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Walking the Walk:
An Examination of Āl Murrah Bedouin's Motives for Continued Nomadism

Benjamin Mehanni

Thesis Director
E. Christian Wells, Ph.D.

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Abstract

The Āl Murrah, a Bedouin tribe in Saudi Arabia, practice nomadic pastoralism to this day. They continue to resist the pressures to settle exerted by government sponsored settlement programs, as well as the rise of a modern capitalist economy, whose growth increases the cost of living. The Āl Murrah's motives for resisting sedentarization are based on a collectivist value system that defines a high quality of life based on accessing the desert and camels' milk, having the freedom to decide when and where to herd their camels, and gaining the respect of their family and community. These factors are contingent upon the preservation of the Āl Murrah's segmented tribal structure. Conflict arises when modern sedentary societies institute policies that emphasize increasing the standard of living without taking into account the policies' effects on Bedouin quality of life. Understanding the Āl Murrah's motives for maintaining their nomadic lifestyle can help government and non-profit agencies develop programs that interact with the Bedouin in more culturally sensitive ways.

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1. Introduction

The Bedouin are Arab nomadic pastoralists living throughout the Middle East and North Africa (Figure 1). Their social structure consists of autonomous and often unrelated tribal units that maintain their herds within a specific, traditional territory. The different groups are united as Bedouin more by their shared way of life and pastoral means of subsistence than any national identity or historical relationships. The Bedouin have lived on marginal lands in extremely arid environments for thousands of years, and the constant pressure of desert survival has shaped every aspect of Bedouin society, from their organizational structure to their value system (Metz, 1992).

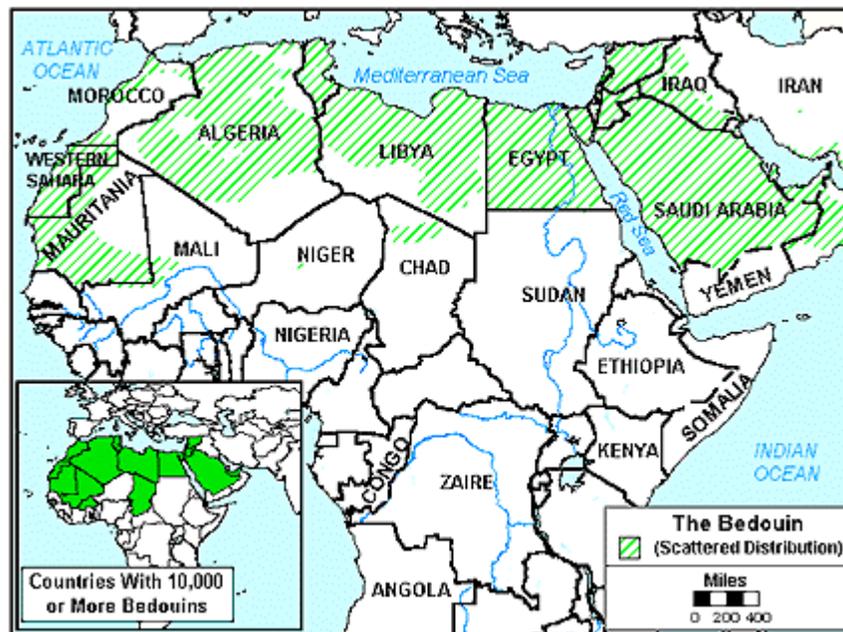


Figure 1. Political map of the Middle East and North Africa indicating Bedouin distribution.

After World War II, as colonialism in North Africa and the Middle East came to an end, traditional nomadic pastoralists faced fresh external pressure from the governments of the newly independent nations of the region, who were eager to assert control over their land and all the

peoples therein. Many of these new governments viewed the Bedouin as a nuisance and threat to their power for various reasons (Cole, 2003, p. 242). Many Bedouin tribes occupied traditional territories that spread into neighboring countries and, during their seasonal migrations, tribe members would cross, undocumented, over the border freely. This international mobility made determining the status of different Bedouin tribes' official nationalities difficult; a task which was complicated further by the fact that some Bedouin only acknowledged the authority of their own tribal leaders, ignoring the taxes and property laws of the national governments (Cole, 2003).

Rather than attempt to incorporate the Bedouin into the states where they lived by making investments in their nomadic pastoral lifestyle, the most common response of the governments and the United Nations to the Bedouin "problem" was an unquestioned and, for the most part, un-researched call for sedentarization. There were frequent, well-meaning but ill-fated efforts to "civilize" the Bedouin with government sponsored settlements, where a switch from livestock to crop production was encouraged, as well as increased availability of education and health care (Cole, 2003, p. 242). At other times there were more calculated movements, where in an effort to gain control over the territories and resources occupied by Bedouin tribes, several of the region's governments instituted strict planning, land use, and property laws designed to force Bedouin into sedentarization and urbanization by banning their traditional settlements or movements (Al-Bakri, Taylor, and Brewer, 2001, p. 260).

All of the sedentarization programs, voluntary or otherwise, had little impact on the overall numbers of Bedouin practicing nomadic pastoralism until the rise of the oil industry and the development of modern capitalist economies (Galaty and Salzman, 1981, pp. 7-9). The huge influx of cash and investment into the region, along with the accompanying increase in

population size and modernization, drove more Bedouin toward settlements than the government programs ever could, because the amount of land available for pasturage decreased drastically as mechanized irrigation and chemical fertilizers opened up new land for cultivation in areas where in the past only hardy shrubs could grow (Al-Bakri et al., 2001, pp. 258-260).

Although the forces, both economic and institutional, driving nomadic pastoralists toward sedentarization, are present and active today in Saudi Arabia, the Āl Murrah Bedouin, a tribe occupying a vast territory in central Saudi Arabia (Figure 2), who are the subject of this research, remain almost entirely nomadic, resisting the pressure to acquire full time labor jobs in the cities and oil refineries or engage in significant crop production in the oases within their territory. Numbering about 15,000, the Āl Murrah range over by far the largest and least densely populated territory of any Arabian tribe, covering approximately 250,000 square miles and including the most remote and isolated region of Arabia, the Rub' al-Khali, or Empty Quarter (Cole, 1975, p. 28). They essentially have an area the size of France exclusively to themselves. While some Bedouin tribes have converted either fully or partially to sheep and goat herding and part-time agriculture, the Āl Murrah exist on the extreme end of the nomadism-sedentarism continuum, eschewing sheep and goats in favor of their traditional milk camels, which can cover much greater distances than the smaller ruminants and survive in the extreme environment of the Empty Quarter. Their seasonal migration, following the rains from summer to fall and winter pastures, covers over 3,000 miles each year. These long migrations, combined with the extraordinary tracking and navigational skills necessary to survive in the Rub' al-Khali, have led to the Āl Murrah sometimes being referred to as the “nomads of the nomads” (Cole, 1975, p. 7).

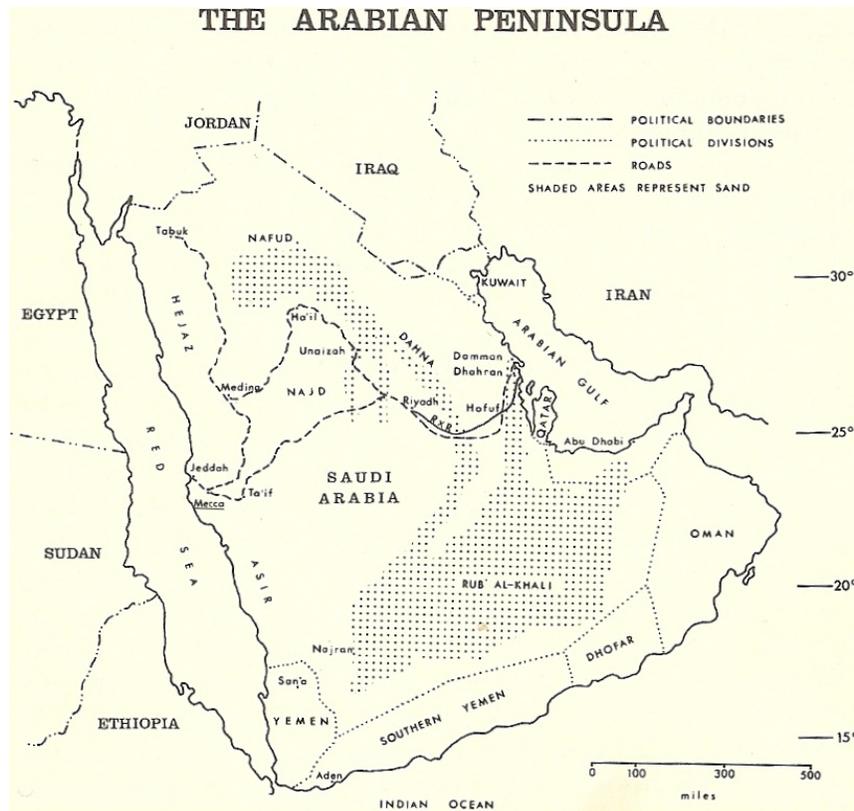


Figure 2. The Arabian peninsula, including the Rub' al-Khali, occupied by the Āl Murrah (Cole, 1975, p. 14).

Because they are so firmly entrenched in their nomadic lifestyle, perhaps more so than any other tribe today, the Āl Murrah provide the ideal research subjects for an examination of the motivation behind some Bedouin's resistance to sedentarization. While different Bedouin groups throughout the Middle East and North Africa exhibit different degrees of sedentarization, they all demonstrated resistance at one time or another to at least some aspects of sedentary life. Studying the Āl Murrah's motives can provide insight into the motivation behind other Bedouin's resistance. Here I assume that the Āl Murrah act in what they believe to be the best interest of their families' quality of life, while government sponsored sedentarization programs operate under the assumption that a sedentary lifestyle would afford them a higher quality of life. Therefore, before it is possible to determine the Āl Murrah's motives, one must first define the

quality of life that they hope to maintain or improve through nomadism, as well as define their sedentary counterparts' beliefs about which factors affect quality of life.

One of the goals of my research is to demonstrate that the Āl Murrah's unique value system, shaped by centuries of desert survival, places more emphasis on nonmonetary factors that affect quality of life than does the value system of sedentary laborers or the Saudi government. A direct comparison of the Āl Murrah Bedouin's and sedentary society's definitions of a high quality of life should show that the sedentary society, being a part of a modern consumer-driven economy, have adopted the Western view that places emphasis on increasing the standard of living as a means to increase quality of life (Nardinelli, 2008). In this research, I will also explore the apparent economic advantages and disadvantages of a sedentary lifestyle compared to a nomadic lifestyle, and attempt to determine if any differences affect quality of life in favor of one lifestyle or the other. In the end, my research evaluates the idea that the Āl Murrah's internal value system is more of a motivating factor in their resistance of sedentarization than any external influence, including politics or economics.

A better understanding of why the Āl Murrah resist sedentarization is necessary if one is to fully understand how the Āl Murrah fit into Saudi society as a whole. A firm grasp of the motivation behind the Āl Murrah's behavior could provide the necessary foundation for developing programs for education or healthcare for Bedouin groups in a way that would be beneficial to both the Bedouins and Saudi Arabians without threatening traditional Bedouin values or social structure. This information could also help aid organizations, both government and non-profit, to create programs that can be implemented effectively to fight the problems facing developing countries, such as disease or famine, with less of an impact on the cultures and

lifeways of indigenous peoples. Understanding a nomadic pastoralist's value system could also help aid organizations know when their assistance is either unneeded or unwanted.

2. Defining Quality of Life

Before attempting to define the characteristics that make up quality of life, it is useful to examine another index used to measure societal well-being: standard of living. The term "standard of living" was originally developed by economists in an attempt to simulate a measurement of happiness. Due to the impossible nature of accurately measuring a society's happiness, measurements of the standard of living are generally based on the monetary value of real income, income adjusted for the cost of living (Nardinelli, 2008). This figure can then be given as an expression of consumer products, such as refrigerators or automobiles per capita, with the assumption that more refrigerators or automobiles in a population indicates more disposable income. An increase in disposable income can in turn be expected to be accompanied by higher quality education, health care, and other products and services that contribute to a higher standard of living (Flora, 1998-99).

Researchers looking for a connection between standard of living and quality of life have demonstrated that there is neither a negative nor positive correlation between the two. One of the reasons for this disconnect between quantity of real income and quality of life is the fact that an individual's desired standard of living is largely determined by observing the standard of living of one's peers. Thus, a poor individual can be just as content with his or her standard of living as a wealthy individual, provided his or her peers share an equally poor standard of living (Flora, 1998-99). Despite this fact, economist Nardinelli's (2008) telling quote, "Although some new indexes attempt to capture the various dimensions of well-being, for most practical purposes

real income per person remains the most telling indicator,” reveals that it is still common in Western society to associate quality of life with standard of living, consciously or not. This is most likely due to the consumer based nature of Western culture. Advertising almost always works by linking the consumption of a product with an increase in quality of life. Showing a smiling actor, having fun, while using a product can make one associate it with happiness and joy, despite the fact that it is unnecessary for one’s well being (Flora, 1998-99).

This mistaken equation of quality of life with standard of living, common among Western consumption-driven economies, can be compared to the manner in which the Saudi government chooses to interact with the Āl Murrah Bedouin. Because sedentary people living in urban areas are able to purchase more goods and services than nomads or people living in rural areas, the government assumes that sedentary people in urban areas have a higher quality of life. They then try to encourage sedentarization of the Āl Murrah in a misguided attempt to increase their quality of life, when the sedentarized Bedouin may, in fact, be sacrificing their quality of life for a higher standard of living (Flora, 1998-99).

To replace standard of living as a measure of quality of life, some Western economists have attempted to create indices that take into account health and education when calculating quality of life, instead of just assuming that the Gross National Product (GNP) used to calculate the standard of living would account for such basic needs as byproducts of growth. The physical quality of life index (PQLI), for example, uses the literacy rate, infant mortality, and life expectancy at age 1 to determine the quality of life across different countries and populations (Slottje, 1991, p. 684). This index would be unfairly biased, however, underestimating the Āl Murrah’s quality of life, because there is nearly a 100 percent illiteracy rate among tribe members (Cole, 2003, p. 241). The mistaken assumption of the PQLI is that literacy is an

accurate measurement of education in all societies. While it may be true that literacy is a good measurement of the educational needs of a sedentary society, for a nomadic pastoralist without access to, or need of, writing of any kind, it is significantly more important to learn how to track animals and find water (Cole, 1975, p. 58).

Many other quality of life indices have similar shortcomings, failing to consider the requirements and values of a nomadic pastoralist society. “Concern for the quality of life is a worthwhile issue in any culture. However, researchers approaching the issue in Third World countries have relied too much on definitions of ‘quality’ derived from North American and, to a lesser extent, West European values” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 397). This observation suggests the need for a subjective definition of quality of life rather than an objective index when considering nomadism. With the standard of living shown to be relatively unimportant for determining one’s quality of life, there are several subjective factors that studies have shown to be critical for rural societies’ quality of life. Among the primary factors are environmental quality, having choice in the productive work that one does, and having the respect of family and people in one’s community who matter to oneself (Flora, 1998-99).

3. Sedentary Quality of Life

The sedentary society of Saudi Arabia, having adopted the Western ideals of a modern capitalist economic system is, for the most part, an individualistic society, wherein individuals look out for their own well being as well as their immediate family. This outlook affects their perception of quality of life in that a high quality of life can only be achieved through individual success, achievement, and self-respect. Self-satisfaction from their work is gained by having

completed a job “well done,” and preserving that self-respect involves avoiding guilt (Hofstede, 1984, p. 394).

Another cultural trait of Saudi Arabia’s sedentary society that affects how its members perceive quality of life is that they have weak uncertainty avoidance, meaning that individuals are less likely to be made nervous by situations that seem unstructured or unpredictable. Because of this general trait, economically speaking, they do not have to create strict codes of conduct to protect themselves, and they are able to take more risks, economically. This type of society generally has a higher need to achieve in order to maintain self-respect and quality of life (Hofstede, 1984, p. 396). This higher need to achieve does not allow sedentary society to appreciate the nomadic ideas about quality of life, which are based on generosity between relatives and a willingness to go without luxuries for as long as is necessary while patiently waiting for more money to arrive.

The quality of the environment in urban centers is perceived by sedentary workers as better than the quality of the environment in the Rub’ al-Khali, with less barren wilderness and more readily available access to modern amenities, hence they believe that the quality of life is better for sedentarized people than nomads. Another subjective factor that affects quality of life for sedentary workers is having a choice in the productive work that they do. When sedentary workers receive an education that allows for some upward mobility in the job market, they are provided with new opportunities and a wider selection of productive jobs, which can, in turn, raise the quality of life. In this instance, the PQLI, which takes into account the literacy rate when calculating quality of life, could be accurate, because for sedentary society an increase in education does often equate with an increase in quality of life by increasing the number of types of productive work available to a worker (Slottje, 1991, p. 685).

Having the respect of family and people in one's community who matter to oneself is not one of the subjective criteria that affects how sedentary people in Saudi Arabia view their quality of life. The modern capitalist system lends itself to an atomistic society, which is more focused on gaining self-respect by achieving individual work goals, maintaining a standard of living comparable to that of one's peers, and avoiding guilt (Hofstede, 1984, p. 394). Thus, considering how to gain the respect of family and friends does not necessarily factor into a sedentary worker's beliefs about quality of life. Despite the fact that Western individualistic societies tend not to emphasize having the respect of others, while overvaluing their standard of living, in their quality of life calculation, it may still have a significant impact on their quality of life, whether they acknowledge it or not.

4. Nomadic Quality of Life

Among the primary factors that affect how the Āl Murrah view their quality of life is the fact that they are a collectivist culture in the pre-modern Arab tradition. A collectivist culture assumes that individuals are connected through birth in a tightly integrated in-group, such as a family, from which they cannot remove themselves, and whose members are expected to be completely loyal to one another and help each other. This social outlook leads individuals to think of quality of life in group terms, wherein those with wealth are expected to share it with their relatives. Individuals gain satisfaction from having their work well recognized by the group. Additionally, individuals preserve their self-respect by avoiding shame instead of the guilt from the individualistic society (Hofstede, 1984, p. 394).

The Āl Murrah's outlook on the quality of life is also affected by the fact that they have a high uncertainty avoidance, meaning they are easily made nervous by situations that seem

unpredictable or unclear. In an effort to provide themselves with economic security, Āl Murrah society is less likely to take risks, they adopt a strict code of conduct, and are relatively intolerant of alternative lifestyles (for example, they have little respect for cash crop farmers). This type of “low risk culture” has a lower need to achieve, and is more willing to accept a subsistence lifestyle (Hofstede, 1984, p. 396).

Hofstede’s (1984) assertions about traditional Arab tribes, such as the Āl Murrah, as collectivist societies are demonstrated by the following description of the Bedouin accounting system:

Money comes in and money goes out; if you have money you spend it or lend it to relatives, if money doesn’t come in you go without or borrow from relatives. One of the sheikhs, through whose hands tens of thousands of pounds sterling passed annually was frequently strapped for cash and used to borrow £50 off me to pay for repairs to a truck. On the other hand, when money was available he would hand out hundreds with gay abandon or buy another new car (which would be given away in a few weeks).

(Lancaster, 1997, p. 97)

While an immediate reaction to this description of Bedouin accounting might be to view it as a repudiation of the concept that the Āl Murrah are a high uncertainty avoidance society, who avoid risks, a consideration of the true nature of the cash flow through the tribe between relatives reveals a very collectivist society. While it may be risky to not save any money for an emergency, the Āl Murrah would consider their quality of life diminished by a lack of self-respect and shame if they did not share all of their wealth readily with family members. Any gifts that seem like unnecessarily excessive generosity are at least partly a form of image-management, wherein individuals increase their quality of life by increasing their self-respect by

demonstrating to others how successful they are, that they can afford such extravagant generosity (Lancaster, 1997, p. 97).

One of the most important considerations for the Āl Murrah when considering quality of life is the quality of the environment. They value the sparse beauty and wide open freedom afforded by the Rub' al-Khali far more than the towns and cities, which they consider to be dirty and crowded (Cole, 1975, p. 27). Without any regard for the modern comforts that might be afforded by urbanization, the nomads believe that, based strictly on the environment, their quality of life in the Empty Quarter is far superior to any sedentary life available to them. Another important environmental quality that affects how the Āl Murrah think about their quality of life is the availability of camel's milk. The milk is their primary food staple, and when they are forced to travel away from their herds, to cities, they always yearn for "the sweet milk of their beloved camels" (Cole, 1975, p. 27). Frequent access to camel's milk would certainly be an important part of the environmental quality calculation when the Āl Murrah Bedouin consider their quality of life.

Another important factor that affects quality of life for rural societies, including the Āl Murrah, is having a choice in the productive work that one does. The desire for the freedom to choose how an individual can invest his or her time in productive work manifests itself differently among the Bedouin than among sedentary workers. For sedentary workers, the key to being able to choose a productive job is access to education and a society that provides an opportunity for upward mobility, which allows sedentary workers to choose their desired vocation. Nomadic pastoralists, on the other hand, view having a choice in their productive work as having more to do with how, when, and where they perform their vocation than actually making a choice between several different lines of work. Sedentary workers might believe the

Āl Murrah have a lower quality of life because there is only one significant type of productive work available to them, camel herding. But although this eliminates the all important freedom of choice of occupation; the Bedouin view their lifestyle as much more liberating than a sedentary one.

Each Āl Murrah household, consisting on average of about seven people, has the freedom to operate completely autonomously for most of the year, as they make their own decisions about where to graze, where to camp, when to move, and how far to migrate. Indeed, this freedom of movement and individual control over productive work is necessitated by the very nature of the harsh desert environment in which they live, with its sparse vegetation and water that can only support an extremely low population density (Cole, 1975, p. 82). While sedentary workers may place increased value on the opportunity to choose one of several different types of productive work, the nomadic Āl Murrah place an increased value on the opportunity to select their own personal method of performing a single type of productive work.

The third major factor that often affects how the Āl Murrah, as a rural, collectivist society, perceive their quality of life, is having the respect of family and people in the community who matter to them. Because they view quality of life in group terms, where self-respect and an increased quality of life is gained by sharing wealth with family and friends, avoiding shame, and having one's work be well recognized by others, the Āl Murrah place a much higher importance on having the respect of people in the community who matter to them than sedentary society does. A consequence of this highly valued communal respect is a direct increase in the importance placed on maintaining proper etiquette and respectful interactions between tribe members. Guests of the Āl Murrah, for instance, are always greeted with a fresh pot of coffee and offered a bowl of milk when available, because not to do so would be

considered rude and shameful by the Āl Murrah themselves, lowering their self-respect and respect in the community, and thereby reducing their quality of life (Cole, 1975, p. 61).

5. Social Motivation to Resist Sedentarization

Having defined the factors that the Āl Murrah and the sedentary society in Saudi Arabia each value as part of their respective beliefs about quality of life, it is now possible to examine the motives behind the resistance of sedentarization by the Āl Murrah and understand them within the context of the Bedouin's culturally relevant perception of a high quality of life. The social structure of the Āl Murrah, as well as other Bedouin tribes, which has been shaped by the necessities of thousands of years of desert survival, is one of the most basic yet powerful motivating factors in resisting sedentarization:

The most basic unit of their society is the patrilocal household composed of an old man and old woman, their sons and their sons' wives, and their children. Households average about seven people. Above the level of the household is the lineage which includes all the people descended from a male ancestor who lived about five generations ago; a lineage averages about fifty households. From four to six lineages unite, according to the patterns of patrilineal descent, to form clans. The Āl Murrah tribe, which includes all the descendants of Murrah, is composed of seven clans. (Cole, 1975, p. 24)

This social structure fulfills the nomadic Bedouin's need for flexibility and freedom. During the temperate winter season, when each family must follow their herd hundreds of miles following the infrequent rains in search of pasture, each individual household must be able to function autonomously. Living deep inside the Rub' al-Khali for several months, a household might not come across another family for days at a time. Their segmented social structure provides a

flexible framework that allows households from the same lineage or clan that cross paths in the Rub' al-Khali, to comfortably join their tents and travel together for a few days or weeks, sharing resources, protection, and friendship, before separating again when the pasture gets too thin for the herds. Alternatively, during the hot, dry summer months when all of the herds must stay near wells or oases, the same segmented social structure that allows households to survive alone and isolated for weeks at a time during winter, provides an ideal framework for hundreds or thousands of Bedouin to gather periodically together in a single encampment. As each clan uses its own traditional summer wells, large groups of Bedouin are able to share resources without conflict by simply respecting the social order (Cole, 1975, p. 82).

Although the close knit hierarchy of Bedouin society has survived thousands of years of challenging desert life, that organizational structure is unable to cope with the requirements of a sedentary lifestyle. When Āl Murrah Bedouin move to towns and cities to take part time jobs as laborers, members of different households, lineages, clans, and tribes are broken up and forced to live mixed together in the only cheap, crowded housing that they can afford. The longer they live in the cities, the more their social structure, based on organization into close knit in-groups, deteriorates. As their social network breaks apart, Bedouin related by lineage or clan are unable to treat each other with the proper respect (Cole, 1975, p. 156). As a collectivist society, the Āl Murrah highly value the respect of others in their community and, when they lose those respectful relationships in the towns and cities, their quality of life is reduced. The expectations of social structure can also motivate the Āl Murrah to resist sedentarization with a desire to avoid shame, as the nomadic tribe members that remain in the desert have low esteem for those who give up their camel herds and move to the cities, losing their ties to lineage and clan (Al-Bakri et al., 2001, p. 258).

Cole (1975) describes how the King Faisal settlement project, a government planned agricultural settlement for Bedouin in Saudi Arabia, failed, just like every other settlement project attempted, because the government failed to recognize the importance of the basic family unit in Bedouin society and the different value system that defines their way of life. Instead, the Saudi Arabian government followed the advice provided in a report by the Ford Foundation, which summarized what the development project's objectives should be, as follows:

a series of changes from:

1. kinship to citizenship
2. isolated camp life to community life
3. nomadic pastoralism to modern farming
4. individualism to cooperative participation
5. traditional technology to modern technology
6. tribal participation as a kinsman to national participation as a citizen. (Cole, 1975, p. 148)

The report went on to describe the values of “Bedouinism” as drawbacks to development, viewing the Bedouin as “victims of limitless hospitality” with “no concern for tomorrow,” which presented significant problems for economic development (Cole, 1975, p. 148). While the report focused on the apparent inability of the Bedouin to function in a modern economic system and how to transform them into “useful” members of society with a higher standard of living, it gave no consideration for how the institutional clash with the Bedouin's values might affect their quality of life. As young men from several Āl Murrah clans accepted jobs as *kuliya* (coolies, their term for manual laborers) on the experimental farm, their dislike of the sedentary lifestyle quickly became apparent. Accustomed to living in breezy tents out in the deserts, they found the

concrete structures stifling, often abandoning them to stay the night in the tent of a relative as they passed near the settlement.

Cole (1975) also describes how Āl Murrah tribe members were driven away from sedentarization by the damage that was done to the social structure of the tribe by the government employees' ignorance of the tribal structure and the importance placed on respectful relationships, as they addressed the Bedouin foremen working on the farm:

[T]o the considerable irritation of all the other Āl Murrah, the company employees habitually referred to these men as “shaikh so-and-so” and thought of them as shaikhs of the Āl Murrah. Neither family, however, was of shaikhly status within the Āl Murrah and it was, at best, derisive that they allowed themselves to be so addressed. That they did lessened their own respect with the tribe as a whole (except among their own clan) and made members of other clans extremely reluctant to seek employment at the site or to become associated with the project in any way. (Cole, 1975, p. 151)

The lack of respect for the social structure and the tribe members caused considerable discomfort and lowered the quality of life for the men living on the settlement.

Another social motivation for the resistance of sedentarization is the Āl Murrah's attitude toward sedentary society. The Āl Murrah are a Sharif tribe, claiming royal descent from Hasan ibn Ali, a grandchild of Muhammad, and as such, are very proud. They view themselves as following a noble, pure, and clean lifestyle, as opposed to the filth and low status of town and city life. In general, households with camel herds are held in the highest regard, while sheep and goat herding families receive less respect, and sedentary farmers are viewed with the lowest esteem of all. Because, for the Bedouin, the amount of respect their community has for them is directly related to their perceived quality of life, this descending order of respect down the scale

toward sedentarism is a strong motivating factor in favor of the continuation of nomadism (Cole, 1975, p. 155).

6. Politics of Nomadism

The political relationships between the Bedouin and the wider society of Saudi Arabia are complex and often serve to reinforce their continued nomadic pastoralism, but they can be best understood when rooted in historical context. Before the establishment of a strong central government in Saudi Arabia, the only military powers were the different Bedouin tribes. The sedentary populations of villages and towns were typically unarmed merchants and farmers who were unable to defend themselves from attack. Each Bedouin tribe used their military power to guarantee the security of different villages, caravans, and market towns from attack by other Bedouin tribes, and in return received a portion of the harvests and market products (Cole, 1975, p. 108).

After the creation of the modern nation state of Saudi Arabia, the tribes were incorporated into the national military structure. Because the villages and markets are now protected from attack by the police and national military, they no longer need to pay protection money to the Bedouin tribes. Instead, all tribes are now incorporated into the National Guard and paid by the central government to serve the interests of the nation as a whole. Today, the Āl Murrah pay for almost all of the provisions that are not provided by their camel herding with the pensions they receive for serving in the Reserve National Guard. Without these payments, the Āl Murrah would have no source of income to pay for the dates and rice, which along with their camels' milk, are the staples of their diet, and they would be forced to work more wage labor, or possibly even give up their camels. Therefore, the political relationship developed between the

militant Bedouin tribes and the central state makes the continuation of their nomadic, subsistence way of life possible (Cole, 1975, p. 108).

The Āl Murrah consider the modern Saudi Arabian government to consist of two distinct parts, the *dowla*, meaning the modern bureaucracy, and the *hukuma*, meaning the members of the Āl Sa'ud royal family. They view themselves as the special supporters of the rightful leaders of Saudi Arabia, the *hukuma*, and members of the *hukuma* in return for their political support, mediate conflicts both within and between the tribes. The political relationships between the *hukuma* and the Āl Murrah are strengthened through marriages between the tribe and members of the royal family (Cole, 1975, p. 109), and it is these personal relationships with powerful political figures that ensures the Bedouin tribes are treated with respect, given partially autonomous local political authority, and able to maintain their nomadic lifestyle without dramatic intrusion by the government. Also, as a Sharif tribe, the Āl Murrah's belief in their nobility is reinforced by the political favor shown to them by the Āl Sa'ud royal family. This relationship increases their pride in their life with their camels in the desert, which they believe to be more noble and clean than any urban lifestyle, encouraging a distaste for sedentary work and reinforcing their nomadic pastoralism, perhaps to a greater extent than for other non-Sharif tribes.

7. Economics of Sedentarization versus Nomadism

Beyond the social and political motivating factors for resisting sedentarization, which are based on the Āl Murrah's internal value system that emphasizes different aspects of their quality of life than the values of the modern, sedentary society, the importance of external, economic factors as motives for resistance cannot be underestimated. While sentimentality toward their

camels and traditional values may often play a role in the Bedouin's, often unconscious, bias toward nomadic pastoralism, the practical economic reality of their situation is the major conscious motivating factor (Cole, 1975, p. 155). The concept that the Āl Murrah's economic prosperity and, by extension, their standard of living, might be better as nomadic pastoralists than it could be as wage laborers or sedentary agriculturalists may seem counterintuitive to a modern sedentary society. Indeed, it is the reverse of this concept that serves as the driving force behind the central government's well meaning efforts to modernize and sedentarized the Bedouin in hopes of increasing their standard of living. In order to understand the dichotomy between these two opposing viewpoints, it becomes important to consider, once again, the sociological nature of both the nomads and sedentary society, collectivist with high uncertainty avoidance and individualistic with low uncertainty avoidance, respectively (Hofstede, 1984, p. 390).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Saudi Arabian government began investing their massive oil revenues into infrastructure and programs that could produce a self-sufficient and sustainable agricultural system that did not rely upon foreign food imports to feed their growing population, as well as increase rural incomes. While large scale irrigation projects and government subsidized fertilizers succeeded in increasing the agricultural yield to a level that allows for a small food surplus, the system is actually less self-sufficient, relying more heavily on foreign imports of chemicals, technology, and labor than ever before. Rural incomes also failed to increase dramatically, as the majority of increases in food production took place on large scale mechanized farms, rather than the small scale intensive agriculture practiced by the majority of the nation's rural inhabitants. Additionally, rural farmers who took advantage of government irrigation projects and agricultural settlement programs were forced to make ever

increasing investments in expensive chemical fertilizers to maintain their crop yields (Metz, 1992).

The Bedouin, as a high uncertainty avoidance society that has a strong aversion for risk, have always valued their nomadic pastoralist way of life over sedentary agriculture for its stability. They, like many other nomadic pastoralist societies, recognize the inherent advantages of raising livestock rather than planting crops. The first, most obvious advantage is their ability to exploit a niche ecosystem with a harsh climate dry enough to discourage any significant competition. Although modern irrigation projects have encroached into traditional pasture areas of some tribes, the Āl Murrah's vast territory, including the Rub' al-Khali, is simply too extreme to support large scale cultivation. The only vegetation that can be supported in their arid environment are hardy scrubs and grasses that are indigestible by humans, but can be transformed by livestock into milk, blood, fat, muscle, and skin, all of which may serve to support their subsistence lifestyle (Bailey, 1999, p. 87).

Another advantage of nomadic pastoralism is its effect on subsistence risk reduction, in which the risk of drought inherent in pre-industrial areas with low, infrequent rainfall, that may cause crop failures, is mitigated by the fact that livestock may be sold or eaten to continue to support their lifestyle even in a drought. Livestock, particularly the camels of the Āl Murrah, are also highly mobile and can be moved to areas of fresh pasture and water, or away from troublesome neighbors and tax collectors (Bailey, 1999, pp. 87-88). The Āl Murrah continue to view these economic advantages as relevant, even in the modern industrial society of Saudi Arabia where mechanized irrigation and chemical fertilizers may protect agriculture from drought, because their high uncertainty avoidance perspective emphasizes the desirability of long term stability for a high quality of life rather than the new, relatively short term economic growth

provided by a modern sedentary lifestyle. The Bedouin recognize that sedentary agriculture and wage labor can provide an immediate increase in real income, which sedentary society views as important for increasing their standard of living and subsequent quality of life, but they do not agree with the sedentary belief that the increase in sedentary standard of living is stable or reliable (Cole, 1975, p. 155).

As a traditional Arab society that can trace their lineage back to Muhammad, the Āl Murrah tend to consider a much broader view of history than sedentary workers when making risk assessments about their lifestyle. One nomad described his tribe's collective distrust of all products and services provided by money from the oil industry, basing their assessment of risk on the fact that the nomads and peasant farmers have always survived in arid Arabia on their animals and dates, while recent immigrant workers can only be fed by buying food with oil money:

“The oil wells,” he said, “can be blown up in thirty minutes and, with no money, all those people in Dhahran and Riyadh would die from lack of food. Why, they would not even have enough gasoline to leave and go back to their homelands.” (Cole, 1975, p. 155)

The Āl Murrah have a strong sense of their tribe's long history of survival and power in a sparse land for thousands of years, and are suspicious of new water sources and unproven, well irrigated agriculture. Modern sedentary society often has difficulty recognizing this viewpoint, and does not understand why the Bedouin do not share their desire for immediate access to higher income and subsequent increased standard of living that the Western perceptions about quality of life tend to emphasize.

The distrust of the modern sedentary lifestyle combined with the Bedouin's disinterest in consumer products or a varied diet, together provide ample motivation to resist sedentarization,

but the Āl Murrah do not live in social and economic isolation. As the cost of living rises in Saudi Arabia, Bedouin must pursue any means available to increase their income, driven not by the Western desire for a higher standard of living, but by a need for the ability to afford the technology and supplies that make their nomadic existence possible, including tents, dates, trucks, and wells (Metz, 1992). Beyond the military protection money paid by the villages and markets that has now been replaced by a Reserve National Guard pension paid by the central government, a traditional source of income for the Bedouin has been to herd camels and other livestock owned by sedentary farmers. The Bedouin would care for the animals, leading them to pasture along with their own herds, while the farmers stayed by their fields, and in return they would receive the rights to all of the milk produced by the animals while they were under their care (Cole, 1975, p. 107).

These traditional sources of income are no longer enough to support their cost of living, so more and more tribesmen are being forced to seek wage labor in the cities, driving trucks and taxis or working for oil companies. It appears that about half of the tribe's adult males are employed in some form of wage labor, sometimes living away from their camps for as much as six months at a time, while their families tend their herds (Lancaster, 1997, p. 100). Rather than encourage sedentarization by making young Bedouin men more familiar with the sedentary lifestyle, the migration of men to urban areas has often led to an even stronger desire to resist sedentarization and preserve their camel herds. This phenomenon can be explained by the increased workload placed on the family members that the men leave behind, as sedentarization breaks up the family unit that is vital for the maintenance of the tribal structure that makes the Bedouin's lifestyle possible. When a Bedouin household is intact, the men herd the camels, while the women generally tend only sheep or goats, if the family owned any, as well as prepare

food, care for the household, and weave textiles, such as mats and tent cloth. A recent study has shown that when women are left alone with children, they have total responsibility to care for all of the animals, including the time consuming and arduous task of camel herding, on top of their traditional household duties (Metz, 1992).

This reality produces both a social and practical motivating factor for the resistance of sedentarization. In addition to drastically lowering the quality of life for Bedouin women by increasing their work load, the change in distribution of work brought men's traditional position of control and protection of the family into question, reducing both their self respect and the respect of the community, lowering their quality of life. At the same time, a practical problem with this situation that increases the Āl Murrah's dislike of sedentary labor is the fact that with only women in charge of the household, they no longer have access to government programs designed to improve the welfare of nomadic families. Women are unable to apply for livestock subsidies, or land or home loans issued near their summer grazing areas. Also, despite being responsible for all of the household work, women can only use trucks, vital for transporting water and supplies between the herds and camps, when they are deep within the desert. They must stay out of sight of government officials because women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia (Metz, 1992). These practical limitations that result from an increase in sedentary wage labor, foster a general increase in the dislike and distrust of sedentary lifestyles among the Bedouin.

8. Conclusion

With a more complete understanding of all of the Āl Murrah's motives for resisting sedentarization, one might quickly lose sight of the key fact that their resistance is not rooted in

any fundamental disdain for sedentary life, but is, rather, a manifestation of their fear and distrust of the many byproducts of sedentarism that they perceive as harmful to their value system and way of life. Evaluations of the effects of sedentarization by Bedouin are based on their beliefs concerning the three major factors that they find important for a high quality of life. High environmental quality equates, ideally, to freedom of movement through the desert with access to camels' milk. Having a choice in the productive work that one does is directly related to each Bedouin household's ability to decide for itself where to camp and when to migrate as well as having the ability to operate independently in the desert for extended periods of time. Perhaps the most important factor for the quality of life of the collectivist Bedouin society is having the respect of one's family and people in the community who are important to oneself, which is directly related to protection of the segmented social structure of the tribe, and the respectful interactions between members of the same lineage, clan, and tribe. Any aspects of sedentarization that prove injurious to one or more of these criteria, such as the breakdown of the tribal social structure in shanty town settlements on the outskirts of cities or decreased freedom of movement and limited access to camels' milk, are motivating factors that encourage the Bedouin to resist any movement toward a sedentary lifestyle.

The majority of conflicts between nomads and modern sedentary societies arise when members of sedentary society fail to recognize the different value system that has been shaped by a nomadic lifestyle, when determining what they believe would be in the best interest of the Bedouin tribes. Members of the individualistic sedentary society, who participate in the modern, Westernized, capitalist economy, overvalue standard of living when making calculations about quality of life and place a high value on individual achievement. The collectivist Bedouin society cares much less about their standard of living or access to consumer products and places

a higher value on sharing wealth with relatives and gaining the respect of the community for their work. With this information in hand, it is hoped that this research will encourage government and non-profit agencies that operate in the areas where Bedouin or other nomadic pastoralists live, to develop programs and methods for interacting with nomadic groups in ways that are more culturally sensitive.

Above all else, the Āl Murrah love their camels—the sweet milk that they provide and the freedom of movement that they represent. They are reluctant to pursue any work that they believe might threaten this lifestyle or the social structure that makes it possible. Many of them recognize the benefits that participation in a settlement can provide, such as cheap access to dates and supplies. When the survival of their camel herds and pastoral way of life is not in question, the Āl Murrah view sedentarization as acceptable as long as their particular social criteria are maintained. The Āl Jaber clan of the Āl Murrah, for instance, spend their summer months at Jabrin, an oasis that is home to sedentary farmers. Because the farmers at Jabrin are considered sedentarized relatives of the Āl Jaber clan, it is an acceptable tribal gathering where nomads and farmers can interact together. The clan opposes government plans to modernize Jabrin, because they believe this would attract unwanted, nontribal foreigners and Saudi Arabians, so their summer encampment would cease to be a tribal gathering and their social structure and quality of life would be threatened. Thus, most of the Āl Murrah agree that sedentarization of at least part of the tribe is acceptable, and even desirable, so long as lineages and clans stay together and do not force Bedouin to break from their tribal groupings by mixing with outsiders (Cole, 1975, p. 156). A program that could increase the standard of living for the Bedouin, with regards to healthcare and access to resources, without having a negative impact on their quality of life would be desirable by every party involved.

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