An economy of legitimating discourses: the invention of the Bedouin and Petra as national signifiers in Jordan

Salam Al-Mahadin

Abstract

In this paper I examine the historical and political contingencies which have produced the city of Petra and the Bedouin as national signifiers in Jordan. The invention of a collective national memory and a utilitarian national identity are inseparable from the power-relations that operate in national contexts. Both Petra and the Bedouin have become symbols of Jordanian national identity in response to crises of legitimacy faced by the Monarchical Establishment in Jordan. Identity construction in Jordan has been based on strategies of inclusion and exclusion, re-inscribing histories, producing new forms of knowledge on groups and sites, and great fluidity and flexibility in response to political ruptures and contingencies. This paper will situate Petra and Bedouins within those contexts to contribute to a better critical understanding of the fluctuating and shifting constructions of Jordanian national identity.

Keywords: Bedouin, Jordan, Hashemite establishment, legitimacy, national identity, Petra

This paper is a critical reflection on identity construction in Jordan as it pertains to the construction of the Bedouin and Petra as national signifiers. The problematics of legitimacy will underpin the claim that these two signifiers were produced and propagated in response to politico-historical contingencies that threatened the Hashemite monarchical regime’s survival and legitimacy in Jordan. The paper draws on Michel Foucault’s understandings of genealogy, power relations and knowledge in the construction of regimes of truth and subjectivity. Foucault’s framework will inform my inquiry into the problematics of identity construction within the Jordanian context and the conditions of knowledge, discontinuities and ruptures which have produced the Bedouin and Petra as the two national signifiers par excellence. Both Petra and the Bedouin testify to Homi Bhabha’s (1994) formulation of cultural
identity as a domain of representation rather than a reflection of some pre-given, irreducible, ahistorical cultural traits of a nation. Thus, Bhabha’s work is useful in explaining how identity is created and represented while Foucault’s work is essential for understanding the power-relations and the vested interests that have given rise to these particular productions of identity in Jordan.

Identities are fluid articulations of subjectivity. Their manifest components are usually the outcome of problematisations underpinned by epistemic violence in which certain components are suppressed and excluded while others are brought to the forefront and emphasised or re-inscribed. The schemata of knowledge that emerge from this process constitute the narratives through which Subjects redeem and construct the ‘totality’ of their identities. The rise and decline of identity markers is often part and parcel of legitimating discourses necessitated by ruptures in the political and social order within the context in which these identities were manufactured. The interpretation of identity requires us to deconstruct all forms of fixity and rigidification: in order to re-conceptualise and properly construe identity markers, it is essential to provide an anatomy of the praxis of identity-construction, and the discontinuities and ruptures operative within a given context.

Both the city of Petra and the Bedouin are instances of identity signifiers which testify to the impressive abilities of Subjects to create, propagate and perpetuate discourses and narratives of identity with their own claim to temporal-spatial truths about locale. Privileging both signifiers in Jordan is quite recent and can be dated back to no more than 36 years, specifically after 1970, the year in which civil unrest led to a confrontation between the Jordanian government and Palestinian organisations operating in Jordan. For the purposes of this article, I shall address identity formation in Jordan through three main periods: 1921-1951, 1951-1970 and post-1970. These are rough periodisations but they will contribute to a better understanding of how Petra and the Bedouin have become the icons of Jordanian identity. The first period witnessed the legitimating concerns of the Jordanian Establishment through their negative representation of the Ottoman legacy. The second period corresponds to the dispositif surrounding the symbolic appropriation of sites in the West Bank of Jordan for the construction of Jordanian identity as a holy land. The last period saw the discursive reconstruction and institutionalisation of the Bedouins and Petra as national signifiers in official discourse as well as through postcards, postage stamps, and various publications.

**Good Ottomans, bad Ottomans: re-inscribing Jordanian history**

The modern history of Jordan is deemed to have begun in 1921 when ‘the map of Jordan, with its ruler-straight lines and pan-handle link to Iraq, betrays the colonial convenience behind its creation’ (Rogan 1999, 1). Thus, at least within the annals of official discourse, 1921 was the moment of birth of the nation. The year was to be recognised, celebrated, solidified and extrapolated as the time in which the ‘geo-
graphic space’ of Transjordan was finally politically defined to create a nation out of *an imagined pre-existing homogeneous cultural community*. But as McLeod (2000) emphasises, nations are like novels; works of fiction. Jordan’s work of fiction has been arduous, not least because no such cultural community as implied in this discourse had existed, and what cultural community had existed could easily have been incorporated into the other carved spaces of Greater Syria. Rogan (1999, 1) further argues that this year cannot be adopted as a point of departure for the creation of the modern state of Jordan because ‘the modern state was introduced in Transjordan by the Ottomans in the nineteenth century, not the British or Hashemites after the First World War’. Thus he suggests that this date is a ‘problematic starting point’ both for political as well as social and economic history.

Official discourse portrays pre-Hashemite Jordan as a neglected, backward, disorganized area. The websites of both the late King Hussein and the present King Abdullah epitomise official discourse regarding how the Ottoman era should be perceived. The same thread runs through almost all texts produced by the government and establishment, including school curricula and university textbooks (Anderson 2001, Nasser 2005), pro-establishment historiography, and official publications on Jordan (Al-Mahadin 2004, 2006). The section entitled ‘The Ottoman Empire’ on King Hussein’s website argues that,

> The four centuries of Ottoman rule (1516-1918 CE) were a period of general stagnation in Jordan. Over the course of Ottoman rule, many towns and villages were abandoned, agriculture declined, and families and tribes moved frequently from one village to another… The Ottoman period saw a general neglect of infrastructural development in Jordan, and what was constructed was usually with some specific religious orientation. (http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his_ottoman.html)

On the same website, Ottoman rule is juxtaposed with the Great Arab Revolt as the argument is advanced that

> Much of the trauma and dislocation suffered by the peoples of the Middle East during the 20th century can be traced to the events surrounding World War I. During the conflict, the Ottoman Empire sided with the Central Powers against the Allies. Seeing an opportunity to liberate Arab lands from Turkish oppression, and trusting the honour of British officials who promised their support for a unified kingdom for the Arab lands, Sharif Hussein bin Ali, Emir of Mecca and King of the Arabs (and great grandfather of King Hussein), launched the Great Arab Revolt. (http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his_arabrevolt.html)

In the same vein, on King Abdullah’s website, Ottoman rule itself is also seen in terms of ‘discontinuity’ with the Hashemite message, drawing on the legacy of the Prophet. Hashemite rule is, in this context, made to seem as though it were the *re-establishment* of continuity with the ‘real’ or deep history of the country.

> The Ottomans set up their empire, but relied on the Hashemite message in administering and ruling its vast areas. They governed the Arab lands, over a period of
four centuries. The Ottoman rule, however, transgressed and diverted from the real meanings of the message of governance and social order, to a strange system that aimed to transform the united society to a non-religious subordination.

(http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main_page=0&lang_hmka1=1)

These extensive quotations reflect clearly where Jordan’s establishment stands regarding the Ottoman period of its history. In the first quotation, Ottoman rule is equated with backwardness, stagnation and neglect. In the second, they are almost depicted as traitors for siding with the Central Powers against the Allies during the First World War. They are indirectly implicated as the source of the trauma and dislocation suffered by the peoples of the Middle East. On the other hand, the Hashemites are represented as the true saviours who had sought to unify the Arab world and liberate it from the Turks. In the last quotation, we see the Hashemites represented as the bearers of the true message of governance and social order from which the Ottomans had diverged.

But was the four-century Ottoman rule truly a period of stagnation and oppression? Scholars such as al-Bakhit (1982), Akarli (1986), Abu-Jaber (1989) and Lewis (1955, 1987) suggest that areas like Transjordan witnessed in this period continuous change and transformation. Johns (1994) talks about continuous patterns of settlement, cultivation and trade, despite ebb and flow, and Owen (2002) argues that the view that the period was one of economic decline rests on only the flimsiest basis. Rogan & Tell comment that despite the attempts by official discourse in Jordan to portray the relationship between the Ottoman period and the Hashemite rule as that of clear historical rupture. ‘From a social history perspective the two periods show great continuity, in terms of social structure, methods of production, land relations and infrastructure’ (1994, xix). Jordanian official discourse, however, consistently portrays these centuries as ones of complete disarray and chaos. Indeed, this view can be seen in the Jordanian state’s actual disinterest in preserving and promoting Ottoman forts and mosques in Jordan (Al-Mahadin 2006).

The relationship that existed between village dwellers and the Bedouins, in other words the dynamics of village-steppe relations, and the two groups’ relationship with the Ottoman government, has been invoked in a disparate and often controversial manner. Scholars who subscribed to the view that the Ottoman period was one of great decline in Transjordan in particular, and Greater Syria in general, create a nexus between the ability of the Ottoman government at controlling and appeasing tribes and the levels of stability and progress in any part of those areas (Lewis 1955, Reilly 1981, Singer 1994). Yet official discourse in Jordan, while holding on to the unsubstantiated view that the Ottoman period was uniformly disastrous, refuses to acknowledge the argument which attributes part of the stagnation and backwardness to the continuous Bedouin raids against settled communities. The tendency has been simply to legitimate Hashemite rule and cast doubts on the efficiency and strength of the Ottoman government.
This particular move occurred within, and as part of, the strategic moment of identity-formation in Jordan. The post-war artificial entity of Jordan desperately needed to create a new form of national consciousness which necessitated several steps to be taken. The first step was the denigration of Ottoman rule and its portrayal as an imperial order incapable of promoting and advancing the people over whom it ruled. The second step was drawing a contrast between the Hashemite saviours who represent pan-Arab ideals, religious legitimacy and progress, and the Ottomans who are invoked as rigid, backward Turks who lost all forms of political and religious efficacy and legitimacy towards the end. The third and most important step was to be the recasting of the Bedouins in a new role not only to create an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) for the burgeoning state of Jordan, but also to win the loyalty of a segment of the population which has been historically prone to be loyal to whoever was willing to serve its interests. That third step itself occurred in two stages; the first was the privileging of the Bedouins as loyal Subjects through the army apparatus, and the second stage was recasting the Bedouins as the main national signifier of Jordanian identity in opposition to the only other locally salient identity, the Palestinian-Jordanian one. This came in the aftermath of the civil war of 1970.

Foucault (1980) emphasises processes such as displacement and implantation, which are useful in explaining the ‘pick and mix’ strategy of official discourse in Jordan. The manner in which the Ottoman period is inscribed upon the land of Jordan is consistently and systematically selective. Official knowledge refuses to acknowledge the new evidence which reveals the Ottoman period as one of great complexity and one which cannot simply be dismissed and reduced to a few denigrating statements. This new evidence points to the existence of modes of progress, administrative reforms and very active trade and agricultural sectors (see Owen 2002). Official discourse also displaces the real social history of Bedouins which may not have been the main reason for some periods of decline during the Ottoman period but, surely, prevented many farmers and peasants from progressing towards surplus production as discussed before. Indeed, peasants on the eve of the creation of Jordan had trouble fending off Bedouin raids and were forced to survive on the bare minimum as most of their surplus production was either looted and appropriated by, or given up voluntarily to, the Bedouins to keep them at bay (Amawi 1992). The establishment’s discourse erects a ‘great collective consciousness at the scene of the events’ precisely through this manipulation and management of history to construct its own regime of truth (Foucault 1980, 70). The establishment, in other words, had a vested interest in re-constructing past realities with regards to the relationship between peasants and Bedouins. Constructing a new collective consciousness necessitated the exclusion of some historical facts in order to manufacture a fresh ‘scene of events.’
Incorporating the Bedouin: the dynamics of space and security

The discursive and normative reconstruction of the Ottoman legacy was done against the backdrop of incorporating the Bedouin elements of the Jordanian population into the security apparatus from 1930 onwards. The Bedouin tribes of Jordan had proven to be quite a nuisance to the burgeoning state, a legacy steeped in the history of the nomadic lifestyle characterised by raids on settled communities. Bedouin inhabitants had occupied a strategic position in the vast Syrian desert which lies between the lands of Greater Syria and ancient Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). The desert was strategically positioned along the major trade routes and no caravan, traveller, or settled communities on the fringes of the desert and further West, could avoid the roaming desert dwellers. The latter had from ancient times, and throughout the lives of the empires that ruled over the region, been a major security threat to traders, pilgrims and travellers (Cretaz 1986, Donnan 1996, Evans 1996, Patai 1958).

The mobility of property (livestock, tents), the search for new grazing pastures, the insecurity brought about by climate, the lack of central policing for protection, and the constant threat by others, have all shaped the nomadic politics of ‘space’. The Bedouins’ relationship with fixed locality is shaky at best because they are constantly being forced to change the ‘space’ of activity. The nomad incorporates ‘the whole of space under his own skin, because his tent is a house that never interrupts his progress, but on the contrary accompanies it: space is an extension, a prosthesis or vehicle for his own movement’ (Palumbo 2000, 71). Thus, the nomadic territorial system or politics of space is ‘geared to the acquisition of pasture rather than establishing vital symbolic links between the community and a particular locale’ (Cribb 2004, 21). Survival and displacement are two notions which are very much intertwined in the perceptions, existence and culture of the nomad/Bedouin.

Lack of fixity and attachment to one space requires a constant negotiation with the forces of nature as well as the forces of the settled human world. Whereas settled communities have had to defend landed property, which gives rise to locale-dependent identities, Bedouins, in the main, have traditionally not developed sentiments pertinent to a territorially bounded ‘homeland’, or to fixed localities. While peasants or settled communities become over the course of generations very much rooted and shaped by the politics of place, Bedouin survival and culture have been historically shaped by the constant need for mobility and the insecurity accompanying that which necessitates the need for allies who can give protection and ensure security. Fixed space, or place, is not much of an issue if mobile property is safe, or access to new resources is secured. Layne (1994) provides an interesting example of Bedouin articulation of space, and the territorial mobility of some families that trace their roots to Bedouin origins in Jordan. The Abbadi family, with whom Layne stayed for a year during her field work in 1986, shift abode during summer when they leave their house and live in a tent for the duration of the summer season. Layne demonstrates how both the house and tent share the same layout in terms of design
and room allocation. This is most interesting since the Abbadi are no longer involved in herding or any form of nomadic life. Their own children go to school and some have government jobs. Layne mentions how the room which the girls usually occupy in both the house and tent is not referred to as the ‘girls’ room’ but a correct translation of the phrase would be ‘at the girls’. This implies that space is defined by the individuals who occupy it rather than its physical parameters. Abu-Lughod (2000, 237) reports on how belonging among Bedouins is inseparable from, and defined by, belonging to the group rather than land, ‘belonging is essential because there is no life outside the group, no alternative social group other than the community’. The pastoral existence’s most striking feature resides then in its relative detachment from bounded space/locale. The Bedouin mechanisms of survival, prior to sedentarisation, had assigned symbolic meaning primarily to the group within which he or she lived, divorced from any differentiating notions of space.

After Amir Abdullah arrived in Jordan from Hijaz in Saudi Arabia in 1921, he faced opposition from two groups – the nationalists who came to consider him a tool of the British Mandatory power, and the Bedouins who feared the loss of their power. Much of the early British Grant-In-Aid given to the burgeoning Transjordan was utilised by Abdullah to appease tribal leaders (Amawi 1992, Dieterich 2002, Hawrani 1978, Wilson 1987). The British allowed him full rein in the administration of the local Arab population and he ‘immersed himself in tribal politics, making an enormous effort to cultivate shaykhs, especially from nomadic tribes’ (Alon 2005, 219).

The first significant turning point in the Hashemite relationship with the Bedouins came in 1930 when Major Glubb Pasha came to Transjordan, on King Abdullah’s request, to assume responsibility over the desert, after failure to stem the tide of Bedouin and nomadic raids and attacks there⁵. Glubb formed the Desert Patrol, comprised solely of Bedouin volunteers, and succeeded within a few years in forming a formidable force. This not only put an end to nomadic raids, but brought them under the control of the central government.⁶ Harsh economic conditions in the 1930s, which left many Bedouins on the verge of famine, and the central policing which prevented their raids, forced the hands of the Bedouins, making them too vulnerable to resist the overtures of the central government. Massad (2001) argues that Glubb Pasha limited the powers of Bedouin tribes to the extent they were forced to assume new identities which were to become the basis of Jordan’s own nationalist trends.

The Bedouins became the backbone of the Arab Legion (The Jordanian Armed Forces) and are still the most loyal subjects of the Monarchy. But while the Bedouins provided the main pillar of support for the Hashemite establishment through their role in the army, they were yet to become part of Jordan’s cultural and tourist image abroad. This was due to several strategic considerations, at the heart of which was the fact that Jordan, until 1970, used to market itself as the Holy Land. In what follows, I will examine the sharp contrast between this articulation of Jordanian identity and the one that emerged after 1970. The political contingencies as well as
the new politics of space emergent from them necessitated that Jordan re-define its geographic space and its symbolic representations.

The re-birth of the Bedouin as a national symbol

When Jordan annexed the West Bank in 1951 and began to take an interest in developing the field of tourism after the Second World War, the focus was on holy places in the West Bank such as Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Maffi (2002, 216) supports this view through her fascinating study of museums and identity in Jordan. ‘Since the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s, the tourist and international image of Jordan has been (sic) closely linked to Biblical History…’ Thus, the land of Jordan was presented as sacred and holy. It is interesting to note here that Jordan had not yet embarked on carving out a distinct national identity for itself at the time. The Bedouins were still the domain of security considerations, while holy sites were used to attract visitors and market Jordan abroad. The two dimensions had not yet been combined to produce a distinct identity. This could be attributed to a very simple fact: national identities are usually oppositional in nature (Mackey 2002, Wilson & Donnan 1998). They are formulated vis-à-vis a colonial or in the case of Jordan, a regional or domestic threat. Jordan had to wait until 1970 for the domestic disturbances – at the centre of which was the existence of a very strong Palestinian presence on its lands and the threat of Israel to turn Jordan into a homeland for the Palestinians – to embark on a very intensive systematic effort to invent an image for itself marked with distinct symbols and signifiers. With the loss of the West Bank in 1967 and the events of Black September in 1970, the Jordanian Establishment realised the need for a new formulation of its identity: a fresh ‘knowledge’ about what Jordan is and how it should be represented.

An example of the pre-1970 official representation of Jordan, and the projection of a specific image, can be found in Pope Paul VI’s visit to the Kingdom in 1964, and King Hussein’s’ declaration of himself as the protector of Christian holy places in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The King also considered himself protector of Islamic holy places there. The Pope’s landmark visit established Jordan as a ‘holy place’ within the international arena. Stamps were issued to commemorate the visit accompanied by a lot of publicity both locally and internationally. The King also took it upon himself to renovate both Christian and Islamic sites. Although places and sites on the East Bank of Jordan were not neglected, they were not utilised in producing a narrative about Hashemite legitimacy or Jordanian identity. The only site that seemed to have been emphasised was Petra, which was adopted alongside the Dome of Rock so that the two together served as symbols of the unification between the two Banks of the Jordan. Several stamps dating from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, bore the images of both Petra and the Dome of Rock on the same stamp, flanking the image of King Abdullah I and later King Hussein. Thus, religious sites
became symbolic national signifiers. Katz notes that the theme of Jordan’s pavilion in the World Fair in New York in 1964 was ‘holy places and the dead Sea Scrolls, of which four were in Jordan’s possession’ (1999, 17). In the same year, 1964, the King published an article in the National Geographic under the title ‘Holy Land, My Country.’ Katz (2003, 221) argues that Jordan’s portrayal of itself as a holy land was done to legitimate Hashemite rule in the midst of the pro-Nasserite, Pan-Arabist sentiments of the 1950s and 1960s.

The 1950s saw the growth of the Arab national movement, which dominated the Arab scene for nearly two decades. Even when Palestinians critiqued the Jordanian monarchy at the time, it was done under the banner of Arab nationalism rather than Palestinian nationalism. The Jordanian establishment cracked down on nationalist groups operating in Jordan in the late 1950s. Pappé argues that, after Jordan had annexed the West Bank in 1950 following the Israeli occupation of the coastal part of Palestine, it struggled very hard to Jordanise the Palestinians under its rule (Pappé 1994, 65): ‘The Hashemites abolished all independent Palestinian institutions and all administrative barriers between the two banks of the Jordan River’ (ibid., 63) but observes that ‘Those who regard the process as an attempt to “de-Palestinise” the West Bank, and thereby generate a new self-identity and allegiance, have concluded that the effort totally failed’ (1994, 65).

It is no secret that the Palestinians had contributed significantly to the modernisation of Jordan between 1950 and 1967. The Holy sites of the West Bank alone contributed to almost one third of Jordan’s GDP in tourist revenues (Pappé 1994, 70). Although the Palestinians were politically very underrepresented, they were socially and economically the backbone of Jordanian society (Abu-Odeh 1999; Lynch 1999a & 1999b; Massad 2001). In 1967, Jordan lost the West Bank when Israel occupied the rest of the Palestinian lands, and the country saw a new influx of Palestinian refugees. Between 1967 and 1970, Jordan, now deprived of its West Bank region, was a fertile soil for Palestinian groups and factions whose main basis of support were the now overflowing refugee camps. Following the failure of the Arab national movement in the 1967 war, a distinct Palestinian identity was crystallizing, and was embodied in the presence of armed Palestinian resistance groups in Jordan which ultimately came into direct conflict with the Hashemite regime. In September 1970 (in what came to be known as Black September) following the hijack of two international aircraft by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)\(^8\), a wide-scale government crack down on the Palestinians in Jordan was launched and the ensuing civil war, which lasted a few weeks, culminated in expelling the Palestinian organizations to Lebanon.

This short account is meant to demonstrate several points. First, Jordan’s own national identity could be said to have evolved in response to two important nationalist movements; the Pan-Arabist movements of the 1950s and the Palestinian national identity of the 1960s. During the 1950s, Jordan responded by advocating a legitimating narrative of being a Holy Land with the Hashemites as protectors of
the holy sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron and Nazareth. Jordan’s response to
the second movement, however, was much more drastic. Not only had Jordan lost
most of the sites that used to constitute its national signifiers, but the country had to
grapple with an overwhelming demographic factor in the form of Palestinians who
had developed their own distinct identity.

Second, Jordan had to struggle to replace those narratives in order to secure the
legitimacy and survival of the establishment, and also to re-draw and recreate its
own national symbols and signifiers which more or less supported the legitimating
discourses of the Hashemites. To achieve this was no mean feat. The whole his-
tory of Jordan had to be reconsidered and reproduced within the domain of the new
knowledge schemata Jordan and its establishment were attempting to establish for
themselves. It is within this context that Bedouins were re-envisioned and reproduced.
It was also within this same context that Petra was reborn and revisited, as we shall
see below. The centrality of both Bedouins and Petra was the product of the political
upheavals of 1970.

The sharp contrast between identity constructions can be observed in the develop-
ment of the peasant as a national signifier in the Palestinian occupied lands (Swe-
denburg 1990). The Palestinian national struggle against Israeli occupation and the
latter’s denial of any Palestinian right to the lands of Palestine have necessitated this
strategic signification process. The peasant, whose identity is subsumed under the
notion of ‘land’, has become the Palestinian national signifier *par excellence*. This is
evident from postcards and posters which connect the Palestinian to a ‘rural sartorial
heritage’ (Moors 2000, 873) and greeting cards which ‘highlight the land and natural
beauty of Palestine and heightens the consciousness of Palestinians as belonging to
the Land’ (Semmerling 2004, 125). But while Palestinians have mythologised the
peasant, the Jordanian establishment has created a historiographic disjuncture with
its peasantry and re-produced the Bedouin as its national signifier.

In discussing the state-tribe dynamics in Jordan, Schirin Fathi (1994,145) ob-
serves that by ‘emphasizing the collectivity of tribes and integrating individual tribal
identities into a broad category of tribal heritage – as has been the government’s
policy – tribalism may serve as a source of shared history and a national symbol’. This
is the process by which Jordan came to identify itself as Bedouin despite the
existence of other groups, each of which could have been utilised in the production
of Jordanian identity. But in the aftermath of Black September and the direct threat
to the regime, Jordan decided to selectively emphasize and build up the Bedouin ele-
ments, both institutionally on the ground, as well as in the symbolic representations
of Jordanian identity.

Following the 1970 civil war, a council under the name ‘Council of Tribal Lead-
ers’ was established in 1971 to help improve the living status of the Bedouins, and
develop agricultural and educational schemes, and offer better health care. All was
part of the country’s plan to unite the Transjordanians (as opposed to Palestinian-
Jordanians) and to give them one national identity under the umbrella of the ‘one
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Jordanian family’ (Massad 2001, 65). Thus, in the 1970s, Bedouin culture was reinforced as the basis for ‘Jordanianness’ at the national level, followed by an assertion of a specific Jordanian identity internationally in the 1980s. Such an approach was adopted for a variety of reasons: to challenge the Israeli declaration that ‘Jordan is Palestine’, to introduce Jordan as the ‘transporter’ of the Arab culture in a modern Arab world, and to produce an international image of a modern country with an old culture and tradition (Massad 2001, 74).

King Hussein aimed at institutionalising the Jordanian culture as a tribal one. He adopted two approaches to achieve this: the sedentarisation of the Bedouins because they are considered to reflect the ‘true’ Jordan culture, and the semiotic Bedouinisation of the country whereby Jordan would be representationally equated with Bedouin life and lifestyle. In other words, settle the Bedouins, and stress and elaborate Bedouin imagery and values. Tourism did not figure in any of these processes in the 1970s. The establishment at that point was concerned with securing its survival. Thus, one cannot argue that Bedouin lifestyle was being produced to cater for tourists who yearn for ‘staged authenticity’. The consumers of Jordan’s new image were the locals themselves and the international community for purposes of legitimacy. As Shryock and Howell (2001) reveal, King Hussein was very careful to cultivate a patriarchal society based on the idea of Bayet or house whereby Jordanians follow the Bedouin traditions of constructing one big hierarchal household with the King at its helm. It was in this same vein that King Hussein, following the first Gulf war in 1990, asked Jordanians to refer to him as Sharif Hussein, which is an invocation of the King’s tribal roots as a descendent of Prophet Mohamed.

Valorising the Bedouin lifestyle necessitated re-creating and excluding certain sets of values attached to their history: Bedouin history as one marked by raids and Khuwwahs has all but been completely deleted from the collective memory and popular culture. The word Bedouin now conjures up images of hospitality and warmth.

Many of the characteristics of the Jordanian and Arab society are found in their strongest form in Bedouin culture. For instance, Bedouins are most famous for their hospitality, and it is part of their creed—rooted in the harshness of desert life—that no traveller is turned away. The tribal structure of Arab society is also most visible among the Bedouins, where the clan is at the centre of social life. http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/people1.html#The%20Bedouins

Shryock (2004) draws a link between Bedouin ‘hospitality’ and the general trends of hospitality that one finds in Jordanian homes, hotels and restaurants. It is almost as if the two are inseparable, even in the minds of scholars.

It is, thus, not surprising to observe that postcards in Jordan have, since the mid-1970s, significantly featured depictions of Bedouins and Bedouin lifestyle. A survey of contemporary post-cards in Jordan reveals that they may be divided into three main groups. Firstly, pictures of the Royal family, exclusively King Hussein, King
Abdullah II and some pictures of the two kings with their respective wives who never appear on their own on any postcard. Secondly, depictions of historical sites in Jordan: Petra, Jerash, the Mosaics of Madaba, the Umayyad Palaces, Ajlun Palace, Karak Castle, Wadi Rum. Thirdly, images of Bedouins, and Bedouin life. The striking point, however, is that the pictures of historical sites almost always lack any human presence while depictions of Jordanians are solely based on images of Bedouins, the Desert Patrol (Bedouin soldiers on camels), and Bedouin habitats, crafts, traditional costumes and practices such as the coffee drinking rituals. Postcards thus reveal that the notion of Jordan as a land is subsumed under the figures of the King and the Bedouins as makers of national symbols. Representations of historical sites are usually produced in order to shed light on Jordan’s historical places – they are not generally used as elements in shaping Jordan’s modern identity. Petra is the exception to this.

Petra as Bedouin/national signifier

The development of Bedouin imagery cannot be separated from the valorisation of Petra both as a site and as a symbol. Milton-Edwards (2001, 68), rightly notes that in the 1950s ‘the development of Petra and other historic sites had not begun-commercial tourism was virtually confined to old Jerusalem and Bethlehem on the West Bank’. She goes on to observe that in the post-1967 Jordan ‘a trickle of tourists to Jerash and Petra were poor compensation of the loss of Bethlehem and Jerusalem’ (2001, 70). This stands in sharp contrast with the sudden interest Jordan took in reinventing Petra in the 1970s onwards. The loss of the West Bank combined with the events of Black September led to the birth of what I shall term ‘Bedouin/Jordanian Petra’.

To understand the shifting status of Petra in the making of Jordanian identity, one may look again at evidence drawn from postage stamps. Stamps are ‘windows of the State’ (Brunn 2001, 315). They are bearers of symbols (Reid 1984), propaganda tools (Rowley 2002), and social agents affecting how nations perceive themselves and are perceived by others (Frewer 2002). Katz (1999) is probably the only scholarly work that has tackled the nexus between postage stamps and identity construction in Jordan. Her survey of postage stamps between 1947 and 1967 focuses on how Jerusalem and the West Bank ‘became very strongly linked with the Hashemite monarchy’s conception of Jordan’ (1999, 2). It is in this vein that one finds ‘both the Dome of the Rock and the Nabataean Treasury appearing on postage stamps as Jordan represented a unified country’. Petra, however, was secondary in importance to holy places in the West Bank. A careful examination of postage stamps up to 1970 reveals that, while holy places in the West Bank appeared in eighteen sets of Jordanian stamps, Petra appeared only six times. This symbolic disparity reflected what was happening on the political and social scene in Jordan. National consciousness was being advanced on the basis of Jordan as a holy land, and its rulers as protectors of the holy sites. Petra as a logo was not laden with any kind of specific signification:
it served merely as a symbol of the East Bank in postage stamps depicting both the Dome of the Rock and Petra. As indicated earlier, the king’s head would appear between the two symbols on the same stamp to represent the unification of the two Banks, as well as to represent the monarchy in the role of protector, and of national sovereign.

Although Petra was an important logo and symbol until the 1970s, it did not become the ‘object of knowledge’ until after the events of Black September. It was then that Petra took centre stage and the logo was endowed with a history and a narrative that was to become one of the major themes in identity formation (and consequently in tourism promotion later on). Petra was singled out from amongst many other historical sites in Jordan for the purpose of public display and consciousness building. More importantly, the Hashemites developed a narrative in which they were on a par with the Nabataeans who built Petra in the 6th century BC, often being compared to them.11 This is in sharp contrast with the emphasis on the religious legitimacy of the Hashemites which had dominated the cultural and political scene of the 1950s and 1960s. Maffi (1995, 93) succinctly summarises this by arguing that archaeology has been used in Jordan ‘to transform ancient history into a battlefield where the political claims of the present states clash’. Petra was thus originally envisaged primarily as a political tool rather than a major tourist site.

One of the most striking features of Jordan’s narrative about the Nabataeans is the manner in which the Nabataeans are represented as the forefathers of the modern Jordanians, despite the fact that Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites had also, at one time or another, inhabited the territory now defined as Jordan. The Nabataean timeline ended in 106 AD and, apart from the magnificent buildings of Petra which they carved in stone, much of their cultural, political and social heritage did not survive beyond circa 300 AD at most when the Byzantines took over the region. Nevertheless, official narratives in Jordan have been at pains to prove that the Nabataeans were Arab peoples, although the numerous inscriptions and graffiti which have survived are written in Aramaic (see Al-Hilo 1999, Hitti 1951).

The following reference to Petra, taken from King Hussein’s website, is exemplary: ‘The city was the capital of the Nabataeans – Arabs who dominated the lands of Jordan during pre-Roman times – and they carved this wonderland of temples, tombs and elaborate buildings out of solid rock (http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/tourism6d.html#Petra). Jordanian scholars such as Al-Mussa (2002) argue that the Nabataeans spoke Arabic even though they wrote in Aramaic. This view is based on the fact that the Arabic language later adopted a script similar to the Nabataean script. Al-Nawaisa argues that it is nothing short of a ‘conspiracy’ that the Nabataeans were ignored as the group to launch the ‘first Arab Enlightenment project’ (2002, 345). The author then comments that the Nabataeans were the true heirs of the Edomite and Moabite cultures. According to the author, modern Jordanians are the heirs to the Nabataean civilization. Al-Shiab (2002) argues that the Nabataeans were originally Bedouin Arabs who settled in Petra when the Edomites left to settle in
Palestine. Although there is no conclusive historical evidence as to the origins of the Nabataeans (Al-Hilo 1999, Hitti 1951), official narratives in Jordan portray them as Bedouin Arabs, rather than immigrants who had arrived from Mesopotamia as some historians argue (Graf 1990, 1992, 1993), thus emphasising the Bedouin character of Jordanian place and space.

We read, for example, that ‘It appears that a nomadic tribe known as the Nabataeans began migrating gradually from Arabia during the sixth century BCE. However, we do know that they spoke a dialect of Arabic and later on adopted Aramaic’ (http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his_nabateans.html). Postage stamps after 1970 sought to entrench this new narrative about Petra. Petra appears 34 times on various sets of postage stamps after 1970, while holy places in the West Bank appear less than 10 times from 1970 till 2004. An accompanying development has been the emphasis on folklore in postage stamps: since 1970, Jordan has published five full sets of postage stamps to celebrate what it deems to be Jordanian Bedouin folklore and traditional crafts and costumes. The symbolism of these postage stamps has to be understood within the post-1970 socio-political context discussed earlier.

Maffi (1995, 95) observes that the Hashemites have attempted to create a parallel between their rule and that of the Nabataeans, the latter represented as ‘worthy representatives in the family tree of the ancient kingdoms, of which the Hashemite monarchy is the last descendant’. The fact that the Nabataeans acted as mediators between East and West, in their capacity as traders, is also stressed especially in connection with the Hashemite attempt to portray themselves as modern mediators between East and West. King Hussein’s official website has a whole section entitled ‘Building bridges between East and West’ in which Jordan appears to act as one of the main problem solvers for all the dysfunctions and conflicts in the region (http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his_periods7.html). Casting themselves in that role, the Hashemites drew heavily on Nabataean history. In order to ensure the validity of the narrative, they attempted to construct a historical continuity between the contemporary period and the previous tribes and kingdoms that ‘followed’ one another in the area. Although kingdoms and city-states in Jordan did not evolve according to a linear model, modern narratives about Jordan and official discourses attempt to demonstrate that ‘Jordanians, in spite of their young age, are not a people without history, but they are closely linked to their country and to the civilisations that emerged on it in the past’ (Maffi 1995, 84).

The same singularising semiotic tendency can be observed in the choice of the name Petra for the official Jordan News Agency. English school textbooks in Jordan are known as the Petra Series. Pictures of the Treasury in Petra have become ubiquitous and instantly recognisable as a metonymic reference to Jordan. The epistemic violence of exclusionary politics extends to both other groups (predominantly Palestinian-Jordanians) and, to an almost equal extent, to other places (as evidenced by the dialogism between Petra and Jordan as opposed to other sites of national heritage). A postcard which conflates Petra and a Bedouin riding a horse with Jordan possesses
a discursive-visual dependency anchored in the wider context of legitimacy, identity and nationhood.

**Conclusion**

The history of Jordanian national identity has been one of great ruptures. The fluidity that has marked its changing borders on the ground is quite unique. The annexation of the West Bank, its loss in 1967, and, finally, the severing of all administrative ties with that region in 1988, have created and recreated new social and political realities which affected how each citizen may perceive himself or herself as Jordanian. Moreover, these factors have influenced how Jordan presented its own experience of that *Jordanianess* to both its Subjects and the rest of the world. If identity is the political terrain on which cultural communities fight for recognition as a collective entity, then the Palestinians have been the main political and social adversary that the royal establishment has had to struggle against. As Pappé (1994, 61) notes ‘the Hashemites in Transjordan have affected and been affected by, the Palestinian national movement’. This is not so odd if one remembers that the ‘foremost objective of all policies in the Kingdom is regime survival and the subsistence of the Hashemite rule’ (Bouillon 2002, 1).

The shifting codification of identity in post-1970 Jordan should thus been seen within this context. Instead of a ‘gradual development of one coherent country-wide national identity’, several collective identities ‘evolved, sometimes succeeding each other, sometimes existing simultaneously’ (Nevo 1998, http://www.hf.uib.no /smi/pao/nevo. html#fn1). Jordan thus ended up transforming its most loyal subjects, the Bedouins, from mere military power into national signifier. The political contingencies behind such a move should not be seen as defined only by the loss of the West Bank and Jordan’s inability to represent itself as the Holy Land and the Hashemites as its protectors. Jordan recreated the icons of its identity to secure the survival of the regime. The civil unrest of 1970 is without doubt the most important juncture in shaping Jordanian identity, and marked the point at which the Bedouin was called upon to re-write his past, including his role as merely the pillar in the security apparatus, to become the repository of values, images and mores of *Jordanianess*.

The main identity themes that existed prior to 1970, those based on the religious legitimacy and leadership of the Hashemites as descendents of the Prophet Mohammed, have been replaced by new ones. Post 1970, the legitimacy of the Hashemite rulers was affirmed through the links drawn between them and their descendents from previous civilisations, particularly the Nabataean, as well as through the tribal institutions in which the Hashemites emerge as forefathers and guardians of the culture and folklore of Bedouin Jordan. In the context of the Palestinian challenge to Jordanian political legitimacy in the 1960s, this legitimated the outright withdrawal of various privileges and opportunities from Palestinian-Jordanians and the parallel empowerment of Trans-Jordanians, now portrayed as the rightful descendents of the
continuous linear line of civilisations that had existed in Jordan. The Nabataean city of Petra served all those purposes with a new narrative portraying them as Arabs and Arab-speaking despite inconclusive historical evidence to fully support that claim. This is how Petra became a new logo of the post-1970 Jordan. Combined with Bedouins as national signifiers, Petra was reproduced as Arab/Bedouin, while in turn the Bedouin’s centrality to Jordanian history and identity was secured.

Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Lena Jayyusi for her valuable comments on the final draft of the paper.

2. Dispositif is a French word which has been translated as ‘deployment’ in the English versions of Michel Foucault’s books. The term refers to the network of practices and institutions which combine with epistemes (discourses operative in a context) to produce knowledge and webs of power relations.

3. In 1916, a secret agreement was reached between Britain and France known as The Sykes-Picot Agreement to divide the Middle East into spheres of control for the two countries once WWI was over. The areas of Transjordan, most of Iraq and Palestine fell under British control while France was allocated Syria and Lebanon. The agreement negated promises made to Sharif Hussein Bin Ali of Mecca to grant him full control over the Greater Syrian territory to set up a unified Arab homeland there in return for his support for the Allies. The San Remo conference of April 1920 reaffirmed the basic terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

4. Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.

5. Major Glubb Pasha, had had extensive experience working with Iraqi Bedouins when he was a soldier in the Royal Engineers in Iraq.

6. Glubb (1976, 113) notes that these tribesmen, who had for centuries regarded the Government as their natural enemy, enlisted in their thousands in the Arab legion and have ever since been amongst the most loyal and patriotic of the citizens of Transjordan.

7. A project that still seems to be alive and has never quite been shelved as evidenced by statements made by Israeli officials over the years. See Brown 1983, Hallaj 1983, and Israeli 2003.

8. The PFLP hijacked four passenger aircraft from Pan Am, TWA, Swissair and BOAC in September of 1970. The latter three aircraft were taken to Jordan where they were evacuated and blown up in front of world media.

9. Khuwwah, meaning tribute of friendship, is a euphemistic reference to the payments made by cultivators and settled communities to Bedouin tribes in return for protection from Bedouin raids. Sometimes, foodstuffs and other material possessions sufficed if these communities could not afford to pay in cash.

10. The observations are based on 156 postcards collected by the author, mostly printed from 1990 onward.

11. Located in the south of modern day Jordan, Petra was built by the Nabataeans between the 4th and 6th centuries BC. A great mercantile city on ancient trade routes, Petra prospered until the fourth century AD when a great earthquake destroyed most of the city and virtually ended the Nabataean way of life. The city was rediscovered in the early 19th
century by the Swiss traveller Johann Ludwig Burckhardt. Carved in red-rose stone, the city has recently been announced as one of the finalists in the international competition to select the new Seven Wonders of the World.

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Salam Al-Mahadin


