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Between tradition and modernization: understanding the problem of female Bedouin dropouts

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This study discusses the problem of Bedouin girls dropping out from the public school system in the Negev region of Israel. Data show that this phenomenon results from a conflict between the modern Israeli institutes' perception of modernity (which promote coeducation) and the Bedouin traditions that remain the cultural ethos of the girls' fathers. Israeli institutions' perception of modernity (enlightenment theory) aims to modernize the Bedouins according to Israel's modern principles, thus revoking traditional Bedouin values (sex separation). This paper promotes a postmodern theory that calls for embedding feminine traditional values of local communities as a necessary process in the development of modernity.

Introduction

Modernization movements and efforts, especially those aimed at improving women's status, have occupied a central place in the political discourse of the Middle East and other non-western countries since the nineteenth century. A great symbol of modernization has been advocacy of women's greater participation in both the public sphere—through education, employment and un-veiling—and in the political arena. In her book on gender and social change in the Middle East, Valentine Moghadam explains why she focuses on women: 'It's my contention that middle-class women in the Middle East are consciously major agents of social change in the region, at the vanguard of the movement to modernity' (1993, p. xiii).

Until recently, modernity discourse was characterized by the dominant western understanding of these regions in terms of modernization theory. This approach creates a dichotomy between the modern and the traditional, perceiving all that is non-western as primitive and archaic, in contrast to the progressive, enlightened West. Several scholars from non-western countries (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Kandiyoti, 1998;

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Ilkkararacan, 2002) have criticized the 'western impact of modernization' on women. As Lila Abu-Lughod claims:

> even more crucial for understanding the projects of remaking women over the last century is to ask how modernity—as a condition—might not be what it purports to be or tells itself, in the language of enlightenment and progress, it is. (1998, p. 7)

Paidar (1996) argues that those who have benefited from modernization are mainly women from the urban middle and upper classes or the dominant race, whereas for lower-class and minority women modernization often means a restriction or loss of traditional modes of power.

The main measure of women's emancipation as an indication of enlightenment has been their entrance into the public sphere in general, and the educational arena in particular, especially in Arab countries. Data from the United Nations Development Program (2002) *Human Development Report* indicates that, even though the Arab world shows the fastest improvement in female education in any region since the 1970s, more than 50% of Arab women are still illiterate.

While there are numerous studies about the unsuccessful attempts of modernization projects to enhance the status and emancipation of Middle Eastern Bedouin women in the realms of employment, planning and veiling (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Fenster, 1999), the educational sphere has received virtually no academic attention. The aim of this paper is therefore to reveal another aspect of the challenge of helping women—in the context of Bedouin girls dropping out of the school system in the Negev. Specifically, the study aims to show that these girls leave school because of the clash between the Israeli (Western) institution's views of modernity and the traditional values of the Bedouin minority. Rejecting the modern enlightenment approach, which calls for modernizing local communities according to the new standards of the state, the current research adopts a postmodern approach (Giddens, 1994), arguing for the embedding of local traditions in modern societies.

Gender and education in the Bedouin context

Schooling for the Bedouins of the Negev in the south of Israel did not begin until the late 1960s and early 1970s. This region was under military administration from the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 until 1966, and, as such, the Bedouins were secluded from other Arab populations in the country. As most of the region's schools were closed during this period, Arab education was only available in the north of Israel. Thus, in order to gain educational and employment opportunities, Bedouins had to ask for special permission. As a result, an entire generation of Bedouin tribes had virtually no access to formal education, especially the women. It was not until the close of the military era in 1966, when the Bedouins could once again freely visit their relatives in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, that attitudes towards schooling changed.

At the same time, during the 1960s and 1970s, the Israeli government built seven permanent settlements for the Bedouins with the aim of 'modernizing' them. The

government's approach to this project is reflected in the words of the Israeli statesman, Moshe Dayan:

> We should transform the Bedouins into an urban proletariat—in industry, services, construction, and agriculture. Eighty-eight percent of the Israeli population are not farmers; let the Bedouins be like them. Indeed, this will be a radical move, which means that the Bedouin would not live on his land with his herds, but would become an urban person who comes home in the afternoon and puts his slippers on. His children would be accustomed to a father who wears trousers, does not carry a *shabaria* [traditional Bedouin knife] and does not search for vermin in public. The children would go to school with their hair properly combed. This would be a revolution, but it may be fixed within two generations. Without coercion but with governmental direction … this phenomenon of the Bedouins will disappear. (*Ha'Aretz* interview, 13 July 1963, cited in Abu-Saad, 2001, p. 241)

Despite this 'modernity approach', the towns that were built lacked workplaces, banks, post offices, sewage systems, public libraries and recreational and cultural centers (Abu-Saad, 1995).

Even as education became more widely available, the Bedouin school system did not receive the same considerations or resources as its Jewish counterpart. The Human Rights Watch (2001) report found that the Israeli Ministry of Education treated the Arab and Jewish educational systems differently. While the latter is subdivided, allowing for educational pluralism (e.g. into secular and religious schools), the Arab system (including the Bedouin's) is monolithic. Thus, while the Israeli government concedes to Jewish religious traditions, it does not make similar accommodations for Bedouins.

Dropout rates among the Bedouins are the highest in Israel, especially for girls. A report by Katz (1998) indicates dropout rates of 10% in the Jewish sector, 40% in the entire Arab sector and more than 67% among the Bedouins. In Rahat, the first Bedouin city in Israel, the overall dropout rate among 17 year olds reached 40% in 2002, and several of its neighborhoods had a 100% dropout rate for girls (Rahat Local Council, 2003). The number of female Bedouin students increases every year, but the size of this increase decreases from one grade to the next (Katz, 1988; see also Central Bureau of Statistics, 1999, p. 78, Table f/9).

Most studies investigating Bedouin girl dropouts (Kressel, 1992; Hos & Kinan, 1997; Ben-David, 2000) blame the traditional nature of Bedouin society. That is, they attribute this phenomenon to traditional values of gender separation, restriction of women to the domestic sphere and the need to protect girls and their families from sexual shame. Hos and Kinan (1997) indicate that many parents do not send their daughters to school for fear of contact with boys from other tribes, which could damage the family honor. Many girls have to walk to a distant school or travel in mixed-sex buses, placing them in a dangerous zone over which parents have no control. In Meir's (1986) study, interviewed Bedouin men stated that girls who have reached puberty are ready for marriage; therefore, they cannot attend school and be exposed to boys. Abu-Saad (2001) points to the inherent conflict between the modern demands of Bedouin schools and the traditional obligations instilled upon girls at home.

These studies, which all perceive traditional Bedouin obligations as the main cause underlying girl dropouts, have offered no workable solution to lower the dropout rate.

Most of them simply suggest that Bedouin society should adapt itself to modern demands, sending girls to school in the existing conditions. The current paper proposes an alternative approach to the 'modern/traditional' dichotomy, perceiving the traditional nature of Bedouin society not as an inhibitor, but as a possible vehicle to promote women, by weaving the modern and traditional together. In order to better understand this approach, we need to first examine the woman's place in modernity approaches in other traditional societies.

Gender and modernization discourse in traditional societies

Many scholars attribute the difficulty of western modernization efforts to promote women in traditional societies to the pull of local traditions. Yet, these very attempts to modernize women in non-western countries—in terms of space, planning, sexuality and employment—have actually added to their suffering and marginalization.

Munson's (2002) study of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Spain describes how women were granted economic and civil rights and access to some public professions, but the debate revolved around how women would and should use space. Modernization gave them physical access to public space, yet they were still restricted culturally in this space. For a man, walking down the street involved watching others; but for the middle-class woman, it meant watching herself. A woman who did not guard her body was no longer protectively cloaked by social convention and was exposed to untold sexual danger. Eventually, in the mid-nineteenth century, women were restricted from public spaces.

In Turkey, which has been the main symbol of a modernizing nation, women's presence in the public sphere was the deliberate aim of reformers, especially in the 1950s. Yet, despite new laws on education, participation in economic and political life, and inheritance rights, women's participation in public activities was still limited in the 1950s. Few women were seen on the streets, in parks or in recreation centers (Ozbay, 1999).

In their study of the impact of attempts by the West to modernize Third World countries, Belen and Bose (1990) show how, in the long term, these projects have served the western country's interests more than the intended beneficiaries. At times of economic crisis in these developing nations, women are controlled and placed in subordinate positions by those who own the means of production and dominant access to capital—namely, the men.

In a similar vein, Kurian's (2000) research on India's Narmada valley shows how the environmental justice movement, which aims to promote environmental sustainability, ignores local feminine cultural needs. Funded by the World Bank, the Sardar Sarovar Project built 3000 dams on the Narmada River, with the aim of irrigating 1.8 million hectares of land, providing drinking water to the people, supplying electricity and offering employment opportunities. However, this project displaced tribal people living on the valley, and the adverse impact on women was great as they now had to walk further and work harder to obtain water, food, electricity and fuel. Denying women compensation for displacement contributes to their economic and social

disempowerment. Not recognizing the role they can play in maintaining the environment thwarts the goal of environmental sustainability. Thus, these women perceive modernizing development projects as a means to institutionalize oppression.

The common thread running through these studies is the implications of modernity projects for women. Aiming to modernize a nation, reformers perceived it as monolithic and assumed women and men would give the same meaning to modernity. By neglecting to recognize the special needs of women, these projects have done little to improve women's status and emancipation. Similar effects are apparent among the Bedouin women in the Negev region of southern Israel.

Bedouin women and modernization discourse

Resettlement of the Bedouin community in urban-style towns was the main thrust of modernization efforts in the Israeli Negev. Yet this process had a particularly adverse impact on Bedouin women, which was not taken into account in the planning process. When one-half of the Bedouin population of the Negev was displaced from the desert to recognized villages (in the late 1960s and early 1970s), they benefited from a variety of services—stores, banks, parks, schools. However, most of these benefits were, for all intents and purposes, denied to the women, owing to their lack of access to and familiarity with the public sphere (Jakubowska, 1988).

Before the move to the villages, the Bedouin woman was a partner in the home, with relatively equal responsibilities. This partnership was evident in the elementary tasks she was responsible for performing, which were critical to the sustenance of the family, such as goat milking, preparing food and building the tent. Such activities increased her status as a provider and a producer during the hard way of life in the desert (Meir, 1997). However, with the transition to the village, her roles were abrogated by modern services, and she became useless and unproductive in her own domestic space. At the same time, she lacked skills to work outside the house and the state did not provide her with an appropriate workplace that embraces traditional Bedouin customs. As a consequence, most of the men work outside the village, while the women stay at home without any vital employment, left solely with the roles of wife and mother (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Fenster, 1999).

Fenster (1999) has shown how the modernization planning process did not consider cultural constructions of space when creating Bedouin towns in the Negev, effectively creating a situation that increased control over the women. Since the resettlement, Bedouins live in neighborhoods within towns, according to tribal affiliation, and men avoid moving in other neighborhoods because of accepted traditional rules of territoriality and respect for women's modesty. This does not, however, prevent the men from moving in public spaces, while it does restrict the women. It is not culturally acceptable for Bedouin women to be seen in public, as this can taint their honor. Thus, modernization efforts have created what Fenster calls 'forbidden' and 'permitted' spaces for women: the home and the neighborhood become their permitted private place, where they are free to move, and outside this area is the forbidden public place—the park, the bank and the town center.

A comparable reduction of women's freedom of movement occurred among Bedouins in the new settlements built in Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran, as demonstrated in Abu Lughod's study of the Awlad Ali Bedouin tribe in Egypt. As a result of the move to towns, the Bedouins began to receive more visitors. Owing to modesty norms that forbid women to have any contact with men, even eye contact, women were limited in mobility to domestic arenas. Restrictions on movement meant that they could not even take advantage of social and welfare services located outside their neighborhoods. As a consequence, these women felt worthless and did not perceive any improvement in their status or self-image (Abu-Lughod, 1986).

These studies reveal the modernizer's lack of consideration for local feminine codes and the lack of gender sensitivity with regard to hierarchical relationships in non-western societies. Thus, the women essentially become the victims of this modernizing process.

The aim of this paper is to challenge this modernizing approach in the field of education among the Negev Bedouins, an area that has not received scholarly attention. Specifically, I question the existing coeducational structure of Bedouin schools, which clashes with traditional values, and suggest that this is a primary factor in the high dropout rate among girls. This is in contrast to the approach that perceives coeducation as 'the most optimal strategy to assure equality of opportunities' (Berkovitch & Bradley, 1999, p. 487). In their promotion of women's education and status, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations have tended to perceive local opposition to schooling as a hindrance to modernization, and have focused on changing traditional beliefs rather than embedding them in their modernization efforts. In doing so, they disregard cultural sensitivity to the educational experience (Berkovitch & Bradley, 1999).

Research methodology

In examining Bedouin attitudes to girls' education, I conducted ethnographic interviews with girls and their parents from two groups: those who were enrolled in school (educated) and those who had left school (dropouts). There were 10 girls, 10 mothers and five fathers interviewed in each group, with a total of 50 interviewees. To ensure that Bedouin girls and women had an opportunity to express themselves, I used a qualitative research method that bases itself on the actions and meanings of the individual person, who can be understood best through his or her language and attitudes (Berg, 1995). This method helped me get to know the interviewees' proximate world, which had not thus far been explored in research. This allowed me to ask the women personal questions in privacy (without the presence of a male figure), especially about their marriage and family life. Participants were asked to express their perceptions of why girls continued in school or dropped out, as well as their perceptions of Bedouin norms and the Bedouin woman's role.

The process of locating the women, especially those in the less-educated group, met obstacles from the fathers, who were sensitive to the issue being studied and were afraid of their daughters' exposure. To locate the dropout girls, I first obtained the names

of 17 year olds who had stopped attending the local high school. Finding that inaccuracies in school registration undermined my efforts, I carried on by locating the relatives of these girls on the basis of surnames in a 'networking' process (Feldman, 1981). To encourage people to respond, I used my role as a teacher in the community and, through my colleagues, was able to visit girls who were not attending school in their homes. Sometimes it became necessary to ask a man's permission to interview his daughters and wives. To reach the girls' fathers, other males in the community needed to help me make the initial contact. Most fathers refused to open up or even to meet me because I am a Bedouin woman. It took me a year to locate 10 girls who had left school whose parents agreed to participate. The girls were interviewed in their homes, sometimes in the presence of their mothers and sometimes alone. For cultural reasons, all interviews with fathers took place in their homes with at least one additional family member present.

I accessed the schoolgirls—all of whom were 17 years old—through the local high school. These interviews took place at the school in a classroom that the principal made available to me. To reach their parents, I asked the girls to obtain permission. At this stage, too, I had to replace one girl with another whose parents would agree to have her interviewed.

My status as a Bedouin woman facilitated my access to the community—but as an independent, modern Bedouin woman by appearance, I represented the antithesis of my interviewees. That is, I did not express the expected behavioral norms of a traditional Bedouin woman; for example, I do not usually cover my head with a scarf. However, it was necessary for me to accommodate myself to the traditional attire (by wearing a long skirt and a long-sleeved shirt) and traditional norms (by not looking directly at men during the interview and by accepting the presence of a woman while interviewing her husband). These methodological concerns exemplify the conflict of a modern researcher researching her traditional community. In order to minimize this distance, she fits in by approaching traditional values as something that can benefit her research, and not by considering them a barrier. The researcher's approach should be to integrate tradition, not reject it.

My sample consisted of two groups of interviewees. The educated group had mothers with nine years of schooling, although a few of the mothers had no education at all. Their average age was 40–45 and they had seven to nine children. All their husbands were employed and most of the fathers had finished high school. The less educated group had mothers with no education at all. Their age was 40–45, they had more than 10 children, 40% of their husbands were unemployed and the fathers had an average of seven to nine years of schooling.

Findings

A Bedouin girl's honor: attitudes of the less-educated families

All the girls who had dropped out of school emphasized the importance of keeping their honor in terms of their behavior and dress, and the difficulty that girls in this

modern age face in doing so. For instance, when asked about Bedouin norms, Tofaha answered:

> The norms that I am going to tell you about all exist, but not among all the Bedouins. Most of them don't want their daughters to go out on the street, because then they will be bothered by boys and they will start calling her *sayaa* [not honored]. They say that going out of the house ruins the girls. Even going to school ruins the girls in their eyes, because they will start to gossip about every girl walking in the street.

Farida says:

> A girl must not go too far. She has to have someone escort her. Because if someone sees her in the street, he will start a rumor about her, gossip, and then they will ruin her name and honor. Even if she is honorable, if she goes to school by herself, they will always gossip about her. That's why I always do what my parents ask me. I don't go out by myself.

Mothers' attitudes were very similar. In the words of Samia, the mother of a dropout girl:

> the most important thing is her *sootra* [protection], that God protects her by marrying her and keeping her honor. We should protect her from the *aar* [shame]. It's better to get her married instead of someone seeing her and causing problems for her family.

Similarly, Lila explains the connection between honor and school:

> if a girl goes out, even to school, she will be worthless. Because if people see her by herself, they will start to think she is not honorable. Then she will have too much freedom, go out with boys and do bad things to her honor. And people today are not compassionate.

Keeping the girl's honor is also the father's primary concern, as Majid, father of one of the dropouts, says:

> My daughter, Manal, had too many men asking for her hand. So we preferred to get her married instead of being seen in school by different men. You know what happens with boys and girls in school. I don't want there to be any bad rumors about her.

Clearly, all interviewees in the less-educated group perceive keeping the girl's honor as the most important value in the girl's life and for her family. It seems that the parents' perception of honor is transferred to the second generation, who cannot and will not disobey the norms by which they were raised.

A Bedouin girl's honor: attitudes of the schoolgirls' families

The schoolgirls emphasize how their parents warn them to keep their honor in school by watching themselves and distancing themselves from the boys. As Nasreen stated:

> My parents always tell me that I am not allowed to speak to boys at all. It's shameful to speak to them or even to sit near them in class. Because people would be suspicious and ask what is going on between [us].

Suad explains why a father who catches his daughter having a secret relationship with a boy from school has the right to stop her from attending school:

> I think the parents are more experienced than us and we need to pay attention to what they say. I think it's a good thing to have a relationship with boys, but a pure relationship, not a romantic one. A girl who has romantic relationships, I think I would tell her father to explain to her that these things are not allowed among us, but if she continues, he has every right to stop her from attending school.

The mothers of the schoolgirls also indicate the importance of their daughters' honor, but, unlike the mothers of dropouts, they perceive the need to keep one's honor not as something that prevents their daughters from attending school, but rather as a condition for them to attend school. As Miriam says:

> I know my daughter protects her honor, acts in an honorable way—that's why we don't mind her going to school, it's up to her. Even if there was some boy who flirts with her, she would put him in his place and react as required, then he would not even talk to her again.

She also indicates her role in educating her daughter to maintain good manners:

> I always tell her not to cross the lines, not to be outside by herself. to come home before sunset. I don't allow her even to go to the store after dark, you know all the boys are out at that hour watching her. I don't want them saying any bad things about her. Why should people gossip about her?

The fathers of schoolgirls, unlike the fathers of dropouts, seem to acknowledge the modern mixed space in which they live. Like their spouses, they do not see the need to maintain their daughter's honor as an inhibitory factor for schooling, but rather as a primary condition for allowing her to attend school. Najeh, another father, claims: 'The first thing is her honor. As long as she keeps her honor and her *oroobia* [being an Arab girl], she will honor herself and be honored by others.'

In order to deal with modern demands, these families embed local traditions within the modern space. For instance, if girls have to walk to school, fathers arrange transportation to keep their honor protected. As Rami says:

> I don't want people looking at her in the street and saying she is dishonored because she is by herself. That's why we have a car taking her to and from school. This I don't disapprove of. I prefer to have a permanent car taking her to and from school instead of standing in the street and hitchhiking.

One father claims that he gives his daughters controlled freedom, effectively embedding traditional values within the space of modernization:

> Traditional Bedouin norms are our weapon. The good thing in them is the honor. I prefer my daughter to wear traditional dress but I don't force her. I just try to direct her, because in this dress boys in school will not look at her. Their age is very difficult. I give my daughters freedom but in a critical way, for instance, we don't let our daughter go out dancing in clubs, I will not let her! [But] I will let her go to a close girlfriend to do homework together.

Whereas the less-educated families seem to perceive honor and traditional norms as something that cannot be maintained in the modern space, the educated families see such norms as a condition for their daughters to move in this space. Consequently,

they allow their daughters to attend school, while acknowledging the difficulties in keeping these norms.

The importance of paternal support

Dropout girls do not benefit from their father's support to attend school because of the difficulties in keeping their honor. In contrast, schoolgirls not only receive their fathers' support, but also have their trust and confidence despite the difficulties and expected bad rumors.

Among the less-educated group, the mothers spoke of how their spouses would not support their daughters' schooling. As Mariam says, 'We stopped her from attending school. You think she can resist her father? She has nothing to do but accept it.' One daughter who tried to resist the decree of her father suffered for it, as her mother explains:

> She is angry and sad, but what can she do? When she wanted to go to school, her father start yelling at her and even hit her. When she went to school, her relatives went there and took her out by force.

In contrast, the schoolgirls had more support from both parents. As Alia indicates:

> When I started studying in high school, my uncle started asking me questions and was very angry at me. But thanks to my father, he did not pay attention to him, because he trusts me and has a lot of confidence in me.

The fathers of the schoolgirls indicate their trust in their daughters even though they know these norms are very hard to follow in school. As Rajeh says:

> I know that boys and girls in school party, but as long as I trust my daughter and I know who I raised, I don't have to be afraid for her. Even if she was alone with another boy inside a closed room, I trust her not to do anything wrong. As long as I trust her, there is no need to worry.

It seems that these fathers place greater importance on their daughters' education; as Ali says, 'If I wanted [to impose] these norms, I would have stopped them [his daughters] from attending school a long time ago.'

In summary, all fathers and mothers of both groups acknowledge the importance of keeping the girl's honor, but the educated fathers trust their daughters to attend school while the less-educated fathers do not raise this issue at all and place the norms above the education of the girls.

Reasons for dropping out: boys, girls and bad rumors

In the less-educated families, the importance of maintaining their daughter's honor seems to have had a major impact on decisions about her attending school. When asked why they left, most dropout girls ascribed this to the fear of romantic contact with boys in the classroom. Suha explains her reasons for dropping out:

> I studied in a weak class, where most of [my classmates] were boys. So I was not used to them. That's why I felt like a stranger and stopped attending school. Also, my best friend stopped, so I did not want to be left alone with the boys.

Suhaila also describes the school as a dangerous place for a Bedouin girl:

> School is also important, but we cannot mix with boys. Here we don't encourage girls to study, since we don't have a school for girls only. Because dangerous things happen to girls in school, and girls are not aware of these dangers. Because every girl who goes out to a mixed school, even if it is not her fault, she will suffer from bad rumors [about her].

The mothers of dropout girls give similar reasons for why the latter left school. Speaking about her daughter, Amira says:

> Her uncle and father prevented her from going to school. If people see a girl who goes out alone by herself, they will start gossiping about her and ask, 'How come she goes out alone?,' 'There is no honor,' 'We should protect our daughters these days; you can't trust a daughter to go to school by herself.' They are afraid for their daughters, because we had a lot of rumors about girls who ran away with their lovers, or you hear about a girl who was killed for family honor, or about a girl who was raped. There are a lot of accidents. That's why they prefer their daughters to stay home instead of attending school, in these hard times where boys and girls always see each other.

The fathers' explanations are of a similar tone. Wahib's statement is typical:

> I disapprove of my daughter studying in a mixed school with boys. My daughter studied until grade 9 and then we stopped her from attending school. In school there are some young boys who could shift her from the right way, you see, girls and boys are like fuel and fire, they just wait to meet each other.

Girls' schools: the preferred scholastic framework

Both generations of the less-educated group prefer separate schools for the girls. Iman expresses her wish to continue her schooling, but on one condition: 'I would like to attend school, but only in a separate school. If there was a school just for girls, then girls would focus only on their studies and their future.'

The fathers describe the existing coeducational framework as something imposed by the Israeli government. Tamer says: 'The truth is that the government imposed this kind of school on us. And I don't accept it. Because when a woman and a man are together, Satan is between them.'

The dropout girls and their parents seem to see the option of separate girls' schools as a viable solution. Indeed, some of these girls, after marrying and bearing children, and with their husbands' approval, now attend a local school for completing studies that is open only to women. As Fatma says:

> I stopped attending school in grade 8. After I married I returned to this [women's only] school. What is special about this school is that the boys are separated from the girls … Because there is no contact here between us [girls] and them [boys]. Here there are no problems at all and all the girls are together.

Sara's father explains why her continued education is now acceptable to him: 'She is not my responsibility anymore. When she is married, she can go to school if her husband approves. When I stopped her from attending school, I wanted to protect her. The most appropriate framework for protecting her is marriage.'

Both the less-educated families and the educated families believe strongly in the importance of keeping their daughters honored in public, and acknowledge the forbidden romantic relationships between the two sexes in school. However, the educated girls, with the support and trust of both parents, are able to manage in the coeducational framework, embedding their traditional values in the modern space, whereas the dropout girls and their parents perceive the coeducational school as a dangerous place and are threatened by the possibility of the bad rumors that attending such a school could arouse. The fathers of these girls do not believe their daughters could both attend a mixed school and maintain their honor. In other words, both groups are unwilling to surrender feminine traditions of honor, but the educated families found ways to embed this tradition within the modern space of the mixed schools, while the families of the dropouts perceive that space as an unacceptable danger to their daughter's honor.

Discussion and recommendations

The phenomenon of Bedouin girl dropouts exemplifies the marginalization of women as passive victims in the process of modernizing a traditional society. The case at hand shows that, when a modern state offered Bedouins an education as part of the modernization process, it did little to consider the needs of the women or the community's traditional values. Israel's coeducation policy essentially discriminates against Bedouin women, creating obstacles to their education while Bedouin men have undeterred access to schooling. The modern concept of coeducation does not benefit a society that forbids women to appear in public. In fact, by giving the Bedouins a monolithic form of education, the Israeli state has extended a limitation of the private sphere to the public sphere.

Delivering modern education to a traditional Bedouin community breaks the sacred traditional social norms of honor. Staudt (1988) argues that modernists endorse coeducation as the optimal strategy to assure equality of educational opportunities. However, while some cultural traditions do not oppose the educational access of girls and women *per se*, they do oppose full coeducation. In such cases, separate but equal facilities for men and women are considered a reasonable compromise (UNESCO, 1995). If parents are unwilling to send their daughters to mixed schools, then more schools should be built for girls. This encourages access while not challenging those cultural beliefs underlying the differential treatment of sons and daughters. In the Bedouin context, married girls who had left school can return to a modern institute that endorses traditional values—a school just for women. This creates an option for those fathers who stop their daughters from attending schools with mixed classes. In this way, the Bedouin community can avoid producing an entire generation of uneducated women.

The discourse of the global campaign to educate women and girls repeatedly cites the aim of elevating the status of women. However, the international organizations that promote such modernity projects seem to find it necessary to counteract 'traditional opposition' to the education of girls in order to enhance women's status. The findings of the current study suggest that this is not necessarily the case.

Traditional values did not fade when the Bedouin community moved to modern settlements, even when girls started attending schools. The Bedouins' perceptions of the girl's honor and other traditional feminine norms, such as veiling and exposure to men, continued to hold. In the more educated families, upholding such norms was a condition for daughters to appear in a mixed public space (the coeducational school); they were able to embed tradition in the modern space. In the less-educated families, the risk of breaking these norms kept fathers from letting their daughters finish their studies.

The modernity project in the Negev threatened the Bedouin culture by producing high residential density, increasing the likelihood of undesirable encounters for Bedouin women and thereby threatening deeply engrained cultural codes concerning women's modesty. As Fenster (1999) argues, the modernist outlook on society emphasizes a formal top-down approach of planning, which ignores the 'others' and therefore pays less attention to social relations and their expression in space. This type of western modernist theory views the direction of change as predetermined, rather than as a product of integrating cultural codes, norms, values and social attitudes. The planners' ignorance of local cultural codes only created greater control over the Bedouin women, who became more restricted by Bedouin men. The males' own ambivalence toward the transition resulted in their forming 'guards of honor' to shield their women from the new realities of the modernized towns.

This paper embraces a postmodern view of society, challenging the grand theory of modernism and emphasizing the particular and the local. Feminist contribution to postmodernist theory is in adding not only cultural sensitivity, but also gender sensitivity. In feminist terms, the approach this study wishes to promote is called 'entryism' (a term coined by Helie-Lucas [1993]), a strategy for women's action that develops from within the community and its traditional values. Entryism is suitable for women who wish to introduce changes in their communities but cannot use revolutionary approaches that contravene local traditional values. The solution of separate spaces in the educational system among the Bedouins respects distinctions based on gender and incorporates these distinctions into plans to urbanize and modernize. As Munson (2002) argues, for women whose modernist spaces limit their access to the public, the best solution is not to change the spaces already dominated by men, but to grant women their own separate but equal spaces.

Applying this postmodernist approach, we can understand how and why notions of modernity have not 'liberated' Bedouin women. When 'modern education' is imposed on the Bedouin community, women pay the price by dropping out of school. In the present case, the solution should come from the Israeli state. Bedouins in Israel are an ethnic minority that faces discrimination and lacks the means to create alternatives. If the state fails to provide the right solution, Bedouin women will remain

torn between two types of otherness: as women in traditional society and as an ethnic minority in modern thought. Release from this otherness requires new discourse, a postmodernist perception of traditional communities.

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