



## Inhalt

### **Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire: Bedouin Women Negotiating Tribal and State Patriarchies**

Fatma Kassem

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Israeli Education Policy toward the Bedouin</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Education as a Double-Edged Sword</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Using Islamic Dress and Rhetoric to Gain Access to Higher Education</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Kha'ola goes on to elaborate her struggle with her father:</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Sharpening Marginality on Campus</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Dressed in a <i>Jilbab</i> on Campus</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Tacit Expectations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Seeing and not Being Seen: 11</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>"I Know My Limits"</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Heart Sealed in a Kettle</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Questions to the text:</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Further links:</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>December 2010, Short Bio</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Endnoten</b>	<b>17</b>



## Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire: Bedouin Women Negotiating Tribal and State Patriarchies<sup>1</sup>

Fatma Kassem

### Introduction

In some modern secular states, like France and Turkey, Muslim women are forbidden to wear traditional religious dress when they attend state educational institutions. For young Bedouin women, however, this same traditional religious form of dress is a social precondition for according them the legitimacy they need to break through tribal boundaries and cross over to higher education. In contrast to these modern states, where secondary-school access is almost taken for granted, young Bedouin women face a whole range of obstacles in both Bedouin society and state institutions if they endeavor to gain access to formal higher education.

This paper aims to present the tribal and state-institutional barriers faced by young Bedouin women in pursuit of higher education. It specifically asks how Bedouin women experience these barriers within their academic institutions and families and then how they manage to cope with them.<sup>2</sup> In addressing this topic, the paper seeks to provide a new perspective on the relationship of young women and education: looking at female education from the complex position of Bedouin women as members of a cultural and social tribe, a Palestinian collective community. These Bedouin are citizens of the Israeli state. Yet they are extremely marginalized, for they live in the harsh geographical area of the Negev and are Muslim in their religious affiliation. The mechanisms of marginalization go beyond the exclusions created by gender: the women are subjected to different kinds of power relations.

This means that, from an early age on, the women are forced to maneuver and negotiate their way around manifold forms of discriminatory constraints in order to gain access to higher education. But how do young Bedouin women deal with these difficulties? How do they manage to surmount tribal and state barriers on the road to higher education?

Most interestingly, they use religious and cultural codes vis-à-vis the tribal patriarchy. They may also resort to silence as a tactic to outwit tribal strictures. With respect to institutional limits, they may be willing to compromise on the initially desired

discipline of study, lower their expectations and choose a discipline that improves their chances of admission. In response, both tribal and state-institutional patriarchies cooperate in trying to undermine the significance of education and its relevance to women's lives, in particular as a liberating tool. Nevertheless, young Bedouin women do manage to overcome these barriers and to gain the knowledge, skills and resources needed to withstand the pressures they face and move beyond the numerous restrictions that define their lives.

### Geo-historical Background

A closer look at the geo-historical and socio-political changes in Palestine/Israel since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is important to understand the living conditions of Bedouin women from the Negev. The analysis of this highly complex and difficult situation sheds light on the various factors that influence young Bedouin women struggling to obtain higher education today. Indeed, any look at their experiences makes sense only within the local social, cultural and political context in which they live (Mohanty, 1988).

Until the end of British rule<sup>3</sup> in Palestine, Bedouin tribes lived in the well-defined, clearly separated territories of Al-Naqab (the Negev). Each tribe enjoyed an autonomous political, economic, and social status. Alliances and rivalries characterized their relationships. The economy was based on herding flocks, livestock and seasonal agriculture. Women and children were an integral part of the social, economic and political tribal web (Kressel, 1976). An older generation of Bedouin women would describe their active role in tribal life, both at home and within tribal borders, like Miriam:

We would harvest, bring water from the well, raise the children, and go out with the herds to the fields. Sowing, netting, planting in summer and planting in winter. We were building homes [the tent], cooking, baking bread, grinding flour and bringing in the crops. Life was very tiring and hard, but satisfying.<sup>4</sup>

When the State of Israel was created in Palestine in 1948, political, social and geopolitical changes took



place in Al-Naqab that sharply affected Bedouin society in general and the lives of Bedouin women in particular. The number of Bedouin was severely reduced. From a population of some 65,000 (according to Israeli military authorities) or 90,000 (according to British records), only 11,000 remained (Maddrel, 1990). The others were uprooted and expelled. A large number fled to Jordan, the West Bank, or the Gaza Strip, where they became refugees. Those Bedouin who remained in Al-Naqab were relocated by the state to a demarcated zone, known as "the Siyag area"<sup>5</sup> (Meir, 2005). The creation of the State of Israel, and the unresolved Zionist-Palestinian conflict still color many social and economic issues faced by the Bedouin community. One manifestation of this predicament is the severely underfunded school system and the total lack of high schools in the state-defined "unrecognized villages."

In 2002, according to the most recent data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, there were 128,000 Bedouin in the Beer-Sheva administrative region. Of these, 82,700 lived in planned villages<sup>6</sup> (*Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin*, 2004); the others lived in unrecognized villages. Although Bedouin who remained in the Negev were given Israeli citizenship, they lived under martial law throughout most of the first two decades of Israeli statehood (Swirski & Hasson, 2006).

Women of the older generation suffered the most under Israeli military rule. Because the movement of Bedouin was restricted, they could no longer freely shepherd their flocks. Moreover, the size of their herding areas was reduced by state prohibitions against land use. Such measures limited their sources of income which, until that point, had granted them a degree of autonomy. According to Bedouin custom, land is regarded as private tribal property and women had been able to move with relative safety within tribal borders. This tradition provided economic independence and thereby bolstered self-esteem. Comparing Bedouin life prior to the establishment of the State of Israel to contemporary realities, Hakmeh, aged 84, observes:

Before we were on our land, today we do not live on our land. On our land there is freedom/liberty (*fi horiyya*); here [in the recognized settlement area] there's no freedom (*ma fi horiyya*).<sup>7</sup>

Hakmeh further recalls:

We never saw the English; they didn't get in our

noses like now. To enter our own land today we need a permit.<sup>8</sup>

Sa'ara<sup>9</sup> also reinforces this lost sense of freedom, but elaborates on it in terms of its emotional effects:

When I felt anger or pain, I went out with the herd, I would cry, I would walk over the fields and I would return much calmer. Today there's nobody to talk to, there's nowhere to go, and we are prisoners here within four walls. We're even forbidden to sit on the balcony.

Clearly, then, older Bedouin women describe their acute feelings of deprivation in a way that highlights their demeaned status, a result of having lost the resources that had facilitated their previous lives.

Today, young Bedouin women in the Negev are born into even more complex social and political realities. The abolition of the military government in November 1966,<sup>10</sup> coupled with the subsequent occupation of the rest of historic Palestine, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, meant the renewal of contacts between the Negev Bedouin and their refugee relatives; they had been cut off from one another since 1948. This had a significant impact on the self-image of young Bedouin women living in the Negev: the realization that their refugee relatives in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had gained a formal education, while many of them, in fact, the great majority, had remained illiterate (Hundt, 1988; Abu-Saad, 1995, 1996). The educational policy of separating boys and girls, adopted both in Jordan and in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, has enabled women to have access to formal education from elementary to secondary schooling. It became clear to the young Negev women that the educational level of their counterparts was higher than their own (Abu-Saad, 1991), an awareness that put them in an inferior position vis-à-vis their peers. Although this difference in educational levels adversely affected their social status and self-image, it did turn into a catalyst for change, however, giving many young Bedouin women in the Negev the incentive and motivation to struggle for formal learning and, later, for higher education. The breakdown of the older generation of Bedouin women – their mothers and grandmothers – and the disappearance of effective traditional roles for women reinforced their desire to excel as they identified the pursuance of education as their ultimate tool.



### Israeli Education Policy toward the Bedouin

Today, formal education and the acquisition of higher knowledge are considered the cornerstones of human development and fulfillment, for both men and women, and the main tools for social mobility. Arab society in Israel has undergone substantial change in recent years. Higher education has become a crucial source of power and status as well as an instrument for social and political change. As a result, investment in human resources has replaced the investment in land (Al-Haj, 1995; Tahir, 1985). Higher education is widening the opportunities for women and improving their chances for a better life. For Bedouin women in Israel, though, "higher education reflects power relations in society as a whole, thereby also reproducing the cultural hegemony of the majority," (Abu Rabia-Queder, 2008, p. 384).

The promises of higher education notwithstanding, Israeli educational policy towards Bedouin in Israel strategically and systematically fails to live up to the preconditions necessary for its realization. The first high school in the Negev was built in 1969 in Ksaifeh, one of the planned settlements (Abu-Saad, 1991). Until then, no Bedouin girl had ever attended secondary school. The guiding principle behind the Israeli Ministry of Education's policy toward the Bedouin is neither a consequence of a specific need of the latter nor the result of an educational plan. Rather, it suits state-security policy as an effective way to control the Bedouin as a subpopulation of Palestinians in Israel (Al-Haj, 1995; Abu-Saad, 2006). In 1954, following moves that dismantled a unified Palestinian population in Israel into fragmented communities, the Ministry of Education established a separate education system for the Bedouin (Meir & Barnea, 1985, 1988). Needless to say, no Bedouin (neither males nor females) have ever held an official position in the Ministry that would have given them a say in setting educational objectives and goals or finding solutions to the grave problems with which the Bedouin education system is faced today. In general, the state educational services provided to the Bedouin community have been minimal (Swirski, 1995). Abu-Saad and others argue that Israeli educational policy provides a strong impetus for Bedouins to relocate to those planned settlements where high schools have been built (Meir and Barnea, 1985; Abu-Saad, 1996 & 2005; Abu Rabiah, Albadur and Alatauna, 1996). At the same time this policy further

delegitimizes the "unrecognized settlements," where no secondary education exists. Furthermore, the state education system serves to control the Bedouin, in particular by imposing a tightly-controlled curriculum and supplying teachers chosen with specific government-defined characteristics. It goes without saying that such a policy sharply curtails the chances of Bedouin girls to obtain secondary education.

As a result, while some Bedouin boys were admitted to higher-education facilities in Palestinian towns and villages in the North, such as Nazareth, Terah and others, young Bedouin women were prohibited from moving up North at all. This restriction was mainly justified on the basis of cultural norms. As Khizaran<sup>11</sup> testifies:

I vividly remember the argument with my brother; he used to mock me and say: "You are not coming with me." I was sure that I would be accompanying him to the North to continue my studies [secondary school]. I strongly believed that my father would let me go. I have a very strong and special relationship with my father and he said to me that he will let me go. My brother said to me that I have no chance. I was totally traumatized when my dad said that I was not going with him [my brother]. I angrily said that I am good for tending the herds and working, but not good for studying.

Khizaran's statement makes clear that the struggle for access to education already begins at the secondary-school level. While a high school education is often taken for granted in modern societies elsewhere, it is not a given for these young women. Nevertheless, in the very act of expressing her anger and disappointment, Khizaran ultimately became determined to transcend her anger and challenge her father's decision. As she puts it:

I swore to prove myself and prove **I could do more and be better than the boys!** [emphasis added].

Later on, high schools were built in the seven planned settlements, not in unrecognized villages. This glaring lack of suitable educational opportunities as well as the restricted access to even single-sex secondary schools has severely impacted on the chances of young Bedouin women to obtain formal education.



Only in the late 1990s did young Bedouin women succeed in enrolling in academic institutions in Beer-Sheva. Between the years 1998 and 2003, 54 female Bedouin students completed their studies at Ben-Gurion University there. In the academic year 2002-2003, 142 Bedouin women were studying at Ben-Gurion University, most of them in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. In Kaye College of Education, for example, Bedouin students enroll for separate coursework known as the "Bedouin lane," designed to train teachers for the Bedouin education system. Because of their deficient preparedness and limited academic skills they are regarded less favorably than their Jewish peers. In the 2002-2003 academic year, 477 Bedouin students studied at the Kaye College and 282 of these were women. In 2002, there were 78 Bedouin graduates of the college and of these, only six completed the requirements for a B.Ed. degree (*Statistical Yearbook*, 2004, p. 155).

### Education as a Double-Edged Sword

The geographic and political background of Bedouin women informs the following analysis of their experiences and perceptions with respect to education. Specifically, the question becomes how the women describe their experiences in academic institutions and how they relate to these experiences. What did these experiences signify, to what extent did they reveal possibilities which questioned and (re)negotiated specific barriers?

At the Bedouin tribal level most of the interviewees report that it was only the support by male figures, in particular fathers, that enabled them to pursue higher education. Indeed, paternal support has proven to be a pre-condition for Bedouin women desirous of higher education. Such a phenomenon is characteristic of the majority of Middle Eastern societies; in her book on Iraqi women, Nadja Al Ali found that "fathers who were supportive and encouraged their daughters' education were a common theme among the women I talked to" (Al-Ali, 2007, p. 64).

But while paternal support is imperative in the quest for higher education, there is still a great reluctance in Bedouin tribes to allow their daughters to further their schooling. As Kha'ola, who is from an unrecognized village, explains:

The biggest problem arose when I finished 9<sup>th</sup> grade and wanted to go to the Tel-Sheva high school. I was the only girl from my tribe who wanted to go to high school. The other girls among my classmates, who had studied with me up to then, left. There was transport, but it was mixed for all the tribes in the area, so my father would not let me go on the same bus with kids from other tribes, in case they bothered us. For the first weeks, I did not go to school. I cried all the time, I would not sit with the family, refused to eat, went on hunger strike [laugh], I did not know it was called a hunger strike then. At that time, my cousin asked for my hand in marriage.<sup>12</sup>

Kha'ola's story of challenging the restrictions imposed on her by her father reveals the difficulties she faced in gaining access to high school; while Kha'ola chose to struggle for secondary schooling, her peers were leaving school to comply with traditional expectations and stay at home. Given the changes occurring in Bedouin communities and Bedouin women's lives, it was clear that the choice *to leave school to comply with traditional gender roles* would adversely affect their chances of acquiring resources and skills that could grant them a certain degree of independence in this changing context.

Kha'ola's persistence, and that of others like her, resulted in her attending secondary school, a step simply taken for granted by most of her peers in other Israeli communities. Her father opposed her travel to the nearby village in order to attend school. Although transportation was provided, he particularly feared encounters with male pupils from other tribes. In addition, fathers from the planned settlements justified their disapproval of their daughters attending secondary school by pointing to the lack of single-sex schools which, unlike the usual schools, would be compatible with Bedouin cultural and religious beliefs (Kassem, 2000).

This impediment notwithstanding, Kha'ola recounts further how she coped with and eventually overcame this familial obstacle:

I took advantage of my father's parental feeling and asked him to allow me to pursue my only high school education, even though I knew he would only agree if I became engaged to my cousin. The truth is, I was confused. I didn't know what



to do. Because I knew that if I agreed to the engagement, there was no guarantee that after the engagement the pressure on me not to pursue my education would not start again. After all, such things had happened in the past [she is referring to experiences of other girls in the tribe]. Nevertheless, I decided to agree to the engagement in order to pursue my education.

Kha'ola's coping mechanisms relied on her close relationship with her father that will be elaborated later on. Her strategies included: putting emotional pressure on the family, crying, segregating herself from them, and staging a "hunger strike," as she called it later. Of further interest is the use of her cousin's marriage proposal as a springboard to maximize her options in reaching her goal.

The social and political restrictions faced by young Bedouin women on the road to higher education were discussed thoroughly in the focus groups. Older Bedouin women and men who participated in these groups explained that the lack of single-sex schools was the main obstacle preventing them from sending young women in their families to secondary school. As Salma, also from a planned settlement, says, "We want our daughters to study, but only with girls and not with strangers."<sup>13</sup> Parents' committees have repeatedly requested that the Ministry of Education offer single-sex high-school education (Katz, 1998), specifically so they can allow their daughters to attend classes, but such petitions continue to fall on deaf ears. In contrast to this conspicuous ignoring of requests for female single-sex education in Bedouin communities, the Israeli Ministry of Education does maintain a policy of single-sex education in Jewish religious schools, including the ultra-Orthodox sector (Kassem, 2000).

As a result of the state's failure to offer single-sex education to Bedouin communities, many tribes in both the planned settlements and unrecognized villages still do not allow their daughters to pursue a high-school education. The phenomenon described above by Kha'ola about her peers, with the words "they left," known in the academic literature as "the drop out of pupils," is in fact the outright denial of the right of young Bedouin women to have access to high school. This deprivation leads to an obscure alliance between Bedouin traditionalism on the one hand and state educational policy on

the other, dovetailing to block young Bedouin women from pursuing higher education.

This issue of state discrimination reflected by the lack of single-sex high schools was often raised and thoroughly discussed in the focus-group interviews. Against this background, both men and women spoke of the importance of formal education and its relevance to their current lives. Wadha, for example, states the following:

In this era, whoever cannot read or write has no life. Learning is what gives women respect. I am very ashamed when I go to collect the [national insurance] allowance and I do not know how to sign my own name. I do not even know how to read the signs in the city—do not know how to read street names or what they say—shame!<sup>14</sup>

Wadha is very aware of the importance of education in offering the possibility of a "new" life for women, a means to new forms of power, including financial power, independence, autonomous decision-making and control over her life. Still, this very possibility brings with it new modes of thinking and behavioral expectations which are hard to implement and live up to. In fact, especially to her and other older women, who did not have access to formal schooling, these "new" standards and expectations have also become discomfiting, confusing and even humiliating. This ambivalence might explain why most of the older Bedouin women have failed to translate their insights into real support for the young women endeavoring to break down traditional tribal barriers and continue their schooling. Instead they have become more fearful, if not critical, of the young women's efforts. Citing the traditional transcendently sacred source used to maintain patriarchal control, Miriam sums up the views of many other women in her generation when she says, "women were born to tend children; this is God's will."<sup>15</sup> Caring for children is a responsibility exclusively assigned to women, naturalized as the sacred will of God. This means that women who try to challenge this dictum are challenging the sacredness of God's will. Such an attitude was prevalent among both Bedouin men and women in the focus groups. Other typical phrases used in reference to the young women who seek the advantages associated with pursuing a formal education, such as salaried jobs, also indicate that older women both fear these changes and recognize the crumbling



of their own status. These include comments like the following: “she will stick her nose in the air”;<sup>16</sup> “she will sit and rest”; “no one will be able to talk to her” and so on. Many men express similar fears about young women, like “they are walking around with a mobile [phone] and no one can talk to them,” and “when she starts to put her salary in her pocket, it will be hard to control her.” Accordingly, young women are perceived as a threat to the privileges, status and respect that tribal order traditionally granted to older women (Hundt, 1988). Older women also fear losing their control over young Bedouin women. In Middle Eastern patriarchies, social and religious rules of behavior require women to obey men; to compensate for this gender imbalance, young women are also expected to obey older women; now the older generation of women is anxious about losing its hierarchical status privileges vis-à-vis the younger generation (Kandiyoti, 1998).

Because older women feel so threatened and challenged by the educational aspirations of their younger compatriots, they attempt to tighten their rule and control over the latter. This sentiment is clearly expressed by Hakmeh: “Those girls of today, you cannot restrain.”<sup>17</sup> Further evidence of their anxieties about losing control can be found in the conflict between the young women and their mothers.

Khizaran:

I had fights with my mother all the time. All the time she said to my brother that a man was needed in the house to hold me back...once I came home late, I was so tired and he [the brother] asked me to prepare food for him, I said you could do it by yourself, I am tired, and he slapped me, I complained to my father and he warned him, but my mother said that she needs somebody at home to hold me back.

Kha'ola:

Mother was always complaining to me, for every little thing, she'd tell me “you're making us ashamed and causing us trouble all the time.” All because I refused to marry my cousin! All the time she told me, “Your father cannot talk to his brother because of you.”

These statements reflect that the threat of young educated women to the older generation is perceived

as very real. These young women are regarded as obstreperous for refusing to conform to traditional customs and marry their cousins, and for demanding to move beyond the tribal borders. As an often encountered consequence, the young women are liable to be subjected to violent punishments for disobedience.

However, by earning their own salaries and gaining economic independence from men, Bedouin women manage to win for themselves greater freedom in other aspects of life.

Interestingly, and much in contrast to the resistance outlined above, men who support young women in their ambitions imply attitudes along the following lines: “Life has changed. Today we need a woman to help children do their homework [and to] understand household management in a situation where everything has changed.”<sup>18</sup> Some older men and women cite economic necessities as a reason for supporting young women in their educational aspirations, e.g.: “Today life is demanding, and a man needs his wife's help”; “it is not shameful to help each other, but a woman must make sure that her work outside the home does not harm her family duties.” (Kassem, 2000) Significantly, then, even when young women are encouraged to pursue higher education, it is clear that they must not do so at the expense of their family obligations. This condition thus places a double burden on young women who attend high school and university.

Thus, even Bedouin women and men who do recognize the importance of young women obtaining higher education often place traditional values, obligations and the privileges of tribal norms over education. In other words, education can become a real goal only as long as it is subservient to tribal norms.

Simply by pursuing higher education, young Bedouin women are rebelling against the oppressively restrictive conditions imposed upon them by a tribal patriarchy that relies on unquestioning obedience to the individual at the top of the tribal pyramid (Sharabi, 1988), as shown above. Their rebellion undermines the “culture of silence” underpinning the hierarchical patterns of obedience that have long defined Bedouin culture and tradition, whereby young women obey older women, and all women, regardless of age, obey the men. Previously, such structures of obedience had gone virtually unchallenged.



Kha'ola succeeded in overcoming the "big problem" and convincing her father to let her pursue secondary-school studies. She depicts her feelings and planning tactics accordingly:

I won the war to pursue my high school studies and this gave me the strength and faith I needed for the next battle. I told myself I must now free myself from my engagement to my cousin. Afterwards I would fight to leave the tribe and go to the big city and university.

Such terms like "war," "battle" and "fight" are quite commonly used by young Bedouin women to describe their experiences, reflecting the intense emotions and tensions they feel as warriors for their educational rights. No doubt, these experiences steel them to develop their negotiating skills and to cope with more challenges in the future.

Sara tells a similar story that strengthens Kha'ola's position:

When I finished high school, I had the feeling that the biggest obstacles were behind me. ... I refused to marry my cousin and that was the biggest obstacle. My father said you have to marry your cousin. I said to him the Prophet demanded that all parents ask for the women's consent with regard to their choice of mate, and [that] marriage not be forced upon them. He was silent...I was sure [that] I could win the battle by being decisive and stubborn, and that I would succeed in leaving home and even studying at university.

Planning their steps to higher education, Bedouin women employ Islamic rhetoric in order to break tribal cultural norms, such as marrying cousins, and to unsettle tribal boundaries.

Once they have completed high school, young Bedouin women, on the road to further academic study, continue to face challenges. The next sub-chapter looks at these and the specific negotiation techniques used to tackle them in greater detail.

### Using Islamic Dress and Rhetoric to Gain Access to Higher Education

To gain legitimacy for their educational goals and to

win paternal support, young Bedouin women demonstrate great persistence and creativity in relying on already existing resources. As Surayia indicates:

I used to dress like you [the Author], but when I asked my parents' permission to go to Beer el Sabih to continue my studies, the first thing they told me is to wear a "jilbab" [Muslim religious dress] and I put it on. The main thing is to go and keep studying.<sup>19</sup>

All the interviewed young women dressed similarly, covering their heads while a long dress draped most of the body. They are identifiable, in fact, through this mode of dress. From the perspective of Surayia and her like-minded peers, wearing the "jilbab"<sup>20</sup> or "hijab" increases their scope of movement and improves their options in life; it enables them to pursue higher education. Young Bedouin women are using the dress as a traditional code and as part of their negotiating strategy to achieve greater mobility.

Kha'ola describes how she planned to attend university:

I got a full matriculation. I registered for Ben-Gurion University. I saved money from holiday presents my uncles gave me. I took care. I said to myself that only after I had an acceptance in my hand would I begin to fight with my family to go and study in Beer-Sheva.

Kha'ola goes on to elaborate her struggle with her father: When my father told me, "No university studies," I said to him, "The Prophet told women to study from birth to the grave. He, Muhammad, commanded all Muslim people and said that knowledge is obligatory even if you have to go to China."

Khaizaran uses similar rhetoric:

To my father who said to me, "Get married and you'll have your own house," I replied, "The very first commandment that God gave the Prophet Muhammad was 'Read,' not 'Get married.' You are Muslims who claim to be religious, but you must also do what God commanded us – to study."

Young Bedouin women apply the Muslim religious rhetoric of the prophet Muhammad to argue that religion supports their case to pursue higher education. In other words, they are subverting Bedouin tradition



by using Muslim religious doctrine as a negotiating technique to broaden their rights – in marked contrast to the older generation, which used religious rhetoric to justify confining women to the household, subservient to husbands and tending children. Through this very same rhetoric, young women manage to effectively argue their way through the barriers of academic institutions. This remarkable shift in performative practice might even be the prelude to a more complete dismantling of the constraints governing the women's lives in general.

Against this background, the observation of the Moroccan feminist-sociologist Fatima Mernissi is cast into a different light. She proclaims that education in Arab society is based on learning specific limits and obedience to them: "Education is to know the *hudud*, [limits] ...To be a Moslem was to respect *hudud*. And for a child, to respect the *hudud* was to obey" (Mernissi, 1996, p. 3). Now, Bedouin women have begun to use this Islamic rhetoric to call the same tradition into question. In this sense, education both provides the rhetorical means to learn the *hudud* and as such, becomes the enabling tool to break through traditional limits.

### Sharpening Marginality on Campus

Once on campus, though, young Bedouin women face daunting, multilayered challenges, in large part arising from the strategies they choose to apply. When young Bedouin women first encounter campus life at universities, this is often their first opportunity to meet and directly interact with other young Bedouins, other Palestinians from the North, the Jewish community and overseas students. The intellectual life on campus exposes them to new knowledge, many liberal ideas and concepts, such as gender equality and social and political justice. At the same time, they also experience a different kind of hostility: exclusion and oppression that, on the one hand, add to their sense of marginalization while, on the other, strengthen and empower them.

### Dressed in a *Jilbab* on Campus

In their research on the experience of Palestinian female students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Lauren Erdreich and Tamar Rapoport (2002) report that

literacy in the dominant academic discourse paves the way for an expanded awareness of marginality and suppression. Here I would like to focus on the stage before such literacy is attained, when Bedouin female students appear on campus in identifiable dress that has a peculiar two-way function.

On the one hand, the traditional religious clothing worn by most young Bedouin women on campus further intensifies their marginalization and alienation. Yet let us consider wearing the *jilbab* when it happens to be a condition imposed on these women by their families so that they can attend university. In this context, the *jilbab* allows them to breach the borders of tribal life and move beyond traditional constraints. At the same time, the *jilbab*, a mode of dress self-chosen yet forced upon the wearer, subjects young Bedouin women to the openly expressed prejudices of their fellow Jewish students, to whom this style of dress symbolizes an affiliation with a primitive (and even *immoral*) collective community. Such hostile prejudgments with overt and covert hassling are exacerbated by tendencies to interpret the Islamic faith as a source of global terrorism, also among members of the university bureaucracy and even the academic staff. Represented thus in and through the *jilbab*, this conflict, born out of the complex juxtaposition of their tribal and "modern" life, situates young Bedouin women between emancipation and oppression, tradition and modernity, a social positioning that results in much stress: daily encounters, harassments and clashes.

Sukeina, for example, who majored in physics in high school and is studying history and Hebrew literature at Ben Gurion University, is married and has a child. Her husband allowed her to continue her studies only if she wore a *jilbab*. During the interview she asked me with a smile on her face: "It is very interesting to me to know how you look at me. Do you consider me as a modern? I know that the [Jewish] Israelis consider me as backward but not those who know me, my friends. What about you!? What do you think?" Here, Sukeina addresses the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. In fact, she blurs this dichotomy by inhabiting both worlds, co-opting tradition to further her engagement with the "modern."



### Tacit Expectations

On campus, these young women have to deal with a complex multitude of issues. Academically, they are in a difficult position as graduates of the Bedouin sector schools, which do not provide them with adequate academic skills that would enable them to study what they desire. On a social level, they face patriarchal supervision, discrimination and oppression from other Bedouins, Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. This sharpens their marginality, as women, as Muslims, as Palestinians and as Bedouins.

Most Bedouin women who make it to Ben-Gurion University study in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (*Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin*, 2004). Only one of the women I interviewed was studying nursing at the university, whereas all the others were pursuing studies in the humanities and social sciences. Yet, all had majored in the hard sciences like chemistry, physics, biology and computer science in high school. Having received low scores in the psychometric exam, they chose to lower their expectations and study what the university offered them.

Khadija: I wanted to study social work, I like working with people and with the community and helping, but I was not accepted because of my age and the psychometric test. I registered for my second choice, general history and Middle Eastern studies, and was accepted. At the same time, I registered at Kaye College [Beer-Sheva] because I was afraid I wouldn't be accepted at the university, and I didn't want to lose the opportunity to study right after high school. I wanted to study right away.<sup>21</sup>

Sukeina explains:

At the university I was accepted to study Middle East. You will laugh at me, when they said to me that I was accepted to Middle Eastern Studies. I honestly didn't know what that means [laugh]. I learned later that this is history. The other department I studied in was Hebrew literature. Those are the only departments that accepted me. In the beginning it was very hard for me, I learned five units in physics at school, but I want to study, I do not want to sit at home, or just get married. I said to myself, "I will be a teacher and that is better than nothing"... In one of the history courses, a lecturer spoke of the Prophet

Muhammad, who married Aiesha when she was eight years old. I felt it was not right, but I shut up. I could not say anything, I was afraid ... what does he want to say? I felt uncomfortable, maybe because I am a Muslim? But maybe because I felt that there were some things he wants to convey by this! I am not sure! I am confused.<sup>22</sup>

Sukeina indicates two levels of obstacles she had to face on her way into the university and throughout her studies. On the first level, she made a compromise and decided to study at the university regardless of the discipline. As a young Bedouin female very much aware of her age, she knew that if she were not enrolled at university she would be forced to get married, which would drastically reduce her subsequent chances of getting into higher education. On the second level, she still had trouble expressing her thoughts in class because of language barriers.

In their study, Erdreich and Rapoport report that the major problem faced by Palestinian women at the Hebrew University was language. From early childhood until the completion of high school, the language of study for Palestinian women students is Arabic (their mother tongue), and not Hebrew. When a Palestinian woman enrolls in institutions of higher learning, she is required to attend lectures, read articles and write papers in Hebrew – a second language. She must also read articles and learn the academic jargon in English. Rabiah, a young Bedouin student, elaborates on this issue:

At first I didn't understand the lecturers. I had trouble understanding the language; the study material was difficult. Up to our twelfth grade we studied at Tel-Sheva in Arabic, and suddenly I had to study in Hebrew.<sup>23</sup>

All young female Bedouin students indicate their inability in the first semester to understand what the lecturer was saying. The Hebrew language was a real barrier to learning at the beginning of their academic life. In fact, Erdreich and Rapoport argue that the language problem in the education of Palestinian women in Israel today poses a major obstacle to their accessing of knowledge and information, sometimes even blocking their access altogether. Because of the language hurdle, placing Palestinian women in Israeli universities entails a disruption in their learning careers and in their personal lives (Erdreich and Rapoport,



2002). Bedouin women studying at the university report that fluency issues in Hebrew and English function as barriers to gaining knowledge; in this context, Hebrew and English are academic languages (Al-Haj, 2003).

Regarding the story introduced by the lecturer to his students about the Prophet's marriage to Aiesha at the age of eight, Sukeinah felt that the way it was told, as a "neutral scientific fact," without any discussion, nevertheless contained a hidden message. She said that she knew the information – it was not new to her – but she had expected discussion about it and not its presentation as "neutral" material implicitly mocking and conveying hostility towards the Prophet. She wished she could have raised the issue, but chose to keep quiet, in order to avoid further marginalization of herself vis-à-vis her mostly Jewish classmates. In effect, university life tends to silence her just as the tribal norms do. This recalls Erdreich and Rapoport's argument that the course contents taught in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Hebrew University intimidates Palestinian female students; they do not participate in class discussions. As a result, they prefer not to attend classes.

The difficulties on the academic level were very real and a source of frustration, as Kha'ola explains:

When I began to study at the university I felt like I was still in the first grade, while the Jewish students had finished high school. Then I began to focus on the difficulties that are different from those at home. I decided I could not let myself get to a point where my department would throw me out... At university I invested a great deal of time in my studies, I didn't establish serious social relations because I had to bridge the gap and succeed. I knew I couldn't fail, not only for myself, but also for those who would come after.

Kha'ola refers to another problem that she encountered as a university student: the clearly serious gap between the educational level provided by her high school and that of the high schools attended by her Jewish counterparts. This means that she came to the university without being adequately equipped with the academic skills that would have facilitated her new life trying to cope with the demands of her studies. Nevertheless, she was determined to make every effort to focus on her studies and succeed, not only for herself

but also in order to be a role model that younger Bedouin women could imitate.

### Seeing and not Being Seen:

On campus, Kha'ola started watching and comparing herself to others in the department; she reflects and explains:

There were Ethiopian and Russian girls in my class at the department. They got help, were always talking with the lecturer. I was alone; I didn't feel that the teachers were seeing me. They weren't interested in me. Towards the end, I met one of the [women] lecturers who taught me. A conversation developed and I shared with her some of what I had experienced. She was shocked and said, "Oh no! All that happened to you and we knew nothing!"

In expressing her personal insights Kha'ola compares herself to her classmates, new immigrant students from Russia and Ethiopia. She sees the empathy and support accorded to them, compared to her sense of "invisibility," reinforcing her feelings of alienation and marginality, exemplified by her comment, "they weren't interested in me." This "otherness" and "invisibility" find expression in her account of the conflict with the Dean of Students for dormitory placement:

In the second year I had to be in the medical department at 7:00 for the training level, "the practicum." It was practically impossible to get to the hospital, especially in the winter. Thus the war with my father started again. He insisted that I sleep at home every night. I wanted him to let me stay in Beer Sheva overnight. I contacted a respected Bedouin physician and a religious scholar, both of whom my father approved. I explained the problem to both of them and asked for their help. They contacted my father and he agreed to allow me to stay in Beer Sheva. At the same time, while talking with my father, I applied for [the] dormitory at the university. After great efforts, I succeeded in persuading my father to let me live in the student dormitories in Beer-Sheva. He agreed on the condition that I only share with Bedouin girls. To my sorrow, my application was turned down by the student dean. I appealed and explained that at home it was impossible to study. I have no electricity; I have to start training and do not have transportation that would



enable me to be on time in the morning. Nothing helped. The answer of the Dean of Students was, "You do not live far from the University so you don't meet the criteria for housing."

Kha'ola mustered up all her resources and inner strength to negotiate with her father to let her stay in Beer-Sheva so as to enable her to pursue her training more easily. She appealed to respected authorities in her society who, she thought, might support her in bargaining with her father, and succeeded. The rejection of Kha'ola's application for student housing by the office of the Dean of Students at Ben-Gurion University again reflects her "invisibility" and the lack of understanding of her needs by the administrative officials. That she lives close to Beer-Sheva was, of course, known to the Dean's office; also known was the fact that Kha'ola lived in an unrecognized village, without electricity, running water, or transportation to the university. Nevertheless, the office turned a blind eye to her exceptional circumstances, referring, in its response to her request for housing, to regulations and criteria apparently predetermined by the university. These stipulations did not consider the special needs faced by Kha'ola and other female Bedouin students.

The sense of invisibility, reinforced by the lack of empathy and understanding towards young Bedouin women on campus, is widespread. Kha'ola was not the only one to raise these issues: they arose in different ways and remained relevant to every student's personal experience.

Amera, another interviewee, is frank about her sociopolitical stance, sharing one particular aspect of the situations that she has had to face and that left her speechless:

I do not talk politics and do not understand politics, but once I was with my best friend [Jewish], and I didn't stand up when I heard the [memorial] siren.<sup>24</sup> To my surprise she starts to shout at me and say, "You do not respect us! You live in our land and do not respect us!" I was so surprised and didn't say anything. What could I say? Does she understand? – if she says that we live in their land! So how could I respond to it? I prefer to stay silent and not say anything."<sup>25</sup>

The campus enables Amera and her counterparts to

interact with Jewish classmates and build friendships. At the same time it has exposed her to tensions, as described above, when a Jewish public commemoration ceremony put her on the spot, unable to carry on a dialogue with her Jewish friend. In this situation she found herself accused of disloyalty and disrespect, an unnerving experience that literally dumbfounded her. Many variations of this theme of incomprehension occurred, especially in dealings with the officialism of the administrative echelons.

University life provides young Bedouin women with opportunities to encounter a wide range of students – from other Bedouin tribes, from the northern Arab populations, from the general Jewish-Israeli population, and even from overseas. These encounters not only highlight the distinctiveness and marginality of young Bedouin women, but also expose them to complexities and ideas that serve to strengthen their sense of alienation. As Kha'ola indicates, "On campus, I was aware of the difference between me and the Jewish students: when I tried to explain my limits to them, they didn't understand. . . ." Young Bedouin students find interpersonal relations on campus challenging on various levels: cultural, social and political in particular. These involve meeting Jewish classmates, men and women, as well as Palestinians from the North. But also their encounters with Bedouin males have proved to be a quite prominent theme, often fraught with tension, disappointment and criticism.

### "I Know My Limits"

Young Bedouin female students are keenly aware of their sensitive position in a tribal society that perceives the relationships between women and men as being based on many restrictions. When it comes to relationships between men and women, "the woman is the one who pays the full price," most of the interviewees state. Young female students criticize educated young Bedouin men who are still far "from being modern," as the interviewees phrase it. Therefore the female students choose to restrict themselves. Reflecting on such reactions, the women say things like: "I know my limits," or "I know I am being watched when I leave home." Their personal constraints are compounded by being supervised by young Bedouin men on campus. As Khirazan relates: "I started to establish an Arab student council on campus, with Arab students from the North.



What Bedouin males and females did was only watch and gossip." Gossip was one of the major preoccupations of Bedouin students. In fact, at times gossip may even lead to young Bedouins no longer being able to continue their university studies.

The interviewees testify that both Bedouin men and women in the community fear that women students may identify with the new values and norms which they meet in academic institutions. As a result, the community tightens its control and restrictions over educated young women. This control is exercised by both younger and older adults of both sexes, who use gossip and cruel rumor as a mechanism of subjugation, in order to instill rules of acceptable and forbidden behavior in the minds of the female students and control them even outside the tribal area.

The most painful price women mention is connected with the difficulties and dangers of having love relationships. As Sumaia says, "I had to respect my limits; I abstained from making contact with men from my tribe or any others... I wouldn't sully my family's honor."<sup>26</sup>

Khadija expresses further the complexities and fears that they face:

I know I am forbidden to have contact with a Bedouin man; they have no awareness of this sort of relationship. My friend went out with her husband before they got married. Lucky for her he married her, but after the wedding he behaved unfairly toward her. He doesn't let her leave the house alone and always says to her: "How can you expect me to trust you when I know you did that with me before marriage?!" They assault their wives and don't respect them. Who needs it?

Bewilderment is felt at times by young Bedouin women from having to deal with so many challenges on several simultaneous fronts. In the following section, I examine Khizaran's experience in order to reflect on the way women attain their peak strengths by articulating the great price they have to pay to obtain higher education.

### Heart Sealed in a Kettle

In her research, the anthropologist Lila Abu Lughod found that Bedouin men in Egypt believed that the

mental identity of men is characterized by *al-akal*, that is, rationality, qualities of wisdom, insight, and above all, control over their instincts. Women, according to the same viewpoint, give in to their desires and are controlled by the emotions raging in their bodies and souls (Abu-Lughod, 1986). Similarly Fatima Mernissi argues that the Arab-Muslim female is conceived by Arab Muslim communities as being unable to distinguish between good and bad whereas the Arab-Muslim male is able to do so (Mernissi, 1987). This notion is pervasive in Arab societies and even more visible in tribal societies. However, Khizaran displays wisdom when, on the one hand, she expresses a need for human desire and emotion, while at the same time choosing to control this need and to give precedence to her education:

I knew I was forbidden to fall in love. So that I could continue to go out to study and progress, I had to sacrifice my love. If not, I'd lose them both – I wouldn't study, I wouldn't love. Once I said to my Dad that I put my heart in the kettle and sealed it up, as the price for being able to study and getting ahead.

Khizaran demonstrates not only control over her body, but full awareness and understanding of the reality of her life. That is, she speaks out against the characterization of *akal*, rationality, as solely belonging to men. When she consciously grants priority to her education over the needs of her body and emotions (love), she shows her ability to "use" the same rationality (*akal*) as the male, dominant group. Thus, young Bedouin women challenge the values that claim that women are inferior to men, who maintain their superiority by being the exclusive bearers of reason. With her attitude Khizaran puts Bedouin men in a quandary: their prevailing male identity is challenged when confronted with educated women. Such a situation, they feel, threatens their masculinity and the legitimacy of their control over the sexuality of women.

### Conclusion

In their tribal society, the education of young Bedouin women challenges the existing social and cultural order that subordinates women and, above all, conserves the culture of female silence and obedience – the pillars of tribal norms. The demand by young women for educational rights is made cautiously: they



negotiate Bedouin socio-cultural barriers by using their own resources, like dress and religious rhetoric, and also by appealing to respected persons to mediate on their behalf. Some Bedouin men and women demonstrate an awareness of the importance of education in dealing with life's new needs and demands: e.g., according to them, women need to know how to help children with their homework, manage the household, assist the husband with meeting the family expenses. Yet men have traditionally been conditioned to brook no contradiction from women, whose sacred duty it has been to tend children, husband and household, a situation which certainly used to trap women within the confines of the tribal society.

At the institutional level, the State has used educational services as a tool of exploitation, e.g., in the unrecognized villages, by not providing high schools at all in order to pressure the Bedouin into moving to the planned settlements and, in the latter, by not allowing single-sex education at the high-school level, against the wishes of many residents.. Consequently, many young Bedouin women continue to be deprived of their right to a high-school education even today. Those women who do succeed in getting a high-school education and going on to attend academic institutions are confronted with a complex situation: on the one hand, the institutions aggravate their marginality and, on the other, expose them to liberal ideas and provide them with skills for "modern life."

The efforts these women have made to access higher education, despite the many obstacles placed on their path, indicate their strength, resilience and determination to better their lives. This strength of their aspirations, willpower and persistence may eventually stretch to the breaking point the tribal restrictions that have hitherto prevented young Bedouin women from fulfilling themselves, and also, in the institutional context, encourage official recognition of these women's needs and the development of an empathetic stance to promote changes and their advancement. Thus the insistence of Bedouin women on pursuing higher education as well as the abilities and capacities they have developed in negotiating the hurdles set up by both state and tribal institutions all demonstrate how education has provided them with skills permitting at least some sense of liberation and success in gaining a more respected and independent life.

Khizaran sums up this feeling:

When I'm in the company of men, I exhibit the necessary knowledge. That way, I force them to respect me. They know that not every man knows what I know, so they have no choice. They respect me and let me in, because, in the end, they want me to help them, and I can.

As I have shown, young Bedouin female students encounter a multitude of challenges in both the tribal and the institutional context when they endeavor to pursue higher education. They live in a tribal society that has been going through severe changes since 1948. As a consequence, both traditional society and the academic institutions embedded in specific political and social structures situate them in-between "modernity" and "tradition." What is apparent in the interviews: young Bedouin female students are highly aware of the limitations at play in the "modern life" they find at Israeli academic institutions. However, they grasp and realize its opportunity, inventing their own form of modernity and thereby improving their living conditions in general. Moreover, the women are equally well aware of the ongoing transition from "traditional" Bedouin to "modern" society, a transition strongly circumscribed by (post)colonial circumstances. Therein, Israeli educational policy and academic institutions severely marginalize these women, who encounter fierce forms of discrimination, even stigmatization, which easily lead to feelings of alienation and "invisibility." However conflicted the perceptions of this situation, the interviews contain rich revelations, particularly the discovery that against this complex background the women demonstrate agency and the ability to choose. Indeed, this observation might be phrased on a more theoretical level: their rationality, self-consciousness and reflection strongly echo a Hegelian concept of modernity (Habermas, 1987), while the women's balancing act on a tightrope problematizes the concept of modernity being set in clear opposition to tradition. Bedouin women present practices which dialectically entangle tradition and modernity. Both spheres are brought into discourse and transformed on a daily basis. Thus, they demonstrate agency by using conformity as a tactic for change. Hereby, they create their own modernity and re-interpret traditions in order to be able to pursue their higher-education goals.



### Questions to the text:

What are the challenges / difficulties young Bedouin women face in case they pursue higher education?

Which roles do tribal patriarchies, social institutions, and Israeli politics play?

How do the women cope with the particular challenges? To what respect do they use conformity as a tactic for change?

How do the women signify "modernity" and "tradition," what does the article mean by locating the women in-between both, a dialectic that leads to mutual forms of reinvention?

### Further links:

The Center for Bedouin Studies and development, Newsletter:

<http://web.bgu.ac.il/NR/rdonlyres/24B57B4F-C2FE-4C6B-9596-74CAB74F5B9D/32056/Newsletter2008.pdf>

Survey of Female Bedouin Graduates of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Beer-Sheva, Israel:

<http://web.bgu.ac.il/NR/rdonlyres/718C7DB8-8BD6-47CD-9C2A-16E824166341/94907/elsana-english.pdf>

### Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, L. 1986, *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Abu-Rabia-Queder, S. 2008, Does Education Necessary Mean Enlightenment? The Case of Higher Education among Palestinians-Bedouin Women in Israel. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol, 39, Issue 4, pp. 381-400.

Abu-Rabia, S, Albadur, S. & Alatauna, F. 1996, Survey of the Bedouin Education in the Negev Area. *Information about Equality*. Tel Aviv, Adva Center [Hebrew].

Abu-Saad, I. 1991, "Toward an Understanding of Minority Education in Israel: The Case of Bedouin Arabs

of the Negev," *Comparative Education* 27: 235-242.

Abu-Saad, I. 1995, "Bedouin Arab Education in the Context of Radical Social Change: What is the Future?" *Compare*, 1995, Vol. 25, pp. 149-160.

Abu-Saad, I. 1996. "Provision of Public Education Services and Access to Higher Education among the Negev Bedouin in Israel," *Journal of Education Policy* 11: 527-541.

Abu-Saad, I. 2002, *The Bedouin Education Structure in a Changing Social Reality*. Yuval le-Maarechet Hachinuch Beisrael, Vol. 3 [Hebrew].

Abu-Saad, I. 2005. "Education and Identity Formation among Indigenous: Palestinian Arab youth in Israel." *Indigenous and Minority Education: International Perspectives on Empowerment*. Champagne D. & Abu-Saad I., editors. Negev Center for Regional Development.

Abu-Saad, I. 2006, State Educational Policy and Curriculum: The Case of Palestinian Arabs in Israel. *International Education Journal* 7(5/): 709-720.

Al-Ali, N.S. 2007, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. Zed Books, London & New York.

Al-Haj, M. 1995, *Education, Empowerment and Control: The Case of Arabs in Israel*. State University of New York: Albany, NY.

Al-Haj, M. 2003, Higher Education among the Arabs in Israel: Formal Policy between Empowerment and Control. *Higher Education Policy* 16: 351-368.

Erdreich, L. & Rapoport, T. 2002, Elaborating Ethnonational Awareness via Academic Literacy: Palestinian Israeli Women at the University. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 33 (4): 1-24.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. 1967, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York), Aldine De Gruyter.

Georgi, A. 1975, An Application of Phenomenological Method in Psychology, *Duquesnes Studies in Phenomenological Psychology* 2:83-103.



Habermas, J. 1987, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Hundt, G. 1988, "Structure of Conflict between Bedouin Women," in *The Bedouin*, papers and articles, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev [Hebrew].

Kandiyoti, D. 1998, Bargaining with patriarchy, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 274-290.

Kassem, F. 2000, Leadership of Bedouin Women: Its Development in a Changing Reality, M.A thesis: Ben-Gurion University [Hebrew].

Katz, Y. 1998, Report of the Investigating Committee on the Bedouin Education System in the Negev. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education.

Kressel, G. 1976. Privacy vs. Tribalism: The Dynamics of Bedouin Communities in a Period of Urbanization, Tel Aviv, HaKibbutz Hame'uchad [Hebrew].

Maddrel, P. 1990. *The Bedouin of the Negev*, M.R.G. Report No. 81.

Meir A. & Barnea, D. 1985, *The Development of the Bedouin Educational System*, Dept. of Geography, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Ministry of Education, Southern Region [Hebrew].

Meir A., Barnea, D. 1988, "Regional aspects and structural returns in the Bedouin educational system in the Negev," in *Bedouin, Papers and Articles*, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev [Hebrew].

Meir, A. 2005, Bedouin, the Israeli State and Insurgent Planning: Globalization, Localization or Globalization? *Cities*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 201-215. Elsevier Ltd.

Mernissi, F. 1987, *Beyond the Veil – Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Indiana University Press.

Mernissi, F. 1995. *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. Addison-Wesley.

Mohanty, C.T. 1988, Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse. *Feminist Review* 30: 65-88.

Sharabi, H. 1988, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. New York, Oxford University Press.

*Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin 2004*, Center for Bedouin Studies & Development, Negev Center for Regional Development, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Swirski, S. 1995, *Seeds of Inequality*. Tel Aviv, Breirot [Hebrew].

Swirski, S & Hasson, Y. 2006, *Invisible Citizens: Israel Government Policy Toward the Negev Bedouin*. Tel Aviv: Adva Center.

## December 2010 Short Bio

Kassem's Master's thesis, titled „Developing New Leadership Among Bedouin Women in a Changing World," 2000, explores how Bedouin women deal with the challenges facing them in the pursuit of higher education and how they mediate tribal and institutional patriarchy.

Fatma Kassem completed her PhD in the Department of Behavioral Science at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. In her research, which stemmed from her deep interest in gender studies, she uses women's life stories to analyze how ordinary urban Palestinian women remember historical events.

Based on this research, a book is forthcoming (February 2011) from Zed Publishers: *Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gendered Memories*. Also, she conducted a study sponsored by the Center for Strategic and Policy Studies (School of Public Policy, The Hebrew University). This study analyzes women's images in history textbooks in Jordan to explore the ways in which the sacred triangle of *Allah*, *al-Mlik*, and *al-Watan* (God-Religion, the King-Regime and Nationalism) reproduce the gender-power relations in society and keep women subordinated to men.

Kassem has both academic and practical training in conflict resolutions. Together with Professor Dan Bar On of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, she has been



a co-facilitator and lecturer of a group of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli students at the University called "Co-existence Through Life Story Narrative." She has also served as facilitator and coordinator for the project "Two Conflicts, Four Countries" which involved university history teachers from Turkey, Greece, Palestine and Israel. Between the years 2005-2007 she co-directed and co-facilitated a group of Muslim, Christians and Jewish women in Jerusalem called "Jerusalem Women as Catalysts for Peace." Currently, she is writing a book based on the analysis of women's life stories who participated in two years project in Jerusalem.

During the 2007-2008 academic year, she was a fellow in the program "Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe" at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.

Kassem herself is married and the mother of five children. She is the eldest of ten siblings and was the first woman in her Upper Galilee village to attend high school and college.

## Endnoten

1 Author's Note: This article has been developed on the basis of my MA thesis (2000) and five in-depth interviews with Bedouin students at Ben Gurion University conducted in 2008. For the cooperation I want to thank the Association for the Promotion of Bedouin Women's Education in the Negev. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Nashwa Salah for helpful suggestions and criticisms. Certainly, the result is solely my own responsibility.

2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as a methodological tool. Eleven young Bedouin women, who had studied in institutions of higher learning until 1998, were interviewed. In addition, six focus-groups of Bedouin women and men were formed, with between six to fifteen participants from planned settlements and unrecognized villages. Planned settlements started to get established in the late 1970s. Today, there are 7 of these in the Beer Sheva sub-district: Tel Sheva, Rahat, Ksaifa, Segev Shalom, Hura, Ara'ra and Laqia. Only Rahat has the status of a city or urban township. Unrecognized villages, on the other hand, are Bedouin villages which are not recognized as legal settlements by the Israeli state and consequently ineligible to receive public services such as running water, electricity, health care, paved roads, high schools, garbage

collections etc. All interviews were conducted from 1998 until the end of 1999, mainly within the framework of an MA thesis (2000) that dealt with the issue of leadership among Bedouin women. The aim was to open up and discuss the same topics with all interviewees (Georgi, 1975). The interviewer took notes on the interviews and analyzed the qualitative data using grounded theory development techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3 The era of British rule in Palestine is broadly referred to in scholarly work as the "British Mandate." In the context of Palestine the use of the term "mandate" is problematic for various reasons. On 2 Nov. 1917, before British forces had occupied the whole of historic Palestine, the Balfour Declaration was issued, acknowledging the region as the national homeland of the Jewish people, at that time a tiny minority in Palestine.

The occupying British forces instituted the mandatory system, wherein indigenous people, ostensibly incapable of autonomous rule, would be prepared for self-governance and sovereignty. In such a system, the local residents were given internal and cultural autonomy while the British would control all other communal and administrative aspects such as economic and foreign affairs. The Balfour declaration refers to Jews as a "nation" or a "people" but to Palestinians simply as "religious" and "ethnic communities"; from the outset, the mandate was not intended to apply to Palestinians as a nation or a people.

4 Focus-group interview, April 1998, planned settlement. This interview, like all the others cited in the text, was conducted in Arabic and translated by the author into English. Miriam and her friends, women in their 70s and 80s, were among those interviewed as focus-group members. They now live in planned settlements, but have found it difficult to adjust to life in a stone house. To compensate for these changes, they have erected tents next to the houses in order to continue with their customary life style. Today, such "scenes" are a common feature of the planned settlements with their modern homes.

5 The term "Siyag" comes from the Hebrew "siyagh," meaning "fence" or "demarcation." The corresponding Arabic word, "sayej," also means "fence" (Swirski & Hasson, 2006, p. 11).

6 There are conflicting data with respect to the number of people still living in "unrecognized villages." Two sources exist: the Interior Ministry, which gives a figure of 55,305; and the Regional Rural Council, which identifies 76,364 Bedouin residents. In the "unrecognized villages," residents are not permitted to construct new buildings and have no



access to water mains or electricity, public transportation, welfare or social services, or any other infrastructure facilities. [See also Note 3]

7 Focus-group interview dated October 1998, planned settlement.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 On 11 Nov. 1966, the Israeli Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, announced the abolition of the military government over the entire Arab population in Israel/Palestine, including the Negev.

11 Interview with Khizaran, in May 1999.

12 Interview with Kha'ola, dated April 1999.

13 Focus-group interview, dated March 1999, planned settlement. Here the word "strangers" refers to boys from other tribes.

14 Focus-group interview, planned settlement, April 1998.

15 Focus-group interview, planned settlement, April 1998.

16 In Arabic, this expression means that someone will gain power or be arrogant.

17 Focus-group interview, April 1998, planned settlement.

18 Focus-group interview, March 1999, unrecognized village.

19 Interview with Surayia, November 1998.

20 Muslim dress for women; a long, loose-fitting garment covering the entire body except for the hands, face and head. *Qur'an* reference; 33:59.

21 Interview with Khadija, February 1998.

22 Interview with Sukeina, December 1998.

23 Interview with Rabiah, September 1998.

24 Amara did not indicate the reason for the memorial siren; it may have been commemorating the Holocaust or the Israeli soldiers killed in Israeli wars.

25 Interview with Amara, July 1998.

26 Interview with Sumaia, April 1998.