Chapter 3
Purity, Nobility, Beauty and Performance: Past and Present Construction of Meaning for the Arabian Horse
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Introduction

The *Classic Arabian Horse*\(^1\) is generally seen as the result of breeding activities of Arab Bedouins from the northern Arabian Peninsula and Syrian steppe desert over hundreds of years. While the exact origin of the breed is vague and still a matter of controversial discussion, it is broadly accepted that the breed was already fixed in the middle of the second millennium B.C. and from then on mostly bred by Bedouin tribes, with Nejd in the northern Arabian Peninsula as “the most significant center” (Derry 2003, 104). Therefore, talking about the Arabian horse in terms of ancestry and origin generally refers to the Bedouin horse or desert horse of the Bedouins who managed to hold the traditional breeding monopoly for centuries.

With the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century the centers of Arabian horse breeding have mostly shifted to Western Europe\(^2\) and the United States. There, new breeding programs were established, based on direct and indirect imports of Arabians from the Arab Middle East, and evolved into a global Arabian horse industry. European and US horse breeders and traders created a transatlantic commodification system of registration and certification for their modern Arabian horses, resulting in the separation of Arabian horses into a Western certified closed group of Arabian pedigrees. These were recognized as the only *authentic* Arabian purebred horse and distinguished from the group of horses with unaccepted or unreliable Arabian bloodlines. This directly connects to an enormous cultural production: The medial
representation of horses, organizations and studs through publications, the internet and in
performative show events and championships are markers of persistently fought-over
discourses about the origin, purity of blood and aesthetics of the animals.

In this chapter I will develop an ethnographic approach to analyze these translocal
connections within the global network of contemporary Arabian horse breeders. The focus
thus lies on the horses and the specific locally-situated work and practice, not only connecting
the horse with their human counterparts but also constituting the different groups of actors
and their relations among each other. Methodically, I draw on theoretical concepts from the
field of anthropology, traditionally concerned with human-animal-nature entanglements
(through domestication studies, studies of nomadic pastoralist societies: e.g. Cassidy and
influenced by human-animal studies such as multispecies ethnography and, last but not least,
the French tradition of science and technology studies. I chose Egypt’s scene of Arabian horse
breeders as the ethnographic center of this analysis. In the first section I elaborate on the
theoretical and conceptual approaches of what one could summarize with the slogan “Follow
the Horses”. In the next section I present a historical contextualization of the emerging global
Arabian horse industry and its dominant actors, which will be followed by an overview of the
collected ethnographic material.

**Anthropological Perspectives on Human-Animal Histories of Entanglement**

In recent work in the field of human-animal studies and multispecies ethnography (Birke and
Hockenhull 2012; Cassidy 2002a, 2007; Descola and Pålsson 1996; Grasseni 2009; Haraway
2008; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Maurstad, Davis and Coles 2013; Shapiro and DeMello
2010) the authors invoke a new and radical re-centration and re-negotiation of the position
and role of animals in social science research and conceptualize them as actors with the potential agency to create and transform social relations. Furthermore, these approaches are directly connected to the French tradition of science and technology studies at the CSI in Paris, which is mainly represented by the work of Michel Callon, Antoine Hennion, Bruno Latour, and their long fight for objects’ symmetric place in social science theory. I will show how a combination of key conceptual tools of both traditions provides a methodological approach for explaining and dealing with the world of modern Arabian horses and their breeders, lovers and traders, and in particular, how specific practices of bonding/attachment between human and horse constitute different transnational communities within the global network. In addressing this, I will focus on concepts developed in Actor-Network-Theory, namely the concepts of “obligatory passage point” (OPP) (Callon 1986, 204), “centers of calculations” (Latour 1993, 37) and “immutable mobiles” (Latour 1999, 306-7). I will also account for the significance of ethnographic research: Malinowski drew on the importance of understanding the Kula by “follow[ing] the natives on one of their overseas trips, describing it in all details” (Malinowski 2002 [1922], 79). This not only evokes the ANT-slogan “Follow the Actors” but also leads to Hennion’s concept of “attachment” (2007, 109), fruitful in the sense that he analyzes the specific processes of how people become amateurs, lovers and experts in their fields of interest through practices in situ. In doing so, they not only discursively create the meanings of objects or animals, but develop a deep attachment based on their bodily experience with them. This brings Tim Ingold’s “skilled practices” (2011, 5) and “taskscapes” (2011, 154) to mind and the “fact that one of the outstanding features of human technical practices lies in their embeddedness in the current of sociality” (2011, 195). Cristina Grasseni, for example, combines Ingold’s concepts with the idea of “communities of practice” (CoP) by Lave and Wenger (1991, 53) and elaborates them further in her ethnography on contemporary cattle breeders in the Italian Alps (Grasseni 2009). The resulting “ecology of practice” focuses on the practices of visual apprenticeship (“skilled
vision”) of the cattle breeder community members (Grasseni 2009, 128-9). It also addresses questions of how to train the eye in developing the skills to judge the good from the bad in their breeding activities and consequently raises issues of how to constitute the community itself: “The local construction of skilled knowledge, through the training of expert eyes, hands, discourses and sensibilities, actually contributes to establishment and maintenance of hegemonic, often global, standards of practice through which we perceive, order and manage the world” (Grasseni 2007, 7-8).

In the case of Arabian horses, one might ask: How and by what means do Arabian horse breeders and lovers deploy their locally constituted ecologies of practice in the global world of the Arabian horse trading industry and international breeders presentation shows? And thus, by what means do different groups of actors constitute diverse, often competing sets of meaning through their specific ‘attachments’ to Arabian horses, defining what an authentic Arabian horse should be and thus recursively producing and/or altering established “hegemonic, often global, standards of practice”? (Grasseni 2007, 7) Consequently, the localized discursive and interactional practices of actors and horses are entangled in a twofold matter: Firstly, they compose the modern Arabian horse in arenas of different scale and through this also give meaning to themselves as individual subjects as well as members of the Arabian horse lovers’ communities. Rebecca Cassidy, in her ethnography on the English thoroughbred race horse industry, puts it this way: “[W]omen and men in the racing industry imagine their lives and those of others through the lives of horses, not to mention the lives of horses through their own” (Cassidy 2002b, 168).

As a consequence, the Arabian horse and its circulation constitutes the network and connects all actors and practices with each other; it is ‘mediator’ and medium for the transnational
interrelations of Arabian horse breeders and lovers. With Hennion’s (Gomart and Hennion 1999) “Sociology of Attachment”, this process of ‘mediation’ can be described as a bodily experienced interaction of human and animal/horse. Hennion (Gomart and Hennion 1999, 220) calls this “attachment” (where somebody else might say bonding). Attachments always realize themselves locally and are situated: in the case of my study in the contact with and handling of horses. Like Grasseni’s “skilled knowledge” above, attachments are also influenced by, multiplied and spread through material and media objects into global arenas of social practice: “They [taste and pleasure] are the results of a corporeal practice, collective and instrumented, settled by methods that are discussed endlessly, oriented around the appropriate seizing upon of uncertain effects. It is for this reason that we prefer to speak of attachments” (Hennion 2007, 108-109). A last conceptual notion in this regard is the idea of the living sculpture, which struck my mind during first observations of Arabian horses at show events and during their training. I have borrowed the term from a debate in art history about the beginnings of performance art. It originally relates to the work of the artist duo Gilbert & George in the 1960s who presented themselves and their daily life as artwork and called it a living sculpture. I use the term in my analysis to denote the culmination point of all practices relating to the Arabian horse – the moment to which all efforts and attachments are designated. It is the climax of every Arabian horse presentation performance, namely the very short moment when the horse freezes in perfect position and shape in front of the audience and judges.

**Origins of the Arabian Horse**

Together and in alliance with camels, horses allowed for a high level of mobility and therefore were essential for the traditional nomadic and pastoralist patterns of Bedouins’ livelihood. They were not least used in warfare and raids where “the superior qualities of the
horse give the rider incalculable advantages over his enemies” (Burckhardt 1831, 134).

However, not all Bedouins bred horses. Rather, the breeding and possession of Arabian horses had always been a marker of social distinction, so that Arabian horses were mostly and exclusively bred by the ‘noble’ Bedouin tribes. These constituted a sort of aristocracy of the desert, both due to their prestige and to the economic advantages of camel herding (Chatty 1996). Moreover, Arabian horses served as an important good for trading with the sedentary population and merchants in the region. From the 13th to the 18th centuries, these merchants established a flourishing oversea trade of Arabian horses, from south Arabian coast ports to India (Lancaster 2011, 388-396). In connection with these pastoral-sedentary relations, this special breed of Bedouin horses attracted different ruling state authorities in the region – such as the Ottomans sultans in Istanbul or Mamluks and Egyptian pashas in Cairo – who purchased large numbers of horses for their stables. State authorities and urban elites accordingly maintained special relations to Bedouins in their capacities as horse breeders, caretakers and trainers at the royal stables (see Aharoni 2007, 96; Shwartz 2011, 152).

Arabian horses are not only of central economic importance to Bedouin society, but they also – and as a consequence of the latter – are significant for the construction of Bedouin cultural and social identity. Arabian horses were incorporated into Bedouin society in different ways and were treated as if they were human members of the society. On the one hand, they were subjects of the same genealogical systems that dominated parts of Bedouin and Arab society. They thus played an important role in the world of meanings, for example in the moral economy of honor and social hierarchy as well as regarding intertribal communication and exchange systems. For example, Emrys Peters highlights the function of the horse as status symbol for the Bedouins of Cyrenaica: “In the ordinary run of daily life, it is impossible to distinguish between patrons and clients. […] There are rich and poor in both statuses, and the prime symbol of wealth, the horse, is to be seen tethered in front of the wealthy client’s tent,
as well as the wealthy nobleman’s tent” (1990, 55). He also stressed the role of the horse as a mount for a tribal leader or shaikh to fulfill his duties and ensure authority and control over his group (Peters 1990, 121, 166). On the other hand, we find a deep bond and attachment of pastoralists and their animals, which went far beyond sole admiration and showed in a range of shared daily practices: the common drinking of camel milk, same treatment for illnesses, and soft and gentle caretaking such as interpersonal interaction (Blunt 1879, 418).

Like any society, Arab Bedouin societies have always been in transition and subjected to social, economic and political changes. Internal competition for pastures or wells and tribal rivalries caused constant migrations. Shifting relations and alliances with ruling (state) authorities continuously impacted on Bedouin life, wealth and income. These were always integrated in the wider “external economy” and thus “have been competitive producers and also developed some types of conspicuous consumption, such as keeping horses and the exercise of lavish hospitality” (Marx 1984, 4). Yet, throughout history the Bedouins never had to adapt to transformational processes like those confronting the people of the Arab Middle East in the 19th and 20th centuries, and which had wide-ranging consequences for nomadic patterns of livelihood. The Western colonial encounter initiated processes of industrialization and ‘modernization’ throughout the whole Middle Eastern region, which manifested in railroads, trucks, mechanized warfare and expanding nation states. The horse- and camel-breeding Bedouin nomads were most affected by pacification campaigns of the desert by means of advanced weaponry (especially the deployment of war planes), the mechanization of transportation and the emerging nation states with their national borders and sedentarization programs. Important traditional forms of income became obsolete, for example security and protection services of the main trading and pilgrimage routes and the camel caravan trading system. Intertribal warfare was reduced to a minimum, due to the monopolization of force, first by the colonial powers and later by the new nation states. By the middle of the 20th
century most of the camel-herding and horse-breeding ‘noble’ Bedouin tribes had abandoned their herding activities and shifted to small stock animals like sheep or goats. As there no longer were constant threats of attack by neighboring tribes or the need to offer protection services to caravans, the economic value of horses drastically decreased. Moreover, the declining importance of the cavalry in modernized armies and their military campaigns further diminished the general demand for horses. With the loss of their economic function, Arab Bedouins held and bred the few remaining Arabian horses only for matters of prestige and cultural heritage.

**Arabian Horses in an Emerging Global Market**

Since the late 17th century Arabian horses – especially stallions – were used in European state-run breeding programs for the enhancement of local breeds, particularly for military purposes. Margaret Derry brings the connection between Europe, the Arabian horse and its meaning for war to the point:

> Certain earliest developments in the French Haras [Europe-wide, state-run war horse breeding and regulation program, initiated by Louis XIV in 1665] indicate the importance of the Arabian to European warfare as early as the late seventeenth century. War and the Arabian [horse] had a long interrelated history by that time in other parts of the world. While the Arab people first relied on the horse in tribal combat and in campaigns of conquest, it was the Ottoman Empire that initiated what would become the global spread of Arabians (Derry 2006, 105-106).

In the second half of the 18th century major transformational processes began to change British agricultural economy. These were primarily connected to the establishment of new selective breeding systems for the improvement of horses, cattle and sheep. The new systems were based on intensive pure-, cross- and inbreeding techniques invented by English breeders...
like Robert Bakewell, who became famous for the creation of his New Leicester sheep. The experimentations of Bakewell and his fellow breeders were dominated by a fascination for the creation of new and unique breeds with distinct inheritable features. These early stages of selective breeding methods did not only lead to some rather grotesque new breeds (like the Durham Ox) but also to the establishment of a new system of public standardized registries. The new system, introduced at the beginning of the 19th century, was designed to control and market the new breeds in an emerging transatlantic agricultural trading system. Derry points to the link between these newly created public registries for pedigrees and its first and only precursor: The General Stud Book (GSB) for thoroughbred horses in Britain. The GSB was initiated in the late 18th century in order to control and register horses involved in the racing industry and thus was an attempt to regulate the racing business (Derry 2003). In the terms of Latour and Callon, the General Stud Book, productive livestock registries and their regulating technologies of certification can be seen as the institutionalized origins of the future centers of calculation and thus obligatory passage points in the global Arabian horse industry.

In the beginning of the 19th century, Europe and the USA developed an increasingly specialised demand for purebred Bedouin Arabian horses. This has to be seen in the context of the above-mentioned developments, since Arab Bedouin breeding traditions suddenly exactly met the desires of this new generation of British breeders:

The Arab people were known to have practiced intense selective breeding on this animal for hundreds of years, thereby enhancing a natural tendency for these horses to breed consistently to a type not found in northern Europe. Arabians were lighter, faster, and smaller than their European counterparts; and these differences, along with their ability to stamp their style on progeny, impressed British horse breeders. The
trueness to type re-enforced certain ideas about the nature of heredity itself (Derry 2006, 31-32).

So, in the course of the colonial opening and Pax Britannica in the Arab East, Western travelers encountered Arab Bedouins and their horses in the Syrian steppe and northern Arabian desert just before the massive social and economic transformations that caused the disappearance of the (Bedouin) Arabian horse. Motivated by their search for the origins of humankind and attempts to escape the noise of European industrialization, they returned home not only with material for numerous books spreading romantic clichés about Bedouin desert life (and of course some excellent ethnographic observations as well) but also with exclusive specimens of pure desert-bred Arabian horses (e.g. Blunt 1879, Davenport 1909). The horses that found their way to Europe and the United States were not exclusively direct acquisitions from Bedouins, but many came from the royal stables of Egypt.

Thus, Western breeders and horse lovers of the late 19th century took up and adopted a local (breeding) practice that had been orally passed down by Arab Bedouins over hundreds of years. From the beginning, Western breeders shared the Bedouin concern with pure (arab. asil) horses with proven pedigrees. I call this the asil paradigm of Arabian horse breeding. Western breeders incorporated asil horses into the registration and control mechanism of the established transatlantic trade system, opening a special section for Arabian horse pedigrees in the British General Stud Book in 1877 (Derry 2003, 110), and by the mid-20th century we find the contemporary regimes of registration and standardization taking effect. The emerging global market for Arabian horses also attracted Arab elites, mainly from the Arabian Peninsula and the Golf countries. Their considerable wealth and the newly resurfacing discourses of cultural heritage meant that the Arab elites entered the world market of Arabian
horses as powerful players. Rebecca Cassidy (2003) examines the irritations that the strong position of the Arab elites generated in the British thoroughbred market.

National and international Arabian horse organizations with their restricted member lists, horse registries and stud books dictate the globally accepted standards of breeding, keeping and presenting Arabian horses in show events. They constitute what Latour calls *centers of calculations*, that is, the control and administration centers of our Western discourse with its focus on enlightenment and modernity (1993, 37). It is their task to enforce the *asil paradigm* of all as purebred-labeled Arabian horses. Moreover, these centers represent the global breeders’ key technologies of exclusion and inclusion by negotiating memberships and particular interests and thus managing cooperation in and access to the global market. The different horse organizations and their agendas of promoting, regulating and marketing Arabian horses thus maintain a restrictive network with *obligatory passage points* (Callon 1986) that every Arabian horse and breeder has to pass in order to participate. A basic requirement for any circulation in the network is the transformation of the Arabian horse from a unique complex living creature into an *immutable mobile* – the transformation of a complex (natural) entity into “a sign, an archive, a document, a piece of paper, a trace” in order to use it for argumentation and mobilization without any need for adjustment in different social contexts (Latour 1999, 102, 306). These transformations differ according to actors’ local practices: their breeding decisions, horse keeping, presentations and the production of specific meanings and publics through media and discourses.

**The Composition of the Modern Arabian Horse as a Living Sculpture for a Global Industry**
I choose Egypt as a site of ethnographic reconstruction and analysis of the dynamics of the transnational circulation networks of Arabian horses, since no contemporary ethnographic material is available on this aspect. Moreover, Egypt’s paradox position within the global network – as a historically important center for Arabian horses that is now peripheral – allow tracing locally situated controversies about authenticity, recognition and participation. I therefore focus on central questions about the potential for interaction and cooperation that transnational Arabic groups hold when trying to engage with and improve their standing in the Western-dominated global industry of Arabian horse breeding and trading.

The field of Egyptian horse breeders is elaborate and professional. My first point of contact was the stud owner and breeder Dr. Nasr Marei (<http://www.albadeia.net>). Marei is a third-generation Arabian horse breeder; his father and grandfather laid the keystones for Egypt’s modern breeding of Arabian horses, dating back to 1935. Marei himself is a well-known international judge for Arabian horse shows, a professional photographer of Arabian horses, and he published the book *Arabian Horse of Egypt* (Marei and Culbertson 2010). When looking for his stud, located next to the pyramids in Giza, I was convinced that such a big and traditional stud could not be missed. Yet, *Albadeia* was not easy to find or ask for. I was lucky to meet Ahmed, a former tourist guide, who promised to show me the way to Dr. Marei’s stud and also offered to arrange meetings with other horse breeders. At the meetings he introduced me as a potential buyer of Arabian horses and explained that this misinformation was necessary since otherwise the owners would not open their gates for us. I visited four studs of different sizes in the course of two days. The first stud was owned by Abd al-Wahab, a cousin or friend of Ahmed. It was the smallest stud I visited, with approximately fifteen horses cared for by two or three grooms. My cover identity as potential buyer was instantly blown as Abd al-Wahab immediately discovered that I knew nothing about Arabian horses: when he and his staff presented his horses and asked for my judgment of age and beauty, I even failed to
determine the right sex. Although realizing that I lacked all skills – Grasseni’s “skilled vision” (2009, 1) – in judging Arabian horses, Abd al-Wahab was kind enough to tell me that I had some sort of connection with the horses and offered to teach me how to know and understand Arabian horses.

The visits to the other three studs did not recreate the intimate atmosphere of the first one but nevertheless yielded important insights into the Egyptian practices of keeping and breeding Arabians. Two of the studs, both holding over a hundred Arabian horses in big stables, are considered to be the most influential and economically successful studs in Egypt. Here I understood why Ahmed told me that the gates would not open for anyone: the studs are worlds of their own, with luxury villas, huge areas of green, palm trees and small farming business next to the paddocks, stables and housings for the grooms. In these surroundings I met a French trainer for Arabian horses who is working for an international training center for Arabian horses, including personal training of horses at studs all over the world. He trains horses that were chosen to participate in a breeders’ presentation show, working on the right standing and positioning of legs, neck and head, which are crucial to gain a high ranking by the judges. The training takes about ten minutes per horse, after that the horse’s attention span is exhausted. This time, he would stay in Egypt for ten days and train the horses for a local show and then travel to the World Championship of Arabian Horses in Paris. Asked if he rides horses, his surprising answer was that he hates riding but loves the training and work with horses on the ground.

This, as I realized, was a central point: the unexpected use (or better: non-use) of Arabian horses, employing them only for breeding and mostly rejecting all riding activities. I did not find a single Arabian horse that was trained for riding on any of the studs. And everyone I
talked to rejected the very idea. While I first surmised to have discovered another
characteristic element and market-driven consequence of the Egyptian horse breeders’ world,
I discovered that most of the Arabian horses worldwide are bred for their beauty and unique
aesthetics. While watching the highly professional and skillful horse training I concluded that
it all comes down to an artistic act: the composition of a perfect *living sculpture*. My first
Arabian horse halter shows strengthened this impression: the horse’s performance in the ring
reaches its climax when horse and trainer meet in the center and perform the perfect stand up,
and the horse freezes into the admired sculptural form for less than a second. This is the
moment when the audience starts to cheer and applaud, and the judges write down their
points. To use the theoretical terms of Hennion and Grasseni, Abd al-Wahab and the French
horse trainer showed me how the skilled knowledge of the beauty of an Arabian is crucial for
deciding who is an expert and therefore part of the in-group.

The episode also revealed, how, where and by whom the sets of aesthetic standards are
negotiated: through bodily inscriptions in the direct interaction of horse and human.
Moreover, when the judges write down the scores, they transform the Arabian horse from a
complex living creature into a commodified, transferable good that is represented by numbers
in five aesthetic categories (1. Type; 2. Head and neck; 3. Body and tail; 4. Legs; 5.
Movement). This locally defined reduction to numbers for the purpose of global circulation
perfectly fits the concept of Latour’s *immutable mobiles* “that focuses on the movement of
displacement and the contradictory requirements of the task” (1999, 307).

A closer look into the different groups of actors in the Egyptian Arabian breeders’ world, will
show the contrasting politics and interests, involved in the transformation of the Arabian
horse into an *immutable mobile*. 
During a second stay in Egypt, I spent more time with breeders, meeting them on their studs, visiting a local breeders’ championship show and a private auction of Arabian horses, and going to El Zahraa, the state stud run by the Egyptian Agricultural Organization (EAO). I also talked to Egyptians in the streets or taxi drivers about my interest in Egyptian Arabian horses. Throughout these small talk situations my conversation partners mentioned a particular region in the Nile Delta, called al-Sharqiya, where I would find the finest and purest Arabian horses, which are still bred by Bedouins. I established contact to the Tahawi Bedouins, who became settled in the al-Sharqiya region as a reward for their support in military campaigns under Muhammad Ali during his land reforms in the 1830s (Aharoni 2007). The Tahawi were well-known and famous Arabian horse breeders and had good connections to other horse-breeding Bedouins in Syria and the Arabian Peninsula. From them they purchased desert-bred Arabian horses for their own breeding programs and delivered the offspring to the royal stables in Cairo. As a consequence of the events of the 19th and 20th centuries, the unique Tahawi breeds of asil (pure) Arabian horses are now nearly extinct. As far as I could gather, most of the Tahawi horses were excluded from official registrations in the 1970s when the EAO introduced a new registration process of Egyptian Arabian horses to meet new international registration standards.

A listing in the national EAO-General Stud book is the essential requirement for being accepted by the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO). The WAHO, founded in 1974, regulates on an international level which horses count as purebred Arabian horses. Until today the Tahawi horses remain largely unaccepted and therefore excluded from the international Arabian horse world. Dr. Marei warned me that the Tahawi have a lot non-asil half-bred horses. Despite the reservations that his cautioning shows, a small group of Tahawi fights for
the survival and international recognition of their last remaining horses. To that end, they have built an international network of supporters through social and electronic media, running a cultural and Facebook-page. Small victories for the Tahawi were the recognition as “horses of interest” by the US based al-Khamsa organization in 2011 and the opening of a special EAO registry for the Tahawi horses as the “Asil Bedouin Egyptian Arabian Horses” in 2013.

For the Tahawi, horse-breeding and dealing with horses is a cultural tradition, which should be continued after the fashion of ‘the old days’. During a short trip to al-Sharqiya and a visit of some members of Tahawi and the breeders’ preservation initiative, it became clear that they follow a concept of horse-breeding and value judgment that differs from the one I encountered in the Egyptian breeders’ community in Cairo. Holding up to the centuries-old Bedouin traditions of breeding, they still value riding and performance qualities of their horses over aesthetic aspects and therefore reject the international beauty contests that dominate most of the international Arabian horse world. Thus, their main breeding activities today focus on the local horse racing industry and the main racetracks in Alexandria and Cairo. They also continue to have their horses integrated in social activities and public events like weddings, fantasias and riding parties of young men into the desert. Their culturally motivated attachment to their horses not only creates specific sets of meaning but also constitutes the Tahawi as a group in contrast with the mainstream establishment of the global Arabian horse world.

Yet, with their rejection of the international halter show business, the Tahawi do not simply oppose their influential fellow Egyptian breeders. They also seek to establish alliances with Arabian horse lovers, who follow similar attachments (such as representatives of the US al-Khamsa organization or the German Asil Club). Within the breeders’ group of wealthy, well-
connected businessmen, there also exists a small group of horse lovers and breeders who reject the show business and do not perform or show their horses in the ring. The Egyptian breeder Philippe Paraskevas openly opposes the international halter shows. In his *The Egyptian Alternative* (2010, 2012) he follows a double strategy. He criticizes the Western dominance in the world of Arabian horses, including the setting up of regulations and dictating of breeders’ decisions through promoting only a few Western-bred elite bloodlines (and intensive inbreeding). His critique aims at a re-orientation of the international breeders network away from a profit-oriented industry towards a global program preserving the diversity of the Arabian horse population at large. He calls this the “safe-havens” for the last remaining *asil* Arabians (Paraskevas 2012, 424.). These preservation efforts are intertwined with a political agenda to strengthen the Arab countries as the traditional origin of Arabian horses. Egypt with the El Zahraa stud should therefore take a central role in the global preservation of the Arabian horse. On a practical level, the breeders are encouraged to integrate horses into their breeding programs that are unknown or unrecognized but proven to be 100 percent desert-bred Arabians. Paraskevas sees the integration of Tahawi bloodstock as one possibility to achieve a new diversity in Arabian horse population (2012, 65).

**Conclusion**

The different Egyptian breeding communities – Tahawi and wealthy business breeders – have to deal with established global standards, ranging from preferred bloodlines of horses to aesthetic ideals to registration regulations and presentation rules. The diverse Egyptian breeding communities radically differ in their levels of integration and participation in the global market for Arabians, not just regarding their means of resources but also by their willingness to commit themselves to established regimes of certification and the dominance of the global halter show business. In interviews and visiting talks, members of the Tahawi
breeders’ initiative rejected the standards and preferences of this global industry as not compatible with their traditional Bedouin practices. On the other hand, they obviously seek alliances within the global world of Arabian horse lovers and fight for the recognition of their horses by the official horse organizations on national and international levels. They have already found potential associates and advocates, for example, in the US al-Khamsa organization, the German Asil Club and the wealthy Egyptian breeder Philippe Paraskevas. It seems that the only way to save the few remaining asil Tahawi horses from extinction is to create an effective public for their concerns through the use of social electronic media and cooperating with the established structures of the Arabian horse world. The main theme of public presentation is the Tahawis’ unique tradition as Bedouin horse breeders and their preservation of a cultural heritage that the majority of the Egyptian breeders cannot access. It remains open whether the current activities will succeed to mobilize powerful supporters and open alternative passage points. At the current moment however, the EAO still embodies the localized needle eye or obligatory passage point that every breeder and Arabian horse in Egypt has to pass. This study, with its focus on the Arabian horse as the overall connecting ‘object of dispute’ provides a basis that enables further research as to how different Egyptian groups of actors deploy their respective opportunities of action, resources and forms of (forced) cooperation to gain access to the global market of Arabians, change established structures and create their own new obligatory passage points.

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Tahawi cultural tribal heritage website <http://www.eltahawysaoud.com>, last access on 27.01.2015.
The term refers to Judith Forbis’ (1976) very influential book within the Arabian horse breeders’ community.

“Western” or “Westerner” is used throughout the chapter as a mainly geographical category to include various European and US-American actors who share certain social and economic characteristics.

For further discussion of the social differentiation of the Bedouin tribes into “noble” and “non-noble” – based on their identities as camel or sheep herders – see Katharina Lange (2005).

The most popular non-military breeding example involving Arabian horses is the creation of the English racing Thoroughbred with its three founding stallions Darley Arabian, Godolphin Arabian and Byerly Turk. For a detailed history of the English Thoroughbred see e.g. Eversfield and Ahnert 1970).

See for example the quote and official definition of purebred Arabian horses, which is used by the German Asil Club, the International Association for the Preservation and Rearing of the Asil Arabian: “The ASIL ARABIAN is a horse whose pedigree is exclusively based on Bedouin breeding, without any crossbreeding with non-Arabian horses at any time. The word ‘aṣīl’ is derived from the Arabic language and means pure, true, noble and genuine. The ASIL ARABIAN horse should have the riding qualities and the characteristics of type by which distinguish the desert Arabian.” (Olms 1985, 52).

The tribal heritage website is in Arabic (<http://www.eltahawysaoud.com>). For the English-run Facebook-page and the Tahawi Horses Newsletter see <https://www.facebook.com/TahawiHorses/timeline>.