

# Essay on bedouin and modernity

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



Bedouins is one of the primarily desert-dwelling ethnic groups of the Arabic origin. The Bedouin are well known for their nomadic lifestyle, agricultural activities, and fishing, but on rare occasions. It is also argued that having mastered the challenges and hardships of the desert, they sometimes augmented their sources of income through providing transportation services for other people across the desert (Abu-Lughod, 11). Due to lack of water and pastoral land, the Bedouins were always on the move in search of the same for their animals. However, over time, the lifestyle of this ethnic group has shifted significantly. Particularly, the identity of Bedouins has been considerably affected by modernity. As a result of modernity, the Bedouins have been forced to abandon their traditional nomadic lifestyle to live a more stable life. Due to the struggles of modernity, their economic activities, political, and social characteristics have been transformed over time. Various cases of smuggling and drug dealing have been cited among the Bedouin community. Having mastered the desert very well in terms of transportation, Bedouins have been used by drug dealers in transporting drugs across the desert into and out of the Arab world. Traditionally, dealing in drugs and smuggling was not but of their trading activities (Sara 11-13). However, because of the modern trade, especially the ever growing drug trafficking activities in the Arab countries, the Bedouins have found it a lucrative business opportunity for earning an extra income to survive in their new lifestyle. For instance, in the Middle East, drug trafficking from Sinai, Israel, has raised concern in the past few years (Garwood). Tourism has emerged as one of the important economic sectors among the Bedouin community. Lately, people from various parts of the world,

especially in the west, visit the desert areas from time to time. Bedouin act as tour-guides in the desert regions, because they have been living there for centuries and understand the place very well. Moreover, the means of transportation has also changed. Because of the increasing influx of tourists with time, modern modes of transport have been invented within the community (Westheimer and Gil, 45-47). Construction of roads has reduced over reliance of camels and horses as the major means of transport. Furthermore, with increasing tourism activities, communication systems have changed as well. Use of mobile phones is no longer a new thing among the Bedouin people. In fact, following the improvement in the transportation and communication systems, the community has been opened and connected to the rest of the world, thanks to the growing tourism activities in the Arab regions. Because of the rapid growth of tourism, most people have sold their lands either to pave way for development of tourism related projects, or to seek new lifestyle in the urban areas embracing modern lifestyle (Abu-Lughod, 9-11).

The culture of this community has also changed over time. For instance, the dressing code of men and women is quite different from what it used to be in the past. Traditionally, men were required to put on long 'djellabaya' and a 'smagg' (headcover). On the other hand, women were supposed to dress in glossily coloured dresses, long dresses. However, when they are out in the public, they were supposed to put on an 'abaya' (long black coat), and covered the head and hair (Garwood). Although in some areas the same dressing codes are still being observed, most members of this community have been affected by the dressing code of the West. Lately, it is normal for

men to dress in official clothes, just like is the case in most parts of the world. Furthermore, it is normal for women to work around without their heads and hair covered. The education aspects of the Bedouins have also been influenced by modernity (Westheimer and Gil, 77).

Modern education system has found its way into the Bedouin education system. Unlike in the past, women are educated in modern schools. Besides, boys and girls attend same schools, although in some parts of the Arab countries the practice of separate schools and curricula for boys and girls is being practiced. Such sharing was not there in this community, especially a time when men were considered superior to women (Sara, 16). A shift in Bedouin's culture, as a result of modernity, is also depicted when it comes to the issue of marriage. Organized marriages were very common in the past. However, although some cases of such kind of marriages are still being reported, the practice has reduced drastically with time. Possibly this could be attributed to the realization and promotion of the rights of women among the Arab communities. Furthermore, education has given women opportunities to explore other occupations in the formal sector, rather than being married at early stages in their life (Abu-Lughod, 29).

Politically, the Bedouins were organized in clans under the leadership of the elders. The elders created and implemented laws that controlled and guided their community. The Sheikhs were vitals figures in the community and were accorded great respect from the people. However, as a result of modernity the influence of the elders and the sheikhs has diminished remarkably.

Lately, rarely to young people respect their elders, something that could not be seen in the traditional Bedouin community. The lack of respect explains

why the rates of crimes have increased in Bedouin community in the past few decades (Abu-Rabi'a, 56).

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