

**Contesting Identities in South Sinai:  
Development, Transformation, and the  
Articulation of a “Bedouin” Identity  
under Egyptian Rule**

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**Contesting Identities  
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Development, Transformation,  
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under Egyptian Rule**

by  
**Joshua R. Goodman**



**The Moshe Dayan Center**  
for Middle Eastern and African Studies



**Tel Aviv University**

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ISBN: 978-965-224-097-2

Production and cover design: Elena Lesnick, The Moshe Dayan  
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Printed by: Tel Aviv University Press



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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to recognize and thank Eli Sperling, my close friend, colleague, and research partner. Without him, it is very likely this project, born from our collaboration, would never have happened. I would also like to thank him for his continuing availability for questions, comments, and continuing debate, as well as his support. Next, I would like to thank Daniel Cherrin, our documentarian, for his patience, commitment, and hard work during the course of this project. Special thanks go to him for documenting and archiving our primary research, providing a number of photos that appear throughout this work, as well as facilitating our close relationship with our subjects.

I would like to recognize my thesis advisors, the late Professor Joseph Kostiner, and Dr. Yoav Alon, both of Tel Aviv University's Department of Middle Eastern and African History, for their continuing support and advice throughout the course of our research and writing. Without their close help, this project would not have been conceived, approved, or successfully executed. In a similar vein, thanks go out to Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies for its support in bringing this study to publication.

In addition to my departmental advisors, I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to Professor Emanuel Marx of Tel Aviv University's Social Sciences Department, who is not only one of the foremost researchers of the Sinai Bedouin, largely paving the way for my own work, but who also consistently made himself available to answer any questions and provide valuable feedback based on his experiences as well as his area of expertise, anthropology. He was also kind enough to provide us with some of his own contacts in Sinai and took valuable time out of his schedule to review a number of chapters. Additionally, I would like to thank Professor Efrat Ben-Ze'ev of Hebrew University's Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, for also agreeing to act as an advisor in an unofficial capacity, especially in relation to issues of anthropology and field research.

This project is the product of my time at not one but two institutions, and I must extend my deepest thanks to Yale University and the MacMillan Center's Council on Middle Eastern Studies,

Sociologists Jonathan Wyrzten and Jeffery C. Alexander, and the participants of the Middle East Social Sciences workshop for their comments. Special thanks are due to Ellen Lust, my advisor in the Political Science Department, for her close assistance and comments on the final manuscript. I would also like to extend my gratitude to James C. Scott, whose ideas echo throughout this work. His unique perspective on agrarian societies and their interaction with states provided a fascinating looking glass for my work with pastoral groups. Thanks also to William G. Nomikos, a colleague and fellow graduate student in the Political Science department. I must also thank the MacMillan Center for providing a finishing grant for the project, providing me an unexpected opportunity to return to the field in the summer of 2012 while I was making my final revisions.

Another important individual to acknowledge is Professor Lila Abu Lughod of Columbia University, whose work *Veiled Sentiments* on identity and the Western Egyptian Awlad 'Ali Bedouin was a primary source of inspiration behind this study. Also deserving of recognition in this regard is Thomas Eriksen, whose anthropological examination of ethnicity provided valuable insights and direction in my own examination of Bedouin identity.

On a more personal note, I must express my deep appreciation to my family and advisors who encouraged me to take the risk and plunge head first into the experience that was picking up my life and moving it to another country. They would readily acknowledge that this was a trying moment in my life, but they gave me the unequivocal support I needed to make the step into that unknown. To my parents, who never once questioned my decision and encouraged me to follow my passions, thank you for your support and encouragement. I must also recognize and thank two professors at Emory, Benjamin Hary and Kenneth Stein, who both helped me to understand the decision I was about to make and the opportunities it would present me. Their support gave me the confidence I needed to succeed abroad, and while they have not been my official advisors for many years, I will never forget the impact they had on me as I transitioned to life in the Middle East.

My warmest thanks and deepest appreciation go to the Bedouin of Aqaba, the Egyptian migrants, and all the others who formed the

basis for the research presented in this paper. To all the inhabitants of Dahab, I dedicate this work to your uneasy coexistence and your attempts to make the best of a difficult situation. Furthermore, a special and eternal thanks to the members of the Mzeina and Jabaliyya tribes who welcomed us into their lives, homes, and families, who showed us nothing but warmth and kindness, whose cooperation was invaluable to this study, and whose friendship will remain with me for the rest of my days.

Finally, I want to dedicate this work to the memory of Joseph Kostiner, who passed away shortly after the completion of the first version of this study and my departure from Tel Aviv. His guidance and support were instrumental both to this project as well as my early encounter with academia. He was the closest thing I had to family during my time at Tel Aviv University. While we did not always agree, he was a source of unequivocal support and encouraged me to stand by my claims and pushed me to develop more convincing arguments. I can undoubtedly say this project would not have succeeded without his personal support. He was a source not only of guidance, but of inspiration, and he will be missed dearly.



## Preface: A Personal Account

My story begins late one evening in the winter of 2008 when I was sitting on the beach in Dahab with a young Bedouin shop-owner and my close friend and classmate, Eli Sperling. Eli and I had come to Dahab in search of a break from the bustle of life in Tel Aviv, where we were both pursuing a masters degree in Middle Eastern History. While the purpose of our trip was purely relaxation, it was typical of us to wander off of the beaten path and perhaps stumble into a scene that a run-of-the-mill tourist might not. After looking into a random shop and being invited to share a shisha with the Bedouin who ran it, we found ourselves having a heart to heart with a complete stranger by the beach. The first thing that struck me was the level of openness he was willing to show us as he began to rant about his dissatisfaction with Egypt and the Egyptian “farmers” (*fellahin*), as he pejoratively referred to residents of the Nile Valley. “Fucking Egyptians,” he practically spat, “I hate those Egyptian farmers.” Wait, I thought to myself, were we not sitting on an Egyptian beach? Wasn’t this Bedouin also Egyptian?

As he launched into a tirade about the feminine qualities of the “Egyptian man,” my thoughts wandered to Lila Abu Lughod’s work on the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin of the Western Egyptian Desert, and the almost identical way in which she described their dim perceptions of Egyptian society.<sup>1</sup> As I listened along with Eli, we both began considering the words of our companion and how his expressions related to the anthropological concepts we were studying in our Middle Eastern tribalism seminar in Tel Aviv. As though a light had been turned on in the attic, we realized that our academic experience allowed us to place this episode in a greater sociological context. There was a deeper, more significant meaning behind this seemingly random display of hostility and bravado, perhaps applicable to a much wider Bedouin culture. This, I felt, was a significant discovery.

Rewind a year and a half, back to my first visit to Dahab in the summer of 2007, shortly after my graduation from Emory University,

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1. Lila Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

where I had received by bachelor's degree, and my arrival in Tel Aviv. While I had visited Israel on many occasions, this was my first time in Egypt, in fact my first time in the Middle East outside of the predominantly Western-oriented State of Israel. I had been eager to see something of the "real" Middle East: a convoy of camels carrying goods across the desert, a fireside evening at a Bedouin camp singing ancient songs about the "good old days," really anything that made me feel like I was *actually* in the Middle East, a region that, as an American Jew, had been a personal obsession for as long as I could remember. Looking back, I will admit, my views of the region were perhaps overly romanticized and I undoubtedly set myself up for disappointment. Indeed, upon our arrival in Dahab, I was struck by how phony the presentation of "Bedouin culture" to tourists appeared to me, how much its manifestation reminded me of tourist reproductions of Bedouin culture in Israel. That is not to say that there were no camel convoys or singing by the campfire, but it still felt artificial.

Due to a certain, albeit limited, understanding of the social history of the Middle East, it was quite apparent to me then that the tourists were getting duped, and there was very little in Dahab that constituted anything resembling "traditional" Bedouin culture of the past in my limited understanding of the subject. I feared that the presence of the town and the tourists had caused the Bedouin and their cultural heritage to disappear, replaced by a manufactured cultural experience presented as authentic in order to give scuba divers and windsurfers an "exotic" atmosphere meant to enhance their vacations.

But for the longest time, I had great difficulty explaining exactly why I felt this way. I knew that something seemed phony to me, but should this come as such a shock in a space devoted to tourism? It wasn't until my arrival at Yale, when during a course on Imperialism in the Middle East I read Timothy Mitchell's post-Structuralist account of British imperialism in Egypt, *Colonising Egypt*, that it hit me. The key was in Mitchell's narrative of European visitors' first experiences in the chaotic disorganization of Egyptian cities after their exposure to sanitized reproductions back home:

They were confused, of course, but perhaps the key to their confusion was this: although they thought of themselves as moving from the pictures to the real thing, they went on trying...



to grasp the real thing as a picture. How could they otherwise, since they took reality itself to be a picture?...Brought up in what they thought of as a representational world, they took representation to be a universal condition.<sup>2</sup>

The problem for these visitors was that they had arrived in Egypt expecting to find something distinctly familiar, connecting their experience in the real world to the “world-as-exhibition” they had experienced back home. I realized my problem had been exactly the opposite; my disappointment stemmed from the fact that Dahab’s Bedouin experience did appear to me as “world-as-exhibition,” when I was distinctly looking for something “authentic” that transcended the superficiality that I experienced in Orientalized Western perceptions of the Bedouin. My disappointment, ironically, stemmed from the unexpected situation in which Dahab met all of my expectations. But the irony was that while my expectations for the Bedouin were quite different than most visitors to Dahab, I, too, was guilty of the same essentialization that had been the source of my disappointment. Looking back, this was a vitally important experience, as it helped me understand how the tourists’ expectations and limited knowledge created demand for certain activities, helping to shape the type of tourism the Bedouin offered, which in turn shaped the way in which their culture was articulated.

Returning to that beachside evening conversation: it was then that I realized that Bedouin culture had *not* disappeared in Sinai, but lingered in both altered forms as well as symbolic forms, reflecting simultaneously an acceptance of development and transformation as well as an attempt to maintain tradition. Our excitement was palpable. Eli and I decided to pursue this subject and immerse ourselves in the Bedouins’ contemporary environment in an attempt to understand how the Bedouin have changed and what their present condition was. This was the beginning of our collaboration.

Our new friend invited us back to his home where we shared tea with his family. From there we were introduced to his cousins and friends who lived in Dahab. Quickly they came to know us,

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2. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 22.

and before long we were seldom able to walk through the streets of Dahab without being recognized and greeted. Over the course of the next three years, our relationship with the young Bedouin (in their teens and twenties) deepened and we came to know the community through their eyes. This group included our friend the shopkeeper, his older sister, divorced by the time she was 23, his mother the land activist, his younger brothers and sisters (full and half-siblings), and their many cousins and friends who formed the core of their social group in Dahab. We met Bedouin shopkeepers and drivers, tour guides, windsurfing and scuba instructors, local drug dealers, hotel owners, community organizers, and school children, Bedouin with an incredibly wide array of occupations and responsibilities. Each had a story to tell, with similar origins but widely different hopes and goals. With all of these individuals guiding us through the developing landscape of Dahab, we came to perceive the town (both physically and symbolically) in a way that we never could have imagined. Instead of understanding Dahab only as a beachside tourist paradise, we came to understand it as an economic and social conflict zone in its own unique way.

Our greatest source of information came from the younger Bedouin, both because of the nature of our encounter as well as the linguistic skills that the members of this generation possessed. Despite our limited Arabic, we found communication to be practically effortless as our English-speaking Bedouin friends would act as translators when needed. This group of Bedouin mediated our encounter with the society of Sinai, and in this way, the research we gathered was most influenced by this young generation of unmarried Bedouin who grew up almost exclusively in an urban setting under Egyptian rule.<sup>3</sup> The

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3. While many people would not recognize a town as small as Dahab to constitute something truly “urban,” the social and economic distinction between urban (town) and rural (village) is vital to this study. The town of Dahab is an important manifestation of early urbanization, and contrasts between Dahab, loosely conceived as a type of metropole, and the surrounding villages will be continually invoked. The distinction between town and village is not based on size, but rather on the fundamentals of organization.

very nature of our field encounter focused our research in a far more significant way than the types of questions we asked.

It soon became apparent that the relationships that we forged with the Bedouin had a significant impact on the direction of our research agenda. As Lila Abu Lughod explains in the introduction to *Veiled Sentiments*, “To ignore the encounter [between researcher and subject] not only denies the power of factors such as personality, social location in the community, intimacy of contact and luck to shape fieldwork and its product, but also perpetuates the conventional fictions of objectivity and omniscience that mark the ethnographic genre.”<sup>4</sup> A fair account of the field research preserves the transparency and integrity of the research. It does not benefit the writer to underplay the personal connection that inevitably results from the ethnographic experience. On the contrary, by acknowledging and embracing the inevitable, we might come to a better understanding of the impact of the research on the final work, increasing the accessibility and value of the research itself. Throughout this book, a number of personal accounts are given. I attempt to present as personal a picture of the event as possible while maintaining my focus on the issue at hand for the very purpose of providing a transparent account of the research experience.

Our first important discovery was that as much as we were interested in learning about the Bedouin’s culture, they were equally fascinated with ours, listening to our tales from home with an intense curiosity. This was not limited to stories, however, and our Bedouin friends viewed our return trips with excitement as we would bring much promised photographs and souvenirs along with our tales. The Bedouin, trapped in Egypt because of restrictions against their travel out of the country, are gripped with a perpetual wanderlust that our tales of New York, Paris, and Tel Aviv could only partially sate. For them, we were a window to the outside world.

It was no small shock for me to discover the strong similarities between myself and my Bedouin friends, especially when I was expecting to be confronted by a very foreign, even unrecognizable culture. But as I listened to the Bedouin speak about their lives, I heard

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4. Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, p. 10.

echoes of my own thoughts, ranging from anxiety about their future success to their attitudes about women, sexuality, and marriage, and even their growing interest in music and sports. It was impossible not to view them as part of a global youth that, in my late 20s at the time of this publication, I am equally a part of. This connection was facilitated by the openness that we were shown, the extent to which the Bedouin were able to understand us from their daily interactions with tourists, as well as the ease with which we were able to understand their lives, which were not so starkly different from our own. While the circumstances of their lives were certainly quite different, it was easy to understand their worries about securing a good job and starting a family, and whether they would be able to support themselves in the future. Instead of focusing on the issues that were unfamiliar to us, we spent much of our time discussing what we had in common, deepening the bond that formed between us.

Further blurring the lines between the field and our lives back in Tel Aviv and beyond has been our ability to maintain contact with our friends from Dahab, through social media and internet communications such as Skype. Many of our friends have Facebook accounts that they access almost daily, allowing us to keep in contact when we are not in Dahab. They have the ability to follow our lives over the internet, and we often have the opportunity to speak and catch up, despite being as many as 5,000 miles away. These Bedouin were not just research subjects, they were, and still are, close friends; people who opened my eyes to new but familiar realities and gave me the opportunity to leave Tel Aviv with a sense of accomplishment and a greater understanding of the world around me.

My greatest regret is that I cannot be more specific when discussing them. I cannot tell their individual stories or even write their names. While we all agreed that it was important to produce a narrative highlighting the sociopolitical trauma of the Egyptian state's development scheme and dismantling the idea that the benefits rain down evenly on all Egyptians, there is no question that challenging the regime's sociopolitical hegemony entails a certain level of risk. But first and foremost, I believe my responsibility is to my friends, and the following work is an attempt to shed light on their situation. It should be fairly clear that this type of subaltern or "bottom-up" analysis

clashes quite strikingly with the “top-down” narratives perpetuated by state authorities.

Perhaps the most important factors pushing me to focus on the particular question of identity contestation were the politics that were unfolding around me during my time in Sinai. While Sinai has received increasing, and increasingly negative, attention in the media after the fall of the Mubarak regime in February 2011, the peninsula has long been considered a hotbed of instability. Narcotics smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism are just a few of Sinai’s endemic problems that have been blamed on the Bedouin. True, Bedouin have been involved in all of these activities. The problem, which is itself a core issue treated in this book, is that the activities of a select few have been generalized as a cultural characteristic afflicting everyone who considers themselves Bedouin. This is simply not true, and the underlying circumstances that produce these types of behaviors have little to do with internal aspects of Bedouin culture. Instead, I discovered that regional and national factors, as well as basic market pressures such as supply and demand, pushed certain groups of Bedouin into certain illicit activities.

The primary distinction to be made among the Sinai Bedouin in this regard is sub-regional; the social geography of North and South Sinai are distinct. This has nothing to do with systematic differences in the nature of the tribes inhabiting each region, but rather the policies adopted by the Egyptian state and the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. North Sinai, especially the areas bordering Israel and Gaza, has become rife with the smuggling of weapons and narcotics as well as of women and refugees across the border, due to the incredibly high level of demand for these goods and the risk associated with transport across a national border. Official embargoes on such goods prevent legal organization of these activities, but the promise of high profits for those willing to take the risk have pushed some North Sinai Bedouin to participate, utilizing tightly bound social networks to facilitate such activities. Their willingness to participate in the black economy is increased by their marginalization from the legal economy. Egyptian policies have failed to provide the Bedouin sufficient economic opportunities in the transforming agricultural and industrial economy of the North. In the South, production and smuggling of

narcotics is widespread, due not to transnational smuggling pressures, but to local demand fuelled by the tourist market. The smuggling of weapons, women, and refugees is entirely absent. Trade routes for these goods and migrants do not transit the South, and furthermore, such activities are potentially disruptive to tourism, the primary source of Bedouin income. The relatively more open access that South Sinai Bedouin have to the developing economy has led to significantly different attitudes about the worth of certain types of illicit activities, as well as economically disruptive violence in general.

The other major issue facing Sinai Bedouin is terrorism. In the opening decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, South Sinai was targeted three times by terrorism. In October 2004, the Taba Hilton was attacked with a car-bomb; in July 2005, a number of explosions rocked Sharm el-Sheikh, and in April 2006, three bombs exploded in Dahab itself, leading to multiple deaths and injuries, among both Egyptian and foreign tourists. In all of these cases, authorities confirmed Bedouin participation and cracked down on Bedouin throughout Sinai. However, in targeting Southern Bedouin for early arrests, the authorities made a serious mistake. While opposition to the Egyptian state is widespread in Sinai, violent manifestations are generally a product of circumstances unique to North Sinai, where opposition ideologies and greater instability have combined to generate violence on a scale unseen in the South outside of these bombings. In the South, on the other hand, the political and economic consequences of terrorism are so devastating that there is absolutely no support for it among Bedouin in the tourist areas of South Sinai.

Authorities later discovered and acknowledged that the Bedouin perpetrators were from Northern tribes, just as the economic logic would suggest.<sup>5</sup> Northern tribes resent both the state and Southern tribes, and the attacks against tourist resorts were as much an outburst against the latter for their “privileged” economic position as they were against foreigners or the state. These bombings devastated the tourist economy in South Sinai, in turn causing severe economic hardship among Southern tribes involved in tourism. Instead of understanding that the Southern Bedouin were as much victims of these attacks as

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5. Roei Nahmias, “Dahab Bombers Were Sinai Bedouins,” *Yediot Ahronot Online*, April 26, 2006.

were the tourists, the Egyptian state undertook efforts to “shield” tourist centers from Bedouin living nearby. While Southern Bedouin were entirely innocent of these crimes, they fell victim to the tendency to assign cultural blame to groups instead of specific blame to individuals. They were dangerous and subversive simply because they were “Bedouin”; the actions of a few led to a generalized stereotype afflicting the entire group.

The Egyptian state made no efforts to prevent the emergence of such patently false and damaging stereotypes. If anything, their actions served to reinforce them. The question is why. I believe there are two answers. First, we all have a tendency to characterize by culture and judge entire groups based on the actions of some of their members. Second, it seems intuitive that the Egyptian state would show little inclination to acknowledge the effects their own policies have played in the Northern Bedouins’ turn to violent opposition. The state, by virtue of its existence as *the state*, rarely accepts responsibility for the negative effects of its policies. Instead, it seeks to blame others for reasons that may be entirely spurious, while attempting to guard the legitimacy of its actions.

Finally, on this note, I would like to insert a bit of a disclaimer about some of the analytical decisions I have made throughout this book. Language is a tricky thing when applied normatively. That is to say, similar actions may be categorized differently depending on the ideological proclivities of the speaker as well as the identities of the actor and recipient of such action; people cannot seem to detach language from the “good” and “bad” connotations that many words carry. The maxim “One person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” speaks volumes about the emotional connotations words carry and the strength of the responses they provoke. It is my strong belief that similar actions or attributes should carry similar labels, and when I select a term, I have done so because of the analytical definition I have attached to it. Thus, when I describe Egyptian state actions as “neo-colonial,” this is not an accusation nor is it an attempt to delegitimize the state. Instead, it is the recognition that the actions of the Egyptian state (or any other state, for that matter) towards its national periphery is strikingly similar to the manner in which imperial centers acted towards their imperial peripheries. Joel Migdal presents

an identical conclusion: “Indigenously ruled regimes... often ended up employing much the same set of policies as the Western powers did in colonial territories.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, when I describe Bedouin identity as “ethnic,” I am not making a political argument but an analytical one, based on a well-established scholarly literature, albeit an argument that is still somewhat contested. I hope that readers will withhold their judgments regarding the legitimacy of such labels until after the evidence has been presented. Legitimacy should come *a posteriori*, not from the normative or emotional response to linguistic markers used to describe events and actions.

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6. Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 56.



# Introduction

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Tourism development and an increasing state presence along the Aqaba Coast of the Sinai Peninsula have motivated a number of transformations among the local Bedouin population. Most notable of these changes relate to patterns of social and economic organization as the Bedouin increasingly settle in towns, pursue economic opportunities provided by Egyptian development, and come into increasing contact with foreigners in their daily interactions. While Egyptian development programs have encouraged many Bedouin to settle in towns such as Dahab and Nuwayba, they appear to be failing to incorporate the Bedouin into the social fabric of the Egyptian nation. This study focuses on the relationship between Egyptian development, socioeconomic change, and the transformation of Bedouin identity in the Aqaba Coast region of the Sinai Peninsula in the period since Egypt reoccupied Sinai between 1979 and 1982 (henceforth “the neo-Egyptian period”). This period has been characterized by rapid development and attempts at national integration. Egyptian state-building has instigated an accelerating process of acculturation among the Bedouin that reflects the major transformations in their sociopolitical environment. Absent, however, is exchange of “traditional” identities for “modern, national” identities as envisioned by Egyptian authorities. Instead, the Bedouin have retained a strong sense of their heritage and tradition despite the significant social transformations they have already experienced. They have developed a unique sense of cultural distinctiveness and articulate their identity in direct opposition to an “Egyptian” identity.

The Bedouin living in Sinai’s Aqaba (Southeast) region have reacted to the increasing presence of both state authorities and unskilled migrant workers from the Nile Valley with hostility, leading to the emergence of a social boundary between the Aqaba Bedouin and the Egyptians who constitute the pool of laborers and authority figures in Sinai. What is surprising, however, is that this boundary is strengthening even as empirically identifiable cultural differences between the two groups appear to be in decline. Furthermore,

and far more interesting, the intensity of this process appears to be tied directly to the intensity and pace of Egyptian development. Simultaneously, the Bedouin are forming closer relationships with foreign visitors and tourists, despite the often significant differences in their social conventions. These relationships constitute a primary source of cultural transformation for the Bedouin, and in Dahab many Bedouin are actively adopting and communicating elements of tourist culture as their own.

How, then, are the Bedouin maintaining their identity and heritage in the face of rapid social transformation, and what role, if any, has the Egyptian government and its policies played in fueling this process? While the connection between state development and Bedouin socioeconomic transformation is quite clear, the link between these processes and Bedouin identity is far less apparent. In order to more effectively anticipate the sociopolitical outcomes of this type of development and the resultant relationships formed by different sectors of Egyptian society, it is important to ascertain the actual effects of development on processes of integration and identity formation.

The social distance between the Egyptian and Bedouin communities, reflected by the economic marginalization of the Bedouin and their self-segregating tendencies, has led to the reinforcement of the boundary between Bedouin and Egyptian social categories. This situation has largely been motivated by the Egyptian authorities' inaccurate assumptions about Bedouin society and the social effects of economic development, both of which were fundamentally challenged by the unanticipated Bedouin reaction to Egyptian development strategies. This study contends that Bedouin identity in the Aqaba region of South Sinai, far from disappearing in the face of new lifestyles, is actually strengthening in reaction to Egyptian encroachment and development despite processes of social homogenization caused by integrative development. The structural integration of the Bedouin into the Egyptian state is not increasing a sense of "national solidarity" among the Bedouin. On the contrary, they communicate both a feeling of marginalization by Egyptian authorities and a lack of national pride and belonging. Instead of folding the Bedouin into the existing "Egyptian nation," increasing contact and transformation is fuelling a conflict between two groups that see themselves as socially distinct.

Simultaneously, the Bedouin are clearly recognizing a number of benefits that tourism development has brought to them, acknowledging the rise in living standards even while lamenting the marginalization due to perceived discriminatory policies of the Egyptian government. This suggests that the Bedouin are not opposed to development, but to the manner in which the Egyptian government is pursuing it.

Due to the economic and political importance placed on the peninsula in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sinai of the past 60 years has been marked by increasing levels of foreign penetration, whether from Cairo, Jerusalem, or more recently, the “Lonely Planet.” As scholars most often focus on the political and “big picture” consequences of this type of penetration, competition, and conflict, the micro-level social consequences have been given relatively little attention and warrant closer study. This has been especially true of the 30 years since Sinai was reoccupied by Egypt and Israeli social scientists largely ended their research there. However, it is undeniable that this perpetual instability, marked by frequently shifting regimes, the intrigues of interested powers, and the recent arrival of tourism on a global scale has ensured that change has been a constant feature in the lives of Sinai’s inhabitants. While some of these changes have been purely political and rather superficial, others have caused significant dislocations in the socioeconomic patterns of everyday life.

The Bedouin, once caught between competing powers, an environment of scarcity, and a territory marked by limited centralized political control, are now faced with a new reality. The Egyptian government, which regained Sinai from Israeli occupation per the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, has discarded its previous plan for Sinai as military buffer to Israel and instead continued the Israeli strategy of economic development, especially in the tourism sector. This development has led to the emergence of urban spaces across Sinai, sites that have supported emerging markets to create local jobs and attract migrants from the Nile Valley searching for work in a stagnating national economy. These towns have given the Egyptian government a foothold in Sinai, allowing the state to bring a measure of regulation to the peninsula; they have also created a destination for an expanding foreign population of tourists and ex-pats, mostly from Europe and America, who have become a common feature in the transforming socioeconomic landscape of South Sinai.

A large majority of the indigenous inhabitants of Sinai are Bedouin, who are often assumed to be disconnected from the realities of contemporary political life and are usually viewed as traditional and isolated. On the contrary, it is inevitable that the lives of those inhabiting Sinai would be dramatically affected by wars, invasions, peace negotiations, phased withdrawals, urban development, and the growth of tourism, and not only politically. Economically, these events have the power to shape markets, and socially, the arrival of new visitors carrying differing forms of culture has fundamentally altered the Bedouins' social space.

The native Bedouin have not ignored the Egyptian-directed development process; indeed they could not even if they wanted to. On the most superficial level, significant changes to the economic situation of Sinai, with the emergence of local markets and a flourishing tourist economy, have encouraged new types of economic engagement, while an increasing government presence has limited the ability to continue a number of traditional activities such as herding and fishing. Furthermore, with the rapid expansion of available technologies and increasing contact with Egyptian authority figures, migrants, and tourists, the Bedouin have been exposed to new forms of culture that have led them to reconsider their place in society. A notable consequence is that they have begun to conceive of themselves as imbedded in a much larger social environment on both a national and global scale. This has recently become a much greater concern to the Bedouin, leading to significant changes in cultural conceptions and self-image.

## **Analytical Frameworks**

A major focus of this study is political identity. A question immediately arises as to the best way to conceive of Bedouin identity. Is the lens of tribalism still the best way to understand socioeconomic and political transformation among the Bedouin? The answer to this question is an unequivocal no, for the continuing tendency to study the Bedouin through the lens of "tribalism" does a double disservice. First, it perpetuates the fiction that there is some fundamental cultural difference between tribal and non-tribal societies instead of conceiving

“tribalism” through an organizational idiom. Second, it eliminates any intersubjectivity with non-tribal populations, complicating any attempt to apply the study of contemporary political processes to the Bedouin.

Instead, I propose to utilize a significantly different type of identity theory to examine the identity politics of the Aqaba Bedouin, that of “ethnicity.” While the term itself carries a number of political connotations, my decision to adopt this category is entirely analytical, defined as “a form of interaction between culture groups operating within common social [and political] contexts.”<sup>7</sup> While this definition may be unfamiliar to some, who instead perceive ethnicity to be similar to ideas of race, there is a rich literature on the politics of identities in interaction, to which scholars, notably social anthropologists, have attached the label “ethnic.” In this way, I draw an analytical distinction between tribalism, which aims to regulate relations within Bedouin society, and ethnicity, which operates between the Bedouin and other social groups. Tribalism is internally regulating; ethnicity is externally regulating. At its most parsimonious, ethnicity is defined as a form of social organization based on an idiom of cultural descent.<sup>8</sup>

This political interaction of distinct social groups within national contexts is precisely the focus of this book, and I have found that this concept of ethnicity has provided high leverage for the analysis of questions of Bedouin identity in a socially heterogeneous setting such as Dahab.<sup>9</sup> “Ethnicity” in this sense, focuses on issues of sociopolitical

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7. Abner Cohen, “Introduction: The Lessons of Ethnicity,” in Abner Cohen (ed.), *Urban Ethnicity* (London: Tavistock, 1974), p. xi.

8. Note that this definition implies that traits such as skin color and language are not the sources of ethnic difference in and of themselves, but instead are signaling devices for different culture groups, whether real or imagined. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 55. Horowitz states, “Ethnic groups can be placed at various points along the birth-choice continuum. But there is always a significant element of descent.”

9. J. Clyde Mitchell, “Perceptions of Ethnicity and Ethnic Behavior: An Empirical Explanation,” in *Urban Ethnicity* (ed.), Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock, 1974), pp. 27–28. When reading anthropology that dates back to the 50s and 60s, as much of Mitchell’s work does, care must

competition and provides a strong approximation of national identities and those that develop in reaction to nationalism and nation-building. In all of these ways, the type of identity that is the focus of this study reflects many ethnic elements, and ethnicity theory, especially as it is articulated among social anthropologists, provides a compelling logic explaining the patterns of transformation and articulation of Bedouin identity in the urban centers of South Sinai.

While the application of an “ethnic” framework is admittedly quite rare in the study of the Bedouin, its importance to Middle Eastern sociopolitical organization has not gone unrecognized. As early as 1984, Itamar Rabinovich and Milton Esman hypothesized that a greater willingness to explore such theories of ethnicity and issues of ethnic pluralism in Middle East societies could significantly aid in the explanation of patterns of conflict that dominate many structurally weak Middle East states, but noted that ethnicity has not often been used as a basis for analysis.<sup>10</sup> Despite this hesitancy, they identified the sectarian conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon, as well as the Sunni-Shi'i rift in the Gulf and the Muslim-Christian divide in Egypt all as phenomena that can be studied in an ethnic framework. This contention is accurate even though the dichotomies themselves may be religious. This has to do with the field in which identities are deployed. Whether religious or racial, in contemporary national interactions, all cultural identities are “ethnic” in this way.

Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner make a related claim in their edited volume *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, in their discussion of the developing relationship between tribesmen and polities. They argue that in conflicts between the state and tribes, ethnicity is a vehicle that tribesmen, like other social groups, might adopt in order to oppose government attempts to increase state

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be taken to distinguish between the use of the terms ethnicity and tribalism. However observers will notice that these terms often reflect the perceptions of “modern” versus “traditional” societies and are thus quite illuminating.

10. Itamar Rabinovich and Milton Esman, “Introduction,” in Itamar Rabinovich and Milton Esman (eds.), *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1988).

control over them.<sup>11</sup> This statement in their introduction forms the basis for this study, which seeks to examine social change and identity formation in the framework of ethnic organization. The focus shall be on examining the transformations in the social and economic forms of organization among the Bedouin and how this relates to the evolution in the articulation of their identity in an increasingly “national” context.

Bassam Tibi, in his chapter in *Tribes and State Formation*, supports a qualified view of Rabinovich and Essman’s hypothesis by reconciling it with Khoury and Kostiner’s, drawing important distinctions between tribalism and ethnicity. He shows that ethnicity as a theoretical framework for studying tribe-state interactions assumes importance due to the centrality of ethnic organization to the modern nation-state (see below). Tibi distinguishes between tribes and ethnicity in that *ethnies* are “sub-national divisions in the communities of the modern nation-states of the Middle East,” while tribalism is fundamentally non-national.<sup>12</sup> He continues by asserting that ethnicity presupposes the *possibility* of further tribal division, using the example of the Alawites in Syria, showing how, despite their Arab heritage and their tribally-divided society, they should be considered an ethnic category in Syrian contexts due to the articulation of their Alawite identity in ethnic terms.<sup>13</sup> This is equally applicable to the Amazigh or Berber tribes of some North African states, notably Morocco, Algeria, and Libya, who have begun to mobilize politically, not along tribal lines but along ethno-cultural lines.<sup>14</sup>

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11. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, “Introduction: Tribe and the Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East,” in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 1991), p. 3.

12. Bassam Tibi, “The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous: Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-states in the Modern Middle East,” in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 1991), p. 139.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

14. See Jonathan Wirtzen, “Colonial State Building and the Negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity in Protectorate Morocco,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011). Wirtzen demonstrates how

The state is the primary factor in ethnic identity formation in two major ways. First, as a territory with established boundaries, it sets the scope for national sociopolitical interactions, defining the arena or political field in which ethnic identity is shaped and deployed. Second, it is a vehicle for the distribution of resources and the pursuit of group interests, which are manifested in state policies. In the words of Barkey and Parikh, "it has already become evident that state policies constituted one of the major determinants of mobilization and shifting identity patterns."<sup>15</sup> The social group controlling the state drives the formation of primary national identities and ideologies, and it will be against this group that other identities form. In these two ways, the contemporary state is the primary arena for group mobilization and the articulation of identities. Furthermore, it is not the state that assumes importance in an examination of ethnic identities, but it is ethnic identity that assumes importance in the contemporary reality of the state system and state-society interaction. This, as Mitchell explains, is because so often "political oppositions are phrased in ethnic terms and in so doing provide the sentiments in terms of which social actions may be justified."<sup>16</sup> It is this link between ethnicity and national context that makes ethnicity theory applicable in an examination of tribe-state relations in Sinai, as the state has, to a large extent, created the basis for a Bedouin ethnicity through its policies towards the group as a whole.

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government policies created the basis for an ethnic "Berber" solidarity that crossed tribal boundaries. This concept of state policy and identity will be explored later in this paper. Regarding ethnopolitical Berber mobilization in Morocco and Algeria in more recent years, see Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Contested Identities: Berbers, 'Berberism' and the State in North Africa," *The Journal of North African Studies* 6.3 (2001). For a short discussion of ethnopolitics between Arabs and Berbers in Libya, see Ishra Soleiman, "Denied Existence: Libyan-Berbers under Gaddafi and Hope for the Current Revolution," *Muftah*, March 24, 2011, <<http://muftah.org/?p=961>>.

15. Karen Barkey and Sunita Parikh, "Comparative Perspectives on the State," *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991), p. 542.
16. Mitchell, "Perceptions of Ethnicity and Ethnic Behavior," p. 30.



Within this framework, this study aims to analyze the marginal status of the Aqaba Bedouin as a result of the realities that the Egyptian state, especially through its development policies, has created for them, specifically through the link between socioeconomic transformation, acculturation, and identity formation. This will begin in chapter one with an examination of Egyptian goals for Sinai. Chapter two examines the Bedouins' adaptation of their economic practices to adapt to the realities of Egyptian development and the proliferation of tourism in the region. Chapter three examines the other side of this coin, the increasing economic marginalization of the Bedouin. Chapter four focuses on the social transformation of the urbanizing Bedouin. Finally, chapter five examines the transformation and articulation of a Bedouin identity to determine the relationship between state policies, socioeconomic transformation, and processes of Bedouin ethnogenesis, which is defined as the articulation and emergence of previously non-ethnic identities in an ethnic idiom.<sup>17</sup>

This study will show that state policies regarding development and integration in South Sinai are motivating transformations in both dominant modes of socioeconomic organization as well as Bedouin identity including expressions of social solidarity. It is simultaneously the goals of development and the manner in which state policies fuelling integration have shaped Bedouin-Egyptian interactions that have led to the emergence of the frameworks necessary for socioeconomic transformation and the emergence of ethnically-articulated identities among the Aqaba Bedouin.

## Definitions

Before continuing, a few definitions should be presented in order to clarify the terms and concepts central to this paper. First and foremost, the subjects of this study are the Bedouin of the Aqaba Coast of the Sinai Peninsula, and more specifically, the sedentary Bedouin of Dahab. The focus of the research has been on the younger generation of Bedouin who did not spend a significant portion of their lives living

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17. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 64.



As the geographical focus of this study is Dahab, which lies in the territory of the Mzeina Bedouin (see Map, Figure 1), a majority of these subjects come from the Mzeina tribe, inhabiting the Sinai coast along the Aqaba Gulf from Nuwayba to Sharm el-Sheikh, and inland to Santa Katarina. However, tribal divisions have not mirrored developments in Egyptian policy and do not constitute a primary source of differentiation for the purposes of this study. Within Dahab, Bedouin from other tribes, such as the Jabaliyya and 'Aleqat, also seek work. Furthermore, the area north of Nuwayba is the territory of the Tarabin tribe, whose members also participate in development and tourism but are not from the same confederational grouping as the Mzeina and other southern tribes: the Tawara, and therefore hold a much different *tribal* identity. For the purposes of analytical accuracy, then, tribal identities will only be used in specific reference to tribal issues. In other contexts, the term "Aqaba Bedouin" will be used to identify them primarily on the basis of their nationally-defined territory (the Aqaba Coast of Sinai, Egypt) and the activities which are dominant in the region, notably tourism, as opposed to their tribally-defined territory. In instances where I am specifically referring to the sedentarized Bedouin of Dahab, I use the term "Dahab Bedouin."

Two terms that must be defined are "state-building" and "nation-building," considered here to be two distinct but related processes, both integral to a study of state-sponsored development and identity transformation. State-building is a process aimed at building institutions that reflect regime preferences while increasing state control over its territory and inhabitants. It seeks the integration of the periphery into the center for this purpose, through the creation of transportation and communications infrastructure, coercive control (such as army and police), the application of national laws and policies and the effective collection of taxes. Nation-building, on the other hand, is psychologically-oriented. As defined by one political scientist, nation-building is a process of "weld[ing] disparate elements of the populace into a congruent whole by forging new identities at the national [=state] level at the expense of localism or particularistic identities."<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is the state's (or other elite groups')

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18. Amitai Etzioni, "A Self-Restrained Approach to Nation-Building by Foreign Powers," *International Affairs* 80.1 (2004).

dissemination and reification of nationalist ideologies and values across the whole of its population. The goal of this process is the standardization of values, ideologies, and identities among a state's population to increase national solidarity and specific patterns of sociopolitical conformity. While state-building seeks to strengthen the state or the polity, nation-building seeks to forge a unified social body, the nation, to overcome the inevitable existence of sub-national social divisions. In blunter terms, nation-building may be thought of as a process of legitimization of a social and institutional order created by those controlling the state. Nation-building strategies are pursued through mandatory education and national media outlets, tourism, museums and other public spaces, and mandatory national service, all of which play an important role in the socialization of identity and values.<sup>19</sup> State- and nation-building are the two processes by which the Egyptian state seeks to increase its authority in Sinai. These processes will be repeatedly addressed throughout this work.

Finally, a major concept presented in this paper is "modernization." Modernization most accurately refers to a cluster of theories seeking to explain the effects of economic development and the sources of social and political change. Originally, the founders of modernization theory sought to locate the sources of participatory government in contemporary trends of economic development, notably industrialization and its accompanying social trend, urbanization. Seymour Martin Lipset, considered one of the formative scholars of modernization theory, showed a correlation between economic output and democracy.<sup>20</sup> The mechanisms through which this process supposedly operates were given greater expression in various other works, notably Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society*, which presents a theory linking economic development to participatory

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19. See for example Byron G. Massialas, *Education and the Political System* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1969); see also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

20. Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *The American Political Science Review* 53.1 (1959), pp. 69–105; See also Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960).

government through processes of social change allegedly caused by economic growth. For Lerner, industrialization yielded urbanization, which in turn promoted the emergence of a mass media, which drove increasing literacy, culminating in greater demands for participatory government (democracy).<sup>21</sup> In a nutshell, the idea is that economic development drives social development which yields positive political development, and by implication, all good things go together.

This is not to say that my own analysis in any way relies on the components of modernization theory. Instead, it recalls a comment once made by the renowned Middle East scholar Elie Kedourie, who said, "When...policies... together with the doctrines and principles which justify them, are considered, then it is realized what a large part verbal traps and dubious dogmas have had in the construction of doctrines and the shaping of policies."<sup>22</sup> Modernization theory can be considered one of Kedourie's "dubious dogmas," enjoying little empirical support at the micro-process level. Samuel Huntington was more explicit in declaring modernization theory an "erroneous dogma," which simply cannot account for the abundance of anomalies whereby industrialization and economic development have failed to produce positive social and political developments.<sup>23</sup>

The abundance of critiques and the persistence of anomalies, however, have not prevented the emergence of a number of extensions and inversions of modernization theory. Perhaps the most problematic have been social variants of modernization focusing on the role of economic growth and institutional change in the disappearance of traditionalism and the emergence of national identities. This strand of modernization theory conceives of ethnic or particularistic identities as "primordial sentiments ... forg[ing] ties of emotion rather than interests ... [that] would be replaced through modernization by loyalties

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21. Daniel Lerner, *Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1958). Moreover, the parallels between modernization and structural conceptions of nationalism, notably by Gellner and Anderson, should be apparent and will be addressed later.

22. Elie Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version, and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), p. 2.

23. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 6.

to the class and the nation,” loyalties that are labeled rational instead of emotional.<sup>24</sup> In a political sense, “modernization” entails a “marked redistribution of power within a political system: the breakdown of local, religious, ethnic, or other power centers and the centralization in *national* political institutions [my emphasis].”<sup>25</sup> Not only does the mantra of modernization enshrine the national state as the sole legitimate authority, but by combining economic and political strands of the theory, it also casts state development as both benevolent and efficient when the reality may be much more traumatic for regions undergoing this development.

The impact of modernization theory on economic ideologies and development paradigms has had serious consequences for the direction of national and global development. Since economic growth is assumed to produce positive social and political outcomes, then by implication more or faster growth is better than less or slower growth. This produced a focus on maximizing economic efficiency. Moreover, since the principal unit of political and economic organization is assumed to be the state (this is certainly the case if we are interested in outcomes such as democracy), the primary focus of the modernization paradigm is not the individual, but the state. Modernization supports a developmental strategy based on top-down economics singularly focused on maximizing efficiency and growth through privatization, reliance on international fiscal institutions, free trade, and foreign investment and control; it focuses more on national economic interests than on microeconomic successes and often does little to address the economic needs of a great portion of the population.<sup>26</sup>

Simon, in an excellent and critical review of development rhetoric, argues that defining modernization in terms of economic efficiency has meant that we no longer predicate modernity on increases in individual

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24. Barkey and Parikh, “Comparative Perspectives on the States,” p. 542. See also Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 42–43.

25. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, p. 142.

26. David Simon, “Development Reconsidered: New Directions in Development Thinking,” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 79.4 (Current Development Thinking) (1997), p. 187.

wellbeing.<sup>27</sup> Policies aimed at maximizing economic efficiency have often ignored questions of whether economic transformations have had positive or negative impacts on the quality of life of a state's subjects, whether it empowers locals to make their own decisions, and whether this development is socially and environmentally sustainable.<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of the observed consequences of economic development, the modernization paradigm's tendency to privilege the welfare of the state has rendered it an attractive model for state-building projects and top-down development. The combination of social and economic strands of modernization enables the state to dismiss peripheral concerns and competing interests by casting them as "traditional" or otherwise irrational. Modernization, as a development paradigm, is very friendly towards states and national goals by legitimizing them and delegitimizing regional development concerns that clash with central interests, which are framed in the rhetoric of the greater good or the national interest. Further perpetuating the centrality of the modernization paradigm in global development and post-colonial state-building has been the dominance of neoliberal policies favored by USAID, the IMF, and the World Bank.<sup>29</sup>

In this way, modernization is given an objective existence as the foundation of the state's development strategy, guiding assumptions and expectations for development, and thus has very real consequences for the Aqaba Bedouin. Borrowing from political scientist Alexander Wendt's constructivist approach to objectivity, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."<sup>30</sup>

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27. Ibid., 185. See also a discussion of economic reconstruction of Iraq: Haytham Bahooora, "Shock-and-Awe Nation Building: Iraq's Neo-Liberal Reconstruction," *Jadaliyya.com*, Arab Studies Institute, May 14, 2012. Web. <[http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5522/shock-and-awe-nation-building\\_iraqs-neo-liberal-re](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5522/shock-and-awe-nation-building_iraqs-neo-liberal-re)>. For Lenin, this was the sacrifice that modernization entailed.

28. Ibid., p. 187.

29. Ibid., p. 185. Simon calls neoliberalism the "contemporary incarnation" of modernization. See also Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.

30. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 330.

What is important to note here is that I am not claiming that these development authorities necessarily adopt an explicit modernization paradigm in their approach to development, that is to say, that the state does not claim that the modernization of such peripheral populations is the overarching goal of development.<sup>31</sup> However, the coincidence in the case of Dahab is striking, and the rhetoric of the state and its developmental agencies appears predicated on many of the assumptions of economic modernization to justify policies whose benefits have tended to target a narrow, politically connected group of officials and entrepreneurs. This issue will be explored in greater depth in chapter one.

What is important to clarify is that the processes of “modernization,” notably economic development, urbanization, the construction of transportation and communications infrastructure and the rise of mass media, the expansion of education and literacy, and the emergence of bureaucracies, to name a few, are better defined as “integrating” processes. These processes lead to the adoption of similar organizational forms and similar expressions of dependence on state structures. This encourages cultural homogenization, but is superficial and not necessarily linked to an adoption of “modern” or “national” identities as predicted by proponents of social modernization. Samuel Huntington acknowledges this reality in *Political Order in Changing Societies* when he states that in contrast with the above “facts” of integration, “progress towards many of the other goals which writers have identified with political modernization [including]... national integration—often is dubious at best.”<sup>32</sup>

This study is not interested in distinctions between “modern” and “primitive” societies, and instead focuses on the relationship and interactions between various social groups bounded by a state as levels of “stateness” increases in Sinai. I define stateness, following Joel Migdal, as the state’s appropriation of forms of social and economic control from non-state actors.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, the state

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31. The Development reports, though, do clearly show this to be at the very least an ancillary objective.

32. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, p. 35.

33. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*. See discussion in Chapter One: A Model of State-Society Relations, pp. 10–41.



should be understood as “regime,” one of a number of social actors competing for sociopolitical influence within its defined territory. To be “modern,” in the rhetoric of the state system, is to willingly subordinate non-state forms of sociopolitical control and solidarity to state interests and organs, a demand that has met much resistance along the peripheries of the developing world. This is one potential explanation for the persistence of “traditional” societies within hegemonic “modernizing” states and suggests a coincidence of identity and interest. In fact, a basic premise of this argument is that the modern-traditional dichotomy, far from providing useful analytic leverage on issues of social change, actually obfuscates the dialectical and co-produced nature of social transformation. The link between this structure of competition and identity will be discussed in chapter five.

The Bedouin are not autarkic, a society able to exist independently from the rest of Egypt (as in thinking about Egypt as a “modern” society and the Bedouin as a “traditional” society), but have come to constitute a unique social category within Egyptian society. It would be helpful to recall the words of Friedrich Nietzsche when he noted, “The general imprecise way of observing sees everywhere in nature opposites (as for example “warm” and “cold” [or in this case “modern” and “traditional”]) where there are, not opposites, but differences in degree.”<sup>34</sup> Instead of examining a transition from “traditional” to “modern” modes of living, the focus shall be on increasing levels of state control and integration and how the Bedouin have responded to these changes.

## Research and Methodological Approaches

While this work is based in large part on ethnographic field research conducted in Sinai, it draws on a number of other sources

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34. Frederick Nietzsche, *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*, in R.J. Hollingdale (ed. and trans.), *A Nietzsche Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988). Quoted in Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism—Anthropological Perspectives* (*Anthropology, Culture and Society*), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Pluto, 2002), p. 162.

of information. It will be beneficial to discuss the particulars of the research as well as the location, Dahab. However, this project relies on a number of other disciplines and methodological approaches in addition to ethnography, and some words should be said about my preference for a multi-disciplinary approach. I have attempted to rely as evenly as possible on the different disciplines chosen for this study instead of relying exclusively on one. The primary disciplines engaged in this study are social anthropology, sociology, and history, though support was sought further afield, including from political science, social psychology, and the emerging field of tourism studies. More will be said about each discipline and their interaction.

The decision to make Dahab the geographical focus of the project stems from the special attention this part of Sinai has received for the development of tourism, which has been a primary tool highlighting and magnifying the identity processes under study. As the mainstay of the Aqaba Bedouin economy, tourism has led to a “traditionalization” of Bedouin economic practices, that is, the communication of these practices through the language of tradition as a way to make these economically valuable practices symbolically meaningful to consumers, who search for an “authentic” cultural experience. Effective symbolism, in this case, legitimizes these activities as “authentic.” Tourism can, in this way, be considered the commercialization of culture for economic gain. This culture, however, far from being a true representation of how the Bedouin live today, is largely constructed based on perceptions about the Bedouins’ heritage and “traditions,” and is thus economically analogous to other symbolic identity processes that are the focus of this study. This type of culture under-communicates aspects of acculturation and focuses instead on elements preserved from an idealized, distant past. Just as ethnic identity links contemporary culture to images of the past, tourism does the same.

Heritage tourism in Dahab has the effect of exaggerating the communication of culture, allowing for a clearer examination of the processes involved in the formation and communication of identity. Furthermore, heritage tourism provided the opportunity to contrast tourist conceptions of Bedouin culture and the actual progress of socioeconomic transformation in order to analyze the role of culture

in identity formation. Tourism as a lens was an invaluable aid in the study of identity politics, especially the construction of culture and tradition and the symbolic purposes they serve.<sup>35</sup> Special attention was given to manifestations of identity through tourism, a central theme in the research. However, tourism so strongly connects culture and economics that it may be the case that the economic aspect of social conflict, a well-established but contested theory, is somewhat overdetermined by the force of particular circumstances.

The field of tourism studies played an important role in studying the economic and social effects of tourism development. While this field is still fairly new, tourism as a global, cultural phenomenon undoubtedly deserves the attention of social scientists, and a number of works on the subject in general, as well as in the Middle East specifically, had a profound impact on this analysis, and even played a role in shaping the direction of the research conducted in the field, providing for the use of certain aspects of tourism as way points and bases for further analysis, such as the state's role in formal versus informal tourism and how each might approach a single concept, such as employment. Tourism is an issue that cannot be divorced from the Aqaba Coast; it was vital to this work to explore the ways in which tourism affects communities and economies. The volume on tourism in the Middle East edited by Rami Daher is an excellent and encompassing look at the various aspects of tourism—combining such fields as economics, cultural anthropology, sociology, and political science—and demonstrates how truly dynamic tourism studies can be as an independent field of inquiry.

Further increasing the value of Dahab as a research site is its origin not as an administrative center, colonial outpost, or military base, but as a Bedouin date oasis, a traditional forum for Mzeina social interaction. Dahab's origin as a tourist center dates from the establishment of traveler camps set up by Bedouin to serve Israeli visitors to Sinai after the 1967 War instead of a tourist resort

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35. Rami Farouk Daher, "Reconceptualizing Tourism in the Middle East," in Rami Farouk Daher (ed.), *Tourism in the Middle East Continuity, Change, and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Channel View Publications, 2006), pp. 16, 19.

planned and built through government projects.<sup>36</sup> Dahab's Bedouin neighborhoods around 'Asala comprise the largest urban Bedouin settlement on the coast, and they have developed organically from an exclusively Bedouin space to a bustling commercial and tourist center. Since Bedouin neighborhoods in Dahab are not the result of an Egyptian urban plan, the space remains a manifestation of authentic Bedouin transformation instead of a Bedouin tourist façade reflecting external assumptions about the Bedouin; the Bedouin presence in Dahab is more reflective of the Bedouin condition than the spaces constructed to fuel Egyptian tourism.

The bulk of our field research was conducted in Sinai between March 2009 and May 2010, in which I, along with my research partner, Eli Sperling, would take trips to Dahab for about a week every other month. Additionally, I was able to undertake two longer periods of research, each consisting of about four weeks, in the summers of 2011 and 2012. From our base in Dahab, spending the majority of our time with the Bedouin around town, we were able to acquire a unique perspective on the effects that development in Sinai and Egyptian policies have had on the lives of the Bedouin. We had the opportunity to explore the ties between the Bedouin and foreign tourists, through the relationship we forged with our subjects, as well as the relationship between the Bedouin, the authorities, and the Egyptian migrants. As a town about half-way down the Aqaba Coast, Dahab provided a perfect base to travel throughout the sub-region. Our excursions ranged from visits to Sharm el-Sheikh to compare the economic roles of the Bedouin between the two towns, to trips into the desert to participate in Mzeina social functions such as weddings and even a ritual goat slaughter, to Bedouin tourist camps in order to explore the role of Bedouin culture in Sinai tourism. While we felt that these excursions did not greatly inform us about the historical practices or lives of the Bedouin, we were able to construct a broad picture of how development has affected the lives of the Sinai Bedouin today

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36. Interview with a Bedouin Divemaster, July 24, 2009; see also Smadar Lavie, *The Poetics of Military Occupation Mzeina Allegories of Bedouin Identity Under Israeli and Egyptian Rule* (New York: University of California, 1991), p. 68.

and were shown how Bedouin notions of tradition were reconciled with the changes to their world.

The goal of the field component of the research was to construct a broad picture of the realities of contemporary Bedouin life, especially in an urbanizing setting, as well as to immerse ourselves in the Bedouin tourist economy. From this it was possible to draw conclusions about Bedouin self-identity and image, notably how Bedouin imagine themselves and their cultural heritage and how they communicate themselves and their community as separate from Egyptians. Additionally, we focused on patterns of socioeconomic organization and attempted to compare these forms to those adopted by other social groups within the Egyptian state in order to draw conclusions about the factors motivating certain socioeconomic transformations. The ultimate goal was to ascertain whether the transformations we identified within the community were motivated by internal structures and dynamics or by external pressures.

The field research came from a mix of observational methods including mapping demographic patterns in the town, charting types and locations of construction and development, and observing Bedouin-Egyptian-Tourist interactions through what ethnographers describe as participant observation as well as formal interviews (See Figure 2). This raw data was then filtered through intense analytical sessions between myself and my partner in which we discussed our observations and used “thick descriptions” to analyze the events we had witnessed and attach underlying meaning to them.<sup>37</sup> While the number of formal interviews we conducted were quite limited, with no more than ten individuals being recorded, our method of informal interviewing, based on the concept of “snowball sampling,” brought us into contact with dozens of Bedouin holding many different occupations and social positions. Additionally, we were able to interview about ten migrant laborers, from Egypt and Sudan, who had traveled to Sinai in search of employment. Snowball sampling, which entails the assistance of current subjects to recruit future subjects, while a non-random sampling process, has the benefit of allowing us to construct a clear picture of the social networks that exist both

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37. Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description, Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 2000).



Figure 2: Conducting an interview on film.  
Photo by author, September 20, 2009.

within Dahab itself and how they connect to villages outside of the town. This non-randomness was an important element in tracing distribution networks that have emerged through tourism and inter-familial as well as inter-generational relationships.

The reflections of the previous paragraph raise two major issues that we confronted over the course of our fieldwork. The first is highly complicated and had the potential to threaten our ability to collect data. This has to do with our interview methodology. We quickly found our attempts at formal interviewing frustrated by the Bedouin, who appeared to react to our questioning with suspicion. It was important to find a method of accessing this information while simultaneously building trust with those we were interviewing. In order to accomplish this, we were largely required to turn off the cameras and recording devices and be less direct in our questioning.

We found that the greatest level of success came when we posed our questions anecdotally and in a largely *quid-pro-quo* manner. By this I mean we would exchange stories with our Bedouin interviewees

and compared their answers with experiences from our lives, or, more commonly, attempted to lead the Bedouin to a certain issue by framing it against the backdrop of our culture. For example, if we wanted to discuss Bedouin marriage requirements, we might tell the Bedouin about marriage practices in America, or tell a story of a particular friend or family member's marriage, and then ask about their own experiences. We found that this worked quite well, and often it would set the Bedouin off on long stories with valuable tangents that gave us more information than a simple question and answer would have. Furthermore, this allowed the Bedouin to volunteer information that they felt was important to the topic, providing an opportunity to study concepts from their perspective.

The second aspect of our research design was the issue of teamwork in the field, which, from the anthropological literature guiding our research, appeared to be quite rare. Nevertheless, working in a team was invaluable. Not only did this kind of work allow one of us to fill in gaps the other might have missed, it also encouraged discussion and debate, fuelling analysis and the consideration of multiple points of view. While we did not always agree on the meanings behind what we saw, our differences of opinion more often than not added to the quality of the material as we attempted to reconcile, convince, or disprove each other's concepts. Working as a team allowed us to support one another, and gave each of us an advisor intimately familiar with the research. We continually challenged each other's ideas, which forced us to carefully construct our theories and raise the quality of our work. While in the end, each of us authored our own papers and focused on different aspects of our experience, there is no doubt that Eli's ideas are reflected in my own work and mine are reflected in his.

One final but immensely important issue to mention in a discussion of fieldwork is the issue of potential bias. While we interacted with a wide variety of people in Dahab, the focus of our research was the Bedouin, and thus a large majority of our time was spent interacting with Bedouin. There was a danger, I was warned, that my feelings for my new-found friends would affect my ability to analyze the situation objectively. This concern was voiced through my advisors, who warned me that my sympathies might lead me to develop a narrative

that is overly critical of the Egyptian government or overly delicate in regards to the Bedouin. In short, the objectivity of the researcher, and by implication the integrity of the work, is called into question because of an emotional connection or a tendency of the subjects to present a biased view that is accepted and adopted by the researcher.<sup>38</sup>

In this way, ethnography more often than not is a double-edged sword necessitating a delicate balancing of two very distinct identities that may very well be impossible to separate: the first being the friend and the second the researcher. Without the friend, the researcher's job would be impossible. At the same time, it is the friend that endangers the objectivity of the researcher, who is supposed to be dispassionate and analytical. Thus, to the researcher, the friend is both indispensable and a liability, and in the field, not a moment went by without consideration of the balance that we had to maintain between them.

Unfortunately, there is no scientific method to counter this tendency towards sympathizing with one's subjects. In the words of John Van Maanen, "Neutrality in fieldwork is an illusion."<sup>39</sup> In this case, all scholars who conduct this type of work might be susceptible to accusations of bias, whether personal or ideological; it is the responsibility of the researcher to navigate this path with as much attention to avoiding such traps as possible. From my own experience, to ignore the friend is impossible and only calls attention to the researcher, generally leading to concerns and suspicion among the ethnographic "subject." The Bedouin have little use for formal data gathering methods such as surveys, and are generally less willing

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38. This has been a perpetual concern to ethnographers, both inside and outside of the field of anthropology. See, for example, Annette Lareau and Jeffrey J. Shultz, *Journeys through Ethnography: Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

39. John Van Maanen, "Playing Back the Tape," in W.B. Shaffer and R.A. Stebbins (eds.), *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1991); quoted in Timothy Pachirat, "The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor," in Edward Schatz (ed.), *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).



to participate in these formal environments. The only alternative is to always maintain self-awareness and to understand that this emotional response is an inevitable consequence of the experience of field research. This process, I imagine, is very personal, varying from researcher to researcher, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to draw an accurate picture of the relationship between the researcher and the subjects just by reading the work without any mention of the personal experiences of the research. It is my goal to present as transparent a picture of the research experience as possible, allowing readers to understand my own ethnographic perspective.

The research we conducted in the field did not present a complete picture of the historical development of the Bedouin community, only their present situation. Thus, this type of data was insufficient to address the types of historical questions that were vital to this study, including how and why Egyptian development was undertaken, as well as how this development has transformed the Bedouin socioeconomic order. History was just as important to this analysis as anthropology, and so constituted a second, yet equally important methodological approach. Historical information about Sinai comes from two main sources: first, the diaries and surveys produced by visitors and colonial officials during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, and second, the accounts and analyses of historians and social scientists who spent time researching in Sinai in the 1970s and 80s, as well as a number of studies published by their Egyptian successors. Since the Egyptian reoccupation of Sinai, however, the freedom to conduct research has been limited and our record for the past 20 years is not as detailed as it was in the 20 years before that.

Many of the early diaries and surveys of Sinai have already been digested by historians and social scientists and consequently held little value for this work, as subsequent analyses published in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s proved significantly more useful. These sources blurred the lines between anthropology and history, as they were often social histories or anthropological studies from previous decades that provided the opportunity to construct a coherent timeline of events and an encompassing picture of the Bedouin community and its transformations across the previous decades. Reliance on history enabled the analysis of the transformative processes that development

in Sinai has instigated. This is an adaptation of a practice that is gaining favor among anthropologists, increasingly utilizing historical texts; I took this practice and reversed it by taking past anthropological studies and using them as historical texts, providing sufficient information to compare, for example, employment patterns of the Aqaba Bedouin in the nineteenth century, the 1970s, and today. In this way, it became possible to examine not only the shape of the Dahab Bedouins' current socioeconomic order, but to trace its development over the past decades to analyze the transformative effects of development.

# Chapter 1

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## Egypt's Vision for Sinai

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This chapter presents an analysis of the Egyptian development project in Sinai in order to ascertain why Sinai development was undertaken and how Egyptian authorities went about setting and attaining their goals. Additionally, it will examine how a number of specific Egyptian policies have shaped the direction of socioeconomic development within the Bedouin community. With this perspective, Egyptian priorities for development and the role envisioned for the Bedouin in relation to the Egyptian vision for Sinai will become clear. In a study of Bedouin reactions to development, an examination of Egyptian approaches is the key to understanding Bedouin transformational responses and identity processes.

The Egyptian development project in Sinai is merely a single aspect of a larger plan for the development and integration of Egypt's vast, unsettled territory. In May 1974, faced with serious economic stagnation and the beginnings of a population crisis, the government of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat prepared a plan, known as "A New Map of Egypt," that aimed at extending Egyptian central authority to territories far from the Nile Valley and developing them so as to make them productive contributors to the Egyptian economy.<sup>40</sup> As Sinai at this time was still under Israeli control, the Egyptian development plan focused on areas such as the Western Desert, the Mediterranean coast, the Red Sea coast, and the Lake Nasser region. The project had the broadly-stated goal of relieving social and economic pressures on the population, and by implication, on the central government.<sup>41</sup>

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40. Dames and Moore International, *Sinai Development Study, Phase I: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Aid, 1985) Vol. 1, "A Strategy for the Settlement of Sinai," 3.1 "National Goals," p. 47.

41. Lavie, *The Poetics of Military Occupation*, p. 75.

The plan eventually adopted to oversee the development of the Sinai Peninsula, as a piece of this greater strategy to increase industrial and agricultural development in Egypt, was aimed at fulfilling goals identified by the government to address central problems; the primary concerns were not the wellbeing or interests of peripheral populations, but those of the central state. One of the stated aims of the Sinai Development Study (SDS-I), published in 1985 by Dames and Moore, Inc. in conjunction with USAID, was to “ensure social justice for the residents of these regions [under development],” to aid in the reduction of “regional disparities.”<sup>42</sup> However, this would only be the case inasmuch as the goals and interests of these residents aligned with those of the state. In fact, in the research and planning stages of the project, the Bedouin were treated only superficially and were never actually consulted on potential courses of development or Bedouin-Egyptian cooperation. Central Egyptian planners viewed the Bedouin as a marginal population that did not need to be directly included in Sinai development, but would react to development by assimilating into Egyptian society.

In their attempt to impose “legibility” on the Bedouin, the Egyptian state made a number of incorrect assumptions about the fundamental nature of Bedouin society and the natural consequences of economic development.<sup>43</sup> Egyptian development strategies ultimately resulted in the socioeconomic marginalization of the Sinai Bedouin. These assumptions, compounded with their “modernization”-oriented approach, facilitated the emergence of a number of obstacles frustrating Bedouin participation in budding tourism industries in the Aqaba region. Many of these assumptions or miscalculations were based on Egypt’s focus on the critical crises that the regime faced in central Egypt, for example the need to maximize tax revenue, provide jobs, and spread the population. In focusing on these goals, the Egyptians neglected to consider a situation whereby specifically Bedouin interests might clash with Egyptian development goals. Not

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42. Dames and Moore, *Sinai Development Study*, Vol. 1, p. 48.

43. James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Scott refers to legibility as the manner in which a state categorizes and defines a concept so that the state may interact with it.

only did they not make an effort to ensure the Bedouin a dominant or even a protected place in the developing tourist economy, they failed even to undertake a comprehensive study of the Bedouin and their standards of living in order to determine how best to harmonize their plan with existing conditions on the ground; the Bedouins' customary socioeconomic order and recent transformations were not examined or considered in the scope of development.

## **Egyptian National Crises and the Need for Development and Integration**

In the early 1970s, Egypt faced a number of social and economic crises stemming from major demographic shifts, destructive economic policies, and President Gamal Abd al-Nasser's fixation on the conflict with Israel. Egypt's economy, which Nasser had based on the socialist model of import-substitution and nationalization, was on the verge of collapse. Compounding a lack of productivity, a rapid population increase created a shortage of employment. While Nasser promised jobs to all university graduates, stagnant economic growth and rampant corruption meant that there were not nearly enough opportunities to satisfy Egypt's population.

Making matters worse, the urban centers of Egypt experienced rapid population increases due to the dual processes of urbanization and accelerating population growth. Cairo, which in 1960 had a population of three and a half million,<sup>44</sup> and in 1989 of 14 million,<sup>45</sup> today has an estimated population of 20-25 million inhabitants.<sup>46</sup> As Cairo's population expands, the conditions in the city have deteriorated

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44. Janet Abu Lughod, "Migrant Adjustment to City Life: The Egyptian Case," *The American Journal of Sociology* 67 (1962), p. 22.

45. Thomas W. Lippman, *Egypt After Nasser: Sadat, Peace, and the Mirage of Prosperity* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. 166.

46. André Raymond, *Cairo*, trans. Willard Wood (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 13. In 2000 Raymond supports the lower figure of 18 to 20 million. The higher estimate of 25 million comes from a consideration of the potential contribution of the unofficial residents of Cairo as well as the figure stated by everyone in Egypt.

for its inhabitants. Overcrowding is now a fact of life and living conditions for many have become less than sanitary. Additionally, the huge population has put an incredible strain on Cairo's aging urban infrastructure, which is in severe need of renovation and replacement and has barely been able to support a city of 20 million inhabitants.

Population growth and urbanization have had a devastating impact on Egypt's ability to maintain food self-sufficiency.<sup>47</sup> Processes of urbanization, concentrated heavily in the Nile Valley, have created a situation whereby land suitable for agriculture is being converted into residential zones to accommodate an increasing number of citizens.<sup>48</sup> While Egypt's population has grown rapidly in the Nile Valley, the amount of cultivable land has not increased despite Nasser's massive land reclamation scheme, which aimed at converting unproductive desert into cultivable land suitable for agriculture. As settlements expand, they continuously encroach on the limited amount of arable land. Egypt, once a major exporter of agricultural products, has become dependent on massive food imports to supply the needs of the population.<sup>49</sup>

When Anwar Sadat became president of Egypt in 1970, overpopulation, under-employment, food shortages, and economic stagnation were the major socioeconomic crises facing the Egyptian state. In order to address these crises, the Egyptian government enacted a number of policies aimed at bringing economic as well as social relief to Egypt. Perhaps the most well-known of these policies was Sadat's program of *Infitah*, or "Open Door" economics, aimed at attracting private and foreign investment, and bringing an end

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47. While World Bank figures show that the rate of population growth is slowing, it is still well above rates in Europe and North America. Moreover, this has done little to relieve pressures on the state to continue supplying sufficient food to urban populations. Source: Google Public Data from World Bank, updated Jan 17, 2013. <[https://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=d5bncppjof8f9\\_&met\\_y=sp\\_pop\\_grow&idm=country:EGY&dl=en&hl=en&q=population%20growth%20rate%20egypt](https://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=d5bncppjof8f9_&met_y=sp_pop_grow&idm=country:EGY&dl=en&hl=en&q=population%20growth%20rate%20egypt)>.

48. Dina F. Ali, "Case Study of Development of the Peripheral Coastal Area of South Sinai in Relation to its Bedouin Community" (MA Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1998), p. 13.

49. Lippman, *Egypt After Nasser*, p. 128.

to the state-dominated economic policies of Nasser.<sup>50</sup> As a clear rejection of the Nasserite economic model based on etatism, Sadat's freer-market *Infitah* was a highly visible concept. It was not, however, the only plan developed to address Egypt's ills. Another of Sadat's programs, geared simultaneously at relieving both the population and food crises, was the "Green Revolution." This "revolution" strove to tame the Egyptian frontier, extract valuable natural resources, convert deserts into farmland, and relieve the immense population pressures in Egypt's cities and along the Nile River.<sup>51</sup>

With this "Green Revolution," Sadat envisioned a massive population shift out of Egypt's urban areas along the Nile into the desert, namely the Western Desert around the oases of Siwa and Bahariyya, the Eastern Desert along the Red Sea Coast, and later, the Sinai Peninsula. It was the government's hope that relieving overcrowding would increase economic productivity, bringing added relief to the economy in addition to alleviating urban congestion. It additionally hoped to convert the desert into cultivable land, bringing Egypt back to food self-sufficiency.

The goals of the Sinai Development Project, as outlined in the development reports published in the 1980s and 90s, are consistent with the crises mentioned above. As stated in the SDS-I study prepared in 1985, the national goals were the following:

1. Social
  - Slower population growth in Cairo and the cities of the Delta
  - Reversal of Brain Drain, in part by creating well-paid, high tech, modern economic activities within Egypt
2. Economic
  - Expanded private sector
  - Foreign aid reduced, later eliminated
3. Strategic
  - Food self-sufficiency, improved yields and land reclamation

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50. P.J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt*, 4th ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p. 430; see also Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Politics of Economic Reform in Egypt," *Third World Quarterly* 14.1 (1993).

51. Lippman, *Egypt After Nasser*, p. 126.

- Integration of remote areas into the mainstream of Egyptian civilization.<sup>52</sup>

The final goal, the integration of remote areas into “Egyptian civilization,” suggests an added aim of increasing state control over its territory and simultaneously working for the socialization of peripheral populations and regions to integrate them into the Egyptian nation. These goals, far from striving to protect the unique characteristics of Egypt’s peripheral populations, suggest that a major aim of the Egyptian government is to transform the character of these territories to reflect Egyptian national values and characteristics. This is a major element in the process of nation-building. Economic development in Sinai aimed both to increase Egyptian state presence and control in Sinai and to socialize peripheral populations into Egypt’s national society.

It is clear from even this superficial examination of the crises Egypt faced and the goals the government set that regional integration and development in Egypt was undertaken to serve the center instead of the peripheries. Despite claims about the importance of regional equality, Egyptian development was less about extending the amenities and services available in central Egypt to the various peripheries as it was about the development of these peripheries in order to solve the problems of central Egypt.

## **From the “Green Revolution” to the National Project for the Development of Sinai — A Plan for 2017**

Between 1979 and 1982, when Egypt re-gained Sinai after the Camp David Accords and the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, the concept of developing the deserts was extended to the Sinai Peninsula. The values and goals of the Green Revolution were reproduced in the Sinai Development Studies and played a primary role in shaping Egyptian goals for Sinai. Soon after the Egyptian reoccupation, planning for Sinai development began. The SDS-I Sinai Development Study was commissioned by USAID in order to survey Sinai and present

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52. Dames and Moore, *Sinai Development Study*, Vol. 1, p. 48.



its recommendations for the best development strategies. This plan eventually yielded the Egyptian Ministry of Planning's National Project for the Development of Sinai (NPDS), which was adopted by Egyptian authorities as the official strategy to develop Sinai between the years 1994 and 2017. These plans hoped to transform Sinai into a multi-sector economy through large-scale foreign investment and the settlement of over a million Egyptians in the peninsula.<sup>53</sup>

There is remarkable similarity between the two development reports, and the NPDS can easily be considered a continuation of the development strategies recommended in the 1985 SDS-I report. The major difference between the two is in the scale of development. The SDS-I had for its goal one million Egyptian settlers in Sinai while the NPDS hoped to attract over three million,<sup>54</sup> reflecting an ever-increasing need to relieve Nile Valley population pressures by both enticing urban Egyptians to seek better working conditions in Sinai as well as convincing rural Egyptians to seek employment in Sinai instead of in the urban centers of the Nile Valley.

The development reports identify tourism as a huge potential market in Sinai, suggesting that Sinai could compete with international tropical vacation destinations; the Aqaba Coast was recommended as particularly suitable for international tourism development.<sup>55</sup> They further suggest that basing tourism on large-scale private and foreign investment could potentially fund other development projects, highlighting the economic importance of tourism and tourist development to the Egyptian authorities in their endeavor to create industry and infrastructure in Sinai. The SDS-I study, and later the NPDS, proposed to expand the Aqaba Coast's tourist capacity by attracting "major international beach tourist resorts along the Gulf of Aqaba," as this would be the most direct way to maximize both growth and (taxable) profit.<sup>56</sup> The plan foresaw continuous development along

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53. David B. Ottaway, "Egypt Tries Hard to Lure Settlers to Sinai Region," *The Washington Post*, April 25, 1983.

54. David Homa, "Touristic Development in Sinai," in *Tourism in the Middle East Continuity, Change, and Transformation*, ed. Rami Farouk Daher (Minneapolis: Channel View Publications, 2006), p. 239.

55. Dames and Moore, *Sinai Development Study*, Vol. 3, "An Economic Development and Investment Plan, 1983 to 2000," p. 80.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

the Aqaba Coast and the eventual growth of Dahab's population from just over 2,000 to over 90,000 inhabitants between 1994 and 2017, and the growth of Sharm el-Sheikh's population from just over 2,000 to over 130,000 in the same time frame, almost all of whom would be Egyptian families enticed to move from the Nile Valley.<sup>57</sup>

While an in-depth analysis of the two development plans is beyond the scope of this study, there are two major aspects that must be discussed in relation to how the Egyptian government chose to relate to the Bedouin in their development scheme. The first is to what extent the reports consider the needs and probable reactions of the Bedouin; the second deals with the issue of the formalization of tourist economies.

## **The Bedouin and Development**

The SDS-I report purports to have conducted an in-depth study of the population of Sinai, and volume six of the report deals exclusively with Sinai's social development. However, the study focuses overwhelmingly on migrant social development and questions of how to attract and maintain such a high number of Nile Valley migrants in Sinai. There is little said in this report about the Bedouin outside of population estimations, and even less is said about the proposed integration of this population into development strategies beyond the need to provide "opportunities for employment." While the SDS-I does not contain a sufficient treatment of Sinai's Bedouin populations, the NPDS contains even less.

The SDS-I report predicted that increasing service- and construction-sector jobs would induce the Bedouin the shift away from "traditional employment" which, according to their understanding, was "livestock grazing," and attract the Bedouin populations to settle closer to the coasts.<sup>58</sup> In this, the report identified and described the

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57. "Distribution of the Existing and Target Population in South Sinai," *Final Report on the National Project for the Development of Sinai*, translated in Ali, "Development of the Peripheral Coastal Area of South Sinai," p. 24.

58. Dames and Moore, *Sinai Development Study*, Vol. 6, "Settlement and Social Development," p. 17.

major transformation in Bedouin economics experienced during the Israeli occupation, the shift of Bedouin populations to coastal centers for purposes of employment. It failed, however, to recognize the fact that this process had already begun and that by the 1980s, herding and “livestock grazing” were not these Bedouins’ primary sources of subsistence. The authors were unable to see the link between increasing sedentarization and the growth of urban economies and employment opportunities. They failed to recognize the effects of development and increasing state control on the declining access of the Bedouin to pastures and wells needed to maintain a pastoral economy. There was no discussion of how jobs would be allocated between the local Bedouin and unskilled migrants from the Nile Valley seeking the same service and construction sector jobs mentioned above. Finally, there was no provision or discussion regarding the potential recognition of Bedouin claims according to their customary laws, specifically regarding certain rights of access, for example to valuable stretches of shoreline for fishing or tribal gatherings. Nor was there any discussion as to the proposed legal status of the Bedouin or their land claims, nor any discussion of compensation for developing on Bedouin land or of providing housing and other services to the community.

This is the extent to which the SDS-I treated the Bedouin. Conspicuously absent are any recommendations regarding the integration of Bedouin populations into the developing economies of Sinai, or visions of how the Bedouin would function in close proximity to these estimated one million migrants. Additionally, in the section dealing with tourist development, the authors mention a number of possible types of tourism, ranging from beach and resort tourism to religious and cultural tourism. This discussion, however, makes no mention of the possible role the Bedouin might play in this industry, notably in the culture tourism sector. Culture tourism, according to the SDS-I, would focus on incorporating Sinai into the existing “Cairo, Luxor, Giza circuit,” integrating Sinai into Egyptian heritage instead of focusing on its own unique culture.<sup>59</sup>

The goals for the NPDS focus even more heavily on the issues facing central Egypt, and the previously mentioned desire to ensure

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59. Dames and Moore, *Sinai Development Study*, Vol. 3, p. 82.

social justice for peripheral populations is absent from this version. Not once in the section outlining objectives for Sinai development are the Bedouin even mentioned, and instead the report focuses on its goal of “building new societies” to vary the lifestyles available to *Egyptians*.<sup>60</sup> Thus the role ascribed to the Bedouin by those responsible for development has been peripheral at best.

The report does, on the other hand, set the goal of appropriating over 90 percent of Bedouin land for development, allowing Bedouin to retain a mere seven percent of the territory they once exploited.<sup>61</sup> While the Bedouin had previously used this land for fishing, holding tribal gatherings, and more recently, running tourist camps, Egyptian authorities hoped to utilize this land for the development of large multinational resorts that had the potential to yield large tourism revenues for the central government.

Egyptian development authorities, in conjunction with USAID, based this land appropriation goal on the assumption that Bedouin do not value land the same way that the development agency would due to their “nomadic lifestyle,” and believed this appropriation would be accepted by the Bedouin. The report went even further, stating that “the NPDS works for the urbanization of the tribal population and at the same time [for] maintain[ing] their tribal cultures as it is part of Sinai heritage.”<sup>62</sup> How, then, did the Egyptians propose to reconcile the confiscation of Bedouin territory for development with a desire to preserve the cultural heritage of the Bedouin? Furthermore, how did they expect to achieve the urbanization of the Bedouin while neglecting to envision a formal role for them in the developing tourism-based urban economy? Finally, assuming that there were more migrants at any given time than available jobs, how would employment be allocated between migrants and local Bedouin? These are questions that Egyptian planners and developers, as well as their American counterparts representing USAID, failed to address.<sup>63</sup> The

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60. David Homa, “Touristic Development in Sinai,” p. 241.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 241. Quote taken from Sinai report titled “Sinai: Location and Natural Resources,” Government publication (1995).

63. While many defend organizations such as USAID for their good intentions, Joel Migdal rightly points out that there is a huge disparity

fact that the Bedouin have intended to participate in the development and future economies of Sinai, notably the tourist sector, has all but ensured that the vision the central government created for Sinai would be complicated by a clash between local Bedouin and central Egyptian interests.

## **Tourist Development along the Aqaba Coast — Egyptian Preferences**

The Egyptian development strategy is best examined through a lens of “modernization.” While as an academic theory, modernization has been the subject of ongoing debate, and the mechanisms through which the process supposedly operates produce questionable outcomes, modernization continues to hold relevance for developing states as a popular paradigm for third-world development.<sup>64</sup> This is not to argue that Egyptian authorities adopted an explicit “modernization” approach to Sinai development, which would assume that a primary goal was social development of the periphery instead of revenue maximization. In fact, the state appears little concerned with the Bedouin outside of the implications for maintaining a tight security presence in the Peninsula. Instead, both written and anecdotal evidence strongly supports the revenue maximization approach. The positive externalities anticipated by the modernization paradigm, such

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between declarations of intent by state leaders and the actual execution of policy on the ground. Furthermore, good intentions and the desire for macro-level transformation say nothing about their knowledge of micro-level social and economic dynamics. Migdal, in 1988, argued that scholars need to examine the impact of social policies from a bottom-up perspective. Ten years later, Simon suggested that while “sustainability” had become an ostensible goal of development agencies, the addition of the label “sustainable” was accompanied by few policy changes and no greater sensitivity to the micro-level impact of development. Today, while progress has been made on the scholarly side, aid agencies have not changed significantly. Migdal, *Strong Societies, Weak States*, pp. 260-1. Simon, “Development Reconsidered.”

64. Simon, “Development Reconsidered,” p. 185.

as social integration, economic rationalization, and increasing state control of its territory, are often assumed to be associated with the type of neo-liberal development policies in play in Sinai. The failure of these policies to yield the assumed benefits warrants the same type of criticism that has underpinned the modernization debate for decades. Furthermore, it would be hard to deny that the promises of “modernization,” notably rationalization of the economy and political stabilization, are themselves attractive goals for state authorities, and it is quite probable that both neo-liberal goals and sociopolitical “modernization” arguments work together in this regard.

The course of tourism development in South Sinai was shaped by the requirements that the Egyptian government needed this sector to fulfill and reflect the basic assumptions stated above. As one of the earliest established sectors of the developing Sinai economy, tourism has become the primary economic activity along the Aqaba coast (as opposed to industry, concentrated on the West coast, and agriculture, concentrated in the North). The authorities have favored courses of tourism development guaranteeing high returns for the government. This has led them to place major emphasis on formalized tourism development, focusing on large, multinational resort chains which invest large sums into development, and from which high taxes and fees can be extracted.<sup>65</sup> In one extreme example, a recent report states that one of the major casinos in Sharm el-Sheikh pays \$24 million in royalties to the government each year, in addition to its annual taxes.<sup>66</sup> While the major resorts undoubtedly pay less, international companies must maintain the proper permits to operate their businesses, and these companies have no trouble paying the high fees. This focus has maximized revenue for the state; however, it has ensured the marginalization of local inhabitants by channeling revenue flows out of the local economy and to national projects and foreign shareholders. The formalization of tourism has made it harder for the Bedouin to participate in and benefit from Aqaba tourism.

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65. Homa, “Touristic Development in Sinai,” p. 252.

66. Adel Abdellah, “Even Tourists and Tourism Operators Say Yes to the MB,” *EgyptVotes.org*, Jan. 4, 2012. <<http://www.egyptvotes.org/en/politics/item/400.html>>.

Smaller hotels have been discouraged due to the perception that these will not generate the same level of revenue and channel it back into further development. In a similar fashion, tourism advertising has focused on expensive resorts and vacation packages aimed at families and wealthier tourists rather than at backpackers and young travelers. The government has reasoned that focusing on wealthier tourists will generate the most revenue per visitor.

This focus on development of formal tourism in Sinai has two major implications for the Bedouin. The first has to do with revenue leakage, a consequence of the preference for large, foreign-owned hotel chains. While these chains build resorts that have the potential to generate significant revenues, a majority of these profits flow out of the locality where they are generated. For example, the Hilton, one of the largest and most expensive resorts in Dahab, channels most of the revenue it generates out of Sinai, into the accounts of the company and its owners and as payments to the Egyptian government for permits and as taxes, translating into high leakage out of the local economy.<sup>67</sup> Formal tourism development, while favored by Egyptian authorities for its potential to generate high returns, is actually an obstacle to the Bedouins' ability to access locally generated tourist revenue.

This is in direct contrast to smaller hotels and local operations, which guarantee relatively low leakages as they are prone to be owned, operated, and staffed by locals instead of foreign investors and migrants. Small-scale tourism is therefore "capable of higher integration into the local economic structure; it is capable of producing a higher multiplier effect on the local economy than the formal tourism sector," whereas the formal sector relies heavily on foreign or external elements.<sup>68</sup> For the Bedouin, smaller hotels and locally-run tour companies would ensure a significant amount of revenue would remain in the community, allowing the Bedouin to realize more profit from economic activities within their territory. However, Egyptian preferences to work with foreign tourism agencies and international hotel chains make it harder for the Bedouin to access their share of the profits being collected. Additionally, the regulations have made it

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67. Daher, "Reconceptualizing Tourism in the Middle East," p. 22.

68. Ibid., p. 24; see also Martin Opperman, "Tourism Space in Developing Countries," *Annals of Tourism Research* 20 (1953).

significantly harder for the Bedouin to build and own their own hotels, which the Egyptians have attempted to replace with larger chains, using the justification that the Bedouin do not meet the safety and quality standards of the large resorts, and that Egyptian regulations are for the safety and benefit of its tourists.<sup>69</sup>

The second implication for the Bedouin is their marginalization from the tourist spaces in general. As one of Egypt's main national goals has been the creation of jobs for Nile Valley Egyptians, migrants from those areas, not the Bedouin, are considered to have first priority when it comes to access to employment. Additionally, the Bedouin are considered to be less reliable because they do not have the professional levels of education favored by the modernization paradigm; many businesses avoid hiring Bedouin altogether, due to conceptions of the Bedouin as stupid, lazy, or something more sinister (see chapter four). For the Aqaba Bedouin, this limits their ability to engage the formal tourist sectors in any manner more substantial than as menial employees in the large resort hotels, leaving them searching for ways to protect their livelihood by ensuring the continuation of informal economies.<sup>70</sup> Primary ways in which they establish informal economic connections are through hiring out jeeps and pickup trucks to carry travelers between locations, by organizing Bedouin cultural events such as camel treks and oasis visits independently of the resorts, and through the operation of illicit economies such as drug dealing or smuggling. All of these issues, and how the Bedouin cope with them, will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapters. It is important, in any event, to highlight that the nature of Egyptian development policies have had profound effects on courses of socioeconomic transformation among the Aqaba Bedouin by creating obstacles to Bedouin participation in Aqaba tourism.

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69. Ben Beasley-Murray, "The Tourism Development Agency uses environmental rhetoric to justify demolishing Bedouin-owned camps in favor of big hotels," *Cairo Times*, September 30, 1999.

70. Heba Aziz, "Employment in a Bedouin Community: The Case of the Town of Dahab in South Sinai," *Nomadic Peoples* 4.2 (2000), p. 32.



## **Dahab and Development**

Dahab has been affected by formalization to a significantly lesser extent than the other major Sinai tourist center, Sharm el-Sheikh, which is dominated by international resorts. This only serves to increase Dahab's significance as a center of Bedouin life, as their access to economic opportunities in Dahab is freer than in Aqaba's other tourist centers. This has to do with the origins of tourism in Dahab, which was pioneered by the Bedouin themselves, as opposed to state-directed tourism in the resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh. During the Israeli occupation in the 1960s and 70s, Dahab became a popular coastal location for Israeli travelers and backpackers. The Aqaba Bedouin quickly seized upon this concept and began building campgrounds for the backpackers to stay. As recently as the mid-1990s, Dahab continued to be dominated by Bedouin-owned campgrounds.<sup>71</sup> As Dahab's popularity increased among these low-budget travelers, the number of campsites increased, soon to be complimented by restaurants, and later, hotels, dive shops, and surf clubs, increasingly owned by Egyptian businessmen and some foreigners. Dahab, over the past 20 years, has transformed from a backpacker destination into a major center for water sports such as scuba, sailing, and surfing, but it continues to be defined by its laid-back, Bedouin/backpacker character, reflecting the informal or grassroots origins of Dahab tourism.

Large-scale development in Dahab did not truly begin until the mid-1990s, more than a decade after the Egyptian reoccupation. At this point, Egyptian authorities began focusing development in Dahab on formal tourism, and a number of large multinational resorts have sprung up by the beach, including a Hilton, a Le Meridien, and a Sofitel, in addition to others. However, the smaller-scale tourist establishments have remained a permanent fixture in Dahab proper, as they were well established by the time the Egyptian development project began.<sup>72</sup> These cater to middle- and lower-budget travelers, such as young backpackers, and involve the Bedouin to a much greater extent than resorts such as the Hilton. This has allowed the Bedouin a significant

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71. Conversation with a Dahab business owner, February 12, 2010.

72. Aziz, "Employment in a Bedouin Community," p. 32.

role in the economy of Dahab by encouraging the establishment of informal economic ties directly with tourists, cutting out the state or its foreign representatives, with limited success.<sup>73</sup>

Recently, however, state-supported resort tourism development has begun to expand, and discriminatory Egyptian policies have led to land appropriation and even the demolition of Bedouin-owned businesses.<sup>74</sup> The number of remaining Bedouin camps has begun to decline as land is being purchased or claimed for three- and four-star hotels. With its large Bedouin presence and ever-increasing Egyptian attempts to force the town to conform to Egyptian ideals, Dahab has become a primary arena for competition between the Aqaba Bedouin, attempting to preserve their livelihood, and Egyptian authorities, attempting to utilize Sinai's resources to pursue national goals.

## **The Emergent Reality of Dahab Development**

While development in Sinai has been largely successful, and tourism along the Aqaba Coast has boomed in the past two decades, one aspect of the NPDS has been a resounding failure. While initially, Egyptian authorities were optimistic that Egyptian families could be enticed out of the cities to settle in Sinai, this rarely occurred; the Egyptians failed to devise a strategy to settle Sinai with Nile Valley migrant families and create a new Egyptian society in the peninsula. Very few families agreed to move to Sinai (most are the families of the few doctors, teachers, and businessmen working in Sinai, but not of those involved

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73. Laleh Behbehani, "Policing the Illicit Peripheries of Egypt's Tourism Industry," *Middle East Report* 216 (2000), p. 33.

74. Personal observations from multiple trips to Dahab, combined with repeated statements from the Bedouin asserting that the discriminatory treatment of the Bedouin regarding land and economics is getting worse. See also Beasley-Murray, "The Tourism Development Agency uses environmental rhetoric to justify demolishing Bedouin-owned camps in favor of big hotels."

in tourism or other menial labor).<sup>75</sup> This has rendered Dahab, similarly to other tourism towns along the Aqaba Coast, unviable as an Egyptian community or an Egyptian society as envisioned by early Egyptian and American planners. Instead, a majority of Egyptian migrants in Sinai are young, unmarried men traveling in search of work so that they can make the money necessary to start a family according to Egyptian social custom.<sup>76</sup> A secondary source of Egyptian migrants is the pool of married, but underemployed, Egyptian males who pursue migratory labor in Sinai. Egyptian development plans have, to a large extent, already compensated for this by adjusting their population goals down and altering the course of development in Sinai's towns from residential construction for families to residential construction for male workers, resulting in dormitory-style living in the town centers.

Egyptian migrants have decided to relate to Sinai employment in a similar manner to other forms of Egyptian migrant labor, as a means of making money to send back to support the family at home in the form of remittances. Egyptian migrants in Sinai interviewed for this study had stories of migratory remittances, and admitted that their only interest in living in Sinai was to make money to send home to support their families, who remain either in rural villages or in the cities of central Egypt. Sinai, specifically through tourism, has become a source of foreign capital for Egyptians. In this way, Sinai is emerging as an alternative to migratory employment in Gulf oil industries or education, which, since the 1960s, has been the primary means to bring foreign capital into Egypt.<sup>77</sup> The major difference is that in Sinai, Nile Valley migrants are favored by authorities, while those seeking employment in Gulf states are often denied civil rights and are subject to many other restrictions on their movement and employment. Egyptian migrants in Sinai say that working there is preferable to traveling to the Gulf because it is significantly closer

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75. Conversations and home visits with Egyptian migrant laborers in Dahab, March 2009–February 2010.

76. Personal observations of Dahab's demographic structure, multiple trips to Dahab, March 2009–February 2010.

77. Nazih N. Ayubi, *The State and Public Policies in Egypt Since Sadat*, Political Studies of the Middle East Series (Reading, U.K.; Ithaca Press, 1991).

to home and migrants in Sinai are subjected to less discriminatory treatment from Egyptian authorities. For these reasons, there is an increasing desire for Egyptians to seek migratory labor in Sinai than abroad.<sup>78</sup> This trend is a clear result of the relative benefits of Egyptians seeking employment within their own borders.

Many Egyptians come to Sinai from the cities and the villages of the Delta and Upper Egypt in search of work, and follow their acquaintances and kin. Jobs are most frequently allocated along kinship lines or among friends. A majority of laborers interviewed in Dahab acknowledged that their job came from an opportunity given to them by an older brother or cousin, who acts as a host to new migrants. Thus patterns of development and employment in Sinai suggest that to central Egyptians, Sinai is not a place to settle and raise a family, but to make money to support the rest of the family at home. This concept of remittances will appear occasionally throughout this work, showing the types of employment and settlement patterns resulting from Sinai development.

Development in Sinai has been closely controlled by the Egyptian state in order to reflect the goals of the Egyptian state as opposed to the interests and developmental concerns of any periphery. In this, attempts to increase state presence and instruments of control in the Egyptian periphery are clearly visible. Egyptian security forces exercise tight control over the main transportation routes across and around Sinai, able to regulate or restrict the movement of all but the Bedouin. Furthermore, Egyptian utilities and services have given the Egyptian government the role of primary caretaker and distributor of goods

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78. None of the Egyptian laborers in Sinai interviewed for this study challenged this statement; they all declared their preference to remain in Egypt to pursue work, and many stated that Sinai was their only viable option, as there were no jobs in the cities of central Egypt. A majority of migrants from urban Egypt indicated that their desire to move to Sinai was to seek better paying jobs and escape the crowded conditions of the city. When asked about the possibility of seeking employment outside of Egypt, not a single respondent declared a preference to give up their Sinai jobs for foreign employment. It is clear from their responses that there is a certain feeling of entitlement among Sinai laborers, that they feel more comfortable there than in a foreign country.



*Figure 3: Ongoing construction in Dahab.  
Photo taken by author, February 10, 2010.*

and services in Sinai's growing towns. Elements increasing Egyptian control in urban spaces include utilities such as water and electricity, which have been made widely available, as well as services, notably health, security, and education, all of which, however, suffer from under investment, resulting in poor quality public goods. Through development, Egypt has been able to extend these services to the towns of South Sinai, increasing the reliance of Sinai's residents on Egyptian goods and services. This dependence has developed unevenly, however, and the Bedouin have, to differing extents, been able to avoid relying on the outcomes of Egyptian development. As a trend, the Bedouin living in desert villages enjoy relatively greater independence than those in the towns. The following chapters examine a number of consequences of increasing Egyptian control and increasing reliance on Egyptian goods and services.

While the Egyptian authorities have invested a great deal of time and effort into determining how best to utilize the available resources to maximize the benefit to the central state, they did not adequately prepare themselves to deal with an Egyptian population that was not ready to commit to national life in Sinai or a Bedouin population that would attempt to participate in the Egyptian project according to their own interests. Egyptian goals have clashed with the interests of the Bedouin and their vision for the future.



*Figure 4: The Dahab Corniche. Photo taken by author, February 20, 2009.*

## Chapter 2

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# **The Evolving Economies of the Dahab Bedouin — Emerging Trends and Continuities**

The development of urban centers along the Aqaba Coast is a new phenomenon for the Bedouin. Whereas historically, these Bedouin had to travel long distances to access towns and their markets and practiced subsistence economics within their tribal territory, Israeli and Egyptian development has led to the emergence of local towns with their own markets. This has had a noticeable impact on Bedouin economic practices by encouraging the Bedouin to participate in the opportunities these towns generate, producing a perceptible shift towards greater reliance on the market economy and a simultaneous decline in the productivity of their subsistence economies. Far from leading to a rejection of pastoral economies in favor of those in the towns (a shift from “traditional” to “modern” economies), the Bedouin have adapted their economic practices to the changing situation by increasing their presence in tourist centers and altering their lifestyles to help them access new sources of income while attempting to preserve the security their subsistence economies provide. These two economies do not operate independently of one another; rather, each system is shaped by the limitations of the other, and elements of one may be applicable in the other. The Aqaba Bedouins’ contemporary subsistence economy can only be understood in relation to the prevailing conditions of the expanding market economy.<sup>79</sup> A stylized ideal-type model would view these economies as mutually dependent

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79. Emanuel Marx, “Changing Employment Patterns of Bedouin in South Sinai,” in Emanuel Marx and Avshalom Shmueli (eds.), *The Changing Bedouin* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984), p. 185.

but separate; however, it would be more useful to understand Bedouin economic practices as existing on a continuum of “market” on one extreme and “subsistence” on the other. In practice, all Bedouin economics fall somewhere in between the two poles, and Bedouin economic practices simultaneously rely on and benefit from the rules of both.

The Bedouin have never subsisted from a single-sector economy, despite popular images that they focus solely on pastoralism. While a major focus on Bedouin economic practices deals with nomadic pastoralism, the husbandry of camels, goats, and sheep, the Bedouin could not possibly subsist off of animal products alone, and the sparse resources of the Sinai desert render pastoralism unfeasible as a single-sector economy.<sup>80</sup> They have instead engaged in a practice described by Philip Salzman as “multi-resource nomadism,” which includes not only animal husbandry, but also some combination of agriculture, trade, smuggling and raiding, as well as wage labor.<sup>81</sup> While Salzman discusses this phenomenon regarding Baluch nomads, his ideas have been applied, almost wholesale, to the Arab Bedouin. Of Salzman’s notion of “multi-resource nomadism,” Emanuel Marx states, “All Bedouin, except a small number of highly-specialized camel-breeding groups, engage in a ‘multi-resource economy,’ combining pastoralism with a variety of other occupations.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, as various studies of Sinai Bedouin economic practices have revealed, these Bedouin have

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80. Aziz, “Employment in a Bedouin Community,” p. 33; cf. Emanuel Marx, “Economic Change among Pastoral Nomads in the Middle East,” in Emanuel Marx and Avshalom Shmueli (eds.), *The Changing Bedouin*, ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984).

81. Philip C. Salzman, “Multi-Resource Nomadism in Iranian Baluchistan,” in William Irons (ed.), *Perspectives on Nomadism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972). Salzman specifically refers to “multi-resource *Nomadism*,” however subsequent studies of the Bedouin, notably by Marx, have qualified this concept by demonstrating that these Bedouin need not maintain nomadic lifestyles to continue pastoral or multi-resource modes of living. Thus when considering this ‘multi-resource’ economy of the Bedouin, we should not assume that it is only applicable to groups that remain nomads.

82. Ann Gardner and Emanuel Marx, “Employment and Unemployment Among Bedouin,” *Nomadic Peoples* 4.2 (2000), p. 22.



never maintained an autarkic economy, and interaction with centers of trade and labor has always played a role in their subsistence.<sup>83</sup> Reliance on towns and markets, while variable to some extent, has been a fixture of Bedouin economic practice.

In this way, the economy of the Aqaba Bedouin is varied, and different aspects of their economy have occasionally assumed more or less importance due to the sociopolitical circumstances they have faced. It is not a case where “traditional” aspects of the economy are in permanent decline, and even with the presence of the town and its markets, “traditional” or subsistence-based economic practices continue to hold economic importance for the Bedouin, especially as a source of economic security.

The major transformation of the Aqaba Bedouin over the past 40 years has undoubtedly been a result of the proliferation of wage-labor employment in the towns along the coast. While income from this type of labor has become the primary source of income for the Bedouin, they have not abandoned other economic practices. Non-income generating economic practices, such as the preservation of flocks and orchards, have either been adapted to take advantages of new economic opportunities or stem from perceptions of political or ecological instability, not cultural factors demanding the maintenance of “traditional practices.” While some of these practices have been preserved, their relative importance to the subsistence of the Bedouin has changed. Cash-income labor is now the mainstay of the Aqaba Bedouin economy.

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83. See various studies on Bedouin economies, notably in South Sinai: e.g., Dan Rabinowitz, “Themes in the Economies of the Bedouin of South Sinai in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17.2 (1985); Aziz, “Employment in a Bedouin Community”; Marx, “Changing Employment Patterns of Bedouin in South Sinai.” See also Marx, “Economic Change Among Pastoral Nomads in the Middle East” for a more general discussion of the Bedouin and “multi-resource” economies.

## **Wage Labor and Employment among the Mzeina**

Wage labor is not a new practice among the Aqaba Bedouin. In fact, they have known migrant employment since the mid-1800s, when it played a supplemental role to Bedouin subsistence. Since then, wage labor has transformed from a source of supplemental income into a primary source of Bedouin livelihood; it has risen and declined in cycles reflecting periods of political instability in Sinai, when employment tends to become insecure and subsistence economies allow the Bedouin to weather the turbulence. Wage labor is actually complimentary to the Bedouin economy, and furthermore, is not a radical new innovation but an increasingly important source of income.

Before wage labor, the Bedouin of South Sinai relied on a number of practices to supplement their subsistence economy. While the Bedouin did operate a pastoral economy, in reality, most of their food was imported from markets like Cairo and Gaza and had to be purchased.<sup>84</sup> Before the accession to power of Muhammad 'Ali in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Sinai Bedouin, like many other Bedouin tribes, derived this income from raiding, the extortion of *khuwa* or protection money from towns, and the transportation and protection of people and goods across their tribal territories.<sup>85</sup> The income from these practices would be used to purchase the agricultural products that the Bedouin relied on but could not produce themselves including cereals, grain, tea, and sugar, as well as other necessities such as clothing and weapons. In the 1810s, however, Muhammad 'Ali began to pacify the Bedouin in the Egyptian deserts and Sinai.<sup>86</sup> Despite vigorous attempts to resist 'Ali's advances, the Tawara Bedouins' free reign in the towns of Egypt and their ability to raid caravans traveling through Sinai was substantially curbed.

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84. Emanuel Marx, "Oases in South Sinai," *Human Ecology* 27.2 (1999).

85. Rabinowitz, "Themes in the Economies of the Bedouin of South Sinai," p. 219.

86. See Gabriel Baer, "Some Aspects of Bedouin Sedentarization in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt," *Die Welt des Islams* 5.1/2 (1957).

Due to the limitations of a pastoral economy, particularly when relying on territory that is underproductive and undependable, the supplementation of animal husbandry with some kind of income-earning practice is necessary.<sup>87</sup> Various studies (e.g., Salzman, Marx, Sweet<sup>88</sup>) have shown that pastoral nomads must supplement their animal-based economy. In the past, additional income was largely derived from raiding and trading; however, the profitability of these practices has declined as states have used their military might to pacify the tribes and increase security along trade routes. In response, some tribesmen began selling their labor to Egyptian industry, including the manganese mines at Umm Bogmah and the petroleum fields of Abu Rudeis on the west coast of Sinai. More substantially, young men began traveling to Egyptian cities such as Suez and Cairo in search of employment as migrant laborers.<sup>89</sup> Although this work was largely supplemental, many Aqaba Bedouin did engage in wage labor at some point in their lives starting from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Until the Israeli occupation of the Sinai in 1967, wage labor functioned as a supplement to the subsistence economy of the Aqaba Bedouin. A number of factors encouraged a shift towards greater reliance on a cash economy after the Israeli occupation. First, increasing Israeli security and policing, as well as the imposition of an international border at the Suez Canal, brought activities such as smuggling—an offshoot of raiding that developed independently of wage labor—to a halt. The Israeli preference to employ the Bedouin in Sinai development increased both the number and proximity of jobs, allowing the Bedouin to seek employment significantly closer to home. The Aqaba Bedouin began working in infrastructure and construction within Sinai, operating motor vehicles, and participating

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87. Salzman, "Multi-Resource Nomadism in Iranian Baluchistan," p. 66.

88. Louise E. Sweet, "Camel Raiding of the North Arabian Bedouin: A Mechanism of Ecological Adaptation," in Louise E. Sweet (ed.), *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East*, vol. 1 (New York: The Natural History Press, 1970). This study demonstrates that the most specialized Bedouin groups, the Arabian camel-rearing Bedouin, are equally dependent on markets to accrue their food supplies.

89. Marx, "Changing Employment Patterns of the Bedouin of South Sinai," p. 178.

in the budding tourist economy, from setting up camps and coffee shops to guiding desert safaris to selling drugs to young backpackers.<sup>90</sup>

After the 1973 War, the Israeli authorities increased their employment of the Bedouin by giving them free access to towns and cities in Israel, and the Bedouin began pouring into Eilat and Be'er Sheva in addition to Sharm el-Sheikh; in the mid-1970s, almost all working-age Bedouin males were employed in a wage-paying job.<sup>91</sup> This had two major consequences. First, the economic opportunities available to the Bedouin both increased and diversified, resulting in a decline in the relative significance of pastoralism to the Bedouin as it comprised a smaller and smaller share of Bedouin economics. This additionally shifted the foundations of the Aqaba Bedouin economy from multi-resource nomadism to wage labor, fully realized in the 1970s. Despite this shift, the animal producing economy of the Bedouin has been maintained, and at times has even been in resurgence. Increasing reliance on employment opportunities closer to home is also leading to a decline in nomadic movement and increased sedentarization. This has to do both with increasingly secure access to water and fodder for flocks as well as increasing reliance on the towns for livelihood instead of the natural environment.

## **Employment trends among the Bedouin in Dahab under Egyptian Rule**

A consistent and continuing trend under Egyptian rule has been the increasing localization of employment. While before the 1960s, employment was limited to Egyptian cities, and during the Israeli occupation was extended to the large urban centers of Sharm el-Sheikh, Eilat, and Be'er Sheva, during the neo-Egyptian period, from 1982 onward, there has been accelerating growth of employment centers even more locally, with the emergence of market towns in Taba, Nuwayba, and Dahab. The number of jobs is increasing, as is their proximity to the homes of the Aqaba Bedouin.

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90. Aziz, "Employment in a Bedouin Community," p. 34.

91. Marx, "Changing Employment Patterns of the Bedouin of South Sinai," p. 181.

Tourism continues to be the primary source of income for the Aqaba Bedouin under Egyptian rule, but the market has undergone a significant change in transition from Israeli control back to Egyptian sovereignty. While the Bedouin did not have to compete with Israelis for jobs, as the Bedouin monopolized the unskilled labor pool and the tourism industry, under Egyptian rule, competition for employment between the Bedouin and unskilled migrant laborers has been intense. These unskilled workers have come to Sinai from both Egypt and the Sudan to take advantage of the jobs that Egyptian development has promised them.

In Dahab, patterns of employment in the tourist industry have experienced a major transformation. In the years of the Israeli occupation, tourism in Dahab was largely run by the Bedouin themselves. They set up campsites and restaurants and employed other tribesmen. Non-Bedouin businesses during this period had to purchase land directly from the Bedouin. Even after Dahab was reoccupied by Egypt, development remained slow in the 1980s and early 1990s, giving the Bedouin a large degree of freedom. This early period of low-budget tourism development cemented for the Bedouin a place in the Dahab economy. At the turn of the millennium, however, the Egyptian government placed higher priority on economic growth in Dahab, and began implementing large-scale tourism development along the beaches according to the goals outlined in the NPDS.<sup>92</sup> This gave the Egyptian government the primary responsibility of regulating Dahab's tourist economy and deprived the Bedouin of a great deal of their economic freedom, increasingly forcing them to rely on the goodwill of the state to maintain Bedouin employment and ownership opportunities.

Consumerism is a relatively new concept for the Bedouin, but a major issue when examining social attitudes towards employment. In a pastoral economy, there are a number of ways to display wealth, notably through practices of granting hospitality, as the *ability* to host others is a sure sign of prosperity, as well as through the production of luxury items instead of subsistence items, for example raising

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92. Interview with owner of a dive shop in Dahab, video archives, May 14, 2009.

horses in Arabia.<sup>93</sup> The Western conception of consumption, based on the concept of saving money to accrue luxury items, appears to have been imported into Sinai only through the arrival of Israeli and European tourists, who introduced the Bedouin to consumer goods.<sup>94</sup> The availability of these items close to home, coinciding with the rise of local markets, has been the major factor encouraging the adoption of consumer lifestyles, which has, in turn, encouraged more and more Bedouin to pursue wage-paying jobs with the goal of accumulating capital. This process, however, is incomplete and is supplemented by a common trend of gift-giving, whereby the Bedouin accrue consumer items through the relationships they have formed with foreigners. In this way, the maintenance of close relationships with foreigners is as important to patterns of Bedouin consumerism as employment, and wage labor is not the only path to consumerist lifestyles. Furthermore, these consumer goods are not always kept by the Bedouin; they are occasionally sold for cash, and should be considered a form of savings or investment that can be converted into currency when necessary. In this way, the turn towards a consumerist economic orientation is also a product of the rising cost of living.

For the Bedouin, employment does not differ significantly from other forms of subsistence: it is a means to provide basic necessities such as food, shelter, and security, and secondarily for purposes of consumption. An implication of this approach is that Bedouin attitudes towards employment differ from those in Western, industrialized nations: maintaining oneself in a job to ensure a continuous flow of income is unnecessary, and perhaps even wasteful, taking away from other activities that contribute equally to the subsistence of the family or the maintenance of relationships with foreigners. The Bedouin work to earn the money they require to purchase items the family needs, mostly food, clothing, and locally available consumer goods. Bedouin concepts of saving place a higher value on preserving and storing necessities for times of emergency than on cash, which has no real utility except in the short term. While the adoption of

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93. William C. Young, "The Bedouin: Discursive Identity or Sociological Category? A Case Study from Jordan," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 9.2 (1999). p. 289.

94. Aziz, "Employment in a Bedouin Community," p. 34.

consumerist tendencies is accelerating and wage labor is increasingly viewed through a lens of consumerism, many of the Aqaba Bedouin continue to view employment as one of a number of practices geared towards subsistence.

This being the case, many Bedouin seek temporary employment in Dahab. This means that a Bedouin will work for a limited period of time, perhaps one to two weeks, make some money, and then take an equal or longer period off. A Bedouin working as a waiter at one of the restaurants on the Dahab corniche explained that he only worked when he needed the money, whether it was to provide food for the family or buy a new bathing suit, and that he might work a week or two to make what he needed and then stop until he needed more.<sup>95</sup> This tendency, not uncommon today among the Dahab Bedouin, has encouraged a view of the Bedouin as lazy and unreliable, leading to accusations that the Bedouin despise work and prefer poverty.<sup>96</sup> Such attitudes, however, reflect the values of a capitalist society that favors steady employment, the accumulation of capital, and saving, which are necessary to drive a consumerism-based society; they do not accurately reflect the values of the Bedouin. A pastoral economy simply cannot be maintained by sloth, and claims that it is are entirely divorced from the reality of life in the desert.

Another Bedouin described his employment history as one of low duration and high mobility. He changed jobs according to where the tourists were concentrated and when. His first job, as a Bedouin tour guide, was only successful during the cool winter months, so he would limit his time working as a guide, and in the summer he worked as a waiter at his brother's beachside restaurant before becoming a Divemaster.<sup>97</sup> He explained that he maintained both a summer and a winter job, not because he needed the constant flow of money for himself, but so that he would be able to send continuous money home to his mother and sisters who live in a desert village. Dahab is a source

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95. Conversation with a Bedouin employee, September 22, 2009.

96. Proof of the existence of these attitudes needs no citation as it is recounted in almost every traveler's journal and official recollection regarding the Bedouin. These attitudes continue to be held by many Egyptian migrants working in Dahab. This topic will be addressed in greater detail in chapter 4 of this study.

97. Interview with a Bedouin Divemaster, July 24, 2009.

of remittances for the Bedouin as much as it is for Egyptian migrant workers. All of the Bedouin living in Dahab have family in Sinai's desert villages, and their sedentarization has created permanent channels for the flow of tourist revenue to the Bedouin not living in Dahab or other urban centers. Many more Bedouin rely on tourist revenue than live in Dahab.

Furthermore, these Bedouin have grown accustomed to labor insecurity, because in addition to political instability having the potential to undermine their access to employment, they also know that they can be dismissed by their employers without any notice. This being the case, the Bedouin value the ability to work in a number of different occupations and quickly change from one occupation to another. This allows them to pursue a wide variety of job opportunities whenever they might be available in order to mitigate the insecurity of the job market or the potential fickleness of Egyptian employers. While providing a measure of flexibility for the Bedouin, this practice has also limited their vertical mobility in the tourist economy because it has created a lack of specialization among Bedouin workers. This lack of specialization is caused by reluctance to make risky, expensive investments in a single skill. This, according to Dan Rabinowitz, "in turn, limits the Bedouins' incorporation into the wider economics on which they are dependent. They tend to perpetuate themselves as pools of unskilled laborers, available for hire by the economies of Egypt... at any time."<sup>98</sup> This allows the Bedouin to pursue a wide range of jobs, but prevents them from progressing beyond the level of menial employment and generates negative perceptions regarding their work ethic.

The major exception to the above discussion has been the increasing employment of young Bedouin, in their early twenties, in the windsurfing clubs attached to the multinational resorts along the Dahab Lagoon, as well as in a few scuba shops that employ Bedouin as Divemasters in addition to drivers and gear carriers.<sup>99</sup> Many of these Bedouin began windsurfing and diving as a hobby during their

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98. Rabinowitz, "Themes in the Economies of the Bedouin of South Sinai," p. 225.

99. Divemaster being a high-skilled job and drivers and gear carriers being low-skilled.



teenage years, and have become natural candidates for employment in these sectors of the tourist economy. More will be said in the next chapter about the willingness of some foreign employers to work with the Bedouin, but for now it is important to note that these Bedouin, who have turned their hobbies into steady careers, represent a small minority of Bedouin employees in Dahab.

Bedouin employment, for the most part, is limited to the peripheries of the Dahab tourist economy. Since Egyptians prefer to hire other Egyptians, there is little Bedouin presence at the larger resorts or the Egyptian-owned hotels, with a few exceptions. Instead, the Bedouin occupy jobs that can be considered self-employment such as driving a jeep or selling handicrafts, working for other Bedouin, or working as menial laborers in shops and restaurants. These occupations allow the Bedouin more freedom, both to pursue a wide variety of jobs and to decide when to work and when not to. While wage labor has become the primary source of income for the Bedouin, its insecure nature and reliance on a single sector of the developed economy, tourism, has led the Aqaba Bedouin to maintain other economic practices as well.

## **The Maintenance and Adaptation of Subsistence Economies**

The maintenance of Bedouin subsistence economies in the urban environment, as shown by the previous generation of Sinai researchers, is a type of economic insurance against political and economic instability. The Bedouin have experienced this instability in the past and know that these periods often lead to increased unemployment or shocks to the tourist market. In times like these, the Bedouin fall back on their subsistence economy and the social patterns comprising it.<sup>100</sup> These structures help prevent food shortages, deprivation, and starvation among the Bedouin in times of crisis or instability. The strength and vitality of the subsistence economy is directly dependent on the state of the market economy.

A number of events that occurred in the Sinai over the past century have reinforced the need for the Bedouin to maintain these

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100. Marx, "Oases in South Sinai," p. 343.

modes of subsistence. Most notable were the wars fought in Egypt and the Sinai: World War I and the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, June 1967, and October 1973, a number of which, most notably the October War, froze the economies of the Sinai and led to full unemployment. More recently, the waves of unrest and terrorism that struck the Aqaba Coast in the early 2000s in Dahab, Taba, and Sharm el-Sheikh, discussed in the preface, as well as in the aftermath of the national uprising in January 2011 that I detail in the epilogue, brought an immediate halt to the flow of tourists, leading to a spike in unemployment in a depressed tourist economy.<sup>101</sup> Through these events, which had devastating economic consequences in South Sinai, the Bedouin have learned that they cannot rely on governments to provide and maintain stable economies and that in times of crisis, the Bedouin must be able to rely on themselves. Additionally, they have discovered the fragile nature of international tourism and the danger of having to rely on a single sector for a majority of their income. By maintaining a subsistence economy in times of prosperity and activating it in times of need, the Bedouin have largely avoided major food and financial crises.

Perhaps more importantly, while this alternate economy has often been viewed as economically unproductive, especially compared to the wage labor opportunities available in the towns, it has great contemporary relevance to the Bedouin as they integrate into Dahab's tourist market.<sup>102</sup> Despite this lack of productivity, these practices have not been abandoned, nor have the tribal social structures that support them. Largely based on pastoralism and agriculture and grounded in tribal social structures, the subsistence system is often viewed as the remnant of the Bedouins' "traditional" modes of living. However, they have been largely adapted to fit the developing reality in Sinai and are more reflective of contemporary conditions, such as the political

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101. I had the opportunity to visit Dahab in July 2011, four months after the end of the January Revolution; tourism had only slightly begun to recover. Despite the absence of instability in the Aqaba region itself, the protests led to a virtual disappearance of tourists from all of Egypt immediately following the uprisings.

102. Marx, "Changing Employment Patterns of Bedouin in South Sinai," p. 173.

situation and the availability of market opportunities, than of conditions of the past. Many economic practices have been maintained, such as herding, fishing, and smuggling, but the form that they have taken is significantly different today, as old practices have been adapted to fit new circumstances born from processes of urbanization and tourism development. In fact, a number of these “traditional” practices have only recently become quite lucrative and have given the Bedouin a competitive edge in the market economy.

## **Herding**

Perhaps most central to the study of the Bedouin is the role of herding and pastoralism. One of the most popular images of the Bedouin is as herders of goats and camels, and it has even been suggested that herding is *the* major criterion defining the Bedouin. For the Aqaba Bedouin, however, pastoralism has always been a limited-value practice.<sup>103</sup>

In the subsistence territory, flocks are taken to pasture by the young girls and camps would move in order to ensure the flocks would get sufficient food and water.<sup>104</sup> Today among the Aqaba Bedouin, the picture is significantly different. The label “nomadic pastoralism” suggests that camps move in order to ensure the provision of food and water to their flocks, the source of the nomad’s livelihood. In the subsistence territory, technological development, notably pumps and generators, have largely mitigated the need for nomadic movement. In Dahab, this necessity is further mitigated by the overabundance of organic waste left around Bedouin neighborhoods. Instead of having to bring the flocks out to pasture, they are let loose in the streets of ‘Asala to graze on the heaps of trash available to them (see Figure 5). As water is also readily available from government-sunk wells and urban plumbing, the Bedouin do not need to move their

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103. Emanuel Marx, “Tribal Pilgrimages to Saints’ Tombs in South Sinai,” in Ernest Gellner (ed.), *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists, and Industrialization: The Southern Shore of the Mediterranean* (New York: Mouton, 1985), p. 113.

104. Gardner, “At Home in South Sinai,” p. 53.

flocks in pursuit of water and pasture. Urbanization and technological development have negated the need for nomadic movement.



*Figure 5: Urban herds.  
Photo by Eli Sperling, May 15, 2009.*

While many Bedouin families living in Dahab own goats and sheep, very few own enough animals from which to subsist. The Aqaba Bedouin seem to agree that 50 to 60 goats are needed for subsistence.<sup>105</sup> In the 1980s, Ann Gardner estimated the average flock size to number fewer than 20 goats, with a large herd consisting of 40.<sup>106</sup> Flock sizes began to further decline in the 1970s as increasing opportunities for employment rendered herding less financially attractive.<sup>107</sup> Today, the average size of goat flocks is somewhere between six and ten animals, and their function has not changed. These herds are not for subsistence purposes; it would be very hard to maintain larger, subsistence flocks due to the sparse vegetation available for grazing, which needs to be supplemented by expensive food purchases. Furthermore, the urban dietary staples of these flocks, consisting mostly of garbage and poor quality fodder, have undermined the quality of the products derived

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105. Marx, "Tribal Pilgrimages to Saints' Tombs in South Sinai," p. 113.

106. Gardner, "At Home in South Sinai," p. 52.

107. Rabinowitz, "Themes in the Economies of the Bedouin of South Sinai," p. 223.

from them. The quality of the meat has suffered significantly and the Bedouin have claimed that the milk from urban goats is essentially useless unless the goats are maintained inside and fed with purchased grains or vegetables, which quickly become financially prohibitive. In a day-to-day context, these flocks are at best unproductive and at worst a drain on Bedouin resources. Instead of considering these flocks as the economic mainstay for the Bedouin, they should be seen as a nucleus for reactivating the pastoral economy in times of crisis and as tools for the maintenance of tribal solidarities. Outside of these two situations, these animals are rarely consumed; their use is primarily geared towards modes of tribal maintenance, such as slaughtering for tribal feasts or celebrations aimed at strengthening kinship ties.

According to historical research done by Dan Rabinowitz, this attitude towards pastoralism is not new, but appears to have been the *modus operandi* for the Aqaba Bedouin even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>108</sup> Thus, pastoralism has not been the primary mode of subsistence for the urbanized Aqaba Bedouin, merely a source of food security in times of crisis. Clearly, herding was never the *sole* occupation of the Bedouin.

## Fishing

The Mzeina have fished the waters of Aqaba for as long as they have lived next to the Gulf, and they have used their catch for both subsistence and trade. Today, fishing remains a valued economic pursuit among the Mzeina, who continue to supplement their diets with dried fish, but who also have found new markets in which to sell their catches. Fishing can be considered a traditional economic activity that they have both maintained and adapted to new sources of demand in the developing market-based economy.

Fishing was (and remains) a popular summer activity for the Mzeina, who in the past organized expeditions to spend a number of weeks fishing from temporary villages by the sea and then would preserve their catch by salting the fish to last many months.<sup>109</sup> The benefits

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108. Ibid.

109. Lavie, *The Poetics of Military Occupation*, pp. 20–21.

of this practice were twofold. First, the fish caught in the summer could be stored by the Bedouin for long periods of time, and could comprise a significant portion of their diet if necessary, even into the winter. Second, the preservation of the fish allowed the Bedouin to bring them to distant markets such as Cairo. In such a market these Bedouin products were rare, and the Bedouin were able to trade relatively small amounts of fish for the grains and other agricultural products they needed. In this way, the Bedouin did not have to rely solely on the products they derived from their flocks.



*Figure 6: Dried, preserved fish.  
Photo by author; September 23, 2009.*

For the Aqaba Bedouin who live in the desert villages, drying and preserving fish continues to be an important source of subsistence. Fishing as an economic activity has been preserved by the Bedouin and continues to function for subsistence purposes. Simultaneously, tourism development in Dahab brought a fundamental transformation in the potential role of fishing for the Bedouin. Along the Dahab corniche, dozens of restaurants specializing in seafood have opened and created strong local demand for fresh fish. Bedouin in Dahab and

other tourist centers no longer preserve the fish for transport and trade in faraway markets, quite often requiring many days of travel and hardship, and have instead turned to the local market. Tourism has created market demand for a number of Bedouin products. The successful operation of these practices in local contexts has allowed the Bedouin to cut their reliance on transitory trade and integrate themselves more fully into local economies using their subsistence skills.

At the end of a successful fishing trip, the Bedouin can sell their catch in the Bedouin fish market in 'Asala.<sup>110</sup> While a majority of the fish consumed in Dahab does not come from the Gulf of Aqaba, a number of restaurants have begun buying their fish from the Bedouin market, for it is both cheaper and fresher than the fish imported from Suez. Furthermore, while much of the fish consumed in Dahab is frozen and shipped in from Suez, every restaurant in Dahab claims the fish is freshly caught locally. Tourists seek fresh, local produce, and if it were not for the manipulation of information by the restaurants, it is clear that those restaurants selling local, Bedouin-caught fish would be favored over those restaurants who import frozen fish from outside the region due to the perceived difference in quality.

Additionally, the Egyptian government has declared commercial fishing in the Gulf of Aqaba illegal, both on an industrial scale, but also for the Bedouin, essentially rendering a main income-earning activity of the Bedouin criminal and simultaneously ensuring a role in Sinai tourism for commercial Egyptian food suppliers. Despite this restriction, the practice of selling Aqaba fish to local restaurants continues and it appears as if the state has decided to look the other way as a number of seaside restaurants continue purchasing their stocks from the Bedouin. Despite the legal ramifications of this relationship, market forces, notably regarding price and quality, have induced these businesses and some Bedouin fishermen to assume any legal risk. Furthermore, with the state's lack of regulation of Bedouin fishing practices, the current system of enforcement actually allows the Bedouin to monopolize fishing in the Gulf of Aqaba. The success of Bedouin fishing activities in the Dahab market suggests the large scale financial success that some previously-subsistence practices

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110. Interview conducted September 18, 2009.

could have for the Aqaba Bedouin in the developing tourist economy under prevailing market conditions.

## Smuggling and Narcotics

The narcotics trade in South Sinai is both a new phenomenon and a continuation of a traditional practice. Smuggling was an occupation adopted after the armies of Muhammad 'Ali suppressed raiding. Similar to raiding, successful smuggling activities require extensive knowledge of the geography of the desert and an ability to move where government forces cannot. As the ability to raid caravans and towns declined as a result of greater state control over main transportation routes, the Bedouin of South Sinai turned increasingly to smuggling, which focused on transporting goods across territories inaccessible to government forces, especially after the criminalization of hashish in Egypt led to a price spike in 1862.<sup>111</sup> This practice took off in the 1930s, and by the Israeli occupation it was a major source of income for the Aqaba Bedouin, perhaps as much as 30 percent.<sup>112</sup> In the period before Israeli rule, the major products being smuggled were hashish and opium; the Bedouin would convey the drugs from their points of arrival into the Nile Valley, which has historically been a major center for the sale and consumption of these two drugs.<sup>113</sup>

Today, a number of developments have transformed the smuggling trade in South Sinai.<sup>114</sup> Tourism in Sinai has once again provided local outlets for the distribution and sale of these drugs. Whereas in the past, most of the drugs transiting through Sinai would exit, now local

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111. Emanuel Marx, "Hashish Smuggling by Bedouin in South Sinai," in Dina Siegel and Hans Nelen (eds.), *Organized Crime Culture, Markets and Policies (Studies of Organized Crime)* (New York: Springer, 2007), p. 31.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

113. For a history of opium in Egypt, see Joseph Hobbs, "Troubling Fields: The Opium Poppy in Egypt," *Geographical Review* 88.1 (1998), p. 68.

114. I do not detail issues of human and weapons trafficking and international smuggling practiced by Northern tribes here.



demand has shifted the flow of drugs into tourist centers, especially in Dahab and to the smaller Bedouin-run tourist camps along the Aqaba Coast such as those in Ras al-Shatayn and Bir Sweir, located between Taba and Nuwayba.<sup>115</sup> These locations have received the infamous label as centers of narco-tourism, and Dahab has often been compared to other vacation destinations known for drug use such as Goa and Phuket.<sup>116</sup> Paralleling this has been a rise in Bedouin consumption and the beginnings of drug cultivation inside Sinai, which began in the 1980s when Lebanese cultivators, fleeing the civil war, relocated to Sinai and began teaching the Bedouin cultivation techniques. No longer just a corridor for the transit of drugs between major cities, Sinai has become an outlet for the sale of these drugs, and more recently, the desert has become a haven for cultivation; many smugglers have made the transition to producers.<sup>117</sup> This was made possible by the rise in local demand stemming from budget- and backpacker-tourism on the Aqaba Coast and the illicit reputation circulated in the media and travel guides, which might be considered “The *Lonely Planet* effect.”<sup>118</sup>

The sale of hashish, marijuana, and opium in Dahab is well established and quite lucrative for the Bedouin. These drugs are not just sold to tourists, however, and migrant workers as well as other Bedouin have become equal consumers, maintaining constant levels of demand. The Bedouin control every stage of local production and distribution, and just like the smuggling activities from the past, the current market employs many Bedouin at a number of stages. These

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115. The more universal name for Ras el-Shatayn is Ras el-Shaytan (Head of the Devil), which is an Israeli corruption that stuck. I have preserved the name conveyed to me by the Bedouin. Ras el-Shatayn is so named because it is the location of two beaches that meet in a peak, “Shatayn” being Arabic for “two beaches.”

116. Behbehanian, “Policing the Illicit Peripheries of Egypt’s Tourism Industry,” p. 33.

117. Hobbs, “Troubling Fields: The Opium Poppy in Egypt,” p. 69.

118. Which is to say that when all the tour guides include a note to travelers that these places are known as centers of drug consumption, then it is only natural that the ones convinced to go will be the ones hoping to participate.

activities can be grouped in two separate categories: the hashish trade, which continues to rely on previously-established smuggling networks since hashish is not produced locally but smuggled into Sinai from places such as Morocco, and the cultivation of marijuana (see figure 7), locally referred to as *treina*, and opium.



Figure 7: Cannabis farm in South Sinai.

Regarding the networks of production and distribution, at the top there are the cultivators, who hide their fields in the mountainous desert to avoid detection, as well as smugglers, who bring the hashish in from Mediterranean ports such as Port Said and transport them across the peninsula. In both cases, they sell bulk units to local Bedouin suppliers who convey them into the towns, avoiding Egyptian checkpoints and other methods of state control, to supply the local Bedouin dealers. Egyptian migrants do occasionally attempt to enter the trade; however, the Bedouin cultivators and distributors refuse to include the Egyptians due to a lack of trust. Besides attempts by Egyptian migrants to sell fake or marked-up hashish to tourists, the

Bedouin monopolize the drug trade in South Sinai.<sup>119</sup> This is another example of Bedouin labor specialization, where their subsistence skill set, tribal social structure, and geographical knowledge make them the only ones able to successfully operate the drug trade in Sinai.

It would be complicated to argue that drug cultivation and smuggling are part of the Bedouins' subsistence economy due to the reliance on the tourism market and the rules of demand and supply. In the past, the Bedouin received the drugs from international sources and merely conveyed them across their territories; in return they would get cash. Thus, smuggling was not based on subsistence but supplement as well as contact with settled society, just as raiding and trading had been in the past. The infrastructure supporting this network, however, is very much part of the Bedouins' subsistence economy; smuggling and cultivation are supported and maintained by the same structures that help maintain the pastoral economy. The movement (but not the sale) of drugs is based on the same rules as pasturing flocks: all Bedouin have equal access to territories of other tribesmen.<sup>120</sup> Bedouin oases and gardens, sources of Bedouin agriculture, are also meticulously maintained as safe havens for smugglers as they move across the Sinai. Finally, and most importantly, smuggling and cultivation are supported and reinforced by the kinship bonds that comprise tribal structure. Tribal social gatherings support smuggling and distribution activities by maintaining networks and helping to establish new social ties. The social patterns at the heart of the Bedouin subsistence economy also regulate Bedouin smuggling. In this way, smuggling is a practice relying on both market and subsistence economies. Demand and distribution are based on the rules of the market economy, while production and supply are made possible by the structures supporting the subsistence economy. Drug cultivation and distribution, a non-traditional activity, has been incorporated into the subsistence structure of the Bedouin. Furthermore, as Dahab lies in the territory of the Mzeina Bedouin, they enjoy the exclusive right to distribute narcotics in the town. Similarly, the Jabaliyya Bedouin monopolize the drug market in the Santa Katerina region, which includes Mt. Sinai, while the Terabin control the market north of Nuwayba, in the beachside

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119. Interview with a Dahab hashish dealer, May 14, 2009.

120. Marx, "Hashish Smuggling by Bedouin in South Sinai," p. 31.

campgrounds of Bir Sweir and Ras al-Shatayn. This further reflects the importance of tribal structures and boundaries in the operation of the drug trade in South Sinai.

In contrast to fishing, a traditional activity adapted to the market environment, smuggling and drug cultivation are external practices adopted by the Bedouin and incorporated into their subsistence system, further showing a lack of distinction between “traditional” and “modern” economic practices. Instead, Bedouin economies should be viewed as being grounded in two simultaneous systems, one based on subsistence and one based on market forces. The subsistence economy is regulated by tribal social structures and patterns. These support structures have allowed the Bedouin to establish economic networks to monopolize certain aspects of the developing market economy. Furthermore, this economy forms the basis for food security in case the more lucrative market economy is disrupted by factors outside their control. These two systems are not maintained independently but overlap in certain areas, even to the extent that a single practice, such as smuggling, may rely simultaneously on both systems to ensure its smooth operation. The Bedouin have not abandoned old economic practices for new, but instead have adapted their old practices to new conditions and taken advantage of emerging opportunities.

### **The Role of the Camel to the Sinai Bedouin: “Traditionalization” of Past Practices**

In practically every state with a Bedouin population, tourism advertising agencies play heavily on the image of the Bedouin and his camel, and popular representations envision an intensely close relationship between the two. This is the case in Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf states, and even Israel. It is true that the raising and reliance on camels was a major aspect of Bedouin economies in Arabia. Khazanov explains, however, that the species composition of nomads’ herds is based more on geographic and environmental conditions than any social fixation on a particular animal. He explains that the camel is ideally suited to the deserts of Arabia and the Sahara, which is the reason the camel

and the Bedouin are associated as strongly as they are.<sup>121</sup> Bedouin are not limited to these territories, however, and also inhabit the deserts of Sinai, the Israeli Negev, Syria, and Iraq. In a number of these settings, notably Sinai, parts of the Israeli Negev, and the Iraqi cultivable zone, Saharan conditions favoring camel-breeding do not apply, especially in the rugged and mountainous terrain of Sinai, which is a desert but one of radically different topography. In the mountains, sheep and goats are better suited than camels, which are adapted to range across great, flat expanses.

This fact has not prevented the image of the Bedouin and the camel from being applied to the Aqaba Bedouin according to perpetuated stereotypes, and through this mechanism the camel has actually come to play a more important economic role for the Aqaba Bedouin in the age of tourism. Many tourists come to Sinai expecting to see camels and hope for an opportunity to ride them. While a number of Bedouin in Dahab own camels, the number of camels located a significant distance from Dahab remains lower, because the value of the camel is directly related to its proximity to tourist centers, notably Dahab, Sharm el-Sheikh, and Santa Katarina. Whereas in the past, the camel was of limited economic value to the Sinai Bedouin, who did not generate their income directly from the camel but used it to facilitate other activities, it has today become an important source of tourism revenue, not for any specific utility it provides, but for its symbolism.

In the past, families generally only owned one or two camels, for use as beasts of burden and transportation, facilitating travel and transport between home and distant markets or for the conveyance of travelers and goods across tribal territories.<sup>122</sup> While these camels were, to a limited extent, kept for subsistence purposes, animal products such as milk and wool more often came from goats and sheep than camels. This is in stark contrast to the way camels have been utilized in Arabia, described by Louise Sweet:

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121. Anatoly M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1994), p. 26.

122. Gardener, "At Home in South Sinai," p. 53.

As a resource of food, wool, leather, and other products, and as a means of freight and personal transport, the camel, in one species, provides all these for the Bedouin on a scale that no other domestic animal or combination of animals in this area can rival. As highly specialized a desert animal as the camel is, it is a multipurpose and generalized beast in the Bedouin economy. It is a primary source of nutrients for the Bedouin, both directly and indirectly...<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, with the advent of motorized transportation, the camel's utility as a beast of burden has largely come to an end, with the exception of certain routes through the mountains that are too rugged for jeeps and pick-ups. Today, despite this decline in the utility of the camel to the Aqaba Bedouin for subsistence and transportation purposes, a number of Bedouin near tourist centers have begun keeping camels in larger herds for tourist use. In the tourist market, the method of acquiring camels is completely different from that of camel-breeding Bedouin; they are purchased, not bred and raised, which requires years of investment, and thus the camel is not a part of the Bedouins' pastoral economy, with the exception of a few select desert villages who have begun breeding camels.<sup>124</sup>

Instead, a number of families in 'Asala keep a small number of camels, generally only one or two due largely to the expense of their upkeep, which points to an economic continuity with past practices. The Bedouin "rent" these camels for the day to other Bedouin who are active in camel tourism, thus generating cash directly from the camel without consuming it.<sup>125</sup> In this way, there is an economic discontinuity with past practices. This camel tourism may be formal, with the existence of agreements to work with specific tour

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123. Sweet, "Camel Raiding of the North Arabian Bedouin," p. 274.

124. Interview conducted at Wadi Ginea with Bedouin camel guide, September 18, 2009. Observation and discussion with camel breeding Bedouin, June 10, 2012—these villages benefit from ideal topographical conditions that support camel breeding. For a discussion of camel breeding versus purchase, see Sweet, "Camel Raiding of North Arabian Bedouin," p. 274.

125. A Demographic survey of 'Asala, conducted on February 12, 2010.

companies, or informal, with the Bedouin offering to work directly with the tourists.

Bedouin engaged in informal camel tourism gather their rented camels in the morning and congregate with these herds near popular beaches and dive sites around Dahab. These sites are visited daily by many tourists, often brought on excursions organized by resort hotels and “safari” operators as well as dive shops; when they are dropped at the site, Bedouin vendors are there waiting to offer their services.

During my travels, I observed that as the distance from tourist centers increased, the number of camels kept by tribesmen appeared to decrease, and furthermore, camels were not kept in herds as they were closer to Dahab. This is because, outside of tourism, the camel has greatly declined in value for the Aqaba Bedouin. Their role as a pack animal was indispensable in the past, but today, the camel has largely been replaced by jeeps and pickup trucks, which not only convey people and goods, but also have the ability to carry goats and sheep. Cars require less maintenance than camels, and across the Middle East, trucks are replacing camels as primary means of transportation. Trucks and paved roads have rendered the camel obsolete in this sense. They have thus been relegated to the realm of tourism as a Bedouin “tradition.”

In one respect, the significance of the camel has diminished. In another, with the emergence of tourism, the camel has achieved a newfound significance and an economic viability that the environment of Sinai had previously prevented the camel from attaining. For these Bedouin, the economic function of the camel has undergone a process of “traditionalization” to reflect a link to these Bedouins’ idealized past. It is this “traditionalization” that has transformed the camel into a cultural artifact, which gives the camel significance to tourists in pursuit of Bedouin culture and gives the camel a new type of economic value.

It would be reductionist to attribute the link between Bedouin and camels to cultural proclivities, especially considering that camels are not considered luxury goods to the Bedouin; they are not raised and maintained, at considerable expense, as mere pets. Instead it is important to examine the economic utility provided by camels, which varies according to geographical region. From an examination of where and how camels are kept in the Aqaba region, it is clear that

the camel does not play a significant role in the contemporary, non-tourist economy of the Bedouin. As a source of subsistence, they have always come second to goats and sheep in Sinai, and as beasts of burden, they have been replaced by newer forms of technology, notably motorized transportation, which is both more practical and more comfortable than transport by camel. This reality, however, has not in any way impacted the stereotype of the Bedouin and the camel, and it is precisely through this stereotype that the camel has found an entirely new type of economic utility for the Aqaba Bedouin.

Externally held understandings of Bedouin culture, in this case made significant through the dialectics of tourism, have the power to affect the way in which the Bedouin communicate their culture to outsiders. It is clear from even this short examination of the camel's role to the Aqaba Bedouin that they continue to be relevant to the Bedouin due to the revenues tourism brings to the community. However, due to the need to legitimize tourist activities as "authentic," the Bedouin have had to manipulate the symbolism of the camel to keep it relevant in a tourist setting. In an article published in the quasi-official Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* entitled "Of Camels and Bedouin," Samir Sobi appears to reflect the wholesale acceptance of this manipulation of the symbol of the camel, even suggesting that "the camel is an inseparable part of any family unit."<sup>126</sup> This claim is certainly untrue and borderline absurd, especially considering that many of the Aqaba Bedouin do not even possess camels. Furthermore, it is unclear how any society would approach the concept of eating or otherwise consuming "indispensable" members of the family. In any case, the wholesale acceptance of the manipulated symbol demonstrates the effectiveness of the "traditionalization" of such a commodity. It further shows what kind of role culture plays in the economics of tourism, and how activities seen as "traditional" play an important role in the contemporary economy of the Aqaba Bedouin.

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126. Samir Sobi, "Of Camels and Bedouin," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, English Edition, Issue No. 1055, July 7–13, 2011. <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1055/special.htm>>.



## **Case Study: Friendship Bracelets and the Adoption of New Economic Roles**

Walking along the corniche in Dahab, one phenomenon impossible to miss is the droves of Bedouin children, usually girls, selling weaved bracelets to tourists who are shopping or eating. This is a prime example of the adoption of new roles by various members of the family, and bracelet-weaving has become a popular activity among young Bedouin girls only since their presence on the corniche became a permanent feature of Dahab. While historical evidence and observations from the Aqaba Bedouins' subsistence territory has shown that herding and caring for the flocks were the primary economic roles of these girls, increasing sedentarization and contact with strangers has limited these girls' ability to travel with their animals.<sup>127</sup> This had the twofold consequence of limiting the usefulness of pastoralism and necessitating the adoption of a new role for the girls. The weaving and selling of friendship bracelets was the replacement. However, the adoption of this practice is motivated not merely by economic factors, but by social necessities as well.

Bracelet weaving as an economic activity has established a flow of revenue independent of the men of the family, the primary income generators. It provides the girls with a bit of money to be self-reliant, which, in turn, has increased its value among the girls, and consequently among Bedouin boys as well. A number of our Bedouin interviewees, both male and female, know the skill, having picked it up during their childhood on the corniche. While past subsistence roles of boys and girls have been different, in the tourist economy, both have gravitated towards the bracelets.<sup>128</sup> However, boys seem to affirm Western perceptions of bracelet weaving as a feminine activity, and this has limited the extent to which they have engaged in bracelet weaving and selling. Instead, the boys appear more interested in engaging in drug dealing.

The sale of bracelets to tourists does not hold merely an economic benefit, but plays a vital social role in the growth of the Bedouin into

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127. Gardener, "At Home in South Sinai," p. 55.

128. Aziz, "Employment in a Bedouin Community," p. 39.



*Figure 8: Bedouin girls selling bracelets.  
Photo by Eli Sperling, February 9, 2010.*

adults. Bedouin interviewed in this study tended not to hold formal education in very high esteem; many seemed to believe that the time they spent on the corniche was more important. This is the forum through which the Bedouin learn English and business skills, where they learn how to interact with tourists to prepare for a life surrounded by the tourism industry and establish personal contacts with restaurants, vendors, and authority figures (such as police) that will allow them to be successful later in life.<sup>129</sup> Thus, bracelet weaving is also a type of investment in skills that will be vital for the future livelihood of young Bedouin.

A number of Bedouin youths, both boys and girls, have told us that their English ability comes exclusively from growing up in the streets of Dahab, and that it is a more important skill than anything learned in school.<sup>130</sup> In this regard, these activities may eventually assume greater importance for the boys than the girls as it is the boys who are expected to maintain their presence in town through adulthood.

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129. Interview with young Bedouin adults, conducted on video, February 15, 2010.

130. Interview with Bedouin female youths, May 13, 2009.

But for Bedouin women in Dahab, bracelets allow daughters to act as messengers and interlocutors for the mothers, who as adults are confined closer to home in an urban setting, indicating this activity plays a second, equally important social function for the Bedouin.<sup>131</sup> Young girls have the freedom to move between male and female spaces, and Bedouin mothers have taken advantage of their children to mitigate the limitations that maintaining modesty in a tourist center has required.

The adoption of bracelet weaving is thus a further adaptation of the Bedouin to urbanization and tourism development; it did not develop in a vacuum. The Bedouin have used it both to participate in the economics of the town and to mitigate the social restrictions of urbanization to maintain the flow of information and contacts between households, as well as aid in the socialization of Bedouin children into the environment of the developing market. It is both an income-earning activity and an educational investment in the skills they will need to be successful in Dahab's tourist economy.

## **Concluding Remarks**

It is clear from an examination of a variety of Bedouin economic practices that the Aqaba Bedouin maintain a broad economy comprised of multiple sectors. Today, wage labor is the primary source of income for the Bedouin community, and along the Aqaba Coast a heavy majority of this is concentrated in the tourism sector. Due to the instability of tourism experienced by the Aqaba Bedouin over the past twenty years, coupled with a much longer history of war and conflict in Sinai, they have realized that they must maintain economic systems independent of tourism that they can operate in times of crisis.

The Bedouin are not permanently shifting away from subsistence economics in favor of wage labor, but continue to balance the two, challenging the unilinearity of economic modernization assumptions. From an examination of the subsistence economy, it becomes clear that this is not an outdated system in permanent decline, but a survival mechanism to cope with a sparse environment and an unstable

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131. Aziz, "Employment in a Bedouin Community," p. 37.

political situation, as well as a source of economic utility in the tourism market. In this way, the two economies are complimentary, with their primary wage economy focusing on supplying the main needs of the community, allowing for a certain leakage of “pastoral economics” into the tourist market, and the other being a backup to cope with external crises that cut them off from the first, either in times of war or due to other external factors, such as government policies, which are out of the Bedouins’ control.

The Aqaba Bedouin are not rejecting development to maintain “traditional nomadism,” which, in any case, was never the Bedouin condition, but neither are they embracing developing economies at the expense of their previously-accepted economic system. Instead, the Bedouin have consistently relied on a balanced approach based on adaptation, where old practices are adjusted to new opportunities, and the adoption of new practices, which are incorporated into the Bedouins’ economic order. As Rabinowitz has shown, the Bedouin have consistently sought to balance income-earning practices with subsistence, and Bedouin subsistence has been a core of Bedouin economic practice only inasmuch as it has historically constituted their last line of defense against economic insecurity. Furthermore, the concept of economic “rationalization,” which is a major theme in the literature on economic development, should not be understood as a rejection of subsistence economics.<sup>132</sup> Consumerism and revenue maximization do not define economic rationality. Thus, it is not accurate to discuss development and “modernization” of Bedouin economies, or the transition of the Bedouin from completely “traditional” subsistence economies to completely “modern” market economies. An examination of economic transformation among the Bedouin instead demonstrates that the Bedouin instead merely hold different notions of economic success that have led them to participate in the emerging market economy according to their own socioeconomic patterns and interests. As we will see, this has posed a direct challenge to Egyptian goals for tourism development in Sinai.

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132. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); see also Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

## Chapter 3

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# Economic Competition and Marginalization

*The thing that makes the Bedouin very angry in Dahab is that there is no economic equality. And there are some people who don't even have a license, a guarantee for his home, and [his family] lived here 300 years ago.*

Bedouin community organizer, May 30, 2012.

Tourism development along the Aqaba Coast has raised the standards of living for the Bedouin, giving them access to both utilities and services (water, electricity, education, healthcare, etc.) on the one hand and economic opportunities on the other. The Bedouin, however, have not perceived these developments to be purely positive. In fact, despite objective material gains attained through development, many Aqaba Bedouin have come to view development as a form of exploitation and marginalization, notably as Sinai shifted back to Egyptian rule and Bedouin monopolization of the tourism industry came to an end. Far from generating gratitude amongst the Bedouin and accelerating their integration, Egyptian development strategies have actually led to increasing resentment of Egyptians, whom the Bedouin came to consider outsiders. These Egyptians, coming to the Sinai as migrant laborers in search of work, have placed increasing economic pressure on the Bedouin community as in many cases jobs are being given to migrants at the expense of the local population. While state policies and employment preferences largely exclude the Aqaba Bedouin in favor of Egyptian migrant workers, Bedouin economic activities are largely closed to Egyptians due to the exclusivity of Bedouin economic networks stressing solidarity, creating the framework for competition between the two communities. Egypt's development policies, while creating greater returns for the Bedouin, are actually restricting the Bedouins' employment opportunities.

Many Egyptians and Sudanese come to Sinai in search of the same opportunities available to the Bedouin, and Egyptian policies, favoring the employment of Egyptian migrants, have made it easier for a newly arrived migrant to secure employment than a Bedouin who has lived in Dahab his whole life. The Bedouin are forced to compete with unskilled migrants who enjoy the support of the state regarding the allocation of jobs and other resources, who have experience dealing with Egyptian bureaucracy, and who appear to be more qualified due to higher levels of formal education. The Bedouin are at a disadvantage for all of these reasons.

As tourism development proceeds along the Aqaba Coast, Egyptian and foreign-owned companies have increasingly come to control all major elements of the tourist economy in Sinai, including hotels, sport clubs, restaurants, and shops.<sup>133</sup> This is partially a consequence of better access and more experience in development among Egyptian businessmen, but is to some extent ensured by Egyptian authorities, who clearly assist Egyptian and foreign employers in establishing the permanence of their business, even at the expense of Bedouin businesses that are occasionally shut down to make way for Egyptian or foreign development. Recently, Egyptian policy has related to the Bedouin as more of a nuisance or a problem than as a group entitled to equitable government treatment. The state has treated certain attempts to establish businesses or assert claims to certain pieces of land as criminal activity instead of a legitimate claim to certain rights or privileges. Government treatment of the Bedouin in the sphere of economics and development has largely shaped their perception of marginalization.

Egyptian policies regarding two issues in particular have combined to create an atmosphere of dispossession: land tenure and business ownership/employment. In both these categories, the Bedouin see official support for giving to the Egyptians what belongs to the Bedouin according to their customary rights, and the Bedouin have been unable to effectively confront this problem. While each Bedouin household uses less land now than in the past, and many took up permanently settled residence when they moved to Dahab, the

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133. Homa, "Touristic Development in Sinai, Egypt," p. 239.

Bedouin believe the Egyptians are gaining the most valuable pieces of land, those pieces that the Bedouin can use to establish their own businesses, and fear that the loss of this land will equate to the loss of income and security.

## **Land Tenure, the Bedouin, and the State**

Generally, tribal notions of land tenure support the corporate claim of a tribe to the entirety of the land it controls. Within this territory, individual tribesmen have the right to claim and develop plots of land according to an accepted formula based on customary right, not purchase. For the Mzeina, both of these statements hold true. The territory of the Mzeina, stretching between Nuwayba and Sharm el-Sheikh along the east coast of the peninsula, is available for any Mzeina to exploit or develop.

According to Mzeina customary law, there are three ways an individual can stake a personal claim to tribal land. First, the family can plant fruit trees.<sup>134</sup> The recognition of control over a piece of land in return for agricultural development is incentive for the Bedouin to plant trees and create orchards. A second method for claiming a piece of land is by building a permanent house on it. While in South Sinai, temporary shelters such as tents or palm huts (*'arishas*) may be established anywhere, even in the territories of other tribes, a permanent structure, such as a brick house, is a sign of ownership. Thus, if a member of the tribe builds a permanent structure on a plot of land, customary law recognizes that land as his (or hers for that matter, as women, as family matriarchs, can also "own" land).<sup>135</sup> Finally, it is possible to claim a piece of land by digging a well, another sign of development. A plot of land containing any of these three developments is considered owned by an individual or family according to Bedouin customary law, and it is not surprising that most Bedouin homes clearly display these three features.

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134. Interview with Bedouin homeowners about land tenure and housing, September 18, 2009.

135. Interview about Bedouin land ownership in Dahab, July 22, 2009.

What does the term “ownership” mean regarding corporate land? Common notions of tribal land tenure recognize the usufructory rights of tribesmen, as well as their right to pass the land to their kin.<sup>136</sup> They would not, however, have the ultimate right of alienation, such as the ability to sell the land to someone outside the tribe. However, with processes of urbanization and development, Bedouin have begun settling permanently and staking claims to available pieces of land, especially in Dahab and other tourist centers. This land, while claimed according to the tenets of tribal law, is presently conceived of by the Aqaba Bedouin in terms of pure ownership instead of corporate ownership. The Aqaba Bedouin, therefore, consider land they have claimed to be available for them to develop or sell.<sup>137</sup> When tourism development began in Dahab, but before the Egyptians had formalized their own system to grant land permits, many Bedouin claimed valuable pieces of land in order to sell them to Egyptian and foreign developers. This land was sold at greatly deflated prices for individual tribesmen to earn quick cash, and in this way, much of the prime land along the Dahab bay passed out of the hands of the Mzeina into the ownership of Egyptian and foreign businessmen. By the time the problem became clear to the Bedouin, it was too late to reclaim these valuable plots. In game theory parlance, this is a classic example of the “social dilemma” where the rational pursuit of individual interests produces suboptimal outcomes for the entire group.<sup>138</sup>

Egyptian policy regarding Bedouin land in Dahab has been to aggressively dispute their remaining claims to valuable pieces of property and encourage the sale of tribal land to developers. The Egyptians have developed two major avenues to gain control of tribal land from the Aqaba Bedouin in and around Dahab. The first has been an offer of compensation; in return for land the government wants, they offer to reimburse the claimant with a plot of 200 square meters somewhere in the desert away from development.<sup>139</sup> The government

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136. Austin Kennett, *Bedouin Justice: Law and Customs Among the Egyptian Bedouin* (London: Kegan Paul Int'l Ltd., 2000), p. 89.

137. Interview with Bedouin Land activists about land and land sales, May 14, 2009.

138. Peter Kollock, “Social Dilemmas: The Anatomy of Cooperation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24.1 (1998), pp. 183–214.

139. Ibid.



thereby hopes to move the Bedouin away from areas targeted for economic development, physically removing them from sources of tourist income. This program has largely been a failure. According to the Bedouin, there is no need to be compensated because both the land by the coast and the land in the interior belong to the Bedouin, and furthermore, the Bedouin do not wish to trade a claim on an economically valuable piece of land near the coast for a plot far from tourist centers. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Bedouin who have already agreed to this deal with government authorities claim that they were ultimately never compensated. The Bedouin have been hesitant to make agreements with the Egyptian authorities because they do not trust that the authorities will fulfill their promises.

The second avenue the state has used to dispute a Bedouin claim to a plot of land is to merely not recognize its legality and maintain the claim that all land is state land. This is possible due to the ideology of the state system that the state should have ultimate sovereignty over its territory, as well as the fact that it does not recognize the legitimacy of any of the customary signs of Bedouin land ownership; the Egyptians only recognize ownership based on possession of legal papers, which generally only wealthier Bedouin possess due to their expense. The concept of state-ownership of land dates to the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, a piece of land legislation whose main principles have been maintained by many post-colonial Middle East governments. Thus, the Egyptian state, since it governs the Sinai Peninsula, has ultimate control and ownership of the land there, and has the “legitimate” right to claim plots of land considered by the Mzeina to be part of their tribal territory. The Egyptian state further argues that since the Bedouin cannot show proof of having purchased this land according to legal standards, the possession of the aforementioned permit, the government does not have to recognize tribal claims.

One Bedouin interviewee described his attempts to build a house before getting married. He had tried to settle on a piece of undeveloped property claimed by his family to build a house, a common requirement to be considered ready for marriage. The police, however, prevented him from settling on this land, claiming that since he could not present legal proof of ownership, he had no right to develop it. The only way to get this proof was to purchase a permit from the authorities at el-Tor, the main center for Bedouin-

government contact in the South Sinai Governate. He said that the permits were quite expensive, perhaps 200 LE for a single square meter.<sup>140</sup> While traditionally, the Bedouin could simply claim a piece of tribal land to build a house by developing it, the Egyptian system has made it very costly and stressful for Bedouin to acquire official permission to build.

This land, now claimed by the Egyptian government, had been under the control of the same family since the Israeli occupation. Our interviewee, who remembers the Israeli occupation, highlighted the dilemma when he said, “The Egyptians want to see our papers proving we own the land. What can we show them, I asked, a contract with the Israeli government?”<sup>141</sup> The state’s legal claim to all land in the Sinai is contested by the Bedouin, who reject the principle of eminent domain and assert their own legitimacy due to customary notions of duration, occupation, and development. They cannot, in any case, confront the powerful Egyptian authorities directly; they believe their choices are to leave the land or be thrown off by Egyptian forces.<sup>142</sup>

The main avenue to contest Egyptian claims to Bedouin land has been the organization of sit-ins by Bedouin women at plots of land claimed by their families, especially in the aftermath of the uprisings that toppled President Husni Mubarak. While at first this was a largely symbolic struggle, as the women did not presume that they would be able to prevent Egyptian occupation through force, after the collapse of the Egyptian government, the Bedouin have been more successful in developing land previously denied to them. Bedouin development has expanded dramatically since February 2011.

Before 2011, women tended to occupy the land instead of men because they believed that the authorities would be less willing to interfere with Bedouin women. Yet there were a number of instances reported to us in which Bedouin women had been arrested and even assaulted by Egyptian police officers, who then removed them from the land forcibly.<sup>143</sup> This, however, was a last resort for the Egyptian

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140. Interview with a Bedouin Divemaster, July 24, 2009.

141. Ibid.

142. Interview with Bedouin land activists about land and land sales, May 14, 2009.

143. Conversation about Bedouin land tenure in Sinai, July 22, 2009.

authorities, who preferred to ignore the Bedouin presence for as long as possible. In one instance, two Bedouin ‘arishas (palm huts) occupied a plot of land in the path of Egyptian residential development on what was then the fringe of Dahab (see Figure 9). The Egyptians continued to build apartment blocks without waiting for the Bedouin to vacate their lot. Finally, the women were presented with the *fait accompli* that their ‘arishas were blocking the last construction lot and were interfering with the building process, since there was only one apartment left to be built. In this way, the women were forced to vacate this plot of land without compensation.<sup>144</sup> Across Dahab, a number of Bedouin women maintain claims to plots of land in this manner. The Egyptians have taken to ignoring them until the moment they need the disputed land or else using force to displace the Bedouin “squatters.” Once the state stakes a claim to the land, it is very difficult for the women to maintain their own claim.



*Figure 9: Bedouin ‘arisha competing with Egyptian construction.  
Photo by Eli Sperling, May 14, 2009.*

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144. Personal observations from multiple trips to Dahab, March, May, and July 2009. The pace of construction is so quick that over a period of three to five months, this entire scenario conducted itself from start to finish. While in March, the ‘arishas were the only structures on the strip of land, by July, the apartments had been completed and tenants had begun to move in. The ‘arishas have all disappeared.

During one of our research trips, we were woken early in the morning by one of our friends who told us that at sunrise, the Egyptian authorities had entered his family plot and set fire to the *'arishas* after plundering them for valuables such as blankets and propane tanks.<sup>145</sup> This had been the first night in over a week that the women did not spend the night at their plot, and they were convinced that the authorities had been watching them to determine when they could enter the land and attempt to clear it of signs of Bedouin possession. When asked why the government tried to burn the *'arishas*, the women responded that the Egyptians wanted to take this land and sell it to Egyptians in order to build hotels, villas, and even a golf course.<sup>146</sup> While this practice is being carried out on empty land, for which the government is preparing purchase permits for commercial and residential construction, the Bedouin are convinced that the Egyptians are equally interested in clearing the Bedouin off their plots in order to sell this land as well. This event caused great anguish among the two Bedouin women. They accused the Egyptians of taking everything from the Bedouin, such that soon there would be nowhere left for them to go. They were quite explicit when they said they believed the government was alienating Bedouin property and rights for the benefit of the “outsider” Egyptians.<sup>147</sup>

Since the uprisings in 2011, however, the Bedouin claim that state presence in Dahab, as regards the land disputes, has practically disappeared. While my trips to Dahab in the post-Mubarak era have indicated a continued expansion of state-directed construction, this has largely focused on areas where the Bedouin have not staked claims to pieces of land. Additionally, it appears that more and more Bedouin have begun staking claims to new pieces of land around Dahab and have begun their own development, leading to the emergence of new Bedouin neighborhoods around Dahab that did not exist before the fall of the Mubarak regime. In keeping with the traditional notions of ownership mentioned above, this development began with very modest permanent dwellings, constructed from cinderblocks, as well as large

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145. Interview with Bedouin land activists, on film, February 16, 2010.

146. This claim is not as outlandish as it might seem—there are golf courses in both Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba.

147. Interview with Bedouin land activists, February 9, 2010.

gardens, which were often completed before the houses themselves. Thus far, the state has avoided any confrontation with the Bedouin over these lands. However, when I asked about the construction, a number of Bedouin told me that they were unhappy with the current state of things, that the houses were “ugly” and underdeveloped. When pushed on the subject, they admitted that this was not due to a lack of taste or aesthetics, but to a concern that the state would eventually decide to demolish them, discouraging the Bedouin from investing more resources and energy into their buildings.<sup>148</sup> This conforms to anecdotal evidence from the Bedouin of the Israeli Negev, who also report that the constant threat of home demolitions is the primary factor discouraging them from constructing more permanent homes.

The dispossession of land is a primary concern for the Aqaba Bedouin. Not only have they not been able to buy back land that has been sold, due to sharply rising prices, but they have been increasingly helpless to retain economically profitable plots, such as those along the beach, and this is infringing on their ability to maintain ties with the tourist economy. The value of property is in its proximity to tourist centers, and the Bedouin are seeking the same land that the government has claimed for development. The NPDS (National Project for the Development of Sinai, discussed in section 1.2) allocated a large percentage of this land for development under the assumption that a tribal (read: nomadic) society would place the same value on this land as would the development authorities. The Bedouin have, however, sought to participate actively in the tourist economy, but have had trouble retaining land on which to establish their own hotels and businesses due to official development strategies adopted by the Egyptian state. Only the wealthiest Bedouin families have successfully retained plots on the beach to develop campgrounds and hotels. For the most part, this wealth came from selling other plots of land for cash.

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148. Day in a new Bedouin neighborhood, June 4, 2012.

## Ownership and Employment in Dahab

A majority of smaller tourist businesses are owned by Egyptians, and the large ones are primarily owned by multinational resort chains such as Hilton and Accor. This, combined with the proliferation of resort-package tourism, has affected the ability of the Bedouin to seek employment and especially to establish their own businesses. Lack of education is certainly an issue, but it is not the only factor blocking Bedouin access to employment and ownership. Equally important are the development policies favored by the state, the negative stereotypes that Egyptians hold regarding the Bedouins' work ethic, and the convoluted bureaucracy regulating tourism development. These factors, coupled with the relative growth of the formal resort-tourism sector, have led to a decrease in employment and ownership opportunities for the Aqaba Bedouin.

Lack of formal education is a major reason that Egyptian business owners claim they avoid hiring Bedouin workers. Even a Bedouin owner of one of the medium-sized hotels in Dahab, a member of the 'Aleqat tribe, admits that he prefers to hire Egyptians because they are better educated. Despite the fact that both migrants and Bedouin go into the unskilled labor pool (Egyptian professionals such as teachers, doctors, and lawyers are not considered here), the Egyptians have better formal academic qualifications. Instead, the Bedouin have largely maintained their traditional employment patterns as unskilled laborers, notably drivers and menial laborers, focusing on skills they can acquire directly in the marketplace and using them in the informal tourist sector.<sup>149</sup> However, there are a number of unskilled sectors of the Dahab economy where the Bedouin face stiff competition, notably the service-sector and construction. Many migrants come to Dahab from Upper Egypt and seek menial labor jobs, such as driving taxis or carrying equipment for scuba divers, in the same manner as the Bedouin. As for construction, a majority of laborers hail from Upper Egypt and Sudan, and there is little Bedouin presence in the booming construction industry.

The Bedouin can certainly be considered "unskilled labor" because of a lack of schooling, but this does not mean that the Bedouin have

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149. Aziz, "Employment in a Bedouin Community," p. 33.

no skills that development authorities and tourism operators would consider useful, such as mechanical abilities, the knowledge of multiple languages (often as advanced than their Egyptian counterparts if not more so), and intimate familiarity with the desert. Despite these very real skills uniquely suited to the Sinai, negative perceptions regarding the Bedouin and their education have led Egyptians to avoid hiring them.<sup>150</sup>

The formalization of tourism and the preference to develop package- or resort-tourism has further limited the ability of the Aqaba Bedouin to participate in the Dahab economy. Increasingly, resort tourism aims to present an entire vacation package to the tourist, and the hotels in Sinai are ever more able to address a tourist's every need, tempering the desire to leave the confines of the experience provided by the hotel. This is true not only regarding food, but also recreation, desert excursions, and souvenirs. These offerings are arranged through the hotel, which either operates its own excursion company or establishes a formal business arrangement with one that is often run by Egyptian or foreign operators. The availability of these goods and services through the resort, coupled with the resort's unwillingness to hire Bedouin, has led to a decline in the ability of the Bedouin to engage the tourist economy. Bedouin run their own desert safaris in town and make and sell their own handicrafts, but as tourists are encouraged more and more to stay within the confines of the resort, where there is no Bedouin presence, the Bedouin are separated from sources of revenue.

Resorts in Dahab and Sharm el-Sheikh organize excursions for their guests to popular beaches as well as dive trips. In the morning, these tourists are loaded into jeeps run by Egyptian operators, who convey them to their destination. In many cases, this includes a stop in the shopping center of Dahab. Many Bedouin vendors claim that these tourists are brought directly to the Egyptian-owned shops. A Bedouin community organizer, who is also quite active politically, unsuccessfully tried to confront this problem. He began to encourage shops who hired and purchased from the local community to mark their products and hang signs indicating that their shops worked with the Bedouin in order to encourage tourists to direct their money to these

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150. Ibid.

establishments. However, after a short while, he was approached by the police who demanded that these signs be removed and threatened action over it. The signs did not last more than a few days.<sup>151</sup> He could not come to any other conclusion except that the authorities did not want to draw tourists' attention to the fact that many shops did not engage the local community, which might decrease their income as tourists may prefer to "buy local."

Another example of the conflict between the formal and informal tourism sectors was explained to me by an older Bedouin guide. He had been offering his services as a sea-guide (he described himself as a Divemaster but holds no formal certification) since the Israeli occupation, operating a boat to take divers to sites around Dahab. As we spoke, he turned my attention to the better known dive sites in Dahab and, knowing that I am an avid scuba diver, asked my opinion. My reply was that the diving in Dahab was incredible, but... "There are too many people!" he jumped in and finished my thought for me. This was exactly the problem with the dive shops, he complained, and he said that the value in the services that he offered was his ability to take divers to secluded and pristine dive sites uncluttered by the shops, restaurants, and other divers that have become permanent features of the popular dive sites around Dahab. And for twenty years, he claimed, his business was excellent, and those who engaged his services were quite satisfied. However, during the past decade he had been subjected to increasing harassment by the authorities, who told him that he was no longer allowed to take divers out unless he was employed directly through a dive shop. He claimed he had been threatened by the police to shut down his service, because it was taking business away from the established dive shops.<sup>152</sup>

The Egyptian government has consistently sided against the Bedouin in business conflicts to ensure Egyptian dominance in the fields of ownership and operation. This has allowed Egyptian business owners to break contracts and leases with Bedouin to ensure they

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151. Interview with a Bedouin community organizer, May 30, 2012.

152. Interview with a Bedouin guide, June 5, 2012. Of course, as a scuba instructor myself, I am always sensitive to issues of risk assumption and liability, so this story is not so cut and dried. Still, this is but one example of the trend to favor businesses paying taxes to the state.



would continue to control certain establishments on Bedouin land; it has also allowed Egyptian authorities to disassemble Bedouin-run establishments to make room for Egyptian-run businesses. Two notable examples made the *Cairo Times* in 1999 when a number of Bedouin-owned camps in Dahab were demolished by Egyptian authorities to clear space for a foreign-owned resort.<sup>153</sup> While the Bedouin had legitimate claim to the land, Egyptian authorities used the excuse that these camps did not meet the international health and safety standards of the resorts. The Bedouin camps were completely demolished to make room for Egyptian-owned hotels and the Bedouin were never compensated for the damage or the land they were required to vacate.

Another example of this policy was related to us by a Bedouin interviewee in Dahab. He told us of an Egyptian businessman who had leased a plot of land on the coast from his father in order to build a hotel. This land was given to the Egyptian to operate for a period of ten years, and according to the agreement, at the end of the term the land could either be re-leased or would revert back to his father's control. The Egyptian had leased this land for a small sum, certainly less than it was worth, and ten years later its value had increased tremendously. At the end of the lease, the Bedouin refused to renew because of the significant increase in the land's value. When approached by the Bedouin, the Egyptian businessman refused to recognize the legitimacy of his claim to the property or that his lease had expired. Instead, he claimed that he had rightfully purchased the land, and he refused to renegotiate the terms of his occupancy. When the Bedouin approached the government, Egyptian authorities upheld the businessman's claim, siding against the Bedouin, and allowed the businessman to retain both the land and his business.<sup>154</sup> The Egyptian government has not expressed any willingness to disrupt Egyptian jobs

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153. "Green Lines: The Tourist Development Agency Uses Environmental Rhetoric to Justify Demolishing Bedouin-Owned Camps in Favor of Big Hotels," *The Cairo Times*, September 30, 1999; see also "Bedouin Camps Demolished: The Claims of Sinai's Indigenous Tribes Are Swept Away by the Tidal Wave of Development," *The Cairo Times*, July 22, 1999.

154. Interview with a Bedouin waiter, April 10, 2009.

or businesses for the benefit of the Bedouin. On the contrary, they have repeatedly intervened against the Bedouin on behalf of Egyptian businesses and business owners.

However, it is entirely possible that the contract signed by this particular landowner was a bill of sale instead of a lease. I have heard such a claim repeated a number of times by various Bedouin in Dahab, as Bedouin appear to be at a disadvantage when it comes to negotiating land deals because of their unfamiliarity with contemporary contract practices. They claim that this lack of experience is being taken advantage of by the state and development authorities in order to acquire land from the Bedouin at deflated prices, further contributing to their marginalization from the tourist industry.<sup>155</sup>

Due to their status as unskilled laborers, combined with the prioritization of resort tourism, the Bedouin have found it increasingly difficult to own businesses, and even to seek employment in tourism along the Aqaba Coast. While it would be significantly easier for the Bedouin to seek employment with other Bedouin, Egyptian preferences have made it difficult for the Bedouin to establish and retain their own hotels and restaurants due to the high standards and costs mandated by multinational resort chains and supported by the Egyptian government. These standards have been used both to deny building permits to the Bedouin as well as to shut down Bedouin camps that already exist on pieces of land desired by the government and resorts.

The exceptions to this rule are non-resort foreign-owned hotels and businesses, notably the dive operators and surf clubs mentioned in the previous chapter, which have shown a willingness to work with Bedouin in a number of professional capacities such as divemasters and windsurfing instructors. These Bedouin consider themselves extremely privileged to have acquired these jobs and acknowledge that it is very difficult for Bedouin to access this type of employment, especially due to the prevalence of Egyptian ownership over foreign ownership.<sup>156</sup> In addition to the relatively warmer social relations between foreigners and the Bedouin, there is an element of economic cooperation that benefits both parties. This has allowed Bedouin

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155. Interview with a Bedouin community organizer, May 30, 2012.

156. Conversation with a Bedouin windsurfing instructor, February 13, 2010.

youths to pursue permanent careers doing something they love to do. These are the only Bedouin who I have ever heard say “I love my job and I love my boss.” For the owners, hiring the Bedouin is quite cost effective, for while these Bedouin are making more money than they would in menial jobs, at the same time, owners have the ability to pay the Bedouin somewhat less than might be demanded by foreign windsurfing and dive instructors.

Bedouin have maintained their ability to earn income mainly through maintaining their contacts with budget tourism via informal economic interaction, which is maintained in and mediated by the town, not the resort. Examples include selling drugs, operating taxis, offering services as guides, and selling hand-made goods to tourists. This is the main difference between the formal resort sector and the informal budget tourism sector: the town is subject to fewer rules and regulations than the resort, enabling increased freedom to pursue employment or income, while undermining the ability of the government to extract revenue from these types of activities.

## **The Turn to Illicit Economies**

As the Bedouin have been actively excluded from formal sectors of the Sinai economy, many have turned to illicit economies to supplement their income. While the previous chapter focused on the “how” of Bedouin smuggling and drug dealing, this section examines why this sector is so important to Bedouin economics in South Sinai. The drug trade, as an illegal and unregulated activity, is completely open to the Bedouin and has recently been a lucrative source of income for Aqaba Bedouin, who find it more difficult to access jobs considered “legitimate” and regulated by the authorities. While Egyptian authorities view these types of activities as criminal, the Bedouin do not. They see the cultivation and sale of cannabis or opium to be just as legitimate as any other economic enterprise, reflected by the level of social acceptability among Egyptians and the many tourists who form the basis of the market, as well as the rise in Bedouin drug consumption.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, it has been estimated that the narcotics sector in South Sinai, comprised mainly of opium and cannabis, has

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157. Marx, “Hashish smuggling,” p. 30.

at times provided up to 30 percent of the income for the Bedouin community, and therefore the Bedouin consider it a vital part of their economy.<sup>158</sup>

The adoption and growth of this activity appears to be a response to the economic opportunities available to the Bedouin. When questioned as to the reason he turned to opium cultivation, one Bedouin replied in the mid-1990s, "Twenty years ago [under Israeli rule], every able-bodied man had a job. Now there is no work," but that working in drug cultivation was reliable as there was little worry of a drop in demand.<sup>159</sup> However, when presented with safer alternatives to drug cultivation, such as owning hotels and running tourism activities, many of the Bedouin cultivators declared their willingness to abandon narcotics production.<sup>160</sup> This is due to the labor-intensive nature of cultivating drugs and the relative risk of being caught. While the cultivators and dealers have assumed the risk because the margins are better than pastoral or urban alternatives, drug cultivation is not compatible with the concept of "multi-resource economics"; it is a single-source activity within an immediate territory due to its illegal nature and the risk the fields pose to other activities in close proximity, notably tourism.<sup>161</sup> The cultivation of drugs is a limited value activity that, if replaced with a legal alternative, *might* be abandoned in favor of less risky jobs. The present trend of marginalization, however, has meant the Bedouin have continued to occupy this illicit niche.

As in other parts of the world, there has been a perception among the Egyptian authorities that the criminalization of these drugs would discourage the practice, but this has not been the case. While in other countries, illegal activities, especially the drug trade, have been coopted by organized crime, in South Sinai the Bedouin have monopolized this sector on their own, and the trade is largely non-violent. This is somewhat of a double edged sword as well, and it appears that to some extent, and depending on political conditions, the authorities may turn a blind eye to Bedouin narcotics distribution as they have

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158. Ibid., p. 29.

159. Hobbs, "The Opium Poppy in Egypt," p. 71.

160. Joseph J. Hobbs, "Speaking with People in Egypt's St. Katherine's National Park," *Geographical Review* 86.1 (1996), p. 15.

161. Hobbs, "The Opium Poppy in Egypt," p. 78.

come to realize what an important part of Dahab's economy it truly is. This claim should not be overstated, however, and anti-narcotics operations in Sinai continue apace.

As clearly stated in the Global Commission on Drugs report published in June 2011, more active forms of government repression of the drug trade often instigate violent responses and the establishment of organized crime.<sup>162</sup> Although Bedouin cultivators are armed, violent confrontations between the Bedouin and Egyptian anti-narcotics enforcement in South Sinai seem to be quite rare according to the Bedouin themselves, despite the fact that the Egyptian authorities attempt to use Bedouins' involvement in the narcotics trade as proof of their criminal or violent behavior. In fact, there have been a number of instances of violent clashes between Bedouin and Egyptian authorities in direct response to anti-narcotics operations. This hit home for me personally during my most recent stay in Dahab during the summer of 2012, when two American tourists were captured and held by members of the Tarabin tribe in retaliation for the arrest of a fellow tribesmen who had been caught carrying a large quantity of cannabis through a checkpoint.<sup>163</sup> While Bedouin in Dahab acknowledged the importance of the narcotics trade for their economy, they were furious that the smugglers had resorted to kidnapping because of the damage inflicted on the rest of the tourism sector, highlighting the complicated relationship between tourism and the drug trade. After

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162. See *War on Drugs: Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy*. Rep. Global Commission on Drug Policy, June 2011. Web. <<http://globalcommissionondrugs.org>>. While receiving little fanfare, this commission, launched at the behest of the UN, was composed of some of the most influential politicians and businessmen in the world including EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana, ex-Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, former Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou, former US Secretary of State George Shultz, former chairman of the FED Richard Volker, and magnate Sir Richard Branson. This short list hardly does the commission justice. The study examined cross-national data on narcotics prevention, enforcement, and treatment.

163. "U.S. Tourists Freed Unharmful in Sinai," *Reuters*, May 31, 2012. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/31/us-egypt-sinai-kidnapping-idUSBRE84U0DL20120531>>.

less than 24 hours of negotiations, both the tourists and the arrested smuggler were freed; both parties hoped to avoid incurring the ire of the US in the event that anything happened to the two American tourists. In any case, this event appears to support the previously-mentioned Commission Report's conclusions that harsher methods of anti-narcotics enforcement often leads to outbreaks of violence. In this setting, the impact on tourism may explain why conflicts are relatively rare.

While engagement in the narcotics trade is not necessarily connected to a cultural tendency towards violence and criminality, the Sinai Bedouin have come to be associated with drugs, especially hashish and heroin. This has contributed to the conflict between the Sinai Bedouin and the Egyptians (and even created tensions within the Bedouin community itself), and reinforced a reputation of the Bedouin as dangerous criminals. Many Egyptians blame the Sinai Bedouin for being a major cause of the drug problem in Egypt, and the authorities and the media are doing what they can to reinforce this perception.<sup>164</sup> Involvement in the drug trade has cast a shadow over the Sinai Bedouin, over the relationships between the Bedouin and young backpackers, often accused of being addicted to drugs, and over Dahab as a whole, which has received the reputation as an illicit drug den in both regional and international news, in guide books, and in the attitudes of Egyptian officials in their treatment of both Bedouin and backpackers.<sup>165</sup>

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164. "Six arrested, drugs seized in south Sinai bust," *Agence France-Presse*, February 27, 1997; see also "Four Foreigners Sentenced for Drugs," *Middle East Times*, 2001, issue 41; see also Hobbs, "The Opium Poppy in Egypt," p. 79. Hobbs discussed the government's exaggeration of the Sinai drug problem and the attitudes these reports have generated within mainstream Egyptian society.

165. Behbehanian, "Policing the Illicit Peripheries of Egypt's Tourism Industry"; I further base this claim on personal observations of treatment at the hands of Egyptian authority figures. The fact that we, as tourists, were consistently stopped and questioned only in the presence of our Bedouin friends is a clear indication that these attitudes are associated with the Bedouin.

During one of our field trips, we organized a day excursion from Dahab to Sharm el-Sheikh to explore Bedouin economic participation in the tourist center of Na'ama Bay. As we approached the city, we were stopped by Egyptian officials at the outermost military checkpoint and told to get out of the car. We were made to stand next to a group of Egyptian soldiers with automatic rifles while another group began tearing through the vehicle, clearly searching for something. After a few minutes, the officer approached one of our Bedouin friends and demanded to know where the hashish was; he had assumed that two Bedouin youths and two American youths would naturally have drugs with them. Upon hearing our adamant denials, they continued searching the car, evidently not believing us, but were unable to find anything illegal with which to hold us. There had never been hashish in the car. Far from catching a lucky break, we were instead the victims of the illicit reputation of Dahab, the Bedouin, and backpackers in general. Over the course of our field research, we became accustomed to this attitude toward us and our Bedouin companions on the part of Egyptian authorities; it has become an institutional part of the system that regulates social dynamics in South Sinai. Without fail, every time I traveled with more than one Bedouin, we encountered this suspicious treatment.

While some Bedouin have adopted drug cultivation and distribution as a consequence of their marginalization from more central forms of employment, the Egyptian authorities' reaction has reflected a perception that Bedouin participation is a result of certain cultural traits. As a consequence, the Egyptian response has been to target the Bedouin rather than the market factors and policies responsible for increasing demand and relative profitability for the Bedouin. The publicity that Dahab has received as a center for illicit activities including sex and drugs has only served to increase its popularity for narco-tourism, fuelling demand among young budget travelers and ensuring the Bedouin will continue to supply. The unequal distribution and availability of urban employment has made some Bedouin turn to other methods of interacting with the tourist economy.

## **Bedouin Niches and Egyptian Attempts to Occupy Them<sup>166</sup>**

As previously mentioned, the Bedouin heritage has given them a special role in Sinai tourism. While a major goal of the NPDS for this sub-region was the creation of a “Red Sea Riviera,” resort and beach tourism are not the only strengths of the Aqaba Coast. Heritage and culture tourism also play a major role. This tourism has two major sources. The first is the monastery of Santa Katarina at Mt. Sinai, the namesake of the Santa Katarina region mentioned earlier as the territory of the Jabaliyya Bedouin, which has drawn religious visitors for hundreds of years and has recently become an UNESCO World Heritage site. The second is Bedouin culture tourism. The Bedouin discovered that they could profit from sharing their culture with tourists in the 1960s and 70s, especially from what have come to be known as “Bedouin hospitality” events. Since then, Bedouin culture has been a major tourist theme, especially in Dahab, which attempts to attract tourists to its “authentic Bedouin atmosphere.”<sup>167</sup> While the Bedouin are in a natural position to provide these services to the tourists, non-Bedouin Egyptians (migrant workers), have also come to understand the profitability of Bedouin cultural activities, and they have increasingly attempted to occupy this niche, partially marginalizing the Bedouin from an activity that is uniquely theirs.

In Dahab, Bedouin culture has been linked to the atmosphere of relaxation permeating the “Riviera.” The beachside restaurants offer “authentic” Bedouin tea, hotels offer evenings at Bedouin camps, and guides offer camel rides as an “authentic” Bedouin activity. The town and its experiences are thus unique, as they have a special “Bedouin” character which has become a major draw for tourists. The important role that Bedouin culture plays in Sinai tourism has given the Bedouin a unique niche in the tourism sector, which has allowed the Bedouin to profit by sharing their culture with outsiders. In its own way, this niche

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166. The theme of this section was frequently stressed by the Bedouin themselves, who asked me to discuss the issue. They appear to consider it a larger problem than I was able to witness personally.

167. Interview with a Bedouin Divemaster, July 24, 2009.



could have been a consolation for the marginalization of the Bedouin from resort tourism, and the two sectors might have complimented one another, which to an important extent they do.

While a discussion on the merits of these activities as “authentic” is beyond the scope of this chapter, the importance is that these activities are increasingly being offered by non-Bedouin in an attempt to increase their market share of the cultural tourism sector.<sup>168</sup> A majority of tourists do not understand the difference between an “Egyptian” and a “Bedouin,” and this has allowed Egyptians to pass themselves off as Bedouin as well as to appropriate elements of Bedouin culture as “Egyptian” in order to gain a foothold in the Bedouin culture market.<sup>169</sup> For example, a number of Egyptian-owned restaurants on the Dahab and Sharm el-Sheikh corniches have Bedouin names and attempt to convince the customers that eating there will constitute a “Bedouin experience,” offering such selections as Bedouin calamari and Bedouin tea. A prominent example of such a restaurant is the Egyptian-owned “Bedouin Bar” in Sharm el-Sheikh, where employees dress up in Bedouin garb.

Competition between Bedouin and Egyptian migrants in the field of Bedouin culture tourism has had two notable consequences. First is the expected marginalization of Bedouin from their own economic niches. This has only served to increase the economic competition between the Bedouin and the Egyptians, as the Bedouin cannot rely on culture tourism as a protected Bedouin-only activity, but cannot themselves break into a number of Egyptian activities. The second consequence has perhaps even greater implications. By occupying Bedouin economic niches and profiting from Bedouin culture, the Egyptians, as the Bedouin perceive them, are attempting to deprive the Bedouin of the features that make them culturally distinctive. The Egyptians have accomplished this by coopting symbols of Bedouin culture and communicating them, not as Bedouin, but as broadly Egyptian. The Bedouin are very concerned with maintaining their cultural distinctiveness and see Egyptian encroachment as part of a larger attempt to impose Egyptian uniformity on the Bedouin, first by

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168. See Hobbs, “Speaking with People in Egypt’s St. Katherine’s National Park,” p. 14.

169. Interview with a Bedouin Divemaster, June 11, 2012.

denying them their cultural uniqueness and second by the imposition of Egyptian cultural symbols and values on the Bedouin community. As such, defense of their economic livelihood is also a defense of their cultural distinctiveness.

### **Case Study: Dahab versus Sharm el-Sheikh**

Dahab and Sharm el-Sheikh are the two most popular tourist destinations along Sinai's Aqaba Coast. While both have been subjected to accelerating tourism development over the past twenty years of Egyptian rule, these towns differ from each other significantly, due to differing origins and development trajectories. Dahab began its development as a Bedouin oasis, a space where Bedouin would spend their summers harvesting, fishing, and strengthening social contacts. Tourism development began with Bedouin setting up tourist camps for Israeli backpackers. Sharm el-Sheikh was chosen for its strategic position, beginning its life as an Egyptian, and later Israeli, military outpost. Development here was always controlled by forces of the state, and tourism has always been a large-scale development project. While Dahab has retained a fair share of its small scale, low-budget character, Sharm el-Sheikh has grown to become a huge tourism city replete with five-star resorts, multinational restaurant chains, and bustling beach-side nightclubs. If Dahab, with its illicit reputation and budget character, has been a disappointment for Egyptian tourist development, Sharm is undoubtedly Sinai's greatest success. Dahab has been targeted by the Egyptian government for development aimed at bringing it more in line with Sharm el-Sheikh.

While the Bedouin presence in Dahab allowed them to be the first to set up their own tourist camps and restaurants, the lack of a similar Bedouin presence in Sharm el-Sheikh made it significantly easier for developers to acquire land there. Additionally, the absence of anything but resort tourism in Sharm el-Sheikh has translated into very few employment opportunities for the Bedouin; few Bedouin work in the town. The Bedouin see the situation in Sharm as a likely outcome for Dahab if the appropriation of tribal land on behalf of developers

and multinational resorts continues, highlighting the importance of protecting what land they still control in Dahab.

For the Aqaba Bedouin, Sharm el-Sheikh and Dahab represent two fundamentally different possible outcomes of development. Dahab, as a Bedouin social space and a center for budget tourism, has allowed the Bedouin to maintain informal economic networks and has become a center for urban Bedouin employment and trade. Even though the volume of tourism in Dahab is lower than in Sharm el-Sheikh, the Bedouin have been able to generate significantly higher income in Dahab. Egyptian development has had to contend with this legacy and has been unable to effectively replace it. Sharm el-Sheikh, on the other hand, has, to a large extent, succeeded in excluding the Bedouin from the economic life of the city. There are very few Bedouin-owned shops, restaurants, or hotels, and furthermore, no Bedouin are allowed to work in Sharm el-Sheikh unless employed directly by one of the resorts or businesses. As a consequence, the number of Bedouin profiting in Sharm el-Sheikh is quite small. The Bedouin feel less attachment to Sharm el-Sheikh than they do to Dahab, and they correctly see that for the Egyptians, Sharm el-Sheikh is an ideal model for tourism development. For the Bedouin, Sharm el-Sheikh as a concept generates high levels of discomfort. In it, they see the authoritarian policies of the central government as well as their own vulnerability.

While the Aqaba Bedouin have the freedom to live and seek employment in Dahab, the rules for the Bedouin in Sharm el-Sheikh are quite restrictive. In fact, the state has devised a system to physically exclude them from the economies of the city and have kept the Bedouin on the economic margins of Sharm. We had a chance to see the limitations imposed on the Bedouin on one of our excursions to Sharm el-Sheikh. While our primary goal was to examine social interactions in the city center, we had the opportunity to spend time with two of our Bedouin friends who were in Sharm for the week selling handicrafts. We drove along the main road until we found ourselves leaving the developed part of the city. Parking by an abandoned construction site, we exited the car and began walking toward the ocean, where we found the women sitting in an *'arisha* next to a half-completed building about 200 meters outside the limit of Na'ama Bay, the tourist center of the city. The limit was delineated

by a chain-link fence with a gate guarded by members of the Egyptian tourist police. On the near side of the fence lay the public beach and a number of ongoing construction sites, on the far side, the resorts, restaurants, and shopping that constituted Na'ama Bay. Tourists have the freedom to move at will through the gate in order to access the public beaches; however, Bedouin vendors are prohibited from passing through the gate into the town.

In Dahab, many Bedouin, both men and women, sit on the corniche in the center of town selling handicrafts, competing with the industrially manufactured goods sold in the shops, while children sell bracelets to tourists (See Figure 10). In Sharm, the authorities have legally prohibited these practices and forced Bedouin vendors out of the town. In this way, Egyptian authorities have maintained Sharm as an exclusively Egyptian commercial space.<sup>170</sup> The Bedouin are allowed to sell their goods outside the fence, but are not allowed in unless formally employed by a business in town, forcing their conformity to formal employment preferences instead of allowing them to freely pursue economic opportunities. This policy highlights the perception of discrimination among the Bedouin and demonstrates how the government creates policies to limit the informal tourism industry.



*Figure 10: Bedouin selling handicrafts on the Dahab Corniche.  
Photo by author, February 20, 2009.*

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170. Personal observations, Sharm el-Sheikh, April 12, 2009.

The marginalization of the Aqaba Bedouin from Sharm el-Sheikh is a consequence of the type of tourism development undertaken by the Egyptian authorities. The successful acquisition of tribal land and the supremacy of resort tourism have allowed authorities to prevent the Bedouin from participating in the booming economy of Sharm by giving primacy to large multinationals and wealthy Egyptian businessmen. The Bedouin recognize this as a possible future for Dahab, and equate government support for Egyptian development as an attempt to seize control of Dahab in order to transform it into a new Sharm el-Sheikh. This comparison highlights the inability of the Bedouin to penetrate the resort sector of the tourist economy. Egyptian development schemes have encouraged this trend and the authorities see tourism in Sharm el-Sheikh as a major success of Sinai development.

While marginalization of the Bedouin may not be explicitly linked to this success, it does show that Egyptian development goals aim to grant the government sweeping control of tourist centers, making it easier for them to implement their preferences for development and employment. In fact, in the spaces where the Bedouin have been able to maintain contact with the tourism industry through informal economic ties, Egypt has perceived a failure to implement its vision for tourism development. Dahab is a manifestation of this trend; Sharm el-Sheikh is the opposite. The Egyptian authorities do not explicitly blame this failure on the presence of the Bedouin, but the same factors preserving Bedouin participation have acted as obstacles to the crystallization of resort tourism in a town such as Dahab. This has necessarily linked Bedouin presence to Egyptian disappointment, further helping to shape official attitudes towards the Bedouin. Thus the Bedouin have come to be associated with the illicit reputations of a town such as Dahab, and the Egyptians have treated them as more of an obstacle than as potential partners.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Bedouin are at a distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis Egyptian migrants due to Egyptian development preferences and bureaucratic norms,

which have led to their increasing marginalization through the imposition of legal barriers frustrating the equitable participation of the Bedouin in certain sectors of the economy. Moreover, as development proceeds, the Egyptian government is claiming more territory and using more of Sinai's scarce natural resources while excluding the Bedouin from a protected role in emerging economies. The Egyptian state's claim to the best pieces of property along the shore for tourism development, as well as their enactment of a number of legal restrictions on Bedouin activities, have further limited the Bedouins' access to business opportunities as well as fishing sites and coastal date oases. Development is replacing the Bedouins' traditional social space, but Egyptian policies have attempted to block Bedouin incorporation into the emerging market.

The Bedouin, excluded from the formal tourist economy and exceedingly pushed from their land, have viewed this marginalization as an attempt by the central Egyptian authorities to grab territory and resources from the Bedouin for themselves, and even more drastically, to destroy their cultural uniqueness and heritage in the Sinai. Economically, they have coped with this marginalization by turning to illicit economic activities to supplement their dwindling informal contacts. This has led to official perceptions of the Bedouin as dangerous, dishonest, and even criminal, which has helped shape the adversarial nature of the relationship between Egyptian officials and Aqaba Bedouin.

While original Egyptian goals for tourism development created a system whereby the native Bedouin population could be excluded from the developing economy, tourism development in Dahab has ensured a Bedouin role in the future economies of the town. The Bedouin are well established in Dahab and are well connected within Dahab's tourist economy, but they have nevertheless had to compete with Egyptian migrants to acquire jobs. This competition has shaped the social patterns of Dahab, involving the Bedouin, Egyptian migrants, and foreign tourists. The economic roles assumed by each group and the competition between them have largely shaped the social patterns regulating the town.

## Chapter 4

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# **Evolving Social Contacts and Frameworks**

Sinai development has fundamentally changed the nature of the Aqaba Coast Bedouins' social space. In addition to an accelerating influx of foreign tourists and Egyptian migrant workers, new sources of income and access to services concentrated in tourist towns have facilitated a process of sedentarization, leading Bedouin populations to seek permanent settlement in urban neighborhoods such as 'Asala in Dahab. Furthermore, participation in the developing economy and the increased presence of state authorities have necessitated the establishment of individual contacts between the authorities and tribesmen, undermining the persistence of tribal corporatism. Additionally, the continuing expansion of tourism has created for the Bedouin a reality of daily contact with foreign social groups, leading to a self-perception embedded in a much wider social space than merely Sinai or even Egypt. The institutionalization of the relationship between the Bedouin and these different groups has played a major role in the processes of cultural change and identity transformation.

The very nature of Bedouin contact with Egyptian officials and migrants is playing a differentiating role in reinforcing identity boundaries. While the Aqaba Bedouin and Nile Valley Egyptians share an increasing number of cultural similarities, including the adoption of similar patterns of urban settlement, acculturation and increasing contact are not leading to an erosion of a particularistic identity for the Bedouin. Instead, uneven Egyptian development policies and the resulting economic competition have been the primary factors defining the Bedouin-Egyptian relationship, which is marked by mutual exclusion and hostility. In examining the nature of the social ties that have formed between the Aqaba Bedouin and the Egyptians, as well as the sources of cultural change favored by the Bedouin, it is clear that there is a link between the economic and social relationships that have formed between these groups. Egyptian development policies,

which played a primary role in shaping the economic contacts between the Bedouin and the Egyptians, have also assumed an important role in the evolving social relationship that has formed between these Bedouin and central Egypt.

Bedouin contact with foreign tourists has had a significantly different effect than contact with Egyptians. While the conflict-ridden relationship between Egyptians and Bedouin stems from a competitive, adversarial relationship, the economic complementarity between foreigners and the Bedouin has led to the establishment of relationships of a different nature. A major element of the Bedouin-foreigner relationship is its *quid pro quo* character. While many travelers seek out the Bedouin to learn about their culture and experience it as part of their vacation, the Bedouin have in turn actively absorbed many values and interests of the tourists. Bedouin attitudes towards consumerism, entertainment, social mobility, and even to some extent sexuality in South Sinai have all been affected by the relationship with visitors from the cosmopolitan global North. Slowly but surely, the Bedouin are becoming increasingly familiar with a global, cosmopolitan society, incorporating and communicating various elements of Northern culture into their own cultural frameworks. Furthermore, the articulation of current forms of Bedouin self-identity, especially among the youth, cannot be understood without referring to cultural symbols that might be considered foreign to the Bedouin.

### **Transforming Patterns of Social Organization — A Decline in “Tribalism”**

Perhaps the most fundamental transformation among the Bedouin in response to development in Sinai has been the start of a process of sedentarization and urbanization, with Bedouin families moving into neighborhoods in expanding urban centers such as Dahab. It is equally clear that the previously-mentioned economic consequences of sedentarization, for example the decline in the importance of pastoral migrations and the maintenance of subsistence economies, have been accompanied by analogous social consequences. The major social effect of these processes has been a weakening of patterns of “tribal” organization; in the transition to life in the town, reliance on tribal



social structures and sources of authority has decreased. While this type of transformation has often been identified as a transition away from “traditional” societies, it should instead be primarily understood as the social manifestation of economic adaptation to urban markets.

Emanuel Marx has theorized that the tribe functions as a unit of subsistence whose members work together to exploit the resources of a given territory. He further shows how tribal divisions and genealogies, based on the dual concepts of agnation and kinship, play the vital role of establishing position and membership (belonging) in this unit and how they regulate the way in which tribesmen cooperate to exploit their territories and resources.<sup>171</sup> In light of this approach, tribal structure may be understood as an organizational system geared towards regulating the subsistence economies of the Bedouin, aimed at solving problems of resource distribution. From this perspective, we may hypothesize that tribal structures and ties of solidarity will be at their strongest when tribesmen must activate and rely on their subsistence economies and kinship networks, and they will be at their weakest when non-subsistence or socially diverse opportunities are widely available. As it turns out, both of these predictions hold true. Various researchers have demonstrated that tribal maintenance activities intensify in times of economic uncertainty, such as in the wake of the October War of 1973, when tribesmen had to fall back on their subsistence economies to mitigate the effects of conflict. I have also observed a decline in tribal solidarity in the wake of sedentarization and participation in the urban economy, for example, in various expressions of economic individualism that have come at the expense of tribal strength and cohesion, the younger generation’s shaky knowledge of their genealogies and kinship ties, as well as the declining influence of tribal shaykhs among urbanized Bedouin.

For the young, urban Bedouin, tribal social structures have not played a vital role in governing emerging forms of social organization because they are not needed to regulate their economic patterns within the town. Furthermore, when asked about tribal genealogies or the structure of their tribe, the Bedouin who were born and grew

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171. See Emanuel Marx, “The Tribe as a Unit of Subsistence: Nomadic Pastoralism in the Middle East,” *American Anthropologist* 79.2 (1977).

up exclusively in an urban setting were unable to discuss these topics in any specific manner. On the other hand, among the Bedouin who have had the experience of living outside of an urban, market-driven setting, knowledge of tribal structures and their genealogies has remained intact. These two processes, urbanization on the one hand and a relative weakening in tribal social organization on the other, are linked. However, they are not unidirectional, meaning that it is not valid to express this as a one-time process of “sedentarization” leading to the rejection of tribal patterns of organization. Instead, social reorganization among the urbanizing Bedouin should be conceived in a manner similar to their economic transformation, an attempt to balance opportunity with security and self-reliance. Thus, in addition to a certain level of social reorganization within the town, a number of social practices that could be considered traditionally tribal have been maintained, such as the respect for Bedouin customary law, gender and generational relations within the Bedouin community, as well as broader tribal loyalties. Notably, however, non-tribal Egyptian populations tend to reflect similar values, suggesting there is nothing inherently “tribal” about many of these cultural practices.

As Marx points out, “Where secure employment is found outside the pastoral field, the maintenance of boundaries and control over access to territory becomes less important, and this may lead to a reorganization of tribesmen in other frameworks.”<sup>172</sup> This is exactly what is happening in the urban centers of the Aqaba region, but it has not led to a fundamental change in the social identity of the Bedouin, merely the adaptation of certain social structures to help the Bedouin integrate into a sedentary, urban, and market-driven environment. Tribal membership has been maintained, but the social organization of the urban Bedouin community has changed to reflect the necessities of urban life. Similar conclusions have been presented by Lila Abu Lughod, who showed that urbanization, notably in the Egyptian coastal city of Marsa Matruh, often led to weakening kin structures, which were in many cases replaced with forms of urban solidarity, sometimes described as “ethnic” mobilization.<sup>173</sup>

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172. Ibid., p. 344.

173. Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, p. 77.

## **The Bedouin and the Egyptians**

*The Egyptian is sick from ful and tamiyyah. It makes him act crazy.*<sup>174</sup>

*I do not like Egyptian people, whatever they tell you, don't trust them.*<sup>175</sup>

*The Bedouin, they are a stupid people. Not like the Egyptian people.*<sup>176</sup>

The Bedouin have tried to avoid Egyptian migrants on a social level; there is very little contact between the two groups outside of necessary economic exchanges and the limited instances of Bedouin employment in Egyptian businesses. While the Bedouin and the Egyptian migrants in Dahab compete in town for economic opportunities, the two communities are socially self-segregating. As Bedouin prefer to work with other Bedouin, and Egyptians prefer to hire other Egyptians, Dahab as a market is not a forum for the establishment of extensive economic ties between the two groups, and cooperation is limited. This has translated into little social interaction.<sup>177</sup>

Additionally, there exists a physical social divide in Dahab. The southern areas of Masbat and Mashraba are dominated by Egyptians and the northern areas, known as the Lighthouse, Eel Garden, and 'Asala, as well as the few scattered bars and nightclubs, are centers of Bedouin-tourist social interaction. While during the day there is a fairly high level of overlap, after business hours, each community confines itself to its respective area. By night, Mashraba has come to resemble a small neighborhood in Cairo, dotted with cafes where migrant workers smoke shisha, watch football or the news, and play checkers or backgammon with other migrants. The restaurants claim to serve "real Egyptian food," which from their menus, is often koshary, kofta, and ta'amiyya (Egyptian falafel).<sup>178</sup> It is quite rare for any Bedouin to be seen in this area in the evenings, just as it is rare to

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174. Statement by Bedouin in conversation, May 14, 2009.

175. Statement by Bedouin in conversation, April 12, 2009.

176. Interview with Egyptian shop owner, February 10, 2010.

177. This is not categorical; there are many Bedouin in Dahab who have formed friendships with migrants from Egypt. It should also not be taken as a claim that there is a lack of civility between the two communities.

178. Koshary and Kofta are two foods commonly found in central Egypt. Kofta is a type of kebab made from ground beef, while koshary, often

see Egyptian migrants in Bedouin neighborhoods or in the bars and clubs frequented by Bedouin youths.

While the Bedouin continue to honor hospitality, a number of Bedouin have told us that they would never invite an Egyptian back to their homes.<sup>179</sup> In fact, there is practically no Egyptian presence in the Bedouin neighborhoods outside of business and the few Egyptian families that have permanently settled there; Egyptian migrants avoid entering them. I have noticed that a number of Egyptians have purchased “vacation homes” in these areas, much to the dismay of their Bedouin neighbors, who complain about their bad habits, which generally involve some type of behavior that disrupts the tranquility of the neighborhood.<sup>180</sup> The Bedouin claim that Egyptians are not welcome, and a number of our Bedouin acquaintances have even declared a willingness to confront any Egyptian who is found near their homes after dark, asserting that Bedouin spaces would be dangerous for Egyptians to enter. This attitude does not appear to reflect a fear that the Egyptians would harm the Bedouin or pose any kind of threat, for the Bedouin do not communicate any sense of fear regarding potential Egyptian actions in Bedouin neighborhoods. Instead, it merely highlights the high level of hostility many Bedouin hold against Egyptians. Bravado or not, this constitutes yet another manifestation of their view of Egyptians as outsiders and reveals the great social distance that exists between the Bedouin and the Egyptians in Dahab.

The stories that are told of Bedouin-Egyptian interactions generally involve confrontation and violence. I occasionally hear stories of groups of Egyptians entering Bedouin neighborhoods. The response, according to these stories, is a mobilization of Bedouin to confront the Egyptians, generally leading to some kind of argument or even clash between the two groups. This trend of action and reaction is fairly normative in Bedouin accounts. A Bedouin interviewee described one such encounter, which ended in an outbreak of hostilities necessitating police intervention. He explained that the conflict had started when a

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attributed to military innovation, is a combination of rice, lentils, and pasta covered in tomato sauce with various toppings.

179. Interview with a Bedouin resident of 'Asala, April 10, 2009.

180. Conversation with Bedouin residents, July 5, 2011; May 26, 2012.

group of Egyptians confronted a Bedouin one evening near his home regarding a contract dispute between two individuals; the conflict soon escalated beyond simple words. When news of the arrival of this group of Egyptians spread around the neighborhood, many Bedouin went to support their co-ethnics, leading to an outbreak of violence in the streets of 'Asala. He went on to explain that this is a typical reaction from the Bedouin in such a situation, because hostility and confrontation were an expected part of Bedouin-Egyptian social encounters.<sup>181</sup> He further explained that these conflicts were most frequently centered on some type of economic dispute, often over land or money, reflecting the economic motivation behind much of the Bedouin-Egyptian social tension.

During my time in Dahab, I witnessed a number of Bedouin-Egyptian disputes over land or money, but have never personally witnessed an escalation of this type; I cannot discount the possibility that these stories may be displays of bravado aimed to impress. In either case, they demonstrate popular perceptions and attitudes held by many Bedouin towards Egyptian migrants. Such a story may even be more revealing of Bedouin attitudes if the event did not actually take place but rather was imagined, due to its scripted nature.

The Egyptian government has not given the Bedouin a significant voice in determining development policies in Sinai; they instead proceed according to their needs and force the Bedouin to cope with changes without any support or acknowledgement of their hardships. In a number of related ways, this has led to the categorization of the Bedouin as an "indigenous people" in Sinai. As an indigenous people, the Bedouin, a non-state group, have been forced into conflict with the central state; the state seeks to impose the values and identities of dominant society while the group seeks official recognition of their cultural and territorial rights.<sup>182</sup> This is not an inherent conflict between two competing social groups, but a consequence of trends in development and integration policies as the state aims to increase its level of control over the full extent of its territory and population. Territorial disputes and heritage defense in the face of radical

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181. Interview with Bedouin about Egyptians, February 11, 2010.

182. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 6.

transformation and marginalization spurred by the state are major elements of the conflict between indigenous peoples and the state, instigated by hegemonic state policies.

One notable consequence of this situation is the inability of those controlling the central government—i.e., the hegemonic social group within the state—to extend their identity to the indigenous periphery. Instead, the Bedouin believe that state policies, whether intentional or not, pose a danger to the continued existence and wellbeing of the Bedouin as an autonomous social group. This has led the Bedouin to mount a defense of their cultural distinctiveness and distance themselves from dominant national identities while claiming privileged access to local territory. This process is directly linked to the clash of economic interests described in the previous chapter. Like the basic incompatibility between Bedouin and Egyptian goals of economic development, the divergence between the Egyptians and the Bedouin in terms of social values plays a role in defining and regulating the identity boundary between them.

Both the Bedouin and the Egyptians have created negative stereotypes of the other, and the attitudes of each group regarding the other can be found in their statements and characterizations. These images and stereotypes provide valuable insight into how the Bedouin perceive the Egyptians as well as themselves and vice versa. An examination of these attitudes is a necessary step to illuminate the social boundary and decipher the processes of identity transformation among the Bedouin.

The attitudes of the Aqaba Bedouin towards Egyptians reflect the statements of other Bedouin groups regarding settled Egyptian society, notably the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin studied by Lila Abu Lughod. First and foremost, the Bedouin perceive an incompatibility between an Egyptian and an Arab identity. The Bedouin interviewed in this study did not conceive of themselves as Egyptians; the statement “I am not Egyptian, I am Bedouin” was common.<sup>183</sup> The Bedouin claim origins in the Arabian Desert, and consider themselves to be true Arabs. Egyptians, on the other hand, originate in the Nile Valley and,

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183. Personal observations and conversations with the Bedouin about their legacy and identity; see also Gardner, “At Home in South Sinai,” p. 49.

according to the Bedouin, are not true Arabs. In a conversation with a group of Bedouin on the beach in Dahab, an Egyptian was pointed out to me. One of my Bedouin friends leaned over and in a conspiratorial tone whispered "*Hatha pharown*" (he is Pharaonic), to which I replied "*Mish 'Arabi?*" (not Arab?). Smiling, he responded "*Aywah, mish 'Arabi*" (yes, not Arab), clearly pleased that I was able to distinguish between their conception of Arabs and Egyptians.<sup>184</sup> For the Bedouin, there is a fundamental incompatibility between the images of Egypt's Arab character and its pre-Islamic history linked to the legacy of the Pharaonic and Coptic periods; in the eyes of the Bedouin, Egypt's pre-Islamic heritage has undermined its Arab and Muslim legitimacy. This presents a fundamental challenge to notions of common descent despite the Arab Muslim character claimed by both populations. The Bedouin conceive of the Egyptians as descended from a pagan riverain (Nilotic) past, which they contrast with their noble Arabian desert origins.

In a similar manner to the Western Desert Bedouin, the Sinai Bedouin disparage Nile Valley Egyptians as "farmers" (*fellahin*),<sup>185</sup> a label to which many negative qualities have been attributed. At the most basic level, the Bedouin portray the *fellahin* as dishonest thieves. In contrast, the *fellahin* attribute to themselves the quality of *karama* (nobility or generosity). The Bedouin vigorously contest this claim by attaching pejorative qualities to them such as lack of honesty, honor, and intelligence. This can be directly related to Abu Lughod's discussion of Awlad 'Ali attitudes towards Egyptians, in which she shows that the Bedouin consider the *fellah* to lack *sharaf* (honor), *sadag* (honesty), and *karama* (generosity).<sup>186</sup>

Abu Lughod has further shown that the Western Desert Bedouin perceive Egyptian behavior to be feminine and dishonorable. I have heard similar comments from the Aqaba Bedouin, who also view Egyptian men as feminine and Egyptian women as manly; in general,

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184. Day at the Laguna, April 11, 2009.

185. The literal translation of the Arabic *fellah* is 'peasant,' however, the Aqaba Bedouin use the English term 'farmer' instead when referring to *fellahin*. This translation has been reproduced by the author to reflect Bedouin statements.

186. Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, p. 45.

Egyptian behavior is often described in feminine terms. One notable example is the dim view they take of Nile Valley male bonding habits, including men hugging and kissing each other in greeting and holding hands while walking together down the street (see Figure 11).



*Figure 11: Cairene youths strolling in the Khan al-Khalili.  
Photo by author, September 21, 2009.*

According to our interviewees, Bedouin men would never behave in this way, as such behavior is only an activity for women.<sup>187</sup> They furthermore criticize Egyptian men for being subordinate to their women, for following behind them in the street and for doting on them. The Bedouin agree that true masculine behavior means the man must set the boundaries and control his wife.

As the greatest source of competition between the Bedouin and the Egyptians has been in the economic sphere, the Aqaba Bedouins' greatest criticism of the Egyptians revolves around business practices. The Bedouin accuse Egyptian migrants of constantly hassling tourists,

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187. Interview with Bedouin (men and women) about Egyptian male bonding, May 15, 2009.



trying to convince them to spend money, and claim that this has given both the Egyptians and the Bedouin a bad image in the eyes of the tourists. A number of Bedouin complained that Egyptian migrants traveled to Sinai solely to make money from the tourists, but that their business practices were dishonorable and their tendencies to lie and cheat their customers have given tourists bad impressions of the people who work in town. This has created a situation in which the Bedouin communicate a belief that poor Egyptian behavior will alienate the tourists from the towns of South Sinai, which will have devastating economic consequences for the Bedouin.<sup>188</sup> In their view, the Bedouin are not merely victims of aggressive Egyptian economic policies, but have also fallen victim to dishonorable Egyptian behavior.<sup>189</sup> These types of statements support the argument that social perceptions are closely linked to economic conditions.

In turn, negative stereotypes of the Bedouin are perpetuated among Egyptian migrants and officials in Sinai.<sup>190</sup> Some of these attitudes were described earlier, but here it becomes important to examine the deeper significance behind them. First of all, the Egyptians believe the Bedouin are lazy, that they prefer poverty to manual labor, and that furthermore, they are primitive and will retain primitive economies because they are incapable of integrating into “modern” economic systems without radical transformation. Reinforcing this stereotype is the perception of the Bedouin as unskilled and uneducated, leading to frequent descriptions of the Bedouin as stupid, as expressed in the quotation at the beginning of this section. This attitude was reflected in the 1985 Sinai Development Study, and appears to have remained the basic assumption regarding Bedouin behavior on the part of the Egyptian authorities to this day despite visible signs of Bedouin integration into the urban economy. Despite this focus on transformation, Egyptians continue to “see” the Bedouin through an

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188. Conversation with Bedouin about Egyptians, April 12, 2009.

189. Conversation about trip to Cairo, September 22, 2009.

190. During interviews in Cairo, I found that those who have had little exposure to the Bedouin in reality tended to take a more ambivalent attitude towards the Bedouin and speak in the abstract. They reflected the media’s negative portrayal, but often added that the Qur’an refers to the tribes as “noble.”

essentialist lens, where the label “Bedouin” automatically implies the above social characteristics. And despite clear signs of integration, many Egyptians believe that to be “Bedouin” means to remain traditional and nomadic, and there is a powerful tendency to view them as such.

A second but related stereotype is of the Bedouin as dangerous and untrustworthy. This is a stereotype perpetuated by Egyptian authorities, who have come to associate the Sinai Bedouin with activities such as drug cultivation, smuggling, human trafficking, and even terrorism and espionage along with a number of smaller vices frequently mentioned in the Egyptian media. Reinforcing this stereotype is the hostility the Bedouin hold against the government and Egyptian migrant workers. Egyptians perceive the hostility to them as a general tendency to be hostile to all outsiders, and they have attempted to present the Bedouin as dangerous.<sup>191</sup> In the event that Bedouin and backpackers are seen traveling together, there is an immediate suspicion that they are participating in some kind of illegal activity. In one such event, I was detained for over four hours in el-Tor, evidently due to a suspicion that my traveling companion and I, who were in el-Tor with three Bedouin friends, were Israeli spies sent to gather information on Egyptian elections. This is the level of mistrust and suspicion in which the authorities hold the Bedouin and their associates. While the incident was largely a misunderstanding, one major question posed to us was why we felt we had to travel with three Bedouin. In the future, the authorities suggested, it would be better to hire an official taxi.

How can these attitudes be analyzed? Anthropology conceives of stereotypes as a method for members of social groups to “fit their neighbors and acquaintances into categories which determine the mode of behavior towards them.”<sup>192</sup> In this way, stereotyping is a method

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191. “Six arrested, drugs seized in south Sinai bust,” *Agence France-Presse*, February 27, 1997; see also Hobbs, “The Opium Poppy in Egypt,” 79-80. See also the volumes of news articles tying the Bedouin to the terror attacks of the 2000s in Southeastern Sinai and the reports of Bedouin violence and agitation against Egyptian authorities.

192. J. Clyde Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), 32. While this quote was written in the 1950s,

of ordering the social world, delineating categories of people based on generalized concepts of who they are and what they do. A similar definition, put forth by a social psychologist, conceives of stereotyping as “a means whereby kinds of objects (people) are classified on the basis of perceived properties, thus facilitating a meaningful response to those objects.”<sup>193</sup> Along these lines, stereotypes do not need to reflect reality, but they must be generally accepted by others in order to have social meaning.<sup>194</sup> While there are a number of possible uses for stereotypes, the Bedouin and Egyptian examples represent two distinct cases.

First is the case of Bedouin stereotypes of Egyptians. These stereotypes focus heavily on putting down Egyptians by attaching pejorative qualities to them to which Bedouin qualities can be positively contrasted, notably regarding attributes considered to be honorable. Thus, while the Bedouin see themselves as noble and generous, they label the Egyptians as dishonest and greedy, focusing their stereotypes on perceptions of invasion and aggression. This sets and hardens boundaries between social groups. These stereotypes “inform the individual of the virtues of his or her own group and the vices of the other, and thereby serve to justify thinking that ‘I am an X and not a Y.’”<sup>195</sup> In this way, negative stereotypes of Egyptians are one form of defending one’s own culture from an encroaching, foreign culture. In terms of identity boundaries, these stereotypes are tools to communicate fundamental cultural incompatibilities between two social groups, reinforcing the perception that members of group Y (Egyptians) do not share the same basic values as members of group X (Bedouin), undermining the value and legitimacy of Egyptian identity in the eyes of the Bedouin.

In the case of Egyptian stereotypes of the Bedouin, these attitudes shape the way in which Egyptians interact with the Bedouin,

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contemporary social anthropologists, especially those focusing on ethnicity and ethnic relations, agree that this function of stereotyping continues to have social relevance today.

193. John C. Brigham, “Ethnic Stereotypes,” *Psychological Bulletin* 76.1 (1971), p. 18.

194. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, p. 25.

195. *Ibid.*

providing justification for their unbalanced policies. By labeling the Bedouin primitive and unskilled, there is *ex ante* motivation and *ex post* validation for the marginalization of the Bedouin from the fruits of economic development. Furthermore, by labeling the Bedouin as dangerous or criminal, authorities justify maintaining tighter control over the population and distancing the Bedouin from tourists, although the true reason may be a desire to limit Bedouin-tourist interaction for the benefit of Egyptian migrants. In terms of Bedouin identity, these stereotypes are prescriptive and constraining. Such stereotypes, created and perpetuated by dominant social groups, enable those controlling the state to place certain restrictions on the Bedouin and perpetuate negative attitudes while also having the function of ascribing “acceptable” roles and relationships the Bedouin may adopt in their national context. The main difference between stereotypes created by hegemonic groups and those created by peripheral groups is the power—coercive, constitutive, and institutional—that lies behind hegemonic stereotypes.<sup>196</sup> While it may appear that the Bedouin and the Egyptians use these stereotypes in different manners, in fact both employ stereotypes to regulate inter-group interaction. And while such stereotypes may be entirely false at the outset, in time such groups may come to internalize some of their images, leading to a cycle of ascription and reflection known as *altercasting*, a subject that will arise again in the next chapter.<sup>197</sup>

This is a consequence of the uneven power relations that exist between the hegemonic social group and the periphery; the state has the capability of reifying its perceptions of other social groups through its official policies and enforcement mechanisms. Returning to Wendt’s maxim “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences,” I suggest a refinement of this statement to include a consideration of power: If men define situations as real, and have the power to reify those definitions, then they generate real

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196. For a discussion of different types of power, see Michael N. Barnett and Raymond D. Duvall, “Power in International Politics,” *International Organization* 59:1 (2005), pp. 39–75.

197. Eugene A. Weinstein and Paul Deutschberger, “Some Dimensions of Altercasting,” *Sociometry* 26.4 (1963).

consequences.<sup>198</sup> This power is why the state has the ability to ascribe acceptable roles and relationships, whereas the Bedouin can merely contest these definitions. Furthermore, this explains why state law consistently dominates Bedouin customary law except in zones the state is unable to penetrate. The importance of this type of social interaction for identity formation is not merely in the conception of “who we are,” but of “who we are in relation to everyone else,” which focuses on roles and relationships “acceptable” (as defined by the dominant power) within heterogeneous social contexts.

Stereotyping is a method in which social groups define boundaries and membership and give order to a heterogeneous social arena. This order is manifested by patterns of social interaction that reflect concepts of social distance, such as barring Egyptians from Bedouin neighborhoods, and value incompatibility, reflected in the competition between Egyptian goals and Bedouin interests for Sinai development. It is a primary way of dealing with the institutionalization of social relations between distinct groups and of coping with processes of integration. Importantly, cultural stereotypes develop in situations of close contact between social groups. The presence of stereotypes is one indicator of the presence of boundaries between distinct social groups, and they contribute to the ordering of relations between them.

## **The Bedouin and Tourists**

As opposed to the hostility that developed between the Aqaba Bedouin and Egyptian migrants, relations between the Bedouin and foreign tourists are often marked by warmth and a high degree of cross-cultural exchange. While the Bedouin perceive the Egyptians as a threat to their livelihood and heritage, tourists play the opposite role. Not only do tourists not pose a threat to Bedouin social distinctiveness, they actually provide an outlet for the Bedouin to communicate and profit from their culture. Conversely, while the Bedouin have openly rejected Egyptian cultural symbols and values, they consume tourist

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198. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 330.

culture, representative of the global North, with fascination. Tourism has provided the primary medium through which the Aqaba Bedouin adopt new values and symbols. While for the purposes of tourism, Bedouin culture reflects a high level of traditionalization (the defense of concepts of tradition and an attempt to maintain them), there is no denying that the culture of the tourists has had a profound effect on the social patterns of the Dahab Bedouin. This not only includes the adoption of new tastes in music and dress, but also changing perceptions of modesty and social mobility.

Many among the younger generation of Bedouin in Dahab are genuinely interested in forming close relationships with foreign tourists and experiencing their culture. They describe these relationships as free, as opposed to the social conventions regulating relationships between the Bedouin, or the hostility regulating Egyptian-Bedouin relations. A number of Bedouin have even confided that they feel they relate to foreigners better than they do to older Bedouin, indicating the emergence of a rather wide generational gap in the Bedouin community.<sup>199</sup> These relationships are forged in Dahab and are maintained through visits and the establishment of permanent lines of communication between the Bedouin and their friends. Most recently, this has been accomplished through the internet and social networking sites such as Facebook, which has become *the* forum for Bedouin youth to maintain relationships with foreigners. Through these connections, the Bedouin are able to maintain their links outside of Sinai and achieve a greater understanding of foreign culture, increasingly able to place themselves in a global context instead of merely an Egyptian one. Foreign cultural symbols have become a daily part of Bedouin life through interaction with tourists, exposure to foreign television such as MTV and BBC, as well as the internet. For their part, the Bedouin are actively absorbing these cultural symbols and taking pride in being able to show the impact of foreign culture on their own lives.

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199. Conversation with Bedouin women about relationships with foreigners, April 12, 2009. I also had the opportunity to witness a rather rude interaction between a group of urban Bedouin youth and their elders at a wedding to which the youth brought alcohol and tourist women who were considered inappropriately dressed. Their response was that their elders are behind the times.

Furthermore, these Bedouin have begun to understand their existence in a global context and begun to express themselves as part of a global youth culture that connects them to the foreigners visiting Dahab. In a number of cases, they have begun deploying adopted foreign symbols to express evolving Bedouin values.

## **Pop Culture and Dress**

The popular culture preferences of the Aqaba Bedouin are largely informed by processes of media globalization through television and internet, which are now widely available in Bedouin homes in Dahab, and by their social interactions with tourists. Through these channels, the Bedouin have begun to embrace certain symbols of Northern culture, adapting them to reflect both local values and values they see as shared with foreign youth.

MTV has become a popular station among the Bedouin youth, and their exposure to international media has allowed them to follow Northern popular culture. Among the Aqaba Bedouin, Hip Hop and R&B are two genres of music that have become immensely popular. One Bedouin, just a few years younger than myself, has even organized a Bedouin break-dancing troupe consisting of himself and four of his friends, performing to the songs of artists such as Akon and 50 Cent, icons of the American Hip Hop scene. The Bedouin see this music as a reflection of a romantic life of freedom and prosperity (associated with the images contained in their music videos), and have begun to identify with this genre of music. They have furthermore begun to identify with HipHop as a form of counter-culture expression, seeing themselves in a similar context to oppressed groups in other states, such as African Americans or French Muslims, for whom Hip Hop is also a popular form of expression.

The Bedouin have adopted these symbols and have begun to reflect them as an organic part of their own culture.<sup>200</sup> To an extent, Bedouin youth identify with African-American expression due to their perception that they, like the African-American community, have

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200. These Bedouin occasionally brag that it was the Arabs who first invented Hip Hop through their tradition of extemporaneous poetry.

been the victims of discrimination by their government. As a result, a number of Bedouin have adopted African-American social symbols, such as “bling” (large chain necklaces), wide-brimmed baseball caps, and as mentioned above, Hip Hop. These adopted symbols have not been adapted to reflect traditional Bedouin values, but reveal that the Bedouin are identifying with and adopting foreign values that reflect similar a sociopolitical contexts and status. It is important to note that they still express a strong sense of Bedouin identity despite these transformations. This type of social change does not undermine their “Bedouin” identity, which is communicated as entirely complimentary, but is deployed as a challenge to “Egyptian” identities and Egyptian processes of nation-building. This relation to the political condition of social groups in other states, as opposed to the acceptance of national (Egyptian) solidarities, clearly proves the extent to which the Bedouin are aware of their role in Egyptian society as well as in expanding global culture. It further indicates the possibility that similar government policies, irrespective of national borders, have the potential to elicit similar identity processes that transcend nationalism or national identities.

The standard dress for Bedouin males has been the *jalabiyya*, the robe worn by the Bedouin as well as many Egyptians. This dress is the only style among many older Bedouin, but among the younger generation, the *jalabiyya* is beginning to lose its popularity. For many Bedouin youth, it has become a traditional dress, worn only on special occasions when participating in tribal activities. In Dahab, on the other hand, many Bedouin have adopted what they might consider the “traditional dress” of the tourists, which is frequently a flashy t-shirt and a pair of board shorts or jeans. This uniform is common among younger Bedouin males, as are items such as European football jerseys and baseball caps. Notable sports clubs, such as FC Barcelona, Manchester United, and the New York Yankees, have become popular among the Bedouin, who now follow their favorite European sports teams on television and the internet. In this way the Bedouin are able to present themselves as socially similar to the tourists, with patterns of dress and popular culture communicating familiarity.

Among young Bedouin women, there is alimited trend towards decreasing personal modesty in the presence of foreigners. In the





*Figure 12: New forms of Bedouin dress.  
Photo by author, February 11, 2010.*

presence of elder Bedouin, Bedouin women maintain a high level of modesty, continuing to cover their head and body with a black *abaya*. In the presence of their foreign friends, however, these girls often uncover their faces, and even occasionally remove the *hijab* (headscarf) altogether. Bedouin concepts of modesty have been tempered when interacting with foreign friends. One female Bedouin, 26 years old, said that she felt uncomfortable in the black *abaya* because it drew attention to the fact that she was different among her foreign friends.<sup>201</sup> While inter-Bedouin relations, notably between genders and generations, continue to be regulated by social convention, increasing contact with foreigners has induced a number of Bedouin to embrace external cultural values.

Clearly one of the ways the Bedouin are attempting to maintain ties with foreigners is the adoption of foreign cultural symbols, which increases familiarity and comfort among both Bedouin and tourists

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201. Conversation with Bedouin female about relationships with foreigners, February 12, 2010.

in their interactions. In this way, the adoption of tourist culture is an expression of tourist-Bedouin social compatibility. While empirical cultural markers between the Bedouin and tourists can occasionally be quite significant, warm relations reflect a perception of social proximity or compatibility, based on the economic and social relationship that has emerged between them.

## **Sexuality and Gender Relations**

Perhaps the most radical social transformation among the young Aqaba Bedouin has been their changing attitudes towards romance, marriage, and relationships, especially as relates to the formation of relationships between Bedouin and foreigners. Many Bedouin youths maintain romantic relationships with foreigners. While this phenomenon has been reported among Bedouin (and occasionally Egyptian) men in Dahab, I was surprised to discover a limited number of Bedouin girls, in their late teens and twenties, who confided that they, too, occasionally maintained relationships with foreign men, but that they had to be kept secret from their elders.<sup>202</sup>

For the young Bedouin men, notably those who work closely with foreign tourists, social interactions, especially at bars and nightclubs, are opportunities for engaging in sexual relationships with female tourists.<sup>203</sup> Simply put, many young women come to places like Dahab hoping to have an “exotic” sexual experience.<sup>204</sup> One woman I met in Dahab even went as far as to proudly explain that she was traveling the world having sex with as many “locals” as possible because she was planning on writing a book about her “exotic” experiences. Due to the high turnover rate of tourists, who often stay for a week or less, there is a constantly replenished pool of women in Dahab, and moreover, relationships tend to be fleeting. It should not come as a

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202. Ibid. and various other discussions.

203. Multiple evenings at a Dahab nightclub, May-June 2012.

204. Much work has been done on this subject. For a local example, see Jessica Jacobs, “Have Sex Will Travel: Romantic ‘Sex Tourism’ and Women Negotiating Modernity in the Sinai,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 16.1 (2009).

surprise that sexual prowess is a status symbol among young Bedouin men, who frequently discuss their sexual exploits with others. This is not to link these attitudes to tribal culture in any way, but instead to acknowledge that this is a fact of youth culture throughout the North, in places such as America and Europe. It appears to be expressed even more strongly in vacation destinations such as Dahab, where tourists tend to be a bit more hedonistic than they might otherwise be. In a similar vein, the Bedouin tend to be more hedonistic with the tourists than with members of their own community.

Among both men and women, relationships with foreigners are preferable to relationships with other Bedouin because they are less regulated by social convention and are, in an important way, less demanding. The availability of foreigners for platonic and romantic relationships has undermined the value of endogamy among the Bedouin. This has spurred some Bedouin men to seek marriage outside of their own community (women have not attained this freedom). Furthermore, the Bedouin have come to greatly appreciate the freedom that surrounds these relationships, as opposed to the regulations regarding modesty and respect that exist both within Egyptian and Bedouin society regulating cross-gender relations. Whereas in the past, marriage was restricted to fellow tribesmen, often agnatic kin (such as a paternal cousin), and many would never have considered marrying outside their tribe, let alone marrying someone from a settled, non-Muslim population, today, many Bedouin youths in Dahab say they would prefer to date and marry a foreigner, perceiving that these relationships grant them greater social freedom. On the other hand, such relationships and potential marriages carry the risk of social insecurity. If they become public, the result is often social ostracization by fellow tribesmen, and if they should fail, it is quite hard to regain the “face” already lost. Bedouin that rely on the social security provided by the tribe, even in urban settings, are constrained in their ability to pursue relationships with foreigners. The ones with the greatest freedoms are those who are economically self-reliant and socially closer with the foreign tourists, which once again means those employed in windsurfing and scuba clubs.

When asked about this preference to carry on relationships and eventually marry outside the Bedouin community, one interviewee

described how marrying a Bedouin would limit his opportunities later in life for two primary reasons. First, a foreigner is a symbol of social mobility for the Bedouin, who are, to an extent, a suppressed group. Bedouin have limited access to certain areas and are treated as second-class citizens by the Egyptian authorities. A foreign spouse would allow the Bedouin to overcome this restriction and escape the limitations of being Bedouin in Egypt. Prominent examples of the benefits of marrying a non-Bedouin include the ability to leave Egypt and get citizenship in another country, the ability to travel around Egypt on vacation to visit places like Sharm el-Sheikh without being confronted by Egyptian authorities, and finally, freedom from the marriage responsibilities of tribal life, such as the necessity to provide a home and a flock for his future wife.<sup>205</sup> Another interviewee described the desirability of marrying a foreign girl simply: “The European women, they don’t need goats.” For Dahab’s Bedouin youth, the requirement to have already provided for a wife has made marriage almost prohibitive due to Egyptian laws and regulations.

### **Case Study:**

#### **‘Asala — A Developing Bedouin Center**

*Egyptian, German, Russian, English—everyone comes to Dahab. Dahab now is an international city. Everybody lives in one land, with Egyptians, Bedouin, everybody together. We are neighbors now. My neighbor is Russian. But the city mentality is too much for many people here. There are many people who aren’t ready for city life—and nobody trains them or gives them education about the city, how to live and make business, how to deal with life in the city. It’s different.*

Bedouin community organizer, May 30, 2012.

The neighborhood of ‘Asala is the focus of Bedouin urban sedentarization in Dahab. The patterns of Bedouin settlement, social organization, and dependence stemming from processes of

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205. Various conversations with Bedouin males regarding marriage, July 22, 2009; September 17, 2009.

development can best be studied within this social space. Not only are we interested in how the Bedouin have adapted their social patterns within an urban environment, but we are also interested in the extent to which patterns of Bedouin settlement mirror patterns of Egyptian migrant settlement in their goals and structures. This will allow us to draw conclusions about the main factors encouraging specific types of social change, notably whether this transformation is fuelled by culture and tradition, or by certain factors within the process of development itself.

The most basic examination of 'Asala involves mapping demographic patterns of Bedouin settlement within the town stemming from natural growth as well as migration from desert villages. Looking at basic demographics, the major difference between the social space of the town and the village becomes clear. Bedouin villages in Sinai are frequently based on kinship ties, and each village has the freedom to regulate its social organization. The town, on the other hand, does not permit the same kind of freedom due to restrictions on physical space, which generally leads to clustering and vertical construction as towns and cities continue to expand. For the sedentarizing Bedouin, there is a clear preference to reproduce village structures within the town, that is, to keep kin units in close physical proximity. Where space is available, brothers and cousins frequently live in neighboring houses. This not only provides a certain bubble of familiarity and comfort within the urban space, it also provides natural avenues of migration for villagers looking to move to the town. It is frequently the case that young Bedouin from the desert villages of Sinai move into urban spaces with older kin, giving them a support structure in an unfamiliar environment.

In these patterns of settlement, there is remarkable similarity to trends of rural-to-urban migration within central Egypt as shown by Janet Abu Lughod, notably regarding attempts to reproduce village structures in urban settings to provide a system of support for new migrants.<sup>206</sup> These settlement patterns create a channel between the town and the villages to allocate and distribute resources. A number of Bedouin describe their relationships with their villages of origin and

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206. For more on rural urbanization in Cairo, see Abu Lughod, "Migrant Adjustment to City Life: The Egyptian Case."

their reasons for moving into Dahab in a manner identical to Egyptian migrants, as a means to earn a living and to send money back to their families that have remained in the village. Thus, the model of migration and remittance is also applicable to the Bedouin. Dahab, then, has become a source of external income that is sought by individuals from different social groups for the purpose of supporting both themselves as well as their villages of origin, which have come to depend on ties established with urban economies for maintenance. In this way, Bedouin villages in South Sinai have become dependent on income from tourism even though they are not directly involved in tourist activities.

Unlike the social freedom of village organization, however, the urban environment has a major limitation, that of space. In many instances, kin are prevented from living in close proximity due to a lack of available space. This has necessarily forced some Bedouin in 'Asala into situations in which they find themselves living next to complete strangers, unable to ensure their privacy, as well as situations in which a young Bedouin may have to select a location for his marriage-home that is quite far from the rest of his kin.

Urbanization, then, has had a major effect on issues such as familiarity and modesty, and has led to a transformation in the social space of the Bedouin. The greatest effect has been on women, who have been forced to spend more of their time indoors in order to avoid interactions with strangers. The urban space is highly restrictive due to issues of unfamiliarity. In the Bedouin neighborhoods of 'Asala this problem was clearly visible; women and children would vacate the streets as we walked through them, obviously uncomfortable with being seen in public by strangers.<sup>207</sup> This is not only a Bedouin

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207. While this might seem to contradict my earlier statement regarding decreasing personal modesty around foreign friends and a desire to form relationships with foreigners, the major issue here is familiarity, not a general sense of openness. The formation of relationships between Bedouin women and foreign men is fundamentally connected to the issue of increasing familiarity, and modesty must continue to be maintained between strangers. This is not a prohibition against seeking to increase familiarity, but one against immodesty in close contact with strange men.

condition, but one applicable to Egyptian women from rural villages, who, as Janet Abu Lughod aptly explains, have increasingly been forced indoors and into a life of solitude due to the social restrictions of unfamiliar contact in an urban environment. Lila Abu Lughod presents a similar discussion regarding changing social restrictions on Awlad 'Ali women in the Western Egyptian Desert as a consequence of sedentarization and the proximity of unfamiliar neighbors and visitors.<sup>208</sup> Social patterns within urban spaces continue to be regulated by social convention, even to a greater extent than in villages, despite changing social realities. Urbanization has inherently undermined the ability to maintain public modesty, leading to greater restrictions over women's freedom and necessitating greater segregation between men and women.

In Dahab, 'Asala has grown well beyond its original status as a loose cluster of Bedouin settlement. As more and more Bedouin are moving to Dahab, Bedouin neighborhoods are becoming more crowded. Additionally, the Egyptian and foreign populations of 'Asala have grown significantly in recent years. While 'Asala began as a Bedouin space, the Bedouin have not been able to shape the demographic patterns of the town to prevent strangers from settling in close proximity. Egyptian development in 'Asala has begun to hem the Bedouin into a limited pale, as the building of Egyptian residences have created a boundary on the north and west edges of the town, bounding the Bedouin neighborhoods by Egyptian neighborhoods on two sides, the sea on a third, and the resorts and hotels of tourist Dahab on the forth. The Bedouin currently have a bit of room to continue expanding, but will soon have to decide between living in close proximity to the Egyptians and beginning to build vertically to maintain connections with their kin. These challenges will inevitably lead to issues such as poor construction and overcrowding, which plague other urban centers in Egypt.

Perhaps the most significant transformation visible in 'Asala has come from the proliferation of commercial centers in the town square. 'Asala is now complete as an urban space, providing for all the needs of the Bedouin as well as making available consumer and luxury items.

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208. Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, pp. 73–74.



Figure 13: Two photos of 'Asala Center'.  
Photos by author, February 12, 2010.



This includes a number of supermarkets, pharmacies, and clothing stores, as well as electronics and computer stores, hardware stores, furniture stores, and even a liquor store. The availability of these services and goods has led to a major transformation of Bedouin social and economic patterns. For example, the presence of supermarkets mitigates the necessity to maintain a nomadic lifestyle. It has allowed the Bedouin to become sedentary without having to worry about feeding themselves and their flocks. Clothing and luxury items are now available significantly closer to home, rendering transitory trade obsolete. Finally, the concentration of consumer stores as well as hardware stores has allowed the Bedouin to invest significantly more into their houses, which no longer need to be movable, leading to an increase in consumer items and amenities within Bedouin homes. For example, most Bedouin houses are now wired for electricity and running water and contain a number of amenities such as refrigerators, televisions, and even air conditioners and the internet. A number of Dahab Bedouin admit that they have become quite used to these luxuries, and could not picture returning to life in the desert without them.<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, due to the growth of the urban setting and the proliferation of luxury items and consumer goods, wealthy and poor neighborhoods are beginning to emerge in 'Asala, betraying an increasing gap between rich Bedouin, who live in neighborhoods closer to the sea, and poor Bedouin, who live further west. This situation is becoming plainly visible in 'Asala by the size and amenities of the houses. Close to the sea, houses have tall, picturesque fences and extensive garden courtyards. These houses might have garages or large gates, as well as their own water pump, all signs of wealth expressed through Bedouin home construction. More modest homes continue to be constructed from cinderblocks and corrugated metal, and do not contain extensive gardens like the wealthier Bedouin. One notable consequence of urbanization has been declining perceptions and expressions of Bedouin egalitarianism and an increasing wealth gap within the community (see Figures 14 and 15).

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209. Statement by Bedouin Youth in Dahab, February 15, 2010. Video Archives.



*Figure 14: Wealthy Bedouin home, showing a cobblestone outer wall and an extensive garden.*



*Figure 15: Poorer Bedouin home.*  
*Photos by author, February 12, 2010.*

From this short examination of patterns of Bedouin settlement, it is clear that urbanization has led to similar transformations in the social patterns of both the Bedouin and migrant Egyptians. Urbanization, then, is a process leading to cultural convergence due to the availability of similar services and amenities and entrance into similar markets. A

notable consequence is the reorganization of certain economic and social frameworks, allowing the Bedouin to integrate into an urban setting. Furthermore, urbanization has led to demographic patterns significantly different from Bedouin villages and subjected the Bedouin to a heterogeneous social setting where the Bedouin inevitably encounter Egyptians, who own a majority of the shops in 'Asala center, and foreign visitors, many of whom prefer to stay in 'Asala. Thus, it is no surprise that the Bedouin have had to adapt their social patterns to urban conditions. These social adaptations are bringing the social patterns of the sedentarizing Bedouin in closer alignment with those of other Egyptian groups. This transformation is a consequence of urbanization processes instead of specific cultural notions regarding "proper" forms of social organization.

## **The Sources and Extent of Social Change**

The above discussion should not be taken as a claim that the entire Bedouin community of Dahab reflects a homogeneous degree of social transformation. To the contrary, the balancing of opportunities in the market economy with the security of the subsistence economy, as discussed in chapters two and three on Bedouin economic change, can be directly applied here. The social order of the Bedouin reflects a continuum of transition between individuals remaining in their subsistence territory and continuing to reflect values more closely associated with tribal social structures, and those who have settled in Dahab, found steady employment, and formed close social ties to foreign tourists. Naturally, this variation has caused tension within the community, a not uncommon occurrence within groups undergoing extensive social transformation.

What, then, accounts for this variation and what can be said about the mechanisms through which social transformation occurs? At the macro level, there is striking coincidence between social transformation and tourism. The emergence and differentiation of the tourist economy closely correlates to the spectrum of social change visible within the Bedouin community, implying some important link between economic and social transformation. Styles of dress and new tastes in music correlate to trends in European and American popular

culture brought to Dahab by tourists, and relationships between the Bedouin and these tourists are the avenue through which the Bedouin absorb this culture. To some extent, certain sub-cultures are even emerging, notably between those engaging with the windsurfers, who reflect a bit more of a “hippie” demeanor and carefree attitude, and those who engage with the scuba divers, who tend to be a bit more professional. In turn, particular relationships tend to map onto employment trends. Bedouin engaged in windsurfing are generally friends with the windsurfing tourists, while the Bedouin engaged in diving are generally friends with the divers, even to the extent that Bedouin in one group occasionally disparage members of the other. Taken together, these observations strongly suggest that tourism is the factor to which the Bedouin are reacting. This is not, however, to claim that tourism, in and of itself, is the causal factor driving specific patterns of social transformation. Instead, tourism should be understood as a phenomenon that entails the disintegration of barriers of isolation, leading to increasing contact between culturally different groups and, consequently, new forms of social differentiation. The importance of isolation and contact, linked to patterns of self-conception and identity articulation, will be discussed in the next chapter. What is important to distinguish here is that tourism has been the channel through which new social symbols have entered the Bedouin community and thus constitutes a ready “pool of availability” that accounts for specific manifestations of socialization in Dahab.

As a general observation it is a minority of younger Bedouin who have undergone the most extreme social changes. Many of the younger Bedouin, while certainly affected by their transforming social environment, do continue to wear “traditional” forms of dress, pray five times a day, and avoid alcohol and the nightlife of Dahab to various extents. Upon closer inspection, the particular extent of social change undergone by individual Bedouin appears to be quite closely connected to the job he holds. Those working very closely with foreign tourists reflect the most extreme social changes, while those who have very little contact with the tourist market may reflect very little social transformation. Finally, there are those in the middle.

One clear example of an intermediate stage of social transformation is that oft hose involved in the hashish and opium trade. Since they are required to exist both in the pastoral economy and the tourist

economy (see chapter two), they appear to have struck a balance between social transformation and social conservatism, often speaking excellent English and being able to carry on conversations with foreign tourists about their own culture (especially drug culture), while at the same time continuing to reflect more conservative patterns of dress and social conduct (such as refraining from drinking). Drivers also exhibit an intermediate state of social transformation, not because they necessarily exist in both economies, but because while they work in the tourist economy, they have significantly less face-to-face social contact with tourists, instead merely conveying them from one point to the next; other Bedouin act as brokers, insulating drivers from direct contact with the tourists. In this way, the aforementioned balance of the Bedouins' "dual economies" can be applied to their triangulation of social transformation. These two processes work together. But once again, the evidence demonstrates that this is not a case of "either/or"; it instead exists along a continuum, blending cultural conservatism and transformation, with a major correlate being the extent of contact with foreign groups.

While this might lead to the conclusion that the particular form of employment is the causal factor determining the extent of social change, we should not be so quick to draw causal inferences from these observations. The micro-level mechanisms that are driving these transformations and mediating the relationship between tourism and social transformation are a bit harder to identify.<sup>210</sup> Issues such as reverse causality and circular causation must be considered seriously. Upon closer examination, powerful selection effects can be readily identified.<sup>211</sup> It is not the case that all Bedouin behave in a homogenous manner until they acquire jobs, and furthermore, they are not randomly assigned to employment, but rather self-select into jobs depending on their own tastes. Finally, connections between family and friends mean that there is no "unit-independence" among the Bedouin, and this has a strong influence on social development. These issues undermine an easy ability to draw neat, strong causal inferences linking employment to social change.

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210. Henry E. Brady and David Collier (eds.), *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

211. Ibid. See especially, "Introduction to the Second Edition."

Many Bedouin youths spend their evenings in Dahab's bars and nightclubs, interacting with tourists and other Bedouin. However, it is not just the Bedouin "of age" who frequent these establishments, and there is often a large group of younger Bedouin, in their early teens, who remain on the sidelines.<sup>212</sup> While they are too young to be drinking and pursuing women, they come anyway; this appears to be an important avenue of socialization for younger Bedouin, who absorb this tourist culture and learn proper modes of behavior from their "elders," Bedouin in their twenties. Eventually, when they get old enough, they self-select into peer- and employment-groups. These younger Bedouin are often siblings or friends of older Bedouin, and family ties to particular groups of older Bedouin appear to have an equally important effect in determining the extent of social change as well as the employment decisions that come a bit later in life. Thus, while there is a very high correlation between employment and social transformation, the above process observation suggests that employment alone is not the primary causal factor determining the extent of social change; family environment and youth experiences are also important elements of the story. This should be unsurprising considering what we know about youth socialization in other settings. While I have often heard arguments claiming that the Bedouin are a socially closed off community hostile to outside culture, it is clear from this discussion that avenues of Bedouin socialization differ little from those of youth living in Brooklyn, London, or Lagos. What might make this surprising are assumptions that Bedouin society is less developed than others, rendering the Bedouin a case of "least likely." This issue will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

As in any community experiencing rapid social transformation, a debate has emerged among the Dahab Bedouin regarding the appropriate extent of transformation vis-à-vis tradition. I often hear criticism directed at the most transformed Bedouin youth from their more conservative elders and peers. Again, these opinions exist on a continuum, where some Bedouin who criticize the most transformed youth for their laziness or carefree manner (usually in regards to the windsurfers) are in turn criticized by their more conservative peers for their own employment and life decisions, for example the

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212. Notes on an evening at a Dahab nightclub, May 25, 2012.

decision to open a hotel. Social transformation clearly has its limits, and this process continues to be negotiated. However, the ability of the Bedouin youths to make their own living has undermined their reliance on more conservative members of their community as well as any sanctioning mechanisms that might be used to bring these youths back into line.<sup>213</sup> This has naturally caused a high level of tension between groups within the Bedouin community in Dahab, and further highlights the nature and limits of social transformation, as well as the friction associated with processes of social and economic change.

In light of the obstacles to drawing valid inferences, can a causal argument still be made for sources of social change? Shifting the argument around to account for endogeneity, it is possible to claim that the socialization process strongly influences the career decisions made later in life. Taken alone, this is neither surprising nor particularly interesting. Yet this raises a question as to what extent these preconceived social attitudes may change *with changes in employment*. That is to say, the problem of endogeneity can be found when examining whether a change in employment predicts a change in social attitudes; however, if it can be shown that the employment decision is exogenous and that social attitudes were subsequently affected, this increases the plausibility of a causal argument. A specific example is illustrative:

One of my earliest Bedouin acquaintances in Dahab owned a shop selling handmade Bedouin souvenirs to tourists. Socially, he fit into what I would call the progressive side of the Bedouin order: he drank alcohol and spent his evenings in nightclubs chasing girls with his foreign friends. He spoke frequently of marrying a foreign girl so he could leave Egypt and settle elsewhere. He listened to American music and seldom prayed. Furthermore, perhaps linked to the fact he worked

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213. James P. Habyarimana, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Coethnicity: Diversity and the Dilemmas of Collective Action* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009); see also James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Ethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* 90.4 (1996). Significant work in Political Science focuses on sanctioning mechanisms for pressuring interethnic conformity. Habyarimana et.al. point to sanctioning to explain intra-ethnic cooperation; Fearon and Laitin focus on sanctioning to explain inter-ethnic cooperation.

closely with Bedouin culture tourism, he was quite chauvinistic when it came to his identity. He constantly spoke with pride about Bedouin culture and slandered Egypt and Egyptians. Two years after I made his acquaintance, his shop was suddenly closed; the Egyptian-owned resort from whom he rented the space apparently wanted it back, depriving him of an outlet through which to sell his goods. Unable to find another source of steady employment, he subsequently turned to drug dealing.<sup>214</sup> Initially, his change in occupation was accompanied by little social change; he still spent much of his time at nightclubs with foreigners and continued to drink and listen to foreign music.

However, as time passed, I began noticing clear changes in his behavior. He began to refuse alcohol and eventually started spending less time at nightclubs, until the point at which he categorically refused to attend bars or parties where there might be alcohol. He also began to pray consistently and regularly wear a *jalabiyya*, which he once claimed he hated. Currently, he is attempting to secure a plot of land so that he can marry a Bedouin girl. As these changes were happening, the gap between him and his friends began to widen until he selected out of his peer group and into another that was clearly more socially conservative. His former friends now refer to him as “boring,” while he refers to them as “not good people.” Finally, as a significant portion of his clientele is now Egyptian, I find that he is much less hostile to Egyptians than he once was.

While I cannot categorically say that it was the switch from one employment position to another that caused these social transformations, the timing is suggestive and I cannot identify any other factor unique to him that can account for these transformations. For example, the intuitive link between increasing contact with Egyptian clients and attenuated hostility suggests the influence that the change in employment has wrought. An alternative explanation, that the passage of time account for his change (a maturity argument), can be rejected on the grounds that this passage of time is constant for everyone, and within his peer group he was the only one who

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214. This should not be understood as in any way accusatory or disparaging. While this statement might carry connotations of stigmatization and illegitimacy in other parts of the world, it is considered a legitimate form of self-employment within the Bedouin community.



underwent this process; he was simultaneously the only one who switched jobs in this manner. As for an increase in religious sentiment potentially being the cause, it appeared to me that his increase in religiosity was itself an outcome of his change in job. Moreover, while he prays, he does not speak often about his religious beliefs to the same extent as I have heard from other religious Muslims.

While I would not argue that tourism or employment is mono-causal, I argue that employment does exert social influence which shapes attitudes and values. So in what sense is this causal? Tourism is a mechanism that generates face-to-face contact between culturally different individuals. It is precisely this interaction which creates moments of social and identity change. In this way, tourism is one of a number of mechanisms that increase the breadth of social contact, in a manner similar to industrializing urbanization in the Copperbelt of Africa studied by Mitchell and Epstein.<sup>215</sup> Additionally, the specific sites for current trends in Bedouin socialization are closely related to the tourist market: resorts, nightclubs, restaurants, popular beaches. Employment determines, to a significant degree, the type of social contacts that an individual will develop, which explains why pre-existing social preferences are such an important factor determining employment selection. On the other hand, in situations in which employment is not a matter of self-selection, it clearly creates somewhat of a path-dependent channel that encourages the adoption of certain social values. These two factors explain the correlation, in a loosely deterministic and dialectic manner, between employment and social transformation. This has important implications for patterns of identity transformation, to be discussed in the final chapter.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The changes in the Bedouins' social space are consequences of economic development and transformation. Among the Bedouin, social patterns are, to a large extent, predicated on modes of subsistence

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215. Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance*. See also A. L. Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community* (Manchester: Published on Behalf of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute by Manchester University Press, 1958).

and economic organization. The stability of tribal structures has fluctuated inversely with political stability and economic opportunity in Sinai development. With the beginnings of sedentarization and integration, the tribal structures and sources of authority prevalent in a Bedouin subsistence economy have declined in relevance, reflecting the social needs of the urban population. Fluctuations in the strength of tribal structures, in a manner similar to the extent of social change undergone by individuals, reflects the balancing of the Bedouins' dual economies, suggesting that social organization is to a large extent predicated on patterns of economic organization.

Increasing contact with Egyptians and foreigners is driving social transformation among the Bedouin, leading to changes in how the Bedouin perceive themselves and their role in the state. Egyptian development policies were the major factor in shaping social relations between Bedouin and Egyptian migrants, and the social patterns pursued in Dahab mirror the economic competition that developed between the Bedouin and the migrants, as well as the economic relationship established between the Bedouin and foreign tourists.

One conclusion that can be readily drawn from this discussion is that the Bedouins' social frameworks are evolving; increasing contact with outsiders has transformed the Bedouins' social space as well as their conception of self. Economic competition and government policies marginalizing the Bedouin have reinforced negative perceptions of Egyptians and the boundary between the Bedouin and Egyptian social groups. Simultaneously, the presence of foreigners is causing high leakage of Northern symbols and values into many parts of urban Bedouin society. The Bedouin are consciously orienting themselves away from Egyptian symbols and society by incorporating cultural symbols brought by foreigners and communicating them as part of "Bedouin" culture. In this way, the Bedouin have reacted to economic development by orienting themselves towards a social order that is noticeably cosmopolitan and barely Egyptian as a way to maintain themselves as a distinct social group within Egyptian society. While this new culture is significantly different from what is considered Bedouin "tradition," it has allowed the Bedouin to retain a unique and differentiating identity from other Egyptian groups and reflect values that some Bedouin have come to embrace as a response to the direction of development.

## Chapter 5

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# **Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Identity Transformation among the Aqaba Bedouin**

Economic development in Sinai is increasing Egyptian state control over a territory previously characterized by the state's limited presence. As we have seen throughout this study, the major consequences of increasing state presence and economic development for the Aqaba Bedouin have been processes of economic transformation and social reorganization spurred by a number of integrative processes including urbanization, sedentarization, expanded communications and transportation infrastructure, and the emergence of local but integrated markets. As the Egyptian state seeks to establish its authority, it is simultaneously working to disseminate and standardize national ideologies and identities. But it must be stressed that these processes, instead of leading to the homogenization of identities, are actualizing reactive processes of identity formation that are dependent on a number of external pressures. And it must further be stressed that there is a difference between these identities themselves and the "politics of difference" in which these identities form the bases of sociopolitical categorization and interaction. This chapter focuses on the latter: the nature of the social politics, or identity politics, of South Sinai and how this is connected to a broader sense of "Bedouin" identity.

As my experiences in Sinai strongly suggested, Bedouin identity is an extremely complicated topic that cannot be addressed without due consideration of the academic and political debates surrounding identity and ethnicity. A holistic understanding of contemporary political identity is impossible without appealing simultaneously to essentialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist traditions, each of which defines a different aspect of identity. While it is undeniable that

identity as a badge is quite “sticky,” this does not imply that the roles and significations of identity are necessarily fixed and unchanging across varying political contexts.<sup>216</sup> And as we will see, identity formation often occurs below the national level. In Sinai, and even just in Aqaba, Bedouin cultural identity is in certain ways distinct from other Bedouin cultures, even within Egypt. For example, comparative studies of Bedouin groups in other settings would probably challenge the claim that something like Hip Hop, discussed in the previous chapter, constitutes an important element in the expression of Bedouin identity. This variability in expressions of identity suggests the situational nature of certain *aspects* of identity.

In the modern state system, defined by discrete, territorially-bounded polities (states) comprised of socially heterogeneous populations, identity politics are closely linked to the spread of national interests and ideologies and a clash with particularist, sub-national ones that for one reason or another have not been absorbed through nation-building strategies. The particular local form this identity assumes is encouraged by the contemporary sociopolitical needs of the group and its elites and is largely articulated as a foil to nationalism, defined here slightly differently than those understandings adopted by scholars such as Gellner, for whom nationalism was “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”<sup>217</sup> Instead, I define nationalism as the ideology that both legitimizes the authority of the territorially-bounded national state and shapes its social programs.<sup>218</sup>

Nationalism provides the ideological basis for dominant national identities, which seek to assert their universal applicability in an attempt to cover social divisions within state borders. As it is this territorial state that has been identified as the basic arena for group competition, it is against these national identities that alternative

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216. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 66.

217. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 1.

218. Thomas H. Eriksen, “Ethnicity Versus Nationalism,” *Journal of Peace Research* 28.3 (1991), p. 263. In the words of Benedict Anderson, “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.” Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 3.

identities, or expressions of collective solidarity, form. This solidarity is structured on “certain qualitatively distinct characteristics,” which form the basis for familiarity and group feeling and constitute the elements of identity.<sup>219</sup> This sense of solidarity is vital to the social being (symbolic existence) as well as the political organization (practical existence) of groups. This produces a conclusion identical to that of Abner Cohen in his work *Two Dimensional Man*, that identities play two primary roles, a symbolic legitimizing role and a practical political role.<sup>220</sup> These dual functions will be repeatedly addressed. Once again, the distinction must be made between the identity itself and the contemporary political role that these identities play.

What, then, is the role of “ethnicity” in the politicization of identity and how does any of this apply to a discussion of the Bedouin? Scholars from all ideological streams have come to recognize that “nations have a historical core” that is based on certain primordial culture elements of the core (dominant) social group.<sup>221</sup> In this way, national identities and the legitimacy of the nation-state are quite often articulated in the language of “ethnicity,” based on notions of social continuity, common descent, and shared cultural symbols and values. Instead of attempting to claim “ethnic status” for the Bedouin, my preference to use ethnicity theory stems from the analytical leverage that this scholarship lends to the question at hand. The wholesale

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219. Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Core Solidarity, Ethnic Outgroup, and Social Differentiation: A Multidimensional Model of Inclusion in Modern Societies,” in Jaques Dofny and Akinsola Akiwowo (eds.), *National and Ethnic Movements* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Ltd, 1980), p. 6.

220. Abner Cohen, *Two-dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society* (Berkeley: University of California, 1974). See chapter 4 “The Political Man, the Symbolist Man.” See also Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p. 80. Joel Migdal links these aspects of identity to patterns of “social control” in the politics of contemporary states: “Effective social control depends first on the regulation of resources and services. Beyond that, it entails the effective use of symbols to give meaning to social relations.”

221. Alexander, “Core Solidarity, Ethnic Outgroup, and Social Differentiation,” p. 10; see also Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 14. In the words of Anthony Smith, identity mainly relates to a sense of community based on history and culture.

acceptance of ethno-nationalism as a dominant ideology regulating the state system has simultaneously legitimized the politicization of culture and identity as an effective basis for contemporary political solidarities in national contexts. From an instrumentalist point of view, all political identities can be considered “ethnic,” whether based on race, religion, or even country of origin.

Since ethnicity is a primary source of identity and solidarity in nationally defined situations, as the Aqaba Bedouin become integrated into the fabric of Egyptian society, they have increasingly begun to express their collective identity in an ethnic idiom, a process scholars refer to as *ethnogenesis*. This chapter will explore issues of identity transformation and articulation among the Aqaba Bedouin in response to Egyptian development as well as other state- and nation-building strategies explored in previous chapters. First, I will discuss what is meant by ethnicity, especially as it operates in contemporary contexts; we must arrive at a satisfactory analytical definition of ethnicity for it to be useful. Next, issues of identity and ethno-nationalism in the contemporary Egyptian state will be explored. This will lead to a discussion regarding the specific shape and circumstance of the identity communicated by the Aqaba Bedouin. By way of conclusion, I will discuss the lessons that the case of the Aqaba Bedouin present for questions of political identity more broadly.

## What Is Ethnicity?

Among partisans of identity, there remains disagreement over what, precisely, ethnicity is. This debate has led to the emergence of two main camps. First are the primordialist-essentialists, who assert that ethnicity is a product of highly identifiable and measurable culture traits that can be traced into the past and which are objective “givens” for analysis. Second are the instrumentalists and constructivists, who claim that ethnicity is a specifically modern phenomenon that is adaptable as circumstances require.<sup>222</sup> However, instead of seeing

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222. For discussions on the primordialist-modernist debate, see Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 98; see also Rabinovich and Esman, *Ethnicity*,

these arguments as rigid definitions for ethnicity, they should instead be understood as two sides of the same coin: ethnicity, in fact, relies on contemporary and primordial elements to give it both relevance and legitimacy.

By understanding ethnicity as simultaneously grounded in both primordial structures and contemporary contexts, we arrive at a definition of ethnicity quite similar to that of Anthony Smith, who acknowledges the importance of both essentialist and instrumentalist elements but agrees that neither, on their own, sufficiently explains ethnicity.<sup>223</sup> Ethnic categories are defined as “populations distinguished by outsiders as possessing the attributes of a common name or emblem, a shared cultural element, and a link with a particular territory.”<sup>224</sup> Overall, Smith identifies six major components that comprise ethnicity: an identifying name, a myth of common descent, shared historical memories, one or more elements of a common culture, and a link to a territorial homeland. Questions regarding the origins and symbols of ethnic identity, and additionally their sources of legitimacy, can only be answered by primordial elements. While Smith grounds his definition of ethnicity in these primordial elements, he agrees with the instrumentalists on the contemporary functions of these identities, if not their origins.

According to instrumentalist arguments, ethnicity is the categorization of individuals in a heterogeneous society for the purposes of interaction and identification, allowing a person to categorize a complex social world and achieve self-definition.<sup>225</sup> Ethnicity, in this

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*Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, p.12. I am not attempting to conflate Instrumentalism and Constructivism; they are not equivalent. However, the contingent and constructed nature of ethnicity according to these schools of thought establishes a useful distinction from essentialist understandings.

223. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

224. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p. 12.

225. Fredrik Barth, “Introduction,” in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969), 13; see also Cohen, “Introduction: The Lessons of Ethnicity” in *Urban Ethnicity*.

sense, is a product of the interaction of social groups who consider themselves distinct, informing the normative patterns of interaction between these groups in a collective environment.<sup>226</sup> Thomas Eriksen, another instrumentalist, qualifies this definition: "Ethnicity is the property of a social formation *and* an aspect of interaction; both systemic levels must be understood simultaneously."<sup>227</sup> Ethnicity, as he understands it, is simultaneously a property of a group formation (essentialism) as well as a co-constituted property of sociopolitical forces (instrumentalism).

Ethnicity, as it emerges from contact between distinct groups, cannot, then, be based merely on objective cultural markers of a group, which can be measured in a vacuum. It instead uses "culture" as a symbolic way of regulating contact between distinct groups operating within a bounded system. This definition identifies the contemporary political role that ethnic identity plays but fails to identify the sources of ethnicity. Smith provides the missing link: myths of common descent provide legitimacy for the identity and its special interests, and cultural symbols play a vital unifying role where values, memories, and customs form the basis for group solidarity in addition to markers of a boundary.<sup>228</sup> Ethnicity is necessarily grounded both in primordial and contemporary elements. Primordial elements serve to legitimize the identity, both internally, as these cultural elements form the basis for group feeling, as well as externally, where the recognition of historical continuity and cultural unity form the basis for external groups to understand and recognize the legitimacy of the group:

It is this sense of history and the perception of cultural uniqueness... which differentiates populations from each other and which endows a given population with a definite identity, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of outsiders.<sup>229</sup>

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226. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, p. 12.

227. Thomas H. Eriksen, "The Cultural Contexts of Ethnic Differences," *Man*, New Series 26.1 (1991), p. 132.

228. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, pp. 14, 61–62.

229. Quote by Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 22; see also Barkey and Parikh, "Comparative Perspectives on the State," p. 531.



The more grounded in recognized historical realities, the greater the basis for the legitimacy of the group. Identities are more easily contested if they are not grounded in primordial elements, which provide the visible basis for their “objective” existence.

Contemporary elements, on the other hand, function to give this identity political relevance. Instrumentalists have shown that cultural variation between ethnicities is not fixed, but is constructed and communicated to reflect tension between ethnic categories and is exploited to serve political ends. In other words, while the essentialists clearly demonstrate that identities and their symbols must have historical basis to be considered universally legitimate, thus contributing to the subjective “strength” of a given identity, the meanings that are associated with these identities can be highly contingent, based on sociopolitical relations and power asymmetries operating in a particular field of interaction. Smith is in full agreement:

Such [an objectively existent ethnic] ‘reality’ as we shall impute to an *ethnie* is essentially social and cultural: the generic features of *ethnie* are derived less from ‘objective’ indicators... than from the meanings conferred... on certain cultural, spatial, and temporal properties of their interactions and shared experience.<sup>230</sup>

This explains why ethnic boundaries may shift depending on situational circumstances and ethnic patterns that regulate society in a particular state will not be equally applicable to societies in other states.<sup>231</sup> The focus of this discussion should be understood as the *transformation* of existing identities as they are mobilized politically, not the formation or emergence of new ones.

As many societies once considered “traditional” are undergoing major social transformations as responses to processes of national integration, ethnic identity is strengthening instead of weakening.<sup>232</sup> While ethnic identity relies on the communication of culture, often through primordial symbols, “heritage” becomes a tool for the legitimation of group identity in the contemporary arena. I define

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230. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 22.

231. Mitchell, “Perceptions of Ethnicity and Ethnic Behavior,” p. 23.

232. Cohen, *Two-dimensional Man*.

tradition along similar lines, as sets of normative behaviors from the past that are no longer utilitarian in contemporary contexts but continue to be deployed because of their symbolic value. These shared practices point to common ancestral pasts and suggest common descent, and have the purpose of strengthening group solidarity as well as distinguishing social groups from one another.

The above discussion suggests that both essentialist and instrumentalist accounts are vital to a broader understanding of what ethnicity is. On the other hand, it is clear that each school of thought addresses a fairly specific set of questions regarding this type of identity in a contemporary setting. Essentialism is necessary to address questions of where, when, and what, relating to the origins of ethnic identity as well as the symbols that comprise relevant cultural forms. Furthermore, this aspect of ethnic identity helps explain questions of legitimacy that plague identity contestation. Overly “modernist” and “post-modernist” approaches to identity have been unable to address such issues appropriately. On the other hand, overly essentialist accounts of ethnicity tend to focus too strongly on the past, making broad assumptions about “process” or lack thereof, especially as it relates to transform ability of social groups and the mutability of identity. They may wrongly assume that such groups are unchanging and that myths of common descent are socio-historical “facts” when the reality may be quite different.<sup>233</sup> There is little use in studying identity without focusing on the contemporary role that these identities play, which has been the focus of instrumentalist accounts and theories of identity. These accounts focus on questions of why and how, especially relating to issues of identity politics and group mobilization. As contemporary identity politics can undoubtedly be characterized as the “politics of difference,” instrumentalist theories of identity boundaries and intergroup relations may assume greater analytical relevance than essentialist characterizations of the sources of identity. Due to the primary focus of this analysis on Bedouin identity in contemporary interactions with the national state, such instrumentalist approaches have been the most valuable in my analysis of Bedouin identity in transformation. My analysis does not focus on

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233. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 66. Horowitz discusses the mutability of antecedent historical conditions, malleable “within limits.”

“what is ethnicity?” but rather “how is identity used in contemporary political interactions?”

An effective way to further understand the difference between essentialist and instrumentalist focuses of ethnic identity would be to consider the differences between *symbol* and *stereotype*. Symbols of cultural identity are closely related to concepts of tradition and arise from within a culture group. Stereotypes, on the other hand, relate to identity boundaries and relations between distinct social groups, and in this way arise from the interaction of culture groups that see themselves as distinct. Symbols fall into the realm of essentialism; stereotypes are instrumental.

Symbols play a cognitive and emotional role. Like “tradition,” symbols are objects or practices imbued with social and historical meaning that, through the “politics of similarity,” form the basis for social solidarities by eliciting similar cognitive and emotional responses from those identifying with them. The purpose of cultural symbols is to homogenize cultural production within a given social community. The goal is to create a situation whereby all of the members of an ethnic community infer the same meanings from a given symbol, creating a shared response which reinforces the idea of group membership and in-group solidarity. Symbols derive from the collective experiences of an ethnic group and thus exist regardless of the particular constellation of social groups interacting in the broader political system. That is to say that the historical symbols of Bedouin communities are largely uniform whether those communities are located in Egypt, Israel, or Saudi Arabia. That is not to say, however, that the precise repertoire of symbols defining specific communities of Bedouin must be uniform across borders, but that specific, shared symbols must generally have the same subjective meanings if they are going to successfully generate group feeling. These meanings arise from the shared historical experience of the broader ethnic category. Symbols can only be exogenously forced on a community through the mediation of history –such as the symbolism of the antique key or the olive grove for Palestinians, signifying dispossession at the hands of another. Symbolic differences are not always invoked, but always remain *available* to define a boundary between the two social groups. Similarly, while “Egyptians” and “Bedouin” share many cultural

similarities, the lack of tribal affiliation is one of the examples cited by Bedouin showing that Egyptians are not part of their culture group. In this way, tribal affiliation has acquired an important social symbolism for the Bedouin as a means of distinguishing themselves as a distinct social group.<sup>234</sup>

Stereotypes are also cognitive and emotional, but play a very different function. Instead of structuring solidarities within a given community, they structure relations between different social groups. Another important difference between symbols and stereotypes is that while primordial cultural symbols are largely uniform across borders, stereotypes can be highly contingent, based on the interests and perceptions of other groups with which the ethnic community must interact. This statement receives additional empirical evidence through a number of studies, notably by Daniel Posner, whose work with dyads of ethnic groups on either side of the Malawi-Zambia border shows that the remarkable consistency in individuals' abilities to identify cultural symbols of the other group does not extend to stereotypes, which differed significantly. Attitudes of social distance were based, not on differences between the communities' symbols, but on the stereotypes that emerged on either side of the border, reflecting political relations between the groups.<sup>235</sup> While internal conceptions of identity may be fairly well established through the strength of cultural symbols and traditions, acceptable roles and relationships can be ascribed through the standardization and reification of stereotypes imposed on the community by politically powerful groups. Symbols may display their own consistency, but stereotypes generally indicate the presence of a social boundary.

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234. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 71. This is a process Horowitz refers to as "Differentiation"—the invocation of a cultural difference in order to define a boundary.

235. Daniel Posner, "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbakas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi," *American Political Science Review* 98 (2004), p. 533. I remain agnostic as to the causal mechanisms posed by Posner; however, the evidence from the surveys is unambiguous. Posner finds in a series of logit regressions that there is no significant correlation between social distance and the number of cultural "differences" between groups as identified by survey respondents.

Despite similar cultural symbols, the sociopolitical implications of a Bedouin identity in Egypt are quite different than they are in a state such as Saudi Arabia. As a more globally familiar example, an Arab or Muslim identity in Egypt has significantly different political implications than it does in the United States, even more so after September 11, 2001 than before. The relationships and constraints ascribed to identity categories through processes such as stereotyping are products of sociopolitical forces interacting at the national (system) level, notably the particular constellation of ethnic groups in the system and the alliances forged between them, as well as the ideology and material interests of the hegemonic or ruling social group. When discussing identity categories, scholars and politicians alike must take care to distinguish between the questions “what does it mean to be an X?” and “what does it mean to be an X in this particular context?” It is almost always the case that the answer to these two questions will differ.

## **Ethnicity in a Modern State System**

As ethnicity is grounded to a certain extent in primordial elements, *ethnies*, according to Smith’s definition of ethnicity, have been identified in pre-modern and even ancient periods. While *ethnies* are not unique to the system of territorial states, the form and function that ethnic identities have assumed in contemporary contexts have differed significantly from those of the pre-modern period. One of the reasons I have shown such favoritism for Smith’s definition of ethnicity is that he clearly identifies the political role of ethnic identities in contemporary, national contexts, and he does not attempt to isolate ethnicity from its role in the construction of national identities. This study is interested in contemporary expressions of ethnic identity along the lines articulated above, specifically how and why they are deployed in contemporary, nationally-defined situations, i.e. in the politics of contemporary states. Notably, ethnic identities frequently form at odds with dominant nationalist ideologies.<sup>236</sup> This is because in many cases, national identities attach themselves to

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236. Eriksen, “Ethnicity Versus Nationalism,” p. 263.

ethnic identities, rendering most nationalist conflicts a type of ethnic conflict, for example in Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, and Israel. This phenomenon is well recognized by scholars of nationalism, as evidenced by the myriad of works entitled *Ethnicity and Nationalism* or some variation that have proliferated over the years.

The territorially-defined nation-state, as it is the primary source of sovereignty in the contemporary international system, is the primary arena for the activation of social conflict, especially in an inter-ethnic sense.<sup>237</sup> It is important to recognize the centrality of nationalism to this argument, as it has provided the context against which other identities mobilize. Nationalism is expressed through cultural symbols and traditions, based on myths of common descent and historical continuity, and is thus articulated in the language of ethnicity.<sup>238</sup> Most nationalisms are, in fact, entho-nationalisms. The concept of language games and competition explains why ethnicity has become a powerful and effective means of contesting nationalism, forming the basis for the social articulation of politics. Language games, first described by Wittgenstein, implies that all interactions must be conducted in the same “language” or an “intersubjective field tied to a particular context, which is reproduced by the individuals [or groups] interacting.”<sup>239</sup> This means that any type of interaction can only be meaningful if conducted using compatible, mutually agreed-upon frameworks or perceptions of the “particular context” in question.

Nationalism, in this sense, may be considered the strategy adopted by central states and dominant social groups in their national interactions to pursue their interests and promote their legitimacy. In other words, it is useful to think of nationalism “as a political activity contesting or upholding a particular type of political order... In this sense, nationalism is not simply about imagined communities; it is much more fundamentally about a *struggle for control over defining communities* [my emphasis].”<sup>240</sup> As a social ideology, nationalism

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237. Rabinovich and Essman, *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, p. 4.

238. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p. 9.

239. Eriksen, “The Cultural Contexts of Ethnic Differences,” p. 132.

240. Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 18.

stresses conformity to the values and identity of the central state, which may or may not be egalitarian across the wider spectrum of society, especially in post-colonial states and states dominated by single social groups.<sup>241</sup> In this sense, nationalism is necessarily hegemonic, seeking to delegitimize and under communicate social differences within the state and instead claim social uniformity based on the identities and interests of the core. In the words of Ernest Gellner, nationalism “insists on imposing homogeneity on the populations unfortunate enough to fall under the sway of authorities possessed by the nationalist ideology.”<sup>242</sup> This is an attempt to assert that the goals and ideologies of the center are equally applicable across the population, legitimizing the core’s pursuit of its own interests as *national* interests; nationalism always legitimizes the interests of the hegemonic social group. Contemporary identities cannot be studied or understood divorced from issues of national interests, goals, and values, for their formation is linked. In order to contest nationalism then, peripheral social groups have increasingly adopted the language of ethnicity, which becomes the most effective basis to contest ethnically grounded nationalist ideologies on the basis of the previously-mentioned common intersubjective framework structured around historical and cultural legitimacy.

While these identities are articulated in the language of ethnicity, they are not assumed as mere foils to national identities, but increasingly to national *ideologies*.<sup>243</sup> In other words, if the state attempts to treat all of its constituent social groups equally, then these groups will generally be less likely to react against dominant values and identities, which are seen as distributive and inclusive instead of potentially restrictive or exclusionary.<sup>244</sup> This further suggests that the

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241. Eriksen, “Ethnicity Versus Nationalism,” p. 263.

242. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 44.

243. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival*, p. 6. “It is tautologically true,” wrote Smith, “that if the nation-state and its agencies can satisfy the perceived needs in ways acknowledged by its citizens, then its inhabitants become nationalists,” implying a direct link between coincidence of interest and the acceptance of identities.

244. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p. 27. Joel Migdal wrote, “Social control rests on the organizational ability to deliver key components for individuals’ strategies of survival.”

mobilization of identities for political purposes is often a reaction to material and psychological conditions that state policies create for social groups.

Perceptions of unequal treatment and discrimination on the part of central authorities often lead to a reaction away from national identities, through the development of both distinct social identities and distribution networks. Which identity will be mobilized, however, is not entirely up to social groups and their elites. In many cases, state policies use pre-existing social categories as a basis for organizing distribution and exclusion. As will be demonstrated below, it is often the case that systemic political conditions “pre-select” and activate specific identities.

A state’s legitimacy among its population rests on its ability to act as an equitable distributor. In contrast, social groups may continue to favor non-state modes of organization which are structurally incompatible with organizational forms favored by the state. These forms will often appear threatening to state interests and will be labeled “subversive”—for example, the Bedouins’ desire to pursue their own forms of employment and labor in Dahab’s tourist economy rather than be subordinated to state development. When presented with this choice, social groups will generally follow the path of greatest utility, further contesting the state’s claim to universally represent the identities and interests of its population.<sup>245</sup> In the event that these ideologies and values are not deemed universally applicable to the state’s heterogeneous population, national identities are more likely to be rejected by peripheral groups who will instead turn to particularistic identities.

This form of ethnic expression is primarily a symbolic way to assert a separate existence from hegemonic forms of nationalism, which simultaneously seek to impose a particular set of interests and values that operate alongside distinguishing forms of culture. Once again, identity simultaneously plays two roles, one symbolic, in the form of cultural identities, and the other political, in the form of group interests. Elements of ethnicity, then, constitute the primary tools of identity transformation and resource competition in national contexts.

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245. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival*, p. 6.



Ethnicity is viewed as an organic form of solidarity as well as an effective means of mobilization to contest national ideologies.

Within the Arab world, nation-building strategies in Morocco and Algeria represent perfect cases of hegemonic forms of cultural national identity clashing with particularist sub-national identities. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, in a study of the Amazigh cultural awakening in these two states, shows how state policies supporting a program of Arabization and Islamo-Arabic supremacy were instrumental in motivating reactions from these states' Amazigh populations, who mobilized to defend their sociolinguistic heritage. Maddy-Weitzman continues: "No less important [to the Amazigh cultural awakening] was the poor performance of the state in satisfying both material and social-psychological needs, leaving an ideological vacuum," which was a primary factor cementing a formal social boundary between Arab and Berber social groups and mobilizing the Berbers.<sup>246</sup> This reflects both the material and symbolic needs of the community. Such a cultural awakening was largely absent in the period before the state's program of Arabization began to systematically marginalize the Amazigh language and legacy, suggesting this movement was a reaction to specific state policies. Mobilization occurred despite the existence of tribal divisions within the Berber *ethnie*, showing that multiple forms of identity may exist simultaneously and tribal divisions do not preclude the possibility of a broader sense of ethnic solidarity. In national contexts, these tribal groups have turned to an ethnically-articulated identity that generally de-emphasizes tribal divisions in favor of a pan-tribal culture group.

## **Expressions of National Identity in Egypt and Their Implications for National Solidarities**

Egypt provides a perfect example of a strongly-rooted ethno-nationalism based on links to the ancient civilization of the Nile River,

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246. Maddy-Weitzman, "Contested Identities: Berbers, 'Berberism' and the state in North Africa," p. 24.

that in the words of Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, “generat[es] a particularist and exclusivist Egyptian national identity.”<sup>247</sup> National identities and forms of expression in Egypt strongly reflect the historical continuity of the Nile Valley from Pharaonic through Islamic times.<sup>248</sup> Thus, Egyptian national identity is based on two historical-cultural elements: Pharaonism and Islamism. While this identity is very strongly tied to the essence of Egypt’s territorial history, it is a particularistic legitimacy that has created a strong national core but has created problems for peripheral nation-building.

Expressions of Egyptian national identity are identifiable in three main arenas: art and literature, tourism, and Egypt’s national institutions and symbols. The articulation of Egyptian national identity emerged in the writings of early Egyptian nationalists in the 1920s and 30s, coinciding with the rise of Pharaonic and Hellenistic imagery in art and literature.<sup>249</sup> This national literature aimed at focusing Egyptian mass culture on the uniqueness of Egyptian history and heritage. In these expressions of Pharaonism there was an attempt to present the idea that Egypt has been more or less preserved since Pharaonic times as a natural entity. In the period after World War II, many more Egyptian writers focused on the particularist history of Egypt, including Taha Hussein and Tawfik al-Hakim.<sup>250</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski provide examples of nationalist expression in numerous

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247. Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Commemorating the Nation: Collective Memory, Public Commemoration, and National Identity in Twentieth-century Egypt* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2004), p. 52.

248. Donald M. Reid, “Nationalizing the Pharaonic Past: Egyptology, Imperialism and Egyptian Nationalism, 1922–1952,” in Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 149. Despite more recent trends toward Arabism and Islamism, Reid states, “A current identification with Ancient Egypt ... seems to have become an independent and self-sustaining element of modern Egyptian identity.”

249. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt*, p. 494.

250. Mahmud Ismail, *Nationalism in Egypt before Nasser’s Revolution* (PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1966) (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1978), pp. 171–176.

forms of art, notably in the expressions of *Nahdat Misr* (The Egyptian Renaissance), showing how Egypt's particularist national identity is enshrined in its art and architecture in addition to its literature.

At that time, the future of the field of Egyptology became a focal point for the Egyptian national struggle against the British, and the political struggle for independence incorporated a strong element of reclaiming and defending cultural and historical legacies.<sup>251</sup> This observation helps to explain why Pharaonism played such an important role in cultural and even political expression during the 1920s and 30s, forming a major basis for the anti-colonial struggle: Egyptian nationalists attempted to "reclaim" their history from the Europeans. In addition to the aforementioned nationalist authors, Pharaonic symbolism was adopted by many of the nationalist political parties including the Wafd, the Umma party, and the Watani party, as well as a number of political newspapers, notably *al-Siyasa* operated by Muhammad Husayn Haykal. Despite the relative decline of Pharaonism and the later rise of Islamism and Arabism, Reid incisively points out that "territorial patriotism, Arabism, and Islamism are incompatible only in the abstract and unreal world of ideal types."<sup>252</sup> Even at the height of Egypt's pan-Arabism, Nasser did not attempt to erase the legacy of ancient Egypt from the memory of the Egyptian nation, he continued to strive for the nationalization of the field of Egyptology, and he worked for the preservation of Egypt's ancient archaeological spaces.<sup>253</sup> Instead of interpreting the relative decline of Pharaonism in the 1940s and beyond as a turn away from this historical legacy, it could instead be seen as an attempt to harmonize this theme with the others to create an identity with broader appeal. Today, the symbols of Egypt's Pharaonic past coexist alongside expressions of Arabism and Islamism in Egypt's nationalist spaces.

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251. Reid, "Nationalizing the Pharaonic Past."

252. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

253. *Ibid.*, p. 147. See also James P. Jankowski, "Arab Nationalism in 'Nasserism' and Egyptian State Policy, 1952–1958," in James P. Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 150–167.

The second arena for the expression of Egyptian national identity is tourism, which has become a primary avenue for the communication of national heritage and culture to insiders as well as outsiders.<sup>254</sup> In Egypt, as previously identified, tourism is predicated primarily on the history of ancient Egypt, in showcases such as the pyramids, the Egyptian museum's focus on its ancient civilization, the Temple of Karnak and the Valley of the Kings in Luxor. In an internet Google image search for "Tourism in Egypt," by far the most popular image returned was of the Sphinx and the pyramids, followed by pictures of Karnak, the Nile, Abu Simbel, and mummies. A secondary source of heritage tourism, notably in Cairo, derives from the legacy of Islam and the Arab conquests. Tourist spaces supporting this aspect of Egyptian history include the many mosques frequented by visitors, as well as the walls of medieval Cairo and the medieval Khan al-Khalili. All of these spaces focus on links to two epochs of Egypt's history: Pharaonism and Islam.

This serves to disseminate Egyptian national identity to a non-Egyptian audience and further reinforce the pride Egyptians take in their identity. Tourism plays a role in reinforcing the cultural symbols of a nation in the minds of the lower classes, as opposed to merely upper-class elites frequently associated with discussions of nationalism and literacy, because it is the masses that are quite often involved in the economics of cultural transmission as touts, guides, and vendors. As their economic livelihood relies on their internalization of the myths of this idealized past, these symbols leave a lasting imprint on the consciousness of all those engaged in tourism. The discussion of the past few paragraphs cannot be overstated, as these issues of political struggle with a "colonial power" as well as the impact of cultural tourism on identity can be applied directly to the Bedouin case that is the focus of this study. These Bedouin are engaged in a form of tourism that reproduces their particularist culture, as opposed to a national "Egyptian" culture.

The museum, a fundamental element of tourism, is constructed to reflect historical continuity between the past and the present.<sup>255</sup> This is applicable to culture museums as well as archeology museums.

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254. Daher, *Tourism in the Middle East*, p. 4.

255. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 181.

Museums not only allow the state to construct spaces fuelling identity, but also allow states to attach their own meanings to such artifacts and draw their own historical connections which serve to legitimize the state's sociopolitical program. The display of such artifacts also aids the state in a process Benedict Anderson refers to as "logoization," or the forging of past images into contemporary symbols.<sup>256</sup>

Furthermore, the museum is a tool that allows the state to draw identity boundaries and establish historical narratives. In the Egyptian case, there are a number of important cultural and archeological museums, including the so-called "Egyptian Museum" (in fact the Pharaonic Museum of Egyptian Antiquities), the Nubian Museum, and the Coptic Museum. That the Copts and Nubians have separate museums expresses an underlying political meaning. Nubian and Coptic history have been deliberately left out of the "Egyptian Museum," as they are considered to be minority or peripheral groups and do not carry the same type of "Egyptian" identity. While the Nubians (non-Pharaonic, and indeed non-Arab) and the Copts (non-Muslim) are excluded from the core Egyptian identity, their representation through these museums reflects an official recognition of their collective existence as minorities and their categorization as such. The Bedouin, on the other hand, have no museum and are not considered an officially recognized minority.

Reid presents another interpretation, one organized temporally instead of culturally but which leads to the same conclusion. The official narrative of Egyptian identity is enshrined in the dedication of four major museums in Cairo to one major historical era: the Pharaonic, the Greco-Roman, the Coptic, and the Islamic.<sup>257</sup> Again, this progression reflects the historical continuity of the Nile and diverges from Bedouin perceptions of their historical narrative. In this way, the Bedouin's existence as an autonomous social group in a socio-historical sense is contested by the state, further fuelling their preoccupation with heritage defense and their desire to communicate themselves as culturally different from "Egyptians." This has led the Bedouin to perceive that they have been "left out" of the Egyptian narrative, further alienating them from a sense of Egyptian solidarity.

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256. Ibid., p. 182.

257. Reid, "Nationalizing the Pharaonic Past," p. 146.

This feeling of sociopolitical marginalization parallels their economic marginalization. As opposed to Copts and Nubians, who are merely marginalized by the state, the Bedouin are denied by the state, meaning the very existence of their collective identity is contested.

Finally, national institutions and bureaucracies are important sources of socialization and transmit Egyptian national identity, reflecting the coexistence of Islamic and pre-Islamic history. This takes on a number of forms. At the most basic level of symbolism is Egyptian money, which is designed to reflect the two sources of Egyptian identity. On all denominations of Egyptian paper currency, the basic design is to place a Pharaonic symbol on one side and an Islamic symbol on the other. For example, the 100 LE note displays a picture of the Sphinx on one side and the Mosque of Sultan Hassan on the other, while the 20 LE note displays images of Egyptian hieroglyphs on one side and the Muhammad 'Ali Mosque on the other. In addition to currency, there are other outlets for the display of national symbols such as postage stamps, the architecture of public spaces (such as parks, malls, and public squares), and street names. These symbols, taken from archeological and historical spaces, have been forged into reproducible logos that have come to represent Egypt and are designed to evoke a sense of national identification and pride around which group feeling is structured. In this way, certain aspects of Egyptian history have become symbols of collective identity, easily recognized and reproduced, around which Egyptians have come to structure their cultural self-image. While these symbols appear wholly organic to many Egyptians, certain groups, the Bedouin included, see them as alien.

Institutions with more active socializing functions include education and the media. In his first edition of *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson stated, "so often in the nation building policies of the new states, one sees... a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth."<sup>258</sup> While Anderson subsequently backed away from this statement in his second edition, it is clear that in many single party states with tight control over

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258. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 113–114, 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

education and the media, these organs have been used to instill a nationalist ideology supportive of state-disseminated histories and identities. In the Middle East, the life's work of Sati al-Husri and his impact on nationalist education in Syria and Iraq is illustrative of this claim.<sup>259</sup> Not without substantiation is the suggestion that "liberal" or "democratic" states do the same.

Images of Egyptian identity are reproduced in the national press as well as public education. The Egyptian press "provides numerous examples of the widespread effort to link contemporary Egypt with its Pharaonic past."<sup>260</sup> Even the names of major Egyptian media outlets reflect this endeavor. Two notable examples are the radio station *el-Nil* (the Nile) and the newspaper *al-Ahram* (the pyramids). Public education focuses on the Pharaonic origins of the Egyptian nation.<sup>261</sup> In Sinai, Bedouin school children are confronted with stories glorifying ancient Egypt in their school books, full of tales of the pyramids and the Pharaohs, which they consider to be quite alien to their own cultural narrative. These socializing institutions are avenues through which central authorities disseminate symbols of national identity and nationalist ideologies (national values), and strive towards national integration by inculcating society with a singular set of symbols, values, and a uniform world view around which social solidarities are structured.<sup>262</sup>

Egyptian national identity is clearly particularistic, reflecting the uniqueness of Egypt's core, increasing its legitimacy for national existence. However, the acceptability of this identity among non-core elements of Egypt's population has been problematic, further showing that Egyptian national identity is not considered universal among all segments of Egypt's population; instead it is only applicable to the core of Egyptian society, identified as Nile Valley Sunni Muslims (the intersection of the legacies of the Nile and of Islam). Among other

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259. William L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati al-Husri* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

260. Gershoni and Jankowski, *Commemorating the Nation*, p. 52.

261. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

262. James Turner, "Universal Education and Nation Building in Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 2.1 (1971), pp. 3-13.

social groups in Egypt, such as the Coptic Christians, the Nubians, and the Arabic-speaking Muslim Bedouin unconnected to the legacy of the Nile, this identity has been perceived as exclusionary.

This leads to the problem of minority formation within states. Minorities form in precisely this situation where social boundaries have been drawn to exclude certain social groups from national membership.<sup>263</sup> This may potentially occur when the state disseminates very narrow ethnic identities, if it discriminates against specific social groups, or in situations where equally applied laws inherently favor one group over another, for example, by supporting inequitable status-quo situations such as land and employment allocation in South Sinai. Smith links the formation of minorities to expressions of ethno-nationalism, where “only people of a presumed descent can be members of the ethnic nation.”<sup>264</sup> While nationalism constitutes a drive towards homogenization and the implementation of cultural uniformity, it is simultaneously exclusionary, “creating outsiders within,” by placing rigid constraints on national membership.<sup>265</sup>

The formation of minorities relates not only to national sentiment, but also to greater issues of political and economic inequality and discrimination. This is because members of the national core, or those ascribing to dominant identities and ideologies, are generally privileged by the state when it comes to allocation of resources. The case of the Bedouin and the Egyptian migrant workers in Sinai is a powerful example of this phenomenon, where the distributive role of the Egyptian state gives priority to the migrants and sets the stage for the competition between them and the Bedouin, leading to the simultaneous emergence of an identity boundary between the Bedouin and the Egyptians. Smith elucidates this issue and deserves to be quoted in full:

Not only are jobs and houses reserved for members of the dominant *ethnie*... aliens within become politically suspect or vulnerable. In these circumstances they may be discriminated

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263. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, p. 108.

264. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, pp. 187–192.

265. *Ibid.*, p. 197.



against, harassed, segregated, and finally expelled or even exterminated...

More often, ethnic nationalism does not involve a specifically racist component, but manages to exclude non-members within and deny them their rights while preserving their essential humanity.<sup>266</sup>

These groups are seen as a threat to national solidarity and nationalist goals, and will often be the subject of attempts at forceful transformation or suppression. Yet again there is a strong link between identity and ideology. In the context of contemporary states and nationalism, ethnicity is a powerful method of contesting the legitimacy of nationalism and national ideologies.

## **Identity Transformation and the Aqaba Bedouin**

What, then, is driving the observed patterns of identity transformation among the Aqaba Bedouin and how is this identity manifested? First and foremost, we have seen that identity transformation occurs in periods of increasing economic and political integration stemming from processes of state- and nation-building. Smith identifies two particular instances where ethnogenesis is most likely to occur. First is what he refers to as “incipient secularization,” or “the nub of a wider clash of cultures, usually between a technologically superior... civilization and a more traditional, backwater one.”<sup>267</sup> Second is “incipient commercialization... breaking down the community’s isolation and involving it in an external economic network based on a superior material culture and technology.”<sup>268</sup> Rabinovich and Esman, in their look at ethnicity, come to a similar conclusion: “Conditions that give rise to ethnic [mobilization] are (1) control by the modern state of the political and economic resources that are vital to the security and wellbeing of its inhabitants and (2) tensions between the

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266. Ibid.

267. Ibid., p. 84.

268. Ibid.

pluralism of society and the claims of the state to regulate the lives of all who live within its territorial boundaries.”<sup>269</sup>

Both of these definitions suggest that ethnic mobilization is most likely to occur in reaction to processes of state- and nation-building and periods of accelerating integration, especially when the interests of the core clash with the interests of the periphery. In Sinai, it is clear that Egyptian preferences for development have not been wholeheartedly accepted by the Bedouin, who fear attempts to suppress their heritage (symbolic) and deprive them of their resources (political). In concurrence with this rejection of Egyptian goals and ideologies, seen as threatening, the Bedouin have also rejected Egyptian national identities, seen as particularistic and exclusive. They have chosen an ethnically-articulated “Bedouin” identity as a preferred alternative. The strength of the Bedouin reaction appears to be directly related to the intensity of the attempt to forcefully disseminate an “Egyptian” identity and pursue national programs, just as the strength of the previously mentioned Amazigh revival was directly related to the intensity of Morocco’s Arabization program.

The Aqaba Bedouin, as a social category, fulfill Smith’s basic requirements to constitute an ethnic category: they have a collective name, they believe in a myth of common descent, they see a relatively shared history based on their shared culture, and they lay claim to a specific territorial component (or type) within Egypt. It should be kept in mind, however, that it is not merely the successful attainment of these elements that give these groups ethnic legitimacy, but the extent to which they can claim these elements and to which these elements are externally recognizable. It is not, then, legitimate to reject a Bedouin ethnic category because of the existence of an Arab ethnicity, which, incidentally, also does not conform exactly to Smith’s notion of *ethnie* because of issues of weak solidarity, contestations of common descent, and specific notions of shared culture. Additionally, as Gershoni and Jankowski identify in the Egyptian case, “Nationalists rediscover, reconstruct, and in some cases invent narratives of a glorious past,” showing that national identities can be socially

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269. Esman and Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, p. 3.

constructed and the clash of identities is largely a political struggle.<sup>270</sup> Identity is necessarily an abstraction from reality, not a claim that individuals within a group are identical in all ways. This leaves open the possibility for contestation of different identities based on different types of abstraction.

Thus, the existence of the Egyptian nation is no more objective than the existence of a Bedouin *ethnie*; the primary existence of each construct is in the minds and expressions of its partisans.<sup>271</sup> Instead, “Egyptian nation” and “Bedouin *ethnie*” should be understood as competing *sources of primary solidarity* whose relative legitimacy is not objective, but is the source of competition between the identities. Once again, the identity that will be favored is the one that holds the most utility for its proponents. There is little sense in working to mobilize an identity with zero contemporary relevance just as there is little sense in working to mobilize an invented identity with zero historical legitimacy. This is not, however, an attempt to assert that the Bedouin constitute a “nation” or an incorporated ethnic community. Instead, Bedouin ethnogenesis is a rejection of attempts to make the Bedouin into “Egyptians,” which rigid Egyptian policies have rendered practically impossible anyway, or otherwise force them into conformity with Egyptian goals.

Major elements of Bedouin cultural identity have evolved to legitimize the separate existence of the Bedouin as an ethnic category by focusing on elements of a shared, distinct culture, claims to a territory, and myths of common descent. Most important of these elements are those that highlight the major cultural differences between the Bedouin and central Egyptians, and that present Bedouin values as superior. These elements have become the primary characteristics in defining a Bedouin identity. For example, the Bedouin communicate themselves as generous and hospitable while they assert that the Egyptians, because of their authoritarian development policies, are greedy and subjugating. The Bedouin also stress their attachment to the desert, contrasted to Egyptian dependence on the Nile and urban spaces. For the Bedouin, the desert symbolizes freedom and nobility while the river and the city symbolize dependence and subjugation.

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270. Gershoni and Jankowski, *Commemorating the Nation*, p. 8.

271. Daher, *Tourism in the Middle East*, p. 19.

To this they add conceptions of honor and masculinity, casting Egyptian social behavior as feminine and dishonorable. Key elements of Bedouin identity, then, have been articulated to contrast with their perceptions of Egyptian identity: that the Bedouin are noble and free while the Egyptians are slaves. This dichotomization serves to establish a boundary between “self” and “other,” as well as an uneven power dynamic where “self” identity is a source of pride in *direct contrast* to the identity of the “other,” which is portrayed as inferior. This maintains distinct boundaries between the two social groups as well as aids in the formation of value-system bases for group solidarity.

The primary factors encouraging the transformation of identity among the Bedouin are those processes identified by the instrumentalists, notably Barth, Cohen, and Eriksen. These identities provide the basis for effective group mobilization and solidarity, seen as preferable to dominant, hegemonic core identities, as well as a way to regulate resource competition. They emerge in reaction to uneven political and economic development between core and peripheral social groups. An important aspect of these identities is that they are assumed in reaction to certain shortcomings of nationalist ideology—primarily the falsehood that nationalism is universal and egalitarian. In actuality, nationalism is either too particularistic and cannot apply to all the social groups inhabiting a socially heterogeneous state (as in issues of Egyptian core national identity), or it is too universal and does not give individuals clear placement in their social environment, generating the need to add an additional element of identity, for example, hyphenated ethnicities in America.

In both of these situations, ethnicity remains a powerful source of mobilization and is often adopted as an alternative to dominant national identities. This is not to say that groups will turn to pre-existing ethnic identities, but that, just as nationalism is legitimized by history, culture, and descent, these alternative identities have been articulated in the same way. An identity previously unrecognized as “ethnic” may begin to adopt ethnic elements as national integration accelerates and the contest between groups becomes political. The Aqaba Bedouins’ increasing integration into the urban environment of Dahab and Egyptian society has motivated a turn towards a political form of identity and solidarity designed to contest expressions of

Egyptian national identity. Their place within the Egyptian state and its society is the primary concern for the Bedouin.

This, further, does not require the forging of extensive ties of solidarity across the entirety of the group, especially in situations of limited contact. For better or worse, it is often the case that a sense of ethnic identity means loyalty to an identity as a badge or imagined community, not necessarily to the individual members of that community. In tribal contexts, a number of studies of North African Berbers and Native Americans show that ethnogenesis can be motivated in divided tribal societies based on state policies that relate to them as a single category.

In North Africa, ethnically articulated tensions between Arab and Berber groups have peaked in times of intense nation-building, when authorities have attempted to promote one cultural identity over another or, in the case of Libya, attempted to forcefully repress certain expressions of alternate cultural identities.<sup>272</sup> This systematic categorization was the primary factor establishing the basis for collective Berber mobilization that crossed tribal boundaries. While there was, to a certain extent, a transnational element to this cultural movement, Maddy-Weitzman clearly demonstrates that the movements themselves focused on *national* politics in both the Moroccan and Algerian cases, even though this identity may have crossed national borders.<sup>273</sup> Jonathan Wyrzten, in his study on Berber identity formation in interwar Morocco, comes to a similar conclusion for a previous era, that French colonial attempts at state building provided a framework for a “Berber” ethnicity by institutionalizing the category across from an “Arab” ethnicity through policies of divide and rule.<sup>274</sup>

Similarly, Eugene Roosens identified the emergence of what he called “pan-Indian culture” in Canada that encompassed all Native American tribes by conforming to general, positive stereotypes

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272. Soleiman, “Denied Existence: Libyan-Berbers under Gaddafi and Hope for the Current Revolution.”

273. Maddy-Weitzman, “Contested Identities: Berbers, ‘Berberism’ and the state in North Africa.”

274. Wyrzten, “Colonial State Building and the Negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity in Protectorate Morocco,” p. 229.

held within Canadian society. Despite historical enmities between individual tribes, pan-Indian mobilization “unites all Indians against all outsiders.”<sup>275</sup> This type of mobilization was made possible due to the singular approach the Canadian government took regarding all Native American tribes. By conceiving of them as a single society, even in a case where there were significant internal linguistic and cultural divisions, the Canadian government created the basis for shared interest and group mobilization. In a number of different states, tribal groups have proven equally vulnerable to the social consequences of national politics by reacting to state policies through forging inter-tribal solidarities in the cases where tribally divided groups are conceived of as a single and relatively homogenous society.

The Aqaba Bedouin have been subject to similar treatment by Egyptian authorities, who see the Bedouin as constituting a singular type of “traditional society.” The legitimacy of the separate existence of these Bedouin, however, is more easily contested and has been suppressed to a much larger extent than those of the Berber and Native American tribal groups. This is primarily because the Bedouin share the same religion and language as dominant national society and thus appear culturally similar, as opposed to the Amazigh and Native Americans, who clearly constitute a separate sociolinguistic category in their respective states. Ironically, this has created somewhat of a paradox of identity for the Aqaba Bedouin: while Egyptians conceive of them as “Bedouin,” characterized as a particular type of “traditional” society distinctly separate from their own “modern,” national society, they contest the existence of a Bedouin identity category. Simultaneously the state categorizes the Bedouin and denies them.

However, these claims about sociolinguistic uniformity are also largely political. For while it is easy to claim that all Egyptians speak “Arabic,” this covers deep linguistic divisions within the Arabic language. This is by no means limited to a discussion of “national dialects,” which merely serve to reinforce the fiction of social homogeneity within national borders. In my discussions with the Bedouin, a number have told me that they have encountered major

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275. Eugene Roosens, *Creating Ethnicity* (London: Sage, 1989). See also Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, p. 70.

linguistic obstacles when trying to communicate with Egyptians in Cairo.<sup>276</sup> One even remarked that he was forced to resort to English because no one in Cairo could understand his dialect. Furthermore, several Bedouin reported that during trips to central Egypt, they were often considered foreigners, with “Saudi” being the most common categorization, based not merely on language, but also on dress and even skin color and body-type:

One time I was in Tahrir Square during the revolution, and I was there with my *Jalabiyya*. Some people came to me and said, “You are Saudi Arabian, you support the government [of Mubarak].” And I said, “I am not Saudi, I am Egyptian.” And no one believed. I showed them my ID card and they told me that it was fake. And I said, “No man, I am Egyptian. I come from Sinai, I am Bedouin.” And one old guy came over and said, “It’s good, it’s ok, the Bedouin.” And the people left, but they had wanted to fight with me.<sup>277</sup>

These Egyptians are clearly conflating “Saudi” and Bedouin, which further demonstrates the way in which ethnicity and nationalism are tied together as well as how ethnic identity often presupposes cultural and ideological characteristics and relations between people. More importantly for this argument, despite political claims to social uniformity—as a “category of practice” instead of merely an abstract “category of analysis”—distinctions are often drawn between Egyptian and Bedouin social groups, even to the extent that Egyptian Bedouin are occasionally “informed” that they are not Egyptian.

But in any event, as this examination of ethnicity has demonstrated, identity is not necessarily grounded in a concrete number or type of cultural structures such as language or religion, and in the case of the Aqaba Bedouin, their distinctive identity is based, not on language or religion, but on a more general type of culture based on origins and descent, elements that *can* define a boundary between Bedouin and Egyptian categories. In the Egyptian context, the Arabic language

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276. Interview with Land activists, May 14, 2009; Interview with Bedouin Divemaster, July 24, 2009; Interview with Community Organizer, May 30, 2012.

277. Interview with a Community Organizer, May 30, 2012.

and the Islamic religion do not constitute major aspects of Bedouin identity used in their heritage defense, as this would undermine their claims to social uniqueness. Instead, the Aqaba Bedouin focus on those things that they do not share with “Egyptians,” such as their tribal affiliations and nomadic descent. While these aspects of Bedouin culture undoubtedly form legitimate bases for ethnic mobilization, the conventional wisdom on ethnicity does not often hold these characteristics in the same regard as language, religion, or certain “racial” qualities such as skin color. Such an identity might therefore be considered “less legitimate” and thus more easily contestable by essentialists and state authorities.

Despite this legitimacy dilemma, these major aspects of Bedouin culture have formed the basis for group interests and inter-tribal solidarities. While tribally-based divisions continue to exist, there is now a clearly identifiable “Bedouin culture” and singular government policies are setting the stage for group mobilization.<sup>278</sup> In this way, tribal divisions may continue to limit the type of ties that might be formed between members of different tribes, but in national contexts, an ethnically-articulated Bedouin identity is presented as an alternative to Egyptian identity, not an identity grounded in specific tribal affiliations, which form a different type of solidarity that operates in different contexts. Furthermore, the Bedouin are increasingly articulating an emerging “Bedouin culture” in their expressions, and recognize that it is forming the basis of shared interests. Now, when discussing their traditions with outsiders such as tourists, they do not say “We, the Mzeina, do X,” instead they increasingly say “We, the Bedouin, do X,” where “Bedouin” is a socio-cultural category operating in national political contexts.

As the Sinai increasingly becomes “state space,” defined as territory under effective control of state forces, the Egyptian authorities are more and more able to apply laws and regulations that institutionalize

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278. Barkey and Parikh, “Comparative Perspectives on the State.” This supports their claim, “it has already become evident that state policies constituted one of the major determinants of mobilization and shifting identity patterns.”



this social boundary.<sup>279</sup> While it is clear that the Egyptian authorities are not undertaking a concerted effort to create any institutional antagonism between the Bedouin and the Egyptian migrant workers, as French colonial policy of divide and rule often did in North Africa, the outcomes have not differed significantly due to the prioritization of central Egyptian interests over local Bedouin interests. Furthermore, as it becomes clear that the authorities conceive of the Bedouin as a separate category, they are providing a pre-determined avenue for political mobilization by the Bedouin, even if this mobilization is suppressed in a non-democratic environment. Thus, the basis for a cross-tribal solidarity emerges, one that includes all tribes that consider themselves “Bedouin” and are seen that way by the Egyptian government, often conceiving of the Bedouin as tribal and Egyptians as non-tribal. In this case, perhaps ironically, it is the very fact that Bedouin individuals in Egypt hold tribal identities that constitutes the basis for cross-tribal ethnic solidarities.

We have seen instances of cross-tribal Bedouin solidarities in Dahab, where members of the Mzeina tribe prefer to work or associate with members of the Aleqat or Jabaliyya tribes instead of mainland Egyptians.<sup>280</sup> We have also seen more removed expressions of this solidarity as well, in interactions between the Mzeina and a visiting Jordanian Bedouin, who was welcomed by the Sinai Bedouin as one of their own despite having different national and tribal origins.<sup>281</sup> As we were walking along the Dahab corniche, we were invited into a Bedouin tent that had been erected on a hotel construction site owned by a local Bedouin. As we spoke with the group, they referred to one of the men and informed us that he was not from Sinai, that he was

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279. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). See especially chapter two, “State space: Zones of Governance and Appropriation.” See also Wyrzten, “Colonial State Building and the Negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity in Protectorate Morocco,” p. 230.

280. Observations from Bedouin-Bedouin and Bedouin-Egyptian encounters in Dahab.

281. Observations from an afternoon with an Anize Bedouin from Jordan in Dahab, February 11, 2010.

a member of an Anize tribe from Jordan, in Egypt on business but in Sinai for a short vacation. Despite different national origins, they referred to this Bedouin as a cousin due to similar ethnic origins. It did not matter that he was Jordanian, not Egyptian, or even that he was Anize, not Mzeini, all that mattered is that they considered him to be a “Bedouin,” which provided the basis for their feelings that this visitor was part of their core solidarity group. This identification involved a certain amount of triangulation, leading to the selection of this particular identity as opposed to wider (national) or narrower (tribal) possibilities, which could have increased their perceived social distance if selected. Furthermore, in our conversation, the Anize Bedouin stated that he very much enjoyed his time in Sinai and always visited Dahab after his business in Cairo was concluded. He felt very comfortable in Dahab because there were many Bedouin, to which he contrasted his feelings of discomfort in “Misr” (Egypt proper), which he described as loud, crowded, and inhospitable.

The ability of a “Bedouin” identity to trump tribal divisions in these cases has to do with arenas in which identities are deployed. All individuals hold multiple identities including religion, nationality, tribe, gender, etc. These is often referred to as “levels of identity”; however, I prefer not to use the term “levels” as I do not view these multiple identities in a strict hierarchy where one is necessarily overshadowed by another. Instead, it is preferable to identify the arenas in which each identity operates; the primary identity deployed is contextual, not strictly segmentary.<sup>282</sup> In tribal contexts, or in the absence of state authority in Sinai, tribal identities might be best suited to regulate intergroup dynamics between different tribes, which would create meaningful divisions between solidarity groups. However, in the context of state interactions, which have increased dramatically over the last half century, these tribal identities no longer have the same practical function, as the Egyptian state does not treat individual tribes differently and conceives of all as simply “Bedouin.” Furthermore, continued inter-tribal competition would render this group less

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282. Identity selection is not, however, an individual choice. It should instead be understood as shaped by collective decision-making processes and power-relations within the arenas in question. This is one aspect of identity formation that Posner does not address.

able to compete in national interactions. Categorization creates a natural avenue for collective mobilization based on shared interests that develop in reaction to policies targeting the group. It further shows the extent to which identities can be imposed externally and how categorization can create the basis for solidarity through these aforementioned shared interests. As a hypothetical counterfactual, if Egyptian policies differentiated between tribes or tribal groupings, for example, between the Tawara (South Sinai) and the Tiyaha (Central and North Sinai), it is probable that these identities would be deployed and developed as state policies would have given them political significance, and they might thus form the basis for group mobilization and competition. While this statement is impossible to test within this study, it is the case that in other Arab states—notably Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf states, as well as Saddam's Iraq after the Gulf War—tribal identities have proven quite significant as avenues for definition and resource distribution and, consequently, competition.<sup>283</sup>

In Sinai, this is not the case and it does not make political sense for the Bedouin to mobilize along tribal lines in interactions with the state. Similarly, it does not make practical sense to mobilize along religious lines, even though the Bedouin hold an Islamic identity. While in Egypt, there is an element of Muslim-Christian conflict, in the Bedouins' sociopolitical space this conflict is largely absent, and further, Islam is not a source of distinction between the Bedouin and the groups with which they are in conflict. Thus, there would be little utility in adopting and communicating an Islamic element as a primary indicator of group distinctiveness. This is why "Bedouin," and not some other source of collective identification, has become the primary source of identity for the Aqaba Bedouin in this context.

In the aftermath of the national uprisings of January-February 2011 that drove President Husni Mubarak from power, the Egyptian

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283. For example, see Joseph Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). On Iraq, see Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29.1 (1997).

state cannot be considered any less “authoritarian.” Yet the temporary power vacuum and state of disorganization have created an opening for Bedouin political mobilization. In Sinai in March 2011, Bedouin across Sinai laid the groundwork for a number of ethnically-oriented structures, including an all-Bedouin television station as well as an inter-tribal Bedouin council to interact with the Egyptian military regime.<sup>284</sup> On a more local level, a Bedouin business owner in Dahab has been trying to organize a Bedouin community center in Dahab for the express purpose of allocating resources such as employment as well as providing a center for cultural activities in the town, once again reflecting Cohen’s dual roles of ethnic identity. Regarding the previous lack of Bedouin political mobilization, a Bedouin journalist from Sinai stated, “We [the Bedouin] have been neglected for a long time and prevented from expressing ourselves,” suggesting that the lack of ethnically-articulated Bedouin institutions stemmed not from a lack of solidarity or will, but from the active suppression of civil society by the Egyptian regime.<sup>285</sup> Even this journalist’s statement is reflective of the recognition of both a shared culture and political interests. The early attempts at ethnic mobilization following the collapse of the Egyptian regime reinforce his claim.

It is clear from the Bedouins’ own expressions of their cultural self-image that they are conforming closer to concepts of ethnic “Bedouin” identities over other, notably tribal, forms of identity. As this ethnic identity is less objectively distinctive than the other tribal examples cited earlier, notably the Amazigh and Native Americans, the legitimacy of a Bedouin identity is far more easily contestable. However, this does not in any way mean that the processes involved are not having significant impacts on Bedouin identity. In fact, this contestation of a Bedouin identity can be seen as a fundamental element of social conflict.

One last point must be made about identity formation and the Bedouin, which is that this phenomenon is clearly not unique to this group, and these patterns of socioeconomic change and identity transformation in response to state building are phenomena that

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284. Amirah Ibrahim, “Push and Pull,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, March 3–9, 2011. <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1037/eg41.htm>>.

285. Ibid.

can be found in practically all developing countries, for example the adoption of certain tastes of sports and music. Why, then, are these Bedouin an interesting case study? I believe it has to do with the distinction between what some scholars have labeled the third and fourth worlds, where the third world, now that the Cold War is over, is a term that refers to developing states, and the fourth world is a term that nominally refers to indigenous people or what are conceived of as “traditional societies,” often seen as autarkic and static.<sup>286</sup> This is clearly not the case, and the idea of the “unchanging Bedouin” is as inaccurate as the idea, once quite popular, of the “unchanging East” that motivated past Orientalist discourse. What was once perceived as a conflict between the Developed and the Developing Worlds during the Age of Imperialism has shifted to one between the Developing and the Indigenous Worlds in the Age of States. In this way, socioeconomic transformation and identity formation are directly linked; both are reactions to state development policies geared at state- and nation-building. Furthermore, under these conditions, the most likely type of identity to develop is ethnic in nature, articulated along cultural lines to maintain a distinctive group identity.

## **Towards an Environmental Theory of Identity Transformation**

From the discussion above, focused on the question “What can ethnicity theory tell us about Bedouin identity?,” we inevitably arrive at the opposite question: What, if anything, can the Bedouin and their increasing interaction with the state tell us about identity and its transformation? I believe the answer is quite a bit, especially in comparison with the other examples discussed in this chapter. Taken together, an interesting pattern begins to emerge, one based on the role of external forces. While often marginalized in the study of identity,

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286. See George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Collier: MacMillan Canada, 1974). For another definition of Fourth World, see “International Day of the World’s Indigenous People,” Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples.

it should be evident from this analysis that external perceptions and sustained interactions appear to have a powerful influence in shaping identities and their articulation. Theories of constructivism already acknowledge the importance of processes of interaction in shaping and sustaining certain identities.<sup>287</sup> This observation simultaneously provides an explanation for the primordial elements of identity, represented by the cultural symbols and labels attached to certain identities, as well as the contingent nature of identities, or more specifically their contextual definitions, which hinge on interactions with particular sociopolitical groups whose own identities and interests vary from state to state.

A number of the empirical and theoretical works cited above seem to support this claim, as their own analyses acknowledge the importance of outsider perceptions in their discussions of legitimacy and meaning. For example, Smith's definition of ethnic legitimacy hinges on the recognition of history and cultural distinctiveness "in the eyes of outsiders," and even his definition of ethnicity hinges on the recognition of traits "by outsiders." Furthermore, as Maddy-Weitzman and Wyrzten demonstrate, periods of heightened cultural mobilization in North Africa appear to be responses to attempts at suppression by politically powerful others. My own observations support these claims. Reid, in his discussion of Egyptian national identity, suggests that Pharaonism became a key element of Egyptian identity as a result of British and French attempts to monopolize and appropriate the field of Egyptology. Too, anthropologists such as Cohen and Mitchell discuss the activation of identity conflict, which is what Eriksen means when he analyzes ethnic identities as a product of *interaction*. But again, these claims should not be taken to mean that identities themselves do not exist independent of interactions with others.<sup>288</sup> I once again appeal to the distinction between stereotype and symbol to clarify the distinction between the constructivist elements of identity and the "primordial."

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287. Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46.2 (1992), p. 421.

288. Or otherwise stated, that these identities cannot be sustained outside of the initial interaction that produced them.

The psychological concept of *altercasting* has the potential to contribute a great deal to our understanding of identity transformation through interaction. While this concept has been studied in the fields of social psychology, marketing, and to a limited extent, international relations, it has rarely been applied to theories of ethnicity and identity formation. However, with slight modifications it may provide valuable insight into the manner in which hegemonic political actors define social groups and project roles onto them. Altercasting is defined as “a technique of interactor control where ego [self] uses tactics of self-presentation and stage management in an attempt to frame alter’s [other] definitions of social situations in ways that create the roles in which ego desires alter to play.”<sup>289</sup> In this way, definitions assumed by the state and reified through the formation of policies are projected onto social groups with the expectation that these groups will behave in the manner described. It should be clear that attempts to impose “legibility” represent less active (at least in their articulation) attempts to align state expectations with the behavioral patterns of the social groups in question.<sup>290</sup>

In the application of the concept of altercasting, a major input in the transformation of identity is the state, whose policies provide a set of constraints that crystallize a structural reality for social groups within that field. This structure should be considered both economic and social, ascribing both acceptable economic roles as well as “official” social definitions to particular groups. The marginalization of the Bedouin stems not merely from uneven economic policies favored by state authorities, but also from the suspicious attitudes projected towards the Bedouin, which shape the manner in which authorities treat them, a quintessential example of altercasting. In turn, these projected attitudes shape the manner in which the Bedouin conceive of their role in Egyptian society as well as their relationship to state authorities and other social groups within the state.

Another element of altercasting is the role that political power plays in the direction of this projection. It has been clearly demonstrated that both the state and the Bedouin have perceptions of the other that are quite different from their own self-perceptions. In a situation where

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289. Wendt, “Anarchy is what states make of it,” p. 421.

290. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

both groups try and cast the other, what can be said about which side prevails? There is little doubt that power asymmetries play a significant role in determining the outcome of this interaction, and the definitions perpetuated by the state have penetrated further than the definitions perpetuated by the Bedouin. Returning to the modification of Wendt's maxim, "If [powerful] men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences," we might conclude that *power* is what gives state authorities the ability to impose their interests and social definitions on other social groups.

Of course, this does not necessarily say anything about where and when identity conflict will break out, since it is not necessarily the case that an incorrect essentialization of a social group will activate conflict; groups may accept the stereotypes and roles ascribed to them and comply with their subordination. In fact, for our current purposes, let us assume that the state is *always* incorrect in its essentialization of social groups (this may not be categorically true but is unproblematic for this argument). In this situation, identity conflict is activated when the essentialized social group refuses to accept the roles ascribed to them and instead continues to pursue its own interests through other paths. I label this process "assertion" which can be constructed diametrically against "subordination." When expectation diverges significantly from self-presentation, especially in situations where ego/self is not interested in updating its expectations but instead desires to force its expectations onto alter/other, this will create friction between the two groups manifested in sociopolitical conflict.<sup>291</sup> One possible explanation for an ability to resist is relative capacity: if the social group has the power to contest roles of subjugation, and it is the case that the utility of resistance minus the resulting sanctions is higher than the utility of subjugation, it is probable that they will do so.<sup>292</sup> In Aqaba, despite the state's moral claims to legitimacy of power, their

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291. On expectation versus self-presentation, see Weinstein and Deutschberger, "Some Dimensions of Altercasting," p. 456.

292. Formally resistance comes when  $U_a - P > U_s$  where  $U$  is the utility function for assertion (a) and subordination (s) and  $P$  represents the sanction from attempts to resist. For an excellent formalization of the political economy of identity, see Moses Shayo, "A Model of Social Identity with an Application to Political Economy: Nation, Class, and Redistribution," *American Political Science Review* 103 (2009).



capacity is relatively weak. This levels the playing field for the Bedouin and undermines the state's ability to sanction the Bedouin for failing to conform to "acceptable" identities projected by the state. The state has paid the price for their attempt to over-cast the Bedouin in a situation where their repressive apparatus is too weak to back it up with appropriate coercion.

Consequently, the emergence of a particular identity in a particular context should be an equilibrium in which the identity adhered to yields the greatest utility contingent on the decisions of all the other actors in the arena and the structures that define it.<sup>293</sup> This approach is undeniably instrumental; however, it does not claim that individuals may simply choose any identity they desire, a common accusation directed against instrumentalist accounts of identity formation. Instead, it suggests that we should be able to predict which identities will be chosen as long as we know the institutions and actors within an arena of contestation.

By creating policies that institutionalize a boundary between national identities and "others," the state has created a predetermined avenue for identity mobilization. From a rational perspective, the state has already done much of the "start-up" work for identity mobilization, providing a set of shared interests and, on a psychological level, reinforcing the idea that individuals are already members of that group.<sup>294</sup> This lowers the cost of mobilization for elites, increasing the potential payoffs. This also provides a plausible mechanism that explains the centrality of state policies in shifting identity patterns. And alongside a discussion of the cognitive power of cultural symbols, this further explains why identities are contingent as well as quite persistent, external perceptions and structural conditions "pre-select" and activate certain identities. Groups do not necessarily have the ability to impose self-definitions of their own identity as sociopolitical facts. This can be considered an "environmental" theory of identity transformation.

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293. This brings us to the type of equilibrium defined by John Nash in 1951. This is one of the central concepts of game theory. John Nash, "Non-Cooperative Games," *The Annals of Mathematics* 54.2 (1951), pp. 286–295.

294. Weinstein and Deutschberger, "Some Dimensions of Altercasting," p. 456.



# Conclusions

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Tourism development along the Aqaba Coast by the Egyptian state has instigated major socioeconomic transformations among the Aqaba Bedouin. Through processes such as sedentarization and urbanization, these Bedouin are becoming increasingly integrated into emerging and developing urban structures in Sinai. The identity processes that the Bedouin are currently undergoing are reflective of these transformations and highlight processes of integration and state building along a national periphery. The shape of this integration, as well as the specific reaction of the Bedouin, is driven not by Bedouin cultural peculiarities but by their reactions to the approach Egyptian authorities have taken regarding Egypt's Bedouin population and Sinai development. Socioeconomic transformation among the Bedouin in Dahab is a reaction to the shape of state development schemes; increasing integration has resulted in increasing vulnerability to, and reliance on, the institutions of the state. Simultaneously, as the integration of the Bedouin accelerates, the identity processes that have helped the Bedouin distinguish themselves from the population of central Egypt have also accelerated. These identity processes are not a cause of Bedouin attempts to increase their autonomy; they are instead reactions to homogenizing processes of integration and acculturation, leading social groups to become more concerned with the expression of cultural continuity and group cohesion. In the face of acculturation and social homogenization, the Bedouin are fighting to maintain a distinctive and distinguishing identity.

Egyptian development in Sinai has produced two major transformative reactions among the Aqaba Bedouin. The first is a process of economic transformation as Bedouin economies have been reorganized to take advantage of emerging opportunities. This has frustrated Egyptian development policies, based on the prioritization of core national interests at the expense of peripheral interests. The Egyptians did not prepare to share the Sinai with the Bedouin. Instead, development reports indicate an expectation that the Bedouin would essentially "become Egyptian," discarding their

traditional values and modes of socioeconomic organization in a manner similar to the assumptions of modernization theory. This has been the primary factor encouraging the emergence of a competitive economic relationship between the Egyptians and the Bedouin in Dahab. We may conclude from the clear empirical evidence that the assumptions regarding the effects of the modernization paradigm for development—notably that the homogenization of identities would follow economic development—have proven unfounded.<sup>295</sup>

The second reaction has been social, as the Bedouin settling in Dahab have adopted new social patterns to regulate their transforming lives. The presence of foreigners has, perhaps, had the greatest social effect on the Bedouin, leading to the adoption of many aspects of Northern, globalized culture including dress, music, and the increasing adoption of consumerist tendencies. The foreign symbols adopted by the Aqaba Bedouin reflect increasing awareness of globalizing culture as well as identification with foreign groups subjected to similar state policies as opposed to greater identification with the values of dominant social groups within their own state. This is a clear rejection of nationalist ideology among the Bedouin, or more specifically, a rejection of national interests and ideologies of the Egyptian state.

The Bedouin do not consider themselves Egyptian despite being *de jure* citizens of the Egyptian state. This is because Egyptian policies favoring the core interests of the central state have created an unequal relationship benefiting Nile Valley Egyptians over the Bedouin; the Bedouin are not granted the same rights or privileges. These issues of Egyptian national interest, expressed through Egyptian development policies and integration processes in Sinai, have resulted in reactive identity processes that have led the Bedouin to reject Egyptian identity due to an incompatibility with the Bedouins' interest in defending their resources and heritage. The Bedouin have instead sought to express their identity through other avenues. Their orientation towards the symbols and values of the tourists is one of the methods the Bedouin have chosen to distinguish themselves from the rest of Egypt. A turn towards an ethnically-articulated "Bedouin" identity has been another. This identity focuses on symbols of Bedouin culture that differ from

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295. Daher, "Reconceptualizing Tourism in the Middle East," p. 21. See also Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Society*.

Egyptian symbols and thus work to distinguish the Bedouin from “Egyptians.” While it cannot be said that these symbols *define* the boundary, since this boundary emerges from sociopolitical and economic conflicts, they help render this boundary socially legible. Through a fusion of elements of both distinguishing traditions as well as adopted symbols, the Bedouin have been able to articulate an identity that reflects local conditions and evolving values.

This is not to say that the treatment of Nile Valley Egyptians in a setting such as Cairo is necessarily better than the treatment of the Aqaba Bedouin. State authorities, especially the feared state security apparatus run by the Interior Ministry, came to rely on repression and intimidation in many cases, and instances of torture and violence against Egyptians were not uncommon. The sheer brutality of security forces, resulting in the deaths of some 846 unarmed protestors during the national uprising of January and February 2011, clearly demonstrate that Egyptian citizens do not have as harmonious a relationship with the state as my discussion of Bedouin perceptions might otherwise suggest.<sup>296</sup> However, these actions are far less visible to the Bedouin than the perceived favoritism shown to the Egyptians in Dahab and across Sinai, and it is state conduct within this arena, more than in faraway settings such as Cairo and Alexandria, that has shaped Bedouin understandings of state attitudes towards the Bedouin and other social groups within the Egyptian state. Bedouin perceptions have formed within their primary sociopolitical environment, the Sinai Peninsula.

While Egyptian policies are largely responsible for shaping the framework of Bedouin economic transformation, including their

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296. At the moment, it is unclear what direction this relationship will take. However, following the collapse of the Mubarak regime in February 2011, the security apparatus of the Interior Ministry was more or less replaced with that of the military. Death toll figures taken from: *Mulakhas al-Taqrir al-Niha'i li-Lajna al-Tahqiq wa-Taqaasi al-Haqaiq bi-Sha'n al-Ahdath allati Wāqabat Thawrat 25 Yanayir 2011 (Summary of the Fact Finding Committee for the Events Accompanying the Revolution of 25 January 2011)*, National Committee for the investigation and fact finding regarding the events of January 25, Arab Republic of Egypt (Arabic), [http://www.ffnc-eg.org/assets/ffnc-eg\\_final.pdf](http://www.ffnc-eg.org/assets/ffnc-eg_final.pdf).

marginalization from resort tourism and their adoption of illegal or illicit practices, the Egyptians have placed responsibility on the Bedouin themselves, attributing these patterns of Bedouin economics to a set of inherent cultural traits that force the Bedouin into the category of a “traditional” society. Furthermore, the Sinai Bedouin have quite often been associated with crime and terrorism, especially in state pronouncements which eschew all responsibility for instability in the Sinai and instead blame the Bedouin, reinforcing their negative reputation. Once again, this has been attributed to certain cultural characteristics of the Bedouin themselves and not, in any way, to the harsh economic circumstances to which the Egyptians have subjected the Bedouin and the relative benefits of illicit activities.

Instead of addressing the causes of Bedouin involvement in such activities, Egyptian authorities have resorted to repressive measures that have reinforced these perceptions, increased Bedouin involvement in such activities, and occasionally sparked violent confrontations between the Bedouin and Egyptian forces, especially in the north of the peninsula. In recent years, this issue has been receiving increasing attention in the media, with many press accounts focusing on clashes between the Northern Sinai Bedouin and the Egyptian police and army, portraying the Bedouin as restive and dangerous. Increasingly, though, the media has given attention to the perspective of the Bedouin, notably in an article published in *The Economist* in August 2010, which examined the causes of Bedouin discontent, stating, “Native tribes in the north of the peninsula complain they have been marginalised and left impoverished, while Egyptians from the Nile Valley have colonised choice lands on its southern coast for tourism,” motivating their turn towards illegal practices.<sup>297</sup> However, since the collapse of the Mubarak regime, outbreaks of violence between Bedouin and security forces as well as instances of Bedouin kidnappings of tourists have only served to reinforce their reputation for dangerous and criminal behavior, undermining any progress towards greater cooperation with the state.

Egyptian authorities are targeting the symptoms and not the causes of the conflict, institutionalizing a repressive relationship instead of a

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297. “Egypt’s Restive Bedouin: Why the Bedouin of the Sinai Peninsula Are Angry,” *The Economist*, August 5, 2010.

potentially constructive one. Instead of addressing certain deficiencies in their own policies encouraging this marginalization, they have instead chosen to blame the Bedouin for failing to conform to the standards set by the government and development agencies. By stereotyping the Aqaba Bedouin with labels of criminality, Egyptian authorities have cast their behavior as deviant as opposed to the “legitimate” actions of the state, ensuring a marginal or subordinated position for them in economic development. In this way, Egyptian authorities have attempted to use this negative image to undermine budget tourism as undesirable and focus development on multinational resort tourism, promoting the agenda of the central government.

It is clear that at no point did the Egyptian authorities undertake a concerted campaign to marginalize the Bedouin, and furthermore that Egyptian policies are not purposefully constructed to discriminate against them. The problem is one of perception. The Egyptian authorities have come to view the Bedouin as a “traditional” society due to their assumptions about who the Bedouin are and what they do.<sup>298</sup> These assumptions, based on faulty premises, have led the Bedouin to consider Egyptian development as a neo-colonial expression of domination. The question that remains, and which I prefer not to address for lack of real substantiating evidence, is whether the state’s essentialization and its claim to have a responsibility to modernize “traditional groups” truly reflects authorities’ perceptions of such groups or whether the state is merely attempting to justify its preferred policies.

## **Bedouin Identity in Contemporary Contexts**

Despite processes of socio-economic transformation among the Bedouin, a strong Bedouin identity has lingered in some form or another. As this identity does not conform to ideal-type patterns of Bedouin organization, the concept of the Bedouin as an objective

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298. Dames and Moore, *Sinai Development Study*, vol. 6, “Settlement and Social Development.”

occupational definition will not enrich our understanding of contemporary Bedouin. Instead, it constrains our ability to examine social transformation among integrating peripheries as we focus our search on rigid and outdated typologies looking for this “traditional society.” In other words, a lingering focus on Bedouin typologies will prevent researchers from examining the social construction of contemporary identities and the roles that they play in the age of states. Both William Young and Dale Eickelman reach the same conclusion, that Bedouin identities are “primarily social categories, not empirical ones,” which will inevitably vary depending on context.<sup>299</sup> Thus, it is not useful to classify a group as Bedouin according to a specific combination of culture traits; Bedouin identity comes from somewhere else. In the words of Eickelman, “Perhaps the best question to ask is not ‘What is a Bedouin?’ but ‘Who says of which group they are Bedouin and why?’”<sup>300</sup> Instead of searching for the Bedouin according to defined typologies, it is better to seek to understand how and why a Bedouin identity can be successfully deployed in national contexts.

In the context of economic development along the Aqaba Coast, the best way to understand the manner of identity transformation among the Bedouin is to return to Samuel Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies*. While Huntington remains a bit more agnostic than myself in his attitudes towards the economic and political aspects of modernization, he clearly identifies the complex relationship between economic transformation, political development, and social identity. A transformed Bedouin identity in Aqaba has been successful precisely because it has been able to “achieve a new consciousness and become the basis for new organization,” in turn because it is capable of “meeting many of the needs of political identity, social welfare, and economic advancement which are created by the *processes of*

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299. Dale F. Eickelman, *Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2001), pp. 73–74. See also Young, “‘The Bedouin’: Discursive Identity or Sociological Category?”

300. Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach*, p. 74.



*modernization* [my emphasis].”<sup>301</sup> While this identity as an idealized type has remained largely unchanged, as have the *communicated* symbols and values of the community, this study has unequivocally shown the significant social and economic transformations already experienced by the community.

In the contemporary era, defined by a system of territorially bounded nation-states, this emergent Bedouin identity is most effectively articulated in the language of ethnicity. This is an almost inevitable result of state-building because it results in a situation where “all groups, old as well as new... become increasingly aware of themselves as groups and of their interests and claims *in relation to other groups* [my emphasis].”<sup>302</sup> In the context of the Aqaba Bedouin, it serves to contest dominant, hegemonic national identities, maintain cultural solidarity, and regulate intergroup interactions in an increasingly heterogeneous social space. It plays the dual function of providing avenues for the distribution of privileges and resources, as well as providing a sense of belonging and social definition. This identity is communicated through the deployment of cultural symbols reflecting common descent, shared culture, and historical continuity, which form the bases for group legitimacy in a nationally-defined setting.

The effectiveness of ethnicity as a source of solidarity and definition has to do with the importance of culture and history to notions of familiarity and group feeling, as well as the centrality of ethnicity in the articulation of nationalism.<sup>303</sup> While this identity focuses on the communication of primordial ties and culture, as we have seen and as researchers like Salzmann, Eickelman, and Young have shown, the Bedouin do not conform to ideal typologies, which themselves are

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301. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, p. 38. Huntington’s “processes of modernization” are almost identical to the processes I describe as “integrating.” I have removed the label “modernizing” because of a lack of definition distinguishing precisely what is modern from precisely what is traditional. Huntington appears unconcerned with this distinction and focuses on “processes of modernization.”

302. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

303. See Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*; see also Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*.

rooted in strong notions of occupational primordialism. How then, can this seeming paradox be resolved? The answer comes from the works of the instrumentalist writers, notably Eriksen and Cohen, who show that while primordial elements legitimize these identities, the purpose of the identity itself is to address challenges of contemporary sociopolitical organization.

Acculturation and social transformation among the Aqaba Bedouin has not led to the loss of their Bedouin identity. It has, instead, spurred the Bedouin to defend their heritage, which they see as under threat from Egyptian state policies due to the aforementioned integrative processes that have led to a convergence in “operational culture,” that is to say normative patterns of socioeconomic organization, between Egyptians and the Bedouin. This convergence is incomplete due to a different set of constraints imposed on each community; but from discussions of patterns of urban settlement, issues of modesty, and patterns of remittances, there is ample evidence showing that similar structural conditions elicit similar responses from groups considered culturally different. These and other similarities have led the Bedouin to over-emphasize the traditional aspects of their culture in order to maintain links to their ancestral pasts. Despite this focus on Bedouin “traditions,” there is no denying that the Bedouin in Dahab have embraced their socioeconomic transformations and are taking pride in their new cultural forms. These new forms, however, have not led to the adoption of national identities or the loss of primordially-motivated solidarities.

## **Identity and Culture in the Contemporary Arena**

A number of Bedouin youths in Dahab have begun to lament the seeming “disappearance” of Bedouin culture due to the sedentarization of the Bedouin and their increasing acculturation.<sup>304</sup> This does not indicate that the Bedouin perceive that their identity is in decline or in danger of disappearing, but that practices considered by the Bedouin

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304. Conversation with Bedouin youth in Dahab, February 9, 2010.

to be traditional are disappearing in the face of development. The Bedouin communicate this understanding by stipulating that Bedouin culture remains alive in the desert villages, where practices that are no longer utilitarian in an urban setting continue to form the basis for Bedouin organization in the desert. The importance of maintaining these “traditions” is that they form the symbolic basis for group feeling and solidarity; they are what the Bedouin believe define them as a culturally distinct community.

This concern creates somewhat of a paradox, in that while these Bedouin continue to assert a strong sense of Bedouin identity, they are increasingly concerned that they are conforming less and less to notions of what it means to be a Bedouin. However, these Bedouin admitted that after being exposed and growing accustomed to the luxuries of settled life and technological development, notably television, internet, and air conditioning, they are completely unwilling to give these things up for the sake of returning to “tradition.” In any event, this disappearance of culture is a perennial concern for the Bedouin, in some ways motivating their preoccupation with heritage defense. This is intimately connected to the issue of globalization, which is a homogenizing process. While economic globalization, as it is sometimes argued, is a continual process that began perhaps centuries ago, the most recent wave of globalization has been increasingly social instead of merely economic, leading to the proliferation of what might be considered globalized forms of culture. The global adoption of similar aspects of culture, including forms of entertainment and the proliferation of global consumer items, have a homogenizing effect in which distinct social groups—be they nations, ethnic groups, or religions—are becoming culturally more similar. This has been made possible through the availability across the globe of specific forms of culture. One example is the globalization of MTV and even just the news, which has allowed various groups to access identical pieces of information. The internet is an additional step beyond, allowing for the global sharing of information and rendering national boundaries increasingly socially irrelevant.

A consequence of this homogenization has been the perception that culture is disappearing, or that globalization entails a “loss of culture” in which culture has been replaced by “consumerism” as a source of

self-definition.<sup>305</sup> Since social groups tend to become more concerned with their distinctiveness during periods of homogenization, they have become very concerned with the consequences of globalization, notably what they see as a loss of their unique identities. This only serves to increase the importance of ethnic identities as a way to tie people to their heritage and to continue to categorize and give order to an increasingly homogenous social world marked by the disintegration of “traditional” social frameworks. These are perceptions stemming from the weakening of solidarity networks, such as the ethnic group, that provide individuals with context and group feeling.

Compounding this pressure is the commercialization of culture, where a reified culture is packaged for consumption. Through tourism, another manifestation of globalization, Bedouin traditions, many of which have lost their original significance due to transformation over time, have assumed economic utility and have become a major source of livelihood.<sup>306</sup> Tourism as an avenue for the commercial transmission of heritage is a primary vehicle for the display of culture both among peripheral populations as well as the state. This is especially true for groups such as the Aqaba Bedouin, since tourism as an industry is the primary economic activity within their territory. As a consequence of the commercialization of this culture, heritage defense is not merely political and symbolic, but economic as well.

In this way, ethnogenesis has been a reaction to globalization and homogenization; additionally, it is a way to compete with national identities and core interests. It serves the purpose of maintaining solidarity groups through the transmission of culture, which forms the basis for familiarity and group feeling. Culture, in this context, is the primary tool to link the individual to a group through the deployment of shared symbols which form the basis of group feeling. In the contemporary era, individuals look to the past and “tradition” as a source of identification that ascribes “belonging” or definition to the individual. Thus, globalization is not leading to the “loss of culture,” but instead to the “homogenization of culture,” which is simultaneously leading to a crisis of social identity necessitating the emergence of

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305. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 165, 166–168.

306. For a discussion on the role of tourism in processes of globalization, see Daher, “Reconceptualizing Tourism in the Middle East,” p. 30.

ethnically-articulated identities. Culture is the primary tool of these identities, which is why cultural defense is so vital to the social being of such groups.

Additionally, globalization has resulted in the transcendence of nationalism among these peripheral populations. In many respects it has provided an alternative source of identity, allowing the Aqaba Bedouin to identify with social groups outside the boundaries of their state. This process undermines the claim that nationalism is the most organic form of solidarity by providing a different framework based on transnationalism. This framework understands that nations are not homogenous and that similar positions within a social hierarchy can also form the basis for a certain type of group feeling across national borders. We might understand that globalization can encourage the formation of “role solidarity,” or the identification with a social group that exists outside national boundaries but which occupies a similar role within their own national society, by adopting and communicating similar cultural vehicles or symbols. One example of this sense of solidarity has been Bedouin identification with African-American culture due to the perception that both are repressed or marginalized groups within their respective societies (see Figure 16). The adoption of similar cultural symbols, for example Hip Hop, is symbolic of this solidarity. In this way, the adoption of certain aspects of global culture can be manifestations of local conditions.

This view of acculturation and identity transformation poses a direct challenge to the assumptions of modernization, which predicts a convergence of different groups’ values through the decline and discarding of traditional identities for “modern” identities, values, and patterns of solidarity. As this study shows, none of the sociopolitical assumptions of modernization actually occurred, further suggesting that the basic tenets of modernization theory do not constitute a useful paradigm on which to base national development policies for development. Perhaps a more accurate model of social change is presented in a theory called “post-traditionalism” which allows us to reconsider exactly what is meant by “tradition” and what a process of acculturation implies.<sup>307</sup> Simon suggests that it is better to view

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307. Simon, “Development Reconsidered,” pp. 193–194.

tradition as “the accumulated amalgam of practices and beliefs from previous epochs and domains,” challenging the dichotomy between “traditional” and “modern” and instead presenting “tradition” as the result of change over time.<sup>308</sup> Post-traditionalism accepts this by predicting a blending of tradition and acculturation, where evolving cultural forms reflect “cross-cutting continuity and change, of old, new, and hybrid identities, of reason and reaction, of gender and power relations, of the preservation versus the transcendence of categories, and of how and by whom they are negotiated, defined, and safeguarded [= elites].” This approach explains many manifestations of transforming Bedouin culture and more accurately approximates avenues of cultural change and identity formation in contemporary contexts. It furthermore allows for the adoption of new cultural forms and the simultaneous retention of primordial solidarities.



Figure 16: Graffiti on a wall in a Bedouin neighborhood.  
Photo by author, May 3, 2010.

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308. Ibid.

## **The Implications of Development along National Peripheries**

From the study of the developing relationship between the Aqaba Bedouin and the central Egyptian authorities, a number of conclusions regarding nation-building and peripheral development can be drawn, especially as relates to issues of integration and identity formation. It is clear that a lingering tendency to predicate development strategies on a modernization paradigm, while perhaps maximizing state revenue, is complicating issues of integration and socialization due to the sheer incongruence between the social expectations of modernization and the social realities of development. This is not to argue that all states and development authorities base their projects on modernization theory, nor is it an accusation that development agencies such as USAID, whose involvement in Sinai development was discussed in chapter one, do this categorically. However, it is clear that there is much congruence between the modernization literature and the development rhetoric of the Egyptian state in Sinai. This has necessarily undermined the fruits of national development programs, leading to increasing tension and hostility between the core of national societies and the margins as dominant social groups attempt to extend national values and identity to the peripheries.

Transformation of identity in this context is a reaction based on the particular form of state policies and social interaction. Of primary importance is the structural position of a specific group within a society, which results from socioeconomic relationships developing between social groups within a state as well as between the government and various social groups. If government policies lead to the marginalization or repression of a non-dominant social group, no amount of socialization, specifically through institutions such as education and media, will convince this group to accept dominant symbols or identities, which would be considered threatening or at least alien instead of complimentary. More likely, as this study has shown, peripheral social groups will turn to alternative identities that provide greater utility and might successfully contest the assumptions of dominant national identities. The Aqaba Bedouins' rejection of Egyptian cultural symbols in education—expressed through imagery

and nationalist histories as presented in lectures and state-approved textbooks—is a perfect example of how socializing institutions such as education and the media play a secondary role in identity formation. The Bedouin claim that these symbols are culturally meaningless to them and further claim that “the government doesn’t put Bedouin history in the books at school. One hundred years from now, my children won’t know who I am and where I came from.”<sup>309</sup> This also suggests that (a) the adoption of national identities is not a natural or inevitable consequence of economic development or increasing integration, and (b) it is impossible to force social conformity to specific identities through coercive measures as long as state policies and institutions favor the adoption of alternatives.

The only way to ensure the successful socialization of these groups into dominant national identities is the articulation of these identities to be able to reflect values considered universal within national boundaries. This means that national ideologies cannot represent a national core at the expense of peripheral social groups; if it does, then a clash of interests will inevitably frustrate attempts at the incorporation of these groups into national society. This also means that if authorities hope to avoid ethnic or other social tensions, state policies cannot benefit one group over another, nor can they seek to appropriate group resources or undermine group distinctiveness by attempting to suppress their history and heritage. These situations have created marginal minorities, undermining national solidarity and often stoking social conflict. However, as states such as the United States demonstrate, wide, inclusive identities often lead to the emergence of narrower “hyphenated-identities” that still subcategorize.

The conflict between the Bedouin and the Egyptian authorities in Sinai resembles an indigenous peoples’ conflict, but this does not mean that all Bedouin in all Middle Eastern contexts can be considered “indigenous peoples” according to the definition given by anthropologists and adopted in chapter four. In fact, in a number of Middle Eastern states, Bedouin heritage and values play a dominant role in national identities, such as in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. For example, Saudi state-building was based strongly on tribal modes of

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309. Interview with a Community Organizer, May 30, 2012.



alliance building, and Saudi identity contains a strongly “Bedouin” element, notably in the relations between Saudi rulers and their subjects and in patterns of solidarity and networks of distribution.<sup>310</sup> In Jordan, Bedouin descent plays a strong element in “Jordanian-ness,” notably in opposition to Jordan’s “Palestinian” population. The Palestinian-Jordanian dichotomy, interestingly enough, closely mirrors notions of settled versus nomadic descent, implying that being “Jordanian” means being of Bedouin descent, and Jordanian national identities and values reflect these cultural origins.<sup>311</sup> Furthermore, tribal identities continue to play an important role in Jordanian society, and tribal solidarities have been identified as a major source of stability for the Jordanian state, as well as a shaper of voting patterns.<sup>312</sup> That the role of Bedouin identities varies across state boundaries is a consequence of the social construction of national and ethnic identities and the dominance of the state as the ultimate arbiter of social identity.

The particular case examined in this study is quite unique to the conditions present in Dahab, and as a result must be considered a micro study of local factors. However, while this study focused on the conditions and consequences of state-building and development in the Aqaba region of Sinai, and so cannot be said to be specifically comparative, this does not mean that the phenomena under study are unique to Egypt or that the processes described are not equally applicable to other cases throughout the developing world. Indeed, it should be self-evident from even a superficial glance at the socioeconomic conditions within other developing states that similar

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310. For an in-depth discussion on Saudi state-building and patterns of national identity, see Kostiner, “Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia.”

311. Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 156–157.

312. Yoav Alon, “The Tribal System in the Face of the State Formation Process: Mandatory Transjordan, 1921–46,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005), pp. 213, 235. For a discussion of voting patterns in Jordan, see Linda L. Layne, “Tribesman as Citizens: ‘Primordial Ties’ and Democracy in Rural Jordan,” in Linda Layne (ed.), *Elections in the Middle East: Implications of Recent Trends* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987).

types of conflicts are present within their borders, and that issues of incorporation, socialization, and solidarity are primary problems facing these countries today. In these countries, it is often the case that economic development and the fuller integration of the state's territory and inhabitants have been primary preoccupations for the regimes in control. Many of the states that have adopted an approach towards economic development similar to Egypt's have faced similar clashes between national identities and peripheral ones. While in the mantra of "modernization," it is easy to view this conflict as one between "modern" (national, core) identities and "primitive" or "traditional" (peripheral) societies, it would be presumptuous to assert that all "national" identities, by virtue of their being the dominant or core identities of controlling regimes, are necessarily "modern," or that peripheral identities are necessarily traditional. Without delving into a discussion of colonialist mentalities, we can nevertheless say that it is exactly this understanding that legitimized the colonial enterprise and which has lingered to dominate the thinking of statist and modernists, often guiding the ideologies of governments focused on development. Furthermore, it is in precisely this manner that state-building and development might be considered "neo-colonial" enterprises. While none of the Bedouin ever specifically used the term "colonial" or "neo-colonial" during my time in Sinai, the language they used to describe the Egyptians and their perception of Egyptian development left no doubt that this was, in fact, their view.

Perhaps the greatest lesson to be taken from this study is the importance of careful and deliberate planning when it comes to peripheral development. Many states place primary value on growth and revenue extraction. However, as this study has clearly demonstrated, development is not merely an economic process. It is also a social process leading to the adoption of new patterns of organization, new social contacts, and often processes of acculturation motivated by the need to adapt to changing environments. However, it is apparent that authorities do occasionally neglect the social aspects of development and express surprise at the "unintended" effects of their development efforts. It is vital that state authorities understand the structure and interests of peripheral populations and take careful steps to ensure their incorporation into dominant identities by

coordinating development with the values and interests of both the center and the periphery. This might require compromise on the part of governments and development authorities to ensure cooperation and that the interests of marginal populations are receiving due attention. Under these circumstances, states will be more successful instilling a sense of national solidarity in their peripheral populations by tying them to the interests of the center. This is valid not only in Egypt, but in all developing states dealing with issues of peripheral development and nation-building.



# Epilogue

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## July 2011– June 2012

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In the aftermath of the events that shook Egypt following the January 25, 2011 uprisings, a question regarding the Sinai has arisen: To what extent has the uprisings that led to the collapse of the Mubarak regime altered the situation in the Sinai? Without a doubt, the issue of Sinai has been a continual concern in 2011–2012, with repeated attacks against the Israel–Egypt gas pipeline, clashes between the Egyptian army and Bedouin in the north of the peninsula, the August 2011 attack on a bus load of civilians in the south of Israel, and the August 2012 attack on an Egyptian police station, which led to armed incursions into North Sinai by the Egyptian military. These events have cast a negative light on the Sinai and its Bedouin inhabitants. But all of these events occurred in the north of the peninsula, among a socially and economically differentiated group of Bedouin.

The situation in the South has been quite different, but no less traumatic. The incidents involving the kidnapping of tourists or factory workers, which occurred throughout 2012 and continues in 2013, as well as armed clashes between security forces and Bedouin in the remote Wadi Firan in June 2012, represented an open challenge to the Egyptian state, revealing its truly limited ability to control Sinai.<sup>313</sup>

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313. “U.S. Tourists Freed Unharmed in Sinai,” *Reuters*, May 31, 2012, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/31/us-egypt-sinai-kidnapping-idUSBRE84U0DL20120531>>; “Egypt Bedouin Kidnap Two Brazilian Tourists,” *Ahram Online*, AFP, March 18, 2012, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/37078/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-Bedouin-kidnap-two-Brazilian-tourists.aspx>>; “U.S. Tourists, Guide Kidnapped by Bedouins in Egypt’s Sinai Freed,” *Al-Arabiya*, February 3, 2012, <<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/03/192306.html>>; “U.S. Tourists Freed Unharmed in Sinai,” *Reuters*, May 31, 2012, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/31/us-egypt-sinai-kidnapping-idUSBRE84U0DL20120531>>; “Bedouin Tribesmen, Police Clash in Egypt’s Sinai, One Dead: Sources,” *Reuters*, June 4,

While demands have been made by the Bedouin for greater inclusion, to which the SCAF<sup>314</sup> and subsequently the government of Muhammad Mursi, paid lip service, at the time of this writing, there appears to be little ability or motivation on the part of the state to truly address Bedouin complaints. In the aftermath of the attack on a police station in North Sinai in August 2012, it instead appears that the state will attempt to respond to continuing unrest with military force.

With the exception of the armed clashes between Egyptian police and Bedouin in Wadi Firan, unrest in South Sinai has been far less violent than in the North. The attention Sinai is receiving, which often characterizes the peninsula as “lawless,” with its inhabitants representing “criminal” elements—notably smugglers, human traffickers, and terrorists—engaging in human rights abuses such as rape, murder, torture, etc., the truth is that while there cannot be any doubt that smuggling groups operating near the Israeli border are conducting themselves in this manner, this characterization does not apply to all of Sinai or even most of Sinai. Additionally, the militant Islamist groups purported to be operating in Sinai, in which a number of Bedouin are believed to be participating, continue to be largely situated in the North as had been the case before 2010.

While the sensationalism of the stories of anarchy and violence in the media has attracted overwhelmingly negative attention to Sinai since the fall of the Mubarak regime, the reality in the South has been far more subdued. Economically, little has changed: the Aqaba Bedouin still face the same pressures for stability in a tourism market. Despite the Aqaba region’s relative calm during the uprisings of 2010 and afterwards, national unrest has had a noticeable impact on tourism in Sinai. As I detailed in chapter two, a theory advanced by a number of anthropologists of tribalism is that in times of instability, the Bedouin have learned to fall back on their subsistence structures. The corollary, discussed in chapter four, is that this will be accompanied by a reinvigoration of kinship ties within the Bedouin community. During the course of my research I had the opportunity to see such

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2012, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/04/us-egypt-sinai-idUSBRE85310Z20120604>>.

314. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the group that seized power from Mubarak in February 2011.

structures, but due to the lack of political instability until 2010, they remained largely dormant; I never thought I would have a chance to see what they looked like first-hand. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, however, I had the opportunity to visit Dahab in July 2011 and again in June 2012 and witnessed this phenomenon. The streets of Dahab were strikingly empty. The Bedouin I spoke with complained that without tourism, there was very little opportunity for work and money was scarce. In these conditions, it appeared as if my friends had fallen back on a more “traditional” pattern of social relations, with the exception of those who maintain steady employment at scuba and windsurfing clubs. One of my Bedouin friends began spending more time with his father’s family, even going to lengths to prepare a plot of his father’s land to begin building a house in case he decides to marry. Another of my friends, who I had never seen wear anything but jeans and a t-shirt, had begun wearing a *jalabiyya*, even though he once told me he hated it. This shift towards greater conformity with “traditional” patterns of social relations (read: those practiced by the older generation) was conspicuous.

I have no doubt these changes in the face of the Egyptian revolution are significant, but what, exactly, do they signify? Does any of this challenge my original set of conclusions about the pace and direction of social transformation? Or does it perhaps reinforce the theory of security in kinship unconnected to issues of political identity? I think that by looking only at this situation frozen in time, these questions are exceedingly difficult to answer, and furthermore, it is far too early to come to any lasting conclusions, especially when the future of the Egyptian state itself is still so murky. When I asked my friend why he was suddenly so concerned with securing a plot of land and building a house, he replied, “What if the tourists do not come back?” lending significant credence to the security argument. And while it was clear from my last visit to Dahab that a more “traditional” set of Bedouin social values were asserting themselves, another aspect of Egyptian state collapse gave me cause for great optimism regarding my conclusions.

While the Mubarak regime expended great energy to prevent political mobilization, its collapse and the subsequent disorder that gripped Sinai permitted precisely the type of mobilization that I

earlier posited, with the tentative emergence of Bedouin-oriented organizations such as the television station, the inter-tribal Bedouin council, and the Bedouin community center mentioned in chapter five. (So far I have, unfortunately, been unable to follow up on the first two and the third is still in its incipient phase.) This substantiates the claim that the lack of Bedouin ethnic institutions was not a result of a lack of a cross-tribal Bedouin identity or solidarity, but one of the suppression of these forms of political mobilization in an authoritarian state. The Bedouin continue to face a coordination dilemma that may prove insurmountable, and the undeniable tension between tribes is an obstacle to closer cooperation. However, with the collapse of the Mubarak regime, and the seeming inability to reassert a strong sense of sovereignty in the Sinai, it will now be up to the Bedouin to succeed or fail on their own instead of attributing their failure to state policies that attempt to prevent political mobilization.

The eventual outcome of the struggle in South Sinai will depend on whether future Egyptian governments respect ethnic pluralism and minority rights, and whether they continue supporting the development paradigm that was the source of tension between the Bedouin and Egyptian migrants in the first place. Furthermore, with the continued conflict between the Egyptian security apparatus and the Bedouin in North Sinai, it is difficult to imagine an Egyptian state strongly influenced by its military interests giving greater freedom to the Bedouin or making a concerted effort to integrate them more fully into the economic fabric of Sinai.

In another regard, the Aqaba Bedouin have exploited this disorder for gains in ways not so dissimilar from the Bedouin in the North. While the presence of Egyptian authorities constrained the Bedouins' ability to assert what they believed were their legitimate land rights, the virtual disappearance of Egyptian security forces have led the Bedouin to increasing boldness. The pace of their attempts to develop the plots of land they have claimed have accelerated significantly. Plots of land that contained simple cinderblock structures in my previous visit have been augmented with gardens and property walls. New neighborhoods, absent in 2009 and 2010, have emerged. Furthermore, the visible police presence in Dahab has practically disappeared. The Bedouin openly disparage the authorities and now claim that while in the past they were afraid of the police, it is now



the turn of the police to be afraid of the people. Graffiti declaring “*La lil-Hukuma*” (No to the government) had appeared in a number of places in ‘Asala between my visits in 2011 and 2012.



Figure 17: Graffiti in ‘Asala declaring “No to the Government”  
Photo by Author, June 2, 2012.

Clearly, the Bedouin have seen the recent instability as an opportunity to advance their own interests, and their actions have been met with some rather harsh criticism by Egyptians and foreign residents I spoke with in Dahab. One foreigner living in Dahab, an employee at an apartment rental agency, suggested that this opportunism was selfish and inappropriate at a time when Egyptians should be coming together to build a better future and doing what they could to help ensure stability. I think this clearly demonstrates the rather large gap in perceptions between the Bedouin and other groups in Dahab, who relate to the Egyptian establishment in Sinai quite differently. More significantly, it appears quite suggestive of Bedouin tendencies to contest state authority and speaks to the age-old idea that tribes and states are fundamentally opposed institutions. This, however, is a subject for another study.

More central to this study is the idea that the processes I describe are not solely unidirectional, but are dynamic and largely situationally dependent. The strengthening of tribal kinship structures that I witnessed gives credence to the idea that the causal mechanism driving identity transformation lies within economic conditions and state policies, or more fundamentally, the ability of the state to implement its policies and enforce them. As with much else in life, only time will tell.

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