Bedouin, Movement, and Environmental Change: The Harasiis of Oman

Language and Nature in Southern and Eastern Arabia

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25 April, 2019
‘Bedouin-ness’, Mobility, and Environment

• Bedu-Hadar distinction deep roots in Muslim history and historiography

• Identity and landscape of the imagined nation: hegemonic notion of the new insiders [government bureaucrats] casting the traditional inhabitants as ‘outsiders’

• Desert Environment – the landscape viewed as terra nullius - local inhabitants and their languages considered interlopers, trespassers
Herders in South East Arabia

- Desert rather then semi-arid land (<50mm per year)
- Natural resources conflicts are not intertribal
- Conflicts mainly with conservation bodies and extractive oil industry
The Jiddat il Harasiis and its People

- South Arabian speaking nomadic pastoral people of about 5,000-7,000 people
- Refuge tribe – oral history places them in the Jiddat from mid-1800s
- Raise herds of camels and goats over the 40,000 sq kilometres of waterless gravel plain
- First water wells in the Jiddat dug in 1950s by oil company
Oman Jiddat il Harasiis
Jiddat il Harasiis
Jiddat il Harasiis 1970s
Jiddat il Harasiis in the 1980s

Social housing

Co-ed School
Innovation in Herding Practices
Harasiis Herding Household Shelter

1970s

2000s
The Azabah – mobile camel camp
Celebration at Kin Group Azab
Changes to Harasiis Tribal Society

- Increased mobility of individuals
- Decreased household movements
- Increasing use of split households and temporary camps; multi-resource
- Social housing units in Oman and UAE
- Hired herders Baluchistan, Sindh
Bedouin Mobility, and Environmental Adaptation

- Tackling the pejorative attitudes to Bedouin mobility, and settlement
- Fears of loss of language as Arabic becomes hegemonic and inter-tribal settlements increase
- Concerned with challenges to their identity and belonging with oil company view of desert as ‘terra nullius’.
- ‘Belonging’ and culture transfer tied to the family Azabah