



**T.C.  
YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**THE BLACK TENT OF BEDOUINS IN JORDAN:  
CULTURE, HOME DESIGN AND SPACE USE**

**by**

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**Submitted to the Institute of Graduate Studies in Social Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Anthropology**

**ISTANBUL, 2008**

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**/ /2008**



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YEDİTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ  
SOSYAL ANTROPOLOJİ ANABİLİM DALI

18 / 03 / 2008

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZ SAVUNMA TUTANAĞI

Yüksek Lisans öğrencilerinden Aysegül Taşbaşı  
18/03/2008 tarihinde "The Black Tent of Bedouins in Jordan:  
Culture, Home Design and Space Use"

başlıklı tezini savunmuş ve aday oy birliği / oy çokluğu ile,

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 Başarısız  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Here, I would like to thank to my advisor Mari Ito Alptürer who encouraged me and helped me locate some of the sources about my topic, and I am thankful to her for her attention and her patience. In addition, I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Akile Gürsoy, Chair of the Anthropology Department at Yeditepe University, Prof. Dr. Bozkurt Güvenç, Yard.Doç. Sevil Baltalı Tırpan, and Doç.Dr. Feza Tansuğ for their support and guidance.

I am also indebted to the following people: Dr. Muhammad Shunnaq, Yarmouk University, who accepted me and helped me with patience; Makbule Terzi, my sister and a dear friend who never abandoned me and always encouraged me when I was doing my research in Jordan and Türkiye; Imad Abu Rayyan, who assisted me and was always together with me, in traveling in Jordan during my trips; Saleh Farajat, for his help during my fieldwork; and my precious friend, Özden Uslu, Yeditepe University; my friend and my daughter Arzu Sarı, Boğaziçi University; Onur Sarıaban; and Gregory Cowan, Mongolian Construction Technology College, who agreed to spare their valuable time to help me during the theoretical research and fieldwork.

I also would like to acknowledge my appreciation here to all Bedouins who agreed to share their life and their tents with me.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and my friends for their continuing support, patience, and understanding during these stressful and difficult times. The final word of thanks goes to my husband, my sponsor, İnkılap Taşbaşı for always being with me.

AYŞEGÜL TAŞBAŞI

December, 2007



## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis presents a study of the relationship between home, society, and culture among Bedouins. Literature was reviewed on such topics as architectural anthropology, place, dwelling, environment, home, and anthropological analysis of home design. The purpose of the study was to explore the culture of Bedouin society through an analysis of their dwelling places, known as the “black tent.” In order to understand Bedouin culture, it was considered crucial to study the tent as an exemplar of vernacular architecture. The fieldwork was conducted with *Huwaitat* tribes in the Wadi Rum and Petra regions of Jordan. During the fieldwork, Bedouin culture was studied through participant observation of their lives in and around black tents. The observation and analysis was constructed according to Canter’s (1977) “Theory of Place,” in which place is perceived as the interrelationship between physical attributes, actions, and concepts or meanings. It was observed that the space inside the tent was organized according to group-based notions of privacy, and not only the space use but also ritualistic activities such as coffee-drinking were employed as means of non-verbal communication. These findings illustrated the unique way in which religion and faith shape the cultural life and living space of the Bedouins.

## ÖZET

Bu tez, ev, toplum ve kültür arasındaki ilişkinin araştırılması üzerine bir çalışmadır. Literatür taramasında, mimari antropoloji, mekanlar, yapılar, çevre ve ev biçimlerinin antropolojik analizleri kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı kara çadırdaki yaşayan bedevi toplumunun ve kültürünün araştırılmasıdır. Bedevi kültürünü anlamının odak noktası geleneksel mimarilerini, yani yaşadıkları çadırlarıdır. Bu çalışma Ürdün'ün Wadi Rum ve Petra bölgelerinde yaşayan Huwaitat kabilesinde yapılmıştır. Bu çalışma Bedevi kültürünü kara çadır etrafında ve onların yaşamı üzerinde katılımcı gözlemlerle incelemiştir. Gözlemler ve analizler Canter'in (1977) "Theory of Place" adlı eseri esas alınarak yapılmıştır. Bu teoriye göre mekan, fiziksel özellikler, çadır içinde yapılan aktiviteler ve bunların anlamları arasındaki ilişkiler değerlendirilmiştir.

Burada görülmüştür ki, çadırın içindeki mekan, topluluk merkezli mahremiyet üzerine kurulmuştur. Sadece mekan kullanımı olarak değil; aynı zamanda kahve sunumu gibi sözel olmayan geleneksel törensel işlevleri de içermektedir. Yapılan araştırma ve gözlemler göstermiştir ki, din ve inanç, Bedeviler'in kültürlerini ve yaşam mekanlarını şekillendirmektedir.

## **PREFACE**

Throughout my life, I have always compared and analyzed people's behavior in order to understand the differences between one society and the other. As a sociology student in college, I realized that there are certain differences among people and I wanted to dig deeper into these differences in order to understand the nature and the reasons behind these differences. The answer I ultimately arrived at was culture. Since then, I have been trying to understand what culture is and why it differs from society to society. I was interested in human behavior and culture and I found myself getting involved in anthropology. It was my respected lecturer, Prof. Bozkurt Güvenç, who taught me during my study for my Masters degree in anthropology that "an anthropologist must examine the culture/society cross-culturally that is, unknown to himself/herself." With this idea, I decided to study the Bedouins in Jordan—because I had no information about them, thus I could be objective while I was doing my research. I turned to my advisor, Mari Ito Alptürer for guidance. She encouraged me in my scholarly quest and I went to Jordan. When I examined the lives of the Bedouins, it was their tents that drew my attention in particular. I wanted to understand how the Bedouins lived in their tents and how they live and expressed their culture by doing so. Afterwards, I began to gather information about the Bedouins and their tents. My trips to Jordan helped me acquire first hand information from Bedouin people face to face. I tried to spend as much time as I could afford with the Bedouin people.

## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

In traditional societies, the relationship between culture and dwelling is direct and immediate. The architectural form of the living space encodes and exhibits cultural and social rules and conventions. Vernacular architecture is a direct expression of the lifestyle and the culture of a community. Here, definition of vernacular architecture can be useful, “Vernacular means native, indigenous, home-born, by the people, i.e., popular, folkish or rather folklorish (as opposed to literary, metropolitan, civic and artistic), local, provincial or parochial (as opposed to country or nation-wide, the international, the scientific or academic)” (Güvenç, cited in, Turan 1990: 285). Turan describes that, “vernacular architecture is a practical activity pursuing environmental adequacy rather than knowledge; it is a way of acting within the conditions of existence, fulfilling certain environmental needs for a particular group of people” (Turan 1990: 15). This thesis is based upon a study of the Bedouins’ black tent as an example of vernacular architecture from a social anthropological perspective of the cultural system.

“Architectural anthropology comprises the anthropological study of the building activities and the processes of construction that produce human settlements, dwellings and other buildings, and built environments” (Egenter1995: 34, cited in, Amerlinck 2001:3). “The central question in architectural anthropology is: How do people who are imbued with cultural significance at all levels (material, symbolic, social) shape buildings while being, in turn, shaped by them? The traditional transmission of constructive processes and the production of highly-valued objects are considered to be widespread and highly stereotypical behavior in traditional societies” (Amerlinck 2001: 3).

To conduct research in the field of architectural anthropology, anthropologists must first start by understanding one of the most basic characteristics of human dwellings: the fundamental act of building a house and making a home. The house is one of the first places that anthropologists enter when they attempt to engage their human subjects and immerse themselves in another culture. When they step through the door of a house into

an unknown world filled with unfamiliar people, they first have to deal with the spatial arrangement of the rooms, with various household objects and with their own predefined status as outsiders in the domestic arrangement that they encounter. Who is who? Who lives where? Who sleeps where? Which spaces do people occupy within the house? As an anthropologist, the researcher's main goal is to answer the question of how people inhabit their homes and use their living spaces in specific cultures.

The topic of this thesis was chosen primarily because the environment in which people live their day-to-day lives has not been sufficiently explored or investigated by anthropologists. Research in the area of architectural anthropology has usually been conducted by architects rather than anthropologists, and a review of the literature indicates that the main focus of existing research has been on the built form. Although anthropologists have traditionally studied (and continue to study) numerous different cultural products, they have not shown much scholarly interest in studying residential buildings in different cultures. Therefore, the present thesis is an anthropologist's attempt at doing research in architectural anthropology, whose focus is on the spatial arrangement within the home. In this sense, this thesis can be properly classified as a study of the anthropology of residential space. Based on the idea that social scientists must be objective and neutral toward the topic they investigate, the researcher chose to investigate the Bedouins in Jordan and their black tents, subjects with which the researcher was not familiar prior to the research.

The thesis explores the culture of the Bedouins who live in Jordan and their influence on the physical form and the function (i.e., the practical use) of their residential place-tent. It is clear that deep anthropological insight into Bedouin culture cannot be gained without first understanding their material culture, which requires the study of house design and use as a significant aspect of that culture. In order to comprehend the unique characteristics of Bedouin culture that distinguish the Bedouins from other communities, the tent of the Bedouins should be investigated as a dwelling place and an expression of vernacular architecture, since tents are still largely unexplored in this respect. Thus, the purpose of the fieldwork that forms the foundation of this thesis is to explore the day-to-

day lives of the Bedouins in Jordan as it revolves around their black tents. By focusing on the socio-physical environment of their tents, the thesis aims to reveal deeply-rooted connections between the dwellings and Bedouin culture.

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 presents a literature review on the key topics relevant to this study, such as culture and environment, dwelling, place, and house design, which form the theoretical framework of the thesis. Furthermore, a description of the Bedouins and their black tents, introducing their general socio-cultural backgrounds together with a review of some anthropological studies of the Bedouins are included in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 puts forth and explains the field work of the study, Chapter 4 describes the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 consists of the discussion section and the conclusion of the thesis.



Fig. 1. A Map of Jordan, (<http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/jordan.html>, last accessed January 25, 2008).

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Dwelling, Place and Environment**

The sense of belonging to a particular place, feeling like a part of it, instills a positive sensation of security in most human beings. Heidegger (1971: 144) has stated that, “Humans do not inhabit like animals do, they dwell and that dwelling takes place not so much in a site or environment as in a world.” He has further argued that, “We are all thrown into the world, to dwell is to be at home at a certain place, to be rooted and to belong there”.

Norberg Schulz (1980), an influential architect, has presented a theory about place that focuses on the quality of a personal existential existence or state of being in the world. Schulz defines place as, “space plus character.” According to him, the existential purpose of the act of building is to make a site become a place that uncovers the meanings potentially present in the environment.

Schulz (1980) argues that an important role of architecture is to provide the physical features of a place that allow a person to dwell in that space. According to him:

“Two psychological functions are considered important in a place: orientation and identification. As a result, to gain an existential foothold, a person has to be able to orientate himself/herself, and has to know where he/she is. At the same time, he/she has to identify himself/herself with the environment, in that he/she has to know how he/she is in that place” (Schulz 1980, cited in Sime 1986: 51).

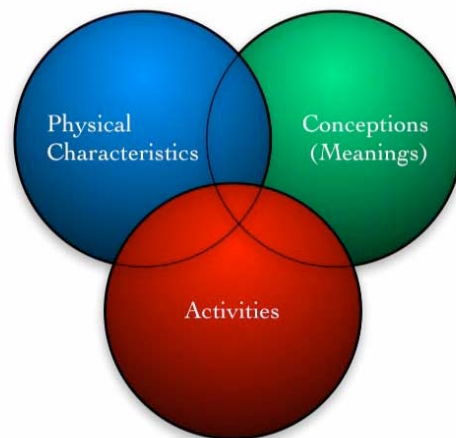
The discussions of a humanistic geographer, Relph (1976), continue to be a remarkable conceptual guide to the phenomenology of place. According to Relph, a place is a whole phenomenon, consisting of three intertwined elements:

- 1) Physical features or appearance,



- 2) Observable activities and functions,
- 3) Meanings and symbols (Relph 1976: 61).

The physical aspects of a place cannot be separated from the activities that take place in it and the meanings or associations that people have of that particular place. According to Canter's Theory of Place (1977), one cannot look at the physical form of a place alone, but must focus on the relationship between what people actually do there, what they think and how they feel about it, and what they intend to do there. According to Canter's theory, places are defined by a combination of their physical characteristics, the activities performed there, and the significance (i.e., the meanings) that places have for people (Canter, 1977: 158). In Canter's words, "a place is the result of relationships between actions, conceptions and physical attributes" (Canter, 1977: 158).



**Fig. 2.** Theory of Place (adapted from Canter, 1977).

Canter presents four main hypotheses in his Theory of Place:

1. There are focused units of environmental experience, which are called "places."
2. These aspects of experience incorporate personal, social, and cultural constituents of person-place interactions.
3. Each of the constituents will be reflected in the functional, spatial, and formal

aspects of a place.

4. For any given place, there will be structural similarities in the ways in which psychological constituents are reflected in the aspects of the place. (Canter 1991: 118, cited in, Ito 2003).

Environment, which is related to the concept of “place,” is a powerful determinant of customs, lifestyles, and behavior in different cultures. For instance, Ibn Khaldun talks about the effect of the environment on Bedouin culture: “Bedouins must move around the desert regions during the winter, in flight from the harmful cold to the warm desert air.” He emphasizes the wild and nomadic nature of the Bedouins, who are fully accustomed to their roaming, wandering lifestyle, and to the consequences of their wildness. Furthermore, he claims that, “the very nature of their existence is the negotiation with nature in building a dwelling, which is a basis of civilization” (Ibn Khaldun, cited in, Bin Muhammad 1999: 27).

Environmental conditions are very important in shaping the structural design and character of traditional housing units. Evans & Schiller (1995: 123) explain in their study that, “The climate of Buenos Aires is characterized by mild winters, hot and humid summers and significant rainfall distributed throughout the year. The “sausage house, casa chorizo,” presents a row of rooms connected by an open gallery which allows a similarly close relation between the indoor and outdoor space”.

According to the rule-role perspective of Canter (1977), environmental role is defined as the role a person is assumed to have in relation to the environment, which influences the types of his/ her interaction with the physical environment. Place rules are prescribed by the culture of the society, and they can be defined as socially accepted principles of the use of a particular place. Being in different places means the change of role and rule, socially defined rules and roles are usually given significance by the particular culture.

## 2.2 Culture and Home Design

Pierre Bourdieu (1990, cited in, Young: 73) illustrates the special importance of the house in the reproduction of “habitus.” He argues that, “people learn a culture-specific habitus unreflectingly and that the process of learning a habitus has a lasting, constraining influence on thought, feeling and behavior”. Habitus refers to the system of transposable schemes of perception, thought, and action within a given culture. “Inhabited space is the principal locus for the objectification of the generative schemes and through the intermediary of the division and hierarchies it sets up between things, persons and practices, this tangible classifying system continuously inculcates and reinforces the taxonomic principles underlying all the arbitrary provisions of the culture” (cited in Layne: 54).

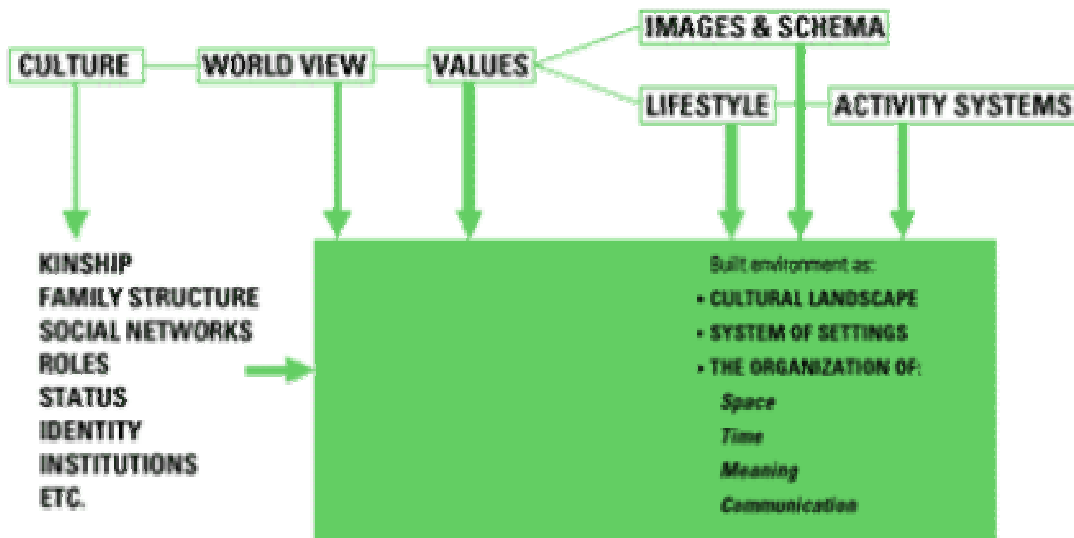
In this respect, Serageldin (1995) explains:

“Norms and customs of different cultural groups are reflected in their use of space, home configuration and design. Human beings decorate and furnish what they use and articulate their living spaces in terms of their own culture. The determinants of behaviour are encoded in the cultural framework with which an individual identifies, and they are reinforced by the social context in which an individual lives” (Serageldin, 1995: 196).

In anthropology, culture has an important role in defining humanity; thus, we have to first clarify our task by asking the question: What is culture? Rapoport (1969) describes culture as, “[a] way of life typical of a group; a system of symbols, meanings, and cognitive schemata transmitted through symbolic codes; a set of adaptive strategies for survival related to ecology and resources. Culture can be said to be about a group of people who have a set of values and beliefs which embody ideals, and are transmitted to members of the group through enculturation” (Rapoport, 1996: 9).

Rapoport (1969, 1977) associated home and community design with cultural factors. At

the “city” level, he explicitly noted the compatibility between cultural values and architectural and community design. For example, certain cultures emphasize privacy in the traditional sense of reducing stimulation, perhaps due to population concentration or various other reasons, and this cultural value is often reflected in the community design observed in these societies. Cultural factors are thus reflected in environmental design.



**Fig. 3.** Using Culture in Housing Design, adapted from Rapoport (2000: 149).

However, it should be noted that culture is not the sole determining factor in housing design. Rapoport (1969) argues that housing and community design are the complex products of numerous factors, including cultural, physical, economic, and religious ones. He rejects a single-variable causation approach, and instead argues that cultural variables are central to housing and community design and that physical factors, such as climate and the availability of technological advancements, are modifiers of cultural influences. Rapoport also observes that cultures can be distinguished in terms of their environmental design processes.

Low has made the following observation, which relates directly to Rapoport’s views with

respect to the relationship between design and culture:

“Design is also a culture-making process in which ideas, values, norms and beliefs are spatially and symbolically expressed in the environment to create new cultural forms and meanings. Designed environments can be created by human ecological forces, such as patterns of settlement created by farming techniques; by direct human intervention based on cultural traditions or historical context, such as vernacular architecture; and by direct, self-conscious professional intervention, such as an architect’s design for a high style building. Design, thus, refers both to the given form and the form-giving properties of the built environment” (Low, 1988: 187).

From an anthropological perspective, design is defined as one aspect of material culture, that is, “cultural ideas expressed spatially in a physical form” (Kent 1984 cited in, Low: 187). Cultural aspects of design focus on the complex relationship, interaction, and correspondence between cultural processes and principles of design. Within anthropology, this complexity of relationship, interaction, and correspondence is usually studied in terms of the spatial patterning of the environment and the spatial arrangement of the social world. Space, as well as time, is given meaning through its symbolic and metaphorical ordering (Fernandez, 1986 cited in, Low: 187). And the basis of that order is culture. Social life and the social space that surrounds it are seen as dialectical; each accommodates and recreates the other.

There are cultural and other culture-related factors that also shape and influence the design of homes and living spaces. For instance, nomadic life is associated with tents and other movable residences, as exemplified by Mongolian Yurts or the living spaces American Indians, who use movable tents and transport systems.

In another example, Rapoport (1969) describes how sex roles are reflected in the home designs of the Tuareg nomads of Northern Africa. The entry to a Tuareg tent faces the south, with the men’s section located on the east side and the women’s section on the

west side. In societies with extended kinship systems, people in the same kin group often live under the same roof, or in separate-but-proximate quarters. Some societies provide separate space within the home for men and women.

In addition, Rapoport (1969) also emphasizes, as do Gauvain & Altman (1982), that physical conditions, such as temperature, humidity, wind, rain, and the availability of construction materials all affect and play a role in shaping the form of housing. “During the hot summer months Bedouins of the Middle East pitch their tents close together around limited water sources and leave the tents completely open, yielding close contact among neighbors” (Faegre 1979 cited in Gauvain & Altman 1982: 40).

With regard to the connection between home and identity, there are a number of notable anthropological examples. For example, Faegre has written that, “Bedouin nomads live in tents made of large strips of cloth woven from goat hair or wool” (Faegre, 1979, cited in Cowan, 2002). The number and name of each strip remains the same from group to group; however, the length of the strip depends upon the importance and social status of the individual owner. The strips have designs that are associated with a particular tribe or clan, but their embellishments also reflect the unique talents of the women who weave the material. In addition, “the “*gata*”—a curtain that separates women and men area of the tent—contains elaborate woven designs. The front of this curtain extends beyond the tent opening and is positioned to face outward for all to see” (Gauvain & Altman 1982: 31).

### **2.3 Bedouins**

What is the meaning of Bedouin? “The English word Bedouin derives from the Arabic term used today by the townspeople and villagers; *badawi* (singular), *bedu* (plural), meaning desert dweller” (Weir 1976: ix).

The word Bedouin stems from the Arabic “*badiya*,” which means “desert,” and it signifies the “simplicity of living” (cited in Roks Bin Za’ed Aluozizi, note of Dr.

Muhammad Shunnaq). In contemporary Jordanian parlance, the word “*bedu*” obviously refers to the Bedouins, and the word “*asha’ir*”<sup>1</sup> is used to denote “the settled tribes” (even though the word “*asha’ir*” technically means “all the tribes,” including the “semi-nomadic tribes” and the Bedouins). And finally, the term “*asha’ir al-badiya*” (literally meaning “the tribes of the desert”) is used to refer to the semi-nomadic tribes (Bin Muhammad 1999: 9).

As Ibn Khaldun has observed, the Bedouins are primarily desert dwellers. He writes that, “They make their living by raising camels and wander deeper into the desert, because the hilly pastures with their plants do not furnish the right subsistence for camels. They must feed on the desert shrubs and drink the salty desert water. They must move around the desert regions during the winter, in flight from the harmful cold to the warm desert air” (Ibn Khaldun 1981 cited in, Bin Muhammad: 27). He adds, “Bedouins restrict themselves to the necessary in food, clothing, and mode of dwelling, and to the other necessary conditions and customs. They do not possess conveniences and luxuries. They use tents of hair and wool.... The food they take is either little prepared or not prepared at all, save that it may have been touched by fire. They make their living by raising camels.... The Bedouins live apart from the community. They are alone in the open and remote from city. They have no walls or gates” (Ibn Khaldun 1981 cited in, Bin Muhammad: 28).

According to Layne (1994), “the term Bedouin comes from the same root as *badiya* (desert or steppe) and literally means desert dweller. Generally the term refers to pastoral nomads and encompasses a constellation of characteristics—residence location (the *badiya*), the residence type (goat-hair tent), residence pattern (nomadic), and a particular form of pastoralism” (:13). Furthermore, she adds that, “Bedouin deal with where and how tribes people homes in tents, in changing locations, in the desert” (:53).

The definition of a “Bedouin” also comprises the lifestyle associated with desert

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<sup>1</sup> *Ashira* means, in kinship and family, two or more lineages that have real ties of consanguinity and affinity and who live together in one place and have real interest among each others. (Note of Dr. Shunnaq).

dwelling. In other words, the term “Bedouin” embodies the idea of nomadism. Furthermore, the Jordanian anthropologist Mohammad Abu Hassan asserts (1984) that a Bedouin community must have certain specific characteristics, such as the following:

- a) Habitation in deserts,
- b) Source of livelihood,
- c) Tribal mobility, and,
- d) Provisions of the law (cited in, Layne 1994: 14).

When one consults written sources for information about the Bedouins, one finds that there are numerous, varying descriptions of the Bedouins. Nevertheless, all of these descriptions share and focus on two main criteria in their portrayals of the Bedouins:

- a) Bedouins are desert dwellers.
- b) Bedouins live in tents.

In any discussion concerning the Bedouins, we must take note of the issues surrounding tribes and tribalism. Tribalism is very important in the larger Jordanian society, and the bonds of tribalism and tribes bind the Bedouins together as well. Bin Muhammad (1999: 12) has observed that, “[the] majority of Jordan is still tribal, even to this day”. One can comprehend the importance of tribalism in modern Jordanian society by paying attention to King Husayn’s words:

“Most recently, I have noticed that some articles have been directed against the tribal life, its norms and traditions. This is most regrettable because it harms a dear sector of our society. I would like to repeat to you what I have told a meeting of tribal heads recently that ‘I am al- Hussein from *Hashem* and *Quraish*, the noblest Arab tribe of Mecca, which was honored by God and into which was born the Arab Prophet Mohammad. Therefore, whatever harms our tribes is considered harmful to us, and this has been the case all along, and it will continue so forever” (Shryock 1997: 7).



We can assert that the Bedouin tribes have also come to symbolize Jordan's national identity. If one divides Jordan into three geographical parts, the most important tribes in each of these areas are: in the north, the *Beni Khalid*; in central Jordan, *Beni Sakhr*, which "was the most powerful tribe in Jordan" (Bin Muhammad 1999: 10); and, in the south, the *Huwaitat* tribe, the last of which is the subject of this research project and the thesis. The members of the *Huwaitat* tribe constitute approximately 80 percent of the Bedouin population in Jordan. Unfortunately, there has been very little written information about the *Huwaitat* tribe to date. Nevertheless, we know that they fought against the Turks with T.E. Lawrence (also known as "Lawrence of Arabia") during the First World War. Jureidini (1984) provides us with further information about this tribe: "The *Huwaitat* was the first major Transjordanian tribe to succumb to Glubb's blandishments and became the backbone of the Desert Mobile force. Eventually, this force emerged as the foundation for the Jordan Arab Army, and the tribal members continue to contribute significantly to the forces of the Jordanian Army today." (Jureidini, cited in, Taylor 2005: 11). Furthermore, Weir (1976) has written that, "The *Huwaitat* groups are today primarily sheep and goat herders, though some have changed from camel herding only recently. Many *Huwaitat* have given up their nomadic way of life during the last decades and taken up agriculture" Weir (1976: ix), provide some additional knowledge about the *Huwaitat* tribe.

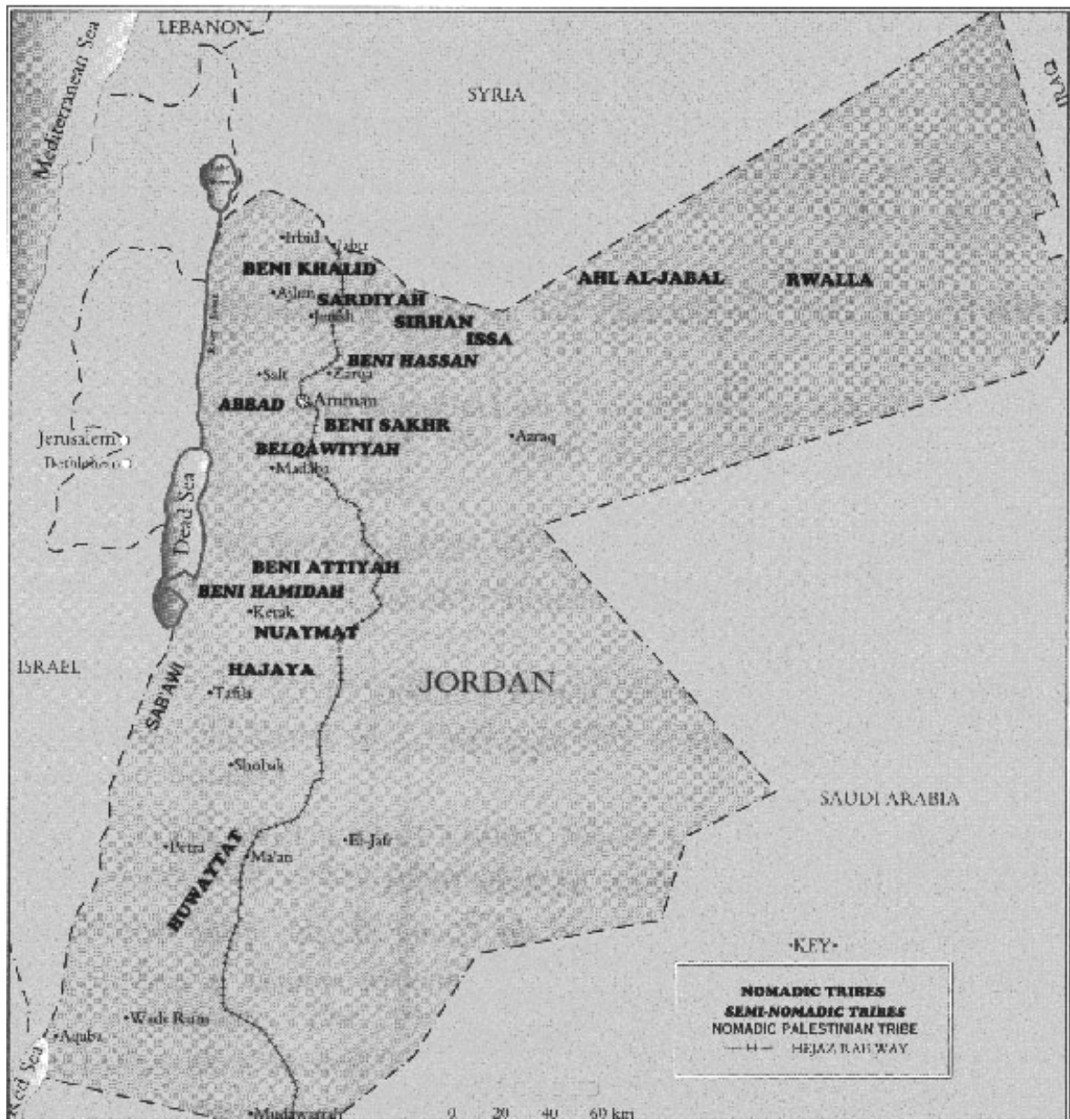


Fig. 4. A Map of Jordan and its Tribes (Bin Muhammad 1999: 65).

## 2.4 Bedouin's Social Structure

The unpredictability of desert life demands mobility from the Bedouins and requires that individual households be able to move separately during certain seasons and then come together in larger units at other times. Through time, their tents have been adapted to these requirements.

In earlier studies, tribal people have described their social system as segmentary; that is, the tribe resembles a pyramid composed of ascending segments or levels, each of which is both a political and a social group. (Metz 1989).

For example, Cole writes that, “The social structure of Bedouins comprises a series of concentric circles. In the center is the household (*biet\**), then the lineage (*fakhed\**), the clan (*ashirah\**),<sup>2</sup> the tribe (*qabila\**), the nation (*umma\**), the Arab world, and the world of Islam. Each circle brings more people into relationship with the household in the center. That the household is an autonomous and independent unit at the center of their social world is a consequence of their ecological adaptation as camel nomads. Each household owns and is exclusively responsible for its own herd, the basis of their subsistence. The other units of their society provide them protection and a general framework within which to organize their herding activities on a regular basis. But their situation demands flexibility and the household quite often has to operate entirely on its own. The segmentary system, which provides for household autonomy instead of lineage or tribal dominance, provides this flexibility” (Cole 1975: 104).

Bedouin society is exclusively patrilineal, and all members of a tribe claim descent by male lineage from a common ancestor. The eldest male in each household is recognized and accepted as the ruler of the family unit. Family ties are extremely strong and they are

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<sup>2</sup> All Arabic definitions have been written by Dr. Shunnaq.

reinforced by the practice of endogamy within the tribe, preferably via patrilineal parallel cousin marriage. Each family unit has a strong sense of collective honor and loyalty, which it defends against all other groups. For the Bedouins, blood is an essential component of their cultural identity. The members of a kin group are all jointly responsible for each of its individual members in matters of morals and honor, which leads to various forms of collective action and punishment, including blood vengeance and honor killings.

## 2.5 The Black Tent

Bedouins generally have a nomadic lifestyle and that is why they mostly live in tents (It should be noted that there are many settled tribes in Jordan as well). The black tent is, as a dwelling place, very suitable for the desert environment and the nomadic lifestyle. Cowan (2002) writes that, “the black tent is incidental, portable and temporary” (:80), and he adds, “the black tent of the Middle East is possibly the best recognized form of nomadic architecture to this day” (:83). He goes on to describe the black tent by asserting that. “the black tent does not represent a dwelling or home, but rather, must be seen as one element of a complete system of life” (:84). Furthermore, Young (1996) supports the idea put forth by Cowan with these words:

“The *Rashiidi*<sup>3</sup> tent is more than just a shelter. It is an organized living space in which a whole series of meaningful distinctions and oppositions are made visible. The ground outside is not the same as the ground inside; the right foot is not the same as the left foot; the front of the tent is opposed to its back, and many other oppositions (pure/impure, male/female, east/west) are implied by people’s behaviour” (Young 1996: 72).

The main criteria for describing tents, based on Feilberg’s (1944) schema are:

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<sup>3</sup> *Rashiidi* is the adjectival form of *Rashaayda*. A man belonging to the *Rashaayda* tribe is a *Rashiidi*.

- Nature of the skin or awning and the means of its reinforcement
- Ties or fastenings used in the tent
- Poles and stakes used in the tent
- Tensioning of the awning
- Tent walls
- Interior arrangement of the tent
- Erection and dismantling of the tent (Feilberg 1944, cited in Cowan: 105).

Bedouins refer to the black tent as “*al- bayt*” or “*bayt al-shar,*” which literally mean “house” and “house of hair,” respectively. According to Layne, “*Bayt* represents not only the home, it represents the people who inhabit them” (Layne 1994: 56). Weir explains that, “The main components of the tent are the roof, walls, poles and guy ropes. The roof is a rectangular cloth supported in the centre and at the edges on poles and anchored by guy ropes. The tent is normally divided into two sections by a woven curtain (*sahah*), which is suspended from the tent poles. Tents are differentiated by the number of centre poles (*wasat*) they have, and vary in size according to the size and wealth of the family. A one poled tent is called *gatbeh*, two poled, *fazah* or *wasatayn*, three poled, *mthowlath*, four poled, *mruba*, and five poled, *mkhumas*. Among the Huwaitat tribe today, the tents are mostly two or three poled” (Weir 1976: 3).

As we have already noted, Bedouins call their tents “*bayt*” or “*bayt al-shar.*” They do not care about the color of the tent; however, Western scholars who employ a Western approach to nomenclature and classification refer to it as the “black tent.” Some researchers maintain that they refer to the tent as black because of its color, but Gregory Cowan has provided a very different and interesting perspective on this subject:

“The Black Tent can be considered as an archetype of subversive anti-architecture: its blackness is menacing to Westerners, like the blackness of

barbarians or ‘foreigners.’ The specified ‘blackness’ of the ‘black tent’ of the Middle East serves to underline the ‘otherness’ of this nomadic tent in Western literature, which apparently assumes, at least in twentieth century modernist attitudes to architecture, that ‘whiteness’ is superior and progressive. The generalization of blackness is symbolic of the detachment of Western interest in the Black Tent” (Cowan: 106).

Furthermore, Cowan asserts that, “the Black Tent of the Middle East, though diverse in colour, is generally considered black, because it consists predominantly of an awning of woven, black goats’ hair, which lightens after bleaching in the sun, and because of its strikingly dark appearance from a distance away, especially in desert contexts. Every surface—roof, floor and wall—as well as furnishings, carpet bags, spindle bags and so on, are made from black goats’ hair” (Cowan: 106).

## **CHAPTER 3. FIELDWORK**

### **3.1 The Aim of the Research**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the relationship between society, culture, and architecture by studying the Bedouins of Jordan as a specific case. This research aims to illuminate the deeply rooted connection between the dwelling, as a physical structure, and the culture and society. The thesis also seeks to explore complex, interrelated cultural constructs in this context. Moreover, it tries to understand the ordinary lives and day-to-day activities of the Bedouins in the tent, and investigate their experiences and concerns with respect to sharing the same space.

The primary goal of the research project was to understand what makes Bedouin culture unique and what differentiates it from other cultures. The analysis of the physical environment and the space of their tents has great potential to reveal the important interrelations among culture, home design, and space use.

In this thesis, the Bedouin tent was studied using, as a theoretical framework, Canter's vision of place, in which "place" is conceptualized as being an amalgam of physical attributes, actions, and meaning. Thus, by defining Bedouin black tents as places in these theoretical terms, the fieldwork was designed to explore the physical characteristics of the tent and the activities that take place in and around it. The concepts and meanings associated with the physical space and the inhabitants' activities were analyzed using the information collected during the fieldwork.

### **3.2 Fieldwork Procedure**

The fieldwork was carried out in Wadi Rum and the Petra region of Jordan. The fieldwork was conducted inside and around the black tents of the Bedouins, and the concepts and meanings that the Bedouins assign to them were then examined.

The main subject of the study was the black tent of the Bedouins, which is an indispensable part of Arabic culture. The research was carried out with the *Huwaitat* tribe in the Wadi Rum region and the Petra area in southern Jordan. During the period between February 2006 and February 2007, the researcher visited the region five times and each of these visits lasted ten days. Besides the observation of the day-to-day life of the Bedouins, a wedding ceremony that took place at the end of May 2006 was also observed.

Information was gathered primarily through naturalistic observation and detailed field notes were kept about how the Bedouins' lives were centered on their black tents. Photographs and videos were taken by the researcher with the permission of the subjects. In addition to observation, informal interviews were occasionally conducted with some of the residents in and around the tents while the researcher was staying with the Bedouins as their guest. These interviews were carried out with the help of a local interpreter who was fluent in both Arabic and English.

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations**

In the course of conducting research (and carrying out fieldwork, in particular), all anthropologists should be expected to follow certain ethical guidelines. One set of guiding principles can be found in American Anthropological Association's *Code of Ethics of American Anthropological Association* (AAA, 1998). AAA makes it clear that anthropologists come from various different communities and cultures, and consequently, they all have their own moral and ethical codes, which are rooted in their own cultures. Besides having a moral obligation to the scholarly community, and on a wider scale to the societies that they live in, researchers also have a moral obligation to the people or animals they study, and finally, to their environment.

*Ethical Guidelines for Social Science Research in Health*, published by the National Committee for Ethics in Social Science Research in Health (NCESSRH, 2000), also



provides ethical considerations and guidelines for social scientists. The four principles that are outlined in this document are as follows:

- 1) The principle of non-maleficence
- 2) The principle of beneficence
- 3) The principle of autonomy
- 4) The principle of justice.

According to these guidelines, researchers must strive not to cause harm to the research participants in particular, and to the people or community in general. Researchers should also try to make a positive contribution toward the welfare of the human subjects, and make sure that the rights of the participants are protected and that their dignity is respected. The balance between the benefits and the risks of the research project should be carefully considered and these benefits and risks should be fairly distributed among the participants and the surrounding community.

This research project strictly adhered to these ethical codes and priority was given to respecting the rights of the participants and the local populace and to avoiding any harm that may result from the research. Any possible harm to the researcher, the scientific community of researchers, and the environment were also taken into consideration in the course of the fieldwork. In this study, the identities of the participants and interview subjects are not revealed in order to protect their privacy and their personal rights.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

What I observed in the fieldwork was documented with photographs. Thus I will present my findings together with photographs, using visual anthropology technique.

### 4.1 Physical Characteristics of the Black Tent



**Fig. 1** A Bedouin black tent

This photograph shows that the tent has two entrances: the entrance on the right side leads to the women's section; on the left side is the men's entrance.

As Alan Keohane has stated, “Because of the desert climate and availability of the goat hair, Bedouins are using goat hair as fabric to build their tents. This material protects them from cold and hot desert air. The goat hair is good insulation and once wet with the first rain, it becomes waterproof as the hair fibers swell and the natural oils help to repel moisture” (Keohane 1999: 58). In the past, the Bedouins wove the goat hair into tents themselves, but today the goat hair is imported from Türkiye (eng.Turkey). As the Bedouins have a mobile lifestyle, their mobility requires that they carry the tent and all their possessions and materials with them, so the goat hair is very useful for the Bedouins as a construction material.



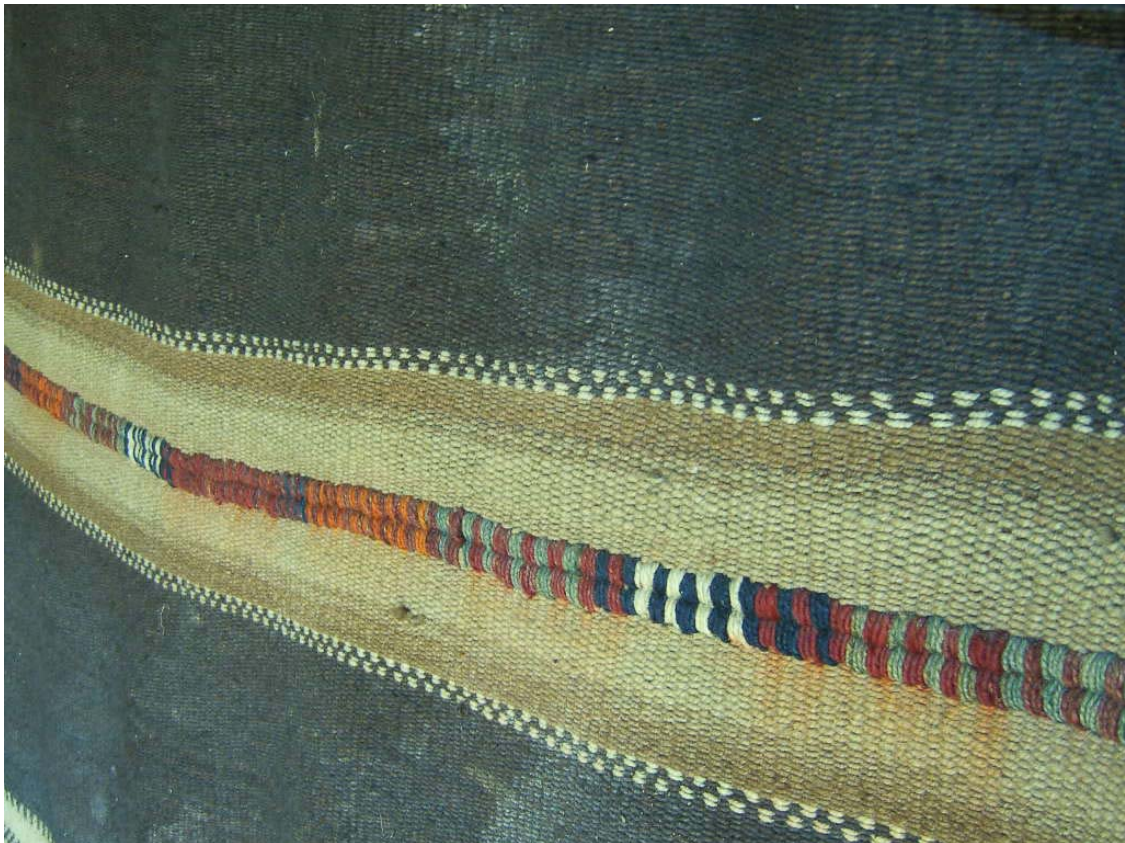
**Fig. 2** Tent material

Roof fixed by Bedouin method

The social and physical needs of the Bedouins are simple and require a minimum of material possessions. This is why there is not much furniture in Bedouin tents.

The furniture in the tents consists of mattresses (*farash* or *janbiyya*), rugs (*mafrash*), and cushions (*mukhadda* or *girna*). There are two types of mattresses used in the tents: *farash*, which is large and made of cotton or wool, and *janbiyya*, a thinner kind of mattress. Mattresses are used in the tent in a variety of ways; they are used as a bed, as a place to sit, and as a prayer rug. Mattresses and pillows are the property of women and they signify the women's wealth.

Bedouins separate their everyday lives into two main spheres: the public and the private, which are considered separate and thus kept apart. In a Bedouin tent, a curtain (*sahah*) is suspended between the front and the back of the tent so as to divide it into two compartments.



**Fig. 3** The curtain (*sahah*)

(The pattern of the curtain (*sahah*) varies among the Bedouin tribes. However, the varied patterns are not considered as important in modern Bedouin culture as they were in previous, more traditional Bedouin tribes).

One of the two sections is the men's section (*al-shigg*), where the Bedouins receive visitors, meet guests, and entertain them. The focal point of the men's section is the fireplace (*magad en-nar*). In her study of Jordanian culture, Linda Layne states that, "the fireplace is symbolically associated with manhood" (Layne 1994: 82). The various utensils used for making tea and coffee are kept here, including coffee pots (*dilal*, *singular: dalleh*), an enamel jug (*ibrig*) for coffee grounds, a kettle for tea, glasses, coffee cups, tongs for tending the fire, and a tripod. The rugs and mattresses are brought over from the women's section, where they are stored, and they are laid out on the three sides of the men's section, and cushions are piled up at regular intervals for the guests to recline on.



**Fig. 4** Men's section and guests

(This tent does not belong to a rich family. However, it should be noted that rich tents do not contain more furniture; it is just the quality of the mattresses that varies from poor tent to rich tent).

The other section in the Bedouin tent is the women's section (*al-mahram*), where the women prepare food, take care of the children, and entertain their friends. This section is also where the whole family sleeps at night. The dividing wall in the tent is always suspended half and half. The relative size of the two sections depends on the size of the tent and the needs of its inhabitants. Stored in the women's section are most of the utensils, bedding, food, cooking pots, and the personal belongings of the family members.



**Fig. 5** Women's section, showing the belongings of the tent's inhabitants

“In a goat-hair tent, bedding is usually stacked in the middle of the tent on the women's section of the center pole” (Layne: 69).

The bedding rugs (*mafrash* and *bsat*), mattresses (*farash* or *janbiyya*), and quilts (*lihaf*) are usually stacked in a pile against the dividing wall of the tent. This pile also comprises bags containing grain, flour, cheese, and other foodstuffs.



**Fig. 6** Kitchen (*matbakh*)

The women's section is for domestic activities such as cooking, sleeping, bathing, and storing the household belongings. It can be said that the women's section is the domestic place for tent activities, but as a structure, the women's side is not particularly different from the men's side. Cooking pots and other utensils are scattered around a fireplace. The fireplace on the women's side has no symbolic meaning as does the fireplace on the men's side; around it, women can spend their times cooking, going about their daily activities, etc. In other words, unlike its counterpart on the men's side, the fireplace on the women's side is functional rather than symbolic or ceremonial.

There is a bathing area in the women's section, which is known as the "*hammam*," but it is not identical to a typical Turkish hamam. Within the *hammam*, there is a bucket full of water for bathing and washing. Generally, tents have a separate bath area, but due to the privacy needs of the inhabitants, that area is not visible from the outside.

There are no toilet facilities in the tent; thus, when the inhabitants or guests need to urinate, they go to an outhouse hidden from view, carrying with them an "*ibriq*" full of water for cleaning purposes.



**Fig. 7** Hammam



## 4.2 Activities

### 4.2.1 Daily Cycle

The day begins at 4 o'clock in the morning for the Bedouins. The women must wake up early to feed and milk the animals and to prepare breakfast (*iftar or futur*). If there is no guest in the men's section, the family eats breakfast together (*madafa*). Otherwise, the women and the children eat breakfast in the women's section and the men and their male guests eat in the men's section. At breakfast, the Bedouins eat bread (*pita*), olive oil, and yoghurt (*laban*). For lunch (*ghada*), they eat potato, salad, and dry meat. The dinner (*asha*) menu is the same as lunch. During the day, women clean the tent, take care of the children, prepare food, wash the clothes, and carry water to the tent from the nearest fountain.



**Fig. 8** Preparing bread

At least two families of ten persons each share a single tent, and the inhabitants of a Bedouin tent are all relatives of each other. There is an elderly man, who is considered to be the senior man and the ruler of the tent. He is retired and spends his time in the tent. Young Bedouin men from the tent work as jeep drivers for tourists. They also feed and tend various animals, such as sheep and goats, which they plan to sell later. Bedouins do not eat a lot of meat, consuming eight to twelve sheep or goats per year per family in the tent.



**Fig. 9** Bedouins

(The young man in the photograph is unemployed, staying at the tent with others).

The children who live in the tent attend school during the day, and after school they generally spend their time in the women's section. Children can move freely within the tent; however, girls who reach the age of adolescence are thereafter required to observe

the same rules of conduct and appearance that apply to the adult women of the tent.



**Fig. 10** Children

When a male guest arrives at the tent, most of the women are required to stay in the women's section for the duration of the guest's visit. However, older women can remain in the men's section to welcome the guest. The extent of the women's participation in the activities taking place in the men's section depends on the circumstances, such as the degree and intimacy of the relationship between the woman and the visitor and the duration of the visit. Younger women are allowed to spend a shorter period of time in the men's section. Female guests have to go directly to the women's section and spend their time there.



**Fig. 11** Bedouin woman

In the evening, both women and men share the same space in the tent and spend their time together in the men's section, as long as there is no male guest present in the tent. Bedouins used to play *rababa* and sing along, but they do not play *rababa* anymore. Around the fire, they talk and listen to music from a battery-powered radio, and then they go to sleep in the women's section at around 21:30 in the evening.

Except for sleeping together at night, men and women spend very little time together in the tent. If there is a guest in the tent, the husband and wife have to sleep apart from each other. If the guest is a man, his bed is prepared in the men's section, and the owner of the tent has to sleep in the men's section with him. Married couples can sleep together if there are no guests in the tent, but due to a lack of privacy, they can only perform sexual intercourse at night with a minimum of foreplay, without undressing, and with no sounds.



**Fig. 12** A young Bedouin playing *rababa*

#### 4.2.2 Preparation of Coffee

When one or more guests arrive in the tent, coffee is prepared for them in the men's section. The preparation of coffee is very important for Bedouins as a way of displaying their hospitality and showcasing their generosity to the guests. Bedouins are famous for their hospitality; even at the poorest tent, offering tea or coffee is customary as the initial symbol of welcome and hospitality to the guests. Among the Bedouin Arabs, there is a saying that is used to describe a generous man, and it is said that no greater praise can be bestowed to honor an Arab: "He makes coffee from morning till night."



**Fig. 13** Coffee (*qahva*)

The coffee ceremony always takes place in the men's section. The coffee offering signifies that the tent owner will protect the guest and providing food to the guest is an

expression of hospitality as well. Tea and coffee are usually prepared by the male host himself. Coffee is always poured with the pot held in the left hand and the cup or cups (*finjan or finjal*) in the right hand. The cups used by the Bedouins are very small and have no handles. Only a small amount of coffee is poured into each cup, and each guest is offered three helpings, after which it is polite to indicate that one has had a sufficient amount by shaking the cup when handing it back to the host. Three cups of coffee is considered to be the socially acceptable and polite amount of coffee to consume as a guest in a Bedouin tent. *El'Heif*, the first cup, is tasted by the Bedouin host to make the guest feel safe; *El-Keif*, the second, is poured and tasted by the guest himself; *El-Dheif*, the third cup, is also drunk by the guest, who then shakes out his cup and hands it back to his host. Once coffee is consumed by a guest in a Bedouin tent, he is under the protection of the host for the duration of his visit.



**Fig. 14** Drinking coffee

### 4.2.3 Wedding Ceremony

There were four tents at the wedding ceremony attended by the researcher, and every tent's regular layout was rectangular. One of the four tents was designated as the men's tent, another was the women's tent, a third was the new couple's tent, and the last tent was used as a kitchen. All four tents were decorated with small flags. These flags indicated that the owner of the tent or the groom's family was inviting the local people to their wedding ceremony. When one saw these flags on the tent, that meant that a wedding ceremony was taking place, and everyone was invited to attend it freely.



**Fig. 15** Wedding flags

At a Bedouin wedding ceremony, there must always be a separate men's tent and a separate women's tent. Wedding tents all lack the dividing interior boundary found in residential tents. This is because men and women have their own tents at the wedding ceremony, thus they do not need to share a single tent with the other gender. While both



men and women come to the wedding ceremony by car or on foot, women have to cover their faces with veils, and they remove their veils only when they reach the women's tent.



**Figs. 16, 17** Bedouin women going to the women's tent at a wedding.

In the men's tent, as the photograph below demonstrates, men sit and talk with each other during the wedding. The fireplace is not the focal point at this time, because they need additional space to seat the wedding guests. In the men's tent, coffee and tea is served, as usual, by a young boy. The host and the guests use plastic chairs instead of mattresses.



**Figs. 18, 19** Bedouin men in the men's tent during a wedding.

During the wedding ceremony only, there is no curtain (*sahah*) dividing the tent into male and female sections in the women's tent. As the whole tent belongs to one gender only during the wedding ceremony, the women are able to act freely. There are no chairs, instead the women sit on the mattresses. They sing songs and play a shepherd's pipe (*kaval*) and drums (*darbuka*).



**Fig. 20** Singing women at a Bedouin wedding.

(Here, women can sing and dance freely as their tent is far away from the men's tent, and because of that they can enjoy themselves during the wedding ceremony as they want).

There is no fireplace in the women's section in a Bedouin wedding. They prepare coffee and tea on a gas-powered stove. In the women's tent, the researcher observed a very interesting detail: the women put two big red chairs in the tent for the bride and groom. During the wedding ceremony, the bride sat on one of the chairs without moving. After the wedding ceremony, the groom came to the women's tent to take his wife to the new tent, which had been built for them. And when the groom arrived at the women's tent, he sat on the big red chair just like a king. The bride was waiting for him on the other big red chair as if she were his queen.



**Fig. 21** The stove



**Fig. 22** The bride and her throne

(Another interesting detail should be noted here: On the morning of the wedding ceremony, the women of the tent brought the bride from the beauty parlor and her skin was colored with white powder).



**Fig. 23** Newly married couple's tent

At the recently constructed tent of the newly-wed couple, everything is brand new. The interior of the tent smells clean. The main pieces of furniture placed in this tent are mattresses, bed sheets, and quilts. There is also a bath (*hammam*) section. The bathing instruments are new as well. The layout of the tent of a newly married couple is rectangular like all other Bedouin tents.



**Fig. 24** Newly married couple's tent



**Fig .25** Tent, prepared as kitchen

There are numerous saucepans in the tent that is used as a kitchen during the wedding. At a wedding ceremony or during other important social events, the men always prepare the food. The national dish of Jordan is *Mansaf*, a Bedouin specialty of lamb seasoned with aromatic herbs, lightly spiced, cooked in dried yogurt, and served on a large platter of rice, almonds, pine kernels, and other nuts. In the wedding ceremony observed by the researcher, another traditional dish, known as *Buhari*, was served, which included meat and rice.



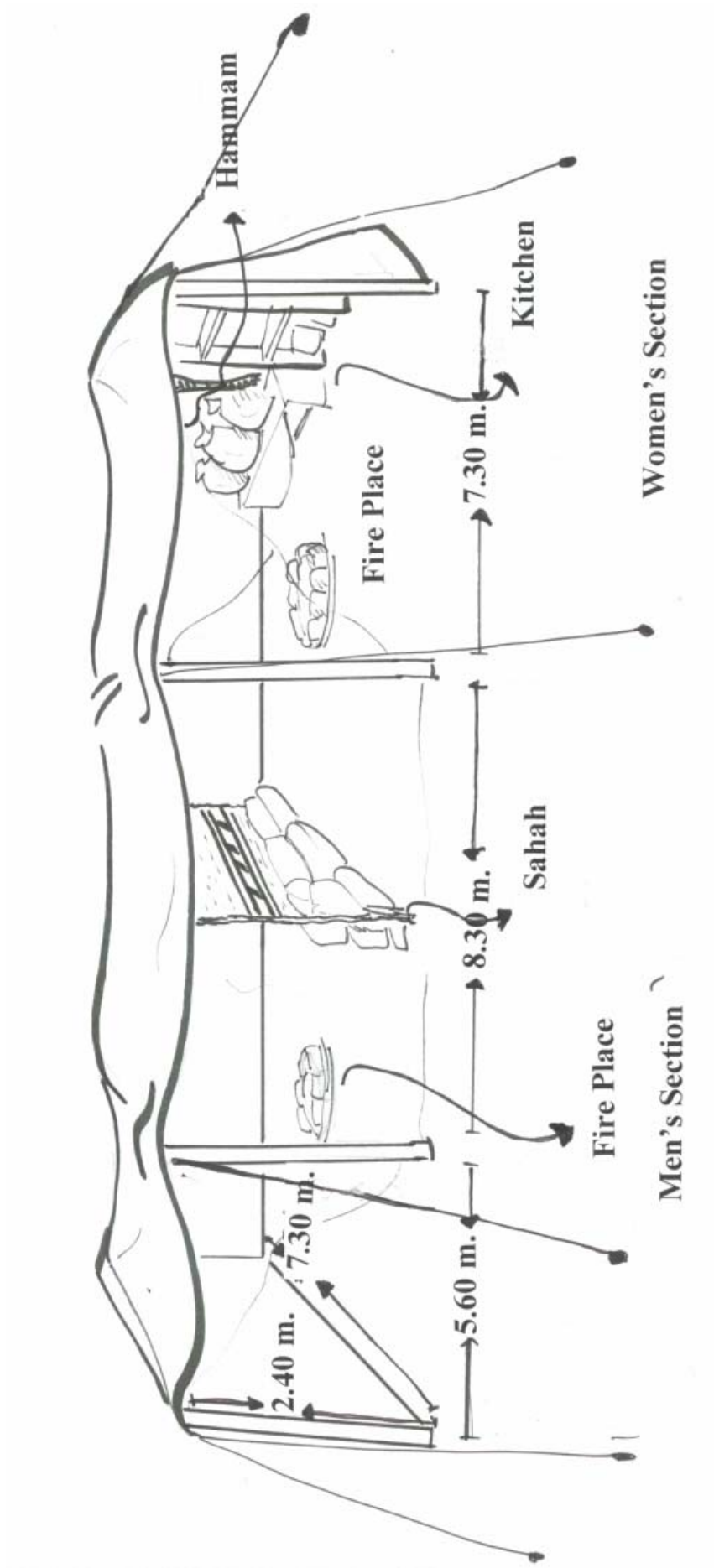
**Fig. 26,** Buhari

### 4.3 The Black Tent as a Place

In the previous sections, I have described the physical characteristics of the Bedouin black tent and portrayed the day-to-day activities (as well as the activities that take place on special occasions, such as a wedding) associated with the black tent. In the next section, I would like to summarize and analyze the findings of the fieldwork according to Canter's (1977) theory of place.

**Table 1. The Meanings of the Black Tent**

	<b>Male section</b>	<b>Female section</b>
<b>Physical characteristics of the tent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rectangular</li> <li>- Fireplace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rectangular</li> <li>- Belongings of household</li> </ul>
<b>Activities in the tent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public activities</li> <li>- Coffee preparation</li> <li>- Welcoming guests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Private activities</li> <li>- Bread making &amp; food preparation</li> <li>- Sleeping</li> <li>- Bathing</li> <li>- Child care</li> </ul>
<b>Meanings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public space</li> <li>- Social interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Private space</li> <li>- Domesticity</li> </ul>



**Fig. 5.** A Plan of the Black Tent



## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

During the fieldwork portion of this research, many things in the Bedouin tent caught the attention of this researcher. Nonetheless, there are three main findings that struck the researcher as particularly meaningful and important for understanding the Bedouins from an anthropological perspective.

### 5.1 Privacy

According to Altman (1975: 18), “privacy is selective control of access to the self or to one’s group.” In the case of the Bedouins, it is the latter. For Bedouins, privacy is not an individual-based concept, but rather a collective one. As we can see in the findings section, patterns of interaction within the household or the tent (and throughout the tribe) are influenced by considerations of age, sex, and genealogical relationship, under the overarching rules and framework of Islam. In the Bedouin tent, there are both visible and invisible boundaries dividing one group from another; for example, between men and women, and also between tent owners and their guests.

Archea (1977) posits that privacy is basically an information distribution process and goes on to argue that we should examine the properties of physical settings in order to fully understand the concept of privacy. However, although environmental factors greatly facilitate or inhibit one’s privacy, the physical environment has not been clearly included in general theories of privacy. Archea (1977) argues that people can adjust the degree of their privacy at a given point in time by changing the physical setting of their behavior.

Bedouins live in communal tents in which physical partitions of space are based mainly on gender and on gender-specific activity. The curtain (*sahah*) is the common physical boundary used for partition inside the tent. It divides the tent into two spaces, which are used for separate functions. It prevents unwanted interaction and precludes the free flow of information between men and women. However, even though information from the

male side can flow to the female side, the information from the female side cannot go in the opposite direction to the male side, and this one-way dynamic regarding the flow of information is purportedly put in place in order to protect women. In this sense, privacy protection is intended especially for women in the Bedouin tent. Therefore, the practice of separating the men's side from the women's side by a curtain in the Bedouin tent is designed not just to control the social contact between men and women, but rather to protect the Bedouin women from unwanted interaction with men or strangers.

It is worth noting, however, that the two sections in the Bedouin tent are actually used quite flexibly; the women can spend their time in the men's section if there is no guest present in the tent. Furthermore, the families (including the husband) sleep together at night in the women's section if there is no guest in the tent. Moreover, elderly women and children can freely enter the men's section. Therefore, one can conclude that the privacy rights of the women are protected against male guests and strangers, whereas the segregation between men and women is not strictly observed within the family unit.

In addition, it should be observed that, although most Arabs no longer live in tents, the spatial organization of their houses is still based on gender-related functions. For example, Abu-Gazze (1995) explains the situation as follows:

“Saudi families live in houses inside which physical partitions of space are based on activity function and gender. While walls are the most common physical boundaries inside the dwelling unit, it is possible that space segmentation may be accomplished through the use of levels. Space is divided into rooms that are used for separate functions by different people” (Abu-Gazze 1995: 97).

Layne (1994: 56) also points out that:

“Abbadis<sup>4</sup> have used new materials and technologies to build according to traditional principles. The dimensions of rooms and house plan as a whole are similar in many ways to the spatial organization of tent”.

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<sup>4</sup> The Abbadis are members of the Abbad tribe who live in Jordan.

Thus, while the curtain has been replaced in modern Arab homes by concrete walls, the avoidance of unwanted interaction and the curtailment of the flow of information is achieved in Arab homes primarily by using the same spatial organization as the one employed in Bedouin tents.

## **5.2 Non-Verbal Communication**

Non-verbal communication is one of the fundamental cornerstones of culture. It reflects cultural values and folkways, and these exist separately from the individual who partakes in them. As Edward T. Hall demonstrated in his classic works, such as *“Silent Language”* (1959) and *“Hidden Dimension”* (1966), architectural design and space use can be incisively analyzed from the perspective of non-verbal communication. In this respect, the curtain (*sahah*) between the male and female sides of the Bedouin tent can be viewed as a symbolic expression of their cultural life, part of which is related to their religious beliefs. Abu-Gazze (1995: 93) writes:

“First, physical partitions are the primary mechanisms which Muslim people use to nonverbally communicate their concern about privacy to outsiders. Second, users of human spaces in Muslim countries make their choices regarding territorial behaviour based on their strong adherence to the Islamic religion and on their sense of self identity”.

The extent and language of the Bedouins’ non-verbal communication is certainly not limited to their home design. For example, Layne (1994) observes the following about the “Arab posture”:

“Abbadis move and position their bodies when sitting or reclining on a mattress or when entering a tent or house exemplifies some of the ways that tribesmen and women construct themselves as tribes people, honorable tribes people” (p.54).

This illustrates that the Bedouins communicate non-verbally by body language as well. When the researcher spent time with the Bedouins, she came to realize that they do not talk too much. Instead, they frequently communicate by means of ritualistic body

movements, such as shaking a coffee cup or tying a knot on the *kufiyya*.

As stated above, Bedouins often communicate with each other by means of a cup of coffee. As previously described in the findings section, they can express their thoughts, feelings, and intentions when they prepare, offer, or drink coffee. For example, when they do not want to drink another cup of coffee, they relay this information to their host by shaking their cup. True feelings are expressed not so much through the actual conversation that they have while drinking coffee, but more so through non-verbal actions and gestures, such as shaking the coffee cup or putting down the cup in a particular way. In this way, coffee takes on a symbolic meaning in Bedouin society, and Bedouins can communicate non-verbally with each other through their actions regarding coffee.

There is also a revealing true story, which was told by my local Bedouin interpreter, about the non-verbal communication skills of the Bedouins. According to this story, a Bedouin man kills another Bedouin's camel. The owner of the camel is incensed, and decides to murder the killer of his camel in response. The elders of the tribe decide to establish a tribal court to resolve the matter immediately. The Bedouin man who is accused of killing the camel has the right to choose an elder man to act as his lawyer in the tribal court. He communicates his choice non-verbally, by tying a knot to the scarf (*kufiyye*) of the elder man whom he has chosen as his lawyer. If the elder man accepts this offer, he ties the knot as well, responding to the non-verbal offer with a non-verbal reply. For the Bedouins, it is said that, "the word is as powerful as the sword." Perhaps for this reason, they prefer to communicate non-verbally rather than to talk.

### **5.3 Faith**

As discussed in the introduction section of this thesis, vernacular architecture is a direct expression of the lifestyle and culture of a group of people living in a traditional society. Abu-Gazzeh has observed that:

“The organization of the built environment and use of the space is a metaphor for

the organization of a culture; the former are the visible, tangible expressions of the invisible, intangible culture” (Abu-Gazzeah, 1995, p.108).

Religion is one of the most powerful forces affecting and shaping the organization of Bedouin life and living space. As Özkan (1995) points out; “Faiths, as a way of life and social memory have had considerable influence on, among other things, the shaping of built environment” (p.182). Particularly in the case of vernacular architecture, faith is the most important determinant.

In the Middle East, Islam touches, influences, and structures all aspects of human life. The Koran (*Surat An- Nur, 24*) explains that the need for modesty is the same for both men and women. Culture, as influenced by Islam and the related segregation of genders, is an important spatial organizing device in Muslim societies. According to Abu-Gazzeah (1995):

“Islam explains that the environmental and social influences which most frequently wreck the moral ideals have to do with sex. Based on the instructions of Islamic religion, human privacy should be respected. Domestic manners, as well as manners in public or collective life, all contribute to the highest virtues, and the part of a Muslim’s duties leading up to Allah” (p.272).

From this perspective, it can be clearly seen that the architectural, social, and psychological dimensions of privacy, based on their Islamic faith, are fundamental to the daily lives of ordinary people in a Bedouin society. In conclusion, it can be said that one of the most significant factors that shape a Bedouin family’s home and living space is their faith in Islam.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

As a final word, I want to briefly talk about the origins of this research project. Why did I choose to investigate the living spaces of the Bedouins who are living in Jordan? I cannot provide a clear answer to this question, except to say this: As a scholar, I felt that I

needed to find an answer to the main question in my mind, which is: How or why do cultures diverge from one society to another? After determining the topic of this research project, I began to collect data about the Bedouins. I entered the world of the Bedouins as a guest and I examined the Bedouins and their black tent, as an outsider, in fact, as a stranger. Through my literature review, I came to the following conclusions about the Bedouins:

- They dwell in the desert,
- They live in tents,
- They use minimum furniture in their tents,
- There is gender segregation in their tents,
- They are renowned for their hospitality.

I focused on the following subjects during the literature review:

- Dwelling, because the Bedouins dwell in the desert,
- Place, because it relates to the Bedouin tent as a living space,
- Environment, which is related to the desert,
- Culture, because the Bedouins are famous for their hospitality, and
- Home design, since the Bedouins practiced gender segregation in their tents.

At the initial stages of my research, I was quite happy with my progress, because I believed that if I shaped my research according to the guidance of the literature review, my research would be in good shape. However, I came to realize that, although all the findings about the Bedouins related to the topics of the literature review, the topics were only relating with the Bedouins, but not relating with my scholarly interests. In other words, after completing the literature review, I was still a stranger to Bedouin culture. Therefore, I decided to look inside the tent and I traveled to Jordan. With the help of an interpreter friend, I was able to go to the desert and live with the Bedouins. After living with the Bedouins for a while, I was able to find the answers I was seeking. I was no longer a stranger to Bedouin culture, and I could understand their way of life.

After gaining access to the Bedouin tent and living their with its inhabitants, the most

important findings I discovered were as follows: (1) The Bedouins used a dividing curtain (*sahah*) to segregate the sexes and to maintain privacy; (2) the coffee offering, which demonstrated their hospitality and was a symbol of the traditional ways of Bedouin life.

The Bedouins had put a dividing curtain in the center of the tent, and the question that popped into my mind as an anthropologist was: What is the meaning of the curtain? At first sight, I thought that the purpose of the curtain was to maintain the privacy of the women of the tent; however, they had to want to keep their privacy from the strangers.

Life has not been easy for the Bedouins; over the years, they have had to fight with other tribes, they have had to find ways to continue their way of life in safety, and they have had to work hard to protect their women and children. Bedouins have to shape their views and thoughts according to the norms of their tribes, they have to believe in (or, at least, act according to) the same principles, and they have to show unfailing respect to the *Shaykh* (the lord of tribe). Furthermore, the members of a Bedouin tribe have to live and migrate together. All these aspects of the Bedouin lifestyle illustrate that, in Ibn Khaldun's (1981) words:

“The Bedouins are a wild nation, fully accustomed to wildness and the things that cause it. Therefore, they provide their own defense and do not entrust it to others or rely upon others for it. They always carry weapons. They watch carefully all sides of the path. They take only hurried naps, when they are together in company or when they saddle. They pay attention to the most distant barking or noise. They go alone into the desert, guided by their fortitude, putting their trust in themselves. Fortitude has become a character quality of theirs, and courage their nature. They use it whenever they are called upon or roused by an alarm. All the customary activities of the Bedouins lead to wandering and movement” (Ibn Khaldun, cited in, Bin Muhammad 1999: 92).

As stated above, Ibn Khaldun's words were very clear and could explain the curtain's

meaning. Their culture requires first and foremost that the Bedouins have to keep away the children and women from unwanted interaction with guests and strangers. In Jordan, honor crimes still occur in Bedouin society and traditional Bedouin Law (*urf' asha'iri*) also plays a significant role in the daily lives of the Bedouins. According to Bedouin Law, which is linked to traditional Bedouin culture, a woman who stays out by herself at night far from any encampment without an excuse and who is perceived to be flirting or inviting men, can be punished by her family. The dividing curtain in the Bedouin tent provides the necessary measure of privacy. This shows that the design of the Bedouin tent is intrinsically linked with the Bedouin culture. This was my first hint that I was on my way to finding an answer to my problem.

The coffee ceremony was another indication of the hospitality of Bedouins, which I experienced as a stranger and a guest in their tent. After living with them for a period of time, I came to understand that the offering, serving, and preparation of coffee have much more subtle meanings than a mere display of hospitality. For example, the Bedouins use a wooden mortar (*mihbash*) to pound the coffee beans. Pounding beans in mortar makes a rhythmic sound (or a beat), which can be heard for some distance and advertises the presence of guests in the tent to the rest of the encampment. The sound can be audible from quite a distance, and if there is somebody in the desert around the camp, that person can hear the pounding sound and discern that there is a place nearby that he can go to and where he can stay for free as a guest of the Bedouins. When the guest arrives at the camp or at the tent, the host must offer coffee to the guest, and the style of serving and the style of drinking the coffee carry numerous non-verbal meanings. Coffee preparation always takes place on the men's side of the tent, around the fireplace, and the continuity of the fire is also significant in Bedouin culture. Furthermore, the tent owner always sits behind the fire, locating himself behind the flames, which demonstrates to his guests and strangers that the tent owner is more powerful than them and that he is the authority figure in the tent. Because of this, the fireplace is always located on the focal point in the men's section of the tent. This is one of the ways in which the inhabitants protect the tent household from strangers who may wish to do them harm. The coffee ceremony was my second piece of empirical evidence for the intricate relationship between culture and



home design.

Linked with these ideas, I also came to realize that the religion of Islam is highly important to the Bedouins. In other words, the Bedouins protect their traditions through the precepts of Islam and Islam fits well with the traditional rhythms of life in the desert. The *Qur'an* is the principal source of guidance for every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with every subject that concerns us as human beings, including wisdom, doctrine, worship and law. However, its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time, the *Qur'an* provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct, and equitable economic principles. Because of the rules of Islam and due to the necessity of preserving their traditional way of life, the Bedouins are shaping their lifestyles, their culture, and their home designs according to their Islamic faith.

In conclusion, every culture has its own unique characteristics, and these unique cultural characteristics are often reflected in that culture's prevalent home designs. The main goal of this thesis was to understand the unique culture of the Bedouins in Jordan and examine the way it differs from other cultures by observing and analyzing their built form and home design. Gauvain, Altman, and Fahim (1983) summarize this point when they observe that, "The home is a window to a culture in that it displays religion and cosmology, sex roles, family organization, and a variety of aspects of culture" (1983, p.180, cited in Sebba, 1991, p.224).

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