



Negev Bedouin and Higher Education

At the Crossroads of a Community in Transition

Sussex Migration Working Paper No. 41

Janine Givati-Teerling¹
Sussex Centre for Migration Research
February 2007

Abstract

This paper analyses the extent to which higher education serves as a tool of empowerment for the Negev Bedouin Arabs in Israel, in light of their dramatic transf

INTRODUCTION

came from the cultivated areas bordering on the deserts and worked the land of the true Bedouin; and lastly, the group of so-called 'blacks' (A'beed), originally brought from Africa as slaves of the Bedouin (Marx 1967).

Estimates of the Bedouin population in the Negev prior to 1948 vary from 65,000 to 95,000, organized into 95 tribes. In the course and the aftermath of the 1948 war, the vast majority of Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled, which decreased the overall Palestinian population by roughly 80 to 85 percent, and by the early 1950s, only around 11,000 Bedouin were living in the Negev, made up by only 19 governmentally recognized tribes (Marx 1967; Falah 1989). Upon the establishment of the State of Israel, the remaining indigenous Bedouin found themselves in the insecure and confusing position of a non-Jewish minority in the Jewish state. Between 1940 and 1966 the Arab population was placed under military rule, which severely restricted their movement and not only isolated them from the Jewish population, but also caused the segregation of the Arab localities from one another (Marx 1967; Al Haj 1995). By that time, as stressed by Al-Haj (1995), forced internal migration was 'the only form of migratory movement that took place among Arabs'. The Bedouin were concentrated in the framework of a sedentarization plan imposed by the Israeli government, which severely disrupted their traditional life style and resulted in the localization of almost the entire Negev Bedouin population (Abu-Saad 2003; Yiftachel 2003; Falah 1989). Twelve of the nineteen remaining tribes were removed from their lands and the whole population was concentrated into a restricted area east of Beer-Sheva, referred to as a 'reservion '7.13,

2003; Abu-Rabia 2004, 2006). It has been claimed that education in general, and higher education in particular, is a crucial source of empowerment for the Palestinian citizens of Israel (Al-Haj 1995; 2003) and – as members of the Arab minority – for the Bedouin community specifically (Abu-Saad 1995, 1996, 1997).

'Presumably if we want to see people empowered we consider them to be currently dis-empowered' (Mosedale 2003). As Kratli (2000) emphasizes in his analysis of education provision to nomadic pastoralists, lack of education is often perceived to be a key reason for disempowerment. However, as he also stresses, 'in this way, the analysis of the causes of the marginalization of nomads is reduced to a tautology: nomads are disempowered by not being empowered (yet) by education'. When analyzing the marginalization of indigenous peoples – whether nomadic, post-nomadic, or settled – we have to consider the social, economic and political dimensions of past and current processes, i.e. the way that power relations have shaped this situation of disempowerment.

Before examining the significance of education as a tool of empowerment and the extent to which

Bedouin traditions within the current post-nomadic setting. The multifaceted transition story of the Negev Bedouin resulted in detailed accounts on a wide range of issues which allowed me to develop a better understanding of the complexity of the situation.

Though the participants' mother tongue is Arabic, all conversations took place in English; five accounts with students were partly in Hebrew and partly in English. All academics I spoke with are male, solely for the reason that among the 885 faculty members at Ben Gurion University, there are only 11 Palestinian Arabs,³ all of whom are men (Abu-Saad 2004a). However, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of female Bedouin students and in the last few years the female-male ratio among Bedouin undergraduate students has been roughly even. To balance the male and female voices presented, five of the six Bedouin students I interviewed are women, of whom four undergraduate and one post-graduate. However, it should be noted that, though gender relations are vitally important in the context of Bedouin society and are touched upon by the women throughout their narratives, this study does not address the women's emancipatory processes in particular. Rather it attempts to provide an impression of their perspectives as Bedouin in higher education.

Though the information presented is not statistically representative, the qualitative data are provided by a broadly representative sample of students and academics. Therefore, their narratives combined with relevant literature provides a plausible impression of the position of Bedouin in higher education today.

Background of the Provision of Education to the Negev Bedouin

Traditionally, most education was informal and not widely developed within the Bedouin community because, as a nomadic society, their way of life required other skills. Through the informal education system they developed, which was based on actual observation and participation in the process of day-to-day life, children received an education that suitably prepared them for the life they were to lead as adults. History, moral and religious values were passed on orally by respected elders, poets and storytellers. There was a very small number of boys, between the ages of 5 and 12, who were taught to memorize the Koran and learned reading, writing and the precepts of Islam.

Lessons were taught by elderly males (called Khatib), with moderate literacy skills, who would migrate caTw0003 Tcroadly nã8lei h eld.02 56.7 24lled (is88)

³ Note: that is 1.2%, while BGU is located in an area where about 25% of the population is Palestinian Arab

Hence, over time, attitudes towards education have changed and Bedouin have gained better access to education. However, the quality and success rate of Bedouin education remains very low and the Bedouin face major barriers when it comes to the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of their education (Abu-Saad 1995).

Education Provision and Access to Higher Education for Negev Bedouin: a Minority within the Minority

'As in other developing societies, the educated among Israeli Arabs are considered agents of social change, fulfilling an important mission in directing the collective and leading the struggle for status improvement' (Al-Haj 1995).

'The new social reality facing the Bedouin community requires an educated populace who can produce sophisticated and innovative solutions to their development needs' (Abu-Saad 1995).

Though, as stressed by Abu-Saad (1996), literature on higher education and minorities emphasizes the importance of higher education in empowering minority development, little research has been done on the attainment and outcome of higher education among the Arab minority in Israel in general and the Bedouin community in particular. Beyond the studies of Al-Haj (1995, 2003) and Mar'i (1978), which concentrate on the wider Arab community in Israel, Abu-Saad's (1996) own study focused on the Negev Bedouin, and research conducted by Pessate-Schubert (2003, 2004), who addresses female Bedouin students, available information is scarce. A possible reason for the scarcity of research conducted on Bedouin and higher education is the fact that formal education is a relatively new phenomenon in Bedouin society. However, evaluation of the significance of higher education for the Bedouin community and an impression of the degree to which educated Bedouin are currently empowering their community are essential for the development of suitable future plans.

Arab Education in Israel

As emphasized by Abu-Saad (1995), Bedouin education must be seen within the wider context of Arab education in Israel. The state educational system in Israel is divided into two systems: a Jewish system and an Arab one. One's first impression might be that of educational pluralism; however, this was not the objective the government of Israel had in mind when launching the system.

Though the Arab citizens of Israel have a separate school system, it is controlled by Jewish officials and Arab authority over their own education is limited. Golan-Agnon (2004) - who, when hired by the Ministry of Education, devoted about two years to studying the way the education system aggravates inequality - points out how Arabs are not partners in the ministry's decision-making system, in policy-making, or in planning: 'There is no Arab district manager, no Arab administration head, and no Arab representation in the Ministry's management. Of the thousands of people who work in the Ministry's administrative headquarters, not even ten are Arab, and most of them work in the cafeteria'. This lack of recognition of the Arab community as a cultural and national minority is clearly expressed in the 1953 Law of State Education which specifies the following aim for education in Israel:

'to base education on the values of Jewish culture and achievements of science, on love of the homeland and loyalty to the state and the Jewish people, on practice in agricultural work and handicraft [labour], on pioneer training and on striving for a society built on freedom, equality, tolerance, mutual assistance, and love of mankind.' (Quoted in Mar'i 1978)

Following the establishment of Israel, the state implemented a so-called 'controlled-segregation strategy' in the Arab education system, aimed at emptying Arab education of any Arab national content while legitimizing the state's ideology (Al-Haj 1995). This separation and control policy is carried out through tight control of curricula, staff and resources (Golan-Agnon 2004; Al-Haj 1995) and is reflected in all aspects of the education system, as shown throughout this paper.

Furthermore, this segregation in the education system extends beyond the institutional separation between Arab and Jewish schools. The government deliberately tried to reinforce the religious-cultural component instead of the Arab-national component by splitting the Arab minority into a number of smaller groups based on religious (Moslem, Christian, Druze) or geographical distinction (the northern 'Galilee'; the central 'Triangle'; and the southern 'Negev'). This treatment was aimed at fragmenting the Arab collectivity and differentiating citizens' rights according to communal affinity (Lustick 1980; Al-Haj 1995; Hajjar 1996; Abu-Saad et al. 2000). Dr. Hershberg, the Ministry of Religions' director for Muslim Affairs in the 1950s,

emphasized that the Arabs in Israel should be treated as

'Israeli citizens of several religions groups and sects ... and not simply Arabs. In other words we do not have in front of us one problem of Arabs, but rather problems of different groups and nations, and we have to solve each separately. We should emphasize and develop contradictions between different groups including the decrease of Arabism. By this way they (Arabs) will forget that they are Arabs and will recognize that they are Israelis of several kinds.' (Quoted in Al-Haj 1995)

were established before

a second barrier. Educators who were found to be suitable to teach, and thus 'politically correct', are expected to follow curricular goals which are, indeed, specifically developed for the Arab students. However, these goals are once again part of the denationalization of Arab education, as emphasized by Al-Haj (1995). Rather than emphasizing Arabic culture, language and background, the Arab curriculum stresses the foundation and acceptance of Zionism. Students are expected to acquire intensive knowledge of Hebrew culture, language

passed the Bagrut (matriculation exams), as compared to 45.6 percent of Jewish high school graduates. Those who do pass the Bagrut are less likely to qualify for university admission, as many are eliminated by the psychometric entrance exam. Many Arab intellectuals, Al-Haj (2003) and Abu-Saad (2004a) among others, identify the psychometric exam as the main obstacle blocking Bedouin, and Arabs in general, from entering institutions of higher education. They claim that it functions as a gatekeeper, excluding Arab students from admission, or from entry to the prestigious subjects that require high exam scores. They describe the exam as culturally biased, designed primarily for students with a Western cultural background. Bedouin students and academics at BGU agree that the psychometric exams are not a reliable reflection of the intellectual level of Bedouin students. An academic at the Center for Bedouin Studies and Development emphasizes this cultural bias by explaining that '[the] psychometric exam has a lot to do with the place you were born, which newspaper you read, which TV programmes you watch, who your parents [are]'

'The quality of the education system and also the psychometric exams are very

rel949qualitAsmetric entThAl-H

other Arab citizens in Israel. Furthermore, problems deriving from their unique circumstances as an impoverished community in socio-economic transition, subjected to government policies specifically designed to transform their lifestyle, push them even further to the margin. Most of the aforementioned factors and barriers have been pinpointed by a selected group of scholars concerned with the Negev Bedouin, particularly by

empowerment; one has to consider the environment prior, during and after the education and question whether this environment is empowerment-encouraging.

One of the aims of the Centre for Bedouin Studies and Development at BGU, which was established in 1998, is to encourage and increase the enrolment of Bedouin students in higher education. Thanks to the support of various funds, more Bedouin students, especially females, are now able to receive financial and academic support, with the result that the number of Bedouin graduates has tripled since the establishment of the centre (Center for Bedouin Studies and Development 2005). However, the lack of students enrolling in the fields of engineering and sciences causes great frustration among the Bedouin (and non-Bedouin) Arab academics: 'Please ask in the Bedouin Centre now how many students are studying Hebrew literature, why Hebrew literature? Who needs Hebrew literature? ... We have a problem; we don't encourage enough [Bedouin] students to go to engineering, natural sciences, other sciences' (Palestinian Arab academic at BGU). Postgraduate student Lila emphasizes the limited options: 'but what can they study? ... History, Hebrew, you know those kinds of things that they can teach; not engineering, not pharmacy ...'. In order to increase the number of students qualifying for a wider range of programmes, the Bedouin centre has recently introduced special preparatory programmes designed to meet the requirements of each faculty. An academic at the Bedouin centre explained that until recently the only way to get Bedouin students with low psychometric scores accepted was by personally trying to convince the respective programme head. Now they have three courses, one for humanities, one for engineering and one for health sciences, where Bedouin students take half of the standard number of credits. After successful completion of this course, they could be accepted on the degree course.

However, efforts to increase the number of Bedouin students in higher education are not left uncriticized by some of the academics within the Bedouin community. A Bedouin academic in sciences describes the jump in the numbers of Bedouin students reaching academia as 'superficial', because the easier acceptance of students with lower achievement and the provision of additional tutoring and financial aid do not improve the basic quality of the education provided to the Bedouin. He emphasizes that 'the education ministry wants to get numbers to be able to [say]: "look, we increased the numbers ... we are putting more

efforts", but this isn't done by honest means'. He adds that the admission of people for the sake of statistics will not change anything, 'in my opinion this contradicts with education'. Himself active in community education projects for the Bedouin, he is a strong believer that more Bedouin should be involved in engineering and technology, because 'empowerment through education with no economical empowerment will vanish within one decade'. However, it is important to bear in mind that the returns of a degree in engineering or sciences are probably not straightforward for a Bedouin graduate. Al-Haj (2003) shows that educated people in the wider Arab community in Israel face very limited opportunities of finding suitable employment. In the absence of an economic base in their own communities, the Arab graduates are economically dependent on jobs in the Jewish sector. However, 'many positions are closed to them because in one way or another they are connected with the army or matters of national security'. As a result many Arab graduates who do have a degree in sciences still find themselves in teaching jobs. Furthermore, university graduates working in blue collar jobs are far more common in the Arab sector than they are among Jews.

Educated Bedouin as Agents of Social Change: Outlooks and Boundaries

As emphasized by Kratli (2000), literature on the impact of education on (post)nomadic peoples refers mainly to what education is expected to do. This observation also seems relevant with regard to studies on the Negev Bedouin. It is of great importance, however, to look at what education actually does (or does not) do. So far, we have seen that Bedouin encounter many problems within the education system, problems that form major barriers through all stages of their education. The notion of 'power' is at the root of those problems and can be clearly classified as power over. Despite those problems, higher education is still expected to play a fundamental role in the development of the Bedouin community, as it is expected to produce the critical mass of leaders able to direct the collective towards social and economic change (Abu Saad 2003). As pointed out earlier, the aim of the empowerment approach is to transform power over to forms of power that move bottom-up, from inner resources. In order to examine the extent to which educated Bedouin are contributing to the empowerment of their community it is crucial to question how power is viewed, used and distributed among the Bedouin. The first issue to consider is at the personal level, which is the way wherein higher

education generates a sense of power from within, a feeling of self-confidence and capacity. The Bedouin students, especially the females, describe how their self-esteem increased during their studies. It is important to note, though, that this sense of confidence and independence is always seen in the framework of the Bedouin society, rather than the university context where Bedouin students generally seem to lack confidence. Though modern education places great emphasis on individualism and achievement, the existence of strong tribal affiliations and social commitment to traditional concepts should not be underestimated. The students' strong sense of connection and loyalty to their communities, in combination with the new and more personal value system of the university and wider Israeli society, creates a reality that can be confusing and sometimes difficult to balance. Aisha expresses her awareness of her position as an educated woman, in relation to her self-worth as well as to her community:

'At the beginning many people [in the village] used to get angry and tell my father "why do you send your girls to study, what for?" At the beginning it used to be very difficult, and also now it is difficult, but people are looking at us now with respect, like modern people, like people who come from the United States or something like that. My sisters and I are looked at differently, we are walking [freely] and my sister drives a car ... I know the Bedouin community; I know the people, the society and the girls around me. I know who is more open [minded] and who is closed, that's the way it is in our society. I didn't change my opinion about them but I feel there is a gap, between [me] and another girl. Not all the girls are coming from a modern family such as mine. This is the gap that I am seeing. I don't know exactly how to explain it ...'

Lila, the post-graduate student who earlier defined herself as 'not a classical example for a Bedouin' – which is a very valid description considering her dress style, background and sharp-tongued arguments – expresses how even a modern independent woman as herself cannot simply shake off the strong influence of the traditional Bedouin social structure:

'I am really independent ... but we do have our challenges. When it comes to marriage [for example], then the patriarchal rules of the Bedouin are imposed on us, in a very

hard way ... You know there is a hierarchy here ... there are very respectable families [true Bedouin] and less respectable families [Falah], [at least] in the eyes of the Bedouin ... So, when my sister wanted to marry a man from another [less respected] family, the whole family and all the other families opposed it and said "no, you can't". It's historical, it is not an easy act ... then [she is] not an independent [woman], [but] part of X family. My sister struggled for three years, my father also struggled within his family, and in the end they got to this compromise ... So, [then] I wanted to get married. I met a very nice man, my husband, [who] is an Arab Muslim from the north, but not a Bedouin. So they said "our rules also apply to him" but because he is not a Bedouin, he doesn't threaten the system as he is from far away. So they accepted him ... [But usually there is not much flexibility] Within our family there was a specific situation, that they allowed us because of my father's approval ... they thought that we would get married to our cousins, this is the traditional way ... So, they [the family] thought "ok, you are living in Be'er-Sheva, you are living an independent life, but in the end you are part of us, you are part of the family" ...'

The above account illustrates how deeply traditional principles and tribal affiliations are rooted within Bedouin society. When assessing higher education as a tool of empowerment for the Bedouin, and moreover as a generator of well equipped leadership, the power of centuries-long tradition cannot and should not be ignored. I do respect the sensitivity of this issue and its complexity, which goes beyond the scale of this study and certainly beyond my insights as an outsider. However, as traditional customs and tribal structures were repeatedly identified as major influences within the Bedouin community, exclusion of those accounts would produce an incomplete and Oli(leadership, mn m

land, thus making them even more attached to their ancestors' land and traditions (Yiftachel 2003). These issues - which have been intensively studied by others and are too comprehensive to be thoroughly addressed in this paper - affect Bedouin's approach to education, as is illustrated by one of the academics who describes an encounter that he and his colleague had with a Bedouin man in one of the unrecognized villages:

'The Bedouin claim that once the tribes are exposed to modern life, they will leave the land, so they don't want them to be educated ... [We] were visiting [this man] who said "I don't want my children to get educated". When we asked "why?" he said "Because when they get educated they will change their [way of] life, they will move on to the towns and settlements, and they will leave the lands..."

However, others do encourage their children and are more positive about the possibility of gaining an education while remaining truthful to one's own community and tradition. Here are two female students, who both live in an unrecognized village:

'[My father] works in Dimona with Jews. He has friends [there] and they always tell him that he should allow us to study. He encourages us the best way possible, and so does my mother ... There are people who, once they are studying, turn their backs to the [Bedouin] society. I want to go back to my society. I got to know the two societies and in this way it is easier to integrate in both [societies] ... Maybe I am

shouldn't go to school and that boys and girls should get married at a really young age.'

Al-Haj (personal communication, 7/7/05) argues that many educated people in developing societies fail to be a source of empowerment because they are either mostly concentrated on themselves rather than on their community, or because the returns of education are too minor - in economic, social and political terms – to enable them to contribute to the development of their community. This leads to a situation of modernization at the

intellectual and academic achievement and the respect attributed to tribal values and traditional leadership within Bedouin society:

'Of course the traditional leadership [gets more respect]. It is not that the traditional leadership is a negative leadership, on the contrary. I tell you, I meet lots of people, from outside the Bedouin community, who view the traditional leadership as negative. As for myself, and I assume that this is the opinion of every Bedouin, I see the traditional leadership as good enough, if not the best, for the Bedouin and especially for the women ... I am aware that there are things that need to be changed within Bedouin society, but there are a lot of positive things, especially all the traditional laws, because they protect the dignity of women.'

After describing the Sheikh as an unfailing source of wisdom, which reaches far beyond knowledge gained through academic studies, and explaining how he is able to 'solve all problems according to the Bedouin laws', she stresses: 'You have to know, you don't become a Sheikh just like that!'

The above account is another example which challenges the claim that education naturally transforms traditional values. Furthermore, it emphasizes the misconception that modern knowledge, and thus education, replaces traditional and indigenous wisdom. Kratli's (2000) argument that knowledge is tied to social structures and that the source of this knowledge and how it is produced are crucial to its status, appears to be valid in the case of the Negev Bedouin

and producing fruitful ground for empowerment. Thus, rather than a neutral enterprise functioning as a vehicle for social change, education turns out to be a highly political project controlled by the state. Such a situation, as argued by Apple (1979), forces the educator to be involved, whether consciously or not, in a political act. This challenges the questions as to whether Bedouin educators contribute to the empowerment of their students and whether educated Bedouin can be considered true agents of social change. The small group that manages to cross the hurdles of primary and secondary education are forced to conform to the rules and expectations of the establishment-oriented education system, a system based on beliefs and values that not only go against those of Bedouin culture, but are also deliberately tint-

- Arabs in Israel: Formal Policy between Empowerment and Control. Higher Education Policy, 16 (3), 351-368.
- APPLE, M. W. (1979) Ideology and Curriculum. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- BELL, J. (1999) Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers in education and social science. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- BORKAN, J. M., et al. (2000) Universal health care? The views of Negev Bedouin Arabs on health services. Health Policy and Planning, 15 (2), 207-216.
- BROUS, D. (2004) The Uprooting: Education Void of Indigenous "Location-Specific" Knowledge. In: CHAMPAGNE, D. and ABU-SAAD, I. (Eds.) Indigenous and Minority Education: International Perspectives on Empowerment. Beer-Sheva: Negev Center for Regional Development Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, pp. 257-265.
- BURREL, G. and MORGAN, G. (1979) Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis. London: Heineman.
- CENTER FOR BEDOUIN STUDIES AND DEVELOPMENT (2005) Bedouin Students Marching Forward. Newsletter, 5, Spring 2005
- CENTER FOR BEDOUIN STUDIES AND THE NEGEV CENTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (2004) Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin. Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.
- CRESWELL, T. (1993) Mobility as resistance: a geographical reading of Kerouac's "On the Road". Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society, (18), 249-462.
- DENSCOMBE, M. (2003) The Good Research Guide. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

for Arab Minority Rights in Israel and The Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA).

JABAREEN, Y. (2004) Law, Education and Social Change: the Case of Palestinian Arab Education in Israel. In: CHAMPAGNE, D. and ABU-SAAD, I. (Eds.) *Indigenous and Minority Education: International Perspectives on Empowerment*. Beer-Sheva: Negev Center for Regional Development Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, pp. 107-135.

KRÄTLI, S. (2000) *Education Provision to Nomadic Pastoralists*. Brighton: Institute for Development Studies.

LAW-YONE, H. (2003) From Sedentarization to Urbanization: State Policy towards Bedouin Society in Israel. In: ABU-SAAD, I. and CHAMPAGNE, D. (Eds.) *The Future of Indigenous Peoples: Strategies for Survival and Development*. Los Angeles: UCLA Press, pp. 175-183.

LESKO, N. and BLOOM, L. R. (1998) Close encounters: truth, experience and interpretation in multicultural teacher education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 30 (4), 375-395.

LITWICK, H. (2000) *An Urban Development Strategy for the Negev's Bedouin Community*. Beer-Sheva: Negev Center for Regional Development and the Center for Bedouin Culture.

LITWICK, H. (2003) Urbanization Policy for Indigenous Peoples: A Case Study of Israel's Negev Bedouin. In: ABU-SAAD, I. and CHAMPAGNE, D. (Eds.) *The Future of Indigenous Peoples: Strategies for Survival and Development*. Los Angeles: UCLA Press, pp. 184-204.

LUSTICK, I. (1980) *Arabs in the Jewish State*. Austin: University of Texas.

MADDRELL, P. (1990) *The Beduin of the Negev*. London:

Aust0-3.5928 -1ment. LVer th5.9(o)(ha,2.1(28 -157-167nd))002 Tc0.2685 Tw[(MADDRELL,))6(P)5.907(.)3.1(MINISTRY C