

Rehab Eldalil

The longing of the stranger whose path has been broken

The Longing Of The Stranger Whose Path Has Been Broken is a personal project in which I reconnect to my roots and work collaboratively with the Bedouin community to explore the notion of belonging and the interconnectedness of people and land.

The project focuses on the process of finding and seeking the meaning of belonging cited through the Bedouin community of St. Catherine, South Sinai, Egypt. The community are participants in the creative process. I'm using their commentary of embroidery, poetry, sound and storytelling to link my photographic work with topics of representation and social injustice. The final outcome of the project is a complementary collection of photographs, written content, embroidery, artefacts, and multimedia.

The project attempts to understand the layers of an identity and the interconnectedness between people and land which defines the notion of belonging. I believe it's a common human emotion to seek a definition of one's identity, yet its complexity is often ignored, creating linear labels and othering. With this dialogue, I'm building a bridge between the voices of the Bedouin community and the western audiences who have long seen the Bedouins and many other indigenous communities through a linear and romanticized gaze.

I'm working with the Jebeleya tribe who've been inhabiting the region for more than 1400 years. The community has survived wars, colonialism, drought and pandemics. But, they are in perpetual struggle with the authorities. During the Israeli occupation between 1967 and 1982, Bedouins remained on their land to protect it while resisting the occupation. Although they played a major role in the retrieval of the Egyptian Sinai lands, their resistance and efforts were overlooked. The larger Egyptian public came to view them as traitors. So began a long struggle to secure civil rights and basic needs. Like many indigenous communities around the world, they are commonly misrepresented in the media, portrayed as isolated from, and a threat to, modern

society. Throughout it all, they remain the keepers of the land, protecting it from harm as it has provided them with blessings in return. This interconnectedness, forged over the centuries, accounts for the community's resilience in the face of challenges.

Since the war, most of the surviving archives about Sinai have been stored in the St. Catherine's monastery. The Egyptian government prohibits public access to these archives, and thus withholds the history of the land, the history of its people and possibly the history of my family.

Having a peculiar last name translated to The Guide, our family was rumoured to have come from Bedouin roots, without further evidence due to lack of archives. This project has been my opportunity to process my Bedouin ancestry and the Sinai land that the community has sacrificed so much for and in return live in its flora and fauna. It's this interconnectedness which survived in my blood and drew me back to this land to find my roots and way home.