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FAULKNER IN SINAI

In 1940 William Faulkner wrote an ensemble novel titled Go Down, Moses. *I came across the novel as I was working on a book project in Sinai in 2009. It was the title that caught my attention. I was not aware that it was named after a famous black American spiritual from the 19th century. For me, a book with Moses in its title could only be about one thing, Sinai, and would provide a clue to which direction I should my own book project. But to my disappointment Faulkner's* Go Down, Moses *did not mention a single word about Sinai, and with an exception of one sentence somewhere at the very end of the book referring to the "pharaoh" there was not even a hint towards Sinai, at least ostensibly so. Why did Faulkner choose the title then? This is what this essay is about. It examines notion of place — in this case Sinai — not as a set of geographic coordinates but as meaning; as a set of semiotics within a narrative (the biblical narrative). That is probably what Faulkner was about when he chose the title. It is not a book about history or religion, it is a book about the wilderness and the relation people forge with it. In this sense Faulkner's novel, albeit being written about the postbellum American South, could still be very relevant to Sinai, a place where the image of the wilderness had played a crucial role in the history of the land. I decided to borrow Faulkner's title for my own book: a collection of essays and a photo sequence about the iconography of landscape and the development of tourism in South Sinai. Of which this essay and photographs were taken.*

"I can't repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never old Ikkemotubbe's to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation. Because it was never Ikkemotubbe's fathers' fathers' to bequeath Ikkemotubbe to sell to Grandfather or any man because on the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing."

The Bear, William Faulkner

I

In 1936 William Faulkner wrote his tenth novel *Absalom, Absalom!* The novel marked the pinnacle of Faulkner's career and secured him the Nobel Prize a decade later. The first pages of the book included a hand-drawn map of Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. At the center of the map was Jefferson, the county seat. The territory extended from Tallahatchie River in the north to Yoknapatawpha River in the south. The map came with a key of corresponding information, detailing surface area and population. It also included the statement:

*William Faulkner, sole owner & proprietor.*
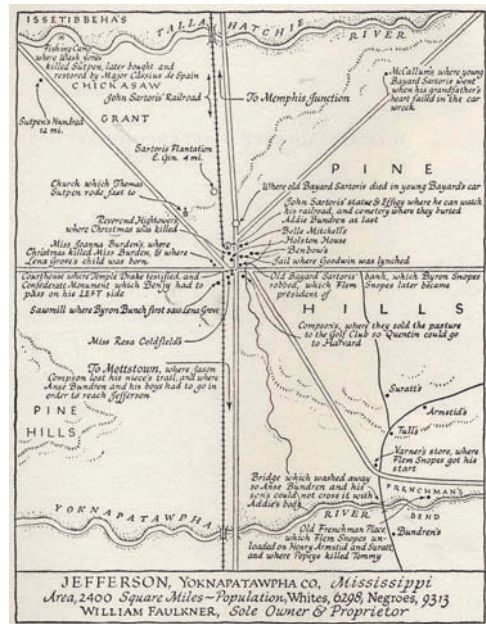
But *proprietor* of what? The map? The land? Or the place? The map was atypical, not only due to the appropriative gesture by its author. The map did not feature places but events and characters in Faulkner's previous novels and short stories, most of which took place in Yoknapatawpha. The eastern territories marked *The Sound and The Fury,* at the center was *Light in August*, and at the northwest was *Absalom, Absalom!* In fact, one might argue, Faulkner was not just the proprietor of the stories attributed to the place but the place itself. Yoknapatawpha was a fictional creation of Faulkner's novels; it is not that stories were charted onto places. On the contrary, stories charted their territories. The map does not chart a set of diagrammatic abstractions in relation to spatial information. Instead, the map sets relations among novels where place functions, not as a backdrop to the narrative, but emerges as a textual operation through the narrative.

One could see the statement of proprietorship on the map as a hint towards the fictionality of the place that owes its attributes to its author. Ironically, despite winning the Nobel Prize in 1949 Faulkner remained a provincial writer. His use of Mississippi

lingo and Southern tropes kept him at a distance from mainstream readership even in the United States. And Yoknapatawpha is not different: it is as Southern and provincial as Faulkner can be. It is a figure of a place brought up by the very condition of Southern-ness as Faulkner saw it.

A question raised by a number of Faulkner scholars was whether to read Yoknapatawpha as a place *in* the American South or as an epitome of the South (Brown; see also Aiken, "Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County"). Both approaches concur in their treatment of the South as an ontic place delimited by coordinates, cultural and historical specificity. This is partly true, but closer reading of Faulkner gives Yoknapatawpha a further dimension. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin, the Southerner from Yoknapatawpha, is having a chat with his roommate, Shreve, in a Harvard dormitory: "Tell me about the South" asks Shreve. "How do people live there? Why do they live there? Why do they live at all?" The conversation betokens a central theme in Faulkner: South–North relations precipitated by the seismic events of the American Civil War. Yoknapatawpha is a figure of a place in the postbellum South. Its *South-ness* is defined in relation to the North. It is a country coming out of the war, defeated and colonized by the new empire.[1] Its post-war status could also be read as a postcolonial status (see Baker).

Faulkner could be added to a list of postcolonial writers whose status is both complex and problematic. Writers like Albert Camus who both enjoyed a privileged status in their local context yet felt deeply troubled by their condition, albeit unorthodox, as subalterns. Although the two cases are geographically and historically distant they share an elusive complexity of southern-ness. I will use the word "south" in lower case to differentiate it from the ontic "South." The former comes close to the notion of "Global South" except for the fact that to apply Global South to Faulkner's South would be anachronistic. Furthermore, "Global South" connotes, and even postulates, a relation to Empire. Lower-cased "south," on the other hand, could be loosely more inclusive; it connotes a relation to *a* north. It is always specific to a north but verges on the singular. There is always a possibility for a south to be evinced at closer probing of geographies; multiple souths emerging within a south like fractals. According to Charles Akin, Yoknapatawpha exists at the verge of two Souths: Upland South and Lowland South. The former is characterized by yeoman-farming culture: The latter by plantation culture.
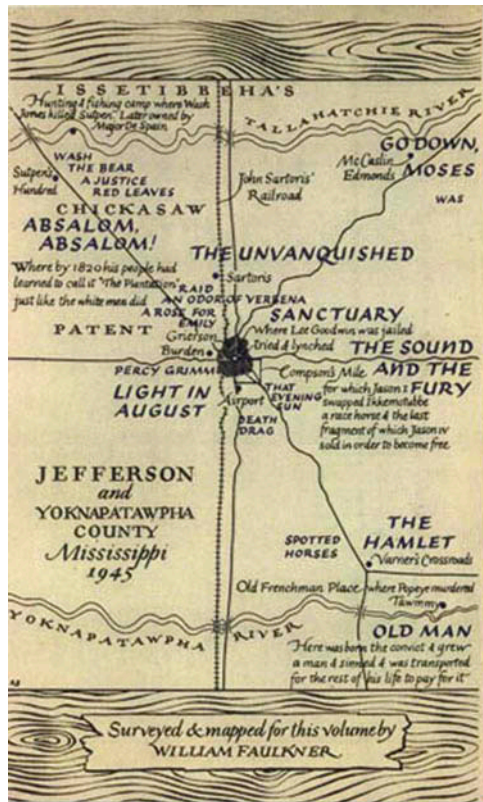
Even a white male from the South can find himself is a state of south-ness.[2] To liberally paraphrase Peter Hallward, to individuate a south is to individuate a subject position, who in recognition of the dividing lines that demarcates the borders between north and south, has moved to a placeless-ness of the in-between. If Camus' South was a place between poverty and the sun, Faulkner's South is a place between history and the land.

Faulkner continued to draw Yoknapatawpha maps, adding more territories as he wrote, relaying topoi not only in space but also in time. In 1946 *The Portable Faulkner* was released. As it was an attempt by the editor to map a topography of Faulkner's landscape the volume included an updated map of Yoknapatawpha, showing more territories marked by new and old narratives.[3] The map included genealogies of protagonists and events leaving their imprints on the territory. Characters would disappear from one novel to appear later in another novel and another moment in time, thickening temporal dimensions to the narrative. The intelligibility of the map always hinges on a past time. Like most of Southern Gothic literature, the past always comes to haunt the present, holding a grip on people and places.

In 1940 Faulkner wrote *Go Down, Moses*, opening new territory in the northern wilderness of Yoknapatawpha. Somewhere down the narrative the young Ike, the main character, and his cousin, Cass, come across ledgers containing unruly chronicles of the land. They sit and read the land.

II

Tourism in South Sinai grew rapidly during the 1990s. Constituting as much as 90% of the region's income in the late 1990s, it became a long-term government policy to regard tourism as a vehicle for regional development. But where, and how, to locate *South* Sinai? Administratively, the Sinai Peninsula is divided into two administrative governorates, North Sinai and South Sinai. I have not, however, come across a map that delineates such a border and few people in Egypt will know where the official border is drawn. For the majority of us it is just "Sinai." It is only on a visit to the local government bureau that one would one learn whether one's constituency is managed under northern or southern jurisdiction. The administrative South spreads from the Gulf of Suez in the west to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Egyptian–Israeli border to the east, and from Sharm El Sheikh in the south to somewhere in the barren lands of central Sinai to

the north. In practice, however, when people referred to South Sinai they referred to an area not precisely defined in geographical terms but in terms of the practice that is tourism. To go to the "South" as affluent mainland holiday-goers would call it, means to go on a recreational trip in Sinai. The South stands for particular localities or zones in the south of Sinai that had developed as tourist destinations. This is a territory cast around scattered loci along the Gulf of Aqaba coast down to Sharm El-Sheikh and with a small pocket around Saint Catherine where Jebel Musa (believed to be the historical Mount Sinai) lies.

The predominance of tourism, as an economic model, is what marks the southern from the northern part of the peninsula. Beyond being mere occupational proclivity, tourism grew into a social formation, and, in turn, precipitated areal differentiation. It assigned roles, dictated identities and bestowed cogency on things. In the South one is either a tourist or one works in tourism. This state of hegemony — the hegemony of tourism — leaves things in a state of perpetual polarization, of being either this or that, leaving few options in between. Yet tourism is not evenly spread across the South. There are areas that developed into centers (or nodes) of tourist activity, marking territories of tourism. There are other areas that lie on the verge of that territory, always in hope of being integrated into the territory. There existed two Souths: divided along the asphalt road that stretches from Taba to the east to Sharm El-Sheikh to the southwest. On one side was a territory defined by major tourist establishments along the coast, on the other side was the hinterland. With a few pockets of shoe-string establishments on the coast, the hinterland marked another South. The differences between the two Souths were not limited to economic difference but also cultural and ethnic difference: the coast corridor is dominated by residents and workers from mainland Egypt along with a substantial expatriate community; the hinterland is exclusively Bedouin. Traversing the two territories is not an open course as relations between the two communities have always been burdened with distrust, condescension, tribal loyalties and accusations of un-patriotism, while, paradoxically, mitigated by a romantic imaginary.

The hinterland is the space of the wild. The land is arid, sparsely inhabited by sporadic Bedouin settlements separated by wilderness space and connected through valleys and off-road tracks. The hinterland is not an open space; your entry needs to be processed before admittance. The hinterland is not a closed space either, for it shares with the coast a commitment to tourism — a commitment to a mode of practice and worldview that regards tourism as the sole possible option for economic betterment. To that end, the hinterland shares much with not only the coast, but also with policy- and fund-makers in Cairo and Brussels. Tourism is the conduit that bypasses ethnic and economic lines of separation, and its subject is the tourist. The hinterland exists at the edge of the territory of tourism, benefiting little, seeking more, moving towards the future while looking towards the past. For there was a time when the hinterland enjoyed prominence in the tourist arena long before the coast took over. Tourism in Sinai started in the wilderness. Or, better to say, it started in an image of the land *as* wilderness. Tourism in the South Sinai is a palimpsest of accumulated history between a traveling subject and the landscape. To probe the history of tourism in Sinai is to excavate its landscape, not just a mere vista but as a way that, at once, projects the desire of the beholder and resurrects historical utterances. It is best, in this context, to invoke W.J.T. Mitchell's definition of the image as an "actor on an historical stage." And in the case of Sinai, a particular image

becomes poignant: the wilderness. It is not a matter of mere geographical description but a literary topos that imbricates the very ontology of the place with its inseparable epithet.

The history of tourism in Sinai is the history of transfiguration of "the wilderness" into a place under the name "Sinai," and ultimately a tourist enclave. Sinai is a no-place imbued with a narrative — I am not referring here to Marc Augé's use of the term but simply as a denomination of nature in its generic form uncharted by history. Sinai first appears in history simply as a topographical feature — a mountain — in the wilderness where a seismic event takes place.[4] The Sinai theophany did not only mark the beginning of monotheism as we know it, it also marked the birth of two intertwined spatial entities, Sinai as a place, a landscape, that is wilderness. If the event marked the birth of the former it marked a vitalization to the latter. In its original sense Sinai was less of a place than a combination of time and place: a place-in-an-event, or an event-place. It is, perhaps, something close to what Mikhail Bakhtin would call a "chronotope," except that its spatio-temporal connectedness seems to be leaning towards the temporal (Herman et al.). Being an event-place, or a chronotope, entails that any textual invocation of the (past) event (divine revelation) will automatically invoke the spatial. It also entails that the place (the Mountain) cannot be directly re-experienced within the narrative events. Being limited to a moment, the spatial takes on a new figure, the wilderness. As Sinai would soon disappear from the Old Testament, its image — or rather its after-image — will linger in the figure of a landscape. It later disappears from the Biblical only to enter a mythical time. Much of its future-history would exist as incessant attempts to locate place onto a material reality; to bring it back onto the land and hence fix it onto the map. To locate the "Mountain of God" out of its generic topography, monks, pilgrims and colonial explorers had to follow the footsteps of Sinai's first geographer, Moses. All they agreed on is that Sinai was a place in the wilderness in an area we now call the Sinai Peninsula. Different pilgrims and explorers located Sinai in different places in the peninsula and as far as northern Arabia (Davies). That did not matter much. For to change the geographical coordinates of the place did not change its obverse side: the event, with all its significations, spatial or otherwise. Nevertheless, to seek a destination is to fix a place, and with every pilgrimage and archeological survey traversing the land, Sinai would gradually get *fixed* as a place on the map. What seem to be recurrent themes in this mapping/fixing process are the incessant mobility and the elusiveness of site, the transiency of place and the primacy of sight.

Tourism was the latest layer in the landscape palimpsest of Sinai. This time it was not Moses the pilgrim or the hermit but Moses the tourist who would put the land on the map. Modern tourism in Sinai first started with the invention of photography in the mid-19th century (*Traveling Through Sinai*). It started as an archeological investigation with the aim to locate and document Mount Sinai. Sinai's image as a mythical place beyond history made it an attractive destination for professional archeologists, historians and hobbyists alike. But it was not until the late 1960s that a contemporary history of tourism in Sinai appeared. Soon after Israel gained control of the peninsula during the Six Day War in 1967 the land was flooded with tourists from Israel and the rest of the world.[5] Most of those tourists were not there for religious tourism. Instead, they were young hipsters, nature lovers and free-spirits. Sinai offered a backyard for the small state in its regional confinement. The southern Israeli border was now an open

backyard: a space where Israelis could roam freely without coming in contact with a hostile Arab population. The landscape opened representational spaces for the ideologies of the Zionist project at the apogee of its empire days (Zerobavel; also Cosgrove, *Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape*; Cosgrove and Daniels). It was the wilderness where the ancient Hebrews roamed; it was a land without people (for a people without land) *par excellence*.[6] Nationalist ideology played out, or perhaps accentuated, the mythical image of Sinai's wilderness-landscape, while its secular nature limpidly spoke to the 20th century imaginary.

III

In 2008 I set off on the road to South Sinai, equipped with a camera and a dossier signed by the European Commission in Cairo stating my mission: "To document and comment on the paradigm of tourism and its impact on the region of South Sinai." A statement that called for some unpacking; not just for the word "paradigm," but even the innocuous "South." What ties the two words to tourism goes way back before the South was made.

There was much hype in South Sinai then: the European Commission in Egypt had started a generous grant making project entitled the South Sinai Regional Development Programme and the expectations were high amongst the Bedouin community in anticipation of who might be lucky enough to get funding. Why would the EU decide to spend hundreds of millions on a regional program is a subject for speculation. The legend went that grant money was signed away by the EU as a gesture of appreciation of Mubarak's role in brokering Palestinian–Israeli peace talks and it was up to him to decide how to spend it. Mubarak, having always looked up to Sinai as his own legacy, decided to channel the money to South Sinai. The South Sinai Regional Development Programme, the SSRDP, was born. From the day the fund was announced in early 2006 a grassroots promotional awareness campaign was launched to introduce the project to the local Bedouins and encourage them to present their own initiatives. The program was presented largely as an initiative targeting the Bedouin community. That would have explained the sense of entitlement that permeated the Bedouin circles and the resentment that ensued once the initial selection was announced as it transpired that a minority of recipients were Bedouins, the rest were professionals from Cairo. Yet the SSRDP

was in some sense targeted towards Bedouins: the focus of the development strategists of SSRDP was tourism. The assumption was that tourism was the best route for the economic betterment of the community.

Between the early hype and the later disappointment existed a distrust of the SSRDP. But that did not affect the conviction that tourism and development grants are the door to quick prosperity. South Sinai had already had a generation that grew up to see tourism as the only possible occupational opportunity. It did not start with SSRDP, but it was testimony to the fact that both the Bedouins and the government are sharing a similar take on tourism: that tourism was a public policy as well as a tradition.

It was not the best moment for an ethnographer to present himself as another euro-funded stranger, not the best way to gain the trust of people. It was Selim's advice not to bring the notion of SSRDP up at the first introduction. Selim was a Bedouin guide from Wadi Arba'een, one of the valleys in the precincts of Jebel Musa, a mountain commonly referred to as Mount Sinai.[7] I had known Selim already for few years then as he had accompanied me on a number of trekking trips. This time I wanted to go beyond the typical path, to places less tourist-trodden. As a tourist your relation to places and people is that to a landscape where everything seemed to be part of the same diorama of the great outdoors. But now it was different: being on an assignment of sorts I had to shed the tourist-photographer's mindset for that of the ethnographer-photographer. I hardly knew the difference. I guessed it meant to picture more of the people and their way of life rather than the landscape.

Most of the Bedouin population in South Sinai lives at a distance from the touristic hotspots on the coast in widely-spaced encampments and small villages. The sparsely populated hinterland is walk-in turf for a stranger: one has to be admitted in. Bedouins live in close-knit communities in verdant wadis with subterranean water sources. There is hardly any government presence there except for the brief and rare visits by government officials. Schools and clinics, if present, are usually empty of personnel most of the year. The ever-receding horizon of barren land is far from being an open wilderness where nature takes over. This is territorialized land subtended by social codes. Tribes, clans and family claim rights to the use of the land: claims to pastoral rights as well as cultivation rights. This means the cultivation of opium poppies and marijuana weeds known as *banjo*. They are easy to plant and more lucrative than any alimentary crop. With the advent of tourism there also came the territorial right to assign guides to tourists; an iterant trekker needs a guide from the incumbent tribe in order to freely roam the place. Strangers, especially if they are non-Bedouins, are viewed with some suspicion. This is particularly the case if they are Egyptians since they could be either a tourist or a police informer. Better be the former.

Wadis are vigilantly eyed by Bedouin kids; "you don't see them, they are up there on the siding hills," remarked Selim. I never noticed anyone up there, but he was right. It was common for us to be intercepted by Bedouins in pickups inquiring about our trajectory and if "we needed assistance," which would lead to the more candid questions as to who, where, and why. Selim's replies always came incommensurable with the sternness of the questions: "we are just having a tour." It was Selim who always answered, not me. Being a Bedouin, he was more credible than I. Oftentimes it was easier to preempt the questions by presenting oneself at the nearest *mag'ad*. Such an exhibition of knowability of desert codes — of being "path-wise" — was indispensable.

The *Mag'ad* is very central in Bedouin social life and an important spatial entity in the life of the landscape. It is a porch of sorts, sometimes attached to the house but could also be at a small distance from it. Sometimes there is no house at all. There are no walls to mark the *ma'gad* circumference, its peripheries lurch out to blend into the landscape. It is neither interior nor exterior. The word is derived from *qa'ada*, to sit. A *mag'ad* is a meeting spot, more like a salon of sorts. A *mag'ad* is associated not with place but with a person, family or group of families and is hence territorial in nature. The *mag'ad* is identified by a clan or people. It marks sites of proprietorship over the territory marking pasturing rights, for example. One family or person might have multiple *mag'ad* in different places. And if they were not present in the location the *mag'ad* can still exist on its own. It demands attention; a passerby is expected to stop by and spend some time there — it could be brief, but one has to stop. Not doing so could be regarded as ill-mannered and even treated with suspicion.

The *mag'ad* is neither a locality nor an object, it is a spatial practice. It is a threshold point in the landscape that charts it according to certain social norms. It is a point of vigilance and a point of ingress into the landscape; that is where every new entry is processed, mine was no exception. On the one hand it is a point of repose; on the other, it is a point of encounter with the other, this time the tourist.

The *mag'ad* played an important role in the history of South Sinai as it provided a ubiquitous spatial infrastructure for tourism to develop upon. This is where tourists first stopped, and as their numbers increased, some *mag'ads* were separated from the residential function and allocated the sole function of being tourist rest-sites. They gradually developed into what became known as "Bedouin camps," shelters with basic lodging and cooking facilities with a campfire area in the middle. Not all *mag'ads* were "elected" to tourist camps of course, only those on locations or trajectories known for their visual amenities, those close to the sea or on trekking routes in the high mountains area.

It would have been impossible to walk there without the company of Selim. One cannot just go there and just knock on doors. The general view of Egyptians has always been antipathetic and relations between the two groups thorny. Selim used to say that "there are two worlds out there and they do not mix: Egyptians and Bedouins," referring to the inhabitants of village of Saint Catherine. He confided how Nile Valley people are viewed as arrogant, condescending and troublemakers and called me *far'on* (pharaoh), albeit in jest.

Selim suggested that, in order to make people at ease with my presence and camera, he would present me as someone working on a guidebook on Bedouin culture. That is what the people expected from the book. I got the impression that Selim did believe — or perhaps preferred to believe — that I was working on a guidebook. Later during the course of the project it transpired that was also what the funders expected: a mix of scenic landscapes, Bedouin traditions and other exotic accouterments. It seemed that any study that invokes a Bedouin state of affairs would always be read against discourses of representation and identity. The conservationist esthetics that reifies the image of Bedouins as good-willed traditional nature-people shared among Egyptian middle-class Sinai-goers as well as European funders was set to counterpoise the conventionally held view amongst Nile Valley Egyptians of Bedouins as traitors, traffickers and bandits. But it is also the esthetics that keep everyone in his or her position, politically speaking. Such esthetics is not just a view from the outside, but it has also become internalized,

at the site of the represented, mainly out of convenience. The ecology of tourism fixed the Bedouin the role of the nature-man for a share in its economy. People came to see their lives as a reflection of what could be seen in a guidebook: the compartment of the bygone, the vanishing genuine. Selim believed that there was not much in Sinai's present that is worth including in the (guide)book: "You need to talk to the elders, not those youngsters. What do they know?" It was then that I came to realize how paramount tourism was to the lives of the people, how it molded expectations and roles and a whole worldview. The "hegemony of tourism," as I started to call it.

Selim's advice was useful. It was more prudent than posturing as a tourist at every *mag'ad* we came across. Nothing misleading about that since, after all, the book project was essentially about tourism; it would by default be put in the same league with guidebooks. It did not matter what questions one asks, what mattered was the condition that situates one's being-there. Ethnographies and guidebooks might differ in the outputs but they are similar in the way they are performed, their modus operandi and their relation to the people and to the landscape — at least in South Sinai. It is the space that contours one's behavior in it. I had to take a less inquisitive, more laidback demeanor of a dilettante tourist. The space contours one's behavior in it. The verb *nemshi* best describes approach. It means "walk" or "go," but in actual contemporary Bedouin usage it means to "travel a distance." The closest English term would be to "peregrinate," which in turn comes from the Latin root *per,* which means "about," and *ager*, which denotes something akin to "territory." Put together, peregrinate means move around and *about* the land. This does not necessarily entail aimless wandering but an attention, recognition, sensibility to the path-making not confined to the geographies of destinations and trajectories; a dwelling of sorts. In a nomadic setting moving from one point to the other entails a significant time spent en route where the act of moving becomes endowed with social significance, *habitus*, or a mode of being onto the social. Even in the post-nomadic times the path is an important milieu in the social formation of the Bedouin hinterland. Nomadism is not the preserve of pastoralism as it perhaps had once been, the practice has been embellished for some time now by the other forms of non-pastoral nomadism, namely tourism and contraband. Both helped to revitalized the mobility mythos and establish new grounds for connection between the traditional and the present. Life nowadays exists less in routes and more in termini: villages and towns, and it is only those who are involved with either tourism or contraband who dominate and can negotiate the path with ease. Knowledge of the desert paths has always been good material for anecdotes, oftentimes with an overkill: there is always a Bedouin who knew a secret route that a lost brigade or spy can take. There were stories around campfires of Egyptian soldiers caught in the Sinai after the Six Day War and who were camouflaged as Bedouins and escorted to the other side of the Suez Canal. Selim, for his part, was proud of his knowledge of the paths and kept boasting about it: "I can take you anywhere in Sinai without passing through a single checkpoint or touching the asphalt." To an extent he was right, we have developed the habit of taking off-road detours before going back to the asphalt in order to avoid checkpoints, just for the fun of it. (Sinai roads are peppered with checkpoints like these, situated at points to major towns and tourist centers with the ostensible objectives of controlling arms and drug traffic.)

Besides being a source of income, Selim greatly enjoyed working as guide. It offered him the chance to leave the village. Contrary to the standard belief, not every Bedouin

has the chance to go wandering around in the out-country nowadays. Bedouins are no longer nomadic and moving around could be costly. Selim would leave his young nephew to take care of the shop as he went to the *jebel* — which means "mountain," although it is used to refer to out-country at large, and not necessarily limited to any particular mountain. It entails going beyond the bounds of the urban into the "wilderness." This is a particularly Sinai-ic note although not exactly synonymous with *jebel*. This interface between nature and the beholder has a name, it is called "landscape." It is a way of seeing that in time becomes a repository of cultural meaning as well as use value (see Cosgrove, *Social Formation and the Iconography of Landscape*). In Sinai landscape is traditionally identified as wilderness. It is probably the most important actor in the historical stage of Sinai: it was landscape that modern-day tourists, Victorian adventurers, monks and pilgrims, Selim and all those guides had in common, a landscape composed from the position of the peregrinatory subject. Landscape — or better to say, wilderness — becomes a relation between a peregrinator and the land. If the wilderness was the text in which Sinai was written it was through peregrination that Sinai was performed. Landscape is an exchange value; it turns land into a commercial property in the new economy of tourism. Landscape is a whole relation to the land, which in turn invites new schemes of management. Wilderness traditionally has no equivalent in Bedouin dialect, at least not in the same signification. The closest word is *he'w*, which means "nowhere," without the cultural weight of wilderness. Tourism converted the ubiquitous *he'w* into a currency of vistas.

A story of two canyons lends a testimony to the change in relation to the land and the birth of landscape and its subjects. Colored Canyon, as it is called nowadays, existed in the nowhere of the *jebel* somewhere close to the Watir valley. With no water source and rocky lime soil inhospitable to vegetation, it had little cultural significance beyond being mere generic *zarnug*, which literally means a ravine. The opening Eilat to Sharm El-Sheikh road after the Six Day War brought the ravine suddenly into the spotlight as a tourist attraction. Now it was called "Color Canyon" in reference to its colored interior. The innominate *zarnug* was "upheld" to a more significant stature in the lives of the nearby Mzeina and Tarabin tribes. It is a beautiful site but not necessarily unique or spectacular when compared to other areas in South Sinai. It is most probably the canyon's accessibility, being close to the asphalt road, that helped to promote it onto the local social ecology.

Like Mount Sinai, many people here depend on the canyon for their livelihood. Under a shade made of goatskin at the base of the valley leading to the canyon awaits a group of young Bedouins in their teens. This is where visitors can hire a guide for day. The road is not really that challenging, logistically speaking, but the clamorous insistence of the guides suggests otherwise and bespeaks to the extent of their desperation. Every day there are more of them but without enough tourists to support all. Nowadays more tourists come as groups arranged by tour companies that have their own team of guides, which means less work for local guides.

Hemeid and his younger brother sit under that shade, waiting on the next group of tourists. There are three sons in the family, two of them have to come here to work as guides. Hemeid does not do Color Canyon guiding anymore as he now makes a living driving a minibus taxi down the Taba to Sharm El-Sheikh road. His life exists on the asphalt, a life betwixt. On the one hand, the glitzy resorts are no place for a Bedouin

like him; their fenced gates mean endless questioning and maybe searching. Once inside he would not be able to afford it.

On the other hand, the bumpy hinterland is no place for Hemeid either: he is a man of the coast. As a driver he spends his working hours on the asphalt and lives near the road, in the town of Nuweiba. He does not live by the glitzy coast, nor does he live inland. He occupies a liminal space. Hemeid never possessed a knowledge of the hinterland — of the *jebel* — the way Selim did, or for that matter Atwa. Like Hemeid, Atwa's world is closely tied to a canyon, or rather a number of canyons. The ravine-full terrain called Zaranig (the plural of *zarnug*, or "ravine") lies far into the deep country, far from the asphalt and the tourist-trodden track. The sandy terrain is intercalated with numerous small ravines. In agronomic terms such a topography is of much value since it can be adapted to collect rainwater by blocking egress points, in a sense turning them into small dams. For this reason Zaranig had been an important site in the social landscape of the Tarabin tribe. But things have changed. If the Color Canyon was promoted by tourism from being nowhere, to the forefront of social life, Zaranig has moved to the backstage, the hinter-most of the hinterland. That is mainly due to its distance from the road and its inaccessibility. The new geography also fostered another activity as the natural irrigation system is now used for opium poppy plantations.

Unlike Selim or Hemeid, Atwa's life does not revolve around tourism, at least in an immediate way. He makes more money transporting and distributing opium and marijuana. To escort tourists is maybe a trivial thing to him, an assumption belied by his ludic curiosity towards the whole tour guide enterprise. It was perhaps because it offered financial means and a pretext to go beyond the environs of the everyday life. One of the real perks of tourism is that it opens new landscapes. There is something to the errant wandering of the novice guide that opens new landscapes, possibilities for going elsewhere in this expansive country where routine makes no demands.

Tourism provided a relatively generous income for the Bedouin population compared to the hitherto subsistence livelihood of the desert. Yet the success and proliferation of tourism in the south of Sinai was due to the fact that tourism was built on a local human ecology. In nomadic and semi-nomadic cultures, the path becomes the abode and social relations are drawn along the peregrination track. There, the distinction between outside and inside dissipates and the periphery is everywhere. Perimeters dissolve into the landscape; instead territory is marked by peripatetic movements. Those were the milieu that transported travelling subjects, old and new. However, if mobility was the common denominator between the local vernacular landscape and the wilderness of the metropolitan environmentalist imagination, it was in their nodality that they differed. Transient resting sites that peppered peregrination tracks would soon become termini. They would turn from local markers of hospitality to tourist impromptu resting sites, then to a campsites, and finally to hotels and resorts. Those spots closer to the beach would be first to get sold. The division between coast and hinterland would take less than thirty years to take effect — that is a whole generation born and raised in a tourist culture and who lived to view it as the future. It was to become ironic that tourism, once it had grown into an humongous body of international professional standardization, multiplex resort operations and mega travel companies, would leave the local Bedouin population in a precarious position: unable to compete, disenfranchised and confined to a nowhere.

IV

The relation between Sinai and the wilderness allows us to read the place across different planes. It allows us to read one in terms of the other. Fix one and pirouette the other. Fix the wilderness and let the place drift, translate into other places. It creates a semiotic currency of sorts. A linguistic sign that functions as context for the other and vice versa — what Roman Jakobson would call contexture. What is evinced, in Jakobsonian terms, is a nexus of a signifying chain that connects and translates topoi like "Sinai," and "wilderness" and "Moses" in a concatenation of images. A landscape can translate into a wilderness, which in turn can lead you to a Sinai, which translates into a Moses and manna in the wilderness, which can translate into *a* Promised Land, etc. The list can go on depending what repository of images we can resort to. In brief, a place is translated into another, or even transposed onto another. And that would make two places like America and Sinai so spatially distant yet so topographically contiguous. One can think of the role Mosaic narrative played in the colonization of America, for example. From the day William Bradford, the leader of settler movement, proclaimed his mission to be as vital and crucial as that of Moses, European settlers would regularly in the New World identify themselves with biblical Hebrews, England with Egypt and America as the Promised Land (Feiler). Think of Daniel Boone in the George Caleb Bingham painting, heading through the mountain with a shaft of light in the horizon and a white horse at his side, conquering the wilderness, earning himself the title "The Moses of the West." Or think of Brigham Young, "The American Moses."

Or think of Faulkner's Moses in Yoknapatawpha; this time it was not a larger-than-life figure of Moses, the conqueror of the wilderness, but the rattled Ike in a disappearing wilderness. His wilderness is now cleared, de-swamped and denuded to clear the land for new cotton fields. He is not a hero in a new land but a failed hero in an old land. It was Moses in the colonized and border-charted land. Or Moses the colonized; the Moses of the black spiritual chanting "let my people go!"

All these incidences betoken an ideological relation between a newcomer and the landscape where Moses becomes a metonymic function that brought Sinai to America. A process of naming and re-naming, thickened by ideological contentions, conjures up the eponymous moment, Sinai and its collapse into a present event-place. That is when the narrative surges from the present, moves in past-time and recoils to a future-history. It is only in the map that time becomes motionless and everything occurs simultaneously.

Postscript

In an edited volume published 1976 Ben R. Finney and Karen Ann Watson described tourism in the pacific as a "new kind of sugar." The study compared the monoculture begotten by the international tourism industry to the sugar plantation culture of earlier years. Their concern was echoed by other scholars who pointed to inequitable distribution of wealth as a result of over-dependence on tourism in developing countries, particularly in peripheral deprived zones. Tourism in the South, as many would see it now, was regarded as a new form of colonialism by metropolitan capital.

Perhaps it could have been more relevant to think of other tourist enclaves in the Pacific or the Caribbean in relation to South Sinai rather than the American South, especially since Faulkner did not mention a single word about Moses or Sinai in *Go Down, Moses.* And, after all, these are "proper" Global Souths. That could have made a nice homology but would not have relayed much conveyance between places. What the Yoknapatawpha map did, in its spectral topoi, is project spaces of representation both future-ward and past-ward. To make sense of a place is not simply to map it onto another, but to compose its landscape; as crossword, rebus, or scrambled pages.

All photographs are part of the 'Go Down, Moses: a book on South Sinai' series 2008–2010. ©Ahmad Hosni. You can order copy at http://www.blurb.com/b/3395423-go-down-moses; e-mail: amdhosni@gmail.com

Notes

1   In an interesting account of Faulkner's visit to Japan in 1955 Faulkner parallel the situation of post-war Japan to the situation of the South, referring to the latter as "my country" (see Oates).

2   A pivotal moment in *Absalom, Absalom!* Is when Sutpen, the white farmer, is turned away at the gates of the plantation by the black servant.

3   See also The *Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*.

4   Sinai is first mentioned in Exodus 1:15. Other biblical nomenclatures appear as "Horeb" and "wilderness of Sin" and refer to the same event-place but their use to denote specific locality is hitherto undocumented. There are a number of theories regarding the etymology of the words, but that extends beyond the scope of this article.

5   It is worth noting that access to the Sinai Peninsula was largely restricted due to two reasons. Most of the Sinai, particularly in the south, was considered a military zone after the first Arab–Israeli war in 1948. Non-residents required special permits to visit the area. This was compounded by a very sparse road network, usually limited to the more populous areas along the Mediterranean coast. As a result Sinai, particularly the south, was virtually sealed off from the rest of the country.

6   The whole population of South Sinai was estimated at 4,355 according to the 1960 census. Source: SEAM Programme Environmental Action Plan, 2005.

7   Names of all interlocutors have been changed.

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