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Bedouins and in-between border space in the northern Sinai

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ABSTRACT

The northern Sinai as interstice space of contestation offers useful insights concerning the relation between the dynamics of power and resistance. This article aims to analyse the complex relationship between the local inhabitants' belonging and spatial practices by referring to the idea of in-betweenness. The article uses the notion of in-between border space to understand the Bedouins' changing identity formations within a given spatial situation, as well as to trace the Egyptian State's spatial variations in achieving social control within its territory. It is argued that the decades-long marginalization and oppression of the Bedouins by the Egyptian State turned their borderland region into a space of resistance and led to the forming of spatio-temporal identities in-between border space in the northern Sinai.

KEYWORDS North Sinai; Bedouins; in-between border space; resistance; identity

Introduction

The case study of the Sinai Peninsula raises several important dimensions related to in-between border spaces. In-between or interstice spaces can be conceptualized as a form of 'spatial production through territorial transformation' (Brighenti, 2013, p. xxiii). Located in-between Israel, the Palestinian enclave of Gaza and the Suez Canal, the Sinai represents a spatial situation where various encounters occur in multiple ways, and the boundaries of territorial statehood are constantly challenged by numerous circumstances. The proliferation of the Salafi-Jihadist groups based in Gaza and the recent presence of Islamic State in the northern Sinai highlight that borders and boundaries are products of social and spatial practices, and are constantly being negotiated between contiguous borderland communities within a given spatial situation. The critical potential of the notion of in-between border space is mainly inscribed in the opportunity of conceptualizing the new forms of belonging and becoming.

A large body of work has arisen over the past several decades precisely seeking to understand the relationship between state borders and identity.

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One of the common approaches to the questions of border and identity involved analysing identities of border dwellers in terms of cultural and ethnic membership (Barth, 1969; Wilson & Donnan, 1998). Contrary to primordialist approach that considers ethnic identity either a constant or stable entity, Barth (1969, p. 14) built his argument on the changing nature of identity. He argued that 'the cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change.' Identity is understood here as 'categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves.' More recently, the eminent sociologist Bauman (2001, p. 129) focused on the ambivalence of the concept of identity, and described identity as 'a never ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity, in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged.'

Critical political geographers, on the other hand, have contributed much to our understanding of the importance of the spatial element in the development of identities in specific location, such as borderland regions. For example, Massey (2009) conceptualized space as the product of relations and struggles which is produced through the establishment or refusal of relations. She (2005) reminded us that the space and power are intimately intertwined, and power is essential for the construction of spatialized social practices. Massey (1992, p. 69) also elaborated the relationship between spatiality and temporality, and questioned Laclou's conceptualization of space and time. It is a conceptualization 'in which the two are opposed to each other, and in which time is the one that matters and of which History (capital H) is made.' Massey (1992, p. 84) rejected this dimension of space without temporality, and further argued that 'the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics, just as the temporal is to geography.' Her emphasis on the spatio-temporal construction of politics offers useful insights into the historically shaped spatio-temporal aspects of identity politics in such liminal configurations.

Thinking of space as the product of relations rather than as an aggregation of territories also questioned the commonly held understanding of the state as a static, coherent and monolithic entity. There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of analysing the everyday practices of the state to understand the state's capacities and vulnerabilities to exert territorial and social control (Migdal, 2001; Mitchell, 1991; Painter, 2006). Painter (2006, p. 764) introduced the concept of 'prosaic geographies of stateness' to reveal the socio-spatial unevenness of state power within the same territorial state, and argued that 'as statization depends on and proceeds through mundane practices undertaken by thousands of individual state officials and citizens, there is considerable scope for what is seen as failure, disruption, and breakdown, as well as qualitative and quantitative social and spatial variation.'

According to him, the state power is exercised unevenly, and differentiated temporally and sociospatially.

The notion of prosaic statization also allows us to revisit the widely held belief of the state–society dichotomy. Migdal's (2001) 'state in society' approach analysed the state as a multi-layered social organization in order to overcome the analytical dichotomy between the state and society. Migdal (2001, p. 50) depicted society a *mélange* of social organizations which 'is marked by an environment of conflict, an active struggle for social control of the population.' According to him, the state is part of the environment of conflict only on a grader scale, which seeks social control by having the individuals incorporate its rule.

The Egyptian State offers a good case for empirical exploration of how the state power differs spatially within the same territorial unit. A case study of the statehood in the northern Sinai contributes a further challenge to state-centric theories which regard states as homogenous entities concerning their power and material capabilities within their borders. The competing relations between the Egyptian State and the Bedouins to achieve social control in the northern Sinai highlight the limits of the Egyptian State in particular statehood and governance. The refusal of the Bedouins to accept state domination in the northern Sinai clearly reveals the Egyptian State's spatial variations in controlling local social forces. The Egyptian State, despite all its efforts over several decades to control the contentious space in the northern Sinai, failed in its attempt to penetrate local Bedouin populations in any meaningful way.

This article will qualify the Sinai as an interstice space of contestation against more institutionalized bordering spaces to explain the dynamics of power and resistance in North Sinai. The article will analyse the Bedouins' interactions and affections of multiple actors as the spatial practices associated with community and identity formation, and struggles for recognition, security and rights. It will engage the question of how the Egyptian State's spatial variations in achieving social control reinforced spatially located inequalities, and empowered liminal positions in the northern Sinai. In turn, Bedouins, as interstitial subjects, transformed their borderland region into a space of resistance, and defied state policies in a myriad of ways. This helps us to conceive the spatial dimension in the dynamics and contingencies of the current alignment of the Bedouins with the transnational violent militant groups who seek to exploit the continuously deepening power void in the northern Sinai. Bedouin's new form of belonging in-between border space in the northern Sinai illustrates how space traversed and constituted by flows and hence continuously changing (Massey, 2005).

The article is organized as follows: Part one examines the troublesome relations between the state and Bedouins from the 1979 Camp David Accords to the overthrow of the Mubarak regime to depict historical and territorial reconstruction processes responsible for the emergence and resilience of in-between

border space in the Sinai. The spatial practices of the socio-economic and political exclusion of the Bedouin population would be analysed as the main dynamic that brought up the space in the middle as a space of struggle in the Sinai. Part two analyses the re-articulation of spatial relations through increasing alignment of local population with the transnational violent militant groups in the security vacuum after the collapse of the former regime in the northern Sinai. This section is followed by a discussion on Islamic State's franchising strategy and its expansion to Sinai to examine how the various form of flows and connections are reshaping in-between border space in the northern Sinai. The last section analyses the sudden consequences of the Egyptian State's policy of expanding buffer zone in the re-articulation spatial relations in a more antagonistic way in the northern Sinai.

The process of bordering in the Sinai Peninsula

The present-day boundary of the Sinai Peninsula has a long history. When the Ottoman Empire lost its control over the Sinai Peninsula due to the demarcation of the Egypt–Palestine border in 1906, the Rafah–Aqaba became a boundary line between British-controlled Egypt and British-controlled Palestine and Transjordan. Britain regarded a new boundary line as an international border and enforced strict controls over the cross-border movements. Bedouins of Sinai and the Negev were the first to be affected by the closure of the border. Following the 1948–49 Israeli War of Independence, Sinai was under the Egyptian military administration until 1967. The boundary line between Israel and Egypt was almost identical to the demarcation line of 1906, with the exception of the Gaza Strip. This borderland became a contentious zone where 11,650 incidents occurred during the early 1950s.¹ Under the circumstances, the Bedouin population of the border zone either moved to Egypt or to the Beer-Sheba region (Kliot, 1995, p. 10).

After the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula in order to secure its border with Egypt and freedom of shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal. Even though the Israeli forces withdrew from the Sinai shortly after, Israel succeeded to break the blockade of her ships through the Gulf of Aqaba and to gain the UN presence in the Sinai (Ehteshami & Murphy, 2011, p. 120). The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) was established in the Sinai on 4 November 1956 and ensured a relative peace along the border until the mid-1960s. Egypt asked for the withdrawal of the UN forces from the border and closed the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping in 1967. This led to the Israeli occupation of Sinai, the Jordanian West Bank and the Syrian Golan Heights in the 1967 Six-Day War. Following Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war, Sinai was occupied by Israel for 15 years. As a result of staged agreements

between 1973 and 1982, Israel gradually left Sinai to Egypt in 1982 under the 1979 Camp David Accords.

The 1979 Treaty, which was designed to delineate the present Egyptian-Israeli border divided Sinai into different zones: In the westernmost Zone A, there would be limited Egyptian armed force of a mechanized infantry division. In the central Zone B, Egyptian border units of four battalions supported by civilian police would be stationed. In Zone C, close to Israel border, there would be only United Nations and Egyptian civilian police (no Egyptian military presence). In a narrow Zone D, there would be limited Israeli force of four infantry battalions. The Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), a multinational military force, from 10 countries were established to monitor the implementation of the demilitarization arrangement in Sinai. (Watanabe, 2015, p. 4).²

The 1979 Camp David Accords were strictly based on the traditional notions of state territoriality and failed in perceiving any liminal configurations which brings diverse spatialities to challenge local and regional territorial dynamics and the orderliness of bordered spaces in the northern Sinai. Borders are evolutionary in nature, and emerge through social construction and a process what Van Houtum, Kramsch, and Zierhofen (2005) used the term 'bordering' to show the relationship between the ordering (of chaos) and border-making. The bordering process of Sinai, too, not only involves the political projects of the hegemonic powers but also is being affected by contestation and resistance of borderland communities in-between border space. Even though the present physical boundary of the Sinai had been shaped by a number of political developments including the struggle for control over the Sinai between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, and the series of wars between Egypt and Israel, analysing of bordering process of the Sinai calls for the analysis of uneven power relations in-between border space, and 'the everyday construction of borders among communities and groups, through ideology, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and agency' (Scott, 2015, p. 28).

The resilience of in-between border space in the northern Sinai after the Camp David accords

Bedouins, longstanding natives of the peninsula offer fruitful insights into the patterns of space/power/identity that is shaping the in-between border space in the northern Sinai. The Sinai Bedouins are group of tribes who arrived from the Arabian Peninsula between 14th and 18th centuries. Today around 300,000 Bedouins live in the Sinai, and they constitute about 70 per cent of Sinai's population.³ Bedouins kept their distinct indigenous identity over the centuries, and challenged state conceptions of sovereignty, territoriality and

citizenship by redefining their environment in-between border space in North Sinai intersticed by Egypt, present-day Gaza and Israel.

Bedouin tribes were given Egyptian citizenship in 1906 when the British Protectorate of Egypt took Sinai over from the Ottoman Empire. The regime saw the strong sense of tribal identity as one of the impediments to the consolidation of state power in Sinai. In order to eradicate political reliance on tribal affiliation, the central state apparatus divided larger tribal structures into small units and carried repressive policies, including the imposition of Cairo's candidates as tribal sheikhs and People's Assembly representatives. The governors of the two Sinai governorates have been traditionally former military generals who had no sensitivity to the locals' grievances (Yaari, 2012, p. 10). In most cases, inter-tribal competition and lack of pan-tribal leadership impaired negotiation capacity of Bedouins in their relations with the Egyptian State (Idris, 2017, p. 4).

The central state authorities severely discriminated against the native population of Sinai by economic marginalization through dispossession of land, the denial of ownership rights and job discrimination. The Sinai Peninsula was declared as a state-owned land (*mulkiya khasa lil-dawla*) in 1981.⁴ According to Law 143 of 1981, the ministry of defence has the right to use this land for the strategic purposes. Since then, the Bedouins' moral claim of *wad'yad* ('placing' the land) over their land became obsolete. The system of official registry of land further increased discrimination against the Bedouins and deepened their political exclusion (Karkabi, 2013, p. 5).

Sinai's indigenous population was also excluded from development projects of the state, contributing to their further marginalization and violation of their basic right. Development projects based in North Sinai, such as the creation of agribusiness, the construction of an industrial zone, and the gas pipeline to Israel and Jordan, were designed as a way expropriating Bedouin lands, to which Bedouins themselves have no ownership right (Pelham, 2012, p. 3). As an International Crisis Group Report (2007, p. i) on the matter put it, 'the government has not sought to integrate Sinai's populations into the nation through a far-sighted program responding to their needs and mobilizing their active involvement. Instead, it has promoted the settlement of Nile Valley migrants.' The regime's mass settlement policy basically sought to replace local people by a settler population.

Most of the jobs in the tourism and services sectors were made available for people who emigrated from the Nile Valley, and Bedouins were excluded from employment in the military and security services.⁵ Only 10 per cent of the Bedouins are part of the official workforce. Subsequently, informal economic activities emerged as a reflection of decreasing opportunities in the formal economy and the unchanging hardship of everyday life among the local Bedouin population. The leading tribes – Sawarka, Rumeilat and Tarabeen whose traditional territories span Gaza and the Negev Desert,

were actively involved in arms and drug smuggling both into Israel and Gaza. In the aftermath of Israel's blockade of Gaza in 2007, the share of illicit trade continued to grow through tunnels between Gaza and Sinai. It is estimated that at their peak, \$700 million were funnelled into Gaza's economy, and 7,000 people were employed due to the opportunities created by the tunnel economy (Piven, 2014).

These practices conducted by smugglers, illicit arms traders, traffickers and radical transnational groups generated specific interconnected setting in-between border space in which contributed to process of de-bordering and cross-border interactions between the northern Sinai and Gaza. Contrary to the common security approaches, seeing in-between border space in northern Sinai as a 'lawless zone' where various violent militant groups and Bedouins carried out their 'illegal' activities, this article borrows from Husken's seminal analysis of the practice and culture of smuggling in the borderland of Egypt and Libya. Husken (2017, p. 897) analysed smuggling as 'a transgressive economic practice that is embedded in the wider social, political and cultural connectivity. This connectivity transgresses state borders, colliding with state sovereignty and territorial integrity.' In the case of the northern Sinai, smuggling has increased the capacity of adaptation of interstitial subjects in-between border space. Even though the centralized Egyptian State has sought to assert its monopoly on economic activity in the region, the resilience of in-between border space has defied hegemonic forms of power relations, and challenged the legality of various economic practices to reshape the interstitial place in the northern Sinai.

The securitization policies conducted by the Egyptian State increased between 2004–2006 when 130 civilians were killed in various car bombings on Sinai's Red Sea resorts of Taba, Ras al-Shaitan and Nuweiba (October 2004), Sharm al-Sheikh (July 2005) and Dahab (April 2006). The Islamist militant group, *Tawhid wal-Jihad* who claimed responsibility for the bombing was formed by Palestinian and Bedouin elements from northern tribes. Egyptian security forces immediately ordered the mass arrest of 3,000 people in three Palestinian towns, and used torture and ill-treatment as an interrogation device (Human Rights Watch, 2005). The regime targeted the whole population of the borderland, and approached jihadi activists and the North Sinai Bedouins by employing collective punishment strategy (Yaari, 2012, p. 4). This, in return, led to merging Bedouin resistance and Islamist militancy and changing local inhabitants' belonging in such liminal configurations in the northern Sinai.

This article thus proposes to discuss belonging as a dynamic process, and argues that the alignment of local grievances with Salafi ideology needs to be considered as the Bedouins' response to local and global transformations and spatial practices over time. Sinai's Bedouins were not historically inclined to Salafism. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sufi communities were strong in Sinai. Following the deterioration of the relations between the Muslim Brotherhood

and the state under the President Gamel Abdul Nasser, local Muslim Brotherhood figures left North Sinai to avoid mass arrest campaign of the regime in Egypt. In this context, Alexandrani (2014) explained that Sufism started spreading in North Sinai coming from Gaza with Sheikh Abu Ahmed Al-Gazawy during this period. Nasser allied with Sufi orders because of their political quietist approach to religion. Sufi groups appeared to become the main partner of the Egyptian military intelligence in 1967 war until the liberation of Sinai in 1982.

Yet, within time Sinai transformed into a space of encounters between the Bedouins and the Salafi groups, such as *Ahl Al-Sunna wal-Jamaa* and *Tawhid wal-Jihad*. As Brighenti (2013, p. 89) put it, 'the space in the middle is a space of encounters with other bodies, a space in which one's body affect and is affected by other bodies. It is not a space of judgement, of secure values, of fixed constructions.' The notion of in-between space thus provides us with an opportunity to conceive the changes in the belonging's perceptions of the Bedouins within a given spatial situation, and to relate space to power and control.

In-between border space in North Sinai after the Arab uprisings

Sinai's indigenous population saw the collapse of the regime in Cairo as an opportunity to strengthen their autonomy in Sinai. Bedouins asserted their right to self-rule by establishing security, economy and legal committees across the region in the security void left by the demise of the Mubarak regime. The jihadist separatist group, *Takfir wal-Hijra* declared a sharia-governed emirate in August in 2011 (Laub, 2013). Even though Bedouins' own common law (*urf*) is not derived from regular Islamic jurisprudence, the post-revolutionary period has witnessed the emergence of a parallel Islamic justice system in Sinai.

The rise of legal practices that run parallel to the formal legal system in the northern Sinai well represents the situation where resistant groups seek to consolidate their authority through performing the state-like functions in a given place. In their analysis of opposition groups' daily enactments of 'stateness' via welfare services during the Syrian conflict, Martínez and Eng (2018, p. 237) argued that performances such as establishing checkpoints, offering welfare services or founding courts to resolve local disputes 'play a crucial role for rebel groups enmeshed in contexts of contested sovereignty. When executed successfully, they foster legitimacy and demonstrate an ability to govern proficiently while making explicit the contingent nature of the incumbent's rule.' It was estimated that within the first 2 years after the uprisings, Sharia-based legal committees' caseload increased eight-fold as they received 75 per cent of caseload which previously heard by the official courts in Sinai. According to Sheikh Marei Arar, the leader of the Salafi movement in Rafah, Sharia committees are being widely accepted as an alternative

to traditional (*urf*) courts by local populations in Sinai not necessarily because of religious reasons, but they are better in addressing Bedouins' economic and political grievances in a less corrupt way (Revkin, 2013).

The Arab uprisings have contributed to a widening of the political and security vacuum that a new wave of local and transnational militant groups used to their advantage. The arrival of new weapons and ammunition from Libya after the toppling of Qaddafi and of many fighters who escaped from prisons during the uprisings further deteriorated the security situation in Sinai. Securing its long border with Libya (1,115 km) has been one of the most important challenges for Egypt in the post-Arab uprisings period. Many new transnational groups who share al-Qa'ida ideology arrived in Sinai and found a fertile ground for building alliances with local Bedouin population.

After the collapse of the former regime, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) launched Operation Eagle I in order to re-establish the central state presence in Sinai and to pressure Hamas for strict border control to curb smuggling. Following the SCAF government, the short-lived Muslim Brotherhood rule constituted a shift in policy on the Bedouins in Sinai. Unlike the previous regime's crackdown approach on Sinai, Mohammed Morsi highlighted the socio-economic problems of the Bedouins. The Freedom and Justice Party's (FJP) electoral document identified the party's policy in Sinai as the development of an industry and the expansion of job opportunities in the peninsula. The FJP developed so-called the 'Sinai Reconstruction Project' which entailed planting various crops and constructing railway infrastructure across the peninsula.⁶ Furthermore, 'the National Authority for the Development of the Sinai Peninsula' was established for the purpose of improving all of Sinai (Breen, 2013b, p. 68). The FJP government allocated LE 1.95 billion for the development of Sinai in the 2012–2013 fiscal budget with a particular emphasis on funding people's immediate needs in Sinai.⁷

In May 2012, the FJP government passes a new law to give ownership rights to local residents of Sinai. However, many Bedouins were not able to benefit from this law because of its executive regulations. According to the Article 8 of the Executive Regulations for Law 14 for the Comprehensive Development of the Sinai Peninsula:

An Egyptian who has obtained another nationality and kept his Egyptian nationality has to sell his property, be it land or buildings, in the Sinai Peninsula to Egyptians who hold solely the Egyptian nationality and whose parents are both Egyptian within six months of implementing these executive regulations. If the six months elapse without the property thus sold, the ownership of the property shall devolve to the state in return for the payment of equivalent (compensation) price to the owner (cited in Shawkat, 2012).

As many Bedouins are descendants of parents with no identity records and/or acquired additional citizenship when they left Sinai during the Israeli occupation,

they found it difficult to comply with the requirements of the law. The FJP government also issued Decree 203 in December 2012 and prohibited private property ownership on land within five kilometres of the Gaza Strip because of the strategic military importance of the land (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Mohammed Morsi visited North Sinai third times during 2012, and promised to change the government's discriminately treatment of Sinai's Bedouins and to reopen cases where Sinai Bedouins were tried *in absentia* during the previous regime. He also initiated talks with the armed groups to foster dialogue and any possible truce. These reconciliation efforts, however, were not sufficient to stop the fighting in Sinai. Armed Sinai groups continued to maintain their operations during the rule of Morsi. Despite the promises and gestures of the new Muslim Brotherhood rule, the FJP government failed to offer a comprehensive solution that could encompass the needs of Bedouins. The opposition harshly criticized Morsi because of his relaxation of security measures across the Gaza border that resulted in the worsening of the situation in Sinai. After the death of 16 border guards in August 2012, the Egyptian army launched Operation Eagle II to protect the Suez Canal and to eliminate armed groups and their smuggling networks (Watanabe, 2015, p. 3). During the short tenure of the Muslim Brotherhood rule neither political nor military approach succeeded. Since the ouster of Mohammed Morsi on 3 July 2013, the numbers of the terrorist attacks on military or security targets in El-Arish and Rafah drastically increased.⁸ There were also some terrorist incidents against Israel or soft civilian targets, such as gas pipelines (Ashour, 2017, p. 9).

Between the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 and August 2017, the 941 terrorist attacks were reported across North Sinai. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), a jihadists extremist militant group, and its successor organization primarily claimed responsibility for 306 of the reported attacks (Burt, 2017). Formed in February 2011, ABM declared its aim to overthrow the Egyptian State and to liberate Jerusalem. Even though the state officially blamed the 'foreign hands' behind ABM operations in Sinai, fieldwork-based research indicates that the vast majority of ABM fighters are Egyptians, including Salafi Jihadists, disillusioned Bedouins, and former jihadists who recruited from various battlegrounds in the wider Middle East, including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Algeria, Libya and Saudi Arabia (Al-Anani, 2014; Idris, 2017).

Islamic state's franchise in the northern Sinai

In June 2014, IS fighters proudly tweeted a picture of bulldozer smashing the earthen barrier that constitutes the part of the frontier between Syria and Iraq in their announcement of the destruction of the 'Sykes-Picot' border (Ruthven, 2014). Since then, many quick analyses on the subject have also agreed that the rise of the organization of the Islamic State (IS) and the

erasure of the Iraq–Syria border by IS fighters have heralded the end of the existing border system in the Middle East as supposedly shaped in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916.⁹ Yet, the territorial gains of IS were severely diminished since 2015, and ‘despite longstanding and region-wide claims of imposition and artificiality, amid ongoing challenges, most of the borders have survived’ (Fawcett, 2017, p. 798).

However, the advance of IS has conveyed important points on the articulation of borders, sovereignty and territories in the region as it aimed to create transnational and borderless Islamic state. As Adraoui (2017, p. 918) put it, the Islamist proposition seeks to ‘reunite all fellow believers across existing external geographical divisions such that the only remaining boundary would be that between Muslims and non-Muslims.’ The self-proclaimed caliph of the IS, Al-Baghdadi explained IS’s esteemed goal is ‘to place all the world’s region under the rule of the “global caliphate” to reverse all the power struggles that have undermined the independence of Muslims over past centuries’ (Adraoui, 2017, p. 932). In order to restore an Islamic caliphate spreading naturally beyond the artifice of nation-state building, the IS’s spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani announced that all faithful Muslims, whether groups or individuals were required to *bay’a* (a pledge of allegiance) to the new caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.¹⁰

The IS has received *bay’a* from individuals and groups in different geographical locations since June 2014. For IS, each new *bay’a* represents IS’s global attractiveness and supremacy. IS used various Jihadist groups’ oath of *bay’a* to IS to demonstrate that IS is a vibrant and growing organization. Maintaining this image has been particularly important especially at the time when the IS’s expansion has been stopped in Syria and Iraq since the start of the US-led strikes in September 2014.

Even though IS’s strategy of expansion of number of wilayat (provinces) is similar to al-Qaeda’s franchises in mid-2000s, their model of expansion through franchising has been quite different from each other: While al-Qaeda used its new franchises for its external operations (mainly attacking Western countries and targets), IS wants them to ‘fight locally, institute limited governance and conduct outreach’ (Zelin, 2015). In doing so, IS sought to incorporate local jihadist groups into its transnational effort of obliterating any national border. IS has been quite pragmatic and flexible in its expansion strategy due to the fact that its ideology is secondary to its identity, ‘which is mostly Sunna and tribal, having relied upon a mix of force, clientelism and manipulation of local rivalries to assert its power in territories.’ Therefore, it has easily adapted to different local contexts and perforate borders (Azoulay, 2015, p. 21).

Sinai-based ABM declared its allegiance to Islamic State (IS) and to ‘Khalif’ Al-Baghdadi on 10 November 2014.¹¹ Three days later, al Baghdadi accepted AMB’s *bay’a*, and ABM changed its name and also its twitter account into

'Wilayat Sinai,' the Islamic State's province of Sinai. The IS's claim of expansion beyond its territories in Syria and Iraq, and its evolving archipelago strategy need to be approached with caution in Sinai. Even though IS's recognition gave AMB additional strength and vigour by enabling them to recruit more members and to access IS resources, Wilayat Sinai does not enjoy a territorial jurisdiction in Sinai in the same way that the IS has controlled parts of Syria and Iraq. Wilayet Sinai is seriously constrained by the Egyptian and the Israeli army in the region. As stated earlier, Wilayet Sinai is not the only Jihadist armed group operating in Sinai. It shares the Jihadi landscape with the other terrorist organizations. ABM's pledge to IS, in some cases, reduces its ability to cooperate with other Sinai-based groups who have closer ties with al-Qaeda. It is also not certain that Wilayat Sinai would be able to attract especially Gaza-based Jihadist groups to join the IS. As Lahoud (2015) argues Wilayat Sinai remains a name without a territory.

Yet, the tribal nature of Sinai peninsula provides a fertile ground for IS to exploit the grievances of the Bedouins and their alienation from the state. As Hassan (2014) argues 'ISIS – in its current and former incarnations – has operated among tribes for around 10 years, and has mastered to a large degree the game of dancing around tribal lines.' IS successfully employs divide and rule strategies among tribes, and capitalizes existing local networks through financial incentives and semi-delegated rule to penetrate deep into tribal areas in its territories. In Sinai, apart from tribal conflict and rivalries, Bedouin's feeling of alienation and the increasing hostility between the state and Bedouins as result of the regime's harsh security measures increases the outreach of Wilayat Sinai to local populations (Azoulay, 2015). Wilayat Sinai constantly uses the army's mistreatment of local population to provoke mobilization for the group and claims that they are fighting against an army of apostasy for a united Salafi-Jihadist post-revolutionary state in Egypt. The IS urges Sinai insurgents to accelerate violence against Egyptian security forces. The IS spokesmen Abu Muhammad al-Adnani advised to Egyptian militants online as follows: 'Rig the roads with explosives for them. Attack their bases. Raid their homes. Cut off their heads. Do not let them feel secure' (cited in Kalin, 2014).

Wilayat Sinai employs heavy-handed repression against the local population as well. The group has killed dozens of Bedouins who were alleged to be spies for the Egyptian army and sought to terminate smuggling of 'un-Islamic' goods such as cigarette and marijuana.¹² Sinai's Bedouins are subsequently trapped between the borderline scorched-earth tactic used by the state and the Wilayet Sinai's violence, which in return reinforces new forms of contestation as well as collaboration between the local population and the state in-between border space in the northern Sinai. The Sinai Tribal Federation, comprised of approximately 30 tribes appeared in this new environment where interstitial subjects coexist in various ways (Awad & Abdou, 2015). The Federation called on other

tribes to take a unified stand to support the state's counter-terror campaign through their leadership in the Federation. Abu Saqer Tarabin, media spokesman of the Federation explained their aim 'to mobilize men from tribes and have them engaged in the battle against extremists all around Sinai' (Shietti, 2017). However, the extent to which the Sinai Tribal Federation could represent all the tribes is unclear.¹³ The majority of the Bedouin population has not participated the umbrella tribal group to combat alongside the military. Likewise, the Egyptian state has not offered any formal framework to incorporate local Bedouin fighters into the ranks of the army either. Instead, in the words of Mohanned Sabry, an Egyptian journalist, 'a bunch of armed civilians are running around and calling others to join them' (cited in Shietti, 2017). The engagement of non-state actors without a formal framework for post-conflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration could potentially lead to the outbreak of further conflict in contentious spaces. The Libyan case well exemplifies this menace for the northern Sinai.

The expansion of the buffer zone: New forms of contestation and resistance space in-between border space in the Northern Sinai

ABM's pledge of allegiance and its continuous attacks on the Egyptian targets followed heavy counter-insurgency operations by the Egyptian State, involving torture and extra-judicial killing of suspects and detainees, forced evacuations, the use of heavy aerial assault in residential areas. According to Sinai's Human Rights Committee in the Egyptian Observatory for Rights and Freedoms (EORF), the military has extra-judicially killed 1,347, detained 11,906, and forcibly deported 26,993 persons between September 2013 and June 2015 (Ashour, 2017, p. 12).

The imposition of a buffer zone has emerged as a decisive component of the state's security campaign and further contributes to the militarization and hyper-securitization of in-between border space in the northern Sinai. It needs to be noted that the creation of a buffer zone came as a direct result of the current security cooperation between Egypt and Israel due to the close relations between both countries since Sisi assumed power following the military coup in 2013. The establishment of a buffer zone along the borderline in the northern Sinai has served Israel in its attempts to keep pressure on the Gaza Strip.

A buffer zone could be defined as 'a region in which the territorial sovereign has, willingly or unwilling, forfeited aspects of its autonomy due to external and humanitarian intervention' (Katz, 2017, p. 1391). The realist international relations theoretical framework which advocates that good fences make good neighbours – following the 'billiard ball' model, functionalizes buffer zones as the tools of the armistice agreements between the conflicting states. This approach, however, does not address the active and

offensive character of buffer zones that allows states to conduct cross-border operations. Since a number of UNSC resolutions acknowledged that ‘large-scale attacks by non-state actors can qualify as “armed attacks” within the meaning of Article 51,’¹⁴ the creation of a buffer zone is increasingly justified as a response to terror attacks conducted by non-state actors, and a means to prevent it among the states (Katz, 2017, p. 1400).

In practice, the creation of a buffer zone often necessitates giving up sovereignty because ‘the outside state patrols a contested area (e.g., a border region) where the other state failed to ascertain its monopoly on violence, in quasi preemptive self-defense’ (Beehner & Meibauer, 2016, p. 5). The imposition of a buffer zone proves ‘a low-cost alternative to direct military interventions for casualty-averse publics’ because of strategic and legal flexibility of buffer zones. They can be used ‘as both a passive tool of conflict management, as well as an active, offensive tool of intervention’ (Beehner & Meibauer, 2016, p. 5). Buffer zones also give greater legal flexibility stems from the fact that there is no effective enforcement mechanism of international law on buffer zones.

The establishment of a buffer zone along the borderline with Gaza aimed to destroy tunnels that were used to smuggle fighters and weapons from Gaza into the Sinai Peninsula. The Defence Ministry’s website announced that the buffer zone would ‘finally eliminate the problem of tunnels, one of the main sources for armed groups to enter Sinai and supply insurgents with arms and ammunition’ (Human Rights Watch, 2015). What remains to be considered is the extent to which the establishment of a buffer zone could stop arms flows to North Sinai. According to Human Rights Watch (2015), most of the heavy weapons have likely been smuggled from Libya, not from Gaza.

The creation of a buffer zone started in October 2014 following an unprecedented attack of ABM that left 28 Egyptian soldiers dead on an army checkpoint in the northeastern village of Sheikh Zuwaid. The buffer zone was originally estimated to be 500 metres in width and 14 kilometres in length along its border with the Gaza Strip. A month later, it was extended to one kilometre. The second stage contributed an extra 500 metres along the 14 km border with Gaza in September 2015. In its third phase, another area of 500 metres were added in October 2017. The buffer zone covered all of Rafah, in-between border town at the southern end of the Gaza Strip.¹⁵ Hamas also started to construct a 100- metre deep buffer zone along 12 kilometres of the border between Gaza and Egypt in June 2017 as part of a recent agreement between Egypt and Hamas.¹⁶

The physical creation and maintenance of a buffer zone are typically necessitated punitive actions that affect combatants and civilians indiscriminately. The self-imposed exclusionary buffer zone in the northern Sinai is no exception. The Egyptian state’s drastic actions to establish a buffer zone involved the demolition of 1000 homes and farms in-between border space

in North Sinai. The Egyptian state routinely violates the civil and private property rights of the local Bedouins. According to Human Rights Watch (2015), between July 2013 and August 2015, 3,255 residential, commercial, administrative and community buildings, and around 685 ha of cultivated farmland were demolished in the northern Sinai.¹⁷ The demolitions were disproportionate and random, and require to be repeated regularly to prevent the rebuilding of tunnels (Richemond-Barak, 2017, p. 103).

Apart from the destruction of properties to clear the army's lines of sight, forced displacement has been harshly implemented in-between border space in North Sinai.¹⁸ Forced eviction campaign that displaced more than 3,200 extended families, was not coupled with specific protections derived from the right to housing, laid out by the United Nations or the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights applicable in Egypt, including adequate and reasonable notice and legal assistance. (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Local people were just asked to evacuate their houses within 48 h, and move from Rafah to Al-Arish (40 kilometres) on their own (Alexandrani, 2015, p. 2). The displaced residents were offered one-time payment of 900 Egyptian pounds (US \$118) for housing allowance for 3 months, after having signed the form that falsely stated that they voluntarily evicted their properties (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

The military campaign carried out by the Egyptian State further exacerbates the tense situation for local Bedouins in Sinai. The construction of the buffer zone and indiscriminate targeting have severely harmed in-between border subjects of North Sinai and Gaza when the tunnel economy came to an abrupt halt. While the Gazans suffered massive shortages and price increases, the Bedouins faced a decline in wages, in addition to losing their homes (Idris, 2017, p. 12). On the other hand, the violent extremist groups were able to find a way to survive and increased their attacks despite the regime's heavy-handed approach. As McManus (2018) put it 'in the medium and long term, a critical challenge has been the resilience of militant groups to these operations.' Following the imposition of a buffer zone on the Gazan border with Rafah, militants moved their loci of operations westward and southward, and continued to carry out their activities. Even though the new insurgency in the northern Sinai represents a different challenge to the Egyptian security than the past ones, the Egyptian army is still using traditional troop tactics with heavy vehicles and blanket artillery, and not does not have enough flexibility to fight in a guerrilla fight settings (Alexandrani, 2015, p. 2).

The regime has deepened its fights against militant insurgency in North Sinai also through legal devices. A new strict anti-terrorism law, which aimed to provide 'quick and just deterrence' against terrorism, was introduced in August 2015. The ratified law, compounded by the broad and vague definition of terrorism, introduced a penalty of life in prison for anyone 'establishes, founds, organizes or manages a terrorist group or assumes command or leadership,' and 'commits a terrorism financing crime.'¹⁹ The law also restricted

the journalists by setting a minimum fine of 200, 000 Egyptian pounds and a maximum of 500,000 Egyptian pounds for anyone 'intentionally, by any means, publishes, broadcasts, displays, or promotes false news or statements on terrorist acts inside the country or anti-terrorism operations contrary to the official statements released by the Ministry of Defense.'²⁰

The regime's harsh crackdown has served to further alienate the Bedouin tribes and continues to punish local civilians through collective and indiscriminate violence in-between border space in the northern Sinai. Outraged by random collective punishment tactics of the military, many Bedouins have taken the side of transnational armed groups. Wilayat Sinai significantly reinforced its position among Sinai's Bedouin tribes and found a way to exploit their vulnerable situations against the indiscriminate targeting of the state. Wilayat Sinai intensified its call for local Bedouins to fight along its side against the Egyptian state by arguing that the establishment of the buffer zone only tightened the Israeli blockade of the besieged Palestinian enclave and further victimized Bedouins in their own territory (Shay, 2016, p. 3). Hammam al-Agha, a 26 year-old resident of Rafah echoes a sentiment felt by many local civilians in Sinai as follows: 'Do they think that when they take away our houses, people will like them and terrorism will be over? On the contrary, they are creating terrorism by these actions' (cited in Kholaif, 2014).

Conclusion

This article analysed the Sinai as an interstice space of contestation against more institutionalized, and economically and legally powerful bordering spaces to explain the impact of space bordering on identity (Brighenti, 2013, p. XVI). The article thus suggested that the notion of in-betweenness could shed light on the spatiality of power beyond the borders of a particular state and the complex relationship between the local inhabitants' belonging and spatial practices. It also showed that the spatial practices of the socio-economic and political exclusion of the Bedouins reinforced spatially located inequalities and empowered a space of resistance in-between border space in the northern Sinai. Bedouins' current alliance with the transnational militant groups suggests that the various form of flows and connections keep reshaping in-between border space 'where established structures are dislocated, hierarchies reversed, and traditional setting of authority possibly endangered' (Malksoo, 2015, p. 226).

The changing demographic structure has increasingly been facilitating the creation of multiple forms of belonging and becoming in-between border space in the northern Sinai. The state's heavy-handed approach and the border-line scorched-earth campaign used by the military forced in-between border space community to evict their land, houses and workplaces changed North Sinai's demographics. Apart from the forced displacement of at least 12,851

residents in the cities of Arish, Hasna, and Bir al-Abd due to the buffer zone state policy, almost all of North Sinai's Coptic population left Sinai following the increasing trend of the sectarian attacks on Christians (TIMEP, 2017).

Under draconian security measures, one could only expect more severe alienation of interstitial inhabitants of Sinai and the creation of new local recruits for transnational militant groups in-between border space in the northern Sinai. Without addressing the roots of local grievances of Bedouins, a security-focused approach employed by the state would only push in-between border population to fight with violent insurgent groups and contribute to resilience of in-betweenness in North Sinai. In the context of regional instability, no political solution that can boost the dialogue with the indigenous Bedouin communities to integrate them into the formal economy, improve their citizenship status and include them in the state structure is likely in the foreseeable future in Egypt.

Notes

1. In the early 1950s, most of the incidents involved innocent activity, such as border crossing by Bedouins, Arabs and Israelis. But in the mid-1950s, more serious incidents including act of sabotage, theft and terrorist activity against Israel occurred (Kliot, 1995, p. 10).
2. Since 2011, Israel has de-facto accepted the remilitarization of eastern Sinai.
3. The rest of the population is divided as follows: 10 per cent are Palestinians, or of Palestinian origin, 10 per cent are Egyptians from the mainland and 10 per cent are 'Bosnians', descendants of Bosnians arriving in Sinai during the Ottoman period (Breen, 2013a, p. 22).
4. The Egyptian state does not recognize communal or tribal ownership of land as legal ownership of land. It recognizes only three types of legal ownership: private, corporate and state ownership (Cole & Altorki, 1998).
5. It was only in September 2011 that military colleges in Cairo began accepting Bedouins from Sinai.
6. Morsi promised to finish the 225 km railroad, linking Ismailia, al-Arish and Rafah.
7. 'Government Allocated LE 1.95 bn for Sinai Development,' *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 3 September 2012 <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/govt-allocates-le195-bn-sinai-development>.
8. Between July and September 2013, a total of 167 attacks were recorded in North Sinai. At least 100 people died and 189 wounded (Human Rights Watch, 2015).
9. Despite IS's obsession of the Sykes-Picot border system in the Middle East, the formulation of a postwar settlement for the Middle East was decided at the San Remo Conference in April 1920.
10. The origin of the practice of *bay'a* goes back to the early Muslims who pledged *bay'a* to Mohammed. This practice continued during Mohammed's successors, and the caliphs used it as a sign of their political legitimacy (Milton & Al-Ubaydi, 2015).
11. Along with ABM, five other groups from Algeria (Wilayat al-Jazair), Yemen (Wilayat al-Yaman), Saudi Arabia (Wilayat al-Haramayn), Pakistan and Libya (Wilayat al-Barqah, Wilayat al-Tarabulus and Wilayat al-Fizan) also pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi in November 2014. The Nigerian group, Boko Haram, pledged allegiance

- to IS on 7 March 2015. In *Dabiq* Issue 5, on November 21, in the article called 'Remaining and Expanding,' it was stated that the new groups would operate under IS and would receive directives from the Caliph (Azoulay, 2015, p. 10).
12. In April 2015, following the execution of the tribal sheikh, the members of the Tarabin tribe attacked Wilayat Sinai's positions in south of Sheikh Zuwaid and El-Arish (Idris, 2017).
 13. The Sinai Tribal Federation is composed of some strong individuals of the major tribes. Many of the signatories don't even reside in Sinai but in Cairo (Awad & Abdou, 2015).
 14. The aforementioned UNSC resolutions are based on the interpretation of the Article 51 of the UN Charters which reads: 'Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.' <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/>
 15. The Egyptian military also constructed a 20 m-deep trench on the Sinai side of the border, and laid pipes parallel to the buffer zone road, and then filled with water from the Mediterranean Sea to prevent further tunnel construction (Newton, 2015).
 16. The long-awaited rapprochement between Egypt and Hamas came at a time when Hamas distanced itself from the Muslim Brotherhood in a new policy document in May 2017. In exchange for agreeing to construct a buffer zone and to improve border security, Egypt sent diesel fuel to run Gaza's only power plant (Harel, 2017).
 17. The satellite footage demonstrates that home demolitions on the border began a year before buffer zone decree was issued in October 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2015).
 18. Forced displacement campaign violates the Article 63 of the 2014 constitution which reads as follows: 'All forms and types of arbitrary forced displacement of citizens shall be prohibited and shall be a crime that does not lapse by prescription' (Elasrag, 2016, p. 233).
 19. Article 12 and 13 of the ratified anti-terrorism law. Article 2 defines a terrorist act as 'any use of force, violence, threat, or intimidation domestically or abroad for the purpose of disturbing public order, or endangering the safety, interests, or security of the community; harming individuals and terrorizing them; jeopardizing their lives, freedoms, public or private rights, or security, or other freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law; harms national unity, social peace, or national security or damages the environment, natural resources, antiquities, money, buildings, or public or private properties or occupies or seizes them; prevents or impedes public authorities, agencies or judicial bodies, government offices or local units, houses of worship, hospitals, institutions, institutes, diplomatic and consular missions, or regional and international organizations and bodies in Egypt from carrying out their work or exercising all or some of their activities, or resists them or disables the enforcement of any of the provisions of the Constitution, laws, or regulations.' Official Gazette, No. 33 (bis) issued on 30 Shawwal 1436 AH, corresponding to 15 August 2015 AD, the 58th year, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/EgyptSource/Egypt_Anti-Terror_Law_Translation.pdf.
 20. Article 35 of the ratified anti-terrorism law.

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