

Obama, the Arab?

Contributed by Matthew DeLong
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Maybe that crazy lady at the McCain rally was right after all.

The Times of London reports that a tribe of Bedouins — a group of historically nomadic Arabs — in northern Israel have laid claim to President-elect Barack Obama as one of their own.

According to The Times, a sheikh in Galilee claims to have irrefutable proof that Obama shares the bloodline of the 8,000-member clan.

“We knew about it years ago but we were afraid to talk about it because we didn’t want to influence the election,” Abdul Rahman Sheikh Abdullah, a 53-year-old local council member, told The Times in the small Beduin village of Bir al-Maksour in the Israeli region of Galilee. “We wrote a letter to him explaining the family connection.”

Mr Obama’s team have not responded to the letter so far but that has not dampened Sheikh Abdullah’s festivities.

He has been handing out sweets and huge dishes of baklava traditional honey-sweetened pastries to all and sundry, and plans to hold a large party next week at which he will slaughter a dozen goats to feed the village.

It was his 95-year-old mother who first spotted the connection, he says. Seeing the charismatic senator on television, she noted a striking resemblance to one of the African migrant workers who used to be employed by rich sheikhs in the fertile north of British Mandate Palestine in the 1930s.

The Africans would sometimes marry local Beduin girls and start families, though, like many migrant workers, would just as frequently return home after several years.

One of those men was a relative of Barack Obama’s Kenyan grandmother, Sheikh Abdullah maintains.

He estimates that his tribe extends to as many as 8,000 members, all of them loosely connected to the African-American senator for Illinois.

Sheikh Abdullah says he has papers and photographs to document the claim, but according to The Times, he will not release them until he has the opportunity to present them personally to the president-elect. In the meantime, the sheikh is basking in the adulation of envious countrymen.

“We knew he’d win,” the sheikh said, constantly interrupted by a barrage of phone calls from wellwishers and those hoping to cash in on his newfound *wasta*, an Arabic term denoting influence or clout. “We have always been a lucky family.

“We hope he’ll end all wars and intervene here to solve our problems in Israel. The Beduin are the people who suffer the most here,” he added while greeting a wellwisher from Ghajar, an Arab town divided between Israel and southern Lebanon, the bitter legacy of the Jewish state’s long occupation of southern Lebanon.

Regardless of whether Obama is related to the Bedouins, it is heartening to see an American president so thoroughly embraced by widely divergent cultures around the globe. And, if nothing else, it should give conspiracy-minded right-wingers something to fulminate on for the next few years.

<http://washingtonindependent.com/18317/obama-the-arab>