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Coping with 'forbidden love' and loveless marriage
Educated Bedouin women from the Negev

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A B S T R A C T ■ The issue of love and marriage is considered a taboo topic that has not yet been researched in the Bedouin community in Israel. This is especially true of the subjective experience of Bedouin women. This article describes the encounter of Bedouin women, who were the first in their tribes to study in higher education institutions, with the issue of love connections with men from 'forbidden tribes' and other difficult marital situations arising from their education and employment opportunities. I describe several types of marital situations created by this encounter: 'tragic heroines', 'matchless women' and 'women ahead of their times', the common theme being that all these women had to sacrifice their emotions for the sake of their independence. I describe their ways of struggling in terms of splitting mechanisms that shift between attachment and detachment of body–mind, reason–emotion and public–private spheres on two levels: behavior and consciousness.

Bedouin society in the Negev region in Israel has been an interesting focus for scholars since the early 1970s, especially in regard to issues concerning education, traditional norms and, recently, Bedouin women. The literature that deals with education examines the history of Bedouin schooling in

general (Abu-Rabia, 2001; Abu-Saad, 2001) and points to the lack of resources provided by Israeli authorities, but it does not explore women's narratives; women's issues are addressed only in terms of statistics. The study of educated Bedouin women deals with their experiences on campus (e.g. Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2006; Pessate-Schubert, 2004) and not women's lives once they finish their higher education. The issues of love and marriage are sensitive topics that have received little attention. This is especially true of the subjective experience of Bedouin women, owing to the difficulty in discussing such issues publicly in the Bedouin community.

Most studies of marriage in Bedouin society deal with the traditional features of accepted marital patterns. For instance, Marx (1972) describes Bedouin marriage as tribal, as its familial relations are traditionally based on a patrilineal, endogamic hierarchy, meaning that one can only marry one's first cousin. Furthermore, prior to the marriage, the couple cannot meet each other, and most marriages are the result of matchmaking on the part of both the bride's and the groom's families.

Love is considered to be forbidden in Bedouin society, because it means free choice, and such a choice could be of a mate from another (forbidden) tribe, which would threaten the tribal social order. Thus, love in Bedouin society is expressed through poems, traditional songs and big events, such as weddings (Abu-Lughod, 1990).

Very few studies examine the mechanisms that Bedouin women adopt to cope with the constraints of traditional norms regarding love and marriage. One exception is Alkrenawe's (1999) research on polygamous marriages, which presents the coping mechanisms used by women to survive tension in the relations between wives in polygamous marriages. However, this study disregards the situation of educated women, who have also recently become part of polygamous marriages. Lewando-Hundt's (1984) study on the power of Bedouin women is highly relevant to the discourse of feminism and resistance, in that it reveals informal ways of coping in traditional settings, but she, too, fails to address the coping mechanisms of educated women in marital situations.

The common thread in this literature is that it deals only with traditional women in Bedouin society. None of these writers have explored the issues of marriage and forbidden romantic contacts among educated Bedouin women. None have addressed the impact of modern elements, like education, on self-identity. The current article unveils a hidden taboo that has heretofore been ignored, exploring emotional issues in terms of the subjective experiences of educated Bedouin women.

A number of studies on Palestinian women in Israel (e.g. Erdrich, 2006) describe the university campus as a venue for the development of romantic relationships between men and women in Israeli Arab society. The current article gives voice to several educated Bedouin women, who were the first

to enter higher educational institutions in Israel, in their encounter with the issue of love and marriage with men from forbidden tribes.

There are a number of contributions this article makes to feminist Middle Eastern literature. First, most existing studies (see Manna and Haj-Yahia, 1995; Marx, 1972) discuss this issue from a traditional perspective, disregarding the women's feelings. Personal narratives of love are not mentioned, as the perception is that Bedouin women are not allowed to express emotions. The current study, in contrast, raises the voices of this forbidden issue from the margins.

A second contribution of this article is a challenge to Middle Eastern feminist discourse that rejects the concept of women's dichotomic coping mechanisms (body/soul, emotion/reason, private/public). The interviewees in this study themselves suggest that such a dichotomy exists as a result of the entrance of 'modern' features into their lives. Most institutions of higher learning in Israel are placed geographically in segregated 'national' spaces; hence, Arab villages are segregated from Israeli universities, which are located in Jewish cities. Bedouin women's entry into higher education thus exposes them to a different culture. They come to simultaneously live in two spaces: tribal Bedouin society, that demands they keep their honorable feminine values (such as veiling, not mixing with men from different tribes), and the world of the Jewish university, where they are exposed to liberal Israeli values of free choice, autonomy and individualism. But unlike other Palestinian educated women in Israel, who can live far from their homes (such as in Jewish towns by themselves) to fulfill their emotional needs or sexual desires (e.g. Erdrich, 2006; Saar, 2005), Bedouin educated women have to return to their tribes. They do so as different women than they were when they left, with modern values that change their accepted cultural model of the 'Bedouin woman'.

One aspect of exposure to modernity is the transformation of the self as a consequence of the dialect between the global and the local. The Bedouin feminine self that has experienced liberal values of modern Israeli society through exposure to higher education is a self that is torn between personal autonomy, freedom and individuality, on the one hand, and the cultural expected feminine self, which is communal, embodied in the collective and the tribal, on the other hand (Cushman, 1995). This segmentation leads to the creation of multiple selves in different contexts (Giddens, 1991). On the one hand, as the first members of their community to make a change (in terms of education), these women progress in the educational and employment areas of their lives, where they are given freedom of choice and advancement to realize their ambitions. At the same time, however, they are held back in the intimate-emotional area when they set out to freely choose their partners; here, they cannot realize their ambitions and there is a split between the ideal and reality. Their community 'returns' them to the

traditional feminine model of Bedouin society, and in this area they cannot change it.

The current study gives voice to the narratives of the first Bedouin women in their tribe (in the case of an unrecognized village) or village (in the case of a recognized settlement) to attend institutions of higher learning, as well as to be employed in the public sphere following graduation. Every participant was the sole woman from her tribe or village to receive such an education at the time. Each gained her father's approval at a time when no other man from her tribe or village let his daughter complete her high school studies or attend institutions of higher learning.

In this article, I describe different types of relations created from the encounters of these women with the issues of love and marriage: tragic heroines, 'matchless' women[1] and women ahead of their time. What is common to them all is that they gave up love for the sake of independence. I further examine different ways of coping, which fall along a continuum of attachment-detachment in both the behavioral and the consciousness spheres. In this way, I show how the educated women's expressions of feelings of love and of the idea of liberal romantic love, as well as their choice of men from outside the permitted tribal limits, is brought into a society whose tribal values do not allow for free choice of a partner, particularly not outside the tribal limits, and how this clashes with the tribal cultural ethos. As the expression of love feelings is an expression of the modern individual self (Illuoz and Wilf, 2004), something which is forbidden by the Bedouin tribal-cultural code, self-identity becomes problematic in modern life in a way that contrasts with self-society relations in traditional contexts.

Women's status in the Bedouin culture: past and present

The term 'Bedouin' derives from the Arabic word *badia*, meaning desert, that is, the Bedouin's dwelling place. Bedouins are Arab by nationality and Muslim by religion. The Negev Bedouins are part of the Palestinian Arab people who remained in their country after the 1948 war, and today they constitute part of an ethnic minority within the State of Israel, numbering 140,000.

In the late 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, the Israeli government built seven villages for them in the Negev desert in order to resettle and modernize them. These villages, called 'permanent settlements', were populated by about 50 percent of the Bedouin, but only at the beginning of the 1990s. The other half stayed on their lands in 'unrecognized villages' (not marked on any map), in a move considered illegal by the Israeli state. Those remaining on their lands did not benefit from any basic services, such as running water, electricity, sewage or schools (Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Bedouin schools were built from shacks and lacked such basic educational needs as libraries, laboratories and teaching equipment. It was not until the late 1970s that high schools were available within the villages. As a consequence, it was not until 1988 that the first female Bedouin was admitted to university in the Negev region. By 1998, only 12 women had finished their bachelor's degrees, the author of this article being one of them (Negev Center for Regional Development, 2004). Public employment of women in the Bedouin community began only in the 1980s. Thus, Bedouin women's entry into the public sphere is relatively new, accompanied by struggles within the traditional society – like women from other Middle Eastern countries.

Before the forced move to the villages, the livelihood of the Bedouins was rooted in agriculture and herding. The division of labor between men and women was clear-cut: the man was primarily responsible for guarding the land and receiving visitors, while the woman was in charge of the farming itself. Thus, men were largely dependent on the decisions and knowledge of their wives in all that concerned the family's domestic livelihood. The Bedouin woman was also invested with a considerable degree of power that involved participation in decision-making about such issues as relations with neighbors and the marriage of her daughters (Meir, 1997).

However, with the transition to the village, her roles were abrogated by modern services, and she became socially 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 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.

Lewando-Hundt (1984) suggests that resettlement into modern villages led to a paradoxical situation that particularly endangers the well-being of the women. On the one hand, Bedouin women are exposed to – but have as yet limited access to – new education and labor opportunities that can provide them with greater involvement in the public sphere. On the other, this process of resettlement has caused all of Bedouin society to abandon its traditional economic structure. The fragmentation of the Bedouin economic structure within the urban labor market has generated dependence upon external economic resources that are beyond the direct control of its members, especially Bedouin women. Consequently, these women are witnessing changes in the family economic structure that entail their own removal from power positions and their growing dependence on men. This process has also led to social constraints, as the traditional social institutions are deteriorating, placing Bedouin women at risk of being left without the internal social support that previously enabled their socialization and well-being and thus contributed to social stability.

Traditionally, marriage in the Arab world is perceived as a sociological, collective family matter more than an individual one. The family is considered the legitimate system in which to have children, and only by marriage (Barakat, 1985; Moghadam, 2004). Women are traditionally perceived as wives and mothers and are expected to marry young and stay married.

As elsewhere, marital patterns in Arab society are subject to change as part of larger transformations in the family system, which itself is influenced by political, social and economic trends. Thus, issues such as whom a woman can marry, when and how, are somewhat fluid. Two factors influence marriage and gender relations in the Arab family: high rates of educated women (education) and their strong participation in the work force (employment). Caldwell (1982) claims that the rise of educated people in the Arab world has led to major changes in the family structure: educated people usually move to live with their nuclear families, leaving their extended families.

While earlier research describes marriage in Arab society in functional terms, as not involving change, feminist studies provide narratives of women, mainly educated, who shape a new discourse on marriage. This discourse has revealed praxes of intimacy that were heretofore hidden and which take place both within and outside the traditional patriarchal order. For instance, Saar (2005) describes how Palestinian women have prohibited sexual relations outside the framework of marriage, in secret. Erdrich (2006) shows how marriage talk among educated Palestinian women in Israel is a sort of agency of the women to create social conceptions.

Traditional marital patterns under change

Although marital patterns tend to be similar in Arab societies, rules are more restrictive among the Bedouins due to the unique social structure of the tribal society. The social-organizational structure of the tribe is patriarchal, based on kinship relations. Bedouins usually marry within the tribe or family, particularly to cousins of any degree. This sort of marriage, which preserves the property held by the tribe, is perceived as promoting its economic well-being and social solidarity.

Divorce is not very common in Bedouin society, and Bedouin women are usually not interested in it, as they could lose their children to their husband or his family. A divorced woman is condemned to the social stigma of a person considered a threat because she experienced sexual relations when she was married. Nor is being single an acceptable status, especially for woman who have reached the age of 25. Many educated women pass the

'appropriate' age of marriage. While some are allowed to remain unwed upon their return to their tribe, most are forced by their families to get married. Sometimes tribal boundaries restrict them, and these women have to marry within tribal limits as second wives to married men. Marriage to a second wife is a legitimate social norm in Bedouin society despite its prohibition by Israeli law. The rate of marriage to second wives in Bedouin society in the Negev reaches 20 percent (Alkrenawe, 1999).

A crucial factor impacting marital patterns in Arab society in general, and Bedouin society in particular, is the issue of origin. The origin of the family is considered an important factor affecting the status of the tribe, the *hamula* (a group of tribes belonging to the same clan) and the family. For instance, Bedouins originally from Saudi Arabia will not allow their daughters to marry Bedouin men who are of a different origin.

The Negev Bedouins are divided into two groups of origin that are considered culturally different: the 'pure' Bedouins, the first to come to the Negev from Saudi Arabia, who are considered the original, authentic group; and the Falaheen-Bedouins, who joined them 200 years later and are originally from Egypt, Jordan and the Maghreb. The former, having arrived first, became landowners, and so are considered of higher status than the latter group, who lack property. The Bedouins call the Falaheens *humran* ('reds'), and the Falaheens call the Bedouins *sumran* ('blacks'). Relations between the two are ambivalent: on the one hand, there is social and cultural enmity; on the other hand, there is social and economic cooperation. This friction is also evident in marriage; Bedouins are unwilling for their daughters to marry Falaheen men because they are not confident of the purity of their Arabic origin (Ben-David and Gonen, 2001).

Despite these prohibitive norms, women from Bedouin tribes meet Fallaheen men in public institutions (workplaces, campuses) and have secret romantic relations with them. These cases of 'forbidden love' inevitably end without marriage. This article gives voice to several educated Bedouin women who experienced 'forbidden love' and sacrificed it to loveless marriages, or who were subjected to other painful marital situations. It shows how they adopted ways of coping, mainly within accepted marital patterns, that allowed them their freedom and independence as educated women.

It is my claim that the narratives of intimacy and love express modern ideas of individualism, freedom of choice and self-fulfillment. This discourse evinces the conflict between the development of the individual self and the collective values of tribal society, as well as the inability of these women to choose their partners or express love feelings. I describe this conflict and its meaning in terms of how Bedouin educated women define their 'self'.

Method

This article is based on the stories of love and marriage related by Bedouin women who were the first from their tribes to leave their villages to study in Israeli institutions of learning (high schools, colleges, nursing schools and universities). In order to do so, they had to get special permission from their fathers[2] or brothers, which was rarely given to girls from their tribe. This permission is what made them pioneers in their communities.

Interviews with these women were based on their life stories (Rosenthal, 1994) and were broken down into two parts: the primary story, where the researcher does not interfere; and the secondary story, where the researcher asks questions to fill in missing information. At the beginning of each interview, I asked each woman to 'tell me your life story'. While I listened, I took notes about things I wanted to develop in the second part of the interview. When they finished relating their primary story, I asked questions in the form of: 'you told me about X, can you tell more about it?' My questions were directed to hear their subjective narrative in the fields of education, employment and romantic/marital relations. In this article I present only my findings with respect to the last field. Most of the interviews were conducted at the university where the women studied. I chose this venue because it was a quiet place in which we could discuss intimate issues without fear of disturbance.

This study was conducted within the feminist approach, which recognizes gender as the most important characteristic of feminist research, affecting the participant and researcher alike. For the participant, this entails an examination of the life experiences of women, including their relations with men, by describing, clarifying and analyzing the feminine world. The second aspect of the gender component is the position of the researcher as a gendered being. Being a woman, the feminist researcher understands the positioning of the women she is studying. The shared experiences of researcher and participant tear down the dichotomy typical of positivistic research. In this way, female researchers, through their interpretations, can see to it that the private world of women participants is better understood (Harding, 1987). This closeness between researcher and participant was a function not only of gender, but also of our shared cultural-feminine story.

As an educated Bedouin woman myself, from the same society as the interviewees, and having had similar experiences in the field of relations, my own marriage narrative came up early on, due to the special interaction that took place during these meetings. My story of a struggle for 'forbidden love'[3] was widely known in the Bedouin community and shared by some of the interviewed women. Most of these women expressed their identification with my struggle at the preliminary stages of our encounter,

even before I began to record the interviews, and soon began to relate their own past love stories. Some told me that this was the first time they ever divulged their personal secrets. For some, it was a therapeutic process, as part of overcoming the pain of their lost love.

For instance, when I met one of the interviewees, her pain was very fresh, as she had just broken off her relationship with her 'forbidden love', and she began to cry every time she tried to tell her story (described in depth later on). Each time she cried, she went out to wash her face in order to relax. It took at least half an hour until she could tell me her story without crying. During the story, she compared her family and mine, and said that what she loved in my struggle was my parents' support, something she did not get herself. After telling her story, she said that she felt very relieved, because it was the first time she had spilled out her feelings to anyone. She now felt ready to tell her 'story' in public without crying. This feeling of release teaches us about the empowerment she experienced during the interview (Fonow and Cook, 1990). She seems to have gone through a therapeutic process by letting out her secret story. According to Rosenthal (1994), this empowerment happened due to the nature of the narrative encounter; when the teller tells a traumatic story explicitly, it provides a feeling that the listeners (or the researchers) acknowledge him/her and his/her pain. Thus, through the story the 'stranger' becomes familiar; through the interview this woman turned her traumatic experience into something exposed that empowered her.

For another woman, the interview was an opportunity to encourage me to learn from her mistakes. She told me of how she almost ran away with a man from a 'forbidden' tribe, but changed her mind at the last moment. She told me: 'Please don't do these things to your parents' and 'You should be strong in front of people; don't let them make you angry or sad.' It seems that, at this point, our roles as researcher and researched were reversed. She then asked me to tell her my own 'personal love story'. Although it was difficult for me to switch roles, I felt obligated to comply, as we were from the same culture, experiencing the same difficulties as educated Bedouin women. As I wrote in my researcher's journal:

> Then I started to tell her, but, as I was emotionally affected by her story, I could not restrain myself and, from my first words, the tears flowed, since I am not used to discussing my 'personal' story with others. Still, I felt secure with her. Then she asked me to tell my story even though I was crying. I started to tell it in tears but, after the second sentence, the tears stopped and I continued to tell my story with pride and confidence. Then she started to cry, putting her hands on her face. Seeing this upset me and we cried together.

These were very exciting moments for both of us. Afterwards she said to me: 'You are a very special woman and this incident will make you

stronger. It will give you motivation to do more positive things.' She empha-
sized that this meeting gave her something that she cannot explain in words,
but she is going to write about it through a poem or story. I felt that this
intimate encounter, which stemmed from the interview, empowered both of
us as Bedouin women. An expression of that was found in my second inter-
view with her, where she introduced herself as a heroine rather than a victim
and she dared to tell more about herself. It seems that the mutual empower-
ment arose from the special intimacy created between women with the same
experience unique to their common culture.

The feminist nature of this research broke down the positivistic binary
division into researcher and researched, in resistance to turning the studied
woman into an object of research. One of the ways to reject this dichotomy,
as we have seen, is by turning the interview into a conversation in which
the researcher responds to the participant's statements and the participant
can ask questions of the researcher. In this manner, the distance between
researcher and participant is reduced to the point of equality. The position
of the researcher as a woman investigating women makes her identify better
with the women and thus turns the research encounter into a social inter-
action, which in turn has a positive effect on obtaining information and on
the flow of the discourse.

Types of romantic relations: forbidden love and loveless marriage

Based on the narratives of the interviewed women about their relation-
ships and marriage stories, I was able to create a number of categories.
Although there is a certain degree of overlap, each type has a different
emphasis. Some women saw themselves as tragic heroines, who gave up
their 'forbidden love' for the sake of their families and accepted loveless
marriages[4] for the sake of their independence. Others, due to their status
as lonely, educated pioneer women, could not find a match like they
wished, as the men from their tribes were so different from them intellec-
tually and with few years of education. Still others seemed to be ahead of
their time, not only in terms of the education they attained, but also in
seeking freedom in marriage to a degree that Bedouin society was not
ready to allow.

The tragic heroines

Muna,[5] age 40, was forced to stop her education at an early age, as there
were no high schools for Bedouins at the time. As a result, she began her
emotional growth early. In her teen years, she fell in love with a man from
a 'forbidden' tribe, and this continued into her late adolescence:

I felt that, from the eighth grade, I started growing up. A 14-year-old girl does not think about these matters; today girls this age read a book, watch television. When I was this age, I was more involved with my feelings. I felt that I started very early. It was difficult for me when I started to emotionally mature. I always fought myself to preserve this side of me, the love. I always saw this relation as something that would never be fulfilled. Maybe if someone would have helped me, I would not have given up, but the difficulties began because I wanted something that was forbidden. It was like a fire that you must not get close to.

After a while, she attended a school of adult education to complete her high school diploma. Because she was a pioneer in terms of her schooling, there were no educated men in her tribe for her to marry, and thus she was forced to 'wander' outside the tribal limits: 'If I could find someone better, maybe I would have married him, but in my time there were no educated men at all.' However, she could not marry the man she loved, because her love was forbidden and she did not want to put her father in conflict with his own tribe: 'He gave me more freedom than others, he gave me all the freedom I wanted, so I could not disappoint him. He would have to fight a whole tribe, and only because of me. I couldn't do it to him, so I gave up.'

Muna had to pay a high price: the pain of love. Instead, she looked for a spouse who would give her freedom and support:

When I left him [her forbidden love], I thought of only one thing: if I want to complete my education and work, I have to marry someone who loves me. It doesn't matter if I love him. If he loves me, he will help me. I was ready to give up everything in exchange for a man who would love me for sure. And that's what happened to me. I married a man who waited for me many years, but I never felt that I loved him. But if I want to achieve something in my life, I must find someone who will give me the same freedom I had in my father's home.

Like Muna, Warda (age 40), too, fell in love with a man who was outside of the tribal limits. There was a point where she was ready to give in to her love and run away with him, but she changed her mind at the last minute when she realized the consequences of this action. She knew that, as the first woman from her village to study at university, she was a role model for other women. If she were to run away with him, people would think that higher education for women leads to 'inappropriate' behavior and this would bring shame on the whole family. Moreover, it could hurt her sisters' chances of going out to study: 'I could do anything, anything, but inside me was a deterrence, between me and myself, that I

don't want to hurt anyone from my family, I don't want people to gossip about me, because then my parents could be hurt, my sisters could be affected.'

The connective nature of the community is reflected in Warda's emotional life. Again, her life and mainly her emotional sacrifice depend on what others say about her, not only because she is a woman, but because she is a woman of new status in society, closely monitored by social surveillance mechanisms. As a result, she has to give up her love for the conceptions of others, and thus her emotional self acquires a connective nature.

She described her lost love as a story in which she is a girl who wants to run away with her lover, but as she leaves her house, she bumps into her father's robe, and then she starts talking to this robe, saying: 'I try so hard not to make you dirty, I clean you so you won't be dirty, but today you are going to be dirty, because what I am about to do will make you dirty.' In other words, she cannot go through with it, as it would 'dirty' her father's name and honor.

As a consequence of this impossible situation, Warda decided to marry a man she did not love: 'I used to call this murder. I murdered my feelings, so as to be strong in my father's eyes.' Nonetheless, there was mutual respect: 'You don't need much in a marriage. People say that marriage stops being a great love. I am married to him, and he respects and values me a lot and I respect him, too.'

Shahira, too, fell in love with a man who was outside the permitted tribal limits. Her father consented, they became engaged and a marriage contract was drawn up. But before the wedding could take place, the tribe pressured them to separate, that is, to divorce each other. For quite a while they did not actually get a divorce and continued their romantic relation secretly: 'We stayed together more than a year and a half, and every time you see someone, you are afraid that he will see us together. We were meeting at the mall, we lived a period of fear, but it was a lovely time and I passed it in peace ...' But her brothers, who could not bear this situation, said: 'Either he marries you or divorces you, we will not accept an "in-between" situation.' Eventually, after five years of secret relations, they were forced to get a formal divorce.

Finally, Suha, age 45, was the only girl in her family to study in an institution of higher learning. Although she did not experience a 'forbidden love', she, too, was forced into marriage against her will. She can be seen as the 'exceptional' tragic heroine who ultimately could only marry an 'exceptional' man.

Suha's story begins with her readiness to surrender her own wishes and marry a man that her family chose for her, for her brother's sake, so as not to put him in an embarrassing position:

My brother gave me everything, and today I cannot disobey him, because it will seem in the tribe like a woman controls him, if he follows my will. It's as if I devalue him. At that time I was very young, he was an ideal for me and he stayed like that. At the time I was ready to accept anything in order to not to hurt my brother's honor.

Suha was married against her will to a violent man, and, after a few unhappy years, she was divorced. As a divorced woman, she was an 'exception' in the society. According to Bedouin norms, any unmarried woman is deviant, but a divorced woman is more threatening than a single woman, since she is experienced with sex and so, according to Bedouin thought, might seduce men to have sex with her outside of marriage.

Despite these Bedouin perceptions of divorced women, Suha felt a strong sense of release after her divorce: 'Today I have more freedom. I feel very confident in myself, even more so than in the past.' But her family and Bedouin society labeled her as an exception: 'They did not consider me as an individual with my own personality, my own thoughts and feelings. They considered me a crazy woman – like I missed out on a house, a husband, a family and children. They saw me as arrogant.'

As a result of these pressures, she tried to remarry. Her intended spouse was a single man, but pressure from society made him leave her: 'I was a threat, I was a threat to people. Everyone who saw me as a divorced woman . . . every man, saw me as a threat, so they treated me like this.'

Suha found it difficult to attempt a third relationship, as she had lost trust in men and internalized herself as an 'exception' who would never marry a 'normal' (single or divorced) man, but could only marry one who was already married (as his second wife). Nonetheless, she did not abandon her main goal, which was to find freedom in marriage despite her status as an educated, divorced woman – for it was her status as an educated woman that had caused a gap between her and her first husband, and it was her status as a divorced woman that had threatened her second partner:

> I had the experience to know I could not marry someone available, single or divorced. Nor did I want to, because at my age I did not find anyone suitable for me, and I did not want to marry someone who would think he was better than me just because I am divorced. I did not want to live with this feeling.

Her 'solution' came in the form of an ironic third relationship: she found her happiness and freedom with a married educated man. Her surroundings accepted this situation, since Bedouin society gives legitimacy to a second wife, even if she is educated: 'It's considered to be positive among people who knew me and knew my life story, all the causes and consequences, and also society accepts a second wife.' Suha describes her situation in the following way:

> With my current husband, people asked: 'Why should he marry a divorced woman?' And people also asked: 'She's an educated woman, how can she be married as a second wife?' So people did not like either situation. So if I am divorced, I must not get married, and if I want to get married, it should only be to a married man.

Despite these social difficulties, she has felt very satisfied in this marriage: 'I saw in him a lot of things that I saw in myself. His thoughts are similar to mine, his feelings similar to mine, he really perceives the world differently from society, just like me, so I found someone crazy like me, like we have the same direction.' But her freedom was at the expense of her happiness: she had to give up the status of first wife and be happy at the expense of another wife's happiness. This situation is difficult for her: 'It is not an easy system to live in, not for him to be married to two women, and not to me to have another woman in the background. I haven't come to terms with myself one hundred percent as a second wife. It is not an easy life.' What does sweeten her bitterness is the legitimacy that Bedouin society gives to her marital state.

What happens when the first Bedouin woman to leave her tribe and family to study returns home and wants to get married, but does not find a man who resembles her in her thoughts and perceptions? If these women married, their husbands did not support their studies or career, and so they became 'others' in their marriage, different from the expected traditional, feminine model of Bedouin women who are devoted solely to their families. Most did not remain in such marriages, but rather chose to live without men in order to maintain their independence. These 'matchless' women created an option of being alone, expressed in four ways: divorce, divorce without marriage, separation and remaining single.

The divorcee

Rana, over 50, was the first woman from her tribe to get an education; she attended a boarding school in the north of the country, where she studied most of her teenage years. When she returned to her Bedouin village, she was unique, and many men pursued her. But as none were educated men of her caliber, she refused them all: 'For them, I was the rose who is blooming in the desert and everyone wants to pick it. At that time I was different, my perceptions were different, so I refused all of these rose pickers. And why is that? Because they were not suitable for me.' Rana was looking not only for an educated man, but also a supportive one: 'When I looked at these men, I knew where they came from, what they would ask of me eventually. Instead of taking me forward, they would make my life regress. They would make me sit at home and only do the housework, and I can't accept that.'

When Rana turned 23, an age at which her family and society expected her to be married, her father stepped in and forced her to marry an un-educated man. It did not take long for the distance between the couple to become palpable, and her husband started to become jealous of her:

> Our marriage did not last a year, I already had my first son. For three years, with the two of us in different places [they were separated], people got in the middle and tried to work it out between us, but I said it would not work. This man can't find himself with me. This is a man who always says to me: 'Why do people love you and hate me? Why do they listen to you and not to me?' It's like you are a bigger person and he wants to minimize me.

Her husband's attempts to restrict her independence eventually led to divorce, which, from Rana's point of view, was the path to her independence.

The divorcee who never married

Reem, age 40, is a divorced woman who has never actually married. Her story needs to be understood within the context of Muslim law (*sharia'*). According to it, an engagement is considered binding once the marriage contract is drawn up. Thus, breaking off the engagement requires a formal divorce.

Reem was forced to be engaged by marriage contract after she finished her higher education:

> My family started to say after I finished my studies: 'You should already be married' … and it was hard to choose, you should marry only from the family, but I could not find someone for me. I saw the men who were my relatives as my brothers, it was impossible. When my cousins asked for my hand, I felt they were not the people that I want to live with, not emotion-ally or intellectually. I was better than them in all respects, so it was diffi-cult for me to choose someone. If he is not educated, it's okay, but there is no emotional tie between us.

Eventually, under the pressure of her family and tribe, she had to accept one of her cousins. But she soon realized that she could not bear the forced engagement:

> Even if I was engaged under social pressure, it was very hard and I felt that I could not continue with it. I felt it was not for me, I suffered, really suffered. I could not talk to him, contact him, I always kept a distance between me and him. I didn't want to marry a man that I did not want. After a month I felt terrible. His family started to bring furniture to our supposed house.

> Our engagement day was a sad day for me. I did not cooperate and I gave them the feeling that I was not accepting this. So I appeared in my house-dress, I dressed that day in the ugliest dress I had. I gave them the feeling that I don't want them. So I had to decide that I must break off this engagement.

Reem was forced to fight for the divorce, and she had to deal with the stigma of being a 'divorced' woman:

> I had to ask for a divorce from a man that I never actually married. I had to say what the *kadi* said, I had to say 'my husband' in court. At this word I stopped. I said to the *kadi*, I can't say 'my husband', because he is not my husband. I swear I could not say it, I could not get this word out of my mouth. How could I? First of all, I never married him, but the *kadi* said, 'You have to spell it out.' They started to laugh in court. I don't know how it got out of my mouth eventually.

It took her a full 10 years to actually get the divorce from her husband.

The result of this experience was an inability to connect emotionally with other men:

> I never thought to have relationships with other men. Why? I don't know. I was pressured by the people who studied with me and by the people who worked with me, they could not see me as an unmarried woman, and this is out of their love for me. They always said: 'It's too bad you can't be a mother, you could raise your children with values that not every person can.' Sometimes I cannot connect emotionally with men. Up to now I have not had any emotional relation with anyone.

The separated wife

Khitam, age 45, has a rather unusual way of life for a Bedouin woman of her time. She is married, studies and works. Because of her work, she goes out at uncommon hours of the day, as opposed to the other women of her village, who all stay at home. As this lifestyle conflicted with her husband's traditional perceptions, he tried to restrict her movements:

> From the day I was born, I was a free person, and suddenly someone comes and tries to control you, 'Do this, don't do that', and you are not used to these things. You are free, have your own opinion and suddenly someone comes and tells you 'no!' First of all, I didn't accept it. We had an agreement before marriage that I would continue my studies and work. Everything was clear from the start. Then, after marriage, you live with a person who does not think the same way as you do . . . I could not just have children and do nothing else.

As a working mother, Khitam divided her time between her family, her studies and her work: 'When I started studying, I divided up the days of the week: two days for my daughter, two days for my husband, and two days for myself in which I study and work.' But her husband did not accept this and the gaps between them continued to grow: 'Imagine yourself living with a man who does not move. You walk and he stays, and he will not go with you. He stays where he is.' Although this man was her own choice, he turned out to be unsupportive and restrictive, and eventually she decided to leave him. Not only did she have to fight for a divorce, but she also had to find a way to keep her daughter, who, upon their divorce, would go with her father as of age six, according to Islamic law. As a result, Khitam continued to be married to her husband, though they were separated. It was not for several years, when he took a second wife, that she finally felt it was safe to get the divorce.

The single woman

Najah is a highly educated single woman, close to 30 years of age. She had to choose a man from the permitted limits of her tribe, but, as she says: 'In these families I did not find someone like me.' Thus, the only option she had was to stay single. She tells about her struggle with this issue:

> I don't know how to address this issue, but I want to answer in a general way. Our existence in this society, despite all its struggles, has effects on our personalities. After all that happened to me, at some point I decided to avoid this issue [marriage]. I wanted to finish my studies first. I don't want to hear about this issue at all. When I finished my first year [of school], and then my first degree, and I started to work, we came back to the question of 'who you are allowed to marry', men only from certain families. In these families I didn't find anyone like me, so I said the issue is closed. Only when I feel I can share my life with a man who will have the same perceptions and thoughts as me, only then . . .

Najah's situation is better than others, as she is able to remain single.

Women ahead of their time

Sabah, who is now over 50, was the first woman in her tribe to study in an institution of higher learning. When she asked to marry a man outside the permitted tribal limits, her uncles rejected her request. Her suffering increased when, some years later, her family allowed other girls, like her younger sisters, to get married outside the family (but not outside the tribal limits): 'In my family today, all of them got married, [but] I didn't. I only

work and go back home. They, whoever comes and asks for their hand, the family agrees immediately. None is opposed to them.'

For Sabah, the freedom to choose came too late. She was ahead of her time and of society's perception of marriage. Remaining single was not an active choice:

> Today, it's no problem, it doesn't matter where the man [I would want to marry] is from, they [her family] would agree, today the freedom is mine, but I . . . Today, I don't have any desire for marriage. They broke my heart, they destroyed my future. Ten years of resistance, after ten years, my heart is broken. The human being cannot stays as it is, it's like a rose, at first you find it open and then it fades with time.

Coping mechanisms

Having described various cases of romantic relations experienced by Bedouin women who were the first in their villages to go out to get a higher education, I now describe the unique coping strategies they use on two levels: in their consciousness and/or in their behavior. In the sphere of consciousness, these women cope by separating their body from their spirit, their emotions from their reason. On the behavioral level, they separate their private lives from their public lives. All of these strategies involve experiences of detachment between opposites, or experiences of simultaneous attachment and detachment. In that sense, these women live in conflicting states that I call splitting.

Conscious detachment between body and spirit

Suha, the tragic heroine who gave up her freedom for her brother's honor, in order to keep her family united, and paid the price of a violent marriage, chose to detach her spirit from her body in order to cope. Since she was married in body to an unwanted man, she gives her body (by marriage), but not her spirit or soul. She describes this situation through experiences of detachment of the body from the soul:

> You give them your body. If this is what they want, and what they like, so take it. For a time, I lived like that, all my thoughts, my soul and my feelings were put aside, and it was one of the strategies I lived by. These were the mechanisms that helped me survive with my first husband.

Employing this strategy, Suha constructed her own world and detached herself from others:

> I don't belong to him, not to his thoughts, not to his *hamula* [clan], so he does not belong to me. I do not belong. It helped me a lot because I felt that, at least from the inside, I am different. And I continued, at least, to live differently in my perceptions, thoughts and spirit. I have my own world and avoid his. Yes, I live in two worlds; it's not an easy way to live, but you live it aware of what you are doing.

Conscious detachment between emotion and rationality

Muna, who gave up her forbidden love for a man who would give her freedom (the same freedom and independence she enjoyed from her father), copes by detaching her emotions from her reason:

> It's better to work from your head, not from your heart, and it was very difficult, but I made my decision. Nothing could help me, so I had to make this separation. It was hard to leave behind something that lives inside you, your feelings. You don't leave your feelings, but you reach a state of detachment and you have to do it.

Imaginary detachment between private and public

Rana, who married a man she did not want and who was not supportive of her, coped by detaching herself from him by going out to the public sphere. She escaped to her work world, which helped her forget her husband, at least temporarily:

> The hours I hated most was the nighttime, because I came back from work and he came back from work, and we had to meet at home. I waited every night for the morning to come, and when it came, I took my purse and ran off to my work. It's like running away from the devil.

Because of the distance between herself and her husband in the private sphere, Rana sought the company of others like her, educated people, at her workplace. In this way she detached herself physically from her husband and from the private sphere as a wife, and mentally joined her professional colleagues: 'The alternative was that, when you came to work, even if all of them were men, I found people to talk with, and when I went to study after work, I found people to speak with, Arabs and Jews. So I felt some sort of satisfaction.' This detachment mechanism was imaginary, as Rana was still a married woman who 'belonged' to her husband, but it helped her to survive her life with him.

Similarly, Reem, who was forced into an unwanted engagement and had to fight her spouse 10 years to get her divorce, coped by escaping to the public sphere:

I worked a lot at the time. What I had at home did not affect me in my work. On the contrary, it gave me motivation and power to continue my life. I went to work until afternoon, came back home and had my conflicts and struggles again. There were times that I did not speak to my father or mother, but I was willing to suffer so I would eventually get my divorce and not live with someone I could not stand.

As a mechanism of coping, she created in her mind an imaginary situation of her spouse's non-existence:

When I saw him in the street, if I could have killed him, I would have. At the same time, I denied his existence. Sometimes I walked near him in the street and he would try to say hello, and I avoided him, as if he didn't exist. For me this is a man who does not exist on this earth.

Today she describes her years of struggle as a time she does not want to remember: 'I erased them even if they exist. You feel that 10 years have passed, but I did something in those years, I continued my studies and work. I was not the girl who just sits at home and fights. I had a problem but I made it into a minor problem.'

'In between' situations: simultaneous attachment and detachment

Khitam's experience of attachment and detachment characterized her whole life. For many months of the year, her parents would wander alone with their herds to another geographical area and leave Khitam and her sisters alone in their home. This situation promoted her independence and eventually led her to choose her own mate, and, when the choice proved to be a poor one, to seek a divorce.

Khitam found herself struggling between the fear of losing her daughter to her husband and the fear of returning to an oppressive marriage. She also wanted her daughter to have a united family with both of her parents: 'I thought a lot. I asked myself, how can I keep my daughter with me? She was little and she had to have a normal home with two parents. Then I gave up and came back to him.' She thus found a middle solution to her dilemma – neither married nor divorced, but separated: 'When I knew that, according to Islamic law, I could lose my child, I decided that I don't want to get a divorce, I want to stay like this. I don't want to get a divorce in order to keep my daughter with me. So we stayed in this situation for seven years.'

This solution returned her freedom and independence, as she was no longer attached to her husband, and at the same time gave her daughter a united family. Khitam raised her daughter herself, but encouraged her to visit her father: 'Although I distanced myself from him, I always told my

daughter that he is your father and you should always visit him. I did not want her to have problems.' It was not until her husband married a second wife and created his own family that Khitam decided to actually divorce him. Moreover, although she lived alone, she kept up a relationship with the second wife, so as to create a 'family' for her daughter, a connection to her half-brothers and sisters: 'Every time his wife had a child, I took my daughter to visit her in hospital and we bought the baby a gift.'

Another dimension of detachment that Khitam experienced was in her emotional life. When I asked her if she is interested in meeting another man, she answered 'no', because she devotes her life to her daughter. She no longer seeks a man or love; all her cares are for her daughter and her own freedom.

Attachment-detachment as an imaginary experience

Shahira, who was engaged by marriage contract to her 'forbidden love' but then forced to divorce him, experienced an intermediate period of a year and a half where the romantic relation continued secretly. This created a situation of attachment-detachment that moves between the imaginary and reality:

> I was formally still his wife, I was not divorced yet. People thought we were divorced, so many men came to ask for my hand. But I could not look at other men, because my heart was with him and I was married to him, I mean I was considered to be married to him. We were not divorced and still married formally on paper, so what were we? We were hanging, not up and not down.

This paradoxical situation positioned their relation as an imaginary one. In the face of society she was considered to be divorced from him, but in reality, they were still married. This reality is an imaginary situation that Shahira created for herself in order to survive and cope in this unwanted situation of being neither married nor divorced.

Contradictory worlds

The narratives of the educated Bedouin women express a craving for individualism and free choice – liberal ideas that contradict perceptions of marriage in Bedouin collective society, which still sees it as based on patrilineal family relations, where the individual cannot express feelings of love or intimacy. These narratives need to be analyzed in terms of the dual cultural positioning of these women. The first Bedouin women to go out to study relate a departure from their tribal world, in its Arab space, with its

collective values regarding marriage and women, to the higher educational
world, located in Jewish spaces, with its liberal values of free choice, indi-
vidual autonomy, ambition and competitiveness, followed by a return to
their tribal world, bringing these new values with them. I am not arguing
that Bedouin tribal society itself is not exposed to these Israeli cultural
values; Bedouin women and particularly men encounter them in their daily
lives (e.g. shopping, working in the Israeli sector). But for the first genera-
tion of educated Bedouin women, this was the first time such values were
'imported' into their culture, changing the expected model of a Bedouin
woman.

One of those 'imported' ideas is romantic love, which Giddens (1992)
and Illuoz and Wilf (2004) see as a value that engenders the main emphasis
of modernity – where priority is given to the individual, autonomy in
personal choices and democratization. Love has become a central and legit-
imate value of the self with the rise of modern individualism as a dominant
ideology. In western discourse, romantic love in its ideal sense embodies
two elements of individualism: through love, the individual expresses
his/her uniqueness and falls in love with another individual's uniqueness;
and through love the individual realizes his/her absolute right to choose a
spouse, where every choice is perceived as equally legitimate, regardless of
religion, race, sex, nation and status. In Bedouin society, in contrast, the
meaning of marriage and family is not rooted in 'pure relations' (Giddens,
1992), but rather in what I call 'impure relations' based on racial and status
differences. Individual love feelings endanger accepted marital patterns, and
thus might unravel the collective tribal structure of Bedouin society, which
is based on solidarity and on a distinction between tribes of different
statuses.

The result is that Bedouin women find themselves torn between their will
to fulfill their choice in a man out of love, on the one hand, and consider-
ations of the cultural fabric they belong to, on the other. In the words of
Illuoz and Wilf:

> Feelings are shaped by cultural meanings, especially by cultural perceptions
> of the self. These meanings reduce the degree of autonomy of the individual
> vis-à-vis the group, his rights and obligations, and the ways in which mutu-
> ality and solidarity are understood and work within the framework of a
> given social order. (2004: 208)

Herein lies the conflict and dichotomy that is imposed on these women in
their contradictory worlds. Succeeding in their educational and professional
lives and given the social legitimacy to attend institutions of higher learning,
at the same time they are blocked by tribal limits in terms of their intimate
emotional choices, and in this respect society treats them the same way it
treats the traditional feminine model. Thus, a dichotomy forces itself upon

them: they live in two worlds, succeeding in their 'public' lives, but unable to bring their most intimate choices to fruition.

This dichotomy reflects the inner conflict between the individual self of the women and their collective cultural-social self. Foucault (1978) suggests that, in vulnerable moments of stress, when the framework of ontological security is threatened, the feeling of the self as safe in the body is lost. Consequently, individuals preserve a division between their self-identities and they put 'performance' into different social contexts. This situation leads to a disembodied self. Essentially, two selves are created: the individual self and the social self. In the case of the educated Bedouin women, choosing their love from forbidden tribes stems from their individual selves, but giving up their forbidden love for the sake of sparing their fathers another tribal battle stems from their social selves.

Unable to realize their choices and fulfill their intimate wishes as individual educated women, these women feel bereft and alone in a world in which they lack psychological support[6] and a sense of security (Giddens, 1991). Some cope at the level of consciousness (which is neither behavioral nor active resistance to the oppressor), entering an undefined zone, a third space outside the limits of the hegemonic space, where they express what Jameson (in Sandovel, 2000) calls 'differential consciousness'. That means that the resistance to the dominant power lies mainly in creating the difference between 'I' and the 'other'. The most apt expression of this resistance is Suha's statement: 'You give them your body, not your soul.' Such use of anything available to negotiate with, cope with and speak back to power, is a means of survival that Jameson and Barter call 'cognitive mapping' (see Sandovel, 2000). Its usage entails mapping, in our consciousness, of our positioning and place in society as an imaginary position. Such mapping is possible only when we combine our existentialist position with our abstract position, decide from here about our desired status and continue from there to create a releasing ideology. The release in this case is in Suha's feeling that she does not belong to her husband, because she does not submit to him in her thoughts. She separates her body from her soul, positioning herself in her own place, distinct from the inferior position that she actually occupies. In this way she turns herself into a subject and releases herself, in her mind's eye, from male domination. In other words, the resisting subject does not live a lie, but rather lives in a disguise that allows him/her to survive. Or in Suha's words: 'These were the mechanisms that helped me survive with my ... husband.' This is also true of the women who detached their emotions from their reason as a means of coping with the loss of their 'forbidden love' and forced marital situations. They, too, resist at the level of consciousness. Escape to reason through detachment from one's emotions is a rational conscious choice.

Other women cope through actual detachment between private and

public lives. The women who choose this option embrace the public sphere, where their romantic relations are not positioned and do not interfere, and force themselves to forget the private (relationship) sphere in their consciousness. This is a coping method that combines behavior and consciousness, but is also imaginary splitting, for although they detach themselves from the private, as if it does not exist, in reality it does. This imaginary character is evident in Shahira's experience. Even as she knows that her engagement to her 'forbidden love' will never come to fruition and she can never have the relationship she craves, she continues to live her emotional life as if they will be married, living in a reality sphere that is actually imaginary.

The educated Bedouin women in this article wear masks in a reality that does not enable them to express their real feelings and will. In his book, *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon (1968) describes the language of the oppressed. It does not involve speaking the language of the dominant culture, or any other language for that matter. Rather, it entails wearing a mask, that is, using a language that hides the oppressed so they can promote their needs. The black skin and the white mask cover something that remains unseen. While the dominant power erases the identity of the oppressed, there is an inner space where the black skin and white mask meet, and in this space body and movement are distinguished from one another. It is within this space, which is neither inner nor outer, that practices of release are created. Some of the educated Bedouin women wear the mask of succumbing to their father's or brother's will, while inside themselves, they are resistant and angry. Others wear the mask of promotion in the public sphere that covers the private sphere. Khitam, who remained separated from her husband for so many years, wore the mask of a united family for her daughter's sake.

These ways of coping are considered methods of resistance by post-structuralist scholars. Derrida (1967) labeled them '*différance*' in the sense of being different, far from the social order. Foucault (1977) argues that resistance exists even if it does not have a formal mode of expression (such as political). Such ways of resisting afford a new sort of power. The educated Bedouin women lack any formal support system (therapeutic or otherwise) in their villages, and so they cope with only what is left for them: their mind and their behavior. Their resistance and coping is internal and hidden; they resist with their inner selves so they can continue to belong to their community and maintain the support of their fathers. Due to their pioneering status as educated women, they feel that they have to maintain the honorable status expected of them as role models in the eyes of society, in order to keep their access to the public sphere (and their independence) and so as not to hurt other women's chances to access higher education.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 By 'matchless' I mean that they are unable to find a mate who is suited to their educational background.
2 The place of men (especially fathers) in the narratives of the educated Bedouin women is highly meaningful. In patriarchal societies, women require their fathers' approval in order to go out into the public sphere, such as to institutions of higher education (Weiner-Levy, 2003). While the place of fathers in the lives of the educated women is beyond the scope of this article, I do claim that the father's support ends where such support is needed the most – namely, with respect to free choice of a marriage partner. The fact that Bedouin women sacrifice this choice so as to save their fathers from yet another battle with the tribe is a significant issue discussed in this study.
3 Some of the interviews were held while I struggled for my marriage; others were held after I succeeded in marrying my 'forbidden love'.
4 By 'loveless marriage' I mean marriages that were chosen in exchange for true love. In this sense they are loveless.
5 All names are pseudonyms. There is no mention of occupations, as that might expose the identities of these women.
6 This topic is sensitive and taboo in Bedouin society, as choosing someone outside of tribal limits out of love involves rebellion against accepted societal norms, especially for the first generation of women who left to get a higher education. Thus, the women did not dare speak of this with family members, male or female, or turn to a formal therapeutic system (which was not available at the time, at any rate, as these were the first women to work in this field).

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