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Géraldine Chatelard

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## **Desert Tourism as a Substitute for Pastoralism? Tuareg in Algeria and Bedouin in Jordan<sup>1</sup>**

Géraldine Chatelard<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, international agencies have introduced new concepts in their development agendas. To foster sustainable livelihoods, poverty alleviation should go hand-in-hand with good governance and biodiversity conservation. Within this matrix, tourism, a crosscutting and fast-growing economic activity, has appeared as a recurrent theme at international development fora and in plans worked out between national governments and international funding and development agencies such as the World Bank or the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)<sup>3</sup>. All these projects contain a socioeconomic aspect targeting local populations –among them mobile pastoralists and nomads– and aimed at enhancing their income through nature-related activities, with a view to gaining their support for conservation. The idea is to reduce the destructive use of resources by local communities, in particular overgrazing, and encourage residents to adopt alternative activities, deemed less threatening to biodiversity, such as specific tourism-related activities (guiding, craft manufacturing, etc.)<sup>4</sup>.

Unlike previous development agendas (Bocco 2000), the more recent of these plans (GEF-UNDP 2002) not only allow local populations to remain in protected areas instead of evicting or displacing them, but they also go as far as adopting a favorable bias towards mobile pastoralists, praising their traditional conservation practices, and calling for the revival of customary laws and arrangements to manage natural resources. Yet while these plans give long due attention to local knowledge and management systems, they also overlook the previous involvement of local peoples with international tourism, or fail to assess the full implications of this involvement for the imposition of a new development framework. Therefore, depending on the plans, two contrasting but equally erroneous pictures emerge: one is that the introduction of modernity among local

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<sup>2</sup> Géraldine Chatelard is a social anthropologist and historian of the contemporary Middle East holding a doctorate from the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris. Her main research interests are the politics of tribal, religious and national identities, the various aspects of mobility (migration, displacement, nomadism and tourism), and contemporary Jordan in a broad perspective and regional context. In addition to several articles, she is the author of *Briser la mosaïque. Les tribus chrétiennes de Madaba, Jordanie, XIX<sup>ème</sup>-XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (CNRS, Paris, 2004), and she co-edited *Jordanie : Le royaume frontière* (Autrement, Paris, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Recent such plans for arid areas of the Middle East and North Africa include the St. Katherine National Park in the Egyptian Sinai, which consultation phase J. J. Hobbs has accounted for (Hobbs 1996), a tourism development project for Jordan (World Bank 1996), a plan for development and conservation in the Jordan Valley (World Bank 2003), a conservation program for the Great South in Algeria (GEF-UNDP 2002), and an ambitious pan-Saharan plan for tourism development (UNESCO 2003).

<sup>4</sup> In this context, “ecotourism” is promoted as the branch of international tourism that is ecologically, economically and socially sound and sustainable.

communities has not predated the current planned development interventions, the other is that modernity was previously introduced only to disrupt the idealized harmonious relationship these communities maintained with the natural environment.

This contribution would like to tackle a series of related questions that are not being asked in these plans, or to which answers are taken for granted, or that are dealt with only from a very localized socioeconomic perspective. The view supported here is that the livelihoods of nomadic, mobile and settled populations in arid areas are affected by larger economic, political and geopolitical factors, and that a diachronic approach needs to be taken to account for the dynamic process of social change that these populations undergo. Based on an appraisal and comparison of the preexisting involvement of Tuareg in the Algerian Great South and of Bedouin in southern Jordan with international tourism, I will ask the following questions: How did the current socioeconomic organization of tourism in these areas come about? What has been, and what is currently the impact of development interventions on local private initiatives in the field of international tourism? What does the history of Tuareg and Bedouin's involvement with international tourism tell us about the local and wider conditions under which tourism-related activities benefits these communities?

### Desert tourism: Case-studies

Before looking separately at Wadi Rum in southern Jordan, and at the Ahaggar region in the Algerian Sahara, it is useful to underline a few basic commonalities and differences between the two contexts. Firstly, international tourism is new to neither location as foreign visitors already ventured there in colonial times. In its current, market-driven form, tourism in the Ahaggar started being systematically developed in the mid-1970s, while in Wadi Rum it took off one decade later. In both instances, it was responding to international market pressures, and received significant inputs from central governments and international tour operators (TOs). Secondly, according to the labels used by professionals, what I will be looking at in both contexts is “desert tourism”<sup>5</sup>, itself a sub-category of “adventure tourism”, this latter activity representing a market niche occupied by highly specialized TOs and with the fastest growing public in the whole tourism industry, says the World Tourism Organization. Thirdly, those travelling to Algeria and Jordan in the context of adventure or desert tours overwhelmingly originate from Western Europe. And finally, the major European TOs in the sector operate tours to both destinations and to other, similarly “desert” locations in Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Libya, or Egypt, to mention but the main ones.

Differences in geographical scale between Jordan and Algeria determine some significant differences in the type of visitors to their respective desert areas. Yet a good part of the business remains comparable. Jordan is relatively small and the quality of its road infrastructure allows for travelling from north to south in 5 hours. As a result, in addition to tourists on desert trips of several days, Wadi Rum also receives a large number of day visitors who come to Jordan on primarily heritage-oriented tours. They visit the

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<sup>5</sup> Labeling the areas visited “the desert” is not unproblematic. National and foreign operators in the industry often constructed this image in view of developing tourism and of marketing specific landscapes and experiences to foreign visitors. In others cases, they merely reproduced existing Orientalist or colonial stereotypes. What the tourism industry calls the desert rarely corresponds to an ecological reality, let alone to the perception local people, particularly pastoral nomads, have of their environment (for Jordan, see Chatelard 2005). My use of the term should be understood in the specific context of tourism.

archaeological site of Petra and stay in the desert from a couple of hours to overnight on their way to Aqaba on the Red Sea. Whatever the type of visitors, they use the services of local Bedouin at least as camel or 4X4 drivers, and in case of desert tourism also as guides, cooks or organizers of desert tours. Two villages, Rum and Disch, concentrate most local tourism services and act as gateways to the desert. The area of Wadi Rum used for tourism-related activities is relatively small, extending roughly over 120km<sup>2</sup>, with a limited intensive-use core of about 50 km<sup>2</sup>. The total population that lives in the area is 4,500, overwhelmingly local Bedouin settled in a handful of villages, a few dozen families that live in permanent or moveable encampments, and many more that alternate residence between a built house in one of the villages and a tent in the desert. Yet focusing on the area of Wadi Rum to assess the operation of desert tourism and the involvement of the Bedouin distorts reality. A more accurate perspective is to consider the movements of those Bedouin that work in adventure tourism. At their maximum geographical scope, their activities extend to Petra, 90km to the north of Wadi Rum, and to Aqaba, 40 km to the south, along ancient caravan routes that have become trails for tourists hiking or riding camels on tours that can take up to two weeks.

Comparatively, the tourist area served by Tamanrasset airport in the Algerian Sahara extends roughly over 150.000km<sup>2</sup>. Beyond the Ahaggar range - the principal destination for visitors coming through Tamanrasset-, some people also tour the Tefedest, 200 km to the north, and the Tassili-oua-n-Ahaggar, 300 km to the south, along the border with Niger. The total population of the wilaya (province) is 130.000, the overwhelming majority residing in Tamanrasset and coming from outside the region. Indigenous Tuareg are a minority in town, while others are either settled in agricultural villages or some semi-permanent encampments. In the case of tourism to the Ahaggar, a broader geographical perspective needs to be taken, that extends to the town of Djanet, 700 km to the east. Besides its own centrality in the operation of tourism to the Tassili-n-Ajjer region, Djanet is at the other end of a classical three-week trekking or camel tour that ends or starts in Tamanrasset. The Algerian Sahara might be immense, yet sites of interest to tourists are localized, there is a seasonal concentration of visitors and no more than a dozen well-trodden trails (with a few variations to avoid meeting other groups) along which Tuareg teams take tourists travelling on Jeep or camel safaris, or on foot with a vehicle or animals carrying the equipment. Arguably, the main difference between desert tourism in Jordan and in Algeria is not distances but rather that, in the latter case, all foreign tourists come purposely for a desert experience physically and mentally more challenging than a quick glimpse at the landscape and some Bedouin folklore.

#### *Ahaggar, Algeria<sup>6</sup>*

For the most part, the Tuareg who live in the wilaya of Tamanrasset, the Kel Ahaggar, still lead a rural life. Although households are mainly regrouped in villages, the Kel Ahaggar remain mobile peoples ready to move to follow opportunities in trade, employment, or pasture (Keenan 2001). Tourism has come as but another opportunity for increasing income that requires individual mobility and flexibility. J. Keenan, who, as a young anthropologist in the early 1970s, lived with Kel Ahaggar households at the time when tourism was developing, writes that:

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<sup>6</sup> If not otherwise stated, background information in this section was collected through fieldwork undertaken in Algiers and the Great South over December 2003 and January 2004. It consisted of interviews and participant observation. I would like to thank all the people in Paris, Algiers, Tamanrasset, the Ahaggar mountains and Djanet who made that stay possible and contributed to the research.

“(…) for many of these tribesmen (…) the difficult and painful transition from nomadism to the restrictions of village life was somewhat eased by the development of tourism. Hiring their camels to local tour operators and working as cameleers, guides, cooks and so forth provided a trickle of income sufficient to enable many to remain in their cherished mountain camps” (Keenan 2001, p. 6).

Tourism was boosted when the ultra-centralized Algerian state created a national tourism agency in the mid-1960s at a time when the salt trade with Niger was impeded by the creation of borders, years of drought had reduced the size of herds, and raiding was no longer tolerated. As a result, Tuareg noble families were facing a drastic narrowing of their economic base that compelled them to look for productive activities. Paid labor in state-controlled mining attracted many, while those who had been to school, knew French and were settled in Tamanrasset were the best placed to become local tourism operators. In the 1970s, by insuring local control over this new resource, a few members of noble families changed their role from providers of protection and land and water to members of productive groups to providers of tourism-related jobs. Only the nobles possessed or had access (through bank loans, in particular) to the capital necessary for investing in the means of production that the new activity required, particularly 4X4 vehicles and camels, and licences as travel agents (TAs). This monopoly allowed them to establish themselves at the interface between foreign, mainly French at the time, TOs and the pool of local manpower necessary for the operation of desert tourism.

In the following decades, more demand in the tourism sector allowed individuals with less capital to also offer their services thus broadening the socioeconomic base of Tuareg TAs. On the other hand, non-Tuareg entrepreneurs coming from other regions of Algeria also started competing for the market by licensing travel agencies in the Great South. However, whatever their origins, TAs had a vested interest in preserving the viability of several traditional economic activities that would have sharply declined had it not been for tourism. This was the case for handicraft production by blacksmiths and their wives and for camel breeding.

Having underlined the pivotal role of TAs based in Tamanrasset, it now becomes easier to describe the involvement of other Tuareg groups in desert tourism and the socioeconomic implications of these activities. The practical operation of a typical tour involves coordination between, on the one side, foreign TOs based in Europe and Algerian TAs with an office in Tamanrasset, and, on the other side, these same TAs and what is known in the jargon as a “local team”. Each TA, depending on the size of their business, may work with one or several such teams, each composed of one or several vehicles or camel drivers, at least one guide and a cook, partly recruited from within pastoral communities with a settled base, a necessary prerequisite so that individuals can be contacted in advance. Because a high level of organization and reliability is required, and because of competition between several TAs for contracts with European TOs, members of local teams tend to become professional in the shorter or longer run, less and less being recruited on an *ad hoc* basis.

According to TAs in Tamanrasset, blacksmiths, many of whom have become car mechanics in Tamanrasset, make good drivers who can repair a car in the desert<sup>7</sup>. A

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<sup>7</sup> The specialisation of former blacksmiths in mechanic dates back to the last decade of the colonial rule when control over the Sahara brought long distance caravan trade to a halt and the French sponsored new means of transportation (Françoise Métral, personal communication).

guide, on the other hand, needs to know the terrain, the trails, watering places, to have some basic medical notions, and to demonstrate leadership abilities. Most often, he will be a member of a vassal group living in the area covered by the trek. The fact that linguistic abilities are required to communicate with the tourists and/or the tour leader that accompanies a group from their country of origin means that the guide has to know French. It means that he should have attended school, either in a village-based household, or in a boarding school for children of nomads. Camel drivers also need to have a specific knowledge regarding the loading and care of animals, and to be familiar with the route. They may or may not own camels themselves. The ones that they drive during the trek may be rented to third parties. Qualifications, know-how, personal qualities, linguistic abilities are self-selecting factors within a system that allows for recycling traditional knowledge and works along the stratified structure<sup>8</sup> of Tuareg society without equally including all its groups. *Harratin* and former slaves, in particular, remain marginally involved in tourism-related activities.

Know-how can be accumulated and transmitted from one generation to another, with the prospect of increasing the local returns of tourism. This is particularly striking with the emerging category of local tour leaders, sons of guides and camel drivers who, unlike the previous generation, have received a formal education. They are able to replace their foreign counterparts, a substitution that most TOs support if only because it is more economical: local salaries are lower and no plane ticket is needed<sup>9</sup>. Over the years, many employees have accumulated savings and invested to acquire independent means of production. In the 1970s, the first generation of car drivers did not own vehicles and was employed by TAs. By the late 1980s, some had been able to buy their own cars that they rented together with their labor. At about the same time, the most dynamic among them established their own travel agencies thus directly competing with the first generation of TAs, and upsetting the previous social distribution of roles in the tourism sector. Many families living in villages or semi-permanent encampments, who otherwise herded goats, had acquired camels that they rented to TAs, with or without their services as cameleers.

Several of these settlements, located a few dozen kilometers north of Tamanrasset at the foot of the Ahaggar range, also host tourists for one or several nights in family-owned lodges or camp sites equipped with facilities. A TA generally works with one or several such settlements, that almost invariably are points of departure of camel or hiking tours, after groups are transported from Tamanrasset by Jeep. Settlements are generally populated by one extended family with a high level of economic interdependency and diversification. Among the community, a number of males have specialized in tourism services without giving up other activities. Agricultural products (vegetable, fruits and livestock), often under the responsibility of women, can also go into the preparation of meals for tourists<sup>10</sup>. In some cases, partner foreign TOs have lent the funds necessary to

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<sup>8</sup> The origin of the stratification of the social order is a central, debated issue in Tuareg studies. New hypotheses are that the hierarchical ossified structure is not very ancient but was created during the French colonial administration of the Sahara, thus transforming the nature of the political order and power among the Tuareg (Claudot-Hawad 1991 ; Bonte and Claudot-Hawad 2000).

<sup>9</sup> This process is greatly impeded by the arabization of the school system. Young people cannot anymore acquire the necessary level of French or of another foreign language at school.

<sup>10</sup> The scope of this paper is not broad enough to allow for covering the issue of the interaction between tourism and gender hierarchies, in addition to the fact that I did not collect relevant ethnographic material among the Tuareg. Gélard (2001), looking at the Berber Ait Kebbach in the South-East of Morocco, remarks that honor prevents women from being involved with tourism therefore forcing men to

build facilities and accommodation and have also transferred their know-how in terms of hygiene, food, bedding requirements, etc. The development of tourism has undoubtedly been an incentive for the Tuareg to remain on what was their traditional rangeland rather than come to live in Tamanrasset.

The operational requirements of desert tourism do not only reinforce local social networks and the relations between the main town, the villages and the encampments, they also allow TAs and team members to maintain geographically-extended networks. Long-distance camel journeys have been revived, like the Tamanrasset-Djanet route which has become a tourism classic building on pre-existing intensive relationships and circulations between the Ahaggar and the Ajjer. Occasionally, tourist caravans are still organized following ancient trade routes linking oases in the northern Algerian Sahara to Agades in Niger. In all these ventures, several descent groups cooperate, basing new types of business arrangements on existing or revived trade connections.

The Ahaggar was made into a park in 1987, partly on the model of the long-existing Tassili national park, under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and with mainly heritage-oriented conservation goals. Introducing zoning and regulations on grazing and the use of other natural resources has been contentious, as it always is in authoritarian settings. In addition to the administrative and scientific staff, the park employs roughly 550 wardens (*gardiens du parc*), mostly Kel Ahaggar. A small number has specialized in guiding. They speak some French, are pastoralists settled in villages, and the structure of their household allows them to leave gardens or herds under the care of a son, a brother, or a wife.

Tourism-related activities are opportunistic and depend on tourist flows and timing. How do they articulate with other income generating activities? There appears to exist several such connections. Firstly, as tourism to the Sahara is seasonal - from October to April-, it leaves ample time to those who own cars and camels to be hired in other sectors of transport, such as the smuggling of cigarettes or of migrants that attempt crossing from Niger to North Africa or Europe. Secondly, the operation of desert tourism has almost certainly helped preserve camel herding, albeit 4X4 tours are more common than camel safaris<sup>11</sup>. There is integration between livestock raising and tourism, either directly as in camel raising by members of households that also work as cameleers, or indirectly between camel herders and urban-based commissioners who buy or rent their animals for tourism caravans. Finally, labor regulations in the public sector also

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undertake activities that are normally viewed as domestic and feminine (like cooking, washing the laundry, etc.). The author concludes that gender hierarchy is altogether confirmed by the segregation of women and undermined by the fact that men undertake tasks deemed inferior (thanks to Barbara Casciari for bringing Gélard's work to my attention). As far as the Tuareg are concerned, I quote from a personal comment from Helène Claudot-Hawad: "The fact that men are cooking (...) is directly linked to these travelling circumstances in which the men have always cooked. I would add that in a lot of Tuareg camps (...) if there are no servants, it is the men, and not the women, who have to perform all the cooking tasks that need physical strength (pounding, etc...)". Among the Tuareg, the Bedouin, and most likely other peoples with a history as mobile pastoralists and traders, such activities as cooking, washing clothes, collecting water or fire-wood are gendered within the domestic context. Yet one has to be careful in interpreting what it means for gender hierarchies when men undertake them in contexts of mobility, such as tourism, in which women are absent. For some considerations on how tourism affects gender relations among Bedouin in Jordan, in particular through lessening the economic input of women in the domestic economy, see Chatelard (2005).

<sup>11</sup>

□ In January 2004, according to the local representative of the Ministry of Tourism in Tamanrasset, out of the 35 to 50 operating TAs, only about 10 offered camel tours.

allow many to combine a paid job with a seasonal activity in tourism since civil servants are given the possibility to take leaves without pay for months, even years in a row, allowing them to fall back on a fixed income off tourism season, or in case of a durable depression of the tourism sector.

This is precisely what happened as a result of the civil violence that plagued the north of Algeria in the 1990s. Although “Ahaggar was an island in an ocean of political instability and upheaval” (Keenan 2001, p. 6), tourists all but stopped coming for almost a decade. At the end of the 1980s, up to 10,000 tourists a year passed through Tamanrasset. Between 1993 and 1999, they were no more than a few dozens. Tourism flow resumed as of 2000 and the Direction of Tourism in Tamanrasset registered over 7,300 foreign visitors in 2002, mainly French followed by Germans. During the long depression that affected tourism, the various local actors involved in the industry opted for alternative economic strategies. Openings depended on local, regional and international conditions, and on personal capacities as much as on a favorable institutional context.

TAs in Tamanrasset adopted a double “tourist drought” strategy: reducing the size of their business to cut off costs, and geographical or occupational diversification. Many closed down the office from which they operated in town, while retaining only their license in view of future activities. They sold their Jeeps or stopped maintaining them. Several fell back on employment in the public sector, including in the oil fields in the northern Sahara. But despite the inaccessibility of Algeria, there was a continuous European demand for desert tourism. As a consequence, several TOs offered their Algerian partner TAs to help them start up desert tours in neighboring countries where this activity was new. It was a way for TOs to insure that partner TAs would keep a source of income so as to preserve the future of their business relations. Algerian TAs had also accumulated a valuable experience as highly specialized service providers. In Mauritania, Libya or Mali and Niger more recently they established partnerships with newly registered Tuareg or Moorish TAs. Many of these ventures were based on preexisting kinship or trade relations.

Provided that they were ready to be mobile, a small number of Algerian local team members benefited from the redeployment strategies TAs had adopted. The most competent guides and team leaders were associated to the ventures as trainers for the newly formed teams. In Libya also, lacking camels and cameleers, Algerian Tuareg camel drivers found employment opportunities in the burgeoning desert tourism sector. In Tamanrasset, only a handful of TAs continued operating during the depression, and they had to make crucial choices regarding the number and composition of their local teams. In some cases, Tuareg TAs decided to keep providing work to members of their own kinship or vassal groups by operating from one single village base, for instance. Other TAs made a different choice: they reduced the number of local teams that they regularly employed, but made them multitribal so that income would be spread more widely. TAs were also instrumental in permitting some handicraft workshops to keep operating: using their connections in European capitals, they sent artifacts to fairs and shops on the European market.

Out in the villages and the mountains of Ahaggar, people who used to work in tourism teams adopted the reverse economic attitude to the one that they had had in the 1980s. At that time, they were able to survive an enduring drought and to remain in the encampments by reducing goatherd sizes so as to minimize the expenses incurred by the keeping of livestock. On the other hand, they had retained the camels that they rented to



TAs. This income, together with their salaries as drivers or cooks, had allowed them to feed the households (Keenan 2001, p. 55). Now that there were bad years in tourism, camels were left to wander on meager pastures, making them useless as beasts of burden, or were sold to free capital. No supplementary income was provided, but the households still survived on the agricultural economy, thank to minimal levels of rainfall. Those individuals who had managed to accumulate enough capital to buy a car during the good years in the 1980s could still hire their vehicle together with their labor and their knowledge of the terrain, by becoming more systematically involved in the transport of smuggled goods or migrants. As was the case with their activities in tourism, they remained hired transporters rather than contractors. When the prospects of employment in tourism are good and they have savings, camels are the first investment pastoral Kel Ahaggar make<sup>12</sup>. Once they have several camels, they may sell them to buy a car. A combination and succession of good agricultural years and good years in tourism would be needed to allow them to accumulate capital sufficient for acquiring means of production that would make them less dependent on the ebb and flow of the international tourism market. This combination has yet to happen.

Government policies have played a role in safeguarding what J. Keenan calls “the conditions for the regeneration of tourism” (Keenan 2001, p. 80). He also sees such policies as part of a strategy to maintain political stability in a region that is poor in employment opportunities, though rich in mineral resources, and prone to ethnopolitical unrest. Keenan describes how being a park warden was a privileged all through the years of depression. Over 500 nomadic and semi-settled pastoral households – which he evaluates to be between a third and a half of the total rural population living in the Ahaggar - supported themselves on the 100 Euro a month wardens received as a salary. Goats provided households with some basis for subsistence, the salary allowed them to buy essential foodstuff, in particular flour and sugar that are not produced locally (Keenan 2001, p. 80-81). Another welcomed initiative on the part of the authorities I was told about was that of the Wali (Governor) that took upon himself to support camel breeding. He had a camel racing ground built and organized regular races drawing prize-money from public funds. Even if there was no prize, the value of the winning camel would allow to sell it on the Libyan, even Saudi, market with a comfortable profit.

Other public policies directly or indirectly impeded the adaptive mechanisms that were necessary to live through the depression without losing all the financial or professional capital accumulated as providers of tourism services. This was particularly the case with credit facilities that were inadequate. In 1989-1990, at a time when taxes were high, the government had sold Toyota 4X4 to TAs at preferential prices, inciting them to take loans. As of 1993, while the market to sell such vehicles was depressed, many were unable to reimburse the loans and went bankrupt. Moreover, families in villages that operate desert lodges may also finance buildings and cars with loans from banks. Their income is unevenly distributed over the year, most of it coming in two seasons, while banks want a monthly repayment. Seasonality and flexibility, two constraints inherent in tourism operation, are yet to be integrated into the Algerian banking system, and more generally into public policies aimed at the tourism sector whether at the national or local levels.

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For a cook, for example, it takes 2 years of good work to buy a camel.

*Wadi Rum, Jordan*<sup>13</sup>

The 1960s saw the beginning of village formation in the Wadi Rum area, a process fostered by a series of state-driven development projects and by incentives to send sons to school. A handful of permanent settlements have since grown, each mainly populated by a different tribal section. Bedouin economy has remained multi-resource, with various combinations of wage labor, army pension, livestock herding – overwhelmingly small ruminants -, cultivation, and, mainly in Rum village, tourism-related activities.

Early in the 1990s, at a time when the Algerian Sahara was not accessible anymore, European TOs and the Jordanian Tourism Board more systematically than before started marketing Wadi Rum as “the Jordanian desert”. There was a pressing demand by TOs who needed competent partners to organize desert tours and those Bedouin who demonstrated personal qualities (affability, dignity and language ability) and a sense of initiative captured a large part of the local market of adventure tourism. Originally, they did not concentrate more economic, social, educational or linguistic capital than most other members of the community, and they did not build upon inherited statuses<sup>14</sup>. Currently in the village of Rum, with a population of 1,200 settled inhabitants, there are a dozen such entrepreneurs, registered as simple “guides” with the local authorities. The label is misleading and I prefer to call them team leaders (TLs) as these young men (aged between 25 and 45) organize and supervise desert tourism much in the same way as TAs do from Tamanrasset. The most significant difference is that they do not own more than one or two Jeeps because a compulsory vehicle rotation system for visiting tourists was put in place early under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism. According to this system, each member of the cooperative that was established to manage the rotation system can register only one car. Hence the fact that competition takes place on a wide basis between a large number of individuals that possess their means of production. On the other hand, several TLs also organize camel tours, an activity that is less competitive and provides fewer returns. Only the few who have an inclination for camel breeding have reconstituted small herds. TLs are equipped with means of communication such as mobile phones and faxes, while computers and Internet connections started spreading around the year 2000. Those allow for direct contact and practical and financial arrangements with specialized TOs in Europe. Wadi Rum TLs have formed teams composed of hiking guides, car or camel drivers, cooks, and musicians, that they have trained with inputs from European partner TOs or tour leaders. The demand from the larger TOs that send several groups at a time has been an incentive for the more successful TLs to set up several such teams.

The existing teams represent the main family groups of the Zalabia, a small section of the very large Aneze tribe that settled in the middle of Rum valley as of the late 1970s. A common initial practice for TLs was to select members of their own family group to work in a team. But as the sector was becoming more professional and competitive,

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□ I have been following the involvement of Wadi Rum Bedouin with tourism since 1993. Most of the findings in this section are drawn from original fieldwork (see Chatelard 2003, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Unlike Tuareg society, Bedouin society is not characterized by socioeconomic stratification, although there are differences of wealth between individuals and there is a distribution between *asil* camel breeders and common tribes. This distribution has survived the changes in economic activities, but it is not relevant in all modern contexts of interaction, and only plays marginally in the social organization of tourism.

quality of service and competence started being valued over kinship solidarity, that is whenever a TL was able to resist pressure by family members. In several cases, migrant workers from the city or from as far as Sudan have been recruited to work as cooks, the less valued of all tourism-related jobs among Rum Bedouin. TLs are paid by the tour leader at the end of a trek. Alternatively, those who have a permanent arrangement with a TA receive a bank transfer at the end of the season. They redistribute the largest part of the amount among the team members and the village shops where they buy food for the tour groups, petrol for the cars, fodder for the camels, and where they maintain their cars at one of the local mechanics. The initial difference in capital endowment between young men engaged in tourism-related activities is not significant enough to prevent the revenues derived from tourism to be spread out widely and relatively evenly among all households in the community.

The farther away the trek goes from villages, the more likely money will be left to distant encampments. Trails towards the Saudi border, where there are spectacular views, take tourists to areas where seasonal encampments of non-Rum based tribes are located, in particular the Dbur, a section of the Howeitat tribe. Those are livestock breeders holding Saudi passports that cross borders with their herds on a seasonal basis and are attached to a settled community on the other side of the border. They marginally benefit from tourism-related incomes as some maintain outlets in the desert, selling drinks, petrol, cigarettes, tea, sugar or flour. They also sell goats for slaughter and water from their storage tanks. More than the Zalabia, these “Saudi” families still breed camels. Over the 1980s and 1990s, when the number of tourists was on the rise, the three main camel-breeding households regularly increased their sales of young camels to Rum and Diseh Bedouin, who, at about the same time, also resumed camel racing without any government incentive. The practice had disappeared from the area in the 1960s after local tribes had completed their transition from camel to goat breeders.

As is the case with the Tamanrasset-Djanet route, Petra-Wadi Rum treks have brought together Bedouin from different tribal groups. Zalabia TLs have established work relations with some Sa’idiyin tribesmen settled around the village of Risheh in the Wadi Araba, a depression to the west of the trail winding on the plateau. The Sa’idiyin live some 50 km away from Petra, but unlike the tribes that are settled in the mountains closer to the archaeological site, they breed camels in the sandy depression. There exist other types of arrangements involving middlemen from Bedouin and peasant (*fallahin*) tribes for renting camels to other Bedouin tribes and allocating jobs as camel drivers. Petra-based Bedouin, the Bdul, with whom the Zalabia and the Sa’idiyin maintained no previous business relations and whom they socially underrate as being a common, non camel-breeding tribe, have become marginally associated to such ventures. It is the demand from European TOs, and usually the physical presence of a foreign tour leader, that has triggered this new kind of collaboration, and that allows it to continue season after season despite recurrent conflict over leadership and resource allocation.

The prospect of deriving an income from hosting tourists, generally independent individuals or small groups including those on day trips, is a major incentive for many households to live most of the year in an encampment even though they own a house in the village of Rum. This is one reason that explains the concentration of inhabited tents (as opposed to tents set up specifically to accommodate tourists that can be equated to desert lodges in villages in the Ahaggar) close to specific sites tourists visit within a radius of 10km around the village. At the beginning of the 1990s, newly wed couples used to settle preferably in a built house, whereas their parents remained in the desert, tending

herds. A decade later, this systematic pattern has been partly altered, and more young couples than before spend most of the year in an encampment, even if they remain a minority in their age group. As men come daily to the village with their cars to take part in the rotation, buy from shops, refill water from the built house, socialize, etc. they also drive children to school. Women who live in encampments value having a larger productive share in the domestic economy, either directly for household consumption or for an income by weaving, making cheese, or preparing meals for tourists.

In 1998, in implementation of provisions in the Second Tourism Plan for Jordan (World Bank 1996), the area of Wadi Rum was made into a protected area. The project had two main goals: introducing conservation practices and “ecotourism” as an economically and ecologically sustainable activity. Reorganizing the existing tourism system was the major bone of contention between the reserve management and the local community. Rum Bedouin saw government intervention as an undue interference in a system that was working although most community members agreed that it had to be improved. Government officials looked down on the local management system and originally aimed at displacing the Bedouin from the reserve (Brand 2001). Base-line studies did not clearly differentiate between day-tourism and desert tourism, and failed to consider the economic importance of this latter sector<sup>15</sup>. Planners adopted measures aimed at facilitating day tourism, with the idea of turning Wadi Rum into a desert theme park. A zoning plan closed entire areas to hiking, horse-riding, climbing and camping. Fixed tourism campsites in the desert were installed. In 2004, it was projected to designate compulsory trails, while wardens already patrolled the reserve to enforce penalties for not respecting the rotation and other regulations. Many of the new rules stemmed from a legitimate concern for the preservation of the environment, yet they were decided with minimal consultation with the local communities, no input from local and international operators in the sector of adventure tourism, and disregard for an existing local concern with environmental issues that predated the establishment of the reserve (Chatelard 2003). The new regulations prevent much of the flexibility that had made desert tourism a successful venture both for the local community and for foreign TOs, the very dynamic that had fueled local concern for the environment. Being direct impediments to desert tourism, inflexible measures make Wadi Rum less attractive than before, especially at a time when alternative destinations in the Sahara are easily accessible.

In the early 2000, the tourism economy in Jordan as a whole was severely affected by regional and international instability (the second uprising in the occupied Palestinian territories, global Islamic terrorism, and the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq). Much as had been the case with the Algerian Great South in the 1990s, Jordan remained an island of stability in a sea of agitation, a situation that did not prevent tourism flow to decline sharply. In 2000, the Ministry of Tourism had registered 100,000 foreign visitors to Wadi Rum. They were only 27,000 in 2002. Local tourism operators reckon that the overwhelming majority of those who kept coming, individually or in organized tours, fell in the category of adventure tourists. It was easy to verify that, over the same years, the

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<sup>15</sup> An evaluation that I undertook together with some Rum Bedouin, local government officials, and foreigners familiar with the local operation of tourism estimates that, in 1996, adventure tourists accounted for 33,600 nights spent in the Wadi Rum area out of a total number of 70,000 visitors. The former figure includes a significant number of foreign rock-climbers and horse-riders on stays of several days. Both activities involve a number of Rum Bedouin: in addition to drivers, cooks, etc, there are several specialized climbing guides in the community, who have received part of their training in Europe, and horse-stables managed by a local couple and having established a joint venture with a Frenchman.

major foreign TAs that market heritage-oriented tours to Jordan had removed the destination from their catalogues.

Rum Bedouin have had a previous experience of how regional instability affects tourism. In their study of the socioeconomic organization of the Bedouin population in the area of Wadi Rum, Rowe et al. (1998) noted that the Zalabia frequently returned to the event of 1991, when the Gulf crisis halted tourism income, to justify why some sections had remained pastoral: in what the authors found to be a “binary economic system”, herds provided security in times of economic stress (Rowe et al. 1998, p. 18-19). The recent period of depression provided an opportunity to observe directly what were Rum Bedouin’s livelihood strategies to cope with the sharp reduction in tourism income. As could be expected, labor and capital resources were switched to other economic activities, mainly herding. But individuals faced decline of their purchasing power. In fact, state subsidies on livestock feeds had been removed in 1996, profoundly affecting Bedouin herders, and prompting Wadi Rum residents to sell and convert into buying more cars or camels for tourism. Rum residents were therefore less affected than others were by the collapse of the livestock economy that followed in 1997 (Rowe et al. 1998, p. 15). But as prices rose steadily as of 1998, Rum Bedouin were hit more harshly when tourism collapsed and they wanted to reconstitute a herd. Public economic policies were a primordial factor negatively affecting local economic processes. On the other hand, favorable social policies were a foremost element in making Rum Bedouin’s alternative livelihood strategies viable: they continued being granted free water supply, free education, almost free medical treatment in the village clinic and the public hospitals in town, employment opportunities in the army, etc.

What helped residents of Rum village and encampments to live through the crisis was that no household relied on livestock and tourism alone. In addition to this combination, most had a job or a pension or managed to get one: young men started enrolling again in the army, a trend that had disappeared when tourism was peaking. A few others partook in the smuggling of drugs to Saudi Arabia that promised high gains. Also, the region of Aqaba having become a tax-free area in recent years, administrative borders too could be turned into a resource to make a gain on price differences.

Households drastically cut down expenses, prioritized spending, made recourse to credit in village shops and used more systematically resources extracted from the desert or the mountains (game, fire-wood, etc.). For village-based households that did not need to circulate between an encampment and a house, one way of freeing cash to meet necessary expenses was to sell their car. Others kept their vehicle while limiting related expenses such as petrol or repairs. Pastoral households who owned several cars sold the one that was used in the tourist rotation, while keeping another to bring supplies from the village, in particular water and fodder for the livestock. Women sold items of gold jewelry (their own properties) either for consumptive spending or for acquiring the means to boost domestic production. Exchanges between village and encampments were more systematic. Several village-based domestic units, that had become economically independent thank to tourism income, chose to adopt strategies of interdependency with a kin-related household. They put their capital in common to buy livestock. Keeping at least one car, one household moved to settle in the desert to herd the goats and make dairy products. The other remained in the village with all school-aged children, to tend a garden, and to remain attentive to possible tourism-related opportunities. Households did not generally resume raising of livestock for commercial sale but preferred to reduce consumption and wait for better days.

## Desert tourism: General conclusion

### *Mobility, relation to space, and diversification*

It is doubtful that desert tourism fosters “nomadism”, as key players in the industry like to picture their activity. Desert tourism, on the other hand, complements pastoral livelihoods. It means seasonal mobility of one or several adult males of a household, for days, weeks or months in a row. This is not a novelty: men used to drive caravans, still go to urban markets to sell livestock, take herds to better pastures, or are on military duty in garrison towns. Mechanisms have long existed to redistribute productive activities between the remaining members of a household. In addition, circulation with tourist groups provides significant occasions to maintain social relations with relatives, friends, partners, and clients that are encamped along the trail. Men negotiate future participation in a caravan, or other types of economic or social transactions. If it were not for this circulation, sedentary Bedouin or Tuareg would not use up precious petrol to visit distant encampments, let alone ride or walk for several hours or days in mountain settings. To households that are permanently or temporarily remote, tourist caravans bring medicine, or other needed goods that are given away or exchanged for items to be consumed, either produced in the encampments, or traded. To derive an income from tourism, pastoral tribesmen need to be mobile. Conversely, the mobility that tourism generates allows pastoral people to continue occupying a wide space in arid areas because lines of communication and of exchanges are maintained between scattered and complementary centers of production/consumption and markets.

Local mobility links to international mobility. One thinks readily about the circulation of international tourists and tourism professionals from the North to the South. But a reverse trend has developed. Off tourism season, members of the local entrepreneurial groups, TAs in Tamanrasset and TLs in Wadi Rum, have now become used to a South-North intercontinental movement. Because, despite Internet and the telephone, face to face relations are important in business, they want to meet their European commissioners, to renegotiate rates for services or discuss new desert ventures. It is also an occasion to attend tourism fairs, to canvass for new clients, to promote their products and services while adapting them to the changing demands of the market<sup>16</sup>. South-South mobility is just as essential for economic survival when the resource flow is redirected to a neighboring country. To cross international borders, the best asset of Tuareg and Bedouin tourism entrepreneurs is their social networks, preexisting or created. Their ancestors based their own mobility on comparable such patterns. If mobility is essential to reach the resources, then desert tourism, as an industry that operates globally, requires that a specialized group emerges from among pastoral communities that is able to be mobile on a global scale.

Pastoral nomadism or mobile pastoralism in Wadi Rum and Ahaggar is often sustained due to resources available in towns, such as the fixed salary or the pension of one member of a household, or access to the markets to sell livestock. In a similar way, the operation of tourism in desert areas is possible only in relation with the existence of an urban center that concentrates a number of services and commands access to the desert.

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<sup>16</sup> This pattern of South-North seasonal mobility has developed as of the late 1990s while visa requirements for Western Europe were becoming more stringent, acting as a selective factor. As a result, only those entrepreneurs with enough financial credentials in their home countries and solid connections in a European county have been able to meet the requirements for the granting of a visa.

It requires public investments (airport, visitor's center), and private operators (travel agencies, or desert guides). As a result of the development of tourism, these centers may grow and attract people from outside the region, be they government officials or migrant workers, whose specific competencies are not available locally and who are instrumental in the operation of desert tourism. The very nature of desert or adventure tourism requires that the local community provide a good part of the services outside from urban areas. This is why desert tourism can be said to sustain the particular relationship of Tuareg or Bedouin with the arid environment, as one generating resources that need to be exploited through mobility. In the same time, desert tourism reinforces dependency on urban centers, and contributes to the existence of rural satellite settlements as intermediary stages between the town and a space that former nomads themselves have started calling "the desert". The *modus operandis* and the socioeconomic organization of tourism, from the international to the local levels, strongly contribute to the material and physically structuring of space in arid areas, which in turn is a matrix within which communities of Bedouin and Tuareg socially reconstruct their relations to this space.

In Ahaggar and in Wadi Rum, tourism comes as a complement in an already diversified economy, either at the level of a household or of several interdependent households. This diversification is a strategy for managing the risks inherent in the two activities, pastoralism and agriculture in general being dependent on rainwater, tourism on the flow of visitors. In the short-term, if conditions are favorable, tourism can be sustainable as the main, even sole, source of income of a village-based household and allow for economic growth. But the regional and international political crises make tourism flows unstable and unpredictable, and hence render specialization unsustainable in the longer-run. Moreover, tourism is not sustainable as the only or main economic activity of a group of interdependent households as profits cannot compensate for the loss of productive activities that go into household consumption. Neither can these productions be abandoned if households are to remain settled in villages or encampments where they provide tourism services but that are far from urban markets. This is why plans for mass conversion of livestock herders into tourism service providers is likely to lead to the further impoverishment of pastoral peoples. That is if one shares the view of E. Marx (1996) that pastoral economies are not subsistence economies on the long run.

#### *Vertical relations and market forces*

As a capitalist industry, desert tourism functions along an international vertical and hierarchical system of commissioners and intermediaries. In Ahaggar, it has reinforced an existing structure in a stratified and non-qualitarian society, albeit allowing some members of the intermediate social category, the so-called vassals, to directly compete with members of nobles families. In Wadi Rum, its operations have resulted in the emergence of vertical relations within a local community where socioeconomic differentiation was not very significant. Yet in both cases it contributes to the economy of pastoral communities in a way that is not possible with mass tourism. It is redistributive and it spreads out the benefits horizontally at several levels of the social ladder. This is particularly true for households that are otherwise economically marginalized and if not, who are socially isolated because their pastoral activities keep them in remote geographical locations. Tourism in Wadi Rum economically benefits the whole community and beyond<sup>17</sup>, but it has also introduced inequalities of wealth, an inevitable trend as the local economy is becoming more tied up to global capitalist

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<sup>17</sup> It has several other social implications that may be considered less positive, and that trigger and fuel processes of adaptation (see Chatelard 2003, 2005).

market forces. Because of these forces, it is unrealistic to expect that tourism will be efficient in reducing extreme poverty. The poorest areas in the Algerian Sahara or in Jordan will not become tourism destinations since they do not have the proper qualities for this, i.e. cultural heritage or an outstanding landscape that can be marketed.

Just like tastes and fashions, several other aspects of the functioning of desert tourism are totally dependent on the demand side. Prices, to start with, are at the hands of European TOs and clients and there is currently a large number of desert destinations offered and less customer demand than at the end of the 1990s. As a result, TOs are in a position to exert pressures over local TAs or TLs to reduce their prices, with direct effects on the economy of pastoral communities. Seasonality also is set by European tourists who want to avoid summer heat, but also wish to make the best of school holidays in autumn, winter and the spring. This accelerating trend leads to ever more concentration at certain times of the year, which leads in turn to a higher number of tourists on sites. Desert tourism is itinerant, but is organized along the sighting of emblematic sites (landscapes, rock-art, archaeological remains, etc) towards which several groups usually converge. As a result, such highlights of a desert trip as the Assekrem plateau in the Ahaggar or the Burdah rock bridge in Wadi Rum can be very crowded at times, calling into question the very notion of desert tourism.

Market-driven dynamics, on the other hand, can play a role in mitigating the negative socioeconomic or environmental effects of tourism. In the two cases I have described, tourists have long voiced their dissatisfaction either regarding the level of services or environmental practices of their local team members, or regarding conditions along the trails and on the sites. As a consequence, several European TOs and local operators in Ahaggar and Wadi Rum, who want to preserve “the desert” as a resource, have introduced practices that correspond to the expectation of tourists who perceive themselves as environmentally conscious. More local teams use gas rather than firewood, manage water use, collect and sort out litter, etc. A growing number of TOs in the sector of adventure tourism now adopt socially-oriented policies with their local partners: they maximize the use of local resources in food, they support local employment, they provide training for local teams, they ensure that seasonal salaries allow them to live year round, etc. “Ecotourism” and “fair tourism” provide the industry with commercial labels for practices that are presented as more ethical. Other forces run against this dynamic, in particular the trend towards mass-marketing of desert tourism, a relative notion if one is to compare it to the size of flows to coastal resorts, for example, nonetheless a realistic concern if one thinks in terms of carrying capacity of the natural environment, of the cultural sites, of the local human communities, and of tourists who want a desert experience.

#### *Dependency on the state*

A degree of flexibility, if not informality, is required so that the operation of desert tourism spreads economic benefits on a wide geographical scale and deep down the social structure of communities of pastoral peoples. Planners and local government employees, on the other hand, aim at regulating and controlling. This is especially true for Jordan and Algeria, that stand apart in the Middle East and North Africa as being two countries where the state retains a strong role in tourism development and management (Gray 2002, p. 324). But whereas in Jordan Wadi Rum Bedouin overwhelmingly perceive the state’s strong role as a positive factor in the development of tourism (albeit with some reservations), all the Tuareg I interviewed in Algeria viewed it



as an impediment. In the first case, state institutions are seen as redistributive, while in the latter case, the state is seen as a predator and the institutional settings that organize tourism as procedural and inflexible. In addition, because of bottlenecks in the banking system, Tuareg TAs who receive their payment from TOs in foreign currencies on European bank accounts reinvest little of this money locally. Clearly, political considerations underpin economic development. In southern Algeria, it is doubtful whether the central government looks favorably upon the development of an economic sector over which Tuareg exert a high degree of control and that would allow them to be relatively autonomous from the state controlled economy.

By comparison, administrative and police control over the operation of desert tourism in Jordan is more flexible, albeit the new regulations that have been introduced in the Wadi Rum reserve betray a tendency towards inflexibility. Historically, Bedouin have been incorporated into the Jordanian state structure and have benefited from the reallocation of political, social and economic resources. Although the trend is changing, the situation inherited from several decades of such practices still allows them to use personal connections to skirt possible administrative bottlenecks. Also, in a liberalized economic and banking system, much less restrictions are imposed on international transfers of currencies. As a result, Wadi Rum tourism operators that have capital do not hesitate to reinvest it locally.

Maybe the main cause of misunderstanding between members of local Bedouin or Tuareg communities and government officials is rooted in the conception the latter have of desert tourism which they equate with student backpacking and a limited spending power, hence grossly underestimating its local returns. Documents from the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism show the number of entries on the site of Wadi Rum, not the number of nights spent in the desert. These figures give the same economic weight to a day visitor and to a visitor who takes a tour of several days and nights in the desert, bringing income to remote encampments and much higher returns to the village community. This distorted view is what renders government planning methods and objectives inadequate to the nature of desert tourism. In Wadi Rum, planners want more tourism accommodation in the form of fixed campsites and desert lodges, a visitor center with restaurants and shops, etc. All these infrastructures will cater for the needs of day tourists and will bring returns to the external investors that are in a better position than any of Rum resident to win tender competitions. With very few exceptions, officials in ministries in Algiers and in the local government with whom I talked expressed similar opinions about desert tourism. They also pictured private sector TAs as unscrupulous business operators who hoard tourism revenues without redistributing benefits to poorer sectors of the local communities, and who have no concern for the environment and the preservation of the cultural heritage. Since there exists no in-depth study of the sector, and since I found the same officials very ignorant of the nature and particulars of desert tourism, it can be hypothesized that their opinion is rooted in a socialist-type of political culture characteristic of the Algerian public sector that leads its members to look with suspicion at the development of a private sector. Alternatively, or additionally, government officials discredit this type of tourism - and consequently its local socioeconomic effects - because it runs against their own conceptions of leisure, of the desert environment and of the people that inhabit these regions.

Finally, it is worth considering that the current development plans that aim at alleviating poverty through tourism among Bedouin in Jordan and Tuareg in Algeria come at particular historical junctures: after Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, and

after the Algerian government declared the return of law and order following years of civil violence. The political and geostrategic objectives of donor countries may well be driving the socioeconomic agenda of recipient countries which would explain why plans have been drafted hastily, are being implemented forcefully and have little adequacy to the realities of the communities whose livelihoods they aim at improving. Certainly the main critique that can be addressed to these plans is that they are still framed within an evolutionist perspective that posits a necessary and unidirectional move from nomadic pastoralism to settled livelihoods, from self-subsistence to reliance on extended market logics. Comparing two distant cases, and despite having to use ethnographic material of unequal quality, allows to highlight commonalities that would most probably be found in other, similar contexts. Even with the introduction of new economic activities linked to the global capitalist market, and despite the push to specialise states and development organisations exert on mobile pastoralists, those continue to favour resources diversification and flexibility of livelihoods as strategies that allow adaptation to changes in the local and international environments.

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