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SIT: Jordan

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Introduction:

As a photojournalism major, a prospective anthropology major, and because of my own personal reasons, I came to Jordan extremely curious about the Bedouin tribes. I knew very little about them, only that they had once roamed the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond and that the number of nomads has since dwindled to little more than a handful. I had heard varying estimates of how many Bedouin were nomadic, semi nomadic, and sedentary, and thus made it my personal mission to confirm the numbers for myself, and to find out how this formerly nomadic population was fitting into the modern state. Above all, I hold a sense of awe for all people who are still able to live independently off of their own land, and I thought that the Bedouin tribes of Jordan would be an example of such people.

Once I began to travel throughout Jordan, however, I found that my idea of Bedouin life was far from reality. No longer do mighty warriors ride fiercely over the harsh terrain of the badia on camel and horseback. Instead, in the south I found a population fully dependent on tourism, a group of people who survive by selling cheap, plastic, beaded jewelry, and in the east, families who chose to settle in tiny concrete houses, reminiscing about the glory of the desert. Rather than being deterred, I became all the more curious about Bedouin lifestyles, for in both regions it was immediately obvious that, to differing degrees, deviations from tribal behaviors, social structures, and traditions were resulting from modernization, Gender roles, treatment of guests, the

importance of the tribe to the individual, and other traditional cornerstones were shifting under the pressures of dependency on government and tourism. Considering these changes, the poverty that many Bedouin live in, and the romantic idea that every Bedouin man I encountered held of his desert past, the question of whether or not they had truly benefited from settling and modernizing was always on my mind.

While most Bedouin fathers would say that they settled for the benefit of their children; and that their new life of hospitals and clean water and packaged food is easier, it is obvious that they miss their nomadic upbringings. Even though traditional tribal elements are still present in Bedouin life, my hypothesis, as I began my research, was that the cost of modernizing for the Bedouin is the deterioration of tradition, and that, while this is still an inner struggle for many, the Bedouin are not resisting this process.

Rational:

I found that there was an unfortunate lack of material on the effects of dependency and modernization on the Bedouin way of life in Jordan. In several books about Jordanian history, Bedouin tribes were mentioned primarily during the state's beginnings and its shift from mandate to nation. In a collection of essays on tribes in the Middle East, arguments were made on why and how the tribal way of life eventually conceded to modern nation-states, but with little information on how the tribes have since been effected. Finally, on the websites of US AID and various NGOs in Jordan, there is information on the various programs that supply rural areas with water, education, housing, employment, and other needs, but in little detail and without specified mention of the Bedouins.

Before I continue, a clarification should be made. I was not attempting to research the overall tribal history of Jordan, nor gathering information on the various social programs in the country. My research would have been much easier if I was. I am concentrating on the formerly Bedouin, meaning formerly nomadic, tribes of Jordan, on their shift to a settled lifestyle and the influence it has had on their tribal and family infrastructure. Current information on these specific groups of people was surprisingly difficult to find. Above all, what I am most interested in is what is most commonly omitted from books and NGO websites: the opinions of tribal members on how modernization has affected them. Regardless, it should be made clear that, while I recognize that Jordan is a predominantly tribal state, I am concentrating my research on the former nomads, and thus, when using the word "Bedouin," this is to whom I am referring.

In their essay "*Pax Britannica in the Steppe: British Policy and the Transjordan Bedouin*," Riccardo Bocco and Tariq M. M. Tell provide a history of how the tribes of Jordan slowly united during the mandate period, not under Hashemite rule, but under the control of John Bagot Glubb. Glubb, known to the tribes respectfully as Glubb Pasha, was a British officer who started in 1930 to form the tribes into an army, the Desert Patrol, in order to cease tribal raids and chaos in the region (108). The writers argue that Glubb was solely responsible for tribal loyalty to the Hashemite throne by the time of Jordan's independence in 1946, and that he was able to unify the tribes mostly because of their economic situation (108-109).

While Britain and France, in accordance with the Sykes-Picot agreement, divided the Arabian Peninsula territorially, the Arab leaders of the mandates competed for control

of the tribes. The Jordanian tribes engaged in warfare along the Syrian, Iraqi, and Saudi Arabian borders. By the 1930's, a combination of raids from Saudi tribes and extended drought left the Jordanian Bedouins in a weakened state of famine (109-122). Glubb, supposedly sympathetic to the tribes as he attempted to unify them, "began to pay subsidies to tribal *shayks* so ensure their cooperation in the control of raiding." (122) In addition to this, "*Ajundi's* (soldier's) pay could sustain several bedouin families in the famine conditions of the 1930s." (122)

Most important to my topic is that Glubb, even in the 1930's, began to notice that the droughts and Saudi raids significantly lessened the camels of the Jordanian tribes, thus already stripping away their nomadic livelihood. However, he believed that they could best survive by remaining semi-sedentary, and began encouraging them in agriculture while employing them in the Desert Patrol (123).

'Andrew Shryock, in his book Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan, briefly voices the opinion that tribal shayks lost their power once they conceded to the Hashemites and to a sedentary lifestyle. During his research, Shryock was told a similar story of Glubb Pasha by Haj 'Arif Abu l-'Amash of the 'Adwani tribe. This version, however, ends with the leaders of the tribes, specifically the 'Adwani, making peace with King Abdullah I under Abdullah's father, Amir Husayn. According to Haj 'Arif, they

"swore on the sword and the Qu'ran that they were brothers, and they are brothers to this very day. The descendants of 'Abdullah control the government, and the 'Adwan are shaykhs of the Balga shaykhs. That talk still holds. Nothing in it has changed." (92)

Shryock comments on the story in his book:

"Their political universe was altered beyond its capacity to generate heroic events. Uncontested power, political agreement, and submission are not the stuff of legend. If 'nothing changed' after 1923, it is because suddenly, in the land of the domesticated shaykhs.. *nothing more could happen.*" (93)

While neither of these texts continues on the theme of modernizations effects on the Bedouins,¹ both accounts broach an interesting idea: tribal settlement was directly correlated to the creation of Jordan as a mandate. Previous opinions led me to believe that the transition from nomadic to sedentary was a long and gradual process, but Jordan's entry into the modern idea of the nation-state, with the new boundaries and central ruling government it entailed, seems an obvious catalyst.

As I jumped sixty years ahead to the present, information became even more difficult to find. I looked for websites that might have statistics on education, development, and employment in the regions of Jordan comprised of formerly nomadic peoples, but had few results. The Ministry of Education website concentrates on the idea that Jordan will be a breeding ground for Information Technology students, and links on the Ministry of Health website either led to "under construction" pages or an error page telling me that I could not be granted access to the site. Knowing that Glubb's Desert Patrol is still in existence, and having heard rumors that the Amman police force is made up primarily of Bedouin brought in from the southern and eastern parts of Jordan to quell Palestinian uprisings, I looked futilely for military statistics on the Department of Statistics and National Information System websites. Web sites on development consistently pertained to Amman.

¹ *Bocco* and *Tell's* essay is from a book that focuses on Jordan's economy during Ottoman and British rule, and *Shryock* concentrates on documenting oral tribal histories.

Websites containing information on NGOs were sometimes helpful. The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development, JOHUD, has a number of programs that help people in rural areas, many of them likely former Bedouin. The Wadi Rum Eco Tourism Project trained local people to be drivers or guides for tourists, a Women in Development program has helped spread awareness on health and taught business skills to five thousand women, and medical units providing basic health services are operating in many regions of the country. There are also numerous programs teaching modern methods of agriculture, and planned projects include an increased amount of mobile clinics in the desert regions and projects with the goal of higher standards of living for impoverished people, specifically women.

The Badia Research and Development Program is a similar organization that works with the peoples of the northeastern desert regions of Jordan. The focus of the organization is on agriculture and pastoralism, and it is their goal to bridge the gap between traditional and modern farming practices. Besides paving roads and teaching methods of irrigated farming, the Badia Program also conducts studies on social aspects of tribal life and uses their findings to help other NGOs.

Jordan is also one of the top six recipients of US AID in the world. USAID in Jordan is divided into three areas: water sector development, economic opportunity, and health and population. While it is clear that USAID has helped in irrigation and wastewater facilities, providing jobs, and bettering health care and education, the USAID website does not state which regions of Jordan are effected. If anything, it usually seems

that more developed areas or tourist spots benefit? The only specific mention of an area in which the Bedouin are prevalent is Wadi Musa, where increased irrigation and new wastewater facilities were no doubt intended to help the tourist trade and, in so doing, help the local Bedouin.

The most useful source that I came across in my research was a sixty-page treatise by Ghazi bin Muhammad entitled The Tribes of Jordan at the Beginning of the Twenty :FirstCenturv. This book documents, albeit briefly, the names and locations of each Bedouin tribe, how and why they settled, the possible effects of western ideals and .modernization, how tribes fit into modern Jordanian.society, and possible solutions to what Ghazi considers the Bedouin plight. .

In a very romanticized few of his fellows, Ghazi describes the "Arab tribesman" as:

"wild and fiery 'People of the Sword' (*Ahl al-Sayf* in Arabic): what appeals to them, in their heart of hearts, is adventure, excitement, danger, nobility, grand acts, courage, movement, endurance and combat - everyone of them is inwardly restless and secretly wants nothing more than to be an epic hero, through feats of arms, and win a fair lady and renown. What they naturally despise, on the other hand, is mundanity, routine, drudgery, stinginess, pettiness, cowardice, mediocrity, security, enclosure and stagnation - and everyone of them secretly fears nothing more than being bored or still, and having done nothing of note to tell their children about."(52-53)

It is due to this nature, he argues, that the Bedouin fit so readily into the lifestyle of the Desert Patrol (55-56). Ghazi also considers the western influence on the tribes in an extremely negative light, saying, "Western popular culture.. .corroded the internal social structure and cohesion of many of the tribes."(14) The tribal nature combined with this Western corruption, according to Ghazi, are the reasons that some Bedouin have taken to

2 Not to say that this is a problem; there is just as much poverty in these areas as in the tribal desert regions.

smuggling in recent years, and, he fears, could likely begin, "taking to violent crimes, to tribal gangs or to banditry...or to Islamic fundamentalism."(57) He argues that it is not the nature of the Bedouin to take handouts, and that they must be integrated into modern society, or else they will revolt against it.

While Ghazi presents an informative background and an interesting opinion, he is clearly biased in his findings. To start with, in his treatise, published in 1999, he describes the Bedouin of Jordan as almost completely nomadic (11). The current estimated nomadic population is about one percent of Jordan (Tarawneh), and it seems far more likely that the shift from nomadic to settled took place over the past eighty years of Hashemite rule, rather than the past five; Also; in the five years since the treatise was published; Jordan has seen little evidence of Bedouin violence or fundamentalism, which Ghazi called a "likelihood."(57) While the reason for this could be that the Jordanian government has done well to integrate Bedouin society, I find this difficult to believe, having seen a number of jobless tribesmen in poverty who seem resigned to the fate of "mundanity" and "mediocrity" that Ghazi claimed they would strive to resist. Jordan, especially when compared to other nations of the region, is certainly not known for its violent crime or Islamic fundamentalism.

All of these sources provided me with a context in which to begin my fieldwork. However, an obvious deficiency remained; I did not know exactly how and why the tribes had modernized, nor their opinions on the process. Through my field research and interviews, I hoped to fill in those gaps and discover the reality of the Bedouin situation; how long some of the tribes have been settled, why, and which way of life they consider

better, if modernization and westernization truly are corruptive to the family and tribal units, and how the tribes are fitting into modern society, if at all.

Methodology:

I visited six communities to conduct my research, three in the southern part of Jordan and three in the east, each one with a different level and type of dependency on government and exposure to outsiders. In the east were Tell Al Remah, an isolated town with little agriculture, Safawi, a Bedouin village on the highway to Iraq, and the nomadic communities in the desert surrounding Safawi. In the south were Urn Sayhun, a village entirely dependent on the tourist trade of Petra, Al Rajif, a poor village dependent on the government, and Little Petra, where tradition meets modernization as Bedouin slowly attempt to capitalize on tourists. Given the time I had, I felt that these communities would help me to see sufficiently varied lifestyles and receive numerous opinions. I compared, those lifestyles and opinions between each place I visited.

In order to make those comparisons, the information that I attempted to obtain in each community, through interview, conversation, or observation, was as follows:

- Where essentials such as food, water, clothing, medical care, and housing come from.
- How education factors into their lives, including who is educated in the family and to what degree.
- How they interact with the government (i.e. military and police jobs, unemployment payment, etc.).
- How technology, such as mobile phones and Internet, have affected them, if at all.
- The importance of religion.

- The history of their tribe, pertaining specifically to how they moved from nomadic to settled, and the importance of their tribe to them.
- The opinions of people from various age groups on their own lives and the nomadic lifestyle (i.e. from the older generation who experienced the shift, and from the younger who have only heard the stories of their parents).
- Interactions within the family, noting specifically the difference in gender roles and the activities of children in different regions, and the treatment of the guest.³
- General interactions with and opinions of outsiders, such as extended family, other tribes, and tourists.

While visiting each tribe, I was also constantly photographing their daily lives. The resulting visual display enhances the comparison I have made between the different regions, showing the differing forms modernization has taken in Bedouin communities and its effects on their way of life, as well as the clash between modern and traditional ways of life. Essentially, photographs and captions comprise the presentation of qualitative data in my report.

During my visits, I was always careful to keep my intentions clear to my hosts and to ask for permission before photographing. I encountered very little hesitance; on the contrary, most of my hosts volunteered significant information and, according to the oral tradition, told numerous stories. They also allowed me to photograph themselves, their families, and their homes.

³ While my own story is obviously not the issue, the reactions of different family members to a guest, especially a foreigner, can in many ways be a measurement of Bedouin modernization.

There are a number of admitted deficiencies in my work, all of them having to do with the lack of substantial time necessary for such an undertaking. Major tribes, such as the Beni Sakr, Beni Hamidah, and 'Adwani, were overlooked; I was unable to visit the Bedouin who probably have the least amount of dependency on the world outside their tribe, those in the caves of Wadi Araba; the specific effects of social programs and ministries were not examined, and, while I visited the web sites of such projects, I was unable to actually contact them; the tribal system of government, as well as Bedouin representation in the Hashemite government, was not thoroughly researched; these are just a few of the many areas that I feel leaves my study incomplete. Given the time I had, I felt it most important to go to the source, to the Bedouin themselves, and view their current way of life. It is certainly a study consisting more of qualitative data and opinions than quantitative information.

The problems that arose once I began my fieldwork also resulted from a lack of significant time. I visited Tell Al Remah and Al Rajif while in the preliminary stages of my research, and thus did not yet have a full questionnaire. In Al Rajif I did not have a fluent English-speaking translator, and in Tell Al Remah I had none at all. My information in these areas is based mostly on observation. Once the actual research period began, I was rushed to visit the remaining four areas and also find time in between to return to Amman where I edited photographs and worked on this study. Accommodations and translators were difficult to find, specifically in the eastern nomadic area. Finally, once I was with my hosts, it was difficult to simultaneously play the roles of researcher, guest, and photographer while only able to stay for a few days (or less) at a time. My trip to Safawi and the nomadic areas was made in three short days, so,

in my photographs, the two are displayed as one region. It is my belief that, in order to complete both a research and photography project documenting, in detail, the lives of the Bedouin throughout Jordan, several months would be required, at the very least.

In the presentation of my photographs, I was torn between presenting pictures that completely profiled each family or those that most effectively stuck to the theme of modernization (another deficiency, for given more time, I feel I could have achieved both). I reached a halfway point by dividing the photos into four categories, and choosing an equal amount of pictures from each area. The categories are occupation, which tends to document the lives of the adults in each area; children, a display of how the tribe is modernizing through the lens of its youth; interactions, which consists of family interactions, gender, and Bedouin families from the perspective of a guest; and housing, a comparison of the differing living conditions of the Bedouin. In addition to this, there are a number of photographs that make some sort of general artistic statement about modernization, or are specific to the region where they were taken and thus did not fit the overall categories, so I felt it necessary to include those as well.

Findings:

These are captions for the photographs. In order, the categories are occupation, children, interactions, and housing, followed at the end by the more random category. In each category, the order of the areas presented is nomadic/Safawi, Tell Al Remah, Al Rajif, Urn Sayhun, and Little Petra.