Re-inventing Culture and Place Searching for Roots, Identity and Sense of Belonging: Winter Camps of Bahrain

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Abstract

Vernacular in many parts of the world, particularly those that are rapidly developing under the forces of globalization have been undergoing dramatic change. From total abandonment to superficial reconstructions, vernacular in such societies survive often on the edge of perceptual, social and physical space, unsure of their place in the world and unable to compete with the ever-modernizing social space. However, the desire to return to, and to immerse even momentarily in the traditional and vernacular have resurfaced in many a ways from ubiquitous designed villages and renovated historic centers to modern shopping malls in almost every modern community.

In Bahrain, such desires manifest more clearly and determinately during every winter period, when the rich urban dwellers choose to reconstruct what is perceived to be a reproduced version of the Bedouin tents in the cold deserts of its hinterland. The traditional Bedouin tents in the Arabian deserts had indeed provided for all activities of life in the deserts in the past although now, they have been abandoned in preference to the individual villas, the compounds and the housing condominiums.

Despite having been provided with the modern amenities such as electricity, satellite televisions, microwaves and barbecue settings, the winter tents seem to re-enact some of the unique cultural practices of the past Bedouin culture. This paper takes a closer look at the winter camps of Bahrain which have become a modern vernacular practice that borrows from and temporarily reconstructs a by-gone practice of every day living that had existed among nomadic Arabs. It examines the history of the traditional tents and Bedouin camps and the ways in which they relate to the contemporary vernacular of the winter camps. It takes the position that the future of the vernacular lies not only in the continuation of the old but the inventions of the new that builds upon those cherishable from the past.

Key words: Vernacular, Bedounism, Bahrain, Winter Camps, Culture.

Introduction: The Bedouins and the deserts

Since the historic times, deserts of the West Asia have been home to many a wandering tribes following nomadic life styles. Unique cultures and places had evolved among them which acquired and sustained the traits of harsh living, allegiance to lineage, warm hospitality and rudimentary leisure. However, studies show that not all nomads in deserts with such lifestyles were Bedouins. There are for example, the Berber nomads of North Africa, Kurdish and other

Iranian and Turkish tribes, and some African tribes in Sudan who are considered to be different from the Bedouins[1].

Literature on Bedouins is scanty and most of those available are accounts of European explorers who had crossed the Arabian deserts as far back as 16th century (Bidwell, 1976; Thesiger,1985) and are couched in literature on Arab culture. Many of the western writers have romanticized their restless life styles and have characterized Bedouin culture with goat-haired tents, the camels and the colorful garbs and home décor with intricate decorations. In fact, Bedouins have been perceived to display ferocity and hard-heartedness, constantly engaged in fighting tribal warfare and the images often show them with daggers and swords. Undeniably, "Lawrence of Arabia" is a classic example of such romanticization that has provided the images of the Bedouins for the world outside the Arab region.

The Bedouin traditions had emerged associated with herds of camel they tendered in the Arabian, Syrian or North African deserts. Breeding herding and grazing the camels have been their main occupation which often involved conflicts with other tribes who shared the land. Constituted mostly of small groups, they had wandered the scanty desert in search of grazing lands and water and their economy had been constructed upon the goats and sheep at the core. Nevertheless, Bedouins were proud of their rustic life despite being unrefined and lacked any comforts and luxuries. Hence, their traditions and life styles had remained unchanged over thousands of years. However, according to Cole (2003) the temptations of settled life together with all the modern conveniences underpinned by the oil economies have seduced them and inevitably Bedouin way of living has become unpopular. In fact, in the light of common droughts that often take place across their natural habitats, they have been forced to give-up the nomadic life in preference to the city.

Unsurprisingly, oil has had the biggest impact upon Bedouin culture which provided tempting luxuries to almost all inhabitants of the Gulf. It has enabled the construction of luxury villas and houses within the new urban centres and the governments have lured them away from the deserts with free houses and other facilities (Hathloul and Edadan, 1995). Today, Bedouins have moved away from the camels to pick-up trucks and from camps to villas (Dawn, 1986). According to Lamb (1985), their population has dwindled across the Arabian deserts over the years from an estimated 200,000 in Jordan in 1950 to 50,000 in 1985 and from 1.9 million in Saudi Arabia in 1974 to 500,000 in 1985. Lamb says that the numbers today are hard to come by but there are indicators that Bedouins are all but non-existent, except for a few tribes still wandering the Saudi Arabian deserts.

Bedouin culture

According to Lamb (1985), "the Bedouin culture has had an impact on almost every aspect of life in the Arab world, influencing the region's language, mentality and traditions. Lamb says that the famous Arab hospitality is really Bedouin hospitality, a strict code that dominated all social relationships. Living in an environment of desperate harshness, the Bedouins offered food and lodging for three days to any visitor, friend or foe, who entered his tent. When the three days ended, he was allowed to leave in peace, although on the fifth day, he might again become an enemy".

As a tribal community (*qabila*) comprised of clans (*qawm*) and then family groups, Bedouins preferred to live as large extended families and never formed complex social or political organizations beyond the clan. Each clan owned its own wells and grazing grounds and protected them with ferocity and perseverance for generations because without those resources, their very existence would be in peril. Clans comprised of family groups (*Hayy*, *Fakhida*) descending from one great-great-grandfather in the paternal line. This created very powerful bonds within the clan that established trust, friendship and allegiance that is characteristic of the Bedouin culture. Camping together most of the time, they took care of each other and took collective decisions with regard to matters of morality. In fact, these family ties were strengthened by intermarriage within the tribe whereby the sense of collectivity was

[1] visit http://www.angelfire.com/az/rescon/mgcbedu.html

rejuvenated and sustained. Unsurprisingly, there had emerged a strong sense of collective honour and loyalty which it defended against all other groups. Thus tribal and family honour was of great value and blood vengeance was at the core of the social life of Bedouins.

As a patriarchal society, a tribe acquires inheritance from the male ancestors among who were the leaders known as '*Sheikhs*'. Each tribe had a *Sheikh* who wielded his limited power within the dictums of tradition and customs, under the guidance of the council of tribal elders, who in turn established and yielded to the principles set by precedents. Like in most traditional societies, experience was considered the wealth of education, which could be applied in understanding and dealing with the hostile and difficult environment in which they lived and thus aging bestowed a Bedouin with a great respect and status. Sheikhs however came only from the noble families, each adult member being entitled to the position at the demise of the elder. Most issues the elders had to deal with involved rights to carefully defined grazing lands and camping grounds for summer and a winter. They ensured that loyalty to the tribe was maintained and each member offered obedience to its leaders. The Bedouin lifestyle that had survived through centuries followed a strict code of rules the breaking of which was perceived to be shameful (*Eib*). It stressed the values of generosity, hospitality, respect, cunning and revenge. Bedouins learned to endure severe physical hardships and this was the test of their learning, experience and manhood. Unsurprisingly therefore, Bedouin history is ripe with inter-tribal wars, revenge killings, instability and disintegration except for the centralized rule that has kept them together through the past.

The Bedouin tents and camps

According to records, the Bedouin's adobes were simple small huts that displayed their temporary nature of habitation and constant movement. The long, tent like structures were made from goat and camel-hair fabric woven by women while the men grazed the goats. In constructing a tent, a series of tall central poles were erected in the middle from the top of which strings were pulled away to the ground and fixed to the anchors or lower poles. So simple the tents were, they could be erected quickly and dismantled equally quickly when they had to move. The goat skin fabric stood well to occasional rains because the wool and hair from which it was woven expanded when wet. The tents provided warmth in the cold desert nights, shelter from the wind and shade from the hot sun during the day. Its sides could be rolled up when cool breeze was available and thus provided well for the circumstances of life in the desert. The larger the tent the higher the status of the inhabitants was and it was generally perceived that the number of poles indicated the wealth and social status of the family within.

Fig. 1: Typical Bedouin camp
Source: http://www.old-picture.com/europe/Bedouin-Camp.htm

The space contained within the Bedouin tent was divided strictly between men and women in accordance with the Bedouin traditions. According to Gardener, (2000) the men's living quarter was at the front and was divided by a curtain known as *ma'nad* from that of the women. In the *maharama*, or 'place of the women', the women entertained the female visitors

and cooked, while in the *Mag'ad* or the sitting place, the men entertained the male visitors. The floor was covered by rugs and cushions for sitting and sleeping while the stores of water and food were stacked at the back in sacks and containers.

Generally, immediately outside the men's space another open space existed with the all-important coffee hearth having been at the centre. Coffee making and serving implements scattered on the sand as if to invite the guests. In good weather, the visitors, particularly men would be entertained in this front area while the women watched their men and visitors by looking over the curtain. The family lived, slept and cooked its food in the women's quarter. The Bedouin hut was a simple space and its containers were few. However, if the Bedouin had affluence, few modern gadgets may also become part of its contents. These usually included an electricity generator for light and power, a TV set, or a sewing machine. Moreover, a tractor or a pickup van may replace the camels or may be added to the usual flock.

The Beduion life had to cope with some of the most unpleasant conditions of the desert such as the hot desert winds, sand storms, excessive sun, and absence of basic necessities of life. Nevertheless it was also enchanting with the total silence of the vast spaces, overbearing blue skies, cold breeze in the nights, moon-lit emptiness and above all feeling of simplicity and being in touch with the natural earth.

Bedouins of Bahrain:

In the known history of Bahrain that goes 5000 years and more, there is no written record of any presence of Bedouins. In fact, the Bahrain museum which takes pains to record and present the ancient Dilmun civilisation, the worlds largest burial mounds and the pottery works of A'ali and the typical Arabic trade, costumes and daily life do not make any references to the presence of Bedouins in Bahrain.

Lamb however suggests that there have been some Bedouin life there. He quotes a minister of Bahrain who in 1989 has said, "But in Bahrain, there aren't any… we have had oil for 50 years and now, that life style just does not exist here anymore. Bahrain is perhaps the only country in the Arabian Gulf where the Bedouins have been totally assimilated, where the Bedouin culture has almost ceased to exist, except for their re-constructions every winter in the Bahraini Deserts".

The contemporary discourses and practices however suggest that a sizeable section of the contemporary Bahraini society associate themselves with the Bedouin culture, attempt to re-kindle traits of that life style and cherish the traditions that have connected the Arabs to the desert lands. In 1997, in a blog site maintained by Ebrahim, an interesting discussion took place about the rising culture of what was called "Bedouinism" (http://emoodz.com/?p=228). The discussion noted that there was an emerging public display of Bedouinism among some of the 'public figures'. It also noted that while around 1970s and 1980s, associations with Bedouin culture was looked down upon by the populace, and that there has been a trendy surge in the emergence of a new Bedouinism, a kind of hippy style becoming popular among the urban youth. The bloggers argued that this new style emerged from the "many popular GCC cultural icons (singers and poets portraying and celebrating the Bedouin culture that has given rise to the Bedouin image and made it a hip sensation in the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia starting the late 1990's).

The major characteristics of this trend according to the bloggers were as follows.

- The rise in popularity of the *hamdaniya* (a UAE style semi turban made by tying around the head instead of wearing it)
- The increase of Bedouin style poets and poetry displayed in what are now weekly poetry extra editions in our local newspapers.
- The rise in the trend of titled *igaal* and the adoption of the heavy accent and new words unfamiliar to the Bahraini dialect vocabulary such as mar7ib ilsa3 (Hello), isha7lik (How are you), illa (on the contrary)

The bloggers argued that the trend has been imported to Bahrain through the following methods:

- The Bahraini media's portrayal of the King's sons (Nasser and Khalid) in Bedouin style clothing, speaking in a Bedouin accent, enjoying originally Bedouin recreational activities (writing poetry, riding horses.)
  Their recent image has been greatly influenced by their newly made UAE royal friends, in particular (Faza'a bin Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoomnd and cousins, http://www.fazza3.com). Faza'a in particular is a "so called" poet and a competitive horse rider and is a teen cultural idol in the UAE. (Besides being the handsome rich son of the UAE's crown prince). Nasser and Khalid's interactions with Fazza'a and his father through horse competitions and the constant UAE media and internet frenzy circling Fazza'a is said to be probably one of the reasons behind this behavioral change.
- Moreover the Bahraini people constant bombardment by images of Nasser and Khalid by the Bahraini media has clearly left its effect on some Bahrainis.
- Links between Bahraini family members and their families in Qatar and the UAE have led to the transfer of some customs between each other.
- The rise in popularity of the Bedouin image culture through GCC media and internet sites, forums, and blogs.

(Extracted from the blog site:)

However, according to Lamb (1985), Bedouins of Bahrain were from the Khalifa clan of the *Aniza* tribe who arrived from Qatar and once roamed in Bahrain, eventually fighting the British to reclaim the island and establish a kingdom. It seems that Ebrahim's blog provides some support to this theory, because as it is accused there, Contemporary Bedoinism is promoted by the Royal family who seems to be re-constructing some kind of roots with what Lamb has quoted.

The Research

This research examined the seasonally constructed winter camps of Bahrain - their physical social and psychological make-up. It is an attempt to understand the phenomena of 'new vernacular' emerging in the modernizing and globalizing societies in the Gulf in the context of development and culture change. Globalization undeniably has set in motion many social processes aimed at countering the adverse impacts of the trend and the construction of the winter camps was seen as an 'escape' from these impacts. As an annual ritual, it also celebrated the change of weather so uppermost in the minds of the inhabitants of the Gulf whereby old traditions were brought back to life, to inculcate values among the society, to educate the young and to sustain cultural identity. The study was aimed at extending our understanding of the post global society and its ways and means of constructing culture, creating place and inhabiting the earth.

Research methodology

This research employed multiple research methodologies to gather data on a multitude of aspects of winter camping such as cultural history and production and use of the camps. It examined literature on Bedouin camps to understand the historical cultural context that is no more and observed the construction and dismantling of the winter camps in Bahrain over four years and recorded the patterns of occupation of land. Informal discussions were conducted with some of the occupants and having observed a general trend among the youth to follow a new 'urban Bedouinism', blog sites were searched to understand the dialogues among the Bahraini people. The data collection was conducted from 2006-2010 and is based on four reconstruction periods of winter camps of Bahrain.

Winter Camps of Bahrain

Quite contrary to popular perceptions, Bahrain has a seasonal weather pattern with a hot summer from June-September, spring from September to November and cold winter from November to April. The onset of winter subsides the usual summer sandstorms and makes outdoor living not only possible but also exciting and invigorating. Although the Northern region's green fields will flourish and bloom with winter, the deserts however remain unchanged except for the cold weather and the absence of desert-storms.

As winter arrives, some behavioural changes can be seen among many Bahraini families. On the one hand, many outdoor spaces such as the sea front in Manama and the inner labyrinths of the Manama *souq* and other spaces come alive with gatherings of men who while away evenings drinking coffee and generally socializing. On the other, some Bahraini families head to the deserts to claim a share of the fun that develops there in constructing an outdoor life that has been denied to them by the harsh climate and the cruel summer. From November to March thus, the midland desert becomes a playing filed; a mushrooming erections of barbecue settings and the social gatherings. Celebrations take place *en-masse* with some times even wedding ceremonies organized within these sites. Winter camps in Bahrain are unique in that the event of the dawn of winter is celebrated not only by tradition-valuing Bahraini families but also the corporate establishments that entertain large numbers of expatriate staff there.

The winter camps are however not in any sense a reconstruction of a by-gone socio-cultural practice or a return to its past Bedouin culture. To the contrary, it is a new invention that has symbolic, perceptual and experiential links to an imagined past. On the one hand, despite a history of Bedouin culture in the deserts of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain has not had such a history of Bedouin past; at least not according to its written and celebrated history. On the other, the culture that is emerging does not represent Bedouin life styles nor does it pretend to do so. Nevertheless, there is a 'Modern Bedouinism' that is acted upon as a temporary practice of habitation constructed against the westernising urban modernity typical in the Gulf.

Winter Camps: Spaces Places and People

Fig. 2: The Location of the winter camps

The seasonal recurrence of the winter camps of Bahrain occurs in the middle of the island few kilometres away from the inhabited land, so it is easily accessible and does not become a 'place-too-far-from-home'. Of course, the southern half of the island is not accessible to the public for having been assigned as the training grounds of the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF). However, the sites of the camps lay at the foot of the hills, adjoining the first oil settlement *Awali* on either side stretching as far as the Royal Compound on the West and the Industrial estates on the East. Through the site runs a few two-lane roads leading to *Durat-Al Bahrain* (The luxury housing enclave created at the bottom of the island) crossing the somewhat mountainous rugged terrain.

The 'site'— an uninhabited and barren desert during the summer is promptly occupied in winter by families and family clans in an almost pre-determined manner. According to the rules, any one interested in camping is entitled to occupy a parcel of land there for the duration between November and March, in temporary structures. No fees charged and no taxes levied. In fact, no state services are provided except general policing for unlawful activity. Understandably entrepreneurs have filled the gaps by providing various services at a price. Small huts selling 'sundry provisions' have also come up here and there.

Three categories of camps for winter camping have been observed to emerge.

- Individual single camp huts
- Camp settlements with a number of huts and a central facility
- Corporate settlements with huts & caravans etc.

The solitary hut (Open and Enclosed**)**

The most rudimentary winter camp is a single tent hut set-up in a space secluded by a few pegs in the ground or a fabric fence. It first and foremost portions out a bounded site from

the vast desert land, defined and concretised by the boundary so defined. In the middle of it is situated the tent either totally enclosed with a single door opening or a full one-sided opening. Often within a site a small toilet unit will also exist by the side of the main hut.

Fig. 3: The solitary hut (open sided and closed)
Source: Author

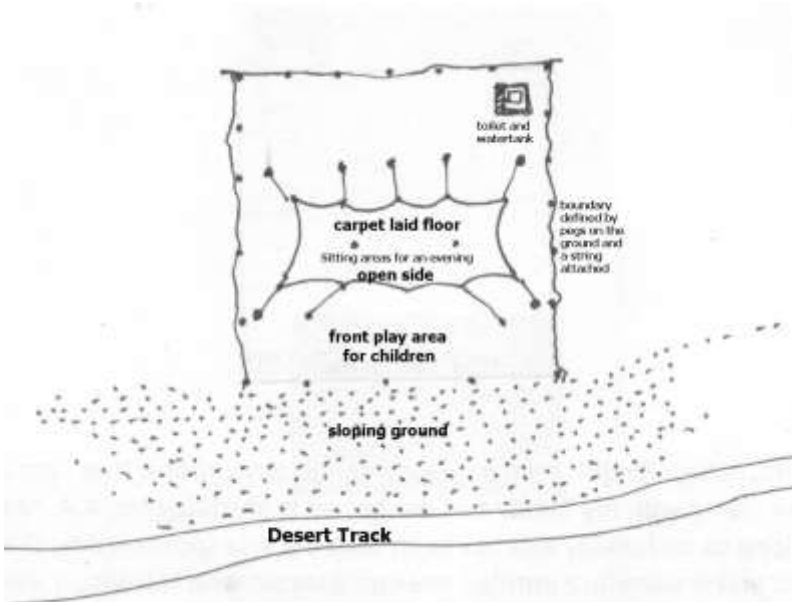

Fig. 4: Layout of a solitary hut (open)
Source: Author

The solitary one-sided hut is sometimes an entirely male space which is occupied in the evenings and becomes a communal social space late into the night. Decorated with the typical Arabic fabric décor and divans on carpets, the space provides for groups of elderly or middle-aged men who come together to sit and sip coffee, engage in conversations and smoke the traditional '*shisha*' that come in the colourful bottles with long pipes.

The settings of such huts are not fixed as such and are not permanently defined as male or female spaces. In fact, the same hut may on a different day and on an occasion may be occupied by the families of the men, when the children play in the centre surrounded by the men and the women who sit around. A TV may be on and coffee may be served.

The construction of these huts however is not always done by the people who own or inhabit the spaces, although sometimes they may be erected by young men of the families. However, in keeping with the contemporary practices of building in the Gulf, foreign labour is employed as it is readily available, inexpensive and more reliable. The architecture of the huts however has a close resemblance to the Bedouin huts although the traditional male female divisions, the separating curtains and the outdoor coffee hearth or the implements necessary to

make coffee there are absent. Instead, the families bring the coffee and other traditional foods such as the *shih tawooq* and the space is transformed to a nomadic adobe.
Open solitary camps are generally constructed overlooking a dirt track or a public thoroughfare, if not a valley below. However, open camps are not many in numbers although enclosed solitary camps are common. The enclosed solitary hut is a single tent with a small entrance opening and a few pull up windows, constructed upon and around one or two poles in the centre by means of a tweed cloth spanned across and then down to the ground and anchored. Within, all facilities sufficient for living will be cluttered as spaciously as possible within the space. A bed, a sofa, a small kitchenette and spaces for the '*shisha*' and other utensils will be stacked together with the implements for a fire place and barbecue. The Camp is 'lived-in' primarily during the night and the space outside is transformed into a fire-barbecue setting around which the families will sit, socialize and make fun. Interestingly, the camps are lit not just within, but elaborately on the outside on the edges of the huts enclosure if only to make its configuration visible as an illuminated entity in the otherwise unlit desert.

The Family Camp: Cluster of Huts

In comparison, the family camp is a more elaborate setting which occupies a large parcel of land and is almost always totally enclosed within high perimeter boundaries. The perimeter is constructed as high as six or seven feet in keeping with the Islamic traditions and provides enhanced privacy within its enclosure. Inmates establish both visual and social distance from their neighbours, even though many camps are constructed next to each other. The entrances to the family camps are almost always indirect, if not also closed with high gates. The perimeter constructions take two different forms; closely situated palm prods and palm thatch in between a fence made of wooden poles and horizontal wires, or an ad-hoc collection of wooden slatted panels, boards and other salvageable materials from the modern industries.


Fig. 5: Family Camps
Source: Author

This conglomeration of an ad-hoc set of panels gives the camps an undeniable temporary feel, insignificance and indeed ruggedness and rusticity that reflect similar characteristics of the Bedouin camps albeit in a different form.

The family camps are comprised of a number of single, fully enclosed single huts laid inside and along its perimeter fence facing the central space. Usually, only the deep-end part of the camp site is occupied with the huts while the front part is left as open space which becomes a children's play space, a car park or both. In the central space is erected a small hut under which a hearth or cooking/ barbecue facility together with a cluster of seats in the surrounding. While during the day time, the camp may be left and its occupants return home, as the night sets in, families will drive down their and the entire camp comes alive with a hive of activities. Generally, huts are occupied by the families and the men gather at the central space. Dancing begins with music on a stage while children play in the yard. The teens and adolescents may venture out on the road, cycling racing or playing volley ball. The family camps light up the entire desert in the night with music and dance and a hive of activities all aimed at making the most of the pleasant weather and the opportunity that is available to live outdoors and experience being under the sky, the moon and the stars in the night.

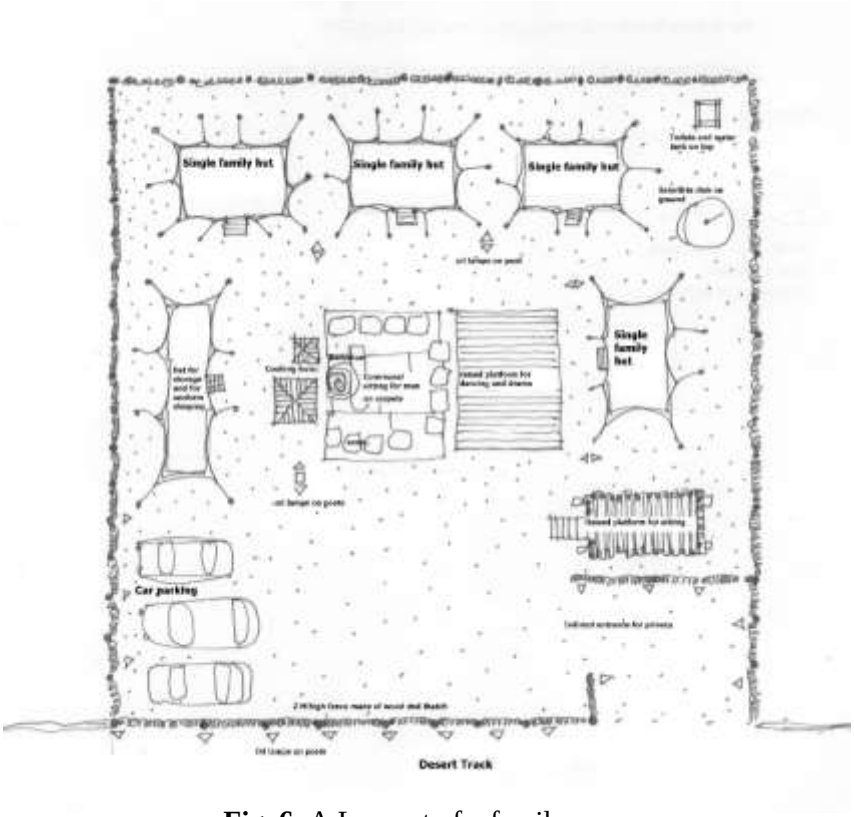

Fig. 6: A Lay-out of a family camp
Source : Author

Fig. 7: Central space
Source : Author

Fig. 8: Interior space
Source: Author

Fig. 9: General view of the camp
Source: Author

The New Vernacular: Emerging Traditions of the Urban Nomads

The annual, almost ritualistic construction of the winter camps suggest that a new vernacular is in the making in the deserts of Bahrain that is loosely yet most certainly hinged on the age-old traditions of the Bedouin camps of the Arabian deserts. Its undefined inhabitation of land at will and the quiet negotiations that go among the neighbours already camping there when one moves in to set-up a camp is undeniably reminiscent of the Bedouin culture of anchoring in the deserts. Its temporariness is prompted by the harsh weather as well as the rules of the desert now established by the rulers of the land. When the campers leave in March, the land returns to its natural uninhabited state awaiting the next winter and the next wave of inhabitations of the modern urban nomads. Indeed, it is as if the 'nomads' have temporarily moved to a new kind of a camp: the city, only to return at the next winter.

The modern urban nomads drive the luxury Lexus cars or four wheel Toyotas and Hummers, carry mobile phones and watch TV during leisure, but are still strongly tied by the family clans, show obedience to the clan and uphold the noble values of their ancestors. Night is celebrated with the camp fire as the focal point of gathering and the activities such as story telling, dancing smoking, and coffee drinking have become intense ways of indulging in the Bedouin life experience at will and at the luxury of choice rather than out of necessity.

In the process, old traits of culture have been re-enacted and new traits created. Places have been made to emerge to sustain and perform the carefully orchestrated ballets of activities that ensure joy, excitement and leisure rather than the drudgery of the life of the Bedouins. These transformations of traditions and cultural traits can be summarized as follows.

Table 1: Cultural Traits: from Bedouin camps to winter camps
Source: Author

Traits of Bedouin Culture	The form of re-enacting	New traits added
Temporary occupation of land: moving from place to place.	Temporary occupation of land: seasonal only	Constructed almost at the same location every winter season.
Camping as the main form of habitation	Camping as only a form of leisure	Often night occupation return to the city daily.
Moving in search of grazing land and water	Not re-enacted	Not relevant
Women indoors and men close to the outdoors	Women occupy the camp huts while the men the outdoors in family camps	Women and men share the spaces in solitary camps:
Fire as a central place to gather and socialize	Fire as a central place to gather and socialize. Family prepares the food.	Barbecue added around the fire place. Migrant workers produce food.

Camel as companions to travel and transform goods.	Camels and donkeys as companions for joy rides and for leisure.	Automobile has become a natural accompaniment to daily life.
Night is celebrated with camp fires and lived out as the pleasant part of the day	Night is celebrated with camp fires and lived out as the pleasant part of the day	Excessive illumination of the camp with fires as well as generated electricity.
Social interaction as the main form of leisure	Social interaction as one of the main forms of leisure	Other modern amenities added: TV, video games, go carting exciting sports in the vicinity of the camp.
Territorial rights as sacrosanct and inviolable.	Trespassing both visual and physical considered a serious offence	Recognition of public space almost outside the camp without visual intrusion.
A great sense of hospitality. Strangers welcome	Controlled sense of hospitality. Visitors by invitation treated with a great sense of hospitality.	Strangers not welcome at all. A reaction to the presence of public space

Table 2: Making the Camps: Spatial and building practices
Source: Author

Traditional Practices of building	Reproducing the traditions / New traditions of building
Goat skin fabric as cover	Numerous fabric covers, imported factory produced tweed; thin plastic sheets
Wooden poles and wooden pegs to support structure	Variety of structures from steel poles to wooden pegs.
Goat hair ropes to stretch out the tents.	
Inner floor covered with rugs and goat hair carpets.	Inner floor covered with rugs and carpets.
Cooking and other implements hung on the fabric wall and the support wooden frame	Variety of methods: movable storage stacks as well as traditional form of hanging
Male and female spaces divided by goat skin curtain.	Male and female divisions some times fused. Or separate huts for males and females
Dismanteled and re-erected by the Bedouin occupants themselves	Occasionally dismantled and re-erected by the occupants themselves. Often employed labour
Transported on camels	Transported in Pick up trucks
Daily and routine maintenance by the owner-women.	No such daily maintenance, since the materials last longer. If required annual mending at workshops in the city

Conclusions

Vernacular Futures

There is evidence that in the fast modernizing countries such as Bahrain, tradition-led vernacular is slowly disappearing abandoned by the people who are moving to the cities and living out modern life styles. Bedouins for example are all but non existent and together with their traditions and cultures Bedouin vernacular practices have ceased to exist. Although culture change is inevitable, there is a growing unease that with such drastic abandonment, people may begin to feel rootless, a sense of loss and a loss of identity that is paramount for healthy social well-being. Mitchell (2007) for example shows how the globalizing city - Dubai having progressed fast and having acquired a global city status had erased all traces of the vernacular and the traditional and is now regretting the erasure and yearn for the reconstruction of them to regain a form of identity they feel they have lost.

Vernacular as a form of social practice however is unlikely to disappear as long as people have the freedom to act in the built-environments in which they live. In Bahrain, a greater freedom seems to exist for people to do things the way they like, in the uninhabited desert lands which have been allowed to be occupied once every year during the winter. When

social, political and physical space is so available, vernacular seem to emerge in new forms prompted by both imagined and real past cultures and practices. Winter camps in Bahrain demonstrates that although there has not been a strong Bedouin history in Bahrain, its people seem to have burrowed the traditions and cultures of the shared larger community of Arabs – from Saudi Arabia and the northern African deserts

Indeed, its people seem to have imagined a nomadic root that is believed to have existed and seem to reconstruct it in the contemporary context fused with new traits, enabled by the new possibilities available to them. New traditions are being produced in the process which differ in both content and process from the past traditions. This new vernacular is underlined by both spontaneous and informal bottom-up processes that emerge from the people in performing their daily lives negotiating the formal cultural settings and processes. Future of the vernacular thus does not seem need to have past tradition as the core of its practices yet able to produce new ones by 'gathering' and 'assimilating' cherishable traits from an imagined past.

The need for new traditions to be created and new vernacular to be practiced is undeniably natural to social existence. Popper (1968) in formulating a theory of tradition shows that 'tradition is needed in order to "bring some order and rational predictability into the social world in which we live". Hathloul (1996) argues that the values of tradition lie in the fact that it forms the most important source of our knowledge and serves as the base for our thoughts and actions. It is a platform upon which one can operate and contains a strong allusion to imitation. He suggests that what is most important is not the preservation of tradition itself but the establishment of a sense of continuity with that tradition.

Culture and tradition are productions of people and whether they live in traditional societies or modern global ones, everyday life produces them in numerous fashions because they form the bedrock of community and habitation. In understanding this phenomenon, Tuan's fruitful concept of 'escape' offers an invigorating tool (1998). Tuan points out that culture is an 'escape from Nature', and 'escape into Nature'. As he argues, if city was constructed as an escape from Nature then, today, society seem to be escaping into wilderness, the countryside and the resort. Indeed, even the mega-shopping mall can be seen as a surrealist escape from the city itself.

Winter camps of Bahrain are undeniably escapist and offer an immediate getaway from the drudgery of the urban life which is characterized increasingly by routine, stressfulness, tension, conflicts and boredom. City life in Bahrain is more so given the harsh climate, smallness of the island, absence of variety in the landscapes and places that offer different possibilities or varieties of places. Despite the luxuries offered by the oil wealth and the accompanying sophisticated life styles, its inhabitants see an enchanting escape in the winter camps, where past is lived in the imaginary, routine is fractured and informality is acted out through the dust and the winds of the desert. Life is coloured through the impermanence of being, absence of the pomp and pageant and abundance of social contact and simple leisure of just being around the fire place.

Indeed, new vernacular itself can be seen as an escape from the old traditions. As this research showed, new vernacular re-enacts the traditional cultural traits, yet not necessarily with their rigidity or control. The new vernacular offers freedom, new ways of building, thinking and new activities. This research shows that in the winter camps of Bahrain, such a new vernacular is in the making and new traditions are taking root disguisingly linked to the primitive and historical past as alternatives (escape) to both rigid-traditionalism and globalizing modernism.

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