

Commission on Nomadic Peoples

“Bedouin and the Oil Economy”

F. Scholz

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Beduinen im Zeichen des Erdoels - Studien zur Entwicklung im Beduinischen Lebensraum SO-Arabien. F. Scholz, ed. Beiheft des Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, Nr. 45, Wiesbaden 1981, 515 S. (Title in English: Bedouin and the Oil Economy - Modern Change in the Traditional Bedouin Areas of SE-Arabia. F. Scholz, ed., 515 p.).

Results of the above mentioned study:

The study about the Bedouin of SE-Arabia (Sultanate Oman), in which H. Asche, J. Janzen, F. Scholz and W. Zimmermann participated, covered the following areas: Musandam, Batinah, Interior Oman and Dhofar. All four case studies started out from the same hypothesis:

Because Bedouinism, and therefore the Bedouin, is highly esteemed in the «small» Arab oil-producing countries for reasons of tradition and the cultural, social, national and demographic interests of the respective governments, and because the oil revenues in these states make possible a modern development embracing all regions and population groups, the Bedouin is offered in principle the opportunity of a positive participation in this change, and de facto a self-determined active participation may be expected of him. It is not social and economic degradation, together with functional and spatial segregation (marginality), but rather social esteem, spatial integration, economic and functional participation (integration) that are the characteristic features of the Bedouin's position in the contemporary transformation of the small Arab oil-producing countries.

The result of the case studies shows the following main aspects:

- (1) The extent to which development in each of the traditional Bedouin areas is linked to the oil industry itself, or to innovations resulting directly or indirectly from it, varies in each individual area.
- (2) Although the Sultanate of Oman - like all the other Arab Gulf states - shows serious interest in the «historical dimension» of Bedouinism, all government measures in Bedouin areas were not conceived specially for the Bedouin to preserve their way of life and economy, but rather to:
 - break down tribal-social and tribal-spatial thought and behaviour patterns with the aim of creating a nation (Oman as a whole; Batinah, Interior Oman),
 - facilitate the work of the oil industry and make manpower available (Interior Oman), or
 - improve control over a strategically important region and commit the population there to the new administration (Musandam, Dhofar).

These objectives are to be realized by means such as monetary payments, job offers, school education and medical care, improvement of infrastructure, land distribution etc. Up to now, however, the government has not introduced measures adapted to the specific settlement and economic patterns of the Bedouin and aiming to preserve the Bedouin way of life or, at least, their economy (nomadic pastoralism). This in turn would preserve vast areas of the country, at least, as extensively usable economic areas.

(3) Direct and indirect links with the oil industry, which vary in closeness from region to region, and governmental intentions and measures, also varying according to the area, lead to various changes in settlement, mobility and economic patterns; to varying degrees of willingness on the part of the tribes or tribal ingroups to accept these changes, and therefore regional variations in the extent of «active» and «passive» participation. Here the following general statements may be made:

- The statement made in the opening hypothesis - that, because of the general regard for Bedouinism in the Gulf states, a generally positive participation (integration) must result or is to be expected - cannot be confirmed. However, conditions were/are being created (including infrastructure, job and educational opportunities) that make «active» and «passive» participation possible in principle for all levels of the population, including the Bedouin.
- The offer of participation is in principle open to all. However, the level of access and thus de facto participation is, for various internal and external reasons, different from tribe to tribe (Interior Oman) or even from ingroup to ingroup (Batinah, Interior Oman). Consequently, the opening postulate of a generally positive participation by the Bedouin in the current development of the oil-producing Arab Gulf States (here: Oman) cannot in general be confirmed. The extent to which participation has already been accomplished and documented is no lasting indication of what the final result may be.

This was a general overview of the changes in the traditional Bedouin areas of SE Arabia. However, since the acknowledged aim of the present study is to give a differentiated account of the local variations in the process of change of the Bedouin areas, and the authors' evaluation of this process did not lead to a mutual and uniform point of view, it seems to us appropriate that each author should comment on the opening hypothesis with regard to his respective study area:

W. ZIMMERMANN on Musandam: «If we consider recent changes (1970-1980) in the traditional Bedouin areas of Musandam, we see that the traditional ways of life and economy continue to exist almost unchanged¹. Socio-economic structures have not been distorted as a result of government measures². Nor have the Bedouin in Musandam been neglected in the Omani concept of development

planning since, in spite of the high technological and financial expenditure involved in the provision of infrastructure and roads and the implementation of development projects in Musandam³, the government is endeavouring to give the Bedouin equal rights and shares in modern developments. This is made sufficiently clear by the governmental measures to improve living conditions and satisfy basic needs. According to present knowledge, the question whether the Bedouin of Musandam are being integrated (as opposed to marginalized) may therefore be answered in the affirmative.

Integration is not understood here as an ideal goal, but rather as a process which, by means of planning and implementation of development measures, brings about processes of change that are, first, adapted, socio-economically and socio-culturally to the given structures; second, help to reduce the development imbalance between social groups and regions; third, lead to the «passive» and «active» participation of all groups, sections and regions in the social, economic and cultural development of the country; and, fourth, create and strengthen internal cohesion within the state.»

H. ASCHE on the Batinah: «The exploitation of the inner-Omani oil resources began three years before the Sultanate was opened to the outside world and created the financial preconditions for the general national development which rapidly brought basic economic and infrastructural facilities to the backward state. In the nomadic-rural area along the coastal plain of Al Batinah, this was the beginning of the decline of traditional Bedouin nomadic pastoralism and the seasonal-periodic migrations were for the most part abandoned. A basic infrastructure was also developed in nomadic areas and job opportunities were created in the encroaching modern industrial sectors. As a result, animal husbandry has been supplanted as a guarantee of subsistence and the Bedouin are becoming sedentary in their traditional rangelands.

At the level of the former migratory groups, the social structures of the nomadic population have proved to be generally stable. The spatial and socio-economic discrepancies between the traditional rangelands and modern centres of development (the area in and around the capital, Masqat, the Emirate Abu Dhabi in the neighbouring U.A.E.) are bridged by the migration of workers.

Complete integration of the nomadic population of the Batinah in the contemporary development of the Sultanate has not yet been achieved, however. This is partly due to deficiencies in the conception of development planning.

Considering the prevailing domestic and development policies of the Sultanate, only specific measures can secure the future of the majority of the Bedouin population of the Batinah. These measures, which I refer to in my contribution, ought not to be delayed further. The Bedouin are already starting to protest and the Sultanate cannot afford internal opposition and disturbances if it is to continue its «leap from the Middle Ages to modern times.»

F. SCHOLZ on Interior-Oman: «In the sixties and seventies there was no government concept of any kind whatsoever dealing directly with the traditional Bedouin areas of Interior-Oman, nor was one explicitly formulated afterwards. Government activity was mainly restricted to ad hoc measures for individual tribes and was mostly concerned with keeping the peace for

the oil company. Consequently, the offer of participation and the de facto «active» participation varied considerably in the individual Bedouin tribes or tribal groups. The principal determining factor here was the specific spatial distribution of oil in Interior-Oman. These spatially varying opportunities of participation are visible in an extremely differentiated active participation which may be traced in patterns of settlement, land acquisition and regional mobility. A final evaluation of the situation in Interior-Oman should, in my opinion, consider the following aspects:

- The process of change in the traditional Bedouin areas of Interior-Oman has by no means come to an end and - as current research indicates - is not likely to be «positive» for all individuals involved.
- The conflict between the specific needs of mobile, tribally organized groups and the supra-tribal interests and planning concepts of the government has not yet been resolved and, in some cases, appears to be increasing in intensity.
- The necessity of preserving Bedouin nomadic herding as an important branch of the national economy (food production, employment, use of peripheral areas) has not yet impressed itself on the government, especially in the case of Interior-Oman.
- There is a general tendency to settle and take over what is sometimes totally unsuitable land. Readiness to leave traditional areas is increasing.
- There is clear evidence that the Bedouin population is interested in opportunities of non-pastoral employment with the aim of earning a cash wage and with the intention of satisfying externally induced, new, and rapidly growing requirements in all aspects of life.

In the course of the «modernization» affecting the entire Sultanate, a process of social and economic differentiation is taking place within the tribes of Interior Oman. At the temporary end of this process we find a great number of «Bedouin» groups, who, in spite of a wide-ranging offer of participation were and are capable to a differing degree for different internal and external reasons, of participating actively. The question whether, in the course of this process, the mass of the Bedouin population of Interior Oman will be reduced to the lower rungs of the social hierarchy, can in my opinion not yet be answered conclusively. However, it is certain that

- (1) the government has not yet become aware of the problem (or is unwilling to recognize it) and thus could/would not consider suitable countermeasures,
- (2) assuming that development continues as before, similar negative consequences may be predicted for the Bedouins of Interior Oman as those suffered by the nomadic populations of other Islamic-oriental states.

As regards Interior Oman - and indeed Oman as a whole - I would even go as far as to maintain that in the long term, the socio-economic changes will

prove more acute than in other states of Oriental Islam, for there is a great disparity between the country's absolute level of distributable wealth and the de facto access of the mass of the Bedouin to the mechanism of distribution. This fact is by no means widely recognized, thus the inevitable social conflicts over distribution have not yet begun.»

J. JANZEN on Dhofar: «In comparison with the other regions of SE-Arabia dealt with in this volume, Dhofar has in part and from a purely material point of view a more favourable basis for integrating its nomadic population into modern progress, although on the whole innovations were first introduced and took effect after 1975.

An important precondition of the rapid social change was the successful quelling of the Dhofar Rebellion in 1976. The rebels mostly belonged to the nomadic-peasant population groups of Dhofar (jebalis = vertical/short-range cattle farmers-peasants and camel and goat herders; Bedouins = horizontal/far-ranging camel- and goat-herders).

In order to bring rapid peace to the southern province of Oman the government introduced an extensive aid and development programme, which benefited not only the sedentary coastal population, but also the nomad areas of Dhofar, where the programme was supervised by the C.A.D., a specially established authority.

This led in some cases to a considerable improvement in the living and economic conditions of the Dhofari nomads (40% of the population) within the space of a few years. The main reasons for this were: the rapid expansion of the technical and social infrastructure (transport network, water supply, schools, mobile health service, religious institutions), material support (free distribution of relief goods, stimulation of petty trade, low-cost housing projects, free distribution of building land, regular payments of money to the needy and to the shaikhs), some measures to modernize traditional branches of industry (oasis agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing) and the creation of thousands of new jobs in the service sector (mainly in the Firqah militia).

This change, initiated by governmental development policy, is marked by extensive alterations in the economic and occupational structure, in mobility, settlement and dwelling patterns, and in the social and political sector. The most important changes were, in brief, the decline of the caravan trade, the advent of motor transport, sedentarization with the transition to horticulture, «commuters» instead of nomadic pastoralists, dependence on outside food supplies and markets, external economic dependence owing to money payments, standard tents and permanent buildings made of shaped bricks instead of the traditional dwellings.

Generally speaking, the nomadic-peasant population of Dhofar has participated in various ways in modern development. Yet there is still a clear development imbalance between the coastal settlements of South Dhofar, with their sedentary population, and the nomadic peasants of the Dhofar Mountains and Interior Dhofar.

If the government wishes to improve the integration of the nomadic-peasant population in the contemporary development of Dhofar it must extend what has already been achieved and introduce special programmes to improve the nomads' basis of existence: for example, modernization of methods of production, market orientation, vocational training for traditional and modern sectors of the economy, veterinary campaigns against animal disease, purchase-points for livestock and agricultural products, measures to improve pasture land, further development of infrastructure in the nomadic-peasant homelands to reduce migration into the towns. Only such a development policy can prevent, in the long run, social and economic degradation and thus marginalization of many nomad families.»

If we consider the conclusions drawn in these statements, numerous aspects are mentioned which are equally evident in the changing nomadic environment of other Gulf states and which are generally supposed to exist in the other states of Oriental Islam. They show that modern developments in these countries leave no further room and no further understanding for a tribally organized population practising a mobile way of life and economy, namely, the Bedouin. However, this statement does not mean that in the Gulf states there is also a lack of understanding and esteem of Bedouinism. It is generally understood as an element of a past rich in tradition yet not accepted as a component of a society emerging into modernity.

The course of development in the traditional Bedouin/nomadic areas between the Gulf states and the other states of Oriental Islam shows several structural parallels, but one main and, in my opinion, essential difference: the Bedouin in the Gulf states have (in principle) a broader spectrum of opportunities to share in the economy and to secure their existence. This important fact disguises the fact that the tribal network of social relationships is dissolving and the consequences of this for the Bedouin population have, at the moment at least, not yet taken full effect. However, if the Bedouin is not willing or able, qualified or encouraged to become active at various levels, to gain qualifications, to undertake responsibilities and/or to formulate his needs and achieve them by political means, then, in my view, similar «negative» features are, in the long term, to be expected in the small, oil-producing Gulf states as those, described above, in the other states of Oriental Islam. The prevailing political and spatial-economic structures in the Gulf states are at present such that the only possibility open to the Bedouin is to adapt to the respective supra-local elites.

Having reached the end of this volume, the reader will probably ask himself what prospects face Bedouin groups in the rapidly changing society and economy of the Arab oil-producing countries, Oman in particular. This study intentionally gives no answers. But it does evaluate material, indicate tendencies, document developments, and thus it creates a basis and delivers information that may, and so all of us involved in the making of this volume hope, will assist those responsible in planning for the future, a future which includes the Bedouin.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cp. the lack of the usual indicators of processes of change: less frequent nomadic treks, shorter ranges, disintegrating social relationships, increased non-agropastoral employment.

2. Nor does the state of current research suggest any cultural/tribal identity loss or absolute impoverishment (e.g. loss of the basis of existence, deterioration of subsistence).
3. These costs are due, for example, to the distribution of small, low-population settlements over a large area and to extreme natural conditions (e.g. high mountains).

Fred Scholz
Freie Universität Berlin