

Between Desert and State: Power Relations and Balance Between Tradition and Modernity Among the Zalabieh Bedouins of Wadi Rum Desert

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Abstract: This article presents an ethnographic study based on the 22 month research conducted with the Zalabieh Bedouins of Wadi Rum (Jordan); herein focuses on the conceptualization of the identity of the male population in multidimensional ways. In the first place discusses the concept of “Bedouinism” as constructed through interactions with the state both by consent and by rupture; and then analyzes “manhood” as self-identification as understood via interactions with the outside “other.” Describes how the Zalabieh Bedouins of Wadi Rum desert, selected for their integrity, loyalty and trustworthy character, manned the army and the police, thereby maintaining and strengthening state institutions. It also shows, paradoxically, how the confidence to do so gives them the courage and audacity to oppose the State and its bureaucrats around certain issues. In addition discusses how manhood is related to Bedouinism and which cultural practices highlight manhood. Camel races and tourism—essential activities of these people—are examined as hegemonic power parameters that display “us” and construct “otherness.” Presents a comparative analysis of camel races with “Balinese cockfights” as described and interpreted by Clifford Geertz in order to highlight certain important elements of Zalabieh Bedouin culture via cross-cultural comparison. Examines the dimensions of “space” and “place”—the desert as a physical environment—in the construction of the discrete Bedouin identity and argues that the *dynamics of locality* are encapsulated in the integration of the biological, the environmental, and the social as existential spaces. Within this overarching framework analyzes the relationships among male Zalabieh Bedouins within their vast desert territory to capture their dual identities as men of the desert and servants of the government, which exist in a state called *balanced opposition*.

Keywords: Bedouin, Identity, Manhood, Place, Power Relations, Middle East, Jordan

1. Introduction: Wadi Rum

As can be seen from the title, the present research deals with the Bedouins of Wadi Rum. The ethnographic study focuses on how Bedouinism and manhood are constructed and experienced, in the context of defending traditional values and confronting modernizing challenges. The Bedouins seem to be balanced between global fantasies and local priorities. On the one hand, they implement customary rules of tribal organization and, on the other hand, they are part of the state mechanism. Facing the challenges of global tourism development but also of modernity, they try to balance between two identities, those of the desert man—the Bedouin, and the State’s officer. The text analyzes the

construction of their Bedouin identity through the national narrative during the founding of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and highlights the mechanisms of consensus and rupture in an attempt at self-determination. Through practices, such as camel racing, Bedouins ensure their manhood and “Bedouinism” by highlighting their uniqueness. The research answers the question of multiple identities, which are complementary and interdependent. Furthermore, as an anthropological study, it emphasizes the indigenous discourse. It also deals with the issue of locality, i.e. the natural environment, in this case the desert, as a determining factor in the construction of their identity. In addition, it opened up research fields on men, Bedouinism, and manhood in the Middle East by a female researcher.

Jordan is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south and the east, Iraq to the northeast, Syria to the north and Israel and the Palestinian Authority to the west. Wadi Rum (Valley of Ram) or the Valley of the Moon (*Al kamaruadiin* Arabic) is a large desert area in the south of Jordan with red sand and granite mountains, 60km east of Aqaba city and 30km away from the main road that connects the northern to the southern part of Jordan. The village of Wadi Rum is located at the entrance to this great desert valley and lies about 20km from Saudi Arabia. The borders of the desert are secured and patrolled by the special desert police, who are Bedouins.

From prehistoric times, the valley has been inhabited by many civilizations. It is presently inhabited by Zalabieh Bedouins who settled in the region, mainly at the valley's entrance, around 1980. Previously they lived in tents situated in the remote Wadi Rum desert. Their village is about 1km from one end to the other in north to south direction and counts approximately 700 to 800 people. Enjoying near autonomy, the Zalabieh Bedouins are for the greatest part involved in tourism, although 80% are retired either from the army and the special forces or the police. Some had even worked for the secret police, and some are still active in these groups.

The nearby border with Saudi Arabia is subject to the strict military control of the border guard, designated by the Ministry of Defence. Bedouin officers patrol on camels. The indistinguishable border line in the desert is regularly violated by the Bedouins of both countries when they go out hunting, but each patrol knows the people so there is tolerance.

Today Wadi Rum is the hallmark of Jordan and a paradise for adventure lovers. It offers multi-day hikes in the desert with camels or on foot, and rock-climbing.

2. Methods and Material: Gender as a Primary Issue

I was drawn to conduct my PhD ethnographic research [29] among the Zalabieh Bedouins in particular by my interests in tribalism and Arab culture, and by my deep love for desert environments. My fieldwork methods of in-depth participant observation, live-history interviews, included living almost every moment with them, asking endless questions, forming relationships, and sharing their problems and concerns. Their lives and stories as data written in my diary, apart being useful for my PhD, deeply touched my emotional world.

For a woman anthropologist, conducting fieldwork among Bedouins was fraught with tensions. The advantage was that I could have access to both sexes. Yet approaching men was easier than approaching women. The men had daily contact with foreign tourists, so they were even proud of me because I was writing about them and their lives. In contrast, women were generally excluded from contact with strangers (local or foreigners) and stayed close to their homes. In their eyes I was a freer woman, not different from the tourists who enjoyed sex with their husbands. Being allowed to ride camels and to accompany groups of men into the desert for

hunting and camping furthered my distance from the local women, who were excluded from such activities. I made great efforts to build trust with these women, but never fully succeeded. The few houses available to rent were for male foreigners (Egyptians or from African countries) who worked in the grocery store, in the chicken shop or mini-market. The fact that it was not acceptable for a foreign woman to even rent a room in Wadi Rum made it necessary for me to live with them in some of their homes for the 22 months of my stay to share their bedrooms, their food, and their activities, to help with household chores, cleaning, babysitting, grocery shopping, and thereby to come closer to these women's affective world though never as close as I would have liked. In terms of language, already speaking both Turkish and Greek helped me greatly to learn Arabic. However, I was linguistically challenged upon arrival in Wadi Rum as there, classic Arabic is mixed with the Bedouin dialect and the accent differs [28]; thus it took me some months to fully understand the language as spoken there.

3. Constructing Zalabieh "Bedounism"

Leder [27] noted that "the figure of the Bedouin was used as a device in an intricate play of interrelated meanings, produced by a continuous re-adaptation of established motifs" (see also [39]). "Bedounism" in Wadi Rum as a self-determined identification was one of the central concepts I needed to deconstruct. How did it come into being, how was it enhanced, and what conditions maintain its existence? The word "Bedouin" derives from the Arabic word *badiya*, which means "desert" and which comes from the root word *bad'a*, which means "clear, obvious, clean." Ghazi [14] argues that the sense of "belonging" to a tribe is essential for tribal members, noting that:

To belong to a tribe is to think the same way, believe in the same principles, assimilate the same values and ethos, act according to the same unique rules and laws, respect the same hereditary *Sheikh* (tribal leader), live together, migrate together, defend each other, fight together and die together.

Thus my focus in this article is on how Zalabieh Bedouin men organize their relations of "belonging" and *asabiya* (social solidarity) [3] and define themselves in relation to the outside "other." Theirs is an identity "in-between," drawing values, beliefs, ethics and authenticity from tribalism, and incorporating them into life in the modern state as both difference and disobedience/resistance, and as an identity also constructed through acceptance of generous offers from the state authority. As the article shows, *consensus* and *resistance* simultaneously shape the male self in the desert. The study of the everyday life of Zalabieh Bedouins, both as desert people and as citizens of the Jordanian state, necessitates unpacking the interactive processes of the state and its Bedouin citizens. The case of the Bedouin Zalabieh highlights the complexity and interdependence of local history and the larger historical processes of the Jordanian State with its neighbouring countries in the process of the

creation of this nation-state and its survival, despite long-term political conflicts, rebellions and wars. Nomadic Bedouin have not survived the twentieth century. But many studies indicate that Bedouin identity is resisting the new spaces and activities of modernity. Their way of preserving values and validating and transmitting the knowledge from the past reflects their ability to adapt to the settle-down conditions of modernity while preserving many elements of their ancient, formerly nomadic culture.

The contextual character of the Zalabieh's conceptualization of their identity reveals their "us" and "them" mentality, with "them" referring to state institutions, private tour agencies, and other, mostly European, people outside tribal culture--in short, the Other. The cultural distinctiveness of the Bedouin and its perpetuation became a political instrument used by King Hussein--who conceptualized these citizens as "his Bedouins"--to ensure the stability and political power of this new Jordanian state. Bedouins were and still are loyal supporters of the ruling Hashemite family.

In the 1980s, Wadi Rum was at the centre of the interests of business and companies aiming at profits from tourism. Jordan was trying to stabilize itself in world politics, as well as in tourism and economic development. The state and various private tourism agencies, having realized the value of the area, highlighted its historical and cultural heritage. The press began to point to and promote the cultural values of desert people, their distinctiveness, and their Indigeneity both to encourage tourism and to help maintain the only stable, traditional, homogenous cultural identity remaining within the modern state.

Until then, the Jordanian Bedouin nomads had seen no need for self-determination, nor for redefinition by another, nor to reify an idealized past. Yet suddenly they found themselves identified and appropriated as the exotic, Indigenous, "Other," whereas they themselves saw everyone else as that "Other."

To stress the uniqueness of Bedouin culture, the press used headlines such as "Jordanian Bedouins enshrine Arab virtues" [26] or printed articles saying, for example,

The Arab desert exemplifies the heroic age which sublimated the motivational drives of its inhabitants into deeds of glory and pride. Prophet Muhammad was sent in his early childhood to one of the Bedouin tribes to learn tradition, manners, customs and way of life [26].

At the same time, however, there were equally dominant discourses against tribalism that deemed it as retrogressive and a threat to modernization. King Hussein himself published a letter condemning such discourses, stating:

...I am al-Hussein from Hashem and Quraish, the noblest Arab tribe of Mecca, which was honoured by God and into which was born the Arab Prophet Muhammad. Therefore whatever harms our tribes in Jordan is considered harmful to us, as has been the case all along, and will continue so forever.

The King's reference to his noble lineage as a Bedouin from the tribe of Quraish was a political appropriation of the

past, linking the Hashemite family directly to Prophet Muhammad. Politically, he felt that he needed to become a Bedouin, thereby redefining himself in the supposed purity of their image. His purposeful linkage to the tribally pure past might be due to an identity crisis provoked by the reality that the majority of Jordan's citizens were Palestinian.

Jordan became an independent state in 1946, officially known first as the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan, then renamed in 1949 as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The multiple conflicts and wars in its turbulent history gave King Hussein good reasons to seek stability and unity--hence his reconstruction of "his" Bedouins as embodying the essence of Jordanian virtues and his conceptualization of them as trustworthy, loyal, stable and "real" citizens. In 1920s-1930s, Emir Abdullah I recruited Bedouins into the Jordanian army [14] and later into the police, even the secret police. Ultimately the Desert Police Legion came to consist entirely of Bedouins. These both gave the state an excellent army and inculcated into Bedouins patriotism and respect for governmental authority. This process of recruiting Bedouins, granting privileges to sheikhs, and generally assimilating Bedouins into state structures consolidated the mutual interdependence between them and the state. This interdependence helped Jordan to stabilize its existence in the political formation of the Middle East, to discipline Bedouins through institutions, and to control them via their own tribal members: Who knows a Bedouin better than a Bedouin? And Bedouins did enjoy the privileges and benefits the state provided. As Borneman [6] stated: "The long-term legitimization of a nation-state is dependent on the extent to which the state can claim to represent a specific national identity unique to it, meaning that it has people with characteristics it can call its own." In the case of Jordan, these people were the Bedouin.

This new, government-defined "Bedouinism"¹ was well accepted by the Bedouins since it improved their living standards, providing salaries, health services, education, pensions, cultivating their distinctiveness from the "other" Jordanian citizens as they wished, and touching their deep emotions of belonging to a vast and harsh territory that was inhospitable to the "Other." A well-known dictum says: "You can take the Arab out of the desert, but you cannot take the desert out of the Arab." For King Hussein, the purest citizens of Jordan were his loyal supporters, the Bedouins [4], [23].

This relationship between the Zalabieh Bedouins and the State from my point of view seemed to be "conditional" as over time, they were partially reshaped into the conditions of modernity. The tolerance is bilateral due to the positions that Bedouins hold within the state apparatus (army, police, secret police and desert patrol). 22 years after this interdependent and conditional relationship was established between the Bedouins and the State, during my fieldwork in Wadi Rum, the Zalabieh Bedouins seemed to be trying to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity, between desert and State. The constitutive elements of their identity as Bedouins

¹ I prefer using the word "bedouinism" instead of "tribalism."

seemed to balance between their identities as traditional community members and as civil servants. Their power and their cultural values are exercised and displayed in various forms at various levels; generosity, prestige, honor, authority, conflict and camel races index local tribal identity, and are subject to broader hegemonic relations that underlie these local idioms [12].

In the following section I focus on camel races because they are highly revelatory of local tribal values and identity, and of Zalabieh Bedouins constructions of manhood. After describing these strong cultural marker in detail, I then proceed to compare them to another example of cultural value and identity display and transmission—Balinese cockfights as interpreted by Geertz, as the multiple meanings of these camel races stand out more clearly via the perspective provided by this kind of direct cross-cultural comparison.

4. Camel Races as Determinative Practice for the Promotion of Bedouinism and Manhood

The camel, as the favourite animal of the Bedouins, is a symbol of male pride, and indirectly generates the line of gender segregation, which is strictly observed and maintained by both sexes. This strict maintenance in turn produces and reproduces the distinctiveness between the worlds of men and women [29]. Male activities with the camel, prohibited even for little girls (despite the lack of any religious prohibition), deprive the opposite sex of the joy and pleasure of riding a camel, playing in the desert, or watching the races up close. This connection of male subjectivity with the camel brings prestige to the races and to men, which in turn enhances their manhood, and unites them under a common Bedouin cultural identity within the nation-state. Male Bedouins are at the top of the pyramid of those who dominate the desert [30], and, as Gutman [19] stated, “some men are inherently or by ascription considered more manly than other men.” The fact that I was allowed to watch the races up close, while the Zalabieh Bedouin girls and women were not, further displayed my positionality as an outside “other” a “free woman” not subject to the usual cultural norms. These activities brought me closer to the men yet kept me farther away from the women, as previously noted.

Camel races constitute the epitome of the performative practices of Bedouin manhood within the community. In these races, male competition, which is just as important to Bedouin culture as male domination over women, is located and performed [25]. Camel races exemplify Victor Turner’s [37] statement that “every socioeconomic formation has its own mirror in which it achieves self-reflexivity.” They take place from November until February—the camels’ reproduction season—because the camels, especially the male ones, are stimulated and most fit to race. The protagonists are the Zalabieh Bedouins and the other families of the area, but also included are people from other countries who take part with their camels, such as Kuwaitis, Iraqis, and mostly

Saudis, because it is easier for them to arrive with their camels from the neighbouring desert.

Almost all the men of the village of Wadi Rum gather in groups, starting early on a November afternoon. From the monotonous village atmosphere, suddenly you find yourself in the midst of whirling movement. Hundreds of car lights and campfires illuminate the desert. Bedouin men, as if they are children, play chase and hide and seek with the cars. Sitting in the front seat of the jeep, I enjoy every moment. The boys and men camp under some rocks forming a shed that protects them from the cool night humidity. The mattresses and covers they bring are redolent with the smell of their multiple uses and smoke from the fire. Tea, the indispensable companion, boils on the many fires that warm up the various conversations, punctuated by jokes and laughter. Sleeping side by side under the clear sky of the desert I thank for this pleasant break in my daily life which gives me time to reflect on how the desert is the absolute life for the Zalabieh men of Wadi Rum, the place where they feel in complete harmony with the environment.

At dawn, around 4am, the hustle and bustle start all over again. Many begin even earlier with their camel(s) to reach the starting point of the race. Those who come only to watch head to the finish line. When everything is ready, the starting signal is given and suddenly the craze begins. Meanwhile, a desert car race also starts. The sand cloud sprayed everywhere by the cars limits visibility to zero and creates the danger of collision. All are driving or riding like madmen.

Throughout, men make comments on the camel—its strength, where it comes from, how much it costs; as well as on the rider—if he sits well, which area he is from, and more; they also comment on the onlookers who have come to watch the race. And they discuss the reputations of the camel owners—men’s gossip in its fullest form. Gossiping among Zalabieh men often includes metaphors and versified sayings in codes only they understand. Gluckman’s [15] statement about gossip is entirely relevant here:

...a community is held together and maintains its values by gossiping and scandalizing both within cliques and in general...in all its many varieties, gossiping is a culturally determined process, which has its own customary rules, trespass beyond which is heavily sanctioned...gossip and even scandal have important positive virtues; clearly they maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups.

For the Zalabieh, such gossip highlights their sense of belonging and their even closer attachment to blood ties and extended family bonds. In the broader sense, such gossip highlights Bedouinism as synonymous with manhood, which is constructed on the basis of difference—difference between Bedouin men and women, and difference between Bedouin men and “Others.”

The owner of the camel can participate in the race either by riding himself or having someone else ride his camel. The Saudis, who lavishly invest in camel racing, breeding camels especially for this purpose, most typically utilize this second option, as the owners themselves are usually too old and too overweight to participate. And often their social position does

not allow them to compete. There is no high monetary profit in riding for someone else, but this professional activity is crowned with social prestige. In both cases, the emotions are the same--excitement and the desire to win.

The races have ratings. Some are of great importance with wide participation and a big prize; the less important races offer a smaller prize. The important characteristic of all races is the collection of money for the defeated--those who finish after the first three winners. To understand this generosity, we need to know that the onlookers pay a certain amount of money to watch the race. Yet, for their ticket there is no specific price. Everyone gives what he can. The monetary reward for the three first winners/camels, collected by their owners, is significant; the owners agree on the amount. Yet the primary purpose is not the financial benefit of the participants. The essence is the race, the camel, and the cultural display. The money collected from the onlookers is distributed equally to all the ones who lose. Abdullah who was retired from the police, and was involved like most of the men, in tourist activities, explained:

It is important for a camel to win the race, because the owner gains prestige among the Bedouins for his camel(s) that he breeds and matches for many years. A good camel thus is awfully expensive and, depending on the race, it must take the reward... Moreover, everything is done by us and for us. Therefore, all the Bedouins of Rum and of the surrounding area support these things.

He continued, "Of course, only we, the Bedouins, do such acts of generosity, because we support each other, and by the way we are real men, not softlike your men, the Europeans." His words indicate that Bedouinism is directly related to manhood through acts of generosity. "Generosity" in this case is not quantified but is a cultural value of desert people. It is not a form of "presentation of self" [17] but rather a presentation of "community self," a sort of maintenance ritual [18] offering support and promoting solidarity in relationships among men, and marking who is included and who is excluded. The "soft" European man or anyone outside Bedouin culture is excluded. Thus generosity in the form of an offering to the losers in camel race is an act that strengthens tribal bonds among equals.

5. Cross-Cultural Comparison: The Rum Camel Races and the Balinese Cockfights

Here I compare the Rum camel races to the Balinese cockfights, described by Clifford Geertz [13] as "thick play." I draw these comparisons because the camel races that are a primary subject of this article can be better understood via this comparison. The common feature of both is the competition, which can be perceived in both a "thin" and a "thick" way. In the cockfights, at first sight it appears that only roosters are fighting, but in essence, in the deeper game, Geertz's thick interpretation shows that whole kinship groups, families, villages and social classes are fighting.

Cockfighting is the nexus of a social matrix. Geertz says that what makes Balinese cockfighting "thick" is not money per se, but what money (the more, the better) can do: the metastasis of the Balinese social hierarchy can be achieved in the body of cockfights. In the camel races, the camels are competing against each other but the men are not. Instead they are competing against "other men"--unidentified outsiders. The ritual of the camel race unites people against external threats that could put at stake the status of men as the guardians both of the desert and of Bedouin moral cultural heritage. In the cockfights there is a winner cock, whereas in the camel races all the camel owners get a reward--either the established reward for the first three or the amount collected from the onlookers for the rest. In the cockfights there are equal and unequal bets. In the camel races there is only the final reward; no bets are made. These two ritual competitions are fundamentally different, revealing differing sets of core values and beliefs and differing social structures. In the cockfights, the bets are gathered on the spot. Regarding camel races, the fee for the first three winners is contributed by the onlookers as they enter the grounds. In the cockfights there is a cock loser and an owner loser, indicating a hierarchy. On the contrary, in the camel races, there are winners, but no specific "losers." Instead, again, the money collected from the onlookers is equally distributed among those who did not win. In the cockfights the game is set; in camel races honesty prevails. In the cockfights there are many strict rules defining the bets; in the camel races there is no need for rules, everything is straightforward--you simply race. In the cockfights there is no respect for the animals, who wear sharp spurs that enable them to fight until they drop, literally leveling the animal and symbolically undoing the owner, as the rooster is identified with the man literally and symbolically. In the camel races, the camel is not symbolically identified with its owner; rather, it is respected as the culturally significant animal that most represents and serves the Bedouins in their desert conditions.

In both cockfights and camel races, women are absent. In other words, both events occur among men, for men, and exclude explicitly and completely the opposite sex--though with the camel races, women and young girls can watch from afar, inside cars. But while in cockfights, the reputation, honor, dignity and respect for Balinese men individually or in classes and kinship groups are at stake, in camel races nothing is at stake or at least is not expected to be. On the contrary, manhood is strengthened collectively, under the wider idiom of Bedouinism. Cockfights have losers, whereas again, in camel races there are no losers; in the end everyone is a winner.

In camel races, generosity as a manly feature is linked to the general identity adopted by the subjects. For the Zalabieh, generosity acquires meaning under the denomination of the Bedouin, and not the Arab. Being a Bedouin primarily means to be a man [29]. Being a man primarily implies supporting your fellowmen--those belonging to the same tribe and to the desert. It is clear that while both of these ritual competitions involve cultural enactment and value display, they are

fundamentally different, revealing differing sets of core values and beliefs and differing social structures, which can be more clearly understood via cross-cultural comparison.

Thus the manhood produced by the practices in camel races becomes a performative exhibition of male dominance [13], [10], [24] over Others, including foreigners, non-Bedouins, Arabs, and especially “soft” European men. Paradoxically this hegemonic Bedouin manhood, now a national symbol of what manhood should be, can also form part of a disobedient response to the also-hegemonic regulations of the state as it intervenes with the policies of tourism development and activities in the area.

6. Disobedience, Negotiation and Undermining Power Relations

Reciprocal trust between the anthropologist and the community is a key factor in the validity of the information obtained. As a negotiated process, this period of building trust varies depending on the community and the form of interaction. In my case, the fact that I was taking sides, always in favor of the Bedouins, on every issue and especially when problems about tourism development arose, played a decisive role in their revealing to me what they hide from outsiders/foreigners--their “second” identity, the “Ranks”--a “Self” as an officer in the army or as a policeman. It took me 6 months to fully realize exactly where and with whom I was doing my fieldwork. They were Bedouins all right--desert people; however, at least 75% of the middle-aged male population of Rum (ages 30-40) had retired from or were still serving in the army, police, or secret police². Some of them had high rank; some were still active with the rank of general and pasha, and one of them was an army paratrooper instructor. These two identities--the desert self strongly tied to cultural tradition, and the self dependent on the state's power apparatus--articulated or dis-articulated, depending on the circumstances. Thus, these men live in a constant process of self-determination.

Golubovic [16] argues:

Two conflicting models of identity are mostly evident in the so-called post-modern societies: the traditional national patterns which prevail on the Eastern part of the continent and Western cultural patterns. What model will be adopted depends on the type of social policy which will become dominant: nationally determined or culturally articulated. Identity crises come into being when those two models penetrate one another, producing confusion, uncertainty

and anomie.

Yet I do not see the two identities of the Bedouin--the man of the desert and the servant of the government--as being in conflict or crisis, as producing confusion or uncertainty; on the contrary, they exist in a continuous dialogue, bridging the gap between each and always in balance of powers deriving from each one separately as they interact together; I term this *balanced opposition*.

Often I sat around the fire with these men in the desert, joking, talking about issues of tourism. Other times, we went hunting (for gazelles and rabbits), watched camel races, participated in weddings and other practices, and in all these situations the “Bedouin identity” prevailed. There was no reason for the other identity, that of the “rank,” to unfold. The “ranks” were useful when negotiating with the state authorities around issues of their existence, their territory and tourism activities and their rights to protect the desert. Their ranks gave them confidence, power and authority against bureaucrats and counter-balanced the otherness constructed by them and by the state based on interaction, interdependence, and mutual tolerance and acceptance.

The following incident is one of the many in which the two identities--the man of the desert and the servant of the government--each selectively played its role in achieving recognition, sustaining differences, and breaking boundaries, while at the same time reconstructing and reshaping all of these. Ali (served some years in the army then resigned, and became involved in tourist activities, working as a driver) narrated:

Here, we have the Rum Cooperative (RTCS), which was founded in 1990-91. Before 1990, there were not many tourists coming here, but over time their numbers began to increase. We did not have enough jeeps and on top of that they were old. They were ok for our own use, but we needed better ones for tourists. In 1994, King Juan Carlos of Spain visited Rum. After this visit, governmental and non-governmental organizations started showing interest in the protection and development of Rum. King Hussein issued a decision to improve the jeeps used by the cooperative for the tourists. A non-governmental organization from Spain, Codespa, donated to Jordan 21 jeep 4x4 for Rum--that is, for us.

But when the cars came, they were transferred to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA). Later they were transferred to the foundation of Alia (QAF--Queen Ali Fund for Social Development). Confrontations were inevitable. Moreover, they had hired their own drivers. 25 people from the village did apply but only two got accepted. When we asked why only two, they replied that the other applicants did not meet the qualifications. Can you imagine that? We drive jeeps since the age of seven, let alone in the desert, and we do not meet the qualifications, while those who follow a course to get a licence are better drivers than us? They justified themselves that the law required a driving licence. Most of the village of course lacks a licence, but that was no problem, we could get that. They also said that we should

²In Jordan the system was as follows: People could retire in 16 years. Someone could stay on and receive the deserved promotion foreseen after these years in service. That is, someone who entered the army or the police at 20 (and many Bedouins entered at the age of 18) could already retire at the age of 36. They get a good salary according to the years and the rank. The regulations concerning the leaves (permissions) granted many advantages to the inhabitants of this remote area. Working days and holidays were equally distributed--10 days in were equivalent to 10 days out, 4 days in, 4 days out. The choice was made by each officer-Bedouin according to his needs, which I believe was an encouraging system to enlist such men

be over 20 and know how to handle tourists. This is how they drove us out of the ecotourism program.

This program was again funded by Spain and was based in Rashdiyyah a village on the main national highway at 30km from theirs]. When one day the jeeps with tourists arrived in Rum, almost the entire village took iron bars and crowbars and whatever else we found and broke all the cars. There were tourists inside the cars, but we did not care, neither for the drivers. We smashed them into a thousandpieces. Some barely managed to leave. This is how we behave when we get nervous, when we are deprived of our rights, so now, no one dares to hurt the Bedouin of Rum, and they know us well.

He continued:

Later they arrested us, and we were put in prison, quite often half of the village is in prison--what a joke, a prison filled with Rum. We stayed two days in prison and later they freed us. We did not pay anything, thanks to the help of Princess Basma of the QAF Foundation. After that, of course, nobody dared to visit the region. In 1996, the Minister of Tourism came to Rum and discussed the whole matter and in 1997 the institution that had taken the jeeps agreed to give 25% of the profit for the development of Rum; in 1998 it increased to 40%, in 1999 to 55% and in 2000 to 75%. The rest were distributed to the surrounding villages.

Do you see what we achieved since tourism is here and now goes through our hands? Of course, money is not coming directly to us here in Wadi Rum, it is for the development of Rum and is managed by a committee composed of the governor of Aqaba, the tourism director in Aqaba, two representatives from QAF and six people from Rum, including the president of the cooperative. If we had not smashed the jeeps then, now the desert would be lost. We are Bedouins, the desert belongs to us and we belong to the desert. In addition, most of us have served and continue to serve the state, we are the real citizens of this country and nobody loves the King more than us. We know the State as well as we know the desert.

In Ali's words, we can observe the interaction of the dual identities of the men of Wadi Rum—as simultaneously servants of the state and masters of the desert. Ali recounted another equally important and transformative incident, when King Hussein came with his escort to the village and to the desert:

Of course, according to the protocol, he should always be escorted and protected wherever he goes but we felt offended. This didn't suit us so we instantly stopped the procession at the entrance of the village, along with the King. Some had their weapons with them and addressed the King saying: "If we cannot protect our King, if he does not feel secure with us, if he thinks he is threatened and needs an escort, then he will not pass. We, Bedouins, are the ones that will give our lives for the country and for the King. If he wants to pass, he will leave his escort outside and come alone. The King does not need protection when he comes to us.

This reaction was well received by the King, confirming

his faith in "his" Bedouin and his political decision to use them for state services. The Bedouin have appropriated this image of extreme loyalty and honor to serve their political ends. This image has been interactively and performatively constructed through power relations that bring the local Bedouins into contact with state power within the framework of national identity politics and policies. Within this context, we can perceive the ambivalent relations of affiliation to the state as well as their undermining.

The sense of belonging to the desert and vice-versa—that the desert belongs to the Bedouins—seems to empower manhood through the process of confrontation with state authorities/bureaucrats related to the environmental issues concerning the region. The primary state body with which the inhabitants of Wadi Rum are in constant confrontation is the Center of Protection of Nature (*mahmia* in Arabic), which is located in the village. The officials of the center are mostly bureaucrats from other areas of Jordan and certainly not Bedouins. This is a new practice, imposed by the state in 1996-7, in the context of the global tourism promotion linked to environmental protection. The center tries to control tourists' activities in the desert to avoid ecological deterioration. It regularly recommends that the Bedouins not unnecessarily cut the branches of small bushes to light fires in the desert, that all the cars should follow the same itinerary so as to leave the same wheel prints in the sand, not to litter the desert with non-recycled garbage, and other such.

In the eyes of the Zalabieh, these bureaucrats are appropriating the desert, acting as authoritarians in a place where they do not belong, so the inhabitants react with disobedience and verbal insults: "Who do you think you are? You come here from Amman to show us how we must behave in the desert? We are the masters here, not you nor the state. When your children are still drinking milk, ours drive jeeps in the desert and go hunting with a rifle." Or, "Don't dare to intervene because we have ways to throw you out of here"; "we don't obey anyone, not even the King. We know perfectly well how to use our weapons and therefore nobody dares to enter the desert, let alone these here [referring to the officials] who tremble like small children. And they think they are men? Let them come here and we will show them how a man is."

7. Balanced Opposition in Zalabieh Bedouin Manhood

The Zalabieh's perception of themselves as masters of the desert, strong men, loyal to the King, cunning, along with their stereotypes around the "local other" the bureaucrat whom they deem as soft, from the city, still drinking milk from his mother—determine the constant confrontation and negotiation over cultural boundaries on the basis of Bedouinism and manhood. Their symbolic capital—traditional values, and their social capital—the ranks—produce and reproduce their otherness. These behaviours lead to their embodiment of power relations. Mastering the signifying practices of

Bedouinism and manhood, they transform their distinctiveness into a “dominant” culture that exists inside two distinctive places and spaces—desert and state—out of co-constructed interactions [22]. In challenging each other, the two dominant antagonistic actors—the modern state and Bedouin-officer—balance the precarious conditions that may arise, bringing the boundaries of these relations to their limits. The confidence constructed by the facts that the Bedouins are the only connoisseurs of the desert and that they have manned the army and the police—selected for their integrity, loyalty, and trustworthy character—seem to give them the courage and audacity to conflict with the institutions and bureaucrats whom they are also duty-bound to serve. I employ the term balanced opposition to encapsulate this apparent paradox and potential identity conflict, which is erased as a conflict via this balanced opposition.

8. Desert Romanticism: The Exotic and the Erotic

Another source of conflict is the various travel agencies that use their own jeeps, drivers and guides for various desert activities. The Bedouin narrative and claim are the same: knowledge of the desert and the belief that they are the ones who should derive economic benefit from tourism. They also put forward the narrative of the “attractiveness” of the “Bedouin man” as a desert figure, with his white or light blue thobe (robe or cape), his headwear (of kufiya or mendil) held in a place with an igal of camel wool; (there are no English translations for these words), sometimes with his farrua (a thicker cape for cold nights), singing around the fire, that excites the fantasy of women travelers who come to enjoy some nights with the exotic Bedouins in the exotic desert. The excitement is reciprocal. Via such interactions, Bedouins confirm their cultural distinctiveness, and for them, women travelers embody the exotic. Tourists are consumers of the local construction of gender, ethnicity and sexuality in the forms of experiences, encounters, and fantasies made real [40]. In the case of “romance tourism” in Wadi Rum, the bodies of local men are ready to be “consumed” so that the power of their charm becomes unquestionable. Unlike other places where the tourist industry and the government exoticize Indigenous people as the ethnic Other, and local people as passive recipients appropriate these images in their self-representations [5], in Wadi Rum, the host constructs his own image for the guest. And when that guest is an “exotic” foreign woman, that image involves projecting sexuality. Bedouinism and manhood, once constructed in the amalgam of tourism practices, transform the power of the distinct, loyal Bedouin state officer to the powers of charm and attractiveness that also differentiate these men from the “others” [29].

The desert constitutes the place where the dynamic of the aesthetic for the “Bedouin man” is constructed, while the exoticized place and people promote local priorities and expressiveness [29]. This expressiveness challenges the

hegemony of the “other” in tourism development. The host approaches the guest who is looking for the “authentic” experience. Not only the male body but also the desert as place is eroticized [29]. It is common for female tourists (not all of course) to have sex with Bedouins in the exotic desert. Both Bedouins and tourists—who are exotic to each other—enjoy their romantic nights under the stars. According to Bedouins, this sparks their fantasies and gives them more pleasure than their wives.

9. The Desert as Habitus

The self-confidence of the Zalabieh Bedouins, their domination in the desert, and their knowledge derive from their bodily connection with this physical environment and from the skills relevant to it [38]. This makes the physical space a primary factor for conscious, unconscious, and pre-conscious habitus [7]—behaviours and construction of selves, a lived space [1], concrete and real [11], that co-creates the lived experience. The desert and its people interactively give meaning to each other; thus in the absence of these inhabitants the desert will quickly “drain of meaning” [34]. If taken away from the desert, the Bedouin would lose their cultural identity and all of its meanings, as indeed has happened to many displaced tribal or Indigenous societies. Though I do not deny that space is socially constructed, I focus on the fact that the needs of living in special environments construct the cognitive mind, which in turn constructs the cognitive self. For Relph, the great quality of space is its power to order and to focus human experiences and actions spatially. The distinctive identity of Zalabieh Bedouins, their “existential insideness” [34] that excludes the “soft others” outside and construes themselves as “masters” of the desert is due to their bodily experiencing the desert for centuries through their historic societal memory and the skills that they have acquired through repetitive conscious, unconscious or preconscious practices.

Their ability to find their orientation in the desert even in deep darkness, to deal with sandstorms, to hunt and track in the vast territory, to climb dangerously on the rocks in their battered jeeps, to recognize individual camel footprints, to accurately identify the footprints of their own people, and so on, are skills constructed of lived experience and needs; these give them the authenticity of being Bedouin and would be meaningless in other contexts. Tim Ingold argues that knowledge consists primarily of skills and is realized in “fields of practice” [21]. Relph [34] describes identity in terms of a place’s physical setting; its activities, situations and events; and individual and group meanings created through people’s experiences and intentions regarding that place.

Thus I can say that the power relations between the Zalabieh and state authorities and tourism agencies are based on the authenticity of place and space and their own place within that space—the desert—and on their confrontations with those who seek to appropriate their desert environmental knowledge. Such confrontations with outsiders become a

means of identification for Zalabieh as “Bedouin men”. Their knowledge of the desert, unavailable to outsiders, is controlled by Bedouins through their personal tourism activities, such as camel rides, long trekking, rock climbing, and actions of disobedience to the state’s apparatus for environmental protection and resistance to incoming tourism agencies. By saying, “If anything happens, they will callus for help anyway”; or “We will show them that just driving tourists in the desert it is not as simple as it seems”; or “To respect the desert means to love it,” they create the distance, the necessary tension for otherness and for the protection of the identity they achieve via their territory. The biological, environmental and social are thereby integrated within a space and place [31]. The difficulty for an outsider to experience this space-desert and to understand its people shows that it is a culturally defined existential space [34] that constructs their ways of thinking [36] and of regulating their relationships with other Bedouin families, such as through customary law, which was formulated according to the needs of desert life.

Zalabiehs are partly desert-dependent and partly state-dependent; they live between desert and state. On the one hand, they try to preserve their memory, their history, and their skills by spending time in the desert, and on the other, they seek to preserve their selected otherness as part of the state’s apparatus within the conditions of modernity. It is their “ideational culture” [8] that makes them unique; an ideational culture is one in which within the culture there exist group of habits considered as ideal patterns of behavior that the members are expected to follow [8]. Paraphrasing Al Khayat, who says that Iraqi Bedouin women are hostages of an ideology of honor and shame as guardians of moral and cultural purity [2], [32], I would say that ultimately Zalabieh men are “hostages” of an ideology, priority, and exclusivity of manhood that leads to an “ideology of Bedouinism”; men for men, against other men, and not against women but rather dominant over them.

10. Conclusion: Constructing Manhood Between Desert and State

Within the condition of modernity, the “premodern” Bedouins were reconstructed and the relationships between themselves and the State were reshaped. In the turbulent formation of Jordan, the political use of the past, with King Hussein linking the Hashemite family directly to Prophet Muhammad and his reference to his noble lineage as a Bedouin from the tribe of Quraish, was sealed by the integration of Bedouins into the Jordanian army, the police, and the secret police. On the basis of difference and otherness, this new (at that time) identity of Bedouins as officers of the State was well accepted by the Zalabieh. Their loyal, stable, and trustworthy character, derived from the values and ethics of Bedouin tradition, constructed a Self “between” desert and State. This cultural otherness as a necessity of their ongoing existence leads Bedouins to

expressive practices that link Bedouinism to manhood. Their traditional values as expressed in activities such as camel races and opposition to bureaucratic practices, and the distinct knowledge and skills derived from living in their vast territory, highlight an identity that separates the men of Wadi Rum from other men outside, such as “soft” Europeans and urban Jordanians.

The two identities of Bedouin Zalabieh—desert and state—are not opposing nor in crisis; rather they exist in balanced opposition—a state of continuous dialogue, bridging the gap between, and always in a balance of powers deriving from, each one separately and collectively. The concept of “Bedouinism” is inseparable from the concept of manhood. The relationship between Bedouins and the State in mutual acceptance and tolerance of power relations, both with consensus or with resistance and disobedience, becomes “conditional” and shapes the Self of these desert men. Their tribal authenticity exoticizes their image, which is further exoticized by women tourists. For these Bedouin, women travelers embody the exotic, just as their Bedouin hosts do for these women. With agility, the Zalabieh transform the power of the distinct, loyal Bedouin-state-officer to the powers of charm and attractiveness, which further differentiate them from “others.” Both these hosts and their guests, who are consumers of these exotic fantasies, challenge the hegemony of the “other outsider” in the context of tourism development. The bodies and the desert are both exoticized and eroticized.

As I have shown, the desert as a place plays a dominant role in the construction of the identity of Zalabieh Bedouins. As an existential space that conducts and constructs their skills, their way of thinking and their behaviors, their vast, difficult, inhospitable (to the outsider) territory constructs the environmental discourse that shapes their identity. Their restricted, insider knowledge of the desert as both inhabited and controlled by Bedouins determines their manhood and the meaning of Bedouinism, and constitutes the limits and dynamics of power relations between them and the State, and between them and other men outside. In this condition of otherness, the biological, environmental and social are integrated and a balanced, though mixed, identity is created.

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