NATURE = LIFE: ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY AS RESISTANCE IN SOUTH SINAI

Hilary Gilbert

Abstract

Sedentarization and 'development', under Israeli Occupation (1967–1982) and subsequent Egyptian rule, have eroded the agropastoral livelihoods of South Sinai Bedu and the strong cultural identity that evolved from them. Unequal access to work and poor education have produced material poverty, while government policy to 'Egyptianize' Sinai has marginalized Bedouin culture. This article explores the impacts on Bedu of living with multiple inequalities, and the strategies people employ to validate themselves in a system that disdains or ignores them. Among the most important is adopting a self-appointed role as guardians of nature. Bedu are choosing to reformulate an environmental identity as an act of symbolic resistance to Egyptianization, and to a neglect of the environment that they feel, with good reason, extends to them.

Keywords: Sinai, Bedouin, inequality, identity, resistance

Figure 1. *May 2011: bureaucracy versus exigency. Radwan 'Eid al Mzeini, his friend Subbah and son anxiously await City Council permission to restore an important local well. (See below, p. 50.) (Photo: Hilary Gilbert.)*

Introduction

The view that the identity of different peoples is immutably shaped by aspects of their culture denies the plurality of human identity, and people's individual and collective agency in choosing how they should be represented (Sen 2006). Dominant discourse in Egypt has never moved beyond a reductionist portrayal of Bedu as primitive pastoralists, uneducated and troublesome (Gardner 2000; Aziz 2000; Altorki and Cole 2006). In this essentialized view, an educated or westernized Bedu is thought to have transcended a 'Bedouinness' defined in a pre-development era. Today's Bedu must camouflage their Bedouinness if they wish to be treated as equals. Most are unable or unwilling to do so. They thus remain assigned to the conceptual realm of 'nature' rather than 'culture', a 'traditional' people whose aspirations and rights as citizens can safely be addressed through conservation.

In reality, of course, Bedouin identity is dynamic and continually changing, shaped in relation to what Hall and du Gay (1996: 4) term the 'constitutive outside': the historically specific developments and processes, and their attendant discourses, which have impinged upon populations in the course of modernization. Whilst remaining linked to origins in an historical past, Hall and du Gay comment, 'actually identities are about ... the process of becoming rather than being'. When local communities forge a collective identity in response to a threat, political struggle often plays an important part in the process (Dalby and Mackenzie 1997); however, political activity in Egypt remains subject to massive control and forbidden to civil society. Bedu have hitherto had neither incentive nor inclination for civic engagement,[1] and the state's security presence makes physical resistance all-but unthinkable. How, then, can Sinai Bedu assert their evolving identity?

As Abu-Lughod (1990: 41) notes, Bedouin resistance takes unlikely forms: 'subversions ... [–] small or local resistances not tied to the overthrow of systems or ideologies of emancipation'. In this article I explore how South Sinai Bedu think about and represent themselves today in the face of multiple inequalities. I illustrate tactics employed as 'everyday resistance' (Scott 1985), to shore up self-respect in the face of disrespect. I then suggest that South Sinai Bedu draw selectively on aspects of their historic identity to resist their marginalization by those they experience as occupiers, noting different strategies adopted in the face of Israeli and Egyptian dominance. I use my own findings to support the view that Bedouin identity remains grounded in a relationship with the natural environment, and that a reworking of that historic aspect – in opposition to the authorities – helps people restore meaning to their position as Bedu today.

Hilary Gilbert

Background

The Sinai Peninsula links Africa to Asia. The spectacular environment of its southern region (shown in Map 1 below), some 31,000 km^2 of hyper-arid desert framed by the Gulfs of Suez and 'Aqaba, includes coral reefs, vast plateaux and coastal plains, and the highest mountains in Egypt. Many of its fauna and flora are endemic, rare or endangered, making it of major conservation interest (StKPMU 2003). South Sinai's natural richness is matched by its cultural wealth. Inhabited for at least 10,000 years, it bears archaeological evidence of settlement, hunting, mining and trade by successive waves of people, including Neolithic hunters, Old Kingdom Egyptians, Nabataeans and Romans, early Christian monks and Bedu. Jebel Musa ('Mount Sinai') is revered by all three 'Peoples of the Book' as the site of Moses' reception of the Ten Commandments. It is thus a major pilgrimage centre and UNESCO World Heritage Site, with the sixth-century CE Monastery of St Catherine at its centre (Grainger and Gilbert 2008). Whether judged by natural or cultural criteria, South Sinai is a place of matchless importance.
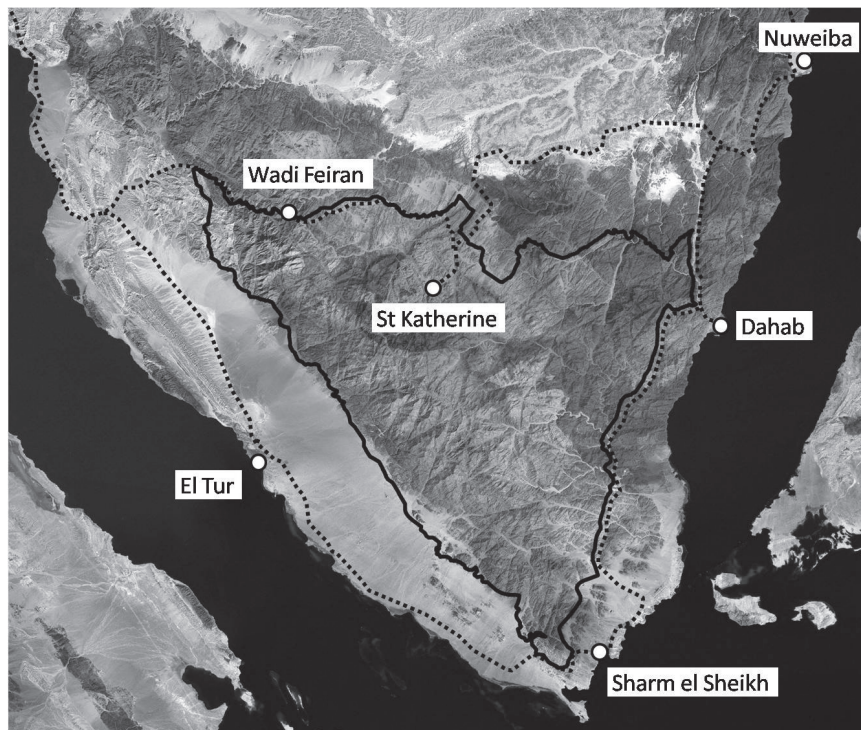
Map 1. *South Sinai showing principal urban areas, road (dotted line) and St Katherine Protectorate boundary (solid line). (Map: Francis Gilbert)*

Nature = Life: Environmental Identity as Resistance in South Sinai

Since well before the Islamic era, Sinai's indigenous population has consisted of mobile Bedu. In 1967 Israel captured Sinai from Egypt. In the ensuing fifteen-year occupation, settlement and rapid economic change produced wholesale shifts away from pre-development Bedouin livelihoods of semi-nomadic pastoralism, horticulture, hunting and fishing. Since 1982, when full Egyptian government resumed, South Sinai has experienced rapid commercial development through tourism and substantial donor investment. An analysis for the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (SEAM 2005: 20) concluded that 'the Bedouin can hardly fail to benefit from these investments'. Yet South Sinai's 40,000[2] Bedu remain among the poorest and most marginalized of Egyptian citizens; a position reinforced by the government policy of settling mainland Egyptians in large numbers in the peninsula, backed by a massive security presence. Development on this scale threatens the environment, and the government has responded by designating almost 40 per cent of South Sinai's landmass and littoral as Protected Areas (PAs). The St Katherine Protectorate (StKP), established in 1996, originally involved Bedu in its planning. Alternative livelihoods and 'sustainable' development were promised to offset income lost through conservation provisions. Yet ultimately these promises were not delivered, and Egyptian-led development proceeded unchecked despite conservation measures enshrined in law (Sowers 2007). Most Bedu have not profited from these changes and are ill at ease with their life today. They blame 'the Egyptians' – conflating conservation authorities and local and national government – for failing both the environment and their community.

Having visited St Katherine regularly for 25 years,[3] I have observed the area's rapid development, and the emergence from it of two paradoxes. First, while wealth has flowed into Sinai from tourism, most Bedu have grown ever poorer. Economic prosperity has created, and left behind, a marginal people. The second paradox concerns conservation. St Katherine Protectorate is a 'flagship' national park and UNESCO World Heritage Site; yet – like Egypt's conservation effort as a whole – its work is undermined by lack of funding and political support (NCS 2006). Developments have been permitted that contradict the conservation messages in expensively produced literature. A huge landfill site for Sharm el-Sheikh's rubbish has long disfigured StKP's southeastern border, while plans recently mooted include settling up to 4.5 million Nile Valley Egyptians in Sinai, a tarmacked road through the Protectorate's most beautiful wadi, a giant bridge between Sharm and Saudi Arabia, and a funicular railway up Mount Sinai. The plan for Sinai's development approved by President Morsi's Cabinet on 20 June 2013 provided for the growth of extractive industry on a previously undreamt-of scale (PEMA 2013). Despite conservation rhetoric, then, South Sinai's environment has not been a real priority for any of Egypt's recent regimes.

My study explores the relationship between environmental neglect and Bedouin marginalization.[4] I trace the effects on Bedu of living with inequalities and contradictions, both the structural inequality of Bedu as Egyptian citizens and the polarization of Bedouin society itself. I analyse Bedouin responses to

development and conservation experienced as control, noting spatial differences that include marked hostility among town-dwellers to state-led conservation. I seek to explain this as a response to a perceived existential threat, leading to the 'reinvention' of Bedouin environmental identity as an act of resistance.

Bedouin Life: Building Blocks

Wherever people have identified themselves as Bedu, certain features of life have been found in some form, namely: tribal social organization supporting strong kinship networks; value systems based on ideas of honour upheld by customary law; and livelihoods based primarily on nomadic pastoralism.

Abu Rabiʿa (2006: 865) summarizes the social structure of Bedouin tribes: 'in ascending order ... the nuclear family, the extended family, the sub-tribe, the tribe and the clan. The traditional Bedouin family was patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal, endogamous, and occasionally polygamous.' As a practical definition this remains current in South Sinai, which is acknowledged as conservative compared with neighbouring areas (Marx 1967). Tribal alliances and loyalties remain active and are renegotiated as circumstances require. The *khamsa*, a five-generation kinship structure which assumes the extended family's responsibility, under customary ('*urfi*) law, for matters of honour and its defence, is active and frequently invoked.

The Bedouin patrilineal segmentary lineage system, being organized around collective, lineage-based responsibility and lacking a formal leadership hierarchy, has led to the contested claim that Bedouin society is egalitarian in nature. Today, many factors challenge that claim: sedentarization and state control increasingly produce material and social inequality, to say nothing of new or existing gender disparities. However, despite (or perhaps because of) their increasingly polarized society, my respondents continue to value ideas of *structural* equality, with no-one owed deference as of right; and *material* equality, traditionally produced by the impermanence of livestock-based wealth and the common holding of land and natural resources (Salzman 1999). While leaders emerge and may be wealthy, Bedu play down wealth relative to values they consider more important, such as honour, ancestry and generosity (Marx 1967; Abu-Lughod 1985; Peters 1990). Traditionally, kudos was more readily earned by giving wealth away than by accumulation (Salzman 1999; Lavie 1990; Bailey 2004). Many of my respondents made unflattering comparisons between today's self-interested leaders – *al kubār* – and those of the past, noting that: *'Nowadays, the strong eat the weak'*.

Clinton Bailey (2004) collected 1,350 proverbs and aphorisms in current use within the past decade, highlighting key aspects of Bedouin life. His collection contains just three references to wealth and not one to poverty; eight to hunger, but 63 describing the importance of generosity to guests. My current research[5] provides a striking example of the resilience of this ideal: asked what they do

with surplus produce from their flocks and gardens, not one respondent, however poor, replied that they sold it. All those who have produce keep some back to give away or serve to guests. Refusing to commodify their scarce resources in conformity with prevailing economics – or even the needs of their own families – they choose instead to use them as tokens of generosity. This wins them *baraka* (blessings) in religious terms, but more importantly weaves new threads into the webs of generosity and reciprocal obligation on which Bedouin social relations depend. Given the chance to control resources, they use them to reinforce a key aspect of their identity as Bedu (H.C. Gilbert, unpublished data).

A way of life based on nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralism is the most obvious defining Bedouin feature. Most, in Sinai as elsewhere, have constructed their lives around the need to find pasture, moving their flocks seasonally between grazing and watering locations, and living typically in easily dismantled tents woven by women using wool from their flocks. An Awlād Saʿīd man I spoke with in a remote area said simply: '*Herding is the Bedu's life*.'[6] Sinai's population by Bedu extends from the pre-Islamic era to the 18th century CE (Murray 1935; Finkelstein and Perevolotsky 1990; Bailey 2002). In its high mountain region, pastoralism has been supplemented by a unique Byzantine orchard horticulture (Hobbs 1995; Zalat and Gilbert 2008) and at lower elevations by the cultivation of dates. Agropastoral occupations have always been augmented not only by hunting, fishing and smuggling, but also by a range of specialist occupations integrating Bedu into wider trading economies (Marx 2003). Whilst this has led some to argue that pastoralism is not the defining mark of Bedu as traditionally represented (Rabinowitz 1985), my 21st century respondents were clear: '*Bidūn ḥalāl bedū mish bedū!*' (Without his livestock a Bedouin is not a Bedouin!). Herding also links South Sinai residents to their wider identity as members of traditionally pastoralist tribes dispersed across neighbouring regions, and they share with many of their contemporaries the experience both of authoritarian states and of conservation as their agent – what Dawn Chatty (2002) has described as 'conservation without a human face'.

Despite 50 years of political and economic adaptation, then, values grounded in the pre-development building blocks of Bedouin life continue to shape how South Sinai Bedu behave and represent themselves today. These are manifest in an environmental imaginary developed through herding, cultivation and husbanding scarce resources; and in a value system that assigns greater worth to generosity and resource-sharing than to private accumulation. I will argue that both contribute to the self-assigned 'guardian of nature' role discussed below.

Hilary Gilbert

The Impacts of 'Development'

Bedouin and States

While Nassef et al. (2009: v.1–4) report that mobile pastoralism can make a significant contribution to national economies, governments across the Middle East have sought to settle Bedu in the interests of nation-building (Chatty 2006). Pastoralists may be treated as second-class citizens or indeed left stateless, and rarely receive the full range of services provided by the state (Jakubowska 2000; Chatty 2003; Marx 2006). Democratic governments – even those not overtly hostile to pastoralists – may be unable to justify the higher per capita expenditure required to provide a dispersed minority with services (Aronson 1980: 180), especially, as in Egypt, where settled populations resist assimilating Bedu into the national identity (Altorki and Cole 2006; Gilbert 2011b).

The Israeli occupation produced a dramatic retrenchment in agropastoral livelihoods. Israel aimed to turn Bedu into 'enthusiastic or productive workers ... accustomed to regular work for wages and acquiring the attitudes, skills and habits valued by an industrial society' (Glassner 1974: 59). As Bedu settled in order to undertake this work (Marx 1980; Perevolotsky 1981; Perevolotsky et al. 1989), the resulting pressure on grazing meant flock size was typically reduced from 80 to 13 per family within ten years, and many orchards were abandoned by migrant workers. Yet while the Israeli occupation dramatically affected livelihoods, I will argue, Egyptian rule has had greater impact on shaping the evolution of Bedouin identity.

Following Israel's withdrawal in 1982, Egypt's development of tourism along the Gulf of 'Aqaba, backed by a strong security presence, combined economic goals with the national interest (Aziz 2000). 'Development and security have always been intertwined', writes Alan Fowler (2008: 112). 'Security creates the predictable conditions required for investment to translate into economic growth.' The original National Development Plan for Sinai aimed at settling three million Egyptians in the peninsula by 2017 (a figure revised in new proposals to 4.5 million).[7] This neocolonial project was intended both to prevent history from repeating itself and to transform a marginal place of dubious loyalty into an orderly province, peopled with good Egyptian citizens. However, Sinai's residents experience the project as another occupation, the International Crisis Group (ICG)'s (2007: 19) respondents in North Sinai explicitly using the same word, *iḥtilāl*, as that applied to the Israelis in 1967.

Up to now the plan has not been realized, although the newly adopted Sinai Development Plan threatens to revive its most damaging aspects. The vast majority of South Sinai's 'settlers' are male migrant workers whose families stay at home in the Nile Valley. But if its social provisions have lagged, its security element continues to flourish. A massive deployment of force in Sinai, especially following a series of terrorist incidents between 2004 and 2006,[8] compensates for the limitation placed by the Camp David Agreement on national troop deployment

with highly visible police (*shūrṭa*: black uniforms), tourist police (*shūrṭa as-siyyāha*: white uniforms), border guards (*ḥaris al ḥudūd*: military camouflage) and secret police (*mukhabarāt*, who are naturally invisible). It has been suggested to me that there is a policeman for every five residents; but at times of heightened security that ratio appears to be reversed. Continual references in Western media to Sinai's 'security vacuum' and 'increasing lawlessness' ring hollow to its residents.

A 'security-fixated conception of development', the ICG (2007: 19) notes, 'is accompanied by the authorities' declared wish to "Egyptianize" the region, not only in economic and demographic terms, but also symbolically, in cultural and identity terms.' Aziz (2000: 30) comments – without apparent irony – that the national project to develop Sinai 'never argued for the elimination of the Bedouin'. However, development has brought poverty and widespread decline in the core livelihoods that long constituted Bedouin identity. One Tarabīn man complained to me: '*The government forces us to leave the mountains, settles us in houses like chickens and makes us pay taxes*'. Donors collude in discouraging the remaining mobile Bedu: the World Food Programme's project in central South Sinai supports local people on condition of settlement, a principle recently extended by the EU-funded South Sinai Regional Development Programme (SSRDP). 'Bedouin culture' excites no interest except as a tourist attraction (ICG 2007: 9). The preferred strategy has been to subsume Bedu into mainstream pharaonic heritage in the interests of nation-building. The Jebeliya, whose territory centres on the formerly Bedouin village of St Katherine, have experienced a wholesale transformation of their surroundings. From a settlement whose stone-built houses were barely detectable against the hillsides, St Katherine has been made into a bustling, street-lit Egyptian town of stucco apartment blocks, concrete bus shelters, neon-lit shops, and a pharaonic gatehouse – a constant reminder of Bedouin powerlessness. '*There is no oxygen in Katrīn* (St Katherine) *now*', a Jebaali sheikh told me. '*There are too many people. We cannot breathe.*'

Inconveniently for the planners, Bedu reject attempts to assimilate them into a culture they do not acknowledge as theirs. Like Gardner (2000), I know of no Bedu who consider themselves, or Sinai, to be Egyptian. Far from it: as Abu-Lughod (1985: 251) comments, Nile Valley Egyptians serve as 'a conceptual foil for Bedouin collective self-definition'. My respondents today state unanimously that future generations will maintain the Bedouin traditions in which they have been raised. Only one dissenting Jebaali exclaimed: '*If life stays like this, no Bedu will stay Bedu. I don't want my children to grow up Bedouin if there's no better life for them than this!*' (H.C. Gilbert, unpublished data).

Polarization and the Production of Poverty

St Katherine today is a place of growing inequality, due both to the material polarization of its Bedouin communities and to the inequality of opportunity they

experience. Egyptian policy ignores their needs – and even their existence – as citizens: I have argued elsewhere that failure to collect information about Bedu excludes them from official indicators, and thus from planning provision (Gilbert 2011b). The poverty resulting from this exclusion is very real. Egyptian employers decline to employ Bedu. The limited education most now receive does not provide access to better employment and most of those working at all survive in low-paid, insecure jobs (Gilbert 2011b). The steep post-revolution decline in tourist numbers, due in part to media scapegoating of Bedu as criminal, has had a catastrophic effect on desert families, with many now surviving on little more than staple starches and tea. Just as the demise of historic core livelihoods enforces Bedouin dependence on paid work, their access to it is barred both by dominant discourse, the legally unchallenged prejudice of employers, and political judgements that they cannot influence. The marginalization of Bedu is structural and severe.

In South Sinai as elsewhere, insensitive 'development' has led people to see themselves as 'underdeveloped' (Sachs 1992). This is especially so in St Katherine, where urbanization is focussed. As Rahnema (1992: 159) comments: 'Everyone may think of themselves as poor when the TV in the mud hut defines the necessities of life.' This perception accelerated as tourism boomed and wealth flowed into Sinai's economy, largely bypassing the Bedu. In the global economy of which Sinai is now part, a Bedouin value system that fails to treat material wealth as the highest good is unintelligible. But Bedouin poverty is not purely a construct of 'development'. South Sinai Bedu have not only learned to *feel* poor; the erosion of core livelihoods means that many people now actually *are* poor, not just relatively but absolutely. Half the working population lives around or below the World Bank's poverty standard, and food poverty in South Sinai approaches double that in Egypt, unrecognized by the state (Gilbert 2011b; Gilbert and al Jebaali 2012).

Structural inequality is compounded for Bedu by increasing polarization within their own society. '*In the past people had very little but they needed very little*', an elderly Jebaali explained. '*Now they need a lot. They see things and want them – they want a TV, a fridge, etc.*' Some people have succeeded in earning enough to participate in the new order and acquire new tokens of wealth: Chinese motorbikes instead of camels, televisions with satellite dishes, even an occasional computer (Gilbert 2011b). Of the 15 per cent of respondents who made positive comments about changes to Bedouin life in their lifetime, five did so on the basis that education gave them better opportunities than in the past. The remainder all cited material improvements and services, primarily electricity, motorized transport and the ability to buy commodities that were formerly labour-intensive to produce. People with access to modern commodities, then, are apt to appreciate them: '*There's been a great change for the better*', a Jebaali in regular work told me. '*There's work now. People have mobiles, TVs and [satellite] dishes. They live in proper houses now, not caves in the mountains.*' In urban St

Katherine, forward-looking, younger family men in work are positive about the future and report their personal circumstances to be improving. They include the small number of optimists who see a future for Bedu in which young people will improve their social and material status by studying to work in professions (6%); the government (3%), information technology (6%) or languages (14%). However, they are far outweighed across the whole sample by those who view change as negative and future prospects as limited to handicrafts (12%), tourism (27%) and traditional agropastoral livelihoods (41%). The ambivalence of many people to modern life was summed up by another Jebaali, Saelim:

> *I try to maintain the old traditions in my family. I loved the old life of moving up to the mountains and living in tents – but my wife and family don't want it. In the old days everyone ate very simply but they were much healthier – they had fewer illnesses then. Now they have illnesses they never had before. Then I would wake up and eat bread with oregano and salt and feel great – I never had a headache. Now I might eat meat or liver, but I can't get up in the morning.* [Saelim ironically sings a snatch of song*: 'Life is good...!'*] *But people have changed – and they have changed our culture and nature. It's not right, the Egyptians taking over the community, getting jobs, getting ahead, when the Bedu are going backwards, getting left behind.* [Another man in the room backs him up.] *We're impatient. The Bedu want help now, not little by little* [shwaya shwaya]*. We're fed up with waiting for things to improve.*

While some adapt and benefit, most Bedu are ill at ease with changes that require them to change their mindset as well as their livelihood.

Prior to the imposition of what Sachs (1992: 4) calls the 'spreading monoculture' of evolutionist, economized notions of 'development', people used their own yardsticks for judging prosperity. Lummis (1992: 49) notes that the idea of the common good, or 'common wealth', often went hand in hand with co-operative use of resources and moderation in private consumption. These have characterized Bedouin practice: as noted above, wealth has traditionally been expressed through generosity rather than material display, and customary law has provided for both resource sharing and restrictions on resource use in the common interest (Perevolotsky 1987; Hobbs 1995).

Approaches to life that valorize social values rather than economic wealth are discounted in the process of modernization as contributing to 'underdevelopment'. The global reach of development thinking, Lummis (1992: 48) comments, 'dispossesses the world's peoples of their own indigenous notions of prosperity'. The satellite dishes bringing soap operas and enticing adverts have changed more than just the physical landscape: they have altered people's interior outlook, introducing an individualistic, consumerist ethic at odds with Bedouin norms (Abu-Lughod 1990). As a result, I was told , people now think more about themselves than others, eroding community cohesion: a common response to my asking what change people would choose to make in their community was: '*For people to care about each other again'.*

For Bedu, then, the valuing of modern material goods introduced by 'development' is doubly damaging: it both contributes to their assessment by others as 'primitive' (Green 2006: 115) and undermines their self-worth *as Bedu*. Compromised identity might be counted with the 'existential lacks' noted by Rahnema (1992: 160) as constitutive of poverty. The 'double whammy' is the notion that the acquisition of modern commodities makes them *de facto* less Bedu ('Abd el Baset 2005; Gilbert 2013). A Bedu judged successful or comfortable by 'modern' standards cannot, by definition, *be* a Bedu. When my colleague Mohammed and I attended a meeting in business clothes, an EU official asked him: '*You were* originally *Bedu, were you not?*' In the eyes of the official Mohammed had transcended his previous state. He could not be both professionalized *and* a Bedu: the states were mutually exclusive. This provokes an internal struggle between the need for a meaningful identity and a reasonable desire for comfort (e.g. owning a fridge in a very hot climate) or status (in a society changing its ways of attributing value to individuals). In response to these pressures many people do not passively accept the new order: denied effective political expression, they find symbolic ways to assert themselves as Bedu.

Response and Resistance

Political Resistance – Who Dares Loses

Hitherto, Bedu–state relations in South Sinai have been characterized by mutual disengagement. As noted, Egyptian policy has been geared to assimilating Bedouin culture and ignoring their needs as a group. Local government has proceeded without them: until 2007, uniquely, St Katherine's councillors were appointed by the Governor, not elected by local people. An estimated 30–50 per cent of Bedu have no ID card and are thus ineligible to vote (Gilbert and al Jebaali 2012). When in 2011 the NGO that I chair invited the Head of St Katherine City Council to visit one of the remote desert communities for which he is responsible (see Figure 1 on p. 40), it was the first time in his fifteen years in post that he had ever been into the desert. Small wonder, then, that services fail to address Bedouin needs. Post-revolutionary politics has seen a range of new tactics emerge in the hope of putting Bedouin issues on the political agenda: citizen demonstrations, youth committees, petitions to the Governor and widespread voting in the parliamentary elections of 2011/12 (Gilbert and al Jebaali 2012). All these tactics have failed, with peaceful demonstrations dismissed as acts of violence, petitions ignored and Parliament – the first in which South Sinai Bedu were properly represented – swiftly dissolved.

Meanwhile, Egypt's hostile climate for civil society obstructs legitimate activism. Its extent has been globally exposed by the suppression of foreign-based NGOs, culminating in five-year jail terms for 43 members of staff in June 2013 (CHIRS 2013; El-Tabei 2013). Previously active advocacy NGOs have

been silenced.[9] While protests continue throughout mainland Egypt, in Sinai – under special Emergency Measures at the time of writing (Westall 2013) – political acts of resistance are now the last resort of the desperate. They include the recent handing-in of ID cards by a group of Gararsha tribesmen in protest at state failure to honour its contract to them as citizens – an open rejection of state authority.[10] A few who feel they have nothing to lose are directly challenging the state. The recent attempts of a Gararsha family to obtain redress for the death of their son at the hands of police has led to a cat-and-mouse war of attrition against the authorities. Tactics include repeatedly cutting the region's communications cables and the disastrously counterproductive 'kidnapping' of Western tourists. The Governor has refused to meet the aggrieved family in this dispute and a heavy-handed police response provokes mounting anger: I received an eyewitness account of the unprovoked beating and shooting by police of an unrelated Gararsha man queuing for petrol.[11] Whilst – in contrast to the more radicalized North – no retaliation by South Sinai Bedu has so far resulted in loss of life, these incidents invariably result in further crackdowns, reinforce anti-Bedouin rhetoric and undermine hopes of constructive engagement.

However, such tactics are the resort of the few. Resistance for the majority is mixed with resignation in the face of insurmountable force – what Appadurai (2004: 81) has called 'the paradox of patience in the face of emergency'.

Narratives of Resistance – Poetry and Stories

By what 'unlikely forms of resistance' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 41) do Bedu negotiate these conundrums? Some are humdrum: a guide told me he had been upset by Western tourists, who then offered to buy him a Nescafé to make up the quarrel. '*I'm Bedouin! I don't drink Nescafé!*' he shouted at them, rejecting the Western commodity. Another everyday leitmotif pits Bedu, as hard, canny desert-dwellers, against flabby Egyptians hopelessly ill-equipped for desert life. That some Bedu grow drugs in the mountains with impunity is sometimes put down to the collusion of corrupt police, but more often to the police being too fat to climb up and seize the offenders.

Other methods make higher cultural claims. South Sinai Bedu have always expressed themselves through poetry (Lavie 1990; Bailey 2002; Holes and Abu Athera 2009). Abu-Lughod (1985) analyses its role as a vehicle for gendered social resistance *within* Bedouin society; however, in Sinai nowadays its message is as often externally directed, and political rather than personal. Egyptian soap operas and contact with tourists promote a westernized individualism in which emotion need no longer be expressed solely through poetry to avoid loss of honour, as Abu-Lughod describes. However, a *qaṣīda* mocking the dominant culture or lamenting its impacts still provides entertainment at a public gathering such as a wedding, and brings prestige to its composer. Bedouin oral poetic tradition remains vital today in South Sinai as elsewhere (Bailey 2002; Holes and

Abu Athera 2007, 2009), with poetry both composed spontaneously and memorized by listeners to repeat at later gatherings.[12]

Stories may be as powerful as poetry in transmitting resistance. Smadar Lavie's sophisticated ethnography of the Mzeina tribe (1990) hinges on her recognition that individuals can be presented as archetypes embodying key attributes of Bedouin identity. The lives of these individuals encapsulate the absurdities and contradictions of Bedouin life under Israeli military occupation: nomads settled in houses, smugglers prevented from smuggling, '*urfi* judges in a westernized legal system, leaders suborned by occupiers, and women's roles subverted, amongst others. Lavie demonstrates that through allegorical storytelling the attributes they embody – the protective power of a sheikh, the cunning of a smuggler, the power of a woman in her sphere – can be reinvigorated, their potency restored to listeners whose structures of meaning have collapsed. In confrontation with the occupier, the skills and values that inform Bedouin identity can be shown to gain (qualified) advantage; not recapturing their former power but restoring people's recognition of them as agents of meaning. In my conversations I have looked for moments of heightened meaning such as Lavie describes. They are rare but they are powerful. The stories and events below came to me over a period of four years through a gifted Jebaali storyteller whom I shall call Jema'. In places the stories are critical of Bedu as well as Egyptians. While not presented allegorically they still convey a meaning that bears on identity and illustrates resistance.

Story 1 (2007). Jema' has hired a builder from Cairo to work on a project, but he has not shown up. Eventually Jema' gets a call from police manning the nearby checkpoint. 'Your worker is here but we took him off the bus. He is a bad man, a thief. We are holding him.' Jema' drives out. 'This man robbed a jeweller's shop', he is told. 'He's a very bad man.' Jema' knows what is required; his hand slips an envelope under the table. 'A good man, this, and a good worker, no doubt!' the policeman beams, releasing the builder. Then he says casually to Jema': 'By the way, I haven't seen you for ages. Why don't you invite me for dinner?' Jema' feels in his pocket, pulls out EGP 10, and hands it openly to the policeman, saying contemptuously: 'If you're hungry, buy your supper from the cafe.' Afterwards Jema' muses: 'These guys, they come from the city. There's nothing for them here, they're bored, they earn a pittance. No wonder they turn to the bad...'

Story 2 (2008). I am present when the Cairo branch of an international medical charity descends on St Katherine. A foreign visitor has alerted them to Bedouin conditions. Their chairman is a urologist, hell-bent on improving Bedouin kidneys. The good doctors have been directed to Jema', who knows the community well, in order to decide who deserves their help. 'How many kidney patients are there round here?' Jema' thinks and gives the number. 'Do they have relatives? Are they healthy? Good – we will transplant them.' Jema' looks shocked and remains silent. 'We will transport them all to Cairo free of charge.

We'll take a healthy kidney from the relatives and transplant them all.' Jema' is speechless. 'Right – that's settled then.' The urologist instructs Jema': 'Draw up a list of all the patients and their relatives and we'll make the arrangements.' He exudes satisfaction at a job well done. Then turning to me, in front of Jema', he says coldly in English (which Jema' speaks well), 'Make sure he knows what we want.' Jema' says nothing: he and I leave in silence. After a minute we look at each other and laugh – mirthless laughter, the only possible response.

Story 3 (2009). One night, a StKP ranger is up on Jebel Musa checking conditions, when a group of tourists and guides appear, all in disarray. One guide had lagged behind the rest at the start; his tourist took longer to mount his camel. In fact, the tourist never mounted at all, but fell off the other side and was left behind. The guide, unaware, had trudged onward for half an hour before looking back. 'Oh no! He's gone!' he cried, seeing the empty saddle. 'The spirits have taken him!' The others were spooked. 'The spirits are out tonight – can't be too careful!' At a bend in the path they stop, and one tourist slips over the wall for a comfort break. His guide looks back. 'Oh no! Now mine's gone! They've taken him too!' The guides confer in panic and refuse to go on: the afrīt *(spirits) have made it too dangerous. But luckily the ranger is there – Jema' leans forward for the punchline – 'Don't worry', the ranger says. 'The Protectorate will investigate.'*

Story 4 (2006). Jema' is en route to St Katherine from the Suez coast when he spots workers from an Egyptian construction company attacking a venerable acacia on their site. The trees are highly valued by Bedu and grow very slowly. He stops and with his companion gets out to berate the workers, who ignore him. He calls the Protectorate to let them know what is happening, expecting them to intervene. The next day he calls at the Protectorate office to urge them to take action to save the tree. They say they will look into it. On the third day Jema' drives back to the coast. Nothing has been done, and the tree is uprooted at the roadside, destroyed.

Story 1 is an act of moral resistance. It is not just another tale of corruption, which are legion. Jema''s response moves from frustrated acceptance of the policeman's ploy to anger at his effrontery, which is where such stories usually stop. This one goes two steps further, however. First, by giving the policeman money for food, Jema' reverses the power dynamic of the encounter: he leaves having established a superior position. Then, in the telling, his response moves on to the higher moral ground of one who, understanding all, forgives all. The story reverses the usual direction of demeaning judgement, allowing the teller to claim moral authority for the Bedu. In Story 2 Jema' is not teller but protagonist. It shows his passive resistance to an arrogance so brazen it could not be answered in words. By remaining silent Jema' refused to accept charity offered with overbearing insensitivity.

Stories 3 and 4 bear directly on the primary way in which, I shall argue, Bedu differentiate themselves from 'the Egyptians': by rediscovering, or reinventing, a role as guardians of nature. Story 3 targets credulous Bedu as well as Egyptians:

we laugh at their foolishness, but the punchline reverses the target. The Protectorate has power to control the Bedu because its regulations are based on science: rangers have university degrees and run an education programme for Bedu. Yet in this story, instead of dismissing tales of 'spirits' as superstition, the Protectorate takes them seriously. 'The Egyptians' are shown to be no more rational than the Bedu they claim to educate, robbing them of legitimacy and thus redressing the balance of moral authority. The same point is made in Story 4, but more acutely. The Protectorate is responsible for protecting the environment, but it neglects its duty. It is the Bedu who see and respond to nature and take an active role in caring for it, while 'the Egyptians' ignore both nature and the Bedu themselves.

A belief in this Bedouin role as guardians of nature permeates the thinking of so many people who spoke with me that I came to see it as central to how Bedu give their lives meaning today. I now examine how Bedu have stressed different aspects of their identity, both to differentiate themselves from those they experience as occupiers, and to draw meaning from aspects of historical identity in order to make sense of the present. I present evidence from my research demonstrating the continuing centrality of nature in shaping both Bedouin identity and relations with the state.

Identity as Resistance

Before 1967, Bedu in South Sinai practised Islam in a singular way. They rarely prayed regularly, but centred their practice on annual pilgrimages to local shrines which reinforced tribal as much as religious identity (Marx 1977). However, in the mid-1970s, in response to the promiscuity of holidaymakers in newly built Israeli resorts, they became more obviously orthodox. Bedu at the coast tuned their radios to the sermons of Saudi imams, mosques sprang up, and Bedu took to praying five times a day (Lavie 1990). Their adopted piety was a conscious act of resistance to behaviour that offended their moral values; a selective emphasis on an aspect of their identity that differentiated them from their occupiers.

Abu-Lughod (1990) argues convincingly that young Awlād ʿAli on Egypt's north coast turn to conservative Islam to resist both the norms of their Bedouin elders and Egyptian culture defined by a westernized elite. However, in South Sinai politicized Islam has little appeal (Gilbert and al Jebaali 2012). Bedu exhibit varying degrees of piety, but faith has lost its power to differentiate them from the dominant group. So too has language. South Sinai dialects are significantly different from colloquial Egyptian Arabic and serve as a social marker as in other Arab-speaking contexts (Holes 1995). However, while an educated Egyptian may affect to find Bedouin dialect impenetrable, no Bedu fails to understand barked commands at checkpoints. Bedouin children are taught in Egyptian Arabic by Egyptian teachers; and the judicious adoption of Egyptian idiom – smoothing relations with agents of the state by lessening their Otherness – is one of many tactics Bedu use to negotiate modern life.

How else, then, might they set themselves apart? Dalby and Mackenzie (1997: 102) explain that a community's resistance to a contemporary external threat may take the form of reconstructing the past, especially where past traditions have been diminished by modernization. This is what Hall and du Gay (1996: 4)[13] mean by the 'invention of tradition' to construct adaptive identities. Prys Morgan (1983) describes how the political suppression of Welsh nationalism led in the 19th century to the invention of a folk tradition; romantic mythologizing providing a future vision for people whose culture had been suppressed. Rather than asserting their identity through faith, I believe South Sinai Bedu today draw on an identification with the natural world established through the practice of pre-development livelihoods. In so doing they *re*invent an element of Bedouin identity that persists despite the dramatic decline of those livelihoods.

Environmental Identity: Nature = Life

It is challenging to speak of the Bedu's relationship with their environment in a way that avoids romanticizing on the one hand, and borrowing from narratives of primitivism on the other. The process of managing scarce resources has allowed detailed empirical knowledge and ecological expertise to accumulate over many generations (Perevolotsky 1981; Perevolotsky et al. 1989; Hobbs 1995; Zalat and Gilbert 2008). It is clear from everyday talk and observation as well as my interviews that the natural world impinges constantly on Bedouin life and priorities: the majority of Bailey's (2004) 1,350 proverbs are concerned with it, and 58 per cent of my respondents named natural features as the best-loved aspects of their home. However, such observations are too often used to bolster narratives of the 'Bedu-as-noble-savage', representing them as 'an endangered species' (Hobbs 1996: 12) and legitimizing their consignment, along with their aspirations, to the realm of conservation.

The modern Western separation of 'nature' and 'culture' is culturally conditioned, and does not correspond to the way other people see and categorize their world. Bedu make no such distinction. 'The environment' is the place they live in, the surroundings that facilitate or hamper their ability to conduct their lives alongside its other elements: weather, plants, trees, wildlife, people. I learned this lesson empirically at the start of my fieldwork, when in answer to my request for an alternative term for *bīʿa* (nature, environment) my colleague doggedly insisted on *ḥayā*, meaning simply 'life'. He did not assign the landscape 'out there' to a different category, as I did. Local people and researchers have vastly different systems for evaluating the value of plants, animals and natural processes (West et al. 2006: 16). Lavie (1990: 98 ff.) recounts Bedouin mockery of Israeli academics who came to Sinai to study mice and even rocks, gushing over the beauty of the landscape. A Mzeina sheikh told an Israeli ranger: 'It's great that your government pays you for playing "Nature" ... with [your pretty] red clouds ... . You put your money in the bank. But we have no bank. All we ever

had is this Sinai and that's it. *And for our life we have to take from it*' (my emphasis).

Bedu, then, see people and nature as belonging to an interdependent system which they can legitimately draw on as needed. There is universal acknowledgement that people hunted in the past to feed their families; some admit (Hobbs et al.1998) that ibex populations suffered as a result. People still pasture their flocks in the landscape where they can, and treat themselves and their livestock with medicinal plants. With entitlement to use natural resources, however, comes responsibility towards them, as indicated by customary practice: restricting hunting, grazing and tree-cutting, and providing pools so wildlife can drink. 'Abd el Baset (2005) investigates environmental perceptions in the Jebeliya. Her respondents indicate that they view themselves from an early age as part of an ecological community that includes people. 'Abd El Baset (2005: 30) notes that: '[Respondents] were adamant about wild animals' right to live, and how they were not dangerous as they had their own habitat ... . [W]ild animals do not represent a great danger for them as long as they live in their own place ... . The animals were only active at night time.' Wildlife, in this vision, has its own temporal and spatial 'place' within shared time and space. Predators that stray outside their proper place receive no quarter (Reiss 2001: 53). This approach enmeshes, as Peet and Watts (1996: 263) express it, 'the social construction of nature' with the 'natural construction of the social'. A Tarabīn man remarked to me: 'The Bedu have lived here throughout history. An Egyptian can come here and work, but if we go to Cairo we cannot live our life. *It is unnatural*' (my emphasis).

The environment is one of many elements that, historically and currently, have affected Bedu, and in response to which they have adapted their aspirations and lifestyle. That said, the Bedouin environmental imaginary ineluctably conditions people's view of themselves as being in contiguous relationship with the natural world. As it was expressed to me, their environment and their life can be denoted by the same word, just as the word *ta'bān* (tired, exhausted, sick) is used to describe their gardens parched from lack of water, and their own feelings when they contemplate them. A young Awlād Sa'īd man from a remote wadi put it this way: '*I love it here, partly because it's so quiet, but also because there is a connection between people, the animals and the mountains. You can't get that in town.*'

This Bedouin view of nature is *ecocentric:* according to Stets and Biga (2003: 409) this signifies that 'human beings ... are seen as one among many other species and objects (such as rivers and forests) that are of worth. When humans act, they must consider environmental forces that may impose constraints on human affairs ... . (T)hose holding an ecocentric view would be concerned with the environment, define their relationship to it as interdependent, and be active and involved in the biophysical world.' Moreover, they add, 'persons who claim an environmental identity ... are [not self-interested but] concerned about the

environment for reasons that are other-oriented. Behaving in an environmentally irresponsible manner can hurt other humans and the biosphere more generally.' An environmental identity, then, is consistent with the resource-sharing and resource-conservation practices espoused by Bedu, and with their emphasis on group rather than individual welfare. 43 per cent of my respondents volunteered that if they could do only one thing they would restore the environment, especially water, for the good of their community. Several added specifically: '*So people can grow things again*'.

Bedu in St Katherine recognized in their Israeli occupiers a similarly ecocentric view.[14] However, Egyptian environmental policy is grounded in *anthropocentric* high modernism (Mitchell 2002; Gilbert 2011a). An anthropocentric view means the environment does not have intrinsic value; instead, it is a means to human ends (Stets and Biga 2003: 410). This approach is well illustrated by the vision statement of StKP itself, which pursues 'the conservation and sustainable development of its natural and cultural resources ... [ensuring] long-term local and national benefits for the people of Egypt' (StKPMU 2003: 3). For the modernizing Egyptian state 'the environment' is a resource to be used for human benefit. For the Bedu it is the indivisible medium of their life, a milieu from which they see themselves as inseparable.

This opposition creates constant tensions in the arena of St Katherine, where those officially charged with conservation have neither the resources to conserve nature effectively nor the power to prevent its degradation by modernizers. Every new line of streetlights, every new block of flats is perceived by the Bedu as an affront, not only to their environment but to themselves as part of it. Dalby and Mackenzie (1997: 101) comment that the process of specifying a threat is intrinsically also a process of specifying that which is endangered. By this means the despoiling of nature has increased people's consciousness of their relationship to it. Bedouin environmental identity has acquired new significance, both as a differentiating factor and as a diagnostic of power (Abu-Lughod 1990: 41). Bedouin opposition to state-led development is seen most clearly in the views people expressed to me about the StKP.

St Katherine Protectorate Singled Out

In April 1996 Prime Ministerial Decree No. 904 defined StKP's boundaries and initiated a seven-year development programme supported by €7.5 million of EU aid (StKPMU 2003). While managed by the Nature Conservation Sector of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, the Protectorate's administration is located with the Governorate of South Sinai, which also has responsibility for planning, industry, housing, road-building and tourism. Its authority overrules the Protectorate and may overturn its decisions (Grainger and Gilbert 2008: 27): thus although the Protectorate was given 'police powers' to enforce legislation, two 100 km^2 industrial zones were swiftly set up within its boundaries (StKPMU

2003: 10–11). From the outset, the PA's capacity to enforce environmental policy was structurally weakened.

Managed by an experienced European conservationist, the Protectorate initially addressed the social implications of its conservation brief. StKP's EU-funded phase consulted and employed Bedu, delivered services they needed, and recognized their right to compensation for the 'opportunity costs' of conservation. It took the Bedu seriously, winning its management lasting local respect. But this positive relationship changed in 2003 with the Protectorate's transfer to Egyptian management and funding. Services deteriorated due to central underfunding: contemporary figures from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature show the global average of PA staffing as 27 staff per 1000 km^2 and the average for Africa as 70. In Egypt, the average was 5.3 staff per 1000 km^2; in StKP it was 1.2 (NCS 2006: 18). In the same period, in contrast with the United Nations Environment Programme's recommendation of U.S.$520 per km^2 as the minimum annual investment for sustainable PA management, Egyptian expenditure averaged U.S.$19. In the StKP, a flagship park and World Heritage Site, it was U.S.$12 per km^2 (NCS 2006: 25).

Community relations deteriorated – unrecognized by the Protectorate itself (Fouda et al. 2006). The reason, I argue, was the replacement of an international conservation discourse that recognized the knowledge and rights of indigenous people with an evolutionist national discourse that viewed them as troublesome and primitive. This discourse is exemplified by Protectorate efforts to tap the ecological expertise of the Bedu, rebranding it as 'Indigenous Knowledge' to meet current conservation prescriptions, while attempting to 're-educate' the Bedu in environmental protection. It is visible, too, in persistent narratives of Bedouin destructiveness through 'overgrazing' the Protectorate, an assumption that has survived dramatic falls in flock size, widespread confinement of livestock and evidence of low grazing impact produced by rangers themselves (Gilbert 2013).

Egyptian conservation is part of a nation-building project that seeks to assimilate an 'improved' Bedouin population into a modernized state (Gilbert 2013). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the most important single perception emerging from the data analysis in this study was negative assessment of the Protectorate, its services and its impact on the environment. Whilst my data revealed diverse attitudes and perceptions, this negative response to state-led conservation emerged as the most significant single perceptual factor – the more remarkably since I avoided leading questions about the Protectorate, or any that asked people to evaluate it. I asked simply whether people lived inside or outside its boundaries; if inside, what services it might provide and how, if at all, it affected them. The questions often unleashed a torrent of ill feeling exceeding any other subject but 'the Egyptians' in general.[15]

This finding emerged from analysis of answers concerned only with people's perceptions. Multivariate analysis of both perceptual and factual variables

together revealed a further association between attitude to the Protectorate and respondents' location. People who lived in remoter areas were associated with approval of StKP, positive assessment of its impact on the environment and services, and more positive views of Bedu–state relations. The Protectorate then still provided health and veterinary services in some remote communities, and several people expressed appreciation of those, as well as the freedom and lack of oversight they enjoyed. However, the reverse was also true: that people in urbanized settings or close to South Sinai's only road (a prime site of state control) tended to be negatively disposed toward the Protectorate and its impacts, and unhappy with Bedu–state relations.

The strength of anti-Protectorate feeling indicates that something more is at stake than mere dissatisfaction with services. The failure of conservation matters more to Bedu than other failures. Of all the complaints made about other aspects of 'development' – education, healthcare, even policing – nothing matched the depth of resentment expressed towards the Protectorate. It is, I believe, not a situational but an existential response, to a devaluing of nature that people perceive as extending to them. The following comments, made by senior members of two tribes outside St Katherine, are representative, if more forceful than most: '*The maḥmiya* [Protectorate] *is zero – crap!*' a Sheikh exclaimed. '*They're supposed to look after the environment but they do nothing. Under the Israelis it was different – they were great for the environment. And when it was managed by foreigners it was fine – it's just under the Egyptians that it's become useless.*' Another went further: '*The Protected Areas do nothing in the whole of Sinai. They're just a joke. They're little Egyptian people – they get themselves an office and a car and go about. They just enjoy themselves, staying in their cars and offices. But nature here is all fucked up! Come out with me in the mountains and I'll show you! This is Bedouin work, to go into the mountains, the sea, the Coloured Canyon, to look after nature, make sure no-one cuts trees. The Egyptians just enjoy themselves, and nature gets fucked.*'[16]

Discussion and Conclusion

Romance and Irony

Bedouin environmental identity draws on the past to make sense of the present – a process well adapted to the paradoxes of modern Bedouin life (see Shryock's 2004 analysis of narratives of Bedouin hospitality in Jordan). It is in a sense a romantic enterprise, invoking a narrative of a harmonious past in which ibex and leopard roamed free and everyone loved each other. The casting of Bedu as environmental angels entails a degree of irony: with consumer goods a recent arrival no customary law governs waste disposal, and Bedouin settlements are often as littered with rusty cans and broken bottles as any Egyptian locale. This does not detract from the power of the idea. Stets and Biga (2003) argue that the

prominence of an identity depends upon the level of commitment to it and support for it in a community, and the extent to which it brings intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. The extrinsic response to Bedu is generally negative whatever their behaviour, making behaviour almost irrelevant: as Salzman (1980: 9) comments: 'A detailed account of Bedouin ideology would provide a good number of assertions which point to group unity and functioning but seem to have little basis in behavioral reality.' What matters today is the social cohesion reproduced by rediscovering environmental identity as an act of resistance.

The counter-myth can in any case be overstated. Since the resumption of Egyptian rule, commentators have consistently reported a loss of interest in conservation among Bedu – possibly to justify conservation interventions (e.g. Hobbs 1996; Hobbs et al. 1998; StKPMU 2003). It has been assumed that customary resource management (known locally as *ḥelf* – grazing areas protected under oath) was a thing of the past. However, my observations were quite different. Over half the people able to apply conservation measures did so. Of the active conservers, 80 per cent were older men; however, one-third of the younger men also reported using *ḥelf*, suggesting that in those families where flocks have been maintained, knowledge of the rules is transmitted along with animal husbandry. Several people mentioned the existence of *ḥelf* in their area even though they had no flock themselves. Areas of grazing rotation are well established, annually confirmed by sheikhs' meetings, and generally respected.[17] This suggests that reports of the death of Bedouin environmental responsibility have been exaggerated. A renewal of environmental identity may be a recent response, but it is arguable that the Bedu-as-conservationist never went away.

The second irony is that those who now stress this identity most forcefully are those whose dependence on nature is receding the fastest. People in the wadis who have maintained agropastoral livelihoods, even in an attenuated form, enjoy a greater sense of freedom and wellbeing, despite having access to less cash and fewer facilities, and tend to have a broadly positive outlook. They feel less need to idealize the past because they are still, to some extent, living within its dynamics. Those in the village or on the road, in contrast, are more removed from 'traditional' roles and seek validation as individuals and as a community in the ideal of Bedouin stewardship of nature. Cohen (1985: 99) notes that 'the re-assertion of community ... is often accomplished through precisely those idioms which these circumstances threaten with redundancy'. People in St Katherine have learned from experience that they, and those of their occupiers who might have been their allies, are powerless to stop 'development' from denaturing their environment. By asserting their environmental identity they are trying, against the odds, to prevent it denaturing themselves.

Conclusion

The conservation apparatus in South Sinai has been experienced by Bedu as a means more of control than of environmental protection. The visible failure of

state-appointed guardians of the environment to protect it leads Bedu to view today's Protectorate as merely another agent of arbitrary authority, charged with controlling and assimilating them into mainstream Egyptian culture. The structural marginalization of Bedu means they cannot compete for jobs with the Nile Valley Egyptians settling in increasing numbers in the region. The result is growing inequality, with the poverty experienced by many Bedu going unrecorded and unacknowledged by the state. In St Katherine itself and near the road, continual contact with the dominant community and subjection to state authority create stress that may contribute to the higher levels of self-reported illness I found there (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009; Gilbert 2011a). The introduction, through 'development' and tourism, of a westernized consumerism creates further tensions, leading to a polarization in Bedouin society between those who have adapted successfully and the many who have not. Eighty-five per cent of my respondents concluded that life for the Bedu had changed for the worse.

In response, people find ways of asserting their identity that do not run foul of the security apparatus. For some this involves simply lampooning Nile Valley Egyptians. Others compose poems or tell stories that restore moral authority to their Bedouin protagonists. But the strongest response that emerged from my research was a tendency to assert the role of Bedu as guardians of nature, in opposition to those who are charged with that duty but who fail to fulfil it. Bedu single out today's Protectorate as an object of particular scorn and place new emphasis on differentiating themselves from 'the Egyptians' by reinventing an environmental identity as an act of symbolic resistance. This is due, I have argued, to the Bedu's view of themselves as part of their environment, and their resentment of a neglect that they feel, with good reason, extends to them.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The 2011/12 parliamentary elections in South Sinai, by contrast, saw unprecedented Bedouin engagement following a programme of Bedouin-led meetings run by the

Community Foundation for South Sinai, of which the author is Founder-Chair. See Gilbert and al Jebaali (2012). http://www.southsinaifoundation.org/.

2. This is the best current estimate based on unpublished South Sinai *residence* statistics (i.e. excluding unregistered migrant workers in the tourist trade who more than double the number). The Governorate's figure is 68,000 (2009, unpublished), and the figure in the 2006 census is 80,000 (http://www.msrintranet.capmas.gov.eg/). Less than half of these are designated 'rural'. Rurality may be taken as a rough proxy for Bedu, who are not separately censused. I suggest a figure of 40,000 – at the upper end of the range due to the large numbers of unregistered Bedu, though informed Bedu suggest it may be as high as 50,000 (Mohammed Khedr, pers. comm).

3. My husband, Francis Gilbert, with his Egyptian colleague Samy Zalat, has led an ecological research group in St Katherine since 1986.

4. My Ph.D. fieldwork was conducted between 2007 and 2010 while living in St Katherine. With the help of my Bedouin field assistant, Mohammed Khedr al Jebaali, 122 individuals were interviewed in Arabic, usually in their own home, using a wide-ranging, semi-structured questionnaire. Eighty-two households were also surveyed as to consumer goods and services and food consumption. The resulting qualitative and quantitative data were subjected to Principal Component Analysis, providing a detailed picture of attitudes as well as factual data (Gilbert 2011a).

5. With support from the Leverhulme Trust I am currently interviewing Bedouin women about child and family health, investigating associations between child health status and the ongoing practice of agropastoral livelihoods.

6. All verbatim quotes can be found in my Ph.D. thesis, as can information on tests of statistical significance. I have not referenced them separately in this article but refer interested readers to my thesis, which is available electronically from the University of Manchester.

7. The original plan was based on Dames and Moore (1981). The new plan was announced by Prime Minister Hisham Qandil and adopted by Cabinet on 20 June 2013. The ensuing political upheaval makes its future uncertain.

8. In Taba, 7 October 2004; Sharm el-Sheikh, 23 July 2005; and Dahab, 6 April 2006.

9. The Chair of a respected national foundation told me it has abandoned pro-democracy work in favour of pure welfare, for fear of state reprisal (Dr Soheir al Masry, pers. comm.).

10. May Kamel, freelance journalist, eyewitness account, pers. comm.

11. Mohammed Khedr, pers. comm. The incident, on 26 June 2013, was observed by scores of Bedu in long queues at the St Katherine petrol station waiting for fuel. Images of the wounded man quickly circulated on Facebook. It provoked the retaliatory kidnapping of two police officers, later released unharmed.

12. Thanks to my ability, as a female anthropologist, to 'live between genders' (Lavie 1990: 15), I have listened to and participated in many all-male fireside discussions incorporating both poetry and politics. Local poets enjoy great respect, but anyone may erupt into verse: a three-hour taxi ride was once filled with a paean of praise for my husband in improvised rhyming couplets, and my NGO colleague was thanked for a grant in a spontaneous ode to our Foundation.

13. Following Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

14. The preservation of Sinai's nature and Bedouin culture were part of Israel's nation-building project (Lavie 1988).
15. Since I asked no direct questions about state authority, these attitudes were reflected in my analysis only as broader comments on 'Bedu–state relations'.
16. This interview was conducted in English: the speaker's strong language is quoted verbatim.
17. Mohammed Khedr and Faraj Mahmoud, my experienced Jebaali colleagues – May 2013, pers. comm.

References

'Abd el Baset, Y. 2005. [Untitled]. Unpublished M.Sc. dissertation. Institute of Education, London.

Abu-Lughod, L. 1985. 'Honor and the Sentiments of Loss in a Bedouin Society', *American Ethnologist* 12(2): 245–61.

Abu-Lughod, L. 1990. 'The Romance of Resistance: Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women', *American Ethnologist* 17(1): 41–55.

Abu-Rabi'a, A. 2006. 'A Century of Education: Bedouin Contestation with Formal Education in Israel'. In *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa Entering the 21st Century*, ed. D. Chatty. E.J. Brill, Leiden, pp. 865–82.

Altorki, S. and D. Cole 2006. 'Land and Identity among Awlad 'Ali Bedouin: Egypt's Northwest Coast'. In *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa Entering the 21st Century*, ed. D. Chatty. E.J. Brill, Leiden, pp. 634–53.

Appadurai, A. 2004. 'The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition'. In *Culture and Public Action*, ed. V. Rao and M. Walton. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Aronson, D. 1980. 'Must Nomads Settle?' In *When Nomads Settle*, ed. P.C. Salzman. Bergin Publishers, Inc., New York, pp. 173–84.

Aziz, H. 2000. 'Employment in a Bedouin Community: The Case of the Town of Dahab in South Sinai', *Nomadic Peoples* 4(2): 28–47.

Bailey, C. 2002. *Bedouin Poetry from Sinai and the Negev*. 2nd edition. Saqi Books, London.

Bailey, C. 2004. *A Culture of Desert Survival: Bedouin Proverbs from Sinai and the Negev*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

CHIRS (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies) 2013. 'Strangling Civil Society with Repressive Laws: Morsi's Bill to Nationalize Civic Activity Must Be Retracted'. 10/02/2013, http://www.cihrs.org/.

Chatty, D. 2002. 'Animal Reintroduction Projects in the Middle East: Conservation without a Human Face'. In *Conservation and Mobile Indigenous Peoples: Displacement, Forced Settlement and Sustainable Development*, ed. D. Chatty and M. Colchester. Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford.

Chatty, D. 2003. 'Environmentalism in the Syrian Badia'. In *Ethnographies of Conservation: Environmentalism and the Distribution of Privilege*, ed. D. Anderson and E. Berglund. Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, pp. 87–100.

Chatty, D. 2006. 'Nomads of the Middle East and North Africa Facing the Twenty-first Century'. In *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa Entering the 21st Century*, ed. D. Chatty. E.J. Brill, Leiden, pp. 1–32.

Cohen, A. 1985. *The Social Construction of Community*. Tavistock, London.

Dalby, S. and F. Mackenzie 1997. 'Reconceptualizing Local Community: Environment, Identity and Threat', *Area* 29(2): 99–108.

Dames and Moore. 1981. *Sinai Development Study – Phase 1. A Plan for the Preservation, Enhancement and Management of the Sensitive Natural Resources of Sinai*. Working Paper No. 5, Advisory Committee for Reconstruction. Ministry of Development, Cairo.

El-Tabei, H. 2013. 'Outrage as Egypt Court Sentences 43 NGO Workers'. 05/06/2013, http://uk.news.yahoo.com/.

Finkelstein, I. and A. Perevolotsky 1990. 'Processes of Sedentarization and Nomadization in the History of Sinai and the Negev', *Basor* 279: 67–88.

Fouda, M., J. Grainger, W. Salama, S. Baha El Din, D. Paleczny, S. Zalat and F. Gilbert 2006. *Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Egypt's Protected Area System (RAPPAM)*. Nature Conservation Sector/Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, Cairo.

Fowler, A. 2008. 'Development and the New Security Agenda: W(h)ither(ing) NGO Alternatives?' In *Can NGOs Make a Difference? The Challenge of Development Alternatives*, ed. A. Bebbington, S. Hickey and D. Mitlin. Zed Books, London and New York, pp. 111–30.

Fratkin, E. 1997. 'Pastoralism: Governance and Development Issues', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 235–61.

Gardner, A. 2000. 'At Home in South Sinai', *Nomadic Peoples* 4(2): 48–67.

Gilbert, H.C. 2011a. "*Everything has its price": Conservation, Development and Bedu in St Katherine Protectorate, South Sinai*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester.

Gilbert, H.C. 2011b. '"*This is not our life, it's just a copy of other people's*": Bedu and the Price of "Development" in South Sinai', *Nomadic Peoples* 15(2): 7–32.

Gilbert, H.C. 2013. '"Bedouin Overgrazing" and Conservation Politics: Challenging Ideas of Pastoralist Destruction in South Sinai', *Biological Conservation* 160: 59–69.

Gilbert, H.C. and M. al Jebaali 2012. '"Not philanthropists but revolutionaries" – Promoting Bedouin Participation in the "New Egypt": A Case Study from South Sinai'. Voices on Arab Philanthropy and Civic Engagement Working Paper. John D Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement. American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

Glassner, M.I. 1974. 'The Bedouin of Southern Sinai under Israeli Administration', *Geographical Review* 64(1): 31–60.

Grainger, J. and F. Gilbert 2008. 'Around the Sacred Mountain: The St Katherine Protectorate in South Sinai, Egypt', In *Protected Landscapes and Cultural and Spiritual Values*, ed. J.M. Mallarach. International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Kasparek Verlag, Heidelberg, pp. 21–37.

Green, M. 2006. 'International Development, Social Analysis, ... and Anthropology?' In *Applications of Anthropology*, ed. S. Pink. Berghahn Books, Oxford, pp. 110–27.

Hall, S. and P. du Gay, eds 1996. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Sage, London.

Hobbs, J.J. 1995. *Mount Sinai*. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Hobbs, J.J. 1996. 'Speaking with People in Egypt's St Katherine National Park', *Geographical Review* 86(1): 1–21.

Hobbs, J.J., J. Grainger and I.Y. El-Bastawisi 1998. 'Inception of Bedouin Support Programme in the St Katherine Natural Protectorate, Sinai, Egypt', *Mountain Research and Development* 18(3): 235–48.

Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger, eds 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Holes, C. 1995. 'Community, Dialect and Urbanization in the Arabic-speaking Middle East', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 58: 270–87.

Holes, C. and S.S. Abu Athera 2007. 'George Bush – Bedouin Poet', *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10(3): 273–89.

Holes, C. and S.S. Abu Athera 2009. *Poetry and Politics in Contemporary Bedouin Society.* American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

ICG (International Crisis Group) 2007. *Egypt's Sinai Question. Middle East/North Africa*. Report No. 61, 30 January 2007. http://www.crisisgroup.org/.

Jakubowska, L. 2000. 'Finding Ways to Make a Living: Employment among the Negev Bedouin', *Nomadic Peoples* 4(2): 94–105.

Lavie, S. 1988. 'Sinai for the Coffee Table: Birds, Bedouins and Desert Wanderlust'. [Review of Rabinowitz, D. 1988. *Ru'ah Sinai (The Sinai Spirit)*.] *MERIP Middle East Report* 150: 40–44.

Lavie, S. 1990. *The Poetics of Military Occupation: Mzeina Allegories of Bedouin Identity under Israeli and Egyptian Rule*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Lummis, C.D. 1992. 'Equality'. In *The Development Dictionary*, ed. W. Sachs. Zed Books, London and New York.

Marx, E. 1967. *Bedouin of the Negev*. University of Manchester Press, Manchester.

Marx, E. 1977. 'Communal and Individual Pilgrimage: The Region of Saints' Tombs in South Sinai'. In *Regional Cults*, ed. E. Werbner. Academic Press, London.

Marx, E. 1980. 'Wage Labour and Tribal Economy of the Bedouin in the South Sinai'. In: *When Nomads Settle,* ed. P.C. Salzman. Bergin Publishers, Inc., New York.

Marx, E. 2003. 'Nomads and Cities: The Development of a Conception'. In *Shifts and Drifts in Nomadic–Sedentary Relations*, ed. S. Leder and D. Streck. Reichert, Wiesbaden.

Marx, E. 2006. 'Political Economy of Middle Eastern And North African Pastoral Nomads'. In *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa Entering the 21st Century*, ed. D. Chatty. E.J. Brill, Leiden, pp. 78–97.

Mitchell, T. 2002. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Technopolitics, Modernity*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Morgan, P. 1983. 'From Death to a View'. In *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Murray, G.W. 1935. *Sons of Ishmael*. Routledge, London.

Nassef, M., A. Anderson and C. Hesse 2009. *Pastoralism and Climate Change: Enabling Adaptive Capacity*. Overseas Development Institute, London.

NCS (Nature Conservation Sector) 2006. *Protected Areas of Egypt: Towards the Future*. Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, Cairo.

Peet, R. and M. Watts, eds 1996. *Liberation Ecologies*. Routledge, London and New York.

PEMA (Centre for Project Management and Macroeconomic Analysis) 2013. 'The Prospects and Challenges of Sinai's Development', *Impact* 11(1): 1–6.

Perevolotsky, A. 1981. 'Orchard Agriculture in the High Mountain Region of Southern Sinai', *Human Ecology* 9(3): 331–57.

Perevolotsky, A. 1987. 'Territoriality and Resource-Sharing among the Bedouin of Southern Sinai: A Socio-Ecological Interpretation', *Journal of Arid Environments* 13: 153–61.

Perevolotsky, A., A. Perevolotsky and I. Noy-Meir 1989. 'Environmental Adaptation and Ecological Change in a Pastoral Mountain Society', *Mountain Research and Development* 9(2): 153–64.

Peters, E. 1990. *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Rabinowitz, D. 1985. 'Themes in the Economy of the Bedouin of South Sinai in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17: 211–28.

Rahnema, M. 1992. 'Poverty'. In *The Development Dictionary*, ed. W. Sachs. Zed Books, London and New York, pp. 158–76.

Rao, V. and M. Walton, eds 2004. *Culture and Public Action*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Reiss, M.J.R. 2001. 'Perceptions of the Environment among the Gebeliya Bedouin', *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 17: 47–54.

Sachs, W., ed. 1992. *The Development Dictionary*. Zed Books, London and New York.

Salzman, P.C. 1980. 'Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response'. In *When Nomads Settle*, ed. P.C. Salzman. Bergin Publishers, Inc., New York.

Salzman, P.C. 1999. 'Is Inequality Universal?', *Current Anthropology* 40(1): 31–61.

Scott, J. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

SEAM (Support for Environmental Assessment and Management Programme). 2005. *South Sinai Environment and Development Profile*. Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, Cairo.

Sen, A. 2006. *Identity and Violence*. Penguin Books, London.

Shryock, A. 2004. 'The New Jordanian Hospitality: House, Host and Guest in the Culture of Public Display', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46(1): 35–62.

Sowers, J. 2007. 'Nature Reserves and Authoritarian Rule in Egypt: Embedded Autonomy Revisited', *Journal of Environmental Development* 16: 375–97.

Stets, J.E. and C.F. Biga 2003. 'Bringing Identity Theory into Environmental Sociology', *Sociological Theory* 21: 398–423.

StKPMU (St Katherine Protected Area Management Unit) 2003. *St Katherine Protected Area Management Plan 2003–2008*. (Unpublished) Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, Cairo.

West, P., J. Igoe and D. Brockington 2006. 'Parks and Peoples: The Social Impact of Protected Areas', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35(2): 251–94.

Westall, S. 2013. 'Egypt Raises Alert Level in Sinai over Jihadist Fears'. 09/03/2013, http://www.reuters.com/.

Wilkinson, R. and K. Pickett 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. Allen Lane, London.

Zalat, S. and F. Gilbert 2008. *Gardens of a Sacred Landscape: Bedouin Heritage and Natural History in the High Mountains of Sinai*. American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

Hilary Gilbert is a Research Fellow at the University of Nottingham, having completed her Ph.D. in 2010 at the University of Manchester. Her research investigates the impact of development and conservation on South Sinai Bedu, and she lives for part of each year in St Katherine. Hilary's work combines research and practice: she is Executive Chair and co-founder of both the Community Foundation for South Sinai, registered in Egypt, and its U.K. partner the South Sinai Foundation (http://www.southsinaifoundation.org/). Email: hilary.gilbert@nottingham.ac.uk