

Friction: The interplay of a Bedouin community, the Egyptian Government, local and global NGOs, South Sinai  
(August – December 2010)

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## Abstract

My thesis uses Anna Tsing's metaphorical concept *friction* to investigate the interaction between the Egyptian national government, the international, national and local development organizations, and a local Bedouin community. My research is based on fieldwork in South Sinai, Egypt from August until December 2010. My thesis tries to explore an alternative understanding of sustainability, inspired by the nomadic Bedouin livelihood. It does so in a narrative fashion, where I present stories about the consequences of forced settlement on the environment in Sinai. By doing so, I discuss the development policies and efforts taken by governmental and non-governmental entities in the region since the 1980s, and so I question the commitment to sustainability in the post-settlement times. I use an analytical framework composed of five concepts with *friction* as the primarily key concept to my investigation. Other concepts include *Representation*, *Dwelling*, *Narratives* and *Benevolent Colonialism*.

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## Introduction

*On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, I took the bus from Cairo to visit my field location in Sinai for the first time and to agree on terms for my internship. I was excited about hitting the highway, although it was not my first time to go to Sinai and to take this route. I took some time watching the mountains on the way, and became completely absorbed in daydreaming. I was sitting in the front seat, when suddenly the bus collided into something. Big bang and we stopped. A donkey struggled to stand up again, and in complete fear, ran off. Another donkey appeared at the sidewalk and ran after his/her companion to check on him/her, followed by a Bedouin man, their keeper. The Bedouin man and his donkeys were attempting at crossing the road, as the bus was approaching. "Thank Allah nothing happened to the donkey, the Bedouin would have started a big fight now", said the bus driver (a non-Bedouin Nile-valley inhabitant). The bus driver went off the bus to check for damages in his vehicle, and then he drove off.*

My thesis seeks to shed light on an alternative understanding of sustainability, based on the nomadic livelihood of the Bedouin community in Sinai. The thesis seeks to do this by discussing the consequences of forced settlement on the environment in Sinai. The incident above can be seen as a metaphorical symbol for the collision between two worldviews, two different modes of living that clash - quite literally in the above incident - within one and the same environment. The environment is perceived in this thesis as a growing organism that is formed through relations between its human and non-human inhabitants. My thesis aims at investigating both governmental and non-governmental development policies in the region, while acknowledging the strategic importance of Sinai to Egypt. Nevertheless, the thesis emphasizes the importance of treating Sinai as an environment, and not as a void space, when framing policies for development.

My research purpose becomes crucial, especially at this point of time, with the change of the ruling regime after the Egyptian Revolution of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011. The new government promised changes in the general strategies and orientations, which has been dominant since the

1980s. Nevertheless, what is more important for the purpose of this research is that the new cabinet formed after the Revolution headed by Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, is giving a revived attention to the development of Sinai. This was clearly stated through a meeting with governors of Sinai as well as tribal chiefs in April 2011.<sup>1</sup>

Sinai has been subject to a long period of contested sovereignty (1948 – 1982) between Egypt and Israel. The contested sovereignty was also accompanied with fluctuating policies and orientations towards the environment of Sinai and its inhabitants. Nevertheless, it was always strategically important to keep the Bedouins - the local inhabitants of Sinai - under control. Moreover, as the wartime was over in the 1980s, Egyptian governmental national strategies were framed to develop and make use of the desert of Sinai. Besides, International Development Agencies started drafting their projects and channeling their funds to compensate the inhabitants of the contested land, who have been subject to the atrocities of war. Policies and development efforts in Sinai created new realities to the Bedouins – the local inhabitants of Sinai, since both contributed to the settlement of the Bedouin nomads in permanent cities and villages.

My research aims to investigate the interactions between the Egyptian national governmental policies, the international, national and local development efforts and the local community. To investigate this, I use Anna Tsing's metaphor *friction*, as my main research concept. Tsing uses her metaphor to signify the unequal encounter between the local and the global, within the global capitalist market that witnesses the constant flow of material, people, goods, ideas etc (Tsing 2005: 4-5). Friction highlights the constant reshaping of power and cultures as the local meet the global (Tsing 2005: 5). I will also use friction to signify the encounter between the local, national and global in Sinai. Furthermore, the metaphor will be useful for my research to investigate the sustainability of the development endeavors in Sinai.

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<sup>1</sup> Official Homepage of the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers, last visited 9/5/2011 (<http://www.egyptiancabinet.gov.eg/Media/NewsDetails.aspx?id=2339>).

My thesis applies an analytical framework to different narratives; collected through ethnographic observations and interviews, which I conducted at field. My fieldwork was based in an eco-touristic resort called *Basata*, close to Nuweiba city, South Sinai. I stayed there from August – December 2010, as an intern for an affiliated environmental protection and community development NGO called *Hemaya*. My analytical framework is formed of five concepts that I try to investigate all through. In addition to my key concept – *friction*, my paper uses the concepts *representation*, *the dwelling*, *narratives*, and *benevolent colonialism*.

My paper is divided into four chapters. My first chapter presents my methodology and research tools, while shedding light on the context of my fieldwork in Sinai. The second chapter discusses my theoretical framework and key analytical concepts. The third chapter tells four narratives, in which I try to present some of my findings at field, which are relevant to my research scope. The fourth and final chapter aims at analyzing the narratives, using the key analytical concepts.

My theoretical framework explains five key concepts and their use in my research. I start with *friction* – as previously explained – and then I move on to representation. The notion of *representation* illustrates the cognitive construction of place, people, activities etc. I start with the view of otherness, as presented by Edward Said through Orientalism (Said 2003), and then I move on to discussing how environments and their inhabitants are constructed through a view of the world-as-exhibition, as presented by Timothy Mitchell (1991). My third concept is *the dwelling*, in which I draw on Tim Ingold's (2000) comparison between the building perspective and the dwelling perspective. While the former conceals the relations between the inhabitants and their houses, the latter stresses the importance of such relations in the growth of the environment.

My fourth concept will be *narratives*. The concept is important both in explaining how I present my data through several stories that I try to narrate in the following chapter, and also in discussing how narratives could empower the local voices and channel their needs. My fifth and final concept is *benevolent colonialism*. I borrow the concept from Steven Sampson's investigation of the work of civil society and the NGOs in the Balkan countries (2002: 5). The



concept is very crucial in analyzing the work of the development agencies in Sinai, and in which I was personally involved as an intern of a local NGO.

The chapter on narratives presents four narratives. My first narrative the *fisherman* is based on an interview with a Bedouin fisherman, who presents an overview of the change in the Bedouin nomadic livelihood and activities before and after settlement. The second narrative the *road* combines three readings into the implications of the asphalt paved road in Sinai. The third narrative is based on ethnography and drawn maps by the students attending a school affiliated to the eco-tourism resort I stayed at. The fourth and last narrative the *cleanup campaign* describes one of the projects carried out by the local NGO *Hemaya*, during my internship there.

My thesis is implemented within the framework of Human Ecology, which is an interdisciplinary subject studying human environmental relations. It draws upon various disciplines including “anthropology, geography, sociology and economic history”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, my thesis tries to use both anthropological research tools, and sociological theories of perception, meaning, and post-colonial inquiries manifested in my key analytical concepts to explore the place and the relations of the human and non-human inhabitants of it. The thesis is written as part of the Master’s program, Human Ecology: Culture, Power and Sustainability, which seeks to represent “an important complement to technological and natural science approaches to sustainability by focusing on the cultural dimensions of consumption and resource use, cultural perceptions of environment and economy”(ibid). Hence, my work tries to investigate how culture is shaped and reshaped as the local meets the global in *friction*. It explores the power of the global, and also the potential power of local narratives about sustainability. It also seeks to question the commitment of development policies to sustainability.

The thesis builds on various previous studies in various fields, as will be illustrated all through the different chapters. My theoretical framework is generally guided by a number of concepts previously investigated by various researchers and writers. As I quote, use or explain any of

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<sup>2</sup> Lund University homepage for Human Ecology: Culture, Power and Sustainability:

[http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s?id=24855&lukas\\_id=SASAM.HUEK&overview=programme](http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s?id=24855&lukas_id=SASAM.HUEK&overview=programme)

those concepts, I try to contribute to them through the analysis of my findings. My main reference book about the Bedouins in South Sinai is an ethnography written by the Anthropologist Smadar Lavie in 1990; *The Poetics of Military Occupation: Mzeina Allegories of Bedouin Identity under Israeli & Egyptian Rule*, which I will refer to a lot throughout my work. Lavie's ethnography is very important to my work, as she describes how both Israeli and Egyptian policies affected the livelihood of the Bedouins of the Mzeina Tribe. My work, however, adds the role of NGOs and development agencies to the picture. Smadar's work presents a good historical background for my thesis.

## **1. Methodology**

### **1.1 Fieldwork and Positionality**

My fieldwork was based in South Sinai close to Nuweiba City. I worked as an intern there for a local NGO called Hemaya that in principle aimed at community development and environmental protection, and hence came the name *Hemaya* or protection. The NGO is affiliated to an Eco-tourism project called *Basata* that is very famous in the region; especially that it is considered one of the oldest tourism projects in the region. Both the NGO and the Eco-tourism project are owned and run by the same person, who became my manager during my internship.

I started my internship in Early August, and concluded my work in mid December. Most of my time at the field was spent inside the Eco-touristic resort (Basata), where I carried out my tasks at the NGO. As I stayed at the resort, I got to meet the tourists coming to the place, the different workers at the resort, coming from different places from Egypt, and above all the Bedouins who worked at the resort (Bedouin young men working as guards or reception night shifts and/or the Bedouin women selling their traditional handicrafts to the resorts' guests).

At field I had various tasks, which created various identities for me. I worked as a coordinator for the various projects that *Hemaya* seeks to accomplish in the region. I was also a teacher at "Basata School" – a home schooling project that was created by the manager as a way to provide

good education primarily for his children, but also to other children (both Bedouins and non-Bedouins) in the region.

Working for *Hemaya*, I also did a lot of secretary work; writing reports, preparing presentations, and corresponding to emails. While carrying out my desk work, it was sometimes very confusing whether I was reporting on the NGOs projects or Basata's resort activities. The difference between both, by time, became blurred. At points I was writing reports about *Hemaya* as the manager's social entrepreneurship entity, but then Basata would remain in the background as the mother organization. At other times I would report *Hemaya's* achievements, yet as a proof that Basata is an eco-touristic project that provides opportunities and services for the local community.

Still, I was also the human-ecology researcher, who was seeking to understand the sustainable living conditions of the Bedouins. As I designed my research proposal before going to field, I went to South Sinai with the aspiration of finding an alternative way of living to the main-stream consumption trends in the city. Therefore, at field I was always moving between my different functional identities as a "developer", a "teacher", a "secretary" and a "researcher". But I was also given more identities by the Bedouins, by my coworkers, and by the manager. My identity as an Egyptian non-Bedouin female researcher in South Sinai was seen differently by the various parties involved at field.

When I first arrived at field, I started working on a project targeting women's handicrafts. So I visited one of the contacts of the NGO -- a Bedouin woman, whose daughter used to run a handicraft business. The Bedouin woman then commented that I looked more Bedouin than her own daughter that looks more like an Egyptian. Later, the lady spent some time teaching me how to apply *Kuhl* eye-lining the way Bedouins do it and saying that this is the first step into becoming a Bedouin. Nevertheless, I decided as a researcher not to consume the Bedouin identity. I was then perceived by the Bedouin women as a non-Bedouin Egyptian (female) developer or a non-Bedouin Egyptian (female) teacher, as my work at the NGO or the school would shape my role. It was also remarkable the number of times that some Bedouins would talk

to me very tenderly thinking I was the manager's daughter. Some created a story about a daughter coming from Cairo to join her father's family or something along the lines.

It seemed that my identity as a "Muslim" was also crucial to define, when dealing with the Bedouins. Lila Abu Laghoud (1999: 13) writes in her ethnographical work "Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society" which describes her stay with the Bedouins of Awlad Ali residing in the Western desert in Egypt, "Many times during my stay I was confronted with the critical importance of the shared Muslim identity in the community's acceptance of me". I faced a similar experience in South Sinai, as I was visiting this Bedouin woman, and as we were smoothly chatting, she suddenly interrupted the flow of our conversation to ask if I were a "Muslim". I hesitated at first, as for me, religion remains a private matter. Yet for the first time, she seemed to be held back with our conversation, until my "Yes" came to return the easiness to our conversation again. The implication of the "Muslim Identity" was affirmed with my Bedouin Students at school. This was mostly clear when observing the students reactions' and relation with the Arabic teacher, who was also their religion teacher. The Arabic teacher maintained strong bonds with the Bedouin students' families and on many occasions, he would use his religious stance to "discipline" the younger students and give advice to the older students.

## **1.2 Research Tools**

### **1.2.1 Participatory Observation**

My internship tasks were divided into two parts; firstly, I worked as a coordinator for the various projects taking place in the NGO. Secondly I was assigned to work as a teacher in the school affiliated to the resort (Basata School). My job was to give awareness classes to all grades about human-environmental relations.

In this sense I could be a *player* and not just an observer to the activity in the region. As Eric Laurier would put it in his chapter on Participant Observation in the book *Key methods in Geography* that the "best participant observation is generally done by those who have been involved in and tried to do and/or be a part of the things they are observing" (Laurier: 2008: 135).

## **1.2.2 Ethnography**

All through my stay at field, I kept a habit of writing reports of my weekly activities, field notes and diaries about the different events and encounters I experienced. I specifically conducted ethnographic observations of the classroom at Basata School. I attended classes with other teachers to observe the interactions between the different actors in the classroom. I try to present my ethnography in the Chapter on narratives, in a reflexive manner and following Geertz' (1973) "thick description" approach, in which I search for meaning while describing, analyzing and contextualizing my events.

## **1.2.3 Structured interviews**

I conducted a series of structured interviews with students, teachers, and also with the manager and his wife about the resort's school, where I also asked them to draw maps for the school. My questions were based on a phenomenological approach, where I assume that the way each of the interviewees perceives the school, and thus draws it, is based on the different experience each of them had within the school. I am, to a far extent, relying here on Merleau-Ponty's (2007) explanation of how the same house can be seen from an infinite number of perspectives (2007: 77). Some of the maps are presented and analyzed in the narrative on the school.

## **1.2.4 Narrative Interviews**

Throughout my stay in South Sinai, I had four narrative interviews, in which my interviewees freely gave an account of their own story, although still guided by some questions. The first interview was conducted with a fisherman. The second interview was conducted with a Bedouin lady, who runs a handicrafts' shop in Saint Katherine region. Both interviews are presented through my narratives.

The third and fourth interviews were conducted with two herbs' specialists in Saint Katherine. Although, both interviewees are specialized in the same field, they present different examples of

local knowledge preservation within the changing environment in South Sinai. A brief reference to one of them is mentioned in my work, yet both were useful in shaping my understanding of the context of sustainability in the region.

### **1.2.5 Investigating the Cleanup Campaign**

I conducted interviews, with one of my coworkers, in an attempt to evaluate one of the projects I was engaged in during my internship. The project was a cleanup campaign that took place in the different Bedouin settlements in Nuweiba in early December 2010. My coworker later made a video for the investigation.

(More detailed description of my research tools is found in the Appendix).

## **1.3 Context of the place**

The Turks were here and went. The British were here and went. Then came the Egyptians, with them came some Russians, and then came the Israelis with the Americans, Scandinavians, French, Australians, and the rest of the world. Only the Chinese have not shown up yet, and China is a rising power in the world, so I'm waiting for them.

(Zeidān al-Shēba: A Bedouin from Mzeina Tribe quoted in Smadar Lavie 1990: 85)

The Sinai Peninsula is located northeastern Egypt, between the Gulf of Suez and Aqaba, at the North-end of the Red Sea. South Sinai, as Smadar Lavie (1990) describes it, is “the mountainous southern portion of the Sinai Peninsula. It covers a triangular area of approximately 17, 000 square kilometers and has well-defined natural boundaries: on the north, the Tih Plateau; on the west, the Gulf of the Suez; on the east, the Gulf of ‘Aqaba. The Ras-Muhammad juncture of the two gulfs at the tip of the peninsula opens into the Red Sea”. (Lavie 1990: 47) The Peninsula has been a battlefield in the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948. Following the Six day war 1967 (The setback or *Nakset* 67), the region has been taken over and occupied by Israel. Hence, the Jurisdiction of the region was moved to the Israeli authority until the 1973 (Yom Kippur) War, when the Egyptian sovereignty was re-established over parts of Sinai adjacent to the Suez Canal. Egypt regained full sovereignty over the entire peninsula in 1982 with the withdrawal of the last

Israeli troops<sup>3</sup>. With such fluctuating sovereignty, some of the regions' inhabitants are left with controversial identities and sensitivities with both the Egyptian Government and with negative stereotypes on the societal level. (Check the map for Egypt and South Sinai in Appendix B)

### 1.3.1 The Bedouins

“*al-bedu rahḥāla*,” the Bedouin are nomads”, was the answer Smadar Lavie (1990) got whenever she asked a Bedouin of the Mzeina Tribe, what the word Bedouin means. (1990: 153) However, she distinguishes between three generations in regard to the nomadic journey or *al-riḥla*. There is the generation that was born around the First World War, which could specify the exact “places and incidents”, of the “complete classic annual nomadic migration cycle” (1990: 153).

The second generation born in the 1940s would just mention the nomadic journey (*al-riḥla*) in general terms, without details. While the third generation born in the 1960s, would just say “*al-bedu rahḥāla*”, but would refer to the nomadic life and journey as something that took place during their parents' time, not theirs. She explains further, that if the latter generation were of the coast-dwellers, they said that “since 1972, the year the Eilat-Sharm asphalt road opened, they had migrated only twice, after the two huge flash floods in 1973 and 1975...Some moved every year during the winter months from the coastline into wadis [dry river beds] near the coast, seeking shelter from the winter winds. But these short moves were not considered *riḥla*, they said” (1990: 153).

The Bedouins of South Sinai are in general described by Egypt's Biodiversity Home page as;

There are seven main Bedouin tribes in South Sinai with about 50,000 members. Approximately seven thousand Bedouins from the seven tribes live in and around the St Katherine Protectorate. The Bedouin have a profound knowledge of their land; they are a conservative people with a rich culture and an enviable reputation for hospitality. Many Bedouin men work in tourism enterprises

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/545586/Sinai-Peninsula>

<http://geography.howstuffworks.com/africa/the-sinai-peninsula.htm>

although some continue to cultivate their walled mountain gardens or work in their oases. They grow vegetables, as well as almonds, pomegranates, apples, apricots, olives and figs. Small amounts of this produce are sold in the market but most is for local consumption. The woman herd livestock and produce traditional craft items. The stylized motifs of their decorative embroidery and beadwork reflect the local plants and animals.

([http://www.biomapegypt.org/biodiversity/Indigenous\\_people/BedouinsSS\\_14.html](http://www.biomapegypt.org/biodiversity/Indigenous_people/BedouinsSS_14.html))

As for my work, Nuweiba and Saint Katherine were the two main spots in South Sinai, where I conducted my research. The two main tribes residing in Nuweiba are the “Al-Tarabin” and the “Mezeina”. Hemaya NGO had more ties with “Al-Tarabin”, and so most my contacts were from “Al-Tarabin”. In St. Katherine, most of my interviews were conducted with Bedouins from “Gebeliya” tribe.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Friction**

My thesis is trying to investigate Anna Tsing’s metaphor “Friction” within the specific context I was based in. According to Tsing, “Friction” could be defined as “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (Tsing 2005: 4). Tsing explains the choice of her metaphor as a reminder of how motion takes place due to friction, when a wheel’s force meets the force implied by a road’s force. Tsing says that her metaphor symbolizes how cultures and power are constantly re-arranged when the various global and local forces *unequally* meet (Tsing 2005: 5).

Tsing explains how the unequal interaction between the global and the particular produce the Capitalist system we live in. She argues that studying “Capitalism” discretely should not be a goal in itself. Rather, it is the spread of “producers, distributors, and consumers” and their “strive to universalize categories of capital, money, and commodity fetishism” that becomes more important to study. The specificity of Capitalism arises from the need to get universals into action through the encounters between the local and the global, asymmetrically or not (2005: 4). It is commonly perceived that the local and the global could be best defined in contrast to each other, more in terms of a dichotomy, where the former is heterogeneous, when seen in



comparison to the latter that is essentially homogenous. However, by seeing it always in these terms would make it hard to find concrete grounds to promote for the particularity of the global. The local would always seem to be fighting hard, yet helplessly against a hegemonic Universal reason to remain present within the asymmetry of the encounter between both. (2005: 58)

Universal reason has been a widely used discourse by the colonizers. Universal reason was presented as a pure truth that offers a “better life for all humanity” (Tsing 2005:9). However, this discourse persisted to dominate the “global asymmetries” (ibid). This makes Universalism a politically non-neutral notion, but rather hierarchically constructed through colonial interests (ibid). Nevertheless, Tsing argues that the universals find roots in the local knowledge. They started first as local narratives. Or otherwise how did the universals start? They mostly appeared as local reactions to particular historical moments in time. Local knowledge, then, travelled across time and space forming universals (2005: 7-8).

Such interpretation of the origins of universals gives the local knowledge, expressed through narratives, more power. While, the unequal encounter between the local and the global, within the Capitalist system and the hierarchy of the true Universals, disempowers the local, seeing the hegemonic universal as originally a local discourse deconstructs its absoluteness.

This could be very helpful for the narratives I present from field to give support to how the local knowledge of a sustainable Bedouin livelihood could stand up for universal pressures of the capitalist system. If the universal originated in terms of the particular, then the particular can offer another alternative to the dominant universal.

The problem is that the Universals are manifested through various levels of forces and actors, and hence promoted and used differently. For one thing, development and settlement are promoted in terms of the linearity towards the modern, represented through different models across time and space. As previously explained, the specificity of the place in my case, is based on the fact that the desert of Sinai has never been isolated, as is commonly perceived. Nonetheless, it was subject to different governments (the Egyptian and the Israel with the

possible change within each regime's policies), visitors (tourists, developers, politicians, etc), policies and even inhabitants. It has been treated differently by those fluctuating actors, with their different narratives and policies. *Friction* in my case takes place clearly when the local, national, regional and global meet within this continuous fluctuation of power, people, goods, money etc.

Tsing explains that her metaphor suits well with the claimed free movement of goods, money, people etc advanced by the Capitalist system. Nevertheless, friction is always there acting against or in favor of this movement. Then Tsing explains how her metaphor is best explained by the image of a road;

Roads are a good image for conceptualizing how friction works: Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so, they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement. Friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing (Tsing 2005: 6).

My very early observation at field that started with my first visit to the location on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, when the bus I was riding collided into a donkey that a Bedouin man was keeping, was a good example for Tsing's *Friction*. The collision between the big vehicle and the donkey and the reaction of both the driver and the Bedouin revealed how Friction is at play, not just on the road, but later more clearly at field. The bus driver coming from the Nile Valley and riding the bus assumes the role of Universal reason in dealing with the Bedouin man, and his exaggerated relation with his donkey, in the opinion of the driver, which was articulated through his comment "Thank *Allah* nothing happened to the donkey, the Bedouin would have started a big fight now". The Bedouin, and his relationship with his cattle (in this case the donkeys) would be best understood in terms of its particular implications. On the other hand, the Bedouin was not really concerned about the passing bus more than about having his donkeys crossing the road whenever they like. The road that facilitated my travel from Cairo to Sinai, restricted the movement of the Bedouin and his cattle.

## **2.2 Representation**

The representation of the “other” is constructed through a lens, through which the person perceives the “other”. The social construction of the other is not that of the individual person, but is rather that of the classification of “otherness”. As if the other belongs to a different kind of human being, a different species like “the whale” (Hacking 2000: 10). One classification of the “otherness” was presented by Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism that is defined as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the ‘Orient’ and (most of the time) the ‘Occident’” (Said: 2003: 2-3). The notion of Orientalism, according to Said, can be historically traced to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century European Colonialism. It institutionalizes the Orient as backward, exotic and ultimately villain, and hence shapes the Western Style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said: 2003: 2-3).

In *Colonizing Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell (1991) describes the French Novelist Gustave Flaubert’s first experience in Cairo in 1850. Flaubert was trying to see Cairo as a “picture”, whose details are to be ordered “in accordance with the laws of perspective” (Mitchell 1991: 22). This made it hard for Flaubert to see reality, which seemed to him at start as a “chaos of colour and detail, which refuses to compose itself as a picture” (Mitchell 1991:21). Seeing reality as a picture or trying to “order” or “discipline” reality within a framework of a picture could be an easy mind trap, when understanding other environments.

Mitchell explains how experiencing environments according to the idea of the “world-as-exhibition” leads to a misrepresentation of order within those environments (Mitchell 1991: 58). Mitchell (1991:18) quotes Benjamin who explains World-as-exhibitions; “World exhibitions are sites of pilgrimages to the commodity fetish”. Mitchell explains that the “production for the market” turns everything people produce into a commodity. Values of such commodities are set by making them resemble and represent other products (Mitchell 1991: 18) of similar and abstract processes of “production”. Thus, if one tries to compare a house in pre-colonial Cairo or in a pre-settled Bedouin community to a Western Modern house, the former might seem to lack order, while by making such comparison, one might simply be misrepresenting order within this environment.

When seeing the real things in different environments from the “world-as-exhibitions” perspective, one reduces the environment into commoditized cognitive “pictures”. Thus, when one thinks s/he is moving from the pre-set pictures of reality to actual reality, one remains confined within the framework of the picture and thus cannot see reality.

In South Sinai, at my field location, there were several defined *pictures* for the Bedouins, for the Organizations involved in development in the area, for the government etc. The set pictures were pre-defined to the different actors involved including myself. Development work is to be perceived through the lens of benevolent communal work. The government is to be perceived and defined, when defining its opposite that is the Indigenous group etc.

As for the indigenous group or the *Bedouins*, whether romanticized or victimized, they also remain concealed within certain outlines of otherness and indigenounity. Tim Ingold (2000) explains two models of representing the *indigenous*, the “Genealogical” and the “Relational” Models (2000: 133). The “Genealogical Model” constitutes the so-called *indigenous* identity, knowledge and environments based on bloodline connections, and racial relatedness (2000: 134-136). The “Relational Model” defines them in terms of the “ongoing engagement with the land and with the beings – human and non-human – that dwell therein” (2000: 133). Ingold argues that the “Genealogical Model” conceals the relationship between individuals and their dwelling area. Such relationship is what really shapes their identity according to the “Relational Model”. (2000: 139)

According to those two models of representation, the Bedouins are depicted as genealogically traditional, according to touristic brochures and guides, while the “Relational Model” would perceive the change occurring to their environment, and to their relationship with their land, and its human and non-human dwellers. While the first model would see both the Bedouins and their dwelling environments as two separate spheres, the second model would only be able to define them as a holistic organism that cannot be separated.

Moreover, there were also pre-set pictures for places. The school affiliated to the resort is defined as *a school* according to the pre-set characteristics of a school that the different teachers involved within this project have as a norm. Since teachers working at the school along with the manager and his wife, come mostly from a western background, hence a school was to be defined according to *our* universal terms of a school, in terms of organization and discipline.

Mitchell (1991) describes how schools have been modeled in Cairo after the European Models for schools in the period in between 1844 - 1849. Elites in Egypt, who promoted this educational system, have received their education in Europe, and some even studied the schooling method in some European countries, namely France and England (1991: 71). The dominant discourse, then, was that of *Modernization*, which reshaped the understanding of different notions and strategies. For one thing "*Tanzim*" became the common tune, the government and Elites was singing at this time, "a word often translated as 'modernization' for this period, though it means something more like 'organization' or 'regulation'" (1991: 67). As for Education; "the school was a system of perfect discipline" (1991: 71), and "learning is a process of discipline, inspection and continuous obedience" (1991: 73). I will argue here, that the legacy of those Models of modernization remained vivid, at least cognitively in our minds, as teachers, at the school. Students were expected to remain disciplined, and were also expected to move hierarchically along the different cycles of education from elementary to secondary and on to university education, and so on.

### **2.3 The Dwelling**

Tim Ingold distinguishes between two perspectives of the environment; the "building perspective" and the "dwelling perspective" (2000: 173). According to Ingold, the building perspective is based on the assumption that "worlds are made before they are lived in; or in other words, the acts of dwelling are preceded by acts of worldmaking" (2000:179). The building perspective is based on implementing a reconstruction of the environment that the "perceiver" (2000: 178) has in mind for the environment. Hence, the perceiver would draw a map or a design of how the environment should look like and then implement this design in reality.

Ingold explains one dimension of the building perspective as presented by Peter Wilson in his book *The domestication of the human species* (1988) that a demarcating point in the history of “human social evolution” (Ingold 2000: 179) is when people started living in built houses. Wilson, according to Ingold, differentiates between hunter-gatherers and villagers. The former create shelters, as part of adapting to their given *natural* environment, while the latter live in a *culturally* made environment, according to an architectural plan. However in both cases, Ingold explains that Wilson’s view presents the environment as a given and, hence, treated as a “container for life to occupy” (2000: 180).

Drawing on Heidegger’s essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1971), Ingold explains, the two words to *build* and to  *dwell* could be understood as two separate words, though complementary, or as synonymous. According to the Western modernity discourse, a “building is a *container* for life activities” (Ingold 2000: 185), and to dwell is to “occupy a house, a dwelling place” (Heidegger quoted in Ingold 2000:185). This means based on the “architect’s perspective: first plan and build houses, then import the people to occupy them” (2000: 180), or to  *dwell* in them. On the other hand, Heidegger’s use of the current German verb “to build” is derived linguistically from the Old English and High German meaning of the word, which means “to dwell” (Ingold 2000: 185). In essence, the dwelling perspective according to Ingold and based on Heidegger’s earlier interpretations could be summarized in “We don’t dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers... *To build is in itself already to dwell...Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*” (Heidegger 1971 quoted in Ingold 2000: 186).

Timothy Mitchell (1991:52) further explains how the perception of dwelling, for instance by the colonial powers, when first coming to North Africa reduced the meaning of housing into a mere object. He writes that “Housing is not an object or container but a charged process, an inseparable part of life that grows, flourishes, decays and is reborn” (1991: 53).

Mitchell (1991) compares between the colonial policies of building cities and houses according to pre-set “plans” of cities and the Arab Sociologist Ibn Khaldoun’s explanation of the word

*`amar*, which means “to-build” in English. The word, according to Ibn Khaldoun, means to “live, prosper, flourish, be full, fill with life, inhabit, raise, be in good repair, build and rebuild” (1991: 53). Thus building is a whole process of living; it is an “active, undetermined process, marked in cycles of abundance and decay, rather than simply the realization of a predetermined ‘plan’” (1991: 53).

Hence, according to the “dwelling perspective” building houses has to take into consideration all dwelling beings in the environment. The relation between the human and the non-human should also be realized when building. Ingold (2000) observes how both human and non-human beings contribute to the evolution of houses. Houses are like organisms. They grow. As humans would decorate houses and make changes based on their domestic needs, animal inhabitants of houses would also make such alterations, although in many cases unnoticed. “Sometimes special provision is made for them [animals], such as the kennel, stable or dovecote. Others find shelter and sustenance in its nooks and crannies, or ...” (2000: 187).

Nevertheless, the “building perspective” would rather create a void container, and not an organism. Therefore, it cannot see the contributions of living human and non-humans to its evolution. The container doesn’t grow, but is reconstructed according to the perception of the occupiers.

The *dwelling* and the *building* perspectives are vital in understanding, the change in the dwelling of the Bedouins, as their nomadic livelihood has changed into a settled livelihood in built villages and cities. This will be crucial to analyze both the city-planning policies that the government takes in the region and also the development models introduced by International, National and Local development agencies or the like. This will also be important in analyzing how the Bedouin’s cattle are treated within the framework of settlement and development policies and projects.

## **2.4 Narratives**

Narratives will be my way of weaving both my reflexive ethnography, and my narrative interviews. I will write my own reflexive narrative about the environment, in which I had my fieldwork in South Sinai. Although my narratives; *the Fisherman, the Road, the School, and the Cleanup campaign* are based on my reflexive ethnography of places, activities and encounters that I have personally experienced at field, they still try to function strongly as a medium for the different voices I have met.

Michael Jackson (2002) in his book *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* states that “to reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one’s own imagination”. (2002: 15)

My narratives will not illustrate any actualities nor does it claim any absolute knowledge about my informants, it only aims at “sharing one’s recollections with others”, as Jackson would put it (2002: 23). However, it is also important to point out that the way I was previously told those narratives, and the way I reflect on my observations is largely shaped by my own background, and hence my perception by the informants. Jackson quotes Michael Gilson that narratives are “reworked, reauthored, retold to different audiences in different ways” (Gilson quoted in Jackson 2002: 23).

As narratives carry and transfer meaning across time and place, narratives in many cases are actually about journeys (Jackson 2002: 30). The story about the journey with its hardships, attempts, losses, gains, etc would affirm social bonds and moral meanings (ibid, 32). It would also involve historical evidence to livelihoods and experiences.

## **2.5 Benevolent Colonialism**

Do you still have a *Sheikh* (Chief) for the Tribe today?

- Yes, there is a sheikh

Who is he?

- A “Sheikh for the boxes”!

When charity - *şadga* - boxes, are sent over to the Bedouins everyone claims to be a sheikh for the tribe,



but an official Sheikh...no we don't have any...anymore!

(Interview with the Fisherman)

Charity, *şadga*<sup>4</sup>, donation, Fund etc are all different forms of how generous compensations have been reaching the Bedouin community since the peace treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel in the late 1970s, as one of my Bedouin interviewees has explained to me. The Bedouin, a traditional healer and herbs' specialist in Saint Katherine, started an agronomy school for young Bedouins in the region. He discussed with me his difficulties at maintaining regular attendance of the Bedouin students at the school. In his opinion, Bedouins grew lazy and dependent, since the Israelis occupation, followed by the Egyptians' resettlement. He said since the area has been through a lot of wars, and then peace agreements accompanied by development efforts, and development funds. Bedouins became reliant on donations. Therefore, he had to create some sort of monetary incentive for the Bedouin students to keep them coming to school.

Nevertheless, development funds channeled through International entities, agencies and programs in the region require sophisticated application forms. I personally experienced this at field, as the NGO would usually apply for funds from entities, such as the European Union, CARE International, the UNDP, Corporate Social Responsibility projects of the Multinational Corporations, governmental entities and so on.

The application process for funds involved writing a proposal with a studied budget, timeframe, implementation steps; sustainability guarantees etc for a certain project that the NGO wants to get the fund for. Applications and proposals have to be written in a certain jargon that is common within the civil society circles. Steven Sampson describes this jargon in his article "Weak States, Uncivil Societies and Thousands of NGOs: Benevolent Colonialism in the Balkans" (2002)

Learning something is called "training of trainers". Getting better at something is called "capacity building". Giving some control to someone else is called "empowerment". Articulating the project goal is a "mission statement". Communicating information is

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<sup>4</sup> Smadar Lavie (1990: 60) explains that "*şadga* consisted of flour, sugar, cooking oil, and other basic staples".

called “transparency”. Trying to find out what’s going on is called “networking”. Finding the money is called “fund raising”. Surviving after the money runs out is called “sustainability”. Taking your money somewhere else is an “exit strategy”. And when donors are unable to utilize their money, one gets what a Danish report termed “donor constipation”. (2002: 5)

Therefore, such jargon/knowledge of the proposal-writing know-how creates a powerful tool in the hands of those who have it. Those are mostly educated non-Bedouin individuals or local organizations. In the Bedouin community, at least the *Tarabin* Tribe community residing in Nuweiba with whom I had contact, illiteracy was quite spread, not to speak of sophisticated proposal writing skills (which even in some cases is required in English). Thus, such power would in many cases result in the “externalization” of the Bedouin local community from the “Project society” (Sampson 2002) created by the Donors.

Sampson, drawing on Marcel Mauss’ notion of *The Gift* (1925), highlights another dimension of funds. Funds are gifts. But Mauss would assert that a *gift* is not “free”. Hence, one way or the other the gift is paid back, even in terms of “prestige” or “respect” (2002:9). However, Sampson also described the Western aid projects as a *benevolent colonialism*; “Traditional European colonialism was violent, repressive and exploitative, but we also know that even the most brutal colonial regimes in Africa had civilizing missions, priests, doctors and humanitarians who truly sought to help. They built roads, sewage systems and railroads. Today’s Western benevolent colonialism seeks to provide a climate of security and stability” (2002: 4).

As Tsing would explain her metaphor *friction* suits well the free flow of goods, money and people (Tsing 2005:6), Sampson argues that within the global project life “[r]esources, people and ideas do not simply “flow”, they are sent, directed, channeled, manipulated, managed, rejected, monitored and transformed” (Sampson 2002: 7). Within this global project life, there is a hierarchy of power created by the special jargon, and procedures, on both local and global levels. The International (in many cases Western) Donors would channel resources, people and ideas that would first reach the local elites, who acquired the project’s society know-how, who would then distribute the funds hierarchically. I will, further, argue the project life and its hierarchy created a culture of acceptance and dependence at the bottom of the hierarchy. Thus,

the local community members, at the bottom of the hierarchy, would willingly accept the knowledge-based authority of the local Elites, the latter being business or civil society members, Bedouins or non-Bedouins.

### 3. Narratives

#### 3.1 The Fisherman

After spending some weeks of confined work within the Eco-touristic place, an invitation from the manager's daughter to join her for a visit to the Tarabin settlement in the near-by city "Nuweiba" was absolutely awarding. She wished to interview a number of elderly Bedouins about their various traditional trades. On top of her list was the *fisherman*. One could of course



**Figure 1: The fisherman**

wonder about the rest of the list. The manager's daughter, an 18-year old girl, seemed genuinely interested in recording and documenting the Bedouin traditional life. But, how did she define the *Bedouin traditional life*?

We discussed together the questions we (the manager's daughter and I) wanted to ask him. Then we set off to Tarabin, heading first to meet a Bedouin girl who is the fisherman's wife's niece, and our contact person for the fisherman. She was also one of my Bedouin students at the school and a close friend of the manager's daughter. So after sharing our questions with her, we all three went to the fisherman's place. The fisherman welcomed us to his house courtyard, we sat, the

four of us, on the floor in a circle around the teapot. His daughters and grandchildren kept on showing up, every now and then, asking us if we needed anything more. I had my digital recorder on one of the rocks surrounding the teapot, and all through, the manager's daughter held

her digital video camera to video tape the interview. As I and the manager's daughter asked our questions, the Bedouin girl would rephrase them in the Bedouin dialect to her uncle.

I asked him where he was born and he replied "here in Sinai". Then I asked if he was originally born in South or North Sinai. Interestingly, he did not recognize my geographical terminology of *North* and *South* Sinai, as for him Sinai is only divided into the *coast* and *mountain* area, while to me being educated in the Egyptian education curriculum, in which Sinai was always divided into North and South, his distinction into coast and mountain area was a revelation offering new understandings of this place. Then as he explained, this spatial distinction as well embraced the people living within the areas. So it became clear that the distinction between *mountain* and *coast* people was mainly based on the economic activity that each would perform. As the coast people would be basically involved in fishing, mountain people would be making wheat grinders out of mountain rocks, and then they would exchange their yield. Therefore, they would be able to have access to more varieties of food, which is very scarce in this environment.

We continued asking about his travels, the fishing trade, the nomadic livelihood before the 1960s, marriage traditions in the old days, and gender roles in the society, etc. The fisherman said that herding in the Bedouin society is the women's responsibility. Part of her bridal wealth, or one would say part of the household's base is the family's cattle. The fisherman addressed the importance of cattle saying that "In our time [before the 1960s], a man would start a family by creating a typical Bedouin house of hair -- *Beit El-Shar* (made of goat and/or camel hair), and getting a couple of goats and a donkey, or the like". He then added that before marriage, women would go on herding trips with their fathers' cattle, and then after marriage, they would still go herding, yet with their new cattle. Bedouin girls/women always went in pairs, and even after marriage they would continue to go herding with the same herding companion. The herding trips of the women were a distinguishing feature of the nomadic life of the Bedouins in the desert.

The fisherman recalled that during his days, women went out freely for herding, but now they are more and more confined to their homes. So we asked him why this happened, and what turned men into being more conservative, in keeping women more confined. He said that both men and

women have changed. He explained that at his time, both men and women had to adapt to the nomadic livelihood. Men would go through the hardships of travels to support his family, and women would use whatever little resources the environment offered to make food and utilities. However, today men have become spoiled, “if you take *Shim’dan* [a kind of Egyptian wafers] away from them, they cannot live”. In his opinion, women, today, get different expectations from the movies they watch on cable televisions, and he also said that the increasing use of cell phones in the society is threatening. He even said that in his days, if such a device was used it would be only used for “spying”. According to him, this change in the features of the Bedouin community, started by the re-establishment of the Egyptian sovereignty in the region in the 1980s.

As I now listen to the recording of the interview, hearing the fishermen talking to us about his travels, I come to visualize my hectic bus trip between Cairo to South Sinai and back. Yet to him, they hadn’t had a road in Sinai until the Israelis paved the asphalt road after the 1967 war (when they had the area under their jurisdiction). After that the use of cars started to spread. For his generation, walking and/or using camels or donkeys were the only means of transportation. For the new generations, cars have become quite essential.

Nevertheless, according to the fisherman, their free nomadic movement as the “People of the Land” (Lavie 1990: 103) was gradually restricted first by the Egyptian government after the Second World War (which he would refer to as the war between Germany and Britain). From then on, everyone needed Personal Identification documents to cross the Suez Canal to move from Sinai to the rest of Egypt. Still the fisherman would move around carrying his fishing yield to villages in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Palestine, and other neighbouring countries, to exchange it for food and supplies.

Before the Israeli presence they needed to move around a lot to get food and to sell their fishing yield, but as the Israelis would always buy their yield at home, prolonged trips became unnecessary. Thus Nuweiba became more and more a settlement point for the fisherman and his family ever since the Israeli occupation in 1967. Although, he would still go on fishing trips that could last for weeks or months, then he would still go back to his wife and family in Nuweiba.

The nomadic life of the Bedouins changed markedly with the re-establishment of the Egyptian Sovereignty in the region in the 1980s. According to the fisherman the “desert” of Sinai was changed into villages, and Sinai, at large, was changed into *North* and *South*, by the Egyptian administration. This drastically affected and changed the living and dwelling conditions of the Bedouins as their representation on the map - dividing Sinai into *South* and *North* Sinai - would conceal the dwelling and living activities of the Bedouins.

Despite the fact that there might be differences within the same tribe, between its North and South dwellers, the map and its implications in reality in terms of checkpoints and administrative borders restrict the activity of the Bedouins. However, the geographical and administrative representation of Sinai represented the government’s desire in keeping the Bedouins within control. Samadar Lavie (1990) refers to this by explaining how the Egyptian “administration had a strong will in sedentarizing these seminomads and keeping them near the main asphalt roads so they would be easy to reach and control” (1990: 82).

Also, like Ingold’s comparison between the building and dwelling perspective, the Bedouins were moved from their dwelling in “semiportable” shanties (Lavie 1990:82), and were moved into built houses or containers. The Bedouins desert dwelling life, which the fisherman recalls, was to be preserved within the new containers the government built and constructed in terms of villages, cities, paved roads, and built houses, and ironically enough, the Bedouin identity was to be “traditionalized” and preserved in the NGO’s documents and video-taping records.

Building on Tim Ingold’s comparison between the “genealogical” and “relational” model of representation (Ingold 2000: 148), explained earlier, I would argue here that the choice of the fisherman by the manager’s daughter, along with others of his generation that master a specific Bedouin trade is based on a genealogical model of representing the indigenous. A genealogical model represents the indigenous based on race, and advocates the transfer of tradition from one generation to the next, and so would see any change in the way of performing a specific activities as a “rapture of tradition” (Ingold 2000: 137-148). So instead of looking for how the trade has

evolved within the environment, we tend to portray and frame only the old traditional way of doing things and thus we hold the continuity of a certain group.

Changes occurred to the Bedouin livelihood as an indigenous group, based on the “relational model” (Ingold 2000: 147-148) that would determine the representation of the individual/group based on relations to the land and its dwelling human and non-human inhabitants. Development and policy-making strategies promote for the settlement of the nomadic life in villages and cities through administrative controls. Yet, they fail to see the connection between the new container houses, the material flow of televisions and cell phones that invaded the Bedouin community, to the changing livelihoods and demands of the Bedouins.

The Bedouins are still requested to appear as traditional to attract tourists, and to fit the laws of the world-as-exhibition (Mitchell 1991: 18). The traditional mode of living was mainly based on the relation with the herding land, cattle, and companions, which would find grounds in the narratives of the nomadic journey. Thus, I would argue that if the nomads are to settle in cities and villages, then the traditional mode has to be changed to fit the new dwelling area and the new relationships with the cattle.

### **3.2 The Road**

The following section presents three different stories that will seem at first unconnected, but the connection between them, through the narrative of the “road”, will gradually become clear.

- **Sinai and the Nile Valley Residents**

In 1981, the Egyptian Government launched plans and studies for the rapid integrated development of all of Sinai, and the first large infrastructure projects were begun. South Sinai coastal settlements were developed as core towns, and the first resort tourist establishments were set up, mostly by private Egyptian investors.

(South Sinai: Environment and Development Profile  
2005: 4)

Policies for Sinai were just part of a national strategy for all desert areas. A national development map drafted in 1997 aimed at the habitation of 20 % of the surface area of Egypt by 2017, up from the current 4 % crowded Nile Valley. Sinai was seen as a model for building new societies

in the desert areas, which would help solving the key problems of overpopulation and unemployment in the Nile Valley. (South Sinai: Environment and Development Profile 2005: 5)

Nuweiba, like other cities and villages in South Sinai, were part of this habitation strategy. Downtown Nuweiba was our (me and some of my coworkers at the resort) only venue to buy our basic food supplements and prepaid cell phone cards. Small shops, supermarkets, and boutiques were owned by Nile Valley residents. To go from the resort to Nuweiba, we usually rode mini-bus cars, which belonged to taxi-companies owned by Nile Valley residents also, who mostly hired drivers from their own hometowns.

- ***Salima and the Handicrafts***

My first project at field was inspired by my personal passion for Bedouin handicrafts, and so as I talked to Bedouin women about their handicrafts, I heard about a famous Bedouin woman at Saint Katherine – *Salima*, who is running a well-known handicrafts' project there. The project benefits a huge number of Bedouin women, who work for her by knitting, sewing and embroidering handmade artifacts. Thus, when I had the chance to go to Saint Katherine, I visited the shop and asked *Salima* for an interview.

I asked her about the motives behind the project. The project aims at making handbags and purses, which are not traditionally Bedouin, although the project claims to be preserving the traditional Bedouin handicrafts. *Salima's* idea was to reproduce the Bedouin traditional handicrafts. Traditionally, Bedouin women of the Gebeliya Tribe, similar to other Bedouin tribes, would embroider special flowers and plants that grow in the area to their clothes. As the project is mainly touristic, *Salima* wanted her products to be of daily-use for her customers, yet still preserve the traditional Bedouin art. Tourists would not dress up in a Bedouin dress in their daily lives, but could use the handbags and purses. So they would embroider the traditional Bedouin units of flowers to the modern handbags.

*Salima* explained that Bedouin women used to wear just white dresses, with some traditional embroidery, and then they started wearing black dresses when the Monks came to Saint



Katherine monastery. Then the Bedouins depended on the two colors (white and black) until the Egyptians started settling in Sinai in the 1980s, and started their businesses. As new settlers came to the area, and lived close to the Bedouins, and started new shops selling clothes suitable to the Bedouins' dressing tradition, yet more colorful. Bedouin women then started giving up on their embroidery tradition, as they stopped wearing white decorated dresses, in favor of already colorful dresses.

- **The asphalt road**

In 1972, Eilat-Sharm asphalt road was opened by Israel (Lavie 1990: 153). In the 1980s, the road was further extended by the Egyptians to connect between Sinai and the rest of Egypt, along with two other roads cutting through the peninsula (1990: 76). Now the road started by the Israelis is referred to as the International Road. The road facilitated the movement of people, food, clothes, televisions, cell phones etc. Cars on the road became both a mean for transportation, and also a symbol. The road connected the fisherman's desert to big cities like Cairo or Eilat.



**Figure 2: The International Road**

One day when I was working with the manager at the resort, a middle-aged Bedouin came seeking advice from the manager. The man could not read nor write, and thus wanted the manager to read some land contracts for him. He actually wanted to sell the manager a piece of land he owned. When the manager tried to convince him that it is better for him to keep the land, the Bedouin man responded that he needs money to fix his pick-up car, and that for him having a car is more important than keeping a land. Arnold Bauer in his book “Goods, Power, History: Latin America’s Material Culture” (2001), said “some people (not everyone, not all times) self-consciously consume food, clothing or live in certain dwellings to express individuality or identity” (2001: 3). According to Bauer, the value of what people consume is derived from the *meaning* the commodity carries to people (Bauer 2001: 3). For the Bedouin, the car might be the symbol for moving freely and unrestrictedly.

The travelling cars along the international road were also an attraction to my Bedouin students. The road was located at the back of the school<sup>5</sup>. Whenever a car or a big truck passed along the international road, the Bedouin students would compete to guess the brand of the vehicle correctly. Going to Israel or to Cairo would be such an adventure to my Bedouin students. I once asked one of my Bedouin students, to describe how she would like Nuweiba to look like. She described a city with big shopping malls, fast food shops, jewelry stores, gyms and cinema houses.

The road is what links the three stories. It creates opportunities for national policies to serve pressuring state problems, for unemployed Egyptians seeking jobs outside the Nile Valley, for us as coworkers in an isolated touristic place to get our needs, for new goods to reach new customers, for new spaces and means for motion for the Bedouins, and also for new aspirations and dreams. The road being the international asphalt road or the airway allowing flights getting tourists from all over the world to Sinai becomes a symbol for new spectrums of interaction and integration.

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<sup>5</sup> This is my description of how the school and the road are geographically located. Yet for some of my students, it was the school that was at the back, and the road in front.

Nevertheless, the road also brings abstract values to new places, where they are alien to. The policies created by the Egyptian government for settlement and habitation of the Nile Valley residents in Sinai, disregard the fact that this area is already inhabited by other dwellers. Policies were made to move people to a desert area, and not to a dwelling area. While the Bedouins lived in the desert and learned from the environment, when they experienced their nomadic ventures, the policies treat the land as an empty place that could just be filled in and occupied.

*Salima's* project that was initially financed by the European Union, creates venues for the flow of the handicrafts that *Salima* and other Bedouin women produce to be bought by tourists, visiting Sinai, or even, as *Salima* told me, through several exhibitions that she held in European countries. The products *Salima's* shop produce is a vivid example of how *friction* takes place between the local, national, and global. According to *Salima*, she was keen to participate in this project as she believes that the special Bedouin embroidering units of the Gebeliya Tribe were threatened to be forgotten, when Bedouin women stopped embroidering their own dresses in favor of the already colorful Egyptian dresses they got from the Nile Valley. For her project to be financially sustainable, it needed to create a “market”, a word used several times by *Salima*. She explained to me that she did a market analysis to know the taste of the various tourists coming to her shop, and then she would do a special research before she holds an exhibition in any of the European countries she went to. She would then alter the designs and colors of her products. Although, financially speaking, the project seems successful and it does support a lot of Bedouin families, and it was also successful in preserving the special embroidery units, the project failed to find a sustainable solution for providing clothing for Bedouin women. While Bedouin women still engage in embroidering for long hours to make products for the tourists, they would buy ready-made clothes that were probably made in China, brought over to Cairo and then later delivered to Sinai. The Bedouin handicrafts are regarded, in this sense, a commodity on exhibition, where the local knowledge has been assigned money value.

### **3.3 The School**

In the remotely located resort from the capital, the upper middle-class Egyptian Cairene engineer and his German wife<sup>6</sup> realized that their Tourism Business had to find a solution for their children's education. Therefore, the manager and his wife decided to start their home-based schooling for their children. Nevertheless, they still aspired that the children would get the social experience that a typical classroom would offer. So the school evolved to include other students. Students vary. There are the Bedouin students and there are also other students, who share similar conditions to the managers' children. In other words, their parents are mostly Egyptians, or Europeans running some Touristic projects in the region. Most Bedouin students don't pay school fees, while other students do pay fees. Not all Bedouin children in the region are accepted to the school. The Bedouins coming to school are mostly within the managers' network of interests that is defined by the geographical close proximity to the resort and historical trade/service bonds between students' parents and the resort.

The school includes three classes: 3rd, 6th and 12th grades. It provides 3rd and 6th grade students to study the Egyptian Ministry of Education curriculum, meant for an English language school, while the 12th grade students get to study the American Diploma Curriculum. The students are, then, registered in other schools, where they get to sit for their exams. The home based school is not really accredited, but it is more of a close convenient solution for both non-Bedouins and Bedouins children to receive better quality of education than what the public schools in the area provide.

It is important to mention that in Egypt, there are different schooling systems. Aside to the governmental Arabic schools, there are language schools, in which students study the Egyptian Ministry of Education curriculum yet in a foreign language (English, French or German). There are also international schools where students get to study the British *IGCSE* curricula, the American Diploma's curricula, the German *Abitur*, the French *baccalauréat* etc. There are a number of public schools in South Sinai, yet as mentioned there is a hierarchy of schooling system that provides different standards of both teaching and treatment.

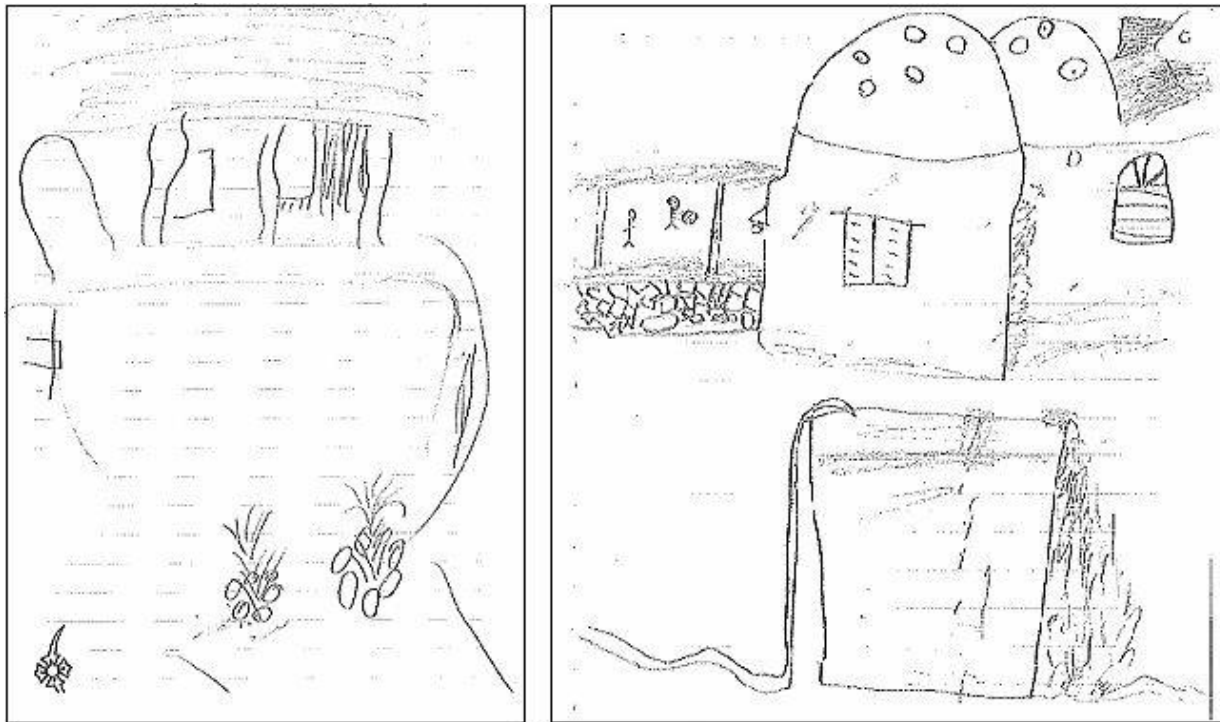
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<sup>6</sup> It is intriguing that at field the wife never took any identity besides her being German!



**Figure 3: The school**

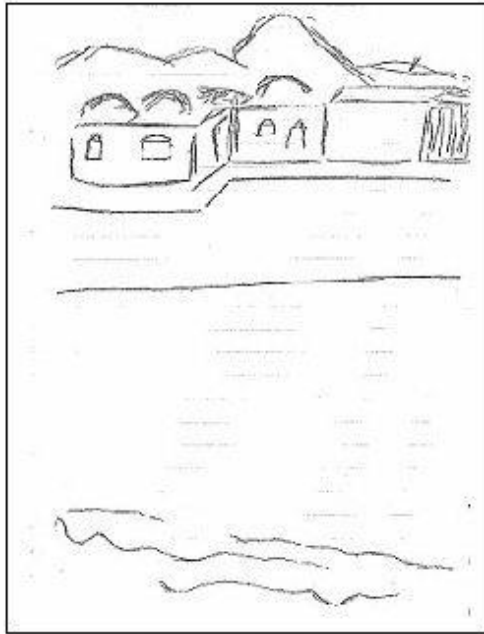
However, my story about the school is best told by the maps that I asked the different actors in the school (students, teachers, managers etc.) to draw about it. I asked them to draw how they see the school; the simple building composed of four study rooms, a bathroom and storage. The maps portrayed the different perceptions of the actors involved. While one of my Bedouin students just drew a quick outline for how the school at large looks like, the manager's son was very meticulously keen to show all details of the school's landscape. Another Bedouin Student, who lives in a house of hair -- *Beit El-Shar* on the mountain across the road to the resort, drew the map from the road view. Two other students (one of them is German and the other is half-German/half-Egyptian) emphasized the mountain at the back of the school and the sea in front. The manager's wife pointed out such details like a hanging picture or a world map that was decorating the school's front. Others put more emphasis on a small tree or plant. Also while most maps seemed to focus on the architecture of the school, one map portrayed some children playing round the school place and so on.



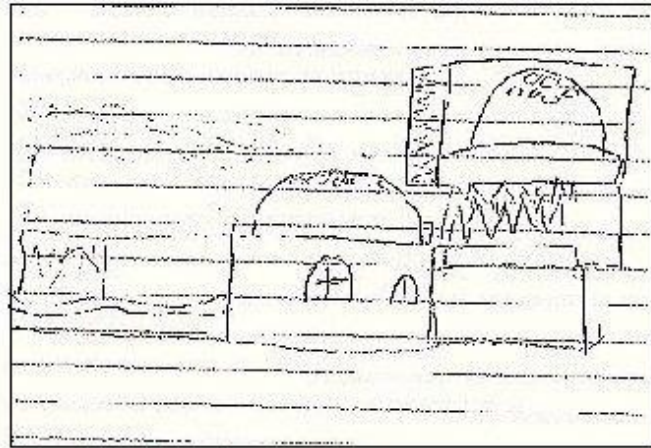
**Figure 4: Maps for school showing plants and students playing**

The maps represented what the school means to the different actors. The sense of details and keenness to draw a perfect map to how the school looks like could reflect the sense of order and discipline Mitchell (1991) speaks of. It becomes more of an expression of the desire to tame the “chaos of color and detail” (1990: 21). The depiction of other students playing, or of a tree or a plant would reflect a relationship with human and non-human dwellers of the school. It could be that the school as an architected building is not important as much as the organism living and growing within it. The aesthetic picture of the school with the mountain at the back and the sea at front could also be a way of taming “the chaos of color and detail” (ibid) into a *picture* of the wild-nature. But it could also be a way of relating to a certain novelty of experiencing an environment. It could be that the Bedouin students didn’t depict the sea or the mountain clearly as the two non-Bedouin students did, because they relate to them not as separate entities of the environment, which should be highlighted, but as integral components of it. However, they would focus on the road, because for them the asphalt becomes more significant as a symbol for motion or aspiration or even a sign for another environment. Nevertheless, my interpretations

would still be subject to reductionism and the flaw of romanticizing of the environment that I'm not a permanent dweller of.



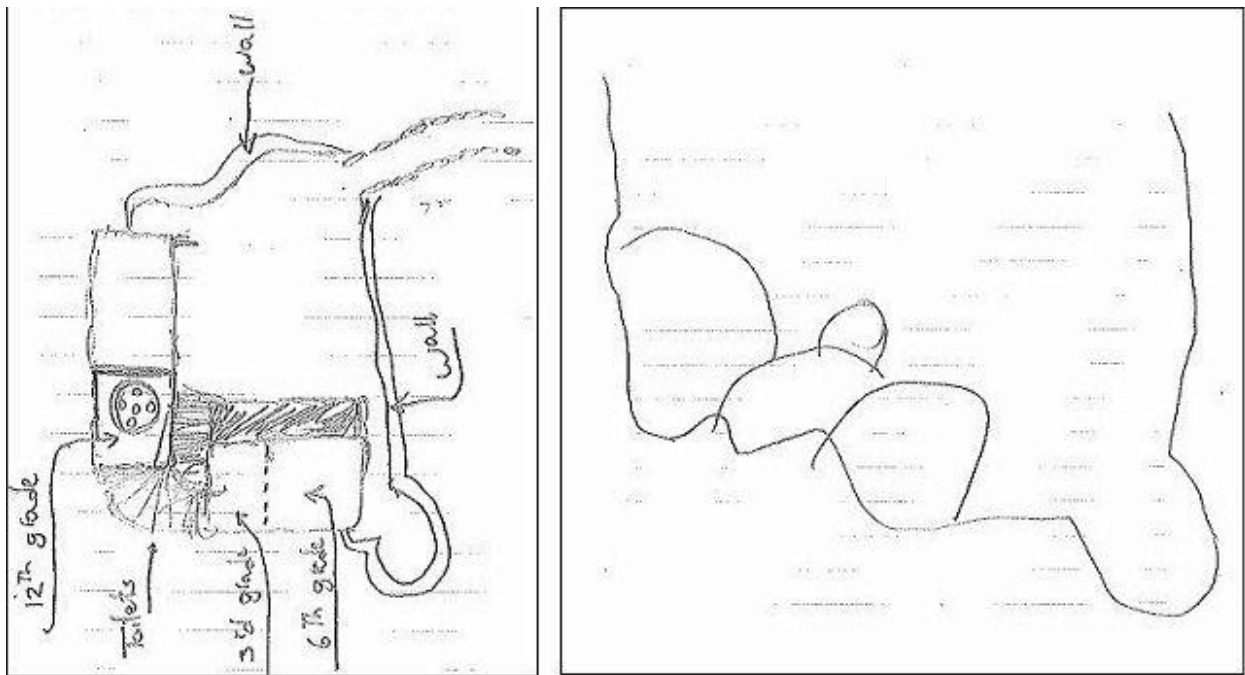
The school: mountain and sea view



The school from the road view

**Figure 5: Maps & Perspective**

In my opinion, a school is a place, where one can get education, socially interacts with other students, and also a place that would ideally shape aspirations and goals for future. During all the time in the field, conversations about the school were accompanied by the de-facto phrase that this year would witness the graduation of the first Bedouin girl holding an American Diploma certificate. The girl is fluent in English, German and Arabic. It is not really common for Bedouin young women to carry on with education until this point, due to societal/tribal pressures that would probably confine young women to stay at their homes and get an early marriage. Therefore, the girl has problems with her family and tribal norms that would hinder her from completing her studies, by going to university in Cairo. It seemed that education has to follow a certain hierarchy of order, where one step should follow the next. So if the girl holds an American Diploma certificate, she should go to Cairo to the American University or the like. Moreover, it also became normative that we (the teachers and of course the manager) know best what the girl should or should not do.



**Figure 6: Maps & Details**

Nevertheless, if I would argue not as a teacher at this school, but as someone who only went to this place to learn an alternative sustainable way of living, then the tribal norms should be more valued than the universal aspiration for the hierarchical education. However, the person, who both seeks to learn from the local community and yet contribute to this local community, found it hard to accept either scenarios that of the Universal understanding of education and also that of the local community's confinement of the girl's aspirations.

So I joined other teachers to visit the girls' family as part of a series of home visits to all students' families. One of the teachers asked her how she first joined this school. She responded that at the beginning, she used to live in a different Bedouin settlement, where her cousins also lived. As she would watch the other two girls leave the settlement every morning to go to school, she asked her late father if she could join them and he agreed. The cousins dropped school earlier though to get married.



The manager, as well as others, perceives this as a possibility for the Bedouin girl to join the American University in Cairo, especially with the scholarship opportunities that the University might offer to her unique case; *she would become the first Bedouin girl to attend the American University*. Although the girl's mother clearly stated that it is impossible for the girl to live in Cairo on her own without a male tribe member escorting her, the manager still found a solution to such a problem. He believes, if he got a job for one of her cousins in Cairo, then it would be possible for both to move to Cairo, until she finishes her education.

Talking to the girl about her plans after high school, she would joke that the best option for her would be to move to the United States. Her joke comes more as a sign of helplessness or lack of hope that she could carry on with higher education. Sometimes, she would just express her desire to work as a teacher in a preschool in the Tarabin settlement, rather than get an early marriage. But she still thinks that pursuing a university degree along with the manager's daughter would be the best case scenario for her, even though she doesn't really know what she wants to study or do with such an education.

As the girl studies the American Diploma's curriculum that is foreign to the Bedouin local Community, it becomes hard to find grounds for such education within common societal terms. In the meanwhile, the education system lacks any connection to the local knowledge of the environment.

I think the Bedouin girl has turned into a *project* that the NGO seeks to implement, and in terms of the special jargon of the "*project*" society, the girl needed to be "empowered" – to get control over her decisions (Sampson 2002: 5). Probably, in time the NGO would need to fill in an application for the girl to get some fund in terms of a scholarship, so she would proceed with her education. However, the *project* would need to evaluate the results to make sure that the funds have been invested in the right venue. This, in time, would make both the *project's* subject - The Bedouin girl - and her environment disempowered, since their decisions would have to guarantee successful results to the *project's* investment. The question becomes what are the criteria that would indicate the success or failure of this project? Would the criteria involve

questions pertaining to the contribution of Education to the environment's sustainability? Or would the results of this *project* be reduced to a couple of articles and news' feeds on the websites of the NGO and, possibly, the American University or the like about the achievement of the Bedouin girl – that is an achievement in terms of the world-as-exhibition (Mitchell 1991: 58), where the NGO, the University and whoever else involved has contributed in a benevolent act of “empowering” (Sampson 2002: 5) a primitive Bedouin?

### **3.4 The Cleanup Campaign**

During my last days at field, a *cleanup campaign* took place in Nuweiba city. The campaign was organized by CARE International in Egypt<sup>7</sup>, British Gas Company, and Hemaya NGO (as a local partner). The campaign was part of an annual event called “BG Energy Challenge 2010”<sup>8</sup>. The event is basically a reward to the participants. Eligible participants should be working in the field of Energy production and have managed to fundraise certain quota of donations that CARE specifies. Funds are then devoted to serve CARE's different community serving projects.

They decided to include a community service dimension in the event this year. This involved the cleaning and painting of several streets in the settlements of the two tribes in Nuweiba. The campaign lasted for two hours, while the initial plan was for one day. Participants were mainly coming to Sinai on a reward week that aims at team-building. So CARE wished to give them a flavor of the community work and get the local community (Bedouins from both Tarabin and Mzeina Tribes to participate). In fact CARE did not really care if both Tribes participated or not as long as a Bedouin would participate, which for them sufficed.

The participation of the local community was important to complete the image of the benevolent development in the region. The local community was represented by the Bedouins, any Bedouin, would just serve this purpose.

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<sup>7</sup> (<http://www.care.org.eg/>)

<sup>8</sup> (<http://www.bg-energychallenge.com/Egypt/en-us/Pages/EgyptHomepage.aspx>)

Participants in the event included 150 persons from the BG Energy Challenge (70% were Egyptians, 30% non-Egyptians (mainly Americans) and they varied in age from mid 20s to 60), few participants from the Bedouins (most participating Bedouins were little kids), participants from the City Council, the Hemaya NGO workers, and some students and teachers from the resort's School.

As I attended most of the preparation meetings between Hemaya NGO, CARE Egypt, and the City Council Chief, which basically took place in Basata resort (where I stayed), I got to see the standpoints of the different actors. Hemaya NGO was mainly negotiating to get more material (cleaning and painting material), as the manager claimed he wanted to organize further clean-ups later in Nuweiba. The manager explained that he sees the participation of Bedouins in the event as a motive for them to initiate the upcoming cleanups and house painting. He also advocated that the Bedouins should use this event to pressure the Government to pave the streets in the rest of the city, as there are very few paved roads.

For the City Council, the chief and the governor both wanted to use the event to prove that Sinai is a safe place, where 150 persons came just to participate with the local community to clean-up the city. For CARE Egypt, the event, as previously mentioned, was a rewarding trip. However, CARE and BG had a lot of safety and security precautions for their participants. One of the points raised in the meetings was whether the Bedouins knew about the event or not. CARE Egypt organizer was most concerned about this as part of their security measures, so as to avoid any defensive reaction from the Bedouins as we should simply be invading their neighborhoods. The Chief of the City Council said that they should not really worry, because firstly the Bedouin *Sheikhs* (heads) know, and secondly because he represents the government, and it is the government, who takes the decision, and the Bedouins have to accept it after all.

Before the event started, I was assigned to accompany a German coworker/friend to take pictures of the places, where the event was to take place. As we stopped at the different locations, some Bedouin women and girls got out of their homes, wondering what we were

doing. We tried to explain to them about the campaign. But they seemed to have never heard about it.

On the cleanup day, the manager, three of my students at school, and four co-workers (teachers and photographers) left the resort to meet CARE and BG participants in front of Nuweiba's general hospital (our meeting point), where other participants from the city council and Hemaya NGO also met. Four huge travel buses carried participants to the four planned locations for the cleanup. I was told later by the Basata students that on the buses, the BG participants were told that they should not interact with the Bedouins, as they are different! One should notice here how the Bedouins are represented by the event participants; the benevolent actors, as being different – the other, they had to be warned of. As the event ended, BG and CARE asked the NGO (Hemaya) to write proposals for both organizations to fund. The proposals should target the snowball effect of the event. Awareness classes should be held for the Bedouins in regard to cleanliness and hygiene. Also another proposal is to be written to carry on with other cleanups in Nuweiba.

The cleanup campaign exemplifies an act of “benevolent colonialism” (Sampson 2002:4), a proposal was written by Hemaya NGO that was further edited by CARE Egypt, for BG to provide the funds. The government cooperated with Hemaya NGO, and CARE Egypt in the planning phase, while the Bedouins were externalized from the planning phase, and barely knew about the event. On the cleanup campaign day, more than 150 participants arrived in big buses dressed in colorfully striking T-shirts and hats, with hygienic gloves to protect their hands, while they collected the garbage, accompanied by their media coverage, approaching the settlements' houses with cameras to record the event. The Bedouin settlements were invaded for two hours by community service participants, who came to clean the Bedouin houses.

As the cleanup campaign was carried out, the white color used to paint few walls, and houses, and the black and white colors painting sidewalks became the symbol for this campaign. Nuweiba was to be *developed* into a city with paved roads and white painted walls, and the *development* efforts are part of the charity work that International aid Organizations and

Multinational Companies perform. This picture of Nuweiba started in the 1980s, when the government allowed the Bedouins to build their own houses, but as Smadar Lavie (1990) explains, “not out of the plentiful, cheap local granite, which blends beautifully with the landscape. The houses had to be made of cinderblock, a material the Bedouin had not learned how to use, so those who could afford it had to hire Egyptians or Sudanese to make the cinderblock and build their houses for them” (1990: 83). Ironically enough, the Bedouins had to use Egyptians or Sudanese to build their houses, and now they have to accept Egyptians and Americans to clean and paint their houses, the only difference is that the latter would not be paid to do the job, but would do it as a voluntary act for the community.

After the cleanup campaign was over, I went back to one of the settlements, where the cleanup took place with my German coworker/friend. Although we were not assigned to evaluate the event, we felt the urge to go back to where the event took place and make a personal investigation. My friend knew a Bedouin man running a local NGO from the Tarabin tribe, and when she phoned him before the event took place, to see if he knew about the event, he said he did not. So we decided to interview him. He criticized the event that it didn't really include the local community. He said that the color they used to paint the few walls they did paint was very vulgar (*white* paint that suits more hospitals or schools) and that it was not in accord with the desert colors.

He further criticized the cleanup campaign as a simplified quick solution to the solid waste problem in Nuweiba. The city-planning in Nuweiba fails to take into consideration that keeping cattle is traditionally part of the Bedouin dwelling. Bedouins would traditionally live a nomadic life that would mean their seasonal movement from one herding spot to the next. However, as they are now settled in towns and villages, like Nuweiba, they have to provide food for the cattle, which they cannot afford. Still the Bedouins would keep their cattle, but as an alternative to herding, they would just let their cattle out to move around in the city and loiter round the garbage bins, where they search for food remnant. As a result, garbage bins would always be spilled over the ground.

Later we stopped at one of the Bedouin houses, and met two Bedouin women, who were very welcoming and generous to our sudden visit. They told us they liked the event and that they did appreciate our concern. They said they don't mind the color of the paint, as long as there could be paint. They said they built their house seven years ago, but had no money for paint. They also told us that they have a huge problem with garbage, as Hemaya (the NGO and who is responsible for collecting the garbage) doesn't really empty their garbage bins nor remove dead animals, and so they have to suffer from the scattered garbage, along with the accompanying smell, mosquitoes and diseases. On our way out the two Bedouin women offered us some herbs to take with us and then "Thank you for caring for us!" was their farewell phrase<sup>9</sup>.

It is important to note here that what the civil society or the government try to implement in terms of community development, does not really address the demands of the local community. A two-hour cleanup would not solve the problem of cities made according to a building perspective that assumed that people have no relations to their dwelling area. First, houses were built from materials that are foreign to the local community, and that disregarded the presence of cattle as a vital part of the Bedouin dwelling tradition. Second, the civil society through such a project like the cleanup, failed to find a solution for the Bedouins' cattle that still needs to be fed, and which the garbage has become their only food supply. Nevertheless, it would be a huge problem within this building perspective, if the government or any of those Civil Society actors would propose building a park, a stable, or even a zoo, where the cattle would be placed in.

#### 4. Narrative Analysis

My theoretical framework based on the five notions; *Friction*, *Representation*, *The Dwelling*, *Narratives*, and *Benevolent Colonialism*, creating my analytical tools for approaching the four Narratives presented. The five notions should be complementing to one another in understanding the phenomena presented through the narratives. Anna Tsing's metaphor of *Friction* stands for "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference"

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<sup>9</sup> We video-taped our brief investigation about the cleanup, and my friend made a video out of it;

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfK7ZnA25AQ&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfK7ZnA25AQ&feature=player_embedded)

(Tsing 2005: 4). The metaphor is meant to exemplify the unequal encounter between the local, national and the global. Such encounter results in the constant reshaping of power and culture, as Tsing explains (2005: 5). In my narratives, the local Bedouin community is in constant *friction* with the national Egyptian government policies, local, national and global agents of so-called development, capitalist market with its local, national, regional and global players etc. *Friction* is materially manifested through the pavement of the International road cutting through Sinai, which the Israelis started in the early 1970s, and then the Egyptians extended in the 1980s. The road facilitated the flow of people, goods, and resources to Sinai, yet it also restricted and threatened the nomadic movement of the Bedouins and their cattle. Firstly, the road created a local market for the coastal Bedouin yield, during the Israeli rule, as the Fisherman explained, which created an incentive for settlement near the road. Later, the road in its symbolic terms – that is in terms of modernizing the desert of Sinai into built cities and villages, as the national development strategies of the Egyptian government entailed (South Sinai: Environment and Development Profile 2005: 4), made the settlement a de-facto state of the Bedouins.

*Friction* is also at play through the iconic representations of place, people, livelihood, building etc that are constantly created when (the Universal reason dominated by) the national and/or global forces meet the local. Through these forces representation, then, becomes more of a colonial process, where the place and its inhabitants, as Timothy Mitchell (1991: 96) explains, are always subject to attempts of control and supervision. Therefore, the subjects of control are always held accountable to a picture of the world-as-exhibition, where the world is shaped according to a pre-set plan designed by the colonizer (Mitchell 1991: 18). Mitchell also refers to a distinction made especially by the French colonizing system, in which the control of the subject is performed through control over both the body and the mind of the subjects (Mitchell 1991: 95). The subjects, in my case i.e. Sinai and the Bedouins are colonized by the world-as-exhibition, which tends to colonize both their body and minds. While their bodies are confined through the settlement policies of the Egyptian government, their minds are colonized by the Egyptian educational system.

The national settlement and habitation policies treated the desert of Sinai as an empty space, where houses are built as void containers with no relations to the environment. Both Tim Ingold (2000) and Timothy Mitchell (1991), build on Heidegger's notion of *dwelling*, to criticize the building perspective of the Western modernity. The building perspective, Ingold (2000) explains, assumes that "worlds are made before they are lived in" (2000: 179). This means that the environment is kept under control and supervision according to a perceived plan for housing and building, then the act of dwelling becomes subject to this perception. However, Ingold (2000) and Mitchell (1991) explain that dwelling is more of a growing process of relations and interactions with the environment. Ingold would assert that such relations involve both human and non-human inhabitants of the environment (2000: 187).

To keep Bedouins (the human inhabitants of Sinai) under control, Sinai was divided into North and South on the map, which cognitively colonized the perception of Sinai. This is understood on different levels. First, as I explained earlier, studying the Egyptian Education curriculum, I was taught that Sinai is divided into North and South Sinai. Bedouins going to school since the 1980s were also taught through the same Education curriculum, and so they were also told that Sinai was divided into North and South. Although, the desert of Sinai as an open free moving place, in some cases, remains vivid in their minds through the narratives and storylines of their parents. This was clear when interviewing the fisherman. The Bedouin girl accompanying us, on the interview, was capable to interpret our (the manager's daughter and I) use of the technical terminology of *North* and *South* into the relational terminology of mountain and coast that the Fisherman could comprehend.

Nevertheless, as the mind was colonized by the map, the body was colonized within settlements close to the asphalt road, forcing the Bedouins to abandon their nomadic livelihoods. In this friction, between forced settlement and the nomadic movement, the role of cattle was not considered. Houses were built from "cinderblock" (Lavie 1990: 83), which are not available at the local environment, but was rather bought from the Nile Valley, and which the Bedouins were not familiar with how to use. The settled life changed the way the Bedouins had access to resources, food and water. Instead of the Bedouins being the people of the desert, who



nomadically adapt to their environment through seasonal nomadic trips, they became people of villages and cities. Before the 1960s, women went herding the cattle and the men went on long trips to exchange fish yield for other needs, or the like. Yet today, as Bedouins are settled down in houses, they have become more accustomed to buy their needs; food, clothes etc at supermarkets and shops. As the national strategy for the inhabitation of the desert areas, encouraged residents of the Nile Valley to move to Sinai for new job opportunities, the new migrants started their own small businesses. The new inhabitants did not really engage in herding, fishing or any other activities of the nomadic livelihood of the environment's dwellers. Since by the time the new inhabitants came to the land, the Bedouins had already stopped going for their *rihla* or nomadic trip (Lavie 1990: 153). Nevertheless, the non-human companions - the cattle - of the nomadic trip stayed with the Bedouins in their new built houses. While, the Bedouins bought their food from shops, their cattle were to live on the remnants of food found in tin garbage bins in the new city.

The built houses from "cinderblock", the Nile Valley residents' shops, and the asphalt road opened the way for the material flow of televisions, cell phones, new food options, cars etc. The new material highlighted the paradox that became more evident in Sinai, particularly in Nuweiba, South Sinai. Nuweiba is treated by government policies, and development agencies as a city, although it remains the main settlement of the nomadic Bedouin livelihood. It is true that the Bedouins are no more nomads, yet they still keep a lot of their nomadic relations both with each other, and with their cattle. Such relations are not treated within the framework of the city. So Nuweiba remains a controversial place, where a city is in the process to be built in terms of the western modernity, and a Bedouin settlement is also striving to create meaning and relations within this city.

The new material, the State policies, and even the development projects carried out in the region same as the Egyptian elite voices back in the 1840s, fostered the colonization of the mind in terms of modernization (Mitchell 1991). Mitchell (1991) explains how even notions were interpreted in terms of the discourse of modernization. The Arabic word *Tanzim*, which means organization was used more at this time to mean modernization (Mitchell 1991: 67). The same

thing is implied when projects like the cleanup campaign are carried out in Nuweiba, South Sinai. The project's motives and results were seen at their best in terms of paving all the streets in Nuweiba, painting all houses in white and all the sidewalks in white and black colors. The main organizers of the project, representatives of CARE International in Egypt, BG Company, Hemaya's manager and the Mayor of Nuweiba, who mostly come from Cairo or the Nile Valley, see such measures as the symbols of community development. As the cleanup only lasted for a couple of hours, the community service warriors - both in terms of invading the place and in terms of the warrior's pride of his accomplishment - left houses and walls literally half painted. The cleanup that consisted of both cleaning and painting of walls, houses and sidewalks, ended up in persisting spreading garbage, yet embraced by newly painted black and white sidewalks<sup>10</sup>.

The cleanup campaign fits well the description of Stephen Sampson (2002) of the benevolent colonialism, where a new society of projects is created when the International donors meet their target group in a local marginalized community, where friction is also at play. The project has to set guarantees for the fund investment, and has to go through certain implementation phases (Sampson 2002). In the same sense of the cleanup campaign, Education is carried out like a project, where each step has to be succeeded in a linear sense by a next step. Therefore, the only possible way for the Bedouin children education would be the same leveled and disciplined education that the Cairene children receive, regardless of its significance to their environment. The case of the Bedouin girl completing her American Diploma certificate this year is also an example of how the target local individuals become projects in themselves. Treating individuals as projects, is done according to the building perspective criticized by Tim Ingold (2000), yet instead of building void architected houses, the project societies build individual void careers.

## Conclusion

My investigation of how *friction* is at play between the local, national and global in Nuweiba, South Sinai, shows that the environment and its dwellers are subject to constant attempts of control. The early dwellers of Sinai i.e. the Bedouins have been perceived by the government as

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<sup>10</sup> watch the video of the event: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfK7ZnA25AQ&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfK7ZnA25AQ&feature=player_embedded)

a threat that has to be confined and neutralized, and by the development agencies as a target group for benevolent projects. Such perceptions have changed the Bedouins' perception of their own selves and of their role in their environment. Reliance on funds has become a growing epidemic in the region, which fostered dependency and apathy of the Bedouins towards their environment. Both the Egyptian government and the developing agencies did not seek to maintain the sustainable livelihood of the nomadic Bedouins. Instead their policies and projects externalized the role of the Bedouins within their environments. The environment has been portrayed by the government as a free desert land that could be a good attraction for youth's projects, and hence offers a solution for unemployment and over-population for youths coming from the Nile Valley. The attraction is based on the notion of the emptiness of the environment, and not the richness of its resources that should be sustained. As for the development agencies, efforts were directed towards compensating the disadvantaged and backward nomads, who have been subject to the atrocities of prolonged war history. Therefore projects, at least the ones I witnessed, carried out in the region were meant to develop the backward community into a modernized society that can adapt with a new life of cities, shopping areas, and material flow of televisions, computers, packaged food, cell phones etc.

My thesis seeks to contribute to a re-evaluation of development policies and efforts in the region. I recognize the flow of funds, policies and projects to Sinai since the 1980s. However, such flow is directed through a linear perspective that conceals the relations between the environment and its inhabitants. I would further wish to go back to Sinai and continue studying - further studies of Sinai could investigate the possibility of sustaining an alternative livelihood based on such relational definition of the environment and its inhabitants. Specifically the possibility of starting an alternative educational scheme in (*South*) Sinai based on local knowledge and its role in sustaining the environment could be investigated. Furthermore, if the government is currently giving special attention to developing Sinai and its inhabitants, then it should revisit its settlement and inhabitation policies. The new orientation should allow both earlier and new dwellers of the environment to approach the environment as a growing organism, to which they could contribute and interact and not as a vacant area, where they would just import other environments and models of development to implement.

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## Appendix A: Research tools

### Participatory Observation

My internship tasks were divided into two parts; firstly, I worked as a coordinator for the various projects taking place in the NGO. During my internship period, we were only two following up with the various projects. Therefore, I was involved in a number of initiatives and projects. In most cases the project would proceed, only if the right funding/backing from a developing international organization and/or governmental agency were available. Projects involved:

- Developing Bedouin women handicrafts
- Providing Bedouin women with home-based IT and illiteracy eradication programs.
- Organizing cultural and musical events for the Bedouin community
- Organizing a mobile service for providing medical care for the Bedouins.
- Helping in fixing and preparing an IT center that the NGO founded in Nuweiba.
- Coordinating for a cleanup campaign that took place in the different Bedouin settlements in Nuweiba in early December 2010.

The second part of my assignment was to work as a teacher in the school that was started by my manager 12 years back in the resort that functions as a private home-schooling place for both my manager's children as well as for some other Bedouin and non-Bedouin children. My job was to give classes to all grades on human-environmental relations; my manager thought that the classes should be mainly awareness classes on what the NGO does in developing and preserving the community.

### Ethnography

All through my stay at field, I kept a habit of writing reports of my weekly activities, field notes and diaries of my own impressions about the different events and encounters I experienced. I specifically conducted ethnographic observations of the classroom at Basata School. I attended

classes with other teachers to observe the interactions between the different actors in the classroom. I try to present my ethnography in the Chapter on narratives, in a reflexive manner and following Geertz' (1973) "thick description" approach, in which I search for meaning while describing, analyzing and contextualizing my events.

## **Structured interviews**

I also conducted a series of structured interviews with students, teachers, and also with the manager and his wife about the resort's school.

### Questions for Students

1. Introduce Yourself
2. How would you describe your school?
3. Do you have siblings? Do they go to school?
4. Tell me 3 things you like about school?
5. Tell me 3 things you don't like about school?
6. Do you wish to finish school?
7. Why do you come to school?
8. What do you plan to do when you finish school?
9. Can you draw a map for the school?

### Questions for Teachers

1. Introduce yourself
2. What do you teach at Basata School?
3. How long have you been at Basata School?
4. How would you describe the School in one sentence?
5. Tell me 3 things you like about the school?
6. Tell me 3 things you don't like about the school?
7. What is your biggest challenge at Basata?
8. Can you draw a map for the school?



My questions were based on a phenomenological approach, where I assume that the way each of the interviewees perceives the school, and thus draws it, is based on the different experience each of them had within the school. I am, to a far extent, relying here on Merleau-Ponty's (2007) explanation of how we perceive an object, based on our experiences, he explains how one could see his next-door house,

For example, I see the next-door house from a certain angle, but it would be seen differently from the right bank of the Seine, or from the inside, or again from an aeroplane: the house itself is none of these appearances: it is, as Leibnitz said, the geometrized projection of these perspectives and of all possible perspectives, that is, the perspectiveless position from which all can be derived, the house seen from nowhere (Merleau-Ponty 2007: 77).

The maps are presented and analyzed in the narrative on the school.

## **Narrative Interviews**

Throughout my stay in South Sinai, I had four narrative interviews, in which my interviewees freely gave an account of their own story, although still guided by some questions. The first interview was conducted with a fisherman, whom I met as part of my work in the NGO. The NGO aims at recording the cultural heritage of the Bedouins. The second interview was conducted with a Bedouin lady, who runs a handicrafts' shop in Saint Katherine region.

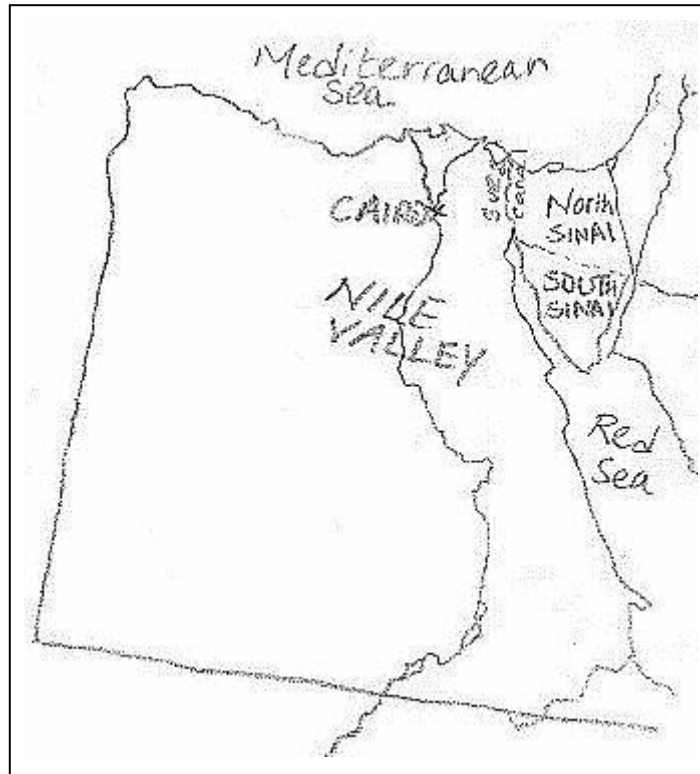
The third and fourth interviews were conducted with two herbs' specialists in Saint Katherine as well. Although, both interviewees are specialized in the same field, they present different examples of local knowledge preservation within the changing environment in South Sinai. The former was running an eco-lodge up in the mountain in Saint Katherine, and he worked as a ranger for the protectorate. He explained the different programmes they try to incorporate at schools to make local inhabitants aware of the wild fauna and flora and how to protect them. The latter a descendent of one of the very traditional healers in the region, started an agriculture school for the Bedouins and then helped them start their own small-scale gardens.

## **Investigating the Cleanup Campaign**

I conducted interviews in an attempt to evaluate the cleanup campaign that took place in Nuweiba at the end of my internship. I talked to a Bedouin man in charge of another local NGO, and also to some few local inhabitants.

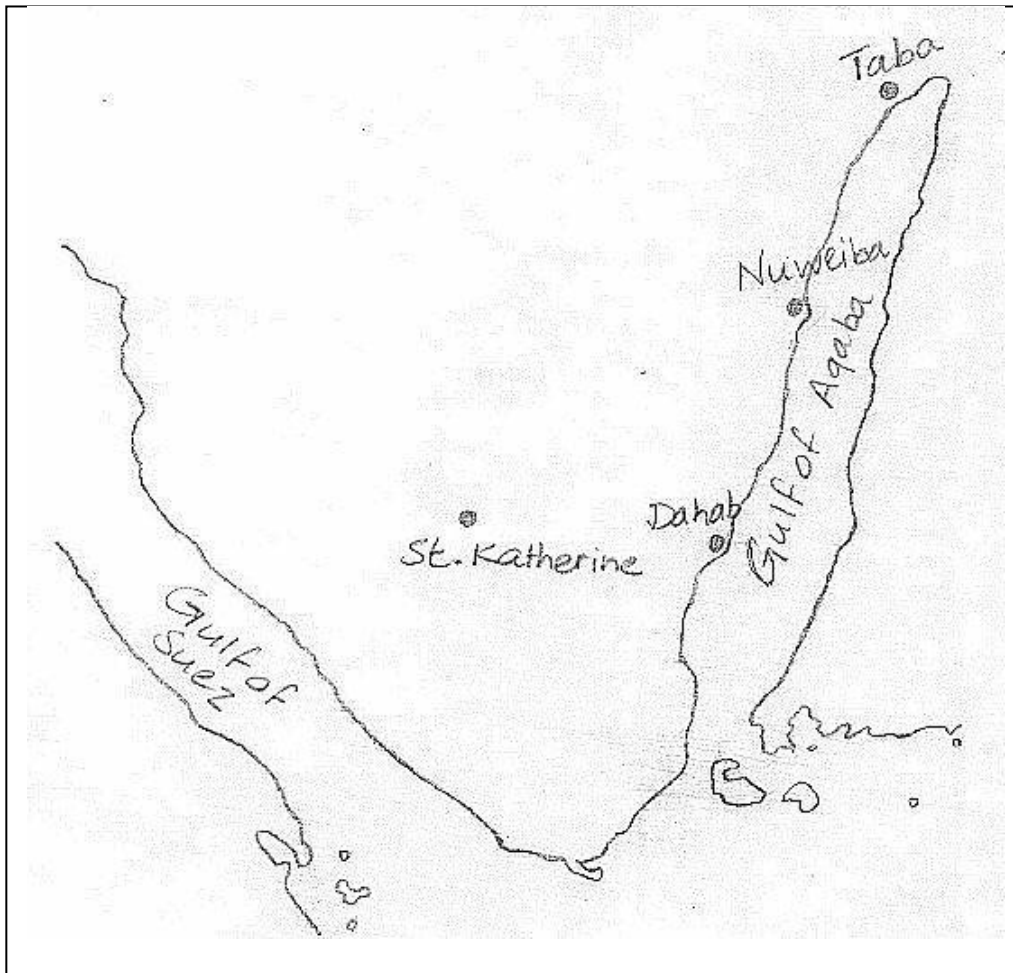
## Appendix B: Maps for Egypt and South Sinai

The following maps are drawn by hand showing both Egypt and South Sinai.



**Figure 7: Map for Egypt**

Figure 7: Map for Egypt shows both the Nile Valley and Sinai. Also the map shows the difference between North and South Sinai.



**Figure 8: Map for South Sinai**

Figure 8: Map for South Sinai shows the two main locations where the research took place i.e. Nuweiba and St. Katherine.