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***Gaza, Beesheba, Dhahriyya:* Another Approach to the Negev Bedouins in the Israeli-Palestinian Space**

In Israel, the Negev Bedouins are often presented and perceived both by Jews and Arabs alike as a group of "loyal and obedient" citizens of the State. Like the Druze, they are viewed as being completely different from the rest of the Palestinians of Israel.¹ Their relationships to the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are considered inexistent. This commonly held opinion is often buttressed by reference to their "cultural specificities" and in particular to their "nomadic culture". Additionally, their political behavior is also cited, and is too frequently reduced to their voluntary enlistment in the Israeli army, and their low level of political militancy hostile to the State of Israel as compared to other Palestinians with Israeli citizenship or more simply, their reticence in presenting themselves as Palestinians.

The idea that the Negev Bedouins are an isolated and a specific group is clearly also rooted in the words and deeds of the actors involved. This idea is further strengthened by direct or indirect support from researchers who have investigated this group. To date, the studies dealing with the Negev Bedouins have cast them solely in a binary relationship with Israeli society.² Although some of these writers note the ties Bedouins have maintained with their relatives and neighbors in the West Bank and Gaza³ over the last fifty years, none have found it

¹ I use either the term "Arab Israeli" or "Palestinians of Israel" to designate non-Jewish populations who, before 1948, lived in Mandate Palestine and who, after this date were integrated into the State of Israel. These populations were granted Israeli citizenship during the first years following the founding of the State of Israel. Most of the Bedouins of the Negev obtained citizenship in 1954.

² This is the case for local anthropologists, such as Kressel, G.M., 1975, *Pratuyot le'umat shivtiyot* (Individual versus Tribal) Hakibutz Hameuhad; or foreign anthropologists such as Jakubowska, L., 1985, *Urban Bedouin: Social Change in a Settled Environment*. Ph.D Thesis, The State University of New York at Stony Brook; for more recent works, see Dinero, S. 1997: Female Role Change and Male Response in Post Nomadic Urban Environments: The Case of the Israeli Negev Bedouin. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. XXVIII (3): 248-261. Works by the geographer Avinoam Meir should also be cited: 1996, *As Nomadism Ends: The Israeli Bedouin of the Negev*. Boulder Westview Press. On the issue of political ties between the Bedouins and the State, see Basson, L., 1995. Les Bédouins du Néguev et l'Etat d'Israël, *Monde arabe, Maghreb Machrek*, 147 (janvier-mars): 149-165; Parizot, C. 1999, Enjeux tribaux et élections nationales, *REMMM*, 85-86 : 237-258.

³ Marx E., 1967 *The Bedouin of the Negev*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Lewando-Hundt, G., 1978 *Women's Power and Settlement. The effects of Settlement on the*

relevant to examine this issue more deeply. From January 1998 to July 2000, while I was conducting research on this group, I was struck by the recurrence and the regularity of meetings and cross border exchanges involving Negev Bedouin and their relatives or neighbors living in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip or in the Sinai. Occurring as 'non-events', these activities cast doubt on the accepted view of relationships between the Bedouins of the Negev and their Palestinian neighbors and call for a renewed approach to this group and its status within the Israeli-Palestinian space.

Modes of Integration and Processes of Differentiation

Prior to 1948, the Bedouin groups living in the Negev were better known as the Arabs of Beersheba ('*arab as-saba*'). The Bedouins themselves used the term '*arab*' instead of *bedû* (Bedouins), whereas they called the Arab farmers in the area "*fellahîn*" (farmers). *Bedû*, meaning inhabitants of the desert (*Bâdiyya*), was a term used more often by farmers. In 1946, the number of Negev Bedouins was estimated at between 57,000 and 95,000 people.⁴ At the time, a pastoral semi-nomadic life was still the rule, although most of the population was already involved in dry agriculture and some men were employed in road construction and infrastructure developed by the British. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Turkish occupation of the region and its pacification and the creation of international borders had already contributed to the gradual sedentarization of the Bedouins who became more involved in agriculture and traded with merchants from the Gaza area, merchants who then exported these goods to Europe.⁵ The city of Beersheba was founded in 1900 for administrative reasons and expanded through land sales and agricultural products. In order to be closer to the authorities, the Bedouin Sheiks of the area quickly settled there. The first stone buildings also appeared among the Bedouin at this time, first to store farm products and then later as living quarters. Farms were also built in the 20s and 30s in the northwest Negev.⁶ However these buildings were reserved for the wealthy minority.

The 1948 conflict and the founding of the State of Israel caused dramatic changes and brutal trauma for the Bedouin population. In 1953, the number of Bedouins remaining in the Negev was estimated at 11,000 people.⁷ The others were expelled *manu militari* or fled before the arrival of Israeli troops and took refuge in the West Bank, the Gaza strip and in the Sinai.⁸ Those who remained in the Negev were confined to an enclosed zone, located to the east and the north of Beersheba, and covering an area corresponding to 10% of the Negev desert. This

Position of the Negev Bedouin Women. Ph. D. thesis, University of Edinburgh; Jakubowska, L., op. cit. ; Kressel, G., 1992 *Descent through Males*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

⁴ Muhsam, H.V. 1966, *Beduin of the Negev*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press: 22.

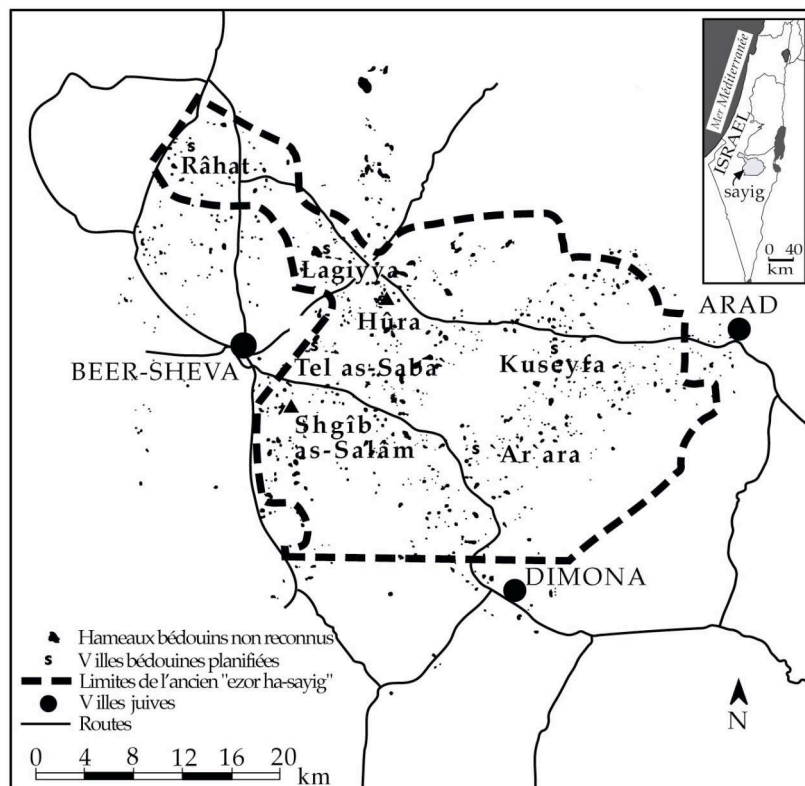
⁵ Kressel, G. M., Ben David Y. & Abu Rabia, Kh., 1991, Changes in Land Usage in the Negev since the Mid-Nineteenth Century. *Nomadic Peoples*, 28: 28-55.

⁶ Meir, A., op.cit. chap. 3.

⁷ Marx, E. op. cit., p. 12.

⁸ Morris, 1997 [1987] *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: 1947-1949*. Cambridge: CUP : 221, 245-246, 253

zone was later placed under military control, which lasted until 1966.⁹ The lands belonging to



Bedouin Planned Townships and Unrecognized Villages in 1990.
(Source : Meir, A., 1997 : 91)

those who had fled or those who were expelled were confiscated, such that by the end of the 1950s, the new State had succeeded in appropriating over 90% of the land in the Negev and 50% of the enclosed zone.¹⁰ Until 1966, the Bedouins were

⁹ Marx, E. op. cit

¹⁰ Falah, G., 1999, Israeli State Policy towards Bedouin Sedentarization in the Negev. *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, vol. XVIII (2) winter: 71-91.

grouped around 19 tribes restructured in haste, and turned into administrative units headed by Sheikhs appointed by the military government. Excluded from the Israeli labor market, the Bedouins were restricted to livestock rearing and farming. The privileged few who were living in Beersheba or in stone buildings were forced to return to their tents to live. In the 1960s, the authorities decided to urbanize the Bedouins.¹¹ This policy was dictated by their intent to take over more land to develop projects for the Jewish population. Officially, the policy was presented as a means of facilitating the Bedouins' access to "modern" State services and resources, since the authorities claimed it was impossible to provide these services to such a 'scattered' population. First of all, two established townships were built: Tel as-Saba', in 1965, and Rahat in 1970. Between the early and late 1980s, five other towns were founded, chronologically: Ksifa and `Ar`ara, Shgîb as-Salam, then Hûra and Lagiyya. These projects, however, failed. Most of the Bedouins refused to live in them. They were afraid of losing their land and were not attracted by the precarious social and economic situation of these cities. Even repeated intimidation tactics (massive confiscation of livestock, demolition of houses in unrecognized encampments, destruction of crops)¹² did not increase their exodus to these townships.

Today, these townships are home to slightly less than half of the Bedouin population of the Negev, a population estimated at 120,000 people. The remainder lives in small villages that were built during the 1960s on the sites of what had become permanent encampments. More permeable to new modes of consumerism and representations transmitted by the dominant Jewish culture, young Bedouin couples began to construct permanent housing. In addition to planting orchards, the construction of these houses was also perceived as means of demonstrating their attachment to the land. These hamlets are scattered for the most part alongside main roads.¹³ Some only contain a few families whereas others are home to several hundred, or thousand people. However, because these locations are not recognized by State authorities, they do not appear on any maps. In addition, they have no infrastructure or utilities. The inhabitants improvise their water distribution systems and use generators to produce electricity.

The established townships have become dormitory suburbs on the edge of Beersheba. The largest, Rahat, today has a population of 30,000 whereas the smallest, Lagiyya, has only 2,000. The infrastructures are often in disrepair and are not adapted to the needs of the population. Commercial and industrial activities are virtually nonexistent. The lack of activity and the low level of skill of the workforce make this population extremely dependent on economic centers controlled by the Jewish populations in the area, and particularly sensitive to economic recessions. In the late 90s, the unemployment rate reached 29% for men and 83% for women.¹⁴

¹¹ Marx, E. 2000 Land and Work: Negev Bedouin Struggle with Israeli Bureaucracies. *Nomadic Peoples*, 4 (2): 106-121.

¹² Al-Afenish, S., 1987, Processes of Change and Continuity in Kinship System and Family Ideology in Bedouin Society. *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. XXVII (4) : 323-340

¹³ Meir, A., op. cit

¹⁴ Marx, 2001 : 113.

Lastly, in fifty years, the Bedouin population that remained in the Negev has undergone profound upheavals. Lifestyles and economic activities have become increasingly urban, based to a greater extent on salaried labor in the surrounding cities. The administrative regimes which followed the military administration and which, since the end of the nineteen eighties have given municipal autonomy to the Bedouins in the townships, have contributed to a renewal of the elites and to the undermining of preexisting hierarchies. Today, the tribe (*ashîra*) has only symbolic relevance. The cohesive groups formed by kinship ties are constituted by lineages (*â'ilât*). At best they form frameworks for mobilizing people during national elections (Parizot, 1999). The extended family remains an economic unit,¹⁵ but not systematically. Mutual assistance among its members has lost its meaning because of growing access to the services of the Welfare State.¹⁶

Over the last fifty years the Negev Bedouins have developed practices, representations and modes of organization that differ considerably from the ones they shared with their relatives who in 1948 were expelled or who fled to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip or the Sinai. Interspersed with other groups in the occupied territories, placed under different administrative regimes (Jordanian and Egyptian), these refugees themselves experienced upheavals that heightened the process of social differentiation. At the end of the 90s, the Bedouins differed from both the Palestinians and from the Jews in the neighboring areas because their integration into Israeli society has taken place within the structures of spatial, economic, and social segregation. Although a few people have chosen to live in Beersheba, the Bedouins today live cut off from the Jews who represent 75% of the population of the Beersheba sub-district. Similarly, although Bedouins have daily contacts with their Jewish neighbors within the framework of economic activities, these relations are ones of subordination. Finally, although the standard of living of the Bedouins has constantly been on the increase in the last fifty years, it remains one of the lowest as compared to the national level: 50% of all families and 60% of all children live under the poverty line. A survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics showed that at the start of the Year 2000, the seven Bedouin townships were the poorest out of the 200 agglomerations included in the entire country, whereas some Jewish cities in the Beersheba suburbs were ranked among the richest.¹⁷

From "Arabs of Beersheba" to "Negev Bedouins" : ethnicization and communitarization

Aside from this exclusion model, the Negev Bedouins have been involved in a process of ethnicity and community building. By adopting the Turkish *millet* system (based on the principle of self-government of religious groups) the State of Israel employed a method that turned religious and cultural groups within its population into statutory groups. It first of all differentiated Jews from non-Jews, and then made a number of subdivisions within the latter group, differentiating Moslems

¹⁵ Jakubowska, L. 2000, Finding Ways to Make a Living: Employment among the Negev Bedouin. *Nomadic Peoples*, 4 (2): 94-105

¹⁶ Meir, 1997, p. 191-192.

¹⁷ *Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin*, 1999, Center for Regional Development, Ben Gurion University of the Negev: Table, 17.3.

from Christians and assigning each their own courts of law to resolve individual claims.¹⁸ The system then further complexified. Subdivisions and other criteria for particularization were included. The Druze acquired a special status in the fifties.¹⁹ Their willingness to serve in the Army (like the Circassians, a Moslem group originally from the Caucasus) enabled them to benefit from special privileges as regards rights and benefits. In 1967, this system was applied to the populations in Gaza, the West Bank, the Sinai and the Golan. Each group was given a specific status, further complicating the overall picture.

The Bedouin category appeared fairly rapidly on official forms, next to Moslems, Druze, Christians, and Circassians. However the gradual differentiation of the Bedouins as a statutory group in its own right was never fully completed. The authorities never hid their intention to dissociate them from other Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, but there was never a coordinated policy to this end. The Bedouins have the same legal status as the other Moslems. Similarly, in contrast to what is generally believed, they do not have a regime that differs from other Moslems or Christians as regards army service. Officially, aside from the Druze and the Christians, the Arabs, hence including the Bedouins, are automatically exempt from military service. They can however volunteer to serve. Up until the 1960s, with a few exceptions, there were no Bedouins in the Israeli army. It was only in 1966, on the initiative of a Bedouin sheikh from the Negev, that a special unit reporting to the Interior Ministry was formed made up of trackers and border guards, recruited from the Bedouin. It was not until 1972 that a tracker unit (*gashashim* in Hebrew) was created specially for the Bedouins and placed under Army control.

The publicity given to this new unit and the efforts of certain members of the military establishment to enlist more Bedouins quickly gave the illusion that, like the Druze, this group was favorable to the draft. Nevertheless, although the number of volunteer Bedouin has risen in the ranks of the IDF, it remains small. According to a civil servant in the Ministry of Public Security, in the last fifty years, there have only been 3000 Bedouins in the ranks of the army in various units. This figure covers Bedouins from the Galilee and those from the Negev; note that more of the former volunteered than Bedouins from the Negev. At the end of the 1990s, the *gashashim* unit only totaled 160 soldiers. Each year the army recruits a maximum of 25 people among the Negev Bedouins, turning down numerous candidates. Lastly, the number of young recruits among the Negev Bedouins is apparently lower than volunteers from the rest of the Moslem and Christian populations of the triangle²⁰ and the Galilee. In other words, the stereotyped image of Bedouins as eager volunteers for military duty is more of a myth than a reality.

Herein however lies the strength of the categorizations imposed by the Israeli legal system. Reiterated in formal and informal discourse and on administrative forms, these categorizations end up shaping discourses and representations of

¹⁸ Abu Ramadan, M., 2001, *Les minorités en Israël et le droit international*. Thèse de doctorat ; Université de droit, d'économie et des sciences d'Aix-Marseille III, Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁹ Rivoal, I., 2000, *Les maîtres du secret. Ordre mondain et ordre religieux dans la communauté druze en Israël*. Paris, EHESS

²⁰ Region covering the Arab villages located between Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Jews and Arabs in the country. The judicial framework and its complexity do not only produce statutory inequalities between members of the Israeli population as a function of their membership in a given group.²¹ Rather, by using terms that freeze and highlight cultural differences among these groups, they create ethnic entities. These entities however are far from corresponding to coherent and relevant groups. Note that the term *bedwi* (pl. *bedwin*) in Hebrew includes both the Bedouin of the Negev and those of the Galilee in a single category although these two groups have nothing in common historically and have practically no contacts with each other today. Beyond this, this terminology also informs on the content of relationships between the target group and the State, and other communities making up the Israeli population, hierarchizing them as a function of their presumed loyalty to the State. The term 'Bedouin' in Israel does not only refer to populations who in the past were wandering shepherds. It also refers to the idea that they are "loyal Arabs" to Israel. By contrast, the term Moslem refers to a "fifth column", and the term Palestinian, to an enemy.

Ahmed Sa'di²² has already stressed this point. According to Sa'di, by emphasizing the cultural features of each group, this categorization highlights the points of cleavages between each, and defines the nature of the relationships they have with the State. The term "Israeli Arabs" which covers "Druze", "Moslems", "Christians", "Bedouins" and "Circassians" presents these groups as a cultural minority and confirms the mono-national character of the State of Israel. It disregards these groups' ties with the land of Palestine and makes them foreigners in the land of Israel (*Eretz Israel*). Finally, it separates them from the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza with whom these groups have various ties.

The ethnic representation of the Negev Bedouins, by stressing their isolation as compared to other groups, did not occur solely through the discourse and policies of the State of Israel. Like all category ascription,²³ it took place through a dialectical process in which the Bedouins played a prime role. The situation of Otherness created by the drastic upheavals which affected this group, facilitated the process of reconstruction of tradition within the framework of terms imposed by the dominant discourse. In numerous contexts, the Bedouins no longer use the ethnic label '*arab*' (literally, Arab) to describe themselves contrasted with the term *fellahîn* to designate the neighboring Arab populations, as was still the case in the 1950s. Today they use the term *bedû*, a term used primarily by their Arab neighbors. In addition the content of the tradition, reconstructed in this way, is often structured around clichés and criteria defined by the Jewish or Palestinians populations in the area. Other Palestinians, whether Israeli citizens or not, stress the exotic nature of the "Bedouin culture" as the Jews do. Many view the "Negev Bedouins" (*bedû an-naqab* in Arabic) as members of a "traditional", "primitive" culture when they do not perceive them as "suspicious".

The internalization of this ethnic label has been reinforced by its recurrent manipulation in the political discourse of Bedouin leaders. In the 1970s, Sheikh

²¹ Abu Ramadan, M. op. cit.

²² Ahmed Sa'di, *Between State Ideology and Minority National Identity: Palestinians in Israel and Israeli Social Science Research*; *Review of Middle Eastern Studies*, 5, 1992, pp.110-130

²³ Barth, F. 1995, *Les groupes ethniques et leurs frontières*. In : Poutignat, Ph. & J. Streiff-Fenart, *Théories de l'ethnicité*. Paris : PUF : 203-249.

Hammād Rabī'a, a Negev leader, took up the Labor Party's suggestion to form a Bedouin list for the 1973 and 1977 elections. Labor's objective was to create ties between the Bedouin in the Negev and those in the Galilee and to facilitate the emergence and the crystallization of shared community spirit between these two groups, but the project failed.²⁴ Nevertheless, in the Negev, forms of communitarian expression soon appeared. In the late 70s, an "Association for the Defense of Bedouin Rights" was founded. In the early eighties, few groups were daring enough to formulate their demands as "Arabs" or "Palestinians", fearing that this would draw criticism from the authorities. As Lonia Jakuowska²⁵ shows, the local actors preferred to express their demands as "Negev Bedouin citizens" to dissociate their claims and their conflicts with the State from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was only after the first *Intifada*, and with the growing influence of nationalistic groups in the region that the Negev Bedouins formulated their demands as Palestinians.

However this late-coming 'national awakening' as certain local activists like to call it, ran up against the identity crisis that affected the Palestinian population of Israel at the start of the 1980s, which also mired the Bedouins. The loss of credibility of the Arab political parties, marginalized on the Israeli political scene, and the signing of the Oslo Accords confirmed the separation of the fate of the Palestinians in the West Bank from those with Israeli citizenship, and encouraged on the part of the latter, a distancing on the national issue, or created a 'moral gap'²⁶. The members of this group thus turned inward towards local issues to seek more significant identification symbols derived from the framework of kinship, or the religious and cultural community.²⁷ At the end of the 1990s, although local leaders and members of non-governmental bodies tended to express their demands as "Israeli Palestinians", they tended to prefer the term "Negev Arabs". This term expresses their desire to be placed on the same level as other Arab citizens of Israel. However it also shows their spontaneity to dissociate themselves from the Palestinians of the West Bank, as well as the priority given to the defense of the interests of their own community.

Over the last 50 years, the different modes of administration imposed on the Bedouins by the Israeli authorities have contributed to marginalizing this group as compared to their Jewish and Arab neighbors in the region, and this marginalization has fueled a process of ethnicity and the emergence of a feeling of community which are expressed in public and political areas. This said, these processes are still on-going and do not account for the complexity of the situation of this group. They are constantly being challenged by the spatial practices that the local actors continue to engage in as 'non-events'.

²⁴ Soen, D. & A. Shmuel, 1987, The Israeli Bedouin: Political Organization at the National Level. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 23 (3): July: 329-347.

²⁵ Jakubowska, L. 1992, Resisting Ethnicity: The Israeli State and Bedouin Ethnicity. In: Nordstrom, C. & Martin J. *The Paths to Domination and Terror*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press: 85-105

²⁶ Bichara, A. 1996, L'Arabe en Israël. Un discours politique mutilé. *Revue d'études palestiniennes*, 7 printemps : 55-75

²⁷ idem.

Neighboring Relations and the expansion of the Negev Bedouins' social space

Although in 1948 the Bedouins were separated from their relatives who had taken refuge in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank or on the other side of the international border with Egypt, in the Sinai, they never broke off their ties with them. In the years immediately following the 1948 war, groups of Bedouins, resettled in the closed zone close to the TransJordan armistice line developed contraband networks on a more or less extended scale. Afterwards, these networks extended towards Gaza. A parallel economy developed through these activities and was a source of considerable additional income.

Conflicting with the security argument put forward by the State of Israel in order to legitimize the creation of a closed military zone in regions of Arab habitation, the borders of these zones were very loosely patrolled, like the southern part of the ceasefire line between Israel and the West Bank. Similarly the military authorities quickly realized the advantages of exploiting these networks. Thus, in the 1950s, Moshe Dayan went in person to the Negev to meet the Bedouin Sheikhs and organize a contraband livestock network. Officially it was designed to import meat for army needs. In fact, it appears that this meat also reached the Israeli markets of the time. The livestock was brought from Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.²⁸ From the 1960s onwards, the military administrators were more conciliatory with the Bedouins and allowed them to leave the zone more freely to enter the rapidly expanding labor force of that time. Thus the Bedouins benefited the Jewish populations in the area, who were also very interested in contraband products. Numerous goods such as transistors, stockings, and olive oil were cheaper when they came from Jordan.

In the center of the Negev, near the place where Mitzpe Ramon now stands, a few Bedouins joined the confederation of the *'Azâzme*, who had been given permission to stay outside the closed military zone. In other words, they quickly took advantage of their proximity to the Egyptian border on the other side of which their relatives had fled or had been expelled. This border was crossed frequently by groups of Bedouins until the end of the 1950s and led to several clashes with Israeli troops and the neighboring kibbutzim. Thus these contraband networks, to which should be added the hospitality provided at times to certain *feda'iyyin*, formed channels by which almost permanent information could flow among groups separated at the end of the war.

In 1967, the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Sinai by the Israeli army enabled groups located on either side of the border to re-establish more sustained ties. The most significant example is provided by the many marriages that in 1967 reunited families separated in 1948. In some cases these marriages were celebrated in the months immediately following the military occupation. How quickly they took place appears to show that the ties between the groups had never been totally severed. Afterwards, Bedouins tried to marry daughters of farmers from the West Bank or Gaza. The small number of women in the Negev made polygamy particularly hard. The opening of the borders enabled

²⁸ Abu Rabi'a, A., 1994, *The Negev Bedouin and Livestock Rearing: Social, Economic and Political Aspects*. Oxford: Berg Publishers; Marx, E. 1967 op.cit.

men with financial means and the necessary contacts to increase their symbolic capital and that of their group of agnates. This was made even easier by the fact that the *mahr* (usually translated by 'bride price') was at the time much lower in the West Bank and Gaza than in the Negev. Similarly, farmers in these areas wanted to extend their network of relationships to the other side of the Green Line. Those who wished to work in Israel hoped that by marrying into Bedouin lineages, they could take advantage of middlemen working with Jewish businessmen or with the Israeli authorities.

The new ties had an impact on the economic activities of both groups. The Dhahriyya market, in the small town located at the entrance to the West Bank on the road connecting Beersheba to Hebron, became a more attractive option for the Bedouins than the Beersheba market. Even some of the Jewish inhabitants in the area went to the market for its low prices. Reviving a practice dating back to before 1948, the livestock breeders of the Negev again hired shepherds in the villages of Sammu' and Yatta (to the east of Dhahriyya). Similarly the livestock market of Beersheba, where these breeders came every Thursday to sell their products became more popular with the farmers of the West Bank and Gaza. The growth of these relationships was made even easier by the fact that up until the late 1980s, movement remained fairly unrestricted between the various parts of the territory under Israeli control.

During the first *Intifada* (1987-1993), the Israeli authorities changed their attitude, increasing the number of controls and further restricting movement of Palestinians outside the West Bank. However the cross border relationships re-established in 1967 did not cease. Young Bedouins took advantage of the lack of public transportation to drive people from the West Bank in minibuses to Beersheba and its suburbs or vice versa. After the signing of the Oslo Accords, these drivers continued their activities despite the growing restrictions on movement imposed on the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza. Even closures after terrorist attacks did not appear to be insurmountable obstacles, except for the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. In fact, some Bedouins became specialized in skirting check points (*mahsom*) and patrols, using dirt paths as detour routes (*turûg al-leffe*).

Since the second *Intifada*, the more repressive attitude of the authorities has restricted but not stopped movement. During the first semester of 2001, West Bank workers still built prefabricated houses for the Bedouins in unrecognized encampments or in the townships. These men were driven by young Bedouins who were temporarily converted into "worker smugglers" (*muharrîb `ummâl*), and who also transported goods from the Dhahriyya market and the West Bank to the townships and unrecognized encampments. Private cars also continued to use the detour paths. People thus did not stop visiting each other, even though these visits took place less often and were shorter.

The economic and social ties that developed from 1967 onwards have also taken on a political coloration. The matrimonial alliances between lineage members separated in 1948 have enabled several groups to form sociopolitical units with more clout on the community level. At the same time, by serving as go-betweens for the Palestinians in the occupied territories with the Israeli authorities, either to find them jobs, or to enable them to settle in Israel or obtain citizenship, some leaders have extended their network of clientele and their influence on a

regional level. Men who initially had little stature in the Negev have reached a level many would envy today. The Palestinians in the occupied territories have not been the only ones to have recourse to these go-betweens. As soon as the Bedouins who remained in the Negev after 1948 were able to travel more often in the West Bank and Gaza, within the framework of their economic or social activities, they needed the assistance of a patron, either for protection or to obtain funds and make connections. By developing client networks on the other side of the Green Line, the Bedouin leaders in the Negev inevitably extended and reinforced the relationship of dependence they had with other Bedouins in the region.

After the signing of the Oslo Accords, the emergence of the Palestinian Authority created a new political actor and changed the nature of preexisting relationships. The Bedouin leaders who had ties with individuals in the new administration obtained direct access to these men's funds and influence over sections of the Palestinian autonomous area. They were able to strengthen their role as go-betweens for those around them and their clients in the Negev as well as for those living in these districts. They had the power to resolve everyday problems (fines, seizure of goods), cut administrative red tape to obtain authorizations needed to start up a small business, a building permit, etc. Some of these leaders took part in more important matters. In 1998, a young leader from the Hūra area was contacted by someone from a lineage close to his. He asked him to get in touch with his contacts to try to arrange the liberation of one of his agnates living in the West Bank, who had been arrested by the Palestinian police. The prisoner was released that same day. Thanks to their relationships with high-ranking civil servants in the Palestinian administration, some Negev Bedouins have also developed highly lucrative illegal cross border activities. Car theft is a flagrant example. The cars stolen by Bedouins in the Negev are often sold as is or as parts in zones under Palestinian authority. Some inhabitants of these zones are apparently specialized in dismounting parts or altering the appearance of these cars. This type of activity, which is hard to conceal, requires the complicity of the Palestinian authority whose fleet of automobiles is not always made up of legally purchased vehicles.

Aside from these illegal activities, there are many areas where ties with the Palestinian authority constitute a considerable political advantage. It is hence understandable that in the 1990s, the Bedouins hoping for local or regional power mobilized some of their efforts to develop this type of cross-borders ties. Between January 1998 and the beginning of the second *Intifada* in September 2000, I frequently attended receptions organized by Bedouin leaders in the honor of civil servants from the Palestinian authority. The staging of neighborly relationships with individuals from the Palestinian authority was not unusual, and fully mimicked the regular and continuous efforts by these same leaders with the Israeli civil servants. During the municipal elections of November 1998 in Rahat, local candidates' connections with Palestinian authority chiefs was used as a political argument to gain more votes. One of the candidates for mayor asked one of his friends to contact one of Yasser Arafat's security service chiefs. During a meeting, he wanted to introduce him to the members of his electoral staff, to impress them by the scope and quality of his relations and hoped that they would mention it in their own circles. The candidate wished to appear as the unrivaled go-between in the eyes of

the voters of Rahat who had interests in the Palestinian autonomous areas. His opponents also used the same technique. Without organizing a meeting of this nature, their brochures presenting their platforms and numerous pictures of them in the company of Israeli politicians and high ranking officials, also included several additional pictures where they appeared alongside the head of the Palestinian authority. Even one of the candidates for mayor, known for his support for the Israeli Labor party, used this ploy.

Until September 2000, local representatives of the Israeli authorities did not appear to be opposed to the establishment of this type of relationship. On the contrary, several Jewish officials in the region even tried to develop their own contacts with their counterparts in the Palestinian authority, without going so far as the Bedouins or other Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. Such networks constitute both potential channels of information and potential means of reaching the Bedouin population. The clientele that they can develop with the former is then used advantageously in a variety of circumstances, in particular when these officials need local support to implement and have an administrative plan accepted, given that their efficiency is the key to their promotion. During national elections, they use additional arguments to solicit votes in favor of the political party they support.

Officials in Arafat's administration can also benefit from these contacts. They also collect precious information and have direct or indirect access to the services of their Israeli counterparts, a set of resources which enables them to enlarge the scope of their personal influence within their administration and their population. From this angle, the creation of the Palestinian Authority has complicated relationships between the Bedouins who remained in the Negev and their neighbors in the West Bank and Gaza. Since this new actor has emerged on the regional political scene, the inhabitants of the occupied territories are in a position to offer or negotiate certain services with the Bedouins and secondarily with their Jewish neighbors whereas prior to this they were the claimants or dependent.

Conclusion

The exchanges and the cross-border relationships between Bedouins and their Palestinian neighbors and kin in the occupied territories all prompt the circulation of people, goods and representations. They have direct effects on the social processes in which the Bedouin population remaining in the Negev and the Palestinians in their areas are involved. They also structure relationships within the Bedouin community and the status of its members as regards their Arab neighbors. Some groups have developed greater ties with their Palestinian neighbors in the West Bank and Gaza or with their Egyptian neighbors, whereas other are in closer contact with the Palestinian population with Israeli citizenship in the region of Lod or Ramle, or the Galilee triangle. The differences in orientations of these ties can contribute to the emergence of differing interests within the Negev Bedouin community. Young Bedouins who are involved in drug dealing between Egypt and Israel are little inclined to be the promoters of Palestinian nationalism, not only because of the distance from other Palestinian populations but also because they do not wish to attract the attention of Israeli authorities. By contrast, the Bedouins living in zones along the border with the West Bank are more likely to nourish such feelings, first of all because they have on-going relationships with their Palestinian

neighbors and relatives and secondly because they are in closer contact with Palestinian nationalistic organizations in Israel and the occupied territories. At this stage in the analysis, only hypotheses can be made as to the real impact of these ties in the structuring of relationships between the Bedouins and their neighbors. It should be recalled that although these cross-border ties can indeed reconstitute networks that existed before 1948 or create new ones, day-to-day experiences of inequality with the Other can also reinforce feelings of difference and fuel particularistic discourse. Further research is thus needed.

Nevertheless, this preliminary analysis shows that the process of ethnicity in the Bedouin population is a construction over time but one that is continually challenged and complicated by the practices of the actors in this space. Previous studies of the Negev Bedouins have too often restricted this space to the State of Israel within its internationally recognized borders, excluding the West Bank and Gaza. However, the social space of this population also extends to the East and the West, covering part of the occupied territories, or the Sinai for the Bedouins living in the central Negev. It is hence imperative for a better grasp of the processes affecting the Bedouins – and in the final analysis other Palestinian groups in the region, since the Bedouins do not appear to be the exception – to take a broader approach than those suggested by the dominant discourse.

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