



Bedouin, Settlers and Holiday-Makers: Egypt's Changing Northwest Coast

Soraya Altorki, Donald P. Cole

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Forces imposed by the twentieth century--modernization, globalization, the politics and economics of nation--have become so great that major changes in the old ways have had to take place for the sake of survival. The arid regions impose strict limits upon human existence and activity. And yet by respecting those limits, the flourishing and stable culture of these regions has for centuries been sustained. In the last thirty years, however, the forces imposed by the twentieth century--modernization, globalization, the politics and economics of nation--have become so great that major changes in the old ways have had to take place for the sake of survival.

Egypt's northwest coast, where meager coastal rains have supported a sparse but thriving population of Bedouin, has recently seen the arrival of settlers from the Nile Valley, accustomed to a very different way of life and production, and hordes of tourists whose "empty, silent structures" have effectively turned the most productive strip of the coastal range into an artificial desert. This study documents the great accommodations that have taken place to ensure the arid rangelands of the northwest coast continue to be viable for the demands of human existence imposed on them.

"A main thesis of this study," the authors write, "is that change in the northwest coast of Egypt has strong parallels in other arid regions of the wider Arab world; and specific comparisons are made to change underway elsewhere--especially regarding the transformation of Arab nomadic pastoralist production to a new form of ranching, and the related changes of sedentarization and the monetization of most aspects of livelihood."

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