The Stateless *Bedoun* in Kuwait Society

A Study of Bedouin Identity, Culture and the Growth of an Intellectual Ideal

Volume I

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Bachelor of Health Science (Hons)
Graduate Diploma of Education
Master of Education

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Education
Faculty of Arts
The University of Adelaide

December 2016

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Abstract

This study is about the Bedouin of the main tribes of Kuwait, and the members of their tribes who have never received citizenship, who are called the 'Bedoun.' The study was framed within the theory of sociology, including the humanistic approach of Florien Znaniecki, and theories of ethnicity, identity and labelling. The methodological approach was inductive, involving a variety data collection methods including fieldwork in Kuwait, historical research, collaborative methodology, and thematic analysis. I argue that the Bedouin are a distinct ethnic group rather than merely a 'social group' in Kuwaiti society, and that the Bedoun are an emerging ethnic sub-group of the Kuwaiti Bedouin. The Bedoun hold multiple identifications, sharing ethnic identification within the same tribes as citizens, but they have also developed to form a new collective identity, characterised by social solidarity and unique national consciousness. This has occurred due to their historical, intergenerational absorption of the national identity as citizens of Kuwait in accordance with government policy, followed by their collective experiences of imposed, restrictive cultural re-organisation of the group since the 1980s, including administrative expulsion, 'status adjustment,' a form of identity erasure, and violent ethnic cleansing. The Bedoun have also developed an intellectual identity since their administrative expulsion, when they were expelled from schools and university. They have developed some degree of resistance to the attempt by Hadar intellectuals to prevent the group acquiring the education and political consciousness with which they could remedy their statelessness and deprivation of their human rights. The emergence of new forms of identity have assisted the Bedoun to rationalise their suffering and improve their capacity to articulate their collective experience. These changes indicate that creative, cultural re-organisation is taking place in the community, though they remain extraordinarily vulnerable. Cross-fertilisation has taken place with people from other cultures, especially for intellectuals and community leaders who have worked with international humanitarian agencies, journalists and scholars since the beginning of the Arab Spring. The Bedoun have also experienced marginalisation, stigmatisation and labelling in their daily social interactions with others, due to the prevalence of a deeply rooted nationalist ideology that denies the identity of all Bedouin as 'Kuwaitis.' Thus, the group has played a crucial, symbolic role in Kuwaiti citizen culture, and this role explains why statelessness has been imposed on them. The Bedoun population has been reduced by around two-thirds over the last twenty-five years. Without the intervention of international organisations and governments, their population and culture may be destroyed altogether. Recommendations include a call for the investigation of Kuwait's official identity erasure policies and measures ('status adjustment'), methods of criminalisation and intense cultural restrictions faced by the group, by the United Nations

Rapporteurs on Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect. The study also suggests the establishment of genuine mechanisms of representation for the community within the United Nations framework, and the implementation of international development measures that would enable the UNDP and UNESCO to establish baseline population data on the group to preserve and protect their future development.

Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution on and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma at any other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide.

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Signature of student:

Susan Kennedy

Principal Supervisor: Dr Margaret Secombe,
The University of Adelaide, School of Education
Co-Supervisor: Associate Professor Hossein Esmaeili,
Flinders University Law School

This thesis has two volumes. The second volume contains the Appendices. Additional materials will be stored online in the Bedoun Archive, at the Australian Data Repository, Australian National University, Canberra. This includes excerpts from the interview transcripts, and an archive of newspaper articles referenced in this thesis. The materials will become available from approximately June, 2018 or upon expiry of the thesis embargo.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the following friends, research collaborators, colleagues and organisations:

There are many friends who I cannot mention for security reasons. Among those who I can, M. M. al Anezi helped to initiate this project from Australia. I did not know what statelessness was before the Arab Spring. He has performed a fine service to his country. Imam Abdul Kader of the Darwin Islamic Society encouraged me to transform my experience in Australia into something that would benefit the whole community.

The twenty members of the Bedoun community who participated in this study and provided me with their personal data, have shared their extraordinary experiences for the benefit of their community. Their life stories will remain etched in my mind forever. No interviewee ever declined his or her material from being published for my research after our conversations. I thank them for their generosity, for expanding the boundaries of my thinking, and their patience in the ensuing years. I hope that their contribution will inspire others to provide them with Kuwaiti citizenship and its corresponding rights.

Mohammed al Anezi of London and Hakeem al Fadhli are the only two members of the Bedoun community in this work whose names are fully disclosed. This should not be interpreted as their endorsement of the interpretations herein but rather, they are mentioned as important cultural guides and contact points for future researchers in Kuwait and the diaspora. Mohammed was one of the first intellecutals and civil rights movement leaders who worked openly on the Bedoun problem in Kuwait, translating the seminal work of al Waqayan (2009) into English. He is a highly regarded leader of the Bedoun community.

Hakeem al Fadhli was as a leader of the Bedoun civil rights movement during the Arab Spring. He then emerged as a public intellectual, contributing as an interviewee, field guide, fixer and translator and interpreter, working on at least ten scholarly research publications, as well as countless news-media articles and human rights reports and his own report to the United Nations Committee for Human Rights in 2015. Many scholars who have described Hakeem as a 'protestor' have actually relied on him for his local knowledge, interview data, contacts and other practical help required for their research. Hakeem's efforts were a major part of the Lund-Johanssen (2014) project which later won the UNHCR research prize on statelessness at the Masters degree level. His input was essential to my own theoretical development. Neither could have occured without his efforts.

Hakeem worked with me on this research in various ways for around half the time this project took to complete, mainly helping me to understand various Bedoun claims against counter-arguments in scholarly circles. This work enabled me to break through the established nationalist ideology and to discover forgotten historical data. I will never forget

the day he asked me why, if I did not believe everything I read, did I believe everything I read about Kuwait? One of the most difficult aspects of this research was realising that the Bedoun were unaware of how negatively they had been represented in the academic literature. Hakeem had absorbed the disappointment of this realisation without prejudice, and remained open to the process of inquiry. His participation in this project helped me to realise the collaborative method. He gave me the courage to openly talk about the Bedoun's indigenous claims, ethnic cleansing and the possibility of their genocide. He had asked to be acknowledged in this research, come what may. His contribution to the Bedoun community and to Kuwait has been unique, unselfish and heroic.

My third translator and interpreter was, and still is, the most reliable man in the field. He helped me understand the subtle details of Bedoun identity management so that I could make sense of my fieldwork observations. He kept second copies of all the research data as a community custodian. He helped me to accept my failures along the way, reminding me to keep looking forward right to the end. I offer him my deepest respect and gratitude. All of my fixers, translators, interpreters and cultural guides, including my husband *Nour al Deen*, were the glue that held my fieldwork, and sometimes my whole life, together. I was totally dependent on their unpaid work and expertise to obtain the in-depth interviews and photographs for this research, and much more.

Associate Professor Mohammed al Wuhaib and Professor Ghanim Alnajjar provided assistance and hospitality during my fieldwork. Professor al Najjar was not only one of the first social scientists to offer theorization of human rights in Kuwait (Alnajjar, 2001). He was one of few scholars to have explicitly theorized the Kuwaiti Bedouin as an ethnic group, and tribal *ethnic minorities* as *cultural groups with political significance* (Alnajjar, 1984, p.66, 79). Associate Professor al Wuahaib helpd me to learn the Hadar way of thinking, and how Kuwaitis rationalise the situation of the Bedoun, which led me identify the nationalist ideologies essential to understanding the Bedoun's statelessness.

Others who assisted me in a variety ways included Siri Gamage (University of New England), Karen Block (The University of Melbourne), Janet MacDougall (Australian National University), Sean Ryan (Batchelor Institute), Uttam Gaulee (University of Florida), Hadeel Borqais (human rights monitor), Mona Kareem (journalist), Rania Maktabi (University of Oslo), Scott Brown (George Washington University), Associate Professor Farah al Nakib (American University of Kuwait), Rashid Muddaffar (Majlis al Ummah), and Professor Abdullah al Moosa (Kuwait University) and Professor Abdullah Alhajeri (Kuwait University).

The American University of Kuwait provided a research fellowship during my fieldwork, in 2014. The Researchers for Asylum Seekers group at Melbourne University provided me with a forum to discuss my early research findings, including ethnic cleansing,

in 2015. The *Australian Data Archive* at the Australian National University has provided archive and data curation services site for the storage of all Bedoun community data collected in this project. Their appreciation of the nature of the project, and the value of the data into the future, is gratefully received. I thank Margaret Priwer and staff at the Law Library at The University of Adelaide for their assistance over the last four years.

My Supervisor Dr Margaret Secombe and Co-Supervisor Associate Professor Hossein Esmaeili provided patient supervision through this unexpectedly challenging and politically sensitive project. I am grateful for Dr Secombe's flexibility regarding my project design, which continued to emerge during the writing-up phase of the project. We could not have foreseen that the factor of educational development was so closely linked to the deprivation of the Bedoun's citizenship, nor that the population was being destroyed to prevent them developing an intellectual capacity and widespread political consciousness. She appreciated the importance of these aspects of the study and the need to document the historical background to the oppression of the Bedoun, making for an extended thesis length. to construct what I hope is a convincing case for the re-organisation of the Bedoun's culture and the substantial threats to their existence.

Associate Professor Esmaeili assisted me with strengthening the portion of the thesis documenting the involvement of international non-government organisations and appealing to processes and remedies in international law. His advice helped me to balance my argument between past approaches to the Bedouin in indigenous and minority rights law linked to self-determination, with the statelessness approach. I hope that this helps to provide a firmer direction for the Bedoun in international law claims in the future, so that they may be compensated for their suffering and be provided with the support they need to survive and flourish.

I am grateful to my examiners, Professor Elsbieta Halas (University of Warsaw) and Professor Damien Short (University of London), for pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, their suggestions for my future work and especially, their support for the arguments put forward. I am very pleased to have encountered the 'plain-speaking' sociological theory of Florian Znaniecki that Dr Secombe has introduced me to, a grand theory that accommodated the realities of this research, and calls state oppression, physical and cultural destruction, and human suffering, what it really is.

Lachlan, Ben, Max kept their faith in my ability to complete this project – thank you for being there. I thank all my friends, family and teachers in Kuwait, Egypt, India, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, Switzerland and Australia, who helped me to get through to the end.

I miss my dear friends in Kuwait very much, and especially my husband.

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Dedication

For

Yhaya

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Surah al Balad
The City

In the name of God,
the Gracious, the Compassionate.

I swear by this land.
While you are a legal resident at this land.
A father and what he begets.
We have created the human being to struggle.
Does he think that no one is able to best him?
He says: "I spent so much money!"
Does he think that no one saw him?
Did We not make for him two eyes?
A tongue and two lips?
We guided him to both paths?
He should choose the better path.
Do you know which the better path is?
The freeing of slaves.
Or the feeding on a day of great hardship.
An orphan of relation.
Or a poor person in need.
Then he has become one of those who
have acknowledged,
and exhort one another
to patience,
and exhort one another
to kindness.
Those are the people of happiness.
As for those who rejected Our signs,
they are the people of misery.
Upon them is a fire closed over.

Quran, A Reformist Translation, translated by Edip Yuksel (2007).
In classical versions of the Quran, this verse is called 'The Land.'

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The Stateless *Bedoun* in Kuwait Society

A Study of Bedouin Identity, Culture and the Growth of an Intellectual Ideal

Volume II

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