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READING THE OMENS OF BREAST CANCER
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN MIDDLE EAST
ALFRED GELL'S EXTENDED AGENCY
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Bread Rising 1994

Mary Pratt

Artist

Using two packages of super-active yeast, I made bread dough and placed it in a clear glass bowl.

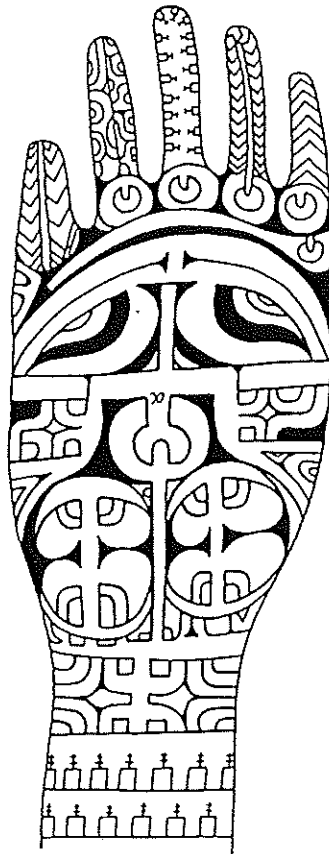
As the breast-like mound began to rise, its cells, like cancer cells, started to multiply at an ever-increasing rate. Suddenly, it was out of control. No matter how many times I punched it down,

the dough — the cancer — kept growing. The photographs I took were quite ominous, and I think I've captured that in my painting.

Mary Pratt is a painter who lives in Newfoundland.

This 'hand face' tattoo from the Marquesan Islands, eastern Polynesia, is analysed by Alfred Gell in *Art and Agency*. '[T]he characteristic involution of the Dravidian kinship universe, where political succour and brides come from an enclosing circle of matrilineal relatives, is connected, via a scheme transfer, to body arts which enclose the individual in a protective wrapping of tattooing'; Gell argues that visual styles are not generated by culture, but have a relative 'inter-artefactual' autonomy. (Source: Karl von den Steinen, *Die Marquesaner und Ihre Kunst*, Berlin, 1925).

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Gell had the capacity to make connections between apparently quite disconnected phenomena, in ways that were often at the same time playful and immensely illuminating. I doubt that it would occur to many writers on art to call Michelangelo's 'David' a 'big doll for grown-ups'; or to characterize geometrical decorative patterns, such as Celtic knotwork, intended to mesmerize and enmesh devils in their maddeningly complex reticulations, as 'demonic fly-paper'. And certainly very few art theorists would imagine there could be anything at all in common between the artist and a soldier in Pol Pot's army, who scatters physical embodiments of his agency in the form of landmines, artefacts which continue inexorably to pursue the soldier's appalling objectives long after he himself has vanished.

If *Art and Agency* is read, at least initially, mainly by those with a particular interest in the anthropology of art, Gell's argument has a significance, and will certainly have repercussions, far beyond this specialist field. Actually, it is likely to move the whole subdiscipline of the anthropology of art much closer to the centres of current anthropological theorizing. For clearly, Gell's view of art has implications for the way we understand some of the key issues in the social sciences; if he is right, a proper understanding of art is critical to a truly adequate theoretical understanding of – for example – the nature of human subjecthood and of social relationships. Gell endowed this book with a strong identity and a very powerful intelligence. He has left us an important presence soon to start acting among us, and on us, and on some of the central concepts of our discipline, with effects that we cannot yet foresee.□

Simon Harrison

Enclosures and exclusions

Conserving wildlife in pastoral areas of the Middle East

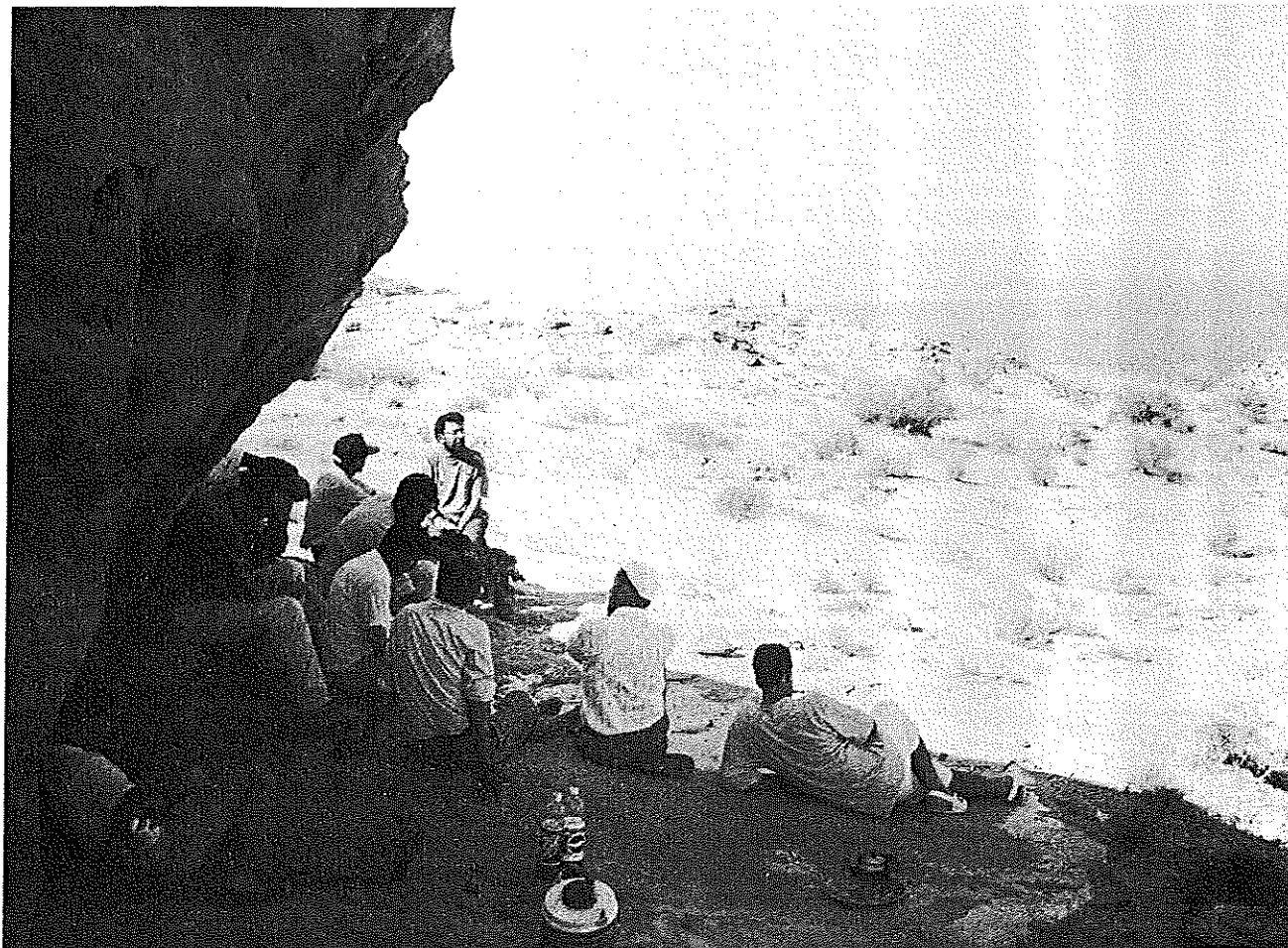
DAWN CHATTY

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Wildlife conservation schemes which, by design, set out to protect endangered fauna and flora, have a relatively recent history in northern Arabia. First in Saudi Arabia, then in Oman and Jordan, projects have been set up over the past two decades to reintroduce the Arabian oryx to its original habitat. In so doing, large tracts of grazing land have been fenced to enclose these precious creatures in a relatively confined space and thus protect them from the dangers which contact with humans is assumed to pose for them. The philosophical underpinnings of such a policy stem from a long African colonial and post-independence tradition. In East Africa and elsewhere, pastoral populations were long ago forced off their grazing lands in order to create parks for wildlife and tourists (Turton 1987, Howell 1987, McCabe et al. 1992). This preservationist style of management which aimed to provide opportunities to experience the natural environment – that no longer existed in the domesticated landscapes of Europe (Anderson and Grove, 1987) – meant the forced exclusion and, for some, resettlement of thousands of pastoral people.¹ The assumption then was that local pastoral populations overstocked and overgrazed the natural en-

vironment and were thus obstacles to effective natural resource management.

Over the past decade there has been a perceptible change of heart. International conservationist circles do now, at least, discuss the concept of 'conservation with a human face' (Bell 1987). A few promising examples of African conservation are emerging where efforts are being made to integrate indigenous human populations into conservation and development projects (IIED 1994). But when transposed to Arabia, this new found conservation wisdom loses something in the translation. Using the internationally supported wildlife reintroduction project in Oman as a starting point, I aim to show that conservation schemes in Arabia continue to regard local populations as obstacles to be overcome – either with monetary compensation or with special terms of local employment – instead of partners in sustainable conservation and development. Conservation in Arabia is still basically defined by its enclosures for the preservation of flora and fauna and its exclusions of the domesticated herds of pastoral tribes. The land upon which all this takes place is, to say the least, of contested usufruct.



Nature reserve staff taking shade near Wadi Mujib in Jordan: photographed by Joshua Appignanesi during the making of his film Making Nature Work: The Dana Wildlands Project, which will be screened on 17 September during the RAI International Festival of Ethnographic Film at Goldsmiths College, 17-20 September. This 90 minute film explores the impact of global Conservation and Development in the local guise of a large World Bank/ UNDP-funded nature reserve project, which claims to be establishing sustainability within a practical idiom of participation, local involvement and eco-tourism. The film was made in 1996 as part of Appignanesi's dissertation when he was studying social anthropology at King's College Cambridge.

Syria is now studying international conservation proposals to develop its own protected wildlife area in a part of the desert that provides crucial winter and spring grazing for the herds of a number of Bedouin tribes. Not only is the livelihood of these communities at stake, but the government's *de facto* acceptance of tribal rangeland use along side officially recognized co-operatives for such activity is likely to be called into question. If these pastoral people are drawn into the planning and implementation of an efficient management system, which incorporates them and their tribal system of rangeland use, there is a chance that the wildlife conservation project will succeed.

Colonial and post-colonial policy towards indigenous people

In the late 19th century and throughout the first half of this century, conservation meant the preservation of flora and fauna and the exclusion of people. Just as with the formation of Yellowstone National Park in the USA, the army or colonial police force in the developing world has been employed to expropriate and exclude local communities from areas designated as 'protected' often at great social and ecological costs. By the 1940s and 1950s the image of the harmless, pristine native was replaced by that of a dangerous and blundering local. Indigenous populations became more often regarded as impediments not only to the state's conservation policy, but also to its general desire to modernize and develop. Subsistence systems were denigrated, and policies were adopted aimed at sedentarizing pastoralists and shifting their livestock economy from a subsistence to a market basis. These policies were enacted throughout Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Americas, affecting hundreds of thousands of pastoral people.²

Recent alternatives to the traditional conservation paradigm

For several decades now, opinion has grown that argues for a more pluralistic way of thinking about the world and how to change it (e.g. Kuhn 1962, Checkland 1981, Vickers 1981, Pretty 1994). Ecosystems are now more clearly regarded as dynamic and continuously changing, and the importance of people in the actual creation of some of these systems is being acknowledged. This concern is based upon the new understanding of human populations as nurturers and conservers rather than simply destroyers of their own environments.

Omani case study

The earliest expression of interest in conservation in Arabia came about in the middle of this century as the alarming rate at which gazelle, oryx and other 'sporting' animals were being caught or killed became clear. By 1972, the oryx was extinct from Oman and the rest of Arabia. In 1977 a consultant with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) toured extensively through the interior of Oman trying to locate an 'ideal' place for a reintroduction project. He concluded that the ideal habitat for the oryx reintroduction project should be in the Jiddat-il-Harasiis, and concentrated in an area known locally as Yalooni, as it had 'the best vegetated pan on the Jiddat, with resources of grazing, shrub and tree browse' (Stanley Price, 1989: 60). He also recommended that the whole of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis should be proclaimed a wildlife reserve or sanctuary. These recommendations were made without any consideration of the nomadic pastoralists that occupied the region. Nor was there any thought given as to the significance which exclusion from Yalooni would have on the local pastoral Harasiis tribe.

The WWF consultant's recommendations were adopted, and in 1980 the first oryx from the World Herd in the San Diego Zoo were flown back into the country and put into small pens before moving on to a pre-release enclosure of 100 hectares.³ The animals were then closely monitored by the conservation management before being released into the wild. The guidelines which the project staff followed were basically that the animals had to acclimatize to the more extreme climate of Oman. They had to become habituated to the sights, sounds and smells of the new environment and they had to group into a herd and form an attachment to the release areas. Ten Harasiis tribesmen, out of an indigenous population of 3,000, were hired to serve as oryx rangers. They were asked to familiarize themselves with the animals while still in the pre-release enclosures, recognizing and naming each individual so that they could be tracked once let out into the open Jiddat and accurate daily records of their movements kept for the conservation management team to analyse. For the next three years of this project the interaction between the conservation management team and the Harasiis tribe appeared to be without conflict.

Gradually thereafter, difficulties appeared in terms of competition for meagre grazing during prolonged drought between the herds of domestic goat and camel and the reintroduced oryx (Stanley Price 1989: 212-213), between the seven lineages of the Harasiis tribe over privileged access to employment and special benefits, and between the Harasiis and the neighboring Jeneba tribe which had been completely ignored in this conservation effort. The appearance of poaching (first reported in 1986), and its yearly increasing level by Jeneba tribesmen, and – some say – disaffected Harasiis youth, point to the flaws in planning, design and implementation which top-down conservation projects all too often make. Here, in Oman, I had observed the step-by-step development of an animal reintroduction project with near total disregard for the indigenous human population. The idea of setting up an oryx sanctuary in Harasiis traditional territory had never been discussed with the Harasiis, nor had they been consulted on the most suitable area to place such a sanctuary.⁴ The very special significance of Yalooni as an important tribal resource in times of drought was never considered, nor was the impact of their potential exclusion from an area they considered their own. The aims of the project, its obvious potential for cooperation and shared mutual benefit, and the implied restrictions on any Western infrastructural development, were never put forward to the tribal community.

As long as the Harasiis had no aspirations of their own, no desire to see an improvement in their access to water, no desire to have regular road grading, or other infrastructural development in their traditional homeland, relations with the oryx reintroduction project remained untroubled.⁵ In other words, as long as the Harasiis remained in some supposedly pre-modern state of nature, unaffected by changes and developments in their homeland, their presence was tolerated by the conservationist management of the oryx project. But the Harasiis, like people everywhere, were opportunistic. They wished to improve their lives, and had no special desire to remain in some sort of pristine traditional state just for the sake of not changing. The Harasiis came to realize that conservation placed constraints on the use of land and resources they regarded as their own.

At the same time, the age old rivalry between the Harasiis tribe and their embittered neighbours, the Jeneba, found new expression. Although the relation-

ship cannot be proved, the fact that there has been a rapid rise in the rate of poaching (nearly 30 oryx were poached in 1996 alone – 10% of the total herd),⁶ and that those caught have all been Jeneba tribesmen, suggests first, that inter-tribal rivalry is on the rise and second, that the project is not maintaining its popularity, or at least not with the youth of the tribe who grew up during the time when the oryx was extinct and was therefore not a tangible part of their cultural tradition. To these disaffected, largely unemployed youths and rival tribesmen, the oryx sanctuary makes no sense other than to put wild animals first, before people and domesticated herds. They see no benefit to themselves, their families or their community. The opportunity to make some money by illegal poaching and selling across borders thus becomes a difficult temptation to resist, especially as they have only a sense of exclusion from the oryx sanctuary that occupies the prime grazing and browsing area of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis.

Pastoralists in Syria

The pastoral Bedouin tribes of Syria have for decades struggled with two opposing forces: one compelling them to settle on the edges of the desert and engage in marginal agricultural production; the other forcing them to move away to seek multi-resource livelihoods and pastoral subsistence across several national borders (Abu Jaber et al. 1978; Chatty 1986, 1990; Lancaster 1981). Some Bedouin communities – particularly the Sba'a, the Beni Khalid, the Mawali, the Haddiidiin and the Ugaidat – have evolved a sustainable compromise whereby they maintain a fixed agrarian existence for a few months each year on the margins of cultivation, and then spend the winter and spring in the desert with their herds of sheep, goat and occasional camel (Leybourne et al. 1993; Chatty 1996).

The establishment of the independent state in the late 1940s saw the culmination of nearly five decades of sustained efforts to control and breakdown pastoral tribal organization. First during the late Ottoman era and then during the French-controlled mandate period, Bedouin leadership was co-opted into the elite urban political scene, and tribal land holdings, once held in common, were increasingly registered in the names of important tribal families and converted into farms. Some Bedouin units settled on the margins of this agriculture. Many combined some farming with pastoralism, moving their herds out into the *Badia* in late winter and early summer. Others moved away from these border areas, and began settling seasonally in small hamlets in the *Badia*, and keeping their herds on the move for much of the year in search of natural graze and post-harvest stubble.

Between 1946 and 1958 the independent Syrian state set out to coerce its nomadic pastoral population to settle. The rationale behind this policy was no different from previous administrations; the need to establish authority over a difficult-to-reach, 'out of control' population. A series of meetings with tribal leaders culminated on 10 September 1956 with a conference in Damascus, the purpose of which was to make available enough land for the Haddiidiin, Mawali and Sba'a tribes in the region between Aleppo, Hama and Salamiyeh to fully settle (Rae et al., 1997:6).

Conservation of wildlife in the Syrian *Badia*

In 1992 Syria attended meetings of the Commission for Natural Parks and Protected Areas of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Sicily, and negotiated funding for a project to rehabilitate rangeland and to estab-

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Bell, H. 1987. 'Conservation with a human face: conflict and reconciliation in African land use planning'. In *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice*. D. Andrew and R. Grove, eds., pp. 79-101. Cambridge: CUP.

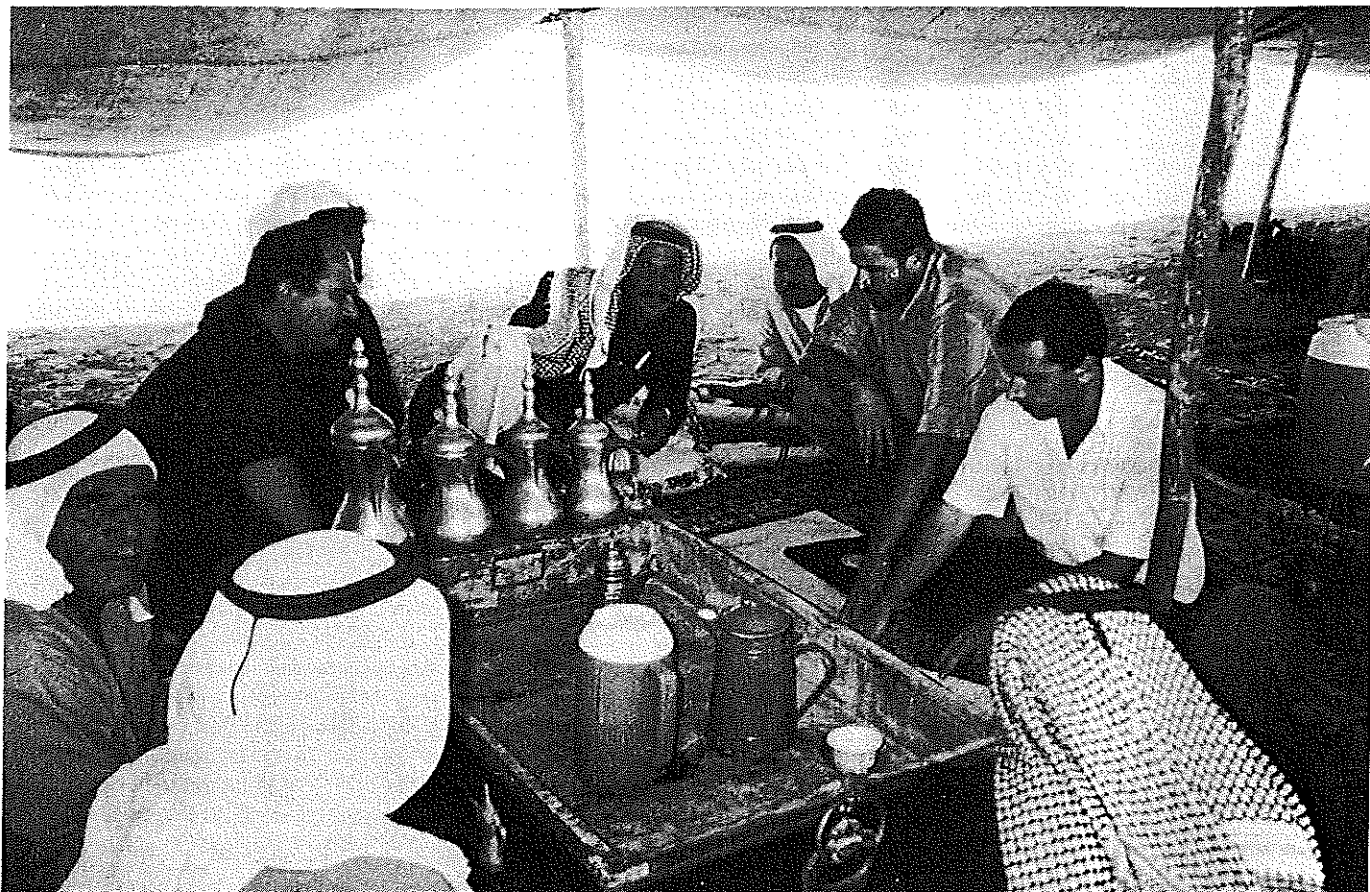
Behnke, R., Scoones, I. and Kerven, C. eds. 1993. *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium: New Models of Natural Variability and Pastoral Adaptation in African Savannas*. London: Overseas Development Inst.

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Bedouin and government officials discussing land use problems, Palmyra, 1997. Photo: Dawn Chatty.

lish a wildlife reserve in the Palmyra *Badia*. The project proposed to address three interrelated issues: diminishing grazing land, disappearing wildlife, and increasing requirements for supplemental feeding of domestic herds. It also proposed to incorporate some of the land holdings of three government cooperatives into protected and enclosed ranges, to set up restrictions on access by Bedouin and their domestic herds, and to run a programme to introduce new plant species. Within two years of operation, it expects to have obtained "higher forage production from the *Al Badia* Rangelands to enable domesticated animals and wildlife to live in harmony on the land" (FAO, 1995:7). In the third and final year of this project, physical boundaries are to be established and "the reserve will only be devoted to wildlife grazing" (FAO, 1995:7). In other words, at the close of the project, the Bedouin and their herds will be excluded from an important area of rehabilitated rangeland.

The project has now commenced its work. A two-metre trench dug around an important grazing area 75 miles by 25 miles identifies the enclosure which houses the reintroduced oryx and gazelle. The project chief technical advisor is in post, as is the international wildlife expert. Eight oryx from the Shaumari Reserve in Jordan and sixteen gazelle from Saudi Arabia have arrived, and are being held in a pre-release enclosure of approximately one and a half miles by two and a half miles. Current thinking is to keep these animals in this enclosure for several years until their safety can be guaranteed on the larger enclosure. Although international conservation experience has repeatedly shown that such projects need the cooperation of indigenous communities, there is nowhere in the project document any requirement to incorporate the Bedouin in its planning, development, or implementation. Instead the indigenous Bedouin population are to be involved in the data recording process and in the discussion of results in order to 'develop their awareness on environmental

protection' (FAO, 1995:11) as a step towards winning their cooperation.

Hema: government managed grazing in the Syrian Badia

In order to more fully understand previous government interaction with the Bedouin and how lessons learned, if any, might inform current conservation policy, it is important to focus briefly on the way in which land management policy in the *Badia* has developed over the past three decades. The 1960s was a period of strenuous government land reform, including the complete seizure of all common tribal land and the confiscation of the large tracts of land owned by tribal leaders.⁷ Following a three-year-long drought in which over two million sheep died, the government instituted a programme to alleviate the problems caused by this ecological disaster. A UN agency was called in to assist in revitalizing the pastoral sector of the Syrian economy and to revive what was perceived as an overgrazed and denuded rangeland. This proved very difficult mainly because the officials running the project did not understand Bedouin methods of animal husbandry.⁸ In turn, the Bedouin had no trust in government, especially in light of the recent confiscation of grazing land, and the explosive expansion of agricultural development over nearly a third of the best rangelands of the *Badia* (Al-Samman 1981:32) – particularly in the area which the Tribal Conference in Damascus had marked out for settlement and agricultural development.⁹

After a number of years of poor project results, a handful of specialists, led by Omar Draz, launched a campaign to convince the government units concerned with rangeland of the importance of studying the people who lived off this land. Draz argued that unless development programmes were in harmony with the customs and ways of life of the pastoral populations, the whole rangeland development scheme would fail. He recommended that the government seriously rethink its ap-

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Pimbert, M. and J. Pretty 1995. *Parks, People and Professionals: Putting Participation into Protected Area Management*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNIRSD). Discussion Paper 57.

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proach. The best means of repairing what was commonly now accepted as damage the Bedouin had caused by overgrazing in the desert was by returning control over management of grazing lands back to the Bedouin. This, he argued, could be done by reviving what he called the 'Bedouin tradition of *hema*' (i.e. managed grazing). His recommendations for what amounted to a return to communal land use, if not ownership, appealed to the Syrian government's socialist orientation and the proposal was accepted. After several years of trial and error, a programme of cooperatives was implemented whereby block applications by tribal units for control over their former traditional grazing lands were generally granted by the government. Each tribal subgroup petitioned the government for permission to form a *hema* cooperative, demarcating, in detail, the area to be set aside, its physical features, and the proposed management and preservation system to be implemented (Draz 1980:13). Once registered, cooperative members elected their own board of directors (usually the tribal leadership) to work along side the government technicians. This board regulated the use of land and monitored the number of livestock owned by each of its members, taxing excess numbers and punishing non-cooperative members. Power and responsibility within a cooperative thus remained within tribal lineages, giving its members a participatory role in the programme.

Between 1969 and 1972, only 8 tribal groups registered as *hema* cooperatives, but this measured, careful Bedouin response was gradually overcome and by the mid 1980s the number of *hema* cooperatives was over 200 with more than 4 million head of sheep. Today perhaps two thirds of Syria's Bedouin population belong to *hema* cooperatives and associated schemes, although government reports (Al-Samman 1981) suggest that number is nearly 90%. As membership has never been mandatory, but the individual choice of a tribesman within a lineage group, the majority of Syria's Bedouin must be joining because they perceive a benefit from doing so. The benefit is both as an individual herd owner and as a tribesman in terms of access to grazing, preferential prices for feed, and some credit facilities.

Despite numerous ups and downs caused by changing legislation, and inadequate restraint on the spread of agriculture into the *Badia*, the current situation, which appears to allow Bedouin a participatory voice in the running of government cooperatives, is an improvement over the uncontrolled grazing of the 1950s and the land confiscations and rigid government regulatory schemes of the 1960s.

Hema cooperatives, enclosures and exclusions

Closer consideration of how the *hema* cooperatives actually function, and what their short-comings are, suggest that alternative systems of recognizing claims to water and pasture are operating in the Syrian *Badia*. The *hema* cooperatives are supposed to regulate the use of government rangeland, the purchase of supplemental feed at reduced rates, and credit facilities. The latter ceased to function at least a decade ago. The reduced rate for supplemental feed, though still in operation, is widely denigrated, as the quality of the feed offered under the socialist regime is inferior to what is available at similar prices on the open market. What remains to be considered is the regulation of government enclosures and the rigidity with which exclusion from range areas is enforced.

During two field trips to the *Badia* in 1997 and 1998, I was struck by how few Bedouin households were camped in pasture areas belonging to their official *hema* cooperative. After asking numerous Bedouin households the same questions I began to realize that nearly all the households were registered in their habitual winter locations where, between November and following February of each season, they tend to remain fixed in one place. Increasingly these encampments have become hamlets made up of cement block houses and adjacent goat-hair tents. For the rest of the year they would be moving their herds to pastures and watering points once officially recognized as under the control of their tribal lineage, but no longer so. However, the lack of official government recognition does not necessarily mean that the lineage and tribal based allocation of resource was not accepted by the government and *hema* officials alike.

As both my visits were in the spring, nearly all the households I visited were from outside the *hema* territory. Some households – those of the camel-breeding Sba'a tribe – were even registered as belonging to a cooperative that had no land attached to it. When I brought this up with the government appointed cooperative officials, they did not find this a problem. Tribal lineage leaders, they explained, could make special, informal arrangement with government to use specific *hema* enclosures when necessary. As long as they made their needs known before hand, there would be no objection.

These two field visits have lead me to conclude that a *modus vivendi* exists in the Syrian *Badia* which allows government to officially control access to enclosed pasture through the *hema* cooperative system, but which also recognizes that an overlapping tribal system of allocation of pasture and water resources exists. As long as the Bedouin are permitted access to enclosures and are not excluded from important pasture areas, these land use systems complement each other. Where difficulties lie ahead is in the projected exclusion of the Bedouin from the wildlife reserve in the Palmyra *Badia*. The Bedouin need to be part of this animal reintroduction effort.¹⁰ Their perceptions of the problems, and the possible solutions which the project raises, need to be taken into account. Their needs for their own herds, their access to grazing land and water within the enclosures, need to be considered as well. For without accommodation of their needs, Bedouin will not support the project, rendering the international wildlife reintroduction effort unsustainable in the long-term.

Government efforts to rehabilitate the Syrian desert rangelands in the 1960s initially failed to meet their objectives. Only when the Bedouin were integrated into project development was there some success (Draz 1977). Thirty years on, government and international development agencies are again proposing to rehabilitate parts of the desert through the establishment of range enclosures and wildlife reserves or enclosures – without any Bedouin consultation (Roeder 1996, FAO 1995). The delicate balance these pastoralists have managed to maintain with their environment is once again threatened by plans which do not take into account their experience, way of life, or indigenous knowledge.

Sustainable conservation requires, above all else, the good will of indigenous populations and not their forced exclusion or displacement. As McCabe and others (1992:353-366) have demonstrated, linking conservation with human development offers the most

Samman, H. 1981. *Al-Birnamaj Al-Suri li Tashin al-Mara'i wa Tarbiyat al-Agnaham* (Syrian Programme for the Improvement of Range and Sheep Production). Damascus: Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform.

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promising course of action for long-term sustainability of nature and human life. Nature reserves and other protected areas must be placed into a regional context. If the economy of the human population is in a serious state of decline, the establishment of a wildlife reserve in their midst does not augur well. The population is unlikely to see any benefit from such a scheme and co-operation is unlikely. If, on the other hand, the problems of the human population are addressed and the community envisages benefit from a combined conservation / development scheme, then cooperation and long-term successes are possible. □

1. There are numerous examples of such forced expulsions in Africa. In 1941 thousands of local Berber were excluded from an area of 40,000 hectares that historically provided important summer pasture land, in order to create the Toubkal National Park in Morocco (E. Fanning 1995). In the early 1960s, several thousand inhabitants of 14 villages and seasonal camps in Chad were forcibly removed from their homes under threat of having their homes and crops burned if they did not vacate by a certain date. Not enumerated, but as affected, were a large number of pastoralists from the northern Sahel who were also prohibited from using key pasture lands that had been confiscated to create the Zakouma National Park (Moorehead and Diakite 1991). More recently some 20,000 Maasai, of whom a colourful political history exists of voluntarily accepting exclusion from the Serengeti in Tanzania in return for restricted access to the Ngorongoro Conversation Area, have faced further expulsions (Homewood and Rodgers 1984).

2. The Maasai, the Berber, the Bedouin, the Qashqai, the Kirgiz, the Khazak, the Mongols, the Shoshone, the Apache and numerous other native American peoples are but a few of the indigenous peoples that have suffered forcible eviction from community land resources, or faced 'forced immobilization' through government settlement projects.

3. Oryx from the Los Angeles Zoo were sent to Israel in 1978 to establish a captive herd in a large reserve in the Negev desert. In the same year, oryx from the World Herd were sent to Shaumari Wildlife Reserve in Jordan, a fenced area of 22 square kilometres (Stanley Price 1989: 63).

4. One Harasiis tribesman was consulted. This was a contact of the British expatriate advisor from his days as a liaison offer for the national oil company. But he was not part of the political leadership of the tribe, who were not consulted, in fact, until the handover of Yalooni was a *fait accompli* (See Chatty 1996:136).

5. A confrontation over grazing competition in the mid 1980s should have raised the alarm with conservationists. Several oryx calves had been frightened either by the Harasiis camps or the presence of their goats, and the oryx reintroduction manager requested that the Harasiis move away from an area of good graze. Some refused. They simply could not understand why the survival of their herds of goats should be held less important than a few wild oryx.

6. The estimated number of oryx poached in 1996 is drawn from a number of informants both of the Jiddat itself and in the capital, Muscat. The former manager of the oryx project station at Yalooni, Roddy Jones, pointed out to me that the pattern of poaching in the Jiddat was suggestive of traditional tribal raiding. The Jenaba obviously see the oryx as 'belonging to the Harasiis'. So the act of poaching is an expression of economic and political rivalry.

7. The leaders of the major Bedouin tribes, while continuing to enjoy a moral authority bestowed upon them by tribal members, were, by this time, well established members of the urban, political and economic elite (Chatty 1977). Evidence in the 1980s suggests that some tribal leaders cooperated with the state security services in exchange for some formal recognition of their land use rights in the *Badia*.

8. Bedouin animal husbandry is based on risk minimalization rather than the more common western market profit motivation. See Shoup 1990:200.

9. The Bedouin 'dry farmed' cereal crops during years of good rain, but the large-scale cultivation in this arid zone had never occurred before.

10. The Bedouin of Syria and North Arabia, in general, used to hunt gazelle with saluki dogs. This sport – recalled with fondness by many – died out 30-40 years ago as the gazelle became extinct. Today it is only the occasional Kuwaiti hunting party that makes its way into the *Badia*, usually in search of bustard. Were the reintroduced oryx and gazelle ever to be released from their present enclosures, the Bedouin would need to be actively coopted to protect these animals from being hunted.

Breast cancer

Reading the omens

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When Azande ask about health or marriage or hunting they are seeking information about the movement of psychic forces which might cause them misfortune. They do not attempt simply to discover the objective conditions at a certain point of time in the future, nor the objective results of a certain action, but the inclination of mystical powers, for those conditions and the result depend upon them. ... Hence when the oracle paints a black horizon for a man he is glad to have been warned because now that he knows the dispositions of witchcraft he can get into touch with it and have the future changed to be more favourable to him. ... [A] man's future health and happiness depend on future conditions that are already in existence and can be exposed by the oracles and altered. The future depends on the disposition of mystical forces that can be tackled here and now. Moreover, when the oracles announce that a man will fall sick, ... his 'condition' is therefore already bad, his future is already part of him.

E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1937)

The art and science of divination has been a preoccupation of people everywhere, and continues to exert a hold over perhaps the majority of the world's population. Whether its practice concerns an examination of the entrails of sacrificed birds or animals, or the patterns of cracks in heated animal bones, the lining up of yarrow stalks according to the rules of the I Ching (*The Book of Changes*), or consultation with oracles in trance-like states, divination produces knowledge not readily available to ordinary people, knowledge that forms the basis for action. Historical and anthropological research suggests that a primary concern during di-

vinatory proceedings addresses explanations for what has already taken place, for it is in the reconstruction of past events that causes of misfortune are uncovered and moral responsibility is assigned, on the basis of which, suitable action can be determined (Reynolds White 1997:6).

Divination does not, however, simply link the past to the present. Omens for the future are also central to many divinatory practices. Nadia Seremataki's research in the Inner Mani reveals how 'warnings' – the interpretations by gifted women of divinatory practices and of their own dreams – permit the bringing together of events, people and meanings usually separated by time and space in everyday life, because dreams and divination do not comply with a lineal temporality. Exactly where and on whom the danger will alight is not usually foretold by the women, but in re-telling their dreams, they frequently speculate about whom the dream 'targets' (1991: 61-63).

The new technology of genetic testing permits us to divine our past, and to make that heritage – in the form of genes – into omens for the future. In this article on breast cancer and the concept of risk, I will argue that although genetic testing permits us to speculate with more precision than was previously the case about who may be struck with misfortune, a characteristic feature of divination nevertheless remains, namely that in seeking to avoid misfortune we create new ambiguities and uncertainties (Lambek 1993; Reynolds White 1997; Wikan 1990). Second, this powerful new technology