

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**New Insights into Bedouin Culture: A Study of Three  
Bedouin Descent Groups in Northeast Egypt**

Being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Anthropology  
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by

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*To My Parents*

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## ABSTRACT

The ethnographic study on which this thesis is based was carried on from September 2002 through August 2003 among three Bedouin descent groups in northeast Egypt and Sinai. Through a cognitive anthropological approach, reflexivity and hermeneutics, and the adoption of participant observation techniques, this thesis is a study of the culture of the Egyptian Bedouin. It aims at providing a better understanding and appreciation of the Bedouin and their culture. It confronts many negative stereotypes and misrepresentations about Bedouin culture and lifestyle. Also concerned with a critical epistemology, this thesis could be considered a statement advocating the cultural rights of the Bedouin. In general, this thesis celebrates the Bedouin organisation and utilisation of their distinctive culture.

In the process of the study, various Bedouin cultural models and schemas are examined and analysed. Examples and comparisons with other cultures are provided wherever possible. The Bedouin construct their own cultural models as a means of negotiating their natural and socio-political environments. They make continuous adjustments in response to the demands of the surrounding natural environment and the socio-political conditions. The Bedouin show a remarkable ability to change and adapt. They can invoke multiple identities and change their model of behaviour according to various contexts. Adaptability becomes very important in the economic sphere. Despite many similarities between different Bedouin groups, each Bedouin group has its own 'local' or 'specific' cultural models, which make Bedouin culture highly diversified.

The study reveals that the stereotypical images of Bedouin as drug smugglers and being 'ignorant' about matters of religion are erroneous. The *'Aiaida* Sufi Bedouin, in particular, demonstrate moral values and Islamic beliefs based on piety and love. Their teachings and wisdom propagate understanding, respect and tolerance of 'others'; such values are highly required for bringing different cultures together. The findings of this study are related to many issues currently discussed worldwide such as modernity and change, Islam and the West, human rights and gender relations. They aim at enriching the ongoing debates on these issues by presenting them from a Bedouin perspective.



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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The Arabic words in this thesis are transliterated according to the Egyptian Bedouin vernacular. I oriented myself to the standard transliteration common in academic books and journals such as the International Journal of Middle East Studies.

Arabic	English Transliteration	Arabic	English Transliteration
ا	a	ض	d
ب	b	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	th	ع	‘
ج	j*	غ	gh
ح	h	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q**
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	s	ي	y

\* In the Egyptian dialect, the classical ‘j’ is pronounced ‘g’  
\*\* In the Bedouin dialect, the classical ‘q’ is pronounced ‘g’.

## INTRODUCTION

This ethnographic study is based on anthropological fieldwork that I carried out among some Bedouin groups in northeast Egypt between October 2002 and August 2003. It also draws on my early experience as a development practitioner working with diverse social and cultural groups in Egypt and the Middle East region. The study deals with three Bedouin descent groups: the *Heweitat* living in northeast Cairo metropolitan area, the *'Aiaida* in Ismailia and Suez Governorates and the *Ahiwat* in central Sinai. It focuses on selected aspects of their remarkable culture and their perceptions and adaptation models to the rapid changes that have affected their whole lifestyle in recent years. It also touches upon the needs and challenges confronting them as a cultural minority group. Close contact with the 'modern' industrial urban culture in metropolitan Cairo has tremendously transformed many of their 'traditional' cultural models. It has also subjected many of them to upheavals imposed by the state's modernisation and development policies.

Anthropology in its recent trends focuses on the voices of the marginalized and makes them force their way to the centre of the world's stage. In recent years, attention has been given to issues of cultural/ethnic diversity, human rights, gender, etc. This thesis falls within this scope. In exploring, these aspects among the Egyptian Bedouin, I have found myself coming closer to the concept of culture. The main focus of this study is, therefore, on culture and meaning formation. How the Bedouin perceive events and changes taking place around them; how they respond to them; and what meanings they make out of these events and changes. The theoretical framework of the study is thus built on theories of cognitive anthropology, and the use of cultural models and schemas (D'Andrade, 1995; Shore, 1996).

I began my study with questioning a widely acknowledged presumption that Bedouin are different from "us". (It is up to the reader to decide who this "us" may be.) The Bedouin's distinctive roving lifestyle and unique cultural identity alone do not completely explain why the sedentary or urban Egyptians divide their social world into 'us' and 'them'. The Bedouin also tend to do the same. In social psychology, the implicit personality theory (IPT) and social identity theory (SIT) propositions provide some insights into this division. The IPT proposed by Bruner and Tagiuri (1954) argues

that people have 'unconscious inference processes' that enable them to form impressions and make judgements about 'others' based on little evidence (known as the 'grain of truth' hypothesis) or even minimal interaction. These inferences are consistent within a culture, held and passed on from one generation to the next. Stereotypes, however, change over time, especially negative ones and some people would be less likely to offer them even if they were held (Gross and McIlveen, 1998, pp.453-455).

The social identity theory (SIT), on the other hand, according to Tajfel and Turner (1986), proposes that people strive to maintain a positive 'self-image' and enhance their own group's 'self-esteem' thus making 'social comparisons' with other groups. By attempting to enhance their self-esteem, 'social competition' arises resulting in the development of emotions of prejudice, discrimination and negative stereotyping (Hewstone, et al, 1996, pp.546-548).

The analysis will prove the invalidity and erroneousness of this presumption and argue against the division of our social world into 'us' and 'them'. In doing this, I tackle in the analysis the negative stereotypical images that are drawn by many sedentary 'urban' Egyptians as well as those in the literature written by many Arab and Western writers. The cognitive anthropological approach will show the 'basic humanity' of the Bedouin (Young, 1996, p.139). Despite the apparent various cultural differences existing between 'us' and 'them', beneath the surface, we are more or less the same. We all share many common things and universal problems such as emotions of love, fear, sadness, happiness, etc.; the struggle for security and material needs which make us all interact with and adapt to the outside world; the need for spiritual support; compassion and care for others including all living things. What makes us different, however, is the way we perceive and experience the world in different social and economic contexts, which equate to differences in personality and character. This study celebrates the Bedouin organisation and utilisation of their distinctive culture. It aims to enhance our understanding of and respect for Bedouin culture.



## Literature Review

Before elaborating on the reasons for the choice of this topic, its importance and my objectives, it is essential to identify the place of this study within the vast and scattered literature on the Bedouin. Bedouin have been the subject of attention from writers in various disciplines for centuries. Countless studies and monographs have been written and the literature is still growing by leaps and bounds. Studies of Bedouin are generally included under the wider subject of nomadic studies. The latter until recently have been described as having “a curiously inchoate, non-cumulative character” (Dyson-Hudson, 1972, p.2). Bedouin studies could also be described as having the same characteristic. The challenge in studying a phenomenon like nomadism as argued by Dyson-Hudson (1972) lies in the difficulty to tackle its variegated aspects after breaking it down into its main components of herding and movement. He argues that until anthropologists manage to possess exact knowledge on its multiple variables, it is going to be very difficult to claim even adequate knowledge of a single nomadic group – let alone ‘nomadism as a general human phenomenon’ (ibid., p.26). A study of contemporary Bedouin, however, becomes more challenging as the anthropologist is not just analysing one phenomenon – nomadism – but several other phenomena like modernism, urbanism and globalisation. Each of these has its own complex variables, which directly or indirectly affect the Bedouin culture and the way Bedouin organise and make sense of their world.

The literature on Bedouin could be broadly divided into two basic fields or sources: firstly, accounts from historians and travellers; and secondly, sociological/ anthropological and geographical studies. Information from the first source is often biased and ethnocentric to a great extent, whether written by Arabs or European explorers and travellers. The renowned Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, in his *Al-Muqaddimah*, or ‘Introduction’ written in 1377, for example, depicted a highly blemished picture of Bedouin, especially camel nomads. He described them as “the most savage human beings that exist. Compared with sedentary people, they are on a level with wild, untamable animals and dumb beasts of prey. Such people are the Bedouins...” (Ibn Khaldun, 1969, p.93). Despite this offensive description, Ibn Khaldun also looked up to them as noble people inclined to goodliness, courage, resilience and many other positive traits. His resolution, however, is that they are inferior to the settled urban folk.



European explorers, adventurers and travellers' portraits of the Bedouin are highly variegated. A common thread visible in all those accounts, however, is the powerful charm of the Bedouin's life and their ability to fire the imagination of those European writers. In some cases they evoked total aversion as in the case of Volney (1787), a French adventurer who travelled among Bedouins in Egypt and Syria. In others, they evoked romanticism as in the narratives of Gertrude Bell (1907) and Lawrence of Arabia. Some accounts gave very intimate details and a wealth of material on Bedouin life and culture such as Charles Doughty's (1936) massive study *Travels in Arabia Deserta* originally published in 1888; Alois Musil's (1928) famous study of the Rwala Bedouins located in Jordan and Syria; G.W. Murray's (1935) study of Egyptian Bedouins based on his observations whilst working as a Director of Desert Surveys in Egypt; von Oppenheim's (1939) study of Bedouin genealogies in German; H.R.P. Dickson's (1951), the British political agent in Kuwait between the two world wars, study of Bedouin life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; and many others. In those accounts one can either find a high regard for Bedouins, their nature and manners as in Dickson's, or a distaste, especially of their alleged pilfering activities and quarrelsome nature according to Murray.

Travellers' accounts in the second half of the twentieth century show a particular interest in preserving the traditional Bedouin lifestyle. One sensitive and beautifully written account is Wilfred Thesiger's (1959) *Arabian Sands*. His intimate description of the people and places is outstanding. He lamented the encroachment of the aspects of modernity, especially vehicles and other modern means of transportation into Bedouin's lives and argued that the new generations of Bedouin will not maintain the age-old bond with the desert and its traditions. Other contemporary travellers have followed in Thesiger's footsteps, such as Asher (1997) – Thesiger's biographer – in his classic of modern travel writing *The Last of the Bedu: In Search of the Myth*. Asher's account is very realistic showing how the modern Bedouin adapt to the changing environmental, economic and political conditions, while still maintaining some of the age-old desert traditions. Keohane's (1994) *Bedouin*, is another testimonial of Bedouin life supplemented with many photographs.

Sociological, anthropological and geographical studies of Bedouin, on the other hand, again are too numerous and remain separate and scattered across those disciplines. I will

limit myself to a discussion and review of some major anthropological studies related only to Bedouin in Egypt. Anthropological literature written about Egyptian Bedouin is relatively new; the bulk being written during the 1960s and 1970s. Many studies are also written in Arabic. These studies can be divided into two major categories based on the topic and approach. The first category focuses on the theme of development and change or Bedouin adaptation to change and sedentarisation, while the second focuses more on their culture and expression of meaning.

Studies under this first category have been mainly commissioned by the government and international organisations such as the World Food Program (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, as well as academic institutions, mainly the Social Research Center (SRC) of the American University in Cairo and the Anthropology Department at Alexandria University. Most of these studies have been undertaken in Egypt's northwest coast among the *Awlad 'Ali* Bedouin groups.

Professor Ahmed M. Abou-Zeid from Alexandria University was the lead anthropologist in this field. He conducted an ethnographic survey throughout the region during the summer of 1964 and wrote extensively about the development of that area and its economy, the introduction of local cooperative societies, problems of local leadership and state-tribe relationships, the work of the WFP (one of the first international development projects in the region). He also produced insightful analyses of the Bedouin's sedentarisation and other changes in their life (Cole and Altorki, 1998, p.viii). Many of Abou-Zeid's studies are primarily written in English. Gerald Obermeyer (1968, 1973, 1977), Abdalla Bujra (1967, 1973) Safia Mohsen (1971, 1975) studies of the same region are also written in English. Other contemporary Egyptian anthropologists, however, have written in Arabic such as Farouk M. Ismael (1975, 1977) and Mohamed Abdou Mahgoub (1973, 1977). Their studies have thoroughly covered all the various aspects of Bedouin life and culture, adaptation models and responses to change and development. The next generation of anthropologists followed in their senior's footsteps such as Mohamed De'bes (1991) in his economic anthropological study of *Developing Human Resources in a Bedouin Community*. Others attempted to explore new regions like Mohamed Ghoneim's (2001) study of some of the semi-nomadic *Dawaghra* or *Bani 'Aṭa* groups in the Delta. This study, however, was mainly conducted by a group of his



students in Mansoura University. It is merely descriptive providing some insights into the socio-economic aspects of those Bedouin groups.

A common thread in all these studies is the pro-sedentarisation argument. Many of these anthropologists stress the importance of Bedouin settlement to induce the aspired development. The nomadic way of life is illustrated as problematic and impeding development. They also emphasise the important role of the local government authorities and other organisations in introducing development among the Bedouin. The majority of these studies use a structural functionalism approach; Abou-Zeid was in favour of that approach and all his students followed suit.

Structural functionalism proposes that a society is a bounded, self-maintaining harmonious system comprising of a number of factors interacting with and supporting each other. This approach seeks to study how the different factors in a society function to make it meet its needs and maintain its structure or equilibrium, whilst responding to changes in the external environment. The social system is forced to change to remain adapted to a constantly changing environment. The actual outcome of the processes of change, however, is not always harmonious. This is one criticism of this approach; functional unity is not always the case. Functionalism also tends to ignore the use of power to enhance the interest of one group of a society over others (Mann, 1983, pp.138-139).

The most recent study about the same region – the northwest coast of Egypt – is Cole and Altorki's (1998) *Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers: Egypt's Changing Northwest Coast*. Again, focusing mainly on development and change, especially desert development and the new tourism industry, it gives valuable insights into the Bedouin groups of this area, their cultural identity, history and relationships with other Egyptians. The primary emphasis, however, is on various aspects of economic development.

The existence of numerous anthropological researches, particularly in the field of development and change, has been one of the major practical factors that encouraged Cole and Altorki (1998) to undertake their study (p.viii). This situation, however, I suggest, has caused an imbalance with regards to covering other areas in Egypt. The reader will notice the scarcity of studies conducted among the Bedouin of the Eastern

Desert and Sinai Peninsula in particular. One major reason for this scarcity, however, is the unstable political situation and the history of the long armed conflict with Israel. All development efforts in the 1960s and 1970s were therefore focused on the Western Desert.

Studies of the Sinai Bedouin have been mainly carried out by Israeli anthropologists. The work of Emanuel Marx (1967, 1984) is particularly important. The major theme in Marx and Shmueli's (1984) edited volume is change and Bedouin adaptation. The main emphasis is on Bedouin economy and their shift to wage labour. Another informative study is *The Poetics of Military Occupation: Mzeina Allegories of Bedouin Identity under Israeli and Egyptian Rule* by Smadar Lavie (1990). It is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out during the transitional period after the 1973 War mainly between October 1975 and August 1979. Written by an Israeli female anthropologist, it depicts intimate details of the life of the *Mzeina* tribe in Southern Sinai and their responses to both Egyptian and Israeli development policies.

Anthropological literature on Sinai Bedouin in Arabic is very scarce. The only study I found was an edited volume by Professor Ahmed Abou-Zeid (1991) entitled *Man, Society and Culture in North Sinai*. The papers in this volume were presented in a conference in al-Arish, the capital of North Sinai Governorate in October 1990. It was part of an ambitious study aimed at surveying all desert communities in Egypt. The actual fieldwork took place between November 1987 and early 1989 by a group of young researchers supervised by Abou-Zeid and commissioned by the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research, Egypt. The studies cover various aspects of Bedouin life, economy and culture in North Sinai. Although providing good insights into several aspects in the life and social organisation of different Bedouin groups in this region, the studies have left out essential elements for understanding the full picture of those Bedouin communities. For example, they overlook the issue of illicit drugs, relations with the local authorities and interaction with settlers from the Nile Valley.

The second category of anthropological studies focusing on culture and meaning is represented mainly in the work of Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* and in her later study *Writing Women's Worlds* published in 1993. Abu Lughod worked mainly with the *Awlad 'Ali* Bedouin women in



the northwest coast of Egypt. She explored their views of life as expressed in their *ghinnawa*, (poetry or songs) and in their stories. Her work covers Bedouin family life, marriage, honour and shame, Bedouin identity and changes in their culture. Although widely acclaimed, *Veiled Sentiments* leaves out some essential objective elements for understanding this particular Bedouin community, mainly references to Bedouin economic activities. Her usage of anthropological analytical tools for the understanding of Bedouin culture and meaning, however, is very sophisticated.

Deborah Wickersham's (1991) *Experience and Expression: Life Among Bedouin Women in South Sinai* is a short monograph exploring the dynamics of social relations among the *Tarabin* Bedouin of South Sinai. Using a phenomenology and hermeneutics theoretical perspective, she focuses mainly on women's perceptions of themselves in the complexity of interpersonal relations that make up their lives. Wickersham follows in Abu-Lughod's footsteps, especially in her analysis of the concept of honour. This short study provides some interesting insights into Bedouin women and their private lives. I find both Abu Lughod (1986) and Wickersham's (1991) studies very informative as they cover aspects, which I could not explore in my study being a male researcher. Other articles about Bedouin women and their exercise of power such as Cynthia Nelson (1973) and G. Lewando-Hundt (1984) have also been useful in deepening my understanding of Bedouin women and gender relations.

## **Importance of the Study and Objectives**

The present study lies within the second category of anthropological literature about culture and the expression of meaning or meaning formation. It attempts to probe further into Bedouin culture using cognitive anthropological concepts of model and schema (D'Andrade, 1995; Shore, 1996). As far as I know, the present study is the first to employ these concepts in the study of Bedouin communities. My aim is to contribute to the anthropological discourse on the subject.

From the above review of literature on the Egyptian Bedouin, the present study is the first to shed light on the culture of three specific Bedouin descent groups: the *Heweitat*, the *'Aiaida* and the *Ahiwat*. My intervention with the first group in an urban context attempts to create an understanding and awareness of the changes that affect them as a

result of urban growth. It also sheds light on the issue of development-induced displacement; a subject often neglected, especially in the study of nomadic communities. The present study also attempts to create awareness of the Bedouin's human rights situation and highlights different types of abuses they are exposed to. As excluded and marginalized social groups with distinct cultural identity, Bedouin are unable to advocate their rights and make their voices heard. This study could therefore be considered a means whereby Bedouin could express themselves and speak out about their rights.

The study also warns against the dangers of stereotyping. In this regard, it explores various aspects related to Bedouin's economic activities, particularly their involvement in illicit drug activities, as well as their religious beliefs. With regards to the latter, the study explores and analyses the Sufi doctrine and methods of a group of *'Aiaida*. The practices of this group are deeply inherent in the orthodox teachings of Islam. It, however, presents a different image of Islam from the stereotypical one fixed in the outlook of many non-Muslims.

Overall, this thesis deals with many issues that are currently being discussed worldwide such as globalisation, modernisation and change, Islam as a religion, the relations between Islam and the West, human rights and gender relations. My contribution aims to enrich the ongoing debate on these issues. I address these issues by presenting them as my Bedouin informants have constructed them. In this sense, the discussions and arguments are mainly their own mental products. A cognitive anthropological approach principally emphasises how people make sense of the world according to their own indigenous cognitive categories, not those of the anthropologist. I hope that this contributes towards a better understanding of Bedouin culture. By explaining their situation and life conditions, I also aim to provide a basis to guide the formulation of policies that improve their living conditions.

Like all ethnographies, this study is selective. It concentrates only on some of the issues that are of concern to the Bedouin respondents themselves, and those which I have found relevant for completing the study. In a sense, the study is a product of its time and place. Thus, one has to be cautious about making generalisations of its findings and results. Nevertheless, some issues have to be taken seriously if the objectives of this study are to be met.



Beside the voices of the Bedouin, what is written down in this study is what I have seen, what I felt and what I hope for. I will therefore be my own judge of what I write. In my opinion, this reflexive perspective is very important in my ethnographic study and analysis. I expect the reader to gain a clear picture of contemporary Bedouin's life and the life of many Egyptians and how they face and respond to events and challenges.

It should be noted that the scope of this study, to a large extent, has been initiated from my interest in Bedouin nomads and their way of life in deserts. Pursuing this topic is strongly related to childhood images that I have of this group of people. My interest in this subject is also initiated from my professional experience as a development practitioner. Working with diverse social and cultural groups, I have become more sensitised to the challenges faced by the poor and excluded communities, especially minority ethnic and cultural groups. After observing and working with lesser fortunate people, I feel more and more obliged to use my knowledge and position in society for the good of others, hence my choice of this topic.

## **Organisation of the Study**

This study is divided into eight chapters and a conclusion. The opening chapter is primarily methodological. It describes the approach and general principles guiding the research. It then turns to a discussion of the process of ethnography and procedures for access to the field, selection of sites, relations with informants, limitations and challenges faced.

Chapter two sets the stage to the whole study. It defines who the Bedouin are and explains their self-ascription models and different social groupings employing various types of cultural models. Chapter three continues the discussion of Bedouin lifestyle and adaptation models by focusing on their diversified economic models. The chapter's point of departure is the notion that human beings are able to make continuous adjustments in their minds in response to the demands of the surrounding natural environment and the socio-political conditions. The chapter also sheds light on issues of land use and urban growth and their impact on Bedouin's lives.

One important Bedouin economic model is connected with illicit drugs. This thorny topic is discussed within the framework of human rights in chapter four. The chapter's main argument is concerned with denouncing stereotypes and promoting justice, fair treatment and respect of other people's right to retain their cultural identities. It also deals with the issue of development-induced displacement and its impact on certain Bedouin communities.

Reactions towards the issue of illicit drugs vary from one Bedouin community to the other. One remarkable perspective to this issue is from a group of '*Aiaida*, members of a Sufi order. Their strong religious beliefs and practices disallow them to undertake any activities related to illicit drugs. Chapter five studies the doctrine and methods of this Sufi order in detail. The discussion of Islam as a religion leads to a discussion of the current debate about relations between Islam and the West from a Bedouin perspective.

Chapter six discusses the Bedouin culture and the modern technology schema. It concentrates mainly on the current changes taking place in Egypt as a result of globalisation, especially its impact on Bedouin culture and how they respond and adapt to these changes. Focus will be on the importance of material necessities, technological devices, media, urbanism and others. Many of the signs of modernity are interpreted by the Bedouin within the framework of the apocalyptic. It is imperative therefore to add a section on the apocalyptic in Islam and discuss the signs thereof. The following chapter provides a different perspective by looking at the relationship between Bedouin and their animals. Despite utilising modern technology and leading a modern lifestyle, the Bedouin still retain strong emotional bonds with their animals and anthropomorphise some of them.

The final chapter discusses gender relations and women in Bedouin communities. I knew before carrying out the fieldwork that I would not be able to have a balanced picture of the Bedouin community I am studying, as it is very difficult for a single male researcher to gain access to the world of women particularly since women and men lead very separate lives. One way to overcome this problem, I thought of, was to find a female researcher among my friends or colleagues who was interested and willing to participate in my study and cover this aspect. This, however, was not possible due to several reasons related to the choice of the fieldwork sites and gaining access to the Bedouin



communities that I studied. The main focus of this chapter is on the Bedouin men's perceptions of women in general, Bedouin women, marriage and how far these perceptions follow the Islamic teachings.

Before venturing into some aspects of Bedouin culture, it is important first to explain the theoretical framework and methodological aspects of the fieldwork to meet the academic standards of doctoral theses. Chapter One covers the theoretical principles guiding my ethnography and the methodological procedures.

# CHAPTER ONE

## METHODOLOGY

### General Principles

The general principles guiding my research project are derived from a commitment to ethnography, especially reflexive ethnography, informed by a cognitive anthropological approach and hermeneutics. This study is also concerned with a critical epistemology that implies an active participation in the field. It could be described as action research or more specifically what Huizer (1979) refers to as “research-serving-action” (pp. 412-413).

### *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity has recently become a significant feature of social research, especially in ethnographic practice. It simply means “to reflect upon, examine critically and explore analytically the nature of the research process” (Fonow and Cook, 1991). To be reflexive is to be self critical or focusing on the consequences of one’s relations with others. According to Gouldner (1970), social research should be “focused not just upon the object of enquiry but also upon the subject conducting the enquiry”.

Reflexivity challenges both the positivist and naturalist epistemologies that neglect “the fact that we are part of the social world we study, and that there is no escape from reliance on common-sense knowledge and methods of investigation” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.21). In fact, it goes beyond positivism and naturalism by producing accounts of the social world and justifying them without relying on the positivist or naturalist empiricism (ibid., pp. 21-22).

Reflexivity, as argued by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), does not imply that it should be directed towards change or serve particular political causes or practical ends, as its main aim is the production of knowledge (pp. 17-21). I agree with their stance, as one of the main objectives of my study is ‘*verstehen*’; understanding of the people’s point of view and adding to the anthropological knowledge of Bedouin culture. However, at the same time, the context of my ethnographic study implies that this understanding should be translated into or directed towards action or more specifically, a theoretical attempt to answer or tackle concerns and implications of the people studied and their culture.

## *Hermeneutics*

Ethnographic research is basically a process of discovery and learning about others and possibly about oneself. In fact, one can understand much about oneself by understanding others. This makes a hermeneutical theoretical perspective also important to my ethnographic research. According to Ricoeur (1974), hermeneutics is the “comprehension of self by the detour of the comprehension of others”. It is a philosophical view considering that a dialectical relationship between the researcher and the researched evolves during the process of understanding. Its profound perplexity is about the comprehension of self.

Hermeneutics is originally a theory and method of interpreting meaningful human actions. Its roots go back to problems of biblical interpretation. The hermeneutical theory of analysing and interpreting human actions was developed by W. Dilthey using two methods. The first is having the interpreter putting him or herself in the position of the actor (creator of an act, a book or a picture). This situation results in understanding as both share a common humanity or both are “expressions of the spirit”. The second refers human action to a wider context or “world-view” of the society, which gives a whole meaning. The difficulty with this is finding a valid interpretation of human actions. To H.G. Gadamer, the way around this is understanding the part in terms of the whole and vice versa. This, however, will never have us reach a completely correct interpretation. Therefore interpretations are always tentative and subject to revision in the hermeneutic circle (Abercrombie et al., 1988, p.112).

Understanding others requires a person to be more experimental and less dogmatic, appreciative and tolerant of others’ social and cultural varieties and ways of thinking. This standpoint has its foundations in anthropology’s critique of ethnocentrism. It has gained new momentum in the postmodern culture. Postmodernism, I suggest, draws on the hermeneutical idea that we can never reach a completely correct interpretation of life or human action as life is becoming less uniform and social interactions less predictable and subject to many doubts.



## Cognitive Anthropology and Cultural Models

To describe the different beliefs, habits, ways of living, behaviour, traditions and values that distinguish people from each other, anthropologists use the term or the concept of culture. In cognitive anthropology, culture is approached through models and schemas. Culture is best conceived as “a very large heterogeneous collection of *models* or what psychologists sometimes call *schemas*” (Shore, 1996, p.44). A cultural model is a stock of tools that concurrently have external and internal, social and cognitive dimensions, which help a person in processing of information and active construction of meanings out of the complex, diverse, and partial information that he/she gathers. A model is specific and concrete. A schema, on the other hand, is a more general and abstract form of a cultural model. The difference between a model and a schema is contextual and relative rather than intrinsic or absolute. The distinction between them becomes useful primarily when a set of specific cultural models share a common general schema (ibid., p.53).

One type of schemas is the foundational schema. It is defined by Bradd Shore (1996), an American cognitive anthropologist as:

a high-level model of great generality and abstractness. Generally, foundational schemas are not dedicated to a single domain of social life but organize and underlie a large number of specific cultural models whose forms are roughly analogous to one another... A foundational schema functions as a kind of template, a common underlying form that links superficially diverse cultural models and contributes to the sometimes ineffable sense of ‘style’ or ‘ethos’ characteristic of a culture (ibid., p.117).

Culture is characterised by being selective. Social groups make their own cultures; choose what suits them and adapt to the natural and socio-political environments in which they live. A basic assumption in cognitive anthropology is that human beings are able to make continuous adjustments in their minds in response to the demands of the surrounding conditions and environment. This assumption is referred to by Shore (1996) as the ‘ecological’ brain concept (p.4). In psychology and neurosciences, this is known as the ‘plastic brain’ theory. The human brain is not only formed in the first twenty years of a person’s life and then becomes static. It is in a process of constant change responding to and interacting with the different conditions in which it lives. Various human activities result in stimulating the growth and connection of neurons in variegated ways thus making people different with respect to their cultures and ways of thinking. Differences in the way we perceive the



world, however, equate to differences in personality and character (Winston, 2003, pp. 49-55; Gregory, 1987, p. 623).

The human brain is also known to operate 'homeostatically', i.e., "[i]t 'seeks' to maintain a state of constancy in spite of the ever-changing landscape outside to which it responds" (Winston, 2003, p.126). It is the human consciousness that determines the degree of homeostasis, thus determining the extent of adaptation to the changing environment and socio-political conditions. This conception explains, in my opinion, why certain societies or communities vary in the way they respond to changes. The collective consciousness selects what suits its needs best. For example, Bedouin would select some aspects of the Western cultural model that suit their needs and enhance their own traditional models after refining them, while at the same time maintaining a state of constancy with other models that do not serve their needs.

In this sense, the division of human societies into 'savage' or 'primitive' and 'advanced' and the notion of culture passing through evolutionary stages to become 'advanced' as proposed by earlier anthropologists such as Tylor (1958) and modernisation theorists are erroneous notions. Essentially, new cognitive sciences have proved that the notion of a 'primitive culture' or a 'primitive mentality' is a fallacy. Shore (1996) argues that there are multiple modalities of human thought and feeling. Acknowledging and exploring them does not entail that we adopt any version of the primitive mentality myth. The ethnographic mind is not primitive except in the restricted sense of Clifford Geertz's fundamental insight that "the nervous system of modern humans evolved under the selective pressures of a hominid line increasingly given over to *cultural adaptations*. The ethnographic mind, at once dependent for its functioning on extrinsic models, and opportunistically creative in producing those models, is an essential feature of a culture-bearing and meaning-making primate" (p.380).

### *Psychic Unity/Diversity Doctrine*

Reference to the 'primitive cultures' myth brings us to a discussion of one of the widely held doctrines in anthropology is that of the 'psychic unity of mankind'. It was originally coined by a famous nineteenth century traveller, Bastian (1826-1905). Having visited a remarkable number of places, he was struck by the similarities between people who live in places far apart. He attributed this to psychological qualities common to all human

beings, which leads people independently to think of similar or equivalent cultural models and traditions, especially myths and rituals. Although all people share the same neurological endowments, they are not of the same psyche or mind. They differ in their emotional and intellectual tendencies and capacities. Social and environmental factors play an influential role in moulding people's minds. This has led some anthropologists to speak of 'psychic diversity'. Levi-Strauss and Levy-Bruhl, for example, were led to theoretical positions that viewed the mind as an emergent and contingent property of social experience. From the postulated psychic unity, both writers were led by the evidence to a potentially radical position of human psychic diversity (Shore, 1996, p.32).

The doctrine of cultural diversity is universally acknowledged. However, sorting out the psychic unity/diversity muddle is a different story. Shore (1996) argues that the subject should not be approached as one versus the other – psychic unity vs. psychic diversity. The two perspectives are not 'mutually exclusive'. They are two sides of the same coin. "We need to model brain-culture interactions so that they reveal at one and the same time the general cognitive processes of information processing and meaning construction as well as the culturally diverse manifestations of those processes in action" (p.40). The two perspectives therefore need to be reconciled.

Consequently, arguments referring to 'traditional' societies or rather 'small-scale' societies, also referred to as 'face-to-face' societies, as being integrated, unified and homogeneous is another fallacy. Featherstone (1991) explains that the myth of primitive societies as integrated *Gemeinschaften*, in which a common culture played a crucial role forming communal bonds, was being laid to rest. "This myth had not only entered into sociological theory through a misreading of Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* but had also derived considerable impetus from Durkheim and in particular Parson's reading of Durkheim... Parsons believes common shared values exist in modern societies, whereas for Durkheim such a high degree of integration was only a characteristic of premodern ones" (p.55). Many studies of traditional rural and nomadic societies have renounced the arguments of a 'self-sufficient', 'harmonious' society. Even the remotest societies are interconnected with the outside world and are marked by great divisions, competition and confrontation (Johnson, 2000, pp.111-116). Therefore, the Bedouin are not and never have been isolated.



Going back to schema theory, cognitive anthropology posits that a combination of several cultural models and schemas constitute a specific culture and form a unified whole or a cultural complex. Culture therefore comprises of multiple models and schemas. The cultural complex, on the other hand, comprises of three interrelated sectors: the cognitive, the material and the social. The first is the beliefs, symbols and value system of a culture. The second is the objects, items or instruments made and used by mankind, and which are given specific meanings, while the third is the social relationships between people or people and objects or living things. Each culture orders its events, material life and ideas according to its own criteria. The aim of cognitive anthropology is to study this order of thought or the categories formed and how they are utilised in the specified culture (D'Andrade, 1995, p.1). In this sense, culture is approached in terms of parts rather than as a whole. This study of Bedouin culture proposes that Bedouin have their own unique organisational system for understanding things and forming meaning that make sense of the world around them. To understand Bedouin culture, it is important to understand their logical system of thought and the criteria they utilise.

### *Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning*

The cognitive theory of cultural meaning provides an influential perspective for this ethnographic study of Bedouin culture. From the perspective of this new theory proposed by Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn (1997), culture is rethought by understanding how human beings construct meanings. They attempt to take another look at cultural meanings. Early definitions of culture by anthropologists such as Tylor, 1958 equated it with socially learnt ideas and behaviours. Recently, culture has been perceived as meaning. Meaning to Strauss and Quinn (1997) is "the interpretation evoked in a person by an object or event at a given time" (p.5). This interpretation includes an identification of the object or event, expectations concerning it and a feeling or stimulus to respond to it. This interpretation is also evoked as a result of past experiences by the person involved. By calling it a *cultural* meaning, Strauss and Quinn imply that "a different interpretation would be evoked in people with different characteristic life experiences" (ibid., pp. 5-6).

Strauss and Quinn's definition of meaning, however, make it a momentary state. But they stress that this state is produced through the interactions of two sorts of relatively stable structures: *intrapersonal*, mental structures or 'private' domain, which they refer to also as 'schemas' or 'understandings' or 'assumptions' and *extrapersonal*, world structures or



‘public’ domain. Same meanings arise for different people when the world around them is relatively stable and they share the same way of life. Nevertheless, people’s experiences can also be shared across space and time even if they are never identical. In this sense, cultures are not bounded and separable (ibid, pp. 6-8).

This theory of cultural meaning explains many of the dialogues and experiences I had during my fieldwork, especially when discussing human rights and feelings of persecution by the police. Bedouin’s expressions were responses to the unjust treatment they faced and are facing. They have their own conceptions about the police and the government based on their personal and collective experiences. Having not experienced these feelings myself, I did not share the same meanings with them, which indicates that I have a different cultural meaning to them. However, when I experienced poor treatment, as will be explained later in the chapter, similar interpretations were evoked in my mind. Again, with many of the Egyptians, mainly urbanites of my same social milieu whom I talked to, their cultural meaning was different from those of the Bedouin. The same can be said about gender and the way the Bedouin ‘understand’ or ‘assume’ gender roles and how I understand them based on my upbringing, education and experience.

Strauss and Quinn (1997) elaborate on the ‘intrapersonal’ and ‘extrapersonal’ structures arguing that there is a complex interaction between the two realms. They are distinct “but closely interconnected; they are separated by a boundary, but one that is permeable” (p.8). Cultural meanings and their variations cannot be explained without understanding this relationship. The distinction is in the dynamism of each realm. In this sense, intrapersonal thoughts, feelings and motives are not simply copies of extrapersonal messages and practices. This makes it essential to understand how the human mind works in order to know about the private realm, as well as socialisation to learn about the public world and how the intrapersonal works to internalise experiences and form meanings.

Understanding how the human mind works requires knowledge of psychology to enable us to explain about ourselves and others and how assumptions are made. Strauss and Quinn (1997) quote Melford Spiro, the psychological anthropologist, putting emphasis on the importance of studying psychology to understand culture saying, “to attempt to understand culture by ignoring the human mind is like attempting to understand Hamlet by ignoring the Prince of Denmark” (as cited, p. 9).

Psychological anthropology, however, is not very popular and is excluded from anthropological discussions as argued by Strauss and Quinn (1997)

Nowadays in cultural anthropology it is perfectly respectable to talk about “the self,” “meaning,” “identity,” “consciousness,” “subjectivity,” “experience,” “reader response,” “the imagined,” and “agency”, strangely, however, we are not supposed to talk about the psychological processes and structures that help explain these. If we ignore psychology, however, we are likely to make false assumptions about the ways selves, meanings, identities, consciousness, subjectivity and experience are constructed and about the way people respond to texts, imagine communities, and resist hegemonic structures (p. 9).

The trouble is that many psychological theories are ethnocentric and Western in approach disguised as universal. Badri’s (1979) main argument is that many psychological theories, especially behavioural psychology and psychodynamic therapies, do not fit well into the Islamic context. This puts many Muslim psychologists into a dilemma, because they attempt to follow Western approaches blindly without testing their validity in the context of Islamic cultures.

In summary, cognitive anthropology is closely linked to psychology because both explore the nature of cognitive processes (D’Andrade, 1995, p.1). To explain culture, we need to understand how meanings are formed and how people understand things, events and behaviour. Through the use of schemas and models, culture could be placed in the human mind and analysed as smaller units, categories or pieces of a culture instead of culture as a whole. Contemporary cognitive anthropology probes into the question of how cultural ideologies are shared and to what extent (ibid., pp.247-248).

### *Critical Epistemology*

This study is also concerned with a critical epistemological stance. Sandra Harding (1987), one of the feminist writers debating methods, methodology and epistemology in feminist research, defined epistemology as being concerned with “providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Quoted in Maynard, 1994, p.10). In other words, it is a framework for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge about the social world, centred on the questions “who knows what, about whom and how is this knowledge legitimized?” (ibid., p.18).

Epistemology is thus concerned with obtaining knowledge based on subjective experiences and meanings of those being researched, while maintaining ethical considerations and power relations between the researcher and the researched; reflexivity and how the researched are related to the researcher in the research, or more particularly, in the ethnographic research context; and bringing about positive change.

Critical epistemology uses the approach of much action research. According to the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1958), “if you want to know how things really are, just try to change them” (Quoted in Huizer, 1979, p.395). Action research according to Huizer directs itself

simultaneously toward the development of theories and to the solution of social problems. Some forms of action research are undertaken to facilitate the solution of concrete problems, while other forms are directed toward a (more theoretical) search for general problem-solving methods which would apply to a variety of concrete situations (p. 395).

With regards to ethnographic research and other forms of social research, many critics have argued that they have too little impact and are worthless as they lie on library shelves gathering dust. “To be of value, it is suggested, ethnographic research should be concerned not simply with understanding the world but with applying its findings to bring about change” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 15).

In my ethnography, I made some attempts to bring about “change” by working mainly with Bedouin men to make their voices heard and advocate their right for retaining their cultural identity. I helped one particular *Heweitat* old man to claim back his suspended pension. I have also been involved with Bedouin children introducing to them Peer Education approaches. I could not assess the outcome of this intervention, as the duration of my fieldwork was not long enough. I therefore decided to put less weight on this subject in the present study. I believe that my intervention is more theoretical attempting to probe further into Bedouin culture thus contributing to the anthropological discourse on the subject. Also by providing a written and coherent record of their way of life, I may help towards greater respect of the Bedouin and challenge some patronising policies denying their cultural rights.



Action research involves the researcher or ethnographer to take sides. He or she cannot be wholly detached from the scene. "Taking sides" is sometimes seen as unavoidable and even desirable. Bruyn (1963) elaborated on this aspect arguing that:

While the traditional role of the scientist is that of a neutral observer who remains unmoved or unchanged in his examination of phenomena, the role of the participant observer requires sharing the sentiments of the people in social situations, and thus he himself is changed as well as changing to some degree the situation in which he is a participant. However researchers have found that although he becomes changed through this participation, it is important that part of him remains unchanged and detached. Although "sharing" the experience, he is not entirely of it (p. 224).

(Quoted in Huizer, p.396).

This aspect will be discussed in further detail in the part of the techniques of research, especially participant observation.

## **Methodological Procedure**

### *An Academic Rite de Passage*

In one sense this ethnography is the story of my journey to understanding myself and others through fieldwork. As Turner (1985) puts it:

Thus experience is a journey, a test (of self, of suppositions about others), a ritual passage, an exposure to peril, an exposure to fear. Does this not sum up something akin to fieldwork, even to pilgrimage, which is, etymologically, a journey "through fields" (peragros), a peregrination?

(Quoted in Wickering, 1991, pp.7-8).

A selection of a research topic is "nearly always a combination of personal factors, disciplinary culture, and external forces in the broader political, social and economic climate" (Davies, 1999, p. 27). The origins of my research project are to be found in my childhood images of the Bedouin people and my fantasies to live a romantic and pure way of life in the desert away from the disturbance and hubbub of city life. I used to see Bedouin women with their stock of sheep and goats grazing in the public gardens in my neighbourhood. They used to live in the desert areas surrounding Cairo, especially in the northeast district. Observing their absence from my neighbourhood aroused my interest in tracing them and exploring their livelihoods, especially in the light of the recent changes taking place in the urban ecology of Cairo. The Egyptian government has been following an urban planning and housing policy aiming to expand the urban base by building new cities

and towns in desert areas, originally inhabited by Bedouin people to solve the problems of overpopulation and over-urbanisation.

From my previous experience of studying other Bedouin groups in remote places in Egypt (Issa, 1999), I realised that these Bedouin groups are not able to retain their own distinct cultural identity and traditional ways of life that they adhere to. Their rejection of settlement in towns and cities until the present age of globalisation in the early years of the twenty-first century justifies my beliefs about them. As a minority cultural group, these Bedouin semi-nomadic groups are not able to speak out for their rights and freedom to retain their traditions and customs. Moreover, my professional experience in the field of development, and belief in helping others to help themselves using my knowledge and position in society, makes it imperative for me to work with these people and be committed to their cause.

Ethnography provided me with the chance to expose my childhood fantasies to the glare of reality. I wanted to live with the Bedouin, experience their habits and way of life; understand their customs, traditions and value system; why and in what way are they different from me; and the ways in which they are coping with the massive changes recently wrought in their environment. Following the ethnographic tradition, however, is not enough. Any academic research has to be formulated within the framework of a certain discipline to be recognised and taken seriously. It must also be relevant to some of the current intellectual concerns of the discipline and encourage the creativity that often comes with a fresh perspective (Davies, 1999, pp. 28-29). This study therefore draws on the body of theoretical writings on cognitive anthropology, culture and meaning. The choice of this approach emanates from a general interest in psychology and recent studies of the human mind.

In choosing this topic, I am not only influenced by my own internal musings. In fact, I find it is a means of learning about a real social world and attempting to impose positive change. Thus, it is not only a fascination with the exotic or imagining communities and people isolated from other social forces. Instead it embraces the complexity of interrelated people and searches for social aspects outside the conventional concerns. This endeavour will involve studying and incorporating the new forces of globalisation and will hopefully develop a completely new topic (Davies, 1999, p.33). Moreover, it will encourage, as argued by Fox (1991), utilising the strengths of ethnographic research especially “the



concern for everyday life, participant observation, cultural relativism, and, most recently self-reflection" (Quoted in Davies, p.33).

My objective is doing something more than reporting a reflexive account of the Bedouin's contemporary lifestyle and changes affecting them. I need to add value to my research by deploying a research methodology and critical epistemology that addresses the challenges imposed by globalisation as argued by Davies (1999)

...globalisation poses a challenge to the pursuit of ethnographic research and to a large extent discredits its continuance in its classic format. Clearly, if ethnographers are doing no more than reporting their experiences of other ways of life, no matter how exotic, whether at home or abroad, then they are offering no more than what thousands of tourists have experienced directly and millions more vicariously by means of electronic media. Ethnographic research must be capable of adding value to such personal experiences and reports. It does so by the theoretically informed nature of its investigations and the deployment of research methods that provide greater depth and validity to the explanations it develops. Good ethnographic research encourages a continual interplay and tension between theory and on-the-ground methods and experiences (p.38).

### *Exposure to Sufism*

In my journey to understanding myself and others, I feel obliged to write about a very personal and private issue. This obligation comes from my concern with reflexive ethnography and the importance of understanding how human beings think to be able to create more understanding and acceptance of others. In this section, I write about my religious thoughts and beliefs, particularly the cognitive dimension in the practice of Islam. It is imperative to my study because religion is part of my social world as well as the Bedouin's. Islam and its various practices and expressions is integrated within Muslims' everyday life. My concern here is with mystical Islam or Sufism (*tasawwuf*), a tradition that developed within the general framework of Islam and followed by many Muslim communities today including many of the 'A'aida Bedouin group mentioned in this study.

My first introduction to the term Sufism has a long history. It goes back to the days when I was at secondary school days where I reached a point of crisis, when for a period of nearly a whole year, I was in doubt about the truth of religion. It was my readings, particularly in Sufism that made me regain my position. I have to admit though that much of the material I read was beyond my level of comprehension at this stage. Difficulty arose mainly as a result of language. The texts I consulted were written in classical Arabic. I



was not a specialist in the subject either. One particular book, however, was very useful – *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (‘*The Saviour or Deliverance from Error*’) – by the renowned medieval Islamic scholar, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. This book is an autobiographical treatise affirming that Sufism is the only reliable antidote to scepticism and one of the highest aspects of Islam. Al-Ghazali realised that it was absolutely impossible to prove God’s existence using human senses, perception or logical thought. As divine reality transcends time and space, God could be perceived by the realm of the esoteric.

The main concern of Sufism is *tawḥīd* or (the doctrine of the Unity of God). It is preoccupied mainly with the esoteric or contemplative knowledge rather than the exoteric. Sufism has always been practiced through *ṭuruq* (literally ways) or orders that are highly organised and follow a strict hierarchical system. Many Muslims join these orders hoping to attain the esoteric knowledge, but in practice they are only taught the methods of the particular order they joined. The method includes prayer tasks and many other material obligations far from the realm of esotericism.

My interest in pursuing this inner truth and reaching the esoteric knowledge at that time was in vain. Reflecting on this now, I realise that I did not understand much of what I read. As an ‘un-illuminated’ seeker of knowledge, the meaning of the texts remained secret and hidden from me. I also did not have the opportunity at that time to meet anyone who is affiliated to these Sufi doctrines. The negative stereotypical image about Sufism among many sections of the Egyptian society had also played an important role in putting me off any further exploration of this matter.

I also remember that my readings about the narratives of the great Sufi masters, who lived ages ago and led ascetic lives in deserted places, gave me the impression that to be a true Sufi, I needed to live in the desert where I could worship God day and night until I reached spiritual progress as an individual traveller on the way to God. This of course was almost impossible at that time, especially at that critical stage when I was getting ready to join university, which marked a new transitional stage in my life.

I reencountered Sufism again in early 2003 whilst undertaking my fieldwork for this study. While doing my own research, I worked in Cairo with a group of Sudanese researchers in a research project aiming to study the Egyptian labour market and employment opportunities

available for Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers. One member of the research group, an asylum seeker, was a member of a large Sufi order in Cairo. He started talking to me about the benefits of being a member of a Sufi order and how good it is when in the presence of God. Out of curiosity, I attended one of this order's meetings, but was not impressed. In fact, I felt disdain. I was also suspicious of their intentions and their eagerness to make me join them.

To my surprise, a few months later, specifically in May 2003, the group of 'Aiaida Bedouin with whom I carried out a major part of my participant observation have also turned out to be members of another Sufi order. This time I had a totally different impression than the one formed after encountering the former order. This Bedouin Sufi order had a lasting impression on me. Living among them from the first day made me feel the serenity and peace of mind I was striving for. I may say that they captured my imagination and impressed me tremendously. My enthusiasm in them had made them accept me and quickened the process of obtaining access to them and many of the intimate details in their lives.

I should also mention that at one stage, I thought of joining this order. However, I was not very sure and sought the advice of the 'Aiaida Sheikh. He answered, "*Well, better wait until you are quite sure of yourself because it is a serious thing once you make the covenant of allegiance. It is a huge responsibility*". I was upset to hear these words from him, as I thought he would welcome me as the members of the other Sufi order in Cairo were eagerly persuading me to join them. Probably, he refused me because he felt I am not worthy of following the way of God or that I am unable to proceed in the way and lacked the patience to do so. I do not know! On second thoughts, I feel I am better off now, as I do not have to gratify or be obliged to anyone. Sufism after all is primarily concerned with the esoteric realm rather than social organisational aspects.

### **The Selection of Field Sites**

Like many minority groups, the Bedouin in Egypt are perceived as a 'problem' group. My preliminary enquiries about these people, as to where and how to find them, their characteristics and way of life, etc. were not in their favour. In fact, I was warned by several people from my social milieu, whose advice I sought, not to attempt to approach these



people, as they are troublesome and undisciplined. The stereotypical image of a Bedouin to the lay Egyptian is that of a drug dealer or an outlaw. One of my neighbours, an automobile trader, whom I knew had acquaintances among the Bedouin, totally refused to help me. I knew he wanted to avoid problems because if anything went wrong with me, or with his Bedouin acquaintances, i.e., the police arrest of any of them for any reason, he would be the one to be blamed.

As this study is related to my childhood images, I knew where these Bedouin lived. The challenge, however, was how to get access to them. I knew they lived on the fringes of Cairo, especially northeast Cairo, very close to where I lived. The site I had in mind where I could conduct my fieldwork was easily accessible; within fifteen minutes by car or half an hour or more by public transport. Whilst planning, I felt that I did not want to go too far or expand the site of fieldwork mainly for financial reasons. Funding is always a major concern to all researchers. Ethnography is known to be an expensive type of field research. However, when the field site is relatively close to where the researcher lives, the cost of conducting the ethnographic study is quite often more reasonable.

Throughout my study, it was my gatekeepers and informants who identified and imposed the sites where I undertook my research. I will explain in further detail in the next section how I accessed the field.

I started my fieldwork in a semi-rural, semi-urban or a *rurban* area (a term coined by Janet Abu-Lughod (1971) in her study of Cairo) known as *el-Marg*. From there I moved to *Madinet al-Salam* or Salam City, a new satellite town built in the 1970s and inaugurated by the late President Sadat in the early 1980s to absorb the overpopulated and over-urbanised Capital.

My wanderings, transects and further enquiries in the area led me to another adjacent squatter area known as *Abu Regeila*, administratively under *al-Salam* local council. The residents of this area face several urban problems, which are discussed in details in Chapter Three.



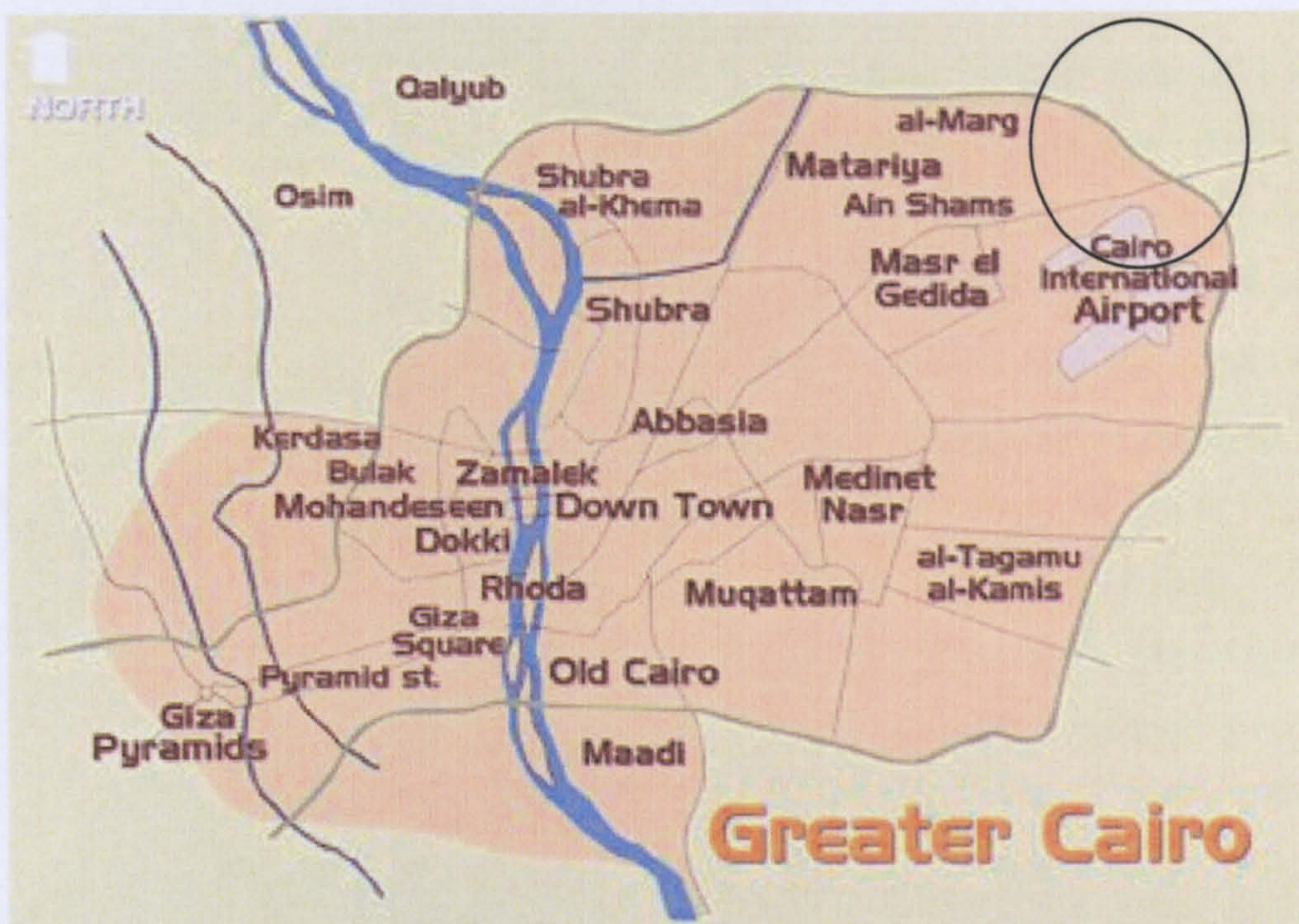


Figure 1: Map of Greater Cairo

[www.egyptmyway.com/maps/cairo.html](http://www.egyptmyway.com/maps/cairo.html). Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> October 2004



Figure 2: Map of Egypt

[www.siteatlas.com/maps/maps/703.htm](http://www.siteatlas.com/maps/maps/703.htm) Accessed 21 October 2004



My initial findings in these areas did not satisfy me as I found that the Bedouin living there are more like townsmen, i.e., with no distinctive cultural differences. They also face the same kind of problems that all other Egyptian urban dwellers face. Being born and having lived in Cairo almost all my life, I tend to have a parochial view of my own urban way of life\*. I was looking for something different. Bedouin in the urban context share many aspects of my urban way of life. They did not provide me with what I was looking for and I felt I was not making any progress. I also agonised about the thinness of my data at this stage.

Knowing also that many Bedouin have abandoned the places where they originally squatted before the sprawl of urbanism and new desert towns, made me more interested to trace them and know about them and their traditional way of life. In fact, to understand how urban Bedouin live, it is important to know how they lived before in the deserts.

At the same time, I felt my ethnography was incomplete, as I could not become a fully participant observer. I found interviewing was not enough. I wanted to live with the people, observe and study them in full detail. In an urban area, however, getting accommodation as a stranger with a family or even renting a room or a flat seemed to be almost impossible. Whilst studying the Bedouin groups in *al-Salam* city, I was making further enquiries, asking several people to introduce me to Bedouin people. My efforts bore good fruit at the end and I was introduced to a Bedouin group, the '*Aiaida*, in Ismailia and Suez Governorates, where I conducted the major part of my ethnography. Seeking more knowledge about other groups, I travelled to central Sinai and later to el-Arish to attend a camel race in August 2003. When you have a golden opportunity to learn something new and miss it, in my opinion, is a mere act of foolishness. I learnt from the mistakes of earlier anthropologists. Malinowski in his personal journal (1967), for example, described himself as acting "unfairly and stupidly" for refusing to pay extra money to go to a trip to Domara (p. 69). I did not think of the cost, time or distance at that time and at the end I found that in a few months I travelled extensively around northeast Egypt and Sinai collecting considerably good data. The following maps show the various field sites.

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\* Barroe and Hicks (1967) in their "Observations on the Mystique of Anthropology" discuss the tendency of Western anthropologists to perceive themselves as marginal members of their own culture. "The psychologist doesn't like himself, the sociologist doesn't like his social class and the anthropologist doesn't like his culture" (Quoted in Wickering, 1991, p.2). I would not actually say that I do not like my culture, but there are many aspects that I disapprove of and would like to see them changed.





Figure 3: Field Sites

<http://mapmachine.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine/view&customise.html>. Accessed 21 October 2004



Figure 4: Field Site in Sinai

[http://encarta.msn.com/map\\_701516553/Sinai\\_Peninsula.html](http://encarta.msn.com/map_701516553/Sinai_Peninsula.html) Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> March 05



## The Ethnography

### *Access to Field*

The issue of obtaining access to the field is often most acute in the initial stage when the ethnographer is negotiating with people the reason for conducting his or her research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.54). It usually starts by collecting information from casual talking with people. Almost all the responses and feedback I obtained about the Bedouin, as mentioned earlier, were negative. It implied many stereotypes and misunderstandings. I did not challenge any of the feedback I got, but determined to carry on with my plan to get access to these people and study them.

I succeeded in getting introduced to one of the '*arabs* working as a manual labourer (gardener) in the public gardens in my neighbourhood through my mother who supervised him at work, being at that time a botanist at the Central Authority for the Cleaning and Beautification of Cairo. His name is *Shahat* (literally 'beggar'). He prefers to be called by his teknonym, *Abu-'Iyd* (the father of '*Iyd*, or Feast). He was very welcoming when I explained to him my research objectives. He invited me to have *iftar* (breakfast) with him at his home one day in Ramadan (the month of fasting). That was in January 2000, when I first started thinking about developing a research proposal. Abu-'Iyd lived in a nearby *rurban* town named *El-Marg* administratively under Qalioubiya Governorate. It was a rural village, but due to overpopulation and over-urbanisation, many people started squatting building illegally on agricultural land and spontaneous settlements have sprawled overnight as in many other places all over Egypt. *El-Marg* retains many of the traditional rural aspects and urban aspects at the same time.

After talking with him about his descent group the '*Aiaida* and how they settled and became farmers and the history of the village, I explained my interest in tracing the remaining nomadic or semi-nomadic Bedouin groups living on the edges of northeast Cairo. He explained that what I was looking for could be found among the *Heweitat* group, but told me to beware of them because they are fierce people. He took me to one of his neighbours, an old man from the *Heweitat*. There, I was introduced to his son who later became my gatekeeper to many of the *Heweitat* in al-Salam city. He showed interest from the beginning in accompanying me and showing me where and how the Bedouin are living



now. Unfortunately, it was difficult at that time to make another appointment and see him as both of us were busy and we could not find the appropriate time.

I started my fieldwork by visiting Shahat in October 2002 twice. He later declined to help me and reintroduce me to the *Heweitat*. So, I contacted my *Heweitat* gatekeeper, who was still very welcoming. He was curious, however, to know where I had been since January 2000. I explained that I postponed my study for a while and then I had started pursuing it again. At first, I had a problem with him, as he was reluctant to introduce me to other people arguing that the information he was giving me was enough and no one would give me any further data. I explained that everyone had his or her unique experience or point of view and it was important for me to collect all these ideas and viewpoints together, of course while ensuring confidentiality. The situation improved and I managed to meet many *Heweitat* informants through him.

Despite the expansion of my fieldwork sites, obtaining access became easier. I am indebted to one of my father's close friends, the late Dr Yousef Dawoody who was of tremendous help to me, introducing me to the 'Aiaida Sheikh in Ismailia Governorate. The Sheikh and his people were very welcoming and understood my role as a student and my interest in learning about Bedouin culture. Their trust in Dr Yousef, being a well-known honest man in the area\*, helped in having them trust me quickly. Another acquaintance in Suez, was also very helpful in introducing me to some of his Bedouin friends, who were again from the 'Aiaida descent group. A Police Major also helped me by inviting me to stay with him and introduced me to a third Bedouin group in Sinai, the *Ahiwat*. This time there were limitations, nevertheless, it was helpful to see things from a different perspective and obtain a balanced viewpoint of the intricate relationship between the Bedouin on the one hand, and the police and local authorities on the other.

### *Field Ethics*

My discussion on obtaining access to the field can only be completed by discussing how I sought permission to undertake my ethnography. With the increasing reflexivity in the

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\* Dr Yousef was an Undersecretary of State at the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture. He was a neighbour and a friend of my father. He owned a piece of reclaimed land in the area where the 'Aiaida lived. He maintained very good relations with the Bedouin, unlike many other urban Egyptians, or Cairenes. His respect of the Bedouin made them speak highly of him. His sudden death after an illness was very upsetting to all who knew him.

conduct of social research, the awareness of ethical considerations is becoming more pressing and “inevitable” (Davies, 1999, p.45). But seeking permission at the initial stage is not enough to be considered as being aware of ethical considerations. In my opinion, informed consent, as a key ethical principle in research, alone, is not enough of an answer or a resolution to problems of fieldwork and publication. It should be considered with other ethical principles such as privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and beneficence. As a matter of fact, research ethics should be viewed as part of morality in general. Morals and attitudes cannot be expressed in or reduced to the form of rules comprising a code of ethics. It is not just a matter of duties and responsibilities; a list of “things to do” and “things not to do”. It is rather concerned with humanity and preserving human dignity. Moreover, the researcher should have the final word concerning what is appropriately ethical and what is not according to his/her own judgement and the research context.

Before carrying out my fieldwork, I found it difficult deciding on which ethical approach I should line up with: the deontological or the consequentialist approach. I believe the choice of approach depends mainly on the situation in the field. What was evident throughout the whole process of fieldwork was carrying out an overt ethnography as an outsider. Saying I am studying abroad in England was quite annoying to some informants from the *Ahiwat* and *Heweitat*. With the *Heweitat* in the squatter quarter in *al-Salam* city, I identified myself as working for the American University in Cairo. I was interested to know about their perception of the sewage project and its social impact on them. One old *Heweitat* matriarch, known as *raa'yit il-beyt* (literally the guardian of the house), showed concern that I would reflect a negative picture of them as being affiliated to a foreign university. She referred to a television programme presenter, *Mofeed Fawzy*, discussing the issue of female circumcision, which raised many arguments after showing an operation on the American news channel CNN during the 1995 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. Slowly, I was able to gain her confidence and she started talking.

No doubt that such television programmes raise people's awareness and make them more cautious in dealing with others, especially strangers. They would ask about people's real intentions and be sceptical of them. This makes it more difficult for researchers to gain people's confidence. Arabs in general, and the Bedouin in particular, believe in people not



in institutions. That is why it is difficult to gain their confidence unless they know you personally. Showing that you are affiliated to an institution makes it more difficult to obtain access.

I preferred to keep the local authorities uninformed about the nature of my study as this would necessitate obtaining research permits, which would lead me into a hectic and never ending process of bureaucracy. Knowing that a researcher is affiliated to a Western university is also not going to be welcomed and would cast suspicions on my intentions and research objectives. All the interviews I carried out with officials, especially policemen were informal.

Another ethical consideration that faced me throughout the whole process of fieldwork was how to pay the people back. The system of give and take is central to every culture. It is an issue definitely faced by every ethnographer or social scientist. Yet it is rarely discussed in traditional ethnographies. "Accounts of problems and pitfalls encountered along the way might diminish the image of efficacy and are usually left out. Moreover, the problem of exchange between ethnographer and members of the host culture is potentially embarrassing. It reveals a crass and material side of the quest for knowledge, and involves motivations that are self-serving on both sides" (Wickering, 1991, pp. 27-28).

Wickering (1991) in her study of the Bedouin women in South Sinai, faced the same problem of how to repay her hosts. They did not accept money. She understood their cultural system, which is taken for granted by members of the Bedouin community. "A problem disappeared, and in its place was an entry to understanding and acceptance"

The Bedouins differentiate between exchange among themselves and that which occurs with outsiders. Among kin, friends and neighbors, goods and services are seen as intangible, and that is without specific cash value. As relationships become more distant, exchange becomes more tangible. With outside strangers, goods and services are almost exclusively exchanged for cash (ibid., p.28).

I was advised that I should offer my gatekeepers gifts. They accepted them thankfully. Sometimes, they would comment, "*It's too much. You shouldn't be doing this*". The 'Aiaida Sheikh reciprocated my gift. Later, he told me that I should not bring them anything. "*We know you are a student and you're building yourself up. You need every*

*piastre to keep you going. We appreciate your good feelings, but we do not want to burden you*". In several other instances, he offered to give me money if I needed any.

In fact, all the people there put themselves at my service. Two families offered to wash my clothes. It still posed a dilemma as to how I could repay them. The answer lay with the children. They made several requests, especially for cameras, books and toys. My departure for Cairo brought their demands forward. Copies of photographs were happily accepted, and also helped me gain good opportunities to take more photographs. In fact, these presents strengthened my friendship with the people all the more.

## **Field Relations**

In this section, I shall highlight further issues that faced me during my ethnography such as initial responses; impression management; personal characteristics; field roles; strains and stresses of fieldwork and leaving the field.

### *Initial Responses*

Like gatekeepers and sponsors, people in the field will seek to place or locate the ethnographer within their experience. This is necessary to know how to deal with him or her. Due to people's lack of knowledge of social research, they will first be suspicious and hostile thinking that the researcher is a spy from the police or tax inspector or journalist, etc. This feeling will quickly dissipate as contact increases. However, this is not always the case (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp. 80-81). I did not pretend to be anything else other than a student pursuing postgraduate studies about the Bedouin and their changing lifestyle and culture. But many people always suspected me as a journalist. I discouraged this image of a journalist and sometimes let others who knew me do the introduction.

Many social anthropologists reflected on the initial responses they experienced in the field. I find Wickering's (1991) description of her experience very similar to mine. The *Tarabiin* were very curious about her motives and asked her a barrage of questions (p.24). Okely (1983) studying the Traveller Gypsies in Britain who share many common traits with the nomadic Bedouin shares a quite different experience. She minimised her identity as a researcher at the beginning and was therefore suspected of being a warden, a council employee, a journalist, a police collaborator, a foot-loose heiress, a girl friend of one of the



wardens, a drug addict and hippy or a fugitive on the run from the police. She discouraged all the images except the last (p. 41). In fact, it is the way an ethnographer behaves and interacts in the field that matters most. In time, when people knew me, they discredited any rumours and I won their love and respect.

### *Impression Management*

Personal appearance is a salient consideration. The way a researcher is dressed and talks is very influential in making him or her acceptable to others. The researcher must judge what sort of impression he or she wishes to create and manage appearances accordingly. Again the ethnographer should decide how much self-disclosure is appropriate or fruitful and to what extent to be honest and frank (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp. 83-91).

I found my situation very much like that of Huizer (1979) when he first entered the village he studied in San Luis, El-Salvador (pp.398-399). Being modest and willing to help and socialise with the Bedouin people, not arriving as a 'change agent' or 'one-who-knows' made them quickly accept me. Once rapport is established, it became much easier to obtain answers for my questions.

It is interesting to note that the *'Aiaida* Bedouin group in Ismailia made it clear to me at the beginning that they never had strangers amongst them before. They would be happy to learn from an 'educated' person like myself, but they would not accept any interference in their affairs or be forced to change any of their ways. In other words, it was like a hidden message that taking on any authoritarian role with them would be unacceptable. Like Huizer, I wanted to learn from the people and have them accept me as one of them. In time, they were happy to see me learn from them and admire their ways and customs. Okely (1983) had a similar experience with the Travellers remarking that her obvious interests in their customs was seen by them as respect and "contrasted this favourably with people who 'try to change us'" (p. 42).

The group whom I befriended first and facilitated my access were the children, boys of course. It was my camera that attracted their attention. They wanted to take photographs and use it. Through them, I learnt many things about the Bedouin's social world and was able to get good photographic opportunities. I started talking to them about education and what they learn at school. I started playing games with them, advising them and teaching them.

One of the 'Aiaida Sheikh's sons became very close to me. He told me after two days of my staying with them. *"I love you as much as my father"*. The next day, he woke me up and started talking to me about birds and sparrows. He said, *"I love you with all my heart"*. *"The birds are sending their greetings to you and singing the 'True Love' song to you. One of them, over there, is asking you if you need anything. Another one does not know you yet. And here is another one looking for you."* And then he repeats that they are all greeting me again. Another ten-year-old boy became like a guru to me, accompanying me to the fields, teaching me how to tend the flocks and cut grass with a scythe. It was a reciprocal relationship. I taught him the Arabic alphabet and basic mathematics, as he did not go to school. His father was contented with this growing relationship with his son. He once told me, *"... [My son] is like your son. You teach him and if he misbehaves, beat him and I will accept"*.

One of the incidents that I will never forget is my first meeting with *Moftah*. It was one afternoon talking to some of the 'Aiaida, when an old man in his sixties dressed in rags came to me asking after shaking hands "are you a Bedouin or an Egyptian?" I answered that I am Egyptian. To my amazement, I found him answering me in perfect English *"F...off? Go back to your home"*. He then sat for a while ignoring me as we resumed our conversation. I later discovered that he was suffering from a mental health problem. He worked in the British camps on the Suez Canal during the British occupation and later with the Israelis when they occupied Sinai in 1967. Though non-literate, he can speak many English and Hebrew words. To the amazement of the other 'Aiaida Bedouin men, I told them that all his English vocabulary was correct. We later became friends and he told me many of his stories about when he was working with the British and Israelis.

I found that it is not only the ethnographer who cares about impression management. The studied group cares as well. Bedouin men pay extreme attention to their self-esteem and social superiority in front of strangers. Keeping up appearances is very important. Word games, jokes and mockery are various ways they use to express their self-esteem and social superiority. The first night I was with the 'Aiaida, I found them involved in a heated discussion. All I could understand is that it was one of their customary law sessions discussing a transgressor attacking another. I took it seriously and listened carefully. After a while, the Sheikh asked me what I made of the discussion. I related my understanding of



what I had heard. He smiled saying, "it is just a mock session". They often say similar things to expose others' gullibility. A group once did the same with the governor of North Sinai. One was claimed to have been killed after being attacked and his people wanted to seek revenge. The governor attended the session to discover at the end that it was a mockery. Wickering (1991) experienced a similar situation on more than one occasion. Children tried it on her saying "Aha! You fell for it!" or "I lied and you ate it" (p.35).





*Fig.5: Author with a group of 'Aiaida informants*



*Fig.6: Author feeding sheep during a grazing session*



### *Personal Characteristics*

There are “ascribed” characteristics that the ethnographer cannot change such as gender, age, race, ethnicity and religious affiliation that affect the relationship with the researched and the research process as a whole (Hammersley & Atkinson, pp. 92-93).

Before carrying out my fieldwork, I believed that all my ascribed characteristics would play a positive role in enabling me to obtain access to the field and maintain good relations with the researched, except for my gender, especially when it came to researching women. I am confident of this, knowing that there is a strong division between sexes in Bedouin communities. Abu-Lughod (1986) highlighted this aspect in her study of the *Awlad 'Ali* Bedouin in the northwest coast of Egypt. She stated that as a woman researcher she enjoyed advantages of access and “unexpected pleasures of intimacy in the women’s world” (p.16). Her position as a researcher also enabled her to access both worlds of men and women. This access was “more balanced than a man’s would have been except in rare instances, male researchers in sex-segregated societies have far less access to women than I had to men” (ibid., p23).

I thought that one way to face this challenge was by finding a female research assistant from amongst my friends who would be willing to assist me in undertaking my study. This however was not possible as the friend I had in mind was not available. It was difficult anyway to introduce her properly to the gatekeepers and informants. The expansion of my fieldwork sites was another limiting factor.

I felt my position as a single man amongst the Bedouin men quite awkward. People just could not believe how I have not married. It is considered strange to find someone in his early thirties who never married, especially since Bedouin men marry at the age of 17 or 18, maximum in their early twenties. I justified it by saying that it is mainly financial constraints, especially as an urbanite, which is true to a great extent. Many young men and women now cannot get married as they cannot afford the cost of marriage, especially when having very demanding parents and in-laws. On the whole, as a relatively young researcher, I easily adopted the “incompetent” position of the outsider or marginal person in the field.



As argued by Hammersley and Atkinson, the early days of the field are the most difficult ones, especially as it is fraught with many difficulties and the researcher faces suspicion and hostility by the researched people. The ethnographer is not familiar with the research site and the people, and therefore acts as a novice. It takes some time before s/he settles, “knows the ropes” and becomes “old hands” (1995, pp. 99-102). I was quite confident that in my situation things were not going to be that difficult as I was quite familiar with the Bedouin culture. I did not have that feeling of estrangement or “culture shock”.

It is also considered essential that the ethnographer converses in the indigenous language of the people researched. Speaking the same language was a great advantage to me, although the dialect was different and sometimes I found it quite difficult to follow. I was, however, able to comprehend many of their words. In time, I gained acceptance by the *Heweitat* and reached the stage of an “imminent immigrant”, where I developed trust and rapport with them (Davies, 1999). With the ‘*Aiaida* in Ismailia, it went a step further where I developed overrapport with the people. I cannot claim to have “gone native”, although I had the opportunity to do so. The ‘*Aiaida* Sheikh was serious in his offer when he told me that I could live with them and he would help me to get married, offer me a job as a personal tutor for his children, build me a house and give me a good salary.

In one incident, as a result of my change of appearance (donning the Bedouin costume and turban), I was taken by the police for a Bedouin “drug dealer” and was searched thoroughly at a checkpoint coming back from the field after my first visit to the ‘*Aiaida* in Ismailia. All items in my luggage were searched. What an invasion of privacy! In the meantime, I was interrogated after being ordered to show them my ID. *Where were you? What were you doing there? What was your occupation? Again what were you doing there?*; reading through my field notes, the newspaper I had, a book about studying Bedouin communities in Arabic. I was left with the mess they had made of my luggage. I felt a stranger in the streets I am used to, feeling that all eyes were looking at me.

I find it interesting now to reflect on how my relationship with the Bedouin people, the ‘*Aiaida*, in particular, developed over the days. Conforming to their rules and etiquette of eating and sitting from the beginning, donning their costume and turban, and following their



religious practices, made it easier for me to be accepted amongst them. According to them, no one had ever come to live among and study them. Showing interest in them, their traditions and way of life, made them keen to teach me how to be one of them.

### *Leaving the Field*

Fieldwork also has its strains and stresses. At one stage, I felt that I was not making progress and felt in utter despair looking at the thinness of my data. The advantage, however, was that I made a more extensive study.

Leaving the field is another difficult thing. Reading about it in other ethnographies and anthropological studies was totally different from experiencing it myself. It was very touching. Many people wished me luck and others advised me. The following are some of their advice:

The 'Aiaida poet, was interested to know how I earn money. When I told him that I am currently unemployed and using my savings to cover the expenses of my study, he showed his disapproval stating the importance of having money. To him, it is only by wealth that people will listen to you. He advised me to collect as much money as I can and recited the following poem:

*Dirhams (money) everywhere give men power and beauty.  
It is the tongue to those who want eloquency and  
it is arms for those who want fighting.  
A poor man telling the truth will be accused of telling lies  
And a rich man telling lies will be believed.*

He added, *"if you are poor and the philosopher of your age, no one will listen to you. The know-how is to have money. With money you can sit and talk to Bush and marry Clinton's daughter. Without money, no one will even look at you"*.

Many others advised me to do good deeds and fear God. Their words were very touching. I shall make sure I sustain the relationship with all these wonderful people despite distance and demands of life.



## Techniques of Research

This section of the methodology discusses the techniques and tools I employed in my ethnographic study. Ethnography is simply the practice of collecting data using participant observation and interviews. It is based on the same relationships and human action as everyday life. It enables the researcher to look at the social situation, for example, in this situation, Bedouin people's livelihoods and traditions in light of globalisation challenges, as it is in both objective and subjective "reality", by first hand observation, shared living, conversations and sometimes joining in activities. No other methodology can provide such first hand knowledge in this respect. Other techniques however were complementary. Participatory and qualitative field methods or techniques such as life histories, in-depth semi-structured interviews with officials and focus group discussions are utilised to enable the people to define, describe, analyse and express their feelings and perceptions of their social reality. Participant observation, however, was emphasised more.

### *Participant Observation*

Participant observation is usually taken as the archetypal form of research employed by ethnographers. It is the hallmark of anthropology. The hallmark of participant observation is long-term personal involvement with those being studied, including participation in their lives to the extent that the researcher comes to understand the culture as an insider. It implies that the researcher becomes totally immersed in the field situation. This makes the researcher get access to the meanings which participants assign to social situations and learn first hand about a situation. This results in having the researcher/ethnographer construct an account of a social situation on the basis of the various accounts obtained from the informants. The problem with it, however, is that it involves face to face relationships, which results in the possibility of researcher modifying and influencing the research context as well as being influenced by it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp.104-109; Davies, 1999). But this can be confronted and not seen as a long-term problem. Long-term 'immersion' means that the researcher fades into the background and is taken for granted by the researched.

My position was that of a participant-observer. Its advantages were having the freedom to come and go, which prevented me altering my behaviour and going native, and penetrated the social situation. As a participant observer among the Bedouin, I was following an



established tradition of anthropology based on living with the people collecting all random information from various informants. But what type of information as an ethnographer should I collect? I wanted to collect data about almost everything in the field: actors, activities, space, objects, acts, events, time, goals, perceptions, feelings, emotions, etc. People's attitudes, values, cultural categories and aspirations are all interconnected in the course of their daily activities. To capture all relevant acts, according to Karl Heider, an ethnographer should always record "whole people in whole acts" (Young, 1996, p.5).

I did not go with an interview schedule. I just had a checklist of topics or themes I wanted to discuss mainly about the people's livelihoods and how things have changed from the past. How did they perceive these changes, how were they affected and what did they do about them? I found the 'funnel approach' the most convenient approach to be utilised in this context (Agar, 1980). Wanting to know and learn about everything, I had to keep all my senses alert and become immersed in the field collecting all what I see, hear, smell and touch to be later sorted and analysed.

Nevertheless, I decided to emphasise studying some facets rather than others. My ethnography is thus selective. I found some topics very vibrant and needed to be covered in detail such as human rights and religion as they are strongly interconnected in the Bedouin's social reality. I was also quite biased in the choice of some other topics. For example, being an urban dweller, living in the city all my life, I did not ask much about methods of agriculture, supply and demand, and livestock raising.

The process of participant observation is part of the culture of anthropology but foreign to the social life of the researched people with which it interacts. I participated in the Bedouin men's daily chores: tending flocks, collecting wood for making fire and working in the land, but to them I remained the urban fellow who is not used to that type of work. I was often teased that I could not do it the right way. I was better off as a tutor for the children and they perceived me in this role. One day, a Bedouin man whom I had not met before approached me asking if I was the new tutor of the Sheikh's children. I answered, "well, not really. But in one way or another, you can consider me so". I felt that I did not have to introduce myself by saying I am studying them. Ultimately, my



prolonged stay made me feel more self-assured and relaxed as being one of them and altered their perception of me as well.

### *Interviews*

Interviewing is acknowledged to help people in general and researchers in particular to understand the complexities and dimensions of particular issues or topics. Unstructured interviewing is the commonest and most popular format used with ethnography by sociologists. It is very close to a natural conversation. However, it is “a conversation with a purpose” (Burgess, 1990). It implies building trust and rapport with the respondents. I believe the more investment made in building rapport with the people, the more the research process develops. I let the information come naturally by asking in a casual way to complete the picture. My interviews were therefore more like conversations or dialogues. I used semi-structured interviews only with the officials.

Sometimes, I found the situation in the field had changed and an individual interview turned into a group discussion as more people came into the scene. I was prepared for such changes by maintaining flexibility. In those cases, I played the role of a facilitator in the group encouraging all participants to express their viewpoints.

### *Life Histories*

Within the ethnographic situation, I attempted to obtain life histories of some of the informants with whom the rapport was fairly strong. These were constructed through our conversation and unstructured interviewing. Some information, however, was verified as the research process developed.

### *Recording Data*

The process of taking notes varied. Sometimes, I took notes during the fieldwork itself, but the majority of the notes were written during intervals in the early mornings or in afternoons. It depended on the situation in the field. In many cases, I had to stop writing, as children would come to see what I was doing. Before going into the field, I believed that tape recording would be difficult, as it would make the people feel uncomfortable and unable to talk freely, so I did not think of using one. I also dislike listening to tape recorders



and prefer written data and field notes. The detailed quotes which appear in this study were all written down during the interviews with the consent of the respondents.

I continued with my diary, which I started keeping a long time ago. I found it very informative, especially during the analysis and writing up phases. Talking about the importance of keeping diaries, Huizer (1979) stated:

Required is an awareness of one's own limitations, a sense of insecurity and of one's relative ignorance (compared with the local people involved). In addition to this one needs consciousness of oneself as working with certain values, such as the desire to help people to solve their problems as they see them. In order to raise my consciousness about myself, my values and the consequences of my action, a diary, making explicit such subjective factors, proved to be necessary—one of the most important notes in my diary was a phrase by René Descartes: "For I became aware that I was involved in so many doubts, so many errors, that all efforts to learn were, as I view it, of no other help to me than that I might more and more discover my ignorance" (p.411).

I definitely believe that one should accept one's ignorance and try to learn from other people through empathy and friendship, what their perceptions and feelings of social life are. This can be done by establishing a line of communication and listening to them. This, in addition to theory, can result in good ethnographic research.



## CHAPTER TWO

### BEDOUIN SELF-AScription AND SOCIAL GROUPINGS

#### Introduction

Some modern notions of nationalism and citizenship posit the uniformity of citizens of a country not only in the way they dress, but also in their actions and even their way of thinking. The study of culture, however, has taught us that the opposite situation prevails. Human life is culturally diversified. Uniformity can only exist to some extent between members of the same cultural group; even within the same cultural group, there are individual variations.

The deserts in the Arab land host a number of nomadic groups. The most famous aggregations are: the Bedouin, the Berber speaking Tuareg, and the Beja and their subgroups in south-east Egypt, Eastern Sudan and further south in East Africa. This study focuses mainly on the Bedouin, particularly those living in the Eastern Desert of Egypt and more specifically on three descent groups: the *'Aiaida*, the *Heweitat* and the *Ahiwat*. Despite similarities between all these nomadic groups in their socio-cultural and economic models, each group forms a distinctive cultural model even when sharing the same spatial and temporal context. This uniqueness is attributed to the different cognitive organisational way in which each group makes sense of its world and social reality. People organise material objects, events and experiences according to their own specific criteria or cognitive categories.

Bedouin groups like all other cultural or ethnic groups have their own cultural models and schemas that give them a degree of cultural unity. At the same time, each Bedouin descent group has its own 'local' specific culture, which distinguishes it from other groups. This makes 'Bedouin culture' also diversified. The 'local culture' is described by Fredrick Barth (1987) as an "aggregate tradition", differentially distributed among numerous groups and individuals (Shore, 1996, pp. 209-210). Culture in this respect is not self-contained.

Each Bedouin group derives its local culture and identity from a specific 'social orientational' model, which regulates social relations between individuals of the same



group and groups to one another. The local culture of a group is also derived from 'instituted' models created by primal identification of the group's unique characteristics and drawing boundaries that initially separate it from other groups culturally and in some cases socially. This separation is taught to Bedouin children at an early age. It is the initial phase of knowledge creation of their distinct cultural identity. This process of knowledge creation based on separation is referred to as '*epistemogenesis*' in Shore's (1996) analysis of the Murngin Australian Aborigines' forms of knowledge transformation (p.218).

This chapter explains and analyses the Bedouin lineage foundational schema. It focuses on the concepts of 'tribe' as a fluid form of social organisation and segmentation. The general social orientational models that separate Bedouin from other cultural groups are also explained. The chapter also attempts to discuss some specific Bedouin 'local' cultures explaining how each group creates its own social orientational and classificatory models that distinguish it from other descent groups. As current trends in cognitive anthropology now focus on how cultural models are related to action, I will attempt to show how the Bedouin social grouping affects their interaction with others.

## **Historical Beginnings and Classifications**

Bedouin or *badw* (in Arabic) are broadly defined as "the Arabs of the desert". This definition is again ambiguous as the term 'Arab' itself refers to a mosaic of people and cultures. It is quite difficult to understand who are the Bedouin and Arabs without putting both terms on a historical continuum. And within this historical continuum, there are a number of categories that need to be distinguished.

Etymologically, the term *badw* (sing. *badawi*) is derived from the Arabic root *ba-da-wa*. From it is derived the noun *badiya* (literally desert, also known in Arabic as *sahara*) and *badawa* (the mode of life in the desert). The verb *tabadda* means that a person lives in the desert. *Badawa* is commonly translated into English as 'nomadism', which is quite inaccurate as it provides only part of the whole picture of the nomadic kaleidoscope. The desert folk or nomads of the desert in Arabia are called *al-a'arab*. This term occurs ten times in the *Quran* often connoting uncouth and unruly people of the desert. One saying in the Prophet's Tradition, *min bada jafa* (he who lives in the desert becomes uncouth) suggests that nomadism as a way of life is unfavourable (Jabbur, 1995, pp.28-29). This



reference has made many commentators argue that Islam as a religion encouraged urbanisation and settling in cities and towns. Southall (2000), for example, argues that Islam is a religion with an urban focus. “The good life can only be adequately led in cities, where there is a Friday mosque, bath and market (contrary to the vulgar perception of Muslims as ferocious nomads—who indeed also played their part)” (p.223). According to Xavier de Planhol (1959), Islam as a religion emphasised urban activities and trade. It is “a religion of town dwellers and merchants, propagated by nomads” (quoted in Southall, 2000, pp.190-191). This perception and stereotypical image of the unruly Bedouin nomads is still prevalent among the sedentary folk up to the present. It is interesting to note that this differentiation based on space is one of the important classificatory models in Bedouin and Arab cultures. I shall return to this later in further detail.

The term *badw* therefore refers to the desert dwellers or the unsettled. The term *al-a‘arab*, mentioned above, has become archaic and is rarely used now. Some Egyptian scholars and officials, however, use the term *‘urban* (also meaning Bedouin, a derivative from *al-a‘arab*, sing. *‘arabawi*). This word, particularly its singular form conjures up objections on part of the Bedouin as it has derogatory connotations. Many of my *Aiaida* informants objected that the title of a local television programme *‘Arabawi*, depicting traditional Bedouin life, is imprecise and politically incorrect.

The term *‘Arab* itself commonly used to define Bedouin is also ambiguous as it has several meanings. According to Peter Mansfield (1992), the term is mentioned in ancient Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions. In one occurrence, the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III announcing victory over a group of rebellious chieftains, one is referred to as “Gindibu the aribi”(p.13). Mansfield argues that historically an ‘Arab’ was a nomad inhabitant of the central and northern Arabian Peninsula. It is probably derived from a Semitic root related to nomadism. Its plural form *‘arab*’ in Arabic also means ‘those who speak clearly’ as contrasted with *ajam* or ‘those who speak indistinctly’ – a term applied mainly to Farsi speaking people or Persians. The Greeks and Romans extend the term to cover the inhabitants of the whole Arabian peninsula (ibid., p.14).

Among the Bedouin themselves, many prefer to be called *‘arab* (plural) rather than *badw*. Areas inhabited by settled or transhumant Bedouin in Egyptian villages and towns are



locally known as places or territories of the 'arab. For example, *ezbet al-'arab* (the hamlet of the Arabs) in Ismailia, or *'arab al-gisr* (the Arabs of the bridge) situated off *Gisr al-Sues* (the Suez Road) in Heliopolis, Cairo. Other places are known by the name of a specific lineage, descent group or family such as *'arab al-'Aiida* or *'arab al-Ṭawila*.

Others prefer to be called *badw*, like the *'Aiida* Sheikh in my field area. Although he defines *badw* as "those living in the *badiya* (desert)", he considers his people and himself as *badw*, despite settling down and taking up agriculture, "*because we still retain our Bedouin traditions and customs. It is difficult to change them and they will remain up to thirty years in the future without any change...*" 'Arab, according to him, refers to all the population living in Arab states. 'Orban, on the other hand, refers to lineage of a *qabila* ('tribe') or a confederation of 'tribes'. He adds that this term is rarely used now. Like other *'Aiida*, he dislikes its singular form *'arabawi*. In my opinion, one simple way to solve this muddle of terminology is to use both terms *badw* and *'arab* synonymously.

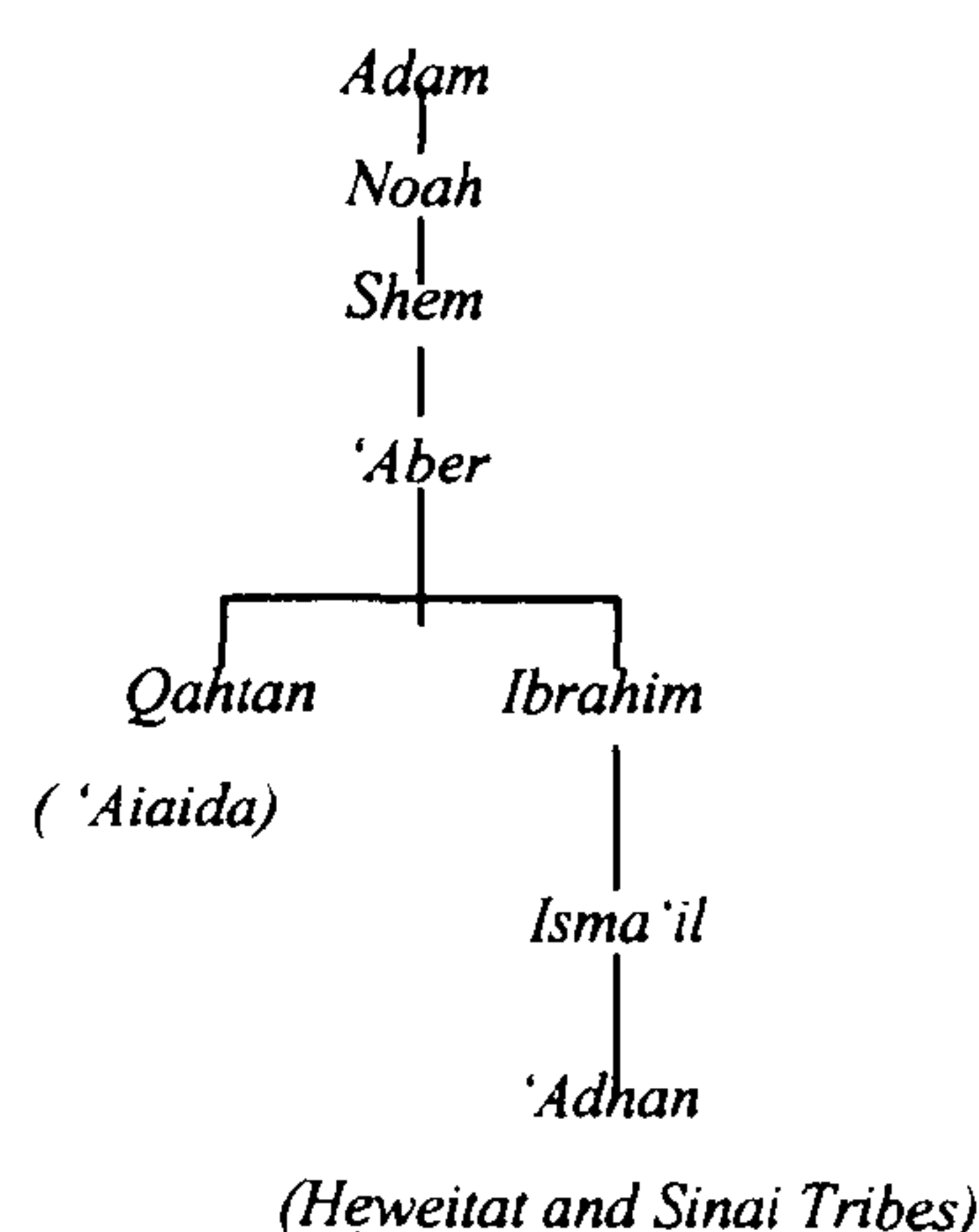
#### *Bedouin Lineage Foundational Schema*

One of the most conspicuous cultural traits of all Bedouin is their great emphasis on lineage and their claim to be *asil* true or pure *badw* or *'arab*, hence superior, especially in their interaction with 'others', whoever this other might be, and particularly anthropology researchers who focus on Bedouin lineage and kinship models. With regards to their interaction with the latter, Bedouin men use a 'special-purpose' model that 'exoticises' their cultural/ethnic image in contrast to the other. An 'exoticised' image symbolised by a positive sign (+) is one of four approaches used by Traveller Gypsies to handle their ethnic image in their relationship with 'gorgio' or Non-Gypsies as suggested by Okely (1996) to analyse their different interactions and economic exchange (pp.52-53). I would like to employ these approaches in my analysis of Bedouin's relations with 'others' pointing out that they have a special-purpose in Bedouin social interactions. I shall return to these four models later in more detail. Suffice to say here that a 'special-purpose model' from its name has a special purpose or function and significance in the mind of its user. Certain societies such as the Murngin Australian Aboriginal groups exploit a small number of their foundational schemas to structure many of their specific cultural models (Shore, 1996, pp.53-54). In my opinion, the same situation could also be applied to the Bedouin case.



I shall call the Bedouin emphasis on their known descent (*nasab* in Arabic) as the 'Bedouin Lineage Foundational Schema'. A foundational schema is a general and abstract model that organises and initiates a wide range of particular cultural models (ibid., p.53). The Bedouin lineage schema proposes that all *badu* or 'arab have a common descent. They trace their ancestry and lineage since time immemorial. The *badu* ancestors, the inhabitants of Arabia in prehistoric times were the Semitic people referred to in the *Old Testament Book of Genesis* as the children of Shem, son of Noah and through him they trace their origin back to Adam, the first man. Noah had three sons Shem, Ham and Japheth. These three had sons after the flood (*Genesis* 9:10). Earlier scholars of Arab lineage whose manuscripts have been preserved such as Ibn Hazm (died 1054 AD) and the famous Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (died 1406 AD) argue that Shem's descendants (the Semites) include Arabs, Assyrians, Persians, Kurds, Armenians and the Sons of Jacob or the Israelites. (Al-Tayeb, 2001, pp.25-26). Although this classification of races has become archaic in modern anthropology and politically incorrect, it is still relevant to many people, particularly the Semites, including the Bedouin Arabs.

To complete the Bedouin lineage schema, one of the sons of Shem was named 'Aber. Some Muslim scholars claim he was the Prophet *Hud* mentioned in the *Quran* (ibid., p.26). 'Aber's descendants were divided into two main lineages: the *Qahtaniyoun* or *Yemenis* whose ancestor was *Qahtan* or *Joktan* and 'Adnaniyoun or *Banu Isma'il* whose ancestor was Prophet *Isma'il* (Ishmael), the son of Prophet *Ibrahim* (Abraham). The contemporary 'Aiida descent group or 'tribe' trace their descent to *Qahtan*, originally the inhabitants of Yemen, while the *Heweitat* and other Sinai 'tribes' claim they are 'Adnaniyoun.



**Diagram 1: The Descent of the Bedouin**



Another important classificatory model within the Bedouin lineage schema is the division of 'arab (the Arabs) into 'arab 'ariba (literally the Arabs of the Arabs or pure Arabs) and 'arab most'araba (Arabs who become Arabised or adopted the Arabic language as their means of communication). There is disagreement among the early Muslim scholars on who belongs to which division. The prevalent opinion is that of Ibn Khaldoun that the former are the *Qahtaniyoun*, while the latter are the 'Adnaniyoun (Al-Tayeb, 2001, p.23). Despite this classification, all Bedouin Arabs whether *Qahtaniyoun* such as the 'Aiaida or 'Adnaniyoun such as the *Heweitat* claim they have one origin. However, the 'Aiaida in particular, in several instances of my daily interaction with them took pride in their descent being 'arab 'ariba, descendants of *Qahtan*.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) in her celebrated study of *Awlad 'Ali* Bedouin society in the Western Desert of Egypt emphasises the importance of *asl* (the blood of ancestry or the nobility of Bedouin origin) among the *Awlad 'Ali* as a matter of great concern linking them to the past and binding them to the present. She explains that

[b]lood, in the sense of genealogy, is the basis of their identity. No matter where or how they live, those who can link themselves genealogically to any of the tribes of the Western Desert are 'arab (Arabs), not Egyptians... Blood is the authenticator of origin or pedigree and as such is critical to Bedouin identity and their differentiation from Egyptians, who are said to lack roots or nobility or origin (*asl* or *mabda*) (pp.44-45).

The Eastern Desert Bedouin groups also share the same foundational schema.

## Bedouin Social Orientational Model

The Bedouin or 'arab as they like to call themselves\* base their social organisation on a kinship model connected through descent from a common patriarchal ancestor or an apical ancestor. This kinship model is referred to in English as 'tribe' and sometimes 'clan'. I have some reservations on the usage of both terms to describe this type or model of social organisation. Using the concept of models in cognitive anthropology, I shall refer to the Bedouin model of social organisation as the 'social orientational model'. A social

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\* Abu Lughod (1986) also noted that *Awlad 'Ali* refer to themselves more frequently as 'arab rather than *badu*. "As in many cultures, the word they use to designate themselves also connotes the general term *people*—for instance anyone returning from a visit to kin is queried, "How are your Arabs?" But the term has a more specific meaning when used to distinguish the Bedouins from their Egyptian neighbors. In that context, it implies the Bedouin claim to origins in the Arabian Peninsula and to genealogical links to the pure Arab tribes who were the first followers of the Prophet Muhammad. It also suggests their affinity to all the Arabic-speaking Muslims of the Middle East and North Africa who, because of common origin, they presume to be just like themselves" (pp. 44-45).



orientational model is a cultural model that organises social relations and kinship calculation between kin groups. Kin relations may also be modelled in various ways such as using symbols or through verbal formulas such as songs, proverbs and narratives (Shore, 1996, pp.62-63). Usually the kin group given a specific name has an apical patriarchal figure founder such as the *'Aiaida* or *Heweitat*. I would therefore use the term **'descent group'** rather than 'tribe' or 'clan' in my analysis of Bedouin social organisation.

In the social sciences, the meaning of the term 'tribe' shifts uneasily with changing world views. Many social scientists have recently started to shun this word as politically sensitive and incorrect, preferring the less sensitive term 'ethnic group' (Mann, 1983, pp. 402-403). Again this latter term is sensitive in some contexts, particularly the Egyptian one, where the society is perceived as quite homogenous.

Within the Bedouin context in particular, some anthropologists find the term 'tribe' also inappropriate and does not provide an exact translation of the Arabic term (*gabila* or *qabila*). One such anthropologist is William Young (1996) in his study of the *Rashaayda* Bedouin in Eastern Sudan. Throughout his monograph, he uses the word 'tribe' between quotation marks. This is partly because, he argues,

"tribe" is a very inexact translation of the Arabic term and partly because "tribe" has been used in so many different ways that it no longer seems to have any definite meaning. Sometimes "tribe" refers to a large population whose members speak a nonwritten language (such as the Navaho); sometimes it refers to a local group of people who claim descent from a common ancestor (for instance, the "tribes of Israel" named in the Old Testament); and sometimes it names an intermediate stage (between the "band" and the "chiefdom") in sociocultural evolution (cf. Sahlins 1968). Because it has so many contradictory connotations, some anthropologists [e.g. M. H. Fried (1975) in *The Notion of Tribe*] now reject it completely... (p.2)

Another commentator, Richard Tapper (1990) argues that local categories of tribes are often ambiguous. Ambiguity extends to the notion of segmentation and definitions based on economic, political, social and cultural differences. The term 'tribe' is also often abused by governments in their political discourse. This abuse, however, is useful in negotiating the everyday meaning and significance of the term (pp.50-56). According to Talal Asad (1986), there are no typical tribes. They may be rather seen as historical and contingent structures in which "the limits and possibilities of people's lives are realised" (p.11).



The term 'clan' also cannot be used to describe the Bedouin model of social organisation, as it is a more general term than that of lineage. Membership of a clan tends to remain constant as its members trace their descent from a common ancestor, whereas lineage membership can be negotiable (Mann, 1983, p.45). Bedouin lineages are very fluid and have become muddled since antiquity. Ibn Khaldun noted that a person of certain descent may become attached to people of another descent and in the course of time his original descent is forgotten. Family lines in this manner continually change (p.100).

Ibn Khaldun argues that this confusion in lineage happened both in pre-Islamic and in Islamic times. Surprisingly enough, it is still taking place up to the present as mentioned to me by some of my 'Aiaida informants. However, they attempt to preserve their 'pure' blood through endogamy.

In the Arabic language, there are several classifications that describe descent or *nasab*. Bedouin men classify seven levels of descent. It is difficult to provide an exact translation of these terms into English. I have also found many discrepancies among Western anthropologists who studied these classifications. These seven, according to my 'Aiaida informants are: first, *al-sh'ab* (the distant or primal lineage such as *Qahtan* and 'Adnan). Second, *Al-qabila* also pronounced *gabila* (literally translated as tribe. In Arabic, it refers to the first subdivision from *al-sh'ab*. Etymologically, *qabila* in Arabic connotes matching or on parallel lines. In English, it could best be translated as a general descent group such as the 'Aiaida or the *Heweitat*). The third subdivision is *al-'amara*. This term is not used among the Egyptian Bedouin. It could refer to a unilineal patrilineal descent from the general descent group. The fourth subdivision is *al-baṭn* (literally stomach as it connotes encompassing a large group of minimal lineages). *Al-baṭn* is often translated into English as 'sub-tribe' or maximal lineage group. The 'Aiaida, for example, are divided into three main *botoun* (plural of *baṭn*): *al-Garab'aa*, *al-Salaṭṭna*, and *al-Gawa'la*. (See Diagram 2). The fifth subdivision is *al-fakhd* (literally 'thigh' connoting solidarity) this is translated into English as the sections or minimal lineage. Each *baṭn* is divided into a number of *fokhud* (pl.) The sixth subdivision is *al-fasila*, also called *al-'ashira* by some groups. It refers to the close agnatic group. Affinals could also be included under this subdivision, particularly in the case of the 'Aiaida as they are primarily an endogamous group. The last subdivision is the *bait* (literally the household or the family). It includes several classifications such as the extended family and/or the nuclear family of both types – the family of orientation or a



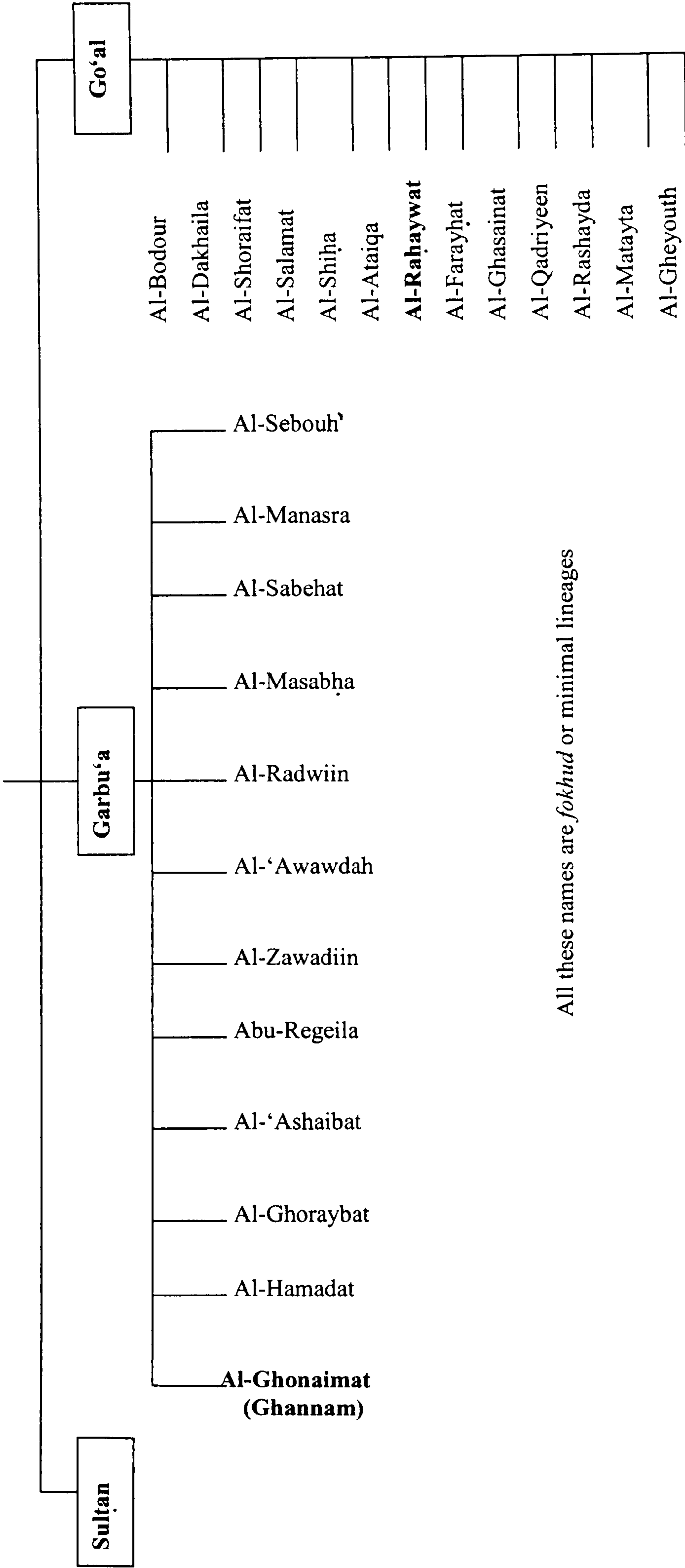
family of procreation. Figure 2 delineates the *'Aiaida* patrilineage descent chart. The reader will note that lineage is based on patrilineal descent from a common ancestor, *'Aiad*, who settled in Egypt after the Islamic conquest, married an Egyptian and formed his *gabila* – the *'Aiaida*, with its three main *botoun* existing up to the present. The chart then follows the egocentric genealogy of *Haj Sweilam* and his *bait* or household.



Diagram 2: The ‘Aiaida Patrilineage Descent Chart

Sa‘ud (Great grandfather of ‘Aiaida originally from Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula and a descendant of Qahtan)

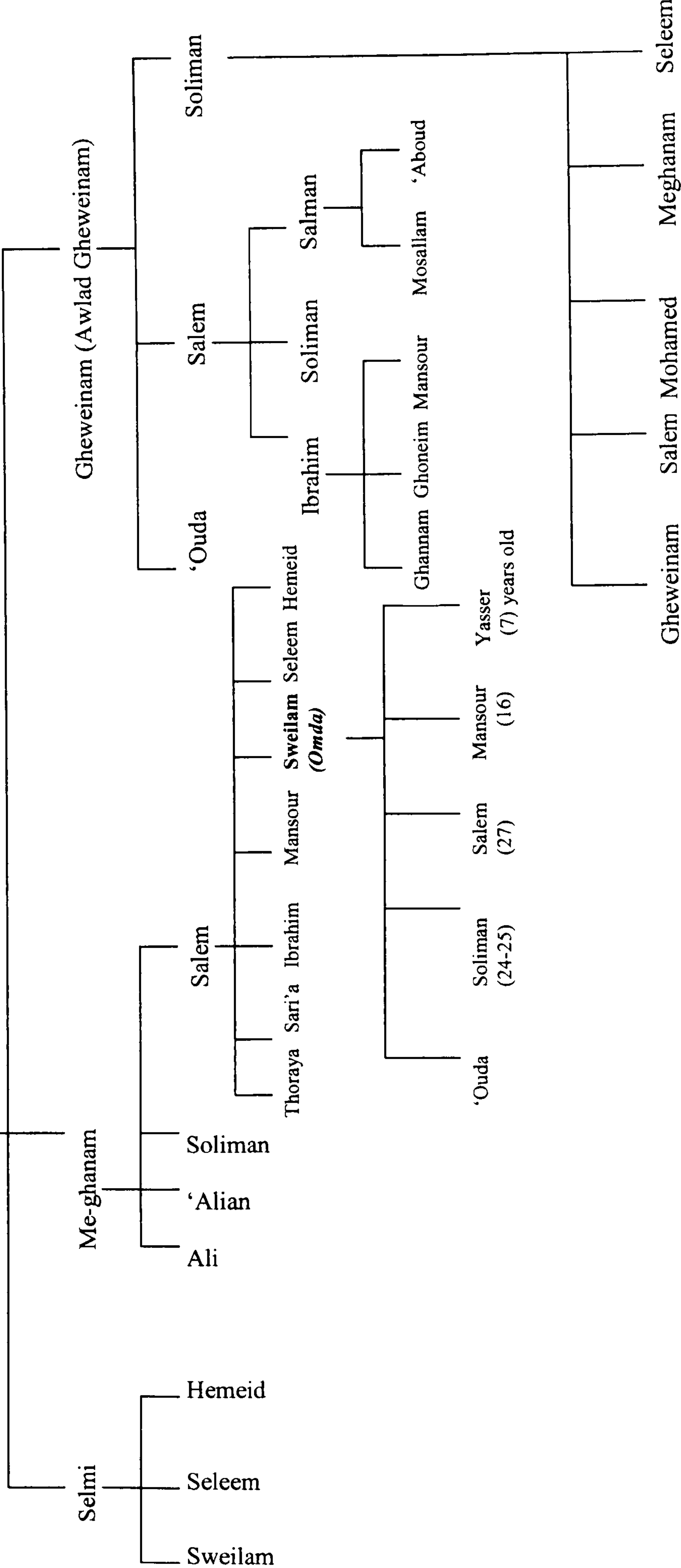
‘Aiad (Founder of the ‘Aiaida descent group) – Sultan from a different mother



All these names are *fokhud* or minimal lineages



Al-Ghonaimat  
(Ghannam)



### *Kinship Model and Segmentation*

Another component of the Bedouin social orientational model is the kinship model or *garaba* in Arabic (from the root meaning “to be close”). According to Abu-Lughod (1986), the Bedouin world view is dominated by “this ideology of natural, positive, and unbreakable bonds of blood between consanguines, particularly agnates, including putative or distant agnates, those related through common patrilineal descent as manifested by a shared eponymous ancestor” (p.51).

Tribal bonds or relations between paternal kin is called ‘*asabiyya* or a sense of solidarity or collectivity’ (ibid.). It is one of the most prominent distinguishing models of the Bedouin foundational schema since antiquity. Since pre-Islamic times, Bedouin Arabs have devoted their attention to their genealogies and adhered to their solidarity and line of descent. Contemporary notions of this term (*asabiyya*) within the Bedouin context refer mainly to biases to one’s extended family and/or minimal lineage. It is again a shifting model that can expand to include the whole descent group in some cases when confrontation or conflict arises with another group.

A common term in Bedouin discourse that explains the role of lineage solidarity is *khamsat* (literally five, often translated as ‘co-liaable group’. A term coined by Emanuel Marx (1967) in his study of the Bedouin of the Negev Desert in Israel). For example, when compensation or blood money (*diyya*) must be paid to settle a conflict peacefully (*sulha*), a circle of patrilineal kin, all descendants of one ancestor extending to five generations must help in paying this compensation. If revenge has to be taken upon someone, it can be taken upon any adult male within the *khams* of that person. In his study of blood revenge among the Bedouin of Israel, Joseph Ginat (1984) argues that a leader of a co-liaable group uses instances of murder of one of its members as a basis for the unification of the group. “Tension will be artificially intensified to make members feel they have to stand together, the leader hoping that the solidarity formed within the group will outlast the blood dispute...” (p.78).

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\* This term was originally used by Ibn Khaldun’s to denote a state of political development out of tribalism inspired by the zeal of following a leader who invests in both the Bedouin roughness and its sense of collectivity. The term refers mainly to a sense of collectivity and social solidarity. Created by natural bonds of affection and identification. “The closer the kinship tie, the greater the group feeling. This same sentiment can also develop regarding neighbors, allies or clients when close contact characteristic of kin ties develops among them” (Ibn Khaldoun, 1958, pp.264-265 as quoted in Abu-Lughod, 1986, p.280).



According to the 'Aiaida Sheikh, *asabiyya* is a major drawback in the 'Aiaida community as it contradicts the principles of Sufi Islam based on brotherhood and equality. "*Asabiyya*", according to him, "*is biased and unjust*". However, as a deeply inherent cultural and mental model within the Bedouin communities, especially in rural and desert areas, it is a notion quite difficult to change. The 'Aiaida, particularly the members of the Sufi group, as well as other groups, know quite well that Islam has curbed the Arabs' adherence to and pride in this spirit of solidarity. There are several verses in the *Quran* and the Prophet's Tradition, which denounce this feeling emphasising that the only difference between human beings is piety and good deeds. It is interesting to note, however, that one of the factors that make this spirit of *asabiyya* continue to prevail, are some sayings of the Prophet which assert that Arabs should know their lines of descent. These sayings are both written and transmitted through oral history, particularly among different Bedouin groups. One saying stated, "Learn those of your genealogies that establish your kinship connections, for the connection of kinship engenders affection within the family, encourages the accumulation of wealth, and provides solace at the moment of death" (Quoted in Jabbur, 1995, p.266).

The Bedouin's social orientational model based on genealogical order and kinship, according to many anthropologists such as Peters (1968) and Abu-Lughod (1986, pp.50-51) in the case of Western Desert Bedouin, Cole (1975) in the case of *Al-Murrah* Bedouin in Saudi Arabia, and Nelson (1973) in general among various nomadic groups in the Middle East, organises their political life in terms of "segmentary lineages". Segmentation, also referred to as fission and acephalous, is originally a Durkheimian concept. In anthropology, it is particularly associated with Evans-Pritchard's (1940) classical study of *The Nuer* in Southern Sudan and *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949). It refers to kin groups that share a lineage system or a line of descent traced to an apical ancestor as well as a system of political organisation often described in terms of dual opposition between different lineages. Segmentary groups often live in spatially well-defined areas and exhibit consciousness of their identity and exclusiveness. They achieve their political organisation through a balance of power between the separate groups. This balance is in perpetual flux depending on the power of sheikhs or chiefs of each group, number of people and material wealth.

Some anthropologists such as Salim (1962) and Fernea (1970) in the case of the Marsh Arabs in Southern Iraq consider segmentation inadequate in describing the political organisation of these groups, as the balance of power between them is almost nonexistent since some groups are much larger in number and in power than others. (Cole, 1975, pp.101-102; Mann, 1983, p.1). However, according to Sharon Bastug (1998), segmentation, as a particular form of 'higher-order' unilineal descent group organisation, will remain a relevant and powerful analytical tool as long as anthropologists continue to perceive it as part of the kinship and descent models used in the formation of social groups (pp.95-118).

In the case of the Eastern Desert Bedouin in Egypt, particularly the '*Aiaida*', segmentation is highly relevant as part of their social orientational model. From my observations of two minimal lineage groups (*fokhud*), in particular, the *Al-Raḥaywat* and *Al-Ghonaimat*, where a number of households (*biyout*) of both groups share the same territory (village) in Ismailia governorate, the balance of power is almost equal, however, with some variations. Both *fokhud* roughly have the same size and are equal in wealth. Political power, however, currently rests with the *Al-Raḥaywat*, as the '*Aiaida*'s Sheikh holds the title of *sheikh al-mashaikh* (the paramount leader or Sheikh of all the Sheikhs). This gives his *fakhd* (minimal lineage group) in general, and his different *biyout* (households), in particular, a sense of pre-eminence among the other groups. This feeling of political superiority and pre-eminence can be clearly identified in the discourse between members of both groups.

In one instance, for example, two young '*Aiaida*' men were arguing about the prominence of their extended families. The young man from the *Al-Raḥaywat* boasted that his family had prevailed when the other family accepted that his brother marry one of their daughters despite objections from some of the girl's paternal cousins (*awlad 'amm*). In theory, a girl's paternal cousins have the right to be consulted before a girl's family gives her away in marriage. One of them might want to marry her, and if he does, he can insist on his right and try to prevent any genealogically more distant suitor from approaching her family. The cousin cannot force the girl to marry him but he can stop her from marrying anyone else (except for another close paternal cousin, who would have exactly the same right to her). In actual practice, most paternal cousins do not interfere in the marriages of their female relatives, which I think was the case with the '*Aiaida*'.



Members of the same *bait* and *fakhd*, in particular, feel close to each other and think of themselves as one people. Conflicts can occur quite often between members of different *bait* or *fakhd* over a number of things such as using insulting or abusive language, or over the right to use water either for irrigation or watering animals, etc. Conflicting segmentary relationships, however, do not weaken the overall structure of the *gabila* or the descent group, particularly in the case of conflict with other descent groups. For example, during my fieldwork, all segments of the 'Aiaida, despite being spatially separated, have united against the *Tarabiyn* descent group, when the latter claimed possession of a water well in Sinai that originally belonged to the 'Aiaida, according to their claim. The 'Aiaida were discussing the type of action to be taken to restore their hold of that well. It was a political game (*siyasa*) between the leaders of both descent groups. The use of force exemplified in destroying the wall built by the *Tarabiyn* and asserting 'Aiaida ownership was one of the options discussed. The matter was still being discussed at the time when I left the field in November 2003. Luckily no violent actions took place, which I hope will continue in the future. The 'Aiaida Sheikh, a very reasonable man with sound judgement, in my opinion, will opt for a peaceful settlement of the dispute using Bedouin customary law once the *Tarabiyn* leaders accept this option.

This case provides a stark example of the importance of loyalty to the descent group and unity of all its segments and members in critical situations. This common feeling of loyalty is expressed among all Bedouin groups. In the case of *Al-Murrah* 'tribe' in Saudi Arabia, for example, they strongly articulate, "People of Murrah, we are all one; our tents are one; we are all brothers" (Cole, 1975, p.93). One common verbal formula or saying that depicts the importance of this essential unity despite dual opposition between segments is "*ana wa akhoya 'ala ibn 'ami; wa ana wa ibn 'ami 'ala al-gharib*" (I and my brother against our cousin; and I and my cousin against the stranger). This differentiation between members of the same group and the 'other' or 'stranger' forms another distinct classificatory model within the Bedouin kinship or social orientational model.

The classificatory model that divides Bedouin kin from strangers is called by Abu Lughod (1986) *garib* vs. *gharib* ("kin versus strangers or outsiders") (p.51). This distinction shapes both their sentiment and behaviour. Bedouin kinship ideology is thus

based on the notion of closeness as agnates sharing blood and flesh (*dam wlham*). This closeness is stronger from the paternal side. A relationship through maternal ascendants is characterised as one of *dmaya* (the diminutive of “blood”) suggesting that maternal links are a weaker form of relationship (ibid.). It is interesting to note that this classificatory model could also function as a special-purpose model that ‘exoticises’ and separates the Bedouin from other Egyptians. In the particular case of *Awlad ‘Ali*, they look down on the Egyptians, alleging that they only know their immediate kin, which is not true in many cases.

Conversely, spatial separation and sedentarisation weaken this kinship model. A different type of social orientational model arises based on spatial proximity and sharing the same locality. Among *Awlad ‘Ali*, non-kin groups who live together form another type of close relationship described by Abu Lughod (1986) as “*garaba min l-galb* (kinship from the heart)” (p.62). Living together or sharing a life (*ishra*) strengthens sentiments and makes strangers familiar and hence more like kin. Although it could be impermanent, it implies many obligations of support and unity. This bond is symbolised by the notion of sharing food signifying the absence of enmity in Bedouin culture and many others. It is called in Arabic (*‘eish wa milh*) “cereal or bread and salt”. Settled Bedouin families visit each other and develop a strong sentiment and reciprocity that is manifested in exchanging everyday visits and ritualised visits on particular occasions (*munasabat*) like weddings, funerals, etc. These occasions in particular provide the opportunity for participating in emotionally charged events that increase the basis of what is shared. People share what they have, by giving gifts both material goods and services (ibid., pp.63-69).

Some studies of sedentarised Bedouin groups in towns such as some groups of *Al-Murrah* (Cole, 1975) and some *Awlad ‘Ali* who settled in Marsa Matruh city (‘Abd al-Hamid, 1969) show that bonds between kin have significantly weakened in favour of those between neighbours. The pattern of life in cities made these Bedouin families abandon the desert life and policies of the tribe and values of honour and modesty. Contrary to this view, Abu-Lughod (1986) argues,

this has not yet come to pass. Although they are becoming settled, the *Awlad ‘Ali* Bedouins are a long way from being peasants. By no means detribalised, they strain under the yoke of political control and prefer to guard what autonomy they have by minimizing dealings with government authorities...the ideology of honour and



modesty so closely associated with nobility of origin has a powerful hold on every Awlad 'Ali individual (p.77).

It should be noted that the community studied by Abu-Lughod is quite homogenous and is situated in a roughly rural context. In urban contexts, however, kinship models do get weak and lineages disintegrate to a considerable extent, particularly the unity under a leader or a 'tribal' Sheikh, as I observed among the *Heweitat* living in Al-Salam City on the outskirts of Cairo.

The *Heweitat* is one the major descent groups – *gabila*, originally from the Arabian peninsula and now its numerous lineages spread across Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt. Their transitional migration to Egypt started more than 200 years ago. They are considered the latest descent group to migrate to Egypt from Arabia. According to several of my *Heweitat* informants in the al-Salam city field site,

*the Heweitat [the collective term 'Al-Heweitat' here refers only to the minimal lineage of my informants, Al-'Omran] came to Egypt in the first decade of the twentieth century during 'al-qaht' [severe drought] in Sa'udia [modern Saudi Arabia]. Some settled in Sinai, others in Suez, Ismailia, Sharkiya, Belbeis, Qalioubiya, Giza, and in many districts of Cairo, in Helwan, Maadi, Basateen, el-Salaam [now Al-Salam City in East Cairo], like ourselves. Some are still nomads, while others have sedentarised. We started settling down in 1965 and adapted to sedentary life and urbanism. We started teaching our children and worked as guards and in trading in lands and livestock (Interview, May 2003).*

The *Heweitat* who settled have lost many of their traditional cultural models as stated by one of my informants, Haj 'Aiad, a wood trader in his fifties from Al-Salam City, "*Our traditions are threatened to become extinct and die out. It is only in places like Sinai where you find the Heweitat Bedouin and others still keeping their old traditions. Here, there is no Sheikh to unite us. Those living in cities have become dispersed; each forming a small nuclear family*". It is ironic that it is not only the ordinary Egyptians who only know their immediate kin, but also the settled Bedouin.

Another informant, Haj Mohamed of *Heweitat*, stated, "*the best thing about 'us' the 'arab' is that we are one hand [meaning solidarity or 'asabiyya]. Among the Heweitat, there are many well-educated officers, lawyers and doctors*". I asked him, "Why don't these people do something then to advocate the rights of Bedouin Arabs or form pressure groups or a community-based organisation (CBO) to support each other?" He answered,

*"Everyone now is looking after his own interest. They do not want to be bothered".* In my opinion, it is astonishing that in a place like Al-Salam City, where a considerable number of residents are of Bedouin Arab origin, (between 30-50 *Heweitat* families, according to *Haj 'Aiad*), they have no representation whatsoever in the Popular Local Council and do not have any local CBOs to address their interests.

Haj Mohamed's picture of the *Heweitat* as *"one hand"* indicating their *asabiyya* solidarity is inherently an image and not a reality, particularly in this urban context. Previously, when they were living as a 'tribal' community in the first half of the twentieth century, this solidarity was a reality. Nonetheless, it is real elsewhere; in rural and desert contexts where the *Heweitat* still retain strong social bonds and Segmentary lineage models. In the urban context, the balance of power has tilted away from segmentation in favour of the central government with its bureaucratic apparatuses exemplified in the local council and the police authority, which coerce Bedouin men and enforce them to abide with their 'own' conception or model of law and order that by far disagrees with the Bedouin *'Arab* model.

With regards to the formation of a local development organisation or a CBO, in my opinion, this model of social development is a new conception to this Bedouin group. This could be as a result of lack of knowledge or unawareness on their part; having not experienced or come across such a model. This is quite different from the case of other Bedouin groups in the Egyptian deserts who were introduced to cooperative societies and have excelled in setting them up such as the *Awlad 'Ali* in the Western Desert since the 1960s and the *Tarabiyn* in South Sinai since the 1980s. I came across the case of one *Tarabiyn* cooperative society when I applied for the job of a Project Manager for one of their projects. I was amazed with their organisation and the air of professionalism that they displayed. The *Awlad 'Ali* case is another interesting example of how the Bedouin modify the organisational structure and even the foundations of cooperatives to fit their social orientational models. According to Abdalla Bujra (1973), after the Egyptian government introduced the cooperative movement in the early 1960s among *Awlad 'Ali* in the Western Desert as part of its programme to sedentarise them, the number of cooperatives rocketed from 39 cooperatives established by the government to 160 established by the Bedouin themselves in 1965. The Bedouin's aim of setting them up



was to strengthen their lineage loyalties and traditional leadership which, according to Bujra, is “inconsistent with the basic principle of the cooperative movement” (p.143).

## **The Bedouin Honour Schema**

The Bedouin’s nobility of origin, according to Abu Lughod (1986), is believed to confer moral qualities and characteristics referred to as the Bedouin ‘code of honour’ (p.78). It is this morality and ‘code’ that makes them superior to other peoples in their own eyes (p.78). I will refer to this ‘code of honour’ here as the ‘honour schema’. This schema forms a standard and conventional type of public behaviour shared by all Bedouin groups. It comprises of the values of honour, modesty and generosity.

Acknowledging these honourable traits by non-Bedouins is a rarity, particularly Egyptians who bear many negative stereotypes of their nomadic fellow citizens. Recognising the fine qualities of a Bedouin becomes even more surprising when it is heard from a high-ranking officer in the Egyptian police. I had a wonderful opportunity to interview a Lieutenant Major working in Sinai who disclosed to me many of his reflections on the Bedouin and their life after living and working with them for several years. The following are extracts from the original interview with him:

*The Bedouin are generally characterised by nomadism. They are always on the move. It is a matter of life or death to them. To remain alive, they have to move with their herds of sheep and goats or camels looking for water and pasture. They are very cautious people when it comes to mixing with others [i.e., non-Bedouins]. Although mixing and dealing with others is a necessity of life – as humans are social beings – yet the Bedouin does it grudgingly. He would do it himself and avoid getting his family and children involved as much as possible from mixing with others, especially with those in the cities or urban areas.*

*The Bedouin does not obey our laws. He does not like anyone to know the place where he sleeps. He shuns strangers. He always checks around his tent for different or strange footprints to know who is wandering in his area. Bedouins, [particularly in the Eastern Desert and Sinai] always pitch their tents facing the East, as danger exemplified in enemies or raiders [mainly non-Bedouins] always come from that direction...*

*The Bedouin shun living in buildings. They do not like to approach urban areas so that they are not scrutinised or observed by anyone. They dislike the nosiness of urbanites. By nature, they are alert to everything; caution is innate in them. In winter, they fear torrential rains and at the same time hope that it rains. During wars [i.e., 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel], they know how and*

*where to hide in mountains, but this does not stop them from playing their patriotic role and defending their country.*

*They have their own rules or code for everything: rules for entering a house [bait, in this context meaning tent]; rules for eating; for greeting, etc. Their women are not allowed to speak to strangers and if they do, it's got to be short and to the point and not exceed asking for water to drink... They pay much attention to honour and morality. They are generous and protective, even with their enemies when they seek their support.*

*Their cultural heritage and value system is based on utilitarianism. They make the most of everything in their harsh environment. Thus, they focus on the utility and benefit. They can make use of very little water or food to keep them going...*

*About their religion, they are very obedient to the values of Islam and apply them well, but they do not know much about the teachings of Islam because of lack of knowledge and education. They rather follow their instincts...*

*Another predicament is that you cannot find a job for these nomads. If you ask someone, 'What is your occupation?', he would reply shyly, 'I do not work'. Nomadism is not an occupation.*

*The palm tree and the camel are also deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. If you knew the amount of things they can make from palm trees, you would be amazed... It is very difficult to get them adapted to urbanism. They however know about the latest technology. Many have mobile phones, the latest models of pickup trucks...*

*The more the Bedouin mix with the urbanite, the more their cultural heritage will demise. It is already demising now... I predict that there will be no nomadism in thirty years and all traditions of the Bedouin people will be like fossils. It is the global world. This modernisation and development is inevitable and if we do not follow that path, we will be marginalised. In this world, there are winners and losers as well as victims. The captains of the ship (the West) and the rich are definitely the winners. (Interview with Lieutenant Major in July 2003)*

Despite some stereotypical images of the Bedouin in the above words, especially those pertaining to their religious beliefs and instincts, they emphasise the importance of understanding and respecting the 'other' despite their differences. The quote delineates many Bedouin cultural models. It would be difficult to discuss them all in detail. I will therefore focus only on their honour code and the values it implies.

Friedrich (1977) defines the honour code as "a code for both interpretation and action: in other words, with both cognitive and pragmatic components...[It is first] a system of symbols, values and definitions in terms of which phenomena are conceptualized and interpreted... [Second, it guides and motivates acts] organised in terms of categories,



rules and processes that are, to a significant degree, specific to a given culture...”  
(Quoted in Abu-Lughod, 1986, p.86).

The honour code implies many values. First, *sharaf* or ‘honour’ including the values of generosity, honesty, sincerity, loyalty to friends, and keeping one’s word. One of the famous verbal formulas or sayings that show how binding a man’s word can be when they make promises or alliances is (*madam al bahr bahr wa alkaf ma yenbet shaar*) or “as long as the sea is the sea and hair does not grow in the palms of the hands”. I heard this formula by two of my informants when they were comparing how things have become different nowadays to what they were in the past, especially in matters of transactions and the increasing lack of trust between people.

Second, *hurr* or ‘being free’. This implies the strength to stand alone free from domination. This is acquired through tough assertiveness with other people, fearlessness and pride. Failing in any of these values disqualifies a man and puts him in a position of dependency or vulnerability to domination by others. A final element is ‘self-mastery’ and stoic acceptance of emotional pain. In this regard, weeping is perceived as a sign of weakness. Thus, men of honour and *asl* do not cry. With regards to the relationship with women, a man should control his passions and provide for his wife and dependants. Failing to do so exposes a man to severe ridicule (Abu Lughod, 1986, pp.87-93).

H.R.P. Dickson (1949), a British political agent in Kuwait between the two World Wars in his *The Arab of the Desert*, focuses on the first group of values when summing up the Bedouin code. He speaks of six duties: the duty towards God; protection of his home (tent) and camp; hospitality; duty towards travellers under his care; the duty of sanctuary; and finally duty to himself: “to raid when he can and keep what he has captured... It is noteworthy that in fulfilling this last duty he thinks of it as a sort or reward for what has gone before. Raiding is no sin, but a virtue, and to kill your enemy a still greater virtue. Therefore, to steal your enemy’s cattle is not robbery but an exploit to be proud of”\* (pp.56-57).

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\* Raiding and warfare were common among many nomadic Bedouin groups. There is a long history of dispute between Bedouin and the “*fellahin*” or peasants in Egypt. The former used to raid the villages and plunder the peasants’ property and stock. This situation lasted for ages till the early twentieth century when the state was weak in enforcing law and order. Much of the prejudice and ill-feelings between the two categories go back to this time.

Throughout my fieldwork, the term '*sharaf*' was often repeated in my Bedouin informants' rhetoric. They honour both Bedouin and non-Bedouin alike. Abu Khaled, the poet, summarised to me the *sharaf* (honour) schema as follows: "*We care for other people and our neighbours in particular. Even if our neighbour is a Jew, we cannot harm or rob him. They have their own religion and we have ours. We will never attack anyone unless we are attacked first... We do not harm anyone. Moreover, we do not accept that if anyone says anything bad to us, we do the same. Anyone who comes to us seeking protection, we have to protect him. We honour our guests and are hospitable to them and to our neighbours, and we support the helpless.*"

The rhetoric of Bedouin *sharaf* in the above quote emphasises the ability to protect, support, care for and defend the other, even if this 'other' is an enemy in need for help. It is defined in relation to space and applies primarily to neighbours.

The *Sharaf* schema includes several other conceptions. In the following quote in an interview with the 'Aiaida Sheikh, he places emphasis on truth and honesty as defining *sharaf*, particularly in the context of Bedouin customary law. "*We have our 'orf' [customs]. Custom is getting used to certain behaviour. We, as Bedouin men, have our own customary law. It is verbal and based on what our instincts tell us. It helps in solving many problems. Our 'torath' [cultural heritage] in Sinai is based on customs and honour. The word of mouth or an oath is stronger than any written document. When people commit themselves to a word, they have to abide with what they said, as it affects their honour. The knowledge of the law and different rulings are in the mind of the Bedouin judge. It relies on his experience and his powerful memory... A judge must have sharaf. He never lies...*"

*Sharaf* is also defined as 'land' or more specifically Bedouin 'tribal' territory, as articulated in the following words of the Ahiwat Sheikh in Central Sinai: "*'Al-ard' [Land] to us is 'sharaf wa karama' [Honour and dignity]. It is in 'qalb wa ruh' [the heart and soul] of every Bedouin, both man and woman. We value our land and we are proud to be Egyptians. We used to crawl on this land when we were infants and then learnt to walk on it as we grew older. We lived here, married here and our fathers and grandfathers are buried here on this land. Land is the most valuable thing to the Bedouin and we protect it*".



The 'tribal' territory or zone is something worthy of defence and protection. Any assault or even trespassing over a Bedouin group's land is considered to be against its collective honour. Skirmishes therefore often occurred between various Bedouin groups over grazing lands and water wells. The conflict between the 'Aiaida and Tarabiyn mentioned above illustrates this point.

### *Women and Sharaf*

The honour schema is of great significance with regard to women. For women, the code of honour mainly implies *hasham* (literally modesty, also includes the values of shame and shyness, or in its broadest sense, propriety). This does not mean passivity. On the contrary, the ideals guiding this behaviour are those of boldness, assertiveness and strength. Laziness therefore is severely criticised. In addition, women must display generosity and honesty (Abu-Lughod, 1986, pp.106-112).

The *sharaf* of women to the Bedouin man is inviolable. It could be a matter of life or death. The protection of the honour of the female figure leading to killing is commonly known as "honour killing" prevalent in many Middle Eastern cultures, particularly the so-called 'tribal' ones. Many of my informants emphasised that any male stranger, whether a kin who can lawfully marry a woman or a non-kin, found inside the *bait* (house or tent) without the permission and knowledge of *rab al-bayt* (the head of the household or patron) could be immediately slain without a *diya* (blood money, i.e., his family cannot ask for compensation or even attempt to seek revenge).

According to one 'Aiaida informant, "*Sharaf (honour) is extremely important to us. We care for our women and have jealousy. Any stranger can dishonour us by changing our customs and our women's ways. This will definitely need intervention on our part to wipe out this dishonour. We refuse to marry our daughters to strangers even if they have good morals and are religious because their ways are different from ours*".

Another informant argues, "*We shall retain our traditions and customs as long as our women share the same values with us; know their duties and respect others [reference here is mainly to kin]. In the city, you find women behaving badly and showing no respect to their in-laws*".

The informant in the above quote underlines a classificatory model distinguishing the Bedouin from the sedentary folk. Women who dwell in cities, in this context, are perceived as bad mannered and disrespectful of others, particularly their in-laws.

### *Women's Costume and Sharaf*

A Bedouin woman's dress is known as *thawb* (literally dress in Arabic). It is a black, loose and opaque garment that serves as an over garment covering other bright patterned dresses underneath. Married and older women always wear a *thawb*, but younger ones can go out in their coloured dresses. Underneath their dresses, they must wear trousers. Married women often wear a chastity belt *hizam* around their waist with their *thawb*. It is usually plain in colour, red or white. Red symbolises fertility and the association with femaleness the creation of life. White is often worn by older women or widows. According to Abu Lughod (1986), it may represent the loss of interest in life. It may also have associations with purity, religion and masculinity (pp.136-137).

All girls cover their hair, after reaching puberty. Again, the young can wear coloured headscarves, but older women wear black ones. Almost all Bedouin women in Egypt, with the exception of the *Hatayma* Bedouin women as will be explained below, have to cover their faces with a *burg'*, referred to as *niqab* in an urban context. On occasions such as weddings, a Sinai Bedouin woman's *burg'* is decorated with chains, coins and beads, often golden in colour.

To Bedouin women, veiling is synonymous with *hasham* (modesty). It covers sexual shame among married young women. Thus, virgins and widows do not cover their faces. Women also generally veil for their fathers and elders whether kinsmen or strangers. They are more likely to veil for married men than for unmarried ones (Abu Lughod, 1986, p.162). Most Eastern Desert Bedouin women always veil to strangers, whether it is a Bedouin or non-Bedouins.

A Bedouin dress marks the identity of the Bedouin woman. It also functions as an impression management tool, forewarning men that they are not easily accessible. It is also used for flirting while retaining their mystery (Keohane, 1994, pp.158-159).



Bedouin men always draw a comparison between their women and urban women now dressed in tight and revealing clothes. It is repulsive and very annoying to many of them showing degradation in morality. Shaḥat, for example, an elderly 'Aiaida townsman, complains that women in his neighbourhood, some of them are even of Bedouin origin, *"go out in tight trousers, seeking after fashions. They no longer wear their chastity belts!"* A Ḥeweitat young man in Al-Salam City complains, *"Vice is seen everywhere now in Cairo, especially among girls and women wearing 'stretch' pants and tight jeans. These scenes have spread everywhere now, even in slum areas"*. Many of my 'Aiaida informants also complain of the way urban women dress immodestly, exposing their flesh. Almost all the 'Aiaida young boys perceive Cairo as *"a crowded place with many girls and women not covered modestly and wearing short clothes"*.

Another 'Aiaida old man argues,

*'al-hadara' [literally civilisation, in this context modernity] changes the nature of women; their dress and hairstyle. Our women are much better than urban women, even better than Bedouin women in other countries, such as Jordan, where they no longer wear the veil. Neighbourhood plays a role here. In an urban area, the girl wants to copy others around her, which affects the reputation of her father. Nevertheless, we educate our girls, but not to go to work; we educate them to get married. If women work and mix with men, they can be easily swayed. It is like putting fire closer to dry wood, or gasoline to fire... What we value most is honour and applying the teachings of God. We do not accept the vice we see in the streets of cities and urban areas. Vice leads to prostitution and destruction of our values and principles"*.

### *Honour and Leadership*

The Sheikh or 'tribal' leader stands at the apex of the scale of *sharaf* in Bedouin society. *Sheikh*, in Arabic, is another fluid term that has several meanings. It can refer to an old man, or the head of an extended family, or a lineage group, or a descent group and sometimes even to the head of a confederation. Within Bedouin societies, each lineage group has its own head, who acts automatically as a magistrate or peacemaker among the group, and is referred to as *sheikh*. A descent group could have numerous sheikhs who represent all its sub-sections. Some descent groups such as the 'Aiaida have a paramount leader called *sheikh al-mashaiekh* (literally sheikh of the sheikhs), who represents the whole descent group.

In addition to these heads or sheikhs, there are other old men recognised for their age, experience and wisdom, who are called upon to mediate or give evidence in the case of a dispute or a crime. Each sub-section or lineage elects a sheikh among its members to represent its interests. Generally speaking, the power of this sheikh depends largely on his wealth and on his ability to reason with other 'tribesmen'. He negotiates with the heads of other lineages or descent groups though always in consultation with members of his own lineage. All Bedouin men feel equal to each other and they obey their sheikh only because they give, not owe, their allegiance. Once a decision has been made, the leadership lies with the sheikh and his orders must be obeyed. Leadership is usually definite to a certain family or house known for its power and prominence. However, it is not always hereditary. The one who possesses experience, outstanding physical and mental qualities is usually chosen as a sheikh. More importantly, he must be recognised by the government.

An important personal trait of a sheikh is extreme generosity and hospitality. He must not be miserly and must keep his house open to all people. If a sheikh is perceived as (*bakhl*) or miser, his influence comes to an end. An honourable sheikh would usually slaughter an animal for his guests or during different social ceremonies and send presents, especially to women of the less fortunate members of his group to please them and indirectly their husbands. A sheikh's wife should also show similar traits. These models of behaviour do not widen the sheikh's political influence; they are merely expected of one who is seen as a patron to his people (Murray, 1935, p.42; Dickson, 1949, pp.52-53, 117; Young, 1996, p.66).

The leadership model based on the figure of the sheikh is central in all traditional Bedouin societies. The following explanation by the 'Aiaida Sheikh, for example, outlines the duties and implications of a sheikh:

*The Sheikh is elected by all the 'qabila'. He does not have to be the richest or the oldest of them. It is not hereditary as well. However, he should have 'sharaf' and 'akhlaq' (good morals). As a natural leader, the Sheikh must have wisdom and wit; an ability to convince others; help people and solve their problems. The election of the sheikh by the 'qabila' is a good example of how democracy is applied in a Bedouin community. Bedouins have dignity and pride. They won't put up with any nonsense from anyone. That is why they are very careful in choosing the sheikh who represents them and looks after their interests... In our 'qabila', we have an ethical model of 'sharaf' based on humbleness and respect of others, especially the elderly. Anyone*



*who does not conform is 'yet-shames' or meshamas (ostracised or expelled, literally means exposed to the sun or who is exposed publicly). This implies that he is no longer supported by his kin, his statements are not considered in customary law, he does not marry from the tribe and he can even be forced to leave the territory of the 'qabila'. This makes him exposed to any assault by any person and no one to defend him. This is worse than imprisonment".*

Conversely, the figure of the sheikh has become irrelevant to the Bedouin in urban contexts. As mentioned earlier, among the *Heweitat* in Al-Salam City, they look upon it with nostalgia as remnants of their passing traditional life. Consequently, the cultural models accompanying this life such as *sharaf*, honesty, generosity, etc. have become weaker, though still emphasised in their rhetoric. The practice of *tashmees* (public exposure) also becomes irrelevant. In cities, individualism is the norm and a man can easily fend for himself. In one of his case studies of blood revenge among the Bedouin of Israel, Ginat (1984) explained that among settled Bedouin groups who are employed, group membership becomes a burden since the settled Bedouin is no longer in need of economic cooperation or group protection. "... the justification for the existence of co-lia-ble groups may diminish where socio-economic changes have taken place" (p.74).

The practice of *tashmees* demonstrates how vital group communication and cooperation are in harsh environments. It also draws an analogy between the culture and outlook of Bedouin and their physical environment. The natural environment plays an influential role in shaping the behaviour of the people within it. The more the risk to human life, the more cooperation among people takes place.

## **Bedouin Lifestyle Models**

This section discusses some further aspects of Bedouin identity and their lifestyle based on observations and interviews in the field. It complements the discussion of the various models and schemas mentioned above to give a better conception of Bedouin culture.

### *Bedouin Identity*

Human beings who are more prone to facing a harsh natural environment and unstable socio-political conditions evolve sophisticated brain technology in order to adapt and improve their survival chances. Developing multiple identities as a method of adaptation is a common feature crucial to all nomadic societies. It is apparent in many aspects of the

Bedouin lifestyle particularly clothes and language. A Bedouin lifestyle is reflected in their perception of identity, appearance, presentation of self. Bedouin people have a remarkable ability to manage social impressions about their selves. It could be said that a Bedouin has a 'lot of personality'. This phrase argues Shore (1996) is "a statement about social effectiveness rather than about personal essence" (pp.148-149). Using personality, in this sense, refers here to social effects rather than causes of behaviour (ibid).

### *Bedouin Male Costume*

One of the most distinctive features identifying a Bedouin man is his dress. A traditional Bedouin man's costume is a long loose dress, with a high collar, known as *gilbab* or *galabiyya* in colloquial Egyptian (also known as *dishdasha* in Arabia) and the headgear or turban known as *shimakh* or '*imama*. In winter, a cloak '*abaya* could be worn on top of the *gilbab*, or a modern jacket or coat. The headscarf in particular distinguishes Bedouin men. It is either plain white or a hounds-tooth chequered pattern in red and white or black and white (more common among Palestinian Arabs). It is wound round the head in several forms. Sheikhs or elite elderly Bedouin men wear an '*agal*, a black head-rope designed as a simple double loop that holds the scarf in place. It is commonly made of black camel hair or wool. Underneath the scarf, it is normal to wear an Islamic skullcap, which gives the scarf a good rounded shape when worn with an '*agal*.

In Egypt in particular, this costume has made the Bedouin a target for the police. Anyone dressed like a Bedouin is suspected of being a drug dealer or smuggler and hence stopped and searched. I experienced this situation myself as explained in the methodology chapter. This has put many Bedouin men off their traditional costume. They now prefer to be dressed in modern shirts, jumpers and trousers to conceal their identities, especially when they go out of their localities. In Suez, two of my '*Aiaida* informants, who work as civil servants, complained how their identities were mistaken for being dressed in their traditional costume with their head-scarf. One of them, who work for the Suez Canal Authority, once reprimanded a worker on the ferries for being rude to him. He showed him his work ID indicating that he is a senior official at the Authority.

If you are not stopped and searched, the other option is that you will be swindled, especially if you wearing an '*agal*. The '*Aiaida* Sheikh, always dressed in his fine



*shimakh* (made in England) and *'agal* is often annoyed whenever he travels to Cairo to do business. He recounts, "*People try to rip me off thinking that I am a wealthy Arab Sheikh.. Beggars, in particular, are always after me, pestering me asking for money*". His good sense of humour emerges when he adds that he would like to buy himself a Western suit and tie. "*But in that case, I'll need a hair transplant to match the suit*". The Sheikh is bald. This statement is not only humorous, but reveals to a great extent the Sheikh's awareness of his own self-image and how to make a successful impression management in a different social setting. It shows as well a good knowledge of plastic surgery and hair transplant techniques. In other instances, we had a discussion about hair removal techniques and 'Viagra' pills; things that have become fashionable nowadays in the West. The Sheikh's alertness to the most fashionable goods and images, however, cannot be applied to the average Bedouin.

### *Bedouin Language*

Language or more specifically 'parole' (speech) is another important element of Bedouin identity. The Egyptian Bedouin have their own Arabic dialect, different from the colloquial Egyptian Arabic often used in Cairo and referred to as 'Cairean'. The most famous letter distinguishing their parole is 'g'. For example, the word 'heart' in classical Arabic is pronounced as *qalb*. A Bedouin pronounces it as *galb* (notice the stress on the 'g'). In colloquial Egyptian, it is pronounced as *alb*.

Bedouin also have their own 'verbal formulas' or clichés. A verbal formula encodes "traditional wisdom, specialized knowledge, or techniques in highly conventional forms of speech. Examples of verbal formulas are proverbs, sayings, traditional narratives, prayers, spells and nursery rhymes. [Clichés, on the other hand] are highly conventional phrases that come ready-made for certain occasions... [They are] closely related to script models, though they are generally limited to phrases rather than comprising whole conversations" (Shore, 1996, p.58). A famous cliché among the *'Aiaida* is "*ya ḥelilak!*" It is like a greeting phrase, or a form of praise. One should answer, *ma ḥal bik 'adw, wa la fi yom sau* (may no enemy come to you or anything bad at any day).

One of the interesting verbal formulas that is no longer brought up in Bedouin discourse is "*ko 'a fi al-barasa wa la faddan melk*" (Literally an elbow leaning or resting on white sand is better than owning a feddan 'acre' of cultivable land). This traditional saying

symbolises the value of resting and leisure as better than tilling land. The 'Aiaida Sheikh believes this saying has become obsolete now. He adds, “ *It should be removed from Bedouin discourse as people now have to think of the future and work hard to make a living*”. It shows a remarkable shift in the Bedouin way of thinking and a change in their core values, particularly those pertaining to labour. Resting is replaced by farm work. This, however, does not mean that the Bedouin will become ‘peasants’. They will always retain their cultural identity.

A common cliché that often recurs in Bedouin speech is asking their guests to “*kaw‘a*” (literally to lean their elbow on a cushion); a sitting posture implying comfort and relaxation. According to the 'Aiaida sheikh, this posture as a Bedouin instituted model is derived from a historical traditional narrative. “*Once, there was a dispute between two men – one was rich and the other was poor. They agreed to refer to the local governor to settle their dispute. The rich man went to the governor first, who welcomed him and asked him to rest. When the poor man arrived, he found his adversary resting with his elbow leaning on a cushion. He had the impression that the rich man was a friend of the governor, and therefore his ruling would not be fair. He decided to leave without complaining or telling his part of the story*” (interview in May 2003).

I noticed that the majority of my informants have the ability to converse in the Cairean accent, very fluently in front of strangers like myself. If they did not want me to understand what is being said or be part of the conversation, they would start speaking in their own dialect fast. It was very difficult for me in that case to follow what was being said. My 'Aiaida informant, the civil servant in Suez referred to above, boasted that he can change his dialect, so that his colleagues question his original identity. It is another technique of the Bedouin's impression management. Bedouin clichés and verbal formulas in that context are exchanged with other common ones used by ‘other Egyptians’ in their day-to-day conversations.

The Bedouin manifold identities also appear in their personal names and the different ways a person could be called. Among the Bedouin, there are three kinds of names: the genealogical name (*ism*), the teknonym (*kunya*), and the “teasing name” (*nibza*). Genealogical names for both men and women consist of their personal names in addition to the names of their male ancestors. Teknonyms have a different form. They consist of



a sex-specific prefix (*abu*, “father of,” for a man and *umm* “mother of” for a woman) followed by a personal name of a child (Young, 1996, p.83). The teknonym usually refers to the eldest son of an individual. Conversely, in the case of some Eastern Desert Bedouin groups such as the *‘Aiaida* and *Heweitat*, the prefix ‘*abu*’ is followed by the individual’s father’s name rather than his son, i.e., a person is called ‘the father’ of his father. The third type of name, the *nibza* or “teasing name,” quite different from a nickname, is used all too often. It consists of a derisory adjective or phrase and identifies a person by singling out his ridiculous or negative characteristics. For example, among the *‘Aiaida*, one man was called *Abu Esba*’ for having four fingers in one hand.

### *Bedouin Eating Habits*

The way Bedouin eat food varies according to different contexts, which marks another facet of their versatility. According to Shaḥat, the *‘Aiaida* townsman, “*We distinguish ourselves from the fellahin* (literally peasants also means common people or masses both Muslims and non-Muslims) *by the way we eat. We only use our right hand and eat from what is in front of us. We never use our left hand when eating. The fellahin, on the other hand, eat with both hands. That is why a true Bedouin does not like to share food with them*”. As his regular guest, however, Shaḥat had let me eat with him from the same common plate. He provided a spoon, but I told him that I prefer eating with my hand. It was quite peculiar at the beginning and took me some time to get used to.

In my first field visit to the *Heweitat* in Al-Salam City, my inability to use my hand dexterously in eating was obvious. One young man asked why I did not use the spoon that was provided, especially that they themselves were eating with spoons. I asked him in return, why did not they use their hands, when it is traditional. He replied, “*We do not eat with our hands at all occasions. Only in certain events, when there are many people present that we eat with our hands*”. Food is usually served in large quantities using pristine crockery to impress the guest and show Bedouin hospitality.

### *Bedouin Use of Space and Interior Furnishings*

Shore (1996) in his study of modern American culture refers to one type of foundational schemas, which he calls the ‘modularity’ schema. It is particularly exemplified in interior furnishings and architectural designs, where rooms have been transformed into open

‘spaces’ or ‘areas’ for carrying out multiple activities rather than having a ‘single-purpose’ personality (p.119). This new notion of modularity in the use of space is an age-old Bedouin conception.

The traditional Bedouin home is a symbol of their nomadic lifestyle. It is a black goat-hair tent or *bait sh‘ar* (literally house of hair). It is a unique space or area, where all activities (eating, drinking, sitting, entertaining male guests, preparing tea and coffee, and sleeping) take place. It is important first to clarify that the tent is divided into two main divisions or sections: one for men, a public area referred to as *al-shigg* (literally section); and one for women, a private area referred to as *al-mahram* (literally barred or excluded). The latter is only accessible to the male head of household, and is where the family’s possessions are stored and food is prepared. The division is usually made by a decorated woven curtain or mat. And each division has its separate entrance to avoid any contact between the sexes.

In their modern brick and mortar houses, this division is still retained and copied in the architectural design. The majority of modern Bedouin houses have a separate entrance that leads you inside a public area for men. The interior furnishing is usually traditional, consisting of rugs and cushions spread in a square or a rectangular form, with a low, rectangular coffee table in the middle. Again, this public area functions as a living room, a dining room and a bedroom for male guests. In some houses, the room is also furnished in one corner with modern office furniture: an office desk and a swivel chair on wheels. These create a business environment where the ‘modern’ Bedouin carry out their transactions, as well as give an impression of professionalism. In these public areas, the traditional and the modern are seen side-by-side.

All the various facets of Bedouin lifestyle, which links their personality, costume, speech, posture, space and numerous distinctions and oppositions, can be understood by what Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1990) calls a *habitus*. *Habitus*, which is learnt unreflectingly, has an everlasting impact on an individual and a cultural group’s thought and behaviour. Young (1996) in his study of the *Rashaayda* Bedouin of Eastern Sudan, follows Bourdieu’s concept to explain some aspects of the *Rashaayda* culture. He explains, for example, “the *habitus* of the household has its impact on even the simplest movements and actions: the way the *Rashaayda* hold their glasses of tea, their posture



when they sit, and their feelings of comfort (or discomfort) when they move from one part of the house to another” (p.73).

### **Bedouin Specific Local Cultural Models**

My aim in this chapter has been to utilise various types of cultural models and schemas to understand the Bedouin socio-cultural identity and their social organisation. So far, all references have been more or less general, depicting Bedouin with a degree of cultural unity and identifying them as a distinct cultural group sharing a common descent and a social structure based on lineage and segmentation; speaking a particular dialect(s) of Arabic; wearing a particular costume; having a particular *habitus*; and obliged by certain codes of behaviour. Within this general approach, I have also enlisted some examples of specificity and differences among the various Bedouin groups. In this section, I aim to highlight those specific cultural models more to emphasise the diversity of Bedouin culture. This diversity shows how different Bedouin groups and even individuals within a group have the ability to choose and reconstruct new identities and classifications utilising various objects present in their social world to accentuate the differences amongst themselves and other cultural groups as well. Furthermore, I shall explain how multiple identities are stressed according to the different social contexts.

Various Bedouin groups have a remarkable ability to form classificatory models to accentuate their specific socio-cultural identity. One model of classification is based on habitat or the type of housing in which a Bedouin lives. Among the *Tarabiyn* descent group in South Sinai, for example, distinction is made between three types of houses: *bait sh'ar* (the black goat-hair tent); *bait el khashab* (a one-story structure of scrap wood and metal; and *bait el tuub* (a one or two room cement block structure) (Wickering, 1991, p.20). These names are slightly different among other groups. To the *'Aiaida* and *Heweitat*, for example, *bait el khashab* is known as *'isha*, while the cement block structure is called *bait suesi* (literally house of Suez; it does not have foundations). One with foundations and concrete is known as *mi-salaah*. The inhabitants of each type of housing have different cultural and economic models. Usually, those living in *bait sh'ar* and *bait el khashab* are nomadic or semi-nomadic, while those in brick or cement block structures are settled.

Within this classification, there are individual variations. *Shahat*, for example, an 'Aiaida town dweller has developed his own classification. He defines *badu* or 'arab into two types: 'arab el *heit* (literally Arabs of the wall or those who live in houses) and 'arab el *kheish* (literally 'Arabs of Hessian' or those who live in tents). He considers the majority of the 'Aiaida as belonging to the first type, i.e., settlers, which is far from true. Those are described by him as "kind and straightforward" in their dealings. 'arab el *kheish*, on the other hand, (in this specific context, he was referring mainly to the *Heweitat* attempting to prevent me from approaching one of his neighbours from that group to pursue my study) "are wayward... They work in drug trafficking and grow 'bango' [cannabis]. As wayward people, you can never trust them. If you ask them about someone, they'll answer you, 'ma b'aref 'anou' ('we don't know about him') or say 'ma b'aref shi' ('I know nothing'). They will never give their secret to anyone, even if you stay with them for a whole month. They only deal with certain people whom they can trust. They do not deal with fellahin [peasants] even if they live with them in the same area or neighbourhood".

*Shahat*, furthermore, depicts the differences between his group the 'Aiaida and his neighbours, the *Heweitat*. However, in that instance, he puts emphasis on economic activities and particularly those pertaining to Bedouin women's labour and the treatment of women. He argues, "We [the 'Aiaida] are unlike the *Heweitat*. 'Qabilat al-'Aiaida' (the 'Aiaida 'tribe') settled down a long time ago and work in agriculture. The *Heweitat* still keep goats and sheep. We are different in the way we treat our women. The 'Aiaidy ['Aiaida man] cares for his harem and keeps them indoors. The *Heweiti* [*Heweitat* man] 'yeshta'at' [knocks about or abuses] his women. He does not support his women and expects them to earn their keep by tending the livestock, etc. The men sleep at home whilst the women keep their families".

Another Bedouin classificatory model is based on geographical location within Egypt. Bedouin groups of the Eastern Desert call themselves *masharqa* [literally Eastern], while those of the Western Desert call themselves *magharba* [Western or from the West] (See Map of Egypt). According to one informant from the *Ahiwat* group, "Both groups have the same origin; they came from the Arabian Peninsula. The 'Masharqa' settled in the Eastern Desert and Sinai. The 'Magharba', on the other hand, migrated to Libya and Morocco, came back again to settle in the West of Egypt and in the South or Upper



Egypt. The 'Magharba' men have a different costume and their traditions are also different''.

One informant working in Sinai, who identified himself as belonging to the *magharba*, argues that the difference between both groups is in the way of treating women. "*The 'Magharba' never let their women go out or work even to herd their flocks [again this is far from true]. This is different from the 'Masharqa' who accept that their women go out of their homes and work*".

As mentioned earlier, each Bedouin descent group is named after an apical ancestor, usually a patriarchal figure. Each group forms its specific or local cultural models based on this common descent. *Shahat*, the 'Aiaida townsman, conversely, utilises his own perception of religion – Islam and links it to the origins of the name of different descent groups, thus, forming his own conceptualisation and classificatory model. First of all, *Shahat* argues that anyone who makes the testimony '*shahadatayn*' (There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet) is an '*arabi* (an Arab). He uses the terms 'Arab' and 'Muslim' here as synonyms. Furthermore, he argues,

*"All gabayel ('tribes') were named by the Prophet (pbuh). The 'Aiaida were praised by the Prophet. He prayed for them that God (ya'oud alikum bel-kheir) or wishing them 'happy returns' in this life for supporting him. Hence, we were named 'Aiaida derived from the verb (ya'oud) or return... The Heweitai's name, on the other hand, is derived from the adjective 'haweet' (literally sly, crafty and discreet). It is difficult to deal with these people. They have evil intentions and are not straightforward... I myself prefer not to deal with them... or sit with them in their places. 'Qabilat Belli' (Belli 'tribe') is another 'qabila' in this area [Al-Marg town]. Again, this 'qabila' was cursed by the Prophet. He prayed that God inflicts (bala'a) [literally curse or plight] on them, hence their name 'Belli', because they did not support him...*

*Another 'qabila' is the Hatayma (also known as Beni 'Aṭa or Dawaghra). The Prophet also cursed this 'qabila'. Their grandmother was a woman named Garrada [literally locust]. She used to spy on the Prophet and inform the 'koffar' [the disbelievers] about his actions. During the Hijra [migration] from Mecca to Medina, she was going to inform them about his place of hiding. The Prophet knew that she had a message to deliver to the disbelievers and asked his companions to stop and search her. Finding nothing with her, he asked them to uncover her hair and get the message from inside her plaits. Hence, the Prophet cursed her praying to God that she 'ye-hatemek' (becomes bereft or deprived of her children). Since that time, this 'qabila' has become ostracised. None of the other Arab 'tribes' marries from them... Only now, it's the educated and broadminded among the 'arab, who accepts to marry their daughters claiming that they are Muslims like us. (Interview, February 2003)*

This specific classificatory model by *Shahat* is unique in several respects. None of my other informants have based their classificatory models on the etymology of the descent groups' names, while linking it to Islam and the Prophet's Tradition in particular. It also shows a strong feeling of superiority of the '*Aiaida* as opposed to other groups, particularly the *Hatayma*.

It is interesting to note that many of my informants from the '*Aiaida* in Ismailia and Suez as well as the *Heweitat* strongly believe in this mythical story about the *Hatayma*. It was often mentioned in their discourse to emphasise their superiority and noble origin as opposed to the inferiority of the *Hatayma* and their descendants. The only exception was the Sheikh of the *Ahiwat* group in central Sinai. He argues,

*This story about the Hatayma is not true. Other 'tribes' like to boast and prove themselves to be better. I myself don't like to talk about lineages. However, the Hatayma are originally from qabilat Muṭayr, one of the biggest and well-established 'tribes' in the Arabian Peninsula. It is a rich qabila. Many of its members are well off and many of their sons are educated and hold high positions. Other tribes marry from them. They are also a well-established qabila in Saudi Arabia now. Because they were marginalized before, King Sa'ud, the founder of the current Saudi dynasty used them to establish his power and fight other tribes" (Interview, July 2003).*

The same argument of the *Ahiwat* Sheikh was also mentioned in Al-Ṭayeb's (2001) study, which emphasised that the mythical story about the *Bani 'Ata* or *Muṭayr* is untrue and has no historical evidence. The story about the woman, who carried the message in her hair, however, is true. According to Ibn Hisham al-Yamany, an ancient Arab historian and narrator of the Prophet's history, the woman's name was Sara. She was given a message to deliver to the disbelievers in Mecca by a Muslim man named Ḥateb, before the conquest of Mecca by the Prophet. Ḥateb doubted the victory of the Muslims and wanted to protect his property and family in Mecca, thus wrote to the disbelievers informing them of the Prophet's plan. The Prophet pardoned him, nevertheless a *Quranic* verse was revealed to mark this incident and reprimand Ḥateb for going far astray from the Straight Path. The verse reads, "*O you who believe! Take not My enemies and your enemies (i.e., disbelievers) as friends, showing affection towards them, while they have disbelieved in what has come to you of the truth... (Quran, 60:1)*" (Al-Ṭayeb, 2001, pp.831-833).



The *Hatayma* (also referred to as *hoteim*) have two distinct cultural markers, which separate them from other Bedouin groups: they are primarily cattle pastoralists and their women do not wear veils to cover their faces. I had a brief encounter with two families of this Bedouin group whilst carrying out my ethnography with a group of *'Aiaida* in Suez. They never referred to themselves as *Hatayma*. They rather identified themselves as “*Bani 'Ata originally a lineage of gabilat Muṭayr*”. *Bani 'Ata* make their livelihood from cattle and to a lesser extent sheep and goats. Their model of nomadism is therefore confined to rural areas; they rarely venture into desert areas. Cattle, unlike camels, need to be watered and fed almost everyday, which could only be provided in rural areas. They make arrangements every year with farmers to settle in their fallow fields to clear their plots before the next crop rotation. They therefore have firm ties with the village folk. Among the *Bani 'Ata*, there are many who took up settled life and practice agriculture a long time ago. They have assimilated themselves to settled life better than many other Bedouin groups. In my opinion, the prejudices other Bedouin groups have against the *Bani 'Ata* are one of the main reasons for their assimilation in the Egyptian rural society. One aspect of this assimilation, I believe, is that their women leave their faces uncovered and wear colourful patterned dresses. Asking one of my *'Aiaida* informants in Suez, why they don't wear veils. He answered, “*Bani 'Ata have chosen 'al-mal wa al-gamal*’ (wealth and beauty)”. Meaning that keeping cattle is a lucrative business and as their women are attractive, they like to display their beauty.

## Conclusion

One of the remarkable traits of Bedouin people is their extraordinary ability to invoke multiple identities and change their model of behaviour according to various contexts. Managing multiple identities is common among all nomadic groups. To better understand this model, I would like to conclude this chapter by referring to Okely's (1996) analysis of Gypsy ethnicity and economic exchange. She explains that Traveller Gypsies employ four models to handle their ethnic image in relationship with 'gorgio' or Non-Gypsies. Those may be: exoticised (+); concealed (O); degraded (—); or neutralised (+ —) (p.52).

In employing these models in my analysis of Bedouin people, I would call them 'special-purpose' models. Each model has a special purpose. The first exoticised model functions as or signifies the Bedouin's distinct and superior cultural identity as 'pure' *'arab* in

contrast to the 'other'. Several studies of Bedouin groups emphasised how Bedouin Arabs retain their cultural identity when they come into contact with other cultural or social groups. It also appears clearly in their *habitus*. This model is also employed among specific local groups to stress their specificity and superiority.

The concealed model is more apparent among the settled Bedouin and in urban areas particularly in the change of traditional costume and dialect among Bedouin men. The *Hatayma* women, who appear in public unveiled, also profit from concealment. By disguising themselves, both Bedouin men and women appear as 'ordinary' and 'normal' in terms of the predominant Egyptian society. Whereas Gypsies use the word 'Gypsify' emphasising their awareness of looking more or less a Gypsy in the eyes of a gorgio (Okely, 1996, p.55), Bedouin men use the term '*arabi* (sing. of Arab) revealing their consciousness of its significance and negative consequences, particularly when having to face the police.

The degraded image used by Gypsies may be utilised to show helplessness, destitution and lack of education in their interaction with gorgios (ibid., pp.55-56). Bedouin people, on the other hand, always like to show their pride and superiority, even if they are helpless in reality. I observed this special-purpose model only in one particular case when there was a direct confrontation between two Bedouin men and a police officer. They appeared quite reserved and uncomfortable.

Non-literacy within the context of state benefits, argues Okely (1996) "may be turned to advantage in so far as it precludes some Gypsies accepting certain jobs available at the unemployment centre. [This makes them] appear suitably mortified [playing up their degraded image]" (p.55). Conversely, in the case of Bedouin in Egypt, where there is no social security or benefits system and self-employment is not a viable option, non-literacy becomes in many cases a barrier stopping them from self-development and leading a decent life. Many Bedouin men find themselves unable to enhance their livelihoods as a result of non-literacy as will be explained in the next chapter.

The fourth special-purpose model is the neutralised. Gypsies and Bedouin alike make efforts to individualise or personalise their relationships with the 'other', to win special favours. Observing the behaviour of the '*Aiaida* and listening to their prejudices against



other Bedouin groups such as the *Heweitat* or *Bani 'Aṭa*, not to mention the *fellahin* (common peasants), gave me the impression that in case of contact with the 'other', they would act defensively or accentuate their specific identity. On the contrary, in several instances a unified identity was the norm and gestures of mutual respect and equal treatment were exchanged. Sharing the same religion is always emphasised in that case; "*after all, we are all Muslims and deal with each other as brothers*". Even with non-Muslims, equality is stressed. In some long-term relationships, the exotic image is no longer needed to be played up. The relationship is rather perceived as political with mutual advantages (ibid., pp.57-58).

Those four special-purpose models of behaviour emphasise the variety of ways in which the Bedouin, like other nomadic ethnic groups, distance and associate themselves with the 'other'. They all show a high degree of adaptability and coping mechanisms useful in dealing with different social situations and changes. The next chapter explains this model of adaptability more within the economic sphere.

# CHAPTER THREE

## DISAPPEARING FRONTIERS: NEW BEDOUIN ECONOMIC MODELS

### Introduction

People have always been customarily categorised as either urban, rural or nomadic based on their place of habitation. This division automatically implies that economic activities are also specialised. Town or city-dwellers are mainly involved in trade, the provision of specialised services, crafts and industry; people in rural areas are primarily agriculturalists/ horticulturalists; and nomads such as the Bedouin are predominantly pastoralists. This threefold division of people, particularly the Arabs, into Bedouin, peasants and town-dwellers has now become almost meaningless, for almost all the populations are now urbanised, even where they continue to reside in villages and/or desert areas. Economic and subsistence models have also been significantly transformed.

A cognitive anthropological perspective is very important in studying this transformation in lifestyle and economic models. In fact, anthropology has always functioned as a mirror reflecting the changes in the world at large. The changes in the lifestyle and economy of the Bedouin are exceptionally interesting as they depict extraordinary abilities of adaptation and continuous adjustments to the demands of the surrounding natural environment as well as the socio-political conditions in which they live.

The rapid change in the politics and economy of Egypt coupled with the increase in the absolute size of the population has affected the whole lifestyle of the Egyptian Bedouin. Everywhere they are absorbed in urban societies; they settle in towns or villages, and wage labour has become their main source of income, yet many of them still maintain their traditions and cultural frameworks. The change of the majority of Bedouin has been primarily spontaneous, i.e., self-initiated, and not the result of any government intervention exemplified in sedentarisation programmes. It is interesting to note in this context that sedentarisation and living in compact settlements with nonkinspeople is not an anathema to many Egyptian Bedouin groups as has been the case with other Bedouin groups such as the *Al-Murrah* in Saudi Arabia as argued by Donald Cole (1975, p.160).



This chapter attempts to explain the Bedouin response to changing conditions by changing their economic and employment models. The concept of 'employment' in this context, according to Emanuel Marx (1984) refers to "any kind of work that is performed for subsistence, or activities carried out in exchange for money, goods and services. These activities should be studied in their social context..." (p.185). This study considers the constantly changing and fluctuating physical environment and socio-cultural and political conditions. An understanding of Bedouin's employment and subsistence models can therefore be understood in connection with these changing conditions.

The reader will find that the picture of Bedouin economic models depicted here is highly diversified. Based on this, presenting a generalised picture of Bedouin economy focusing only on pastoralism would be misleading. The chapter discusses various economic models that vary from one location and one Bedouin group to the other.

According to E. Marx (1984), the shift of pastoral nomads to urban diversified employment has not received enough attention in anthropological literature. The only detailed study was Kressel (1976) published in Hebrew. Other studies made frequent references such as Abu Zeid (1963), Bujra (1973), Cole (1975), Lancaster (1975) and others (p.4). E. Marx (1984) argues that

The limited academic coverage may be influenced by the continuing concern of the nomads with pastoralism. They often view economic diversification as the end of tribal life... The fieldworker too is tempted to concentrate his attention on the well-integrated culture of the pastoralists, the 'real' tribesmen. He finds it hard to follow the migrations of numerous men of one tribal unit dispersed in various workplaces in different locations. Furthermore, he is reluctant to view the dilapidated shanty towns as social units that deserve to be studied in their own rights. Yet it is to be hoped that once the permanence of the economic change and the significance of wage labour and shanty towns are fully appreciated, more attention will be paid to their study. Only then will the realities of life in the tribal area be seen in a new light (pp. 4-5).

More recent studies of Bedouin economy particularly in Egypt such as Cole and Altorki's (1998) study of social and economic changes among the *Awlad 'Ali* and other groups in the northwest coast emphasise that many have left the steppe and settled in Marsa Matruh city or other urban places, while those who remained in the steppe shifted most of their economic activities to crop production or trade. Although many continue to own herds, they combine pastoralism with agriculture, wage labour, salaried employment and trade (pp.133-134). Cole and Altorki's (1998) study, however, focuses mainly on

desert development and the growth of tourism and beachfront tourist villages. Despite presenting issues from the perspective of the local people, their analytical approach is rather on a macro level evaluating the impact of tourism development in the regional economy and society as they operate in the northwest coast. This chapter rather focuses on the Bedouin's strategies for developing new economic models that adapt to the changing socio-economic environments in which they live. It explores Bedouin groups living in urban, rural and desert contexts.

### **Ecological and Socio-Economic Changes: Background Information**

The physical boundary between the desert and the sown is strikingly sharp in Egypt as it is in the wide Middle East region. On the one hand there are green cultivated areas and urban settlements, and on the other sandy deserts and rugged terrain. Between both areas exists a crossing point referred to by some commentators as the 'desert frontier'. Shmueli (1984), a famous Israeli geographer defines it as "a transitional zone between the actual desert and pastoral areas, and the cultivated and settled areas. The combination of physical features and human activity encountered in these zones gives them a singular character" (p.17). He adds, "[i]n the human sector, the frontier is a contact zone for shepherds and farmers practicing either dry farming or irrigated agriculture. Two different cultural groups, permanent settlers and nomads, maintain a broad basis of contact in trade, economic matters, social life and warfare" (ibid.). Occasionally, the frontier area was employed as a zone for the assimilation of nomads and their eventual absorption in the permanent settlers' culture. However, according to Ibn Khaldun, "fresh waves of nomads coming from the desert always kept the strife alive" (Quoted in Shmueli, 1984, p.18).

About a third of my ethnography was carried out in one of those frontier areas in northeast Cairo in Al-Marg town and the fringes of Al-Salam city (see map of Greater Cairo). These frontier areas have been recently transformed into spontaneous urban areas, where the boundary between Bedouin and sedentary farmers and townspeople has become less precise. Even for the insiders living in these areas, they observe no real differences between the mainstream Egyptians, whether of rural or urban origins, and the Bedouin. It needs an experienced observant eye and much probing on the part of an anthropologist to depict the cultural differences between the various groups. This difficulty in spotting cultural differences as well as the dispersal and assimilation of



Bedouin groups into the mainstream Egyptian culture could be one of the reasons, as argued earlier by E. Marx (1984), why anthropologists are less tempted to study the Bedouin and other pastoralists in those urban environments.

Before analysing the perceptions of some Bedouin from the *'Aiaida* and *Heweitat* descent groups living in that former frontier area about the socio-economic changes in their environment, it is important to briefly describe the changes that took place on the physical and social environments in that place. The following paragraphs give a brief explanation of Egypt's rapid process of urban and demographic growth and the socio-economic changes accompanying that growth.

Egypt's map is rapidly expanding and changing in urban and demographic terms. By all socio-economic indicators, it is over-populated and over-urbanised. This is vividly seen in Cairo – Egypt's capital and primate city, *Al-Qahira* (literally 'The Victorious'). Cairo has always been an urban centre since it was founded with its current name in 969 AD. Throughout the twentieth century, the process of urbanisation increased tremendously in Cairo attracting with it a newly urbanising population. By the late 1940s, the capital's population reached about 11 percent of the nation's population, then estimated at 19 million. This percentage rose to 17 percent in the 1970s and is now estimated at 25 percent of Egypt's 70 million (Abu-Lughod, 1971, p.121; Ibrahim, 1979, pp.551-552).

Abu-Lughod (1971) analyses Cairo's growth by tracing it to three relatively independent sources: natural increase in population; rural-urban migration; and annexation or the incorporation of non-mobile sections of the population into the city due to the expansion of city limits. The first two sources represent a true increase in the demand for urban expansion, while the third is a by-product of that expansion. Its contribution is rather relatively insignificant (p.121).

In recent years, however, annexation and expansion of the city limits have become a significant factor in Cairo's growth as many agricultural lands in rural areas have been fallowed, turned into housing units and annexed to the capital. In addition, there is also the expansion into the frontier and desert areas surrounding Cairo and building new cities and urban communities. This latter trend of urban development in desert areas started with the construction of a *new* Cairo (*Misr al-Gadidah*), or Heliopolis as it is referred to

in English, by the Belgian Baron Empain on the desert plateau northeast Cairo at the beginning of the twentieth century. It proved to be an economically feasible project.

This process has initiated a speculation business that is still thriving up to the present. It also began the process of breaking the desert barrier and expanding horizontally into the desert, thus creating new economic opportunities. Taking a glimpse of the area surrounding Cairo now, one can easily depict the disappearance of the desert frontier zone and the erosion of agricultural lands. Instead of green and yellow desert patches, an urban landscape has sprawled littered with concrete jungles.

This urban growth brings with it various socio-economic, health and environmental problems. The following are just a fraction of those problems: shortage in adequate housing and the inability to absorb any rural migrants or even any natural increase in the population and incorporating them into the city's institutions; low income, poverty, unemployment or thriving of informal models of employment; mounting pressure on services resulting in a deterioration of quality and diminishing of quantity per capita. This is coupled with poor health and environmental conditions. It is ironic to note that despite these problems, migration to Cairo and other major cities has not stopped, as rural migrants believe the situation in cities is still better than in the countryside or smaller towns. Over urbanisation has also led to social disorganisation and loss of a sense of community. Social problems like crime, violence, prostitution, drug addiction, and depression are rapidly increasing (Ibrahim, 1979, pp.560-561).

### *Egypt's Employment Problem*

Focusing briefly on the employment problem, its nature, size and characteristics, as it is the main topic of this chapter, one can easily observe that the growth in unemployment rates have soared tremendously the moment Egypt's current economic malaise began in the late 1990s. In the fiscal year 2001/2002, unemployment rate was estimated at about 17 percent of the total workforce estimated at about 20 million (29 percent of the total population). An increase of about 10 percent than the previous fiscal years (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 14-20 March 2002).



Observations from the field as well as studies and recent publications about Egypt indicate that the privatisation programme, comprising an essential component of the liberalisation and structural adjustment programme, has resulted in forming a large group of unemployed people who had to resign or seek an early retirement. Another large group of unemployed is the new entrants to the labour force or new graduates who have been waiting for jobs for periods of more than five years. The recent announcement of vacancies by the government and the number of applications submitted is a case in point. A third group is that of unemployed manpower who held previous jobs at home, especially in the construction or informal sector and abroad (returned migrants). It became evident that during the last two years there has been a sharp downturn in the domestic construction sector caused by the fall in investments resulting in a substantial increase in the number of unemployed labourers. The demand for expatriate labourers in the regional market has also decreased dramatically in the last decade, which made it very difficult to seek employment in the region, especially in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region.

Despite the high rate of unemployment, according to the official figures, many people can still be employed, however, in informal institutions and not counted in official census. The informal sector provides an alternative means of employing surplus labour and is becoming recognised as such in many developing countries including Egypt. Yet, the Egyptian government does not attempt to promote it. It is interesting to note that these informal institutions are found to be significantly more important in shaping labour market relations than the formal ones. And although they are characterised by the absence or ineffectiveness of regulations by the legal authorities and bureaucratic institutions, they have their own strong foundations based on traditions, kinship ties and social networks.

Obtaining statistics about the size of employment in the informal sector is very difficult. According to Rizk (1991), the only year for which data are available is 1976. It indicated that the number of workers in the informal sector stood at 2,416,000 based on the criterion of the size of establishment (up to 9 employees per establishment) (pp.170-172). Rizk argued that the informal sector grows at a rate of 18.6 percent every five years based on data gathered between 1980 and 1985 by another researcher, Fergany. Rizk estimated informal sector employment to reach 4.5 million in 2000 (ibid., pp.173-

179). Using that same rate of growth (18.6 percent), I would estimate that in 2003/2004, the number of people in the informal sector could have reached 5.3 million (about 7.5 percent of the total population).

The epitome of the unemployment problem is manifested in Cairo and surrounding urban areas. Its population, the Cairenes have to bear the frustration of its meagre employment opportunities, ensuing rise in the prices of goods and all the other problems resulting from overcrowdedness. The Bedouin groups who used to live on the fringes of Cairo now find themselves enmeshed in a frustrating urban environment in which they need to cope with and adapt to its conditions in order to survive. The following section discusses some perceptions of those Bedouin, their coping strategies for the development of new economic models.

### **Testimonies from Urban-based Bedouin**

The first testimony is from Shaḥat, a non-literate elderly urban 'Aiaida tribesman living with his two married sons in al-Marg town, now part of Greater Cairo. Their present situation is strongly tied to the socio-economic changes that took place over the last fifty years. This reference to history will recur in all personal testimonies that appear in this chapter. Shaḥat's testimony is a synopsis of the stepping-stones of his life. The main emphasis, however, is on employment.

Shaḥat's narrative begins as follows:

*Before the 1952 Revolution, a large part of al-Marg town was a feudal estate owned by a Princess named Ne'mat hanem [Lady Ne'mat]. She was King Farouk's cousin. We [Shaḥat's grandfather and father] took her permission to settle and work on the land. The area was then named 'hoad al-Ṭawila' [al-Ṭawila plot]. We used to grow clover, maize and wheat. Some peasants before the Revolution owned some plots of land which they bought from the Princess and had them registered. After the Revolution, the state distributed the land among the peasants. Each family was given 2-3 feddans depending on its size. However, we had to pay for the price of the land in instalments for 25 years, but without a down payment. After 25 years, we owned the land. The land remained cultivable until the last decade [early 1990s] when people started building on it. [Land was first fallowed, then divided into building plots and sold by metre on an informal basis without planning or any urban development schemes by the local councils and without any infrastructure installation].*



*Before the Revolution, I worked as a wage labourer in a carton factory, which was later nationalised, as the revenue from the land was not enough for our subsistence... Then, [after the Revolution], I opted for a job with the 'baladiya' [a local council's Police branch]. [Shahat's job was to round up informal traders of petty commodities or fruit and vegetables roaming the streets]. Once, the police officer asked me to arrest a man selling fruit. The man ran and escaped inside a block of flats. The officer ordered me to go and follow him up the stairs and arrest him by any means. I found the man and he was crying asking me to spare him... He was destitute. I then decided to walk out of that job regardless of the consequences. I did not want to harm or be unjust to any one...*

*In 1976, I worked for Heliopolis Local Council as a labourer [gardener] until my retirement in 2001... My pension today does not cover the cost of my tobacco and tea... [After the boom in the prices of lands Shahat decided to sell the land he inherited from his father. He had the greatest share of the inheritance being the only son with only one sister]. I sold my land a few years ago for LE 400,000 [approx. £35,000 using the current exchange rate]. I bought another piece of cultivable land and built that house [a two-storey concrete house with basic infrastructure installed], where my sons and their children live with me...*

Shahat's eldest son works as a driver on a pickup used for conveying passengers between al-Marg Cairo Metro Station and the environs of al-Marg town. It is an informal job, as he does not carry a driving licence. Obtaining a licence requires sitting for a literacy exam, which he is not ready to undertake. Consequently, he cannot drive his vehicle outside al-Marg. If he gets caught without a licence, he could pay a heavy fine or even get a prison sentence. Being a spontaneous settlement, with no established law and order, he and many others could get away with undertaking such informal and illegal activities. The young man relates to me that he starts working at about 10:00 – 11:00 am until midnight, the time of the last metro. *"I have to wait for my turn at the station to convey passengers; we have a rotation and everyone respects it... It is hectic job, but we need to make a living and I prefer to be self-employed..."* His returns can reach LE 20-30 (approx. £2.7) per day depending on the number of rounds he make. After working for several years as a wage labourer, Shahat prefers that his sons be self-employed in the informal sector. His other son works as a seasonal labourer, helping his father on their land.

Haj Gebreel, another elderly man of Bedouin origin living in a different frontier area in Giza that became urbanised in the late 1960s, recalls,

*This shari' Faiṣal [a wide road that links Giza Square with the Pyramids area, named after King Faisal of Saudi Arabia] was originally 'al-Ahram' canal [the Pyramids irrigation canal]. It was joined with al-Marioutiya canal [another irrigation canal that cuts across Faiṣal Road flowing from the Nile to Alexandria]. That was until the 1930s. Now everything has changed completely. We used to live on the borderline of the canal in a bait sh'ar [black goat-hair tent] and had our plot of cultivable land and our cattle... In 1969, I worked as a wage labourer in a factory in Giza. My daily wage at that time was PT 25 [25p] or LE 7.25 per month. I had a bicycle at that time and used to cycle all the way to the market in Giza to buy three or four pounds of meat, eggs, fruit and vegetables and return with a remainder of five or seven piasters from my daily wage. Now prices have risen tremendously...*

*At that time [late 1960s], we found the landscape changing rapidly; high-rise buildings sprawling all over the area... Next to us, a high-rise was built owned by a member of parliament. The price of land was still cheap at that time... Of course, no one would like to have Bedouin living in a tent and their cattle as their neighbours. We had no option but to sell the land and move...*

Haj Gebreel and his sons are now well off pickup drivers. Unlike Shaḥat's son, he and all his three sons have driving licenses and their own vehicles. They own a four-storey house and a plot of cultivable land in one of the villages near Marioutiya.

Haj Gebreel was fortunate, as his family owned the land. The majority of Bedouin in the frontier area in northeast Cairo (al-Marg and al-Salam city) are illegal squatters. Many were forced to move and were displaced by the local council. This will be explained further below and in the next chapter.

The few Bedouin families who stayed behind in al-Marg and al-Salam city, and did not have to leave for the Eastern Desert, Suez and Sinai in search for new livelihoods, have also had a dramatic change in their economy. The following testimony by a middle-aged *Heweitat* man, whom I call Salem, explains what he and his family has been through:

*When we [the *Heweitat*] first came here, it was during the "qaḥt" [drought years at the beginning of the twentieth century]. We were "taḥt el-ṣefr" [literally, below zero or penniless]. My grandfather came with his camel and his family. They settled in Qalioubia governorate, in al-Marg on the fringes of cultivable land. He [his grandfather] used to hire his camel to the peasants to carry the crops and till the land. We bred our own livestock, sheep and goats. We would sell a sheep to get money to buy the necessities [food, clothes, tools, etc.]. Other *Heweitat* men worked as watchmen on those lands and some settled in lands adjoining canals and drains. They built their houses on those lands with no infrastructure and they are still living there... Areas like "Abu*



*Regeila*” [a shanty town close to Heliopolis and ‘Ain Shams districts] *were orchards but now they are wasteland occupied by [squatter] Bedouin families...*

*A man living in a ‘esha [one-storey small house of scrap wood and metal] would think first of buying himself a pickup truck to earn a living and support his family. He would later think of building a decent home and then educate his children. People [town-dwellers in general and particularly policemen] think that as those Bedouin men have cars, they are rich and want to exploit them...*

Salem calls himself “*ragol a‘maal*” (a businessman). His work involves trading, buying and selling lands, brokerage and contracting. He has a wide network of connections with other ‘businessmen’ in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. He claims to have dealings with his cousins in Saudi Arabia. He lives in a modern one storey house or villa with a large courtyard built according to Bedouin traditions with a separate entrance for men leading to an office room equipped with modern office furniture and a modern en suite toilet. Salem has reached a considerably high stage of social mobility, despite having only completed his basic education. However, it is interesting to note that he pays special attention to the schooling of his children and enrolled his daughter and older son at a private language school. He confided to me that he wants to enrol his youngest son at a public Azharic (religious) school; an indicator of his recent interest in religion, but is afraid that his son will blame him in the future for differentiating between him and his siblings in the quality of their schooling.

Another dramatic narrative by the urban-based *Heweitat* is that of Nasser and his father. Nasser, a middle-aged man in his early forties, currently lives in al-Salam city, while his father stills lives as a squatter in *Abu Regeila*.

Nasser narrates,

*We [the Heweitat] were the kings of Cairo’s Eastern Desert. When the Baron Empain came to that area now Misr al-Gadidah [Heliopolis in northeast Cairo], it was all controlled by Bedouin groups. He offered us land [legal land ownership] to establish a village for ourselves to settle in, but we refused and preferred to remain scattered in the desert living as nomads. There was also an opportunity for us to return to Saudi Arabia. But many of our grandfathers refused and it’s us – their children and grandchildren who are suffering now. If they had returned, things would have been very different now [for us]. Those who returned are totally different now [i.e., living a luxurious life]...*

*My grandfather was recruited by the Camel Corps to guard the frontiers. He was controlling all the lands from Cairo to Suez, along the Suez highway till*

*Ras Ghareb [a town on the Gulf of Suez coast]. He used to report to the Camel Corps of the Coastguard Administration [now part of the Egyptian Armed Forces, who also controlled all the hinterland. Their headquarters is still in 'Ain Shams]... My uncles now work as watchmen, guarding property in al-tagamu' al-khames [a new middle-high class residential urban area known as New Cairo or Fifth Settlement, built along the Suez Highway]...*

*We used to live in 'arab al-gisr [part of the desert frontier zone that separated urban Heliopolis from the Eastern Desert, now a highly populated low/low-middle class urban area overlooking gisr al-Sues or Suez Road], until they [the local council] evacuated us in 1976 without prior notification, demolishing our houses and leaving us without shelter... I was young at that time, but I remember that we were left out in the open for a week until we resettled here [in Abu Regeila]...*

*I learned car mechanics when I did my military service\* for three years and then travelled to Saudi Arabia. I worked hard for six years as a driver and mechanic. I was paid well... I invested all my savings from my earnings in buying a plot of land and building a two-storey house... Before building the house, I lived with my wife at the house of one of my cousins. We were living as brother and sister [i.e., he could not approach her for lack of privacy]... We now live on the ground floor with our two children and rent the upper floor...*

Nasser prefers to live in the countryside and invest in cattle. He now works as a freelance driver. He owns a Peugeot 504 hatchback saloon, which he refurbished recently after a horrific accident which cost him LE 40,000. A few months later, I heard from his father that he sold the Peugeot and bought a Mercedes sedan 1980s model.

In another interview, with Nasser's father in June 2003, he narrates:

*I was a corporal in the army. I volunteered and participated in the 1967 and 1973 wars. I resigned afterwards and worked as a "zohorat" [unskilled wage labourer] at the Nile General Company for Roads and Bridges. I now get a small pension from the Armed Forces.*

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\* Conscription is obligatory in Egypt for all males above the age of 18. Some categories, however, are exempted. These are: a sole male whose father is above the age of 65; a male with female siblings; or a male with a chronic physical impairment or disability. The number of years spent in the service varies according to the level of education. Non-literates and holders of basic education serve for three years; secondary school and diploma holders serve for two years; while higher institutes and university graduates serve for 13 months. Before the 1952 Revolution, there was a royal decree that exempted all Bedouin men from conscription. This decree was abrogated after 1952 as an indication that all Egyptians citizens have equal rights and duties. Some young men including Bedouin men can still find a way out of it by absconding until they reach 30 years old, when they go to a military court and usually pay a high fine. In some cases, the military service turns out to be useful teaching young men a craft or a skill as in the case of Nasser.



Probing about his job with that company, I discovered that he was entitled to a pension from them, which he had not made a claim for. According to Nasser's father, the responsible person at the Personnel Department told him that as he was already receiving a pension from the Armed Forces, he was not entitled to the other pension despite the deductions from his wages. Being non-literate and naïve, he believed the personnel clerk and left without enquiring again about his rights. I persuaded the old man to claim for his pension and accompanied him to the company's head office in the City Centre. After searching for it for more than two hours, as the old man had forgotten the address, we managed to meet one of the clerks who got his file and promised to study his case. The clerk first claimed that because of the time lapse (about eight years), the applicant had waived his rights. When I insisted that he puts it in writing, he asked us to enquire again after a week to give them time to restudy his case. The next time I went to them on my own after obtaining the old man's permission, they asked me about my identity and said that the applicant should write an official request and that I could only submit it on his behalf if I had an official affidavit as his trustee. I informed the old man and advised him to make one of his sons a trustee. When I met him a few months later, he had not done anything about it, despite his earlier enthusiasm to get his problem sorted. He wanted the money to marry his late wife's sister, who is also a widow. It was hard for him to live as a widower after his wife's death a few years ago.

Nasser's father lives with his elder son, a wage labourer, and his family – wife and three children. Their house known as *bait suesi* (a one-storey brick house without foundations) consists of four rooms and a yard for keeping some goats, which graze in the neighbouring dumping site owned by the Armed Forces. They sell those goats during *'Id al-Adha* (the Muslim feast of Abrahamic sacrifice). They do not consume the meat themselves because of its poor quality, having been fed on rubbish. Despite the modest appearance of their house and the poor area in which they live, indications of conspicuous consumption are clearly visible on the roof of the house – a large satellite dish. The old man spends most of his time watching TV and surfing the satellite channels.

All their neighbours are squatters; rural-urban migrants working either as wage labourers, craftsmen or street vendors. One neighbouring family from the same descent group – the *Heweitat*, is headed by an old matriarch. The old widow lives with her married son and

daughter and their children. Her son works as a driver for a public sector company. They also own a small herd of goats, which graze at the dumping site opposite them and keep their own poultry for consumption.

The old Bedouin woman complained of the high cost of living and looked with nostalgia to the past when commodities were cheaper. She used to go shopping in Heliopolis before the Muslim feasts to buy material which she sewed herself to make new clothes for her children. Her other biggest complaint now is insects (flies and mosquitoes) breeding in the neighbouring *rash'ah* (drain) and the dumping site owned by the Armed Forces. Lack of security is also worrying her. She makes surveillance shifts with her daughter every night for fear that someone might break into their house. Their one storey house made of bricks, wood and corrugated iron is insecure and the large yard at the front has no fence.

### *Time Factor in the Construction of Narratives*

One thread that links all those testimonies by the urban-based Bedouin, who used to live at the desert frontier, is the recurring reference to the past and associating it with their current economic situation. The past forms an ever-present factor in people's construction of their present reality and economic situation. As argued by Alfred Schutz (1964) in his article, 'The Problem of Rationality in the Social World', "... meaning is not a quality inherent in certain experiences emerging within our stream of consciousness but the result of an interpretation of past experience looked at from the present..." (p.110, also quoted in Wickering, 1991, p.8). It shows deep reflection and rationality.

All the changes that took place at the desert frontier resulting from overpopulation and overurbanisation have led to the expansion of Cairo's boundaries and the disappearance of the desert frontier. This physical transformation was accompanied by a transformation on the economic level. Urban economy has become diversified and customary divisions of employment patterns based on location have been remodelled. This has offered Bedouin men in the frontier area different types of employment other than the traditional subsistence pastoralism and/or subsistence agriculture. As seen from the narratives, unskilled wage labour has become one of the main sources of income as those Bedouin were non-literate and possessed only some skills that were of use in urban contexts such



as trading, brokerage and surveillance. However, they have not attained much in other technical and administrative/clerical areas, as they have not acquired the necessary skills through schooling and training. This finding was also recorded earlier by E. Marx (1984) in his study of some Bedouin groups in Israel and South Sinai after the 1967 War. The Bedouin that he studied possessed few skills and thus became farmhands, construction workers or watchmen, often in small establishments and were paid less (p.5).

On the other hand, some shrewd Bedouin men who possessed an entrepreneurial approach have sought the opportunity and profited from the urbanisation process by turning to land brokerage, speculation and service provision. This made them amass a considerable wealth and enabled them to climb the social ladder. Others who had lands and sold them for urban development have also made great profits. Before turning to a discussion of Bedouin economy in rural/desert contexts, it is important to shed some light on the issue of land and its value.

### **The Value of Land**

A well-educated farmer from the *Awlad 'Ali* told Cole and Altorki (1998) in their study of Bedouins, settlers and holiday-makers in Egypt's northwest coast, that "the ownership of land is a thorny problem in the whole governorate of Matruh" (p.199). To this statement, I would add that landownership is problematic all over Egypt. Egypt's vast desert lands and lands outside the borders (*zimam*) of existing cities and villages are known as *aradi bur* (undeveloped lands). Those are officially owned by the state – *malkiya khasa lil-dawla* ("private property of the state"), which according to Law 143 for the year 1981, the state can use, lease or sell. That law also stipulates that the Ministry of Defence has the right to use this land for strategic purposes, but can be developed by other ministries for development purposes with the permission of the Ministry of Defence (Quoted in Cole and Altorki, 1998, p.201).

On the other hand, the flows of different Bedouin descent groups who settled down in Egypt since the Islamic conquest have established their own tribal territories. Their claims to landownership are patrimonial claims legitimised only by '*urf*' (customary law) not legal ownership. Desert lands and landmarks on them such as wells are inherited by males based on the basis of patrilineal descent. Such property can be owned individually

or collectively (ibid., pp.199-200). Some lineages have papers legitimising their moral claims to the land but not their legal rights. Accordingly, when conflicts arise between Bedouin groups on a piece of land, those could only be resolved by referring to Bedouin customary law as indicated in the previous chapter.

This moral claim to landownership is known as *wad' yad* (literally means “placing the hand”) or squatter’s rights. According to Shahat, the ‘Aiaida townsman in al-Marg, *“Land in the 1920s [and before that time] was owned by whoever (literally) put his hand on it. If you want a piece of land or want to build a house, you stand at the edge of your neighbour’s house, turn your back to it, pick a stone and throw it away. The range the stone reaches can be yours where you can build your home and own the land”*.

However, according to Cole and Altorki (1998), the ‘right’ of the ‘squatters’, who have held the land for at least two hundred years and long before the promulgation of contemporary land ownership laws by the state, is not formally recognised by law. “Nonetheless, the state informally recognizes *wad' yad*; and a procedure was developed during the presidency of Anwar Sadat to allow compensation to people holding land under *wad' yad* in cases of state-approved land sales to individuals and cooperatives” (p.202).

This procedure, however, is rarely carried out. Many Bedouin who squatted on such lands in the northeast desert frontier of Cairo, as has been briefly indicated and will be discussed in more details in the chapter on human rights, have been forced to move out of their lands without any compensation. It is interesting to note in this respect that the Bedouin do not easily give in or admit their defeat. Land as indicated earlier by one Bedouin Sheikh from Sinai is the *“honour and dignity [of the Bedouin]. It is in the heart and soul of every Bedouin both man and woman... Land is the most valuable thing to the Bedouin”*.

They would return to the land and reoccupy it. If the land was sold to a private owner or investor they would ask for compensation from that new owner who has to abide by their rules. As one retired police general indicated, *“Those Bedouin men do not have an occupation. They just force people to give them money as they control the land. They make good watchmen; so, if you have a piece of land or want to build a house or*



*undertake an economic activity, you have to seek their protection, or else your property would be squandered and be eligible for sabotage. They also work as land brokers...*”

As mentioned earlier, the urban growth that has started taking place since the last three decades caused the prices of land to rise tremendously. Many Bedouin, both those who had legal ownership and those who had not, thus benefited from this by selling their lands or getting compensation. Nasser’s father remembers that *“thirty years ago, the price of one square metre of land in ‘arab al-gisr, [where they used to live before being evicted] was PT 50. While here, [where he squats now in Abu Regeila], it was PT 20. Now [June 2003], the metre is estimated here at LE 500; while in ‘arab al-gisr, it can reach over LE 1,000... Unfortunately, I did not buy land at that time. Those who did, have made a huge fortune now”*.

Nasser’s father, however, cannot sell his land now or get compensation because his squatter rights are not formally recognised. What is worse, he and all neighbouring squatters are threatened with having their houses demolished and their land expropriated (See Appendix 1: The Case of Land Use in *Abu Regeila*). The threat of eviction and displacement awaiting Nasser’s father and other squatters is one of many cases of development-induced displacement that have become widespread in Egypt in the last three decades. People such as the residents of *Abu Regeila* are classified as “internally displaced people” (IDPs). The issue of IDPs as a result of national development projects is no longer an internal affair. It is rather an international human rights issue. The next chapter will discuss this issue in further details.





*Fig.7: Wastewater Project in Abu Regeila*



*Fig. 8: the Drain in Abu Regeila - Notice Urban sprawl in the background*



## Bedouin Economy in Rural/Desert Context

In the second part of this chapter, my aim is to discuss the economic models of some Bedouin groups in rural/desert context. Again, in this context, the Bedouin show a high level of adaptation to the changing socio-economic conditions. This section discusses the economic situation in one particular 'Aiaida village in Sinai. It starts with a description of the history of the village's site until its establishment in 1995. Oral histories and testimonies from Bedouin men living in the village explain the transformations the place and people have been through up to the present. Those form the core of my ethnographic fieldwork in rural/desert context.

According to one 'Aiaida non-literate old man,

*This part of the land [central western Sinai] is originally ours. Our forefathers lived here and grazed their camels here. I was born here and lived all my life as a camel herder moving about following the rain... It is a tough life... It is difficult for you son to live in the desert. [He was addressing me as I earlier showed my interest in living in the desert]. It is a harsh life and you are not used to it. Your father and grandfather have to be born and brought up in the desert so that you can cope with that life. You can still go there [open desert] and stay for a while, but it cannot be forever...*

*Things started to change after the war with Israel and the occupation of Sinai [by the Israelis in 1967]. This area was evacuated as it turned into a battlefield [eastern coast of the Suez Canal]. Many of us became scattered in the desert; some went north to al-'Arish, others to central Sinai and many crossed the Suez canal and settled in Ismailia, Sharkiya and Qalioubiya governorates... I remained in Sinai and we came back to that land after the 1973 War.*

Another 'Aiaida man in his fifties from Suez confirms, "during the period from 1967-1973, many Bedouin migrated westwards to Cairo and Qalioubiya away from the war zone. Very few remained here. They used to graze their animals there and trade in vegetables such as cauliflower and maize..."

This division of history (prior to and after the war) is a recurring theme by all the Bedouin in Sinai. Wickering (1991), for example, in her study of the *Tarabiin* in Southeast Sinai explains,

In 1967, as a result of war with Egypt, Israel occupied the Sinai. This had long-term effects on the inhabitants of the peninsula. In the *Tarabiin* perception of the recent past, a strong dividing line is made between the time prior to and after the Israeli occupation. According to the Bedouins, it was during the occupation that they left

their old ways of life and entered the modern world. This accelerated the long trend toward reliance on a cash economy (p.15).

E. Marx (1984) also noted, in his study of some Bedouin groups in South Sinai during the war years, that most of them became migrant or commuting wage labourers. And as many were left stranded after the October 1973 War, they only felt secure among their tribesmen and kinsmen and their small flocks, fields and gardens served as an economic reserve. Some people from the '*Aleqat* tribe in South Sinai, who migrated and settled in Egypt with their families, retained their kinship ties with their tribesmen who stayed behind. Those ties are constantly renewed by marriages and mutual visits (pp.2-9).

After the peace treaty with Israel and the restoration of Sinai in 1982, Egypt embarked on massive desert development projects in the peninsula. Some projects targeted the Bedouin aiming at their sedentarisation particularly in North Sinai governorate. Other groups such as the '*Aiaida* were neglected. The '*Aiaida*, however, did not wait for the state. They embarked on their own development. They restored their ancestral land through *wad' yad*, reclaimed the land for agriculture and built their own village. The following in-depth interview with the '*Aiaida* Sheikh follows the history of the land (central western Sinai) since that time and its people. The central feature in the narrative is the development of new economic models. The interview took three consecutive days from 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> June 2003.

The '*Aiaida* Sheikh's narrative begins as follows:

*Urban settlements started in Sinai in 1982. I have been working in new desert agriculture since 1986. We established our village – (qariat al-'arab) [the 'Aiaida village] in 1995. It is one of the satellites of al-Abtal Village [literally the Heroes]. We started by building the zawiya [prayer room or mosque] and the mag'ad [central meeting and socialising place for men]. Then, I built my house [a modern large two-storey house]. I helped my people financially in building their homes. Electricity was installed only in the zawiya in 1995. After 5 years, in 2000, the local government installed electricity and water in all the village houses. The price of building land now in the village is LE 14 per square metre and reclaimed cultivated feddan is about LE 6,000. [According to another 'Aiaida informant, three years ago, the square metre of building land in the village was estimated at LE 5. Now after electricity and water have been installed, the price rose to LE 14... In some areas near urban settlements, the price of reclaimed land can reach up to LE 20,000 per feddan].*

*We need to build a school now to educate our children [An Azharic Primary Institute consisting of two rooms was built in August-September 2003 and*



teaching started in October 2003]. *We send our children to the [primary] school in al-Abtal, which is quite far [5-6 km]. This name, al-Abtal is a national name. It has a patriotic connotation. Other neighbouring villages also bear similar names such as al-Obour [the Great Crossing of the Suez Canal in the 1973 War], al-Ahrar [the Liberators], al-Salam [Peace]. All those villages were established by the government and housing units were given to youths from the Nile Valley to start agricultural development.*

*The government did not give us the land or build any housing settlements. We placed our hands on it (wad' yad) and started building on it. Later, we made an application to the Ministry of Agriculture to purchase the land. The total area of the village was estimated at approximately 89 feddans, 7 of which are allocated for housing and the rest is agricultural land. Our applications were processed and the land became ours in 2001. It is us who should have priority over this land. But this was not the case. In fact, they wanted to throw us out of the land. We did not take even one metre of reclaimed land from the government.*

*We have about 100 families living now in the village [all 'Aiaida descent group]. The average family consists of 5-10 people. The population could thus be estimated at 600-700 inhabitants. Sedentarisation took place only in North Sinai. But here, in Ismailia, the government did not undertake any sedentarisation projects. Although we are geographically in Sinai, administratively we are part of Ismailia governorate. In 1979, the government issued a decree adding 30 Km east of the Suez Canal to the governorates of Ismailia, Suez and Port Said.*

*Four years ago, the governorate issued a decree to sedentarise the Bedouin in al-Abtal district. 60 settlement units are to be constructed. This decree has not been materialised up till now...*

Explaining the economy of the village, the 'Aiaida Sheikh continues,

*We are mainly "mozari'in" [farmers as opposed to fellahin or peasants] now. Those who do not own land, share with others [sharecroppers] or work as daily wage labourers. Grazing is still practiced along with agriculture but on a smaller scale than in the past. However, there are some Bedouin families around us who are totally pastoralists [rather semi-nomadic pastoralists]. They can cover 3-5 Km daily in search for pasture. They have small herds of 20-50 heads maximum. Sometimes, they have to buy fodder... We are almost self-reliant in everything, except for few items such as cooking oil, rice and cotton...*

Elaborating on new desert agriculture, the Sheikh explains,

*Agriculture is the future. We now have big agricultural projects and huge investments in orchards and mango trees. Agriculture is 'istiqrar' [putting down roots]. Unlike grazing, which involves mobility, agriculture implies settling down. It is more economically rewarding than grazing. It is generosity from God to help us grow our crops, fruit and vegetables and sell them when supply is low and make profits... We rely on the latest technology in*

*agriculture. We have become experts in it. These new agriculture techniques need more effort and planning rather than manual labour. It needs organised irrigation and natural fertilisers. I learnt by experience and trial and error. I would read instructions on labels of seeds, fertilisers and agrochemicals and apply them... Reliance on agricultural extension services provided by the Agriculture Directorate constitutes about 50 percent. It is mainly our care and supervision and using state of the art technology in irrigation that made us succeed...*

The new desert agriculture in that part of Sinai is dependent on the new irrigation canals such as *al-Salam Canal* and *Sheikh Zayed's canal*, financed by the government of the United Arab Emirates, which bring the Nile water to the area as part of a large-scale desert land reclamation programme in Sinai. Drip irrigation is the main type of irrigation systems used through pumping stations. Deeper inland and northward some areas depend on systems of water harvesting involving the construction of small dikes.

It is impressive to see the agricultural production in that formerly arid desert. Mangoes, grapes and other varieties of fruit trees and vast fields of tomatoes and other vegetables confirm that agriculture as a new economic model is firmly taking hold among the '*Aiaida* Bedouin. Moreover, the '*Aiaida* Sheikh's farm now includes two large green houses in which he grows cucumber and green pepper; again, confirming their adoption of high-tech agricultural systems.

The transformation in the life and economic models of this group of '*Aiaida* Bedouin over the last decade clearly shows that their way of life is not a moribund, inflexible traditional one. It is rather a highly adaptive way of life that could instantly be adjusted to any change in their socio-economic and political environment. In the face of those changes they kept their economic alternatives opened and diversified, and fostered new economic models that made them on equal footing if not better than many other groups in the Egyptian society.

The '*Aiaida* have not abandoned pastoralism altogether. The majority still raise sheep and goats. Fewer, however, keep camels. They devoted less time to livestock keeping and more effort to modern desert agriculture. The majority of the '*Aiaida* believe, as mentioned above by their Sheikh, that modern agriculture is much more important than pastoralism. Divisions based on economic activities are subtle. More than one model exists in the same extended family and even the same household. Many also work as



traders and farm wage labourers. However, it should be noted that some families are changing more rapidly than others. On the border of the 'Aiaida village, live some families who still retain their semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle, as will be explained below.

The interesting fact about the 'Aiaida village, is that the people themselves made the decision to settle down. No government sedentarisation policies or desert development projects have addressed the needs of the Bedouin communities in that region or their role in the development of their land. They find this very disappointing. When the first few families made the decision to settle and build their village, according to one informant, *"We bought bricks and building materials, hired builders and labourers to build our houses and resumed our life. We applied for electricity and water, which were installed 3 years ago in 2000... All we want is peace and to work hard to secure the future of our children and educate them"*. Working and provision of social security for the family appear to be the most important things to a Bedouin man. E. Marx (1984) also stated this point concluding "what is clear is that nomads seek to strike a balance between their wish to maximise money income and their wish to provide full social security for their families" (p.14).

The Bedouin's major complaint is the soaring prices of goods. Comparison between prices in the past and current prices was a recurring topic in their discourse. However, according to one 'Aiaida informant – Haj Said a livestock trader and sharecropper – prices remain the same. He argues, *"Now there is no baraka [blessing]. Prices remain the same as they were in the past despite the rising prices. For example, I now buy a sack of flour weighing 50 Kg for LE 40. Five sacks cost LE 200. This is equivalent to the price of a small sheep or a goat. In the past, about twenty years ago, the price of a sheep was LE 7; with this amount I would also buy 5 sacks of flour, so it is really the same. The daily wage of a farm wage labourer, however, has increased; it is now LE 10-15 per day"*.

The 'Aiaida's shift to new desert agriculture has increased their interaction with the urban folk and outside markets. To reclaim and cultivate the land, they have to hire machinery such as tractors, etc. from land reclamation companies or private investors. Seeds, pesticides and fertilisers are also bought from traders in Ismailia and Cairo. Their produce is sold to vegetable and fruit wholesale traders from different urban centres, who

transport it to urban markets. The Bedouin's net profit after deducting all production costs is sufficient.

Even before their sedentarisation, when they were pastoralists the '*Aiaida* always have had ties with urban markets and have never been purely subsistence producers. They still buy their necessities such as clothes, household utensils, vegetables, oil, soap and other goods from the Sunday market held in al-Abtal village. Many studies of nomadic communities focused on the relations between the desert and the sown, particularly pastoralists who exchange their animals and products at markets, in particular Nelson, 1973 and others.

### *The 'Aiaida Semi-Nomadic Pastoralists*

There are different types of nomadism that could be plotted on a scale (Cole 1975, Jabbur 1995 and others). At one end of the scale, there are 'pure' pastoral nomads who produce for their own subsistence and have no access to markets. I doubt the existence of this model in Egypt or anywhere now. All my informants indicated that all nomadic Bedouin groups have access to markets and relations with the sedentary folk. On the other end of the scale, there are those who are fully integrated and have adopted an urban lifestyle as mentioned earlier. According to Cole (1975), there is a continuum that "runs the gamut from sedentary agriculturalists through transhumant agriculturalists, semisedentary pastoralists, and pastoralists who also engage in some agriculture to full-time nomadic pastoralists..." (pp.22-23).

The semi-nomadic type of pastoralism is based on the raising of livestock consisting of sheep and goats and only a few camels. Those Bedouin groups have firm ties with the people living in settled villages and urban centres. According to Jabbur (1995), this group of Bedouin have seen the positive aspects of sedentary life.

They have begun to incline toward the equanimity, tranquillity, and ease to be had in a settled existence. They have even tried to assimilate themselves to settled life, so that with the passage of no more than one or two generations their descendants will have fully incorporated to it and be counted among the sedentary folk. It is from this level of nomadism that the process of natural sedentarization begins... (p.31)

On the north-eastern edge of the newly reclaimed land of the settled '*Aiaida*, lives another group of '*Aiaida* tribesmen who are best described as semi-nomadic. They



number around 90-100 living in eight households, mainly 'esha (small house made of palm tree boughs, wood and scrap metal). Each household consists of about 12 people. They are mainly sheep and goat herders and occasionally work as farm wage labourers during tilling and harvesting seasons. During the rainy season in winter they move with their herds deep inland in search for scarce vegetation. The men's main occupation is livestock raising. They sell their animals in neighbouring markets in villages and towns. As natural grazing is usually not enough for fattening their livestock, they use fodder procured through the market.

This group of 'Aiaida utilise their herding skills to the utmost. They understand the economic significance of pastoralism and the need of the sedentary population to consume large amounts of the lamb that they raise. Thus, they are always in search for places where water and pasture can be found. They utilise "areas that are not conducive to agriculture but which provide the potential for high returns through the rational pasturing of animals..." (Cole, 1975, p.20).

Each household owns around 50 heads of sheep and goats. It is difficult for them to accumulate a larger number of animals because pastoral production is much more riskier and unstable than agriculture. "Pastoralists have a chance to rapidly increase their wealth but must deal with the likelihood of losing it all just as quickly" (Young, 1996, p.59).

Children, both boys and girls, take the animals for grazing from the early hours of morning till sunset. As they grow older, however, some young men prefer to achieve their economic independence and leave herding to seek wage labour. There is an increasing embarrassment among many young men at being called 'shepherd'. This has become prevalent among many pastoral Bedouin communities, as mentioned by Cole 1975, and Eloul 1984. "Many therefore sell their herds, settle and join the wage labour market" (Eloul, 1984, p.167).

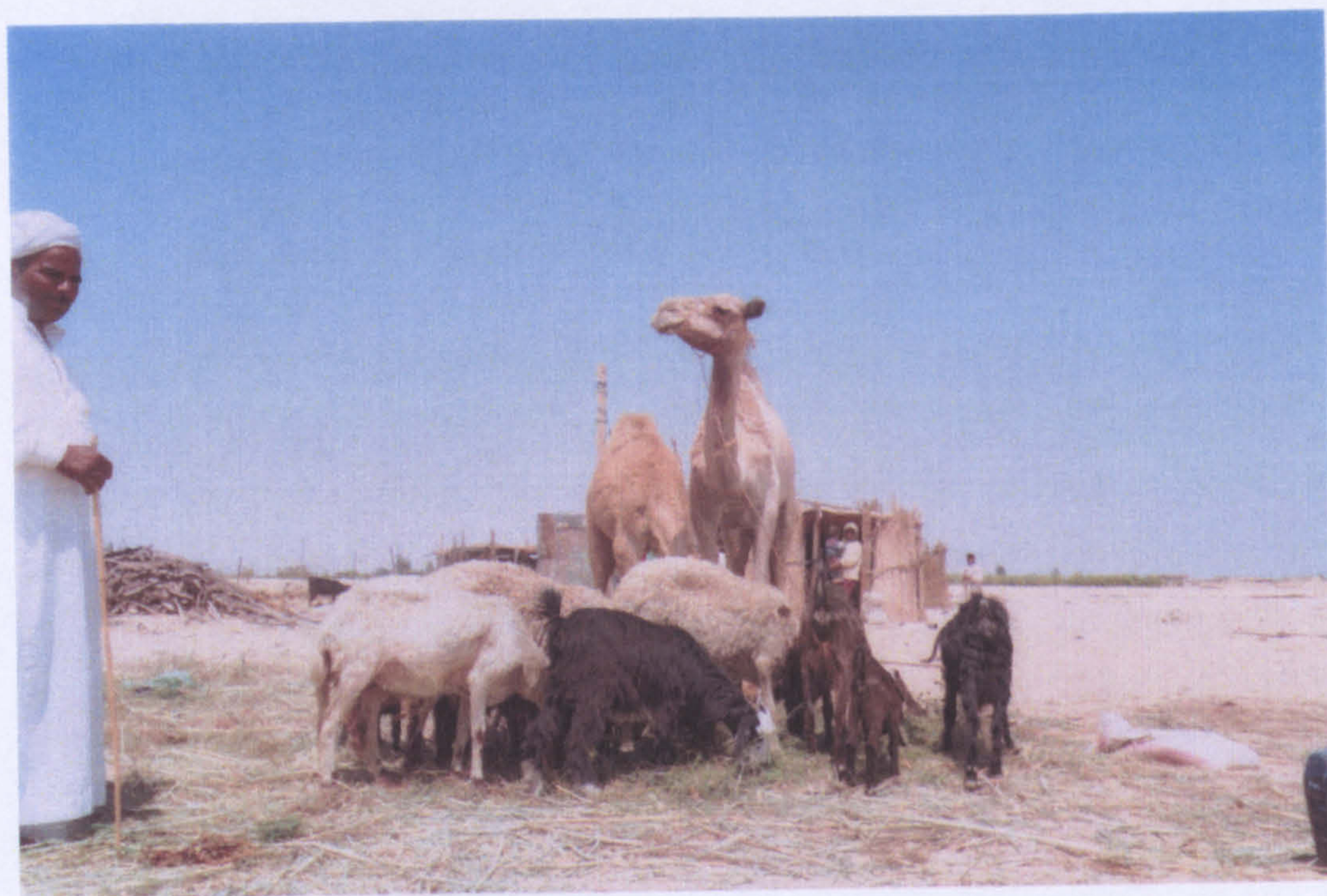
One of my semi-nomadic 'Aiaida informants complained, "*The government has not offered us anything; no land, no electricity, no water, nothing. We, however, care for the future of our children because we want them better than us. We send our children to school... Pastoralism is our way of life and we are content with it and will never change it*".

This middle-aged informant is happy working as livestock raiser and trader. I wonder what his children, who are currently attending school, think when they grow older. Are they doomed to urbanisation and adopting wage jobs?





*Fig.9: Grazing in Ismailia*



*Fig.10: 'Aiida Bedouin with his flock*



## Final Remarks on The Bedouin Ecology

Any study of economic models of a group of the population cannot ignore the influence of ecological factors, which play an important role in determining the type of economic activities carried out by that population. Many people acknowledge indeed this fact. The police major, who gave me in-depth insights about the Bedouin and their way of life, expressed elaborately the importance of the ecology. He explains,

*... Bedouin Arabs are now well educated and they hold important positions in the state and the armed forces. Some of them even hold high positions abroad, for instance, one scientist is working for NASA. It is the ecology that mainly affects their way of living and what they turn out to be. For example, what is the difference between the son of a doctor and the son of an " 'arbagi"[man working on a cart pulled by donkeys]? There is definitely a huge difference between the ways they are both brought up and in their values. Take another example, the Bayadiya tribe of Northern Sinai and 'Arish. The least educated of them holds a bachelor degree or a high diploma because they settled a long time ago and education was accessible to them. In north Sinai, the environment is hospitable. Water is quite abundant. In central Sinai, it is more difficult as it is very arid. You can dig up to 1000 metres and still you cannot find water. The scarce population there is mainly pastoral. They do not care much about education. The South [South Sinai], on the other hand, is different. The economy relies mainly on tourism due to the wonderful seaside, coral reefs and natural scenery. Some of the Bedouin men there have become multi millionaires and even billionaires from establishing joint ventures with foreign companies working in tourism. Others on the western coast of the Suez Canal have big orchards of mangoes. Some of them are known to be drug dealers as well. (Interview in August 2003).*

Those significant words by the police major imply and emphasise the fact that the Bedouin in any type of environment always maintain close exchange relations and economic ties with the sown. No matter how remote and secluded their life is, still they are integrated into the wider (national and international) economy. The more hospitable environments they live in and the closer they are to urban areas, the quicker the change. Further changes are in store for the Bedouin. However, many of their traditional values and egalitarian principles will remain intact as those furnish them with power and honour.



## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, diversified models of Bedouin economy in urban and rural/desert contexts have been discussed. The Bedouin rely on a number of skills to eke out a living and adapt to the ever-changing conditions. In urban contexts, they confine themselves more or less to urban economic activities considered as being compatible with their nomadic identity such as surveillance, trading and brokerage. In the rural context, modern agriculture is coupled with traditional pastoralism, which also maintains their identity and separates them from peasants. In both urban and rural contexts, the Bedouin demonstrate a strong sense of self-consciousness, independence and control over their own affairs. They prefer to 'develop' and face challenges independently without the help of the government.

One model, however, which I have not touched on and mentioned in the last sentence of the police major's interview, is drug dealing and smuggling. The Bedouin are allegedly most famous for excelling in this model. The next chapter discusses this model and links it to issues of human rights, as the two are very interrelated from the Bedouin viewpoint.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ILLICIT DRUGS, BEDOUINS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

#### Introduction

Anthropology has always responded to changes in our world. In recent years there has been more and more attention given to issues of cultural/ethnic diversity, rights of marginalized or socially excluded groups, justice and governance, and human rights in general among many other subjects/concepts in the social sciences. Anthropological studies have therefore taken the lead in exploring and analysing those issues. Amidst those competing topics, I have been trying to find a relevant framework to present some of the material of my fieldwork.

In accordance with those recent notions, I turn my attention in this chapter to hearing the voices of the marginalized Bedouin. I could not avoid or discard those voices who found, through my ethnography and interviews, a forum to express their disappointments and frustrations with the injustices and abuses inflicted on them. This chapter deals with many topics that could be viewed from different perspectives. It covers the issues of: social exclusion of a minority group who are unable to express their cultural identity; deprivation and vulnerability in terms of insecurity and defencelessness; poverty, again perceived in terms of insecurity, exposure to violence and unlawful activities; corruption and laxity of police authority; development-induced displacement; housing rights including rights to security of tenure; stereotyping and prejudice; and last but not least human rights in general. Each of those issues could form a study of its own. My holistic approach, however, entails combining them as one topic or issue. Analysis of those issues will show that the main thrust is based on the stereotypical image that all Bedouin men are smugglers and drug dealers. Though this statement is partially correct, I would like to warn against the danger of stereotyping and generalisations.

My analysis of the issues raised in this chapter is again based on the robust concept of culture from a cognitive anthropological viewpoint. The Bedouin construct their own cultural models as a means of negotiating their natural and social environments. Drug crop farming and smuggling is one alternative economic model that some Bedouin men find attractive because of the lack of other alternatives. There are, however, many



exceptions to this model. This will require debate on this issue and developing an understanding of the Bedouin culture and way of life. Such debate should be led by all involved parties (the police, Bedouin communities and the Egyptian society as a whole). All parties need to accept that changing stereotypes is necessary and important if we are to meet the challenge of living in a just society where all groups are integrated.

### **References to Drugs and Smuggling in the Literature on the Egyptian Bedouin**

Perhaps one of the earliest monographs written about the Bedouin and their involvement in drug smuggling is the Dutch Colonel André Von Dumreicher's (1931) memoirs entitled *Trackers and Smugglers in the Deserts of Egypt*. Dumreicher served as the Director of the Desert Directorate, one of three divisions of the Egyptian Coastguard Administration during the first three decades of the twentieth century. His book provides interesting in-depth insights into life in the desert at a time when camels were the only available means of transport. I will discuss this book in some detail as it touches on several issues of importance and relevance to my study.

Dumreicher's force incorporated the Coastguard Camel Corps using the service of 500 men spread over the Western desert (then named the Libyan desert), the Eastern desert (formerly the Arabian desert), the Nubian desert and the Sinai peninsula, with the headquarters in 'Ain Shams, near Heliopolis, Cairo. The principal duties of his force included preventing the contraband of hashish and salt, and the illicit landing of pilgrims on the Red Sea coast as well as maintaining public security in the deserts (p.xi). He stated that before the establishment of his force, the Egyptian deserts were not subject to any interference by the state authorities and the Bedouin and smugglers were working with impunity attacking fiercely any patrols sent out to them. He affirmed, "Nothing resembling an orderly administration of any kind existed. The Bedouins reigned supreme, hostile to all authority and resolutely set against any change" (ibid., p.4).

Dumreicher's perception of the Egyptian Bedouin was very ethnocentric. He was the 'civilised' Western officer whose duty was to bring law and order to the land and teach those noble savages about the benefits of civilisation. However, he admired their 'unspoilt' human nature, their high sense of equality, piety, virtuousness and their being 'untouched' by the modern way of life. For example, he argued that the majority of Bedouin men at that time did not know about the value of money. Speaking about one of

the Bedouin Sheikhs in the Libyan desert whom they compensated for purchasing his tribal land to construct their barracks, Dumreicher wrote, "He [the Bedouin Sheikh] confessed that he had not the slightest idea whether the Egyptian pound was worth a quail or a camel, the price of a quail being three halfpence and that of a camel eight pounds" (ibid., p.9). In another instance, he argued,

The bedouin's knowledge of external nature is limited, to an almost incredible degree, to the desert; of this his knowledge is extensive and minute; of all outside it his ignorance is complete. The same one-sidedness is to be remarked in his social being. The one institution he recognizes is the clan. He has a vague idea of what he calls the 'Miri' [governmental or official]. But for practical purposes he recognizes no institution but the family... (ibid., p.38)

Despite its ethnocentrism, as mentioned earlier, the book provides many valuable insights into Bedouin life and the application of justice. For example, it tells us that the Bedouin were compensated for any lands taken from them although it all belonged to the government by 'the right of might'. Something contemporary authorities need to consider while enforcing Law 10 for the year 1990 referred to in Appendix I. Dumreicher's experience of Bedouin life and their code of justice also made him aware that the modern codes of justice could not be applicable to them in all cases. A young man avenging his father's death seen through the state's eye as a murderer, according to a Bedouin cultural model, is a national hero (ibid., p.44). Dumreicher was also very critical of his interference in Bedouin justice despite being successful. It is useful to quote his reflections with regards to this issue as it has implications, which could be of use to contemporary police authorities dealing with the Bedouin. He thought,

For the prestige of the Camel Corps, which, at that period, was having a most difficult time in the desert, this successful intervention in the private quarrels of the nomads was of great value, but in every other respect it was unjust, unfair, and reprehensible. As an excuse for my interference I may add that, while then inexperienced in desert lore, I had studied Roman law and was still full of prejudice in its favour. This case [a blood feud between two groups], however, may have borne some little fruit if it proved to even the most narrow-minded judge that the application of the modern code to the desert without any modification is not only impolitic but also a bitter injustice, the immemorial belief in the give and take of blood justice being still paramount in the bedouin's mentality (ibid., pp.76-77)

More importantly, the book provides invaluable accounts of smugglers' strategies and methods. Camel caravans were used in transporting contraband and drugs. They could be identified by their tracks and droppings. To avoid that, smugglers would use routes used by other trading caravans in the hope that their tracks would be obliterated by the tracks



of following caravans. However, the Camel Corps trackers could still identify them as smugglers drove their caravans in straight lines and at high speed. Their camel droppings, on the other hand, were different from those of the Camel Corps. The latter contained grains of Sudanese millet (ibid, pp.94-95).

Hashish at that time was not grown in Egypt; it was smuggled from Greece and the Levant to Alexandria port and from there, Bedouin men would transport it through desert routes to Cairo and other urban centres. According to Dumreicher, intelligent Greeks and Levantines were running the trade on business lines and made sure that the risk of loss was minimal; less than ten percent. Some of those ringleaders treated “the whole business as a sport. They showed ingenious cunning and offered the most liberal bribes to attain their ends” (ibid., p.155). Throughout his book Dumreicher described the efforts of his force to stop those smugglers as a game of hide and seek. It depended on intelligence and counter espionage.

It is interesting to note that this testimony by Dumreicher about the origin of illicit drugs was confirmed to me by an old *Aiaida* informant in Ismailia. Complaining about the way the police treat Bedouin men, particularly the elderly like himself, he stated, “*The police do not respect us or our age or status. We are always accused of being drug dealers and smugglers. We are not responsible for that. We do not bring the most hazardous illicit drugs like heroin powder from Lebanon and Turkey. We do not cross borders or go through airports or ports*”(Interview, August 2003).

However, there were also Bedouin smugglers who travelled to Greece to buy the hashish like the Beni ‘Amar, whom Dumreicher described as being ‘daring robbers’, ‘rascals’ and ‘outlaws’. They gave the Camel Corps the most trouble through their ‘bravery’ and ‘resourcefulness’. They lived in a big village on the fringe of the desert in Beheira, west of the Delta. Dumreicher narrated many events of confrontation between his patrols and their convoys to seize their contraband (ibid., pp.177-182).

Instances of police misconduct associated with preventing contraband and drugs were also reported by Dumreicher. Bribery from smugglers was a common practice. Even Dumreicher himself confessed that he was once offered a large sum of money (£5,000) to be “a sleeping partner in a big smuggling trust...” (ibid., p.191). Such cases of

misconduct resulted in flooding Egypt with drugs and making smugglers gain enormous profits. One of the worst types of police misconduct referred to in the book was extortion and faked seizures of contraband, from houses of both peasants and Bedouin alike, where none existed. Dumreicher stated that he took those complaints seriously and dismissed the culprits (pp.166-167). Unfortunately, nowadays incidents of the above nature take place regularly and due to corruption thriving throughout the police ranks, they go unpunished as argued by many of my Bedouin informants.

Dumreicher also touched on another important issue – state policies which have an adverse impact on the poor, and which on the long run affect the whole fabric of the society, heighten insecurity and hinder development. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Egyptian government introduced a salt monopoly. This monopoly had a devastating impact on the Bedouin and other inhabitants who lived on the fringes of cultivated villages in Upper Egypt and who had no economic alternative than to dig for salt and sell it to villagers. Suddenly, those people were turned into thieves and were made to pay heavy fines even for ‘stealing’ a handful of salt or went to prison. The consequences of sending them to prison are expressed powerfully by Dumreicher.

... Formerly they had feared the police and prison. Now, though not realizing that they had done anything wrong, they were sent off to jail. There they came in contact with the criminal class of murderers, thieves, and blackmailers who swarm in Upper Egypt. These men are interesting and can tell fascinating stories. When the sentences are completed, the new friends join forces and commit fresh crimes. Thus the prisons became schools for criminals and the harmless salt-thieves were turned into real robbers and blackmailers (ibid., pp. 173-174).

At present, the same adverse situation happens with the case of illicit drugs. According to the Department for International Development (DFID's) Strategy Paper on *Illicit Drugs* (March 1999), the “cultivation, trafficking and use of illicit drugs are detrimental to sustainable economic and social development” (p.4). The Paper argues that “poverty is one of the root causes of the drugs problem in many developing countries” (ibid., p.5). It is usually through governments' mismanagement and laxity that the drugs problem persists causing a series of problems on different levels. It is useful to quote DFID's argument here in details before explaining the case of the Egyptian Bedouin and drugs. DFID's Paper explains that activities related to illicit drugs flourish in

... remote, marginal, underdeveloped areas of poor countries, where government institutions are weak or absent. Poor people are attracted into the industry by the lack of alternatives. Drug crop farming often appears a more attractive option than legal



alternatives to poor people living in remote areas with poor natural resources. Markets are too far away from farmers to use for the sale of licit crops. Typically, remote areas are neglected by governments, so have little in the way of public services (including education and health services) or infrastructure.

Turning to drug crop production does not, however, improve life for poor farmers. Their incomes tend to be unstable and are offset by insecurity, low levels of human development, environmental degradation and often violence. They receive a low proportion of the profits from the production and sale of drug crops. Commercial transactions associated with drug crop farming are increasingly made in kind (drugs), forcing farmers into the circuit of trafficking and consumption... When governments try to eradicate drug crops, (often done forcibly without the offer of alternative livelihoods), a climate of fear and insecurity develops. This can discourage investment in education, health, etc. Alcoholism and prostitution often flourish.

Drug crop farmers often suffer from human rights abuses. Government repression may be an explicit strategy, compounded by poor quality policing, crude eradication targets or police corruption. Production and trade in illicit drugs is often coercive and exploitative... The absence of human rights institutions and accessible justice means that human rights abuses are neither recorded nor punished. Unpaid family and child labour is often used for drug crop farming and processing... (ibid., pp.5-6).

The Paper also points out that in some countries, security and police forces have links with the drug industry. This redoubles the negative impact on the poor.

### **Illicit Drugs, Smuggling and Bedouin in Contemporary Egypt**

Almost all the points referred to in DFID's Paper were exposed to me by my Bedouin informants. Today, illicit drug trade and smuggling in Egypt, particularly in a cannabis-like plant locally known as *bango*, is thriving. It is grown in remote desert areas, and smuggled to towns and cities by some Bedouin men and farmers in vehicles normally pickup trucks. Several informal interviews with high-ranking police officers and a retired police general also completed the picture of illicit drugs in Egypt.

First asking about why some Bedouin men opt for drug crop production and smuggling as their economic model, the answers were one and the same. To one police major, *"cultivating and dealing in drugs is the only alternative to enable the Bedouin to have a high standard of living"*. The *Ahiwat* Sheikh gave a similar answer. *"Some Bedouin men have to deal in drugs because they do not have any other source of living... They know that they are forbidden and it is a sin, yet they still grow and deal in them. Nevertheless, they do not use them, as they know their hazards"*. (Interview August 2003).



Another high-ranking police officer explains, “‘Bango’ and opium are very easy to cultivate. They grow anywhere and are mainly planted in rugged terrain that are inaccessible to vehicles. Police forces [Illicit Drugs Squad] face the problem of getting access to those plantations. When they are informed of a plantation and go on a mission to raid them [seizure and burning down], the Bedouin’s watchmen see them at a distance and escape. Police forces would later go to their village and arrest one of the suspects, but they never find any drugs on them” (Interview August 2003).

Asked about methods of smuggling, the same high-ranking police officer explained, “They have brand new swift Toyota pickups, which they use for trafficking their drugs. These Toyotas are nicknamed Maradona, after the famous Argentinean football player for their high speed”.

In another long informal interview with a retired police general in Cairo, he touched on the same points in further details. The following are extracts from that interview also held in August 2003.

*... In the desert, you cannot prove ownership of a house or a building. So suppose we find drugs in a person’s house or a store in the desert and we know that they belong to him, he would claim that they are not his, as he does not live in that house and there is no documented evidence proving his ownership, so he easily gets away with it.*

*When we seize illicit drugs, we do not arrest anyone because they [smugglers/dealers] all escape before we reach them. Their knowledge of the mountains and the wilderness facilitates their escape. They therefore prefer those remote deserted areas. Those areas are unlike cities, where their movement is limited and they could get easily caught. In the city, we know that such a person lives here or has such an occupation. [i.e., easier to obtain information and carry out investigations]...*

*The reason behind the spread of this cheap drug – ‘bango’ is the rising price of hashish, and beer. Many young men, who want to be ‘high’ on drugs, find hashish very expensive. It is sold by ‘qirsh’ [a weighing unit equivalent to a few grams] Nowadays, a ‘qirsh’ costs about LE 120. Beer is also expensive. Thus, ‘bango’ became an alternative and is widespread now. It is also very easy to cultivate...*

*Those who deal in drugs only think of making a profit. They never think of the religious aspect, that it is forbidden and sinful or that they are harming others by trading in these drugs. They never use these drugs themselves and never become addicts... They [Bedouin men] are characterised by powerful intelligence and the ability to change their colour and lie. They would store their drugs in a far away place and live somewhere else totally different. They have their own system and code. They totally reject to refer to the police to solve their problems or conflicts...*

A considerable percentage of the bango crop production in Egypt nowadays takes place in Sinai and some parts of the Eastern desert. According to the high-ranking police



officer, *“Israel is to be blamed for the introduction of ‘bango’ in Egypt through Sinai. Using highly figurative language, he adds, “...When she left [end of Israeli occupation in 1982], she left her ‘bintaha’ [her daughter] behind. She is very seductive luring Bedouin men into making illicit huge profits...”*

Historical evidence from secondary sources, however, proves the contrary. Illicit drug activities started to take place in Sinai later in the twentieth century after the police forces cracked down on smugglers in other areas, particularly in the Western desert. According to Dumreicher (1931), smugglers did not use Sinai earlier in the twentieth century because it was administered by the War Office. They later turned to it after Dumreicher’s forces made it difficult for them to pursue their illegal activities elsewhere (p.204). Also, according to E. Marx (1984), *“In the early 1950s the smuggling of hashish and opium which had for generations contributed to the economy of the Bedouin became even more important. It brought more money into the locality and created the incentive to raise standards of consumption. As a result ever more Bedouin sought employment, mostly as menial laborers in Egyptian cities...”* (p.179).

During the Israeli occupation and the war years until the late 1970s, drug cultivation and smuggling activities declined to a large extent because too many risks were involved. According to one of E. Marx’s informants – a smuggling organizer, *“today there is no smuggling or commerce. Now you can only work as a laborer”* (ibid., p.182). Many Bedouin men who were involved in drugs shifted at that time to wage labour provided by the Israeli administration in Sinai. It was only after the return of Sinai to Egypt that illicit drug activities started to grow steadily and now prove to be an issue of great concern to both the authorities and the public. In my opinion, it is corruption and poor quality policing that aggravate the case of illicit drugs in Egypt.

An alarming fact that was mentioned to me by several Bedouin informants and also referred to in DFID’s Paper is the involvement of security forces in the drug industry. According to one *Heweitat* informant, *“... It is the police officers themselves who make agreements with some Bedouin men to grow those drugs, especially ‘bango’ and share the profits of the crop with them after it has been smuggled and sold. A small plot of land cultivated with this plant can reach LE 2-3 million. They share the profits 50-50. The next year, the police officer(s) would arrest the Bedouin growers and smugglers; killing two*



*birds with one stone. They make money and they get their promotion by arresting the 'bad guys' who grow and trade in drugs... Moreover, there was a former Minister of Interior... who was well known to have links with the drugs industry... Those drugs, however, usually come through the sea [ports]". He poignantly concluded, "... You cannot follow a straightforward path in this country; you have to follow hideous and wayward ways with the elite to be able to achieve your aims".* The 'Aiaida Sheikh, who eradicated all drug plantations in his *zimam* (area under his tribal leadership), also confessed that his actions were met with displeasure from some police officers who made a living through their links with the growers and smugglers of drugs. The grounds for this action by the 'Aiaida Sheikh will be explained later.

### *Smuggling People*

Before turning to a discussion of stereotypes and the Bedouin and their implication on their access to justice and other basic human rights, I would like to refer briefly to another type of smuggling that has recently become prevalent among a few Bedouin men in Sinai. It is the smuggling of migrants, particularly Russian women, who cross the Egyptian eastern borders to Israel to allegedly work in prostitution. It is a stark example of the enmeshment of Bedouin nomads in the powerful web of globalisation.

*The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (November 2000), Article 3(a), defines smuggling of migrants as "... the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident" (Quoted in Gallagher, 2002, p.27). My knowledge of this issue affirms that it does not involve the use of any type of force, coercion or abduction; therefore, it cannot be referred to as trafficking\*. As far as those Bedouin men are concerned, their job is only to carry those women to the border. Instances of smuggling Russian women came to my attention twice

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\* Trafficking in persons is defined in the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (November 2000), Article 3(a) as "...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purposes of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (Quoted in Gallagher, 2002, p.26).



in two different field sites. First in Suez, one of my *'Aiaida* informants mentioned it when he was sent for to negotiate the release of a Bedouin young man who was arrested with his camel on suspicion of smuggling.

He explained, *"Some Bedouins now smuggle Russian women who work as prostitutes in Israel. As it is difficult to obtain an entry visa to Israel, many women prefer to come to Egypt, where obtaining a visa is easier. They make agreements with Bedouin men who traffic them across the border to Israel on camelback. This issue concerns the Egyptian police, who are very alert nowadays to stop them. A Bedouin can take LE 15,000 per head. The dealer on the border would take LE 30,000 to facilitate their crossing of the border"* (Interview in July 2003).

The second occasion I came across this issue was in Sinai, where policemen at security checkpoints are adamant about arresting any Bedouin involved in smuggling people to cross the border. One problem, however, argued a police major, is that those women would dress up and cover themselves like Bedouin women. This makes it difficult for the policemen to identify them. In my opinion and as argued by Anne Gallagher (2002), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Adviser on Trafficking, the crux of the matter is not to get those migrants and their traffickers/smugglers caught, but how to stop violations of their human rights. It should not only be a matter of fighting crime and border control, but also protecting their rights and addressing their needs.

### **Stereotypical Images of the Bedouin and Their Implication on Justice**

Unfortunately, like many minority groups worldwide, the Bedouin suffer from many prejudices against them, which are mainly caused by negative stereotypical images that have been associated with them for ages and would never be easily obliterated from the memories of those who formed them. Many of those images had some basis in the distant past, but have been reduced now to only historical remnants. There was always a tension between the inhabitants of the desert and those of the sown. A few Bedouin groups were acknowledged for their illegal activities – pilfering, plundering, taking hostages and holding cattle against high ransoms, arson and much more. Many villagers paid them monthly tributes to protect their properties and selves from them. Many writers, for example Dumreicher 1931, Murray 1935, Jabbur 1995, Iman 'Amer 1997 and others,

mentioned those historical facts. The motivation behind those criminal activities, however, was destitution and lack of resources to enable those Bedouin groups live a decent life. With the establishment of modern states and their institutions of law and order, the picture improved, yet the memories remain vivid.

Current discourses by Nile Valley Egyptians in both urban and rural contexts about Bedouins revolve around the stereotypical image of them being thieves, gangsters, unruly outlaws, liars, secretive and mysterious involved in illicit drugs activities. Some people associate them with Traveller Gypsies as both groups share a bad reputation. This association with Travellers was referred to in several studies on the Bedouin such as Dumreicher (1931) who compared them to English Gypsies for their bad reputation in being involved in pilfering (p.127). This is another unjust stereotype. Anthropologists studying Bedouin communities, however, dispelled the connection between the two ethnic groups explaining that each group has a distinct culture and lifestyle such as Dawn Chatty (1986) in the case of Bedouins in North Arabia and William Young (1996) in the case of the *Rashaayda* in Eastern Sudan.

My aim in this section is to discuss the implications of this prejudice on the Bedouin's access to justice and their human rights. The Egyptian Bedouin's lack of access to fair treatment, justice and police protection makes them both poor and vulnerable. Recent studies of poverty, particularly the World Bank's (1999) *Consultation with the Poor* or *Voices of the Poor*, calls attention to the issue of poverty as not only a matter of lack of income. The 20,000 poor people from 23 countries involved in the study confirmed that safety, security and justice issues are a major concern "ranking in importance with hunger, unemployment and lack of safe drinking water" (quoted in DFID 2000, p.3). More importantly, the study showed astonishing consistency in the negative impacts of the law and order institutions on the lives of those poor people. "The police were the subject of many complaints, being perceived as lax, corrupt and often brutal..." (ibid.).

Lack of effective justice systems, according to the same report induces four types of justice-related impoverishment: failure in fulfilling stated objective of protecting people and enforcing legal rights; prevalence of police extortion and bribery making the justice system like 'organised theft'; prevalence of a culture of fear as a result of lawlessness;



and last but not least recourse of vulnerable households to their scarce incomes for self-protection (Quoted in Anderson, 2002, p.1)

Those four types of justice-related impoverishment apply to the case of the majority of the Egyptian Bedouin. The following quotes demonstrate the different abuses and injustices they are exposed to. The only reason for those abuses and prosecution by the police authority is that they are '*badu*' ['Bedouin'] who are all labelled as 'drug dealers' and 'smugglers'.

A serious type of justice-related impoverishment is extortion and faked seizure of drugs or arms, often coupled with kangaroo courts. The first account of this type is narrated by an old *Heweitat* man in al-Marg town: "*Once, a group of police detectors stormed into my home, started searching and arrested me for no reason. At the police station, they blackmailed me; unless I paid the officer LE 300 or got him a kalashnikov, Port Said brand, he would have me accused of drug dealing*". He managed to call one of his acquaintances – a police officer, who got him out.

*Shahat* – the '*Aiaida* townsman from al-Marg – narrates another story about one of his acquaintances named '*Ayad* who went to Saudi, made money and came back to open a butchery shop. "*People who envied him planted drugs on him and arranged a fake seizure. He was imprisoned and lost all his savings. His children are now living in dire conditions*".

Another *Heweitat* man from al-Salam City expressed bitterly: "*We are deeply insulted here and our rights are abused. If you want to know about the Bedouin; well, they go to prison and are displaced and have to live their lives as vagrants*". When a Saudi citizen and an Egyptian enter a police station together, the Egyptian is insulted and abused in his own country in front of the Saudi. Corporals and low ranking officers victimise us and make false accusations that lead to our imprisonment if we do not pay them money. They can plant guns or drugs on us if we do not pay what they ask for. Those low ranking officers or corporals are easily bribed. We are always accused in drug cases despite the fact that we are not involved in them. Those low-ranking officers or corporals can collect up to LE 1000-1500 per day by victimising people and taking their money"(Interview, May 2003).

Reference to Saudi Arabian citizens was specifically made because of the *Heweitat*'s strong claim to be originally from the Arabian Peninsula. One of the above *Heweitat* man's distant cousins had recently obtained a Saudi nationality after proving that his ancestors lived there. Many of the *Heweitat* and other Bedouin descent groups had applied for Saudi nationality in the early 1970s after a particular incident, which I will refer to later. The application process, however, was very lengthy and had to be supported with concrete evidence that the applicant had strong links and ancestry in Saudi Arabia. It took this particular cousin, for example, ten years to obtain a decision after submitting his application. He visits Egypt regularly and is treated differently by the authorities knowing that he is now a Saudi citizen. The *Heweitat* man, on the other hand, could not provide enough evidence of his ancestry's origin and therefore could not even obtain a visa to go to Saudi Arabia. He questioned the reason for this unjust treatment.

In another interview with the *Heweitat* man's brother, he said in utter disgust and irony, *"once we are arrested, we are free to choose which type of conviction we would like to be prosecuted for: drugs, bango or carrying weapons; you choose!"* Apparently, injustice and victimisation is not restricted only to the Bedouin. Anyone who lives in shantytowns and informal areas is prone to be victimised by some of those corrupt police officers. The Bedouin's feeling of being an outcast and a marginalized population, however, makes them more sensitive to any injustice and poor treatment.

Another type of justice-related impoverishment is unlawful seizure of people's vehicles to use them in police patrolling. Those acts are often preceded by a stop and search, confiscation of personal IDs and extortion. Nasser, another *Heweitat* man and his father relate the following account: *"Police officers usually stop us demanding that we show them our IDs. Once you hand it to them, they retain it and blackmail you until you pay them money"*. Nasser added that he once left his ID with the officer after he refused to pay him the fifty pounds he asked for. His father also did the same and applied for a new computerised ID.

Nasser adds, *"Moreover, they seize cars such as minibuses and pickups to use them on their patrols rather than using the police vehicles, which are their responsibility"*. Incidents of that nature were discussed in the widely read national newspaper *Al-Ahram* in 2003 by the renowned columnist Salama Ahmed Salama, who pleaded for more respect of people's



dignity and their properties. In another instance, during the camel race I attended in August 2003, one early morning, an officer from the military intelligence raided the tents of some Bedouin groups and seized three brand new Toyotas, not yet registered (with no number plates). Tribal sheikhs intervened and the matter was resolved after much arguments.

A further type of injustice, which heightens the emotions of insecurity and the culture of fear among people, is illegal entry by the police to search people's homes. Abu Ashraf, another *Heweitat* man in Al-Salam city complains, *"The police enter people's homes, infringing their privacy and disregarding the honour of women. Many Bedouin families have now moved and are living in Ismailia and Suez to retain their Bedouin way of life"*. Another *Heweitat* informant, Haj Mohammad, asserts the same, *"We are harassed by the police. It is everyone in the police force, both the low and high ranks; all of them are exploitative"*. Illegal entry is not only restricted to poor informal urban areas, the 'Aiaida in Ismailia also complained of the police's behaviour and unjust treatment. The 'Aiaida Sheikh refers to them as *"'midnight visitor' who usually raid houses after midnight to arrest suspects"*.

One example of police harassment mentioned to me by one of the cousins of the 'Aiaida Sheikh, shows that the bad reputation of the Bedouin is deeply inherent in the minds of people, which makes them act unfavourably towards Bedouin. He relates, *"I was once at the police station wanting to buy a police stamp tax. I gave money to a soldier on duty to get it for me. He was an acquaintance. The sheriff saw me giving him the money and thought I was bribing him to do me a favour. He dragged me immediately into custody and wanted to interrogate him. Luckily, the mayor (head of the village) was with me waiting outside in his car... He stopped them from arresting me for no reason"*.

Another major threat facing the Bedouin is losing their cultural traditions, particularly their men's traditional dress. As mentioned earlier, anyone wearing a *galabiya* literally becomes a suspect. To survive, Bedouin men have to adapt to the complex social situation and wear Western costumes. This is not the only type of assimilation that Bedouin communities need to get accustomed to. According to David Homa (2002), in his study of the South Sinai Bedouin as a culturally endangered group, Bedouin communities have to cope with the long-term challenges of sedentarisation and what accompanies it in terms of reduction of mobility, over-crowding, pollution, limited access to water and energy sources. Integration

also means coming closer to the centre of the state's power. This integration, however, as argued by Homa, comes at some cost: "They lose some of their cultural traditions; they no longer teach their mother tongue languages to their children, and they interact extensively with the Egyptian state..." (pp.55-56). Contrary to Homa's argument, many of my informants expressed their longing to be included in the national education and development policies implemented by the government. They appreciate any support provided by the government to develop and improve their livelihoods. Furthermore, they fully understand the value of education and strive to provide it for their children.

Returning to the issue of men's attire, the following narratives explain the extent of trouble the Bedouin dress can lead its wearer into: Talal, a young *Heweitat* man from Al-Salam city gives his own poignant account, *"Although we are all Egyptians, we are treated differently... Once I was driving my motorbike when a car hit me from the back and drove away. That was near al-Óbour market [Cairo-Ismailia highway]. I was left unconscious and injured. When I regained consciousness, I found a police corporal, who took me to the police station because of my dress knowing that I am an 'arabi, instead of calling an ambulance for me. We pay the price for being from an Arab origin"* (Interview, April 2003).

Another *Heweitat* man avows that he once heard police officers talking to each other, after seeing a man dressed in a white long dress knowing that he is an 'arabi, saying *"'bring him here [i.e., to them]; he's got money with him';* a plain example of how extortion takes place. My informant adds, *"The problem is that we 'arab are peaceful. We do not like problems and police officers use this point against us. Now, the 'arab [Bedouin men] are changing their attire and names to escape this harassment by the police. Egypt is good except for its injustice. Policemen are like gangsters. They make money by preying on people, especially on the 'arab. Those in al-Salam police station call it 'Kuwait' [a symbol of lavishness], as those working there can make huge money by extorting money from people"*

Both Nasser and his father mentioned above also feel they are ostracised for being 'arab. The old man states at one point, *"We are labelled as drug dealers. They [the police] always mix the innocent with the guilty"*.

The first thing a young *Aiaida* man from Ismailia talked about when I introduced myself to him was his complaint of the police treatment. He says passionately, *"We are always*



*suspected, stopped and searched because of our dress. These make us hate being Egyptians...*” Commenting on police harassment, the ‘*Aiaida* Sheikh alarmingly said, “... *This harassment make them [some Bedouin men] liable to cooperate with their enemies as their country [Egypt] becomes no longer valuable to them*”.

My fieldwork was taking place during the events of the War on Iraq, which started in March 2003. The war was always the prime subject of discussion in any meeting or interview that I carried out. One alarming point that was often repeated to me by many of my Bedouin informants was their wish that the Americans would come to Egypt to save them from the injustices inflicted upon them. Many argued that a popular uprising might take place once external support was provided. Wrath would be incurred mainly on the police authorities. The media at that time was promoting the claims that the American-led war was motivated by protecting the human rights of the Iraqi people and overthrowing the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein. As events began to unravel and the true face of the American occupation started to emerge, some of my ‘*Aiaida* informants showed pride that the resistance was carried out mainly by tribesmen of Bedouin origin such as the Marsh Arabs in the South.

It would be interesting to know what public opinion, especially the Bedouin’s, is now after the incidents of human rights abuses of prisoners at Iraqi prisons by their former saviours and the increasing insecurity and chaos at the present. One thing, however, that the Americans or Westerners in general are admired for is their faithfulness and honesty. Those attributes were documented by Thesiger (1967) in his monograph about the Marsh Arabs. Speaking about the English, in particular, his Arab companions told him, “...They did not lie, they did not take bribes and they did not oppress the poor. We Moslems, as you well know, do all these things...” (p.124). Again, the same thing was mentioned about the Israelis, “*despite being enemies and disbelievers*”, said one ‘*Aiaida* informant from Sinai, “*they are honest and keep their words and promises. Whatever promises they make, they keep them, unlike the Egyptian authorities. We know that they are infidels, however, they are better...*” Relations between Muslims and the West from a Bedouin perspective are discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

## Dilemma of Internally Displaced Bedouin

In the previous chapter, I touched on the issue of land use and expropriation by the state to undertake public utility projects. One of the negative consequences of this issue is the eviction and internal displacement of the population who do not have legal ownership of the land. This type of internal displacement as a result of public utility projects is known as development-induced displacement. Commentators on this issue such as Bjorn Pettersson (January 2002), a coordinator at the Norwegian Refugee Council's Global Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Project, considers it as no longer an internal affair but rather an international human rights issue.

In an interesting article published in the twelfth volume of *Forced Migration Review* (January 2002), Pettersson critically assesses the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, especially those pertaining to development-induced displacement. The Guiding Principles ambiguously refer to that type of displacement; it falls under what is termed as a "human-made disaster". Such development projects, however, need to be justified by "compelling and overriding public interests", or else the resulting arbitrary displacement will be deemed prohibited, according to Principle 6.2(c). Pettersson questions this Principle, "Who has the authority to adjudicate that 'compelling and overriding public interest' can justify forcing people off their lands?" (p.17). The answer comes from one of the drafters of those Principles, Walter Kalin who suggests that is justified when "the requirements of necessity and proportionality are met" (Quoted in Pettersson, 2002, p.17). The problem, however, is that no further light is shed on that matter and it is left to the discretion of governments and development agencies. Pettersson argues that national sovereignty comes with certain human rights responsibilities and the people's right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose residence according to Article 12 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) has to be respected and implemented (pp.18-19).

In a more controversial article published in the same volume of *Forced Migration Review*, Scott Leckie (January 2002), the Executive Director of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), draws attention to the plight of evicted people as a result of 'development cleansing'. The arguments stated by Leckie apply to an enormous extent to

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\*Development cleansing' is a term coined by Balakrishnan Rajagopal in his article entitled 'The Violence of Development' published in the *Washington Post* (8August 2001).



the situation of some Bedouin groups in Egypt and it is thus useful to summarise some of those arguments.

Leckie begins his argument by saying,

Many of those forced to permanently vacate their homes as a result of development projects, slum clearance operations, urban renewal and redevelopment measures, city 'beautification' schemes, compulsory purchase orders, arbitrary land acquisition, expropriation measures ('eminent domain') or land disputes have escaped the attention of the IDP movement (p.20).

As those forced evictions are meant to be permanent, they therefore take place "within the context of violations of the right to adequate housing", as stated by the UN pronouncements on forced evictions (ibid., p.21). An IDP advocacy movement was set up recently, which recognises the right of IDPs to security of place. "...everyone everywhere has an enforceable and defensible right to physical security and rights to housing, property and land, including rights to security of tenure" (ibid.). This last type of security, argues Leckie, is

a relatively new term to the human rights community and the IDP movement but one with tremendous potential in terms of preventing arbitrary displacement or eviction before it occurs... Such a right makes no presumption that one form of tenure is necessarily preferred over another. In other words, owners, tenants, traditional occupants, **squatters** and all other types of tenure groups could be protected... (ibid.) (My emphasis).

Protection in this quote is also relevant to all nomadic groups and applies to them.

Before turning to the accounts of displaced Bedouins themselves, I would like to end this review of the literature about IDP with a quotation from a court ruling in Nicaragua, which reveals a remarkable and outstanding approach to how states should protect their citizens' human rights, particularly their property rights.

The Court stated that the tribe's [Awas Tingi indigenous group in Nicaragua] tie to the land formed the fundamental basis of their cultures, their spiritual life, their integrity and their economic survival. It reasoned that the tribe's relation to the land is "not merely a matter of possession and production but a material and spiritual element which they must fully enjoy, even to preserve their cultural legacy and transmit it to future generations"... (Quoted in Bailliet, February 2003, p.10).

As mentioned in the chapter on Bedouin self ascription, land to the Bedouin is "honour and dignity". The way the Egyptian government authorities dealt and is still dealing with the minority Bedouin communities forcibly evicting them from their lands is an absolute breach of their human rights, including their right to the security of place and tenure. More

abhorrent is the fact that forced eviction is coupled with other types of human rights violations and injustices by the police authorities as depicted in the following accounts.

Nasser, his father and older brother narrate, “*We used to live in Gisir al-Sues Street in the area now known as ‘arab el-gisir [near Heliopolis, northeast Cairo]. That was 30 years ago when they evicted us*”. The father and the older brother disagreed about the exact year. The former argues that it was in 1973, while the latter says it was in 1976. The older son continues, “... *the local council demolished our house without prior notification... Tell me, how can you ask me after that to love my country, protect and defend it? We hate the bad treatment they give us and we hate the army... We were left without shelter, exposed to the elements for a whole week, before we moved to where we live now [Abu Regeila]. The same thing happened to my uncles in Belbeis when the army bombarded their village with missiles and Napalm after two officers were killed to avenge their deaths... People complain of what the Jews are doing to the Palestinians and they are doing the same thing to us here*” (Interview, May 2003).

This reference to the army’s bombardment of a village in Belbeis District, Sharkiya governorate in 1966 was confirmed to me by several people. The residents of the cited village were drug dealers who killed two high-ranking police officers in one of the raids to seize the contraband. (See below for one version of the narrative). The government retaliated in that extreme manner. After that incident, according to Nasser’s father, officials from the Saudi Embassy in Cairo came to investigate the matter and encouraged the Bedouin, particularly from three descent groups – the *Heweitat*, *Belli* and *Ma’aza* – to apply for Saudi nationality. He made an application ten years ago but has not heard from them since. Nasser, who worked in Saudi Arabia for some time, commented that he admired the Saudis’ security system, order and respect for people and their rights.

Another *Heweitat* informant who currently lives in Al-Salam city narrates, “*In 1975, when the plan was set to construct madinet el-Salam, the government promised to build a Bedouin village for us. This never happened and we were evicted instead. The number of Bedouin at that time was estimated at 10,000. About 30-50 families only are still living in el-Salam now ... The rest have moved to Ismailia, Belbeis and other areas... The main tribes found here were the Heweitat, Belli, Ma’aza and Tarabiyn*” (Interview May 2003).



The course of eviction and abuses was explained as follows, by another *Heweitat* informant. *“Officials from the local council and police come to those Bedouin families to be evicted pretending they will compensate them. They ask for their personal details and ask them to get their possessions, especially the money and jewellery. Then the police extort them... Before destroying their houses, they throw their few items of furniture out; pour out by force their sacks of flour and rice; take their possessions; and threaten to arrest and detain them if they complain. They address them saying, ‘ya awlad el-kalb – ya ghagar’* [literally ‘you sons of a dog, you **Gypsies**], *‘what made you come here to Egypt’”*. My informant defiantly asserts that such inhumane evictions and abuses are taking place up to the present time. He is ready to provide me with details and serial numbers of complaints filed by Bedouin men against many abusive police officers (Interview in May 2003 – my emphasis).

This last quotation clearly indicates that such violations of Bedouin human rights are based to a considerable extent on prejudices arising from negative stereotypical images about the Bedouin, particularly associating them with Gypsies. As far as I know, reports on human rights violations in Egypt such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have never referred to such incidents. In an informal discussion I had with a human rights activist at the Cairo Centre for the Studies of Human Rights in June 2003, he seemed unaware of such violations.

### **Paying Homage to the Egyptian Bedouin**

In contrast to the negative stereotypes of Bedouin people, Egypt is much indebted to its Bedouin communities and the authorities should pay them homage for their endeavours to protect Egypt’s security and its national interests. Unfortunately, very few people know this information as argued by many of my informants. Haj Mohamed of the *Heweitat*, for example, makes it clear, *“el-nass* [literally laypeople, i.e., general Egyptian public] *know nothing about the issues, concerns and problems of the Bedouin, who played an important role in the 1967 and 1973 wars. No one, however, admits or acknowledges this fact. They have many martyrs and brave men. The only people who know about these facts are the Military Intelligence Corps who recruited these Bedouin men”*.

Several of my older informants in Ismailia and Sinai were granted medals after the 1973 War by the late President Sadat for their services to the Egyptian military during the war



years. The 'Aiaida Sheikh, one of those honoured for his invaluable services, however, blames the Bedouin leaders for their lack of concern about being rewarded. He relates, *"after the victory in 1973, President Sadat invited all the tribal Sheikhs of Sinai and the Bedouin men who served in the army to take part in the celebrations but none of them cared to go. Now, we've been forgotten"*.

Good deeds, however, are not overlooked even if their doer had a bad record in the past, as another old *Heweitat* informant argues. He narrates the full story of the infamous bombardment of the Belbeis village, which he argues all 'arab know very well. Its events took place in 1966.

*One Bedouin man, who worked as a guide for the police, informed the Illicit Drugs Squad at Nozha police station that there was a smuggling operation taking place in Belbeis. A police general, the guide and two police officers travelled at dawn to seize the contraband and arrest the offenders. The smugglers felt that the police were approaching them, so they started shooting at them. The general and one of the police officers were killed and the guide was badly injured in his head after a gunshot slightly missed his head. Among the smugglers, there were two cousins, one of them was convicted for a crime and could be imprisoned for 25 years. After this incident, the two cousins decided to escape, as they knew the government would not leave them alone. They sought refuge in Israel. The police took revenge by burning down all the area where they used to live. One of these smugglers was married to two women. The other had three wives. They left them as well as everything else behind to escape. One of their Bedouin acquaintances assisted them by giving them a camel for their transport. Then, the 1967 war broke out and the "naksa" [the infamous defeat], as you know was great. The first smuggler – the one convicted for 25 years – returned to Sinai immediately after the war and while wandering in the Sinai desert, he met a group of lost Egyptian soldiers and two army generals who were attempting to return to Egypt. They asked for his assistance and he introduced himself to them as an Egyptian and told them his story. They promised that if he would save their lives and take them back to Cairo, they would do their best to assist him and prove him innocent. The man exerted a tremendous effort to take them through the desert and save them. He used to beg for food to cater for them and protect them with his "kalashnikov" made in Israel. He succeeded in taking them to Suez, where they met the Minister of Interior who was there at the time of their arrival. They informed him of the whole story and the Minister contacted President Nasser who asked to meet all of them. He met the fugitive, praised and exonerated him of all the crimes he had committed. He gave him permission to carry his gun. He even joked with him asking him where his gun was made and when he responded "Israel", the President asked him if he would like to keep it. He answered, "as you like it ya Bey [sir]". He gave him permission to keep it and the man returned to his wives and children. His cousin is still a fugitive in Israel (Interview, January 2003).*



One thing to be concluded from this dramatic narrative is that reconciliation between the Bedouin and the authorities could be achievable. Commitment, understanding and justice, however, are imperative to make it work.

## Finding a Way Out

The question that comes right away to one's mind after listening to all those narratives and testimonies about injustices and abuses to Bedouin men is "what could be done about it?" I asked this question to all my informants who raised this issue. In the majority of cases, the answer was, "*No comment*" or "*We can do nothing about it. There is no one to speak on our behalf because we are ignorant*". Some became silent, looking at me, then looking upwards pointing their forefinger upwards; i.e., it is in the hands of God to resolve the matter. Very few, however, seemed determined to do something about it. The 'Aiaida poet of the desert argues that the answer lies in embracing the moral and ethical principles of Islam, particularly justice. He stresses, "... *I would like the officials and governors to be just like the ancient followers of the Prophet, especially Omar ibn Khattab. A governor is supposed to be a father like figure responsible for his children, or people living in the territory he is governing...*"

The 'Aiaida Sheikh is one Bedouin man determined to make that change and struggle against injustices. He asserts,

*We [Bedouin people] should have our rights like others. We are very patriotic people, but we are marginalised in many aspects. The police can raid our villages, arrest our men, search their homes and interrogate them. We do not complain because we are not educated and we are not ready to be hanging around in police stations or offices making complaints. We say, "It is better to be good and stay quiet". I myself talked to many officials about that treatment. I believe it is getting better nowadays, especially after the police administration was changed here a year ago. However, under the Emergency Law, there is still some annoyance. There are many hard-line police officers and others who are good and leave us with a good memory in our hearts...*

Emphasising the illicit drugs issue, he adds,

*The Bedouin are always perceived as enemies and evildoers because of growing illicit drugs. But using force is not the proper solution to the drugs issue. They [police] should arrange for a meeting with all tribal sheikhs, link them together in an agreement and give them authority and access to vehicles and a stipend and they can do the job and stop their own people growing illicit drugs. I did that*

*myself in the region under my control reaching 90 sq. km and I assure you that it has succeeded 100 percent. The problem, however, is that some police officers do not like what I did. They want to show that they are the ones who did it. Although the government knows what I have done, nothing was reported as a best practice to combat the cultivation of illicit drugs...*

*The Bedouin society is not bad. In any society, there are the good and the bad. They should not put the two together. Again, we as sheikhs have a role, but they do not want us to interfere or give us any authority. The power of Sheikhs, however, differs from one group or tribe to the other... (Interview June 2003).*

To stop the growing of illicit drugs in the area under his control, the 'Aiaida Sheikh agreed with the other tribal sheikhs in the area to eradicate all the plantations and report anyone who grows or deals in drugs. His area is acknowledged by everyone to be totally clear of any drugs. This, however, as I was told later by him in an informal discussion, did not please some police officers who used to make a living from illicit drugs, as explained earlier.

After listening to the Bedouin viewpoint and their perception of finding a way out, it was also important to listen to the police's arguments. Asking the retired Police General, "what could the state do to help the Bedouin people?" He answered, "*There is no solution [particularly to their involvement in illicit drugs activities]. It is very difficult to do anything for them or increase their loyalty*". He believes that what some Bedouin men say about being persecuted and harassed by the police is untrue because "*the role of the police is mainly to investigate crimes and arrest criminals... We have no time for harassing people...*"

A totally different argument, however, was made by a police major. He indicated that it is intentional to leave the Bedouin, particularly in Sinai, living under those dire conditions in the desert for strategic military reasons. Would this reason make the state concede the Bedouin's need to improve their livelihoods by growing illicit drugs? This question brings about a dilemma, which I believe is difficult to be easily resolved.

The Police Major argues,

*... It is important for the government to leave them [the Bedouin] as they are because they constitute a strategic dimension in protecting our eastern borders. Their knowledge of the paths, the topography of Sinai, the rugged terrain, etc. are all important things that the army needs to know to protect our boundaries... It is the Military Intelligence and Tribes' Affairs Bureau [another intelligence body] that know the details of the tribes and their history, and know*



*how to deal with them and recruit them as guides... The Bedouin still living as pastoralists in the desert have not been 'tamed' yet like the ones who settled long ago and conform to the state policies and system. If you observe, you will find that they always build their tents and huts facing the eastern direction so that the sun rises in front of them. This is due to their innate fear of any enemy or intruder coming to them who usually comes from the east. Even when they build block and concrete houses, they still prefer to have their tents pitched next to them, as they feel insecure inside those houses. They always like to be exposed to the elements... (Interview August 2003).*

## **Personal Reflections and Implications: A Conclusion**

No matter how 'wild' or 'tame' the Bedouin are, the fact remains that they are human beings who need to live a decent life and be given some respect for their human rights. After listening to the stories of the Bedouin men about corruption and injustice, I felt rage and disgust. The narratives depicted a jungle where only the fittest survive. Leeching becomes a fact of life. Strong groups of people who have power, leech other groups lower in the pyramid of power and status until you reach the very bottom, where the poor and vulnerable get crushed. Living with the Bedouin, particularly some of the vulnerable among them has given me an idea of how some poor people really live. One big challenge, however, I believe facing me is to have the capacity to deal with these injustices. Using my knowledge to help the Bedouin in that matter becomes an obligation particularly after some informants asked me to put in my study their anger about corruption and lack of justice. Exposing such incidents, in my opinion, does not make me disloyal to my country. Some other informants were anxious about the fact that I am undertaking my study at a Western university and expressed their fear that I would say things, which would depict them and our country – Egypt – negatively. I was advised by some to fear God in what I say and do. I am committed to this and God shall be my witness.

Whilst analysing and writing up the material of this chapter, I thought about why Bedouin men are labelled as outlaws? Could it be for their past actions of raiding and warfare and the present involvement of some of them in illicit drugs and other unlawful activities? There are several causes for a person to become an outlaw, e.g., injustice, double standards, marginalisation and deprivation from the benefits of development to mention a few. All these factors lead to despair. Many Bedouin groups faced and are still facing unjust treatment, are deprived and are considered a minority cultural group. Some get involved in

illegal activities such as smuggling of drugs and other contraband or form bandit groups. These activities, however, should not make them all be labelled as outlaws. The nature or temperament of the Bedouin is not of the extreme type. They accept compromises and are ready for adapting themselves. They have no fanatical views either, unlike some extremists who hold strict views and refuse middle ways. Accumulation of injustices, however, could breed hatred and rage. In that case, it would become difficult to predict the consequences. The solution is simple from a Bedouin perspective: justice and treatment with respect.

Changing negative stereotypical images is also of the essence. It is not factual that all Bedouin men are smugglers. One remarkable example that proves false this 'fact' is the '*Aiaida* Sheikh's practice. More notable is the cooperation of his people and their resolution to disallow any illicit drugs activities. This group of '*Aiaida*'s strong religious beliefs and practices are the key reasons behind that. They are members of a Sufi order named *al-Tariqa al-Gaririya al-Aḥmadiya*. The next chapter studies the doctrine and methods of this order in details.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### BEDOUIN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS: UNDERSTANDING SUFISM IN A BEDOUIN CONTEXT

#### Introduction

There is an obvious difference between a discussion of religion and other aspects of Bedouin social life because religion is markedly bound up with the emotional side of their lives and their system of beliefs and practices. An interest in contemporary Bedouin culture and the Bedouin perception of the meaning of life cannot ignore this aspect of their lives as it forces itself and dominates people's actions and relationships with the entire universe. The discussion of Bedouin religious beliefs is a difficult subject to approach because it deals mainly with *Islam*. Anthropologists, who concentrated their studies by and large on small-scale, technologically simple societies, speak of religious systems of beliefs particular to those societies such as the Nuer religion (Evans-Pritchard, 1956) or the religion of the Dinka (G. Lienhardt, 1961) and so forth. Such societies are "characterized by religious and cult systems peculiar to the given linguistic and/or ethnic grouping, and, while there is often a diffusion of symbols and beliefs across boundaries, the religious complex in its cognitive, ritual, and mythical dimensions is regarded by both observer and adherent as specific of that society" (Gilsenan, 1973, p.181). Islam, on the other hand, is a universal religion. There are over 1.3 billion Muslims around the world. The universality of Islam is *claimed* to transcend ascriptive statuses of ethnic and language boundaries and encompass within an order of belief and institutions a wide variety of societies and modes of life (ibid.).

In this chapter, I agree with the arguments of many scholars (Berger, 1970; Trimingham, 1971; Lings, 1975; Lubeck, 1987; Turner, 1994; Gilsenan, 1982, Ahmed, 1992 and others) that Islam as a religion cannot be seen as a "monolithic bloc". "The familiar statement that Islam is a religion, a culture, and a polity is no doubt illuminating, but it also conceals the diversity that has accompanied this integrative tendency" (Berger, 1970, p.2). The Islamic world is by no means homogenous. One should note the diversity of Muslim societies themselves and the diversity of their cultural and historical heritage. Even with the interpretation of the *Quran*, each culture has a selective interpretation of scripture. In many matters, Muslims' ideas of what is right and wrong vary from place to place and time to time despite the fact that there is only One Source and One Revelation.

“There is only one water, but no two Revelations are outwardly the same...” (Lings, 1975, p.12).

There is a great diversity, multiplicity and complexity of Islamic cultures, lifestyles, traditions and values around the globe, which “preclude an essentialist version of a monolithic ‘Islam’” (Turner, 1994, p.102). This is particularly obvious in the case of new converts to Islam as explained by Adlin Adnan (1999) in his study of converts in Britain.

The mosaic and pluralism of Islam should make people abandon reductionism and all reified notions of ‘Islam’ as an universal essence in order to allow us to understand many ‘Islams’ in all their complexity and diversity (Turner, 1994, p.104; Ahmed, 2002, p.3).

The second problem related to understanding Islam is analysing it as a socio-political system from sociological and political perspectives. These analytical perspectives have become clear first after the fall of the Communist Bloc and the fame given to theories such as Samuel Huntington’s (1993) “The Clash of Civilizations?” whereby Islam has become a political ideology constituting a major threat to the existence of the Western world. This perception has become more intensified after 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 where Islam has been put under the microscope. It is not the objective of this chapter to analyse the arguments related to this aspect of Islam. I am referring to it with the aim of showing that within the “Islamic” societies, there are two forces colliding together: “secular” and “radical” religious movements. These two movements have their impact on the Bedouin communities that form the focus of this study and cannot be separated from the analysis.

With the advent of modernism and secularism in the Islamic world, especially in many Middle Eastern states, since the second half of the nineteenth century, there has been a decline in the influence of religious ideas and organisations upon social and political life. At the same time, due to rapid political change, abuse of human rights, denial of free expression, stress and frustration from the inability to achieve development goals, many people turned to religion to find the salvation and stability they are aspiring for. In this sense, religion becomes a coping strategy, i.e., a cognitive and behavioural effort to manage the stresses exceeding their capabilities (Gross & McIlveen, 1998, p.166). In my opinion, it is an ‘emotion-focused’ coping strategy as it does little to reduce or eliminate



the long-term effects of the stressors. Religion has also provided these people with a form of solidarity and social support still permitted to them. Islam, as a religion, has always been and will continue to be the uppermost in the life of vast numbers of Muslims and a guiding principle in their actions. The return to Islam could also be seen as “a polemical response to the vast colonial enterprise of conquest carried out by Western countries” (Ernst, 1997, p. xii). Islamic movements took many forms and shapes. The radical ones\* have focused their wrath on accusations of the secularism and moral corruption associated with ‘the West’\*\* (ibid.).

The trend toward the revival of religion is not a modern age phenomenon that occurred only as a response to secularism and Westernisation. It has its roots deeper in history. In a study of the Sufi Literature in Egypt in the thirteenth century (seventh century of the Muslim Calendar), Husain, Ali Safi (1964) explained that Sufi religious movements flourished at that time as a response to the “oppression, defeat in war, immorality, irreligion and poverty. These conditions stirred pious men to preach a return to religion and self-sacrifice, and they won over many people disturbed and frustrated in such times” (Quoted in Berger, 1970, p.75).

Since the nineteenth century, Sunni Islamic religious movements sought salvation through different paths. One path was through Sufism and the establishment of *Turuq* or Sufi Order. At first there was symbiotic relationship between the orders and other orthodox groups, but by the 1920s onwards, the relationship turned into hostility and denunciation of the Sufi Orders (*turuq*) as deviant (Trimingham 1971, p.245; Gilsenan, 1973, p.188).

By the mid twentieth century the situation has changed more. The rise of nationalist movements and rapid socio-economic changes coupled with increasing social differentiation have led to the erosion of the old unity of values based on Divine Revelation. More radical methods were therefore sought. Sufi orders became seen as ‘passive retreatism’ and their leaders were left without a social *raison d’être*, or the means to assert their leadership (Gilsenan, 1973, pp.204-205).

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\* I prefer using the term ‘radical’ or ‘militant’ Islamic movements rather than fundamentalist as the latter connotes a return to the basics of religion or orthodoxy.

\*\* I use the term “West” like Ernst (1997) now as a code word for the governing political, economic and scientific authority invested in European and American countries and, to a lesser extent, in their former colonies.

The radical movement, however, has alienated many groups of the Egyptian society who viewed these radical Muslims as oppressors and therefore some groups turned again to Sufism as the way to freedom and universality. Some Bedouin groups have followed that path.

A third problem related to the interpretation of Islam is stereotyping by both Muslims and Westerners alike. One reason for this stereotyping originates from seeing Islam as a monolithic bloc as mentioned earlier. To the West, for example, Islam has always been related to the study of Orientalism (Said, 1978). As a basic variant of the Abrahamic faith, it is seen as a sectarian offshoot of the Christian faith or a parasitic upon Christian culture (Turner, 1994, p.22). Recently with the upsurge of militant movements and suicide bombings, Islamic ideology has become associated with terrorism.

By acknowledging the diversity of cultures within the Islamic world, people tend to form a different kind of stereotyping about Muslims' knowledge and practice of Islam based on regions. According to Trimingham (1971), for example, these cultural differences among various Muslim societies mould in many ways the expression of Islam. "Islamic legalistic culture received its fullest expression within town and city, and was found at its weakest among nomads, whether Arab, Berber, or Turkish. And similarly with the religious orders; their popularity and the hold they exercised varied in different environments" (p. 219).

In his study of the Egyptian Bedouin, Murray (1935) argued that the Bedouin's religious knowledge is minimal. Their conception of God and the next world is purely materialistic. Talking specifically about the Sinai Bedouin, Murray added that although Islam originated in such a desert community like theirs, it has hardly reached them. Such arguments based on stereotypical images are still prevalent up to the present among many sectors of the Egyptian society. My experience with the *'Aiaida* Bedouin in particular, however, prove otherwise. They have deep knowledge of the religion and its practices.

It should be mentioned in this respect that many travellers and anthropologists (such as Dickson, 1949; Thesiger, 1984; and Cole, 1975), who studied different Bedouin groups,



especially in Arabia, have acknowledged their strong religious beliefs and practices as inherent in their value system. The '*Aiida*'s Islamic doctrine, however, is deeply rooted in Sufism and mystical contemplation.

### **Approach to Studying Islam**

In an attempt to work out the problems related to a discussion and analysis of a universal religion such as Islam, in my opinion, we have to tackle it from several perspectives. The first is the anthropological perspective, which forms a solid basis for understanding and analysis. Anthropology can enable us to understand the specificity of Islam by studying a particular society at a particular time and place. The understanding of this society must be based on the analysis of specific situations, while clearly underscoring both the historical and contemporary factors that form the cultural meanings specific to that society. This can preclude falling into the dangerous trap of generalisations and drawing upon pre-existing assumptions and stereotypes, which provide a matrix of interpretations of contrasts and differences. According to Turner (1994), "the anthropological gaze should be also directed towards the otherness of Western culture in order to dislodge the privileged position of dominant Western cultures"\* (p.104).

With the anthropological perspective, we need a 'global' perspective that sees several *Islams* within a global context of interpenetration instead of the dichotomy of North/South or East/West (Turner, 1994, p.104). At the same time, we need reflexive, self-critical, postmodern and hermeneutical perspectives. "Reflexivity produces a new focus of the self in postmodernity" (ibid. p.184). As individual human beings, we should have the right to seek out our own meanings and beliefs, and form our own lives (ibid., p.195). The reflexive, self-critical attitudes also help us to understand and appreciate the diversity and complexity of Islamic traditions and values, which preclude an essentialist version of a monolithic 'Islam' (ibid., p.102). Postmodern and hermeneutics as congenial methods also give us justice, which enables us to give primacy to difference, heterogeneity and diversity, as well as an appreciation of local knowledge (ibid.).

Last but not least, religious beliefs have a strong cognitive dimension. Religion is a personal and individual cognitive phenomenon. This, however, would bring about

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\* I use "Western culture" here to problematise the arguments of Western ethnographers/travellers as well as to refer to my own specific culture being an urbanite influenced by modernism.

another predicament in the understanding of Islam. Is Islam a personal faith or a social organisation/system, or both? There is a distinction here between the private and the public domain or between the esoteric and the exoteric expressions of the religion.

Sociological approaches to Islam usually depict it as a “social movement” (Gellner, 1969, p.127). Although Islam, more than any other religion, is a blue print of social order, the individual is the basis or the building block of the religion. Islam is primarily interested in the individual and establishing ‘*aqida* (faith or belief). Reducing Islam to collective social actions (c.f. Durkheim 1858-1917 in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*) is therefore dangerous and does not present the full picture.

The anthropological perspective once again proves to be more appropriate in this respect. Early anthropologists working on “Primitive Religions” like E.B. Tylor (1891) focus on beliefs as being more important than social actions (Mair, 1972, p.212). Beliefs are reached through Gnosticism\*. It generates primarily from an internal cognitive activity in the human mind. It is mainly intuitive and non-verbal and is thus difficult to explain in words. These internal ideas are then interpreted into the form of rituals and social actions. I shall refer to this issue later in further details in the discussion of the esoteric/exoteric dichotomy.

In the following pages of this chapter, however, I attempt to discuss and analyse Islamic beliefs and symbols as they form cultural meanings to the ‘*Aiaida* Bedouin. The chapter concentrates on Islamic religious activities, doctrine, method and organisation of the ‘*Aiaida* Sufi Order. The chapter also discusses the ‘*Aiaida*’s relationship with the state and their perceptions of Islam in a wider context and its relationship with the West. Before that, I briefly explain what is meant by Sufism and its socio-cultural implications.

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\* Gnosticism is derived from the Greek word *gnosis* related to knowledge or investigation, which is also the root for ‘cognitive’ and ‘cognition’. Gnosticism assumes knowledge of a spiritual or a supernatural world that brings with it the promise of salvation (Gregory, 1987, p.294).



## Sufism: A Brief Synopsis

Like Islam, the subject of Sufism is difficult to approach as it is controversial and involves various viewpoints. Before delving into the analysis of Bedouin Sufism, I shall provide a brief synopsis of the meaning of Sufism, its beginnings and some of the current arguments about its religious legitimacy.

Sufism (*taṣawwuf* in Arabic) has different etymological roots. Some scholars argue that it is derived from *ṣuf* (literally wool). *Ṣufi* is woollen and by extension 'wearer of wool'. The term *Ṣufi* was first applied to Muslim ascetics who clothed themselves in coarse garments of wool.

*Ṭaṣawwuf* is also linked with the Arabic word *ṣuffa* or bench (source of the English word *sofa*), and in this sense it invokes the historical memory of the People of the Bench, a group of poor followers of the Prophet Muhammad who were homeless and slept on a bench in Medina, sharing their meagre belongings and supplies. This derivation according to Ernst (1997), "clearly attempted to link the Sufis with an early group of ascetic followers of the Prophet, but just as importantly, it established the ideal of shared community as the basis of Sufi mysticism" (p.22).

Another etymology, first suggested by the Arab philosopher and traveller al-Biruni, links Sufi with the Greek word for wise man, *sophos*, and hence with Greek philosophy. This derivation has not played any role in Sufi literature, however, it has been revived again by Orientalists like Sir William Jones (1807) and the German philosopher Tholuck (1821) (Ernst, 1997, p.20).

*Ṭaṣawwuf* is also derived from *ṣafw* (literally purity) and *ṣafwa* (literally the chosen or selected ones). In that sense, it has the meaning of what has been sifted as grain is sifted from chaff. One of the names of Prophet Muhammad is *Muṣṭafa* (literally the Elect, the chosen by God). The 'Aiaida Sufi Bedouin refer to themselves as *ahl el-ṣafa* (literally the people of purity). To them, Sufism is *ṣafa'a* or purity of the heart. In fact, the whole notion of Sufism revolves around the notion of the purification of hearts (*taṣfiyat al-qulub*), which indicates, "a rigorous ethical discipline based on meditative exercises" (Ernst, 1997, p.23). To Lings (1975), 'purity' is the beginning and end of Sufism. It is linked to Divine Origin (p.77). The core of Sufism is "the establishing of the personal

link between the lover and the Loved, rather than the distance separating worshipper from the transcendental, omnipotent God; the state of the heart (*qalb*), not the quality of man's actions" (Gilsenan, 1973,p.130).

There is no one comprehensive definition for a wide term like Sufism. Muslim Sufis or mystics traditionally refer to it as meaning certain ethical and spiritual ideals. In practice, it is contemplative and emotional mysticism (Trimingham, 1971, p.2). And in general, it is used as a descriptive term for a body of religious beliefs, philosophy and practices of the mystical tradition of Islam (Ernst, 1997, pp. xvi-xvii).

From personal experience and practice with the *'Aiaida* Sufis, I conceive of Sufism as a standard term for those who practice a type of Islamic ritual, attempting to reach knowledge of God. This internal or esoteric practice is reflected on the external social domain in terms of ideal social duties (*mu'amalat*) covering manners, ethics and social habits. In this sense, Islam, as a religion, is purely concerned with the domain of *mu'amalat* (social duties) based on the *ḥadith* (Prophet's tradition), "*al-din al-mu'amala*" (Religion is a social duty).

There is an ongoing debate since the term Sufism was first used whether it is inherent in Islamic beliefs and practices or a deviant form of Islam. As there is no one version of Islam, there is no one form of Sufism. Only those who develop an understanding of the theosophy and practice of Sufism know that it is deeply rooted in Islamic principles and jurisprudence, while those who attack it as alien to Islam, base their arguments on its stereotypes. The majority of Muslim scholars and Orientalists acknowledge that it developed within the general framework of Islam. For example, Ibn Khaldun, writing in the fifteenth century, argued that the title 'Sufi' was given to those people who dedicated themselves to the worship of God as opposed to others who got carried away by worldly ambitions and its vanities (Quoted in Ernst, 1997, p.17). Many orientalist also held the same view that asceticism and mysticism are integral parts of Islam (Berger, 1970, p.64).

Sufism has followed two main streams: the first, beginning after Prophet Muhammad's death, is that of individuals "who felt a call to the mystical or devotional life. The second is the corporate pursuit of the 'way' *tariqa* by groups of Muslims who came together in



the Sufi Brotherhoods following one of the great Saints of medieval Islam” (Gilsenan, 1973, p.1).

Sufism is divided in several hundred *turuq* or Orders (literally ‘ways’ or ‘paths’). The number of *turuq* is dramatic. The spread in the number of Sufi Orders has started for several internal and external reasons. Internal reasons include political factors such as the upsurge in the importance of tribal groups and dynastic struggles as well as religious factors, specifically as a reaction against Islamic formalism and rigidity. External factors, on the other hand, that led to the spread of Sufi orders, were mainly as a result of pressures from Western invasions during the Middle Ages in the form of the Crusades and in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the form of colonialism. Historical studies acknowledge the effective role played by these Sufi Orders in defending Muslim lands against the encroachments of Europeans (Berger, 1970, pp.65-66).

By the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Sufi orders have declined mainly for their failure to play an important role on the political arena and to cater for the needs of their followers at a time of great socio-political upheaval. The exoteric/esoteric dichotomy in the practice of Islam is considered another reason behind the decline of Orders. Trimingham (1971) views this decline as “symptomatic of the Muslims to adapt their traditional interpretation of Islam for life in a new dimension. Islam as exoteric religion addresses itself to the whole of humanity, conveying the truth in a form that can be lived by anybody, whereas mysticism is a way open to but few” (p.258). Lings (1975) also follows the same line of analysis arguing that “[t]he relationship between Islamic esoterism and exoterism is thus both complex and delicate, and looked at from the outside it could seem that the Sufis are continually cleaving chasms and building bridges between themselves and the rest of the community” (p.107).

All these factors accumulated together, in addition to some ceremonials carried out by some Sufi Orders, have led to the decline of the Orders and the establishment of the negative image of Sufism as deviating from the straight path of Islam. Sufism has been reduced, according to many people from different social strata in Egypt, to mere deviant anti-Islamic processions and ceremonials conjuring up stereotypical images of idleness, ignorance and filth practiced by the grassroots (Trimingham, 1970, p.250; Gilsenan, 1973, p.178; Gilsenan, 1982, pp.229-230; Berger, 1970, pp.122-123).

Despite this negative image, Sufi orders started gaining momentum once again later in the second half of the twentieth century to counterbalance the radical Islamic movements, especially after the failure of the latter to bring about reform and find solutions to the people's everyday problems. Many groups of the society have been alienated and sought Sufism as another more emotional and satisfactory alternative whereby they can withdraw from a sinful and unjust world. For those people, radicalism has become a symbol of authoritarian oppression, while Sufism is the way to freedom and universality (Ernst, 1997, p.xvi).

In present-day Egypt, many Orders are actively recruiting new members and spreading their teachings and doctrines. The Orders are now becoming a strong force counteracting the radical movements.

### ***Al-Tariqa Al-Gaririya Al-Aḥmadiya: A Bedouin Sufi Order***

In the early 1950s, a new *ṭariqa* or Sufi Order was established in al-‘Arish, the capital of North Sinai Governorate. Nowadays, it has followers, mainly Bedouin men, spreading out across Sinai, the Eastern Desert and even in some parts of Jordan and Palestine. This *ṭariqa* is known as *al-Gaririya al-Aḥmadiya*. As far as I am aware, no one has studied this Sufi Order before, especially among the ‘*Aiaida*. According to my ‘*Aiaida* informants, I am the first researcher to live with them and study their way of life and their Sufi doctrine and rites. In this section and the ones that follow, I shall explain in some detail the beginnings of this *ṭariqa*, its founder, its doctrine and rites based on the oral history and perceptions of my ‘*Aiaida* informants as well as my participant observations, having lived and practiced with them.

It is beneficial to mention at the beginning that the *ṭuruq ṣufiyya* (Sufi Orders) take quite different forms in both their doctrines and rites based on their different founders or the social milieus and places in which they exist. Some *ṭuruq* basically embody ‘urban’ trends such as the *Ḥamidiya Shadhiliya* studied by Gilsenan (1973), while others such as the *Gaririya*, the subject of this study, mainly represent a Bedouin phenomenon. All *ṭuruq*, however, are descended from the Prophet. Initiation into a *ṭariqa* means attachment to its particular chain. According to Lings (1975), “the differences between the various orders are mainly differences of selection, by the founders of the orders, from



the wide range of practices offered by the Prophet's own example and recommendation" (p.101).

### *The Founder*

*Sheikh 'Iyd Selim Garir* is the founding Sheikh of the *ṭariqa*. He was born in 1918 in West of al-'Arish. He is from the *al-Garirat* tribe in al-'Arish. He descends from 'Okasha ibn Mo'ṣan, one of the early Muslims from Arabia who settled in Sinai. Before the establishment of the *ṭariqa*, he was an ordinary non-literate Bedouin, however, known for his *sharaf* (honour), *taqwa* (piety) and *zohd* (asceticism). *Sheikh 'Iyd* started his call for the *ṭariqa* in 1949. "His teachings transformed many Bedouin groups from their tribal and clannish life based on solidarity, disputes and following of un-Islamic traditions and customs to a new life based on faith, the love of Allah and fraternal cooperation in following Allah's orders and making good deeds" (interview with 'Aiaida Sheikh). He died in *Geziret Sa'ud*, *al-Hisaniyya* district, in Sharkiya governorate in 1972.

According to the 'Aiaida oral history based on *Sheikh 'Iyd's* own narration presented to me in the field, he was ordered to proselytise the *tariqa* in the month of Ramadan of the Islamic year 1370 (1949 A.D.).

He dreamt of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for three consecutive nights. On the first night, the Prophet asked him to stretch his hand to make a covenant of allegiance (*bai'a*) with a handclasp [a symbol of mutual love and cooperation] swearing obedience to Allah and the Prophet to deliver the Message calling for the True Path (*al-ḥaq*) and Faith in Allah (*al-iman*). *Sheikh 'Iyd* made the handclasp with the Prophet's holy hand and swore the oath or covenant. On the second night, the Prophet ordered him to lead the people in prayers. He answered, 'I am illiterate' (*ana umi*) [meaning here that he cannot recite the *Quran* and has not had any religious education]. The Prophet recited all the *Quran* to him and put his holy hand on *Sheikh 'Iyd's* chest. He woke up from his sleep to find he knew all the *Quran* off by heart. And finally on the third night, the Prophet (pbuh) ordered him to call the people to be subservient to Allah and adhere to the Standard Religion (*al-din al-ḥanif*), and hold fast to God's Cord (*ḥabl Allah*), the love of His Prophet, and the abandonment of forbidden deeds (*mo'ḥaramat*) as well as pre-Islamic (*jahili*) traditions and symbols. Since that day, *Sheikh 'Iyd* considered himself as ordered by the Prophet (pbuh) to carry out the Mission. He began his calling and was followed by "The People of Happiness and Success" (*Ahl el-sa'ada wa al-falah*) (interview with 'Aiaida Sheikh, June 2003).

It is important to note that Sheikh 'Iyḍ did not go out proselytising about his *ṭariqa* of his own free will, but was under God and the Prophet's commands to do so through a *ru'ya ṣadiqa* (true vision) of the Prophet held from God. His role was to obey the direction of God and the Prophet. According to the Sufi doctrine of sainthood, a *wali* (saint) is a pious person for whom God takes responsibility. He also takes responsibility for uninterrupted devotion to God and obedience to Him (Ernst, 1997, p.59).

The *ṭariqa Gaririya Aḥmadiya* is an invitation to the Way of God. It is a command from the Prophet (pbuh) to follow in his path and pick from the flow of his wisdom and traditions. It is known as *Gaririya* after the name of Sheikh 'Iyḍ's tribe (*al-Garirat*) and *Aḥmadiya* after Ahmad al-Badawi (d. 1276 A.D.), a Sufi ascetic and *wali* (saint) and founder of *ṭariqa al-Aḥmadiya* (also known as *Badawiyya* in Egypt). Sheikh 'Iyḍ's *ṭariqa* claims spiritual descent from the *Aḥmadiya*. Sufi masters and founders of early orders such as Ahmad al-Badawi have "codified and institutionalised the distinctive teachings and practices of the orders, although in many cases their reputations as saints go far beyond the circle of initiates" (Ernst, 1997, p.127). I am not sure of the exact reason for Sheikh 'Iyḍ's choice of the *Aḥmadiya* in particular to be spiritually attached to it, but according to Gilsenan (1973), Sheikh Salama, the founder of *al-ṭariqa al-Ḥamidiya al-Shadhiliya* followed the *Shadhili* way because "they regarded the Sheikh al Junaid (Died AD 910, one of the leading orthodox exponents of Sufism and held in the highest esteem) as the *sheikh at-Ta'ifa*, Sheikh of the *Ṣufiya* and he (Junaid) had become a Shadhili. 'They say that "our beginning is the end of all others" for all go back to him'..." (p.36).

Sheikh 'Iyḍ is always the main topic of conversation among the Sufi 'Aiaida. His photograph is treasured by his followers and placed on the walls of their homes, in their shops and in their wallets. And visions of him are seen regularly as part of the normal course of events. A particular subject of conversation of interest to all is his *karamat* (manifestations of God's favour or grace acts or deeds). This is different from *mu'jizat* (literally miracles, and particularly the Prophet's evidential miracles). Such *karamat* are an honour from God bestowed upon the individual. Their aim is not to impress others, they rather "exist for their own purposes" (O'Halloran, 1980, p.37). Honour by God may manifest itself in many ways. As a *wali* (saint, literally friend of God, also connoting



nearness to and protection by God\*), Sheikh 'Iyd possessed esoteric knowledge that came to him by transmission and inspiration from Prophet Muhammad. He is also called by his follower *'arif bi'llah* (the one who knows God).

As a non-literate man, one of Sheikh 'Iyd's major *karamat* is memorising all the *Quran* by heart and becoming learned in all aspects of *shari'a*. He was examined by *al-Azhar ulema* who acknowledged his mastery of the sciences of the religion. This is very important to show that his *tariqa* and teachings are far from any *bid'a* (a blameworthy innovation). His charismatic and captivating character, and ability to gather the hearts of those around him and Bedouin men from other descent groups in the region is another of his *karamat*.

It is his supernatural *karamat*, however, that attracts the attention and amazement of his followers often described as miraculously above human nature or comprehension. He was known to read people's minds and know what they were thinking of and what was troubling them. In one instance, one of his followers wanted to donate ten pounds to support the *tariqa*, but he was short of money. Sheikh 'Iyd knew what was troubling him, put his hand behind his back and produced a ten pound note, which he handed to the man asking him to donate it. In another instance, he reprimanded one of his followers for his arrogance in thinking that he was better than a tribesman who came to take the *bai'a* (covenant). Moreover, his supernatural powers could transform the nature of one element or object into another. Once, he was travelling with one of his disciples and their car ran out of petrol. They were in a deserted place near the sea, so Sheikh 'Iyd asked the man to fill the tank with seawater, which he did and they managed to complete their journey. "*Subhan Allah (Praise be to Allah), Sheikh 'Iyd could make an engine work with seawater instead of petrol*", exclaimed one of my *'Aiida* informants.

Another story was narrated to me as follows:

*One day, Sheikh 'Iyd had a revelation that President Nasser was going to be poisoned by someone putting poison in his milk. He sent a message informing the President of the conspiracy, which turned out to be true. Nasser, however, thought that Sheikh 'Iyd was the mastermind behind planning his poisoning. He ordered the Minister of Interior to arrest him. The head of the police directorate in Ismailia and the Governor went to round him up. After getting*

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\* The Quranic verse often mentioned about wali is: "*Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor shall they grieve*" (*Quran* 10: 63).

*him into one of the vehicles, the driver could not start the engine. They put him into another one and the engine again did not start. Sheikh 'Iyḍ told them that the engines would not start unless they took him to meet the President in person, which they had to do. In the meeting, he assured the President that he was supporting him. Sheikh 'Iyḍ had an aura of divineness around him. The President welcomed and honoured him. After this incident, the followers of the tariqa increased tremendously.*

Similar *karamat* of Sufi masters or saints *awliā* (pl. *wali* friend of Allah) are mentioned by many scholars who studied Sufism and Sufi Orders (for example, Gilsenan, 1973 and Lings 1961).

The story of the meeting with President Nasser, however, is highly significant in the social meaning of the miracles of Sheikh 'Iyḍ and the credibility of his *tariqa*. In his analysis of the political reaction to Sufi Orders and the discourse of miracles in the Egyptian society, Gilsenan (1982) argues that “[a] centralizing and highly bureaucratic government, such as that of President Nasser in the 1960s, however, which was strongly nationalist and in many respects concerned to curb religious groupings, might see the invocation of miracles as a basic contradiction of the kind of society the government was trying to create” (p. 78).

Although many people, both scholars and laypersons dismiss these miraculous deeds and spiritual powers as fictions produced for the credulous, they are very important, constituting part of the religious outlook of all members of Sufi Orders and have to be taken seriously if we want to understand how they formulate their cultural and religious meanings. Moreover, any faithful Muslim should have belief in the existence of saints and sainthood in Islam or the existence of people who have such esoteric knowledge.

But beyond the spiritual and supernatural powers of saints, they play a very important social role in their Orders as teachers, doctors of the souls and hearts, and role models. According to Gilsenan (1973), this role is “central to a framework of a cognitive, moral and social order. They [saints] redefined and reordered the life-world of their followers, requiring of them not only devotion but prescribed patterns of behaviour” (p.42). They are “a symbolic representation of a total order of things” (ibid., p.43). As doctors of the souls and hearts of believers, they are needed to link the worshipper with Allah (ibid., p.72); and as role models, they pursue a lifestyle that does not conflict with what is conceived of as proper for someone in their position (ibid., p.81).



To attain such an exalted position, a saint must have the following highest spiritual qualifications and conditions: godliness; asceticism; moral character; knowledge or gnosis and understanding of *shari'a*; and the personality and style of a mentor (Gilsenan, 1973, p.73).

The Sheikh or saint's power in his *tariqa* is absolute. His followers must obey him unquestionably and participate fully in the overt and ceremonial aspects of the Order's activities. The relationship, however, is a one of love and respect. The followers or disciples also called *muridin* (literally aspirant) must not argue with the Sheikh or ask for any proof of what he orders or makes them do. Sufi Orders are very rigorous in their organisation. These orders have to exist with their administrative monopoly in order to enable the Sufi teaching process take place. In his article, 'A Catholic among the Sufis', Father F.X. O'Halloran, asked one of the associates of a Sufi Teacher about the purpose of the Order, who replied:

If you want to walk, you have to learn how to do it first. The 'order' is something which both prepares you, if you need this kind of preparation, and also provides innocent avenues for the discharge of necessary but otherwise limiting, emotional feelings" (Quoted in O'Halloran, 1980, p.29).

It should be noted, however, that a saintly sheikh in Sufism could not grant salvation or guarantee redemption. The conception of confession (*'itiraf*) also does not exist in Sufism or Islam. A Sufi might confess his sins to his Sheikh only to relieve a guilty conscience. According to Gilsenan (1973), it probably acts for the individual as "a kind of catharsis or psychological release mechanism" (p.107).

### *Organisation and Structure of the tariqa*

A discussion of the organisation and structure of the Order is important to provide an holistic view, as well as clarifying some aspects about power relations within the '*Aiaida* Bedouin community.

The men\* who first followed Sheikh 'Iyḍ and whom he accepted as his disciples became to be the teaching and recruiting elite of the *ṭariqa*. They established *zawiya* (pl. *zawaya*) (literally a corner; a small Sufi centre including a mosque. Also known by the 'Aiaida as *mag'ad*) in their residential places. These men had the responsibility for the spread of the *ṭariqa* and draw others to the way of the Sheikh. Currently, the *zawaya* are spread out in three Egyptian governorates: North Sinai, Ismailia and Sharkiya; as well as in some locations in Jordan and Palestine. In Ismailia alone, where I carried out the bulk of my fieldwork, there are sixteen *zawiya*. I visited six of them including the central one where the present Sheikh of the *ṭariqa* lives.

The elite (referred to here as officials) in every *zawiya* have built a common life in the neighbourhoods of their villages, with a hierarchy for administration of the group's various functions such as leading communal prayers and *dhikr* ceremonials. They are officially recognised as the representatives of the *ṭariqa*.

From a structural perspective, the *ṭariqa Gaririya Aḥmadiya* is considered as an association rather than an organisation. Corporate groups like the Sufi brotherhoods can be described according to Max Weber as 'voluntary associations' (*Verein*). That is, "corporate groups 'originating in a voluntary agreement and in which the established order claims authority over the members only by virtue of a personal act of adherence'" (Quoted in Gilsenan, 1973, p.66). Moreover, none of the groups claim "a monopoly of the legitimate use of the hierocratic coercion", since all regard themselves as part of a wider framework of Islam derived from Revelation and the *Sunna*" (ibid.). Although the mode of entry to the *ṭariqa* is voluntary, in the majority of cases, entry becomes a matter of descent based on family and kinship ties. Children would automatically follow their parents' affiliation as soon as they are mature enough to take the covenant. Hence, the main cause of a person's attachment to the *ṭariqa* is the family link, and "what kept him there were the spiritual, social and other functions derived from that relationship" (Trimingham, 1971, p.225).

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\* The reader will notice that references are to men only. Women's role in the *ṭariqa* is minimal, or almost nonexistent. Women do not participate in any of the communal activities and *dhikr* rituals. However, according to the 'Aiaida Sheikh, there are many women, wives of members of the *ṭariqa*, who have taken the oath and practice the rituals, but within the vicinity of their houses or tents.



The relation between members of the order can be described as predominantly a *gemeinschaft*. There is face-to-face interaction among all the members. It is an ideal relationship based on friendly relations and mutual love. Teaching is carried out also with kindness and courtesy. Other Sufi Orders also maintain the same notion (Gilsenan, 1973, pp.110-114).

The situation, however, differs with non-members or outsiders. It is very difficult to get admission to the *tariqa*'s meetings unless invited. People were always asking about my identity and the 'Aiaida Sheikh had to explain who I was. This could be one of the reasons why this *tariqa* has only recruited Bedouin men. The *tariqa* forms an organic part of the structure of Bedouin communities. The basis of membership is tribal rather than religious and the binding unit is kinship.

It is worth mentioning here that the *tariqa*, like many other orders, has developed its own stratification system separating and differentiating between members and non-members. Sufis consider themselves *al-khassa* or the elite as opposed to *al-'amma* or the masses. This differentiation is also made by Muslim scholars, *ulema*, who separate themselves from the masses. Turner (1994) thinks of Sufism as a religious pyramid linking dead saints, pirs, disciples, novices and the mass. Max Weber has also referred to this aspect as the difference between mass and heroic religiosity (Turner, 1994, p.64). This stratification and hierarchical form of organisation and practice conflicts with and is contradictory to "the egalitarian principles of the core tradition [of Islam]" (ibid., p.85).

Despite its apparent centralisation, the *tariqa Gaririya* cannot be described as an 'organisation' like the *Shadhiliya*, for example, who have a higher degree of centralised control and insist on exclusive membership and dominance of the role of the members (Gilsenan, 1973, pp.90-91). Moreover, it does not have a written law like the *Shadhiliya*. Sheikh Salama, the founder, was influenced in his organisation of his *tariqa*, the *Shadhiliya*, by his experience of departmental work in the Civil Service. According to Gilsenan, the *qanun* (law) of the *tariqa* is the most obvious example of this influence (ibid., p.127). Asking if the *tariqa Gaririya* has a law, the 'Aiaida Sheikh answered me: "Our Law is the Holy *Quran* and the *Sunna*. The *halal* (literally right or lawful) is clear and the *haram* (forbidden or unlawful) is also clear!"

The *ṭariqa*, however, has a list of regulations concerning its regular monthly meetings (See Appendix 2: Pamphlet on Regulations of *Ṭariqa* Meetings). All the members of the *zawaya* in each governorate meet once a month on the first Friday of the new lunar month. The meeting is held in one *zawiya* and follows a rotation. The *ṭariqa* also has a larger annual meeting, where all the *zawaya* from all different governorates meet. The monthly meetings in Ismailia are attended by the current Sheikh of the *ṭariqa*, and the deputies or officials of all the *zawaya*. The meeting is called *ḥafla* (literally party). The members of the host *zawiya* prepare the place; furnishing it with mats and cook a dinner for all the attending members. The *ḥafla* starts with a short recitation of the *Quran* and a sermon by the Sheikh of the *ṭariqa*, followed by commentaries from some of his deputies. It is interjected by the dusk communal prayers and finishes with serving dinner, the Bedouin custom. Night communal prayers follow and finally a performance of communal *dhikr* and chanting as will be explained below.

From the description of the organisation of the *ṭariqa*, several features are evident: the authoritarian and hierarchical structure based on disciplinary principles; the collective rituals and *dhikr* (remembrance); and the initiatory principle involving the oath of allegiance (*bai'a*), whereby the *murid* swears obedience to the sheikh with a handclasp and hand-kissing (*musafaha*).

### *The Doctrine of the ṭariqa*

The *ṭariqa*'s doctrine is based on the following principles: "*al-tawḥid al-khalis* (Pure Monotheism); Observance and Worshipping of Allah; Dutiful abiding by the Rights of Allah; *al-ṣidk wal ikhlas* (Honesty and Sincerity); *al-ḥob al-moqadas* (Holy Love); *ḥob Allah wal ḥob fii* (Love of Allah and Love in Him); Commitment to the *kitab* (literally the Book; *Quran*) and *Sunna*; *tazkiat al-nafs* (Purifying the Soul) by resisting its *shahawat* (the thoughts and desire of a natural man) and preventing its *hawaha* (whims and impulses); following a knowledgeable Sheikh; and meeting with the purpose of *dhikr Allah* (Remembrance of Allah) and holding fast to *ḥabl Allah* (God's Cord)" (Interview with 'Aiaida Sheikh).

Like all Sufi doctrines, the *Gaririya ṭariqa* doctrine is mainly based on the *Quran*. *Kitabullah* (The Book of Allah) is of Divine origin not human composition. All verses of



the *Quran* are believed to be miraculous signs (*ayat*) of the existence of God. The main theme is Allah Himself and the words are from Him by way of Revelation and it leads back to Him through guidance along the *straight path*. It is a guidance for the pious as it embraces every aspect of human life.

The *ṭariqa*'s doctrine is secondly based on the *Sunna* of the Prophet (pbuh). As the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad is seen as the epitome of goodness; a virtual perfection. According to the *Quran*, "*You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah*" (33:21).

In his teachings, Sheikh 'Iyḍ, the founder of the *ṭariqa Gaririya* concentrated on '*ulum al ḥaqiqa wa 'ulum ash-Shari'a* (the sciences of the Truth and of the Holy Law). His followers also follow in the same line. They encourage the *muridin* to understand the principles of *tawḥid* (unity and monotheism) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence), while observing Allah in all their deeds (the concept of *iḥsan* or spiritual excellence). In fact, Sufism consists of three main standpoints: fear (*makhafah*), love (*maḥabbah*), and knowledge (*ma'rifah*). The whole of man's subjective obligation towards God lies between them.

*Hob Allah* (Love of Allah) and other human beings is a principal doctrine in the *ṭariqa Gaririya* and in many other Orders. Sheikh 'Iyḍ's main teachings were on love and its importance. The current Sheikh of the *ṭariqa*, always talks about love in all his sermons. In one sermon, he said, "*Love is the essence of Islam. The soul loves those who are good to it. We, as Muslims, should love our good faithful brethrens and cooperate together to do good deeds*".

Love of one another is also imperative to the *ṭariqa*. It is often coupled with self-sacrifice and the preference of others over oneself. Sufi teachings are full of parables depicting these doctrines. One of my informants narrated the following parable about love and self-sacrifice, which he heard from the 'Aiaida Sheikh:

*Three warriors in the past were deeply wounded and were on the verge of dying. They had very little water left with them and the three were thirsty. The first refused to drink and passed it to the second who again refused and passed it to the third. The Third passed it again to the first. But by that time, he discovered*

*that he had died. When he went to the second he also found him dead. The man wept because his companions preferred him over themselves.*

This concept of self-sacrifice is a major theme in the history of Islam. It was the basis on which the first and only Islamic nation state was established.

In one of his sermons, the 'Aiaida sheikh explains,

*Belonging in Islam is mainly to Allah and His Prophet, not to a clan, tribe or even a nation. Humans are all alike. One way of strengthening a Muslim's faith is by loving his brothers in Islam and treating them the way he likes them to treat him... Unity, equality and fraternity are all principles that Islam have called for... In one hadith: "You will not be faithful until you love the good for your brother as much as you love it for yourself". Muslims are supposed to be merciful amongst themselves. Egoism is not in Islam. The ego or the personal pronoun 'I' is also not favoured in Islam. Saying that it is none of my business when seeing something wrong is not in Islam. We need to revive our good deeds and chivalry, sense of belonging to Allah because if the individual disintegrates, the whole society will also disintegrate... All what we need is to be faithful in our lives, excel in our work and have good intentions. In another hadith of the Prophet (pbuh), "Excellence is to worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you see Him not, He can see you"*

(Sermon attended in June 2003)

The ultimate aim of a member of a Sufi order is to purify his/her heart and have peace of mind. The 'Aiaida poet, also a member of the *tariqa*, explains to me his feeling of peacefulness and satisfaction saying, *"We are happy because we are satisfied by what God has given us. We do not think of the future as it is in the hands of God. He shall never forget us"*. This attitude, however, should not be misunderstood as fatalism. On the contrary, in it lies the deep meaning of Islam as submission to the Will of God and to His predestination of events. A belief in the predestining hand of God does not in itself imply a passive world acceptance. Muslims and Sufis, in particular, have a strong desire and volition (*irada*). This point was also clearly illustrated by Weber in his analysis of the history of European Protestantism (Gilsenan, 1973, p.131).

Honesty and sincerity are also among the basic principles of the *tariqa*, emphasised in its meetings. Sufi literature is full of parables with moral tips about the importance of these characteristics often transmitted orally by 'Aiaida Sufi Bedouin men. When asking one of my informants during a grazing trip, if he lets his herd feed in neighbouring orchards, he was quite offended and said assertively, *"We look after the property of our neighbours in their absence"*. He narrated the two following parables:



*There was once a good honest man who lived a long time ago. He was once walking next to an orchard and found an apple on the ground. He was hungry and ate it. But then he regretted it and wanted to apologise to the owner of the orchard. He asked about him and met him. The man told him I forgive you, but I have a partner living in the Levantine (el-Sham) and I do not know if he will forgive you or not. The man decided to travel to el-Sham to ask the forgiveness of that other man. When he arrived and told him the story, the man told him, I'll forgive you on one condition: that you marry my daughter. However, she is dumb and deaf and has no limbs. The man agreed and on the wedding day, he discovered that she was a perfect beauty. He married her and his father-in-law gave him an orchard as a wedding present for his honesty (Interview, June 2003).*

The second story is about a man whose neighbour asked him to look after his house while he was away. This good honest man even refused to sit in the shade of his neighbour's house because it does not belong to him. To my informant, “*adab* (good manners) are better than ‘*ilm* or education”. This is a well-known often-recited proverb in the Egyptian culture.

Demonstrating how Bedouin morality is inherent in Islamic Sufi manners, my informant, the ‘*Aiaida* poet explains:

*The Bedouin in particular care for other people and neighbours. Even if our neighbour is a Jew, we cannot harm him or rob him. They have their own religion and we have ours. We will never attack anyone unless we are attacked first. Our Islam is a religion of peace, forgiveness and purity. We do not harm anyone. Moreover, we do not accept that anyone says anything bad to us and we the same. Anyone who comes to us seeking protection, we have to protect him. We honour our guests and are hospitable to them and to our neighbours, and we support the helpless... The Bedouin understand well the Prophet's tradition, “I have been sent [as a Messenger] mainly to perfect morals”.*

In Islam, religion is morals and anyone surpassing others in his/her morals is considered more religious.

The moral perfection of the Sufis (a synthesis of Divine qualities of majesty and beauty) is based primarily on purifying the *nafs* (soul) by resisting its *shahawat* (desires) and *hawaha* (whims and impulses). This is a basic principle in all Sufi Orders. Man's soul, which lies in the heart, has to be divested of its limitations and prejudices, which blind it, to restore its primordial Divine nature. According to the *Quran*, it is not the eye that is blind, but the heart (*qalb*). “*Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts and*

*minds may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts” (22:46). Qalb, in Arabic, denotes the abode of consciousness, intelligence, understanding, as well as emotions and affections. Lings (1975) explains this meaning as follows:*

In many cultures vision is attributed to the heart rather than the eye indicating not only the bodily organ of that name but also what this corporeal centre gives access to, namely the centre of the soul, which itself is the gateway to a higher ‘heart’, namely the Spirit. Thus, ‘heart’ is often to be found as a synonym of ‘intellect’. It has the power to transcend the rest of the body although substantially it consists of the same flesh and blood (p.48).

Many Muslim scholars further argue that the heart (*qalb*) is also synonymous with the spirit (*ruh*), which has a Divine as well as a created aspect. *Qalb* also indicates the topmost step of the ladder, that is, the Infinite Self or the super ego. According to al-Ghazali, the renowned medieval Islamic scholar, “although the spiritual heart (*qalb*), which is the controlling centre of the soul, is different from the physical human heart, its functioning is related and directed by it” (Quoted in Badri, 2000, p.14).

In neurophysiology, John Eccles claims the presence of what is called a ‘self-conscious mind’ (Badri, 2000, p.10). Scientific experiments show that neuro-transmitters, which play an important role in the functioning of the brain, are found in the heart. According to Joseph Pearce, another neurophysiologist, “Actions of the heart precede the actions of both body and brain... We know now that the heart... controls and governs the brain action through hormonal, transmitters, and possibly finer quantum-energies of communication” (Quoted in Badri, 2000, p.13). Badri, a famous Sudanese psychotherapist adds, “people getting heart-transplants often dramatically reflect certain behaviours of the later donors” (ibid.). In my opinion, this matter is still controversial and has not yet been proven.

The process of purifying the *nafs* is like the rites of initiation (a *rite de passage*). People who have Sufi inclinations would go through the *tariq* (the path or way) and seek initiation because they are haunted by the thought of God. But not anyone can manage to seek this process. It is conditional; “the clouds in the night of the soul must be thin enough to allow at least some glimmer of Heart-light to penetrate the gloom” (Lings, 1975, p. 52).



Sufi philosophers spoke about several types or stages of *nafs*, their characteristics, and the methods for purifying them. I will not discuss them in detail, as I have not covered this topic in-depth during my fieldwork. An important aspect, however, emphasised by Sufis is that to purify the *nafs*, an aspirant has first to discard all desires and whims and substitute them by *mahabba* (love) of God and His holy attributes.

In this process of initiation, the aspirant's selfhood is transformed. By looking into his subjective inwardness, he becomes aware of his limitations and inclinations to desires and fight against them, whilst seeking Divine qualities and the Ultimate Reality. This inner fight is called *jihad* (wrongly translated as Holy War). A Sufi's true *jihad* is against his soul commanding evil.

In one of his sermons, the 'Aiaida sheikh explains:

*The worst enemy to man is his 'nafs', which commands and leads him to wrong and evildoing. Jihad is the jihad of one's nafs to stop sinning and committing evil". It is the war against the soul. He quotes a ḥadith of the Prophet speaking to his Companions saying after they returned from a battle "Now, we have returned from al-jihad al-asghar (the Lesser Jihad) to the al-jihad al-akhbar (the Greater Jihad)'. Asking about the meaning of this, the Prophet elaborated, 'the Lesser is the war in the battlefield and the Greater is the jihad against the nafs'".*

In summary, the soul becomes strong by self-affirmation, self-expression and self-development through creating in itself the attributes of God.

### *Islamic Habitus Model*

Islamic beliefs are rich in habitus, or structures linking body, space and numerous dichotomies. One interesting distinction is made between *al-yamin wa al-shammal* (right and left). In Islamic culture the right is more privileged than the left. It is preferable to eat with the right hand only. The person on the right should always have priority over those located on the left. A Muslim puts his right foot first when entering a mosque and his left when coming out. In the right-left dichotomy, there is also a question of secrecy, especially in giving alms. According to one *ḥadith*, "Let not the left hand know what the right hand does". The left hand in this case is the human ego. Virtuous people are described in the *Quran* as *ahl al-yamin* (the people of the right); they are the ones to

enter Paradise in the Hereafter, while the *evildoers* are described as *ahl al-shammal* (the people of the left), who go to Hellfire.

This attention paid to directions by Muslim societies reveals a striking feature, which Lings (1975) calls 'direction consciousness' (p.36). Muslims have their spiritual roots in Mecca. Their direction consciousness is "regularly sharpened every year by setting off to pilgrimage... And in the five daily ritual prayers. Each cycle of movements culminates in a prostration which could be described as pouring out of the soul in the direction of Mecca" (ibid., p.37). The *Kaaba* (literally cube for such is its shape, is the house of God in the Centre of Mecca) is a symbol of the Centre of a Muslim being. "When the exile turns his face in the direction of Mecca he aspires above all, if he is a Sufi, to the inward return, to the reintegration of the fragmented finite individual self into the Infinitude of the Divine Self" (ibid.).

Muslims and Sufis, in particular, also have time consciousness. One of the meetings of the *tariqa Gaririya* was devoted to a discussion of the concept of time in Islam. The Sheikh of the *tariqa* explains, "*A Sufi is 'ibn al-waqt' [the son of time]. He is conscious of time and does not waste it*". The observance of the five daily prayers is strongly linked to a consciousness of time. We all know that there are three times: past, present and future. Similarly, three times in our perception: before, now and after. In terms of spatial relationships, when considering points in our social surroundings, we are aware of: here, there and the space in between.

Sufis, on the other hand, speak of a continuum of five times or *ayam* (literally days): *yawm mafqud* (a lost day, connoting the past); *yawm ma'hud* (a conscious day, connoting the present); *yawm mamdud* (an elongated day, connoting Purgatory or life after death before the Hereafter); *yaum mawrud* (a day of passage, connoting the crossing of the *sirat*, a path leading to the Hereafter, which determines the destiny of man whether he/she will enter Paradise or Hell; and finally *yawm mash'hud* (the Observed day or the Day of Judgment). This continuum indicates the inseparability between this life and the Hereafter. Death, in this respect, does not indicate the end of human life, but a transition into another life. Consequently, people will account for all the deeds and actions they carry out in this life. Moreover, God is believed to be Time itself. At the same time, timelessness is one of His attributes.



### *The Method of the ṭariqa (Rituals and Ceremonials)*

Sheikh 'Iyḍ composed several *qasa'id* (odes or hymns- singular *qasida*) portraying the stages and method of purifying the *nafs*, remembering God and praising the Prophet. His collection of odes, sayings, advices, and litanies have been collected by his followers, and recently typed and printed in one volume as a book of hymns or *diwan* entitled *Bustan al-Maḥaba (The Orchard of Love)* in 2002. This volume is unpublished and is only circulated between the officials and senior members of the *ṭariqa*. Every evening after the dusk prayers, the 'Aiaida Sheikh reads an ode or a section of the book as part of the daily communal *dhikr* rituals. One particular ode often recited is *Sababat al-ḥob* (the Ardour of Love, see Appendix 3). In it, Sheikh 'Iyḍ in a very eloquent and poetic language speaks about the purification of *nafs* and submitting it as a sacrifice to God, whilst following in the path of Sufi masters.

Commenting on the importance of following the path of the righteous and being in their company, the 'Aiaida poet, explains, "*As Sufis, we should follow each other. The person left to his own devices can be led astray. 'The wolf would eat the astray sheep [that does not follow the rest of the herd]'. As long as we follow the words of Allah and His Prophet, we won't get lost*" (Interview June 2003).

Reciting the above poem and others in the collection is part of the *dhikr* ritual. *Dhikr* (remembrance of God) is the central ritual of Sufi Orders. It has two types: *dhikr al-khafi* (hidden repetition in the mind or muttered in a low voice) and *dhikr al-jali*, the open recitation in which the worshipper recites aloud in a congregation. *Dhikr* is made by *al-lisan* (the tongue) and *qalb* (heart) each is a succeeding stage. The latter stage is attainable only "by increasing spiritual excellence, on the path that leads by total capture of the thought, heart, and most inward part to separation from the world and complete concentration on the Divine" (Gilsenan, 1973, p.156). In other words, it is inward contemplation. To be of full value and achieve its full purpose like any other type of worshipping, it requires a *niya* (intention) to undertake it. The purpose of remembrance of Allah is to have success and prosperity. It is also to obey the direct word of God. Many members of *ṭariqa* are aware of the justification of *dhikr* and furnish explanations of the ritual that are fully in accordance with orthodox thought and structured after the teachings of Sunni Islam.

Most orders have regular *dhikr* recitals in congregation, known as *ḥadra*, (literally presence; it is used by Sufis as a synonym of *ḥudur*, 'being in presence of Allah'). *Ḥadra* forms part of a more or less elaborate liturgical recital. In the *ṭariqa Gaririya*, all members – aspirants, officers and the Sheikh – stand in a closed circle (*da'ira*) symbolising their equality in the presence of God. If there are any children present, they sit in the middle of the circle and do not participate in the ritual. Children are supposed to be not fully aware of the significance of the ritual. They have not gone through the initiation process. In other orders such as *Shadiliya*, the *ḥadra* takes the form of a square with the sheikh in the middle. This form can be seen symbolically as having the sheikh as the centre of grace to which the members face, while the closed square or circle as “a spatial representation of the separation of the group from the world to which the outer ranks have their backs” (Gilsenan, 1973, pp.160-161).

In the *ṭariqa Gaririya*, the *ḥadra* is held every Sunday and Thursday night after performing *isha'* (night's prayers). These two nights are called in Arabic *lailat al-ithnain* and *lailat al-juma'a* (the night before Monday and the night before Friday). These two days have symbolic significance in Islam. Friday being the day when Adam was created, when God talked to Moses on Mount Sinai, and when the Day of Judgement will take place. Mondays and Thursdays are also holy days as men's deeds are raised to God by angels every week on those two days. One of the Prophet's *sunna* is to fast on those two days. Recitation from Sheikh 'Iyḍ's *Diwan (Book of Hymns)*, however, takes place among the 'Aiaida Sufis everyday after *ṣalat el-maghreb* (dusk prayers).

All participants stand in a circle. The 'Aiaida Sheikh acts as the director of the ritual, controlling the speed of the chanting and the crescendo. He “wakens the hearts of the brothers, inflames their feelings, and stirs their innermost secret parts” (Quoted in Gilsenan, 1973, p.169). A *munshid* (singer), one of the Sheikh's deputies who leads communal prayers, is responsible for singing *madiḥ'* (praise of the Prophet) and *tawassulat* (applications or petitions) to Allah and the Prophet at certain interjections. And finally the devotees or aspirants recite together the various formulas (See Appendix 4: the *Ḥadra*).



Some critics of Sufism believe that Sufis turn to *dhikr* particularly as a narcotic. According to Gilsenan (1973) the rhythmic movements in the *ḥadra* produce “a physio-psychological state in relative passivity and through the medium of a specific substance; whereas in the *dhikr* he can ‘work out’ tensions, release emotions, and induce satisfaction by the explosive and violent movements of his own body. In either case he does so in the close and intimate context of the group” (pp.171-172). Gilsenan’s analysis, however, ignores the contemplative dimension in the *dhikr*. According to al-Basri, a famous ascetic and Sufi master, *dhikr* implies meditation<sup>\*\*</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, the *ḥadra* is carried out on Sunday and Thursday nights. The *ḥadra khasa*, which follows the general one, is also carried out every night after the night’s prayers. In addition, after dawn and dusk prayers, there is a collective twice-daily recitation of *surat al-waqi‘ah* (the Inevitable, 56). It is one of the most valuable chapters of the *Quran*, according to one *ḥadith*; “Whoever reads it daily will never have a misfortune in life”. This *surah* is one of many in the *Quran* devoted to Revelation and the Hereafter. Its main theme is the certainty of the Day of Judgement and its adjustment of true values. It also addresses Allah’s power, Goodness and Glory, and the truth of Revelation. It makes a clear distinction between three categories of mankind in the Day of Judgement: those nearest to God, in exalted bliss; the companions of the Right Hand in bliss; and the companions of the Left Hand in misery. To Sufis, like the *‘Aiaida* of the *ṭariqa Gaririya*, this *surah* is rich in its symbolic implications. It depicts their society with its three main divisions of spiritual hierarchy. First, there are the Sufi masters and saints, the friends of God, who are nearest and dearest to him; second, there are those Sufis who have a lower position; and thirdly the masses of unbelievers or the ‘exoteric’ majority.

In addition to the collective *dhikr* carried out in *ḥadra*, Sufis should recite certain verbal formulas known as *awrad* (litanies, sing. *wird*). These are carried out by the individual privately after one or more of the five daily ritual prayers. These litanies differ from one

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<sup>\*\*</sup> In psychology, meditation is defined as a relaxation technique. Wallace and Fisher (1987) found that meditation reduces oxygen consumption and induces electrical activity in the brain indicative of a calm mental state. It also reduces blood pressure (Gross & McIlveen, 1998, p.165).

Performing brain scans of Tibetan Buddhist meditators, the American Neuroscientist, Andrew Newberg found that meditation causes a shutdown in the posterior parietal lobe of the brain, the area responsible for giving a sense of self in terms of time and space. Meditation, therefore, makes a person merged in space and lose track of the passage of time (Winston, 2003, pp.183-184).

order to the other. The *'Aiaida* recite the following *awrad*, a hundred times each at least. An individual can increase as much as he/she can. They are:

- *'la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah'* (the declaration of faith)
- *'Allahum ṣali wa salem 'ala sayedna Muhammad wa 'ala 'alihi wa sa'hibihi wa salem'* (Allah have blessings and peace on our master Muhammad, and his Family and his Companions)
- *'rab ighfir li wa tob 'alai inaka anta al-tawab al-rahim'* (God forgive me and accept my repentance, indeed Thou art the Acceptor of Repentance, the Compassionate)
- *'subḥan Allah wa bi-hamdu, subḥan Allah el-azim'* (Glory to Allah the Praiseworthy; Glory to Allah the Great One).
- *Surat al-Ikhlās* (Sincerity Chapter 112).

Some also say the following formula: *'I ask forgiveness of God, the Infinite, there is no God but He, the Living, the Self Subsistent, and to Him I turn in repentance'*. All these formulae emphasise the core of Sufism about God as the Truth and Reality and the Oneness of Being. When reciting these litanies, a Sufi should be meditating and concentrating on the Divine Presence. The Sincerity Chapter, in particular, is very important for emphasising faith in monotheism and the concept of the Unity of God.

In my opinion, as a practising Muslim who also followed the method of a Sufi Order, I find that the beliefs and practices of Islam (namely *shahada*, *ṣalat*, *ṣaum*, and *hajj*) are not few and simple as argued by Grunebaum (1958). On the contrary, they are full of symbolism and complex spirituality. His study and analysis of Islam is superficial. Turner (1994) refuted Grunebaum's argument in some detail (pp. 72-73).

### **The *Tariqa* and the State**

Since early in Islamic history, there has been an ongoing struggle between Islamic religious institutions and the ruling elite. Islam, however, remained the widest and most effective basis for consensus, despite all efforts to promote other political agendas such as nationalism, patriotism, socialism, secularism, modernism, etc. (Berger, 1970, p.47). To guarantee political stability, rulers have used Islam as an instrument of the state and increased their power over religious institutions by tightening their control over the religious leaders and transferring their functions to the ruling authorities. Ruling governments have also sought authentic reforms in religious institutions and practices. Such efforts, however, are described as "rather limited" by some observers such as



Berger (1970, p.61). Although this study is quite outdated now, it is relevant as eye-witnessing the rise of some radical and extremist Muslim groups who sprawled through private mosques and associations.

In Egypt, all mosques and religious institutions are subject to government control and inspection represented by the Ministry of Waqfs (Endowments). Sufi Orders are also under tight control by government jurisdiction. *Law 118 of 1976* organises the establishment and practices of Sufi Orders. All *ṭuruq* in Egypt, numbering about sixty-eight are represented in the Supreme Council for Sufi Orders. The basic jurisdiction has not changed since the nineteenth century and the Khedivial decree issued in June 1903 stipulating the appointment of *Sheikh Mashaiekh el-ṭuruq el-ṣouffia* (Head Sheikh of the Sufi Orders) (now appointed by a presidential decree). He is responsible for supervising the activities and practices of the Orders and legally representing them (*Law 118*, pp.6-7).

To hold their meetings or organise celebrations such as *mulid* (birthdays of saints), the Orders have to obtain an official licence (*tarkhees*) from the Supreme Council in coordination and collaboration with the Ministry of Interior. A representative from the State Security Service (*'amn el-dawla*) attends their meetings and Friday collective prayers at noon regularly. In the *'Aiaida's* *zawiya*, an officer from *'amn el-dawla* attended every Friday. He was noticeable among the mass of Bedouin men praying because he was the only one dressed in ordinary clothes (shirt and trousers). He would have a short conversation with the Sheikh, have a quick lunch on his own and leave without speaking to anyone else. The people observed him more than he observed them!

### **The Public vs. Private Domain in Islam**

In the above paragraphs, I have attempted to explain how Islam is used as a political tool to achieve different agendas of diverse groups. All religions, specifically Islam, will always be used as an instrument of oppression and social control as long as those who call themselves Muslims treat it primarily as a social system, while ignoring the fact that it is originally a personal notion related to the esoteric rather than the exoteric domain. Hodgson (1974), an American orientalist, in his detailed and in-depth study of Islam, distinguishes between Islam as a personal faith (*islam*) and Islam as a social system

(*nizam*). It is a distinction between the private and public domain, the esoteric and the exoteric. To him, faith is a private matter related to piety and conscience. He defines Islam and all religions as primarily a matter of piety. Turner (1994) considers Hodgson's interpretation as based on his beliefs as a Quaker and is thus partial (pp.54-61). Contrary to Turner, I support Hodgson's interpretation.

In his analysis of Muslims in north Lebanon, Gilsenan (1982) argues that the esoteric and exoteric issue is far more than a metaphysical notion. It is related to everyday life:

The notion of *batin* and *zahir*, far from being the subject of metaphysical debate among experts with no relevance to daily life, is here the stuff of daily existence. It plays a significant part in the discourse and practice of everyday life, for the elective affinity between this Islamic set of terms and the social world of north Lebanon, with its heavy emphasis on show, appearances, the manipulations of the surface, and the acquisition of knowledge of what intentions lie behind it, gives an enormous resonance to the distinction between that which is visible and that which is invisible... (p.139).

I would argue that human beings could not live in chaos without *nizam* or a social and political order that governs them. This system, however, should not be based on enforcing religion into the private domain. However, once a group of pious people live together, their piety, good conscience and positive attitude affect their way of life. They would live in an 'ideal' community. Indeed, a 'utopian' world might exist in that way.

I suggest that idealism could be sought internally rather than following others. For others who sought external change of the society only, radicalism and extremism was the only available option. Islam to them was only a public, exoteric domain. If we return here to the history of Sufi Orders, as mentioned earlier, the decline of the Orders was symptomatic of the Muslims in adapting their traditional interpretation of Islam for life in a new dimension. Islam as exoteric religion addresses itself to the whole of humanity, conveying the truth in a form that can be lived by anybody, whereas mysticism is a way open to but a few (Trimingham, 1971, p.258).

When I first started fieldwork among the 'Aiaida Bedouin, I learnt about their Sufism, practised with them, and observed their way of life, I felt the serenity and peace of mind that I was striving for. A few months later, these same thoughts were explained to me in an articulate way by one member of the *tariqa*, who used to come regularly to the 'Aiaida's *zawiya* to participate in the *ḥadra*. The following are his words:



*Our lives are like those of the first followers of the Prophet. The Quran was revealed to the Prophet in a Bedouin setting. The words and meanings are all related to the desert and terms used by the Bedouin in the desert. These words are still used till the present time... Islam does not encourage urbanisation because it is a lavish life. On the contrary, our lives are full of hardships. Our problem [as Egyptians] is that we do not work or exert any effort as Westerners do, for example. We only talk. It is all talk without action. If we go back to the teachings of our religion, it will teach us the importance of working and having a good conscience... Today it is work without judgement and tomorrow [in the Hereafter], it is judgement without work'. Now, we can do what pleases us and no one will judge our deeds. Thus, we've got to be cautious... Life is like a prison for the faithful. It is important that a person is humble and does not lead a lavish life (Interview August 2003).*

Reflecting on these words now, I may argue that this informant is a pious man leading an ascetic way of life. As a Sufi, he is disciplining and purifying his soul. His ideas, however, cannot be generalised to cover the whole community of the 'Aiaida Sufis. On further reflection, I discovered that neither them nor their world is as 'ideal' as I first thought. They have their own flaws and specific cultural models which strongly influence their conception of their religion. They have their own selective interpretation of the Scripture based on their traditional beliefs. In certain situations, I have also observed that the cognitive dimension in their practice of Sufi Islam is somehow missing as it does not penetrate the consciousness and is thus not translated into action. Those observations stress my conception that traditions are stronger than religion, and that the latter could be easily manipulated to fit different cultural contexts.

Another problem with religion is that it has become institutionalised to the extent that any individual attempt to interpret the religious text is considered by the religious authority to be wrong if not heresy. Gilsenan (1982) argues, "The text becomes an instrument of authority and a way of excluding others or regulating their access to it. It can be used to show that others are wrong and we are right; what is more, we have the right to be right and they do not! We *Know*. So Revelation is controlled and becomes a potential mode of control..." (p.31). Adnan (1999) makes a similar argument rejecting some Muslims' position of giving themselves absolute rights in religious matters (p.31).

## Islam and the West

Another controversial issue that forced itself into my study of the 'Aiaida Sufi Bedouin is the relationship between Islam and the West. I shall discuss this aspect in light of an interview with a young member of the *tariqa*, which took place in July 2003. The following are parts of our detailed discussion. He argues,

*As long as 'we' ['we', in this context, refers to Muslims in general] are far from Islam and follow the West, we will not improve. They want us to be like them. But they are much better. They know what they are doing and set objectives for their development. We should start by ourselves, advise ourselves and our families. We should follow the teachings of our religion without going to extremes. We need wisdom and good advice. The problem is that we are mistaken, but we do not admit it.*

He supported his argument with the following two parables about how the Prophet dealt with others:

*There was a Jew who was a neighbour of the Prophet. Everyday, he used to throw rubbish on his doorstep and on the Prophet himself. One day, the Prophet found that the man did not come out as usual. When he asked about him, he was told that the man was sick. He went to visit him. The Jew thought that the Prophet came bearing a grudge against him, but the Prophet assured him that he came to visit him as a sick neighbour. The man converted to Islam after realising the graciousness of the Prophet.*

The second story is about a disbeliever,

*Once, a man attempted to assassinate the Prophet, but failed. He was caught by the Prophet's followers, who brought him to the Prophet. He asked him to convert to Islam. The man refused and the Prophet set him free advising him not to try to harm him again. After a while, the man came back to the Prophet and declared himself a Muslim. The Prophet asked him, 'why didn't you say you were a Muslim the first time?' The man replied, 'at that time, your men had caught me and I did not want to convert under force. Then afterwards, I became a Muslim because I believe in God and that you are His Prophet'.*

The purpose of these parables, according to my informant, is to show how Muslims have become weak. They do not have the honesty to admit their weak faith in God. Their bad behaviour does not give a good example of the purity of Islam as a religion encouraging good behaviour and peace. His message is that we should start by improving ourselves inwardly. He thus perceives religion from its esoteric notion, which is the realm of Sufism.



Regarding Westerners, definitely *“these disbelievers (kafir) are better than Muslims because they are honest and sincere... They do not lie to us”*, argued several of my informants. For the Bedouin and for any other person, it is difficult to talk about other people who belong to a foreign culture unless one has a deep understanding and knowledge of ‘these’ people and their ways. Even with social scientists, it is difficult to form opinions about others. The preoccupation with others and their ways, however, is an attempt to understand oneself or “what I am”. According to Muñoz (1999), “it is the most essential feature of contemporary thought” (p.71).

The Bedouin like many other non-Western people contrast themselves to Western people in an expression of power relationships. In their discourse, the West, on the one hand, represents technological advancement, democracy, freedom of speech, respect for human rights, fairness, equality, hard work, etc. It stands for things that are lacking in their life-world. In this respect, they are not against the West’s materialistic civilisation and its propagation of good values (Tozy, 1999, p.171). On the other hand, the West represents stereotypical images of ‘promiscuity’ and decadence; things which generate in some Oriental Muslims the notion that what belongs to Islam is inevitably alien and opposed to the West.

From a psychological perspective, we can analyse the latter stereotypical image of the West as projection. This concept is originally used by Freud to describe the tendency of unconsciously attributing to other people and situations, one’s own repressed feelings; generally unpleasant feelings associated with guilt, aggression and inferiority. It is an unconscious ego defence mechanism (Badri, 1979, p.38; Winston, 2003, p.262). Projection makes Oriental Muslims believe in their moral superiority as opposed to the West.

Western Orientalists were also preoccupied with oriental societies contrasting them to their own. As a discourse, Orientalism “represents the exotic, erotic, strange as compared to the rational” (Turner, 1994, p.21). Despite the many critiques of Orientalism (Said, 1978), the problem of interpreting other cultures is universal, “given the very existence of norms and values in human society. There are good reasons for believing that all societies create an ‘insider-outsider’ division and in this sense Orientalism is not a problem peculiar to the Occident” (ibid., p.101).

According to Badri (2000), in cognitive psychology, complex responses that influence people's beliefs, decisions and observable behaviour come from previous conceptualisations, emotions and experiences which give meaning to subsequent stimuli. It is what people think about that affects their beliefs and consequent behaviour.

When dealing with other cultures, it is important first to embark on a cognitive activity that aims at self-discovery and self-knowledge. These are central notions of our postmodern era (Ahmed, 1992, p.86). It is no longer appropriate to avoid contacting other cultures in this global world. Understanding 'fear' or 'dislike' of others requires 'preparedness'; a term coined by the psychologist Martin Seligman (1976) to refer to human phobias. He noted a category of stimulus which he called 'conspecifics' – that is other humans who pose a threat (Winston, 2003, pp.157-158). Preparedness involves introduction to the source of fear. In this context, establishing communication and mutual understanding with people from the 'other' culture.

The argument about mutual understanding, respect and acceptance of 'the other' is not new. It has been propagated since the Middle Ages by the famous Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who attempted to resolve the opposition and differences that predominated the relations between Islam and Greek philosophy at his time. He based his argument on three main principles: understanding 'the other' in his own system of reference; the right to be different; and tolerance and indulgence. In light of Averroes' philosophy, a dialogue based on understanding, trust and tolerance between East and West can bring out peace and stability to this world (Al-Jabri, 1999, pp. 76-79).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed and analysed the '*Aiaida* Bedouin Sufi beliefs and rituals. It began with the argument that all simplified and reductionist notions of 'Islam' as a unified and homogeneous bloc should be abandoned to allow the study of different versions of 'Islam' in their diversity and complexity of cultures and traditions. Islam, as well, cannot be perceived solely as a political tool utilised by any state or any group to serve their own political agendas and enforce social control. Religion is a private and personal matter concerned with the esoteric domain. Experience based on fieldwork with the '*Aiaida*



Bedouin proves that the Bedouin are not ignorant about matters of religion. The 'Aiaida are members of a Sufi Order named *ṭariqa Gaririya Aḥmadiya*. Their Sufi doctrine and manner of worship is based on fear, love and knowledge of God. They attempt to reach spiritual perfection by purifying their souls and adopting Divine qualities of Majesty and Beauty. Their doctrine and method of worship is strictly observed within the context of *shari'a*. Their Sufism is also a community affair hard to separate from the rest of their lives and culture. Their conduct and inter-personal relations are characterised by a high level of courtesy both in verbal address and respect behaviour.

The conception of the Bedouin, especially the Sufis amongst them, is full of prejudices and stereotypes because judgements are made according to anti-mystical standards. My knowledge of the 'Aiaida reveals that their life is not stagnant and their attitude not fatalistic. They progress both materially and spiritually. Both Islamic religious beliefs and modern scientific principles can coexist harmoniously without leading a dual personality. Many Bedouin people are capable of modernising and adopting some Western standards, without obliterating their religious beliefs and traditional culture at the same time. There is no contradiction. The next chapter studies this aspect in further detail by looking specifically at Bedouin responses to modernity and globalisation.

Sufism, which leads man to and reintegrates him in his Divine origin, could also function as a bridge between East and West. Purifying the soul implies tolerance, understanding and accepting of others. Sufism is about overcoming the opposition in the soul and the ability to give.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **BEDOUIN CULTURE AND MODERNITY: SCENES FROM THE APOCALYPTIC**

#### **Introduction**

Today's world is greatly influenced by the cognitive landscapes of modernity. The relationship between the industrial and electronic technologies and cognition are understood in terms of foundational schemas (Shore, 1996, pp.117-118). Many people's knowledge of the world has been shaped by modern technology. In this chapter I argue that in our contemporary world featured by rapid change and high-technological advancement, the Bedouin have 'adapted' their culture and developed new cultural models that entered into complex relations with their existing models to form new meanings. This argument entails that the interaction between cultural models and the ability to form new ones is an important source of creativity and continuity in the Bedouin cultural life. It also confirms the argument that primitive mentality is a fallacy. Some of the examples of a technologically driven modernity schema referred to in this chapter are deeply inherent in visions of the apocalyptic depicted in the *Quran* and the Prophet's tradition. These visions have always recurred in the narrative of many of my Bedouin informants as well as many other Egyptians whenever the issue of modernity or civilisation were discussed. Again, this makes us return to the issue of the 'rationality debate' and redefine rationality. In this context, my anthropological subjects speak for themselves and make their own interpretation of their changing world.

#### **The Question Concerning Our Age**

Our age is changing with such incredible speed that the majority of people are finding it increasingly difficult to accommodate and adapt to the shifting events and environments. This dramatic change has encouraged many commentators to believe and propagate that we are entering or have entered a distinct phase of human history – an 'apocalyptic' moment in history (Ahmed, 1992, p.32). This phase has been given different names by different scholars and commentators. Following the modern era, it has been called the 'postmodern'. Now, some refer to it as the 'post-postmodern' or 'the New Modernism' (Jencks, 1990). Others refer to it as the 'Late Modern Age' or 'High Modernity' (Giddens, 1991). It is also called the post-industrial, technological era, late capitalism



and the globalisation era, all proclaiming a 'New World Order' and 'the End of History and the Last Man' (Fukuyama, 1992). This last title in particular has been totally discredited in the aftermath of 11<sup>th</sup> September.

These different terms are clichés or catch-phrases, and not really "the herald of a new phase in human history" (Ahmed, 1992, p.9). Speaking of postmodernism, in particular, Featherstone (1991) suggests that such references "immediately exposes one to the risk of being accused of jumping on a bandwagon, of perpetuating a rather shallow and meaningless intellectual fad" (p.1). Furthermore, they are 'an ephemeral fashion'. To Pawley (1986), theorists are often obliged to invent such terms and movements because their careers depend on it. "The more movements they can give names to, the more successful they will be" (Quoted in Featherstone, 1991, p.1).

To the Bedouin, the majority of whom are non-literate or young, these terms are meaningless, especially when translated into Arabic. I never attempted to use any of them in my discussions with them. Rather, I used the simple term '*taghaiurat*' (literally changes) and '*madaniya*' (literally urbanism also connoting modernity). Regardless of the name given to describe our age, aspects of the rapid changes are evident everywhere. The aim of this chapter is to examine these changes and how they affect the Bedouin lifestyle. However, before discussing specific facets of modernity in Bedouin culture, it is important to mention that these facets are linked to the spread of consumer culture or consumerism. There is a growing salience of leisure and consumption activities in contemporary societies, as well as generating direct bodily excitement and aesthetic pleasures (Featherstone, 1991, p.13).

Consumerism finds its medium or means of expression in cities. One of its features is sites of consumption such as shopping centres and department stores. In this context, the Bedouin are no exception. Groups of Bedouin men and/or women or families go to towns or cities to buy their necessities and sell their produce. They satisfy their curiosity by strolling through the streets and markets looking at and examining the different goods on display. To them, the shopping experience is also "a leisure-time cultural activity" (ibid., p.103).

The production of consumerism is carried out through the media. Media and advertisement play a dangerous role in this respect. Featherstone (1991) argues that in consumer societies, media and advertisement are exploitative. Advertisement “attaches image of romance, exotica, desire, beauty, fulfilment, communality, scientific progress and the good life to mundane consumer goods such as soap, washing machines, motor cars and alcoholic drinks” (p.14). Media threatens our sense of reality. “It creates a simulational world in which the proliferation of signs and images has effaced the distinction between the real and the imaginary” (ibid., p.85).

A discussion of consumerism is incomplete without referring to the different modes of consumption. To speak of the consumption of goods immediately hides the wide range of goods, which are consumed or purchased. It is important therefore to differentiate between durables and non-durables, also between goods for necessity and those for leisure. At the same time, there are goods, which are referred to as ‘symbolic’. These are not consumed, but gazed at, admired, dreamt about, talked about, photographed. “Symbolism is not only evident in the design and imagery of the production and marketing processes, the symbolic associations of goods may be utilized and renegotiated to emphasize differences in lifestyle which demarcate social relationships” (Leiss, 1978 as quoted in Featherstone, 1991, p.16).

The term symbolic goods is used by Bourdieu (1986) to refer to goods that are used to mark social differences and act as communicators. According to him, they refer to conditions of supply and demand, competition and monopolisation, and the struggles between established and outsiders. Bourdieu also uses the concept of ‘cultural goods’ to refer to certain consumption patterns and lifestyle based on taste. To him, “taste classifies and classifies the classifier”. Taste, consumption preferences and lifestyle practices are associated with specific occupation and class fractions. For him, taste in cultural goods functions as marker of class and in *Distinction* (1986), Bourdieu seeks to map out the social field of the different tastes in legitimated ‘high’ cultural practices (museum visits, concert going, reading) as well as taste in lifestyles and consumption preferences (including food, drink, clothes, cars, novels, newspapers, magazines, holidays, hobbies, sport, leisure pursuits) (Featherstone, 1991, p.88). The high cultural practices do not entail that they are the only dominant model. There are other cultural models that can



adapt this 'high' model, change and transform it to suit its own taste and traditions like in the case of Bedouin and their reaction to modernity.

This, however, is conditional on having sufficient knowledge. Knowledge is imperative in this respect. Knowing of new goods, their social, symbolic and cultural value, and how to use them appropriately helps in transforming existing models to adapt new situations. This is particularly the case with aspiring groups, such as the Bedouin, who adopt a learning mode towards consumption and the cultivation of a new lifestyle, while maintaining their own traditional culture.

## **Some Facets of Modernity in the Bedouin World**

### ***1. The Car***

One of the most evident examples of modernity is the private car. I prefer to start with this example because it is the earliest and most famous in the Bedouin experience. A car functions mainly as a means of transport. Moreover, it permits more functions and is used with a high degree of flexibility. When talking about a car in a Bedouin context, we mainly refer to a pick up truck or a four-wheel-drive vehicle, rather than the ordinary saloon or sedan car, although the latter is also becoming common among some Bedouin men.

Many writers have noted the dynamism of the Bedouin culture and how they shifted from 'camel-technology' at one point in their history to 'automotive technology', which suits them more now until it is also rendered out of date (Asher, 1997, pp.111-112). This, however, does not mean that the camel has completely disappeared from the Bedouin culture. The chapter on animal symbolism explains in further detail how the camel still retains a high position in the Bedouin's value system.

The comparison between the camel and the car is always drawn to explain the dynamics of social change in Bedouin life. One of the most informative studies about this theme is Dawn Chatty's (1986) *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouin in the Modern World*. Focusing her study on Bedouin groups in Northern Arabia, Chatty attempts to describe and analyse how the truck has changed the Bedouin's way of life and has developed new concepts of time and distance. She explains that since the late 1960s and 1970s, the

Datsun and Toyota half-ton trucks have become a more common sight in the Bedouin landscape parked beside tent encampments than baggage camels. “The very rapidity with which the truck is replacing camel transport... is... becoming a threat to the long-term viability of this way of life” (p.143). Chatty, however, is not attempting to romanticise the old way of life. She speaks of the advantages of this shift. “The recent introduction of the truck has served to emphasize the unique nature of the pastoral adaptation... Such an adaptation ought not to be regarded as evidence of a system in decline. Rather it needs to be viewed as a system adapting to new factors—a potentially modernizing form of pastoralism” (ibid., pp.139-140). Moreover, this new association with the modern truck will eventually bridge the cultural gap that separate the Bedouin population from the rest of Middle Eastern societies (ibid., p.157). Indeed, the Bedouin association with the modern vehicle has recently bridged some of the cultural gaps, but at the same time has created some negative social and cultural aspects as well, as a result of ‘upward mobility’.

The pickup truck has various usages. It transports people and households during seasonal migration. Also used in transporting different commodities, foodstuff and water when going deep in the desert. Furthermore, it facilitates the commercialisation of livestock. It also provides for easier contact between relatives and different members of the tribe living in scattered villages. It also permits many Bedouin families to diversify their economic activities by undertaking work in towns and urban centres away from their villages or settlements (ibid., p.142). Modern vehicles have also facilitated the illegal trafficking and smuggling of goods across borders, particularly drugs.

Technologically advanced vehicles with their commonly associated automated accessories, combined radios and cassette-tape or CD players, and other gadgets are examples of consumer durable goods prevalent in consumer Western societies that have now become common among the Bedouin. These accessories and gadgets are not particularly crucial to the vehicle’s main function, which is transportation. They permit the expansion of the vehicle’s function as a symbol of social mobility. Owning such a high-tech vehicle sends a message that the owner is rich and distinct.

High-tech vehicles have become an object of social ‘distinction’ and a symbol of prestige. Some young Bedouin men, in particular, boast of their latest and brand new



models of 4X4 Toyotas and pickups nicknamed 'Maradona' after the famous Argentinean footballer known for his high speed. This is another stark example of the global village and advanced telecommunications systems. Although Maradona retired a few years ago, the new pickups still retain that name. These vehicles, in particular, are allegedly used in smuggling.

Another model, the Toyota Land Cruiser, because of its rounded rear wings, is given the name 'Laila Elwi' after a pretty plump Egyptian actress, famous for her rounded hips. This name is also common in all the Gulf countries, where this Toyota model is very popular. The Hummer vehicle, epitomising American might, endurance and dominion has not spread in Egypt on a large scale yet as it is very costly. Moreover, vehicles are anthropomorphised. The front with the headlights, bumper and side-view mirrors are viewed like a human face with eyes, ears and mouth. Many people including the Bedouin personalise their cars, giving them human names. Decorating and adorning vehicles with ornaments and Arabic calligraphy quoting proverbs and verses from the *Quran* is also a common practice.

As symbolic goods, these classy luxurious vehicles are also an object of admiration and pride. Many young Bedouin men like to have their photographs taken next to these cars. This distinctive machine-human relationship produces, what Shore (1996) refers to as 'techno-totemism'. It should be noted, however, that although the vehicle has replaced and supplemented the animal, it has not been given an animal identity. This is a very significant aspect in Bedouin culture showing that the camel remains symbolically separate and not merged with its substitute – the modern vehicle.





*Fig.11: 'Aiaida Children enjoying their ride*



*Fig.12: 'Aiaida boy on board of a modern tractor*



Whilst attending a camel race during my last phase of fieldwork, I observed something that I will never forget. It shows the stark contrast between the traditional and the very modern in the desert. A camel race is supposedly a traditional event, where rich and honourable Bedouin men put on display their thoroughbred camels and compete to show their sturdiness and speed. To me, the camel race was more of a car race. Once the camels start racing, all the new Toyotas (Maradona), Land Cruisers and Jeep Cherokees speed up next to them, coming first whilst beeping their horns and stirring a huge cloud of dust. As far as I was concerned, I was confused not knowing which to watch, the camels or the cars? I asked one of my elderly informants, who acted as one of the race referees, about these vehicles. He said the drivers were following their camels and encouraging the riders (jockeys). They showed their enthusiasm by beeping the horns. To him, they were not showing off. I thought otherwise. What confirmed my viewpoint is that after the end of the races, some drivers entered into a competition of their own to see who was the one who could do the largest number of *khamzat* (literally fives). Five in Arabic numerals is written like an 'O'. Drivers turn round with their cars 360 degrees forming full circles, stirring a cloud of dust and a terrible noise from the motor and tyres. This competition, which took about an hour, had definitely worn out their cars.

The traffic in Cairo is widely acknowledged as terrible. Asking several of my *'Aiaida* informants about whether they like it in Cairo, many commented that they could not put up with the traffic. A young boy at preparatory school mentioned that he went to Cairo once, but was very frightened he might get run over. Another young man told me that he spent part of his military service as a traffic warden. It was his first time in Greater Cairo. His first traffic duty was in Giza Square, one of the busiest in town. He remembers the incident with disappointment saying, "I felt lost, looking around, not knowing what to do about the traffic". He was lucky to spend the rest of his service looking after the prayer room in the soldiers' barracks.

I felt sorry for him imagining the scene as he narrated it. A young Bedouin man who has spent all his life in the desert finds himself one day in the middle of a big square jammed with traffic, high rises blocking the view, smoke, pollution, noise and is supposed to sort out the traffic and organise the flow of vehicles. I believe the transition was a great shock to him.

## 2. Television

Perhaps, of all the technological inventions of the twentieth century, the television has become the most popular and common commodity across all social classes worldwide. In Egypt, television was first introduced in the early 1960s. It was prevalent among the upper and some of the middle classes of the society. Now, it is found in almost every household across the country. It became widely spread in rural and remote areas after the installation of electricity. In the '*Aiaida* village, electric power was installed five years ago, in 2000. The majority of households now have TV sets. The '*Aiaida* Sheikh has a satellite dish as well. Across Sinai, many Bedouin are also deeply involved in channel surfing. Some Bedouin households, who still retain their nomadic lifestyle, can still enjoy television by investing in an electric generator. In these few households, it is often the men rather than women who watch TV, especially if they cannot afford a generator. Thanks to their vehicles, they can drive to their nearby settled kinsmen, where they spend the night watching television, then return to their encampments.

In this age, the debate about the impact of television and satellite channels is increasing because of its creation of a 'fantasy' world that effaced the distinction between the real and the imaginary. Before reviewing the Bedouin's perceptions of television and its impact on their lives, it is important to discuss how television is a powerful tool of modernity that transforms our lives so deeply.

Several studies have discussed the role of media and television in the process of social change especially in traditional societies, for example, Mitra (1999), Johnson (2000) and others. Johnson (2000) argues that television has recently transformed Indian village culture. Its influence reaches almost every aspect of rural life. Its magnitude and long lasting structural influence, however, remains to be determined. My fieldwork among different Bedouin groups covered to some extent the role of television in their lives. I reached similar conclusions to those of Johnson (2000), especially the impact of television in devaluing traditional life, reinforcing new trends and broadening the knowledge base. The following are the perceptions of some of my informants.

With regards to broadening horizons and increasing knowledge and information, many respondents confirmed and demonstrated this positive aspect of television. There are several incidents, which I will never forget. One day, a young boy at preparatory school



told me, when we were watching a newly born camel being vaccinated by a vet, that it had SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome). Amazed, I asked him what he knew about it? He answered that he heard about it on TV news and that it is a respiratory infection that caused the death of many people in China. One night, the 'Aiaida Sheikh was discussing with a group of tribesmen the Iranian Siamese Twins and they were amazed at how this could happen. The sheikh had seen the news item when he was surfing his satellite channels. The news about the war on Iraq was another topic of daily discussion as mentioned earlier.

In the interview with the old Bedouin *Heweitat* matriarch, she said that she likes watching TV, especially programmes that discuss current issues, social problems and crimes as they show real life stories. She likes the programme '*Ḥadith al-Madinah*' ('City Talk') by Mofeed Fawzy, a famous TV presenter and journalist. She narrated stories about social problems from the TV programmes she watches: *"all incidents that take place in these programmes are real. They indicate that security is missing in our lives now. There is no trust in people nowadays as if we are living in a jungle. If you do a favour to someone, you've got to be cautious and avoid his harm"*.

No doubt such TV programmes raise people's awareness and make them more cautious in dealing with others, especially strangers. Scepticism has become a common trait in people's daily interactions in this present age. This makes it more difficult for researchers, in particular, to gain the confidence of the researched. In this particular interview with the Bedouin woman, what raised the subject of television was her inquiry about my identity and the purpose of my research. She wanted to make sure that I would not say any negative thing about Egypt abroad. Referring to Mofeed Fawzy's programme, she mentioned the incident of the CNN broadcasting a secret back street female circumcision operation, which stirred public opinion in Egypt during the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994.

The 'Aiaida poet, debated the pros and cons of TV. *"TV is good. It increases a person's knowledge and information. But it has its dangers as well. I would say that its good sides and bad ones are equal. The dangers are in watching nudity and promiscuity. Those negatively affect people, especially the youth. The more they see such things, the more they decline to get married..."*

To another young man, holding a diploma in computer, some TV programmes are trivial. He argues, *"I find the programmes debating social and political issues speak of trivial things that do not require all that time and all these views of professionals and specialists. Talking about divorce for example, Islam has stated the rules for that matter easily and ages ago. These programmes make a fuss and discuss unimportant things. Nevertheless, I like watching it. All children like watching it too, especially films, both Egyptian and American films and cartoons"*.

Many informants mentioned the television's role in changing and undermining traditional values. Haj 'Ayad of the *Heweitat*, for example says, *"Now young people are involved in side talks. No one listens when older people are talking. Youths now watch TV and ignore what the elderly says. TV has been forced on us"*. He is amazed at the increasing number of crimes and strange crimes and social problems, which he watches on some TV programmes. Haj Gasem, of the *'Aiaida* also shares the same argument. *"TV broadcasts many things that do not belong to our culture or traditions"*. Another young man of the *Heweitat* said, *"Satellite dishes broadcast things that are different from our traditions and customs. It facilitates the spread of vice and interference into our internal affairs"*.

Contrary to some arguments claiming that TV reinforces social relations by making people see each more often and developing friendships (Johnson, 2000, pp.205-206), some Bedouin men argue that, on the contrary, it undermines social relationships and communication between relatives, friends and neighbours. According to an *'Aiaida* informant, *"TV is occupying people more. You cannot talk to anyone or visit anyone when they are watching TV, especially the serials [Egyptian soap operas]"*.

According to an electrician of Bedouin origin in Suez, life has started changing in his town since the mid 1970s, and particularly after the installation of electricity in 1982. He adds, *"No one at that time had a TV. We used to watch it at the coffee shop. Nowadays, things have changed, everyone now has a TV set and many have satellite dishes and videos. In the past, we would study under a kerosene lamp. This change is definitely for the better. But, at the same time, you'll find that the TV has its negative aspects. The films and songs broadcast show values different from ours and are thus harmful to our traditions and values"*.



According to two 'Aiaida brothers in Suez, the reason behind the decline of their traditions and values is the media. One argues, *"TV is teaching our children different values. Now our girls want to look like a certain actress. They gave up wearing their black long dresses and prefer wearing tight trousers. It teaches young boys and girls flirting and dating. 'Where shall we meet?' 'When can I meet you?' It no longer talks about the desert and the values of desert life. It is not an aspect of development; it is a sign of deterioration in morals. It also breeds brutality, roughness and terrorism as it shows people how to commit crimes"*.

The 'dream' or 'fantasy' world created by the TV could have devastating effects, especially on children, as one young 'Aiaida boy told me about one of his younger cousins. This cousin was about four or five years old at that time. *"He was watching Batman on TV and tried to imitate the film. He jumped over the wall and injured his head"*. Similar stories of this type occurred several times in different locations and contexts.

For some few Bedouin groups who could be described as 'disadvantaged' by modernists and developmentalists, the situation is different. One of the *Aḥiwaṭ* Sheikhs in Sinai, for example, believes that *"TV does not play an important role in bringing up our children, simply because we do not have electricity yet"*. In a sense, lack of electric power and consequently TV could create a 'disadvantaged' group. Johnson (2000) argues that television in rural India has created *"a more disadvantaged information underclass"* (p.215). It is a class of people who have 'no access' to television and cannot consequently converse on the same level with those who 'have access'. The context of Johnson's study, however, is quite different from the *Aḥiwaṭ* group one, as in the latter, the whole community does not have access to TV, except for those who can afford to obtain a generator or visit their kinsmen in towns to watch TV. This situation is also common worldwide, especially in the global age with the advent of the Internet.

### **3. The Press**

A discussion of TV and media should include the press. As more Bedouin men are now becoming literate as a result of sedentarisation and schooling, especially the young generations, newspapers have become a new commodity that attracts their attention. It is the tabloids, however, that are often read and exchanged between friends. The tabloids,

referred to in Egypt as 'the yellow press' have spread in the last few years. They are attractive because they are full of printed coloured photographs of models, actresses and celebrities as well as columns and articles about the latest gossip and crimes. News items about football and sports are also of interest to some Bedouin youth.

Among the 'Aiaida, young men would buy newspapers on Sunday at the local weekly market. In one event, a young man bought a paper and it was read by all his mates and kinsmen who happened to be around that day. Pictures of women and exciting articles were read enthusiastically. One commented. "*What's happening in the world and in Egypt nowadays? Things used to be good! What's all this sex and promiscuity?*" As the young men could not read the paper in privacy, each went to a corner of the room so as not to be disturbed.

To the 'Aiaida Sheikh, journalists fabricate news and interviews. He mentions, "*In one event, the local newspaper published an interview with me, which I did not give nor even make any announcements*". As a tribal leader, however, they like to put my name in any news article related to Bedouin affairs. Since this event, I never believe, whatever they write".

#### **4. Digital Technology**

Digital technology is a plain feature of modernity in this global age. Martin Heidegger (1978) argues that "everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it" (p.311). To him, the word *techne* is related to *episteme*. And both words refer to knowledge in the widest sense and revealing of truth and essence (ibid., pp.318-319). But in reality, technology has threatened the essence of man instead of making him more knowledgeable and free. Heidegger (1978) adds,

The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence. The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth (ibid., p.333).

Shore (1996) argues that recently technology has shifted from the analog to the digital coding. He refers to David Mindell (1989) who noted that knowledge as information has



made possible 'a radical qualitative reduction' in knowledge forms, along with a conversion of all knowledge into digital data (p.152).

Shore (1996) proposes that forms and shapes of life have been replaced by digital coding (ibid.). These arguments are true to a great extent in the Bedouin context. One of my first observations in all the field sites where I carried out my study is the prevalence of mobile phones among all Bedouin young men. At a rough guess, the ratio of those who own mobiles to those who don't is 1:3. Again, it is a symbol of consumerism. This commodity with its new and diversified models is also seen as a symbolic and a cultural commodity that marks distinction and high social status. Bedouin young men boast of their latest *Nokia* models and the different melodies and images they download. Children imitate the adults and play with plastic mobile phone toys. They create their own fantasy world imagining that they are talking to real people.

Referring to high-tech digital commodities and children lead to a discussion of video games or 'Atari' as they are popularly known in Egypt. These devices have spread widely in recent years among all social classes, both rich and poor including Bedouin children, because of their cheap prices. They create a 'virtual reality' world where children find refuge from their 'real world'. But one of the most alarming aspects of this 'electronic simulation of reality', according to Shore (1996) is its creation and proliferation of 'virtual violence'. This type of violence is more serious than the one watched on TV, because "[W]hile television violence distinguishes viewer and actor, its video-game counterpart does not. From the military end, the rocket launcher and the gunner on a modern bomber now become 'viewers' as well as fighters, viewing their targets through electronically mediated scopes and video screens" (p.146). The psychological effects of this 'virtual violence' has not been thoroughly studied yet, but, according to Shore, "there are some disturbing signs that these effects may not be trivial... At once real and illusory, the consequence of violence can be annulled by a flip of the switch. The scene of the crime vaporizes on the screen, while it whizzes out of sight for the occupants of a speeding car" (ibid., p.147). My observations of Bedouin children playing and some of their drawings reveal their fascination with war games, guns, jet fighters and tanks.

Some Bedouin young men know of the health hazards of mobile phones, but still insist on using them. A young man from the *Heweitat* in Al-Salam city argues, "*Technology*

*and urbanism are signs of backwardness. Air conditioners cause illnesses like common colds and flu, etc. Mobiles cause cancer, but we use them and cannot stop using them now”.*

On the other hand, mobile phones are useful because they strengthen social ties and keep kinsmen in touch with each other, especially since time has become limited and people have become so occupied that they do not have enough time to visit each other as before. According to the old woman of the *Heweitat*, “*telephones are good because they can save people in emergencies*”. As far as I know, this woman does not own a telephone herself. Mobiles are only a privilege for men. As I could not maintain contact with any Bedouin women, I cannot claim if Bedouin women also use mobiles.

Too many telephone calls, however, can become a nuisance and an invasion of personal privacy. To Haj ‘Ayad, an elderly ‘*Aiida* sheikh, “*Telephones are a disease. They cause disturbance and irritate people when they start ringing. However, we cannot deny their importance*”.

David Rumelhart, a cognitive psychologist argues, “[T]he inspiration for our theories and our understanding of abstract phenomena is always based on our experience with the technology of the time” (Quoted in Shore, 1996, p.136). To this statement, I would add that managing technological devices depends on our knowledge and selective use of them and hence our experience with the technology of our time. An incident that took place during my fieldwork made me realise the relevance of Rumelhart’s statement. I wanted to give my contact number in Cairo to one of my informants in Suez. As I did not have a pen and a piece of paper handy at the time, I asked his brother if he could fetch them for me. My informant pointed out that there is no need for them as he could save my name and number on his mobile, which he did dexterously. As I did not own a mobile at that time, the idea of using a phone as an address book never crossed my mind. The SARS case mentioned earlier is also relevant in this context, when the Bedouin boy related what he saw on TV to the existing condition of the camel.

According to one of the police officers interviewed, “*Bedouin men always need to have the latest state-of-the-art technology exemplified in satellite mobile phones, 4X4 vehicles and automatic weapons to be ahead of the police... Today’s crimes are different from the past as*



*they are based on technology to a great extent*". This police officer, as well as many others shares the stereotypical image that all Bedouin men are involved in drug dealing and trafficking. The signs of affluence with the Bedouin could only have one source – drugs.

Shore (1996) explains that a good everyday example of the shift from the analog to the digital coding is in the representation of time. Analog watches and clocks, bearing a perceptual link with the movement of the sun across the sky, have been transformed into digital timepieces representing time abstractly (p.153).

The example of time is significant in the contemporary Bedouin context. Almost all Bedouin men, old and young wear digital wristwatches. Mass production of these commodities in South-East Asian and Chinese markets has made them cheap. A digital watch can be bought for about LE 3 (30p) in local markets in Egypt. The Bedouin, many of whom are non-literate, have managed to read the time represented in these watches in English. They find it easy now. They can even put it into words, but only voicing numbers. For example, if you ask someone the time, he would say 8:50, but cannot say ten to nine in Arabic. My analog watch was unfamiliar to them. I taught some children and young men how to read the time using the analog way, but it was too difficult for them. One young man stated that he was happy the way he read the time and showed a lack of interest in learning. I find this quite surprising and sad that young Bedouin men can no longer know the time through the sun and its movement across the sky. Even prayer time is now known through the radio and calendars. Navigation in the desert using the stars has also become a rarity. Only old men know how and are interested in reading the constellations and pointing out their locations. My attempts to attract the younger generation to look at the sky and identify stars and constellations were in vain. No wonder, when the new Toyota 4X4 Land Cruisers are now equipped with compasses and satellite digital navigation systems.

## The Age of Cities and Masses

In contemporary Bedouin discourse, there are many references to the city, urban lifestyle and city culture, modern civilisation, overpopulation and the masses. These discourses could form several studies on their own. In this section, I shall only shed some light on the contemporary Egyptian Bedouin's perception of life in the city, and the social and demographic changes that accompany life in the modern city. This brief review will help in better understanding the discourse on the apocalyptic. The city, in this context, refers particularly to Cairo.

### *Egypt's Massified Society*

The population of a country, particularly in its urban centres, is often referred to as the 'common people' or the 'masses'. 'Common' means something shared, also low, vulgar and unrefined. It is derived from the Latin *vulgus* or the 'common people'. The term 'masses', on the other hand, has become identified with the urban industrial lower orders and working people, or the 'herd', which form a perpetual threat to 'high' culture. According to Raymond Williams (1958), "there are no masses; there are only ways of seeing 'other' people as masses. To see common people as masses emphasises their lowness and vulgarity as opposed to cultivated taste" (Quoted in Featherstone, 1991, pp. 135).

Featherstone (1991) explains that, in this age, technology and mass communication suggest that society has become 'massified' and a tasteless mass culture has been produced, which destroyed the ideals of the humanistic elite culture, exemplified in the middle and upper classes. This elite or high culture shows fear of falling and being dragged down or swamped by the vulgar masses, and losing its privileged position and self-control. This fear is therefore often coupled with a feeling of revulsion and disgust. The close contact with the 'masses' in new urban places and public transportation has even accentuated these feelings (pp. 134-135).

According to Bourdieu (1986), "[T]he taste of common people often appears [to the bourgeoisie] too simple and easy, too closely linked to the palpable pleasures and sensual desire of animality" (p.32). 'Pure' taste, on the other hand, according to Kant, is seen as 'distanced' and 'disinterested' compared to the vulgar taste of the masses. To Bourdieu,



‘pure’ taste entails “a refusal, a disgust of simple enjoyment and pleasures. The disgust can be related to a horror for the vulgar on the part of those who have had to achieve painfully the discipline and respect of cultural tastes which are difficult” (Featherstone, 1991, pp.135-136).

Contemporary Egyptian society is falling apart in many respects. I would argue that the ‘lower’ urban classes, who constitute a considerable percentage of the population, are deprived of the conditions where refinement of taste could be cultivated. The quality of life is declining continuously with all its aspects becoming worse. It is going into a vicious circle. The rising population and high density are devouring all cultivable lands. Despite the urban planning activities and the new settlement projects in the deserts, many cultivable lands are up to the present made fallow and wasted to be used as building plots for high rises, creating more stress on the weak infrastructure. Corruption, on the part of some members of local councils, who accept bribes to let people build on these agricultural plots, is rife. New social classes (*nouveau riches*) have risen as a result of this economic activity trading in lands as brokers. Many people prefer to work in the informal sector away from any supervision or order. Promiscuity and violence are widespread. Poor and slum urban areas have become ruthless spaces characterised by exploitative and manipulative relationships. Many people are, therefore, becoming more alienated and depressed. These changes affecting many segments of the Egyptian society are also affecting the Bedouin.

The Bedouin consider their culture ‘high’ and their taste ‘pure’ compared to what they perceive as the ‘vulgar’ culture and taste of the masses or the common Egyptians, particularly the *fellahin* (peasants) and ‘lower’ classes living in urban poor and slum areas. Shahat’s reference to eating and the refusal of Bedouin men to eat with the *fellahin* who eat with both hands, mentioned earlier, could be better understood in this context. Bedouin discourse is also full of verbal formulas depicting this distinction and the disgust shown particularly to peasantry. One famous saying, which is still valid nowadays about marriage, is ‘*ermiha lel timsa’ah wa la ti-zawegha lel falaḥ*’ (throw your daughter to a crocodile, better than marrying her to a peasant). Contemporary Bedouin men, especially the older generations, lament the changes in their cultural values and traditions after they have been engulfed by the culture of the ‘lower’ urban and rural Egyptian masses. Bedouin discourse depicts the city and its masses as a ‘low’ culture and therefore constitutes an element of constant grievance and revulsion.

The following quotes reflect the feelings of some Bedouin informants in various contexts regarding the city and the masses:

Shahat, the 'Aiaida townsman, believes that as the population is increasing, there is a change in values, traditions and customs. *"Nowadays, you cannot distinguish between us [the Bedouin] and fellahin [peasants]. This is because we no longer stick to our old traditions and values"*. He adds, *"There is a huge urban development taking place now on cultivable land [after being left fallow]. Things have become different now. If time goes back and the wasteland used for construction becomes cultivated once again, then our values and traditions will return"*.

Haj Gebreel, another old Bedouin townsman says, *"this urbanism is not development; it is 'kharab' (decline and waste). Personal interest is the only motivation for people to know each other or deal with each other nowadays. There is no good now and no 'baraka' (blessing). Even the old traditions and customs have withered away. I would never sit in front of my father with my hair uncovered or carry my children [role reserved only for females]. Now it is different, children now smoke in front of their fathers"*.

In those two cases of Shahat and Haj Gebreel, it is interesting to note that they both speak with nostalgia about the past and the good old days, but at the same time boast of their material possessions and their upward mobility after they both benefited from selling their plot of cultivated land and built new modern concrete houses.

Some Bedouin townsmen also show deep concern at the withering away of their traditions and their mixing with the masses, such as Sheikh 'Ayad, of the *Heweitat*. He argues, *"Our traditions are threatened with becoming extinct or dying out. It is only in desert places such as Sinai where you find the Bedouin still keeping the old traditions. There is no sheikh or leader to unite them. Those living in cities have become dispersed, forming small families [nuclear families]...* He adds, *"Now we have the scum of the society living here [Al-Salam City]. It has become a tainted area. However, there are good people as well and some of them refer to us to solve their problems in our traditional way"*.



Haj Mohamed of the *Heweitat*, a middle-aged townsman in Al-Salam City argues, “*The problem with urbanism now is that people are not satisfied with what they have. There is covetousness, greediness and materialism*”. Materialism has become a common characteristic among all groups of the society, even the young. In a culture famous for its generosity and hospitality, materialism has become predominant in both urban and rural contexts. One reason for this could be the poor conditions under which many of the Bedouin families live, as another *Heweitat* townsman argues, “*In slum areas, crime is ripe. People have covetousness and are envious of each other. They do not seek good for each other. This is because of deprivation*”. In my opinion, it is more a result of the spreading consumerism. Everyone now wants to keep up with the Jones’.

I wonder if consumerism with its emphasis on hedonism, the pursuit of pleasures and development of egoism, forms a threat to Islamic religious beliefs as it has affected the Bedouin culture. I was able to discuss this subtle question with very few informants. The ‘*Aiaida* Sheikh’s answer was a notable one. He argued that God has given us many blessings in the form of material goods and there is nothing wrong with proclaiming the Grace of God as long as the poor also benefit. From my observations, I believe that some members of the ‘*Aiaida* community, particularly the poor, would not be satisfied with this answer.

One of the ‘*Aiaida* informants refers to modernism, urbanism and materialism using the term *hadara* (literally civilisation). He argues, “*Civilisation has destroyed many of the good things. It has not improved things. Now everyone is living on his own busy with what he is doing. TV is occupying people more...*” In this context, he skilfully uses the sociological definition of civilisation meaning material values and practices that are shared with other peoples and that do not reflect individual culture, in particular, the Bedouin culture considered to be a unified and homogenous entity.

Another aspect of change and example of the breakdown of healthy social relationships emphasised in Bedouin discourse is the lack of trust between people nowadays. Shaḥat, Haj Gebreel, and many others agreed that in the past, any deals or contracts were made without writing them down. “*Now everything has to be written down. Marriage as well has to be registered. In the past, it was just by the word of mouth and there was trust. We used to say ‘madam al baḥr baḥr wa alkaf ma yenbet shaar’* [“as long as the sea is the

sea and hair does not grow in the palms of the hands”]. *We would never change our word*”.

In traditional Bedouin justice, rulings have to be written down as well and all parties involved have to sign. In one traditional judiciary meeting in Suez, an interesting incident occurred. After more than three hours of discussing the case, the judges made their ruling and wrote it down. Both litigants had to sign. A problem arose as one of them was non-literate and could not sign. In that case, they had to take his forefinger print. But as they did not have any inkpads at the time, one of the participants suggested that the man could use soot out of a car’s exhaust pipe. The man had to wet his finger and rub it against the exhaust pipe of a pickup truck parked next to us to sign the paper. He had to do this several times, as he had to sign three papers. The man was complaining and someone else suggested jokingly that we ought to bring the car next to him to keep him sitting comfortably.

The *Heweitat* matriarch argues,

*This rapid urbanism is the result of the increasing population. There are many people now who have migrated [to Cairo] during the several wars we had [with Israel]. Giving birth to many children as well has increased the population tremendously. It is not a good thing! Children need to be looked after, be fed, dressed and join a school. Now, they even get children enrolled in schools while they are still in their mum’s wombs.*

Elaborating more on overpopulation, social changes and violence, another *Heweitat* old man states,

*In the past, a man’s ezwa (power or backup) was in having many children. A man would have fifteen sons to support him and back him up. These were the days of fawda (chaos). Nowadays, it is different. You cannot find that situation. A man’s ezwa now is in his ‘lisan helw’ (good words, literally sweet tongue) and deeds. Some conflicts and arguments, however, have to be settled by using force (arms). He adds, “There was once a disagreement between my daughter-in-law on one side and my son and daughter, on the other. My daughter-in-law’s relatives interfered and beat my daughter on her head with a long wooden truncheon. At that time, I had an injured hand (caused through an accident on his motorbike). I wanted to get my kalashnikov and open fire at them, but I could not due to my injury.*

Urban development has its advantages as well. Haj Mohamed of the *Heweitat* mentions some, particularly the better quality of life. “Now we are much better. We have drinking water in our taps and a clean house. It is a more comfortable life with easy



*transportation. It is a luxurious life much better than in the past when I had to walk for hours to go to my primary school”.*

In central Sinai, An *Aḥiwat* Sheikh speaks of urban development again as *ḥadara* (civilisation):

*Civilisation is good in terms of providing us with electricity and water. It facilitates life. Education is also important. Now, everyone cares for the education of his children. The population is increasing because there is more care by the government for the health of people. In the past many people would die of diseases such as pneumonia and TB, but now you find hospitals and clinics providing free services and free immunisation. We have many medical caravans coming to our villages and travelling in the deserts to meet the health needs of the Bedouin. Again water is available. In the past, we used to carry water on our backs in leather bags made from goatskin. Water is also available for our animals and all is free. In terms of our traditions and customs, nothing has changed. We still have our Bedouin justice, which we adhere to.*

Another man of Bedouin origin believes that *“all the urban development and the new cities is one of the great achievements of the peace with Israel. I am just wondering where all these people come from and where they live. There is, however, so much squandering of money and resources by building lavish villas and mansions, especially along the seacoast and the Suez Canal. Whilst planning, no space was left for the poor to enjoy the sea”.*

The following quotes from my field notes and interviews show more varied opinions from settled Bedouin men in rural areas in Ismailia, Suez and Sinai:

One *‘Aiaida* informant believes that *“Urban life or (city life) is crazy”*. Nevertheless, he does not find it difficult to live there. He has been to Cairo several times and visits a doctor in Heliopolis, where I live. He adds, *“I do not care about the lavish life of the city. I go to places where I can find my comfort like visiting the mosques and tombs of great saints and sheikhs. You would not expect me to show up at a funfair. I go to places where I can seek comfort like Al-Hussein or Sayeda Zeinab”* (famous mosques in Cairo).

Contrary to the above argument, an *Aḥiwat* young man claims, *“We accept and like our lives here in the desert. Whenever I go inside a building, I feel I am unable to talk; my tongue is not as fluent as when I am outside. I hate the noise of the city as well”.*



The 'Aiaida poet argues,

*I prefer living in the wilderness rather than in a city. In the wilderness, however, I do not have the facilities available in the city. These facilities have their own hazards. Electricity, for example, is important but it affects the eyesight. Our eyesight is as sharp as a falcon. Living surrounded by walls also affects our sight because they form a barrier. In the desert, the land is vast with no barriers to the horizon.... In Egypt [Cairo] people are to be acknowledged for being able to live in this crowdedness; their faces close to each other. This spreads diseases... The beauty of life is in its hardships. We work, get exhausted and when it is time to rest, we feel joy. Now, we do not feel this joy any longer. I myself am 'me 'kawa 'a' [stretching] all day, which makes me feel bored. Our aspirations [as Bedouin] are now different from the past. In the past, I only wished to have a pair of slippers. Now people are aspiring wealth and cars. Everything was scarce in the past and we were longing for them such as old music disks, now we have plenty of cassette tapes but they are tasteless. Clothes now also do not have a value...*

Two 'Aiaida brothers in Suez also compare the 'good life' in the desert compared to the city's hectic and unhealthy lifestyle.

*We care for our families and keeping in contact with them. We have an innate intelligence. We can read tracks (qaṣ athar) and navigate the desert by the stars. It has been proven scientifically that electric light weakens eyesight. In the desert, we have fresh unpolluted air. Our food is always fresh. We bake bread everyday and do not store it. So, fungi do not grow on it. We are self-sufficient. We do not rely on the market except for very few items. We drink fresh milk and eat fresh meat on special occasions only. All this fresh food protects the body from diseases. Our diet is also simple. It consists mainly of one or two types. Our homes are made of wool and goat-hair, which are healthier unlike the brick houses where walls are plastered. The paints used are hazardous...*

Another 'Aiaida old Sheikh argues,

*Our religion encourages development. The problem with urbanism, however, is that it makes people dispersed. Everyone is living in his own house or flat. People no longer want to socialise. They no longer want to be hospitable and honour their guests. This hadara (civilisation) is dividing us. Moreover, it confines us. Houses are cramped, but we like spaciousness and ample room to live and graze with our animals. We also do not like mixing much with different people. We only like mixing with good people who teach us good things". In the same group interview, another informant adds, "We value our honour most and applying the teachings of God. We do not accept the vice seen in the streets of cities. This vice leads to prostitution and destruction of our values and principles...*



To other 'Aiaida, these changes and urban growth is inevitable. One informant argues, *"To build and develop is for our benefit. It is by God's will and a gift from God to let us grow the land and live on it. Development helps us to become educated and educate our children"*.

Again, the negative sides of the modern life are emphasised, however, this time with a different emphasis. According to one Ahiwat informant,

*We now have a crisis of conscience. No one wants to work hard and we are far away from the teachings of our religion. We are at the end of the world. The urban growth and the high rises around us are all signs of the approaching day of judgement. The government does not offer us anything. Teachers do not teach at their schools. All these things lead people to drug addiction"*.

Another Hweitat townsman emphasises, *"urbanism and the increasing population are all signs of the day of judgement"*.

Many people whom I came across throughout the process of this research in various contexts, roles and capacities refer to the current changes and events as signs of the approaching Day of Judgement or Doomsday. What are these signs? How are they interpreted? And how far do people believe in them? To these questions, I started searching for anthropological answers which can contribute something to the understanding of Bedouin culture and current social changes.

## **The Apocalyptic in Islam**

Interest in foretelling the future and the end of the world is an incessant phenomenon found in many different cultures throughout history. This phenomenon has different names. It is often referred to prophecy, apocalyptic, fortune telling, manic wisdom, Millenarianism, etc., all emphasising that there will be a 'last day' when the world will come to an end and terrible things will happen. This 'Day' again has been called several names: the Day of Judgement, Doomsday, the Day of Resurrection, the Hereafter, the Hour, etc.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in this phenomenon. According to Grabbe (2003), the prophecy, apocalyptic, etc. are "all means of trying to ascertain knowledge of the divine will, the spirit world, the cosmos, the future and the fate of

human beings. In our somewhat troubled world today, most of us would be greatly pleased to have such esoteric knowledge. No wonder, prophecy, apocalyptic, and manic wisdom still flourish even in our scientific age” (p.37).

The apocalyptic is not an “untenable and outdated” mythical eschatology as Bultmann (1941), a Bible scholar, argues (Quoted in Koch, 1972, pp.65-66). Even if it is mythical, myth in anthropology plays a major part in the lives of human beings. Many cultures construct their own symbols and worldview on such myths. In fact, social and cultural anthropology have a potential to make a valuable contribution to the debate about prophecy and the apocalyptic “if used according to strict methodological principles” (Grabbe, 2003, p.36).

A complete understanding of Bedouin culture and their way of thinking is therefore incomplete without understanding their version of the apocalyptic and how they interpret the world and events around them. One difficulty, however, is terminology and definitions. The term ‘apocalyptic’ is not used in Islam. Its lexical meaning as *safr el-ruy’a*, refers mainly to Biblical writings and ideas about the end of human history on earth. Islam, on the other hand, speaks about the ‘signs’ (in Arabic ‘*alamat* or *isharat*) before and during the Day of Judgement. There are minor and major signs. The former have started to take place since the Prophet’s death 1400 years ago and are ongoing, while the latter will take place before the destined ‘Hour’ or the Day of Judgement itself.

References to this ‘Day’, or the ‘Hour’ and its major and minor signs are not written by scribes. They are revealed by God in the *Quran* and narrated by his Prophet Muhammad through the word of mouth in his *ḥadith* (tradition and actions). His companions and later authoritative Muslim scholars wrote these *aḥadith* (pl.) down and collected them as part of the Prophet’s tradition. Quranic verses and *aḥadith* are authoritative and thus cannot be easily denounced as mythical. Any such attempt is considered heretical. Belief in the Day of Judgment and destiny are part and parcel of the belief system of a Muslim.

As in Christianity and Judaism, there is a growing interest in Islam about rediscovering the narratives about the Day of Judgment and its various signs. There are new interpretations of the *Quran* and new readings of the Prophet’s tradition within the new



occurrences taking place. As mentioned above, the discourse about this phenomenon has become widespread among almost all sectors of the Egyptian society as well as in many parts of the Muslim world.

It should be noted, however, that this growing phenomenon in Islamic apocalyptic could not be considered a movement like Millenarianism, although it anticipates a period in the near future when supernatural intervention as well as human action will be necessary. Those who expect it to occur soon are referred to by Worsley (1970) in his study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia as 'activists', i.e., preparing themselves for that Day now, rather than resigning themselves to the present destiny and looking for salvation in the Hereafter (p.22).

In Egypt, there are many books in Arabic discussing the signs of the Hereafter. Some of them are widely available and discussed among the Bedouin, both literate and non-literate alike. Many Bedouin men believe that many of the recent scientific and technological inventions such as solar energy, electricity, oil, modern vehicles, satellites, etc. are mentioned in the *Holy Quran* revealed more than 1400 years ago (See Appendix Five).

The Prophet's tradition complements the Quranic references. In it, there are several references to minor signs proclaiming the approaching end. Some Bedouin informants referred to some of them, particularly, the increase in killing; the disappearance of knowledge and the appearance of ignorance; the prevalence of promiscuity, adultery and drinking wine. Two signs were often emphasised which many Bedouin informants relate to. These are: the decrease in the number of men and the increase in the number of women. The 'Aiaida, in particular, refer to this sign as a rationale for polygamy. The second is that "'hofat'. 'or'a' (literally 'bare feet' and 'unclothed' people or the poor; some interpret it as the Bedouin) will compete in constructing high buildings". Signs of affluence among nomadic Bedouin groups, especially in Arabia, are strongly linked to this sign.

## Conclusion

The chapter began with an explanation of modernity as a foundational schema influencing many aspects of our modern life. This was followed by a review of several

examples of modernity, many of them are strongly linked to the city and urban culture. References to modernity and city life are strongly related and have much in common with the concept of the apocalyptic in Islamic discourse. The apocalyptic in Islam is not false. And if some argue otherwise, then we cannot deny the major power it plays in shaping the views of many Bedouin people, as well as many other Muslims worldwide. As mentioned earlier in the chapter on Bedouin Sufism, time is a constant element. There is no difference between this world and the Hereafter; both form a continuum in the Bedouin and Muslim people's thinking and cognition.

The Islamic conception of the apocalyptic provides for some Bedouin a sort of rationale to come to terms with the rapid changes in their world. It proves to be rational in light of the context of their belief system and experiences. This type of rationality is referred to by Shore (1996) as 'contextual rationality'. "[It] assumes that acts or statements are 'logical' in terms of an often hidden context of supporting beliefs or acts with which they are functionally integrated... [It] is the most common relativistic account for the reasonableness of apparently incomprehensible actions and beliefs..." (p.170).

Daniel Bell (1976) considers the problem of modernity is one of belief. "Secular systems of meaning have proved illusory solutions to the spiritual crisis once the anchorage of society in religion has been served, and only a religious revival is capable of restoring the continuity of generations and producing images of cosmic order, humility and caring which can satisfactorily address our sense of the existential predicaments" (Quoted in Featherstone, 1991, pp.116-117). Before Bell, Durkheim argues that as societies become more complex, and social and cultural differentiation increases, what people need to retain is their humanity. According to Featherstone (1991), 'The idea of the human person', hence, becomes "a powerful symbol, one of the few examples of the sacred which had potential for universal appeal in the modern world (p.145).



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BEDOUIN ANIMAL SYMBOLISM

#### Introduction

To many urbanites whose world views have been shaped by technology, the power that many animals and plant species have over people living in direct relation with them appears to be strange or rather irrational. With the growth of cities, especially in the post-industrial technological era, many human attitudes to nature and animals have become rather detached and materialistic. Animals, especially domesticated ones are often perceived as utilitarian objects “good for eating”. Despite this, anthropomorphism is still a universal human proclivity. Many human societies identify themselves with certain animals or plants living in their environments, develop a close affinity with them and attribute their human characteristics to them. Animals and to a lesser degree plants form emblematic signs and bear metaphorical relations to humans. People classify them into different categories that form conceptual models for human social relations.

This identification with animals and plants has in some cases been labelled as totemism. It is often associated with the study of religions and interpreted as the ‘worship’ of animals. Lévi-Strauss (1966), however, considers totemism as an intellectual rather than a religious phenomenon. Totems are chosen not because they are “good for eating” but because they are “good for thought” (Mair, 1972, p.220). They have thus become “food for thought”. Totemism is used now as the technical name describing the association between specific animal species and specific human groups.

There are two different approaches to interpreting totemic symbolism: metaphorical and metonymic totemism. Associated with Lévi-Strauss (1966), the former stresses the metaphorical relationships evident in animal-human relations, understood as analogies. It emphasises the inherent rationality and classificatory nature of human thought and is thus seen as logical. The latter has an apparent “irrational character”.

[It] stresses the literal identification of the species from which a name is taken and the named individual or group... Metonymic totemism conceives of direct spiritual or physical “participations,” incorporative relations between animals or plants, on the one hand, and humans on the other hand. These direct identifications reflect both a mystical bond between human and totem and sometimes consuming practical interest in a species as a source of food necessary for the continuity of human life”  
(ibid., pp. 172-173).

To the human mind, animals have a symbolic purpose. As “self-acting inhabitants of the non-human world”, they represent both the existential and normative aspects of human experience, in addition to their interrelation. Animals have the ability to alternate between two different modes: the analogical mode of the metaphor and the contiguity of the metonymic. It is this alternation between similarity and contiguity that makes man and animal relate to each other (Willis, 1974, pp. 128-129).

This chapter discusses the symbolic role that animals play in Bedouin thought and culture. Animals have a symbolic significance and value rather than just being pragmatic objects that provide a functional role in the life of human beings. This becomes evident by studying the Bedouin’s perceptions and attitudes to their animals. Their relationship is deep and entangled to an extent I have never thought of before. The chapter discusses the most important animals to the Bedouin. Like many other societies, Bedouin societies have established a hierarchy of symbolically significant animals. The camel is at the apex of this hierarchy. A discussion of other animals follows based on their relative importance and value. In many cases, we face two totally paradoxical and incompatible sets of moral values in the Bedouin’s treatment of their animals.

### **Bedouin Animal Classification**

The Bedouin’s desert environment is abundant with animal species both domesticated and wild. The Bedouin have forged several kinds of relationships with the numerous animal species around them. They use their meat as food, skin and hair for clothing and covering, some are used for riding and carrying worldly goods, and others for hunting prey. Both man and animal sustain each other. The relationship is not parasitic as often thought by many people. It is a symbiotic relationship that transforms into a form of exchange rather than a predatory one. With some species, however, the relationship goes deeper to reach close affinity and association. Some animals are given human qualities. Bedouin totemism is metaphorical. The Bedouin use various analogies when referring to their animals. Their continuous contact and observation of these animals and their different behaviours and habits have also made them develop their own animal classificatory system.



In his study of the natural history of the *Ma'aza*\* Bedouin group in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, Hobbs (1989) describes their classification of the animal kingdom. The *Ma'aza* recognise six major categories: swine, true animals, flying creatures, crawling creatures, swimming creatures, and an anomalous group of non-human creatures with humanlike moral attributes that falls between the category of swine and true animals.

The “swine” (*khanziir*) category includes human beings, Man or (*Bani Aadam*) literally “son of Adam”. Man is considered to be the foulest and most dangerous of all creatures. He is the “king of death” because of his remarkable intellectual power enabling him to kill the most powerful of animals. Human faeces is considered the rottenest amongst all animals that only some animals in the swine category such as dogs and donkeys will eat. This category also includes humanlike primates, domestic pig, horse and all carnivores (*kilaab*) literally dogs (p.88).

The “true animals” category (*hayawaanaat*) includes the hare, sheep, goat, camel, gazelle, ibex and Barbary sheep. The *Ma'aza* consider these animals clean and are fond of them but do not recognise any physical or moral affinities with them. “Flying animals” (*tuyuur*) includes all birds and flying animals, including bats and winged insects. “Swimming creatures” (*samak*) literally fish includes all sea creatures. “Crawling creatures” (*duud*) literally worms encompasses reptiles, molluscs and crawling insects.

The sixth anomalous category consists of the rock hyrax (*wabr*) and dabb-lizard. They are like “*Bani Aadam*” but not “*Bani Aadam*”; not “*khanziir*”, but true animals “*hayawaanaat*”. Their burrows are referred to by *Ma'aza* as homes (*bayt*), rather than holes, which connotes human social organisation. The hyrax lives in colonies where they protect each other. They post guards that call loudly in case of danger to warn others. Thus they are humanlike in their willingness to sacrifice themselves, but they are not like man because they chew cud. The hyrax meat is forbidden (*haraam*) by the *Ma'aza*. They consider eating its meat like eating human flesh. Eating the dabb-lizard is also forbidden by the *Ma'aza*. They claim it has many strange humanlike qualities. One informant told Hobbs that it has five fingers on the hand like *Bani Aadam* and put its hands to its head as if it had headache when a rock hit it in the head (Hobbs, 1989, pp. 87-90).

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\* *Ma'aza* literally means “Goat People”. The Scottish cartographer George W. Murray (1935) recorded that this tribe’s progenitor’s wet-nurse was a goat (Hobbs, 1989, p. 7).

It is interesting to note that the *Ma'aza* classification bears some similarities with other tribal and communal societies. In his comparative study of animal symbolism in three African groups: the Nuer in Southern Sudan, the Lele in Congo and the Fipa in Tanzania, Willis (1974) discusses the social structure of these groups based on their classification of animals. Among the Nuer, for example, animals are conceived in terms of local communities, descent groups and lineage. They have a lineage of carnivorous community, riverine community and others. Moreover, each animal has allegiance to its descent group and locates its space by virtue of that allegiance (p. 12).

The Lele studied by Mary Douglas are very much like the *Ma'aza* in the sense that they classify animals in sets of paired groups. They have ground animals as opposed to animals of above, land and water animals. The Lele also have a class of animals with distinct features that they, especially their women, refuse to eat such as the tortoise, the baboon and the pangolin (Willis, 1974, pp.28-37). The Lele, however, are different from the Bedouin in regarding domesticated animals disdainfully (ibid. p.44). The *Ma'aza* have high consideration for their domesticated animals, except for those classified under the *swine* group.

A comparison can also be made between the *Ma'aza* classification and that of Traveller-Gypsies in Britain as both share some likeness. Traveller-Gypsies classify animals based on their appearance, washing and eating habits. In their classification, they distinguish between the inner and outer body. This classification is also related to Gypsy-Gorgio political and economic relations. Like the *Ma'aza*, Travellers consider all carnivores (swine category) such as cats, dogs, rats and foxes dirty or polluted (*mochadi*) because they lick themselves and transfer dirt to inside their bodies. Horses however are not included under this category. They have a special relation to the Travellers and are considered absolutely clean. Travellers also share many common regulations with the Bedouin regarding types of animals to be eaten and those that are forbidden. For example, they would eat rabbits and hares but would not eat rodents or birds of prey. Eating horse flesh is considered the most heinous crime according to Gypsies. This is very much like eating hyrax as both species are believed to have humanlike qualities (Okely, 1983, pp. 89-100).



In these different cultures, people develop their own criteria of classification based on various indicators which they themselves choose such as habitat, cleanliness, eating habits, inner and outer body, and more important their selected resemblance to human beings physically and behaviourally. A category of anomalous animals, whether domesticated or wild, is by definition included in the social world of human beings. People avoid killing or eating them because they bear the same human qualities. Killing or eating them is like manslaughter or committing incest and are thus frowned upon as being atrocious\*. This classification determining what to be dignified and what to be slaughtered and eaten illustrates two totally contradictory and incompatible sets of moral values. This is even clearer in our treatment of domestic and domesticated animals. Some are kept and pampered as pets, while others are killed to provide us with meat. According to Serpell (1986), this inherent inconsistency in the treatment of different animals appears paradoxical, especially when we assume that both types of treatment are normal (p.16).

Like the *Ma'aza*, and other Bedouin groups, the *'Aiaida* in Ismailia and Sinai have developed strong relationships and bonds with their animals, but with slight differences. Being affiliated to a Sufi order, their culture is strongly shaped by pure Islamic beliefs. I did not discuss with them Hobbs' (1989) *Ma'aza* taxonomy of the animal kingdom mentioned above, but strongly believe that they would disagree with it as it is far from Islamic beliefs, especially about Man (*Bani Aadam*). In one of the Friday sermons, the *'Aiaida* Sheikh was preaching about the concept of human supremacy and how God created the human being in the noblest image and subdued everything in the universe for his benefit.

### **Animal Sacrifice**

The inconsistency in the treatment of different animals is an unmistakably obvious paradox, especially when we assume that both types of treatment are 'normal'. How can the people who care for and nurture their animals, slaughter and kill them with a clear conscience? People have their own self-justifying imaginations that support them to make a virtue out of necessity. In their consciousness, according to Serpell (1986), they deliberately detach themselves from their animals and depersonalise them as objects to

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\* Levi-Strauss (1966) in *The Savage Mind* has pointed out the symbolic association between the act of eating a pet and the act of sexual intercourse between close relatives (Serpell, 1986, pp. 53-54).

be eaten. They create a void between themselves and their animals on which they inflict pain and misery for their own benefit. This “detachment” can be learnt easily; people who regularly slaughter and butcher animals are able to develop desensitisation to the process (Serpell, 1986, pp. 151-153).

Another justification people from different cultures make is that God demands the sacrifice. According to Evans-Pritchard (1965), the Nuer slaughter their cattle because the spirit world demands a sacrificial gift as an appeasing token of good faith. “The beast dying as a surrogate for man, meeting a ransom demanded by God” (p.21). And as God demands the sacrifice, the Nuer shifts the blame for the killing from himself to this supreme entity, so that the meat can be eaten with a clear conscience. Sacrificing here has taken a ritual form representing an action of purification and unity with God. It should be noted here that Evans-Pritchard was influenced by his own religious beliefs as a Catholic.

The Nuer’s sacrifice ritual shares some similarities with the Bedouin sacrifice ritual deeply embedded in Islam. Slaughter of animals in Islam has to be done ritually: the living animal’s throat must be cut while saying “*In the Name of Allah; Allah is great*”. Sacrificing animals provides a situation of total identification between animal and man as subjects to the commands and will of God. Pronouncing the name of any being other than God renders the slaughter and eating the meat as invalid and unlawful. It is acceptable if the person carrying out the slaughter forgets to pronounce the name of Allah, but omitting it intentionally makes it unlawful. Thus, it is acceptable for Bedouin Muslims to consume the flesh of animals slaughtered only by fellow Muslims or the ‘People of the Book’ (Christians and Jews) as they are considered believers in God and their scriptures contain commands on slaughtering animals that correspond to the Quranic commands. To be lawful, however, slaughter has to be carried out by a sharp knife that cuts the veins and food pipe causing blood to flow out. Hunting animals for food consumption by using trained animals like dogs or falcons, or by using any type of weapon is also lawful on condition that the name of God is also pronounced. *Shari’a* requirements regarding slaughter do not distinguish between men and women. Both genders can carry out slaughter as long as they are mature and have a sound mind. Bedouin traditions, however, have restricted this activity to men only. The origin of



slaughter in Islam is significant in the analysis of the relationship between man and animal.

In Islam, the story of the First Sacrifice goes back to Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic) and his son Ismael (Issac in the Bible). Regardless of who the protagonists were, the moral of the story in the different Sacred Scriptures is absolute and total submission to God. According to the parable, Ibrahim was ordered by God to sacrifice his first beloved son by himself and that he should sacrifice him in the hardest way – slaughtering – using a knife and passing it across his throat. The test was hard for both father and son. The father had to obey the word of his Lord and the son had to show compliance with the word of his father and Lord. As both fully submitted to God's will and embarked on the action of sacrifice, God interfered at the last moment and prevented the sacrifice by offering a ram or a sheep instead. This parable forms the basis of animal sacrifice in Islam up to the present. It is a type of worship with the symbolic significance of showing submission to God. The aim of sacrifice, according to the *Quran* is becoming a pious Muslim.

It is not known if the sacrificial animal in the parable was true or symbolic. It is believed primarily to be a ram. In *'id al-Adha*, the Muslim feast of the Abrahamic sacrifice, Bedouin men can offer any animal for sacrifice: a sheep, a goat, a cow or a camel depending on their financial ability. All these animals are common among the Bedouin and occupy their natural world. In the rest of this chapter, I confine my discussion mainly to the animals that I saw or heard of in the field among the *'Aiaida*. I observed and participated in many activities where animals were the centre of action. Some of these animals are domesticated, while others are wild. A description of the characteristics of each animal is provided coupled with the Bedouin's perception of these animals and how they identify and associate with each of them.

## The Camel

The camel in particular amongst all other animals in the desert environment has a very special status to the Bedouin nomads. It is situated at the apex of their hierarchical pyramid of symbolically significant animals, in some sense similar to the ox in the case of the Nuer; the pangolin, for the Lele; and the python for the Fipa (Willis, 1974, p.8).

In fact, the camel is totally indispensable to all desert nomads and comprises the most important if not the central pillar of their life. It has thus been referred to as a gift from God “*Ata Allah*” (Thesiger, 1984, p. 83). The Rabari nomads in India feel most strongly associated with their camels, believing its creation to be coeval with their own. According to Hindu mythology, it is part and parcel of their lives and comprises their wealth (Davidson, 1996, pp. 53-54).

Among the Bedouin, the camel is also commonly known as *safinat al-ṣaḥaraa* or “the ship of the desert”. One Arab poet called his she-camel *safinat al-barr*, “the land-ship” (Jabbur, 1995, p.197). Michael Asher (1997) argues that this name has been applied not by the Bedouin, but by the native inhabitants of southern Arabia who were originally seafarers and domesticated wild camels after becoming landlubbers about five thousand years ago. The camel replaced the ship as a familiar image to their newly acquired means of survival (p. 112).

Many people believe that both the camel and the Bedouin are inseparable and that without it, the Bedouin could not have crossed and occupied the mighty deserts. It has also enabled them to maintain the freedom they value most by living unbound in the vast deserts away from the sedentary world.

The Bedouin’s preoccupation with camels can be compared to the East African pastoralists’ with their cattle. Whereas the latter have what Herskovits (1926) labelled a “cattle complex” (Barfield, 1993, p. 20), I argue that Bedouin nomads have a “*camel complex*”. The Bedouin relationship with the camel reflects a complex cultural set of beliefs, customs, as well as socio-economic and political structures. The camel sustains the Bedouin, enables him to maintain social relations and dies for him in sacrifice to God.



It should be noted, however, that as patriarchal communities, the Bedouin's attachment to camels is more pervasive among men rather than women. This emotional attachment is also for ecological reasons because it is mainly men "the tougher sex" who are able to tend camels in the wilderness on their own without protection. The Bedouin nomads have valued the camel and chosen it to sit at the apex of the animal hierarchy because of its extraordinary physical qualities and their perception of its resemblance to human behaviour. The following lines describe some of the actual characteristics of camels coupled with the Bedouin's perceptions of them and how they associate them with human qualities and behaviour.

### *Characteristics and Value of Camels*

The camel is endowed with an unusual physiological system, extraordinary strength and superb adaptability to live in the blazing desert climate. God gives it as an example to people to think about His creation. "*Do they never reflect on the camels, and how they were created?*" (Quran 88:17). "*If man is created from clay, the camel is created from rock*", one of my informants from the *Ahiwat* in central Sinai told me.

The camel has an enormous ability to tolerate thirst for long periods of time that can reach about fifty days in winter and about three to five days in summer. In winter it relies on the moisture in plants, which enables it to do without water for such a long time. It has the ability to retain moisture which does not evaporate from its hide through perspiration therefore its body temperature does not alter. Camel metabolism is also very economical. It is adapted to desert plants and thorny shrubs that grow in barren lands. It can live without eating for about ten days in winter and about a fortnight in summer.

These characteristics made the Bedouin nickname the camel, *Abu Ayoub* (Father of Job), a name indicating a superb ability of tolerance and persistence. The Bedouin admire camels' tolerance and patience most. A patient and tolerant person is compared to a camel and referred to as "*shayyal hemoul*" (a carrier of heavy burdens). Muslims are advised to observe this characteristic and develop it in themselves. For example, Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1983), in his philosophical poem, '*The Secrets of the Self*', uses the metaphor of the camel to moralise about self-discipline (p.72-73).

Another physiological characteristic that makes the camel tolerate hunger and thirst is that of being a ruminating animal. A famous Arab proverb is “*al-jamal bi-yagtar eli fi baṭnu*” (the camel regurgitates what’s in its stomach), indicating that the Bedouin offer to share what they have, especially their food with others. In other words, “what’s mine is yours”. One outstanding feature mentioned about camel regurgitation is that its undigested cud could be squeezed to extract water out of it for drinking. Some commentators like Jabbur (1995), however, doubt it unless the liquid is strained through a finely woven cloth (p. 206-207). I do not consider this strange after learning that the ‘*Aiaida*’ would eat from the same container from which their camels have fed earlier as they consider them absolutely clean.

Keeping camels is very costly, especially if there are not enough natural grazing lands. Supplementary food is expensive. In Egypt, each camel requires up to two kg (4½ pounds) of flour cakes and grain daily to complement its diet of desert forage. (Hobbs, 1989, p. 38). In Saudi Arabia, camels are also fed on a daily basis. A few ordinary camels are fed twice (morning and evening). Racing camels are also fed twice, but with well-balanced food incorporating all basic nutrients, while limiting the fat intake. The most important food that is given to camels is barley (Al-Torki, 2003, pp. 187-188). The ‘*Aiaida*’s camels are fed once a day mainly on straw and clover scythed by women and children from neighbouring fields and along the banks of canals and drains. An additional supplement of dried fodder is also given. Racing camels, especially those belonging to the ‘*Aiaida*’ Sheikh, eat dried fodder.

This high cost of keeping camels has made the number of Bedouin men owning camels in the Arab world greatly decline. This was coupled with climatic changes causing several years of drought as well as social changes in the structure of many Bedouin’s lives. According to Al-Torki (2003) in his study of the socio-economic characteristics of camel owners in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, keeping camels is not profitable, as no economic benefit is derived from them because of the high cost of fodder and scarce vegetation. Despite this fact, many Saudis still keep camels for status (p.198). As Bedouin men do not gamble like some people do with racehorses, camels are not considered a source of financial investment.



The situation is the same among the Egyptian Bedouin. According to one *'Aiadi* camel owner, keeping a racing camel can cost between LE 3,000-4,000 per year (£300-400 Sterling). This figure is very high bearing in mind that no economic benefit is derived, as the Egyptian government does not encourage Bedouin groups to keep camels. The owner of a racing camel that wins a race is given a maximum of LE 500 as a prize. This amount according to the *'Aiaida* is not worth the effort exerted and money paid to keep their camels. Nevertheless, like the Saudis and other Bedouin in Arabia, many Sinai Bedouin still value their camels and consider them as symbols of status and prestige, and their nomadic identity. They keep them because they are fond of looking after them and nurturing them as pets. Like many Europeans and North Americans who keep dogs and cats as pets, the Bedouin are prepared to spend as much of their emotional and material resources on their economically unprofitable camels. This attitude toward animals is comparable to Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. In this sense, animals are kept because they are aesthetically appealing. They are acquired "by means of a sort of withdrawal from economic necessity" (pp. 52-53).

Another important attribute of the camel that make it indispensable to desert nomads is its sturdiness and endurance in crossing the desert. Its long slimly built legs raise it clear from the hot sand and its wide padded feet make it travel easily across soft and loose sand. Female camels are said to surpass males in their endurance and strength and are thus preferred more by many nomads. Some Bedouin groups, however, such as the *Ma'aza* prefer males for riding. Nevertheless, both sexes can carry loads of up to 330 pounds (150 kg) and march twenty-five miles (40 km) in a day (Hobbs, 1989, p. 34).

The Bedouin do not use she-camels only for transportation and loading; they subsist on their milk. Camel milk is widely acknowledged for its many benefits. It is "the answer to all our prayers. 'It has half the fat of cow's milk, and less sugar, so good for diabetics. It has a lot of Vitamin C. It's good for vascular problems, women take it to have a clear complexion and they say it's a tonic for men'... 'One protein in it is similar to human insulin, and as camels are pretty close to humans in the evolutionary tree, so the proteins are closer to humans, and it's less allergenic than cow's milk'" (Palin, 2002, p.101).

Al-Torki (2003) mentions that she-camels' milk contains a lower ratio of fat than cows and goats; lower sugar content; high mineral content; as much protein as cow's; as well

as unique proteins and an unusual fatty acid composition. Camel milk is also known to be easily digested and does not curdle when sour. Its content of Vitamin C is very important to pastoral nomads' diet which lacks fresh fruit and vegetables (p.52).

To the '*Aiaida*', camel's milk is now considered a delicacy as few of them own camels after they settled down. As it is also not a commodity, no one purchases it. Only those who own she-camels would consume their milk without sharing. It is often drunk in private at their homes and given to children with bread for their morning meal.

Another benefit derived from camels is their meat. The meat of young camels is known to be soft and easy to digest. It does not differ much in taste from beef, but has a higher ratio of protein and less fat than beef (Jabbur, 1995, p. 216). To slaughter a camel for an esteemed guest is considered the greatest sign of honour to him among the Bedouin Arabs. This tradition is still common in Saudi Arabia, especially if the guest is a prince or a dignitary (Al-Torki, 2003, p. 56). Among the Egyptian Bedouin, this tradition is rarely carried out now due to the high price of camels and their low numbers. Only at big wedding parties or gatherings would a camel be slaughtered by a rich Sheikh to feed all the guests. One of the common Bedouin sayings is "*edbah jamal teshbah' lahm*" (slaughter a camel and you'll get plenty of meat". Sheep however are preferred for slaughter as they are cheaper and more abundant.

The other benefits of camels have not yet ended. Camels' hide and fur are used to make different items and furnishings for the Bedouin. Handmade items are very rare among the '*Aiaida*' nowadays. Camels' dung is also very useful; it is used as fuel for fire over which the Bedouin cook their food, make their tea and coffee, and bake their bread (*liba'a*). It is considered clean and does not pollute the bread.

Camel droppings are small, round, dark brown pellets that quickly harden in the sun. To an experienced Bedouin's eye, they say much about the place where a camel grazed and watered last. It is used as a trailing device for other groups to know their movements and take precautions against raids (Thesiger, 1984, p. 66). More interesting is that they make ideal pieces for playing *siga*, a game similar to draughts. The opponent player would use either small pebbles or cigarette stubs. *Siga* is common among all desert nomads but under different names; to the Sahara Tuareg, it is called *dhaemon* (Palin, 2002, p.74). As



for camel's urine, some Bedouin women use it to wash their hair claiming that it protects the hair from infestation by vermin and gives it a reddish hue (Jabbur, 1995, p.221).

More importantly, camels are used as an exchange unit for paying dowries and *diya*, (blood money or restitution paid for someone who has been killed). An ancient statement or *Hadith* allegedly attributed to Prophet Muhammad says, "*Do not revile camels, for through them the flow of blood ceases and the dowry of the noble women is paid*" (Quoted in Jabbur, 1995, pp. 221-223). A common saying in Saudi Arabia is, "*Do not under-estimate the camels' necks, because they are the bride's dowry, staunchers of blood, providing milk to slim the adult and grow the child*" (Al-Torki, 2003, p. 40).

This custom of using camels for paying bride-wealth and blood money is no longer common among many Egyptian Bedouin nowadays as they use cash instead. However, the value of dowry and restitution are still estimated by the current prices of camels. Knowing my interest in and admiration of Bedouin life and that I am single, one of my informants from the *Ahiwat* offered to get me a bride if I would pay a dowry of ten camels (approximately LE 30,000/ £3,000 sterling).

### *The Camel in Bedouin Discourse*

One can easily understand how much the camel is rooted in the consciousness of Bedouin nomads by listening to their ordinary speech and poetry. The Bedouin's verbal models are full of references and analogies between themselves and different objects, and the camel and its different parts. Big eyes are compared to the camel's eyes. "*Zay ein el-gamal*" (as a camel's eyes). The Arabic name for walnuts is '*Ein-gamal*, being round and big. A camel's wide and heavy padded feet connote clumsiness. A person walking heavily would have his feet compared to "*khof el-gamal*" (a camel's foot).

As mentioned earlier, the camel can tolerate thirst and hunger for a long time. However, when it starts eating or drinking it gulps down (*ye-ghob*) food and water quickly. A person eating greedily is compared to a camel's way of devouring food (*ye-ghob zay el-gamal*). Mothers spoon-feeding their babies, in both urban and rural areas, encourage them to eat saying, "*hum ya gamal*" (like the exclamation yum in English). A baby in this expression is called "camel" as a pet name.

As a big animal, the camel is used as a connotation of big things. Its value is equivalent to that of adoration and great love of a beautiful woman. One common saying is *"If you adore, adore a full moon and if you steal, steal a camel"*. Another saying indicating a camel's big size that cannot go unnoticed is *"three things cannot be hidden: love, pregnancy and riding a camel"*. It is also worth noting here that the *Quran* and the *Bible* refer to the camel's big size. Allah vows that unbelievers will not enter paradise until the camel shall pass through the eye of a needle. *"For those who have denied and scorned Our revelations the gates of heaven shall not be opened; nor shall they enter Paradise until the camel shall pass through the eye of a needle. Thus shall We reward the guilty"* (Quran 7:40; Mark 10:25).

Camels are also used as metaphors for beauty and beautiful women. In fact, the term camel *"jamal"* itself is derived from *"jammal"* beauty in Arabic since the Arabs consider the camel a beautiful animal. Jabbur (1995) even thinks that perhaps the word *"jammal"* (beauty) is itself derived from *"jamal"* (camel) (p. 237).

Bedouin men describe their beloved ones or beautiful women as *"bakra"* (a young she-camel). One of the common sayings comparing women to she-camels is *"if you adore someone, adore she-camels, but do not graze in their lands"*. It encourages loving beautiful girls, while at the same time advising that it is inappropriate to act or pretend to be like a woman. "Grazing in their lands" here is a metaphor indicating women's domain and behaviour.

Faults and imperfections are perceived in a camel's curved neck and hump. The Bedouin would say, *"a camel does not see its curved neck"*, meaning that a person does not see his/her own shortcomings, while talking about the flaws of others. They would also say *"a camel does not see its own hump"*. A more sarcastic saying is *"lao shaf el-gamal hadabto la-weqeh wi inqatamet rigabtu"* (if a camel saw its hump, it would fall and break its neck) again indicating those who get occupied with counting others' mistakes and conceal theirs.

To describe a person as being idle and lazy, the Bedouin would use the term *"baw"* (He or she is like a *baw*, i.e., hopeless or of no use). She-camels are known to be very affectionate mothers. If a mother loses its calf, some Bedouin groups like the *Rwala* will



relieve the mother's grief by stuffing the dead calf's skin with dry straw or hay and put it in front of her so that she can take comfort in smelling the skin. This they call *baw*, which in fact is useless. (Jabbur, 1995, p.230).

Other Bedouin groups use a different technique. If they wish to slaughter a calf, they will trick the mother by giving it a substitute calf from another female, which is usually ill or producing little milk. The substitution succeeds by tying an old piece of cloth to the calf to be slaughtered for a few days to be impregnated with its smell, then transferring it to the substitute calf (Keohane, 1994, p. 83). In India, to soothe a desolate mother, the Rabari nomads cut off the dead calf's tail and hung it up for her to smell as they milked her (Davidson, 1996, p. 263). The *'Aiaida* do not have any of these customs. I remember one of the Sheikh's calves died of a respiratory infection. The calf was buried and the mother kept moaning for three days. Sometimes, a she-camel's bereavement may last for a month as noted by Jabbur (1995, p.230). These different attitudes to camels show that there is no single view among the various Bedouin nomad groups.

In Bedouin customary law, judges also refer to camels in their speech to make their point. Idioms about camels cover human activities not just human views of camels. For example, if someone were denying an incident, the judge would give a hint saying "*haza el-gamal wa haza el-gam'mal*" (This is the camel and this is the camel rider), meaning that everything is clear and there is no point in denying. If a suspect claims to have stolen something trivial, still it is considered a crime. In that case, the common saying is "*eli be-yesrak el-ba'ara be-yesrak el-ba'er*" (the one who steals a camel dropping would also steal the camel) or would say "*el-ba'ara min al-ba'er*" (the camel dropping is from a camel). It also means that there are signs for everything.

In another case that I attended in Suez, two Bedouin neighbours from different descent groups (*'Aiaida* and *Bani 'Ata*) fought with each other over whom to irrigate his land first. To settle their dispute, one of the participants reasoned with them saying "*el-nar be-te-khalef ramad, wa el-gamal bi-y-khalef ba'ar*" (fire turns into ashes, and what comes out of a camel is droppings), meaning that fighting causes nothing but destruction and harm. Another common saying is "*I-quilha wa tawakal*" (tie it, and depend on Allah). It is often said when someone embarks on carrying out a task.

### *Camel Temperament as Representation of Bedouin Experiences*

There are also several sayings about the temperament of the camel. It is acknowledged that she-camels are gentler than males. In general, all camels are mild-mannered, except in certain cases when they are being loaded and when males are rutting. The Bedouin compare an angry man in a rage to a snarling camel. They say "*bi-yehdar zay el-gamal*" (snarling like a camel) or "*zay el-gamal el-haddar*" (like a snarling camel).

Like any other animal, camels like to be treated with kindness and affection. The Bedouin are very considerate of their camels and are ready to suffer hardships themselves in order to spare their animals (Thesiger, 1984, p. 59). "Always the camels' needs come first" (ibid. p. 83). All the Bedouin men I have seen stroke, pet and kiss their camels both males and females. They would call the camel, which lowers its head down and put its lips on its owner's lips and kiss. Jabbur (1995), Hobbs (1989), Thesiger (1984), Al-Torki (2003) and others have also noted this affectionate relationship. Thesiger states that he never saw a Bedouin striking or ill-treating a camel. Camels are loved for their patience and fidelity to their owners (pp.83-84). This care for animals and especially camels is deeply rooted in the Islamic traditions and mentioned in many of the Prophet's sayings. The Prophet advised travellers on camels to be thoughtful and kind-hearted to their camels saying, "*If you travel in fertile land, give camels their share in this land, and if you travel in a bare land, be quick until you arrive at its end*" (Quoted in Al-Torki, 2003, p. 35).

Jabbur (1995) argues that the cross and spiteful nature of the camel is probably only familiar with the village camels which are subjected to hard work in the fields thus making their lives a misery (p. 225). In my opinion, the temperament of the animal depends on the manner it is treated. One of my *Ahiwat* informants narrated to me a remarkable anecdote about a Bedouin who ill-treated his camel and used to beat it harshly. The camel kept patient until one day the man got off its back, stood in front of his camel holding it by its lead and squatted to urinate\*. The camel sought the opportunity to take revenge and dropped on its knees settling on the ground and resting its chest and forelegs on the man who was crushed underneath. Struggling to escape, the

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\* Bedouin men both urinate and defecate while squatting. It is a *sunna* (sayings and deeds) of the Prophet Muhammad that men relieve themselves squatting. Standing up causes urine to splash thus making a man's clothes unclean which disables him to perform prayers even after performing ablution.



man kept screaming until some of his mates came to rescue him. The camel stubbornly refused to rise despite being beaten hard by the men. It was recounted that it put its head on the man trying to hear his pulse to make sure he was dead. The camel only rose on its feet after it was sure the man was dead. In my opinion, this anecdote is a wonderful argument for attributing human intelligence to a camel. It is also an example of the Bedouin's perception of the camel as having humanlike attributes.

When a camel bites, it inflicts awful injuries. Thesiger states that he had treated a man in the Sudan who had been bitten in the arm and the bone was splintered to fragments (1984, p.57). I have also seen that some of my *'Aiaida* informants had their forefingers torn as a result of being bitten by male-camels while trying to tie them. Hobbs (1989) describes one of the worst incidents among the *Ma'aza* when a man whipped his bull-camel for some offence when it was rutting. The vengeful camel turned on the man biting his head, shoulders and neck, which caused his death in less than half an hour. Angry camels can also throw their riders with the intention of harming them (p. 35). These fierce camels are called *'okla* (literally man-eater) by the *'Aiaida*. They know a spiteful camel from the way it looks.

These appalling incidents of camels attacking people coined many sayings about the spiteful and nasty nature of camels such as "*el-gamal ghaddar*" (a camel is deceitful). A mean grudging person is described as "*'ahqad min gamal*" (more spiteful than a camel). A camel's sharp pointed teeth have also been used in proverbs connoting nastiness. A cruel and vicious person is described as having a yellow fang "*nabou asfar mithl nab el-ba'er*" (he's got a yellow fang like a camel's incisor).

Opposite to what has been said earlier, the camel is known to be docile and easily led even by a child. Some would even go to the point of depicting it as a stupid animal "most prone to mishap in dangerous places and predicaments" (Jabbur, 1995, pp. 226-227). The camel is also considered a cowardly animal. Some Bedouin men would thus never leave their camels grazing on their own. A camel left to its own devices can easily be frightened and run away. Many camels get lost as they wander off in search of grazing therefore they are always hobbled. In some cases, they are given limited freedom to roam and graze on condition that there is a ghost or a scarecrow to frighten them. Hobbs (1989) once came across "a line of six cairns, each about five feet (1.5m) high, located at

about fifteen-foot (5m) intervals across a canyon floor” (p. 35). Hobbs’ informants explained to him that these stone piles are ‘*zawwaal*’ or ghosts to frighten any wayward camel into turning back to their camp. Camels are said to be frightened of any stationary object that they have not seen before in a particular place, even if it is a man standing still for several minutes (Ibid., p.35).

A more interesting legend told to me by one of my *Ahiwat* informants is that camels fear man because a camel’s eye has a convex lens which magnifies man to appear as a giant in front of the camel thus it has been easy for man to tame and lead camels. I doubt the validity of this legend as in that case camels would fear anything that approached them and would never attack a human being. I have also never come across this axiom in any of the studies written about camels.

### *Camels as Symbols of Unity with God*

A fable about camels is that mentioned by Middleton (2003) told to him by the Tuareg nomads of the Sahara desert. He noted that camels are born with an attitude of haughtiness and they look so pompous. The reason for this superiority is explained by the story of Allah’s hundredth name. Allah has a hundred different names, ninety-nine of which are known to Muslims. No one else knows the hundredth name except the camel because Prophet Muhammad revealed it only to his trusty camel. The camel told this name to all its mates and since then camels had their incredibly condescending demeanour (Middleton, 2003, p.137).

Leo Tregenza (1955) who travelled with the *Ma’aza* Bedouin of the Eastern Desert in Egypt also mentioned it (Hobbs, 1989, p.35). I asked two of my old *Aiaida* Bedouin respondents if they know about this anecdote, but they had never heard of it. One answered that it could be possible because all living creatures have a language and praise Allah. He recited the following verse from the *Quran*. “*The seven heavens, the earth, and all who dwell in them give glory to Him. All creatures celebrate His praises. Yet you cannot understand their praises. Benevolent is He and forgiving*” (17:44).

Camels are also believed to act as God’s messengers, one such being sent to the pagan Arabs of Thamud, who killed her in spite of a warning from the prophet Ṣāliḥ (*Quran* 7:73-79). I would suggest that the image of the camel here as a symbolic animal in unity



with God reflects the struggle in the human Muslim self between sin and the ideal behaviour that is longed for in their guilty consciences. I also believe that many Bedouin Muslims believe that animals are much better than themselves in the sense that can better unify with God; whereas man gets more and more detached from God, at least in his own consciousness, by sinning and being led astray from the right path, animals are more united with God.

### *The Complex Vocabulary of a Camel*

The Bedouin's closeness and affinity with their camels made them give them personal names and trace their lineages. There is a remarkable inventory of terms for camels' sex, age, colour, purity and numbers. These names vary among different 'tribal' groups and places (compare for example Altorki, 2003, pp. 59-60 and Jabbur, 1995, p. 234). According to the 'Aiaida, a pregnant camel "asharat" gives birth after twelve months. The newborn calf is called *hiwar* for the first four months, then at one year old when it is weaned and loses its fur, it is called *labna*. At two it is a *haji*. When it starts teething at three, it is called *thani*. When it changes its teeth, it is a *riba'a*. At the age of six, a camel reaches adulthood and develops full teeth *nab* (literally fang). A bull is then called *gamal* and a she-camel is a *naqa*. A young she-camel is also called *bakra* for the first five years, and a young bull, a *ga'ud*. As a bull grows older, it is called *hirsh*. A bull can live up to twenty-five years and a *naqa* twenty-four. The average lifetime is twenty years.

A she-camel gives birth every two years. In its lifetime, a good healthy *naqa* can give birth to ten *hiwar*. The 'Aiaida believe camels never give birth to twins as this will mean a declaration of the end of the world and the approach of the Hereafter. "*lao gaat toam tegoum el-sa'ah*" (If a *naqa* gives birth to a twin, it will be the Day of Judgement), another apocalyptic sign in the 'Aiaida religious culture. Jabbur (1995) states that he has been told of she-camels giving birth to twins but only rarely, though he has never seen one (p. 233).

Different Bedouin groups have also developed their own strains of camels. The Bedouin differentiate between two types of Arabian or dromedary camels: ordinary and thoroughbred. According to the 'Aiaida, there are "*aseel*" (pure pedigree) and "*gheir aseel*" (less pure), each of which is valued for particular characteristics. The less pure or ordinary camels are used for their milk, fur and for loading. Thoroughbreds, on the other

hand, are mainly used for racing and for paying blood money. Thoroughbreds can also be milked. For paying dowries, both types are used.

Al-Torki (2003) compares the difference between a racing camel called “*thalool*” or “*mitiyih*” (plural *higin*) and riding camel called “*jamal*” or “*ba'er*” to the difference between “a thoroughbred racehorse in England and an ordinary carthorse... Racing camels [thoroughbreds] have a small head, wide forehead, small nostrils, longish ears and large eyes, strong legs, and is wonderfully gentle and understanding. Their movements are like those of a gazelle” (p. 71).

Each Bedouin descent group has also its own lineage of thoroughbred camels based on distinguished bloodlines and well-known regions. The ‘*Aiaida*’s lineage is matriarchal. They are proud of their camels’ bloodlines as they are of their own genealogies. They have about seven or eight bloodlines of thoroughbred camels. Each bloodline name represents a specific characteristic or colour of the she-camel:

- *Dab'an* bloodline from *Da'bah* (literally a female hyena)
- ‘*Osayfan* bloodline from ‘*Osayf*
- ‘*Owaygan* from ‘*Oweig* (literally curved)
- *Khodayran* from *Khodeira* (literally greenish)
- *Sho'ailan* from *Sho'aila* (literally greyish)
- *Samhan* from *Samha* (literally cute or nice-looking)
- *Rohayfan* from *Rohayfa* (literally delicate or graceful)

My informant who dictated these names to me, an old ‘*Aiadi* Sheikh in his late sixties, does not know the origin of these bloodlines or the first descendant. “*We found our fathers and grandfathers have these bloodlines and we are keeping them since*”, he said. He claimed that to have thoroughbred pure descendants, both parents should be pure. However, if a less pure male mates with “*talag*” a pure female, the offspring will be less pure. Nevertheless, it still carries the mother’s name. This less pure descendant’s grand offspring can become pure after five generations of cross breeding with pure ones.

Some Bedouin groups such as the *Rwala* in Syria recognise a thoroughbred (*hurr*) she-camel whose father is thoroughbred only after four generations in which the female



descendants from this calf mate with thoroughbred bulls. If the newborn camel is a male, then the line is recognised after nine generations (Jabbur, 1995, p. 213).

One anecdote claims that thoroughbreds are the descendants of a common she-camel that was left to its own devices by its owner overnight when a wild undomesticated bull came and covered her. According to Jabbur, “There is no foundation of truth to this, and the story is rather only a well-travelled fantasy” (1995, p. 210). In another story, the she-camel was impregnated by a strong wind and its descendant was called *Zoraykan* (Shokeir, 1916, p. 93). A third story traced to the *Tiyaha* descent group of Sinai argues that *Zoraykan* is the offspring of a she-came who was covered by a magic camel that “sprang out of the sea, married her, divorced her, and disappeared all in a twinkling” (Murray, 1935, p. 114).

Camels of both types also have pet names or honorary names based on their characteristics or temperaments. They are also given names of other animals, people’s names or objects of value to them. The *‘Aiaida* take pride in some of these names. They call their camels “*Ziib*” (wolf); “*Asad*” (lion); “*Gallad*” (patient); *Safina* (ship); *Ṣaroukh* (rocket); *lamḥ el-basar* (quick as a flash, literally wink of an eye. It is a she-camel known for its swiftness. One of my *‘Aiaida* informants claimed it covered six kilometres in only six minutes) *Pasha*; *Maradona*; *Ṣaddam*; *Ḥassan*; *Joma’a*; and other people’s names.

Another common custom among the Bedouin that clarifies the strong bond between them and their camels as well as their sheep and goats is branding (*wasm*). Branding is different from tattooing (*washm*) as the former implies putting a permanent mark on the skin by burning, while the latter is made by pricking little holes and filling them with a coloured dye, usually green. *Wasm* in Arabic, however, can be used to mean both. Both branding and tattooing have been practised by Arabs since ancient times. Prophet Muhammad used to brand camels offered for slaughtering to make them noticeable from others. Whereas branding was encouraged for animals, tattooing was discouraged for people, as being sinful because it implies changing the appearance of the skin in a way different from its original state created by God. Branding a man is humiliating. It is mentioned in the *Quran* about a disbeliever who used to bully and slander the Prophet. To humiliate and punish him, God affirmed to brand him on the nose (68:16).

Animals on the other hand are branded to identify their owners. Each Bedouin descent group has a distinct brand recognised by the other groups and within the group itself additional marks are added to identify individual ownership. Special attention is paid to branding camels. In Saudi Arabia, the Bedouin have a special branding day when men compete to brand their animals. Branding takes simple forms and symbols derived from the pasturing environment. The brand is marked on different places of the camel's body like the face, neck, thighs or shoulders depending on each tribal group (Al-Torki, 2003, pp. 113-115).

The '*Aiaida* brand takes the shape of a capital I ( I ) marked on the right hind thigh. Each family has an additional mark. The Sheikh's camels are clearly distinguished with the brand الله (the Arabic script for Allah) marked on the neck. Another lineage mark is ( I T ). The *Heweitat* brand is marked on the thigh drawn like an upside-down V ( ^ ), while the *Ahiwat's* is on the face ( III ).

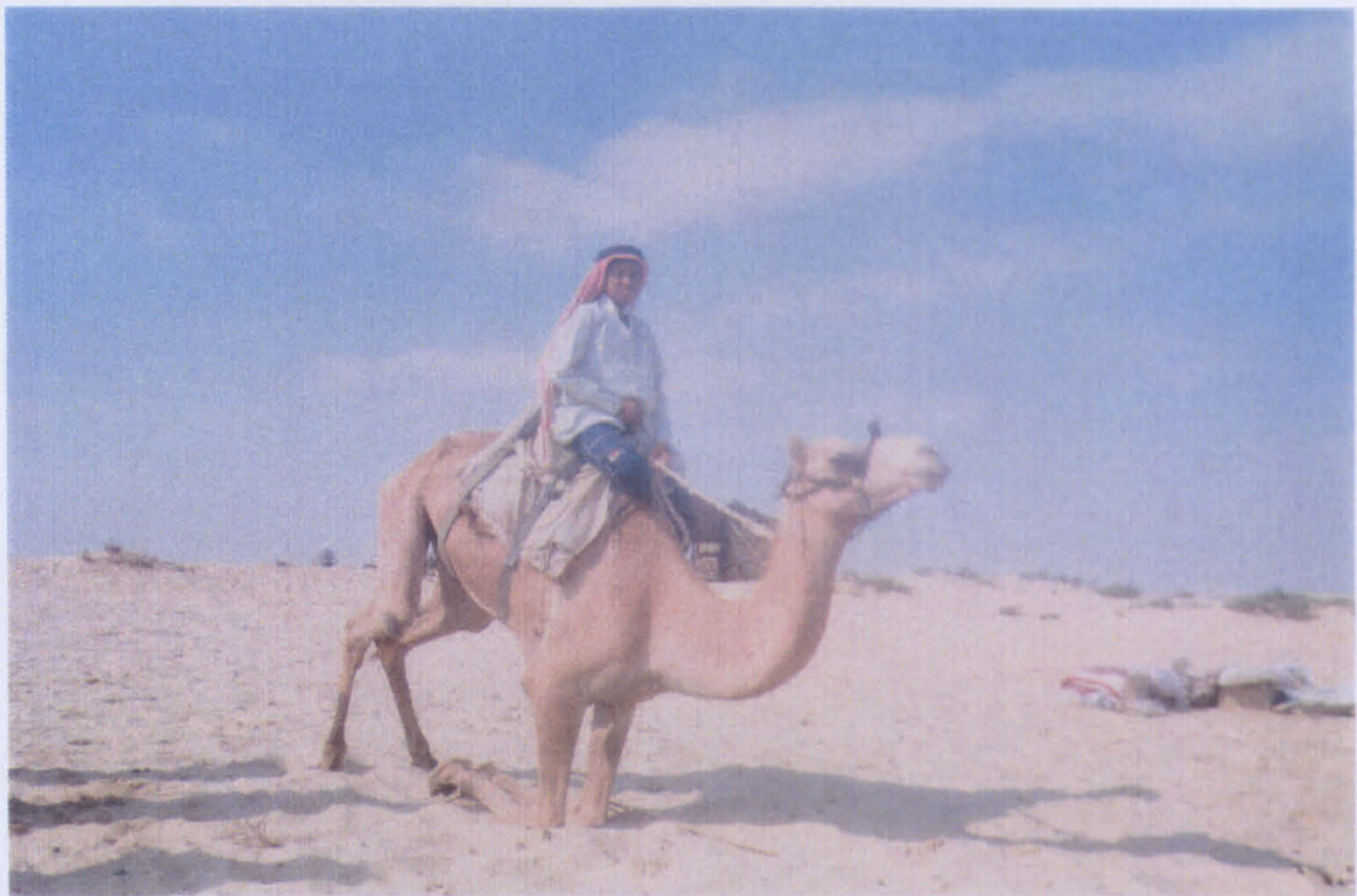
From the above mentioned discussion the importance of camels in the Bedouin's social and cultural life becomes clearly illustrated. Camels are regarded as an expression of the remarkably solid bond between man and beast. The camel's marvellous qualities and attributes constitute the basis of Bedouin nomads' culture. The Bedouin form their cultural meanings through their camels. They are expressions of their wealth, social prominence and prestige. They attribute the camels' both positive and negative characteristics to themselves. Camels symbolise the traditions and values of the desert people. Although many Bedouin men have abandoned the camel in preference for the car, it will always remain as an integral part of their culture.

There are many other animals in the desert environment, however, with a lesser importance to the Bedouin. In the following paragraphs, I will shed some light on some of these animals, especially those common among the '*Aiaida*, and explain their relationships with them.





*Fig. 13: Author feeding Camels*



*Fig. 14: Mastery over the camel*



## **The Donkey**

It is perplexing that the only species that has never been raised to cultural supremacy among nomadic communities everywhere is the donkey, despite its crucial importance. Donkeys are known to be very hardworking and resilient beasts of burden, but this is not enough to become prominent. According to Barfield (1993), to give prominence and cultural significance to a certain species as a key animal in a pastoral community, the animal has to meet four ecological and cultural criteria:

- (1) It must be well adapted to the ecological conditions to enable it to survive in large numbers.
- (2) Its ownership must be common among all households in the community.
- (3) Its pastoral requirements prevail over the other animals constituting the herd. In other words, it determines the migration pattern and herd composition.
- (4) The key animal must fairly define the nomad's social, political and economic relation to the inner and outer world (pp. 10-11)

In the case of Bedouin nomads, all these criteria are met by the camel, but not all by the donkey or even the horse. Some Bedouin groups kept horses only as a luxury because they are considered prestigious and were used in fighting and raiding.

For Bedouin groups who live in mountainous rugged terrain, the donkey performs a better job, as it is more adapted to negotiate steep and rocky terrains. Most Bedouin families, however, own at least one donkey, as it is very useful in herding and transporting water and other burdens. Donkeys are often mistreated and victimised in Egypt "perhaps because they are the objects of food prohibition in Islam and vulgar jokes in folk culture" (Hobbs, 1989, p.37). A donkey is perceived as a symbol of stupidity.

## **Goats and Sheep**

Archaeological records indicate that the oldest domesticated animals were sheep and goats, together with cattle. Bedouin nomads have forged strong relationship with these two species since antiquity. Again, it is a symbiotic relationship. Domesticated sheep and goats could no longer survive or reproduce successfully on their own and the survival of the nomads depends primarily on the wellbeing of their animals (Barfield, 1993, p.5).

The Bedouin highly regard their sheep and goats as "money or goods on the hoof" (ibid., p.93). In that sense, they do not have the same status or cultural prominence as camels.



They are mainly kept for their various products: wool (in sheep), hair (in goats), milk and meat.

Moreover, they symbolise Bedouin hospitality and generosity. A greater way to honour a guest is by slaughtering a sheep or a goat for him. "The animal is killed and dressed in churchlike silence and eaten in a spirit of communion" (Hobbs, 1989, p. 34). Meat is an infrequent item in Bedouin diet as regular consumption would mean economic ruin. Slaughtering sheep and goats is only carried out on important occasions such as feasts, weddings, circumcisions, or funerals (ibid., p.34).

Herding is always the duty of women and children. To manage their herds, the Bedouin need the support of transport animals, mainly donkeys as well as dogs to protect the livestock from predators and thieves. Herding has to be carried out on a daily basis. It begins at daylight by driving the herd out of the camp toward pasture. Herders have to ensure that there is no dew on the plants as it upsets the animals' stomachs as claimed by the *'Aiaida*. They return at dusk. Herding in cultivated areas however can be problematic if the animals tread on the crops and eat them. A more common custom among the *'Aiaida* now is going to nearby fields on donkey-back or with carts pulled by donkeys to scythe grass and weeds, load them in sacks and feed them to the animals at home.

The composition and number of a herd depends primarily on ecological as well as economic conditions. As mentioned earlier, due to several years of drought and the sedentarisation of many Bedouin groups, the number of herds has decreased dramatically. The market also plays an important role in determining the composition and number of the herds. According to Stauffer's (1965) study of Iranian nomads, the closer the markets to nomads, the more sheep there are, and vice versa. The further the market, the more goats, as there is less demand for goats (Khazanov, 1994, p. 26).

Among the *'Aiaida*, an average household can own a herd of 20-30 heads. This figure could be doubled in a rainy season. As few of the *'Aiaida* I met are livestock traders, their herds have more goats than sheep despite the proximity of the market. The goat to sheep ratio in a herd is 1 to 2. However, in many cases, they have an equal proportion. In another descent group, the *Bani 'Aṭa*, for example, the proportion of sheep is higher as they sell them in rural markets. In all cases, there has to be a mixed herd to reduce risks and maximise benefits. Poor households can rely on a *misrim*, a rich man with no

children to work as herders, who gives his herd to be kept by a pastoralist and they share the production.

The 'Aiaida keep different types of sheep. They enumerated the following names: "shamiya", "borgi", "rahmani" and "khooli". The *rahmani* type in particular is preferred for its big size. Goats, on the other hand, are known as local goats "anz baladi". They are preferred for several reasons: they are easier to tend; less demanding about their food; more hardy and easily adapt to changes in temperature; and they provide more milk (Khazanov, 1994, pp.26-27).

Like camels, sheep and goats are also branded to identify them. The 'Aiaida's brand symbol for a sheep is  $\Pi$ , while the goat's is  $\Upsilon$ . They are usually marked on the sides of their faces. Sheep and goats are also as intelligent as camels in recognising different words. To walk them, a herder says (*rrrrrr*) and to start eating, he or she calls (*hy hy*). It is not easy for an inexperienced person to lead and control a herd. And contrary to my expectations, a herder has to be very watchful and alert. Contemplation can only take place while resting.

Bedouin men take much pride in their occupation as herders. "*The Prophet was a shepherd*" emphasised many of my 'Aiaida informants. "*Herding taught me mercy and to be considerate for others and their feelings. I remember once one of my ewes lost her lamb. Its cries over its dead baby made me cry. I prayed to God to make it live again to stop her agony*", the 'Aiaida Sheikh confided in me. Every Bedouin both man and woman must have spent a stage in their lives herding sheep and goats. They start at an early age when they are about five or six years old. The Bedouin perceive their goats and sheep as their comrades. Herding with their animals teaches them to be independent, fend for themselves, meditate and value their freedom. Unfortunately, many Bedouin boys and young men are no longer interested in this occupation complaining that it is exhausting and boring. They also find it embarrassing to be called "shepherds", as mentioned earlier. The state does not encourage herding and forces the Bedouin to sedentarise. Besides, as an occupation, herding is not officially recognised. The majority of the Bedouin men I have met are recognised as unemployed by the state. Their IDs bear this humiliating title "*bi-doun amal*" (not working or unemployed).



## Cattle

Cows in particular have been included in the *'Aiaida* region after they settled and become cultivators. Again cattle are perceived as capital. The *Bani 'Aṭa* (or *Hittam*) Bedouin group in Egypt are more specialised in cattle as they roam cultivated lands across different regions and leave their animals to graze after crops are harvested. A common name used for all grazing animals is "*ma-washi*". This includes cows, sheep and goats. Sometimes more specific terms are used. The term "*da-bash*" is used to refer to sheep and goats, while "*ba-hayem*" is used for cows and buffaloes. The *Bani 'Aṭa* very rarely keep buffaloes for purely economic reasons. They refer to them as shade animals that are better kept in pens to produce meat and cheese. They are not adapted to covering long distances as cows and *da-bash* (Ghoneim, 2001, p. 42).

## The Dog

Dogs are reviled as symbols of filth and degradation. The Bedouin detest dogs as in the Islamic faith their saliva is considered *nijis* (unclean). One reason for this could be as a result of their diet, especially that they eat faeces. The Bedouin only keep dogs for protection and to help them tend their flocks. In the deserts, dogs live a harsh life like their owners. To the Bedouin, keeping an ordinary dog as a pet is difficult to conceptualise. The relationship, however, is symbiotic. The dog guards the herds and camp in return for being fed. Among the *'Aiaida* village, I have seen many stray dogs. Children would sometimes throw stones at them mischievously. A swear word often used to chide boys is "*ya kalb*" (you dog!).

Some Bedouin groups also keep hunting hounds known as "*saluki*" for hunting hare and gazelles. These thoroughbred hounds are considered as a breed apart from the shepherd dogs and perceived as hunting partners. Bedouin men allow them inside their tents and show them great affection. They are famous for their great speed and eyesight (Keohane, 1994, p. 98). It is interesting to note that the subject of the salukis' saliva is never mentioned by the Bedouin who keep them.

This unequal treatment of ordinary dogs and hunting dogs among the Bedouin is a stark case of "misrepresentation". According to Serpell (1986), it is another popular method of justifying the harmful exploitation of some animals. By emphasising the ordinary dog's

negative attributes and focusing on the salukis positive qualities, some Bedouins give themselves the excuse to abuse the former and become indifferent to its welfare, while pampering the latter. The animal here often becomes “a projection of our own darker motives and desires, a symbol of the beast that lurks menacingly in the thickets of the human psyche” (p.159).

Serpell (1986) points out that the same rule applies in the case of modern Europe and the United States with dogs, but in a less extreme form. Dogs are divided into mongrel and pedigree, “as if knowing an animal’s bloodline made it somehow morally superior. Indeed, the whole Western perception of the dog as the epitome of loyalty and sincere affection is equally a misrepresentation...” (ibid., p.163).

In other respects, as dogs are considered in some cultures to be very human-like and easy to identify with, they serve as symbols of human moral degeneration and depravity. The Maoris of New Zealand believe that dogs originated from a human being who was transformed into a dog as a punishment for social misbehaviour (Serpell, 1986, p.162). Another tribe among the native North Americans trace its origin to dogs. Among the Bedouin, George Murray (1935) noted that the ‘*Ababda*’ of the Eastern Desert in Egypt firmly believe of the existence of a race called *Beni Kelb* (literally sons of dogs), “whose males are all dogs but able to talk, while the females are normal women”. He argued that this anecdote could have got mixed with the name of a famous ‘tribe’, *Beni Kelb*, in the early days of Islam and some travellers’ tale of baboons in the mountains of Southern Arabia (Murray, 1935, p. 97).

The contemporary *Ma‘aza* still believe in a similar story. There is a Sudanese group named Bani Maklab (literally sons of claw). Their males have faces like men, but bodies like dogs, while their women are normal. They are *Bani Aadam* (sons of Adam). This group tried to tempt Prophet Muhammad to violate the taboo of eating carnivorous animals (*kilaab*) by offering him dog’s flesh. The Prophet knew and cursed all the men by turning them into dogs, but spared the women because one of them had warned him (Hobbs, 1989. pp. 26-27).

In these fables, the theme of hybridism is an interesting one; women and dogs. The fable, however, does not elaborate on the consequences of this hybrid race. Another



significant remark is that women are given credit for their good deed. This is quite peculiar in a patriarchal community like the Bedouin.

### **Foxes and Wolves**

The Bedouin have a particular aversion to animals of the canine family, especially foxes and wolves as they represent a threat to their survival attacking and killing their livestock. Whenever news spread about the presence of one of these animals in a Bedouin community, men would take up arms and set up traps to capture the intruder.

Foxes (*abul ḥusayn* or *leḥusayni*) in particular are considered as vermin. It is very common among the *'Aiaida* who admire its intelligence and beguiling ability and fear its devastation. A fox can kill a whole flock of poultry in one attack, while eating only one bird. It would also eat ripe mangoes from orchards. As some of the *'Aiaida* grow mangoes, during the harvest season, they stay all night in shifts protecting their orchards from mischievous foxes. To the *Ma'aza*, "the fox has a brain just like that of *Bani Aadam*" (Hobbs, 1989, p. 92).

Some Bedouin groups like the *Rwala* eat foxes. One of my *'Aiaida* informants also claimed that he ate fox flesh although it is considered forbidden in Islam, being a carnivorous animal. According to one fable narrated by Alois Musil (1928), the fox has a great grudge against human beings for pursuing its descendants and eating their flesh instead of honouring it for its good deed. The fox accuses Adam of ingratitude because it helped Adam kill a serpent, which threatened to bite him after Adam saved its life (p.23).

Wolves, on the other hand, are rarely seen among the *'Aiaida* territory. Another animal that I heard them talk of apprehensively is the *shiib* or *sal'owa*. They believe it is a hybrid of a dog and a wolf. It is very ferocious and attacks their herds and even people. The *Ma'aza* also mentioned this animal, which they believe is a doglike creature, but distinct from a wolf, hyena, jackal and domestic dog. Musil (1928) also heard accounts of it among the *Rwala*. They call it "*sib*" and believe it is a cross between a wolf and a female hyena (Hobbs, 1989, p.141; Musil, 1928, p.22). Stories of this hybrid animal are also common in rural and urban slum areas in Egypt. It cannot be considered as a totally mythical animal as several witnesses have claimed its presence. It has also been mentioned in local newspapers.

Misrepresentation of wolves is widespread among the Bedouin. The *Rwala* believe that the wolf was once a human being, whose name was *Serhan*. It can still understand human speech. According to their fable, *Serhan* once committed a great sin and for punishment he was changed into a wolf, and all the flocks of sheep and goats he had were taken from him by man. *Serhan* still regards all the flocks as his own and therefore hates all shepherds and dogs because they stop him having them back (Musil, 1928, p.21). The Prophet's tradition, moreover, asserts that wolves have spoken to men in their human speech. It is again one of the signs of the apocalyptic, when beasts will speak to humans and be understood.

Musil (1928) narrates another fable of a Bedouin and a wolf forging a brotherly relationship whereby they would help each other (pp.21-22). This asserts the social identity between man and wild beasts expressed in terms of the reciprocal and fraternal relation between the Bedouin and the wolf. This is similar to the Nuer's explanation of the totemic relation between social group and animal species by saying that "an ancestor was born as twin to an animal" (Willis, 1974, p. 20).

## **The Falcon**

At the peak of the Bedouin hierarchical pyramid of symbolically significant birds (*tiyur*) sits the falcon (*saqr*). Falcons are recognized as the most popular birds of prey to be used in hunting. Hawking or falconry has always been acknowledged as the passionate sport of the rich. Many Bedouin groups, especially in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region practice falconry. Some Bedouin hunters would capture the birds themselves, while others buy them from dealers in markets. The most popular type is the *saker* falcon. It is admired for being large, tough and able to hunt different game showing great intelligence in its tactics. Its big eyes have led the Bedouin to believe that it has the best eyesight. Another valuable falcon is the peregrine or (*shahin*). It is swift and hunts while flying, however smaller and more fragile than the saker. The lanner falcon or *horr* is also one of the best.

The Bedouin prefer large falcons to small ones believing they are males. It is the female falcons however that are larger. Young wild birds, less than a year, are also preferred over older ones or captive-bred falcons. The latter are more inclined to docility preferring



to be handfed and lack the natural hunting instinct. The Bedouin has to train the falcon himself to enable it to get used to its master. The falcon is never separated from the falconer. A wild falcon can be trained to hunt in a fortnight to three weeks. Bedouin men call their falcons pet names and look after them well. As falcons are vulnerable to the blazing desert heat, they have to be kept in an air-conditioned environment. Nomadic Bedouin men would keep their birds in winter and release them before summer when they migrate northwards. A released falcon does not come back to its owner the next season. It could be caught by another hunter (Keohane, 1994, pp.96-98; Thesiger, 1984, pp.288-289; Musil, 1928, pp.31-33).

Bedouin men always associate themselves with falcons. A man with sharp eyesight is compared to the *ṣaqr* (*zay ein el-ṣaqr*). Enumerating the benefits of living in the desert, the Bedouin boast of their sharp eyesight like falcons. And in describing their way of life, one of the most picturesque metaphors I heard was by an old 'Aida Sheikh. He stated,

*The Badu are like a falcon that lives in mountains, the desert and wilderness. It flies at a high altitude and does not mix with other birds as it is a noble bird. Once, a group of hunters set a trap for it and caught it. Since that date when it was taken into captivity, its nature and temperament has never been the same again. We are like this falcon. We have been caught in the web of urbanisation, civilisation and development. This has affected our ways and changed us. Television has a bad impact on us. However, with civilisation (more means modern technology), there are useful things that we make use of such as the telephone and car. Well, this change is normal. The world is moving forward and we have to keep up with its pace. The important thing, however, is that we should bring up our children right and ensure they are strongly attached to their religion (Interview, July 2003).*

These words are very significant of Bedouin life today. They recognise the basic dichotomy between their lives in the past and in the present. It is a dichotomy between their freedom to roam the deserts and the restrictions of sedentary life governed by the state and its oppressive apparatuses: a paradox of wandering and sedentariness. By ceasing to wander and settling down, the Bedouin lost many of their invaluable qualities – tolerance, wiliness, independence and courage. It is their mobility, which strengthens these qualities that so distinguish them. Modern technological inventions are acknowledged for their benefits as they are used to enhance their nomadism and autonomy in opposition to the state.

The words also express another dichotomy between the Bedouin as an individual and as a communal being. The falcon is a solitary bird. Falcons will come together only during the mating season. Like the falcon, Bedouin men also lead a solitary life in the desert, especially when tending camels. Nevertheless, men are still affiliated to their families, clan and descent group, which all set standards and codes of behaviour and conduct regulating the Bedouin life in the desert.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed animals as symbols among Bedouin societies. It gathered and analysed scattered literature on animals, especially camels among pastoral societies, from an anthropological perspective. It also recorded and analysed several aspects of animal life and their symbolic significance in Bedouin culture. The Bedouin have maintained symbiotic relations with many of their animals. They also established a hierarchy of symbolically significant animals. The camel is at the apex of this hierarchy. The camel is the core around which Bedouin nomads' daily lives are organised and the medium through which they express their social processes and relationships. The camel sustains Bedouin nomads' lives. Bedouin nomads thrive on the various products provided from their camels. Bedouin men also use them to obtain wives, when they are paid as dowries, and settle their disputes, when making compensations in them. Moreover, they have an aesthetic and intellectual purpose. They are "good to think", "good to feel" and "good to imagine" (Willis, 1974, p.14). The Bedouin associate themselves and others with the camel and its various characteristics. Although other animals within the Bedouin environment have not reached the status of the camel, many of them bear a symbolic significance that determines Bedouin social relationships and meanings. An appropriate concluding point is Roy Willis' (1974) argument that "The meaning of the symbolic animal remains always, like the animal itself, in some measure beyond conscious and rational comprehension" (p.10). Human attitudes to animals will always remain strangely subjective and unpredictable.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### BEDOUIN WOMEN AND GENDER RELATIONS

#### Introduction

A discussion of women, gender relations and Bedouin family life is an integral part of Bedouin culture. The main objective of this chapter is to dispel some of the other negative stereotypical images and misconceptions about the Bedouin, particularly about women and gender relations. Most of our ideas about Bedouin women and their family life have come from male travellers and social researchers, many of whom have never lived with Bedouin families or mixed directly with women. According to Wickering (1991),

Bedouin women do not figure much in written accounts. Most travellers and researchers were male, and their contact with women was minimal. In travellers' accounts women appear superficially, either from a distance tending herds or keeping the home or as romantically veiled creatures confined to harems (Pastner, 1978). Until recently, contemporary researchers have been more interested in the public world of political and social organization. Women in such accounts appear as passive recipients of larger forces (p.11).

It was only recently over the last thirty years that a clearer and more balanced picture of Bedouin women has become known thanks to the efforts of women researchers such as Cynthia Nelson, 1973; Katakura, 1977; Lois Beck and Nickie Keddie, 1978; Susan Davis, 1983; Gillian Lewando-Hundt, 1984; Soraya Altorki, 1986; Lila Abu-Lughod 1986; Deborah Wickering 1991 and many others. Arab women in general and Bedouin women in particular have emerged in those studies as active participants in social life with considerable authority forming strong social networks and conveying vital information. It should be noted, however, that the monographs written by those women researchers vary enormously, as customs regarding women vary from one Bedouin group to another.

As mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, it was not easy for me to have a balanced picture of women, as it is difficult for a male researcher to gain access to the world of women, particularly since women and men lead very separate lives. Despite spending a great deal of time with my Bedouin informants, particularly the *'Aiida*, I never had access to their world of women nor even given the opportunity to speak to them directly, except on one rare occasion when I interviewed an old *Heweitat* matriarch. Therefore, the account of

women presented here is mainly from a masculine viewpoint based on the words of my male informants and supported by secondary resources. The reader will note a tone of tension in some quotations, as if a battle of sexes is in full swing. My observations, however, contest those tense implications. They primarily display ideas of male superiority and indicate their imaginary domination.

There are many ways of studying gender relationships in any society. One useful way is studying the process of socialisation. A more common way, which I utilise here, is studying models of political power and authority, including authority over sexuality.

### **Gender, Space and Power Relations**

One of the misconceptions about Bedouin women is that they have a subordinate position to their men. To understand gender relations in Bedouin societies it is important to differentiate between the private and the public spheres of life. One of the central Bedouin habitus models is the division of space into the private and public domains. In the private or household context, women rule supreme. In the public sphere, however, there are some inequalities, which make women partially excluded and therefore unable to exercise certain political powers. Nevertheless, they maintain strong socio-political powers, particularly in arranging marriages. The division of space model is also related to the Bedouin model of honour and maintaining law and order in Bedouin societies. According to William Young (1996), “The open desert (*il-khalaa*) is thought of as a place for men also a markets is a men’s space. For a woman to enter such an area and linger there would be ‘shameful’ (*‘eyb*) and would elicit negative comments from the men present” (p.45). Hence, it is usually men who trade in markets.

Among the *‘Aiaida*, women would rarely go to markets unaccompanied by their male relatives or a group of women from friends and neighbours. Their mobility is mostly, within the community to homes of friends and relatives, or for tending their flocks. Age and status are the main determinants for women’s mobility. Young and adolescent girls have responsibility for sheep and goats. They take the herds daily to pasture and sometimes spend days looking for pasture in the wilderness. Their movements, however, do not go unnoticed by their male relatives, who usually track them and check if any strange men have been following them. Once married, a Bedouin woman stays mostly indoors and visits only her immediate neighbours. Older women are more free to move about.



The exclusion from participation in the public sphere, however, as argued by many commentators including Young (1996), is the result of gender inequalities with regard to their resources and kinds of authority. These inequalities are partly the products of the Bedouin's value system and partly the consequences of external factors. Significant changes, however, are taking place as a result of new educational and employment opportunities (p.129).

From a cultural and ideological point of view, Afsher (1991), talking about Muslim women, argues that there are ideological misconceptions related to women's productive role that deny them the right to work outside the domestic sphere and idealise their image as 'home-based, child-rearing women' (p.9). These misconceptions also aim at protecting their honour and dignity (Afsher, 1987, pp.4-5). Development could take place "only if and when it addresses the double-burdens of production and reproduction carried by women" (Afsher, 1991, p.2). Once women's productive roles are accepted, it becomes easier to begin the long process of ideological change, empower women and eliminate their exclusion.

Bedouin women's productive roles in Bedouin economy are acknowledged and accepted, but are not remunerated. Like many other women around the world, they therefore reap little benefit from their labour (Afsher, 1991, p.6; Moser, 1993). Illustrating the case of rural women in Southern Africa in relation to their access to and control of resources, for example, Anne Akeroyd (1991) argues that although these rural African women have *de facto* responsibilities as being female-heads of households, they lack *de jure* control over decision-making and the allocation of resources. For example, a married woman may need her husband's approval before buying items either for investment or consumption, undertaking paid work, or making gifts or loans to her kin (p.148). In my opinion, however, this approval or permission is not a sign of subordination, particularly if we apply it to the case of Bedouin women. On the contrary, it confirms participation among family members. Marriage thus becomes a partnership, where both partners have a say.

Developmentalists argue that to achieve the aspired human resources development, it becomes a necessity to address women's needs. There are two types of needs: practical and strategic. Practical needs include improving their health and services for their

families, increasing their income and reducing their workload. Strategic needs, on the other hand, include improving their education opportunities, gaining equal opportunity for employment and ownership, and increasing their participation in decision-making (Moser, 1993. Quoted in Pearson, 2000, p.388; Foster-Carter, 1985).

In Egypt, the Bedouin now pay particular attention to the basic education opportunities of their children both boys and girls. This process, however, is incomplete, as the majority of young women are not allowed to become engaged in wage labour. Although decision-making in the public sphere is restricted to men only, it is important to note, that women are not totally secluded from those decisions and events. Bedouin women lead autonomous lives to a great extent and form their own informal networks and connections that keep them interconnected with the men's public circle. Wickering (1991) in her study of the *Tarabiin* Bedouin women in South Sinai argues that these women are not secluded from the rest of the community or the men's domain.

...Their network of personal relations is part of the community as a whole. It intersects with men, and with families through the structure of kinship. Despite a conspiracy of silence that keeps women's activities secret from men, the women's network relates to the broader society through the flow of gossip and community information that circulates among women and between women and their menfolk. In short, the women's network permeates and influences the entire clan (pp. 6-7).

She adds, "the hierarchical structure based on a moral code of honour and segregation of men and women serves to give women autonomy and integrity in their lives. Women influence the whole community as they intersect all segments of the Bedouin livelihood" (ibid., p.33). Abu-Lughod (1986) also noted that the *'Awlad Ali* Bedouin women also enjoy a great amount of freedom within their communities as they compliment the economic and social roles of men. As for the control and ownership of resources, Wickering (1991) argues, that while the *Tarabiin* women do not own resources, they control the household and its goods" (ibid., p.37).

### *Spatial Models and Gender Division of Labour*

The Bedouin's model of space division is also reflected in their gender division of labour and the extent of contact with strangers and the outside world. Wickering (1991) explains that the type of work associated with women make them work close to their homes where



they meet only strangers who enter their community. Men, by contrast, range widely, often spending long periods of time away from home meeting and engaging with strangers (p.15).

This situation, where men become more exposed to the outside world, while women become more confined to their homes, has widened the gap between both sexes, particularly in places where Bedouin groups have sedentarised. According to Abu Lughod (1986), the two social worlds have been created among men and women living in the same household and the same community (pp.72-74). Dickson (1949) and Al-Shahi (2001), based on Peter Lienhardt's fieldwork in the Trucial Coast of Arabia, had also observed this situation saying that women of Bedouin nomads have more freedom than Bedouin women in towns (p.35). The increasing insecurity in urban areas and lack of strong social ties are the main reasons for this restriction on women as argued by one of my *Heweitat* informants in Al-Salam city. "*We are worried about our women living in cities. We do not let them out of the homes for fear that they might get assaulted, especially after all the rape incidents that we have been hearing about lately. Our women now have to wear the 'niqab' [which covers all their body and face in black]. Another Ahiwat informant in Sinai asserts, "We do not like our women to know anything about the outside world or what is going on around them. We keep them indoors and we do not let them watch TV"*.

In my opinion, there is a huge difference between protection and oppression of women. This last quote by the *Ahiwat* informant puts Bedouin women in a subordinate position. However, I have never heard this type of comment from any other informant throughout my fieldwork. I believe it also reflects my informant's patriarchal ego.

The main point with regards to the Bedouin's model of gender division of labour is that both roles complement each other. There is, however, a change in the balance between the roles of both men and women as a result of external factors exemplified in the structure of external markets. Young (1996), in his study of the *Rashaayda* pastoralists in Eastern Sudan, argues that since the 1960s, there has been more and more demand for men's wage labour, while women's labour – weaving and sewing material – has been replaced by purchased goods, an indication that their work is losing value. It is also reflected in their prestige (p.125).

Abu Lughod (1986) also argues that the shift from subsistence to market reliance has altered the Bedouin economy and lifestyle. Men's control of resources has reflected on women and undermined their work, which is confined to "an increasingly separate and economically devalued domestic sphere. Women have also become profoundly dependent on men, as subsistence is now based on cash rather than on the exploitation of herds and fields, which required the labour of men and women and entitled both to a livelihood" (p.73). Reliance on a cash economy and market goods have also reduced women's mobility as they no longer have to tend their flocks covering long distances.

In discussing the Bedouin model of the gender division of labour, it is also important to emphasise certain gender-related constraints on work, in the domestic or private sphere. There are certain prohibitions imposed on both Bedouin men and women preventing them from undertaking certain activities such as slaughtering animals for example. It is mainly men's work. The *'Aiaida* would never let their women slaughter a sheep or a goat. Milking animals in some Bedouin groups is also men's work. Among the *'Aiaida*, however, there are no restrictions as to which gender milks the animals. Cooking, making tea and coffee, and laundering are also neutral jobs. With regards to cooking, *'Aiaida* men cook meat outdoors, especially when there is a wedding and large quantities of food are prepared over open-air fires, but they will not cook indoors. Conversely, *'Aiaida* men would never wash their clothes in public. It is more common, however, for women to do the entire household washing. Young (1996) has also reported similar models of division of labour among the *Rashaayda* in Eastern Sudan. He argues, "...it would be misleading to characterize the men's work as 'public' and the women's work as 'private' or 'domestic'. In a sense, since the decorated products of women's work [rugs, saddles, etc.]... are always on display, one could say that women's work is 'public' not 'private'" (pp. 53-55).

### *Spatial Models and the Exercise of Authority*

Amongst all Bedouin communities, the right to command and exercise authority is closely linked with seniority and the gender division of labour. Wickering (1991) states "The formal hierarchy of authority in the Tarabiin community is seen by the Bedouin to be based on a reciprocal relationship of responsibility and dependency. The major determinants of authority are age and gender" (pp.36-37). Usually when work is undertaken within the men's domain, the most senior man in the community or the household exercises the



ultimate authority. In the private domain, on the other hand, it is the senior woman or matriarch of the household who has the right to give the residents of the household instructions.

Generally speaking, according to Wickering (1991),

The authority of men over women cuts across age divisions. Women remain dependent on their male kin throughout their lives. In the absence of father or elder brother, a younger brother has authority over an older sister. However, women exercise considerable influence despite their formal dependence. Older women are sought in matters of family negotiations and decision-making... (p.37).

Focusing on older women's status and authority, Wickering (1991) explains,

Senior women enjoy respect because of age and the authority the lineages they and their husbands represent... They have much freedom of movement around the community, and are active as mediators in family disputes. Yet, when women are together there is little differential behavior, and rank is marked mostly by younger women serving the older women tea (ibid., pp.40-41).

My encounter with the old *Heweitat* matriarch confirms those statements by Wickering. Although her children are grown up and financially independent, she is the authority in the household. Her daughter served us tea and disappeared indoors.

Moreover, women have a strong bargaining position, particularly in Bedouin communities where subsistence production is the main economic model. According to Young (1996),

Men are completely dependent on their wives and mothers for shelter and largely dependent on them for food [preparation and cooking]. Men cannot even move the tent cloth under which they sit, much less weave it or repair it. If a man divorces his wife, he has a right to the household tent and takes it with her when she returns to her father's camp or moves to a sibling's camp. Unless he has a second wife and a second household where he can live, he is left without shelter. He must either return to his mother's tent or must live as a guest with one of his brothers. Both options can be humiliating for a man who has become accustomed to being the head of a household (p.63).

This situation, however, has changed after the shift to market economy and many men seeking wage labour, making them more independent and self-reliant.

### *Marriage Arrangements and Women's Authority*

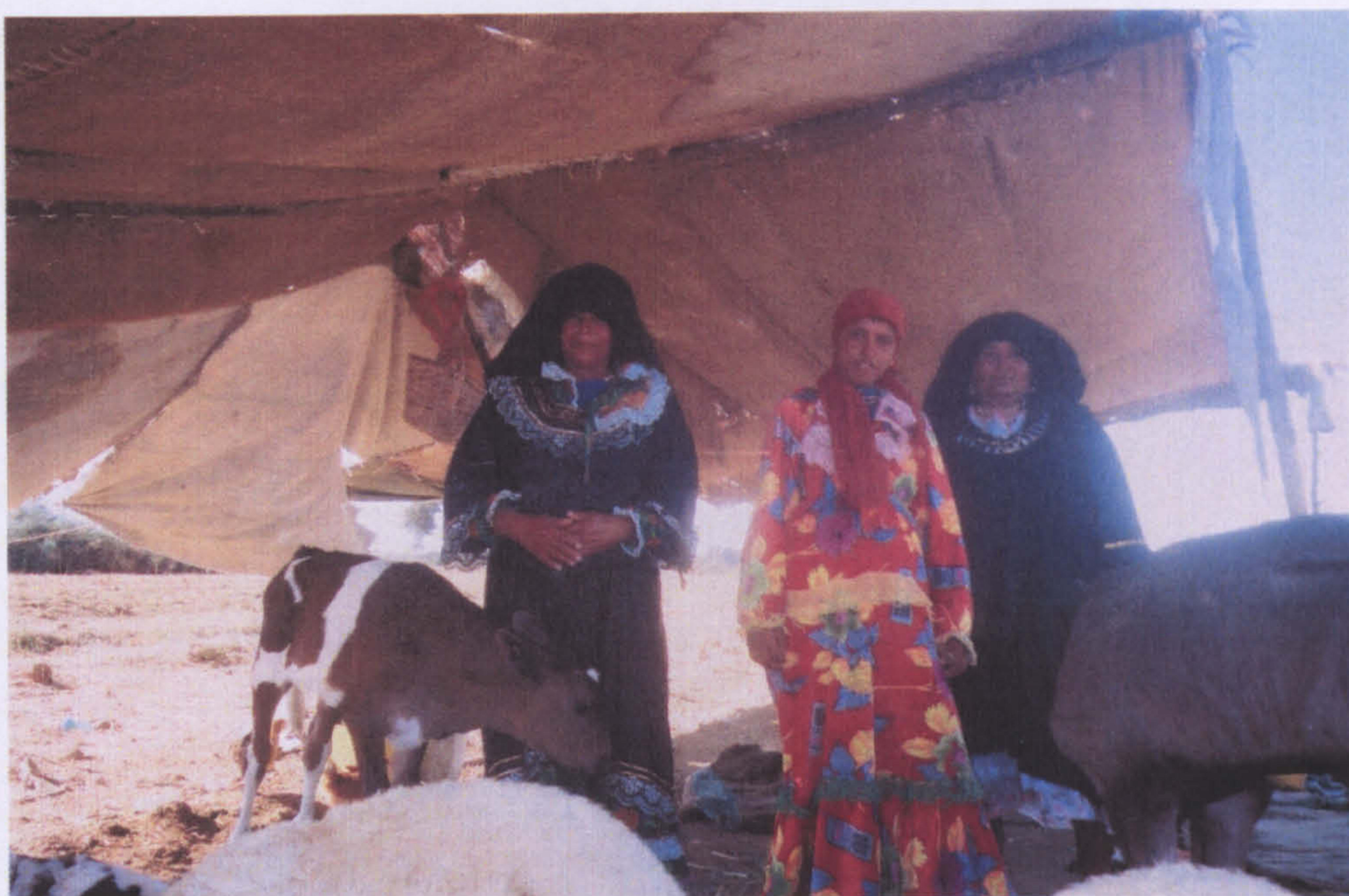
Bedouin women's bargaining power and authority are particularly evident in the domain of marriage. They have the advantage of negotiating marriages and controlling information

about marriageable girls based on their strict model of division of space. According to Young (1996), "Men cannot inquire about young girls themselves and have few opportunities to see them, much less talk to them, because of the spatial separation of the sexes. Only women have a chance to examine unmarried girls when they visit other households, and when they return to their own households they can adjust their reports about these girls to suit their own interests" (ibid., pp.128-129).

Marriage in Bedouin communities is seen more as a social contract and a political scheme than a love match. Since antiquity, it has been used as a tool to form political alliances between different descent groups. Women's roles in marriage arrangements and negotiations, however, do not allow them to build up patronage networks or exercise any further political powers within their communities. Their sons-in-laws also do not become their clients. The reason for this, argues Young (1996), is "partly because brides are not like money. Marriageable girls cannot be quickly accumulated and distributed periodically to the people whose support one wants to attract. Further, a woman can have only a comparatively limited number of sons-in-law, and five or six of them do not constitute a very wide network" (p.129).

Women can also cause friction and even divisions between family members if their arguments and conflicts become uncontrollable. *Shahat*, the 'Aiaida townsman in al-Marg explains that the main reason they settled in al-Marg was the split between his grandfather and his brother as a result of the conflict between their two wives. "*The jealousy of the wives caused our family to break up. 'Ali, my grandfather, came here and settled and we have not moved since*".





*Fig.15: Bani 'Ata Women in bait sh'ar (tent)*



*Fig.16: A group of 'Aiaida women at a wedding (Photo taken by a young boy)*



## Marriage and Family Life

As mentioned earlier, marriage among the Bedouin is seen more as a social contract. It is governed mainly by the Bedouin code of honour. Thus respect of women, their honour and rights are absolutely guaranteed. Women, on the other hand, are expected to perform their family duties. This is confirmed in my fieldwork. According to the *Ahiwat* Sheikh,

*We care for our women. Women are the goddesses of their homes. A woman looks after her children and her husband. She washes their clothes, cooks the food and cleans the household and children. She brings up her children teaching them good manners, honesty, hate of lying and love of land and nation. Bedouin justice honours the woman and pays her homage. It cares for her dignity. If anyone harms a woman, her right is four times that of a man. No one would dare to follow the steps of a woman or a young girl grazing in the desert on her own as her people could avenge her if someone harms her (Interview, August 2003).*

The police major who lived with the Sinai Bedouin for a long time confirms the above argument by the *Ahiwat* Sheikh, however, admitting that Bedouin customs and traditions are not fair to women in certain respects, particularly restrictions on her movement and right to work. He argues,

*The Bedouin man is spoilt by his woman. The woman is the pillar of the family. She takes the animals to graze, brings up children, and teaches them pastoralism. However, She is unjustly tied by their strict traditions and customs... She is not allowed to become engaged in many activities... Their justice, however, emphasizes the protecting of women, especially during grazing when they are on their own in the wilderness (Interview, August 2003).*

### *Bedouin Perceptions of Marriage*

Women thus have control and exercise authority over the household and its goods. As far as men are concerned, women cannot have authority over their husbands. Many of my Bedouin informants emphasised this point demonstrating a strong patriarchal attitude. One 'Aiaida old man stresses, "*A man's word should be obeyed by his women. The woman has no right to discuss or make any arguments with her man. The man does not consider the opinion of his wife. She has no right to ask him where he is going. If he wants to inform her, he can. If this does not happen, they will have an equal relation (tête a tête)*" (Interview, July 2003).

Another *Heweitat* young man in his early thirties, who expressed his wish to marry a second wife, argues, "*I never listen to a woman or accept what women say. You know the saying,*



*'shawirhom wa ikhlifhom' (ask their advice and do the opposite)... So, for example, I might ask her, 'Shall we turn right or left?' While I intend to turn left. I would turn right first and then turn left as I have already intended''.*

This saying, argues Peter Lienhardt (2001), is based on a Quranic verse telling men to ask the advice of women but not necessarily to take it. Such ironical interpretations of the *Quran*, however, are regarded by most Bedouin people to be "in bad taste" (pp.45-46).

The *Heweitat* young man and his brother living in al-Salam city prefer rural Bedouin women than those brought up as urbanites. His brother argues,

*Marrying an urbanite girl is problematic, as she'll think that she is on an equal footing with you; tête a tête. Those girls have great expectations and ambitions. They are greedy, never stop asking for money no matter what your earnings are... One of my friends became 'gaban' [literally 'coward'] after his marriage. We went once to his home, his wife opened the door and claimed he was unavailable, when we were sure that he was inside. A girl from the countryside would be better than the urbanite as she is 'maksurat al-ginah' [literally 'with a broken wing', i.e., humble, vulnerable, without expectations and dependent]" (Interview May 2003).*

This perception of the *Heweitat* young men is common everywhere, even in the West as some men often do not like women who challenge them or who are too demanding. The point remains that many women need their rights to be addressed and their social positions improved. Mainstreaming gender, in my opinion, would be beneficial, especially if coupled with an improvement in men's position and maintaining equilibrium between the power of both men and women to avoid potential conflict.

The main purpose of marriage from a Bedouin male point of view is reproduction and having a large progeny that strengthens the Bedouin model solidarity based on lineage. Another old *'Aiaida* man in his eighties, argues, "'al-baraka fi al-intag'" (God's blessings is in reproduction, i.e., having many children)

In contrast, Bedouin women's perceptions emphasise affection, warmth and a strong sense of duty, as argued by the *Heweitat* matriarch.

*Marriage is half the religion. A man needs to make a family and have children. The woman is to care for her husband and serve him. Bring him his food, drink and clothes and look after her children and home. A man has to work and the woman looks after the household. Wage labourer women are always exhausted*

*because all their house chores get accumulated. A man ought to assist his wife. The Prophet assisted his wives... A woman feels very jealous if her husband knows [i.e., has an affair] or marries another woman... Moreover, "rigala yeta'hfishow wa sitat ye'ash-eshow" [Literally, men break away or pull out while women tend to put down roots or set up a nest]. It is the mother who settles and looks after her children, as this is her duty in life to bring up her children and grandchildren. We have to bear for the sake of the children. (Interview, June 2003)*

Those different views about marriage by Bedouin men and women reflect two completely different sets of cultural models. However, it is interesting to note that in two of the above quotations, the use of metaphors, especially those related to birds such as the broken wing and nest, used for marriage are shared by both men and women. Strauss and Quinn (1997) approach cultural meaning from a cognitive perspective. In their illustration of understandings of marriage in the United States, they argue that metaphors derive their sharedness from two sources. "First, they draw upon cultural exemplars of those aspects of experience that the speaker wishes to clarify for the listener. Secondly, these metaphors fall into classes reflecting a shared set of underlying concepts that the metaphors have been chosen to represent and highlight" (p.141).

Birds, especially small ones such as sparrows or doves, represent affection, sharing and effort, especially in building their nests and looking after their young. Those characteristics appear to be more appealing to Bedouin women. Birds are also weak creatures that rely mainly on their fragile wings for living. A bird with a broken wing is debilitated and could be easily dominated; something men prefer to demonstrate their dominance, especially in patriarchal communities such as the Bedouin. Such metaphors thus provide good clues to the cultural understandings that lie behind them.

The harsh life of the Bedouin makes them practical and often thinking in terms of making the maximum profit and reducing the losses to the minimum. Women, thus, are mainly the means for reproducing children, beneficial for strengthening the lineage's solidarity and marriage is a binding social contract to avoid mixing sexual partners and ensure the purity of the Bedouin line. Reasoning about the choice of partner and marital events is also therefore efficient. The success of this cultural model of marriage among Bedouin communities makes it appealing and valued and hence widely available and transmitted across generations.



This does not mean that love is nonexistent. On the contrary, all Bedouin men and women cherish love and Bedouin songs and folklore are full of great romances. Bedouin men narrate many love stories and elopement of lovers who would both become outcasts by their own descent group and be forced to live under the protection of some other group. One 'Aiaida young man narrated to me a story which he claimed to be true about a Palestinian Bedouin cousins.

*They eloped together and lived in the wilderness for sometime inside a cave. The man would ambush travellers in the desert and rob them for his and his lover's sustenance. But one day, he was overpowered by another man whom he tried to rob. That man chained him up and forced him to take him to his place of hiding. When he found that beautiful Bedouin woman in the cave, he had sexual intercourse with her. The Bedouin man could not bear to see his cousin dishonoured. He freed himself and killed the man and his cousin. He returned to his tribe dragging their bodies. His uncle who expelled him earlier, honoured him for protecting his family's honour [i.e., by killing his sinful cousin] (field notes, August 2003).*

The Bedouin's model of honour, as mentioned earlier, is of greatest importance and the bloodline of the lineage or descent group is not to be diluted by anyone, even someone from the same group who harms the family's reputation.

Another appealing and successful Bedouin marriage cultural model is marrying first cousins, or 'patrilateral parallel-cousins'. It is usually the girl's parents and the parents of a suitable prospective cousin who make the marriage arrangements when a girl reaches a marriageable age. Reactions to a girl's refusal to a marriage proposal differ from one Bedouin group to the other. In some groups, the patrilateral cousin is entitled to kill the girl without fear of reprisal (Keohane, 1994, p.107).

The model of marriage between patrilateral parallel-cousins\* is considered ideal in practical terms for two reasons, according to Keohane (1994):

Firstly, marriages are arranged for the sake of children that will be born as result – that is, a match must be chosen that will ensure the continued purity of the tribe. Secondly, it is sometimes said that the ideal wife for any man is his sister. In such a theoretical match there could be no doubt that the woman was of the right bloodstock. Also, because a man is the guardian of his sister's honour, he could be sure that he was marrying a woman of unblemished reputation – a matter of great importance given that

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\* Although I do not have enough genealogical data to confirm the prevalence of this model of marriage among the three Bedouin groups I studied, I came across many examples of Bedouin men who told me they are married to their patrilateral parallel-cousins. This model is also very common in Arab cultures. My parents are one example of this model of marriage, as are many relatives and acquaintances.

so much of a family's honour is determined by the chastity of its women. However, as incest is forbidden (and virtually unknown) among the Bedu, the closest permissible connections [is] marriages between first cousins... (ibid.)

Another advantage of marriages between first cousins is that the dowry asked by the bride's father of his nephew is usually less than the one asked of an outsider. Kinship ties and family honour are more important than money in that respect. In some cases, therefore, the bridegroom may not even be asked to pay the dowry in full. "... the figure agreed is more important than the amount actually handed over. Obviously, if the marriage is kept within the family; it is much easier to agree a substantial dowry without paying it than it would be if a man wished to wed into another clan" (ibid., p.109).

According to Abu Lughod (1986), this type of marriage is preferred because it emphasises the importance of agnation. Cousins look after their wives and protect them. Women, on the other hand,

feel comfortable in the community, living among kinfolk with whom they share interests, loved ones, and often a lifetime of experience. Even if the match does not work out, they need not leave their children. Marriages between coresident cousins are often more affectionate because they build on childhood experiences of closeness, in a society in which relations between unrelated members of the opposite sex are highly circumscribed and often either distant or hostile (p.58)

Young's (1996) study of the *Rashaayda* in Eastern Sudan also demonstrates the same model where both men and women prefer endogamous marriages.

The quality of care and psychological security that a woman's in-laws will offer her are primary considerations when she decides who to marry. Rashiidi women hesitate to marry nonrelatives precisely because they are not sure that they can rely on nonrelated in-laws in case of need. As one woman told me, "if your in-laws regard you as a stranger, they may not take care of you when you are sick."... Thus Rashiidi women counsel their daughters to marry relatives, so they will not end up living with strangers (p.92).

Up to the present, many Bedouin groups in Egypt would never accept their women marrying outsiders, especially fellahin (peasants). The *'Aiaida*, in particular, totally reject the idea of mixing their bloodline. Some of them argue that it is a religious matter, as the outsider man would not share the same values and customs of the group. Two *Heweitat* men, however, challenge this cultural model. One argues, "*It is mainly a matter of customs and traditions. It has no basis in the religion of Islam. According to one of the Prophet's sayings, 'if you [people/Muslims] find a prospective man whom you accept his*



*religion and morality, marry him to your daughters'. Yet, traditions are stronger than religion in that matter''.*

### *Polygyny*

One misconception about the Bedouin and Arabs in general is that all men are polygamous. Both models – monogamous, polygamous – however exist. It is quite common that those who are wealthy can have more than one wife, but again it is not always the case. Dickson (1949) showed in his study of the Bedouin in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that men are faithful and loving to their wives. “In spite of their religion permitting men to take more than one wife, and in spite of easy and sensible divorce laws, the standard of morality among the dwellers in hair tents is one of the highest in the world: this naturally tends towards a high standard in family life, and results in mutual admiration, compassion and trust between man and wife” (pp.57-58).

In Egypt, however, it is becoming increasingly common among Bedouin men from different descent groups, especially the *Ahiwat* and *'Aiaida*, to have more than one wife. “*Polygyny is a must, especially with the increasing number of women compared to men*”, says one *Ahiwat* man. This informant is married to three wives, all living in the same house, but in separate flats.

According to the *'Aiaida* Sheikh in Sinai, “*The norm is to be married to more than one wife. If I could, I would let all men in my lineage marry four wives... There are more women than men now in the society... It is one of the signs of the approaching Day of Judgement... If these women do not get married, vice will spread. We are protecting our women from leading a deviant behaviour this way. They have to accept that men have several wives. Women also help each other in housework*”. It is interesting to note that the Sheikh is married to four women and has twenty-five children, all living in one big house.

In a theological debate with the *'Aiaida* Sheikh, I argued that the *Quran* discourages men from taking several wives, as a husband cannot treat all his wives equally. He must treat one wife more favourably than the other(s) and this is shunned. The *'Aiaida* Sheikh's interpretation of the same Quranic verse, however, considers polygyny as the common model, while having one wife is the exception. Asking about the rights of the other co-

wives, the 'Aiaida Sheikh answered, "*What about the rights of the women who cannot marry at all?*" (Interview, June 2003). This debate presents another stark example of how traditions, particularly the endogamous marriage model, are stronger than religion. It also explains clearly how scriptures could be easily interpreted in different ways to suit certain cultural models.

According to another informant of Bedouin origin in Suez, "*Polygyny is spreading because men want to have many children. They could marry a woman who is barren and in that case need to remarry to have children. It is widespread among the Hatayma in particular. Their women, especially the mothers-in-law are tough and demanding. They are not on good terms with their daughters-in-law and order their sons to marry again to tease their wives. The wives, however, are stubborn and resolute. They remain in the household and refuse a divorce*" (Interview, July 2003).

It is common that a husband sets up a separate tent or house for a second wife. Co-wives would rarely live together. Living in an extended family is more common. As a result of poor economic conditions, newly married couples would live with one set of their parents, usually the groom's parents. Both Bedouin men and women often marry at a young age, with the financial support of their parents. I was considered an exceptional case among all my Bedouin informants. They asked me in amazement "*How can a man in his thirties remain unmarried all that time?*"

### *Women's Domestic Rights*

Another misconception is that women's rights are abused by their husbands and families. In fact, a husband cannot ill-treat his wife or abuse her rights because her paternal family would look after her rights. Women remain part of their own families even after marriage. As mentioned earlier, women marry their patrilateral parallel-cousins who regard them highly and treat them with honour and respect. In contrast, wives who are not patrikin, according to Abu Lughod (1986), are often treated differently. But again, this does not imply their ill-treatment. Wives in the tribe empower each other and form alliances with one another (pp.58-59). If they feel ill-treated, they would go back to their patri-groups who interfere in order to settle any disputes or problems.

A Bedouin woman, though married, never ceases to belong to her father's family and returns to it at once, if she considers herself ill-treated. Then it is for her father



or brother, not her husband, to revenge her death or injury. So also her family has to pay for the wounds she inflicts, and receive compensation for any damage she may sustain in her turn (Murray, 1935, p.52).

Closeness to patrikin does not negate the importance of maternal kin. According to Abu-Lughod (1986), the latter does not conflict with the principle of agnation. It is derived indirectly from agnation itself because it is concerned for the children as much as it is concerned for the woman (pp.60-62).

### *Honour and Sexuality*

The Bedouin's model of honour rests in guarding and concealing the sexuality of women. Sexual segregation is the basis of that model. The concept of agnation is also based on the symbol of women as chaste child-bearers. Sex outside the social bounds of marriage threatens the pure bloodline and collides with the model of honour. Sexuality, also as a source of passion and desire, has to be controlled and not expressed explicitly. Segregation and concealment of women thus avoid this collision with honour. Mixing sexes is a novelty, which many Bedouin men frown upon. My *Heweitat* informant from Al-Salam city showed concern about the future behaviour of his seven-year-old son as a result of mixing with girls at school. The issue was raised when I asked him if his son's private language school was mixed. He did not understand the term '*mokhtalata*' ('mixed') at first. So, when I explained, he said in disapproving sarcasm, "*Private language schools have to be mixed nowadays. I'd find him next talking to his girl friends on the phone. And one day, he would come back from school with a bride and marry her without my permission. He would do as he pleases and would marry anyone* [i.e., ignoring the principle of *asl* or pure descent]. *At that time, no one would know what would happen except Allah!*" (Interview, May 2003).

In more cynical words, an '*Aiaida* old man (in his eighties), expressed his disapproval of the way urban women, in particular dress and act nowadays, saying, "*Next, we'll find a woman checking a man's sexual organ before agreeing to marry him*" - A hyperbole that women have gone too far exposing themselves and mixing with men appears as follows: the discussion turned to the old man's boasting of his sexual vigour and his ability to have an erection. Young men participating in the discussion started teasing him that they would take his sexual organ to be displayed at the Egyptian Museum.



This was one of the rare occasions when a topic of a sexual nature was discussed publicly and explicitly, especially in my presence. Bedouin men are very conservative and would rarely talk about sex. I had some insights, however, from other informants. Another old *Heweitat* informant expressed his preference for plump women. An *'Aiaida* middle-aged man expressed his preference for young urban blonde girls in tight jeans. Exposure to the outside world, particularly after the spread of television and satellites has changed the Bedouin men's model of sexuality. The *'Aiaida* poet laments, "*In the past, women were like fruit. We desired them and used to be longing for them. Now, all the nakedness you see in the streets and on TV, makes you lose interest in them. Youth are not willing to marry any longer*".

More in-depth insights about Bedouin men's sexuality were revealed by the high-ranking police officer. He argues, "*The changing lifestyle, watching TV and satellite dishes and marrying urban women, made many Bedouin men change their sexual behaviour. Many now care about foreplay and having different [sexual] positions*".

He narrates two unique anecdotes recounted to him by two Bedouin men themselves:

*The first was a Bedouin man who had a second wife from an urban area, whom he divorced and returned to his Bedouin wife. When he was making love to her [the Bedouin wife], he asked her to talk to him, but she had nothing to say, as she was not used to talking to him. He told her, 'Say anything'. She said, 'I want to defecate (bedi a'khari)'. He told her, 'go then. You are disgusting'. When she came back he asked her again to say something. She did not know what to say. He told her to repeat after him, "May Allah curse me [i.e., himself] for divorcing my urban wife and coming back to you'...*

*In another anecdote, a Bedouin man told me that he wanted to have foreplay with his wife and was caressing her breasts. She told him, 'You have no business with my breasts. If you want to copulate, just do it and finish' (Interview August 2003).*

Though humorous, those anecdotes if genuine, reveal, in my opinion, a significant problem in Bedouin's sexual relationships. They depict sexual intercourse as a mechanical process devoid of any passion or devotion; something, which negates what was mentioned earlier about Bedouin romanticism. The thinness of my data on this subject, however, makes it difficult to support any argument.



It is interesting to get an overview of women's attitude to sexuality. Wickerling (1991), as a woman with easier access, observed the following incident in many settings during the grazing journeys she undertook with *Tarabiin* young women:

There was a road some distance away, and when a truck passed, the girls would yell and pretend to be prostitutes, inviting the truck driver to join them. Of course, the trucks were far away and went by in a flash. But one of the girls might rush out and pull up her dress toward the road, reducing the rest of them to helpless laughter.

In their clan community, these girls are treated as virgins; their naiveté in sex is assumed and they are expected to conform to strict codes of modesty and deference. In the autonomy of their own company, however, they turn authority on its head and play with the taboo of their sexual favors. They open to view a part of their body which is shameful to expose. They "offer" their virginity, so essential to family honor, to passing truck drivers. Such sexual play flaunts and defies the very nature of their subordination" (p.43).

The only instance where women could have the opportunity to exercise their autonomy and self-determination is when they are segregated and keeping their activities secret from men. (ibid., p.36). Behaving as such in public would not only be met by condemnation, but by instant killing of the perpetrator.

*Different versions of the same story: The Story of Haj Jouda.*

This case study depicts how Bedouin men interpret incidents from different perspectives, though sharing the same culture. Haj Jouda is an old 'Aiaida grandfather in his late eighties, early nineties, about whom one day the entire village was talking concerning his decision to get married. He decided to remarry, despite being a grandfather and having many grown up children. The following quotes depict different viewpoints on his decision.

The first commentator, an 'Aiaida tribesman, says cynically, "*The man has no excuse to get married. It is a priority to get unmarried youth to marry rather than him*". I argued, "*As an old man, he needs someone to give him company*". He answered, "*But he is already married. And this may be his fourth or fifth wife*".

Next, one of his sons states, "*...He can do as he pleases. He was married to a woman whom he divorced yesterday and decided to remarry today. She [the divorced wife] was quite insane. She was very jealous that he would marry again. He decided to tease her, and is getting married*".



In a third instance, the old man's brother expresses grief for his deceased sister in law, "[His wife] died in 1998 or 1999 in a car accident when they were going to Sunday market. She used to do everything for him [Haj Jouda]. She would carry hot coal on her palm and give it to him to light his cigarette. He would turn the red-hot coal on her palm to burn her and give her orders. He maltreated her. He is a womaniser"

The next day, everyone in the village was still talking about the marriage. People were asking how old the bride was. They could not guess. Some said she was in her forties, others said in her fifties, or sixties. Others wondered if she could bear children from him. To this, the 'Aiida Sheikh replied, "It is possible like Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) whose wife gave birth when she was barren and he was about 83 year old. It is God's will. We can say nothing but show amazement at the will of God and His acts".

All of these speakers interpret the event of Haj Jouda's marriage with a vested interest, some with a conscious resentment, and some with religious passion. Each speaker's viewpoint is to be taken seriously representing a different aspect of Bedouin culture. The speakers here, as in other parts of the study, speak for themselves. Their authority and power of interpreting events are intact. I speak about them using their voices to narrate the story. This particular incident explains how marriage is a very significant event in the Bedouin's life. It is both a social necessity and a religious duty. Lienhardt (2001) argues that in principle, the social importance attached to marriage is the same for both men and women (pp.57-58).

## Conclusion

By analysing Bedouin women and gender relations from a power and authority perspective, my objective in this chapter was to dispel some of the negative stereotypical images and misconceptions about Bedouin women and their subordination. Bedouin gender relations need to be analysed in their spatial context. The Bedouin's model of space division is reflected in their gender division of labour, where women's roles are associated with herding and household maintenance. This spatial model also associates women with areas close to their homes. By contrast, men, who are engaged in wage labour or other social activities, range widely and for a long time away from their homes and families. The family, however, remains the most important social unit in a Bedouin community. Marriages are arranged between families rather than individuals.



Nevertheless, women maintain many rights in their homes and are always protected by their kinsmen, even when married to strangers. The patrilateral parallel-cousins marriage model, however, remains the ideal one. Regarding polygyny, despite the prevalence of the monogamous model, many Egyptian Bedouin men, from specific descent groups, prefer the polygynous model referring it to their interpretation of the *Quran* and associating it with one of the signs of the apocalyptic. Bedouin men's perceptions about marriage and sexuality are also changing as a result of exposure to television and satellite channels.

## CONCLUSION

I perceive this study as a long cognitive journey to understanding myself and Bedouin culture through ethnography. Ethnographic practice provided me with the opportunity to experience one of my childhood fantasises; to live with the Bedouin and understand their culture. I began this study with the presumption that the Bedouin are different from 'us'. Through reflexivity, hermeneutics and a cognitive anthropological approach, I came closer to understanding Bedouin culture from their own perspective. My central interest was to understand the Bedouin's subjective experience and how they form meanings of things and events.

In this thesis, I am concerned with a critical epistemology, i.e., obtaining knowledge based on the subjective experiences and meanings of the Bedouin informants, while maintaining ethical considerations and power relations. Critical epistemology also directs itself towards taking action and bringing about change. In this respect, I worked with some Bedouin informants to make their voices heard and advocate their rights for retaining their cultural identity. This thesis could be considered in part a statement advocating the cultural rights of the Bedouin. In general, this study celebrates the Bedouin organisation and utilisation of their distinctive culture. It aims to enhance our understanding of and respect for Bedouin culture.

My thesis contributes to the vast anthropological literature written on the Bedouin in several respects. Firstly, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first anthropological study to be conducted among the '*Aiaida*' descent group in Ismailia and Sinai. According to my '*Aiaida*' informants, I am the first researcher to live among them and study their culture, especially their Sufi doctrine and rites.

Secondly, my intervention with the *Heweitat* descent group in an urban context – al-Salam city, northeast Cairo – is also original as it studied the impact of urban growth on them. It also shed light on the issue of development-induced displacement; a subject often neglected, especially in the study of nomadic communities. I attempted to create awareness of the Bedouin's human rights situation and highlights different types of abuses they are exposed to.



Thirdly, my approach using a cognitive anthropological approach and the concepts of model and schema in analysing Bedouin culture is also new. Overall, I attempted to cover many issues that are currently being discussed worldwide such as globalisation, modernisation and change, Islam as a religion, the relations between Islam and the West, human rights and gender relations. My contribution aims at enriching the ongoing debate on these issues by presenting them from a Bedouin perspective.

In general, the study is based on the robust concept of culture. The Bedouin construct their own cultural models as a means of negotiating their natural and socio-political environments. They make continuous adjustments in response to the demands of the surrounding natural environment and the socio-political conditions. Chapter Two, which set the stage to the study of the Bedouin, started with the analysis of cultural models and schemas related to the identity and social organisation of Bedouin groups. All Bedouin groups share a lineage foundational schema based on the concept of noble descent. They also share cultural models, which distinguish them from the 'other'. These are mainly based on different models of behaviour, particularly the concept of honour or 'code of honour'. Bedouin groups are also distinguished by their distinct identity exemplified in their costume, especially the head dress; use of the Arabic language and expression of specific lexemes; eating habits; and last but not least their 'habitus' models or their use of space and organisation of interior furnishings. Bedouin groups use these cultural models to 'exoticise' their cultural/ethnic image in contrast to the 'other'.

This, however, does not mean that Bedouin culture could be viewed as a unified whole. Each Bedouin group also has its own 'local' or 'specific' cultural models, which distinguish it from other Bedouin groups. The local culture of a Bedouin group is derived from certain 'classificatory' models created by primal identification of the group's unique characteristics and drawing boundaries that initially separate it from other Bedouin groups culturally and in some cases socially. In this respect, Bedouin culture is highly diversified.

In their interaction with the 'other', the Bedouin show a remarkable ability to change and adapt. They can invoke multiple identities and change their model of behaviour according to various contexts. Managing multiple identities is a common characteristic amongst all nomadic groups. Adaptability becomes very important in the economic

sphere. Chapter three discussed the Bedouin adaptation models in relation to economic activities. The chapter depicted highly diversified Bedouin economic activities and employment models, which contradict the 'typical' picture of the Bedouin as predominantly nomadic pastoralists. The rapid urbanism and modernity have significantly transformed the Bedouin economic and subsistence models. Many groups have become sedentarised voluntarily and combined pastoralism with agriculture, wage labour, salaried employment and trade.

The chapter discussed Bedouin economic models in both urban and rural/desert contexts. It argued that Bedouin men rely on a number of skills to eke out a living and adapt to the ever-changing conditions. In urban contexts, they confine themselves more or less to urban economic activities considered as being compatible with their nomadic identity such as surveillance, trading and brokerage. In the rural context, many Bedouin households have taken up agriculture as the mainstay of their economy. Despite this, they insist on retaining their distinct cultural identity, separating them from the 'common' peasants, and their traditional values and egalitarian principles furnishing them with power and honour.

In both urban and rural/desert contexts, the Bedouin demonstrate a strong sense of self-consciousness, independence and control over their own affairs. They prefer to 'develop' and face challenges independently without the help of the state. In its attempts to 'develop', the state, however, overlooks the 'cultural' and human' rights of different groups of the population, including Bedouin groups. Bedouin 'human rights' are more liable to be abused because of the prevalence of many negative stereotypes among the Egyptians, especially the state officials. Many of these stereotypes are related to the convenient conception that all Bedouin men are 'allegedly' involved in illicit drugs' production and smuggling.

Chapter three discussed the illicit drug issue in Egypt within the framework of human rights as perceived by my Bedouin informants. The chapter's point of departure was anthropology's response to current issues of the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups, human rights and justice. The chapter provided a forum for my Bedouin informants to express their disappointments and frustrations with the injustices and



abuses inflicted on them as a result of negative stereotyping. It also confronted all forms of stereotyping and injustices.

The chapter also discussed the dilemma of some internally displaced Bedouin groups as a result of development projects. Development-induced displacement is a controversial subject in the field of refugee and internal displacement studies. All people must have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose residence. These rights become of particular importance in the case of nomadic communities such as the Bedouin.

The argument that all Bedouin men are involved in illicit drug activities, in view of this detailed research, is a fallacy. One particular Bedouin group – the '*Aiaida* – strongly proves my argument. Some lineages of the '*Aiaida* descent group are members of a Sufi order named *Al-Tariqa al-Gaririya al-Ahmadiya*. A considerable part of my ethnography focused on studying the doctrine, methods and rites of this Sufi order. It is based on observing pure monotheism, love of God, honesty and sincerity, and purifying the soul. Involvement in illicit activities of any type is therefore totally unacceptable and regarded as sinful and contradicting their religious beliefs. The study of Bedouin religious beliefs also confirmed the erroneousness of the stereotypical image among other Egyptians that the Bedouin are 'ignorant' regarding matters of religion.

I attempted to link the beliefs and perceptions of the '*Aiaida* Sufi order to the main arguments about Islam as a religion and relations with the West. I suggested that Islam is first and foremost concerned with the esoteric domain. In this respect, idealism could be pursued internally rather than externally. Extremist models of Islam are therefore far from the 'ideal' notion of Islam. There are also several versions of Islam and therefore it cannot be viewed as a 'monolithic' bloc. Building bridges between Islam and the West, and discarding apprehensions require 'preparedness', i.e., an introduction between the two cultures, and establishment of communication, mutual understanding and tolerance.

In this study, I also argued that there is no contradiction between adopting some Western cultural principles, whilst retaining traditional customs and values. The Bedouin are not against the West's materialistic civilisation and its propagation of good values. They prove capable of adopting some Western standards without obliterating their identity and

traditional values. I elaborated on this theme by studying the Bedouin responses to modernity and globalisation.

In this modern age characterised by rapid changes in all domains of life, many people are finding it difficult to cope and respond to these changes. Many Bedouin groups, however, attempt to adapt and embrace modernity and sophisticated technology to enhance their livelihoods and traditional cultural values. I discussed some facets of modernity in the Bedouin world such as the car, television and satellite channels, the media, and digital technology including the mobile phone. I also covered the Bedouin's perceptions of urbanism, and urban lifestyles. Mainstream Egyptian culture is perceived as 'low' by Bedouin standards. It propagates many negative values which contradict the Bedouin values of honour, graciousness and modesty.

Many Bedouin men consider the decline in morality and values coupled with technological advancement as a sign of the approaching Day of Judgement. Subsequently, the apocalyptic in Islam and its signs are discussed. Belief in the Hereafter is an integral part of the Muslim belief system. It is not mythical and therefore plays a powerful role in shaping the perceptions and understanding of the Bedouin as well as many Muslims worldwide. It also provides for some Bedouin a sort of rationale or 'contextual rationality' to come to terms with the rapid changes in the world.

Despite adopting modern lifestyles, many Bedouin groups still retain strong direct relations with their domesticated animals. The camel, in particular, stands at the apex of the hierarchy of Bedouin animals. Animals play a significant role not only in the livelihoods of the Bedouin, but also in shaping their cognition. They function as powerful symbolic tools that represent both existential and normative aspects of Bedouin experience. The chapter on Bedouin animal symbolism covered many animals that exist in the Bedouin world and their metaphorical relationships with the Bedouin as analogies.

Last but not least, the study covered Bedouin women and gender relations in Bedouin communities. Again, this aspect of Bedouin culture is loaded with many stereotypical images about the subordination of Bedouin women. However, to understand Bedouin gender relations, it is important to view them within a spatial context. The Bedouin world is divided into the public and the private domain. In the private domain, Bedouin women



rule supreme. They enjoy many rights and exercise power and authority, especially in family matters and arranging marriages, which are reflected in the public domain, controlled by men. Despite the impression that the battle between sexes in Bedouin communities is intense as depicted in the narrative of Bedouin men, I argued that it only reflects a patriarchal ego. Marriage and family life have a very significant value in Bedouin culture. There is fear, however, that some of these values are changing as a result of the impact of television.

This study has confronted many negative stereotypical images and fallacies about the Bedouin. From a psychological perspective, stereotypes are understood in terms of the implicit personality theory (IPT) and the social identity theory (SIT). The former proposes that people derive certain stereotypes from their background culture and/or individual experiences to make judgements about 'others'. Although these stereotypes might have 'a grain of truth' in them, in-depth personal experience and interaction often contradict the existing stereotype. The latter, on the other hand, proposes that people's attempt to enhance their 'self-esteem' often results in the development of emotions of prejudice and negative stereotyping. Bedouin culture is deeply affected by these stereotypes and misrepresentations. My aim has been to provide a different outlook about Bedouin culture to understand and appreciate it more. There are many positive things 'we' can learn and make use of from the Bedouin.

Overall, the cognitive anthropological approach, closely linked to psychology, made me realise that despite the apparent various cultural differences between 'us' and the Bedouin, beneath the surface, we are more or less the same. We all share a 'basic humanity'. What makes people different, however, is the way they perceive and experience the world in different social and economic contexts, which equate to differences in personality and character. The Bedouin way of life is unique and worthy of respect and appreciation.

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## GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

<i>al-baṭn</i>	Large group of a minimal lineage (literally stomach)
<i>al-fakhd</i>	Section or minimal lineage (literally thigh)
<i>'aqida</i>	Faith in monotheism
<i>'arabawi</i>	Bedouin (conjures objections for its derogatory connotation) pl. <i>'orban</i> .
<i>ard</i>	Land
<i>'arif bi'llah</i>	The one who knows God
<i>'aṣabiyya</i>	Sense of solidarity or collectivity
<i>awlad 'amm</i>	Paternal cousins
<i>badawa</i>	Mode of life in the desert (inaccurately translated as nomadism)
<i>badiya</i>	Desert
<i>badw</i>	Bedouin
<i>bait</i>	Household or family
<i>bait sh'ar</i>	Black goat-hair tent (literally house of hair)
<i>bango</i>	Type of illicit drug like cannabis or marijuana
<i>bid'a</i>	A blameworthy innovation
<i>dhikr</i>	Remembrance of God
<i>diya</i>	Blood money
<i>'eid</i>	Feast or Bairam
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>ghagar</i>	Gypsies (derogative connotes quarrelsome unruly people)
<i>gilbab - galabiya</i>	Long loose dress worn by men (known as <i>dishdasha</i> in Arabia)
<i>ḥadith</i>	Prophet's tradition and actions
<i>ḥadra</i>	Congregation for the remembrance of God, literally presence
<i>ḥafla</i>	Sufi meeting (literally party)
<i>ḥurr</i>	Free
<i>iftar</i>	Breaking the fast at dusk during the fasting month of Ramadan
<i>'ishra</i>	Living together – sharing a life
<i>istiqrar</i>	Putting down roots or settlement
<i>kalb</i>	Dog
<i>karamat</i>	Manifestations of God's favour or grace acts or deeds
<i>Kaw'a</i>	Cliché meaning to lean with your elbow on a cushion
<i>khamsat</i>	Co-liaible group (literally five)
<i>Mag'ad</i>	Central Bedouin meeting and socialising place for men
<i>mu'jizat</i>	Miracles
<i>munasabat</i>	Social occasions
<i>nafs</i>	Soul
<i>nasab</i>	descent
<i>qabila (gabila)</i>	Descent group or tribe
<i>qalb or galb</i>	Heart
<i>qanun</i>	Law
<i>raa'yiat il-beyt</i>	Female guardian of the house
<i>rab-al-bayt</i>	Head of household or patron
<i>ṣalat</i>	Prayers
<i>shahat</i>	Beggar
<i>shahada</i>	Declaration of faith in Islam



<i>sharaf</i>	Honour
<i>shimakh – ' imma</i>	Turban or headgear
<i>siyasa</i>	Politics or political game
<i>taqwa</i>	Piety
<i>ṭariqa</i>	Sufi Order (literally way) pl. <i>turuq</i>
<i>taṣawwuf</i>	Sufism or mystical Islam
<i>tashmees</i>	Public exposure or expulsion
<i>tawḥid</i>	The doctrine of the Unity of God
<i>ṭhawb</i>	Dress
<i>torath</i>	Cultural heritage
<i>ulema</i>	Religious scholars
<i>'urf</i>	Custom or customary law
<i>wad' yad</i>	Squatter rights (literally placing hand)
<i>wali</i>	Saint (literally friends of God)
<i>zawiya</i>	A small Sufi centre including a mosque, literally a corner
<i>zimam</i>	Border of city or land

# APPENDICES



## APPENDIX I

### THE CASE OF LAND USE IN ABU REGEILA

The area known as *Abu Regeila* was originally orchards belonging to members of the aristocracy before the 1952 Revolution. It was located in the desert frontier northeast of Cairo. After the Revolution, the land was abandoned and turned into a wasteland, but remained a rich grazing site. Many Bedouin families settled there in the 1960s and those who were evicted from neighbouring areas like *'arab al-gisr* also settled there in the 1970s. The area's eastern border is demarcated by an open drain locally known as *rasha'*. Many squatters both Bedouin and rural-urban migrants from all over Egypt settled along that drain. The whole area was *de facto* state property. One plot of land adjacent to the *rasha'* was used by the armed forces as a dumping site. Together with stagnant water from the drain, both have formed an infested breeding ground for mosquitoes and flies; a source of regular complaint by the people as mentioned earlier. The area has become one of many poor dirty shantytowns scattered all around the Capital.

With the ongoing frenetic process of urban growth taking place around Cairo, urban planners and investors started to show interest in that area. Since the last decade, many high-rise buildings have sprawled all around *Abu Regeila*. A whole new urban area was built within a few years known as *Qiba'* city. Now *Abu Regeila* is included in the plan of urban development known as *Nozha Gedida II* or (the second new Nozha residential area). A landscape planning and construction company obtained a concession from the local council and started selling plots of lands for private investors and businessmen. According to a Bedouin land-broker from the *Heweitat* working in the area, "*the square metre of land ranges from 350-500 depending on the location and whether it is overlooking a wide street or a narrow one or a corner... We have many elite Egyptians and Arabs both from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait investing here*". The value of land is estimated based on market forces of supply and demand. As the demand is high, the prices are also getting higher.

Basic infrastructure has to be installed to meet the needs of the present/future residents. Along the *rasha'*, where many squatters live, a new phase of Cairo Wastewater Project is taking place. A site adjacent to the armed forced dumping site had been chosen for a shaft and the land had been dug. Large sewage pipes had been stocked up and the drilling

machine digging the tunnel had already started working (November 2003). All the squatters are facing eviction and demolition of their houses without compensation. To better understand this situation, it is imperative to briefly review the legal framework involving that situation.

One of the important laws that have been recently promulgated is "*Law 10 for the year 1990*" on the Dispossession or Expropriation of Private Property for Public Utility. Expropriation for public utility used to be carried out under Law 577 for 1954. During those thirty-six years, the massive changes that took place in Egypt exemplified in its overpopulation and over urbanisation made it inevitable to legislate that new law. According to Law 10, the state has the power to seize private property to enable it to perform duties related to public utilities (i.e., construction of roads, bridges, infrastructure projects and their upgrading, etc.) against compensation paid to dispossessed citizens. As public utility projects performed by the state for the welfare of the society have lately increased, so have the decrees issued for the expropriation of private ownership.

Article 5 of Law 10 indicates that enumeration and identification of lands and real estates required for public utility shall be carried out by a committee composed of the representative of the party responsible for the dispossession of ownership, a local administration officer and a trustee. This shall be preceded by a formal notification through an official registered letter to all people who shall be affected. The committee shall register in a memorandum the properties, names of proprietors, owners and their addresses. Registered information shall be verified by checking records and other sources.

Article 6 and 7 stipulate compensation procedures. Compensation shall be estimated according to the current value at the time when the expropriation decree was issued. Proprietors, people eligible for other rights and party-requiring dispossession shall be formally notified about the amount of the compensation. The compensation could be either cash or in kind. Proprietors and people eligible for compensation or other rights shall be notified to evacuate within a maximum of 5 months through an official registered letter. People affected also shall have the right for objection and contestation according to Article 8. Contestation procedures, however, are very complicated and have



to be launched within a certain timeframe. The Law also covers several types of expropriation. Some are temporary seizure of land, whereby the proprietor is paid a compensation for usufruct of the land.

Regarding informal squatters, there are no laws or decrees related to the legal status of informal squatters. From formal interviews with government officials that I carried out in this study and in a previous study (*Social Impact Assessment of Maadi Rock Tunnel*, 1998), I learnt that expropriation of ownership occurs only if the real estate or land is registered. However, as there was no national plan or jurisdiction to control or guide urban growth, informal squatters became the norm in many parts of the Capital. Plots of lands and buildings are purchased without registration and related services were supplied through illegal means or not supplied at all.

Squatters are of two types: either recognised by the government or unrecognised. Settlers in recognised areas are owners according to the (*Hikr* system). They pay real estate taxes (*'awayed*) [like a council tax], electricity and water bills. These settlers are eligible to compensation if their property is demolished. However, compensation is in-kind, in the form of another council house or flat. The government is obliged to settle dislocated people somewhere else. Compensation is only for the building or flat and not for the land, originally the state's land.

When a public utility decree is issued to upgrade an unrecognised informal area *wad' yad*, the government takes different measures. The Properties Department of the Local Council contacts the local police station which studies the security situation in the site to be demolished, enumerates the people and notifies them to evacuate within a certain period of time. The police station notifies the council to demolish the informal area. In such a situation, no estimation of properties or compensation shall take place.

Some high officials such as the Deputy Governor of Cairo, however, remarked in an interview in 1998, that there is no difference between these two types of informal squatters. They are both treated equally and are eligible to receive in-kind compensation. According to him, "nobody is thrown out onto the street".

The residents of *Abu Regeila* are very anxious about their fate. The local council and the police came and enumerated them two years ago before the digging for the wastewater tunnel started. Since that time, many rumours have been spreading. They do not know whether they will be evicted and compensated or just evicted without any compensation. They do not know what type of compensation they might be entitled to. And if it were a flat, where would it be located? Many residents prefer to keep the *status quo*; remaining as they are and are ready to bear the consequences, even if this means the collapse of their houses as a result of the construction of the tunnel underneath. In my last visit to the area, (November 2003), many cracks had started to appear on the walls and some residents claimed that two houses had already collapsed and their occupants are now homeless. Earlier in June 2003, the old Bedouin woman said, "*the government will not let us down and if they evict us, we have to be compensated*". The future of *Abu Regeila* remains precarious.



## APPENDIX II

### PAMPHLET ON REGULATIONS OF *TARIQA* MEETINGS

The regulations of the *tariqa* monthly meetings were printed on a pamphlet. They read as follows:

The *zawaya* meetings aim at:

- Performing of additional *zikr* Allah (remembrance of God) and praising His Prophet (pbuh);
- Teaching religious sciences, '*aqida* (monotheism) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence);
- Teaching Islamic manners and ethics and Sufi sciences with practical applications;
- Keeping social contact and strengthening social bonds and pure love for the sake of Allah, away from violence, conflicts and extremism;
- Maintaining positive cooperation in kindness and piety (*al-bi'r wa al-taqwa*) and public service within the context of loyalty to religion and the nation state.
- Meetings start an hour before dusk and finish an hour after night prayers;
- Due to the importance and benefit of the meetings, all members must attend unless they have a good excuse;
- All members are required to show simplicity and avoid any signs of boasting;
- All members must be committed to orderliness and good behaviour; no one should talk or leave without taking permission from his deputy brother.
- All members shall carry their *tariqa* membership cards in the meetings; attendance of non-members is prohibited without permission.

*May Allah give us success in our efforts, accept our good deeds and  
make them pure for His sake.*

Signed and approved by: *Sheikh of Tariqa* ...

### APPENDIX III

#### ṢABABAT AL-ḤOB

*Ṣababat al-ḥob* (the Ardour of Love) is an ode composed by Sheikh 'Iyḍ. In a very eloquent and poetic language, he speaks about the purification of *nafs* and submitting it as a sacrifice to God, whilst following in the path of Sufi masters. The following is my translation of the ode having received permission from an 'Aiaida informant to do so:

Oh, if thou swore the oath to join the discipline.

*But the oath has rules and conditions.*

Set up the balance based on shari'a.

*And resign thyself to the command submissively.*

*Submit thy soul to monotheism as a sacrifice.*

*And make thy state of unconsciousness as thy address.*

*Do not envisage that thou have any power or dominion.*

*But refer all might to thy Lord gratefully.*

*And accept His Will to give or deprive.*

*And seek refuge in the people of righteousness with thy feelings and emotions*

*Make thy desire as theirs however its condition*

*No one says of his own desire without suffering.*

He abandoned for their sake monies and children.

*And tasted the flames of love passionately and desolately.*

*And he composed from his deepest emotions rhymes.*

*And returned to them with the clothes of separation in nakedness*

*So, have patience in crises testing you,*

*To gain the Acceptance and Grace of thy Lord.*

*And have success, as success promptly follows patience and contentedness.*

*"And keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His face; and let not thine eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, the one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds"*

The ode ends with a verse from the *Quran*, *Surat al-kahf* (Chapter of the Cave, 18:28), speaking of the true servants of Allah (the Sufis) and the benefits one gets from following in their path. After each stanza the congregation recites the following formula twice: "*mawlay ṣali wa salem da'ima abadan 'ala ḥabibak khair el-khalq iḥsana*" (Oh, Lord praise and have everlasting peace upon your beloved [Prophet Muhammad] the perfect among mankind in his excellence).



## APPENDIX IV

### THE ḤADRA

- The ḥadra opens with a recitation of the *fatiḥa* (the Opening Chapter of the *Quran*) by all.
- The *dhikr* begins with all participants chanting together the *tahlil* (chant) of the formula or verbal model: '*la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah*' (the declaration of faith), while swaying right-left, right-left, then the tempo changes to moving forwards and backwards following the Sheikh. The formula is repeated for about seven times. It breaks off and movement ceases when the Sheikh indicates this by clapping his hands once.
- The *munshid* then starts a solo *madiḥ*', praising the Prophet and his excellence. He ceases and all chant together '*ishfa' lana ya rasul Allah*' supplicating for the Prophet's mediation.
- The Physical *dhikr* begins anew chanting '*Allah dayem, baki, ḥayy*' (Allah is Endless, Everlasting and Alive).
- The same pattern is repeated then the formula '*ṣali wa salem ya Allah 'ala-nabei wa men wala'a*' (have peace and blessings upon the Prophet and those who befriend or follow him) is chanted.
- The last formula is '*ya laṭif eltuf bina*' (Oh, the Kindly One, be kind to us). The participants then sit down cross-legged in the same circle. This marks the end of the first ḥadra called *al-ḥadra al-'amma* (the general ḥadra), and the beginning of *al-ḥadra al-khasa* (the specific or personal ḥadra)
- The *munshid* recites some verses of the *Quran*, usually *surat al-Duḥa* (*The Glorious Morning Light*, 93) or *surat al-Qadr* (*The Night of Power*, 97).
- Next, the participants start reciting together *surat al-ikhlas* (literally sincerity, also translated as the Purity of Faith, 112\*) thrice. Reading this verse thrice, according to the 'Aiaida Sheikh, is equivalent to reading the whole *Quran*.
- Participants then repeat after the Sheikh the following formulas seven times each: '*astaghfar Allah al-azim min kol al-zonoub*' (I ask forgiveness of Allah, the Great One, from all sins), then '*Allahum ṣali wa salem 'ala sayedna Muhammad ṣalatan da'ima*' (Allah have peace and blessings upon our master Muhammad, an everlasting peace).
- The participants repeat reciting *surat al-Qadr* thrice again and finalise by supplicating to God and reciting the *fatiḥa*.

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\* In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.

As noticed from the description of the *ḥadra* ritual, it always begins with the recitation of the *fatiḥa* as a prayer for the community of Muslims, and Saints. The *shahada* or declaration of faith follows as the fundamental absolute of the Islam, of the Oneness and Unity of God. Together with the recognition that 'Muhammad is the Prophet of God'. According to Gilsenan (1973), "it constitutes the basic creed, acceptance of which marks one's identity as a Muslim" (p.165).



## APPENDIX V

### MINOR SIGNS OF THE HEREAFTER IN THE *QURAN*

One of the books that has become widely available in Egypt recently among many sectors of the society is Farouk Al-Dessouki's (1998) *Encyclopaedia of the Signs of the Hour*. It is a six-volume encyclopaedia proclaiming the approaching Day of Judgment. The author is an Egyptian professor of Islamic theology and philosophy. He provides a new interpretation of some Quranic verses by analysing the etymology of Arabic terms and linking them to characteristics of the objects described. In Volume III, for example, he focuses on the recent scientific and technological inventions and how these were mentioned in the *Quran* 1400 years ago.

In chapter LXXXI, *Surat al-Takwir* (Wound Round and Lost its Light), for example, there are many signs of the massive technological development of this age. The verses refer to the use of solar cells in generating energy; the invention of electricity; the development in construction and engineering; the invention of vehicles replacing camels as the prime means of transport in the past; and the exploration of oil and gas, particularly offshore causing seas to become a blazing fire. The verses also connote the new phenomenon of cloning; modern day printing and the press; and the greenhouse effect. Another verse indicates the spread of evil and tribulations in the world, exemplified in massacres, genocide, evil rumours and backbiting, which turn some people's lives into hell. There are also references to the expansion in the volume of the universe recently calculated by cosmologists (Al-Dessouki, 1998, Vol. III, pp.62-104).

Al-Dessouki argues that these verses could also be interpreted as signs that could literally take place before the Day of Judgement itself. However, he prefers their symbolic connotation. What confirms this is the next verse, "Then every person will know what he/she has brought" (81:14). This knowledge, according to him is taking place now (ibid., pp.105-106).

The chapter continues with a reference to *al-khonas*, *al-gawar al-konas*, whose meaning into English is translated as the planets that recede, move swiftly and hide themselves (81:15-16). Al-Dessouki interprets these verses as connoting satellites with their various usages and aerial photography. These two verses are followed by reference to the night as it departs and the dawn it brightens (81:17-18). To him, some satellites revolve around the earth from the west to the east about twelve times in twenty-four hours. This makes them witness the temporal events of daylight and darkness as they occur. In another verse, "*and they used to conjecture about the Unseen from a far place*" (35:53), again refers to satellite TVs broadcasting events that take place in far places at the same of their occurrence. The 'Unseen' in this verse was interpreted in earlier texts as referring to the Hereafter, Hell, Paradise and Resurrection. As time is changing, modern interpretations are therefore needed (ibid., pp.115-126).

In chapter LII, *Surat at-Tur* (The Mount) God swears "By the *Tur* (Mount). And the Book inscribed in parchment unrolled. And by *Al-Bait-ul-Ma'mur* (the *Ka'bah* at Mecca). And by the roof raised high. And by the sea kindled with fire" (52:1-6). According to Al-Dessouki, the *Tur* is green highlands. It is also a reference to tropical forests. God swears by it to show the importance of green vegetation to life on earth. In



this context, it is a connotation of deforestation and destruction of rain forests taking place in our modern world. The Book inscribed in parchment unrolled is a reference to the modern day computer because of its ability to retrieve data saved inside it to be read or listed to through its hardware. The 'parchment unrolled' is literally interpreted as the computer microchips. 'Unrolled' also connotes its prevalence, as computers have become widespread and common in many households across the globe nowadays. The *Bait-ul-Ma'mur* and the roof raised high are references to the massive expansion that took place recently in Mecca and Madina in Saudi Arabia to accommodate all the pilgrims, reaching two million, who take the annual journey to perform their pilgrimage. The sea kindled with fire is another reference to the offshore oil and natural gas resources explored. These five references are followed by a remembrance of the Day of Judgement "*Verily, the Torment of your Lord will surely, come to pass...*" (52:7) (ibid., pp.128-145).

Chapter LXXVII, *Surat Al-Mursalat* (Those Sent Forth) is about all the modern means of transportation, particularly aircrafts for their speed like wind. The term *nashirat* is a connotation of the institutions running these means of transportation, as well as meteorological and traffic control centres, while '*fariqat*' (literally separators) connotes stations and airports or the places where families and friends are separated from each other when they see each other off. *Al-mulqiat* connotes the amplifiers and announcements made about the different journeys (ibid., pp.150-159).

Chapter LXXIX, *Surat An-Nazi'at* (Those Who Pull Out) is applicable more than anything else on submarines and modern navies. *Al-sabiqat* connotes missiles and torpedoes. Chapter C, *Surat Al-'Adiyat* (Those That Run), on the other hand, refers to modern air forces, with all the different models of military jets and helicopters. *Al-mughirat* is a connotation of air raids. The fourth and fifth verses of the same chapter translated as "*And raise the dust in the clouds the while. And penetrating forthwith as one into the midst (of the foe)*" connote the impact of bombs and missiles when they hit their targets stirring clouds of dust and destruction. These two verses are followed by "*Verily man (the disbeliever) is ungrateful to his Lord*", refers particularly to atheism common in the modern world (ibid., pp. 169-188).