare to eat” (Lanfry 1938: 66, 68).

35 There is no distinction in this regard between a male and a female guest. If a man and a woman both have been classified as guests, the woman sits in the western section of the tent and is given the same slices of choice meat that her male counterpart receives, after he has separated the “meat of the hospitable” from the rest. Her serving of choice meat is not put into the Saħāfa but is held back by the women and is shared by her and the woman of the house. A woman guest does not eat any of the *lahmat il-mugraa*. The Palestinian Bedouin also honor men and women guests equally but serve them separately (El-Barghuthi 1924: 199).

36 Note that these different evaluations are based in the Rashaayda’s values, not those of the author. The Rashaayda themselves prefer meat from the liver to meat from the haunch. Other Arab societies, with different local economies and different cuisines, may not share these values. The point is not that liver is better than the haunch, but that the differential evaluation of the meat could imply a differential treatment of the guests. To avoid giving the impression that one guest is preferred over another, the Rashaayda are careful to give all guests servings of meat from all parts of the slaughtered animal.

37 Among the Kroumir Arabs guests eat from a common bowl but each one takes only the food that is directly in front of him (Lanfry 1938: 63).

38 In Tunisia the meal is brought to an end when the guests all plant their spoons vertically in front of them in the pile of couscous that remains in the dish (Lanfry 1938: 66).

tinue with *allaah yikhallif 'aley-k bi-l-halaal* (“May God repay you with something good/lawful”)<sup>39</sup> to which the host replies, *'asaa-haa bi-l-'aafiya* (“Would that it were [eaten] in good health”). Uttering these ritual phrases terminates the first course. Informants identified this entire procedure by referring to a verb in the ritual formula, *yikhallif* (to say, “God repay him”). As they described it, “The guest says, ‘May [God] repay (*aḏ-ḏeyf yikhallif*).’” Guests always leave some meat in their bowl but once they pronounce the formula no one may continue to eat.

The reader might think that this rule is a mere convention that is not taken too seriously. In at least one instance, however, a violation of the rule brought the meal to an abrupt and early end. When I was conducting fieldwork, I visited some close relatives of my host family and was received formally as a guest in their house. They presented a slaughtered goat in my honor. I was eager to demonstrate that I had learned the ritual formulae correctly. I uttered the words “May your enemies be slaughtered . . .” after eating only a few handfuls of meat. Unfortunately, I had not checked to see whether the other men at the meal were eating slowly – as a sign of satiation – or eating quickly – as an indication that they were still hungry. So I uttered the ritual formula prematurely, before the others were finished eating.<sup>40</sup> When they heard me speak they froze in surprise. One of them actually had a small piece of bony meat in his hand and was still chewing on it. He rolled his eyes sarcastically and threw the morsel over his shoulder, letting it fall outside of the tent (where the dogs would get it). Even though everyone present was acutely aware that I had made a mistake, the damage had been done. The senior male of the house lifted up the wooden serving bowl and handed it to a child, who took it into the western section of the tent where the women and girls were waiting. The men could not permit themselves to eat any more of it.

(f) *Initiating and terminating the second course.* The offering of meat is followed by a serving of cooked grain which is moistened and flavored

with a sauce (*iidaam*). The rules for serving it and eating it are similar to those described above. The host washes the hands of those present once again (since they have licked their fingers and so polluted them with saliva), brings in one bowl of food for the guests and senior neighbors and a second bowl for the others, and pours the sauce on the cooked grain in both bowls. When the course is to be terminated the senior guest makes no reference to slaughtering but may say, instead, *aḥalnaa rizz-ku wa daam 'izz-ku* (“We have eaten your rice, and may your strength/high station in life endure”). The host’s reply is similar to that made after the first course. At this point the meal is ended.

#### 2.4.2 Woman as Host

This description of hospitality would not be complete without additional information about the role of women. The senior woman has a role in hospitality even when all of the guests are men and do not eat with her. The visibility of the woman’s role varies according to context.

When a man comes to visit a household and the male head of that household is absent, his wife takes on the responsibilities of hospitality.<sup>41</sup> If she has sons, she moves into the western section of the tent and allows them to lay out the spread (*firaash*) for the guest and entertain him. If she has no sons, she goes into the eastern section to give the guest something to drink but does not stay there to chat with him. She makes him tea and coffee, serves it, and returns to the western side of the tent. Since no male resident is present she cannot offer the guest anything else. As the Rashaayda say, *il-mara laa tigaddim* (“Women do not [ritually] offer [food]”). The reason given for this is that no host can offer food without eating some of it; if no one shares the meal, the guest is too “reluctant” to eat. A woman, however, may not eat with a man unless he is her husband; she cannot share her food with the guest.

To solve this problem, a woman host sends for a male neighbor. This neighbor, irrespective of his kinship ties to her household, slaughters one of his own animals and brings it to her tent. If she does not have the water necessary to cook for the guest, he also saddles up his camel and goes to a water source to fill her water bags, a duty which would ordinarily be fulfilled by her husband or sons. For the sake of the guest, her neighbor will work for her.

41 The same observation holds for the Rwala Bedouin of Saudi Arabia (Lancaster 1981: 45, 63).

39 The same words were said by Palestinian Bedouin in the 1920s; cf. El-Barghuthi (1924: 177). The word *halaal* refers to foods and acts which are permitted to Muslims.

40 A Jordanian authority on Bedouin hospitality stresses the duty of the host to refrain from lifting his hand away from the common platter as long as his guests are eating, since when he stops eating they must also stop, even if they have not satisfied their hunger (Malā’iba 1993: 63). He clearly presents the offering of food as a rule-governed ritual, not a simple etiquette.

Like men, women also act as guests. If a woman visits a household by herself, the male head of that household welcomes her and then withdraws; the senior woman of the house serves coffee to the guest in the western section of the tent and shares the meal with her. If the household members decide that a woman guest is “worth slaughtering for,” the senior man butchers an animal but eats separately from the guest.

### 3 Structure and Categorical Differentiation in Ritual

Throughout this series of transactions the social categories that are invoked most frequently and instantiated most uniquely are: “Female Guardian of the House” (*raa’iyit il-beyt*) and “Senior Guest” (*aḌ-Ḍeyf* or *čibiir aḌ-Ḍuyuuḑ*). It is the senior woman of the household who crosses into the eastern section of the tent to serve hot beverages, and it is she alone who is referred to when the guest sets aside a “piece of meat for the hospitable” when he accepts the meal.<sup>42</sup> The senior guest is also specifically singled out. When coffee is served, the senior guest is given the first cup. Later, when the meat is presented, it is set in front of the senior guest for him to accept. Finally, the senior guest utters the ritual formula which ends the meal. These two categories, one which gives hospitality and one which accepts it, form the two poles between which all messages and offerings move.

The third general category in the ritual, which is frequently labeled *raa’yi il-beyt*, can be instantiated by any of a number of people (the husband, son, or neighbor of the senior woman). They act as go-betweens for the senior woman and the guest. For instance, when the guest approaches the woman’s tent,<sup>43</sup> the mediator goes out first to

greet and welcome him, thus making it possible for the “female guardian” of that tent to greet him. When the senior woman enters the eastern section of her tent, where the guest is sitting silently in accordance with the ethic of “reluctance,” the go-between speaks for him, asking the senior woman to prepare tea and coffee. The guest sends his thanks to the senior woman by means of this go-between, setting aside a piece of meat for her that the go-between brings her. Finally, after the guest ends the meal, the go-between takes the half-eaten bowl of meat into the western section and indicates to the senior woman that her offering has been accepted.

Both the senior woman of the house and the guest are restricted by the code of “reluctance” (*at-taḥaḥshud*). In the woman’s case this has connotations of sexual modesty, as can be seen from her silence in front of men and her careful covering of her head and mouth. In the guest’s case “reluctance” is grounded in debt, since he is the recipient of a generous presentation which he may never be able to return. These gender-specific connotations make this term difficult to translate. A male guest could be said to be “ashamed” to consume his host’s wealth while a female host may be “bashful” of her male guest. Regardless of how the term is translated, the important point is that the Rashaayda ascribe *at-taḥaḥshud* to the hostess and the guest but do not ascribe it to the go-between. The “male guardian of the house” speaks and moves freely, without “reluctance” or “shame.” “Shame” marks the opposed categories in this transaction and distinguishes them from the mediating category. It stems from the structure of a transaction which involves both a separation of the sexes and an exchange of goods.

### 4 Structural Description and Possible Explanations of the Rashaayda Case

The foregoing account of Rashiidi hospitality is not, by itself, an explanation of the ethnographic facts. Rather, it is a restatement – in more general, abstract, and theoretically oriented terms – of the ethnographic data. It represents them more systematically than the native informant statements do and assigns certain of the data – for example, the fact that the utensils used for making coffee and tea are not stored in the eastern section of the tent but are moved back and forth, from the “women’s side” to the “guests’/men’s side,” throughout the course of hospitality – more significance than they would have for an observer untrained in ethnog-

42 One informant joked about this indirect exchange between the guest and the hostess. He said that occasionally a guest might forget to take out the *lahmat il-mugraa* and acknowledge the “female guardian of the tent.” If he happened to be sitting near the divider between the eastern and western sections of the tent, the hostess would remind him of his responsibility by pushing him from behind the cloth and giving him a sharp jab in the ribs!

43 The tent is explicitly associated with the senior woman who inhabits it. She weaves the tent cloth out of which it is constructed, strikes the tent when preparing for a pastoral migration, and rebuilds it when migration is over. Although the campsite (*daar*) in which a tent is located is named after its senior man, the tent itself is identified by referring to the woman who made it and kept it in repair. The senior woman of the tent also purifies it with incense every year. See Young (1996: 33, 48–52, 70, 85).

raphy. We argue that our treatment of the data illuminates them by linking them to the large and highly developed corpus of work in anthropology about the importance of exchange and reciprocity for social life.<sup>44</sup> Our treatment also contrasts with the interpretations of other ethnologists (e.g., Patai 1983) who view women's roles in hospitality as an expression of an Arab "honor and shame" value complex. Rather than interpret hospitality as an expression of values, this analysis represents it as an effort to instantiate abstract categories and oppositions (e.g., between Senior Woman of the House and Male Guest) in concrete acts. By adopting this approach, we aim to make Rashiidi hospitality into a culture-specific instance of a more universal, mediated opposition: Giver < Mediator > Receiver.

Neither of these approaches, however, can explain why Rashiidi hospitality differs – if indeed it does differ – from hospitality in other Arab societies. What is more, neither the "values" interpretation nor the "categories and oppositions" interpretation can explain why Rashiidi hospitality differs from American hospitality. This is because both interpretations are just restatements of the facts that need to be explained. To argue that Rashiidi hospitality differs from American hospitality because the Rashaayda have different "values" or "categories" merely displaces the problem; we then wonder *why* the Rashaayda have different "values" or "categories." This kind of argumentation easily becomes tautological. We ask why the Rashaayda incorporate guests into their households and are told "because it's part of their culture." Then we ask how we know that this type of hospitality is part of Rashiidi culture and are told "because they do it."

To explain ethnographic variation, rather than simply interpret ethnographic facts, we must employ cross-cultural comparison and identify the independent variables which cause hospitality to vary from one society to another. By carrying out cross-cultural comparison, we can easily suggest some plausible explanations for the three striking characteristics of Rashiidi hospitality: the relatively important role of women, the incorporation of the guest into the host's household, and the ritualistic character of hospitality (i.e., its comparative rigidity and its formal, explicitly verbalized rules). Proving that these explanations are both plausible and correct, however, is more difficult.

Let us consider women's role in hospitality first. One plausible explanation of why Rashiidi women

have a relatively prominent role in hospitality is that Rashiidi women also have a prominent role in the Rashaayda's subsistence economy. Rashiidi men depend entirely on their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters for their cooked food and shelter; a man literally cannot live by himself without the help of a woman (cf. Young 1996: 32–43, 45, 48–55, 61, 63). Since a woman's productive work is indispensable, it is not surprising that her contribution to ritual also cannot be dispensed with. Rashiidi men are not in a position to exclude women from these prestigious activities. In more highly monetarized Arab societies, however – such as the ancient urban centers of Damascus and Cairo or the recently monetarized cities of Yemen and the Gulf – a wife's labor can be replaced by hired labor or consumer goods (frozen food, commercially sold housing, and so on). Monetarization could conceivably allow wealthy men to dispense with the help of their wives and reduce the economic bargaining power of women. Thus urban elite men could very well exclude their wives from hospitality if no noneconomic forces or sanctions were operating to constrain them. In short, the independent variable seems to be economic: if the economy is monetarized, there should be a tendency to exclude women from the locales where hospitality is offered to male guests, while in subsistence economies women should have more prominent roles.

Unfortunately, there is no way to test this explanation because there are almost no complete descriptions of Arab hospitality in the ethnographic record. The single most complete description, Meneley's account of hospitality in the Yemeni town of Zabid, tends to support the hypothesis that monetarization is causally related to the exclusion of a household's women from offerings of hospitality to men. In Zabid, elite men hire laborers to cook and clean and do not depend on their wife's labor. Hence women can be completely separated from men's hospitality sessions (cf. Meneley 1996: 69; n. 28). But does this explanation also apply to Beirut, or Cairo, or Damascus? We cannot say, because we simply do not know whether or how Arab women participate in formal offerings of food to men in these cities. We also do not know whether unmarried men in these societies are able to offer hospitality successfully in their own names. Perhaps, when they want to entertain important guests, they must still rely on their mothers to provide the proper locale and appropriate food, even if they can theoretically afford to entertain at hotels and restaurants. Although we suspect, based on our knowledge of our own extremely

44 For a recent, and very thoughtful, review of this work, see Godelier (1999).

monetarized society, that restaurant hospitality is not as highly valued as home hospitality in urban Arab societies, there are almost no systematic comparisons of the two in any ethnographies.<sup>45</sup> We may also suspect that women's bargaining position in these societies is not based exclusively on their cash contributions to the household. Arab women also provide nonmonetary services such as child-care and care for the elderly, and they organize nonmonetary transactions such as marriage. For this reason, we doubt that women are completely excluded from home hospitality in any Arab society – whether urban or rural – and suspect that the absence of women from descriptions of home hospitality is due, to some extent at least, to faulty ethnography.<sup>46</sup> Regardless, without detailed descriptions of hospitality in a number of Arab settings (urban/rural; elite/working class; subsistence production/commercial production), we simply cannot know how much the role of women in hospitality varies nor what the independent variables are.

The same lack of baseline data bedevils us when trying to explain, why the Rashiidi hosts incorporate guests into their households and allow guests to dispense hospitality when the senior hosts are absent. One plausible explanation for this could be the almost complete absence of police and other national security forces in the Rashaayda's territory. Among the Rashaayda, if armed clashes break out near a home or if a camp is attacked, the household residents must rely on themselves for protection; there is no one else they can turn to. A guest who is visiting a camp when it is attacked must be protected by his hosts. In return, if the guest is a man, he must join ranks with the other men of the camp to defend it, even if his own relatives are among the attackers (cf. Young 1996: 55 f., 58, 77 f.). Under these conditions, it is quite important to know exactly which household

every person is attached to. The Rashaayda use their rules of hospitality to assign every guest to a specific household and make it clear exactly who is responsible for protecting him in times of conflict.

One would expect, then, that other Arab groups who rely on self-help to pursue their enemies and protect themselves against attack would also use the rules of hospitality to fully incorporate guests into their households. This was clearly the case in rural Jordan and also in rural Najd before the creation of modern states in these regions in the early twentieth century. A number of accounts stress the obligation of a host to protect his guest from all attackers during this lawless period. In these societies, moreover, there was an elaborate set of norms that granted protection to a fugitive (*dakhiil*) who has managed to escape his pursuers by entering the shelter of a nearby tent.<sup>47</sup> The absence of public police forces seems to be the determining factor, in eastern Sudan, rural Jordan, and Najd, that caused rural pastoralists to make their guests into virtual household members.

Perhaps the converse is also true. That is, in urban Arab societies, where the state has installed police forces in every neighborhood and does not permit individual households to attack each other or defend themselves from attack, the guest should be merely a visitor, not a potential member of the household. Moreover, the ritual formula that stresses the household's right to attack its enemies ("May your enemies be slaughtered . . .") should be absent from hospitality. This does seem to be the case, although the lack of ethnographic data about hospitality in premodern Arab cities (such as early twentieth-century San'a, nineteenth-century Damascus, eighteenth-century Cairo, and so on) makes it difficult to prove this hypothesis definitively.

The third distinctive feature of Rashiidi hospitality – its formulaic, ritual character – may be grounded in the relative egalitarianism and comparatively small scale of Rashiidi society. In societies where one's normative rank depends largely on how well one fulfills obligations to family members, neighbors, and friends – rather than on inherited distinctions of wealth and privilege – these obligations tend to be explicitly and clearly codified. Small-scale societies such as the Rashaayda also constitute a speech community in which verbal formulas are well known and carefully transmitted from one generation to the next. Thus, in small-scale, egalitarian societies one

45 See, however, Shryock's comparison of domestic and commercial hospitality in Jordan and his interesting observations about the impact of commercial hospitality on the sexual division of labor (Shryock 2004: 41–44, 47 f.). Howell, also, has much to say about the difference in value between domestically produced food and market commodities (2003).

46 Shryock is one of the few ethnographers to point out that "hospitality is always partially unseen. As a social performance, many of its most important elements are time-delayed or acted out elsewhere. The bulk of food preparation, for instance, is seldom witnessed by male guests" (2004: 59). His observation underscores our point that just because Arab women are not physically present during the meal does not justify excluding them from ethnographic description and analysis.

47 Cf. Ingham 1982: 257 f.; al-Qusūs 1972: 59–61; Sowan 1985: 41–49.

knows what one's obligations are to guests, allies, and kin, and one knows equally well what the social sanctions for violating these obligations are. What is more, rules and obligations are explicitly verbalized by means of semantically rich formulas and sayings (such as the "May your enemies be slaughtered ..." referred to above). But in class-divided societies the wealthy and powerful are "at war" with the poor and weak. Social norms are observed more in the breach than in practice, and the sanctions against rule-violators are enforced by the elite, not the community. In class-divided societies hospitality is used primarily as an occasion for the conspicuous display and consumption of wealth, allowing individual households to distinguish themselves from social inferiors and attempt to emulate those higher in rank. In such circumstances the obligatory "rules" of hospitality – and the communal sanctions that reinforce them – may tend to evolve into an elaborate etiquette that is constantly in flux, continually transformed by the innovations of the *nouveaux riches* and the efforts of the *ancien régime* to restore "traditional" standards.<sup>48</sup> Verbal formulas and ritual are devalued; instead, greater emphasis is placed on literary allusions and demonstrations of good taste (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Meneley 1996: 99–117).

Although this hypothesis is based on the familiar distinction between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity proposed by Tönnies over 60 years ago (1940), it may still have some usefulness. However, it is difficult to prove that the ritual character of Rashiidi hospitality is derived from the strong communal norms and relative absence of class differentials among the Rashaayda without good comparative evidence. We need descriptions of hospitality in both class-divided Arab societies and more egalitarian Arab societies to test the hypothesis.

If a structural description cannot explain variation in hospitality from one Arab society to another, what is its value for the anthropology of the Arab world? What have we gained by treating Rashiidi hospitality as a ritual which instantiates a mediated opposition between the senior woman of a household (who gives food and shelter)

and a guest (who receives it)? First, the structural approach permits us to describe different varieties of hospitality without evaluating or judging them. Among the Rashaayda, for instance, women hosts offer hot beverages to guests directly while in the presence of coresident males, but they offer solid food less directly, through male intermediaries. In some other Arab societies (e.g., the Al Murra of Saudi Arabia, the Bedouin of western Egypt) women also initiate offerings of food and drink but do not present any of it, while still in others (urban Egypt) women hosts both prepare the meal and eat together with male guests and male coresidents. If hospitality is viewed merely as expression of cultural values, then variation in hospitality can only be attributed to variation in values. This leads us to view inter-Arab differences in naively normative terms: compared with Egyptian Bedouin, the Rashaayda Bedouin and urban Egyptians seem either "more liberal" or "less honorable" because their women interact more directly with male guests. But from a structural perspective, the senior woman of the house is "present" – conceptually, if not physically – in all of these cases.<sup>49</sup> The question then arises why exchanges between the senior woman of the house and male guests are mediated more elaborately in western Egypt than in Cairo. The causes of the more elaborate mediation between male guest and hostess in western Egypt – for example, the varying economic role of women, the varying degree of socioeconomic stratification, the varying power of the state security apparatus – can then be sought in those dimensions of social organization that experience has taught us have explanatory power.

The second advantage of a structural description is that it facilitates the comparison of the relevant native terminology across languages. That is, in addition to providing a concise and focused

48 We have northern Lebanon in mind, here; see Gilsehan (1982: 96 f., 101 f., 164–166, 169, 182–187; 1996: 241 f.). In the stratified Yemeni city of Zabid, the etiquette of hospitality apparently is not so easily manipulated; social climbers who try to bend the rules are ridiculed (Meneley 1996: 33, 35, 106). We might suggest a continuum between the highly ritualized rules of hospitality among the Rashaayda and the fashionable styles of hospitality in Lebanon; Zabid falls somewhere in between.

49 We cannot help but recall a comparable ethnographic problem in the field of kinship studies – the question of why the maternal uncle has an important role in certain kinship systems – and Lévi-Strauss's solution of it: "Thus we do not need to explain how the maternal uncle emerged in the kinship structure: He does not emerge – he is present initially. Indeed, the presence of the maternal uncle is a necessary precondition for the structure to exist" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 44 f.). We could raise a similar question about Arab hospitality: "Why does the senior woman of the household have such an important ritual role in some cases?" and give a similar answer: "She has an important role in all cases, and indeed must be present conceptually, if not physically, for the structure of home hospitality to exist. She has not appeared unexpectedly in some cases; she was structurally present to begin with."

description of behavior during hospitality, a structural account supports a systematic examination of the semantics of hospitality in Arabic-speaking societies and non-Arabic-speaking societies, as we will see.

## 5 Structural Description, Semantics, and Crosslinguistic Comparison

We have described hospitality in one Arabic-speaking society by focusing on only three terms: Hostess < Mediator/Host > Guest. Because our selection of terms is so parsimonious, we can compare them with the same three terms in other Arabic-speaking societies, to see whether they constitute the same semantic field there that is found among the Rashaayda. Furthermore, we can show how the terms for “host,” “hostess,” and “guest” in Arabic differ semantically from these terms in other Middle Eastern languages. As we will demonstrate, this crosslinguistic comparison lends further support to the idea that Arab hospitality is semantically a rite of incorporation.

### 5.1 Arabic Terminology

Among the Rashaayda, the terms for “host” and “hostess” (*raa’yi il-beyt* and *raa’yit il-beyt*) literally mean “guardian” or “shepherd” of the house. This is parallel to the Jordanian Arabic term for “host,” that is, *mu’azzib*, which literally means “shepherd” or “seasonal pastoralist” (cf. Shryock 2004: 36). Bahraini and Najdi Arabic speakers also use *m’azzib il-beyt* “master of the tent” as their expression for “host.” (Holes 2001: 348; Ingham 1994: 33, 181). By using either term, these Arabic speakers make semantic links between controlling and protecting livestock, controlling and protecting a house, and – by extension – controlling and protecting guests. It is striking that Bahrainis, Najdis, the Rashaayda, and the pastoralists of central Jordan make the same semantic links despite the fact that they use different lexical items – *raa’yi* (“herder”) and *mu’azzib* (“seasonal pastoralist”) – to do so. This indicates that the semantic links among three separate responsibilities – guarding/controlling sheep, guarding/controlling houses, and guarding/controlling guests – is more important conceptually in these three cultures for the representation of social order than the selection of any single lexical item to establish these links. It also suggests that Arabic speakers who use terms for “host” that are semantically distinct from the

Bahraini, Najdi, Rashiidi, or Jordanian terms may have different conceptions of the relationship between guest and host.

Speakers of Iraqi Arabic, for example, use *muDayyif* for “host,” not *raa’yi il-beyt* (as do some Bahraini speakers) (Clarity et al. 2003: 88; Holes 2001: 314). This usage detaches the activities of the host from hospitality’s domestic locale; the word for “house” (*beyt*) is not part of the expression. It implies that the distinction between home hospitality and hospitality in commercial locations (restaurants, hotels) may not be as important for urban Iraqis as it is for Jordanians, Bahrainis, Najdis, and the Rashaayda pastoralists. On the other hand, these Arabic speakers have a second expression, *Saahib ad-da’wa* (“originator of the invitation”) that might be applied to hosts in non-domestic contexts. Perhaps the very existence of two expressions for “host” in these dialects establishes a contrast between domestic and commercial hospitality that is missing from the culture of the Rashaayda. Ethnographic fieldwork could resolve this question; structural analysis, however, is what has raised it.

The term for “guest,” also, merits our attention. The Rashaayda’s term, *Deyf*, is a reflex of the classical Arabic *Dayf*, which is derived from a root that means “to add to, attach.” The classical word for “hospitality” (*Diyaafa*) closely resembles the word for “annexation, attachment” (*iDaafa*) (Wehr 1979: 640 f.). This suggests that a “guest” is a person who is “added to” or incorporated into, the host’s household. That is to say, classical Arabic lexicography supports our interpretation of Arab hospitality as a rite of incorporation.

The semantic duality of *Dayf* (= “guest” and “added to”) seems to be an archaic feature of the early Arabic lexicon that has been preserved in good a many modern colloquial dialects of Arabic. The dialect of Cairo, for example, has a verb, *yinDaaf*, which means both “to be added” and “to be given hospitality” (Spiro 1973: 348; Hinds and Badawi 1986: 526 f.). Bahraini colloquial Arabic, Iraqi colloquial Arabic, Syrian colloquial Arabic, Sudanese colloquial Arabic, and Yemeni colloquial Arabic all retain the verb *Daaf*, meaning “to annex, add (sth.) to (sth. else),” and also use a derived form of this verb, *Dayyaf*, to mean “give shelter to a visitor or guest.”<sup>50</sup> In Algerian colloquial Arabic the verb *Daaf* means both “to annex, join” and “to receive hospitality, be treated as a guest, be

50 Holes 2001: 314; Qafisheh 2000: 405; Qāsim 1972: 466; Stowasser and Ani 1964: 3, 119; Clarity et al. 2003: 283.

a guest of someone” (Beaussier 1958: 539). Although some modern dialects may not retain this dual meaning of *Daaf*, it seems sufficiently common for us to claim that almost all Arabic speakers tend to conceptualize hospitality as an act of incorporation, even in those Arab societies where guests do not actually become virtual members of the household. This observation provides us with a useful starting point for comparing the semantics of Arab hospitality with hospitality among speakers of other languages.

## 5.2 Hebrew Terminology

The standard Hebrew word for “guest” is *’ōrēāh*, which is related to a Biblical Hebrew verb for “to travel or wander”; the term itself means “wayfarer.” There are a variety of terms for “host.” Two of them – *mə’ārēāh* (“someone who shelters wayfarers or guests”) and *maknīs ’ōrḥīm* (“someone who gathers wayfarers or guests”) are both etymologically derived from the word for “guest.” But an alternate expression for “host” – *ba’al bayith* – suggests a range of meanings which are close to the semantics of hospitality among the Rashaayda. For this alternate expression means “lord or master of the house” (Alcalay 1981/I: 1647, 1796), which would be a good translation of the Rashiidi expression *raa’yi il-beyt*. In fact, the words for “house” in both expressions are cognates. The Hebrew term for “hostess” is the marked, feminine form: *ba’alath bayith* (“mistress of the house”) (Alcalay 1981/I: 1796; Koehler 2000: 86 f., 143 f.).

All of this implies that the offering of both food and shelter is central to the discourse of hospitality in Hebrew, as it is for Arabic. But the Hebrew terms also suggest one important distinction between hospitality in Hebrew and Arabic. The Hebrew term for “guest” emphasizes the lack of any connection between the traveler and domestic shelter. He is a stranger, a “son of the road” (cf. the comparable Arabic expression *ibn al-sabiil*, “wayfarer, traveler”) who is to be pitied for his homelessness. Although the host feels an ethical obligation to give him sympathy and generous hospitality, he does not feel compelled to make the guest a member of his own household. Unlike the Arabic terminology, there is no implication in Hebrew that a guest is “attached” to the host’s home. Despite the great ethical importance of hospitality in the rabbinic literature, the rabbis did not take hospitality in quite the same direction as the Arabs did. To quote the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1972: 1032):

Children were taught to be hospitable by instructing them to invite guests to dine when they answered the door. . . . the rabbis denounced the parasitical guest, especially if he were a scholar. Two extremes were avoided through a clear definition of the duties of host and guest: The host was forbidden to make his guest feel uncomfortable . . . The guest was instructed to show gratitude . . . , to leave some food on the plate, and to comply with his host’s wishes. The guest was forbidden to give food to others without his host’s consent.

Among the Rashaayda, by contrast, a guest can receive new guests when the male household head is absent. He can also slaughter and butcher one of his host’s goats for the guest and ask the senior woman of the household to cook it, without waiting for the male household head’s consent. Thus hospitality in the Judaic tradition is not a ritual of incorporation. The guest is generously served but he does not become a member of the host’s household.

## 5.3 Persian Terminology

In standard (Tehrani) Persian, the word for “guest” is *mehmaan*; the word for “host” is *mehmaandaar*, meaning “holder of a guest” or “someone who has guests.” The basic Persian term for “host” is nonspecific, in the sense that it is not marked for gender. To say “hostess,” Persian speakers use the gender-marked term *zan-e mehmaandaar*, “female holder of the guest.” While it is also possible to mark the basic term for gender and say *mard-e mehmaandaar* (“male holder of the guest”), this is infrequently used. Hence the three basic terms are *mehmaan* (“guest”) *mehmaandaar* (“holder of the guest” or “host”) and *zan-e mehmaandaar* (“hostess”). What is striking about this terminology is that the terms for “host” and “hostess” are derived directly from the term for “guest,” whereas in Arabic – and English! – the terms for “host” and “guest” are etymologically distinct. Further, the Persian terms make no reference to the house, which implies that the offering of shelter is not central to the offering of hospitality. This interpretation is supported by the existence of an alternate term for “host”: *miizbaan*. This term is derived from the Persian word for “table,” *miiz*; one might venture to suggest that it means “master of the table.” If this is correct, then hospitable prestations in Persian might be more a matter of presenting food at the table rather than offering both food and shelter in a house (which is what is implied by the Arabic terminology).

Crosslinguistic comparisons such as these open up new questions about how hospitality is defined in various Middle Eastern traditions. Based on our examination of three key terms (“guest,” “host,” and “hostess”) alone, we can identify three different definitions of hospitality that are implicit in the terminology: as an offering of food alone; as an offering of both food and shelter; and as a rite of incorporation. These tentative results show us another advantage of a structural description. It focuses our attention on a restricted number of culture-specific terms that exchange theory suggests should have general significance. This is an improvement over the various semiotic approaches to culture with which structural analysis is often compared. Many other semiotic approaches lead us endlessly through a forest of symbols (cf. Turner 1967), so that it becomes difficult to complete even a single description of a sociocultural institution like hospitality, much less compare one society’s institution to another’s. Rather than plunge into what Shryock (2004: 40) describes as an “infinite semiotic regress,” the analysis presented here concentrates on a single mediated opposition: Hostess (*raa’yit il-beyt*) < Mediator > Guest (*Ḍeyf*). In so doing, it both identifies some of the specific semantic characteristics of hospitality in one Arab society and suggests fruitful comparisons with hospitality in other Arab societies and, what is more, in non-Arab societies.

## 6 Conclusion

We have utilized structural analysis to construct a concise and theoretically motivated description of Rashiidi hospitality. We began by identifying three aspects of Rashiidi hospitality – the indispensable role of the household’s senior woman in hospitality, the incorporation of the guest into the host’s household, and the highly ritualized character of hospitality – that may differ from hospitality in other Arab societies. We then proposed a structural description that includes “hostess” as one of three primary terms or categories in hospitality. This in turn permitted us to suggest that women are not structurally marginal in Arab hospitality, even in those Arab societies where women are not visible or physically present in the locale where hospitality is offered to male guests. We also suggested that guests are semantically incorporated into the host’s household in every Arab society, even though they may not be assigned the full range of rights and obligations that are given to other household members. Our structural description enabled us to

identify many new questions about hospitality that the conventional approaches obscure. In addition to the question, “What values does hospitality express?” we ask, “Who is responsible for each phase of hospitality?” “Are senior guests distinguished from junior guests, and if so, how?” “Is there a connection between a senior guest’s rank and gender, on the one hand, and his physical placement in the hospitality locale, on the other?” “What are the differences in the roles of senior and junior guests, male and female guests, and male and female hosts?” “What different ethical or moral stances are expected of the participants?” Because a structural description treats hospitality as a unitary phenomenon, without deciding prematurely whether a given element expresses “generosity” or “honor and shame,” it provides a theoretical motivation for asking such detailed questions. Finally, our description provides a starting point for comparative research on the semantics of hospitality in other Middle Eastern societies where Arabic is not the dominant language.

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