Permission to Rebel: Arab Bedouin Women's Changing Negotiation of Social Roles

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MOST STUDIES ANALYZING the Bedouin women of the Negev in Israel describe this population as marginalized and powerless, blaming the traditional nature of Bedouin society.[1] This body of literature describes the Bedouin woman as a victim dependent on the male collective for support, unable to fight or cope in her own society. Nonetheless, a few studies describe her as an empowered contributor to society or to social change, through the theme of secondary or higher education.[2] These latter studies, most of which were carried out by women, point to the Bedouin woman's agency while highlighting the interaction between the power of tradition and the effects of colonization.

The current study, which analyzes the Bedouin woman's power and contests her marginalized status, contributes to existing literature in several ways. First, although studies of the Bedouin community in general and of Bedouin women in particular have focused on a single generation, the current research examines three generations–daughters (schoolgirls and dropouts), mothers, and grandmothers. This helps to highlight two main issues: whether these women, as three generations that live in the same space but encounter different realities, have different ways of struggling with their lives and whether one generation influences the next in their

ways of struggling. For example, is power passed from mother to daughter as knowledge to contest, adapt, and transform her reality?

Second, most studies have focused on more privileged Bedouin women. For instance, Anat Passate-Shubert and Ronit Halevi[3] analyzed Bedouin women who studied at institutions of higher learning, describing them as leaders and change agents. In contrast, the present study looks not only at the struggle of educated girls but also sheds light on a more neglected group of Bedouin women–girls who have dropped out of school–and aims to show their own way of struggling as different from that of their educated peers.

Third, other studies of female dropouts from the Bedouin community have described the girls as objects rather than subjects. For instance, as Jewish men, Yosef Ben-David and Ron Hos[4] could not enter the female space in this gender-segregated society, for Bedouins forbid any public contact between women and men. They were therefore forced to inter-view the dropout girls through informants from the local village. In contrast, as a Bedouin woman, I was able to hear the voices of these girls directly, interviewing them face to face and entering their world. More-over, although Ben-David and Hos focused on the reasons for dropping out, mostly blaming the traditional nature of Bedouin society, my study examines the ways these girls cope and struggle in their everyday lives with internal Bedouin and external colonial forces that cause them to leave school, reflecting the girls' seeds of resistance and untapped power within the context of Bedouin society. The aim of this study is to show that women from the margins–that is, those who are not major actors in the public sphere and are essentially invisible–also have an individual face and, more importantly, have their own way of seeing their lives that is both similar to and different from that of the educated girls.

The Dual Marginality of Bedouin Women

The Bedouin woman is marginalized twice: once, as part of a Bedouin minority among a Jewish Israeli majority and an Arab minority, and, again, as a female in a Bedouin male-dominated society. This dual discrim-ination affects women's status in all aspects of their lives.

Ethnic Marginality in a Jewish-Majority State. The Bedouins of the Negev are among the Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 and today comprise a minority group among Israeli citizens. From 1948 until the late 1960s, the Negev Bedouins lived under the Israeli military administration, as did all Arabs in Israel. This meant that they were isolated from Arab populations in other parts of Israel and needed special permits to leave their restricted area in search of jobs or education.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Israeli state developed plans to re-settle the entire Negev Bedouin population into seven towns. However, only 50 percent of the Bedouin population of 120,000 was actually transferred to the planned towns (known as "recognized villages"), while the other half continue to live in "unrecognized villages" in the former restricted territory on their own lands. These unrecognized villages lack basic services, including plumbing, electricity, roads, clinics, and high schools.

Bedouins (whether in recognized or unrecognized villages) are discriminated against by Jewish Israeli society and marginalized within Arab society in all aspects of life. They receive few economic, cultural, and social resources. Like other Arab communities, they tend to be among the poorest people in Israel; they lack an industrial tax base, depending more heavily on residential property taxes, and they receive less money from the state than Jewish localities. Arab schools lack sufficient classrooms, and existing ones (especially among the Bedouins) are in poor condition, with fewer libraries, sports facilities, and laboratories than Jewish schools.

Like other Arabs, Bedouins are affected by such political issues as the Intifada and the politicization of Islam, but their main concerns are the struggle for recognition of their land and daily survival. Analysis of the broader political context is beyond the scope of this paper; instead, the focus here is on the day-to-day lives of Bedouin women.

Gender Marginality in Bedouin Society. Bedouin women are subject not only to ethnic discrimination as Bedouins, but also to gender discrimination as women. Male domination is legitimized in Bedouin society by two cultural codes primarily affecting the lives of women: the sexual and the collective.

Sexuality plays a dual role in a woman's life. As a vehicle of procreation, she is both marginalized and important. Her primary reproductive role emphasizes her connection to uncontrolled nature, which restricts her ability to be morally equal to men. But her procreative power also makes the woman the center of homemaking and the bearer of tradition; as such, she is highly protected by Bedouin traditional law, and any offense against her may lead to revenge by her collective male kin.[5]

Similarly, girls are not permitted to interact with the male public sphere.[6] The need for modesty is reflected in the concept of tahashum (shamefulness and self-control), which requires modest, traditional dress for girls and women alike. In this context, the veil is meant to defend females from sexual harassment.[7]

At the same time, the collective code plays an important role in female marginalization. The Bedouin woman is driven to marriage for the sake of the collective rather than for her own personal interest. As such, she is meant to increase the size and power of the group (her extended family). Marriage occurs according to tribal relationships and always takes place within tribal limits. The collective code also infiltrates the individual's life; any person who wants to be honored in her/his group has to obey the group's codes by unconditional loyalty to the tribe, and any shameful behavior weakens the power of the group. In order to prevent this, women are constantly watched.[8]

In the name of these two codes, many Bedouin women have restricted access to the public sphere, especially to education and employment. To this day, many girls do not attend school because their families are afraid they will bring shame to the tribe by meeting boys from other tribes. Thus, we can see that these codes place the Bedouin woman in a paradoxical position: in her important role as honor preserver, she is highly restricted.

The Intersection of Ethnic and Gender Marginality. The Bedouin woman's gender marginality is exacerbated by her association with an ethnic minority that is subject to discrimination. This ethnic discrimination takes place within an organizational process created by the Israeli state, whose victims are Israeli Arabs in general, the Bedouin community in particular and, even

more so, the Bedouin women within that community, especially in regard to the areas of education and employment.[9]

When half the Bedouin population of the Negev was displaced from the desert to recognized villages, they benefited from a variety of services—stores, banks, parks, schools. However, most of these benefits were, in practice, denied to women, owing to their lack of access to and familiarity with the public sphere.[10]

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.[11] 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.

Julian Lewando-Hundt suggests that resettlement into modern villages led to a paradoxical situation that particularly endangers the well-being of women.[12] On the one hand, Bedouin women are exposed to—but have as yet limited access to—new educational 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.

The marginalization of Bedouin women is apparent in reported employment statistics. For instance, in 2003, more than 18 percent of women in Rahat village and 24 percent in Kseifa village (both located in the Negev) were registered as unemployed. Moreover, the national unemployment rate for Bedouin women in that year (21 percent) was considerably higher than for Bedouin men (9 percent), according to the Statistical Bureau.[13] Although these percentages may seem low, they do not reflect the full reality, as many Bedouin women, especially women from unrecognized villages, are "invisible" because they cannot reach the employment offices due to lack of transportation to the town in which such services are offered. Moreover, because they are not documented, these women are unable to receive unemployment benefits.

It is important to recognize that the struggle of the Bedouin woman is not only against the limitations of tradition: Israeli state policy is another force marginalizing Bedouin women. Even if a Bedouin girl could convince her parents of the importance of attending public school, the state negates the possibility by not allowing her to study under culturally appropriate conditions. Thus, even if she manages to overcome these limitations, her possibilities are blocked by lack of appropriate opportunities in the public sphere. In this doubly marginalized situation, how do these women cope?

Women's Struggle in the Middle East and North Africa

When examining the strategies that women use to change their status, it is imperative to consider their cultural context. Life experiences in a given geographic area determine the sort of feminist struggle carried out in that area. Arab women in the Middle East share a common experience: they are generally defined by the name of a man—their father or spouse. Even the most powerful woman is framed by patriarchal limitations, which can

endanger her well-being if she does not remain within traditional boundaries.[14] Margot Badran claims that the strategies employed by Arab women in their feminist struggles depend on their awareness of gender limitations and their willingness to destroy those limitations in order to create an equitable system between the sexes.[15] But women who try to break the barriers will likely find themselves outside the social circle. That is why Muslim women from the Middle East apply strategies that enable them to stay within cultural boundaries, rejecting some Western feminist norms that could exact from them too high a price.

In a system where women cannot exceed patriarchal limits, they often fight through their culture and religion. For instance, many Muslim feminists consider the veil a powerful symbol. They see it as a safety net that allows them to move freely in the public sphere and protects them from sexual harassment. In her study of Bedouin women in Egypt, Leila Abu-Lughod shows how they find cultural ways to express their resistance to male power: they smoke cigarettes in secret, and they gossip and dance when they are alone, far away from men.[16] This strategy is particularly useful in a sex-segregated society, as it allows the women to act freely in the absence of men.

Another strategy is used by Arab/Palestinian women in Israel to challenge local political leadership. Using a pragmatic strategy, they try to improve women's status through collaboration with the existing social order, adapting to the changing needs of the society—and not by revolutionary means, which would disrupt the social order. These women look for acceptable ways to break into the male public sphere, for example, by turning to a traditional male figure, who will sanction their actions, before making any moves.[17]

Yet another strategy that strengthens women's power and reduces their dependency on men is networking. Female networks allow women to exercise power and independence within society: "The feeling of community is important in strengthening confidence in one's abilities, and in establishing a common solidarity and consciousness."[18] In her study of women in Saudi Arabia, Soraya Al-Torki noted that the very segregation of the sexes that prevented women from gaining access to positions of authority in the wider society created conditions for women to influence

male decisions.[19] Through traditional networks of kinship and friendship, women not only controlled information needed for marriage arrangements but also used this information to further their own interests. These ways of resisting are considered informal power structures that protect the individual woman's interests within the family and society. This is an alternative meaning of power, unlike the masculine notion that focuses on formal power structures, such as access to parliament or the labor market.[20]

As some of the above examples illustrate, the most widespread way that oppressed groups, such as Arab women, struggle and exercise informal power without endangering the social order is by looking for support in the tribal or family network. These ways of struggling have been variously conceptualized: Aimée Muna and Lucas Hagelan's concept of "interism" reflects the belief that Arab women should cooperate with tradition and the community as a tactic to manipulate inside the social order while changing it at the same time. Deniz Kandiyoti referred to this as a sort of bargaining with patriarchy: women increase their safety and survival in the face of oppression, a variation on the game's rules. They negotiate their social order with men, resisting traditional limits in a passive way and following cultural norms (for example, modest dress) in exchange for protection of their honor and the opportunity to receive schooling.[21]

All the mentioned studies describe the women's struggles as a consequence of their cultural, social, and/or political contexts, which are shared by women in the Middle East and North Africa. The common theme of this body of literature is that Arab women struggle inside and against the boundaries without threatening the social order. In fact, they use traditional forms as a source of activism; they use male support and family relationships as a means of defense and a lever for building their power.

Whereas the aforementioned ways of struggling can all be seen as *visible actions* within patriarchal limits, the current study aims to analyze additional ways of struggling that are *invisible*—those that fall in the arenas of language and consciousness rather than action. Furthermore, in addressing the unique struggle of Bedouin women in the Israeli Negev against the cultural background of Middle Eastern women's life experiences, this research contributes an additional context that influences the

struggle–intergenerational transmission between mother and daughter. Specifically, it shows how the perceptions of daughters, mothers, and grandmothers of Bedouin customs, education, women's status, marriage, and religious definitions reveal their different resistance strategies. Looking at the differences and commonalities between the struggles of three generations of women helps to unveil the nuances of the Bedouin woman's invisible resistance to patriarchal limitations.

T H E   S T U D Y

In contrast to the few existing studies on Bedouin women whose subjects (mainly educated women) had relatively easy access to the public sphere (for example, Passate-Shubert's), the present research focuses on and compares two groups: girls who attended school and girls who dropped out of school. It offers the latter group of dropouts, which is often considered powerless and unable to fight the limitations society places on them, the opportunity to express their own mode of resistance. In order to enrich this information with an intergenerational dimension, the study also delves into the opinions and thoughts of mothers, as well as a group of older women, hereafter referred to as the "grandmothers," although they are not literally the grandmothers of the women studied.

Also included in the research were the girls' fathers. The decision to interview a male group rests on the assumptions that Bedouin society is male-dominated and that decisions are made primarily through men. As such, it is the Bedouin girl's father who designs her fate. It is important to examine fathers' perceptions of their daughters, so as to understand better the coping mechanisms of women within this power structure.

There were seventy participants in the study: ten girls (age seventeen) from each group, ten mothers (ages forty to forty-five), and five fathers (ages forty to forty-five) from each group; plus twenty grandmothers (over the age of fifty). Most of the schoolgirls' mothers had six to nine years of schooling and seven to nine children each. In contrast, most of the dropouts' mothers had less schooling (only 30 percent studied until the sixth grade) and had more than ten children each. All of the schoolgirls' fathers were educated (at least twelve years of schooling) and employed, while most of the dropouts' fathers had little schooling (at

most seven to nine years) and were unemployed. All the grandmothers had been married at the age of fifteen or sixteen, had no schooling, and were unemployed.

The first two generations–schoolgirls and dropouts and their mothers and fathers–participated in semi-structured ethnographic interviews that allowed me to hear each individual voice. They were given enough room to explore their views (on education, religion, cultural norms, and so on) and describe their life events.[22] All the interviews took place at their homes. Fathers were not present at the interviews of the daughters but were sometimes present at the interviews of the mothers.

The sensitive nature of the interviews made it difficult to locate the families of dropouts who would be willing to participate. I first asked the principal of a local high school for a list of girls who had left school that year (2000) and who were seventeen years old. Because inaccurate address registration delayed locating these girls, I then used the networking approach, turning to local people I know socially or through work in order to locate these girls by their family names. When I managed to find the girls, I first had to ask for their fathers' approval: this was done by my networking people (due to my sensitive status as a Bedouin woman). For the most part, the fathers refused to discuss their daughters' dropping out in front of me because I was teaching at a local school inside that town. My presence was threatening, as it is common for female schoolteachers to visit the homes of dropout girls with the aim of bringing them back to school. It is also possible that fathers feared I was sent by the authorities, because education is mandatory until the age of fifteen. Only after a year did I succeed in locating dropout girls, with both mothers and fathers who would agree to be interviewed.

Locating the schoolgirls was somewhat easier and was done in a local school. All the girls were initially chosen randomly and interviewed at school. However, in order to reach their mothers and fathers, I had to ask the girls for their parents' permission to come to the house. Here, too, I was often turned down, forcing me to look for other girls and their families who would agree to be interviewed in their homes.

The most difficult group to locate was the grandmothers. Grandmothers were mostly sick, unable to be interviewed, or uninvolved in

their family's lives. For this reason, with the help of a local social worker, I located a group of women over fifty years old from different families in the village. The meeting with the group was held in a room of a local clinic. In order to best hear their views, I interviewed them in the format of a focus group. This gave participants the opportunity to express their views freely, without fear of reprimand. Their common experiences as women meeting in an all-female environment made it easier for them to voice their thoughts. All the field work took place between the years 1999 and 2001.

My status as a Bedouin woman had contradictory effects in the field: on the one hand, it made it easier for me to locate the interviewees, enter their homes, and speak their language. On the other hand, it was difficult to interview the fathers alone because certain social principles, such as the honor code, modesty, and sex segregation, forbade meetings between me as a Bedouin woman with men from different tribes. That is why most of the interviews conducted with the fathers were in the presence of more than one female member of the family.

Coping Strategies: Inside and against Boundaries
Grandmothers' Voices: Dominant Traditional Orientation. The Bedouin women of the grandmothers' generation had no formal education at all because fifty years ago Bedouins did not have schools, and women were not permitted to study. Nevertheless, although they lacked schooling, they had the wisdom of life experience. According to these women, at age fifteen or sixteen their fathers forced them to accept traditional female roles (essentially, by marrying). As Soraya indicates (all names are pseudonyms, to protect the identity of study participants): "The situation sucks, they did not ask me or consult me. They took me like this and gave me to the groom."

Despite their lack of education and lack of familiarity with the school system, these women are not opposed to female education, but only to co-education. Thus, they insist upon sex-segregated schools, in keeping with the cultural belief common to this male-dominated society. As Maram indicates: "All over the Arab world, there are separate schools for boys and girls. Only in Israel are they together. Why can't they separate them here? What can we do? When boys and girls study together, they party."

It is difficult to ascertain whether these women arrived at this argument through their own individual beliefs or whether they internalized it from their male-dominated surroundings. It seems, however, that having married at a young age and having never attended school, they cast their worldview from their place in the traditional women's world. Their opinions about what happens inside the school between the two sexes are probably assimilated from rumors circulating in their society, and their beliefs about the sort of education that is suitable for girls are probably internalized from the common male-dominated surroundings that express moral codes shared both by women and men.

At any rate, these women indicated in the interviews that their opinions do not matter, as they have no effect on decisions regarding the future of their daughters and granddaughters. They cannot decide when girls will be married and to whom or whether they continue to study in school. In Miriam's words: "On the contrary, we want our daughters to go to school and study, but this is the decision of the father, not mine." Discernible in her answer is a conflict between a genuine desire to express her opinion and a reluctance to voice it; women's expressions are disabled before they are even made public. This is confirmed by the standard way these women began any response to a question: "What difference will it make if we talk? We are not the ones who make the decisions." Yet in order to hear them out, I asked them again and again to try to express what they think. I tried repeatedly to empower them by indicating that their opinions matter to me, by showing them that I was listening to them.

These women's opinions—and the lack of value they ascribe to them— are representative of a generation that experienced relocation to settlements late in life and had no schooling or occupational resources with which to cope with such a change. Their perceptions fit the cultural norms of their upbringing: they continue to uphold and believe in traditional life arrangements and norms, such as gender separation and the culture of different spaces. This is probably related to a need to create continuity between their past and changing present, even if at times it seems to an outsider as collaboration with patriarchy. These women are trying to make sense out of their lives and "collaborate" with tradition in

order to have a voice and protect themselves. By indicating their voiceless-
ness at decision making, they reflect a consciousness of oppression and of
their own dwindling options as a result of imposed relocation.

Mothers' Voices: Between Two Spaces. The second generation is made up of two
groups: mothers of schoolgirls and mothers of girls who dropped out of
school. Mothers of the educated girls tended to marry later (at age nine-
teen to twenty) than mothers of dropouts (age fifteen to sixteen) and to
have fewer children. Moreover, in keeping with findings that parents of
dropouts tend to be less educated, the mothers of dropouts had fewer
years of schooling. Consequently, the schoolgirls' mothers had more
influence upon decision making in the family (that is, in the private
sphere), such as the number of children.

Despite these differences, mothers from both groups experienced the
same difficulties in the transition from desert life to settlements. When
they arrived in the new villages as young adults, they lost their productive
role in the family and ceased to contribute to the domestic sphere, as they
were no longer needed to perform duties crucial to daily life in the desert.
As Warda, a dropout's mother, said: "Today we can buy bread and milk,
we don't have to bake it on the saj [traditional oven] as we did once. Our
children go to the market and buy everything, but I still bake." As a con-
sequence of losing this role, decision making is left to the men. As Mirvat,
mother of a dropout, indicated: "They [the men] always interfere, there is
always pressure. They force girls to do things. The Bedouin woman has no
say, she does not decide a thing." These women, too, seem to feel that
their opinions carry no weight. When, at the beginning of our interview, I
asked Rim, a schoolgirl's mother who had only six years of schooling, her
opinion, she replied: "My opinion does not matter. In any case the deci-
sion is not mine, so what can I do? Nothing. You should ask her father." It
is therefore not surprising that the scholastic future of their daughters
depends not so much on what their mothers say, but on their fathers'
opinion.

Like the grandmothers, the mothers' awareness of their voicelessness
is in itself a form of resistance; it reflects a consciousness of inferiority
resulting from the move from desert life and from state-imposed

"modern" conditions (that is, mixed schools) that they did not always deem suitable for their families. Such awareness of inferiority is the first step toward taking action; indeed, the first stage of feminism perceives consciousness of inferiority as recognition of the woman's position in society. Although this may be considered a very rudimentary form of resistance, it is a necessary condition for further action. Thus, when relocation to recognized villages by the colonial powers exposed these women to new conditions, some (unlike the grandmothers' generation) had the ability to take advantage of new opportunities.

Although the less educated mothers could not translate their productive potential into other industries because of lack of education and employment, the more educated mothers tried to regain their productive role by using their schooling to secure employment inside the village. As Lila explained: "I am working as a kindergarten assistant, and with the money I make, I help my husband and I also keep something for myself."

Both groups of mothers (of schoolgirls and of dropouts) struggle for self-identity and the sense of being a subject. Notwithstanding the differences between them, both groups have difficulty integrating their past and present lives in the face of spatial and temporal change imposed on them by "modernizing" capitalist and global forces within Israeli society. As Salma (a schoolgirl's mother) said: "Education is the heart of the matter in life. When I go to the store, I can't understand a thing, so, what? Should I leave my daughters ignorant like me? That's why I want them to be educated."

These mothers want their daughters to reap the benefits of "modernity" (education) that they lack themselves. Salma continued: "With education, she can make a living for herself and her children. If her husband dies and she has to stay alone with the children, she can help herself." This statement indicates that even women who are relatively less educated recognize the benefits of education, as long as it serves their own and their daughter's everyday needs. They are in favor of their daughter's schooling mainly because of the economic advantages it can afford. They wish their daughters a better future through education by recognizing certain requirements of women in the new reality. In this way, they hope their daughters can gain from the changing world of women rather than suffer

as they do, even at the expense of changing customs, as Mona (a school-girl's mother) indicates: "Today Bedouin customs are better than in the past. Once, girls could not go out of their homes; today we can see progress, girls go out to school, even girls from other villages go to school."

Alongside such support of changes in the woman's place, the mothers in both groups find it hard to abandon traditional elements of their past, such as the perception of women's roles. Most mothers of dropouts and half of the mothers of schoolgirls claimed that the woman's primary role in Bedouin society is to be a wife and mother. Soheir (a dropout's mother) said: "She should sit at home and take care of her children, her husband, and her house." The other half of the schoolgirls' mothers believe that the woman should be active in society, without abandoning her main traditional role in Bedouin society. As Safa said: "Her first role is to study and do her duties in education, and then she should choose the man she wants to marry." This generation of women allows their daughters to be active in society through education but without forgetting the daughters' marital role.

This conflict between autonomy and commitment to the collective way of life is also seen in perceptions of Bedouin customs. Half of the dropout mothers expressed criticism about the traditional dress and the limits set on girls' movement; as Suad said: "These customs are hard, very hard." The other half adheres to traditional values; as Rina said: "Today, there is more freedom than in the past; today the women are free. The Bedouin customs are good; a Bedouin woman should cover her head and she should not sit with strange men. We must not change the customs."

These mixed messages, which reflect the mothers' desire to preserve those Bedouin values with which they were raised and yet reap the benefits of schooling, are indicative of the ambivalent identity of this second generation of women. The mothers are torn between maintaining traditional values and a desire to abandon them. Clearly, this generation of mothers struggles with conflicting and contradictory internal and external, past and present, local and global powers.

Daughters' Voices: Challengers within Patriarchal Boundaries—Explicit and Implicit Resistance. The two groups of seventeen-year-old girls whose voices are

heard in this section differ from each other not only in their years of schooling but also in terms of whether or not they receive the support of their fathers. Although the schoolgirls' fathers (who tend to be more educated and employed) legitimize their daughters' resistance, the dropouts' fathers (with little schooling and often unemployed) do not offer them this opportunity. This is reflected in the two groups' ways of struggling with and challenging Bedouin norms: The schoolgirls explicitly voice their resistance, whereas a minority of the girls who dropped out of school resist in implicit ways.

The Schoolgirls. The girls who attend school put their own needs first when they speak of their education. Asked about their reasons for studying, they replied: "I enjoy it" (Suha), "This is my goal, to be something" (Galia), "I want to prove myself to them, and not only for them, but also for my personal satisfaction" (Rifka). In these statements, their desire for personal and professional fulfillment is clear, in contrast to their mother's and grandmother's voicelessness at home. This is also expressed in their perceptions of a woman's role, as Salwa said: "She should be brave and be able to stand up to her father, claim her rights, and have an opinion at home." This statement reflects a need to have a voice at home that is heard and that presents an explicit challenge. It is of no small consequence that these girls told me they voiced such opinions openly to their fathers.

Born in the village, the schoolgirls have witnessed their mothers' difficulties in adjusting to urban life and seen how it determines their inferior status as non-decision makers. Watching those difficulties and hearing their mothers' and perhaps their grandmothers' support of female education as a means of survival may have led the girls to challenge social norms in a highly visible way.

The schoolgirls challenge many Bedouin customs–the traditional dress, early marriage, polygamy. In their eyes, patriarchy is a dominant force that only imposes limitations, and the way men relate to women is one-sided. In regard to traditional female clothing, they said: "Our parents force us to wear the mendil (scarf) and the jilbab (traditional dress). They think that a girl is judged by her apparel" (Manal); "These customs are against Islam, they only care for wearing the mendil. It's a bad custom. If a

girl doesn't wear a long dress, she is considered a slut" (Shamia); "They make her wear a religious traditional dress without her being convinced of the need" (Rania); "It is a primitive tribal form of protection" (Sabha).

These girls are not afraid of expressing such opinions in front of their fathers, in the knowledge that their fathers enable them to do so. However, despite their voiced challenges to the traditional framework, these girls still need support from men. For example, regardless of their personal desire to go to school, they need their father's approval to do so.

The paradox here is that, despite their resistance to traditional dress, they wear it, even though there are also modern forms of Islamic dress. This paradox is reflected in their definition of being religious as expected from them by social norms. According to Islam, a religious woman wears a traditional dress and scarf and performs all required religious duties, such us praying and fasting in the holy month of Ramadan. But these girls deconstruct this definition, constructing a new one that differentiates between the look (wearing traditional clothes) and act (performing the religious duties), on the one hand, and their self-definition, on the other. Although they act and look religious, according to local social norms and expectations, half of the girls declare themselves nonreligious, and this declaration is their rebellion. This is most succinctly stated by Samia: "I am not really religious. I wear the traditional dress, but I am not committed to it"; or, as Rania said, "I pray and fast, but I don't consider myself religious." Aida claims that the traditional dress is a type of lip service that has to be paid to society so that she will eventually be let free to fulfill her desires: "I am traditional only in school, but outside school I wear [traditional clothes] only as a duty." As these statements attest, the girls' struggle is expressed in their own definition of what is considered "traditional" according to social norms. Their ability to make this distinction is an indication of their willingness to challenge certain norms and practices while maintaining others.

Why is this resistance purely verbal and not reflected in action? Despite their claims of resistance, it seems clear that the girls are obliged to follow the male-ordained traditions in order to be able to leave the privacy of their home and attend school. In other words, they have to be seen as upholding traditional norms, as is expected of a Bedouin girl in the public sphere, so

that they remain safe and protected. Only in this way can they obtain the male support that legitimizes their attendance at mixed schools. Although their fathers do not approve of coeducation, they nevertheless do not restrict their daughters' involvement in the mixed environment at school. Rather, they let their daughters attend school because of the importance of education, but only as long as they do not violate the norms. As one of the fathers said: "Education is one of life's needs. As long as she wishes to study, I support her, but she has to wear the *jilbab* and the *mendil*." Thus, the girls use their traditional appearance to gain their father's support for something the fathers oppose (mixed schooling).

Girls Who Dropped Out of School. The resistance and struggle of girls who dropped out of school is more complex and ambiguous than that of the schoolgirls. Unlike the latter, they do not benefit from the support of their fathers, who tend to be uneducated and unemployed and often do not grasp the value of schooling. As the mother of one of the dropouts said: "This [leaving school] is her father's decision, not our decision, the women. Even though she wanted to continue [studying], her father forbids her, and there is nothing we can do to change his mind. He will not let her go. He will not change his mind, and we must obey him."

Without male support, these girls lack the legitimacy and thus the ability to voice their concerns. That is probably why the large majority of girls who left school succumb to the norms imposed on them: "I respect our traditional norms, because they protect the girl's honor" (Lobna). "What is important is that [a girl] should keep her virginity and her honor; these are the most important things. That's why she should cover her hair" (Rawia). "She must not have a boyfriend, it's forbidden. She must not be alone with boys. I agree with that, because it keeps her honored" (Manwa). Most of these girls see their future as wives and mothers: "A Bedouin girl should sit home, have children, and take care of her husband" (Lobna); "She should have children and perform her household duties" (Rawia).

Only a few of the dropout girls express resistance to expected norms. Their struggle takes place in various implicit ways, expressed only in front of me, a female Bedouin researcher (and sometimes also in front of their mothers). They do not express resistance to norms in front of their

fathers, as that would be considered rebellious and carry a harsh punishment, such as forced marriage or even femicide.

For these girls, resistance is expressed through ideas that differ from those of their parents. This is most evident in their definition of a traditional feminine appearance as expected by local social norms. Although most parents define themselves as religious, half of the dropout girls consider themselves nonreligious, even as they continue to wear the *jilbab* and *mendil* and perform the required religious duties. Like the schoolgirls, they create a new religious definition. Samar said: "I am not religious; I wear a scarf when I go out, but I am not religious all the way." Wahiba stated: "I am not religious. I just pray and fast when I need to." Fatma said: "I am not religious; I just perform the religious duties." This new definition they create for themselves should be defined as resistance, because, lacking the support of their fathers, they have no ability to explicitly challenge cultural norms, not even verbally. The only route left to them is to resist implicitly, through their self-definition, revealed only to me as a Bedouin woman (and sometimes to their mothers).

Examining more differences of opinion between fathers and daughters can further reveal the hidden struggle of these girls. Both parents ascribe their daughters' dropping out to the decision of a male member of the family. As one of the fathers explains: "After grade nine we don't send our daughters to school. School has boys that distract them." But most of the girls gave me other reasons entirely. Half of them referred to not being honored by boys in school and feeling alienation as a consequence. As Najea indicated: "I didn't like school. There were boys there who did not respect the girls." Manwa said: "I felt like a stranger; that's why I left school." A third say they dropped out because of family responsibilities. Lila said: "My mother was very sick, so I had to stay home and take care of my little brothers."

How can a girl who lives in the same house as her parents give different reasons for the same event? This question is highly relevant in the Bedouin context, because all members of this collective society, especially girls and women, are expected to express the same ideas in order to demonstrate their solidarity and identification with the collective. Thinking differently from their parents, especially from their unsupportive

fathers, endangers these girls, which is why they cannot confront their fathers directly but rather resist implicitly and in private via their perceptions. This is a form of silent resistance (thinking, believing) determined by the special context in which these girls live.

It is important to note that some of the girls who dropped out of school at the age of seventeen completed their studies several years later, after marrying and having children, with the consent of their husbands. This is yet another illustration of how Bedouin women can use feminine norms to further their personal goals. In this case, the girls transformed their female role as wife and mother into an opportunity to reenter academic life and escape the domestic circle. Yet, here, too, they remain dependent on their husbands, for they can do nothing without their consent.

Another sign of silent, implicit resistance is how these girls view the traditional age of marriage. Most mothers and fathers of the dropout girls think the ideal age for a girl to be married is between seventeen and twenty. As one of the fathers indicated: "When she has children at a younger age, she becomes prettier and so do her children. But if she gives birth at age twenty-five, she turns black." One of the mothers said:

> Today no man will ask for the hand of an educated girl who has passed age eighteen. It takes time for girls who study to get married. But when you have a daughter at age seventeen, eighteen and she refuses to accept marriage and passes age twenty, who will agree to take her? Because the men will say, "Why we should take her when she is twenty and there are girls who are sixteen or seventeen?" The best thing for a girl is *elsotra* [keeping her protected by marriage].

In contrast, some dropout girls hope to be married only after age twenty-five or after graduating from college. As Karima stated: "I should get married when I decide. It doesn't matter when, even after age twenty-five it's OK. The important thing is that I should decide."

This sort of thinking is another kind of implicit resistance particular to the Bedouin context. It, too, can be perceived as rebellion against the social order, which could lead to violent reprisals. Against this back-

ground, this group of girls cannot loudly declare their resistance to Bedouin norms. They cannot voice their beliefs to their fathers. They can only express themselves to me by implicit language and perceptions as Bedouin women sharing the same patriarchal context. Knowing the traditional harsh norms applied to women in this society, and the consequences of breaking them, it is clear to me that their expressions are indicators of implicit resistance.

The difference between girls who continue to attend school and those who have dropped out is not due to differences in their talents, but rather lies in the conditions that determine their options and strategies of resistance. Schoolgirls benefit from their fathers' support and so can explicitly express (via "resisting" language) resistance to patriarchal norms. In contrast, girls who drop out of school have no paternal support at all. Lacking conditions for freedom of thought and subject to the threat of harsh punishment for rebellion, they cannot be expected to express opinions openly. Nonetheless, even in their nonsupportive environment, they struggle to maintain an autonomous spirit and consciousness. They express their resistance through their perceptions, through ways of thinking that differ from their parents' perceptions. This silent, implicit resistance is their own "action."

Discussion

These cases of three generations of Bedouin women demonstrate the changes and development that the female struggle has undergone in recent years as a function of colonial, cultural, social, and familial processes. Although the size of the sample prevents generalization to entire generations of Bedouin women in the Negev, this narrative study nevertheless reflects the changing context of these three generations.

In a patriarchal society, the male's power is dominant in the lives of the women. The three generations of Bedouin women in this study cope with and resist patriarchal power by resisting Bedouin ways, although such resistance is not expressed in action, but rather in language. Yet, notwithstanding such resistance, all three generations still need to stay within cultural limits and meet the demands of their patriarchal society in order to fulfill their ambitions. As a way of resisting, they all negotiate

patriarchal forces in order not to be excluded from it. To borrow Hilary Lip's words, all these women exercise "power from within." According to Lip, "when women use their power in socially acceptable ways, they are accepted as making a positive contribution to the society."[23]

Bedouin female society is not monolithic; it includes different groups of women, and each generation has its own form of struggle and resistance related to the effect of colonial conditions imposed by the Israeli state. The grandmothers, who did not have the opportunity to study but who had the power of being productive decision makers prior to relocation, express opinions that appear to follow a dominant male orientation. But the very encounter with permanent settlements that do not meet their needs creates a consciousness of oppression resulting from exposure to the opportunities they are now barred from. By stating that their opinions do not matter in post-desert life, they express awareness of the oppression they experience. The women in this generation–which has experienced a decline in their (traditional) authority–are those with the least access to the new resources for alternate sources of women's authority (education and paid employment). Thus, they are reduced to preserving the only institution that will still provide them with a valued place in the family: their son's and husband's protective authority as head of the family. In expressing ideas that seem to be male-dominated, they bargain with patriarchy for protection of their honor, as a means to increase their safety and survival in the face of oppression.

The situation of the second generation (mothers) is ambivalent, because they have differential access to resources of modern forms of authority. Although they may now have access to the village store and bank, lack of education often keeps them from utilizing such new options. Althoiugh they, too, like the grandmothers, bargain with patriarchy, much of their energy is invested in adjustment to the move to the permanent settlements. Nonetheless, educated mothers (of the schoolgirls) have been able to continue working and thereby retain their productive role in the family. Yet, even the dropouts' mothers, who have fewer resources with which to bargain, pass on to their daughters a desire for change in their status. All mothers express interest in the economic benefits of urban

life and support their daughter's studies so that the girls can avoid the difficulties they themselves have had to face in post-desert life.

In wishing their daughters not to be ignorant like themselves, the mothers' ambivalence seems to be transformed by the daughters into resisting power. Schoolgirls and dropouts alike appear to be motivated to pursue a status that is different from that of their mothers. The daughters seem to be aware of their mothers' nonproductive role in the domestic sphere as a consequence of their lack of education. Seeing the difficulties their mothers encountered, the schoolgirls take a firmer stand in regard to education, tradition, and the Bedouin female role. Even some of the dropout girls indicate a desire to improve their status, viewing marriage as not only a way to fill the domestic role but also as an opportunity to continue their schooling and obtain gainful employment. Unlike studies of other Arab women that point to the power women gained through networking (for example, Al-Torki), we can see power transformation from individual mother to individual daughter in an implicit way in the Bedouin context (as the mothers did not encourage them verbally to resist), which drives the third generation to struggle and resist.

The situation of the third generation of daughters, born into the post-colonial situation, is also ambivalent. These girls are torn between their wish for autonomy and for belonging; they want both to obey their fathers' wishes and to be part of the community on their own terms. Thus, they have developed a hybrid identity. On the one hand, they are exposed to liberating values of education (whether currently as school-girls or as former school attendees) and want to be autonomous individuals who rebel (in different ways). On the other hand, they need to stay within patriarchal limits. Thus, they change and preserve tradition at the same time. But the schoolgirls' and dropouts' ways of resistance differ in accordance with their different circumstances.

Because schoolgirls benefit from their fathers' support, they not only can enter the public sphere of schooling but they can also express resistance in words in a relatively free and visible manner. This use of male support is not new to the Middle Eastern woman. It can be seen in the case of Palestinian women who run for political office with the support of

male figures, so as to face less resistance. It is also seen among Arab-Druze pioneer women in Israel who, with their fathers' support, have managed to break down the traditional barriers and study in institutions of higher education that are located outside the village.[24] For a girl to challenge traditional customs, she apparently must recruit the support of a male.

Yet, even as they attempt to challenge traditional norms, the school-girls remain within patriarchal limits. In this sense, their struggle is similar to that documented in the existing literature about Arab women; they do not overturn the existing social order (for example, continuing to wear traditional dress) even as they reject it. This sort of struggle returns us to the discussion of how the Arab Muslim feminist struggle is unique. These women refuse to detach themselves from the traditional family system. Rather, in their struggle, they manage to include the family unit, embracing the ties of marriage and children. Instead of pursuing equality between spouses, they seek to create complementary roles. In this way, they can promote their rights without losing the system that gives them protection and honor.

In another sense, however, the Bedouin schoolgirls' struggle differs from that of Arab women described in prior literature. Although in the foreground of their society and benefiting from entering the public sphere with their father's support, schoolgirls still express their resistance only by language and not by action. These girls can voice resistance to traditional appearance and behavior in front of their fathers, but they cannot remove the traditional dress (act), as it is their entrance ticket into the public sphere (school). Having even less freedom than schoolgirls, the dropout girls experience more difficulty resisting. Their silent, implicit struggle may be attributed to their unique conditions: their fathers, uneducated themselves, are unaware of the benefits of continued schooling and are only interested in seeing their daughters married. Lacking male support altogether and relegated to the domestic sphere, where they have little contact with women other than their mothers, the only place they are able to voice resistance is to me, a Bedouin woman (and probably to their mothers, some of whom were present at the interviews).

Like the schoolgirls, the dropouts resist through language, but unlike their educated peers, the language itself is not explicitly resistant in

nature. Rather, their resistance is inferred from expressed perceptions that differ from those of their parents. Thus, for instance, although they appear religious in dress and behavior, they nevertheless refrain from labeling themselves "religious" (but to me, the researcher, and not to their fathers), in opposition to their parents' definition. In the Bedouin context, this in itself can be construed as a silent rebellion. That is, their words can be interpreted as resistance only if the one who hears them knows and fully understands traditional norms regarding Bedouin girls.

Theirs is an implicit confrontation and a humble outward acceptance of social norms. The dropouts do not express visible verbal resistance to their dress–as the schoolgirls do–for they are careful not to cross particular social lines. That is why their struggle and coping strategies are actually reflected by their self-declared definition: they (and not their parents or society) decide what their definition will be. These girls probably obtain the covert support of their mothers, as several of them made such declarations in their mother's presence.

Although both schoolgirls and dropouts use language as their means of resistance, the language of the dropouts shows that their resistance is exclusively at the level of consciousness, not at the level of action. The dropout girls' perception of themselves as subjects implies one kind of action, one that opens a potential space for nurturing freedom. Silent voices that are heard against oppression should be considered resistance, and where there is resistance, there is also struggle. These women exercise power in their daily lives, despite diverse sources of subordination, similar to the unconventional forms of noncollective resistance practiced by the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin women documented in Abu-Lughod's study. Abu-Lughod points to the women's use of secrets and silences to their advantages, such as hiding knowledge from men or smoking in secret, and shows how this form of resistance is indicative of power relations and structures in the Awlad 'Ali tribe. Resistance is a diagnostic of power, as she explains:

> These forms of resistance indicate that one way power is exercised in relation to women is through a range of prohibitions and restrictions which they both embrace, in their support for the system of sexual segregation,

and resist, as suggested by the fact that they fiercely protect the inviolabil-
ity of their separate sphere, that sphere where the defiances take place.[25]

   In order to recognize such expressions as resistance, the researcher
needs to be highly familiar with the specific cultural conditions of the
group under study. Being a Bedouin woman researcher, I could hear the
direct voices of these girls and interpret them against the background of
their traditional norms. Furthermore, by examining the changing gener-
ational struggle, I could reveal how the particular societal and cultural
context of each generation of women was affected by colonial forces. In
the context of the Arab feminist struggle in the Middle East, this study
shows that neglected groups of women who have few resources of
empowerment that other Arab women typically share (such as women's
networking or male support) find ways to resist using language, the main
resource they still have, and even so, their resistance is covert or implied
rather than open or direct.

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