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Laura Strachan
The University of Western Ontario

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**Keywords**
political ecology, identity, Harasiis, Oman, globalization, nomadic pastoralists

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Political Ecology and Identity: A Study of the Harasiis of Oman

Laura Strachan

INTRODUCTION

The world is in a constant state of flux. Globalization is often, if not solely, blamed for these perturbances. It is omnipresent, reaching beyond physical borders and social parameters into national and local levels. No one is immune to its forces. Individuals and their respective groups often have to re-evaluate who and what they are in response to these new pressures. Of concern to the social scientist is the degree to which people are affected economically, politically, and socially. Over time, these responses provide the foundational framework upon which anthropologists can study identity formation and social reproduction.

The purpose of this paper is to look for the forces at work in social and cultural reproduction in the process of local identity formation. Many indigenous populations have been forced to reinvent themselves in response to the encroachment of the west. Inevitably, the inherent pressures associated with these processes alter, and may even promote the reconfiguration of identity while inadvertently contributing to local agency. It is through these processes that local people/social groups appropriate, bypass, or put to new uses available ideological and material resources, both old and new (Philibert 2001: 511A syllabus). The interconnectedness of these spheres and the abilities of the local actors to appropriate at will contribute and even perpetuate their social existence. The restructuring of indigenous identity does not necessitate the loss of traditional ways. For many groups, cultural reproduction facilitates the old while appropriating the new.

Assimilation is a large threat for many indigenous peoples worldwide. Governing nation-states are attempting to 'civilize' their native groups. For many of these people, the allure of the Western world has been too great. Still, there are those, like many of the nomadic pastoralist tribes of the Middle East, who continue to maintain a strong hold on their traditional and historic ways of life. Their nomadic identity is intimately connected to their tribal origins and to their relationship with the desert environments. With every social, economic, political, and environmental perturbance has come a reassessment and adaptation specifically tailored to meet these changes head on. Their unrelenting will and ability to reproduce their own social identity has enabled them to maintain many of the ways of their forefathers while living within the constraints of the dominating national authority.

I am concerned with tackling the notion of the global through the local. My intention is to show how the nomadic pastoralists of Oman, the Harasiis, continue to live in one of the most inhospitable environments known to man, yet are able to reinvent and restructure their identity in
spite of the ongoing encroachment of Western ways. Their ability to adapt and appropriate, when necessary, the material trappings of the Western world contributes to the continuance of their traditional lifestyle. To illustrate the reproduction of Harasiis identity, I will be using Dawn Chatty’s ethnography Mobile Pastoralists (1996). I feel it is a good representation of a society that has responded to global impact in a manner which enables its members to maintain their traditional ways. Chatty considers the environment, politics, and economics as determining social factors in the restructuring of the Harasiis identity.

I will attempt to demonstrate how a political ecology approach addresses social reproduction. This approach will illustrate how politics, economics, the environment and society are all inextricably intertwined with one another. I will show how marginal peoples, such as the Harasiis, are impacted by these institutions and how much institutions contribute as a whole to the social reproduction of these people. I feel it is imperative to the discussion to introduce the fundamentals of political ecology, the Bedouin, and the notion of identity formation and social reproduction before the discussion turns to the political ecology analysis of the Harasiis.

**POLITICAL ECOLOGY**

In terms of the discipline of anthropology, political ecology is a relatively recent theoretical approach. Its origins are rooted in the acknowledgment that existing ways of life are unsustainable and that the forces of globalization have become unavoidable processes and concerns for mankind. These forces increasingly impact human populations and their respective environments through persistent environmental degradation of resources and biodiversity accompanied by substantial population growth; increased penetration of world capitalism, resulting in higher rates of resource extraction, consumption, and waste; medical/drug effects of modern technologies, including increased levels of toxins in the environment and new and resurgent infection diseases; political and ethnic conflicts that produce environmental destruction, human displacement, and refugee populations; the increased dislocation of peoples from their homelands; and the loss of local systems of knowledge (Little 1999: 264).

The concern for human existence and environmental sustainability has escalated. Political ecologists view mainstream analyses of social and environmental interactions as unsatisfactory.

No human or biological system stands alone so it makes sense (to me) that no analytical approach should be grounded in a linear manner or objective. During the 1980s, actor-based, decision-making models used in processual ecology were combined with political economy approaches used in anthropology, which led to the emergence and consolidation of a significant research program, newly termed political ecology (Little 1999: 255). The program is an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates many prominent concepts from a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, biology, geography and development studies, to name a few. Unlike environmentalism or conservationism, this approach attempts to reach beyond the mainstream conceptions created by linear approaches of the past. It attempts to bridge the gap between nature and culture. The implementation of a hybrid approach is believed to broaden the research by showing the interconnectedness of the spheres and forces. Political ecologists have been particularly alert to the effects of global inequalities on local landscapes and communities (Crumley et al 2001: 7). It focuses on the study of local human societies within the constructs of the global system. Bailey and Bryant suggest that the focus should not be on the description of the environmental physical changes themselves, but rather on the way in which those changes relate to human activities (1997: 29).

Global-level phenomena have become increasingly important in political ecology research because of the planetary dimension of many environmental problems and issues and the recent intensification of long-term processes of globalization (Little 1999: 260). The reality is, there are few places, if any, which are immune from the constant assault of global forces. The interaction between the global and the local becomes an important element for the study of identity formation. Political ecology focuses more on the scale and the level at which the actors are operating. Scoones argues that scale is critical to the discussion because of the dynamic interplay between structure and agency, sedimented in space and time across scales between the local and the global, with dynamics operating at different rates across scales (1999: 493).

The issue of power is another integral component of political ecology. Power dichotomies support political and economic
interests and penetrates into all aspects of life. Binary opposition exists between the nation and the nation-state, traditional and the global, and between the sexes to name but a few. A central tenet of theory in political ecology is that power relationships matter in human interactions with their environments (Lees 1998: 43). Power relationships, whether global or local, dictate how environments are to be used for human, hence, economic interests. The fundamental political issues of structural relations of power and domination over environmental resources have been seen by a variety of scholars as critical to the understanding of the relationships of social, political, and environmental issues (Scoones 1999:485). It is within this mind-set that political ecology attempts to look at pertinent issues from the global, national, and local levels of politics, economics, society and the environment in order to understand the complexity of the relationships and the ultimate construction or reproduction of identity.

Little says that the concepts of territory, place, and landscape have served to reintroduce geographical space as a significant factor in ecological research (Little 1999: 263). This concept has been transposed to the realm of social analyses. The notion of 'place' has become an important research tool. Anthropological political ecology has established a dialogue with geography and political economy and has developed a strong critical approach in which concepts such as claims, rights, power, and conflicts predominate (Little 1999: 256). This perspective recognizes that global interests are beginning to have enormous control over marginal environments. It is becoming an all too common occurrence. National and global powers are controlling the local environments for external economic interests. They have become the governors of local resources. Batterbury and Bebbington say that political ecology work in marginal environments has been concerned with understanding the main forces which determine how resources are used, the strategies that people use to manage those resources, and the possibilities for finding alternative resource management strategies to address, variously, problems of poverty, environment or (less so) growth (1998: 1). The notion of resources as socially and politically constructed has been central to this approach and has resulted in important work on how perspectives on environmental change must be gauged from the viewpoints of different actors (Scoones 1999: 485). The nomadic pastoralist's traditional lifestyle is vulnerable to the global forces of commercialism.

An interest in the complex intersection of social, political, economic, and environmental change has provoked a wide range of new works and methods - quantitative, qualitative and textual - drawing from both the natural and social sciences. Cumulatively, they inform a more integrated type of study, which investigates real processes of environmental and landscape change; the social, political and economic processes that influence and are conditioned by environmental change; as well as the cultural symbols, interpretations, and meanings of such change (ibid.:491). Tsing states that critical theory, cultural geography, Marxist class analysis, and world systems perspectives are used to forge critical perspectives on the ideologically charged frameworks of conservation biology's alliances with neoclassical economics (see Crumley et al 2001: 7). The reality is the political ecology approach has an enormous range of methods and practices. The method of choice is dependent upon the researcher, the environment and actors, the governing bodies, and, of course, the discipline from which the study originates.

**BEDOUIN**

A discussion of social reproduction would not be complete without providing some background on the Bedouin of the Middle East. Bedouins are by no means homogeneous. Analogous to indigenous groups elsewhere, Bedouin populations are extremely diverse while sharing many commonalities.

Bedouin is a generic term for Middle Eastern nomadic pastoralists. It comes from the Arabic word bedu. Bedu refers to someone who resides within the badia, the desert and semi-arid regions of the Arabian landmass. They are unmatched authorities on the ecology of their environment (Hobbs 1989: 93). They have been able to eke out a sustainable existence in a harsh environment. They have adapted to an ecosystem that the governing nation-states originally ignored. Nomadic pastoralism is their traditional life strategy. The herding of goats, sheep, and now to a lesser extent, camels is the crux of this lifestyle. By definition pastoralism is animal husbandry by natural graze and browse with some access to crop cultivation (Chatty 1996: 3). Weir suggests that the Bedouin also supplement pastoralism with small-scale farming, smuggling, protection of trade routes, and other activities (1990: 9).
The Arabic peninsula serves as the nomad’s pastureland. Generally considered desolate and inhospitable these semi-arid desert regions experience environmental extremes. Summer temperatures could potentially reach as high as 45-50 degrees Celsius. Natural resources are scarce. The dominant feature is the shortage of permanent water sources and the meager rainfall (ibid.). Of greatest consequence to the Bedouin are the decreased levels of sustainable vegetation and limited access to well water. Constantly in pursuit of viable resources the Bedouin is in perpetual motion. This inevitably became the impetus for their nomadic migrations. Their animals need water and fodder to survive in these harsh climates and their survival is dependant upon their animals.

Bedouins rely upon their animals for a host of things. They consume their milk and meat; make utensils from their skins; weave bags, furnishings, trappings and, most important of all, tent cloth from their wool and hair; burn camel dung as fuel; transport themselves and their belongings on camel-back; and sell or barter their animals and their products to obtain those things they cannot provide for themselves (ibid.: 1). Essentially, they are their richest resource. It is for this reason that they go to great lengths to maintain and protect their herds. Their very being is intertwined with their animal’s sustainability.

Bedouins also identify themselves through their tribal membership. These affiliations are inherited through the male line. Tribal identification guarantees its members political, economic, and social support. Tribes and confederations of tribes formerly inhabited and controlled their own territories, and it was through tribal membership that individuals secured access to vital pasturelands and water sources (ibid.: 9). Each Bedouin man also belongs to a descent group of about twenty to fifty men which provides physical and legal protection for its members, and defends their rights to pasture and cultivable land (ibid.: 10).

Many Middle Eastern nation-states strove to have a single national identity. This quest was initiated in the early 1920s through the assimilation of the nomadic tribes. Their goal was to control the pastoralists who were assumed, by many government administrators, to impede national unity and the future of the nation-state. The governing bodies believed that the backward Bedouin would become one with the dominating nation through the government’s enforced settlement programs, mandatory army recruitment, and/or government implemented agricultural schemes. It was believed that the Bedouin would forgo his traditional identity and join the ranks of the other nationals.

The Bedouins continue to struggle for independence and sovereignty. The popular consensus over the past few decades continues to be that the nomadic tribes are a major obstacle to social and economic development and the only overall solution envisaged by national administrators is the settling of the tribes (Chatty 1996: 15). The state persistently recognizes pastoralism as anti-progressive. It is still considered to be a throwback to an earlier, uncivilized time. In the last few decades Bedouin life has been transformed by changes in economic and political conditions (Weir 1990: 10). These changes continue to be initiated and administered through the nation-state. Political, economic, environmental, and social disruptions have caused pastoralists to adopt new and inventive ways to maintain their identities. According to Weir, this is not so unusual. Historically Bedouin groups have constantly adapted and responded socially, economically, and politically to changes in their local environment and the wider world (ibid.). This has allowed them access into the modern world. Most Bedouin now have larger disposable incomes than ever before, not only from wage labour, but from other activities such as smuggling (for example in Sinai and Syria) and large-scale camel breeding for racing (as in the Gulf) (ibid.: 11). This has resulted in dramatic changes to their material conditions. As consumers they have become part of the global economy. In fact, it has contributed to their successful longevity in the harsh desert climate. Their quest to maintain their Bedouin identity becomes evident through the analysis of their adaptations.

IDENTITY

Nation-states aim to be homogenous state levels of organization indicative of a particular patriotic cultural identity. In reality, many of these state societies are anything but cohesive groups of people sharing the same ideology. What usually exists is a complex heterogeneous state rooted in opposing objectives - nation-state versus indigenous identity. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the modern State defines itself in principle as “the rational and reasonable organization of a community”: the only remaining particularity a community has is
interior or moral (the spirit of a people), at the same time as the community is funneled by its organization toward the harmony of a universal (absolute spirit) (1987: 375). Tension pervades the two diametrically opposed perspectives. The state’s anxiety is due in part to its need to assimilate traditional peoples and to create a single national identity. Antithetical to this are those who cling to their traditional lives and are in no hurry to be assimilated. Their identity remains tied to their traditional ways.

Global level phenomena inherently impinge upon local environments. This affects the nomadic identity. Comaroff says that in Africa, as elsewhere in the Third World, the relationship between local social orders and the agencies of the world system shows clearly the inadequacy of synchronic models that presuppose the “perpetuation” or “reproduction” of existing sociocultural structures (1985: 3). For many Bedouins, their identity is not associated with the homogeneity of the state organization, but it comes from the contemporary manifestation of the traditional nomadic pastoralist. They respond to global forces by reinventing themselves. Values associated with the landscape strongly influence how the Bedouins use their environment, identify themselves as kinspeople, and distinguish themselves from settled folk (Hobbs 1989: 67). They are deeply rooted in the nomadic notion of identity.

The construction of social identity is no simple task. “Identity” is a process through which social actors construct meaning on the basis of cultural attributes that are given priority over other potential sources of meaning (Edelman 2001: 23). There are many extenuating circumstances and contributing factors to the overall identity of the group and/or that of the individual. On one hand there is the notion of a collective identity. Cerulo suggests

Collective identity addresses the notion of the “weness” of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group coalesce. Early literature approached these attributes as “natural” or “essential” characteristics-qualities emerging from physiological traits, psychological predispositions, regional features, or the properties of structural locations. A collective’s members were believed to internalize these qualities, suggesting a unified, singular social experience, a single canvas against which social actors constructed a sense of self (1997: 3).

On the other hand there are those who believe that collective identity has taken a back seat to anti-essentialism or the social constructionist approach. This perspective recognizes the social construction of identity as a more viable basis of the collective self because it rejects any category that sets forward essential or core features as the unique property of a collective’s members (ibid.). Saul says that the communication of ideas means the communication of how a society might construct itself (1997: 173). What becomes obvious is that identity has many different faces. Each actor is a player within the global, national, and local realms. Social reproduction stems from the manner in which these actors respond to external forces.

Then there is the notion of agency and how human agency contributes to the formation and/or reproduction of identity. It is a major component of identity reproduction. The broader argument, according to Scoones, is that an appreciation of the interaction of structure and agency across scales must be the centrepiece of a dynamic understanding of people-environment interaction (1999:493). Identity transcends many scales. The recognition of Bedouin identity is a perfect example. The Bedu claim identity on many different levels. Tribal members identify with their tribe, their environment, their role within these arenas, national and religious affiliations, and the more global identification as an Arab. It is the scale or level they identify themselves with that is of concern. It is in this regard that the actors have a say in their social reconstruction. They consciously contribute to the formation of their own identity.

POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF THE HARASIIS

For some time now there has been a concern about the relationship between the environment and culture. Many believe the two are inextricably connected. This becomes relevant when studying marginal societies. Generally, marginal areas are of extreme environmental fragility, aridity, and resource constraint; they are areas of socio-economic
poverty where regions of indigenous populations and local communities are confronting rapid modernization and commodification, etc. (Batterbury and Bebbington 1998: 1); they are places where local inhabitants are in a constant struggle to maintain their traditional ways and hold onto their identity. Hobbs says that nomads live in some of the most marginal, resource-poor habitats in the world and are nomadic because these environments could not support them if they were settled (1989: 28). Marginal areas become the lens through which the effects of environmental degradation and subsequent indigenous cultural implications are experienced.

Dawn Chatty’s work focused on the marginal Harasiis society of Oman. Until the 1970s, there was little known about these people. Here was a situation otherwise, until just two decades ago (Chatty 1996:8). Development was limited, vehicles were rare, and contact with the Harasiis was almost unheard of. It was during this timeframe that the government of Oman began to take strides to ‘civilize’ their interior nomadic tribes. The time had come, some officials felt, to extend the government’s quest for national unity. This ideology originated with the British and French mandates, the Bedouin were in constant competition for these resources, Sheikhs, their rights to use certain areas (Chatty 1996: 3). To many administrators the Bedouin were an evolutionary throwback to an earlier time. The government’s goal was to denigrate pastoralist identity. Consequently, local governments have had to make concessions. Change became a part of the nomad’s life. Chatty says that many Bedouin quickly absorbed and altered many of these new changes to meet the needs of their own highly adaptive systems (1996: 8). Unequal distribution of power has resulted in skewed concepts, ideologies, and ultimately misunderstandings that favour those in power over those in marginal locations. Bailey and Bryant have suggested that unequal relations between actors are a key factor in understanding patterns of human-environment interaction and the associated environmental problems that, in aggregate form, constitute the Third World’s environmental crisis (1997: 38).

Patterns of authority are inscribed in landscapes and reflected in ecological patterns and processes; physical spaces and biophysical features become socialized and institutionalized over time, and localities are produced through the institutional and political interconnections across space and time (Scoones 1999: 492). Bedouin life is dependent on the land. The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.) (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 380). Up until the mid-twentieth century, Bedouin tribes were in constant competition for these resources, and the weaker units or tribes, or less ably represented ones, were often forced to give up their rights to use certain areas (Chatty 1996: 3). There were serious consequences for weaker tribes. They could easily be eradicated. Sheikhs, the head of the tribal governing bodies, were in charge of the tribal lands and resources. This began to change with the formation of the nation-states. Enforced settlement resulted in allocated
The Harasisi of central Oman occupy one of the most remote and desolate landscapes in the world. They live in an area so uninhabitable that up until the 1950s they were rarely bothered. The area, the Jiddat, was once a waterless gravel and limestone desert plateau that was difficult to cross, let alone to survive in (ibid.: 13). The small number of inhabitants, approximately 3,000, carried on their traditional nomadic pastoral lives without any outside interference until the first oil explorers ventured into their territory. In 1958, an oil exploration team came to the Jiddat-il-Harasisi and drilled two water wells as a support for their oil exploration, which resulted in political upheaval for the Harasisi (ibid.: 14). These were the first water sources in this area. The exploration teams hired many of the locals. The salaries opened up new venues for these once sheltered peoples. The local sheikh requested that the wells be left open after the team's departure and the tribe took full advantage of the gift. The wells attracted other nomads and their herds. For a few individuals this was an economic opportunity that could not be passed by. With water suddenly available, two Harasisi brothers, the Nalii and the Bahhii, brought the black longhaired northern Omani goat onto the Jiddat and prospered (ibid.). The Harasisi were forever changed.

The global demand for oil greatly impacted many of the Middle Eastern countries. The Arabian Gulf States were relishing in enormous profits from petroleum sales. Further exploration was planned and new schemes were implemented to control the nomadic pastoralists. Control, in a political sense, was attempted by encouraging the individual tribesman to come forward and register himself as a citizen who would then have access to government granted privileges (ibid.). What was becoming evident was that the Sultan's earlier initiatives only succeeded in thinly veiling national and regional "expert" opinions that the pastoral way of life was somehow backward and that settling pastoralists was synonymous with development and progress (ibid.: 171). The Omani government became
more and more dependent upon the oil revenues. Oil exploration increased in the
Jiddat. Territory lines were redefined and a new province was established in the centre of the
country. The water well, which was established in 1958, had grown into an economic, social
focus for the Harasiis tribe (Chatty 1996: 184) due to the increased infrastructure development
and expansive road system. In essence the
Harasiis' had fallen prey to the same nation-state pressures as their Middle Eastern
counterparts. Their lands had been confiscated and their traditional ways had been disrupted; albeit on much friendlier terms. The conflicts
between locally based (often indigenous) nations and the official state over control of and
access to natural resources are the source of the twentieth-century “resource wars” (Little 1999: 261). The Harasiis way of life was in jeopardy.

Perhaps the past decade has seen too much change on the borders of their universe, and the reaction of individuals within the
community is naturally to fall back on traditional ideals and values as a way to protect
themselves and their family from outside influences (Chatty 1996: 177). The Harasiis continue to adapt and appropriate what they
demn necessary in order to maintain some sort of semblance to their pre-contact lives. Their
experiences stand as an example of how politics, economics, society, and the environment are intrinsically connected. It is
through this linking that the disruption at one level creates a simultaneous disruption of others.

ECONOMICS

The nation-state has acted as a facilitator for the globalising capitalist system in the
development of the Third World's environmental crisis by the appropriation of
environmental resources for intensive commercial exploitation (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 104). In Omani terms, the national and
global pursuit of oil extraction has affected not only the Harasiis and their way of life, but also
the environment in which they have traditionally lived. The escalating demand for
this resource combined with the financial profits for the governing nation-state administrators
have created unrelenting pressure on the local people. Although disguised as government aid, Harasiis life and their environment have been
forever altered by the external economy.

A key feature in the development of the global capitalist economy in the twentieth
century has been the creation of a network of multilateral institutions whose primary aim has been to promote social and economic
development through the provision of technical and financial assistance (Bailey and Bryant 1997: 76). This has been the case for the Harasiis
Bedouin. The development of the extensive infrastructure in reality only benefited the
outsiders who visited the Jiddat for economic gains. In the absence of an effective and
equitable global environmental management regime, therefore, most Third World states (as
with their First World counterparts) persist with policies that favour economic development over
environmental conservation goals; even if those policies contribute to global environmental
problems (ibid.:72). The Jiddat-il-Harasiis has been inundated with drilling and construction not
to mention the number of vehicles, people, garbage, etc. The environmental toll is very high.

There has been a rapid decline in the Harasiis' unique ecosystem. Production and consumption
of accumulated goods, then, become the social manifestation of power and politics, in turn, the
sphere of power, is reduced to "the economy, stupid" (Kowalewski 1999:73). Stupid in the fact
that it weighs economic progress over environmental degradation and human safety. The
world's oil crisis is considered a higher priority than the local environment or people.

The introduction of the truck has had serious economic, political, environmental, and
social implications for the Harasiis. It has become an important and often fundamental
Bedouin possession. The vehicle has displaced the nomadic pastoralist's beast of burden - the
camel. Vehicles need to be maintained. Unlike
camels, the truck requires fuel, oil, and parts that
only can be acquired from outside the nomadic pastur e land s. In response to the introduction of
the truck, there has been an increased demand for monetary funds needed to support this luxury
item. This has instigated a desire for wage
labour. Therefore, men have been abandoning
their nomadic lives to search for employment in
urban centres. These migrations have separated
families and have had serious social implications.

Women and children have been left to tend to the
herds of animals alone. The trucks have also been blamed for the degradation of the pastur e lands.

Tire tracks from off road excursions have resulted
in the disruption of growing patterns.

The raising of sheep, goats, and camels
to a lesser extent has also come under the scrutiny
of the national economy. At one time Bedouins
raised animals for their own usage. With the

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introduction of the truck the camel was no longer in high demand. The Harasiis began to rely more on goats and sheep. Around the same time external interests began to control the Bedouin pasturage. The women and children were employed to raise animals for purposes other than their own. Those in charge began to demand larger herds than what the women had traditionally managed. This resulted in overgrazing and the destruction of traditional pasturelands. The role of women changed accordingly. The door was also opened for the entrepreneur. Some Harasiis families took their lands and their people.

Harasiis women also became active participants in the global economy. Their role slowly began to change. They began to respond and take action towards the changes instigated by the government initiatives. They started to use their traditional handicraft skills for monetary gains in the market economy. The women have responded by incorporating the old with the new. Camel straps and decorations were converted to the production of car key "switches" and stick shift covers for their husbands, sons, and for a few commercial distributors (ibid.: 173). Their continuous adaptation to an exceedingly harsh and unpredictable environment and their firm belief in a strong, just, and beneficent deity presupposes an unshakable independence of spirit and mind (ibid.). This has given the women the fortitude to carry on with the struggle.

Ultimately, the power rests in the hands of the global economy and those who manage it. Kowalewski proclaims that the civilized economy has the same logic as a cancer cell—it grows for the sake of growth while damaging its host, the earth (1999: 73). The Harasiis future rests on their ability to adapt to the forces of capitalization and to appropriate when necessary the elements of the global economy that best suit them. Power, therefore, becomes a matter of scale. Conversely, the power that is gained from the subtle incorporation of the West into their lives rests on their desire and determination to remain pastoralists. Chatty says (1996: 193) that they continue to search for the optimal adjustment to gain the best of both worlds - the modern cash-oriented economy and the one they know best.

ENVIRONMENT

Desert environments are harsh and inhospitable ecosystems. They experience low levels of precipitation and extremely high temperatures. All life forms, including humans, struggle to survive. The nomadic trajectory distributes people (or animals) in an open space, one that is indefinite and non-communicating (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 380). Nomads have survived in these desolate locations for thousands of years. Their longevity has been attributed to their ability to adapt. Moran says that humans appear to have neither genetic nor developmental adaptations for living in dry heat areas but instead rely on acclamatory and behavioural adjustments to facilitate their occupation of these regions (1982: 174). Their sustained survival has also been attributed to their intimate knowledge of their environment and its natural resources. The problem of locating water, storing it, and minimizing its loss is central to human adaptation to arid conditions (ibid.). Sustainable vegetation sources are also environmental concerns.

Bailey and Bryant have suggested that unequal relations between actors are a key factor in understanding patterns of human-environment interaction and the associated environmental problems that, in aggregate, constitute the Third World’s environmental crisis (1997: 38). This is true for the Harasiis. Up until the 1970s they lived in extreme isolation in one of the most inhospitable semi-arid landscapes in all of the Arabic landmass. The installation of the two wells transformed their environment and their political and economic situations. The tribe reserves for its members certain rights over the strategic resources found in its territory, such as water for the irrigation of gardens, house building sites, pasture, and employment opportunities, or any other combination of rights (Marx 1984: 13). Since the evacuation of the oil teams the wells have been under the control of the Harasiis’ sheikh. He has used them to the tribe’s advantage. Neighbouring tribes utilize the resources but at a price. The power paradigm has shifted.

Perhaps the most far-reaching development to affect the nomadic pastoral tribes was the establishment of a regional infrastructure during the Interwar Mandate (Chatty 1996: 21). A road system was established in the Harasiis territory to accommodate the government officials and oil exploration teams. From a global perspective this has been highly beneficial for the outsiders, but from a local perspective it has affected the Bedouin in a multitude of ways. It
has literally carved up and dissected their environment. The vehicles themselves have created environmental degradation. Exhaust, noise, and waste pollution have become by-products of the new technology and development scheme. Plants, already in a fragile ecosystem, have died. The roads have also increased access to what was once considered a very difficult terrain to traverse. The door has been opened to the outside world.

As environmental degradation spreads and intensifies, this will deny growing segments of local populations' access to basic needs, forcing them to further abuse homelands and/or migrate from them and also contribute to the pollution from expanding consumption patterns (Crumley et al 2001: 119). This is already becoming a Harasiis reality. The implementation of the truck alone has contributed to social, economic, political, and environmental strife. It must be remembered that these ecosystems are very delicate and are in a state of equilibrium. The holding capacity of this niche cannot be perturbed. If the balance is disrupted the ecosystem, including the humans, could perish. According to Harvey (see Bailey and Bailey 1997: 5)

all ecological projects (and arguments) are
simultaneously political-economic projects (and arguments) and vice versa.
Ecological arguments are never socially neutral any
more than socio-political arguments are ecologically neutral. Looking more closely at the way ecology and politics interrelate then becomes imperative if we are to get a better handle on how to approach environmental/ecological questions.

SOCIAL

In terms of this discussion, a political ecology approach illustrates the interconnectedness of life's institutions that contribute to the social reproduction of the nomadic pastoralist. Every aspect of their daily existence is a reflection of their social reality. Willis says that "ideology works on and in, produces and is partly produced by, the cultural. Ideology is, itself, partly influenced by cultural production, and for that, contains a modality and effectivity within cultural processes" (1977: 160). For the Harasiis and other Bedouin tribe's cultural production is manifested through their own experiences with their environment, fellow members, and external forces. Daily encounters with the outside world, global or national, contribute to the overall rectification of their cultural identity. The manner in which the society is impacted is dependent upon the nature of the actors. For example, women, children, and men may all respond differently to political, economic, and environmental issues. Initially, their responses contribute to personal identities. Collectively, they contribute to the 'wenness' of the group. This collective identity allows them to see themselves as social actors within their own community and within the national and global realms. Willis says:

It is the milieu of everyday existence and its commonplace span of shared concerns, activities, and struggles. It is also the realm of meanings, objects, artefacts, and systems of symbols which help to constitute and make some meaning of these things. These meet on the terrain of "experience" and the ways in which this is intimately bound up with the structures and contradictions through which social agents must live. This general level of social existence I designate "the cultural."

Social reproduction and contradiction must be shown not as abstract entities, but as embedded dynamically within the real lives of real people in a way that is not simple "correspondence" or "reflection" of unchanged, somehow "deeper" structures. Agents' intentions do not proceed from themselves, but are bound up in the complex way in which structures are inhabited through "cultural forms" (1977:201-2).

One of the most interesting outcomes from the government institutions has been the manner in which the Harasiis have adopted
modern education into their traditional lifeways. This has transformed the social configuration of the family. More and more children are being formally educated outside of the home. The Harasiis have realized that an education provides their youngsters with enormous advantages. An education enables the children to broaden their horizons and make choices that did not exist before ‘contact.’ What is interesting in terms of the reproduction of identity is the age that the children are beginning school. The official age for school entry is seven years, but Harasiis boys and girls are often a few years older because the parents want to ensure that their children have been sufficiently socialized in the ways of their own culture and are equipped with the survival skills necessary for life on the desert before sending them away to school (Chatty 1996: 142). Parents provide the cultural and environmental foundation for their children. When the younger generation has been fully grounded in Harasiis traditions, the parents then decide whether to send their children away to learn additional skills that will enable them to survive outside of their home territories.

Oil exploration and the introduction of the truck have had an enormous impact on the traditional Bedouin society. Each one has transformed the cultural realm of Harasiis life. Women and children now have greater access to distant relatives and friends. Men have a means of accessing the urban areas manifested by a greater impetus-money. Families have been separated. Women are selling their crafts and children are participating in formalized education. Contact with the outside has exposed them to new forms of consumption and material goods. The environmental degradation has affected the traditional pastoral systems. The Harasiis have adopted new methods and adjusted some of the older ones to suit their new circumstances. They have taken their new situation and incorporated it into an old model. Scoones says that ecological patterns and processes are seen as deeply embedded in social and institutional ones, as part of a continuous, yet highly differentiated, interaction (1999: 494). Although the forces were not of their choice, the Harasiis have adapted in a manner best suited to them and their environment.

**HARASIIS IDENTITY**

Change for the nomadic pastoralist is inevitable. Globalization has made it almost impossible to go anywhere in the world and not be affected by this movement. Initiated on the global level the ideologies and material accoutrements reverberate to those at local levels. Nomadic pastoralist identities are not what they were 100, 50, or even 20 years ago. The reality, therefore, is that there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ pastoralist. What becomes evident is that these people attempt to cling to their traditional lives. In spite of constant national and global interference there remains an unquestioning, underestimated thirst to remain Bedouin. Many anthropologists attribute this to the nomad’s intrinsic adaptability. The decisions made by these people are conscientiously orchestrated to enable them to maintain life in a manner best suited to their identity. Tribesmen stick to their traditional economic pursuits even when they earn good wages outside the tribe, and even when their flocks and gardens do not yield profits because they know that in times of need they can fall back on their traditional economy (Marx 1984: 9). They feel comfortable with the lifestyle taught to them by their forbears. It is the lifestyle best suited for their environment.

As the Western world begins to creep into societies, such as the Harasiis, its presence is taking a toll on tradition. Their name, Bedouin, identifies them with their desert environment. Their pastoral identity is a kind of ethnic badge that does not have any relation to actual dependence on livestock (Chatty 1996: 179). The Harasiis, like other Bedouin, take pride in their hospitable and generous traits. It is these cultural markers that link their material culture with their moral and belief system (ibid.: 174). I would argue that they are also the markers that contribute to the identification of the ‘self’ and the ‘social.’

The Harasiis have been able to withstand the encroachment from the West, although it is apparent that they are no longer the isolated peoples of years gone by. They have been able to appropriate from the ‘other’ so as to maintain their cultural traditions to the best of their abilities. Scoones says that an appreciation of the interaction of structure and agency across scales must be the centrepiece of a dynamic understanding of people-environment interaction and that the incorporation of Giddens’ structuration concept (1984) is useful because it points to the continuous dynamic interplay between structure and agency, sedimented in space and time (1999: 493). The Harasiis have done just that. Men, women, and even children have acquired new methods for incorporating the new with the old. They have adjusted to the very
rapid changes in their physical, social, and
technical universe with an internal logic that is
often not understood or grasped at the national
or international level (Chatty 1996: 193). This
internal, intuitive logic is ‘Bedouin social
identity.’

Deleuze and Guattari speak of the two
types of sciences, or scientific procedures: one
consists of “reproducing,” the other in
“following” and that following is not at all the
same thing as reproducing (Deleuze and
Guattari 1987: 372). In this regard, reproducing
refers to the replication of something. The
Harasiis, I believe, are a perfect example of this.
I argue that they are not attempting to replicate
the culture of the ‘other’ or nation-state but are
attempting to restructure their own social
identity. They are following and appropriating,
when they see fit, elements of the dominant
society. Their goal is to maintain their
sovereignty while living within the confines of
the governing ideology. What becomes obvious
is the degree of change that the Harasiis, or any
other Bedouin, are willing to incorporate into
their lives in order to maintain their traditional
ways.

CONCLUSION

Many political ecologists agree that
there is a need for far-reaching changes to local,
regional and global political-economic
processes (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 3). Their
work has been largely an attempt to describe the
spatial and temporal impact of capitalism on
Third World peoples and environments (ibid.).
What is becoming evident is that there are no
quick, easy fixes to the environmental and
social problems experienced in the Third World.
The rapid destruction of the world’s
diversity, a product of nearly four billion
years of evolution, at the capricious hand of
humans, and the destruction of the world’s
sociodiversity as a result of the policies of
powerful global and national economic and
political agents, represent a dramatic and
troubling development for all species interested
in the long-term survival of life on earth (Little
1999: 274).

The future for the Harasiis is uncertain.
The past couple of decades have brought
enormous change and turmoil to these people.
To date they have demonstrated incredible
adaptation skills resulting in altered patterns of
survival. Chatty says that the benign but not
negligent government policy, coupled with the
sheer remoteness of the population, makes
active government interference unlikely and that
the Harasiis are likely to have time to find their
own particular, and perhaps idiosyncratic,
solutions to their problems (1996: 141).

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