

Chapter 2

Bedouin: Evolving Meanings

The term Bedouin is connected with seasonal nomadic behavior in arid deserts. Other definitions are associated with the terms meaning ‘the beginning’ (*al-Badia* or *Badia*), alluding to the Bedouin being original or indigenous. Today, most of the Bedouin in the Negev live in sedentary dwellings; two-thirds dwell in towns (2014), and less than 5 % work in agriculture or grazing. The Bedouin are Arab and Muslim, yet differentiate themselves from the larger Arab minority, affiliating themselves specifically as Bedouin. The origin of this term, its meaning, the Bedouin context, and consequences are the focus of this chapter.

Between Ethnicity and Lifestyle

The term Bedouin¹ in general and in the Israeli context in particular require reexamination in order to describe the new reality of this community. The term refers to “a nomadic Arab of the desert,” describing the Arabs of the early seventh century

¹The **Bedouin** (/ˈbedu.ɪn/, also **Bedouins**; from the Arabic *badw* بَدْو or *badawīyyīn/badawīyyūn* بَدَوِيّون, plurals of *badawī* بَدَوِي) are a part of a predominantly desert-dwelling Arabian ethnic group traditionally divided into tribes or clans, known in Arabic as ‘*ashā’ir* (عَشَائِر). The Bedouin form a part of, but are not synonymous with, the modern concept of Arabs. Bedouins have been referred to by various names throughout history, including Qedarites in the Old Testament and “Arab” by the Assyrians (*ar-ba-a-a* being a nisba of the noun *arab*, a name still used for Bedouins today). While most Bedouins have abandoned their nomadic and tribal traditions for a modern urban lifestyle, they retain traditional Bedouin culture with concepts of belonging to ‘*ashā’ir*, traditional music, poetry, dances (like Saas), and many other cultural practices. Urbanized Bedouins also traditionally organize cultural festivals, usually held several times a year, in which they gather with other Bedouins to partake in, and learn about, various Bedouin traditions—from poetry recitation and traditional sword dances to classes teaching traditional tent knitting and playing traditional Bedouin musical instruments. Traditions like camel riding and camping in the deserts are also

who were “Bedouin or desert nomads.” It is derived from the old French *beduin*, based on the Arabic *badawī*, (plural) *badawīn*—“dwellers in the desert,” from *badw* “desert” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/americanenglish/Bedouin>). The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Bedouin as Arabic-speaking nomadic peoples of the Middle Eastern deserts of the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Israel, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and North Africa (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/58173/Bedouin>). In Arabic the word *badawī*, is connected with the *Badia*, which is taken from the word beginning or original. Thus the Bedouin feel and define themselves as the original native community. They are hierarchically ordered as *badawī* (nomads), *falah/humran* (peasants), *abbed/sumran* (slaves or servants), rural, and urban. This traditional classification needs reframing in light of the rapid urbanization leading to the economic and functional transformation of Arab countries in the Middle East as well as the emergence of Israel as a nation state. The outcome has transformed the settlement networks and human behavior of the Bedouin. To say today that the populations of Riad or Jada in Saudi Arabia, Dubai or Kuwait in the Gulf countries, or even Maan in Jordan are Bedouin is not an apt description of reality, even though these groups try to maintain their identity as Bedouin, fueled by a nostalgic longing for the past.

The Bedouin currently represent only a small portion of the total population of Arab countries. In 2013, 21.2 million or 5.7 % of the total Arab population of 370 million inhabitants in Arab countries were classified as Bedouin. Despite these relatively small numbers, they inhabit or utilize a large part of the land area. Most of them are animal herders who migrate into the desert during the rainy winter season and move back toward the cultivated land in the dry summer months. Although Bedouin, as a matter of caste, traditionally despised agricultural work and other manual labors, many of them have become sedentary as a result of political and economic developments since World War II. In the 1950s, Saudi Arabia and Syria nationalized Bedouin rangelands, and Jordan severely limited goat grazing. Conflicts over land use between Bedouin herders on the one hand and settled agriculturists on the other have increased (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/58173/Bedouin>). The past three decades have witnessed the growth of large urban centers within Arab countries. This growth, catalyzed by national and regional plans and the provision of public services, includes Bedouin immigrants to these urban centers.

In the Israeli context, Bedouin does not describe a way of life of a nomadic community, but defines an ethnic group which is part of the Arab minority. Israeli policies do not deal with the Arab community as a national and collective minority; instead, they deal with sub-ethnic groups according to both religious and cultural affiliation (Muslims, Christians, Bedouin, and Druze) and geographic location (North-Galilee, Center-Triangle, and South-Negev) as well as according to the local governmental structures within which they reside. Such structures include Arab citizens living in heterogeneous cities, Arab municipalities, or Arab villages within

popular leisure activities for urbanized Bedouins who live within close proximity to deserts or other wilderness areas. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedouin>

regional councils. The Bedouin of the Galilee are treated as a separate community, in contrast to the Bedouin of the Negev (Israel's southern desert). Most of the Bedouin in the Negev accept and even prefer to identify themselves as Bedouin, despite their transformation from herders to a more sedentary lifestyle, some of them living in towns which offer private and public services, and in recognized and non-recognized villages.

The Bedouin affiliation is a sociocultural and kinship belonging to tribal traditional structures, as well as territorial and land ownership links; the latter are the focus of major dispute between the Negev Bedouin and the State of Israel. The strength of tribal kinship among the Bedouin of the Negev is a result of the following:

- Sociocultural and historical tribal affiliation: The Bedouin affiliate themselves with eight tribes (Azazmah, Tarabin, Tiaha, Hanagrah, Gubarat, Saidin, Ahewat, and Gahalin), consisting of about 95 sub-tribes or clans (this book will use the term clan), each occupying a territorial area (*H'ema*, protected and belonging to a certain tribe) (Fig. 2.1). Three of these, the Azazmah, Tarabin, and Tiaha, are the major tribes that remained in the Negev after the establishment of the Israeli State in 1948. Each aspires to continue to live on its historical territory. With Statehood in 1948, Israel resettled the Bedouin who remained in the Naqab/Negev desert in a concentrated region called the Syag (Fig. 2.2) under a military governor. This movement created change in the *H'ema*; yet even for those who were moved, the territorial affiliation and attachment to this newer territory remain strong. Communities remain as 'closed' tribal areas at the level of towns, kinship or clan affiliations at the level of villages, and extended families at the level of neighborhoods.
- The Bedouin live as a minority within a minority within a minority: They are a minority in the peripheral and marginal Negev region, as well as being a minority among the Arabs of Israel, who are a minority in the Jewish Israeli State. This increases the societal and geographical marginalization of the Negev Bedouin and contributes to strengthening the traditional system of tribalism as a way of protecting their individuality. The situation and status of minorities have a direct impact on the Bedouin as a collective, subcollective-tribal entities, and as individuals. This impact is evident in their minimal economic opportunities, lack of political power, and only nominal and more recent ability to mobilize.
- There is differentiation and fragmentation (religious, cultural, and regional) among Israel's Arab population which Israel's policies reinforce. The separation of the Bedouin living in the Negev, Galilee, Triangle region, and mixed cities contributes to the added marginalization of the Negev Bedouin, as those living in the remotest region (Fig. 3.1).
- The physical planning of Bedouin new towns dates back to the mid-1960s when the government plan for the new town of Tel Sheva was developed, followed by Rahat at the beginning of 1970s. At that time, the towns' physical layouts were based on tribal affiliation and traditional social stratifications at the level of districts and neighborhoods. These residential plans reinforce the tribal and clan affiliation. The plan rationale was to create a tribal town, divided

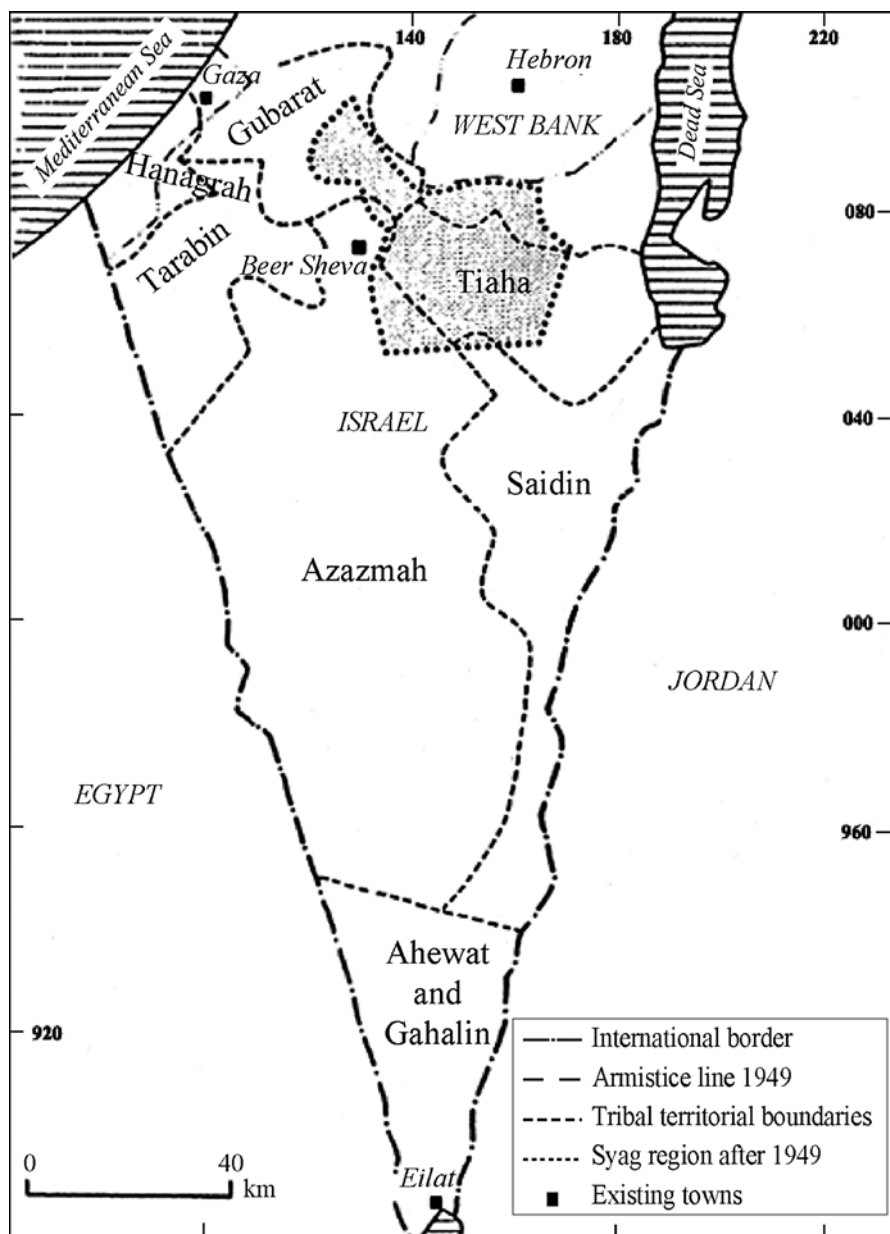
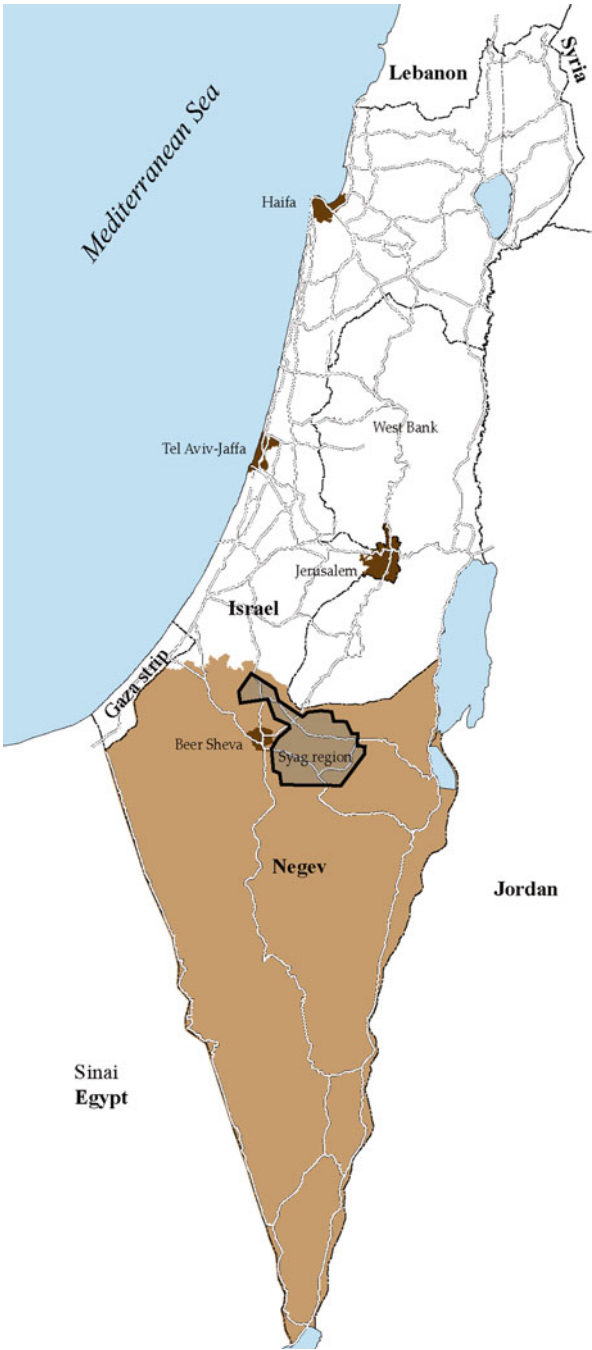


Fig. 2.1 Distribution and territory (H'ema) of the major Bedouin tribes in the Negev 1948, and Syag region (based on Shemony 1949)

Fig. 2.2 Syag region



into clan and extended family neighborhoods, which would allow non-landowners from different clans to congregate. The new planned towns used the Bedouin social structure and hierarchy as a basis for the physical layout (Stern and Gradus 1979).

- The intensity of the ongoing dispute between the State of Israel and the Negev Bedouin over land ownership, resettlement, spatial concentration, and economic development policies reinforces the attachment of tribes/clans to their place and land. This attachment strengthens their sense of, and need for, clan affiliation as a way of protecting both the nuclear family and individuals. The dispute is rooted in the Jewish Zionist and democratic nature of the state, and the Bedouin belonging nationally and culturally to the larger group of Arab inhabitants of the land, who became a weak minority with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. These sociocultural and geopolitical differences fuel the conflict, reducing common interests between the state and the Bedouin community (Nasasra et al. 2014).
- The governmental policy of Judaization of the Negev and attraction of Jews to the Southern region is the reverse of its policy of spatial concentration of the Bedouin. For Jews, policies include individual farms in the Negev, Galilee, and the Judean Hills, which are operated and managed by a single farmer, one family, or a small number of settlers, spread over a large area. Israel has 30 individual farms, most of them located in the Negev whose purpose was to both develop tourist sites and maintain national land from illegal occupation (Bedouin).

Community Variation and Subgroups

As a result of the above factors, the Bedouin community comprises a unique subcultural group among the Arabs in Israel. ‘Bedouizem’ is now acknowledged to be ethnically and culturally differentiated. Beyond the various tribes and clan associations, the Bedouin community is not monolithic in other ways: some are landowners living traditionally on their land, and others do not own land and in this group some are internal refugees.

The Bedouin, a traditional, patriarchal society, continue to cling to their social frameworks, isolating themselves from other segments of society. The community’s stratification in terms of social affiliation, class, and ethnicity has a direct impact on municipal organization. Lack of social mobility reinforces territorial enclosure and impedes cooperation and interaction with other groups. Although Bedouin society is no longer nomadic, the economy of those living in villages remains strongly based upon herding with some farming. Therefore these villagers have need for access to land even when concentrated within small municipal settings. Social stratification

among the Bedouin population is based upon the following (Marx 1980; Falah 1989; Meir 1997; Porat 2009):

- *Tribal tradition*²: Tribes (*kabela*), sub-tribes (*ashera*), clans (*sebit*), and extended families (*hamula*), each branch living in its separate territory in keeping with customary and habitual Bedouin law: the social structure of the Bedouin stratification hierarchy is dynamic, changing according to size (growth) of the tribal units and time period. For example, tribes are divided into sub-tribes (or clans in the case of the Negev). As these clans grow, they themselves become tribes. Often tribes are fragmented socially and territorially during different time periods and ties to the original tribe diminish. Thus, nuclear families become extended families, extended families become sub-tribes/clans, and these become tribes. Social stratification is still strongly connected to previous generations.
- *Social class: Bedouin* (nomads), *humran* (farmers/peasants), and *sumran* (servants): Social immobility, combined with restrictive government policies, reinforces this social arrangement with relatively little mixing of classes. However, social class is becoming more dynamic, it too being connected to time, place, habits, size of group, and economic and political power. The social stratification of the seminomadic period of the 1940s differs from that of today which is influenced by residential hierarchies: planned towns versus organic villages (recognized and unrecognized by the government) and degrees of modernization.
- *Land ownership*: Some tribes originated within the area and hold title (dating back to the Ottoman or British Mandatory periods and their land regimes) to the land on which they live.
- *Social stratification stemming from generational and/or professional achievement*: Tensions between educated, young Bedouin and the older, dominant traditional tribal leaders.
- *Internal evictees/internal refugees*: Bedouin evicted in 1948 from their areas of settlement and grazing lands in the South were relocated to the “Syag” area (see Fig. 2.2) on lands belonging to tribes already living there. They now wish to return to their former lands or, alternatively, to secure recognition and receive land rights where they now live.
- *Status and condition of women*: Women constitute approximately half the population, but the dominance of traditional social restrictions renders them vulnerable and they suffer both economically and socially. The reduced demand for traditional occupations such as weaving and crafts creates pressures for greater educational opportunities for women to enable them to better shape their own destinies.

²Tribal structure and terms vary from country to country. We have adapted nomenclature to fit the Bedouin in the Naqab/Negev. The sub-tribes and clans in the Negev usually refer to the same classification; clan will be used in this book.

This stratification makes it difficult to achieve consensus within the Bedouin community, as the Bedouin are diverse and their status, economic, and political power structures are in flux. The conflict surrounding land claims, recognition, planning, and appropriate municipal frameworks for Israel's Negev Bedouin, especially those living in dispersed, unrecognized villages, is even more complex. The explicit and implicit policies related to the Bedouin in the Negev contribute to the strengthening of their own sense of ethnic separateness. This separateness, rooted in their historical nomadic way of life which sets them apart from the rest of the Arab minority, has evolved into cultural and ethnic behaviors which partially explain the unique problems of spatial planning, management, and organization.

Today the Bedouin have a complex socioeconomic and municipal structure. As a group they are changing from a marginal minority within Israel as a whole and among the Arab minority to a group involved in both national and Arab minority politics (Abu-Rabia 2012). They now identify more strongly with the larger Arab minority who in turn relate to the Bedouin less as a marginal and peripheral group than as a group whose struggles relating to land policy, planning, and municipal structure are both important and central to the larger Arab agenda and can be integrated into the more general lobbying for policy equity.

Thus, it is important to understand the dispute within the wider context of the Arab minority in Israel—the focus of the next chapter.

Israel's Invisible Negev Bedouin

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