

"We Have to Survive": An Ethnographic Field Study Of Tourism And The Bedouins
In Wadi Rum, Jordan

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A thesis submitted to the Comparative Cultural Studies Department,
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in Anthropology and World Cultures and Literatures

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University of Houston
May 2023

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to three people: first, my late grandmother, who was the first to introduce me to the Bedouins and instilled in me a passion for travel and learning about the unknown. Second, my mother, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and critical feedback I could not have completed this project without. Finally, my grandfather, who endlessly cheered me on all the way from the Lebanese mountains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first acknowledge and thank the Bedouins of the Zawaideh and Zalabia tribes, for being so incredibly hospitable, kind, and helpful in my interest in tourism in Wadi Rum. I could not have carried out this project at all without the help and support of the Wadi Rum Bedouins, and wish to sincerely thank each interviewee and their wonderful families. Next, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Susan Rasmussen, my mentor and thesis director, who provided me with incredible academic assistance and direction that I am deeply grateful for. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Emran El-Badawi and Dr. Cengiz Sisman, the members of my thesis committee, for their advice and feedback, particularly on the direction of my thesis.

In Jordan, I had the assistance of several scholars who advised me on the content of my thesis or helped connect me with Bedouins interested in participating in interviews. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Dawn Chatty at Oxford University, who provided general guidance and feedback on my thesis, connected me with a notable camp owner in Wadi Rum, and introduced me to another scholar studying Bedouin-related tourism in Jordan, Dr. Olivia Mason. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Olivia Mason at Newcastle University, who connected me to a few interviewees in Wadi Rum, offered her advice regarding specific elements of my thesis, and also accompanied me on one trip to the site. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Ismaiel Abuamoud at the University of Jordan, who connected me to an interviewee in Wadi Rum, shared survey details of Wadi Rum with me, and provided guidance on the direction of my thesis. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Huda Abu Qtaish at CIEE Amman for assisting me in the translation of this study's informed consent forms into Arabic.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the existing tourism industry in Wadi Rum, Jordan, through a critical lens as informed by the critiques and voiced needs of the indigenous Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouin. The major components of this project consist of an examination of cultural shifts undergone by the Bedouin in response to commercial tourism in Wadi Rum, an analysis of environmental degradation related to tourism in Wadi Rum and the way it affects the traditional Bedouin lifestyle, the oppression of Bedouin voices and lack of positive regulation by the local governing body, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority. Project material was largely gathered through in-depth interviews with members of both Bedouin tribes over a series of several weekends. Interviews were conducted with camp owners, operators, guides, traditional shepherds, and government employees, with the intention of uplifting Bedouin critique of tourism development in Wadi Rum and suggestions for environmentally and culturally friendly tourism methods. Through these interviews, the study found that there exists a system of consistently supported suggestions for counteracting overdevelopment in Wadi Rum, as well as a burgeoning awareness of the need for sustainable Bedouin-owned and operated ‘traditional’ Bedouin tourism. The aim of this study is to promote awareness, support, and implementation of Bedouin-sourced modes of ecotourism in Wadi Rum.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the existing tourism industry in Wadi Rum, Jordan, through a critical lens as informed by the critiques and voiced needs of the indigenous Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouin. The major components of this project consist of an examination of cultural shifts undergone by the Bedouin in response to commercial tourism in Wadi Rum, an analysis of environmental degradation related to tourism in Wadi Rum and the way it affects the traditional Bedouin lifestyle, the oppression of Bedouin voices and lack of positive regulation by the local governing body, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority. Project material was largely gathered through both unstructured interviews and guided conversations with members of both Bedouin tribes over a series of several weekends. Interviews were conducted with camp owners, operators, guides, traditional shepherds, and government employees, with the intention of uplifting Bedouin critique of tourism development in Wadi Rum and suggestions for environmentally and culturally friendly tourism methods. Through these interviews, the study found that there exists a system of consistently supported suggestions for counteracting overdevelopment in Wadi Rum, as well as a burgeoning awareness of the need for sustainable Bedouin-owned and operated ‘traditional’ Bedouin tourism. The aim of this study is to promote awareness, support, and implementation of Bedouin-sourced modes of ecotourism in Wadi Rum.

a. Purpose of Project

The ultimate purpose of this project is three-fold: first, to examine the effects of exponentially growing tourism on autochthonous populations—of which the Wadi Rum Bedouins, having undergone such drastic change in the past four decades and being relatively isolated, are an excellent example. Second, to critique a few of the most pressing ongoing issues related to

tourism in Wadi Rum—such as overdevelopment and corruption—and their social, environmental, and economic implications. Finally, to analyze and uplift the suggestions given by the Wadi Rum Bedouins for improving tourism in Wadi Rum to be more sustainable for the environment and for the Bedouins themselves.

b. The Wadi Rum Bedouins

The term *bedu*, which the English word Bedouin derives from, is the plural form of the Arabic word *badawi*, which is translated to desert-dweller. While there is much academic and public discourse about the definition and use of the term Bedouin, it is most simply and commonly used in reference to individuals who either presently or historically herd animals like sheep, goats, and camels, live in portable tents, do not permanently settle, and mostly roam desert or steppe areas in the Middle East. Certain cultural practices, such as the underground cooking of *zarb* chicken, camel racing, hospitality, and falcon hunting are associated with the Bedouins. Though the Bedouins do not typically keep their own written histories, it is believed that the Bedouins have likely been wandering the Middle Eastern and North African regions for centuries, if not millennia. Several people I spoke with in Jordan expressed their belief that the original, ancient way of life in the Middle East was the Bedouin lifestyle, and that settlement came afterwards.

The social structure of Bedouin tribes, which is relevant to this study in that its makeup has been somewhat altered by the unique social and economic influences that a tourism-based economy brings, is generally the same across countries in the Middle East. The smallest unit of the tribe is the *bayt*, or *home*, which might be a tent or concrete home that houses the nuclear

family and possibly other relatives. Several family units (*bayt[s]*) form an *aela* (literally, *family*) which denotes a clan with common blood/ancestry. These *aela[s]* then form the *qabilah*, or tribe, which is the biggest social unit. The tribe is historically headed by a *sheikh*, who carries out his decisions typically with the advice of elder men representing each clan/family, as well as the opinion of the tribe overall. The traditional tribal structure of the Bedouin is extremely tight-knit; families, especially those physically near each other, would be extremely close, and marriages outside of the tribe—even to other Bedouin—were traditionally highly frowned upon.¹ This is rather intriguing in light of the growing phenomenon of Bedouin men in Wadi Rum marrying European women, which was a subject mentioned to me several times while in Wadi Rum.

The Bedouin tribes spoken of within this study, the Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouins, are subsects of the larger Huwaytat tribe of southern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia.² The Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouins began being settled by the Jordanian government in 1971, with the government constructing basic homes for the Bedouins after constructing a military academy in 1960 and a clinic in 1965 in what would later become Rum Village.³ While the Bedouins began settling in the 1970s, they became almost totally sedentary following the tourism boom of the mid-1990s and nomadism becoming economically obsolete.

¹ Markus, B., Alshafee, I. & Birk, O. Deciphering the fine-structure of tribal admixture in the Bedouin population using genomic data. *Heredity* 112, 182–189 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1038/hdy.2013.90>

² Na'amneh, Mahmoud, Mohammed Shunnaq, and Ayseguir Tastasi. "THE MODERN SOCIOCULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE JORDANIAN BEDOUIN TENT." *Nomadic Peoples* 12, no. 1 (2008): 149–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43123817>.

³ Brand, Laurie A. "Development in Wadi Rum? State Bureaucracy, External Funders, and Civil Society." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 571–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594787>.

The Wadi Rum Bedouins do not have legal ownership of the lands of Wadi Rum; it has belonged to the state of Jordan since the 1920s.⁴ However, the Bedouins I spoke with indicated to me that although they do not have technical legal ownership over the land itself, their long-standing tribal affiliation with and claim of the land has allowed them to have priority for leasing the land from the government. The Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouins' claim over Wadi Rum is not written into law, but it is still acknowledged by the government in this manner. In general, the Wadi Rum Bedouins have little legal or 'official' political control in Wadi Rum beyond their assigned representatives from the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (who I was told barely visit Wadi Rum and do not communicate its problems to the government). However, they still hold some measure of influence over the crown and the military. The Bedouin tribes of Jordan have historically held significance to the crown, as their military support of the Hashemite family against the Ottomans in the early 20th century is a large part of what allowed Jordan to break free of Ottoman rule. It is generally well known in Jordan that the army is largely made up of Bedouins, although this information is not officially publicly written in any government publications. I believe it is because of these historical ties that the Bedouins in Wadi Rum are given priority for leasing land and are generally allowed to craft their own tourism industry, rather than the Jordanian government completely taking over Wadi Rum and its development.

The treatment of the Bedouins in Jordan, particularly in Wadi Rum, is arguably more humanitarian than that of some surrounding countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In these countries, Bedouins are liable to be forcibly moved or killed by their respective governments

⁴ Chatelard, Géraldine. "CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OVER THE WADI RUM RESERVE: WERE THEY AVOIDABLE? A SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITIQUE." *Nomadic Peoples* 7, no. 1 (2003): 138–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43124124>. p.141

during disputes over territory claims, development, or accusations of terrorism or smuggling, even to the present day. While I was in Wadi Rum and speaking with one interviewee, I was informed that there was somewhat of an uproar in Wadi Rum amongst some Bedouins due to spreading news that other members of the Huwaytat tribe in northern Saudi Arabia were killed by the Saudi Arabian government to make room for the new tourism city, Neom. In Egypt, the lives of the Sinai Bedouins are markedly different from those in Jordan; many Sinai Bedouins were mistreated by government policies, harrassed by police, prevented from participating in the military, and some even denied citizenship, which denied them access to government services such as schools and hospitals.⁵ Although many Bedouins I spoke with discussed perceived mistreatment and neglect at the hands of ASEZA and the Jordanian government (such as not repairing faulty or exposed electrical lines), such incidents as the wholesale killing of Bedouins or denying their citizenship do not typically occur in Jordan, from my understanding.

c. History of Wadi Rum tourism

Wadi Rum first appeared on the international radar for tourism following the release of the historic 1962 drama “Lawrence of Arabia”, which depicted the British war hero T.E. Lawrence’s escapades with the Arabs and Bedouins in their rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. In the film, Wadi Rum and its Bedouins (played by actors) are featured, which first revealed to the rest of the world the magnificent sweeping red sands and plateaus of the region that would later become so prized for their appeal to tourists. While Wadi Rum had now been placed on the periphery of international interest, its remote location, lack of development, and

⁵ Ahmed, Akbar, and Harrison Akins. “No Arab Spring for Egypt's Bedouin.” Brookings. Brookings, July 28, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/no-arab-spring-for-egypts-bedouin/>.

lack of any tourist-friendly information surrounding it meant there were little to no tourists visiting Wadi Rum until the late 1980s and 1990s.

Though little written, reliable historical information exists on the history of tourism in Wadi Rum, recollections given to me by the Wadi Rum Bedouins indicate that the 1987 climbing guide *Treks and Climbs in Wadi Rum* by the British climber Tony Howard is what truly began the international tourism industry in Wadi Rum. Wadi Rum was first known as an adventure tourism destination for hikers, climbers, and campers, and still had little to no development in the way of tourism camps, souvenirs, hotels, et cetera. I was told that at this time, the typical expected experience was for tourists to sleep outside in sleeping bags or on thin mattresses, which was par for the course for tourists expecting a truly immersive, natural experience.

However, by the mid-1990s, tourism had blossomed from a thin trickle of adventure-seekers to swathes of more conventional tourists who expected the comforts of beds, running water, and electricity.

Here I would like to quickly note the conflicting information I have collected regarding the implementation of running water and electricity in Rum Village. According to Dr. Laurie Brand, who wrote a 2001 article on development in Wadi Rum, Wadi Rum had insufficient water and no electricity leading up to 1994.⁶ However, because of the exponentially increasing number of tourists to Wadi Rum, the government began to supply electricity, more reliable water, and telephones. The obvious implication of this statement is that the Bedouins of Wadi Rum received

⁶ Brand, Laurie A. "Development in Wadi Rum? State Bureaucracy, External Funders, and Civil Society." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 571–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594787>.

these amenities arguably purely due to tourism, and would either have not had these amenities otherwise or would have had to wait much longer for their provision. When questioned about this observation, several interviewees I spoke to expressed skepticism about the relation of the provision of these resources to the increase of tourism, and one directly told me that their electricity and running water existed prior to the 1990s and was due to the natural development and petitioning of the Bedouins, not related to tourism. Thus, I cannot confidently state whether the implementation of electricity and reliably running water was either due to tourism or took place in the mid-1990s.

Regardless, what is important to understand is that the massive increase in tourism from a few dozen a year in the 1980s to over seventy thousand in 1996 required inordinately rapid development of resources in order to accommodate increasingly demanding tourists.⁷ As one tour guide in Wadi Rum put it to me, in the 1990s, just sleeping under the stars with a mattress or blanket used to be enough—now tourists expect water, electricity, bathrooms, and other commodities. As I was told, Wadi Rum’s earliest tourists—during the 1980s—were mostly adventurous climbers and nature lovers hailing from Europe and the US who came to Wadi Rum explicitly with the expectation that there would be no development present. These types seem to be the minority in Wadi Rum now, as I gained the impression that the majority of tourists book full service camps and tours instead of bare-bones hikes and sleeping bags. In the present day, tourists of many nationalities and interests come to Wadi Rum for a variety of purposes. For example, a family friend of mine attended a Syrian wedding party in Wadi Rum replete with DJs, a huge tent, dancers, and a buffet. In this instance, there was obviously little interest in Wadi

⁷ Chatelard, Géraldine. “CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OVER THE WADI RUM RESERVE: WERE THEY AVOIDABLE? A SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITIQUE.” *Nomadic Peoples* 7, no. 1 (2003): 138–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43124124>. p.140

Rum's ecology or culture beyond its function as a beautiful and unique setting for a wedding party.

In speaking to the Wadi Rum Bedouins, I learned a few of them associated different interests and behaviors with certain nationalities. I was told that generally, European tourists (especially the French) appreciated Wadi Rum's natural environment, were careful not to litter, and generally showed a kind of respect—or at least an interest—in the culture and environment of Wadi Rum. Meanwhile, one Bedouin camp owner had told me that Arab tourists (especially those from Amman) were known to litter, have little respect for the environment, and generally came to Wadi Rum to throw parties rather than to learn or appreciate the land. Europeans are apparently the most common category of tourists to come to Wadi Rum, especially Western Europeans. Tourists from other parts of the world, such as the other parts of the Asian continent, Africa, or Latin America, were not mentioned (beyond an off-handed story regarding a group of Japanese tourists confused about camel riding). American tourists were not usually singled out, but instead lumped into a general category of 'Western' along with the European tourists.

Initially, tourism in Wadi Rum had little substantial interference from NGOs and government entities. According to a 2003 article by G. Chatelard, the beginning of outside involvement in Wadi Rum's tourism may have begun as early as 1984 with the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism setting up a "modest" plan for tourism development in Wadi Rum by helping to establish the Rum Tourism Co-Operative, or the RTC, to help organize and rotate the village's store of jeeps, camels, and Bedouin tents to use with tourists.⁸ However, in the following years, numerous organizations would begin to be tied to the development and

⁸ Ibid.

restriction of tourism in Wadi Rum, such as the previously mentioned Ministry of Tourism, the Aqaba Regional Authority and its later iteration, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, USAID, the World Bank, and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature.

The involvement of NGOs and international aid organizations in Wadi Rum is still visible today. During a weekend that I stayed at an interviewee's home, I spent a significant amount of time with his children (one preteen girl, a teenage boy, and a slightly older teenage girl) and was introduced to a specific kind of date and wheat-based snack bar the youngest girl had several of. These date bars are quite similar to products like Fig Newtons in the United States. I was told by the teenage boy that these date bars are provided by the World Food Programme to the schoolchildren, and that they have tons of them around the house. According to the packaging, the bar is a product of a United Nations initiative and specifically sponsored by the Irish Government through Irish Aid. In addition to the date bar, the children were given a board game as a gift by their uncle who works as a district manager in Diseh. The board game is similar to the American game Snakes and Ladders, but has pro-environmental messages built into the game (i.e. pictures of burning trash and littering are superimposed over the harmful snakes, and pictures of recycling and picking up litter are superimposed over the beneficial ladders). According to the labeling on the product, the game was made specifically for the Jordan Municipal Support Project, whose purpose is partially to help promote sustainable behaviors in certain communities in Jordan. These two items were brief glimpses of the types of products circulating in the Wadi Rum area as a byproduct of the involvement of both national and international aid organizations.

As for the Bedouin women, they do not work in tourism at all as a general rule, especially not in any position that would result in them working with foreigners face-to-face. I have been told very few women or daughters assist their male relatives in such matters as managing websites, but otherwise, women are completely absent from any direct work in Wadi Rum tourism. This is because Bedouin societies are typically quite gender-segregated, and the honor of the family rests on its women behaving honorably (i.e. not interacting with any non-closely related men, avoiding being in public unnecessarily, etc.) Foreign men would be especially scandalous and egregious for Bedouin women to interact with; it would be incredibly shameful and dishonorable for any male Bedouin to subject his female relative or wife to such a position. Of course, exceptions exist—some Bedouin women wind up in public-facing work in art, tourism, or academia, though these cases are unusual. Therefore, Bedouin women would not typically be found at any tourist camps or welcome centers. They typically spend their time at home, school, or family gatherings, and rarely have public-facing positions. I had the opportunity to spend two weekends with the wife and female children of one interviewee, who were all incredibly hospitable and friendly, but had little to say about tourism and its happenings in Wadi Rum.

d. Types of camps

There are two main categories most Wadi Rum camps can be sorted into: ‘bubble’ camps and ‘Bedouin-style’ camps. The Bedouins themselves do not live in these camps; they are built purely as tourist accommodation, and once the Bedouin owners or employees have finished their work at the camp, they return to their homes in Rum Village or Diseh to sleep. The camps are relatively far from both villages, most being around two to three miles away. Bubble camps are relatively recent, only coming into existence around 2015-16, as I was told, and are constructed

of ‘bubble’ tents made of either plastic or glass, which are sometimes partially or totally see-through. These bubble camps are often billed as luxury accommodations, and often have AC/heating and attached bathrooms. Depending on the camp, these bubbles are associated with different commodities, but often feature hotel-style beds with full Western-style bedding and pillow sets, attached bathrooms with standing showers, complimentary toiletries, and even sometimes include features such as attached hot tubs. These camps also typically feature massive dining halls, sometimes even air conditioned, with several cooks and huge buffet-style meals.

The food served at both types of camps is usually similar, with a Mediterranean-style spread that is presumably the ideal mix of palatable and Middle Eastern for Western tourists. Several extremely popular and traditional Jordanian foods, such as *mansaf* (lamb cooked in fermented yogurt) and *kofta bi batata* (ground lamb meat with sliced potatoes) are typically absent from camp buffets, and instead replaced with more internationally recognizable foods such as chicken *zarb* (chicken that is cooked in a pot underground), rice with vermicelli (a popular Lebanese rice recipe) and *fattoush* (a Lebanese salad made up of chopped cucumbers, tomatoes, and other vegetables). I would speculate that these foods were chosen to be served at camps because Lebanese/Mediterranean cuisine is often the most popular and commonly available type of Middle Eastern cuisine available outside of the Middle East, and would therefore presumably be the most acceptable to the largest number of guests.

Every Bedouin individual I spoke to, even the individual who is currently a co-manager of a bubble camp, expressed extreme distaste and dislike for the bubble camps. Common complaints included that, first, they were of foreign origin and invented by foreign investors (it is

worth noting that to the Bedouins, even people from Amman are considered ‘foreign’, even though they are also of Jordanian nationality) and had nothing to do with Bedouin culture, heritage, or history. The bubble camps’ plastic construction and their perceived extremely wasteful use of resources such as hot tubs (for reference, Jordan suffers a chronic severe water shortage) were the subject of frequent denunciation by the Bedouins I spoke with. In one interview, a Bedouin man criticized the use of plastic for the bubbles, rhetorically asking when the Bedouin had ever lived in plastic, which then leads to one of the other major complaints regarding the bubble camps—that they disregard Bedouin culture and the Bedouins themselves.

From my conversations, I understand that the arrival of the bubble camps in the mid-2010s, backed by mysterious foreign investors who hired Bedouins to be the local faces of their camps, must have sparked fears of Wadi Rum’s tourism industry being co-opted by foreigners who had never even set foot in the desert. Even though several years have passed since their initial introduction, hostile sentiments towards the bubble camps are quite clearly still felt. Despite the Bedouins’ general dislike of the bubble camps, they continue to be immensely popular among tourists, especially those seeking a ‘glamping’ (glamorous camping) experience, which most of the Bedouin-style camps, with their goat hair tents and rustic setups, cannot quite achieve.

The Bedouin-style camps are designed to roughly aesthetically imitate an actual Bedouin encampment, although they obviously differ in many major ways. The “tents” guests reside in are actually concrete or brick units with the classic Bedouin goat hair fabric draped over the outside and thinner patterned fabrics draped on the interior walls, which are similar to the fabric

setup of actual Bedouin tents. The beds are usually fairly simplistic, consisting of a metal bed frame, mattress, thin sheet, a pillow, and thick blankets during the cooler seasons. These beds are markedly different from the hotel-style beds of the bubble camps, but even more different from the actual traditional method of sleeping for Bedouin, which is simply sleeping on the ground with cushions and blankets. Whether or not a 'tent' in a camp has an attached bathroom is usually dependent on the camp. When there is not an attached bathroom, guests are expected to use communal bathroom buildings, separated into male and female sections. Like the bubble camps, Bedouin-style camps have dining halls as well, though they are typically less extravagant and essentially a larger, more open-air version of the concrete 'Bedouin tents' used for the guests. In summary, the Bedouin-style camps, though they are naturally departed from the traditional Bedouin lifestyle in many ways, are supposed to offer a vague glimpse into some elements of the life of the Bedouins through the food, fabrics, and of course close contact with actual Bedouins. The bubble camps, on the other hand, have very little ties to Bedouin culture beyond decorations (which are often taken from a wide variety of Arab cultures and not exclusive to the Bedouins) and focus more deeply on providing a luxury experience rather than an authentic cultural experience.

Though it seems little official information exists on the exact quantities and details of bubble vs. Bedouin camps (in addition to little official statistical information on camps in general, as loaning out camp licenses and creating various names/identities for the same camp has created difficulty in establishing exact numbers), I observed in Wadi Rum that there appear to be greater numbers of Bedouin-style camps than bubble camps. However, this might be due to

the fact that the Bedouin-style camps are much cheaper to set up and maintain while the bubble camps are much more expensive and generally only affordable by foreign companies.

There exists a new, third type of camp which I had the privilege of seeing just a few weeks after it opened to the public; this camp was meant to find a middle ground between the luxury of the bubble camps and the Bedouin heritage intimated by the Bedouin-style camps. It is a boutique luxury camp, only having perhaps around ten or twelve cabins, a dining hall, and a luxurious recreation of a Bedouin tent for guests to relax in. The camp is also different in construction from the bubble camps and the Bedouin-style camps, as the cabins and other buildings are lifted onto wooden platforms, and wooden walkways connect the whole camp. I was proudly informed by the camp owner that their guests would never have to touch the sand while inside the camp. As ironic as it seems to avoid touching sand when the scenery itself is a large part of Wadi Rum's allure, having experienced the aggravation brought about by unintentionally spreading sand into bed sheets made me understand the logic behind this design philosophy. As I was given a tour of the camp, the owner (who I later interviewed) expressed to me the importance of including authentic Arab-produced fabrics and building materials in the camp, citing his use of traditionally embroidered fabrics made in Syria rather than cheap mass-produced material made in China. The camp was described to me as an attempt to blend aspects of traditional Bedouin culture, such as the use of goat-hair fabrics, traditional embroidery, and materials made from local resources, with the luxury that many tourists, both Western and regional, had come to expect. This camp also posited itself as eco-friendly due to its use of solar panels and other technologies to reduce resource waste, unlike the bubble camps, whose massive use of plastic, water, and gas indicate little concern for the future status of Wadi

Rum's environment. Seeing this camp was a rather remarkable experience for me, as it suggested that perhaps the future of luxury tourism in Wadi Rum may head in the direction of minimally invasive boutique camps that blend standards of Western luxury with locally sourced materials and creations. Time will tell whether this brand of eco-friendly half-Bedouin-style luxury camps will overtake the bubble camps in terms of popularity.

e. Literature review

Only a few published works exist on the tourism industry of Wadi Rum, although these publications provide some of the only historical records for what tourism in Wadi Rum was like in previous years. The three most in-depth publications regarding tourism/development in Wadi Rum and its various issues—"Tourism and Representations: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Ramm" by Geraldine Chatelard, "CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OVER THE WADI RUM RESERVE: WERE THEY AVOIDABLE? A SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITIQUE" also by Geraldine Chatelard, and "Development in Wadi Rum? State Bureaucracy, External Funders, and Civil Society" by Laurie A. Brand—were all published in the early 2000s, with the latest being "Tourism and Representations" published in 2005. Due to their temporal placement, these works naturally do not incorporate many issues in Wadi Rum's modern tourism industry, such as bubble tents, overdevelopment, prolific scamming, et cetera. The most up-to-date publication on tourism in Wadi Rum, published in 2015, is a brief survey and interview-based study by Dr. Ismaiel Abuamoud at the University of Jordan, who I personally worked with while conducting my fieldwork. His study is titled "Impacts of Ecotourism in Jordan: Wadi Rum", and focuses on demographic and economic data in relation to ecotourism and commercial tourism in Wadi Rum. These four publications represent the only works I could find focusing explicitly on

tourism and development in Wadi Rum, although additional publications discussing Bedouin heritage tourism (“The Potential for Developing Community-based Tourism among the Bedouins in the Badia of Jordan” by Salem Al-Oun and Majd Al-Homoud) and environmental regulations disproportionately affecting Bedouins (“DANA DECLARATION +10 WORKSHOP REPORT 11-13 APRIL 2012, WADI DANA, JORDAN” by Dawn Chatty) also contributed to my understanding of Bedouin tourism structures in Jordan.

The three works initially mentioned formed the bulk of material referenced for this project, although it is mostly referenced in regards to notable historical figures or developments in Wadi Rum, due to many of the observations and comments generally leaning towards a broader look at the influences targeting Wadi Rum (such as NGOs, the government, modernization in general, etc.) and are mostly relevant when discussing the prior influences and development projects of Wadi Rum. The fourth work, “Impacts of Ecotourism in Jordan: Wadi Rum”, provides some useful statistics regarding certain financial aspects of the relationship between the Bedouins and tourism (for example, this work states that 76% of respondents confirmed that tourism was their only source of income⁹). However, it is mostly survey-based and does not discuss the broader context of tourism in Wadi Rum at that time to the extent that the three previous works do. To provide a rough overview of the material taken from each of these four most important texts, I have summarized the most pertinent information and histories from each of them below.

⁹ Abuamoud, Ismaiel. (2015). Impacts of Ecotourism in Jordan: Wadi Rum. European Journal of Social Sciences. 50. p. 124.

Going in publishing order, “Development in Wadi Rum? State Bureaucracy, External Funders, and Civil Society” by Laurie A. Brand, published in 2001, analyzes the burgeoning involvement of the government and foreign influences in the development of Wadi Rum. It is worth noting that Dr. Brand is a professor of international relations with a focus on political economies in the Middle East¹⁰, so this work approaches Wadi Rum’s early development from a largely political and economic angle rather than anthropological or ethnographic. In fact, as Dr. Brand indicates early in the paper, Wadi Rum is used rather like a case study for the purpose of examining the effects of numerous NGOs clamoring for influence in a space that is a focus for economic development. Dr. Brand introduces the first three main entities that begin to exert their control over Wadi Rum; first, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, after an ecological study in 1978 recommended that Wadi Rum be protected. The Jordanian government handed over this responsibility to the RSCN, which, while not technically being a state organization, is patronized by the royal family and retains special standing with the government in comparison to other NGOs. Next to be introduced is Aqaba Regional Authority, established in 1984 and given power over the economic development of a large region around Aqaba - including Wadi Rum. The ARA, which would later become ASEZA, is uniquely powerful in that it reports directly to the prime minister instead of being subjected to the bureaucracy that other regional authorities are held to. It is functionally independent from the ministries of the government and has been compared to a “state within a state”.¹¹ This still holds true today, as my understanding while in Wadi Rum was that ASEZA is now the ultimate authority (only short of the central government itself) over development in Wadi Rum and holds the highest amount of

¹⁰ “Faculty Profile > USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.” USC Dornsife College News RSS. <https://dornsife.usc.edu/cf/faculty-and-staff/faculty.cfm?pid=1003127>.

¹¹ Brand, Laurie A. “Development in Wadi Rum? State Bureaucracy, External Funders, and Civil Society.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 571–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594787>.

influence regarding both development and conservation of Wadi Rum. Next, Brand briefly introduces the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA), which, while being an official ministry of the government and claiming partial authority over sites related to Jordanian tourism, does not seem to be a practically visible authority in Wadi Rum's development - neither in 2001, at the time of Brand's writing, or in the present day.

Brand then summarizes the struggle between the RSCN, ARA, and MOTA (including a few minor NGOs, such as the Friends of the Environment Society and the Friends of Archaeology) during the mid-1990s as tourism in Wadi Rum began to take off. The RSCN attempted to exert its influence as an authority over the environmental protection of Wadi Rum, but ARA held the highest authority for economic development, and continued to invest in quick-return development regardless of its environmental consequences (such as the installation of invasive high-voltage cables). MOTA hardly interfered, with its stance being that any development in Wadi Rum was permissible as long as a previous study had indicated it wouldn't be harmful. To consolidate the interests of these numerous organizations, in 1996 a committee was organized consisting of representatives from MOTA, RSCN, ARA, the Department of the Environment, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Finance, and the Bureau of Lands.

Another actor entered the fray in 1996, when the World Bank drafted and made public a series of assessments and plans for developing tourism in popular locations in Jordan, such as Wadi Rum, Petra, Jerash, and Kerak. Its assessment for Wadi Rum contained a proposal for a new (less "unsightly") village for the Bedouins to live in, a mixture of economic development plans and environmental conservation policies, and, most importantly, emphasized that these

plans were crafted in total cooperation with and with input from the Wadi Rum Bedouins. However, after this plan was released, two letters from two notable local leaders in Wadi Rum expressed their discontent with the World Bank plans, requested for Wadi Rum to be officially recognized as a protected environmental zone rather than “a national park with special regulations”, rallied against any further development, and claimed that they had not been consulted regarding the aforementioned future development.¹²

The work goes on to describe the many additional political conflicts between the Wadi Rum Bedouins and the both governmental and non-governmental organizations seeking to develop Wadi Rum, which provide a rich understanding of the political and bureaucratic backdrop of Wadi Rum’s development. However, because this work was published in 2001, its valuable history is limited largely to the space between the mid-1990s, when tourism was booming in Wadi Rum, to 2001, when tourism in Wadi Rum sharply dropped due to 9/11. Despite this temporal limitation, Brand’s work is incredibly useful for this thesis for providing political and historical context for the beginning of development in Wadi Rum at one of the most critical time periods in its tourism history (the mid-1990s).

“Tourism and Representations: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Ramm” by Geraldine Chatelard, published in 2005, is undoubtedly one of the most thorough and detailed works on the subject. It is quite different from Brand’s work in that it is entirely and deeply anthropological, discussing and analyzing how tourism practices in Wadi Rum (such as the

¹² Brand, Laurie A. “Development in Wadi Rum? State Bureaucracy, External Funders, and Civil Society.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 571–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594787>.

employment of Egyptian migrant workers and passing them off as Bedouins) plays into the unique social dynamics created by the development of Bedouin society, which for so long shunned even settlement, into a tourism hub. I used this work largely to read in conversation with my own observations of the Bedouins in Wadi Rum, as many of Chatelard's descriptions of Bedouin interactions with tourism—such as the changing definition of the concept of hospitality in order to fit its use within transaction-based tourism—resonate with phenomena I had witnessed myself in Wadi Rum. Her study is largely social and based within concepts of 'selling culture', Orientalism, hospitality, notions of nobility, and the separation of genders in tourism work.¹³

The third major work discussing tourism development in Wadi Rum is also from Geraldine Chatelard, and is titled "CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OVER THE WADI RUM RESERVE: WERE THEY AVOIDABLE? A SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITIQUE". It was published in 2003, before Chatelard's social study, and covers much of the same material as Brand's documentation of the various NGO influences in Wadi Rum. However, this work is unique in that it places a specific focus on the status of the Bedouins in the midst of these political conflicts, discussing the nature of Bedouin claims to the land of Wadi Rum, and how specific elements of Bedouin society in Wadi Rum (such as the instrumentalization of government-provided resources like water and electricity, the definition and rights of the Bedouins if considering them to be indigenous peoples, etc.) are shaped and influenced by its continued development.¹⁴

¹³ Chatelard, Géraldine. "Tourism and Representations: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Ramm." *Représentation et construction de la réalité ... wadiram.userhome.ch*, May 24, 2014. <https://academia.edu/resource/work/1053449>.

¹⁴ Chatelard, Géraldine. "CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OVER THE WADI RUM RESERVE: WERE THEY AVOIDABLE? A SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITIQUE." *Nomadic Peoples* 7, no. 1 (2003): 138–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43124124>.

The fourth and final major work used for the basic historical/statistical framework for this project is “Impacts of Ecotourism in Jordan: Wadi Rum” by Dr. Ismaiel Abuamoud. I had the privilege of meeting and speaking with Dr. Abuamoud at the University of Jordan while studying near the university. His study with the Wadi Rum Bedouins was almost entirely survey-based and aimed to quickly gather demographic and financial information in regard to the Bedouins’ relationship with tourism and was not meant to be a long-term ethnographic study. For an ethnographic study such as this, I believe Dr. Abuamoud’s work is best used for providing demographic and statistical context for the cultural shifts seen in Wadi Rum. The statistics he has gathered regarding the prevalent reliance on tourism as a sole source of income and some sentiments of the Bedouins regarding tourism (such as believing that tourism helps tourists understand Bedouin culture) are helpful in contextualizing broader changes.

f. Positionality

My relationship with my research questions and with the individuals involved in the project is colored by my ethnicity, sex, and religion, in addition to some specific worldviews and opinions I retain about indigenous tourism in the Middle East. In order to provide full and straightforward context about how I approached the project and how certain aspects of my identity influenced both the way I thought about my research and how certain individuals reacted to me, I have gone into detail about how I believe particular elements of my character and background affected the project and its execution.

First, regarding my ethnicity, I am from a Syrian background. I did not feel my ethnicity strongly affected the way the Wadi Rum Bedouins treated me, beyond brief interest in my family history and why I was studying the Middle East. In terms of my own approach to the project, I recognize that my Syrian background may lead me to unconsciously develop a sense of camaraderie and sympathy with the Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouins as fellow Arabs, which might theoretically positively influence my final conclusions regarding my observations and interviews.

Second, as a woman, I believe I had a different experience with the Wadi Rum Bedouins that a man might have, as Bedouin society is typically highly gendered and conservative, with certain roles and attitudes reserved for each sex. Navigating the tourism industry in Wadi Rum generally resulted in my being surrounded by only men, as women strictly do not work in the public face of tourism. A few interviewees and men I spoke to expressed concern for my safety and comfort as a woman in a foreign village; I was escorted by interviewees or their relatives almost everywhere I went and was occasionally checked on through WhatsApp.

I also had the privilege of spending considerable time with one interviewee's wife and children and slept in their home, which is something unknown men are typically not privy to. I don't believe my status as a woman necessarily affected the opinions I drew about what I learned in Wadi Rum, but it almost certainly affected what information I had access to from men and women.

In addition, I would like to note that several Bedouins I spoke to were not necessarily surprised that a lone woman was conducting ethnographic research in Wadi Rum; a few interviewees, especially those who managed large camps, were familiar with one or two foreign female anthropologists and scholars coming to Wadi Rum in the past, though none were able to provide specific names. I observed that these Bedouins who had previous exposure to female anthropologists were more open and forthcoming during interviews than those who had never participated in interviews before.

Third, I am Greek Orthodox Christian, while the two Bedouins tribes I worked with are Sunni Muslim. I do not feel this religious difference significantly impacted the way I was regarded, nor the way I regarded the Bedouins, as many aspects of Bedouin culture are pre-Islamic and the subject of religion mostly appeared when discussing its place in tourism. Despite this, I wish to acknowledge that my background as a Christian may have prevented me from fully understanding the religious backgrounds of certain aspects of Bedouin practices or beliefs, such as seemingly spiritual connections with the desert, which was occasionally mentioned in interviews.

With respect to my personal opinions and biases regarding Bedouin tourism in Jordan, I must admit that I naturally lean towards sympathy and support for the Bedouins' perspectives rather than ASEZA's or the Jordanian government's. This is partially due to the fact that my project focused on the Bedouins' perspective rather than ASEZA, the RSCN, any other NGOs, or the government. Because of this focus on the Bedouins' perspective, I developed the impression that the Bedouins are, in several ways, oppressed and ignored regarding certain

policies and initiatives affecting their social makeup and environment. However, this impression glosses over the subtleties of conflicts within the Bedouin tribes, the motivations of some Bedouins to knowingly overdevelop, and the fact that not all Bedouins share the same values regarding development and conservation. In the interest of providing as honest and thorough an observation as possible, I have tried to avoid taking an activist stance regarding the issues in Wadi Rum discussed in this work. Despite my natural tendency to support the Bedouins' perspective, I have strived to include as wide a perspective as possible by including both statements from the Bedouins and my own personal observations that sometimes contradicted their claims.

Finally, I would like to clarify that I consider myself an advocate for the Wadi Rum Bedouins and their stated interests in reforming Wadi Rum tourism, but do not consider myself an activist. I seek to elevate the concerns of the Bedouins to an international audience that can better understand how they might be of help, such as supporting locally owned and operated Bedouin camps using regionally sourced materials and practicing environmentally friendly tourism.

II. RESEARCH ETHICS

This study was carried out with the use of informed consent forms for interviews that also requested audio recording permission. These informed consent sheets were originally written in English, approved by the University of Houston IRB, and then translated into Modern Standard Arabic by myself and my Arabic teacher at the time, Dr. Huda Abu Qtaish. The informed consent sheets followed the framework set by the UH IRB, including information about the

project, how the collected data would be used and stored, what interviewees could expect from the interview, and all other information required by the IRB. Before interviews began, potential interviewees were asked to read the informed consent sheet thoroughly, decide whether or not they wished to participate in an interview, indicate whether or not they would give permission to be audio recorded, and then sign.

a. Brief outline of project execution

To briefly summarize the technical details of this project: this project had seven interviewees total, was spread over the span of three weekends in November and December, and was conducted almost entirely on my own—on the final weekend, I was accompanied by friend and fellow researcher Dr. Olivia Newman, who wished to meet with some friends in Wadi Rum. On the first weekend I visited Wadi Rum, I spent the night in the home of an interviewee connected to me by Dr. Ismaiel Abuamoud at the University of Jordan. The second weekend, I stayed in a camp owned by the same interviewee. Though he initially refused payment from me, he eventually allowed me to pay a small amount of money for the tent. On the third and final weekend, I stayed in a camp owned by another interviewee connected to me by Dr. Dawn Chatty at Oxford University. Interviewees were totally sourced through personal networks and contacts at the University of Jordan, Oxford University, and Newcastle University. Interviews were very loosely scheduled, as work schedules and obligations among the Bedouin men working in tourism were fairly unpredictable. Obtaining interviews with specific individuals took patience and flexibility, as I sometimes had to wait more than a day for a potential interviewee to have time for an interview.

Interviewees were all male, as only men are socially approved to work face-to-face with tourists, and therefore usually only men would have firsthand experience with tourists. I spoke briefly with a few female relatives of male interviewees, but they usually had little to discuss regarding tourism beyond the male interviewee's relation to it.

The interviewees were aware that I was not a typical tourist; I did not use the English term "anthropologist", but had instead told them I was a student studying the culture of the Bedouin and Wadi Rum tourism. I received unique treatment from that of typical tourists, being allowed to enter some interviewee's houses, eat meals with their families, and typically was always accompanied by an interviewee or their male relative. While some interviewees initially seemed skeptical or confused by my description of my project, they all seemed to take the work much more seriously after reading and signing the project's associated informed consent form, as well as once I had started audio recording and taking notes on my notepad. After this stage, I felt that the interviewees were much more open with me than they would have been with a typical tourist asking the same questions, usually only becoming reluctant to speak when it came to the financial or business particulars of their own camp.

b. Brief profile of interviewees

This study aims to keep the identities of the interviewees anonymous, and will not provide any directly identifying information such as names or ties to specific camps. However, in order to provide context for varying viewpoints and lifestyles, this study will clarify the tribal affiliation and occupation of each interviewee. The interviewees are as follows, in no particular order:

Interviewee 1: Man affiliated with the Zawaideh tribe and owner of a ‘Bedouin-style’ camp.

Interviewee 2: Man affiliated with the Zawaideh tribe and a schoolteacher; he previously worked as a tour guide.

Interviewee 3: Man affiliated with the Zawaideh tribe and co-manager of a ‘bubble-style’ camp.

Interviewee 4: Man affiliated with the Zawaideh tribe and a government employee akin to a district manager of Diseh Village; he helps arrange government administration of tourism initiatives in Wadi Rum.

Interviewee 5: Man affiliated with the Zalabia tribe and co-owner of a climbing tourism business that he runs with his brother. He welcomes and hosts guests upon arrival but does not lead tours.

Interviewee 6: Man affiliated with the Zalabia tribe and the other co-owner of the previously mentioned climbing tourism business. He leads tours.

Interviewee 7: Man affiliated with the Zalabia tribe and owner of multiple camps, both classic Bedouin-style and luxury eco-friendly Bedouin-style camps.

To clarify the interviewees’ relationships with each other: interviewees one through four are all related either closely (uncle-nephew) or somewhat distantly (by tribe name). I understood in Wadi Rum that the Bedouin definition of “related” includes individuals who have unknown actual family ties but belong to the same tribe. Interviewees five and six are brothers. Interviewee seven had no known close relationship to any of the other interviewees.

Additionally, to clarify the difference between the Zalabia and Zawaideh tribes; the most obvious and relevant (to this study) difference between the two tribes is that the Zalabia live deep

within the Wadi Rum protected area in Rum Village, and are much more deeply saturated with tourists than the Zawaideh are. The Zawaideh live in a village called Disch on the outskirts of the Wadi Rum Protected Area, a place where tourists rarely go unless meeting a camp owner or tour guide that will later take them elsewhere. I did not try to pry too deeply into the interviewees' perceptions of the neighboring tribe (as I did not want to seem as if I was instigating something negative), but a few mentioned their own opinions with little prompting from me.

A few Zawaideh interviewees mentioned to me that the Zawaideh tended to put their children all the way through grade school and sometimes into college as well, whereas the Zalabia apparently tended to pull their male children out of grade school in their early teens to have them work in tourism (typically as tour guides). This was usually said with an air of greater regard for the Zawaideh practices, and emphasis that the Zawaideh were better educated and less reliant on tourism because of their education. One Zawaideh interviewee who worked as a schoolteacher expressed to me the difficulty of convincing (typically) Zalabia Bedouins to keep their young sons in school instead of pulling them out to work, as the immediate economic benefit was obviously more appealing to most families than the intangible benefit of allowing their sons to finish their education.

Only one Zalabia interviewee mentioned the Zawaideh in detail, and it was to complain about the Zawaideh's overt personal involvement in Wadi Rum tourism despite living in Disch and not the Wadi Rum Protected Area. He had expressed to me that he was upset by some Zawaideh claiming to be 'Wadi Rum Bedouins' to tourists, since, according to the interviewee, they were not truly Wadi Rum Bedouins since they lived in Disch. Other than what has been

noted, there are not many significant cultural or social differences between the Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouins.

c. Methodological limits

I undertook the fieldwork for this project while I was studying abroad in Jordan for the Fall 2022 semester, which inevitably led to limitations on my fieldwork. As an undergraduate thesis, the fieldwork for this project had to be carried out as I was simultaneously taking a full course load in Amman, the capital city of Jordan and where my study abroad program was located. Because Wadi Rum is about a six-hour journey from Amman by bus and taxi, I could only visit Wadi Rum on the weekends for two days total. In total, I spent three weekends in Wadi Rum. In addition to time constraints, language barriers were also a factor—despite having intermediate speaking skills in Arabic, the dialect and accent spoken by the Wadi Rum Bedouins are different enough from Shami, the dialect I am most familiar with, that I struggled to speak with individuals who did not speak at least a little English. Because of this, I was typically unable to conduct in-depth interviews with individuals that spoke no English, such as the elderly and many women.

The topics explored by this project certainly necessitate much more in-depth and long-term fieldwork, which—due to Wadi Rum’s somewhat remote location—would best be carried out either by a researcher working full-time in Wadi Rum or in Aqaba, the closest major city. I consider this project to be a brief exploration of what is a highly complex issue, and wish to conduct further study of the subject in the future as a graduate student.

d. On the term “culture”

“Culture” is a word undoubtedly historically central to the discipline of Anthropology, particularly following the major influence of Franz Boas. A classic definition or idea of culture might be described as “the heritage of learned symbolic behavior” or “the heritage people in a particular society share”, though this definition has been subject to intense analysis and redefinition over the past few decades of anthropological debate.¹⁵ Several theorists have contested the usefulness of retaining the term culture as an anthropological concept, as its popularization in the mainstream has led to a reification and broadening that could be argued to have lessened its effectiveness in describing particular social structures and frameworks in a given society.¹⁶ Other theorists—specifically, the combined works of Alfred Kroeber, Leslie White, and Emile Durkheim—have defined culture by what it is not, separating culture from behavior and regarding culture instead as the framework that allows for resulting behavior to spring forth.¹⁷ Though defining culture as an anthropological concept is beyond the scope of this work, it is relevant to this study to describe what constitutes ‘culture’ as referenced throughout this project.

The term “culture” will appear repeatedly in this work, as this project largely centered around how tourism in Wadi Rum has affected certain Bedouin practices and social structures. As culture is a somewhat broad term, this thesis necessitates the precise clarification of what terms “culture” is confined to in this work. I use “culture” in this project to describe the

¹⁵ Keesing, Roger M. “Theories of Culture.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3 (1974): 73–97. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2949283>.

¹⁶ Lentz, Carola. “Culture: The Making, Unmaking and Remaking of an Anthropological Concept.” *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 142, no. 2 (2017): 181–204. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26607020>.

¹⁷ Yengoyan, Aram A. “Theory in Anthropology: On the Demise of the Concept of Culture.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (1986): 368–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/178978>.

following: material traditions practiced by the Bedouins (for example, the construction of goat hair tents, camel racing, pastoralism, climbing, and hunting), intangible traditions practiced by the Bedouins (such as traditional cooking techniques and oral nabati poetry), the Wadi Rum Bedouins' spoken dialect of Arabic, social structures historically practiced by the Bedouins (such as the leadership of a sheikh, and close-knit ties between individual families), traditional modes of Bedouin dress (such as the thobe, keffiyeh, abaya and niqab), and spiritual beliefs regarding both Islam and subtler historical and cultural ties with the desert. The previously listed items do not necessarily represent the whole of Bedouin "culture" but serve adequately as general representatives of what is termed "culture" in this work. To phrase it succinctly, I use culture to loosely describe the prevalent or widespread practices and beliefs of the Wadi Rum Bedouins.

I mostly worked in English when speaking with interviewees, and my use of the English word 'culture' prompted responses indicating the understanding of this word to be referring to the widespread practices and beliefs of the Bedouins. In Arabic, there exist a few words adjacent to the English word "culture" - there is *thaqafa*, which can be translated as 'culture', but also refers to general concepts of intellectual cultivation and/or education. Another phrase, '*adat w taqleed*', arguably more accurately refers to culture as it is being used here, as it translates to "customs and traditions". I am unfamiliar with what specific word is used in the Bedouin dialect to refer to their collected practices and beliefs; however, when I would introduce my project in Arabic by explaining that I wanted to study the Bedouin *thaqafa*, those I spoke to seemed to understand that I was interested in learning about Bedouin customs and practices.

Another term central to this project is authenticity. Authenticity, particularly within the subject of indigenous tourism, is a topic that is hotly debated due to its inherently Western-centric sentiments; as Richard Handler points out in his article on Authenticity, the notion that authenticity is central to anthropological study is “a function of Western ontology rather than of anything in the non-Western cultures we study.”¹⁸ Handler goes on to argue that the Western concept of authenticity is intertwined with the Western obsession with individualism and nature, as Western anthropological theory might tend to understand non-Western cultures as sort of individuals on their own, possessing a specific character that the West can judge to be pure or corrupted by outside influence.

While I agree with Handler’s metaphysical approach to authenticity as a concept, the focus of this study requires some kind of framework to acknowledge the leap from centuries, or perhaps even millennium, of virtually unchanged practices to a rapidly shifting set of norms and behaviors that can be observed to be directly tied to an influx of foreign influence in the form of tourism. The concept of ‘authenticity’ is problematic but useful for the sake of communicating to a reader what the term conjures up in this context—the notion that a particular group performed and passed down certain behaviors without outside stimulation or influence in the past, then became incentivized to either change certain aspects of their practices or present their heritage in a way more commercially profitable (as in the case of tourism).

While I will try to avoid falling into the “trap of authenticity”¹⁹, as Dimitrios Theodossopoulos has termed it, it is difficult to acknowledge the changes present and

¹⁸ Handler, Richard. “Authenticity.” *Anthropology Today* 2, no. 1 (1986): 2–4. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3032899>.

¹⁹ Theodossopoulos, Dimitrios. “Emberá Indigenous Tourism and the Trap of Authenticity: Beyond Inauthenticity and Invention.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (2013): 397–425. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41857331>.

acknowledged by the Wadi Rum Bedouins without indirectly implying that one set of traditional or historical practices is authentic while one set of practices adopted within the past few decades in response to tourism is not. As Theodossopoulos points out, the outside criticism of ‘authenticity’ assumes several things; that there is some original, ‘authentic’, imagined indigenous culture, that authenticity is static, and that indigenous cultures lack the “complexity and transformative potential” that Western culture presupposes itself to have.²⁰ This last point is particularly poignant—the average American would not consider themselves or their practices “inauthentic” because they live a different lifestyle than their grandparents in the 1940s; after all, they consider themselves capable of change, and would even see it as a symbol of complexity and growth. Why is this logic not applied to indigenous cultures who partake in tourism?—I would argue it is because of the implicit Western thought that non-Western or indigenous cultures are static, ancient, and untouched, and any kind of change or development is not a symbol of complexity of natural adaptation, but instead a symptom of corruption by outside influence.

I do not believe it is contradictory to both agree with the transformative and complex nature of indigenous society and acknowledge changes the Wadi Rum Bedouins have made directly in response to tourism. I posit that the most important factor in this observation is the acknowledgement of agency—that the Wadi Rum Bedouins are not helpless recipients of a colonialist, capitalist influence, but follow their own heritage of adaptation by constructing a material society profiting from tourism. The Bedouins themselves, although none used the specific term ‘authentic’, did also demonstrate some separation between what they considered to be “real Bedouin” (the actual phrase used) versus what was not “real Bedouin”, or foreign.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 398

Interestingly, the way the Bedouins defined what was really Bedouin or not really Bedouin seemed to have less to do with newer practices willingly adopted by the Bedouins (such as the use of semi trucks), and more to do with what was considered ‘foreign’ or invasive to the desert, particularly when it was not willingly adopted by the Bedouins. One example of this is the bubble camps; one Bedouin I spoke with disregarded them heavily, saying to me: “This is not from Bedouins. Since when do Bedouins sleep in plastic?” All interviewees I spoke with indicated a heavy dislike for the bubble camps and certainly regarded them as not really Bedouin; I think this is especially due to their rumored foreign ownership.

The notion of authenticity is strangely in flux in Wadi Rum; most Bedouin I spoke with did not seem to be deeply concerned with any sense of ‘authenticity’ or lack thereof in regards to themselves or their children. They might wear Western-style clothes, drive Japanese cars, and live in concrete homes instead of roaming the desert, but most individuals I spoke with remained solid in their Bedouin identity. There wasn’t any real discussion of ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’, because the prevailing attitude among interviewees seemed to be more concerned with ‘Bedouin’ or ‘not Bedouin’; furthermore, the status of ‘Bedouin’ is something you are born into, and most individuals I spoke with regarded it more as an identity rather than a lifestyle.

However, there is a distinct difference between the use of concepts of authenticity and sincerity in regards to personal life and identity versus camp branding and marketing. In regards to marketing and labeling their own camps, specifically the classic Bedouin-style camps, many Bedouins freely use terms like ‘real Bedouin camp’ or ‘authentic Bedouin tent’, et cetera. I believe the use of these terms as applied to their camps speaks less about their genuine belief in

tourist encampments as a longstanding element of their tradition, but rather about their desire to separate themselves from the foreign, artificial bubble camps. The most obvious references to ideas of authenticity or sincerity in Wadi Rum or among the Wadi Rum Bedouins is present in advertising, both by the Bedouins themselves and by tourism-related entities like guidebook writers and the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism. These entities wishing to push tourism to Wadi Rum often advertise Wadi Rum as a sort of oasis of authenticity, an untouched fragment of living ancient history in the form of the Bedouins and their desert. These campaigns obviously tie the supposed authenticity of Wadi Rum to the historical past of the Bedouins, with no acknowledgement of recent adaptations made; this stands in direct contrast to the Bedouins themselves, who seem to generally have little internal conflict over their own authenticity and freely adopt practices in contrast to their own historical traditions. However, for the sake of tourism and its economic benefit, the notions of authenticity purported by entities like the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism work in tandem with the practical desires of the Bedouins. Simply put, the Wadi Rum Bedouins generally economically benefit from Wadi Rum's commercial success as a tourist destination for the authentic Bedouin desert experience, even if the advertised concept of authenticity does not align perfectly with the Wadi Rum Bedouins' notions of authenticity. Because of this, many Bedouins will gladly label their camps, souvenirs, and tours as 'authentic' or 'the true Bedouin experience'. Ultimately, it seems that the public usage of 'authenticity' as it related to Wadi Rum and the Bedouins is tied primarily to advertising and its expected economic benefit; whether that be on the side of the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and its attempts to market Wadi Rum as an unspoiled ancient wilderness to visitors, or on the side of the Bedouins who capitalize on expectations of authenticity to define their own camps and services by it.

This does not clarify the inevitably necessary distinction between historic Bedouin culture and cultural elements that might be perceived to have originated from outside, typically Western or Ammani, influences. To attempt to draw a line between what could be considered “authentic” Bedouin culture and cultural elements that are foreign in origin is a difficult task, as the notion of culture is, by nature, fluid and absorbent, adapting as necessary to new influences and constantly incorporating new practices. By what standards could a foreign observer judge certain elements of a society’s culture as either “authentic” or “inauthentic”? Even if a practice has obviously been newly adopted and originates from a foreign country—a concrete example would be the novel prevalence of blue jeans, graphic tees, and other American-style wear among the Bedouins—in what sense could this practice be considered inauthentic if it has been totally adopted by the Bedouins due to its positive benefits and/or necessity (i.e. convenience, economic cost), which is generally the same motivation behind many Bedouin “authentic” practices (such as the use of camels, which, before the popularity of trucks in the 1980s²¹, was the most efficient way to traverse the desert). These new cultural additions, once absorbed, seamlessly become part of the flow of tradition for the Bedouins; for example, pickup trucks and semi-trucks, which were totally foreign to the Middle Eastern Bedouins before the 1980s, have now become an inseparable part of their daily lives, their work, and mobility for themselves and their children.

Though I do not claim to judge the “authenticity” of a certain cultural practice—as this raises additional questions of what might be considered authentic—for the purpose of this project,

²¹ Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouins in the Modern World* (Cambridge, UK: The White Horse Press, 2013).

I will acknowledge what I have observed to be two distinct waves of cultural change for the Wadi Rum Bedouins.

The first wave occurred in the mid-20th century, when the fairly young Jordanian government enacted its settlement initiatives for the Wadi Rum Bedouins, beginning with the construction of basic homes in what is now Rum Village and the provision of necessary institutions such as a school and clinic. Interestingly, one of the first permanent structures built in Rum Village was a military preparation academy—this will be further examined later in the work. This first wave resulted in major shifts in basic Bedouin practices. Most obviously, the settlement of the Bedouins resulted in the first, and quite big, steps away from practicing a nomadic lifestyle, which had been the default way of life for Bedouins across the Middle East and North Africa for perhaps thousands of years.

I posit that the second wave of cultural change began its infancy in the 1980s with the appearance of climbing and adventure tourism in Wadi Rum, though the number of tourists was too few to significantly impact the Wadi Rum Bedouins overall. However, by the mid-1990s, this second wave was in full force, with more tourists flooding in from around the world than ever before and impacting Wadi Rum appropriately. This second wave is when changes that could be attributed specifically to tourism, such as the increasing fluency of English among Bedouin men working in tourism and the climbing numbers of Bedouin men marrying foreign women, begin to appear and escalate in influence and variety. This particular point of Bedouin men marrying foreign women, typically European, is quite interesting; while I was in Wadi Rum, I was told that there were several European women living there full time with their Bedouin husbands, although

I was unable to secure any personal visits. Marriages between Bedouin men and European women have slowly become more mainstream over time, although they are still rare - such books as *Married to a Bedouin* by Marguerite van Geldermalsen, though about a Bedouin at Petra and not Wadi Rum, indicate the slow rise in this unusual practice.²²

I acknowledge these waves of change not to imply certain new practices are inauthentic in some sense, but to state the reality that in the centuries of documented Bedouin traditions and behaviors, these two waves resulted in major departures from what were long considered hallmarks of the Bedouin lifestyle. The dramatic nature of these changes must be considered and recorded, not to postulate the superiority of older practices to newer practices simply due to “tradition”, but to illustrate a faithful history of the Bedouins and their undeniable changes in the face of economically motivated modernization.

Thus, when I reference “Bedouin culture” in the context of discussing modern changes brought on by tourism, I reference the collection of practices and traditions that have been documented by both native civilizations and interlopers to have remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years—such as the use of camels for transport, the climbing-hunting of the ibex and the oryx, and the practice of nomadic movements to follow rain and grass growth for feeding animals. I do not imply newer traditions to be inauthentic or negative, but rather that due to their relatively sudden appearance, they could be reliably evaluated to have originated from an outside influence and therefore are evidence of cultural change brought on by a foreign source - whether the settlement initiatives enacted by the Jordanian government or the rapid development encouraged by the numerous tourists visiting Wadi Rum.

²² Geldermalsen, Marguerite van. *Married to a Bedouin*. London: Virago, 2011.

e. Forces of change

Matei Calinescu defines modernization as “a temporal/historical concept by which we refer to our understanding of the present in its unique historical presentness, that is, in what distinguishes it from the past...”²³ Calinescu later elaborates upon ‘modernity’ as a Western notion tied to the prioritization of rationalism, or what is perceived to be rational, and its superiority to non-Western or non-Rational ways of life. While I do not wish to tie the lifestyle of the Wadi Rum Bedouins to this essentialist and Western-centric viewpoint of modernity, I would like to examine the term modernization for the purpose of describing what a Western reader—as the audience of this paper—might understand to be ‘modern’ in the context of Bedouin lifestyle adaptations; such as the adoption of cars over camels, concrete buildings and electricity over tents, cellphones, et cetera. It is impossible to genuinely label any specific kind of practice or adoption as ‘modern’, when what is modern is what is existing in the present, and many different perceptions of modernity exist. Instead, I will acknowledge these adaptations (the adoption of cellular devices, semitrucks, concrete homes, etc.) as resulting from cultural encounters with other entities, such as the relatively young state of Jordan and its settlement initiatives.

f. Changes brought about by cultural encounters

When discussing a few of the more obvious (relatively) recent changes undergone by the Bedouins, such as their shift from a totally nomadic people to becoming almost totally sedentary, it is imperative to clarify the roles that either or both tourism and settlement initiatives have played—and to what extent they interact with one another. It would be misleading to suggest that,

²³ Calinescu, Matei. “Modernity, Modernism, Modernization: Variations on Modern Themes.” *Symplokē* 1, no. 1 (1993): 1–20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40550352>.

for example, the Bedouins began using pickup trucks solely due to tourism, despite the fact that in 1996, 96 out of 102 vehicles in Wadi Rum were used for tourism.²⁴ Although the increasing popularity of tourism did lead to a greater need for vehicles to transport tourists to camps and to carry out tours, and also provided the finances necessary for the Bedouins to purchase several cars, Bedouins across the Middle East have widely adopted the use of vehicles, both for work and for personal transportation, beginning in the 1980s.²⁵ Would it be accurate, then, to generally ascribe the increasingly prevalent use of vehicles and the decline of the use of camels for transportation to the rapidly growing tourism industry? In truth, it is most likely that most major changes undergone by the Bedouins, including the use of vehicles, are due to a combination of the government's settlement initiatives and the economic stimulation and unique needs that tourism brings.

I do not claim the influences of tourism that will be later discussed here to be the only forces of change for the Bedouins. Rather, this study will demonstrate that tourism tends to intensify the effects of changes that were originally attributed to the government or other settlement initiatives. A straightforward example of this is the settlement of the Bedouins in their concrete homes in Rum Village and Diseh Village. The Bedouins were not necessarily compelled by force to settle in the 1970s, but instead were incentivized by the government to settle for various benefits. Because they were not individually forced to settle, many Bedouin families, though a minority, still continued their nomadic seasonal movements around the Wadi Rum region and retained their livestock. However, this has changed dramatically over time. In Wadi

²⁴ Legg, Julia. "Repercussions... on Tourism in Jordan." *Teaching Geography* 28, no. 2 (2003): 74–78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23754316>.

²⁵ Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouins in the Modern World* (Cambridge, UK: The White Horse Press, 2013).

Rum, I was informed by several individuals that today, there are perhaps a maximum of five to ten families, out of a few thousand in the region, who still practiced nomadic pastoralism. I was told this was due to largely economic reasons; firstly, that tourism and climate change resulted in far fewer grasses for their animals to feed on, which made it harder to live off the land, and secondly, the financial benefits of tourism were simply too high for most families to make the choice to live in the desert rather than reap the benefits of living in the village and participating in the tourism industry. Remember that the longstanding Bedouin lifestyle of pastoral nomadism, which lives almost totally off the land and allows for little excess, is functionally directly above or at the poverty level. However, settlement and the economic benefits of tourism allow for the possibility for families to send their children to school, purchase high-quality varieties of foods, obtain luxuries such as cars, mobile phones, televisions, servants, and other such comforts.

An example of a phenomenon that I would argue is due almost totally to tourism, and not general modernization, is the prevalence of intermediate to high English-speaking abilities among Bedouin men in Wadi Rum. I specify Bedouin men because my personal observation while in Wadi Rum was that English-speaking abilities among women are generally inferior to men's—this is due directly to the fact that the vast majority of Bedouin men in Wadi Rum frequently work with tourists in English, while Bedouin women very rarely work face-to-face with tourists and thus do not receive the same chances to improve their English skills. To further support my argument that advanced English-speaking skills are almost totally due to tourism, I posit that other opportunities for the Bedouins to advance their English skills, such as formal schooling, social media, and TV, are equally available to both men and women and do not explain the discrepancy in English-speaking abilities. In fact, as I was informed in Wadi Rum,

Bedouin girls typically spend even more time in formal schooling than Bedouin boys do, due to boys being pulled out of school or finishing school early to begin work in tourism. This would indicate, then, that the appearance of advanced English-speaking abilities among the Bedouin men can most reliably be explained as a direct result of working in tourism and interacting with tourists, rather than the government-backed development of schooling or technology in Wadi Rum.

As for the Bedouins themselves, there seemed to be little relation between elements of Western ‘modernity’ – that is, cellular devices, semitrucks, and concrete homes – and how they perceived themselves in the present. The attitude towards these items was akin to tools, like any practice or material they might adopt in order to help make life easier for themselves. These objects or technologies did not seem to define their own sense of modernity or age their traditions; they were themselves–Bedouins–and did not fit inside of Western notions of ‘modern’, but were totally separate.

Without a clear reference for what changes have been brought about by unregulated tourism, it is impossible to generate any genuinely insightful criticism for the improvement of Wadi Rum’s infrastructure and management, which is one of the major purposes of this work. The broad changes discussed thus far, such as the widespread use of cars and improvement in English-speaking skills among men, are basic examples that demonstrate the sometimes mixed, sometimes distinctly unique influences impacting the shape of Wadi Rum’s societal makeup today.

III. ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL AND OBSERVATIONS

This section will focus on summarizing interview results and observations regarding the main topics of the interviews, such as the environmental, cultural, and social effects of tourism, as well as the interviewees' personal perspectives on tourism in Wadi Rum.

a. Environmental effects of tourism

When I first arrived in Wadi Rum, the most obvious environmental consequences I observed as a result of tourism were trash and graffiti. Even in the “remote” areas, it is not uncommon to find random pieces of trash littering the landscape, such as chip bags, soda cans, et cetera. Graffiti is especially rampant for an area that is supposedly protected, and many popular nature sites feature significant amounts of graffiti right next to ancient Nabataean petroglyphs. It is worth noting that virtually all of the graffiti I had personally observed was written in Arabic, which brings me to a brief point regarding who is typically blamed for littering and graffiti in Wadi Rum—tourists from Amman, the capital.

A professor at the University of Jordan who assisted me in setting up this project had confessed a rather amusing tidbit about his experiences in managing litter at Petra; he had told me that if one thousand Western tourists went to Petra, he would have nothing to worry about, but if just ten tourists from Amman went to Petra, he would send a team out immediately to assess and rectify the damage. This sentiment was echoed by several Wadi Rum Bedouins I spoke to, who openly blamed tourists from Amman for littering, creating graffiti, driving their cars off the approved paths in the protected areas, and being generally disrespectful and careless towards Wadi Rum and its inhabitants. When asked about tourists from Amman in comparison to

Western tourists, I was told invariably that Western tourists are almost always more considerate of the environment than tourists from Amman or other parts of the Middle East were.

This had been somewhat surprising to me, as I had previously assumed that tourists from Amman, being Jordanian and almost definitely partially Bedouin (most city-dwellers have Bedouin heritage) would be particularly keen to protect lands symbolizing their living heritage and their country—which, according to the Bedouins I spoke with, is generally not the case. One interviewee had gone even further, telling me that most tourists from Amman come to party in megabuses and attend DJ parties and raves in Wadi Rum, staying in the foreign-owned megacamps and totally disregarding the Bedouins and their local tourism operations. While the purpose of this study is not to analyze the behavior of tourists from Amman, this hostility towards the perceived stereotypical attitudes of Ammani tourists was reminiscent of previous evidence I had seen of a general friction between Bedouins and city-dwellers. I had been openly told by two Ammani citizens I had spoken to about my project proposal, one having done research with the Wadi Rum Bedouins in the past, that the Bedouins are incapable of managing themselves and need government members from the cities to control them.

The following image is a map of the Wadi Rum Protected Area provided by the Jordanian Tourism official website. For the purpose of discussing environmental degradation in separate areas of the Wadi Rum Protected Area, please note the “Free Access Zone” (colored in pale red) and “Wilderness Zone” (colored in pale blue) regions present on the map. The Free Access Zone is where the majority of permanent settlements, camps, and structures of any kind reside. All permanent campsites and ‘sites of interest’ noted on the map are within the Free Access Zone,

while the Wilderness Zone is free of any permanent settlements or established roads. The most important general areas of this map to keep in mind are the Free Access Zone, which is where the majority of commercial tourism activity (camps, camel rides, jeep tours, etc.) takes place, and the southern section of the Wilderness Zone directly south of the Free Access Zone. The placement of these zones will provide geographical context for the following discussion.

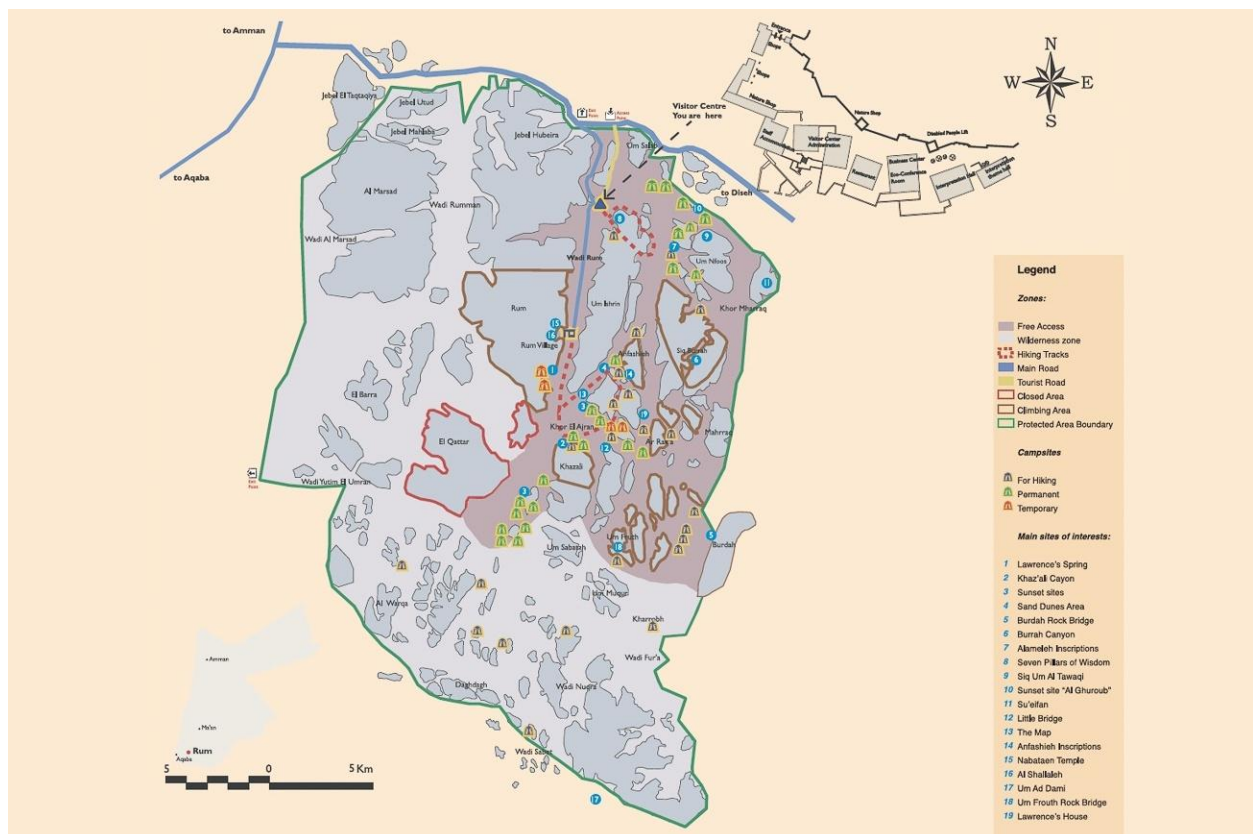


Figure A. Map of Wadi Rum²⁶

Regardless of the veracity of the Bedouins' claims that much of the littering comes from Ammani tourists, the damage brought about by tourism in all its forms, including the movements of the Bedouins themselves while guiding tourists, is undeniable. This is easily visibly

²⁶ "Wadi Rum Protected Area." Wadi Rum | Wadi Rum Protected Area, November 10, 2013. <http://wadirum.jo/>.

demonstrated by the following two images, which I took myself while in Wadi Rum:



Figure B. North Wadi Rum Landscape



Figure C. South Wadi Rum Landscape

Figure B was taken in the northern area of Wadi Rum (the Free Access Zone), which is where the vast majority of camps and tours are located. Figure C was taken in the southern area of Wadi Rum (within the Wilderness Zone), which is far from most camps and has very few tourists—in fact, while making the journey of perhaps fifty or sixty miles into the south and back, I did not see a single tourist. The most immediately obvious difference between the two images is the presence of shrubs and small grasses in Figure C, which while perhaps not significant to most viewers, marks a huge difference for the ability of prospective Bedouin pastoralists to easily feed their animals. Traditional Bedouin pastoralists who had lived in the arid region of Wadi Rum for centuries engaged in little to no farming, able to rely on the natural grasses and shrubs of the region to provide food for their goats, sheep, and camels. In the Wadi Rum of today, however, the northern region is reminiscent of a true desert, with little to no shrubbery or

grasses in sight. In the north, the only greenery I had ever seen were usually small grasses or bushes located in areas too narrow for a car to enter—in the wide open spaces, however, the only evidence that there had ever been plant life in the area was the occasional sight of groups of thin sticks poking up from the ground where a bush used to be. This lack of greenery poses a significant obstacle for any Bedouin who wishes to pursue a nomadic pastoralist lifestyle, as he must then purchase animal feed for his flocks, which is a large expense for a profession that makes little to no money.

The only option left for a Bedouin who is insistent on pursuing a nomadic pastoralist lifestyle is to move deeper into Wadi Rum, into the still relatively untouched south. It was here that I was introduced to one of the last remaining true Bedouins, an elderly woman who remained in the desert permanently with her goats, moving her tent periodically to follow the rain and wind patterns. I had obtained the privilege of meeting this woman coincidentally, as it had happened that she was the mother of one of the gentlemen I had interviewed. When I had asked questions about how many Bedouins remained who still practiced the traditional lifestyle, he had directed me to his own mother and offered to take me to her for lunch. When heading into the south, I was struck by the sudden appearance of shrubbery, grasses, and even trees, which had seemed to spring up out of nowhere in comparison to the largely barren desert of the north. I was told that a few decades ago, the north looked like this as well, with plenty of greenery and wild animals roaming around. However, since the 1990s, it had begun to transform into the landscape seen in Figure A.

Not all of the environmental changes are due to tourism—for example, climate change was also mentioned as a contributing factor, with a few Bedouins mentioning that the rain frequency and patterns had shifted significantly since their youth. When meeting the aforementioned female Bedouin in the south, however, it was clear that tourism was a leading cause for pastoral Bedouins moving further into the desert. The woman's son told me that she had moved deeper into the south because she had felt uneasy being near camps, perhaps due to their being filled with foreigners and droves of cars, and wished to move far away from any centers of activity. Besides this individual woman's trepidation regarding tourism activity nearby, the lack of grasses for animals to eat in the north ensures that any Bedouin wishing to practice at least part-time pastoralism must either migrate to the south or spend a significant amount of money on animal feed. Even the south is not unaffected by simple car traffic and climate change, however, and greenery is not necessarily as plentiful as it once was—the woman's son told me that he still visits her regularly to bring animal feed to supplement the grazing of her flocks.

From my own observations and those of the Bedouins that I spoke with, it appears that the uncontrolled pathways of vehicles in the northern region of Wadi Rum is the major cause of the destruction of greenery and grasses. When driving through the open areas of Wadi Rum, I was immediately struck by the countless overlapping tire tracks running each direction in the sand, not seeming to follow any sort of main road and covering seemingly much of the surface in the areas with many camps and tourists. What I had initially thought was a small observation revealed itself to be a significant point of contention in the issue of environmental preservation, though it is rarely discussed in existing material on Wadi Rum.

One Bedouin I spoke to, who has worked in tourism for decades, owns numerous camps, and has pushed for greater environmental regulation, had told me that he had raised the issue of the uncontrolled driving in the open areas to ASEZA, but had been dismissed because, according to him, ASEZA did not feel funding his proposal was justified. His suggestion had been that ASEZA pave an official pathway in the open areas of Wadi Rum and strictly enforce adherence to the roads instead of allowing drivers to freely roam. This would have ideally protected the last remaining bits of greenery and allowed grasses to begin regrowing, as well as reduce the number of unsightly tire tracks covering the landscape. Admittedly, as he told me, a paved road in the desert would look quite out of place and perhaps disrupt its serene appearance, but that a visual disruption would be preferable to continued environmental destruction of the desert due to reckless driving. ASEZA did not agree with his suggestion, and, as he told me, several Bedouins disagreed with him as well. While it is difficult to ascertain what exactly would be both the most environmentally beneficial and practical means of remedying this issue, there appears to be little official activity confronting environmental degradation, despite Wadi Rum being designated as an area for special environmental protection. In fact, this was perhaps the single biggest complaint heard from every single Bedouin I spoke with—the lack of regulation of tourism and its disastrous consequences for the environment.

As one Bedouin put it to me, “They are f***ing up the desert for money.” Regardless of the official duties or mission of organizations such as ASEZA, it is clear from the lack of concrete action regarding overdevelopment and environmental degradation that quick-return investment and development is prized over carefully developing sustainable forms of ecotourism that support the Bedouins and the environment. Existing literature had indicated that the Wadi

Rum Bedouins generally resent regulation from the government and NGOs, but I had experienced the opposite in Wadi Rum, with every Bedouin I spoke to describing similar complaints: that the current state of tourism in Wadi Rum was a mess, especially in regards to overdevelopment, and needed to be much more efficiently and seriously regulated.

More than litter or tire tracks, I received the impression that overdevelopment is the single biggest environmental issue facing Wadi Rum today. Most interviewees clearly stated that they felt there were too many camps and too many tours in Wadi Rum, and one suggested that instead of constructing dozens of small camps (hosting up to thirty or so people) that quickly fill up the landscape, camp owners should be incentivized to instead construct one or two larger camps (hosting up to one or two hundred people) hidden in isolated areas so as to preserve the open and unspoiled look of Wadi Rum. Several interviewees lamented the frequency with which tourist camps now dot the landscape, devaluing the natural beauty of the steppe and increasing car traffic in what would otherwise be quiet, serene areas. I observed through discussion of overdevelopment that the aesthetic beauty of the Wadi Rum region—its quietness, serenity, and untouched appearance—was typically just as much of a concern as its environmental health for many Bedouins. This concern is twofold; naturally, the beauty of the Wadi Rum region is an important factor in the satisfaction and enjoyment of the tourist, especially those who come to Wadi Rum for nature-focused activities such as hiking and climbing. Unfortunately, it appears that the level of development in Wadi Rum is already enough to cause some tourists to be dissatisfied, with two interviewees telling me that they occasionally hear complaints from their tourists about the level of development in Wadi Rum, which is often advertised as a pristine wilderness for tourists to explore in promotional materials abroad. The fear of Wadi Rum

becoming obsolete in the future due to overdevelopment was expressed to me by one of these interviewees, who pointed out that if development in the region continued to the point where the area lost its natural appeal, the tourism industry would collapse in on itself. Thus, it is a matter of business interest to try to maintain and improve the natural beauty of Wadi Rum and prevent its overdevelopment.

However, a few Bedouins I spoke with also appeared to express a deep emotional connection to the Wadi Rum steppe and personal offense and anger at its destruction for business ventures. As the Bedouins are inherently associated with the desert (the arabic word for a singular Bedouin, *badawi*, literally means ‘desert-dweller’), have grown up on the desert and its natural resources, and claim historic ownership of the Wadi Rum region, it is unsurprising that some Bedouins see the overdevelopment of Wadi Rum as offensive. The level to which each Bedouin expressed their disdain for overdevelopment varied noticeably; for example, the brothers operating a climbing business very directly and harshly condemned overdevelopment of Wadi Rum, calling for major reform and strongly supporting non-invasive forms of tourism such as hiking and climbing. The brothers are not associated with any camps and only run a climbing business, which seemed to also be a part of their passionate stance against needless development. However, two other Bedouins I spoke to, who both own multiple camps, were more subdued in their calls for action against overdevelopment. They both agreed overdevelopment was harming the desert, expressed a personal and emotional connection to Wadi Rum, and supported greater regulation and a reduction in new camp creation. However, both individuals own multiple camps, and, in the case of one individual, were in the midst of launching a brand new camp.

As evidenced by the different behaviors of different Bedouins (such as the climbing brothers versus those who own multiple camps), there are varying levels of concern for the environment amongst the Bedouins. While it seemed that virtually all Bedouins would at least agree on the importance of having a beautiful landscape to satisfy tourists and maintain Wadi Rum's popularity, there was a differing level of personal commitment to opposing overdevelopment and preserving Wadi Rum's natural beauty. For example, the brothers who own a climbing business were staunchly against excessive camp development and expressed this through their refusal to open a camp as well as their undisguised criticism of any form of tourism that involved development of the landscape. On the other hand, the two Bedouins I spoke to who owned multiple camps expressed their desire to preserve the environment, but their involvement in developing Wadi Rum seemed to conflict with their pro-environment statements. Those who had a greater financial investment in the development of Wadi Rum (such as the two individuals previously mentioned) condemned the overcrowding of camps in Wadi Rum equally as those who didn't have their own camps (such as the climbers), but seemed to express little individual guilt or self-consciousness about their own participation in the development of Wadi Rum. I believe this is because both individuals who owned multiple camps perceived their environmental impact as minimal.

I do not wish to broadly imply that one cannot criticize overdevelopment and still own multiple camps, as both individuals did emphasize to me that their philosophies for creating camps centered on protecting the environment and natural beauty of Wadi Rum—for example, such as placing their camps within a hidden alcove in the rock in order not to spoil the desert

view, using solar panels for energy instead of relying on generators, or spending greater amounts of money to purchase firewood that comes from outside of Wadi Rum.

This last example is particularly interesting, as I was first told about it by the camp owner who owns the previously mentioned boutique luxury ecotourism camp. As I was told, when a camp in Wadi Rum requires firewood, typically for cooking, the camp owner is ideally supposed to purchase wood from areas north of Wadi Rum, where the land is not protected and trees are theoretically more plentiful. This is naturally more expensive, as the owner must pay for a separate individual to chop and collect wood, and then spend more money on gas to drive to the north to pick it up. However, in practice, some camp owners chop down the few remaining trees in Wadi Rum to save on money. This intriguing issue was later mentioned to me again by a different interviewee, who commented that he had needed to purchase firewood for personal use from the north. Thus, the camp owner I spoke with had made it a specific point of pride to be transparent about the sources of the materials used in his camp to demonstrate his commitment to being environmentally friendly. Thus, it is impossible to paint all camp owners, even those who own multiple camps, with a broad stroke. Although some camp types could be considered to be inherently more environmentally destructive—bubble camps with attached hot tubs would be an obvious example—the actual environmental impact of the camp is largely up to the behavior of the camp owner, as even a more traditional and presumably environmentally-friendly Bedouin camp might contribute to environmental degradation if its owner is using generators instead of solar panels, chopping wood in Wadi Rum instead of purchasing it elsewhere, dumping trash illegally instead of through the proper channels, etc.

This once again returns to the problem of regulation in Wadi Rum, or rather, the lack of it. When I had asked interviewees why overdevelopment was allowed in Wadi Rum—after all, aren't multiple organizations, including the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature, involved in development decisions regarding Wadi Rum?—the answer was roughly the same: that although the RSCN used to be more heavily involved in Wadi Rum's management and was apparently one of the only legitimately helpful organizations in limiting development and promoting environmental protection, their authority and any other organization's authority, short of the government itself, had been vastly superseded by ASEZA's in recent years. When asked why ASEZA did not control the rampant overdevelopment in Wadi Rum or other issues such as making numerous Booking.com accounts for the same camp, answers were again rather consistent; that ASEZA did not have any sort of full-time monitoring staff in Wadi Rum, and that they largely relied on reports provided by the administration of the Wadi Rum Visitor Center. One interviewee then implied the Wadi Rum Visitor Center was subject to corruption, as according to him, wealthy camp owners with numerous camps are the ones who hold practical influence over the reports sent out by the Wadi Rum Visitor Center, and, naturally, would be interested in downplaying any issues regarding overdevelopment or unethical business practices. Of course, I cannot supply any evidence to support this speculation, but I theorize that other Bedouins share similar thoughts as well, as several interviewees seemed highly distrustful of and openly critical of ASEZA and its failure to properly monitor tourism in Wadi Rum.

Although ASEZA has special authority over Wadi Rum, the Jordanian government ultimately holds true authority over development in Wadi Rum, so one may wonder why the government would allow one of its most prized tourist sites—highly significant in a country where

tourism provides for 14% of the GDP²⁷—to become noticeably degraded due to lack of regulation and management. After speaking with a Bedouin who works for the government as a sort of district manager for Rum Village, I was told that the government continues to promote development in Wadi Rum especially due to apprehension of Neom, a tourism project planned by Saudi Arabia that will be fairly close to the Jordanian-Saudi border, where Wadi Rum is. According to this individual, the Jordanian government has been prioritizing quick-return development and expansion in the hopes of being able to compete with Neom by the time it officially opens. I cannot provide evidence to support this claim, as although a few international online media sources have speculated on the threat Neom poses to Jordanian tourism²⁸, I have been unable to find any Jordanian sources stating or implying that the Jordanian government is intentionally allowing overdevelopment in Wadi Rum in order to compete with Neom. It is worth noting that although Jordan theoretically allows freedom of the press, open criticism of the government and its actions—beyond basic comments on policy—is somewhat rare.

In conclusion, the environmental impacts of tourism, as seen through visibly obvious practices such as littering and graffiti, in addition to less obvious detriments such as uncontrolled car paths, are possibly the single biggest and most important negative consequence of both the sheer numerical increase in tourists and the lack of proper regulation by governing bodies like ASEZA. The Bedouins themselves certainly seem to see it as the biggest issue facing Wadi Rum,

²⁷ Mustafa, Mairna. “Potential of Sustaining Handicrafts as a Tourism Product in Jordan.” Academia.edu, January 27, 2016. P.145

https://www.academia.edu/20978099/Potential_of_Sustaining_Handicrafts_as_a_Tourism_Product_in_Jordan.

²⁸ Roger, Juan Girón. “Saudi Arabia's New Tourism Roadmap to Challenge Jordan and Egypt.” The Corner, May 17, 2022.

<https://thecorner.eu/news-the-world/world-economy/saudi-arabias-new-tourism-roadmap-to-challenge-jordan-and-egypt/101688/>.

its people, and its tourism industry today, with almost every interviewee choosing to focus largely on the environment when discussing changes brought on by tourism.

Although it is difficult to confidently recommend specific practices to implement in Wadi Rum to protect its remaining ecological qualities and ideally restore them in the future, what is unquestionable is the need for monitored environmental regulation. Increasing environmental officers throughout the whole of Wadi Rum might be a wise start—they might assist in protecting trees, deterring graffiti and littering, and educating tourists on the importance of preserving the environment. Additionally, I would suggest that environmental officers wear specially designated, non-military-like uniforms and practice friendly interactions with tourists in order to avoid needlessly frightening them, as documented in *Rum Business*²⁹. I suspect promoting friendly relations and understanding between tourists and environmental officers would also promote cooperation between the Bedouin guides and the environmental officers, as most complaints about the environmental officers documented in *Rum Business* centered around the officers' disturbing the tourists and their experience³⁰, which reflects negatively on the guides and their businesses.

In addition, the issue of car paths is significant and must be addressed. I would suggest that a committee be formed that includes the Bedouins of Wadi Rum and environmentally-oriented organizations like the RSCN in order to determine a solution that neither unnecessarily restricts the Bedouins and their tourism operations nor allows further

²⁹ *Rum Business*. University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, 2002.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_doDYbcBfv4&t=704s.

³⁰ Ibid.

destruction of what greenery is left in north Wadi Rum. Whatever solution is agreed upon must then be vigorously enforced in order to ensure the restoration of Wadi Rum's natural ecology.

Finally, and most obviously, development of new camps must be limited, if not completely halted. Space in Wadi Rum is finite—allowing further development will only continue to destroy what little land is left until camps overtake the scenery completely. A finite total number of camp licenses should be agreed upon and announced. Existing camps should be held to a certain standard of environmental consciousness—needless and outrageously wasteful commodities such as hot tubs and pools should be either heavily restricted or removed completely. Ideally, ASEZA or the Jordanian government would begin subsidizing some costs for Bedouins starting non-environmentally-invasive forms of tourism, such as climbing and hiking businesses, individual-scale overnight Bedouin tent/family experiences, cooking classes, handicraft classes/experiences (such as observing the creation of and purchasing traditionally woven fabrics) and selling locally made handicrafts in order to promote tourism industries other than camps and a more balanced tourism economy in Wadi Rum. Promoting cottage industries, handicrafts, and heritage tourism has already proven to be highly economically successful in pilot projects in other parts of Jordan³¹, and simply needs the investment and structure of a governing body to begin.

Diversifying Wadi Rum's tourism economy to include handicraft production and sale will also allow women to more easily participate in tourism, as women's handicraft cooperatives have

³¹ Al-Oun, Salem, and Majd Al-Homoud. "The Potential for Developing Community-Based Tourism among the Bedouins in the Badia of Jordan." *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, December 2008.
https://www.academia.edu/3179899/The_Potential_for_Developing_Community_based_Tourism_among_the_Bedouins_in_the_Badia_of_Jordan.

existed in the past and were moderately successful, though fell through due to a stop in funding and management. Ultimately, promoting these types of tourism will not only diversify Wadi Rum's economy and allow for women, a historically economically immobile group, to gain economic leverage, but also reduce the environmental strain camps place on Wadi Rum and still allow for Bedouins to economically capitalize off of the popularity of Wadi Rum as a tourist destination.

b. Scams and distrust

Another consequence of the lack of regulation is the prevalence of scams, which harm tourists' trust in Wadi Rum tourism, creates negative experiences for consumers, and undermines legal authorities in Wadi Rum. Although the Bedouins have been historically renowned for their famous hospitality, kindness, loyalty, and honor, some of these cultural values seem to have been lost following the total economic immersion into quick-return tourism. An observation I would like to quickly note is that I believe this is partially due to tourists becoming a more separate social entity for most Bedouins than 'guests', which are historically honored in Bedouin culture. I personally observed this while existing simultaneously as a guest of the Bedouins I was working with and as a tourist experiencing the camps and services they advertised.

For example, in regards to one camp owner I worked with, I was invited to sleep in his home, spend time with his children, eat at the table reserved for the camp owner and his managers, given private tours of the camp and surrounding area, and was allowed to stay in his camp without paying (although I insisted on paying and did). These hospitable actions would not typically be extended to any tourist—however, because I had been connected to him through a

mutual contact and was plainly going to be his guest for some of my visits, I had the chance to experience the true Bedouin hospitality that tourism only intimates. Most tourists, however, do not seem to fit into this ‘guest’ label, and are instead simply a function of business, and perhaps do not necessitate the same emotional investment that a true guest might. This is only my approximation of the reasoning behind what seems to be a disconnect towards classical Bedouin values regarding guests/foreigners and the kind of behavior that is actually practiced in Wadi Rum. Another thing to note is that not all individuals working in Wadi Rum are Bedouin, and may not feel obligated to adhere to Bedouin values.

As was previously mentioned, a current issue complicating consumer trust in Wadi Rum businesses is the practice of creating numerous Booking.com or TripAdvisor accounts for the same camp. This is typically done for two reasons; first, to better boost visibility and customer yield, as having three or five different camp pages will theoretically lead to higher numbers of bookings overall than having only one camp page. The second reason, and this being the typical point of criticism for this practice, is to get rid of bad reviews by simply deleting the camp page with the bad reviews and creating a new one. I was also told that these camp owners will tend to populate their own camp pages with fake positive reviews, which will lead prospective visitors to be more likely to trust the quality of the camp. Then, as the story goes, tourists will complete their experience at the camp, likely have complaints about the facilities or the way they were treated, review the camp negatively online, only for the camp page to be deleted and the cycle started over again. These deceptive tactics decrease tourists’ trust in Wadi Rum tourism as a whole and create negative experiences that are posted elsewhere online, which may begin to hurt Wadi Rum’s tourism in the future.

Another common scamming tactic is advertising Bedouin camps for as little as 1 JOD (roughly \$1.41 USD) a night, luring tourists in with unbelievably cheap prices, and then marking up all other services and tours to extremely high prices. To get from Rum village to the camp it might be 10 JOD, then 5 JOD for each meal, then 30 JOD to go on a camel ride or jeep ride, et cetera. Costs can add up quickly and end up being more than a camp that includes basic services and provisions in its nightly prices. The interviewees who first told me about these camps seemed to hold a disdain for them and denounced their practices.

The final form of scamming I had personally witnessed in Wadi Rum is collusion between guides and shop owners to swindle tourists into buying imported, cheaply-made goods passed off as local handicrafts. This is an especially unfortunate example of wasted economic potential due to a lack of regulation, as souvenir shops do very well in Wadi Rum, and had these shops been selling actually locally crafted items, it would significantly contribute to a healthier and more diverse economy. Typically, a guide will have a deal with a specific shop owner, who will give the guide a portion of the sales proceeds in exchange for the guide heavily pushing their tourists into purchasing items. I had witnessed this in one shop I had been examining, in which the shop owner was attempting to sell two obviously cheaply-made mass-produced bags—I had seen these exact bags sold for 2 or 3 JOD in Amman—for 60 JOD to an elderly Italian woman, insisting that they were special bags made only in Wadi Rum and an unforgettable souvenir. She had been surprised by the price and uncertain, but her guide suddenly appeared and insisted to her that it was a great deal, the bags were an excellent souvenir to take home from Wadi Rum, and that she wouldn't get this chance again. I briefly considered interfering and informing the

woman that the bags weren't worth the asking price, but then worried about alienating myself from portions of the community in Wadi Rum by interfering with their sales. Technically, in Jordan, licensed souvenir shops must separate imported souvenirs from locally handcrafted souvenirs, and must truthfully label souvenirs according to their place of origin—for example, items not made in Jordan should not be labeled or said to be made in Jordan, but marked as originating from the correct country.³² In practice, of course, this is rarely followed, as shopkeepers stand to make much more money by purchasing cheaply-made, mass-produced goods and selling them for high prices under the guise of supporting local craftsmen and women.

Not only do these scams and deceptive behaviors ultimately harm innocent tourists, businesspeople, and guides, but also the overall tourism industry of Wadi Rum. In the case of the handicrafts scam, rectifying these deceptions through regulation and replacing them with genuine handicrafts sales would benefit Wadi Rum greatly. Unfortunately, regardless of what laws are passed (as seen with the handicrafts case) little permanent change can occur without regulation. This point was brought up to me by the interviewees themselves, as they seemed to believe the most effective way to stop the scamming and restore tourist trust was for ASEZA to enforce anti-scamming regulation. This is an issue that must be addressed with ASEZA or the Jordanian government.

³² Mustafa, Mairna. "Potential of Sustaining Handicrafts as a Tourism Product in Jordan." Academia.edu, January 27, 2016. P.148
https://www.academia.edu/20978099/Potential_of_Sustaining_Handicrafts_as_a_Tourism_Product_in_Jordan.

c. Cultural effects of tourism

When I first began this project, I had presumed that the cultural changes undergone by the Wadi Rum Bedouin in relation to tourism would naturally be at the forefront of our discussions, and that it would be a primary cause of concern for the Bedouins. However, as I spoke to more and more individuals from both tribes and from several different walks of life, it became apparent that this concept of changing culture I had originally based my project upon was a much more complicated and murky topic than I had first thought. While all interviewees acknowledged that the Bedouins had significantly changed their lifestyles in the past half-century, only a few considered it to be a problem or even just something that warranted discussion. When considering how to frame the changes that, although some Bedouins may not consider important, do exist, I was struck by this phrase in an article discussing community-based tourism in Bedouin societies: “The ability to change and adapt is a Bedouin tradition in itself.”³³ I believe this is partially why some Bedouins do not seem to feel disturbed by the huge cultural and social changes among the Zalabia and Zawaideh Bedouins; perhaps they perceive these changes simply as functions of adaptation, which is necessarily the entire basis of their history as nomads in harsh lands, and therefore less foreign to their cultural philosophy than an outsider might think.

However, some Bedouins I spoke to did express some concerns about the loss of a few key cultural elements that have been historically associated with the Bedouin, so in the interest of

³³ Al-Oun, Salem, and Majd Al-Homoud. “The Potential for Developing Community-Based Tourism among the Bedouins in the Badia of Jordan.” *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, December 2008.
https://www.academia.edu/3179899/The_Potential_for_Developing_Community_based_Tourism_among_the_Bedouins_in_the_Badia_of_Jordan.

portraying the whole kaleidoscope of opinions about the Bedouins' cultural changes, I have outlined and examined these.

I heard conflicting opinions on this issue, but it was expressed to me that the youth of the Bedouin tribes are beginning to lose their distinct Bedouin accents. 'Accents', in the context of Arabic dialects, is much more than just a certain intonation or way of speaking, but is effectively its own minor dialect, noticeably different from the Arabic spoken in the capital city, Amman. An example that one interviewee gave me is the common use of the English word "ticket", as it is a fairly typical word when used in conversation with tourists discussing reservations and tours. However, the interviewee continued, the word has become so ubiquitous that some Bedouins continue to use the English word "ticket" as a loan term when speaking to other Bedouins instead of its equivalent in the Bedouin dialect. He also went on to observe that the new generation's familiarity with English and the Ammani dialect of Arabic meant that they sometimes used words or phrases in these other languages rather than in their traditional Bedouin dialect. Another Bedouin told me that he hadn't felt the dialect was being lost at all and hadn't noticed any changes. I wasn't in Wadi Rum long enough to be able to observe these supposed phenomena for myself.

Fashion is an interesting subject to discuss in relation to tourism, as this is one of those changes that cannot necessarily be accurately attributed to either just tourism or modernization. Tourism may have certainly influenced style choices for young men seeing the way Westerners dress, but globalization and the easy availability of cheap, mass-produced Western-style clothing certainly also had a factor in changing certain types of dress. While most Bedouin men one

might see in public in Wadi Rum still wear the traditional *thobe* (a long robe) and *keffiyeh* (a checked scarf worn wrapped around the head) and women are always wearing an *abaya* (a plain, loose outfit covering the whole body), some Bedouins choose to wear Western-style clothing such as jeans, graphic tees, sportswear, and hoodies in the comfort of their own home or when not interacting with tourists. One of the Bedouins I worked with had taken me to his camp to show me around and have me eat dinner, and during this time, he had been dressed in jeans, a graphic tee, and a backwards baseball cap. His family also dressed in similar ways at home, with all members except the mother wearing house clothes identical to what an American family might wear, such as printed pajamas, hoodies, etc. I had not thought especially deeply about his choice of dress until halfway through dinner when additional tourists filed in, and a European tourist wearing a traditional thobe approached the man I had been working with. Before the man I had worked with could even finish greeting him, the tourist asked in a distraught voice why he was dressed the way he was, and wasn't he supposed to be wearing the same clothes the tourist was—a thobe? The tourist further elaborated that he had dressed in a thobe because he had thought Bedouins wore thobes, and he didn't understand why my colleague was dressed like that. My colleague sheepishly explained that this was a rare occasion, he had been running a specific errand today, and that he usually does wear thobes. The implications of this were intriguing and caused me to wonder to what extent the Bedouins were 'performing'—for example, in the sense of wearing clothes they might not otherwise choose to wear—for Western tourists to conform to their Orientalist expectations. It also indicated a level of entitlement that I had not quite expected from any tourist, which is perhaps due to the heavy marketing of Wadi Rum as an untouched, frozen-in-history wilderness.

When I spoke to my colleague about it later that evening, he told me that while he enjoys wearing jeans and t-shirts for any manual labor or rough errands he has to run, he is typically extremely careful not to wear Western-style clothing in front of tourists, so as not to fall short of their expectations of what Wadi Rum and the Bedouins are like—which appears to be a fantasy of an untouched wilderness and an ancient people frozen in time. I am again reminded of the sentiment that change and adaptation is the essence of Bedouin tradition, which I think encapsulates the reasoning behind the adoption of Western clothes as well.³⁴ In fact, I would posit that it is a privilege afforded to the wealthy and well-established to be able to weather change and refuse to adapt, even in the face of economic incentive—i.e., mass-produced Western clothes being cheaper and more easily available than traditionally made garb. In the age of fast fashion giants like Shein—and I was told by my interviewee’s daughters that much of their clothes, stickers, and decorations came from Shein and Aliexpress—it is bizarre to expect that economically disadvantaged populations in the Middle East will ignore the economic benefit of cheaply-made Western-style clothes in order to maintain the West’s desired image of their culture.

Another interesting development that has arisen due to tourism is the nature of hospitality among the Wadi Rum Bedouins. Hospitality for the tourists includes receiving the tourists at the camp, sheltering them in tents, feeding them coffee, tea, and food, et cetera. Naturally, these services are not free, but are performed with the expectation of payment; in this situation, it is difficult to see how this ‘hospitality’ is the same hospitality that the Bedouins traditionally

³⁴ Al-Oun, Salem, and Majd Al-Homoud. “The Potential for Developing Community-Based Tourism among the Bedouins in the Badia of Jordan.” *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, December 2008.
https://www.academia.edu/3179899/The_Potential_for_Developing_Community_based_Tourism_among_the_Bedouins_in_the_Badia_of_Jordan.

extended in the past without any expectation of repayment (and, indeed, would be offended at the thought). It seemed obvious during my visit that the effects of capitalism had transformed Bedouin hospitality and the notion of guest. I had personally drawn the conclusion that the Wadi Rum Bedouins were commodifying and selling the concept of hospitality, as the exchange of money inherently made it a paid service, despite the Bedouins continuing to market their offerings under the same umbrella of unpaid, 'genuine' hospitality. However, Geraldine Chatelard states in her in-depth analysis of Wadi Rum tourism that the "Bedouins do not feel they are selling hospitality."³⁵

Chatelard argues this is due to two main points; first, that the Bedouin, especially the older individuals, do not typically take payment upfront and are hesitant to haggle or discuss prices directly with tourists. This is preferably left up to a guide, who serves as the middleman for discussing costs between the Bedouin host and the guest. This separates the Bedouins themselves from the selling process, which is something Chatelard states the Bedouins do to preserve their self-image of a "superior social ranking"³⁶, which is above petty acts like openly discussing money for services.

According to Chatelard, the second reason why the Bedouins do not feel they are selling hospitality is that they are not at the beck and call of tourists like hotel employees would be, but are instead the owner or host of a camp where the guest is privileged to enjoy services that the Bedouin is willing to provide. Performances of servitude, such as cooking for the guests, taking

³⁵ Chatelard, Géraldine. "Tourism and Representations: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Ramm." *Représentation et construction de la réalité ... wadiram.userhome.ch*, May 24, 2014. <https://academia.edu/resource/work/1053449>.

³⁶ Ibid. p.42

guests on scheduled tours, and providing wake-up services in the morning, are usually left to the various immigrant workers (typically from Egypt, Sudan, and Iraq) often hired for this kind of labor in tourist camps.³⁷ These jobs may be filled by non-Bedouin Jordanians as well; at one camp I visited, the head cook was a Jordanian man from Aqaba (a large city about one hour from Wadi Rum) who would commute to Wadi Rum on the weekends to work in the camp. In this way, the Bedouins are able to maintain their perceived position as being the host of the tourist and *choosing* to provide them with such services, rather than being obliged to take care of them like a hotel employee would. Viewed within this context, the lack of cultural conflict about calling tourist services ‘hospitality’ is logical, as providing hospitality is seemingly a point of personal choice and honor for the Bedouins rather than self-flagellating servitude. As is with many changing aspects of Bedouin life, I would argue that the Bedouins do not view this apparent change in hospitality as an unavoidable effect of capitalistic influence, but instead an adaptation they have chosen to make to benefit themselves and their families.

This attitude towards selling hospitality as a service appears to be well-accepted among the Bedouins, even at an individual level. For example, the climbing guides I had worked with told me that they knew of other small families who lived out in the desert full-time in their traditional tents that would occasionally allow very few tourists to stay with them overnight. These were marketed as genuinely ‘authentic’ Bedouin experiences for those seeking the most historical and traditional Bedouin experiences in Wadi Rum. The accepted nature of this service indicates that even at a hyper-traditional level, where a Bedouin family lives isolated in the desert according to historical practices, some see no conflict with extending hospitality for payment in the context of tourism. I believe the context is the deciding factor in their perception

³⁷ Ibid. p.43

of the relationship between hospitality and payment; for example, if I were to try to pay an interviewee in exchange for his wife feeding me lunch, it would have been highly offensive, as I was a personal guest at their home. However, if I were a tourist at the same interviewee's camp, I would inevitably have to pay in order to have access to freshly-prepared meals. Both situations are, at least in name, examples of Bedouin hospitality; however, the context of the situation and the relationship of the guest to the Bedouin (whether they are genuinely a personal guest or a tourist) are significant in determining the exact relationship between extension of hospitality and payment at that time.

d. Change in social dynamics

The rapidly changing economic structure of Wadi Rum and the push to accommodate as many tourists as possible has inevitably created new social dynamics in a society that previously lived off livestock and the wilderness. As I was told by a few interviewees, the biggest change in this aspect has been the shift from a tight-knit classical tribal society with clear leaders (the sheikh) and his family, the radial families, and so on, to a much more individualized, business-oriented society that, ironically, mimics American suburban nuclear family lifestyles relatively closely. This was first mentioned to me in one interviewee's discussion of what he perceived to be negative social effects of tourism development in Wadi Rum. He had proudly told me how, in the past, everyone knew everyone, guests between families and houses were very frequent, and that there had been an overall strong sense of community and trust between the whole tribe, or at least the collection of families that populated a certain small area. Now, he had lamented, people don't even visit their neighbors anymore, too busy with attending to their businesses and tourists.

This leads into an interesting dichotomy between what Bedouins sometimes pity city-dwellers for and what they are becoming themselves. A few Bedouins expressed to me their opinions that city-dwellers were living the wrong way, too wrapped up in their fast-paced city lifestyles, jobs, and modern comforts to take the time to appreciate quiet moments in the desert, cook homemade food from scratch (for women, specifically), and spend quality time with neighbors and relatives. The direct comparison following this was to the Bedouin lifestyle in Wadi Rum, which was comparatively much more relaxed and theoretically appreciative of life and its simple pleasures. However, the Wadi Rum Bedouins are quickly approaching lifestyles just as fast-paced and consuming as the city-dwellers they separate themselves from. This naturally leads into questioning who the Bedouin will become once they've completely detached themselves from any semblance of the lifestyles and attitudes of the historic desert-dwellers. Will "Bedouin" be relegated to a descriptor of a bygone age populated by forgotten traditions and grandfathers' memories? Only time will tell; but the common usage of "Bedouin" by city-dwellers to describe themselves, despite having only distant Bedouin heritage, suggests that the noble pride associated with Bedouin heritage will continue to be claimed in one way or another.

e. Fear of becoming like Petra

A surprising sentiment repeated to me a few times throughout the course of the interviews was a demonstrated fear that Wadi Rum and its inhabitants would become like Petra—overdeveloped to the extreme, blocking the native inhabitants from their own historic lands, and devoid of any of its post-Nabataean culture or history in favor of presenting Petra to

be frozen in time. These worries only defined concerns about what might happen to Wadi Rum, however; the real anxiety stemmed from fear the Wadi Rum Bedouins would someday become like the Bedul at Petra—selling themselves as cartoonishly exaggerated Orientalist parodies of what Bedouins are supposed to be, abandoning Islam in favor of drinking alcohol and sleeping with Western women and men, and resigning themselves to a life of hawking cheap souvenirs and harassing tourists into paying to ride abused donkeys, with any spiritual or historical connection to the desert completely forgotten. Even the Bedul women were mentioned as evidence of their moral degradation to me, as I was informed by one interviewee the shock he had when he had learned that some hotels at Petra had Bedul women working in them, face-to-face with male tourists. As I previously mentioned, Wadi Rum Bedouin women working face-to-face with tourists would be highly socially inappropriate; it is a matter of protection according to Islamic beliefs.

I have no criticism of the Bedul at Petra and would suggest that they are simply attempting to manage their lives while functioning in the complicated political mess that is Petra; this is simply how one interviewee chose to describe his perceptions of the Bedul to me. Regardless, I observed a very real fear that the Wadi Rum Bedouins, who a few interviewees implied to currently be more pious and in touch with their noble heritage than the Bedul, would suffer a moral, religious, and societal breakdown due to the continued influx of tourists and tourism management that aggressively pushes commercialization and development. While the Bedouins I spoke with mentioned a specific point of comparison they wished to avoid (Petra), I believe this anxiety to be representative of a greater, broader sense of worry for the unknown future of Wadi Rum and the Bedouins.

f. The tourists

While it may just have been due to not wishing to speak negatively of their source of income, all the Bedouins I spoke with had generally fond attitudes towards tourists—specifically, Western tourists. The different attitudes towards Western tourists and Ammani tourists are, once again, quite amusing. One climbing guide told me he specifically no longer works with Arab tourists and only works with non-Arab tourists, citing his previous experiences that Arab tourists tend not to listen to his instructions while climbing and endanger themselves and others. Regardless, discussions of tourists often turned into lighthearted stories, such as when a group of tourists thought decorative camel saddles in a dinner tent were supposed to be used as seating, and caused the Bedouins to burst into laughter upon returning to see their tourists all straddled across camel saddles on the floor, as if ready to go for a ride.

There also seemed to be a difference in the relationships Bedouins would have with their tourists based on whether they were a camp owner, tour guide, or leading no-frills trips (such as the climbers). I observed that the camp owners tended to treat their tourists somewhat as hotel guests, functioning more as a manager of the camp and occasionally checking in on the tourists' experiences, though not spending the majority of his time with them. These relationships were quite distant, and no camp owners I had spoken to expressed any kind of personal relationship or attachment with any tourists that had come to stay in their camps. Tour guides were closer to tourists, as they were the ones individually leading them on trips and tours around Wadi Rum, and had some amusing stories and memories to share with me about tourists they had worked with. However, they seemed generally uninterested in any relationship or meaningful discussion

with tourists beyond their brief time together. Finally, those who had spent a more significant amount of one-on-one time with tourists, such as the climbing brothers I had worked with, had a greater personal awareness of and depth of interest in tourists that came to their business. I posit that this is due to two main factors; first, that the tourist and climbing guide are spending greater amounts of quality time together in intense/challenging situations, such as climbing, hiking, and setting up camp in the wilderness; and second, that when climbing with a Bedouin guide and sleeping in the wilderness, the tourist and guide are on more practically equal footing than that of a serviced camp guest and hired tour guide. I witnessed this phenomenon firsthand, as a friend of mine who had been conducting research in the Dana Reserve in Jordan was greatly beloved by the climbing brothers I worked with due to their extensive climbing experiences together. They had a relationship much more akin to genuine friendship than that of a hired guide and camp guest.

However, a few Bedouins expressed slightly negative experiences they had had with tourists either not understanding or not respecting their religious restrictions, such as when one elderly couple tried to coerce a Bedouin guide into drinking, or when another guide was asked to hold a tourist's girlfriend in an intimate position for a photo. I witnessed one of these (presumably) unintentional offenses myself as I had been chatting with one interviewee in the tent where tourists who signed up for climbing expeditions would wait for their expedition to start. A few European tourists had come in and started chatting with my colleague, making jokes about him sleeping with one of the male members of their group to keep warm at night and smoking marijuana, both taboo topics in the still quite conservative society of Wadi Rum. My colleague had brushed off their jokes at first, but once I had questioned him after they left,

appeared to be more obviously agitated, confiding in me that tourists did occasionally accidentally push moral or religious boundaries with the Bedouins serving as their tour guides or hosts.

Because of the economic benefits tourists pose, it seemed that the Bedouin were willing to excuse most behaviors that would be otherwise unacceptable, as long as they weren't egregiously offensive. One camp owner I had worked with remarked that, for example, he wouldn't be willing to let me walk around his camp in a bikini. However, that same night, a group of young women passed around a large bottle of alcohol they had brought and became increasingly drunk, which would generally be totally unacceptable and taboo behavior according to typical Bedouin norms. However, due to the practicalities of business, these behaviors are ignored by the Bedouins who would typically otherwise condemn them. I argue that this is an element of the social and cultural dynamic inherently brought on by the economic power held by the tourists.³⁸

g. Bedouin sentiments regarding Wadi Rum

Several interviewees expressed a deep, emotional, perhaps spiritual connection to the desert. In regards to the spiritual connection, the desert was generally framed within its status as a creation of Allah and to be appreciated and respected as such. However, as the Bedouin have historically lived off the desert, many of them (especially the older Bedouin or those who chose

³⁸ Chatelard, Géraldine. "Tourism and Representations: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Ramm." *Représentation et construction de la réalité ... wadiram.userhome.ch*, May 24, 2014. <https://academia.edu/resource/work/1053449>.

nature-adjacent careers, like climbing guiding) expressed personal and emotional connections to the desert. These connections also expand to desert activities such as hunting ibex and oryx (gazelle-like mammals native to Wadi Rum), tracking animal tracks, climbing the impressive plateaus of Wadi Rum (done in the past for hunting purposes but now also done recreationally), riding/racing camels, etc.

This connection was especially highlighted during discussions of the destruction to the desert that tourism and its associated development has wrought. One interviewee expressed that while he appreciates the economic benefit tourism has brought, and that his ideal outcome would be that tourism in Wadi Rum could be balanced in such a way to achieve environmental sustainability, he felt that he would rather have no tourism and a spotless desert than a thriving tourism industry with the desert destroyed as a result. He had also referenced the pandemic with slight wistfulness, as he remarked that the lack of tourists forced some Bedouins to return to their nomadic pastoralist lifestyles and allowed peace to return to the desert.

IV. FURTHER RESEARCH

The social, political, and economic dynamics of Wadi Rum's tourism industry and its relationship with the Wadi Rum Bedouins are highly complex and necessitate in-depth further exploration through long-term ethnographic research. In particular, collection of as many numerical values (such as the number and locations of camps, number of tour guides, number of shops, number of camels, vehicles, etc.) as possible may prove beneficial for demonstrating slopes of change with evidence beyond just memories and individual perspectives. Additionally, although this study collected some data regarding the Bedouins' complex emotional and practical relationships with tourism and its various effects, long-term field research—in the realm of one to

two years—conducted while living with a Bedouin family in Wadi Rum (similar to Lila Abu Lughod’s research method in *Veiled Sentiments*³⁹) would certainly provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the breadth of effects tourism has on the everyday lives of the Wadi Rum Bedouins. Finally, I would also recommend further research into how NGO and governmental policies are actually implemented on the ground in Wadi Rum, as several pieces of literature exist documenting the supposed contributions and actions of NGOs in Wadi Rum that are reported to still be in effect today, but in reality have long been defunct and are of no benefit to the Bedouins. Overall, the obvious disconnect between policy and law dictating development and management in Wadi Rum and the actual practices that exist in Wadi Rum must be unraveled, and key obstacles identified.

V. CONCLUSION

This study found that the major cause behind the environmental degradation of Wadi Rum, which is the source of many Bedouins’ anxiety and complaints surrounding tourism and its future, is due to a lack of regulation and enforcing existing laws and policies. There appears to be a significant lapse between what policies, laws, and NGO programs are published as being active in Wadi Rum and what is actually being maintained on the ground. As a result, the Wadi Rum region continues to be overdeveloped and deprived of its natural ecological diversity, which will undoubtedly harm the Wadi Rum Bedouins in the long-term. While this study did not originally set out to primarily analyze the shortcomings of Wadi Rum’s tourism industry and its effect on the environment, being in Wadi Rum had led me to realize that the Wadi Rum desert, its overdevelopment, and the lack of open communication with authoritative bodies managing

³⁹ Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. University of California Press, 2016.

development in Wadi Rum was just as important to the Bedouins' cultural development and struggles as other observable cultural influences originating from tourism. The sphere of tourism's influence in Wadi Rum cannot be separated into individual rays, and must be analyzed holistically in order to best approximate the changing life-patterns with which the Bedouin function. Ultimately, while the issue necessitates further and more in-depth study, I hope this body of work will prove to be an informative glimpse into the current status of tourism and the associated Bedouins in Wadi Rum.

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