

This article documents a recent sociolinguistic phenomenon at work in the Arabian Peninsula. Being Badu used to be associated with a pastoral lifestyle, but sedentarism turned this lifestyle into an ethnic identity. The sedentary population lived within the walls 2015 AMIN ALMUHANNA AND JEAN-FRANCOIS PRUNET 315 of densely populated Kuwait City (KA madinat li?kweet), while the nomadic population moved in search of pastures in the sparsely populated remainder of the country. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, some young people of Badu origin (also known as Bedouin) have been using numeric codes to refer to their tribes in digital media, such as social networks, and in public areas, such as bumper stickers on cars and graffiti. 1 These codes express pride in their heritage and are used and discussed openly. The nomadic population of Kuwait, on the other hand, was concentrated in and around the town of Jahra (KA il?jahraa, MSA al?jahraay), about thirty-two kilometers from Kuwait City, but it moved freely within Kuwait as well as between Kuwait and KSA, Iraq, Qatar, or Iran. In Kuwait, both Hadhar and Badu are now sedentary and, although the Hadhar dialect and lifestyle define the contours of a national melting pot, dialectal and social differences remain between these two co-cultures, as we see in the next section. The epicenter of this phenomenon is probably the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), but these codes also exist in the State of Kuwait (henceforth Kuwait) and the State of Qatar (henceforth Qatar). Its urban dwellers are called Hadhar (KA sg. Rdo iriy, pl. Rado ar, MSA sg. Rado ariyy, pl. Rado ar). Different Badu groups embraced nomadism to different degrees—some of them being quite sedentary—but all practiced pastoralism, an activity that, in dry areas, requires mobility to find water and grass. They lived in the walled city of Kuwait City, which was divided into four districts called jibla 'prayer direction' (MSA qibla), oarg 'East' (MSA oarq), il?waso ato 'the center' (MSA al?wasato ), and il?Members of this group are known as Badu (KA sg. bduwiyy, pl. badu, MSA sg. badawiyy, pl. .badw). Prior to 1960, the population of Kuwait was distributed over two areas. 2