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Journal

Arab Fund for Arts and Culture - AFAC

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Publication Date

2011-11-01

Continuity and Change: Bedouin Expressive Culture in the North Badia, Jordan

By Kathleen Hood, Ph.D. and Mohammad Al-Oun, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Although expressive culture, which includes the performative traditions of music, dance, and poetry, has long been an important part of Jordanian Bedouin identity, many factors have affected these traditions over the years, especially since the latter part of the twentieth century.

This research project examined continuity and change in the expressive culture of the Jordanian Bedouins of the North Badia region, located in the northeastern portion of Jordan.¹ The Badia region of Jordan is usually subdivided into the North Badia, the Middle Badia, and the South Badia (see Figure 1). Although eighty percent of Jordan's land mass is located in the semi-arid regions known as Badia, only about five percent of Jordan's population lives there.² The inhabitants of the Badia are numerous Arab Bedouin tribes who were historically nomadic. The majority of the Bedouins in this area are no longer nomadic, but are either semi-sedentary or permanently settled in villages, a fact that has already impacted their cultural traditions.

This study is based on ethnographic research conducted during July 2011 and includes interviews with community members and recordings of performances by local musicians, poets, and poet-singers.³ The recordings and interviews were made in the following villages of the North Badia, Jordan: 'Amra wa Umara, al-Dafyana, Khishā' Slaytīn, Manshiyat al-Jadu'a, Şabhā, Saydiyya, and Umm al-Qutayn. On July 15, 2011 an evening event, sponsored by this study, was held that aimed at recreating a variety of performance traditions for comparison with current practices.

¹ This research was made possible by a grant from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) in 2011. Previous fieldwork in the same area in 2010 was made possible by a grant from the Firebird Foundation.

² Information from www.badia.gov.jo/land.html, accessed November 3, 2011.

³ The study's team of researchers included (in alphabetical order): Anne Colquhoun, Kathleen Hood, Atallah Qattash Al-Madarmah, Gazua Al-Oun, Mohammad Al-Oun, Sulayman Al-Shurufat, and Hamad Al-Shurufat.

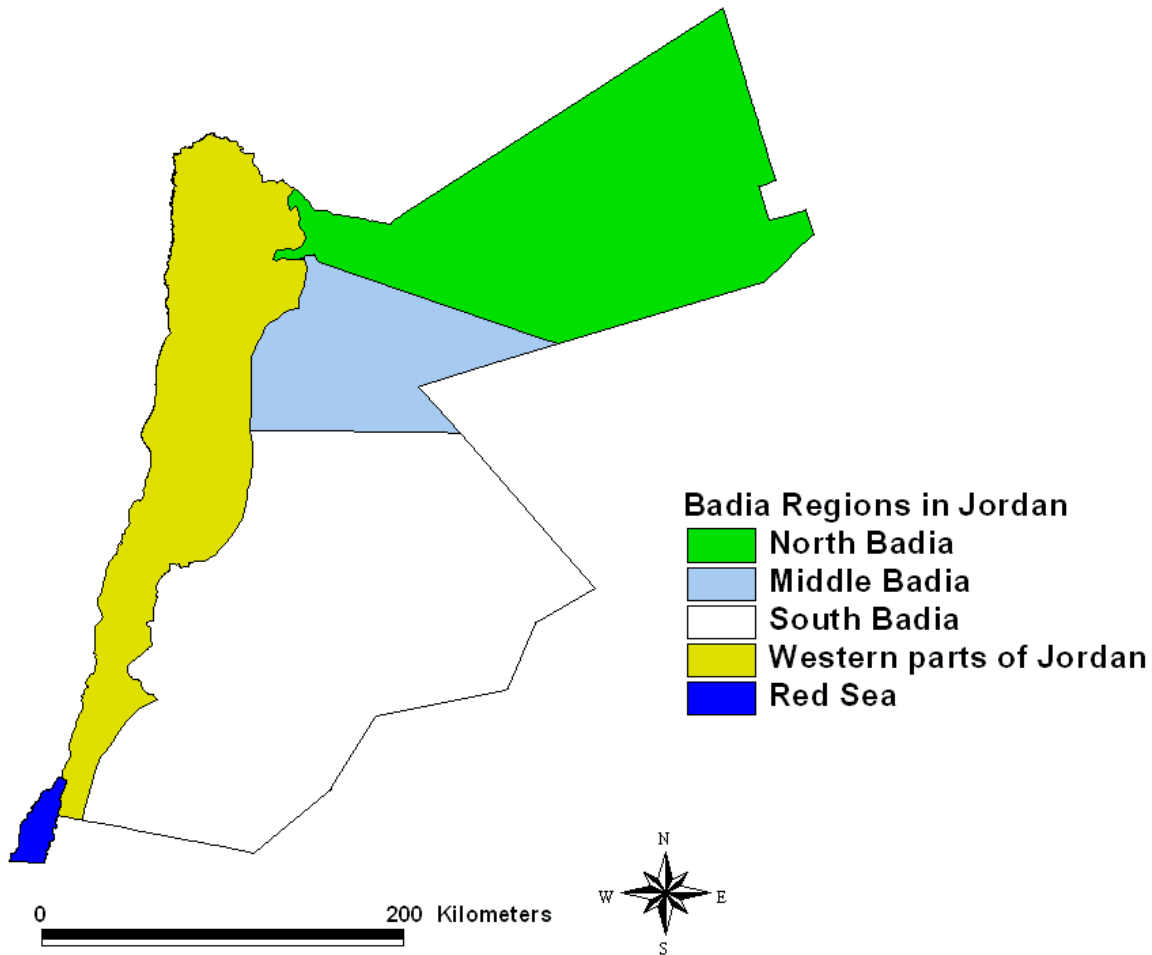


Figure 1: Map of Jordan showing the three Badia regions.⁴

Although many Bedouins were already settled by the mid-1960s, the sedenterization process accelerated during this period because “the government took a more active role in settling down tribesmen” (Abu Jaber et al. 1987:7, 110). This study is timely, because many elderly people who were interviewed were old enough to have grown up during the nomadic period and lived through the dramatic changes leading to sedenterization (see Figure 2). They described their youth spent traveling from one place to another with their camels and donkeys, venturing as far north as Syria and as far south as Saudi Arabia. Most of them stated that they ceased living a nomadic life during a period ranging approximately from 1965 to 1985.

⁴ This map is from <http://www.badia.gov.jo/land.html>, accessed November 3, 2011.



Figure 2: Team member Atallah Qattash Al-Madarmah (right) interviewing Shānī al-‘Azīz al-Sardī (left) and Awād al-Ta‘ān al-Sardī (center) in the village of Ṣabhā, Jordan. (Photo by Anne Colquhoun)

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Bedouins and the Desert (Jabbur 1995), a book originally published in Arabic, is an excellent overview of many aspects of pre-settlement Bedouin life. However, in the chapter “Education and Cultural Life,” the author states that Bedouin cultural life consists of poetry and folk tales, and he makes only passing reference to the use of the *rabābah* as an accompaniment to the poetry. Music is only discussed in any detail with regard to a particular nomadic tribe of contested origin, the Ṣlayb, who are known for their music and poetry.

Describing conditions in Jordan in the late 1970s, *The Badia of Jordan: the Process of Change* (Abu Jaber et al. 1987) is important for establishing a baseline for comparison with conditions in 2011. It discusses the idea of Bedouinism as a form of cultural identity (Ibid.:v). However, aside from brief discussions of the Bedouin goat-hair tent (*bayt sha‘r*) and traditional household activities, for example, cooking, spinning, and weaving, there is no mention of other cultural elements, such as music, dance, or poetry.

Although pastoral nomads in the Middle East were studied extensively by anthropologists up until the late 1960s (Eickelman 1998:74), few of their accounts examine the musical practices of the people. More informative on the musical traditions have been the published accounts of early European travelers from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, as discussed in A. J. Racy’s “Music of the Arabian Desert in the Accounts of Early Western Travelers” (1996b). Traveler’s accounts of note include Burckhardt (1822 and 1831) and Doughty (1888). A well-

known study of sung poetry of the Awlād ‘Alī Bedouins of Egypt is found in Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1986). Her exploration of this community was continued in *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (1993), an intimate ethnography of Bedouin life featuring stories by and about Bedouin women. Racy has written an excellent study of the Bedouin ethos that is prevalent in the musical traditions of the Near East (Racy 1996a). In this article, he examines the complex patterns of cultural exchange among rural, urban, and nomadic communities. Abdel-Hamid Hamam has written brief but informative entries on Bedouin music and Jordanian Music in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd Edition (2001a and 2001b). More specifically, the traditions of the Jordanian Bedouins have not been extensively documented in English, although Ghawanmeh has written quite a number of items on Jordanian Bedouin music in Arabic (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2009). These works are important because they include a wealth of detailed musical transcriptions and excerpts of the poetry used in the songs. In these works, he analyzes most of the main Bedouin music and dance genres, including *sāmīr* (a men’s song and dance form) and women’s *tarāwīd* (a genre that includes some wedding and circumcision songs).

Commercial sound recordings of the Bedouins of the North Badia are hard to find. The best existing recording is perhaps *Bedouins of the Middle East* (2005), compiled from field recordings made in 1955 and 1960 by ethnomusicologist Deben Bhattacharya. This contains recordings from various Bedouin tribes of Jordan and Syria, but only a few tracks are from the North Badia area. The Ethnomusicology Archive at the University of California, Los Angeles, one of the largest sound archives in the United States, with over 100,000 audio-visual recordings, has only one recording devoted to Jordanian Bedouin music and only a handful of recordings containing any Bedouin music at all.

PERFORMATIVE TRADITIONS IN THE NORTH BADIA, JORDAN

Although many people often think of folk and traditional music as something frozen in time and unchanging, this is an erroneous idea (Blacking 1986:5). Change can occur from within the culture for a variety of reasons, including adaptation to a changing environment. Change can also come from outside influences, through contact with neighboring cultures, trade, and other factors. Perhaps changes are occurring at a more rapid rate in the modern era, but, nevertheless, change has occurred all along. The preceding and subsequent discussions may make it seem like change is something that is imposed upon a culture. It is important to keep in mind, however, as Blacking has noted, that ultimately “only human beings can invent and change tradition” (Ibid.:7), and indeed, changes “... are the results of decisions made by individuals about music-making and music...” (Ibid.:3). In other words, even though sedenterization and other changes are occurring in the lives of the Bedouins, ultimately it is individuals who make the decisions regarding which of the traditions to keep, alter, or discard altogether.

The following section will discuss the traditional contexts for music making among the Bedouins in the North Badia, Jordan, as recalled by the study’s interviewees during their

lifetimes. The period covered begins in the early 1940s, when the elders recorded by our study were children, up to the mid-1980s, roughly the time period when many of the study's interviewees ceased living a nomadic life. The end of the nomadic lifestyle brought a number of sweeping changes to the performative traditions in the North Badia. These changes will be discussed later in this article.

Contexts

Among the Bedouins in the North Badia, the main contexts for music and dance traditionally were life-cycle events, such as weddings and engagements, funerals, and circumcisions. In addition, there were work songs and songs associated with child rearing, such as lullabies and children's songs.

Weddings, and the preceding engagement parties, were (and still are) the most common contexts in which traditional music and dance could be found. Weddings in the past took place over a period of seven days (although some interviewees reported different lengths of time, ranging from three to nine days), allowing many opportunities for the performance of musical genres, many of which are accompanied by dance. Because of the separation of the sexes in Bedouin society, men and women would generally perform different genres in different locations and at different points in the wedding celebration.

Funerals are another context for music. The tradition of women singing laments (*nadb*) at funerals is an ancient Arab custom going back to pre-Islamic times (Racy 1986:27).

During the lifetimes of the study's interviewees, parties accompanying circumcision for boys (*al-ṭuhūr*) were occasions for singing, eating, and joyous celebration. A sheep would be sacrificed and eaten, and women would sing songs and dance. According to one interviewee, women would perform songs and dances similar to those performed at weddings. Often a three-legged, tent-like structure would be erected around which women would dance and sing.

Work songs have been a part of many cultures, and Bedouin culture is no exception. Work songs have a variety of purposes. Often the rhythm of the songs helps to make the work more methodical. The songs can also help to synchronize the motions involved in a communal work task. Singing can also make work more pleasant. In traditional Bedouin culture, the work song genre includes songs for shearing sheep and songs for weaving.

Instruments

The musical instruments used by a culture depend on variety of factors, including the availability of materials to build the instruments and practical considerations, such as portability. For example, a nomadic lifestyle would tend to limit the size and weight of instruments that a person would want to carry with them. Thus, few instruments are used by the Bedouins, and they are relatively small in size and use materials available in the Badia. Traditionally, there are two main instruments used by the Bedouins in the North Badia. The first is the *rabābah*, a rectangular fiddle, covered on both sides with goat or gazelle skin, having one string made of horse hair and

played with a bow made of wood and horse hair. It is typically played by a poet-singer, who uses it to accompany himself while reciting or singing poetry (see Figure 3). Second is the *shabbābah*, a small reed or metal flute, originally an instrument played by shepherds, but mainly used today in weddings to accompany the *dabkah*. Another instrument currently used in weddings to accompany the *dabkah* is the *mijwiz*, a wind instrument having two parallel reed pipes of the same length, each having a single reed. The *mijwiz*, however, is not part of the traditional Bedouin culture, but is a folk instrument found throughout the East Mediterranean world. Another addition to the set of instruments used by the Bedouins is the *ūd* (fretless, pear-shaped, plucked lute having a short neck), an urban instrument primarily associated with Arab art music. The previous instruments are all played exclusively by men. Among many Arab groups, the only instrument performed by women in traditional folk music is the *daff*, or frame-drum, which is played in weddings (Doubleday 1999). According to the study's consultants, however, women in the Badia do not play this instrument, but nowadays will sometimes play the *darbukkah*, known locally as *tablah* (a single-headed goblet drum) and a fairly recent addition to Arab folk music from the urban Arab music tradition.



Figure 3: Poet-singer 'Udhaymān al-Ghiyyāth playing the *rabābah*.
(Photo by Kathleen Hood)

Performative Genres

In the Bedouin tradition, music and poetry are often closely linked. Speech and song are not polar opposites, but can best be represented as points on a continuum (List 1963). Both having rhythm and

melody, speech and song are dependent on sound. “Arabic spoken poetry is close to song on the continuum because, like music, it has a metric structure and uses language different from that of everyday speech” (Hood 2007:87-88). Some of the genres listed below could either be recited as poetry or sung by a poet-singer accompanying himself on the *rabābah*. Songs can be broadly categorized as life cycle songs, including songs performed at circumcisions, weddings, and funerals; work songs (women's domestic work songs, sheep shearing songs); lullabies and children's songs; and group entertainment songs. During the research in 2010 and 2011, recordings of most of the song genres discussed below were collected (some were performed outside the original context, and others were discussed, but not performed).

Men’s Traditional Song Repertoire

Songs performed by the poet-singer accompanied by *rabābah* include: *shrūqī*; *mashūb*; *hujayna* (colloquially *hijayni*); *ḥidā’* (colloquially *ḥidā*); *ghazal* (love poetry); *lahn Durzī* (melody, or song, in the Druze style). The following are songs performed unaccompanied by groups of men:⁵ *hujayna*; *ḥidā’*; *sāmir*; and *dahḥiyyah*.

The *sāmir* is the primary men’s traditional communal song and dance and is still performed at weddings, although it is not even performed at every wedding anymore (see Figure 4). The *sāmir* features songs that have a slow, duple meter and often have a jagged melodic contour. During the dance, men walk slowly or sway side-to-side in a circle or half circle. Traditionally, at one point in the dance, an unmarried woman (known as *al-ḥāshī*, or “defender”), covered from head to toe in a cloak and veil and brandishing a sword, would enter the circle of men and dance alone in the center of the circle for a period. During the *sāmir*, the men may also break into a performance of *dahḥiyyah*, a melodically repetitive song with a very quick tempo, accompanied by handclaps.



Figure 4: Men singing and dancing *sāmir* at the “Bedouin Night” on July 15, 2011, in the village of Manshiyat al-Jadu’a, Jordan. (Photo by Anne Colquhoun)

⁵ Because these were recorded outside of their usual context, most of these songs were performed solo instead of in a group, with the exception of the *sāmir* and *dahḥiyyah*, which were performed at the “Bedouin Night” event.

Women's Traditional Song Repertoire

Women's genres are generally unaccompanied and include: wedding songs; circumcision songs; lullabies; work songs, including sheep-shearing songs, weaving songs, songs for sewing the *bayt sha'r*, yoghurt-making songs, and songs for sacrificing sheep; songs sung while moving from one place to another; songs for rain; songs for *ghazū* (raids); and funeral laments.⁶

Wedding songs make up a large percentage of the women's repertoire. One of the main traditional genres of women's song is the *fāridah* (plural, *fawārid*), and these songs are still performed today. They are antiphonal songs, i.e., two women, or two groups of women, alternate singing the lines. These are sung at weddings during the *zaffah*, a procession bringing the bride from her family's house to the groom's house. In other wedding songs, known as *tarāwīd* (singular, *tarwīdah*), women sing about the wedding events, compliment the bride and groom, welcome and praise the guests, and refer to the festivities themselves. The lyrics are often improvised according to the specificities of the occasion and set to standard melodies typically used at weddings. On the night before the *zaffah*, there would typically be a henna party (*laylat al-ḥinnā'*, or "night of henna") for the bride, during which her hands, as well as those of her friends, would be decorated with henna, while her friends would look on and sing songs. One interviewee stated that these were often sad songs, since the women were unhappy that the bride would soon be leaving them. She gives this as a reason that this type of song is not performed much anymore, and indeed, the henna parties are currently not very popular.

Poetry

As discussed above, poetry often overlaps with song. This section outlines poetry that was recited in spoken form and recorded as part of this study, without the accompaniment of the *rabābah*. Poets can be men or women, although male poets are more common (see Figure 5). Only one female poet was recorded, Samrā' 'Īd, and, sadly, she passed away in August, 2011. The poems, or *qaṣā'id* (*qaṣīdah*, singular) are primarily in colloquial Arabic, and the topics and types of poems included: *qaṣīdah waṭaniyyah* (a nationalist poem, or poem in praise of the nation, in this case, Jordan); *ghazal* (love poem); *rithā'* (eulogy); poems of praise, for example to the King of Jordan; poems on philosophical topics; historical poems; satirical poems; poems on topics related to Bedouin life, i.e., Bedouin society, camels, the Bedouin tent, friendship, care of elders, pride; poems about the changes in Bedouin life; poems giving advice on the writing of poetry; and poems as a means of communication to poets from other tribes or other geographical areas. Poetry is also a means to preserve the history of the tribes.

⁶ The women's songs recorded for this study were all recorded in an interview setting. Some, such as the circumcision songs and funeral laments, were recorded out of context because they are no longer performed, and others, such as the wedding songs, were recorded outside the wedding context because recording women at the weddings was not allowed.



Figure 5: Poet 'Ali Salāmah Ḥamdān al-Gmayth in the village of Umm al-Qutayn, Jordan. (Photo by Kathleen Hood)

Lullabies and Children's Songs and Games

The Bedouins have traditionally had a variety of lullabies and children's songs, although both of these genres appear to be on the decline. Some of the women interviewed mentioned different games, including a type of chess game played by children, a type of hopscotch game, and another game using stones placed on a grid. One woman mentioned that girls would play with dolls made of sticks. She also mentioned a game played by girls called *chufiyya*, which involved moving in parallel lines and turning around. During interviews for this study, some older women could remember some lullabies, but only a few gave permission to be recorded. Unfortunately, no children's songs were heard.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Many things have changed during the lifetimes of the interviewees of this study, whose ages at the time of recording ranged from about sixty to eighty years. The nomadic life has ceased for

most people in the North Badia, although some people still have herds of camels and other remnants of their former existence (see Figure 6). Some people lament that certain aspects of that life are now gone, but many feel that the sedentary life is a good thing, and they enjoy the comforts of modern living. In particular, many of the women interviewed seemed to feel that the changes have been for the better, since their lives as nomads had been difficult. They had to fetch water, get firewood, and take care of the sheep, not to mention the difficulties of moving from place to place. As one elderly woman said, “In the past we had so many problems in our lives, but now we are like princesses.”



Figure 6: The old and the new: Camels pass by modern concrete Bedouin houses in the North Badia village of Şabhā, Jordan. (Photo by Kathleen Hood)

Continuity

On the side of continuity, poetry, recited or performed to the accompaniment of the *rabābah*, seems to be thriving. This is not surprising, since poetry has long been one of the main forms of expressive culture among the Arabs and is still thriving today, as evidenced by the popularity of the television show *Shār al-Miliyūn* (roughly, Million-Dollar Poet, or Million’s Poet). Sponsored and organized by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH), the show is a contest, similar to *American Idol*, in which the contestants recite poetry before a panel of judges

in hopes of winning 1.3 million dollars. Other technology, such as the internet, has been effective in transmitting and preserving this art form. The Jordanian Ministry of Culture also sponsors poetic festivals in the Badia. Regarding music and dance, the *sāmīr* is still performed, although it is now performed without the female *ḥāshī* or sometimes substitutes a male one.

The gender-based divisions found in musical performance still continue. Although there are female poets, women still do not perform on the *rabābah*, nor do they play on any of the instruments currently performed by men.

Change

Some items of Bedouin traditional culture have already died out, such as the singing of funeral laments and circumcision songs, women decorating their faces with tattoos, the singing of songs during the *zaffah*, and women dancing as *al-ḥāshī* during performances of the *sāmīr*. Many of these traditions stopped around the same time, during late 1970s to the mid-1980s, although a few interviewees claimed that some of them continued up to about 1990. The changes are discussed in more detail below.

Song Genres

Many of the traditional song genres have disappeared completely, including funeral laments, circumcision songs, and work songs. Although there are still funerals in the Badia, funeral laments, like many of the older traditions, seem to have ceased being performed during the mid-1980s. Understandably, many women seemed to be reluctant to even talk about lament singing, since funerals can be very unpleasant to discuss. Funeral poems (known as *rithā'*), however, are still composed and recited. There are still circumcision parties in the Badia, but women no longer sing any songs during the festivities. Now people just have circumcision parties where sweets are served. The cause for the demise of work songs could be a topic for further research, but in traditional cultures in general, work songs often die out due to changes in the economy and work practices, including the incorporation of technology that no longer necessitates the coordination of human labor through rhythmic singing.

Instruments and Performance Practice

Although singing and dancing in the Badia is often a communal endeavor, the main instruments, such as the *rabābah*, are traditionally performed as solo instruments, not in groups of more than one, nor in ensembles. In recent years, similar to developments in other traditional musics around the world, there have been changes involving the type of instruments used, the construction of the traditional instruments, and the manner in which they are performed. For example, there are now ensembles in the North Badia that include the *ūd* along with the traditional Bedouin *rabābah*. The Badia Band, which features singers as well as instrumentalists, has twenty-two members, including two *rabābah* players. The leader, Abdulkarīm al-Shurufāt, performs on the *ūd* with the band. This band is a professional musical group that performs at weddings and other

events throughout Jordan. Because of their travel and cultural and religious considerations, the group is made up of men only. According to al-Shurufāt, the aim of the ensemble is to preserve the Bedouin folklore and to form a link between the old traditions and the modern age. Not surprisingly, given their innovative and non-traditional aspects, this band was at first met with criticism from the community. Eventually the disapproval faded away, however, and now they are very popular in the Badia. The founding of this band by al-Shurufāt is an example of how traditions can be changed by individuals.

The increasing prevalence of professional ensembles and musicians getting paid for their work has parallels in other parts of the world, including the broader Near East. Lebanon in particular has long experienced a replacement of communal singing and dancing by professional musical groups in weddings and other festive occasions. The reasons for the professionalization of the traditional music in Lebanon are complex and include a tendency toward genres requiring skill and specialization; influences from the West; and a decrease in communal participation at weddings over time due to the many years of civil war, a condition that discouraged festive weddings.

Regarding changes to the instruments used in the Badia, the *shabbābah* is not so popular anymore, and we were not able to even find a performer to record during the summers of 2010 and 2011. As mentioned earlier, the *rabābah* is still widely played, but many of the instruments currently in use have a covering made of plastic (often x-ray film, according to the musicians), instead of the traditional goatskin cover. Apparently, one individual thought of using x-ray film, and it caught on quickly with the others. The musicians like the plastic because it is not affected by changes in humidity or temperature. The single string of the instrument is often made of metal nowadays, instead of horsehair, although the hair of the bow is still made out of horsehair. The *mijwiz* is used nowadays to accompany *dabkah* dancing, and there are a few players in the North Badia who get paid to perform at weddings. Electronic keyboards are also commonly used, in particular to accompany singers for *dabkah* dances at weddings. The keyboard can imitate the *mijwiz* sound, thus eliminating the need for actual performers on this instrument. At weddings, women sometimes will play the *darbukkah*, also known as *tablah* (a single-headed goblet drum), an instrument that is associated with urban Arab music.

Weddings

Weddings, being the major context for performative traditions, have seen the most changes. First of all, the wedding festivities have shrunk from about one week to a single day in some cases. The *zaffah*, or procession of the groom's party to get the bride at her family's home, has changed dramatically. In the past, the party would walk to get the bride and bring her back riding on a camel. The wedding party would sing songs while they walked. Now, the groom and his party get in cars and drive to the bride's house. There are no more songs, just the loud honking of car horns. People drive in their cars, even if the bride lives within walking distance of the groom.

Most women agree that the *fawārid* songs are in danger of being lost entirely, and the younger generation of women, for the most part, do not seem to be interested in learning them.

The *sāmīr* song and dance is still performed by men at some weddings, although increasingly it has been replaced by performances of the *dabkah*. Women no longer dance as *al-ḥāshī* in the middle of the circle of men performing *sāmīr*, however. People gave me varying dates as to when women stopped performing as *al-ḥāshī*, but the general consensus is that this tradition stopped in the mid-1980s. Since that time, men will often wear a women's cloak and veil and play the part of *al-ḥāshī*. Older people questioned about the disappearance of *al-ḥāshī* gave a variety of reasons, which are summarized here. First of all, the settlement of the Bedouins into villages was one of the main reasons and had a variety of subsequent ramifications. The availability of transportation between different villages, which are in effect different tribes, meant that people (especially young people) from different villages could attend a wedding without an invitation. The presence of strangers compromised the privacy of the wedding, and people preferred not to have a female dancer in front of visitors from other communities. Second, the introduction of the television showed them that different kinds of dancing existed in other places. Finally, improvement of the economic status of people encouraged them to contract professional bands. The bands became an alternative option to the *sāmīr* with a female *ḥāshī* and other Bedouin traditional song and dance forms.

The *dabkah* dance is a fairly recent addition to the Bedouin wedding repertoire in the North Badia, and most people agreed that it was introduced by contact with rural farming communities. One interviewee stated that the *dabkah* was introduced in the 1960s. More than one person claimed that it came to the Badia from settled agricultural peoples in Syria in two ways: some Jordanian Bedouins copied it from Syrian workers who came to work on the harvest in the Badia, while other Bedouins traveled to Syria and saw it performed there.

There are a variety of reasons why the *dabkah* has become part of the Bedouin culture. Many young Bedouins believe that having *dabkah* dances with a singer at their weddings is a sign of distinction. It can also be performed to commercially recorded music, so it can be danced wherever there is a CD player, even if no live singer is present. It is also possible that the *dabkah* has taken hold because it provides a means for young women, who are often separated from the men, to observe at a safe distance the eligible bachelors of their community.⁷ The active and often athletic dance can be a showcase for the men's strength, agility, and creativity. In other words, *dabkah* is a display of manhood. *Dabkah* is not limited to men, but women can also dance *dabkah* by themselves. A final consideration that cannot be underestimated is that it is fun and entertaining to do, and it provides a means for communal participation at a wedding.

Poetry

Some elders interviewed by this study indicated that there are more poets now than previously. However, they lamented the commercial nature of much poetry in the post-nomadic period,

⁷ The men are usually outside at a wedding, while the women celebrate indoors. The women, however, can often see the men dancing by looking out of a window, or sometimes the women may go outside and sit in an area reserved for them.

stating that the poetry was better in the past, since it was often composed in response to a particular occasion and not motivated by financial gain.

Performative Traditions as Intangible Cultural Heritage

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The concept of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is defined below by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO in her Foreword to the booklet *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

Article 2.1 of the Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills—including the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated with the—that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity. (*Basic Texts* 2011:v)

The need to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of the Jordanian Bedouins of the North and South Badias is quite urgent at this time, since these traditions are in danger of dying out with the older generation. Indeed, as discussed previously, some of these traditions are already gone. In 2008, the “cultural space” of the Bedouins in Petra⁸ and Wadi Rum (South Badia) was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The following excerpt from the UNESCO website discusses “cultural space” as follows:

Several Bedu tribes (namely the Bdul, the Ammarin and the Sa’idiyyin) continue to use the Nabatean water-collecting cisterns and caves near Petra. To the southeast of Petra, Wadi Rum is situated amidst vast semi-arid pasturelands. Today, several semi-settled Bedu communities inhabit this area, keeping alive the traditional pastoral culture and the knowledge and skills related to it. While these are common to most Bedu communities across the Arab world, the Bedu of Petra and Wadi Rum, as a result of specific climatic and geographic conditions and the contacts with settled communities, have preserved a specific knowledge related to the flora and fauna of the area, to traditional medicine, camel husbandry and tent-making craftsmanship, tracking and climbing skills, and rituals of coffee-making and hospitality. The Bedu have developed a profound knowledge of their environment, a great cultural creativity, a complex moral and social code, all of which is expressed and transmitted orally.

Growing out of the very intimate relationship that the Bedu have developed with this region, their rich mythology manifests itself in various forms of oral expression. These comprise poetry, folktales and place-naming, songs as well as the art of story-telling. Here too, several forms of oral expressions belong to the Bedu world at large. Yet what

⁸ Petra, an ancient city of the Nabateans, is Jordan’s most famous tourist attraction. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Petra was half-built and half-carved out of rock.

makes those of the Bedu of Petra and Wadi Rum specific is the fact that they are related to particular places and their history.⁹

The Bedouins of the North Badia, however, also have traditions in need of safeguarding, and these should not be overlooked. The research undertaken by our team in 2010 and 2011, which focused on the Bedouin community of the North Badia, Jordan, provides the groundwork for inscription of further items of ICH for the Bedouins of Jordan. The work entailed the identification and recording of various performances of music and poetry, and also included interviews with culture bearers from the community. This information will be compiled to create an inventory, which is needed to determine which of the traditions should be considered to be in need of safeguarding. Ultimately, this inventory will include (but not be limited to) the following items of intangible cultural heritage: music, musical instruments, poetry, stories, rituals and ceremonies related to lifecycle events (such as weddings, circumcisions, etc.), agricultural and/or livestock-raising techniques, and traditional medicine. Ultimately, input from the Bedouin community is needed in order to nominate particular items of ICH that the Bedouins deem to be worthy of safeguarding.

Tourism

“Heritage tourism,” which “brings peoples from distinctly different backgrounds and cultures into close proximity with one another” has become prevalent in the latter part of the 20th century (Dinero 2002:69). Although this type of tourism can serve to educate and “to promote intercultural understanding, ... the commodification of tradition as a tourist product also has the potential to foster the creation and perpetuation of misinformation, in the form of stereotypes, biased viewpoints and prejudices” (Ibid.). Tourism in the South Badia began slowly in 1812, after Swiss explorer John Ludwig Burckhardt brought Petra to the attention of the West (Shoup 1985:279). In the early 1920s, roads leading to Petra were paved, electric and telephone lines were added, and the Thomas Cook Travel Company built a small hotel inside Petra valley (Ibid.:280). Over the years, tourism has had both positive and negative effects on the local Bedouin population living in and around Petra, although the negative effects seem to outweigh the positive ones. These negative effects are outlined in an article entitled “The Impact of Tourism on the Bedouin of Petra” (Shoup 1985) and include the forced removal and relocation of the Bidul tribe from Petra and the commercialization of Bedouin culture. Up until now, the North Badia has been spared the negative effects of tourism that have often plagued the South Badia. There are a few tourist attractions in the North Badia, such as the ruins at Umm al-Jimal and the desert castles, such as Qasr ‘Amra, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but the South Badia is a more well-known tourist destination because of the ancient city of Petra.

Perhaps lessons can be learned from the case of the Bedouins of the South Badia, and a positive model of tourism can be adopted. As mentioned previously, tourism can have

⁹ This passage is from the UNESCO website, http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/20arb_uk.htm, November 3, 2011.

advantages, especially if undertaken in an ecological and sustainable manner that respects the values and traditions of the Bedouins. For example, Bedouin Night events, such as the one that was held in July 2011, can be a source of revenue for the Bedouin community. This revenue can then be directed to projects that will benefit the community, such as a proposed Bedouin Center for Traditional Culture, which will serve as: a) an archive and museum to preserve the heritage; b) a learning center where workshops and classes can be held; and c) a performance space (such as an auditorium and/or a *bayt sha'r*) where live performances can be held.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that more North Badia Bedouin traditions have changed in some fundamental way or have been abandoned than have remained the same. To summarize, some traditions remain, but in a changed form, for example in performances of the *sāmir*, in which men have replaced women as *al-ḥāshī*. Other traditions, such as funeral laments, circumcision songs, and work songs, have completely died out. The traditions that remain, particularly poetry, either spoken or sung to the accompaniment of the *rabābah*, are kept because various individuals have decided to keep them alive by continuing to practice them. Traditions that are conserved are those that appear to help the Bedouins define their cultural identity, as they wish to portray it. Traditions that are discarded have somehow lost their value to the culture over the years. This is a natural process, however, and traditions should not always be preserved. According to UNESCO,

Intangible cultural heritage should nevertheless not always be safeguarded, nor be revitalized at any cost. As any living body, it follows a life cycle and therefore some elements are to disappear, after having given birth to new forms of expressions. It might be so that certain forms of intangible cultural heritage are no longer considered relevant or meaningful for the community itself. As indicated in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, only intangible cultural heritage that is recognized by the communities as theirs and that provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, is to be safeguarded. Any safeguarding measure must be developed, and applied, with the consent and involvement of the community itself. In certain cases, public intervention to safeguard a community's heritage is not even desirable, since it may distort the value such heritage has for the community itself. ("Questions and Answers" 2009:3)

While sedentarization, modernization, and globalization in and of themselves do not cause the changes to the performative traditions, they are factors that have led individuals to make changes to their traditions. For instance, when the Bedouins ceased being nomadic, songs that were sung while moving from place to place and those that dealt with camel driving and sheep herding were no longer necessary, and people stop singing them. The use of cars in the *zaffah* to take the bride from her home to the groom's home have eliminated the need for songs that were previously sung while walking to the bride's house.

Future generations of Bedouins in the North Badia may have to contend with the economic pressures of tourism to shape their traditions in ways that may be more marketable as commodities. Examination of safeguarding measures, such as those outlined in UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, can provide a forum for the Bedouins to discuss and evaluate their traditions before tourism makes inroads into the North Badia. Inscription of items of ICH through UNESCO can be a way to preserve Bedouin culture and identity, provided the culture-bearers themselves are involved (and indeed, UNESCO requires this). Safeguarding imposed from without the culture, such as that dictated by the economic pressures of the tourist industry, could potentially preserve the culture in unnatural and artificial ways, such as privileging genres and forms that are perceived to be of interest to tourists or shortening them to accommodate the short attention spans of some Western tourists. Ultimately, however, it is the Bedouins themselves who will decide what is valuable to their cultural identity and what is not, and they will evaluate which traditions should be kept and which should be changed or abandoned.

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