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## The Nature of Domestic Demand for Authentic Ethnic Experiences in Egypt: Exploring Egyptian Visitors' Perspectives and Assessments of Bedouin Cultural Attractions

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## The Nature of Domestic Demand for Authentic Ethnic Experiences in Egypt: Exploring Egyptian Visitors' Perspectives and Assessments of Bedouin Cultural Attractions

### Abstract

Much emphasis in the literature on Bedouin tourism in the Arab world has been given to the demands, perceptions, motivations and experiences of international tourists while domestic demands are not fully understood. Thus, this study challenges the status quo, being one of a few studies in which Egyptians are represented as tourists consuming Egyptian ethnic culture. A mix of qualitative research methods, including 29 semi-structured interviews with domestic visitors, observational data and document analysis, was employed to explore Egyptian visitors' perspectives and assessments of Bedouin cultural attractions in Egypt. The findings revealed that the concept of experiencing existential authenticity through interactions with the workers and performers appeared to be outside the visitors' sphere of thought, as they focused almost exclusively on tangible elements of the site offerings. This study has important implications for Bedouin tourism suppliers as well as tourism researchers. Egyptian visitors can be viewed as a powerful potential market for Bedouin attractions. Thus, site management should reconsider their approach to Egyptian visitors, as well as rethink the mission and goals of their site. Theoretically, the findings of this study strongly contest the notion that objective authenticity is no longer essential in ethnic tourism.

### Keywords

Bedouin, Ethnic Tourism, Egyptian Visitors, Objective Authenticity, Sinai, Domestic Demand, Qualitative Research

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# The Nature of Domestic Demand for Authentic Ethnic Experiences in Egypt: Exploring Egyptian Visitors' Perspectives and Assessments of Bedouin Cultural Attractions

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*Much emphasis in the literature on Bedouin tourism in the Arab world has been given to the demands, perceptions, motivations and experiences of international tourists while domestic demands are not fully understood. Thus, this study challenges the status quo, being one of a few studies in which Egyptians are represented as tourists consuming Egyptian ethnic culture. A mix of qualitative research methods, including 29 semi-structured interviews with domestic visitors, observational data and document analysis, was employed to explore Egyptian visitors' perspectives and assessments of Bedouin cultural attractions in Egypt. The findings revealed that the concept of experiencing existential authenticity through interactions with the workers and performers appeared to be outside the visitors' sphere of thought, as they focused almost exclusively on tangible elements of the site offerings. This study has important implications for Bedouin tourism suppliers as well as tourism researchers. Egyptian visitors can be viewed as a powerful potential market for Bedouin attractions. Thus, site management should reconsider their approach to Egyptian visitors, as well as rethink the mission and goals of their site. Theoretically, the findings of this study strongly contest the notion that objective authenticity is no longer essential in ethnic tourism. Keywords: Bedouin, Ethnic Tourism, Egyptian Visitors, Objective Authenticity, Sinai, Domestic Demand, Qualitative Research*

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## Introduction

In Egypt, Bedouin culture has long been an integral part of what tourists experience during their visit to the Sinai Peninsula and is widely publicized in tourism brochures (Abdel Aziz, 1999; Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2017). Since the early 1980s, the Egyptian government and local and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have been calling for increased participation of Egyptian Bedouin throughout the tourism industry, building Bedouin capability, improving support and resourcing for the sustainable development and management of Bedouin tourism and developing Bedouin tourism resources (Belal et al., 2009; Sheehan, 2013). However, the Egyptian Bedouin themselves still invariably rate lower on a variety of socio-economic indicators in comparison to their non-Bedouin counterparts in Egypt (Altorki & Cole, 1998; Hobbs & Tsunemi, 2006; Homa, 2007). Despite the Egyptian government's repeated calls to actively support and empower Egyptian Bedouin through tourism, in practice, Bedouin communities continue to experience marginalization, displacement from areas zoned for tourism and exclusion from the expanding tourism sector in the Egyptian North Coast, Sinai and Red Sea regions (Altorki & Cole, 1998; Aziz, 2000; Belal, Briggs, Sharp, & Springuel, 2009).

Tourism is perceived as a major source of potential economic development for ethnic minority communities in developing regions such as the Miao, Li and Hui ethnic groups in China (Wall & Xie, 2005; Yang & Wall, 2010), the Karen and Hmong ethnic minorities in Thailand (Conran, 2006; Walter, 2015) and the Bedouin communities in the Middle East

(Altorki, & Cole, 1998). This is exemplified in the greater attention given in their government policies to increasing the level of involvement of ethnic minority communities in the tourism sector (Hazbun, 2008, 2009; Homa, 2007; Oakes, 1997; Yang, 2008). In China for example, the recent China National Tourism Plan 2015 has called for increased participation of ethnic minority communities in the tourism industry and transforming ethnic minority cultures into sustainable, efficient, convenient and profitable tourism products (Feighery, 2008; Yang, 2008). Meanwhile, demand for wilderness opportunities and cultural tourism experiences, such as visiting ethnic communities and their surrounding natural environment, have experienced fairly high growth rates in tourism worldwide, increasing by about 15% per annum and also contributing to 37% of all world travel (Abascal et al., 2015, 2016; Sustainable Tourism Online, 2010; Weaver, 2011; World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2004). Tourists searching for authentic cultural experiences through interactions with ethnic minority groups in developing countries are also willing to spend more money for these experiences (Walter, 2015). Exotic cultural images and the perceived cultural differences between ethnic minority groups and tourists generate revenue from the tourists who seek to escape from stress and problems associated with modernity into an idealized simple life (Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2017; Wall & Xie, 2005).

It is important to note that ethnic tourism is a concept subject to various definitions. In her influential book *Hosts and Guests*, Smith (1978) described ethnic tourism as tourism promoted “to the public in terms of the ‘quaint’ customs of ethnic and often exotic peoples” (p.4). McIntosh and Goeldner (1990) and Wall and Xie (2005) reiterated the views of Smith by describing ethnic tourism as a form of tourism in which the prime motivation of the tourist involves a desire to experience and interact with the culture and lifestyles of truly exotic peoples. Along similar lines, Yang (2008) defined ethnic tourism as travel motivated primarily by quest for cultural otherness, including the “consumption of artifacts, performances, and other products or services” (p. 752).

For some Bedouin communities, tourism has been a promising industry and cultural driver for Bedouin community development. There is strong evidence from research studies (i.e., Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2011; Dinero, 2010; Timothy, 2011) and unpublished consultancy reports (i.e., Mohssen, 2013; National Conservation Sector, 2002; The Egyptian Tourism Authority, 2012) that rather than being menial service providers, some Bedouin people are involved in tourism as owners and operators of their own businesses, which take advantage of their unique culture and heritage. For example, since the early 1980s, a number of wholly Bedouin owned and operated Bedouin villages and large camps have been founded, which are purpose built tourism attractions providing access to expressions of Bedouin culture for a fee. In these villages, the enactment of coffee ceremonies, and song and dance shows, along with Bedouin foods and souvenirs, provide opportunities for tourists to become acquainted with Bedouin culture and traditional lifestyle. These Bedouin attractions not only function as model cultures with which tourists can identify; they also serve as Bedouin interpretation centers to showcase the past Bedouin lifestyle to the tourists. These attractions constitute the key points of access to Bedouinism for many tourists (Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2017; Altorki & Cole, 1998; Aziz, 2000; Homa, 2007; Jacobs, 2010; The Egyptian Tourism Authority, 2012). Meanwhile, Bedouin communities perceive tourism as a means to improve the conditions and quality of their lives (Aziz, 2000; Cole, 2003; Dinero, 2002; Marx, 2013). In a way, it promotes and safeguards their cultural identity, while at the same time empowering them (Homa, 2007). Thus, one may argue that Bedouin cultural tourism is a sustainable activity with a symbiotic relationship between economic benefits and cultural survival.

The associated literature on Bedouin tourism in the Arab world can be divided into two strands. The first, concerned with the issues and impacts of developing tourism in Bedouin communities, is outside the scope of the present study. The second focuses on the motivations

and experiences of visitors to Bedouin tourism sites. These studies have predominantly focused on the demands, perceptions, motivations and experiences of international tourists, mainly from Western countries (Abdel Aziz, 1999; Chatelard, 2005; Homa, 2007; Jacobs, 2010; Reichel, Uriely, & Shani, 2009; Uriely & Belhassen, 2005; Uriely, Maoz & Reichel, 2009). In fact, Westerners' perceptions and experiences have often been the implicit definition of tourists' knowledge, reflection and image of Bedouin culture. Historically, dominant Eurocentric discourses in tourism studies have shown little interest in non-Western tourists (Alneng, 2002; Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Hazbun, 2008; Mkono, 2013a, 2013b) and continue to cast Arabs/Muslims, Africans, and Asians as the hosts or the toured people (Al-Haj Mohammad & Som, 2010; Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994; Buda & McIntosh, 2012; Chatelard, 2005; Conran, 2006; Jacobs, 2010; Kuo, 2007; Lepp, 2009; Walter, 2015). Similarly, since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, travelers' expectations, perceptions and experiences of Bedouin culture have been researched and interpreted mainly by Western scholars (Hazbun, 2008), with these interpretations often conjugated with a historical, political or religious approach. However, Arab scholars, with few exceptions (Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2017; Abu-Lughod, 1999; Altorki & Cole, 1998), have rarely addressed the subject. Although, gradually non-Western tourists are becoming the focus of research attention (Abodeed, Wilson, & Moyle, 2015; Abodeed, Moyle, & Wilson, 2017; Mkono, 2013a), the literature on domestic visitors' perspectives is lacking (e.g., Yang & Wall, 2010). In regards to exploring tourists' perspectives, demands, and experiences of Bedouin tourism, we believe this study to be the first in which Egyptians are represented as tourists consuming Egyptian ethnic culture. Hence, it challenges the status quo and present new perspectives on the nature of domestic demand for authentic ethnic experiences in Egypt.

Domestic visitors are particularly important for the Egyptian tourism industry, in the face of Egypt's numerous political and economic challenges during the past six years. These challenges include the diminishing of the Egyptian Pound against the US dollar, continuing global economic downturns, political unrest in Egypt since 2011, persisting Arab-Israeli tensions, inter-Arab conflicts, the continuous threat of terrorism, and a lack of strategic direction for policy and planning in the tourism sector (Nassar, 2012). These problems have impeded the Egyptian tourism market from maximizing its potential, and tarnished perceptions of the country among Westerners (Nassar, 2012). Inbound tourism in Egypt declined by 48% in 2016, and Egypt experienced a 68.4% decline in tourism revenues in the same period (Michaelson, 2016; Saad, 2016). Hence, attracting and satisfying domestic tourists is important for sustainable national tourism. In Egypt, domestic travel generated 76.1% of direct travel and tourism GDP in 2016, while international visitor spending accounted for merely 23.9%. Domestic travel spending in Egypt is expected to increase by 3.5% per annum up to 2027 (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2017). Egyptian visitors may demand different experiences from the Bedouin attractions they visit. Thus, to attract more domestic visitors, Bedouin tourism suppliers need to know what domestic tourists expect and want from their experiences of a Bedouin culture.

An understanding of domestic tourists' perspectives and demand for Bedouin tourism experiences in Egypt are the focus of this study. It is hoped that the results can help Bedouin tourism businesses adapt or develop their products to manage visitors' expectations and the perceptions of authenticity that they have towards their products. A more detailed discussion on the concept of authenticity as central to domestic visitors' perspectives of and demand for Bedouin tourism experiences in Egypt is provided below. This is followed by details about the methodology, background information on the case study site, visitors' demographics and a discussion of the resulting themes in light of the existing literature. This paper concludes with insights regarding strategies to help Bedouin tourism enterprises satisfy domestic visitors' quest for authenticity and manage authenticity perceptions.

## **Ethnic Tourism**

Ethnic tourism is exemplified by travel to remote minority villages in quest for real ethnic flavor and authentic culture; culture tourists witness firsthand by participating in activities that include visiting ethnic villages and native homes, attending traditional dances and ceremonies, or participating in religious rituals (McIntosh, 2004; Yang & Wall, 2010). These definitions have in common a focus on the experience of the visitor as a consumer without reference to the ethnic people only as products. In contrast, Hinch and Butler (1996) and Smith (1978) define ethnic tourism as a form of tourism in which the key components of the tourist's demand include activities (i.e., attending traditional dances and ceremonies, participating in religious or cultural rituals and buying ethnic artifacts) that allow for ethnic communities' participation directly in tourism either via control or by having their unique culture as the core of the attraction. As the latter definition considers the mutual interplay between tourists and ethnic communities, this definition has been adopted for the purpose of this study.

## **Authenticity Motivating Demand for Ethnic Tourism Experiences**

Motivations form the cornerstone of understanding tourist's expectations, needs, and desires. Gaining a clear understanding of tourists' motivations and expectations is essential for segmenting tourism markets, developing ethnic products to meet identified demand, and designing brochures advertising relevant narratives and images (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). Previous research has found that cultural elements and an interest in foreign cultural experiences play a key role in driving travel demand (Amoamo & Thompson, 2010). Hu and Ritchie (1993) examined destination attractiveness of Australia, Hawaii, China, France, and Greece, finding that one of the most important touristic attributes was an interest in the local people or their way of life. Similarly, Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) explored destination attractiveness of Thailand and found that one of the most important touristic attributes was an interest in local customs and culture. As Gray (1970) claimed, it seems a common trait in many human beings is the desire "to leave things with which they are familiar and go and see, first hand, different exciting cultures and places" (p. 87). Thus, tourism promoters have capitalized on cultural elements to present and promote particular images of their destinations and ethnic communities. In particular, regions with rich culture and heritage backgrounds (i.e., Asia, South America and the Arab World) generate significant demand for ethnic tourism (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Hazbun, 2008; Jabbur, 1995; Rittichainuwat & Brown, 2001).

While an interest in exotic cultures and their people is perceived as a significant motive in ethnic tourism, the packaging of cultural and ethnic events for sale affects their authenticity. Ethnic culture and traditions are frequently exploited as a packaged product with an exchange value (Nash, 1977). A number of ethnic communities have embraced, either by choice or by the necessity of the situation, this pre-packaging and sale of cultural experiences to meet tourists' demands, a marketing approach of "staged authenticity" (MacCannell, 1973, 1976). When ethnic communities put their cultures and themselves on sale, to an extent this packaging modifies the nature of the historical events themselves (Ivanovic, 2008). The end result of these superficial representations may be regarded as the "commoditization of culture" (Mkono, 2013a; Su et al., 2014, p. 2; Walter, 2015). Boorstin (1964) criticized the standardization of tourist experiences and commoditization of culture for mass tourism, resulting in what he called "pseudo-events." He argued that authenticity is associated with originality or genuineness, that is, objective authenticity, and thus these "pseudo-events" lead to the loss of genuine tourists who demand a more authentic experience.

Some empirical studies suggest that indeed, ethnic tourists are not usually motivated by the authenticity of ethnic communities as long as the experience is “a playful search for enjoyment or an aesthetic enjoyment of surfaces” (Mkono, 2013b; Wang, 2000, p. 55). Other empirical research has found that some ethnic tourists become aware of their paradoxical relationship with the physical environment and ethnic communities, in that their presence and behaviors can have negative impacts on natural attractions and the authenticity of ethnic cultures they seek. Therefore, they settle for contrived ethnic personations and offerings or “pseudo-events,” and sometimes even favor these (Cohen, 2003; Walter, 2015). Scholars call this type of tourists “postmodern tourists” (Berger, 2013; Wang, 1999, p. 357). Unlike the “cultural sanction of the modern tourists” which has been the search for authenticity, “the cultural sanction” of the postmodern tourists of the globalizing world is based on pleasure and hedonistic pursuits and the increasing awareness of the potential negative impacts of tourism on the physical environment and local cultures (Berger, 2013, p. 56).

However, a number of studies have found that tourists’ informal personal interactions with ethnic communities provided more meaningful and authentic experiences than staged cultural events did (Conran, 2006; Su et al., 2014; Walter, 2015; Yang & Wall, 2010). This supports MacCannell’s (1976, 1999) argument that tourists are not content with experiencing “pseudo-events.” MacCannell argued that due to discontent with modern society, the tourist is a secular pilgrim demanding authentic experiences that are missing from his or her everyday life. MacCannell (1973, 1976) viewed authenticity as two different forms, “experienced authenticity” and “staged authenticity.” The “experienced authenticity” involves tourist’s demand for authentic feelings and interactions. In contrast, “staged authenticity” is that form utilized by the commercial tourism industry to reconstruct past lifestyles and key historical events as if they were still present. MacCannell maintained that tourists desire authentic experiences, but usually fail to make contact with the truly authentic and often end up experiencing only staged cultural events. Hence, the cultural event the tourist buys becomes a fantasy and an “illusion of authenticity rather than a definitive reality” (Yang & Wall, 2016, p. 236). What is implied here is that tourists demand objective authenticity or the authenticity of originals, but the tourism operators or ethnic communities mislead tourists into believing that they are having authentic cultural experience.

As a result of MacCannell’s approach, scholars began questioning the notion of objective authenticity and increasingly explored the tourist’s quest for authenticity in the cultural experiences of others. Cohen (1979) developed a typology of five types of tourist experiences that stretch from the search for simple pleasure on one end to the search for meaningful experiences or authenticity on the other. Other scholars have identified several different forms of tourists’ demand for authentic experiences and explored ethnic communities’ efforts to stage cultures and events for outside consumption. Some (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999, 2000) have argued that authenticity is a socially constructed phenomenon (something that can arise or attain social recognition as authentic) and thus is likely to have different degrees of significance to different market segments. Handler and Saxton (1988) discerned two types of authenticity: the authenticity of toured objects and that of tourist experiences. Selwyn (1996) also distinguished two aspects of authenticity that tourists pursue: knowledge—which has to do with the real world or physical environment; and the experience of the real self or authentic feelings. Feifer (1985), Mantecon and Huete (2008) and Mkono (2013b) have argued that the existentialist notion of authenticity does not recognize the existence of true authentic objects, and instead blurs the boundaries between false and original. Similarly, a constructivist view (Wang, 1999, 2000) argues that authenticity is not fixed but rather negotiated and socially constructed. The perception of authenticity within the context of ethnic and cultural tourism is thus dynamic, always fluctuating and changing depending in large part on tourists’ personal perceptions (Wang, 1999, 2000). Thus,

tourists' demand for authentic experiences has been described in various different forms, reflecting the complexity of the concept and its importance to different market segments.

### **Authenticity and Market Segmentation**

Empirical findings have generally found that authenticity of cultural and ethnic experiences are more important to international and particularly Western tourists than to domestic Asian or African tourists. In online accounts, such as blogs and trip-advisor comments, as well as through interviews and questionnaires, a large number of Western visitors pursuing ethnic experiences around the globe have expressed concerns about authenticity of the presentations (e.g., Kuon, 2011; Mkono, 2013a; Walter, 2016; Yang & Wall, 2010). While a minority of visitors have been content with "staged authenticity" they experienced so long as they had a good time (Walter, 2016), many are still seeking truly authentic experiences. For some, this authenticity has been found in opportunities to genuinely interact with host families (Walter, 2016) or local tour guides (Kuon, 2011). However, others have felt cheated by a lack of objective authenticity, feeling that if they go a bit further into rural places, they may find authentic ethnic experiences (Mkono, 2013a; Yang & Wall, 2010).

In contrast, the limited research on domestic tourists in parts of Asia and Africa has found that they are less concerned about finding authentic ethnic experiences. This may be because the places they are visiting are not particularly exotic, since the cultural difference is relatively smaller than for Westerners (Mkono, 2013a). Yang and Wall (2010) found that Chinese visitors to an ethnic performance in Yunan, China were not concerned that the performance was staged and were still able to enjoy themselves. However, they were more concerned about the lack of hand-made authentic souvenirs with a large number of cheaply produced, factory made counterfeits available for sale. Mkono (2013a) likewise found that in Zimbabwe, indigenous Zimbabwean visitors judged ethnic cultural performances on the basis of aesthetics and artistry, without concern about whether they were authentic representations of traditional performances. This being said, domestic tourism market research in many places is still in its infant stages. The lack of research into domestic visitors' perspectives and assessments of Bedouin cultural attractions in Egypt is particularly noticeable. This study provides some insights into a previously unresearched context using qualitative research methods. Findings from the present study indicate that object-related forms of authenticity form the primary demand for, and evaluative criteria of the Bedouin cultural presentations and offerings among domestic visitors. This finding has important implications for Bedouin tourism suppliers as well as tourism researchers. Domestic visitors can be viewed as a powerful potential market for Bedouin attractions. Site management should reconsider their approach to domestic visitors, as well as rethink the mission and goals of the site's presentations and offerings. Theoretically, the findings of this study also strongly contest the notion that objective authenticity is no longer essential in ethnic tourism experiences.

## **Methodology**

### **Researcher Context**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that due to the significance of the self of the researcher in qualitative research writing, it is important for researchers to provide readers with relevant information about themselves. This move towards self-disclosure has been associated with the "best practice" of doing a qualitative study (Corbetta, 2003; Decrop, 1999; Patton, 2001). Qualitative research generally requires the researchers to immerse themselves in the research topic within which they are examining (the nature of domestic demand for authentic

ethnic experiences in Egypt: exploring Egyptian visitors' perspectives and assessments of Bedouin cultural attractions) and to undertake personal interactions with participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Drawing on the lead author's own experiences as a tourism academic and private individual, rather than just telling the stories of others, is perceived by a number of qualitative scholars as an enlightening process that informs the knowledge creation process and situates the researcher's study within his own epistemological journey (Babbie, 2004; Corbetta, 2003; Patton, 2002). The lead author entered into the present research with a fairly good idea of what he wanted to explore for his topic. He had been told, and read, many times that it is important to select a topic in which he has a keen interest, one that can sustain his attention throughout the research process, a topic driven by curiosity, rather than method (Patton, 2002). He knew that the present research could drive from many sources: personal experience, gaps in the literature, interest and work experience. He had a strong belief that this study was important, that it needed to be done, and that it could provide a valuable perspective and fill gaps in the literature about domestic visitors' perspectives and demand for Bedouin tourism experiences in Egypt.

The lead author is an Egyptian citizen who has been working within tourism academe since 2008 with an interest in understanding ethnic tourists, including identifying who the ethnic tourists are, and their motivations, expectations, perceptions and satisfactions regarding ethnic products and experiences. As academic researchers, the lead author and the second author have co-researched and supervised research centered on issues of ethnic heritage and spirituality, and such issues sit comfortably with their interest in exploring domestic visitors' perspectives, demands, and assessments of Bedouin tourism in Egypt (i.e., Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2016; Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2017; Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2018). Moreover, the case study site was purposefully selected for this research because the lead author is able to provide an insider perspective of the site. The lead author was a long-term resident of South Sinai in Egypt. Thus, he is familiar with different Bedouin tourism attractions in the town and has experienced the case study site from a variety of perspectives—consumer of Bedouin visitor attractions, tour guide, resident, passerby and researcher. His experiences of the case study site were directly contingent on one primary factor—his past work experience. This study is informed by tour-guiding work the lead author has conducted with British, French, Italian, Israelis and American tourists in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western Desert of Egypt. He worked in a travel agency in Cairo as a tour guide and tour package leader, and one of his main duties was to accompany different international tourist groups visiting Egypt to different Bedouin attractions including the research site under examination here. The tour-guiding work covered time periods between 1999–2000 and 2005–2007 and consequently the lead author used to accompany international tourists on their trips into the desert where they visited the case study site and other Bedouin cultural attractions to watch or participate in cultural performances, witness camel races, taste traditional Bedouin foods, and buy Bedouin handicrafts. Nearly every day of the year, professionally trained guides lead similar tours that create an open space for cross-cultural exchange within the Bedouin cultural attractions in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western Desert. Exploring the Bedouin space in its unique role as a tourist site demonstrates the interlinked experiences of tourists and Bedouin performers and workers, as tourists seek to access an authentic Bedouin experience. Visiting Bedouin tourist attractions are thus an opening through which Bedouin operators can show tourists what Bedouin culture really is, defining Bedouinism on their own literal and metaphorical grounds.

During the lead author's guiding career, some of the questions related to the current study focus cropped up in his mind: "What do Bedouin attractions offer to other visitors (i.e., Egyptians, Africans and visitors from Gulf countries?)" "Why do other visitors choose to visit Bedouin sites?" "What do other visitors want and expect from their experiences of Bedouin culture?" and "How do other visitors perceive the Bedouin cultural presentations and

offerings?” Hence when it came to selecting a topic for a research study for the evaluation of faculty performance in research, exploring Egyptian visitors’ perspectives and assessments of Bedouin cultural attractions was the obvious choice. Thus, the lead author became an “informed reader” (Denzin, 2001, p. 67) within the context of this research. This provides him with a particular understanding about the site, its staff, and domestic visitors’ perceptions and demands. While this might be considered an inherent bias, it can also be regarded as a meaningful advantage with regards to empirical understandings (Denzin, 2001). Concurring with Patton (2002, p.108), personal insights and reflections of the researchers produced a “creative synthesis” in the research project and contribute to the theoretical framework by bringing an element of reflexivity. The ideas presented in the following sections linger on in you, the reader, and in the process of reading become subject to further examinations and dissections. This study is, in fact, unfinishable and to a certain extent a purely subjective phenomenon for both writers and readers.

**Basis for the use of qualitative inquiry for the design of the research study.** In many ways the basis for the use of qualitative inquiry for the design of the research study is based on the belief that a qualitative approach to the research aim set out in the introductory section is one that will best provide insight (Corbetta, 2003). Insights into ethnic-based tourism within tourism precincts weave a complex web and some issues are difficult to understand in a quantitative statistical way. There are limitations in a numerical presentation of the complexity of visitors’ perceptions, experiences and behaviour often examined in ethnic-based tourism (McIntosh, 2004; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Mkono, 2013a, 2013b). While quantitative methods allow results and overall patterns to be generalized, qualitative methods produce a deeper understanding of the visitors’ perspectives, experiences and complex behaviour rather than generalizing, predicting or quantifying it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Oakes, 1997). In other words, a major strength of employing qualitative research approach in this study is that it enables the authors to capture and understand domestic visitors’ perspectives, descriptions and meanings of their visits. In the same vein, Babbie (2004), Corbetta (2003), McInstosh (2004), Patton (2002) and Walle (1997) emphasized that a qualitative approach is a more suitable method for different researches especially when the subject of the research is concerned with experiences, motivations, perceptions, expectations and behavioral issues. In the current study, for example, qualitative methods place emphasis on visitors’ own accounts of their visit and the ensuing meanings they have made from them. In general, by using qualitative methods, the role of the researcher and the perceptions, behaviors, activities and experiences of those being researched become of major significance (Walle, 1997).

Increasingly, tourism and museum researchers are realizing the advantages of qualitative techniques as a valuable tool for understanding diverse aspects of visitors' experiences and perceptions and for exploring intangible elements of visitor behaviour (Armstrong, 2002; Falk, 2008, Mkono, 2013a, 2013b; Moussouri, 2003). Quantitative methods have been criticized as having weaknesses when investigating the tourists’ perceptions and experiences, for instance providing statistical evidence without sufficient rich explanation of the various results on such experiences and perceptions (McIntosh, Smith, & Ingram, 2000; Silverman, 2007; Walle, 1997). Quantitative techniques have the disadvantage of not being able to explore the “intersubjective nature” of visitors’ perceptions and experiences (Eyles, 1985, p. 54); they are inflexible for exploring the feelings and experiences of individuals, while qualitative approaches provide deep insights when studying complex human behaviors (Walle, 1997). Silverman (2007, p. 84) also maintains that the qualitative approach is a vital technique when the researcher attempts to address the “whats” and “hows” of participants’ interactions.

One point that the authors of the present study would like to stress here is the fact that the scholarly arguments above of the advantages of qualitative methods serve well as an explanation of why they choose to employ qualitative approaches. Yet these arguments do not

intend to devalue or marginalize all quantitative methods, which suit certain contexts and studies such as visitor surveys, annual reporting, public accountability and marketing campaigns. Also, the authors' arguments above do not imply that quantitative research cannot be combined with qualitative methods. The point is, perhaps, that there is no right or wrong, no one approach that is the 'best'. The issue is more that the choice of method should suit the research objectives and questions, the purpose of the study, as well as the conceptual framework within which the researcher operates (Silverman, 2007). Hence, if the goal is an understanding of the visitors' perspectives and demand for Bedouin tourism experiences, then qualitative insights are of fundamental significance.

### **A Mix of Qualitative Methods**

The case study site is examined with an integrated qualitative methods approach using interviews (face to face), observation and document analysis which were employed at various stages of the research. Since each individual method has its own methodological weaknesses and strengths, the combination of qualitative methods was considered important. This combination of qualitative research methods enables the authors to address the research objectives with both depth and breadth and also allows each method to compensate for the limitations of the other. Walle (1997) summed up by arguing that an integrative qualitative research methodology is useful since different qualitative methods can be deployed strategically to allow the research progress through distinctive phases over a given time period. The next section discusses the case study approach and the individual methods.

**Choice of the case study sites.** The authors adopted a case study approach to provide detailed insights into Egyptian visitors' demands for, and their views on, visiting a Bedouin Camp in South Sinai, Egypt. Case studies are relevant to the research project when the researcher is interested in "how," "what," and "why" questions (Silverman, 2007, pp. 84-85). A case study method enables the researcher to understand a complex event, experience or perception and can provide an in-depth account of what is already known through previous research. The case study method has been recommended by museum researchers and heritage and leisure tourism scholars to facilitate the systematic exploration of a particular setting "in its real life context" (Decrop, 1999, p. 361; Falk, 2008; McIntosh, 2004; Oakes, 1997). Choosing a limited number of sites is not only cost-effective within the boundaries of the research project but provides limits to the research context by concentrating on a particular site, population, phenomenon or characteristics (Decrop, 1999). Patton (2002) suggests that suitable settings should be accessible and convenient with a high probability of the experience and event being examined occurring. Besides, for a study to be viable, the settings chosen have to be attended by enough visitors to make sure the study succeeds (Decrop, 1999). Yet, as Patton (2002) notes, one of the disadvantages of the case study approach is that findings are specific and may not be relevant or applicable to other settings.

The research objectives of the current study were approached using the case study method within one selected site: a Bedouin camp for tourists in South Sinai, Egypt. The site was purposefully selected for this study, and a number of factors had to be considered for site selection. As indicated earlier, the site is known to the lead author and this study has provided an opportunity to spend more time in a place with which the lead author has experienced before. Therefore, the lead author's prior knowledge of the site ensured there was a stronger chance of richer information being presented. A command of the Arabic and English language, and a background in ethnic tourism, as well as long-term residence in South Sinai represent distinctly personal justifications for choosing the Bedouin attraction in South Sinai as suitable case study site. Previous work experience and contacts also delivered a sound background for this study.

**Documentation reviews and archival records.** The utilization of documents and archival records is a popular method in heritage and tourism research (Decrop, 1999; Mkono, 2013b; Ryan & Huyton, 2002). In order to review documentation and archival records, the lead author approached and secured management cooperation and permission to use data from the site's marketing unit. Copies of different documents and records were obtained, and field notes were recorded for those documents not permitted to be copied. Documents of relevance to the analysis of the site's presentations and offerings, visitor profile and preferences were reviewed and these included: management and marketing documentation, events offerings, visitor surveys and visitor feedback/guestbook. The lead author used the internet as another source of data since he was not present in South Sinai continuously. Since the late-1990s, the World Wide Web has become an effective and valuable tool for social research (Babbie, 2004). Accordingly, special events, advertisements and press articles contained within the case study site's web site kept the authors up to date with the latest offerings.

### **Interviews**

The lead author conducted face to face semi-structured interviews with domestic visitors since they are very effective in eliciting narrative; they also let the research process be adapted to the interviewees, facilitating probing for answers, clarifying statements, and exploring new ideas and views (Babbie, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Although the current study did not require formal ethics committee review or approval study (e.g., Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects), the lead author considered the ethical implications of the present research at the planning stage of the project. The lead author also obtained permission from the site manager to interview domestic visitors prior to the commencement of the fieldwork phase of the research. He emailed a brief summary of the research to the site manager to facilitate approval being granted at the site. He then approached the site manager by telephone and emails to finalize the fieldwork periods. The Egyptian identity of the lead author and his previous work facilitated access to the sites and contributed to facilitating rapport and creating trust with management, allowing him to be welcomed by a number of local Bedouin guides who led guided tours for domestic visitors. Adequate lists and consequently sample frames for domestic and international visitors who booked their accommodations and tours were made available for the researcher; therefore, these lists were considered to be the most effective technique to obtain a purposive sample of domestic participants. To further protect the business owner(s), workers and participants' confidentiality, the authors ensured the anonymity of the case study site by describing the attraction in more general terms.

The lead author began all his interviews with an explanation of the purpose of the research. Each of the interviewees gave informed consent to being interviewed and to their data being used in the way explained. The lead author assured research participants of the confidentiality of the information they provided and of their right to withdraw comments or even refuse to give information at any stage before or during the interview. He explained to them that a bilingual expert would examine the language of the transcript to assure accuracy of translation. He also offered the interview guide to each participant to view, but only a few of them looked at the list before the interview began; the rest were relaxed and willing to talk in a natural conversational manner. Moreover, he informed participants that the name of the attraction, where the study was conducted, was kept anonymous to prevent leaking of their names. The data collected came from 29 domestic visitors (aged 18 years or over), who were each interviewed on the completion of their visit. All of the participants were interviewed in the café area or restaurant of the site since each provided various quiet and private seating areas away from the background noise from other visitors' conversations and traffic. All interviews

and on-site observations took place over a three-month period in the summer of 2016. The sample size of the study was determined when the point of data saturation was attained; that is when the same information was being reported without anything new being added (Babbie, 2004; Patton, 2002).

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, as this was the Egyptian language in which the lead author was fluent. Egyptian participants who were willing to participate were offered a small incentive, such as a cold drink or a cup of tea or coffee, to encourage and thank them for their time (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews began with the interviewer becoming acquainted with the respondents by talking about food, hobbies, travel experiences, and past educational experiences in a friendly and candid manner. This kind of exchange proved helpful in “breaking the ice” and laying the groundwork for the interviews (Grbich, 1999, p. 98). The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, and were audio recorded. The lead author utilized a semi-structured interview protocol to elicit Egyptian visitors’ demands and perceptions of Bedouin attractions as expressed in their own words and in relation to pertinent issues they raised. The interviews also sought to explore the importance participants placed on experiencing Bedouin culture. The questions were framed so as to find out about the content of their site visits, their perceptions of the visit and the activities they engaged in during their visit. The following are excerpts from the interview question topics for domestic visitors:

- Was there anything in particular you were looking forward to seeing at the Bedouin site today?
- How has this visit been different/similar to visiting other attractions in Egypt?
- Did you engage in any activities at the site? If yes, which activities? What do you think about them?
- Do you think the visit to the Bedouin site today added to your understanding of Bedouin lifestyle and culture in Sinai? In what ways?
- What did you like most about your visit to the Bedouin site today?
- What did you like least about your visit to the Bedouin site today? Why do you say that?
- In general, what would have improved your experience at the Bedouin attraction today?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me, which relates to your interest in and experience of the site?

### **Observations**

The authors’ decision to use observational method stemmed from consideration of various remarks and valuable observational work undertaken by a number of qualitative scholars (i.e., McIntosh, Smith, & Ingram, 2000; Mkono, 2013a, b; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Walle, 1997). These academics emphasize that the hallmark of observation is its unobtrusive nature which minimizes any interference in the behaviour of those observed, neither manipulating nor stimulating them. Therefore, the interviews in this study were supplemented with unobtrusive observation work since this approach can extend the researcher’s perspective in field research. The advantage of observations is that they approach reality in its natural setting and examine incidents and actions as they progress (Babbie, 2004). Observations and interviews were not collected from the same audience. Observations at the Bedouin attraction were carried out in two phases. The initial observation schedule was conducted during the interview phase of the research and focused on the site itself; the lead author familiarized himself with the activities, events, the large selection of Bedouin handicrafts and souvenirs, the restaurant’s offerings and the manner of presentation and the

workers and performers' attitudes and behaviors at the site. During this stage, key themes and ideas (i.e., the Bedouin plate presentations at the restaurant, the menu, the Bedouin's attire of the workers and performers and the presentation and quality of the craft souvenirs) were noted for the attraction. Additionally, the lead author used digital photography occasionally as another source of data to capture some of the settings and this visual method helped him sometimes in recalling different surroundings later during the in-depth analysis. The following is a sample item from the initial observation sheet:

Stage of Fieldwork	Source of Data & Objectives	Observation Notes
Phase 1  Date:  Starting time:  Finishing time:  Number of people:	The Main Restaurant  1. To become familiarized with the restaurant's ambience & menu.  2, To learn about the service & staff behaviour & practices & unexpected incidents related to the phenomenon under investigation.	

In the second stage, the lead author conducted more observations shortly after the completion of the interview phase. The data from the interviews were used to design and inform subsequent observations. For example, during this phase, observations were undertaken at three very distinct locations, the 135-seat venue for Bedouin cultural performances, the main restaurant and the large open-air market inside the site. The main restaurant was chosen due to the fact that it was a popular place for the majority of domestic visitors completing the interview. The other two locations were selected because they were experienced by the majority of the domestic respondents who expressed negative reactions to them. The information from the observations was helpful in clarifying the data generated from the interview questions by providing a context for the visitors' responses. For consistency of data, lead author's record-gathering of observations were carried out during the same times of the selected days. The initial observation at the site was conducted on one weekday (Wednesday) and a weekend day (Saturday) from 10:30 am to 4.00 pm. The second phase of observation at the three locations ran on Monday to Saturday from 10.30 am to 4.00 pm. and Sundays 11:00 am to 3:30 pm. Observations were conducted on weekdays and weekends to encounter high use and low use periods (Corbetta, 2003). In total, the lead author conducted twenty three hours of observations at the site. The following is a sample item from the second stage of field observations:

**Phase 2: Visitor Observation Sheet**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Collection Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher will observe visitors from a distance.

Individual adults in various group compositions will be observed.

Observations will be focused on visitor interactions and behavior within a specific area of the Bedouin site.

Time spent: \_\_\_\_\_ Group composition: \_\_\_\_\_ # of adults \_\_\_\_\_ #of children

Estimated Age Range:

Observed Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

- 17 and under
- 18-25 years
- 26-35 years
- 36-45 years
- 46-55 years
- 56+ years

Crowdedness level:

- Empty
- Moderately visited
- Crowded
- Extremely crowded

Make tally marks whenever behaviors happen:

Behaviour	Observed instances	Observed notes
Smile (S)		
Laugh (L)		
Engages with or participates in something (dancing, singing, playing traditional shepherds flute) (E)		
Point to something (P)		
Nodding (N)		
Lean in toward someone (LI)		
Displays disinterest or boredom (DB)		
Talk or joke with others in group (G)		
Talk with staff or Performers (SP)		
Call someone over to share or explain something (CS) (i.e., "Hey, look at this").		
Ask someone a question (Q)		

The lead author constantly used his portable computer as a fieldwork tool which facilitated the saving and organization of field notes. Material generated from observations was recorded in notebooks and then typed into Word documents that were printed out and stored in folders. A running list of observational data was then created to generate the category themes.

## Data Analysis

The Arabic transcripts and some documents were translated into English prior to conducting any analysis. The interview transcripts in Arabic were transcribed as soon as possible and then were reviewed by another qualified specialist (postdoctoral researcher) from the English Department, Faculty of Arts at Cairo University. To assure accuracy of the full and complete translation of Arabic interview responses and some of the marketing reports, the lead author followed Behling and Law's (2000, p. 19) technique of "translation/back-translation" where the researcher meets with bilingual specialists and they examine the language of the transcripts and documents until they reach an agreement. Behling and Law (2000) maintain that such procedure scores high on informativeness or source language transparency. One minor challenge the lead author and translator faced is the untranslatability which occurred at the word level due to lack of equivalence between Arabic and English languages at this level. Few Arabic terms (5 terms) were culture-specific par excellence. They represented a category of translation non-equivalence because they could not be appropriately translated by providing their dictionary equivalents. Arabic terms and concepts were translated not by providing their English total equivalents (one-to-one) but by providing Behling and Law's (2000) strategy for dealing with non-equivalence. In this case, utilizing a loan term or a loan word plus a short explanation was judged to be more precise and more accurate in rendering the full meaning of these few Arabic terms. For example, the noun *asala* signifies lineage (*asl*), pure Egyptian personality, Egyptian noble roots or descent, and its adjectival form, *asil*, corresponds to the English term "authentic" or "original." The English equivalent is taken only as approximation to the general meaning of the term. Also, the word (*Allah*), can be translated by using its one-word English equivalent "God" or "The Supreme Being who created the universe," as many translators did in translating the Quran. However, these equivalents do not give the complete meaning of the Arabic word as it is used by the domestic respondents. The term *Allah* is used by the respondents to express their enjoyment of the delicious meals in the restaurant.

All interviews, field notes, observational data and documents were analyzed and categorizations made with the support of the QSR NVivo software package for Social Sciences (Version 8.0) which was developed to assist in the analysis of qualitative research data (Richard, 1999). The authors chose NVivo over manual coding and analysis primarily because coding with NVivo was easier and quicker than manual methods. For example, it was easier and quicker to code text on screen than it would be to manually cut and paste different pieces of text relevant to a single code onto pieces of paper and then store these in a file. Typing memos within the NVivo software rather than manually (by, possibly, writing in a notebook) and linking different pieces of information together through electronic memos was helpful when building up themes across the data.

Once the documents were imported into the programme, they were read and re-read to begin creation of trees of nodes that matched up, such as different issues covered in interview questions or observational data (i.e., visitors' assessments of the Bedouin souvenirs, visitors' demands for a more authentic Bedouin experience or visitors' positive and negative perceptions of the Bedouin shows and performances). For example, when considering domestic visitors' views on the Bedouin shows at the site, the relevant text from all interviews was coded as "views on Bedouin performances" and a coding report was typed of this node. The themes of "object-related forms of authenticity and genuine experience" and "the artificial nature of Bedouin performances" were identified from this node coding report and thus main ideas were formulated for the results section which showed that the participants tried to differentiate between the real and artificial, contrived presentations and offerings by reading deeply into what they encountered as staged cultural presentations. As more documents were added, some nodes were refined or new ones created, developing a picture of the study including domestic

visitors' interests, needs, wants and demands for authentic experience at the Bedouin attraction. Finally, connections were made across the full body of data and with relevant literature; a process that is mirrored in the results and discussion sections.

The authors also utilized a more formal analysis of term frequencies that was achieved by generating a list of all most frequently occurring words in the texts and counting the number of times each occurs (Patton, 2002). They analyzed the most frequently used words among domestic respondents by running a Word Frequency query created in NVivo. The NVivo software package easily generated term-frequency lists from the texts, and therefore it was a quick and easy way to look for themes and concepts. For example, when respondents were asked "Do you think the visit to the Bedouin site today added to your understanding of Bedouin lifestyle and culture in Sinai? In what ways?" and "What did you like least about your visit to the Bedouin site today? Why do you say that?" the authors found that the most frequent words in the set of responses were "fake," "false," "unreal," "copy," and "imitation." The authors used this information as clues for themes (i.e., inauthenticity, lack of object-related forms of authenticity and contrived ethnic personations and offerings or pseudo-events) that they would use later in actually coding the texts. In summary, utilizing NVivo programme helped the authors greatly in organizing, analyzing and connecting the 123 documents that represented the interviews, observations, field notes and existing documents made during this research.

Lastly, triangulation is a significant technique in the interpretation process as data from different methods and different stages of the research and from the different respondents in the study can be systematically compared (Babbie, 2004). In order to ensure data analysis led to trustworthy and credible findings, all material collected was first read and analyzed by the two authors independently using NVivo software, and then cross-referenced to identify common views and demands that emerged from the data. After the main visitors' perspectives and demands for Bedouin tourism experiences in Egypt had been identified, rich quotes were highlighted and relevant aspects annotated, so that the authors could compare findings to generate and prioritize ideas, and to identify commonalities. In addition, triangulation was accomplished by using different methods to answer the research questions. Triangulation is one of the primary and commonly used methods to address credibility (Denzin, 2001). Triangulation of the data was useful to offer additional explanations for domestic visitors' responses and behaviour patterns when data from one method regarding a research objective did not provide enough detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the present study, observational data was triangulated with interview responses and field notes which allowed us to move beyond a single view of the Bedouin site. This lessened the risk of the result being based on a single technique of data collection and therefore enhanced interpretation. For example, analysis of interview data found that a number of domestic visitors perceived the Bedouin shows and performances as boring, fake and shallow, stating that it presented inaccurate representations of Bedouin music and dances. Visitor observation findings were consistent with these comments, as Egyptian visitors appeared disinterested in the shows, disregarding calls to join the Bedouin singers and dancers on the stage. In the example above, the method of cross-checking data from multiple sources provided a more informed impression of the visitor's perceptions of the Bedouin performances and went beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach and thus contributed to promoting quality in the research.

The study findings are presented across three emergent themes: (1) visitors' demographics; (2) visitors' demands for object-related forms of authenticity or related concepts, and; (3) visitors' assessments of the Bedouin shows and ethnic souvenirs and their attempts to differentiate between the real and artificial, contrived ethnic performances and products. Before presenting the emergent themes from the study, the following section will provide a broad overview of the case study site to provide a context for understanding the findings.

## **Results**

### **Description of the Case Study Site**

The case study site is located in the Sinai Peninsula. The Sinai Peninsula has more than twenty Bedouin cultural attractions that lure young, western independent tourists and wealthy package tourists from North America, Israel and Western and Eastern Europe (Mohssen, 2013). The majority of these Bedouin attractions have been promoted by many travel agencies in Cairo and Alexandria since the last Israelis left the Sinai Peninsula in 1982 (Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2017; Hobbs & Tsunemi, 2006; Homa, 2007). The Sinai Peninsula is a flat sandy area in the north where local nomadic Bedouin used to spend a few nights camping on their periodic migration from the higher to the lower valleys. Since the early 1970s, the Sinai has been frequented by international recreational tourists stopping on their trekking routes to the high mountain areas. Over time, the Sinai has become a favorite spot for recreational tourists looking for a genuine Bedouin camp, dune bashing and Bedouin-managed mountain-trekking.

Most of the Bedouin attractions in the Sinai have their own dedicated websites and are also mentioned in several tour operators' brochures, where they are described as living exhibits of Bedouin cultural and natural heritage readapted and transformed according to tourists' expectations, needs, wants and interests. Most of these Bedouin sites are also wholly owned and run by Bedouin families. They attract mainly international tourists interested in long-term, personal engagement with Bedouin community members. Besides providing adventurous trips into the desert, these sites entertain tourists with traditional Bedouin cooking, preparation and drinking of traditional Bedouin coffee, storytelling from Bedouin history, dances, songs, and Bedouin wedding shows. Tourists can watch or participate in cultural performances, witness a camel race, taste traditional Bedouin foods, and buy Bedouin handicrafts.

### **Visitors' Demographics**

The respondents were all domestic visitors who came from Cairo, Alexandria and Giza governorates. All the interview respondents travelled independently and made bookings themselves rather than through travel agencies or tour operators. Their average length of stay at the site lasted from 7 to 9 hours. Of the 29 visitor respondents interviewed, the majority were between 30 and 60 years of age. The gender ratio amongst respondents was uneven (23 males and 6 females). This is perhaps related to cultural norms as Egyptian males would often speak for females, and some females would feel uncomfortable speaking to a male researcher. Also, social and cultural barriers hindered the participation of female visitors. For example, seven Egyptian Muslim women who were heavily veiled were approached for interviews, but they declined since they were not escorted by girlfriends or male family members. Here the researcher's gender impeded the exploration of these visitors' perspectives (Patton, 2002). Educational, health and managerial professionals were highly represented amongst respondents, with 25 of them stating managerial or professional careers. Most of the respondents (27 of the 29) indicated that their annual income was less than \$US 30,000. All of the respondents were married, and they all joined the Bedouin tours with a partner, friends, and/or relatives, such as grandparents and cousins. In general, this section provided some insights into respondents' demographics, though it did not explain domestic respondents' perspectives and assessments of the cultural presentations at the Bedouin site. Hence, the following sections present the results and discussion on visitors' demands and perceptions of the Bedouin attraction as expressed in their own words and in relation to pertinent issues they raised.

### Visitors' Perspectives on Bedouin Cultural Attractions: Demands for Authenticity

All respondents interviewed were first-time visitors to the site. Most of them (25 of the 29 respondents) learned of the existence of the site through brochures and pamphlets displayed in their hotels, coffee shops and restaurants or the websites produced by the Bedouin cultural attraction, while the rest heard of the sites from local people who live near the tourist resorts. From the data obtained, it shows that the majority of participants were more concerned with authenticity and getting to know Bedouin people than their enjoyment of the Bedouin performances or the overall tour. When asked to describe their impressions of the Bedouin experience, the majority of respondents (27 out of 29) brought up the theme of *asala*, an Arabic term most directly corresponding to the English word "authenticity", on their own, either directly or using related terms like "pure," "genuine," "real," "original," or "unpolluted" culture. They demanded authenticity and sought the "real culture" and "original Bedouin people." Moreover, they expressed perceptions of inauthenticity, commenting, unprompted, on the "fake," "false," "unreal" and contrived nature of some experiences of Bedouin culture they had encountered. Other comments included how "the Bedouin experience today was artificial and too commercial."

The frequency of references to inauthenticity among domestic visitors (25 described a lack of authenticity) also supports the view that these tourists pursue authentic experiences, but usually fail to make contact with the truly authentic and often end up experiencing only staged authenticity, that is, front stage cultural performances (MacCannell, 1973, 1976). However, even though these domestic visitors were constantly thwarted in their quest for authentic cultural forms, they still believed that authenticity still exists elsewhere. As one respondent explained, "The site is too commercial, it is nowhere near authentic. It's just a tourist spot to earn tourist money ... but if you want to feel their [Bedouin] real life experience and environment, you can go trekking on your own in the Sinai high mountains. You will meet real Bedouin tribes and encounter authentic Bedouin culture and traditions. And it's way cheaper than here." Another respondent confirmed that visitors want to leave the site and explore the Sinai mountains to experience the most "basic nomadic Bedouin community," by which he meant that, "in the Sinai mountains they don't speak any foreign language like English or German, and you will not see mainland Egyptians from the cities wearing jeans ... You see their black,-goat hair tents and watch real Bedouin herding camels, sheep, and goats. They still adhere to their former habits, and remain pure Bedouin, untouched by urban living." In this statement the respondent implied that his desire to have a truly authentic experience meant the absence of non-Bedouin workers, an inability to "speak any foreign language" and adherence to a nomadic simple lifestyle in the desert. Domestic visitors in the present context were also hopeful to experience Bedouin culture in a natural environment (i.e., the mountains of Sinai), where they could explore, appreciate and connect with the "real life experience and environment."

Participants in the present study anticipated an objective authentic experience and were dissatisfied by evidence of "development," "modern technology" "Western music and songs," and "American way of life." They had paid to see a specific landscape and experience a particular atmosphere. Reality at the site fell short of meeting their demands, motives and expectations, and many of them felt deceived. When further prompted as to what they meant by "I came to watch original Bedouin performance," "Before I booked the tour, I expected to see something that is genuine, rather than an organized, commercial tour," and "I was expecting an authentic experience of traditional Bedouin lifestyle," participants explained that "Bedouin authenticity for me means a lack of development, a lack of things that are modern and Western,"; "being able to experience the Bedouin who are untouched and unpolluted by modern technology and American way of life. But the visit here is a snap shot of a Bedouin

theme park. Loud music ... they use music technology that can speed up songs to fit general Western rhythms. I want to watch a real Bedouin performance.” Another visitor voiced, “I’m a bit disappointed. This is not exactly what I was looking for. The rental tents have air conditioning, a small bar fridge, LCD TV screen, and laptops for your comfort. I see my visit today as a luxurious stay in the middle of the desert. What I really wanted was to encounter an authentic Bedouin site, no electricity, no laptops, no mobiles, and no social media.” In this sense, domestic visitors rejected the site’s presentations and offerings as a depiction of Bedouinism, or in postcolonial terms, a representation of the Bedouin *Other*. A thorough discussion of *Otherness* and *Othering* falls beyond the scope of this paper and is explored elsewhere (Abdelfattah & Eddy-U, 2017; Said, 1991).

In the context of the above, one could simplistically notice that participants’ demands for more tangible forms of authenticity in their experience contrasts with the existentialist notion of authenticity, which is not related to whether or not toured objects are authentic, and instead blurs the boundaries between fake and real. Unlike existential visitors, the respondents tried to differentiate between the real and artificial, contrived presentations and offerings. They read deeply into what they encountered as staged cultural presentations, and the “fun,” “commercial” and “entertainment” elements failed to provide them with an escape from contemplating Bedouinism or the nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouin community. Instead, the domestic tourists were on a quest for real ethnic flavor and authentic culture.

The perceived objective authentic experience appears to be an important element of domestic visitors’ demands for Bedouin tourism experiences. It is suggested therefore, based on the above findings, that for domestic visitors, the commercialized offerings at the Bedouin site is substituted by objective authenticity criterion for evaluating cultural presentations and performances. It is obvious that this alternative is more meaningful and relevant to Egyptian visitors. It seems that the Egyptian visitors had demands for objective authenticity in their mind, at least in the context of the present study. In effect, commodification and modernization of the Bedouin site put Bedouin tradition and authenticity in jeopardy. Given that this research was exploratory, the suggestions made are, however, only tentative. Further larger-scale research is required to ascertain how widespread these characterizations of Egyptian visitors are.

### **Visitors’ Assessments of Cultural Performances and Ethnic Souvenirs: Attempts to Uncover the “Unreal”**

Several domestic participants (18 out of 29) tried to detect potential deception and substantiate the authenticity of particular components of the site’s presentations and offerings. As a result, many felt that they were being tricked, and even attempted to attest that they were not easily deluded. A male visitor explained, “I was trying to check if the workers and performers were Sinai Bedouins because some of them claimed that they belong to the Bedouin tribes in the area. I figured out that the majority of them were not the real Bedouins of the desert.” He deliberately went to hold a long conversation with some of the site’s performers and workers who serve Bedouin tea and coffee. During the conversation, he detected their strong Egyptian accent. He maintained, “A number of them spoke an Egyptian dialect that was completely different from the Bedouin dialects. I would say the majority of them mainly came from the crowded Nile Valley to work and live in the Sinai resorts. Another visitor concurred, “Bedouin way of life and dance are commonly shown to visitors in the site, but it is rarely Bedouin themselves who participate in these cultural presentations. Rather, it is the Egyptian migrant workers who guide visitors and perform the shows and they use particular symbols of traditional Bedouin culture.”

Furthermore, a few respondents commented on the originality of the site's souvenirs. There was a suspicion on their part that they were being cheated. One respondent voiced his concern about the ethnic souvenirs, "... too many souvenirs, such as Bedouin camel bags, blankets, jewelry and brass coffeepots, they are all factory made, but they use traditional Bedouin designs in order to make them look like original." Another respondent noted, "All the Bedouin crafts were imported from Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said and Mansoura cities. They are machine made. I prefer to buy Bedouin handmade products, not machine made crafts."

These comments also, while requiring further substantiation, potentially showed that the tourist site might try to deceive visitors with counterfeit souvenirs and devise overtly staged Bedouin culture in a convenient setting but visitors are constantly assessing the ethnic cultural products to uncover the faked souvenirs and Bedouin cultural performances. Visitors became suspicious and tried to assess the authenticity of the original and exposing an inauthentic staged version of ethnic traditions. They voiced their concerns about the ethnic souvenirs and cultural performances being "artificial," "false" or phony. Such attempts show that ethnic tourists are often not passive victims of staged authenticity; instead, they become cynical of the authenticity of cultural products and questioning the truth claims made about originality and authenticity by ethnic communities and tourism businesses.

The findings also suggest that domestic visitors refused to perceive the song and dance show as depictions of Bedouinism. When asked, "What did you like least about your visit to the Bedouin site today?" The words of three interviewees voiced the opinions of many respondents: "I didn't like the show. It is a false show. I watched it for about 5 minutes, and then left after that. The dances and songs are inaccurate. They are not related to their [Bedouin] tradition and culture at all"; "I would say the worst part is the cultural dance. It was inauthentic [interviewer: what do you mean by that] I mean it was more commercial and less realistic. We were entertained by musicians presented as real Bedouin but who mainly came from Cairo or Alexandria and play commercial Egyptian songs and tunes. They don't faithfully show the real Bedouin dancing. The female dancers are Cairene [from Cairo], Iraqi or Syrian refugees who are hired to perform belly dancing alongside the Egyptian employees of the site. All in all, it was an inaccurate type of performance." Paralleling this comment, another respondent expressed resentment at what she perceived as "low-class Egyptian belly dancing" and "belly dance performers on the stage of a low-class cabaret." One explanation is that the domestic visitors had a far deeper understanding of Egyptian music, dress, customs, and people than international visitors would, which made it easy for them to notice objective inauthenticities, or rather similarities to modern Egyptian practices, which may or may not have been inauthentic in the traditional Bedouin context. For example, one respondent commented, "I experienced the Bedouin wedding; it was kind of a shallow and fake show. It is similar to the modern-day Egyptian wedding in Cairo. I was hoping to experience a real one." While they may not have been intentionally evaluating the authenticity of the performances, noticing similarities to modern Egyptian culture gave them the perception that what was being performed was inauthentic and thus disappointing.

Again, such disappointment is related to perceived inauthenticity of tangible aspects of the tourist presentation. For the informed Egyptian visitors, objective authenticity of Bedouin elements was an important criterion affecting their perceptions and assessments of the Bedouin performances. Thus, for several participants, only authentic Bedouin dance, presented with its own Bedouin accompaniment, its own songs, or its own music, would satisfy their demands for authentic experience and provide fair representation. They refused to watch a distorted view of Bedouin culture by means of inaccurate performances or superficialities.

## Discussion

Respondents at both sites were asked to state their usual occupation. The question yielded a variety of occupations. Managerial, health and educational categories were heavily represented amongst domestic respondents. One possible explanation for the dominance of professional and managerial occupations of the respondents is that the region of South Sinai and Egypt's Western Desert tends to attract more high-yielding cultural and adventure tourists who stay longer and spend more than other tourists (The Egyptian Tourism Authority, 2012). Research on visitors to ethnic tourist attractions has also found that visitors to such sites are generally well educated, older, employed in professional occupations, spend more money, respect cultural diversity and are sensitive about their impact on ethnic minority groups (McIntosh, 2004; Ryan & Huyton, 2002; Wall & Xie, 2005; Walter, 2015; Yang & Wall, 2010). In terms of travel party, all of the respondents attended the site with a partner, friends, and/or relatives, such as cousins and grandparents. McIntosh's (2004) study of tourists' experiences of Maori culture in New Zealand and Yang and Wall's (2010) study of tourists' experience of ethnic attractions in Yunnan, China showed similar findings, where most participants visited the sites as part of a social group and found comfort and safety in groups.

Domestic visitors' perspectives of, and the nature of demand for, ethnic tourism in Egypt are important for identifying consumer demand for product development and for assessing appreciation of Bedouin culture in the pursuit of tourism that is mutually beneficial to visitor and host. As indicated earlier, much emphasis in the literature on Bedouin tourism in the Arab world has been given to the demands, perceptions, motivations and experiences of international tourists while domestic demands are not fully understood. Similar to other visitors visiting ethnic sites in China and Thailand (Johnson, 2007; Novelli & Tisch-Rottensteiner, 2011; Walter, 2015), the findings from the present study indicate that object-related forms of authenticity form the primary demand for, and evaluative criteria of the Bedouin cultural presentations and offerings among domestic visitors. Their assessments of the cultural presentations at the Bedouin attraction in South Sinai centered on the inauthenticity of the souvenirs, cultural showcases and physical elements in the site, and whether the workers and performers looked, sounded, dressed, and danced, as performers and representatives of "authentic" Bedouin culture. They contended that the site was artificial and tourist-centric, and they wished to experience the Bedouin culture in its natural setting. Similar to the findings of McIntosh (2004) and Walter (2015) in ethnic tourism, authenticity or an experience that was "original" was therefore considered an important part of experiencing Bedouin culture. In short, authenticity of tangible offerings was key to these Egyptian domestic tourists within the Bedouin cultural tourism contexts.

Some domestic respondents in the present context also reported lack of connectivity to the Bedouin culture and wanted to experience the culture in a natural environment (i.e., the mountains of Sinai), where they could observe, explore, appreciate and connect with the "real life experience and environment." They did not seek fairly shallow, easy to consume experiences. As such, findings of the present study provide some support for Abascal et al. (2015, 2016) and Johansen and Mehmetoglu's (2011) studies that claim that the connection between ethnic tribes and their habitat is perceived by some tourists as an important element of authenticity. Furthermore, the findings suggest that unlike existential visitors, the respondents did not play "with an eclectic mix of experiences (pseudo-events) for hedonistic enjoyment," (Mkono, 2013b, p. 354) and instead attempted to distinguish between the authentic and artificial, contrived presentations and offerings. They thought too much about the Bedouin cultural performances being fake and shallow and refused to recognize the performances as a representation of Bedouinism. Along the same line, Sofield and Birtles (1996, p. 396) also confirm that the increasing demand for ethnic tourism stems from tourists' increasing

preoccupation with more authentic ethnic experiences, and their “hunger to taste if only briefly” the “authentic” and “distinctly traditional” way of life of ethnic communities. Much more, this kind of authentic experience demanded by respondents resonates with the “cultural sanction of the modern tourist” which has been the search for authenticity, as opposed to “the cultural sanction of the postmodern tourist” which has been “a playful search for enjoyment” or an “aesthetic enjoyment of surfaces” (Berger, 2013, p. 56). It is important to note here that these findings are in contrast with Yang and Wall’s (2010) findings where the majority of Chinese tourists were unconcerned about authenticity of ethnic performances and products in Yunnan Province, and instead consumed pseudo-events and contrived cultural products for hedonistic enjoyment. The finding also is in direct contradiction to that of Mkono (2013a) who found that Zimbabwean visitors observing African dance performances in Zimbabwe were not concerned about authenticity of the dance and even enjoyed modernization of the musical style. This suggests that tourists from different parts of Africa have quite different demands for authenticity of performances, and thus more localized market research is essential.

Findings from the present study indicate that the ethnic visitor attraction attempted to trick tourists into accepting that superficial and manufactured experiences are, in fact, authentic but visitors were continuously verifying object authenticity and exposing possible deceit. These findings, while requiring further verification, potentially confirmed Mkono’s (2013a) earlier observations that some “tourists are tricksters in their own right” (p. 209). The findings also concur with previous suggestions that few tourists may become suspicious and attempt to evaluate the authenticity of the original and revealing an inauthentic staged version of ethnic traditions (McIntosh, 2004; Yang & Wall, 2010). In the same vein, previous studies have yielded similar attempts by tourists to prove the authenticity of indigenous cultural products consumed by tourists in Thailand (Conran, 2006; Walter, 2015) and China (Oakes, 1997, 2006; Su et al., 2014).

Theoretically, the findings of this study strongly contest the notion that objective authenticity is no longer essential in ethnic tourism. Clearly, the participants in this study do think about authenticity of tangible things, from the objects to the ethnicity of the workers. For this market, the concept of experiencing existential authenticity through interactions with the workers and performers appeared to be outside their sphere of thought, as they focused almost exclusively on tangible elements of the site offerings. Moreover, this study differs from the majority of research on tourists’ demands, motivations and experiences of ethnic tourism, which found that international and particularly Western tourists are the ones who call for objective authenticity. Previous studies of domestic tourists’ demands have suggested that domestic tourists are only slightly concerned or even unconcerned about authenticity of ethnic performances and products, which is the exact opposite of this study’s findings (Mkono, 2013a; Yang & Wall, 2010). In fact, when they are concerned about authenticity, domestic visitors may be less easily fooled by the “commoditization of culture” (Su et al., 2014, p. 2) or the staged attempts to imitated genuine cultural presentations than international visitors would be. Thus, what is proposed in this paper is that objective authenticity is more significant for some groups of tourists than others, and this importance does not necessarily lie in international/domestic divisions. More thorough domestic market research in different countries is necessary to clarify the situations or locations in which authenticity is or is not likely to be important to domestic visitors.

This study has important implications for Bedouin tourism suppliers. Egyptian visitors can be viewed as a powerful potential market for Bedouin attractions. Thus, site management should reconsider their approach to Egyptian visitors, as well as rethink the mission and goals of their site. In particular, considering the importance of objective authenticity to these domestic tourists, site operators should make efforts to ensure authenticity in tangible aspects. For example, rather than hiring immigrant or refugee workers, efforts should be made to train

and hire ethnic workers and performers, both for the sake of linguistic and cultural authenticity and to preserve the ethnic traditions that tourists are eager to experience. This paves the way for sustainability of the ethnic tourism sites and ethnic practices, as well as providing employment for impoverished segments of the ethnic group. Although commercial presentation of culture is, to some extent, acceptable for some tourists, it can cause discontent to other tourists and even devalue ethnic traditions. No tourist attraction can appeal universally to every tourist, but sites can work toward a balance by offering some elements of objective authenticity in addition to “pseudo-events” or “staged authenticity.”

In addition, marketing messages need to be honest with customers by highlighting the differences between objectively authentic and staged elements. For example, the findings of the present study showed that domestic respondents were concerned about the lack of hand-made authentic products with a large number of cheaply produced, factory made counterfeits available for sale. Ethnic tourists visiting cultural sites deserve to be informed which souvenirs are factory-made replicas rather than hand-made authentic handicrafts. Sites could include areas where Bedouin people are hand-making the souvenirs and selling them. Seeing the production could convince visitors the process and souvenirs are authentic, and many visitors are willing to pay more for authentic products. At the same time, sites should clearly demarcate other souvenirs as Bedouin style, but not made through traditional means, to allow consumers to make educated choices in purchases of souvenirs. Likewise, sites should make efforts to hire pure Bedouin performers, but if this is not possible, they should be honest with the customers by advertising the performance as, for example, a sampling of middle-Eastern dance rather than an authentic traditional Bedouin dance performance. When visitors are told beforehand that the performance is not traditionally authentic, they may be less likely to feel cheated upon seeing it.

This study has a number of limitations, which relate to the nature of the qualitative approach itself. It is well documented that qualitative research cannot produce the same results, in terms of representativeness or generalizability, as quantitative research (Patton 2002). A limitation of this research is that the data collection was confined to one Bedouin tourism site. Besides, all interviews were conducted in Arabic, and hence the data here predominately represent the perspectives of Arabic-speaking visitors, a limitation of the study. This research only represents the population of domestic visitors at a particular Bedouin cultural attraction in South Sinai. Visitors who had not made the decision to visit the Bedouin site were not represented in this research. It would be important to replicate this study in different Bedouin sites in the Arab world, as the type of Bedouin presentations and the domestic visitor profile visiting those cultural attractions could be different. Therefore, domestic visitors' perspectives and assessments of the Bedouin cultural presentations and offerings in each destination could vary. In short, this study does not provide representative claims relating to all Bedouin cultural attractions in the Arab world. However, the authors regard this as a limitation of the scope and not of the nature of this study. It is ultimately up to the general reader and tourism theorists and practitioners to decide if and to what extent the one exemplary case is useful for understanding domestic visitors' demands and perspectives of Bedouin tourism attractions.

Also, while effort was made to interview a wide range of domestic visitors, this was limited by two factors. First, selection of participants was limited to adult visitors (18 years and over), thus the sample is not fully representative of all visitors at the site, which included children and teenagers under 18. Hence, future research could explore the perspectives, demands, and experiences of these types of visitors. Secondly, although the lead author intended to approach all visitors during the data collection period (over 18 years), practical considerations made this impossible at the site. For example, domestic visitors who exited the attraction while the lead author was negotiating with other participants about the interview location were missed and such interruption could be considered random.

Lastly, the sample size of this study was not considered a limitation as sample sizes of 20-25 interviewees are generally considered adequate for qualitative, exploratory studies of this nature (Creswell, 2009; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; McIntosh & Siggs, 2005). Furthermore, sample size of the study was determined when the point of data saturation was attained; that is when the same information was being reported without anything new being added (Babbie, 2004; Patton, 2002). As this study only focuses on one Bedouin tourism site in South Sinai, future research is also suggested on other destinations that offer a greater variety of Bedouin tourism activities and are more closely associated with ethnic tourism. Comparison with international and regional visitors (i.e., Arab visitors) could also be undertaken. In spite of the above limitations, this study provides a rich, in-depth understanding of domestic visitors' perspectives of and demands for Bedouin tourism experiences in Egypt and consequently offers some strategies to help Bedouin tourism enterprises satisfy domestic visitors' quest for authenticity and manage authenticity perceptions.

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