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Where Have the Bedouin Gone?

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The Bedouin have been exoticized as nomads and essentialized as representatives of segmentary lineage organization and tribalism. This essay shows more complex and multifaceted existences and argues that "Bedouin" has changed from denoting a way of life in the past to marking an identity today. A multi-sited perspective presents socioeconomic and sociopolitical change among Bedouin from Algeria to Saudi Arabia and includes colonial impacts, commercialization of pastoral production, occupational change, and sedentarization. Bedouin involvement in tourism and the manufacture of Bedouin heritage for sale as a commodity and as a component of (some) Arab national heritages are also discussed. The coexistence of segmentation, markets, states, and Islam is stressed, with class divisions now becoming predominant. A concern with Middle Eastern ethnography in general, largely implicit, runs throughout the text [Bedouin, Arab World, segmentation, complex society].

The overall outlines of Arab Bedouin society are well known to anthropology, despite the lack of detailed studies.

—Robert F. Murphy and Leonard Kasdan 1959:18

To answer the question “Where have the Bedouin gone?” requires identification of who are the Bedouin, consideration of where they have been, and understanding of their contemporary presences in wider Arab state societies and national cultures. The question is simple and straightforward; but an answer is neither easy nor clear-cut. “Bedouin” is not an occupation recorded on national identity cards or passports. The category of Bedouin (or nomad) existed and was counted in the censuses of colonial governments; but Bedouin are not enumerated as such in today’s national censuses.¹ Indeed, the *Arab Human Development Report 2002* does not even mention the Bedouin in its analysis aimed at “creating opportunities for future generations” (United Nations Development Program 2002). Have the Bedouin ceased to exist? Are the Bedouin a part of the past with no present or future roles?

Educated urbanites I met during the course of fieldwork in Saudi Arabia in 1968-70 usually told me that the Bedouin were all but gone. They had become taxi drivers, traders, worked for the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), served in the National Guard, were low-level government employees, and so on. Many families were settling, boys were going to school, young and middle-aged men were putting aside old-fashioned styles of Bedouin clothing in favor of a new, more homogeneously national style. The Bedouin never came to town anymore on camelback but in red Ford pick-up trucks. Perhaps a few Bedouin—women, children, and old men—remained in the steppe with the herds, but this was a holdover from the past. Fieldwork (Cole 1971, 1975) showed that observation to not be true: a vigorous nomadic pastoral production system still existed. Yet, most urban Saudi Arabians, and some Bedouin, thought the present back then would be but a short period of transition to a future in which the urban and the national, or modernity, would replace nomad camp and tribe, or tradition.

Despite their statistical non-existence and the predominance of the urban, the national, and now the global, Bedouin persist in multiple and changing ways in all seventeen Arab states in Southwest Asia and North Africa and in Palestine/Israel. In searching for the Bedouin in this vast and differentiated terrain, three interrelated issues are addressed.² The first issue is the socio-economic transformation the Bedouin have experienced—both at home on the range and in new occupations in villages, towns, and cities. The second issue is change in sociopolitical relations between and among the kin-based identities and groupings strongly associated with the Bedouin and the wider state systems within which they exist. The third issue explores a relatively newfound role of the Bedouin in the manufacture of cultural heritage consumed as a component

of national identity, or authenticity, in some settings and/or by local and global tourism in others. At the end, this essay does not find the Bedouin as they used to be. Yet, an anthropologist born and raised in the Syrian steppe among Bedouin sheep herders has characterized the social life of the Bedouin today as,

not one of simple and total transformation, but rather of an ongoing dialectic of continuity and change, an interplay between tradition and modernity. They are adjusting their material and political life to rapidly changing modern conditions and yet they continue to respect and adhere to a range of traditions that help them define and perpetuate their ethnic integrity, their Bedouin-ness (Khalaf 1990: 241).

True, but concern with “ethnic identity,” with “Bedouin-ness” reflects an important change. Indeed, this paper argues that the Bedouin and the meanings of “Bedouin” have changed during the past century and before and continue to change. “Bedouin” previously denoted a way of life that was specialized and revolved around steppe-based herding. Today, “Bedouin” refers less to a “way of life” than to an “identity.” The way of life was grounded in ecology and economy, the identity in heritage and culture.

“Bedouin” is derived from the Arabic *badawi* (pl. *badu*), which can be glossed as “desert-dweller.”³ *Badu* is an antonym of *hadr*, “sedentary,” “urban,” “civilized,” but the boundary between the two is not precise. Arabic distinguishes *badu al-rahlah*, “mobile Bedouin,” which implies that some Bedouin are sedentary while others are nomadic. Mostly, Bedouin have been associated with the raising of livestock, principally sheep, goats, and camels, and occasionally cattle, horses, and donkeys—in the *badiyah* (“open country,” “range,” “steppe”). They have usually spoken Arabic dialects that differ from those of the *hadr* in their geographic regions and also from the dialects of other named Bedouin groups.⁴ Other cultural markers have existed, such as tattoos, hairstyles, clothing, headdresses, and veils that have distinguished Bedouin among themselves and in contrast to settled villagers and urbanites. Other differences—from type of housing to styles of poetry and patterns of demeanor—have also existed between these two components of Arab societies.⁵

However, as Bourdieu warned, “one must be careful not to regard [the Bedouin] as radically different from the sedentary peoples” (1962: 66-67). Despite specificities, the Bedouin have participated in and been affected by local and global forces that have also contributed to change, historically and at present, among the settled rural and urban populations of the Arab World.

That the Bedouin have been involved in change generally underway throughout the region is hardly a profound conclusion, except that the Bedouin have often been treated *as if* they were separate from the rest of the population and somehow outside of, or beyond, history. The Bedouin have also been essentialized as a principal representative of what Abu-Lughod calls "*homo segmentarius*," (1989: 280-287). In her critique of Middle East anthropology's classic concern with "segmentation, segmentary lineage theory, or tribalism," Abu-Lughod raises the important question: "Why privilege this aspect of society and say it accounts for the whole?" (ibid: 284).

Through a synthesis of diverse ethnographic, historical, and geographical data from multiple sites in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, and Algeria this paper demonstrates broad regional dimensions of change among the Bedouin. Time-depth and global forces are also shown, as the contemporary transformation is linked back to the early nineteenth century and includes colonialism. The issue of segmentation is addressed not from a perspective that gives prominence to descent, honor, violence, and warfare⁶ but from its role in the mundane everyday context of herding in the open country, mainly in the past. The existence of markets, states, and Islam is stressed; these institutions were as much a part of Arab culture, society, and political economy as were the genealogies and the segmentary lineages the Bedouin (and some, but not all, other Arabs) constructed. I specifically do not privilege segmentation; but it was one, among other ways, of organizing life in the steppe, of talking about one's community, and of keeping track of how people were related, or not, to each other. Segmentation lingers today and takes new forms, even as "Bedouin" takes on a more ethnic dimension. I strive, however, to not replace a segmentary essentialism with an ethnic one.

Socioeconomic change on the range

The Bedouin were strongly linked to the livestock they raised and took care of and which were dependent on the Bedouin, who themselves depended on their animals for much of their own livelihood and sustenance. This interspecies co-dependency or symbiosis⁷ was a central feature of the old Bedouin economy wherein the livestock constituted a person's and a family-household's capital (*ras mal*). These animals were owned individually as private property (*mulk*)—often by the senior male head of household as part of an inheritance and/or by purchase. Some were owned by women in the household who acquired them in lieu of a right to inheritance or through purchase. Sometimes,

a herd was inherited and held in trust (*jumlah*) by brothers who did not wish to divide their capital. Likewise, merchants, amirs and shaikhs, or other individuals occasionally owned a herd or part of a herd looked after by Bedouin.

Many variations existed; but under "ordinary" circumstances the Bedouin family-household (*bait*)⁸ was the basic production and consumption unit. A household traditionally equaled a herd, such that when a household divided, the herd was also divided. Family members of the household provided the labor required for herding and for processing animal products as members of the household. Likewise, they consumed what the household produced or acquired in exchange for its produce. Tents, kilims, blankets, saddlebags, and other items woven by household members (usually women) were the private property of those who made the items but were for the common use of the household just as the privately owned animals, or their products, were for the common use of the household. Cases where household members did not own the animals, or most of them, usually indicated indebtedness (to merchants) or contracted service (to amirs and shaikhs). In such cases, the household provided the labor for herding, consumed milk and perhaps other products, and received goods and merchandize or a portion of the animals' offspring. The owners kept their capital and also benefited from the offspring.

Beyond the household was the domain of kinship. Wells were commonly the property of lineages⁹ or smaller groups descended from a common male ancestor usually held to have dug or cleaned out or otherwise improved the well. Natural vegetation on the range depends on the rain and is thus a gift of Allah and, like fire and air and water (if not developed), is available to all users.¹⁰ However, access to the range depends on access to water, and it is thus through the control of water wells they developed, or claimed to have developed, that Bedouin typically controlled indirectly the territories (*dirat*) that carried their tribal or clan names in addition to local place names. Beyond the household and kin groups were markets, centered in towns and cities but with agents of urban merchants and independent traders operating in the open country among the dispersed and mobile camps. Markets linked the Bedouin to other specialists, including blacksmiths and other metalworkers, leatherworkers, and manufacturers and purveyors of arms. Bedouin livestock, and sometimes their products, "paid" for the armaments, herding and household equipment, cloth and clothing, at least some food items, coffee and/or tea, and incense that constituted basic and luxury needs of Bedouin in the steppe.

Also existing within this system were other specialized food producers, the settled farmers in oases, river valleys, and areas where rainfall was sufficient for crop

production. Some of these shared kinship or friend-partnerships (*sadaqah*) with the range-based Bedouin; and in these situations exchange of animals and animal products for supplies of dates and grains were governed by the principles and norms of reciprocity.¹¹ In other instances, armed Bedouin extracted tribute (*khuwah*) in the form of foodstuffs from villagers, usually in isolated areas. However, the lion's share of exchange involving pastoral and agrarian produce was organized and carried out according to the principles of the market and through the mediation of merchants, traders, auctioneers, and other specialized market personnel. Meanwhile, Islamic law and morality prevailed, while central state authority existed in principle if not always, or even usually, in fact.

This socioeconomic system was complex and multifaceted. Aspects of the household mode of production were present, along with aspects of kin-ordered, tributary, and mercantile modes.¹² No single mode was dominant; they were all present in varying degrees in different situations. This multiplicity of modes is similar to a situation Altorki and I encountered in the case of 'Unayzah, a settled agricultural oasis and market center in Saudi Arabia with numerous villages and a city. While one expects a single mode to be dominant, the contrary obtained: what predominated was the *coexistence* of multiple modes. Each of these modes was indigenous to the local political economy and continued, in 'Unayzah, through the 1920s and into the 1950s (Altorki and Cole 1989: 30-31). This complex system, operating also among the Bedouin, began to fracture in the early nineteenth century. According to Bourdieu, "the widespread, vigorous nomadism of the period prior to 1830 has been replaced by a limited, controlled and weakened form of nomadism" (1962: 69). Arabic-speaking people, and especially the Bedouin, had predominated in Algeria's well-watered plains. This was the area that "felt most strongly the direct shock of colonialism, ... [where] the weakening of the old social structure has been most severe, [and where] European colonists have taken over nearly all the best land" (ibid: 57).

The Bedouin and settled Arabs worked as hired hands for the colonists and were pushed off the better lands into more and more marginal areas. With population increase and limited land of poor quality, land degradation set in, poorer yields were obtained, and greater poverty was created. The spread of cultivation into drier areas reduced the extent of pasture, while restrictions were placed on nomadic migrations. The privatization of landownership, in the 1860s, also facilitated the sale of land to European colonists. These changes plus, later on, the introduction of modern transportation, increased monetarization of the economy, development of the oil industry with new employment opportunities and high wages, rapid population growth, and stagnation in tra-

ditional farming led, in the mid twentieth century, to a "crisis of the nomadic way of life" and "to the nomadism of the work-hungry, a nomadism which brings to the cities wretched persons who have been torn from their accustomed way of life and cut off from their now completely disintegrated community" (ibid, 69-70).

Algeria is an extreme case due to the 132 years of French colonialism it experienced from 1830 to 1962. Yet, a similar pattern of socioeconomic change affected Bedouin in other parts of the Arab World. In nineteenth century Egypt, according to Baer, "the most important factor in the disruption of the social fabric of nomads and semi-nomads was the socio-economic differentiation among the members of the tribe" (1969, 6-7). Horizontal and vertical expansion of cultivation, the privatization of landownership, introduction of cash crops, and the support of Egypt's rulers for these changes combined such that by the end of the nineteenth century Bedouin shaikhs had become "big landowners, while other members of the tribe 'were lost among the fallahin'" (ibid, 7). Similarly, the implementation of land registration policies in greater Syria and Iraq following promulgation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 was associated with the commoditization of land, the creation of large landed estates, and the emergence of masses of Bedouin, and peasants, with few or no rights of access to land for pasturage and/or cultivation.¹³ As in the case of French Algeria, cultivation spread into areas formerly devoted to grazing and restrictions on migrations were increasingly enforced. The demarcation of state boundaries early in the twentieth century hampered movements, while military actions related to "pacification" policies were largely against the Bedouin.

A robust pastoral production had continued in the Arabian Peninsula and in Libya throughout the nineteenth century. These areas experienced considerable political change associated with the Wahhabi and the Sanusi religious movements, both of which called for and fostered settlement and the development of crop cultivation. Italian settler colonialism impacted strongly on the Bedouin in Libya during the 1920s and 1930s. However, the old Bedouin production system continued relatively intact in these areas and, despite all the changes elsewhere, the Bedouin persisted throughout the Arab World in the range-based raising of livestock. The Bedouin were, however, in the 1950s at the bottom of Arab state societies everywhere in terms of most indicators of socioeconomic status: almost 100% illiteracy; no access to modern health care; probably the region's highest rates of infant mortality; decline in market demand for camels and horses; and almost no alternative for work they had previously depended on in desert caravan transport.

Moreover, the governments of the states in which they lived did not support the continuation, much less investment in the improvement, of their nomadic pastoral production. Newly independent Arab governments and Saudi Arabia (which had not been colonized), the newly created Arab League, and various organizations of the newly created United Nations began to call for sedentarization of the Bedouin. The unquestioned, and largely un-researched, solution to the Bedouin "problem" from the 1940s through at least the 1970s was settlement and a shift from livestock to crop production. A number of state-sponsored settlement programs and projects, often supported financially and technically by international agencies, were planned and some were implemented. Success was limited at best. A few Bedouin took advantage of what was offered; but the projects were piecemeal and minimalist, and their impact overall was minor.¹⁴

Changes in the region's political economy gathered momentum in the 1950s. Oil became increasingly important; new infrastructure was built; new urbanization emerged; public education and health care expanded; occupational mobility emerged; rural-urban migration began to take-off; trade expanded; there was more money in the economy; and governmental institutions were expanding. Modest and unevenly distributed both between and within countries, these innovations nonetheless reached beyond cities to villages and to the steppes. Many Bedouin reacted positively and energetically to the new circumstances and enthusiastically crafted changes in their own pastoral production systems.

Vidal (1975) described aspects of this transformation as he had researched it in the 1950s in Saudi Arabia. What had been a minor "Bedouin Problem" for the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) and the Trans-Arabian Pipeline Company (Tapline) "became particularly marked during the summer of 1956." Large numbers of Bedouin arrived and camped with their herds at pipeline pump stations across northern Saudi Arabia and at gas oil separator plants in the huge Ghawar oilfield area in eastern Saudi Arabia. What attracted them was "an assured water supply," but what surprised Vidal was "the extremely varied tribal allegiance and origin of the groups." Many campers in the Ghawar field were from nearby areas, but others came from all over the rest of Saudi Arabia and from Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Oman, Kuwait, and Iraq.

Twenty-five tribes had members present in the camps, while 2901 tents were observed at 47 sites in the Ghawar region in August 1956. This large influx was attributed partly to drought elsewhere in Arabia, but Vidal presciently noticed changes underway that suggested a break, at least partially, with the past. Good retail markets, wage-labor opportunities, modern health care, and a good

network of roads and motor transport were attracting Bedouin and other Arabians to "ARAMCO's zone of operation." Pick-up and other light trucks were being acquired by Bedouin, which contributed to a speeding up of migrations. The trucks were also being used to haul water directly to herds in grazing areas and had the potential to transport fodder as well.¹⁵

Vidal emphasized the importance of the water supply and, as an ARAMCO employee, noted a potential strain on ARAMCO water facilities in case Bedouin became more dependent on that supply. He was concerned about the likely growth of shantytowns inhabited by semi-settled Bedouin, since these might lead to increased demand on ARAMCO for the provision of local services. Other "undesirable features" for ARAMCO included "crowding of operation roads, land ownership difficulties due to the establishment of prayer sites and cemeteries [and] a possible increase in the number of incidents between various groups of Bedouins over water problems..." There were legal and technical matters to address, but Vidal felt the need for the government to go "into water development on a large scale" was essential. He also noted a weakening in "the feelings of tribal membership and tribal allegiance" and their replacement by "a growing feeling of national belongingness and solidarity." This changing identity he found in statements Bedouin made about their grazing lands being "one," i.e. open to all, or that "the entire country is the grazing land of Al Sa'ud" (Vidal 1975).¹⁶

Numerous examples exist of similar changes in other parts of the Arab World. In Syria, the Bedouin were all but wiped out during a severe drought from 1958 to 1961. According to Lewis (1987: 170-192), Syria lost most of its camels and half of its sheep. The range was barren; and while some Bedouin managed to take flocks to graze in Lebanon on rented pasture, many others had to sell livestock that had not already perished and were forced to seek jobs in cities. Many poorer Bedouin did not return to pastoral production after the end of the drought, while some better-off Bedouin consolidated their losses, sold off what remained of their camels, and entrusted any sheep that had survived to hired shepherds. However, some Syrian Bedouin chose to return to the steppe and entered into partnership relations with urban merchants who financed the restocking of sheep flocks. Meanwhile, the Syrian state introduced cooperative societies, subsidized the provision of fodder, supported the drilling of modern wells and the renovation of cisterns, and promulgated a ban on plowing the steppe in an effort to promote conservation of the natural range.

With good rains and with increasing demand for mutton in Syria's growing cities and especially in the rapidly developing Arabian Gulf, a vigorous live-

stock sector was reestablished by the mid to late 1960s. However, this was no longer the old kin-ordered pastoral production of the past, with family-households constituting the basic production and consumption units. Hired shepherds provided most labor inputs; migration became an individual affair no longer controlled by tribes or other kin groups; purchased (but subsidized) fodder increasingly replaced natural graze; and water from government wells was trucked to the flocks. The factors of production had become capitalized, while production was oriented towards sale in the market.

Metral (2000) provides a detailed case study of this new pastoral production and its integration with crop production during the 1980s. Sukhna is a town and a district in the arid heart of the Syrian steppe. After a long demise due to the decline in caravan transportation and in pastoral production, both the town and the district began to recover in the 1970s and were booming during the 1980s. The existence of complex and complementary networks are highlighted, showing dynamic interaction between town dwellers and Bedouin, between the steppe and richer agricultural areas in Syria, and between Syria and consumer markets in the Arabian Gulf. Some of the Bedouin who previously came into the area are now gone, having returned back to the Arabian Peninsula. Yet, many of these or their descendants now act as intermediaries and agents for the sale of Syrian meat and livestock in Arabia. While camels along with sheep figured in the livestock make up of the region in the past, sheep now predominate almost exclusively. Other aspects of the old system, like the payment of tribute (*khuwah*), are as much a part of the past as are camels and caravans. Tribal wells remain, but government wells provide water for all. Herders of sheep from a multiplicity of tribal backgrounds and different geographical areas, including many newcomers, congregate on the district's grazing lands during autumn and spring.

Meanwhile, intensification in the raising of sheep and increase in the size of flocks has been accompanied by large-scale expansion of barley production that encroaches on grazing lands. Yet, the two are linked: more sheep fuels the need for more fodder, and vice-versa.¹⁷ Livestock fattening operations have become common; procurement and warehousing of fodder from the local district and other parts of Syria have been developed; trucks for international transport of livestock to the Arabian Gulf are owned and operated locally; and contracts to supply the Syrian army with meat have been established. This complex institutional development has been achieved locally in what was a moribund community and district and involves multifaceted investments and relations among town-dwelling traders, Bedouin pastoralists, state and public sector authorities,

cooperative societies, and importers abroad. According to Metral, “lifestyles change but identities remain” (2000: 127). Behaviors such as “diversified investment,” “calculating the risks,” and “managing the risks” apply to both the traders and the Bedouin as people from both categories are concerned with markets, the organization of transport, the procurement of inputs, and similar market concerns. Risk in the past was linked strongly to the rain and thus to the conditions of the range. Market conditions and principles thus now seem to take precedence over ecological factors—at least in the short run.

Behnke (1980) describes another dimension of socioeconomic change among Bedouin in Libya. Development of the oil industry in the 1960s drew Bedouin men away from their family-household herds and barley fields into waged labor in the oil sector and into trade or government service in newly expanding villages and towns. Many of these Bedouin, who had spontaneously settled and taken on new occupations, found it convenient to liquidate their herds and thus sold-off their livestock. A few others, however, not only kept the livestock they owned but increased the size of their herds from an average of around sixty sheep to between three hundred and four hundred head. They hired shepherds, first from among Libyan Bedouin and later on, when these became too expensive, from among Egyptian Bedouin. The now absentee owners managed the herds—making decisions about where the flocks should graze, which animals should be culled, and when and where livestock should be sold. There was also the need to arrange supplies of fodder and presumably other provisions such as veterinary health care. Behnke called this new market-oriented herding “proto-ranching” and stressed that this transformation was indigenous to the Libyan Bedouin who had implemented it on their own initiative without technical advice or outside financial aid.

Recent fieldwork in Jordan by Rowe (1999) shows the importance of state intervention in the pastoral sector and provides detailed data on how the market has transformed pastoral production and many other aspects of life in the open country. However, Rowe argues for an equally if not more powerful “continuity with tradition.” The Bedouin diet continues to stress milk and milk products and now, with more prosperity, meat. A household’s livestock thus still contribute to subsistence. Bedouin social organization continues to be strongly “based on kinship and lineage.” The preference for engaging in multiple economic activities “echoes the risk-adverse multiple resource economy practised in traditional pastoral society.” Meanwhile, the Bedouin perceive that the natural graze and browse of the open country contributes to the good condition of herds and improves the flavor and quantity of milk.

Although access to the steppe in years of good grazing lowers significantly the amount of money needed for supplementary fodder, most Bedouin depart for the range before knowing what its condition will be. The pull of social ties is strong and channels people to migrate to areas where there are others whom they know and interact with. Since the preponderance of social interaction is among kin, the "information landscape" continues to be linked with what one can learn from and impart to relatives who are likely to share similar backgrounds and attitudes. There is change; but simultaneously the practice of range-based livestock production remains a Bedouin specialization (Rowe 1999). Indeed, non-Bedouin legally have the right to set up tent and herd on the range just like the Bedouin; for any non-Bedouin outsider to do so on his or her own is unimaginable.

In Palestine/Israel, most Palestinian Arabs were peasants, although Bedouin herded in grazing areas in and among the villages and pastured herds on crop residues. The more range-based Bedouin were in the Negev. According to Abu-Rabia (1994), the Bedouin population of the Negev numbered between 65,000 and 103,000 people at the end of the British Mandate in 1948. However, "when the Israeli Army conquered the Negev at the end of 1948, the majority of the tribes were expelled" (1994:7), while others who were fearful "left of their own accord." The situation remained unstable until 1953 when about 11,000 Bedouin remained as "remnants of tribes or a few branches of tribes." These were relocated under military rule in a closed area of less than ten percent of the Negev (1994: 7-8). Migration outside of this area requires special permits. Goats are not allowed and sheep are supposed to be tagged and registered with the authorities. Generally, there has been a major movement out of pastoral production (1994: 17) and resettlement in several specially created Bedouin towns where high rates of unemployment are reported to prevail.¹⁸

Other examples exist and add nuance to that which has been presented above. Chatty (1996) details the impacts of the oil industry and associated wage labor on Bedouin in Oman, shows the multiple ways in which trucks have been incorporated into the Bedouin way of life and transformed many aspects of pastoral production in the steppe, calls attention to disparities that have accompanied socioeconomic change, and discusses how the new economy affects cherished cultural foundations such as generosity and hospitality. Her work is especially important because of how it situates women as "harbingers of change" and brings into focus the importance of education to women and for the Bedouin community.

Chatty also provides a unique ethnography of a development project, an inside view of communication and miscommunication among international bu-

reaucrats, state officials, local and foreign experts, and the “target population.” Such projects are increasingly part of the socioeconomic matrix involving Bedouin, and the multiple and conflicting interests of the different parties merit further comparative research. Meanwhile, as Chatty reminds one, “the desert can only carry a limited population of people and subsequently animals” (Chatty 1996: 141). Modern transportation and other communication systems facilitate movement between the desert and the sown, while population growth and the pull factors associated with urbanization have influenced many Bedouin to leave the range behind.¹⁹

Socioeconomic change off the range

A Bedouin teenager in Egypt's Western Desert told me in 1992 that, “We, the Arabs (i.e., Bedouin), are more honorable and are cleaner than the Fallahin (i.e., peasants); but the future is better for the Fallahin.” He explained that Fallahin villages had schools and clinics and were connected by train and paved roads to cities. The village youth could live at home and go to school and then get good jobs in the urban economy. He, by contrast, lived in the desert—in a permanent stone house—but without a school, a clinic, electricity, television, or telephones. To do “anything” he had to leave his family and kin-based community and walk for half a day to the nearest road in hopes of catching a ride into town. He hated to leave his family, but for him the only hope for a decent future lay in leaving the desert for town or city.

Steppe-urban migration has paralleled rural-urban migration in the Arab World and, although not as well researched as the latter, identification of its main features is crucial for a search of where the Bedouin have gone. Migration and settlement almost always involves occupational change, as well. Cole and Altorki (1998: 213-214), for example, document a case from among the Awlad 'Ali in the Western Desert. Four brothers, the oldest born in 1914, grew up in tents and were primarily engaged in herding as young men. They began to settle in the 1930s and again after the end of World War II. In 1994, these elders were occupied in both dry farming and livestock production. They had 24 adult sons, all settled, of whom four (17%) engaged in farming and herding, four (17%) were merchants, seven (29%) worked in transport, and nine (38%) were employed as professionals. The old men are all literate but never attended school; twelve (50%) of their sons completed primary school, five (21%) finished secondary school, and seven (29%) university. These people are from among the Awlad 'Ali elite, but the generational mobility observed among them is not unique. The

grandsons and granddaughters, the third generation, from this family are currently in school and are becoming adults; but their potential for “upward” mobility is likely to be more constrained than was the case for their parents. Constraints they increasingly face stem from socioeconomic conditions within the wider society and are not limited to relatively oil-poor countries like Egypt but also haunt the major oil-producing countries where expectations for upward mobility have been very high for both Bedouin and sedentary citizens.²⁰

In Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Gulf, steppe-urban migration, settlement, and occupational change began modestly in the 1950s, gathered momentum in the 1960s and early 1970s, mushroomed from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s, and currently faces stagnation or at least uncertain futures for many.²¹ The first settlers in the 1950s included many Bedouin who were livestock poor. Young Bedouin men did manual labor for wages alongside their counterparts from among the sedentary people and lived in canvas tents in work camps. Some took their savings and returned home to the range. Others stayed on, gained technical skills, started to trade, perhaps bought a taxi, and constructed a “box” (*sunduq*) out of plywood, scrap tin, or other inexpensive materials. This “box” was a new home, located in a spontaneous settlement in the outskirts of a town where other Bedouin from his and other tribes were congregating. His wife joined him, their first kids were born there, he saved money, they improved their house, and the settlement expanded in terms of both population and institutions. By the end of the 1960s or so, the nuclear family had a modest but regular income, the children (at least the boys) were in school. Relatives from the range dropped by and thought how poor (*miskin*) the conditions of life were in these shanties; the people living there thought their relatives from the range were noble but slightly mad—tied to their camels or sheep and goats with no concern for the education, health care, or even cleanliness of their children.²²

Such communities were not only developing in and around cities, they were also springing up around deep wells in the desert and in small previously uninhabited oases. Built without permits on land that technically belonged to the state, these settlements were at best paralegal. Gasoline, some basic supplies, a café, and a small mosque marked out on the ground were the nuclei of many a settlement that expanded rapidly in the 1970s and took on an air of greater permanency when a few school teachers arrived. Boys came in from the range to study in the schools, sometimes camping out with others in a shack to learn—from a curriculum that included not one item relevant to their life on the range.

The oil-revenue boom from 1974 to 1982 speeded up the development of these settlements and brought massive government financial sponsorship for the construction of legal permanent housing in special government sanctioned communities for people with "limited income" (*dakhl al-mahdud*), which was usually a circumlocution for Bedouin. Masses of skilled and unskilled expatriate labor poured into Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Gulf and were willing to work at what were locally low wages. The settled Bedouin were left to fend for themselves in small-scale trade, repair shops, drilling and contracting, low levels of the bureaucracy, and military service. A very few became rich, some developed new farms in the desert with interest free government loans, but many remained in the rungs of the lower income and lower-middle income brackets. Yet, with modest savings from time to time, they invested in buying some sheep and put them with a relative out on the range. This was an investment they could afford, in an economic sector they understood, and with a good chance for a high rate of return (a ewe can have two and sometimes even three lambs a year). The remittances sent back by such people to the herds are uncalculated, but they contributed greatly to keeping the pastoral economy afloat.

Finally, throughout the Arab World those who have been pulled most strongly off the range and into urban scenes are younger Bedouin men. Wives, as noted, often followed husbands to new settlements. Yet, one should not conclude that Bedouin women occupy passive positions limited to household and family life in the new environment. Many a settled Bedouin woman has actively engaged in trade, including setting up shop in markets. Increasingly, Bedouin girls are obtaining education and some actively pursue careers outside the family-household. Meanwhile, out in the open country the management of everyday herding activities is likely to be in the hands of women. Younger and middle-aged men come and go; homes on the range since the 1960s and 1970s are increasingly composed of women, children, and old men. In a sense, these are the people who have been left behind. In another sense, these women on the range have played major roles in keeping Bedouin pastoral production alive, even as their own now market-oriented weaving contributes to household income. Yet, proportionately fewer and fewer family-households remain on the range; almost all Bedouin families now reside in permanent housing, their herds and flocks visited by family members while the everyday work of herding is done for wages by hired male shepherds. Some of these shepherds are other Bedouin; some are foreigners, especially in Saudi Arabia.

Sociopolitical change

The shift away from the domestic and kin-ordered dimensions of herding and the ending of tribute, indicated above, implies a significant weakening of lineage, clan, and tribal formations²³ associated with the Bedouin. Technological and economic changes have been at the forefront of this transformation, but political factors emanating from both colonial and national states have also been important. Wolf (1969) records, for example, that in Algeria the French introduced "a program for the dismemberment of the great tribes" in which people from the same kin group were settled in different locations (*douars*) and then granted access to land on the basis of locality rather than membership in the kin group. Thus, "lineages and tribes had been scattered, the familiar political structure dismantled" (1969: 214-217). Evans-Pritchard (1949) documented multiple impacts of Italian colonialism on the Bedouin in eastern Libya. The Italian occupation there triggered an all but universal Bedouin resistance from the 1910s through the 1930s that resulted in massive loss of life but also brought political change, including foundations for the eventual establishment of an independent state in Libya after World War II.²⁴

In the case of greater Syria, Lewis (1987; 2000) records the strengthening of Ottoman armed forces and of government control in the open country during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Ottoman government favored one tribe against another, restricted movements, demanded payment for camping and grazing in certain areas, imposed taxes, and incorporated tribal shaikhs into government service along with granting them decorations and sometimes even the title of Pasha²⁵ (2000: 37). Velud (2000) shows the impacts of French mandate policies in the Syrian steppe during the 1920s and 1930s. Political control was seen to be a necessary first step before any attempt at economic development. Two mounted camel companies were thus created in 1921 leading to a separate military administration of the steppe where Bedouin proliferated. One aim was to keep "the nomadic populations apart from the nationalist fervour prevailing in the western region" (Velud 2000: 67), while another was to keep the Bedouin divided among themselves, to foment minor rivalries that existed among them, and, thereby, "to avoid the risk of a bedouin union being formed in Syria, or elsewhere beyond the Syrian border" (2000: 70).

Egypt's three deserts, the Western Desert, the Eastern Desert, and the Sinai, were administered independently of each other and separately from the Nile Valley and Delta from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The Bedouin there were excluded from the Egyptian army, a major nationalist force and vehicle for upward social mobility in the local Egyptian society. The Bedouin

were also denied Egyptian national identity cards until long after their compatriots received them. They thus existed in a kind of limbo until they were brought back into the army as Egyptian citizens in 1947 and as their areas were brought under the same administrative structure as the rest of the country at the end of the 1950s. In Saudi Arabia, the process of state formation in the early twentieth century involved religious-inspired settlement, military defeats, marital alliances between the leaders of the state movement and tribal leaders, replacement of customary law (*'urf*) by Islamic law (*Shari'ah*), and incorporation of Bedouin into what became the National Guard.

Space does not permit a more detailed presentation of the history of political change relevant to the Bedouin. Suffice it to note that, despite differences in style, the same general process of the extension of central state power into the range has occurred everywhere in the Arab World. No Arab state administers its territories on the basis of *tribal* territories but on the basis of geographically demarcated areas, or *place*. Local administrators are usually appointed by the central government and are almost always outsiders to the region, both geographically and in terms of social identity.²⁶ All non-demarcated land in the desert and steppe is state property; and tribal, or communal, rights to land ownership are not legally recognized. In Egypt, for example, individuals have been allowed to claim "squatter's rights" (*wad' yad*) to desert tracks and to be compensated for relinquishing those rights, but their legal ownership of the land is not recognized, while patrimonial claims of kin groups to certain areas are purely "social" or informal with no basis in state law.²⁷

Customary law (*'urf*) continues to be applied informally among Bedouin dealing with internal issues among themselves. However, as Khalaf (1990) shows, important aspects of "Bedouin justice" such as extended periods of protection (*dakhlah*) whereby a whole kin group is granted refuge by another kin group is no longer practical. Most people are now settled and cannot easily pick up and move to another place, as was the case previously when they lived in tents and were primarily dependent on mobile herds. Moreover, he notes that people who have spent many years in school are "ill prepared to understand fully all the tribal legalities and the psycho-cultural implications of the [protection] system" (ibid, 231). Meanwhile, state police forces are increasingly present in communities where Bedouin live. Such communities also have more and more residents from differing backgrounds. Thus the application of Islamic law or state law increases. That said, many Bedouin continue to express high regard for their customary law and to praise it as more effective than state law.²⁸

Fabietti (2000) writes of “detrribalization” among the Bedouin. Economically, politically, and legally that is a well-founded conclusion. Socially, however, one can argue for the continued existence of tribal identities. When Bedouin who do not know each other meet, they usually ask about the other’s lineage, clan, or tribe—suggesting an identity of kin. By contrast, for example, Cairenes are usually interested in knowing from what part of Cairo the other comes—an identity of place. North Americans are apt to ask the other about his/her occupation—an identity of occupation. For most Bedouin today curiosity about another’s identity is little more than that; knowing his/her kin affiliation allows one to place the other in a framework that is meaningful mainly in terms of identification. As sedentarization and participation in the modern urban-centered economy has expanded, one notes a marked increase in the use of tribal names as surnames, especially in Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Gulf. Telephone books, for example, now list hundreds of subscribers under their tribal names. Previously, a lineage name was the more common identifier of a person’s position and status. Today, use of the tribal name implies not only tribal descent status,²⁹ socially important among local people in the region, but also a (historical) Bedouin connection.

The Bedouin connection is shared across tribal lines. In Egypt, people from the Nile region know only that the local people in the Sinai or the Western Desert are ‘*arab* (Bedouin). In Saudi Arabia, people from *hadr* backgrounds in cities and villages lump all those with backgrounds in range-based herding together as *badu*. Meanwhile, among Bedouin themselves one can see a growing sense of “Bedouin-ness,” of a shared identity that includes a sense of a common history and sub-culture that cuts across tribal boundaries that perhaps divided people more in the past. While dialects have tended to vary along tribal lines, the various tribes have histories preserved in poetry that recall events relating to themselves and other Bedouin, and many Bedouin share a keen interest in and knowledge of genealogies that very often link them back, at least in theory, to a glorious and noble past. Thus one might argue that an emergent ethnicity is replacing tribal identities of the past. Yet, I am hesitant to overstress a new ethnicity. The Bedouin are Arabs, and within the Arab World “ethnic” suggests non-Arab. Meanwhile, even though range-based livestock production is much reduced among them, people with Bedouin identities still reside in the steppe—in scattered homesteads, villages, and towns. Their social ties to kinfolk in the same area remain strong. Within the local provincial setting they may actively support a kinsperson in local elections, and people from different kin groups but a common Bedouin

background may combine to keep migrant settlers from elsewhere from winning control of local elected bodies.³⁰

Bujra (1971), in his analysis of the Hadrami regional society in South Arabia, noted that Bedouin and settled townspeople were linked economically, spoke the same language, shared the same religion, and had common values. He recognized that Hadramis "have traditionally seen their society as being composed of the 'civilized' people (*hadr*) of the towns and the 'primitive' tribesmen (*bedu*);" but he saw this division as more of a continuum than a contrast. Indeed, Bujra stressed that the "contrast is within the society" and argued that

whereas political action in tribal areas is still more or less within the framework of segmentary organization, in the towns stratification is the main framework for political action. Significantly, however, the segmentary framework is only operational within the tribes, the framework of stratification applies to the society as a whole" (*ibid*, 5-9).

There are, in my analysis, no separate Bedouin or tribal *societies*,³¹ as such, in the Arab World. The existing *societies* are state systems within which some communities and some individuals self-identify as Bedouin, Fallahin, workers, royalty, or whatever and also consider themselves members of other collectivities—including their nation and religion. The *de facto* exercise of state authority in areas frequented by Bedouin has often been weak or ineffective. Yet, Bedouin have anciently recognized the legitimacy of the state as an institution and have historically served militarily and in other ways in state systems, even if they have preferred to take care of their own affairs without interference from the state. At present, the exercise of Arab state authority among Bedouin is increasingly strong throughout the region. Conversely, the role of Bedouin in the region's state systems has varied enormously over the centuries and from one area to another—strong, weak, or irrelevant, depending on the specific historical and political economic situation. Bedouin participation in Arab state politics today is probably at its lowest ebb ever. If that is, in fact, the case, it is due more to their socioeconomic status (or "class") within the context of the wider society than to their being Bedouin (or their "ethnicity"). Still, in some local settings low socioeconomic status sometimes coincides with Bedouin identity, a situation with a high potential for perceived deprivation and a motive for rebellion or resistance against the dominant political economy.

Cultural representation and heritage

In a shift that is both a sign of the times and of new directions in anthropology, Wooten (1996) addresses “how Bdul Bedouin identity is reaffirmed through tourism.” Bdul³² have a long history of residing in Nabatean caves in the area of Petra in Jordan, where they also formerly raised goats and presented “a rather atypical image of a Bedouin tribe: no tents, no camels, few sheep, clothed in skins and living in caves.” Recently, Bdul have been relocated out of the tourist site into a “Bedouin village,” have shifted from goat-herding into new occupations associated with the tourist industry, and perceive that they have become prosperous as a result of tourism. Many Bdul consider that they are no longer “real” Bedouin. Thus, according to a Bdul youth, “I am *Bedu* yes, but not ‘real’ Bedu,” while in the words of another: “Yes it is strange, I am Bedouin and the tourists know the Bdul are Bedouin but its true we are not living like the real Bedouin now. But even other Bedouin are not living like before” (quoted in Wooten 1996: 51-52).

Descent, or what Wooten calls “heritage/ancestry,” was a key criterion Bdul considered when discussing their Bedouin identity. Way of life, “that of the Arab nomadic pastoralist,” was another main criterion. Thus, “I’m not wearing the Bedouin dress, and I never took the goats, not once in my life, but I can’t change who is my father, or my father’s father” (quoted in Wooten 1996: 54). Meanwhile, “shifting self-perceptions” are heard in Bdul statements such as “its like we are almost fellahin,” “the Bedouin are becoming more like Europe people, living in houses, with television and refrigerators,” and “the Bdul are changing fast from tourism—you will see, the village will soon be like any village in Jordan or Europe” (quoted in Wooten 1996: 58-59). Yet, Wooten (1996: 59) argues that:

a sense of Bedouin identity still remains, an identity that is constantly shifting and being re-defined ... ‘Bedouin’ is still the social category with which the Bdul are associated and in the presence of tourists, it is this identity which most often comes to the forefront (as opposed to a specific family lineage, tribe, nationality, etc) ... They still see themselves as “more Bedouin” than the Others involved in Petra’s tourist industry ... [And this] industry currently helps to maintain and reinforce this identity for them.

Tourism has also “commoditized the image of the Bedouin,” while tourists “now provide an audience” in front of whom Bdul “perform their Bedouin identity.” The film *Lawrence of Arabia* and Lawrence’s own *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* “influence [tourists’] preconceptions about Bedouin,” as do literature

and images produced by government and private tour companies about “exotic Jordan” in which Bedouin mounted on camels and in full regalia with daggers and rifles “appear to be the only people of Jordan” (Layne 1994: 102 quoted in Wooten 1996: 64). Within Petra, tourists encounter “Bedouin motifs” in decoration, “Bedouin tents” where they can drink “Bedouin tea” and smoke water pipes, and “Bedouin mensifs” or huge plates of rice topped by a whole goat or sheep. Bdul and other non-Bedouin Jordanians are inventing new “traditional” art, including sand-bottles filled with ribbons of colored sand and other items for sale. Bdul have set up black goat-hair Bedouin tents as shops for selling souvenirs and where one can “buy” some “Bedouin hospitality.” Although never much involved with camels, a few Bdul have brought camels onto the scene at Petra as a kind of “revival of tradition.” Although presented as “authentic” and believed to be so by tourists, most of the material items of this presentation are new acquisitions related to tourism—at least among Bdul.

Wooten also discusses how Bdul act out their Bedouin identity under the gaze or spectatorship of “an interactive tourist ‘audience’ to whom they may perform aspects of this identity and ‘be’ Bedouin.” In doing so, they do not try to match the image of Bedouin created by the tourist industry. They don’t wear Bedouin “costume” or perform warrior or camel pastoralist roles of “traditional” Bedouin. Rather, they stress “other elements of their Bedouin identity...which reflect tourists’ stereotypes and romantic images of ‘hospitality,’ ‘naturalness’ and/or ‘primitiveness’.” They mix work and play and in the process of interacting with the tourists comment on their culture and explain aspects of their lives, always adjusting those comments and explanations to meet their own stereotypes of different kinds of tourist. Thus, a tourist comment is, “*I think we have a lot to learn from these people about how to live with nature, away from so many material things,*” while another is, “*The Bedouin live so simple it is a shame that they are changing*” (quoted in Wooten 1996: 95).

That Bdul have televisions and other modern conveniences, are literate and increasingly have university-level education, and are becoming like “Europe people” are features that they do not show to the tourist. However, these are issues about themselves that Bdul stressed to the ethnographer. “Off-stage” Bdul proudly proclaim they are the “wealthiest bedu in the kingdom [of Jordan].” They express nostalgia for a remembered past but do not bemoan the change from “poor’ goat-herding Bedouin into wealthy entrepreneurs of international tourism.”

Bedouin roles in tourism increasingly occupy new and varied niches in foreign and local tourism scenes in the Arab World.³³ A holiday in the Sinai will

probably include a "Bedouin night" in which the "Bedouin hosts" are hotel employees and are more likely to be Upper Egyptian villagers than Bedouin from the Sinai. Desert safaris, increasingly popular, have "Bedouin guides" but such guides are seldom from the desert areas in which they are guiding. Economic roles of Bedouin in this new tourism are uncertain. Bedouin claim to have benefited; a more common reading is that Bedouin are at best marginal beneficiaries of an expanding tourism industry along the desert coasts and in parts of the steppe that were previously "theirs."

Changing roles of culture associated with Bedouin are by no means limited to the realm of tourism. Aspects of such culture have become parts of state-sponsored construction of national heritage, as well as of scholarly and popular production of knowledge about dimensions of Arab heritage. A popular national radio program from Kuwait in the 1960s was the "Bedouin Hour," in which recitation of Bedouin poetry featured centrally. Transistor radios had spread rapidly in Bedouin tents, workers and National Guard barracks, shanty settlements, and towns and cities in eastern Arabia. The "Bedouin Hour" was the single most popular radio program among Bedouin, many of whom listened to it regularly and discussed it at length among themselves. The program was also popular among people from *hadr* backgrounds and often reminded them of their own poetry and cultural traditions. The poetry and other discourse on the "Bedouin Hour" addressed a wide range of specific historical events and issues of contemporary experience, which is worthy of study on its own; however, what struck one at the time is how Bedouin from different tribes increasingly identified with this production as something commonly shared among all Bedouin, *as Bedouin*. Meanwhile, it was not foreign to the local sedentary people.

Other relevant cultural events that began in the 1960s include the initiation of horse races and then of camel races in Riyadh and other Arabian cities, most notably in the United Arab Emirates.³⁴ Arabian horses historically span nomad and sedentary communities of the region, while the camel is of course famously linked to Bedouin. However, organized horse racing and camel racing were by no means regular features among either group in the past. Individual Bedouin might race each other's mounts on the spur of the moment. Yet, the organized races, especially of camels, resonated strongly in the 1960s among Bedouin and *hadr* throughout much of Arabia. A resulting search for purebred Arabian horses contributed to resurrecting these breeds from almost dying out in the region and their consequent reintroduction as an esteemed element of Arab cultural heritage. Search for purebred race camels, and also milk camels, led elite urban men back to Bedouin camps and their herds in the steppe.

This resulted not only in the acquisition of some very fine creatures but also fostered elite appreciation of Bedouin as individuals and as renowned collectivities strongly tied to an Arab past and many of its cherished customs.

Private and public collections of Bedouin material culture have proliferated in Saudi Arabia, the Arabian Gulf, Jordan, and to a lesser degree in other Arab countries. A central exhibit of Saudi Arabia's national museum in Riyadh is of a fully furnished black goat hair tent representative of a Bedouin home. Many of the material items are of Bedouin manufacture; but many other items are the work of settled artisans and craftspeople. Still, the latter items are a part of Bedouin culture, even the red and white tea kettles made in China, as Bedouin were always specialists linked to and dependent on the production of others—usually through the medium of market exchange. Bedouin, sedentary person, and foreigner view the museum exhibits today. For older Bedouin and older sedentary folk they bring back fond memories; for younger Bedouin and their sedentary compatriots they are almost as foreign as they are to the foreigner.

Serious scholarly research informs the museum and many of the private collections. Scholarship also underlies the recording, transcription, sometimes translation, and analysis or interpretation of vast bodies of oral culture. Some of this collection is the work of lay people. Among that of formal scholars is the pioneering work of Sawayan (1985; 1991). Yet, the writing down, formal publication, and scholarly analysis of this *oral* culture trigger controversy. Shryock (1997) describes and discusses this phenomenon at length for specific cases in Jordan where differing versions of history and background take on political significance in the changing roles and positions of different tribal communities in their wider polities. In Saudi Arabia there has also been the challenge that the oral colloquial (*nabati*) poetry of the Bedouin does not constitute “poetry” according to the canon of classical Arabic language and literary scholarship. Moreover, some issues and topics addressed in these Bedouin materials deviate from that which is considered correct according to accepted Islamic scholarship and/or state political authorities. That said, thick volumes of recorded materials have continued to be published,³⁵ private and semi-public recitations are organized, and men from younger generations, with and without Bedouin identities, eagerly attend.

Bedouin theme parks are also springing up.³⁶ Khalaf (2001) reports on the establishment of Dubai Heritage Village in 1997 with scenes of old Dubai town, of mountain village houses, and of Bedouin tents. The site also incorporates Dubai's Diving Village, and there are shops, exhibition halls, and theatrical stages. The motives behind the village are concern for Dubai's “national heritage

and its preservation” and also promotion of its tourism industry by stimulating travel and shopping. The village sponsors shopping festivals and is a “living museum” where United Arab Emirates history is performed by “living actors.” During March 2001 the village staged 29 events, of which two were Bedouin events. One was the “Arabian Bedouin Lifestyle Festival” that continued daily throughout the month with representations of Egyptian, Yemeni, Libyan, Jordanian, Sudanese, Mauritanian, Algerian, and United Arab Emirates Bedouin “lifestyle activities.” The second event consisted of nine Bedouin weddings performed by the “visiting Bedouin heritage groups.” These “weddings” attracted huge crowds of local and expatriate visitors and, according to Khalaf, were the most popular of all displays.

Conclusion

So, where have the Bedouin gone? I contend that they have mainly settled and are to be found in dispersed communities and oases in the steppe, in villages, small towns, and provincial centers, and in scattered neighborhoods of cities. Some Bedouin continue to be mobile and are still out on the range. These Bedouin and many of those who have settled own livestock; however, the livestock are most likely herded by hired shepherds or by one or two sons rather than by a whole family household as before. The maintenance of herds is influenced by considerations of tradition and consumption, but livestock are also seen as capital (*ras mal*) and their raising is now oriented towards, and to a large degree is organized by, the market.

Bedouin are today citizens of states, carry national identity cards, vote where voting is allowed, and are no longer differentiated administratively from other citizens or nationals as previously occurred in some cases. Younger generations of Bedouin, both settled and from among those on the range, are increasingly literate with growing proportions completing secondary school and going on to universities. Occupationally, most Bedouin on the range have small-to moderate-scale enterprises. Many of those settled work in trade, contracting, or transportation, serve in military or police forces or other government service, and similar occupations that are moderately skilled. A few are professionals, a few hold high positions, and a few have become very rich. Some are very poor. Yet, educational levels and occupations place most Bedouin in the middle class—many in the lower rungs of that class but a few in the middle and upper rungs.

The changes Bedouin have experienced are in part, of course, the results of local histories: oil in Arabia and Libya, Arab socialist policies in Syria and Egypt,

wars and battles fought by outside forces in North Africa and the Iraq-Kuwait-Saudi Arabia border areas, and so on. However, broad processes of regional transformation should not be obscured by local exceptionalisms. The multiple and changing roles of states and markets, of newer and older globalisms, of Arab national politics and culture cut across state and local boundaries and engage Bedouin and their compatriots from rural and urban backgrounds throughout the region. Thus, comparison of Bedouin communities, nomadic or settled, in different state settings is especially attractive. At the same time, comparison of small-scale farmers and small-scale herders promises a better understanding of both than if they are divided into two different worlds, as has often been the case in Middle Eastern anthropology. Comparison of both with large-scale agribusiness is also highly relevant.

Many scholars and development specialists, back in the twentieth century, thought that nomadic pastoralists would settle and become peasant farmers: the Bedouin would become Fallahin. Many Fallahin moved to cities, became urbanized, and still self-identify as Fallahin. The same holds for Bedouin. "*Baduwi*" is today used by Bedouin to identify specifically a person fully involved in steppe-based herding. It is also used more generally to identify a wide range of others whose only connection to herding is heritage, or ancestral. Thus, concern with Bedouin heritage is an emerging field of study and of cultural production. Bedouin theme parks, camel races, museum exhibits, poetry recitals, and television talk-shows sustain continuation of Bedouin identity and honor it as a part of national heritage. A political dimension also exists to this cultural production and performance. Much of Bedouin poetry, especially that of men, recounts historical events from the perspectives of the Bedouin that differ from those of state rulers and others. Some younger and better-educated Bedouin are increasingly interested in writing their own society—their traditions, their specificities. They are not alone in this, as some from among the village and urban masses also search for their own authenticities. How and why this is done, concerns with "text" and "context," strongly beckon future research.

Characterizations of the Bedouin with exotic social phenomena such as segmentation, parallel cousin marriage, or raiding as a system of exchange distort the Bedouin and contribute to misrepresentations of the Arab World and the wider Middle East. All these "exotica" are, or have been, social practices among the Bedouin; but none of them has existed alone by itself or necessarily even as a dominant feature. Moreover, all of these phenomena cut across the Arab nomad/sedentary "divide." For example, nomads, villagers, and urbanites all practice parallel cousin marriage, but not all marriages within any of those

categories are with a parallel cousin.³⁷ It is within such a context that I argue for seeing the Bedouin as ordinary, everyday people. Colleagues rightly argue that I am stating the obvious, a simple truism. Yet, many Westerners express keen disappointment when I argue against the Bedouin having special powers or senses or of their having remained unchanged since “time immemorial.” Many urban Arabs express disbelief when I stress similarities rather than differences between nomad and sedentary.

A 1959 statement by Murphy and Kasdan about the Bedouin being well known “despite the lack of detailed studies” provides the epigraph that starts this essay. With a dearth of ethnographic data, a considerable amount of Orientalist writings, and a strong comparative theoretical perspective, they crafted a stimulating discussion of one aspect of Middle Eastern social life. Yet, since my first fieldwork among Bedouin in 1968-70, I have felt the need for what Marcus (1998) calls multi-sited ethnography. That need back then was made obvious because the nomads were on the move—to different pastures and wells but also to markets, National Guard camps, homes of royal amirs, ministry offices, prisons, and on holy pilgrimage to Makkah. The scope of sites today is vastly expanded geographically and institutionally and demands greater flexibility and multi-sightedness. This paper has aimed to highlight the paths Bedouin have been traversing. A simple plea is that the Bedouin be neither cast aside as an exotic artifact of the past nor fashioned into a romantic representative of some Other. The more exciting and fruitful approach is to engage in those “detailed studies”—still only partially done—that promise a fuller understanding of where the Bedouin, and others in their wider societies, are.

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NOTES

¹"Nomads" or "Bedouin" are clearly distinguished in Egypt's 1907 and 1917 censuses and appear in tables on nationality and race; however, neither appears as a separate category in later censuses. The 1974 census of Saudi Arabia classified people according to place of enumeration: amirate capitals (cities), villages, and water points. Many of those enumerated at water points are presumed to have been Bedouin but this is not necessarily so since water points included all informal settlements. Moreover, many who identify as Bedouin live in villages or cities. Abu-Lughod (1989, 284) has reckoned that "pastoral nomads or transhumants" make up about one percent of the population of the Middle East. The population of the Arab World in 2000 was 280,000,000 (United Nations Development Program 2000, 35). Some 2,800,000 *practicing* livestock raisers in the steppe seems reasonable. My guess, based on observations of selected cases, is that the absolute number of Bedouin on the range is about the same today as it was in the 1960s. If one includes recent settlers and descendants of Bedouin who have settled since the early nineteenth century and who still identify at least sometimes as Bedouin, then the numbers may explode into the tens of millions. As Eickelman (1998, 11) rightly warns, estimates of Middle Eastern nomads must be taken with great caution.

²This essay is informed by anthropological and related literature, for better or worse in English. Monographs on the Bedouin include Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993; Abu-Rabia 1994, 2001; Ahmad 1974; Al Rasheed 1991; Asad 1970; Behnke 1980; Chatty 1986, 1996; Cole 1975; Cole and Altorki 1998; Davis 1988; Fabietti 1984; Ibrahim and Cole 1978; Ingham 1986a; Janzen 1980; Johnson 1973; Hobbs 1989, 1995; Lancaster 1981; Lavie 1990; Layne 1994; Lewis 1987; Marx 1967; Meeker 1979; Mohamed 1980; Moshen 1975; Muller-Mahn 1989; Peters 1990; Shryock 1997; and Young 1996. The author's research among the Bedouin was conducted in Arabic.

³Some writers (e.g. Asher 1986, 1996) include non-Arab nomads under the rubric of "Bedouin." I restrict "Bedouin" in this paper to people in the Arabic-speaking world.

⁴See Ingham 1986b, 1997 for professional linguistic discussion of this issue. My non-professional ear suggests that Bedouin increasingly speak the dominant colloquial Arabic of their country or region, often as a second dialect. This is especially the case for younger Bedouin who have worked in towns or cities and/or attended school.

⁵As Hopkins and Ibrahim indicate, "Arab society has traditionally been viewed as a trinity of Bedouins, peasants, and urban dwellers, living together in some kind of symbiosis. Detailed studies have tended to stress the differences between these and other categories of people, differences which the social and economic politics of Arab and foreign regimes have long tended to exacerbate" (Hopkins and Ibrahim 1997, 1).

⁶An excellent example of such an approach is Meeker 1979. See also Abu-Lughod 1986 and 1993 for discussion of descent and honor especially from the perspective of Bedouin women, and Dresch 1989 for presentation of the segmentary system in a non-Bedouin tribal setting in Yemen.

⁷See Swidler 1973 for a discussion of the interrelationship between nomads and their livestock.

⁸These households "typically" consisted of a senior man and a senior woman, their unmarried children, their married sons and daughters-in-law, and the latter's unmarried children. Other individuals were sometimes added (for example, a divorced daughter) and, of course, the composition changed due to the demographic cycles of its members.

⁹Lineages were/are named collectivities that group together all male and female descendants through the patriline from an eponymous ancestor who existed at about five generations remove from ego. Al Murrah refer to these entities as *fukhud*, "thighs;" Awlad 'Ali as *'ailat*, "families." Other terms are also used, for example, *al-khams*, "the five."

¹⁰See Wilkinson 1983 and Altorki and Cole 1998, 123-124 for discussion of relevant concepts of "ownership."

¹¹See Bradburd 1997 for a comparative view of nomads and their trade partners in Iran.

¹²For discussions of the household mode of production see Meillassoux 1981 and Sahlins 1972; for kin-ordered, tributary, and mercantile modes see Amin 1973 and Wolf 1982.

¹³See Fernea 1970, 30-32 for a description and analysis of the political, economic, and social impacts of the implementation of this code in Iraq.

¹⁴See Bocco 2000 for a critical assessment of the planning and implementation of settlement projects. See also Cole 1975, 144-158; Ibrahim and Cole 1978, 99-109; Cole and Altorki 1998, 97-104; and Chatty 1996, 165-166.

¹⁵See also Cole 1973 and Chatty 1986 for descriptions of the introduction of trucks among the Bedouin.

¹⁶One should not conclude from this statement that Bedouin conceived of the whole country as the private domain of the Al Sa'ud. The reference here is symbolic for the state and probably reflects what some Bedouin thought was the right thing to say to a person such as Vidal who was connected to ARAMCO.

¹⁷Mundy and Mussallam 2000, 1-2 characterize this type of use, or abuse, of the Syrian steppe as "mining."

¹⁸See Abu-Rabia 2000, Jakubowska 2000, and Marx 2000 for data and analyses on land, work, employment and unemployment, and relations with the bureaucracy among Bedouin in the Negev.

¹⁹Before leaving the range, one should note that other entities and people increasingly dominate the open country. Military forces, public and private sector desert development schemes, new cities, desert and beachfront resorts, fenced highways, and oil pipelines occupy large swathes and have enormous impact on the ecology of the steppe. Gigantic feedlots with imported livestock dot the range. Urban hunters illegally hunt rare and endangered species. City folk use large areas of the range for recreational purposes. These new patterns of land use have negative environmental impacts on the arid habitats. Land degradation and desertification of the steppe is usually blamed on the Bedouin. However, the new uses, or abuses, are the work of non-Bedouin. Indeed, many Bedouin are themselves victims of the misuses of others.

²⁰See Yamani (2000) for a detailed presentation of the hopes, fears, and frustrations of settled youth in Saudi Arabia.

²¹For comparative perspectives from Egypt, see Bujra 1967, Abou-Zeid 1979, and Cole and Altorki 1998, 89-110. For Libya, see Benhke 1980, 79-84. The description with reference to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf is based on the author's research, including Cole 1971, 236-239, and observations from the 1970s to the 1990s.

²²In 1977, Saad Eddin Ibrahim and the author interviewed a middle-aged Bedouin man in the Wadi Dawasir in Saudi Arabia. When asked if he would consider settling so that his children would have better access to education, etc., he replied, "*Halali gabl ayyali*" ("My herd before my children").

²³A clan (*qabilah*; *hamulah*) is constituted of several or more lineages the members of which claim descent from a common ancestor. A tribe (*qabilah* or *qabilat*; *'ashirah*) is a joining together of several or more clans as the descendants of a common ancestor. Leadership, separated to at least some degree from the everyday life of one's "ordinary" lineage or clan mates, was vested primarily at the level of a clan or clans and in some cases of the tribe.

²⁴See Ahmida 1994 for an analysis of colonialism and resistance in Libyan state-building.

²⁵See Salim 1962, 27-33; Amin 1970, 83-86 and 104-107; Fernea 1970, 105-107; and Cole and Altorki 1998, 67-74 and 210-213 for analyses of the roles of shaikhs and other leaders in tribal communities.

²⁶See Cole 1982 and Cole and Altorki 1998, 104-110 for descriptions of local administration and government in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, respectively.

²⁷See Fabietti 2000 for a critical analysis of how tribal grazing areas in Saudi Arabia were converted into state lands open to all in Saudi Arabia. Controversy about land tenure in desert Egypt is addressed in Cole and Altorki 1998, 199-204.

²⁸See Cole and Altorki 1998, 205-210 for an example of efforts to develop customary law to deal with problems and issues that confront Bedouin in the contemporary lives.

²⁹However, it is common in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf for people of former slave status to have the names of the tribes to which they were previously attached. Thus a tribal name by itself does not automatically mean freeborn Arab tribal (*qabili*) descent.

³⁰As Davis 1988, 141-143 has shown for a case in Libya, tribal people voting together in an election are not necessarily following "primitive" tribalism but have seriously studied and evaluated the political and economic issues at stake.

³¹In this I follow the lead of Leeds 1977 who argued against the denomination of peasants as constituting societies. They are always components of a larger and more complex social, economic, political, legal, and cultural system. In the present Arab World, one may speak of a tribal community within a state society.

³²See also Shoup 1985 for a discussion of the impacts of tourism on Bedouin in the Petra region.

³³For descriptions of Bedouin and tourism in the Sinai see Aziz 2000, Gardner 2000, Lavie 1990, Meyer 1996, and Wickerling 1991. For Bedouin involvement in holiday resorts and tourism in Egypt's north coast see Cole and Altorki 1998, 161-198.

³⁴See Khalaf 1999 for a detailed ethnography of camel racing in the Arabian Gulf.

³⁵An example is the three volumes by Kurpershoek 1994, 1995 and 1999.

³⁶For a critical reaction by Fawziyya Abu-Khalid, a Saudi Arabian (woman) writer, to the cultural heritage village of Janadiriyyah near Riyadh see Arebi 1994, 57-59 and 68-71.

³⁷See Cole 1984.

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