



Bedouin children in the Judean Desert. Photo: Dror Avi (CC BY-SA 3.0)

# Tribalism, Religion, and State in Bedouin Society in the Negev: Between Preservation and Change

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This article deals with Bedouin society in the Negev, which is positioned on Israel's social, economic, and geographic margins. Using Bourdieu's field theory, it examines the three main fields in which Bedouin society is active: tribalism, religion, and state. It then demonstrates the dynamic between the fields in the tension between preservation and change by analyzing four issues: higher education, polygamy, the call of the muezzin, and police stations. The principal findings indicate that tribal norms currently determine much of Bedouin society's way of life. At the same time, in recent decades, the force of religion has increased significantly. Together with religion, the influence of the state has become stronger and is challenging tribal rules, and even to some extent the religion field. Nevertheless, to date, the force of the other two fields outweighs the state's influence. The field theory enables a new analysis of the forces operating in Bedouin society, and allows a better understanding of its complexity.

*Keywords:* Bedouin, Negev, Israel, Islam, tribalism, polygamy, education, social resilience, social cohesion, national security

## Introduction

Social resilience, a key component of national resilience, is recognized in the literature as an important element in national security. Studies have emphasized that national security should not be addressed in a narrow fashion; rather, it is essential to consider a broader range of topics, including issues pertaining to social cohesion (Elran et al., 2015; Michael & Fishman, 2019; Kahan et al., 2005; Amit & Fleischer, 2009). The resilience of a society with many deep rifts, when certain elements feel excluded and alienated, is greatly reduced. It detracts from the society's national resilience and its ability to cope with challenges. In 2018, recognition of the connection between social cohesion and national security issues prompted the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) to conduct a number of studies on the subject, among them an extensive survey of the Bedouin population in the Negev. The current study makes use of this survey's findings.

The discussion of social cohesion and social resilience in the context of Bedouin society in the Negev can address various facets. For example, internal cohesion can be examined, or alternatively, the focus can be on cohesion of Israel society in general, in which Bedouin society is one of the components. This article examines aspects affecting the internal cohesion of Bedouin society, which also impact on the state-wide context. The analysis relies on social cohesion theory and the assumption that the integration of the Bedouin society in the Negev in Israeli society is desirable and a matter of national importance (Goldberg Commission, 2008; Yahel, 2019). Our goal is to provide insights into Bedouin society in the Negev and its existing dynamic that will enable the recommendation of new processes leading to better integration of that population into Israeli society.

There are many theories that address interaction between individuals and groups in society and their identities. One is social constructivism (Wendt, 1987), which holds that social identity is based primarily on

the definition of the "I" versus the "other." According to this approach, identity is dynamic, as individuals in society change their identity according to changing interactions and interests (Jepperson et al., 1996). To the best of our understanding, while this theory of identities and similar approaches are useful in understanding the identity dynamic existing in the Western world, which is based on concepts of freedom and individualism, they are less suitable for describing processes and phenomena in conservative societies operating according to rigid rules, and whose focus is more on the group and less on the individuals themselves. Bedouin society is a fundamentally conservative society divided into distinctive sub-groups with a clear hierarchy between them. Consequently, analyzing it on a dynamic individualistic identity basis will not provide the necessary broad picture. The same applies to the structuration theory of Giddens (1989), which concentrates on understanding social practices over axes of time and space, with an emphasis on the activity of agents. Despite its advantages, it has been adapted to explain processes in post-traditional societies but lacks the depth necessary for understanding processes in societies with prominent traditional elements.

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Bourdieu's field theory was chosen because of its suitability for understanding social processes and phenomena in a broad variety of societies, including conservative collectivist societies. It can be used simply and effectively in order to understand specific events, and provides tools for evaluating trends as they unfold, including an explanation of dialectic relations. Furthermore, it allows connecting subjective dimensions to objective dimensions existing in social life (Abu-Ajaj, 2019).

Relying on the field theory, the study analyzes the dynamic existing between three main fields in which Bedouin society operates: tribalism, the Islamic religion, and the State of Israel. It further examines how this dynamic shapes the attitudes of the Bedouins, with an emphasis on four topics: higher education, polygamy, the call of the muezzin, and police stations. The current study stresses previously unexamined phenomena, while taking into account the findings of a 2018 survey commissioned by INSS and conducted by Public Opinion Research of Israel (PORI).

Along with the selected fields, there are additional fields that influence Bedouin society, including Palestinianism and Arabism. This study does not deal with these fields, because they are less suitable for applying the tools offered by Bourdieu's theory. First, the existing research literature cites tribalism, religion, and the state as the main influence on the lives of the Bedouin (Abu-Rabia, 2011; Stewart, 2006).<sup>1</sup> Second, only the fields that we selected have a clear and tested system of laws and binding behavioral norms that cover a broad range of human activities and have penetrated into many spheres of life. This significance exists only to a lesser extent, or not at all, in other fields. Needless to say, this does not negate the importance of future studies involving additional fields.

The first part of the article offers a brief literature review, including data about the Negev Bedouins and general principles of the field theory. The second part applies the theory to the three designated fields through a specification of the fields and a presentation of their respective rules, capital, and primary agents. The third part presents the survey and samples the findings about four topics. The final part summarizes and provides recommendations.

## Literature Review

### *The Negev Bedouins: General Background*

A review of the literature reveals that the Bedouin population in the Negev is among the

most highly researched populations in Israel. The accelerated modernization processes it has undergone, the end of nomadism, and the transition to permanent settlements have attracted researchers from a variety of disciplines. For the purpose of the current study, studies dealing in processes of change undergone by Bedouin society in the Negev, such as those of Ben-David (2004) and Marx (2006), are especially relevant. A number of studies have delved into the changes that took place in Bedouin identity in recent decades (Algoran, 2006; Al-Atawneh, 2015; Dinero, 2004), while the study by Kressel et al. (1991) emphasizes the changes in land uses relating to the transition from a tribal-traditional-nomadic society to a permanently settled society. The reciprocal relations between the groups within Bedouin society have also affected the changes undergone by this society, as shown by the studies of Marx (1967), Kressel (1976), and Ben-David and Gonen (2001). Other aspects are cited in the study by Mintzker (2015), which deals with groups in the Negev Mountains that did not move to regular settled communities, and a study by Galilee (2013), which deals with the changes as reflected in burial customs. These studies fit in with broader studies about the processes of change underway in nomadic and tribal societies around the world in their interface with religion and with the modern state (Ayubi, 1991; Khazanov, 1995; Khoury & Kostiner, 2004; Rabi, 2016).

Other matters addressed in the literature involve the relationship between the state and the Bedouins in the context of settlements founded for them and the question of land ownership. There is extensive criticism of the existing Israeli policy in the literature, including charges that the government policy is discriminatory because it was designed to deprive the Bedouins of their rights (Ben-Israel, 2009; Yiftachel, 2000; Meir, 2006; Porat, 2009; Nasasra, 2011); there is also criticism of the central government's inconsistency and lack of interest in dealing with the subject, symptomatic

of the government's general neglect of the Negev and its population (Yahel, 2019). There are likewise studies on the Bedouins in the context of majority-minority relations and in the context of issues concerning indigeneity (for example, see Kedar et al., 2018, as opposed to Yahel et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is a range of publications in additional fields dealing with educational, social, health, and other matters (Abu-Naja, 2004; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2005).

According to an analysis of figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Population and Immigration Authority, nearly 280,000 Bedouins live in the Negev (as of January 2021). This is the youngest population in Israel, with 51 percent children under 18. A majority of the Bedouins live in 18 settled communities founded and recognized by the state. Approximately 70,000 people live in the city of Rahat, about 100,000 residents live in other towns, and 20,000 more in two regional councils. These communities are run by local authorities and local committees. At the same time, nearly 80,000 Bedouin live outside the localities recognized by the state (Online database, n.d.). There is a shortage of employment in all of these communities (Abu-Bader & Gottlieb, 2009); the population is the poorest in Israel; and their communities figure among the two lowest socioeconomic groups. Due to a combination of factors originating in failures by the authorities and the existing norms in Bedouin society, the communities suffer from a shortage of available lots for construction. Although the prices of the lots and development in the Bedouin communities are subsidized by the state, some young people find it difficult to shoulder the costs. The conditions outside the established communities are more difficult, because there is no regular connection to infrastructure, such as water, sewage, and electrical systems, and the services provided to them by the authorities are extremely limited.

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### *Bourdieu's Field Theory*

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu sought to explain the daily behavior typical of societies (Silverman, 2011). He developed a series of concepts, headed by "field," "agent," and "capital," to argue that in contrast to existing one-dimensional approaches, man is not merely a subject or object in society (Swartz, 1992; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1997; Abu-Ajaj, 2019).

Bourdieu borrowed the term "field" from physics, which is based on forces and objects operating in space (Thomson, 2008). A social field is an arena created in an environment of people and institutions organized around an important shared interest. Various spheres of social and cultural life are organized as a field, each with its own coherence. A "game" takes place in a field, meaning permitted structures and paths in which "agents" act (Bourdieu, 1993). Each field has an internal logic, and a variety of forces operate in it: autonomous, oriented, dynamic, inflexible, and others. The rules of the game determine the internal hierarchy, the control mechanisms in the field, the types of "capital" that the field can offer, and the "habitus"—a system of behaviors acquired by individuals as part of the socialization process. This refers, among other things, to habits, qualifications, and even physical inclinations. The agents can influence and change the rules, and their success is reflected, inter alia, in their ability to determine the rules (Osnat, 2004), for example by setting a rule whose control they are allowed to bequeath to their descendants (Gelernter, 2006).

The characteristics of the field, its independence, the clarity of its rules, and the force of the struggles taking place within it have a direct impact on the agents' activity. The affinity between the fields is connected

to the separate historical development of each field and how they integrate (Tubin & Tal, 2011). Since the rules of the game in a field are determined by the agents operating in it, the success of external agents in introducing new rules indicates a weakening of the field's autonomy. At the same time, the force of each field and the relations between the fields result from the ability of one field to change the rules of the other field. The extent of each field's autonomy can be measured according to the extent, quantity, and force of penetration of the rules that it applies to the organization, management, and supervision over those in it.

The agents within each field influence the types of capital from which the hierarchies and positions of power are derived. There are various compositions of capital. In addition to economic capital, which consists mainly of money and assets, there is also cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Gelernter, 2006), social capital representing a network of social connections with individuals and institutions (Bourdieu, 1983), and symbolic capital, which reflects how the individual's status is perceived by others (Bourdieu, 1991).

There are conversion ratios between the different types of capital that can take place between the fields. It is thus relatively easy to convert economic capital to cultural and social capital. The agents need this conversion of types of capital because certain elements are sometimes unobtainable with economic capital alone; a specific social capital is needed. An agent's social capital consists of ethnic origin, religion, and family origin, as well as education and qualifications acquired or expertise in a given sphere. Bourdieu contends that non-material capital gives added social and cultural capital to the agents operating within the fields. By using symbolic capital, for example, actors can legitimize balances of power within symbolic structures. This can be demonstrated in the religion field, for instance, when the cultural capital in general, and particularly linguistic capital, enables agents to improve their social

status. This linguistic capital is expressed in the knowledge of religious terms that refer to sources from the ancient culture of Islam. The image of senior agents in the religion field such as imams and preachers is linked to the status of their rhetoric, or in Bourdieu's terms, the strength of their linguistic capital.

The field theory, with all its advantages, also has considerable drawbacks (Thomson, 2008), led by the difficulty in defining the fields and delineating the boundaries of each field. This involves the continual changes within each field and the changing affinities between the fields. Furthermore, defining the world as a collection of fields results in a large number of fields, which makes it difficult to count them and assign a higher priority to the more relevant fields over less relevant ones. Beyond this, it is asserted that the theory does not provide an adequate separate response to the spatial expressions of each field. Despite these criticisms, the theory's advantages, which lie in the explanation that it provides for the phenomena existing in Bedouin society in the Negev, outweigh its drawbacks (Abu-Ajaj, 2019).

### **The Fields and their Relationships in the Context of Bedouin Society in the Negev**

The study focuses on applying Bourdieu's field theory to Bedouin society in the Negev, with an emphasis on tribalism, the religion of Islam, and the state.

#### ***Tribalism***

Tribalism in general and nomadic tribalism in particular is a form of life with deep roots in human history. The phenomenon came into being primarily as a result of the difficult living conditions of nomads who lack permanent walls. Regulating the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of life, it is based on blood ties of dynasties of relatives on the father's side, and is built on a hierarchal network of connections and obligations that includes, inter alia, the solidarity group also known as the

blood money group or *hams*, the tribe, and the confederation (El-Aref, 1944; Algoran, 2006; Ashkenazi, 2000; Ben-David, 2004; Ben-David & Gonen, 2001; Bar-Zvi, 1979; Marx, 1967).

In the Middle East, cultural-tribal frameworks were preserved from the period preceding the establishment of modern states. The rules, customs, and traditions followed by the Bedouin tribes in the region are similar (Stewart, 2006), and they all share the Arabic language in local dialects. Tribalism still occupies a prominent place in the Middle East, even after most of the Bedouins have undergone processes of permanent settlement in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and others (Rabi, 2016). Although researchers have noted the difficulty in defining “tribe” and “tribalism,” in the Bedouin context, the tribe is usually regarded as a social and political organization incorporating within itself groups having a common culture, customs, and language, while the glue connecting them is the idea that they are descendants on their father’s side of a common ancient ancestor (Tapper, 1983; Stewart, 2012). The question of a shared past is significant in preserving the traditional structures (Algoran, 2006).

*Rules of the game* in the tribal field include an assortment of customs and patterns of acceptable behavior assimilated over many years (Tapper, 1983). This refers to what is allowed and what is forbidden in the framework of relations within the family and between families, the arrangement of weddings and funerals, customs for receiving guests, and the like. One important rule is the obligation of uncompromising solidarity in the tribal collective (Salzman, 2004; Stewart, 2012). Another element is the tribal legal system and the method of settling disputes (Abu-Rabia, K., 2011; Abu-Rabia, 2018; Alsrailha, 2016; Bar-Zvi, 1979; Shahar, 1997; Stewart, 2006).

*Types of capital* in the tribal field include numerical size, which dictates the balance of power between the families and the tribes, the purity of the dynasty and the origin, and the

extent of control of land as an expression of power (Kressel et al., 1991). After the founding of the State of Israel, land became a source of friction with the field of the state (Yahel, 2019). Another kind of capital is honor (Stewart, 2000).

*Key agents* in the tribal field are the sheikhs and tribal leaders, the large groups (Alon, 2007; Mor, 1971; Marx, 1967; Alon, 2016), and senior figures in the tribal legal system.

### **Religion**

Islam arose in the seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula and swept through the Bedouin tribes. It offers a comprehensive way of life that combines religious activity by man toward God, belief in God, religious rites, and a system of moral values between men and between man and society, such as honesty, sincerity, good behavior, and more (Abu-Freih, 2014). Islam can be viewed as a technical label, a folkloristic-cultural framework, or a binding and comprehensive framework of religious law. There are various movements within Islam. One, which has garnered substantial support among the Bedouin in the Negev, is the Islamic movement, whose southern branch developed there. According to Uriya Shavit, this movement promotes a concept that incorporates three fundamental assumptions. The first is that in the long term, the sole legitimate political framework is the *ummah* or *ummat al-Islām*, which unites all Islam believers without discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin or language. The second is that the binding framework in all areas of life, including the political sphere, is Islam. The third is that harmful Western influences should be driven out of Muslim societies (Shavit, 2011, p. 22). It is therefore clear that the concept of the Islamic *ummah* challenges both the concepts of the liberal democratic state and those of the tribal frameworks.

*The rules of the game* in the field of religion are Islamic religious law (*shari’a*), based on the Qur’an and the Sunna—the Islamic oral law (Abu-Freih, 2014; Ilan, 2002). *Shari’a* is interwoven

between religious ritual and daily life, while setting rigorous standards and highlighting the negative consequences for anyone not observing it. The five basic commandments binding on every Muslim are the oath, prayer, the fast of Ramadan, charity, and pilgrimage (hajj) (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1980). Furthermore, every Muslim is commanded to take action to settle conflicts between people and between groups.

*Types of capital* in the religion field include knowledge and higher education in religious studies and in other educational frameworks; this is evidenced by the education of the candidates representing the Islamic Movement in elections. Additional capital is belonging to a social framework based on joint religious activity. Another type is linguistic capital of power of expression that facilitates the use of religious terms, and a dress code, including a white gallabiyah (robe) and a beard.

*Agents* include religious figures—the imams at the head of the community of believers and those responsible for managing and leading the prayers and the mosques, the preachers responsible for weekly sermons in mosques, and the muezzin.

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***The State***

According to Max Weber, a state is a political organization possessing the right and exclusive ability to use force toward a population with a distinct identity within a defined territory (Weber 1919/ 2015; Ophir, 2010). Ernest Gellner also declares that the modern state has a monopoly of force and uses it through separate authorities—the police and the courts (Gellner, 2006). Other definitions emphasize mechanisms for dividing authority and forces (Eisenstadt, 1978). Through its laws, the state sets binding rules for behavior by the population, and is

obligated to care for the people’s security, economic needs, education, welfare, health, and more. The nation-state serves as a source of affiliation and identity (Gellner, 2006).

States seek to move nomadic societies to permanent settlements for a variety of reasons, including a desire to control them and the land. Permanent settlement severs the dependence on the tribal framework, thereby enabling the state to constitute a direct organizational substitute for the members of the group (Khazanov, 1984; Khoury & Kostiner, 1990; Rabi, 2016; Salzman, 2004; Bocco, 2006; Kark & Frantzman, 2012). Israel differs from Arab countries that are home to Bedouins primarily in the contexts of culture, language, religion, and regime.

Before the State of Israel was founded in 1948, the number of Bedouins in the Negev was estimated at 65,000. Following the War of Independence, only 15 percent of the Bedouins living there remained, while the new borders that emerged separated tribes and families. The state recognized those who remained as a “friendly” population, and even allowed thousands of them to return to the Negev and obtain Israeli citizenship (Yahel & Kark, 2015). At the same time, in the early years following the establishment of the state, the Bedouins were perceived as a security risk, both because of their nomadic way of life and due to their proximity to the borders and their connections with Arab countries. With this background, and given Israel’s desire to use the land for other purposes, among them development, immigrant absorption, Jewish settlement, and security needs, Bedouins living in the Negev gradually moved to the northeastern Negev area, encompassing 1.1 million dunams (275,000 acres). A military administration was imposed in this region, as well as on the other Arab citizens (Bäumel, 2007), imposing restrictions on movement, and implementing a licenses regime. The Bedouin economy underwent many changes, mainly because of a reduction in the high-quality agricultural areas and pastures

that had been at their disposal in the western Negev (Meir, 2006).

Even after the military government was dismantled in 1966, the situation of the Bedouins remained difficult. The state established special mechanisms for dealing with the challenges posed by Bedouin society, particularly in the context of land rights and their permanent settlement. An Operational Administration was set up in 1979 to resettle the Bedouins removed from Tel Malhata in order to establish the IDF Nevatim airbase as part of the arrangements accompanying the peace treaty with Egypt (Yahel & Kark, 2016). A special educational authority was founded for Bedouins in the Negev. Furthermore, a Bedouin administration was founded in the Israel Land Administration in 1986, which was later replaced by the Authority for Development and Settlement of the Bedouins in the Negev (Cabinet Resolution no. 1999, dated July 15, 2007). A special enforcement mechanism was subsequently established in the Ministry of the Interior for coordinating enforcement of land laws in the Negev (Cabinet Resolution No. 3707, dated September 11, 2011). In the past two decades, various task forces on this subject were established, most prominently, the teams headed by Justice (ret.) Eliezer Goldberg, Ehud Praver, and Ze'ev Binyamin Begin (Goldberg Commission, 2008; Yahel, 2019).

Although the Bedouins moved to permanent residences, the state failed in providing them with the same level of services provided to other population groups in the areas of personal security, education, employment, health, and welfare. This leaves a substantial space for the development of alternative systems (Rudnitzky, 2012).

*The rules of the game* in the state field include principles of the rule of law, freedom, and equality. There is a separation of powers, with constant preservation of balance. The law in Israel is based on legislation and judicial review (Barak, 2000). Every citizen in the state is equal under the law, regardless of gender,

origin, or religion. Underlying the system is the recognition of the existence of basic freedoms, with a person entitled to make his/her own independent decisions. Every person is responsible only for his/her own deeds.

Legislation in Israel takes place in the Knesset, and its laws are public and universal (Fuller, 1969; Rubinstein & Medina, 2005). The laws are implemented through a state enforcement system, comprising mainly the police and the courts (Barak, 2000). At the same time, there is criticism of how the law is applied. The authority of the executive branch is derived from the law, and the citizens are free to conduct any action not forbidden by law.

*The types of capital* in the state field are diverse, including physical force and enforcement agencies capital, economic capital, cultural capital, capital of information, symbolic capital, and more. The state's control of these types of capital gives it great power in comparison with other fields (Bourdieu et al., 1994). The principal security systems in Israel include those responsible for handling external and internal threats, with preservation of the law and public order among them. Military service confers social connections, prestige, and potential for economic leadership. It also has symbolic value that can be converted into economic capital (Levy, 2014). Bedouins can serve in the army on a voluntary basis. The proportion of Bedouins recruited is very low—less than 3 percent of men of draft age (State Comptroller's Report, 2018). Furthermore, the state has much control over economic capital, knowledge capital, and cultural capital. Although the Arabic language has an official status in Israel, knowledge and command of Hebrew and the majority culture are very significant.

*The leading agents* in the state field are the policymakers and political leaders elected in the national and local arena. In the local aspect, most Bedouin communities are run by residents. In the national sphere, however, their participation is on a small scale. Bedouins

have never been part of a government, and only a few of them serve in public institutions and government ministries, including in the Authority for Development and Settlement of the Bedouin in the Negev. Despite the existence of programs for encouraging their recruitment in the police, few Bedouins express interest in this (State Comptroller's Report, 2018).

### **Dynamics of the Fields: The Survey Findings (INSS and PORI, 2018)**

According to the theory presented above, the activity of the tribal, Islamic, and state fields takes place in a way that leads the dominant agents in each field to strive to preserve their power in the field through ongoing competition. The INSS and PORI survey provided us with a specific status report on the state of these struggles. This status report, combined with other sources, will help in analyzing expected trends. This section presents information about how the survey was conducted and its limitations, followed by a description of the dynamic between the fields as reflected in four areas: higher education, polygamy, the call of the muezzin, and police stations.

The 2018 survey (unpublished) was initiated by INSS and carried out by PORI, engaging local Bedouins to conduct face-to-face personal interviews in Arabic. The survey was conducted over a wide area, and response to the survey was high: 300 Bedouins in the 18-70 age bracket, half of them women, responded to the survey. Two thirds of the interviewees (200) live in regular communities, and one third (100) live outside them.

The survey has several limitations. The first is that it addresses the existing tribal and hierarchical status diversity in Bedouin society only to a partial extent. The second is overrepresentation of the 25-30 age bracket (34 percent). The third is overrepresentation of those with higher education. In view of these limitations, we have chosen to include additional sources as a basis for our findings

(reports in the press and on Arabic language websites, laws, and existing research literature).

According to the self-perception expressed by the respondents, Islam is the most dominant element in their identity: 96 percent rated Islam as an important element in their identity (71 percent of them regarded it as very important). Bedouin identity was rated as important by 84 percent (52 percent regarded it as very important), while Israeli identity had the lowest rating—64 percent (24 percent regarded it as very important).<sup>2</sup> Seventy percent of the interviewees responded that they felt that they were part of the State of Israel and Israeli society.

In addition, when asked further about the role of religion in their lives, 86 percent answered that this was of central (49 percent) or medium importance (37 percent). Twelve percent said that religion was of marginal importance, and less than 2 percent answered that religion played no role in their lives. At the same time 44 percent of the respondents said that the Bedouin society around them was becoming less religious, 32 percent that there was no change, and only 24 percent said that the society around them was becoming more religious.

### **Analysis of Four Issues according to the Field Theory**

#### ***Higher Education, Equality, and Freedom of Choice: State and Religion vs. Tribalism***

Both the state and Islam encourage institutionalized formal education. For example, in institutions of higher education, special organizations have been founded that operate as part of the Islamic movements, and aim to encourage young men and women to pursue higher education and acquire knowledge. Organizations such as al-Qalam hold higher education open houses and explanatory meetings for high school students, and also offer student scholarships.<sup>3</sup>

Formal education was formerly not a part of the tribal field, and the nomadic way of life

did not suit it (Algoran, 2006). Knowledge and practical experience were transmitted orally and directly between generations, and they were the source for acquiring education and knowledge (Abu-Saad, 2001). In the late 1970s, formal education for girls, and to a large extent also for boys, was limited to elementary school (Meir & Barnea, 1987). In recent years, over 70 percent of young Bedouins in the Negev finished high school, compared with 87 percent of the Arab population and 95 percent of the general population (excluding ultra-Orthodox and Bedouins). Among 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, 47 percent of the Bedouins in the Negev are eligible for matriculation, compared with 60 percent in Arab education and 73 percent of the general population (excluding ultra-Orthodox and Bedouins). The proportion of women who finish high school among the Bedouins is higher than the corresponding proportion among Bedouin men (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2017).

According to the survey, 90 percent of the participants believe that education is very important for success in life. Studying in institutions of higher learning is not perceived as contradicting adherence to religion (Feldman, 2020). Education among the Bedouin population was encouraged through the development of special programs and budgets for the purpose. These programs and budgets were effective, mainly among Bedouin women. In this gradual process, the state succeeded in helping hundreds of women—who until a few decades ago were forced by the tribal leaders to discontinue their studies at the end of sixth grade—to complete high school and to continue on to higher education. There are currently more Bedouin women in higher education than Bedouin men; 20 percent of the Bedouin women completing high school enter higher education, compared with 8 percent of men (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2018).

A byproduct of the education of women is promotion of the state's values, in the

form of personal freedom, gender equality, and empowerment of the Bedouin woman. This is especially prominent in the context of marriage, because educated women are given greater independence in their choice of spouse (Feldman, 2020). Academic studies with men and women studying together also lead to acquaintance between them outside of the tribal or hierarchical status context. Institutions of higher education constitute a kind of neutral ground for young Bedouins. As a result of higher education and studying away from home, the tribal field has begun to absorb norms that are encouraged by the state and religion. While the matchmaking process was previously an internal tribal affair, these boundaries have now been breached, and marriage by women according to personal choice, including mixed marriages, have become common—exactly as recommended and encouraged by both Islam and the state. This conclusion emerges from news on the local social media in advance of the wedding season.<sup>4</sup>

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Higher education also contributes to a change in the tribal hierarchy. While positioning within the tribal field was previously determined according to dynasty and origin, determination of social status has gradually shifted to the level of education. The tribal hierarchy has also been greatly affected by trends toward the acquisition of higher education by individuals within the tribal field. Most of the leadership now emerging in this field is educated leadership. These findings emerge from an analysis of the educational data of those elected in the Bedouin local authorities, which showed that

over 65 percent of elected officials had higher education.<sup>5</sup> Confirmation of this can be found in the educational level of those elected to the local authorities and the Knesset.

Thus the tribal field, which opposed formal education in the early years following the establishment of the state, has gradually changed its attitude toward education, and is now adopting the view of the state field and the religion field about acquiring an education in general, and higher education in particular.

### ***Polygamy: State vs. Tribalism and Religion***

Tribalism encourages large numbers of descendants. Polygamy contributes to numerical capital, thereby strengthening the power of origin and the dynasty. The phenomenon of a man marrying more than one wife was common for many years in Bedouin society, especially in the context of sheikhs who took pride in their many wives and dozens of descendants.

According to Islam, the Qur'an allows a man to marry four wives, unless there is a reasonable suspicion that he will not treat them equally. In practice, the *qadis* in the *shari'a* courts recognize these marriages as valid (Abu-Rabia, R., 2011). The argument by more and more women that such marriages should not be allowed, because the men do not treat their wives equally, remains marginal. In practice, polygamy preserves the tribal rules, including male hegemony, while receiving backing from the rules of the religion field.

According to estimates obtained from the welfare authorities, nearly a third of Bedouin men have more than one wife (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2006; 2013). According to the findings of the 2018 survey, 36 percent of the respondents expressed support for this phenomenon, and stated that it was undesirable for a man to have only one wife.

In contrast to the reinforcement from these fields, Israeli law bans polygamy, and the penalty imposed on those violating the law is a five-year prison term.<sup>6</sup> The state has linked

the phenomenon to oppression of women, child abuse, and perpetuation of backwardness (Albador, 2005; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2005). Nevertheless, the Ministry of Justice has not enforced this ban on the Negev Bedouins, although it was enforced in other regions (Yahel, 2017). In 2017, then-Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked instituted measures designed to enforce the ban against polygamy in the Negev.<sup>7</sup> Since this decision was taken, polygamous marriages have continued, although the State Attorney's Office has filed several dozen indictments, some of which culminated in convictions. The survey found that 55 percent of the respondents believed that this justified legal protest. Another finding that can be explained using Bourdieu's field theory is that 24 percent of the respondents believe that there will be a severe confrontation between the tribal field and the state field if the State of Israel enforces the ban on polygamy.

To summarize, the meeting between the tribal field and the religion field, which encourage polygamy, and the state field, which has formally banned polygamy for many years but has taken no steps to enforce it, has enabled the phenomenon to continue.

### ***The Call of the Muezzin: State vs. Religion***

Another finding from the survey involves a dispute about the muezzin. According to Muslim tradition, the first call to prayer was ordered by the Prophet Mohammed. In later periods, high mosque towers were constructed, designed, inter alia, to facilitate believers hearing the call of the muezzin for prayer at long distances. Prayer times change according to the hour of sunrise, and the muezzin reads verses from the Qur'an before the dawn prayer. Today, it is common for the call of the muezzin in the public space to be amplified with a powerful public address system and loudspeakers. This phenomenon began as part of modernization processes, and has become accepted religious practice in the Arab communities.

The nomadic tribal tradition did not include prayer in a mosque, which is a permanent

building, and is therefore unsuited to a nomadic society's way of life. The first mosque in the Negev was built at the initiative of the Ottomans around the time that Beer Sheva was founded in 1900. The first mosque built in a Bedouin community was initiated by local families in Rahat. These were the first families to settle in the new permanent settlement, and they asked the Ministry of Religious Services for financial assistance in building the mosque.<sup>8</sup> Since then, dozens of mosques have been built in the Bedouin communities (Algoran, 2006).

The survey shows that 76 percent of the interviewees pray at a mosque on Friday (42 percent answered that they always or usually pray, 34 percent that they pray sometimes); 24 percent answered that they usually do not pray. Taking into account that women, who have no religious obligation to pray in a mosque, account for half of the participants in the survey, the responses reflect the significance of religious ritual.

In recent years, with the introduction of powerful loudspeaker technology, the issue of the power of the public address system, especially in the early morning, has aroused a major dispute among non-Muslim population groups, with demands of the state to exercise its authority.<sup>9</sup> These demands included, inter alia, attempts to pass legislation, which aroused extensive public debate.<sup>10</sup> While the state regarded limiting the volume of a public address system as part of enforcement of the laws against noise, opposition to the measures arose among the Muslims in Israel. The survey findings confirmed that the Bedouins also perceived the measures as unacceptable interference with their customs: 85 percent answered that they would protest enforcement of restrictions on the volume of the muezzin, and 59 percent answered that they would respond very vigorously.

The field theory is likely to explain the above clash as part of the dynamic between the religion field and the state field. The survey findings reflect the power of religion against the

state. This finding, combined with the Bedouin protests against a restriction on the volume of the call of the muezzin, shows how the Bedouins in the Negev regard the religious practices that were adopted on a large scale by the tribal field in recent decades. The force of norms dating back 50 years is sometimes equal to that of norms going back hundreds of years.

To summarize, it is clear that as a result of the meeting between Bedouin society and the religion of Islam, Bedouin society has fully accepted the norm of the call of the muezzin. In recent years, the State of Israel has had to address the issue of the volume of the call. The conflict on this matter is not confined to Bedouin society; it extends to all of the Muslim communities. Although as of the time of this writing the state has not taken any enforcement actions, the last word in the matter may have not yet been spoken.

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**23 percent believed that if the police presence in communities increased, it is liable to cause a severe clash.**

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### *Police Stations: Tribalism vs. the State*

The level of violence in the Negev Bedouin communities in general, and in schools in particular, is high (Abid et al., 2018). At the same time, most of the respondents in the survey (79 percent) said that they had no wish for a significant increase in the police presence in their community; 23 percent believed that if the police presence in communities increased, it is liable to cause a severe clash (between the state field and the tribal field). These findings can be explained by the perception that police stations are an expression of the state's presence and its rules in the area. The extent of acceptance of the existence of police forces in the area indicates the degree of public consent to the rules and tools of state enforcement. The low level of support for a police presence shows that the Bedouins do not regard the state enforcement system as a factor providing

a solution to internal problems. Bedouin society has rules for arranging affairs between people, including rules for settling disputes according to tribal and religious principles, and prefers the rules of its tribal and religious system. Furthermore, the small scale of a police presence means that many interfaces between the police and the community are in the context of state enforcement against activity perceived in Bedouin society as legitimate. One example of such enforcement is the demolition of buildings (Yahel, 2019).<sup>11</sup>

According to the survey's findings, in case of a clash between the Bedouin tribal rules and those of the state, 47 percent held that the state laws are supreme. Twenty-nine percent responded that tribal Bedouin law should be preferred, while 24 percent responded that there is no contradiction between the two. To the question "Is it sometimes justified to break the law in order to make a living?" 55 percent answered no; the question did not distinguish between different laws.

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**It is clear that in cases in which the state promotes norms that do not clash with the tribal field or the religion field, cooperation by Bedouin society is possible.**

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Army service is another path connected to the state enforcement mechanisms. According to the survey, 29 percent believe that it is desirable for young Bedouins to enlist in the army. Seventy-one percent do not believe that Bedouins should enlist in the army, and 45 percent are highly opposed to enlistment. A different picture emerged for civilian service, with 45 percent responding that civilian service by young Bedouins is desirable; 55 percent expressed opposition, including 31 percent that were highly opposed.

To summarize, in the meeting between the state law enforcement system and the tribal and religious system for settling disputes, as

of now, there is a clear preference for the tribal and religious system over the state system.

## Conclusion

The current study presents a new dimension to understanding the dynamic between preservation and change in parts of Bedouin society. The trends we have cited influence the connections within Bedouin society and the connections to Israeli society in general. The study uses findings from a survey conducted in Bedouin society in the Negev as its starting point, and the findings are combined with the theoretical system proposed by Bourdieu and an array of sources and other studies.

An analysis of the three fields—tribalism, religion, and the state—and the dynamic between them made it possible to present a range of preservation and change processes underway in Bedouin society. Each of the selected fields offers an array of rules of the game, types of capital, and prominent agents. The relations between the fields are examined through the findings presented on four issues: education, polygamy, the call of the muezzin, and police stations in the communities. In addition, the study demonstrates that by using this theory, a variety of matters, both specific and general, can be explained effectively. Furthermore, the theory's ability to view the dynamic and the unseen flows of each field and conceptualize them with the help of a specific status report arising from the survey findings is demonstrated.

Combining the sources used in the current study shows that when the state attempts to employ direct tools of legislation and enforcement in order to revoke the accepted rules of the game and capital in the tribal field, it encounters strong opposition and serious difficulty. This difficulty intensifies when religion combines forces with the tribal field. Regarding polygamy, the tribal tradition is supported by religious rules, while the state has avoided dealing with the issue for many years, even in circumstances in which a precise interpretation

of the religious regulations is in dispute. A similar picture emerges regarding the state's attempt to limit the volume of the call of the muezzin in mosques. Here the tribal and religion fields join forces against the state field, and the survey findings reveal broad opposition.

On the other hand, it is clear that in cases in which the state promotes norms that do not clash with the tribal field or the religion field, cooperation by Bedouin society is possible. In the case of higher education, for example, the survey findings show that the tribal field can match other fields. The religion field's support for acquiring higher education, and not just religious education, helps in forming a coalition in this matter.

The study also finds that important aspects of the way of life in Negev Bedouin society are still determined by tribal norms. At the same time, the force of religion has greatly increased in recent decades, and has become an especially significant field. Together with the rise of the religion field, the state's force has also increased, though to date, its influence is more modest than that of the other two fields. As the state becomes present in broader areas of life and acts in conjunction with the other fields, its ability to exert influence will grow.

Our conclusion is that the use of Bourdieu's theory helps to analyze and understand points of friction between the fields, and provides profound explanations of the processes underway within and in the context of Bedouin society. Similarly, the theory helps map the existing interfaces between the fields, and in finding ways in which all of the fields can act together. The study indicates the existence of agents of change that draw Bedouin society closer to or more distant from Israeli society, and emerge in an analysis of the forces operating between the fields. Since cohesion is an element in national resilience—as Israel also acknowledged when it declared the integration of Bedouin society to be its goal—it is important to generate knowledge infrastructure, while

at the same time improving the provision of services and physical infrastructures.

In this context, we recommend the following measures:

- a. To conduct extensive and thorough mapping of all of the fields operating in Bedouin society, including those that are less influential.
- b. To locate the connecting points between the fields and the existing trends in them, and act to strengthen the trends supporting integration of the Bedouins in the country, such as in education in general and the education of women in particular.
- c. To locate the sources of friction between the fields, and to utilize the theory to analyze the possible connections, including those linked to the dynamic existing within the fields and between the agents—by expanding public information activity by the police, for example.
- d. To conduct periodic thorough surveys that can provide more extensive and accurate information about the trends mentioned in the study, and about additional trends.
- e. To continue conducting studies about Bedouin society, which assess the contribution of supplementary theories, while locating additional processes in Bedouin society and thoroughly analyzing the various elements.

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## Notes

- 1 For studies of religion and tribalism, see Layish (2005) and Natour (1991).
- 2 The respondents were asked to rate the magnitude of their connection (very unimportant, unimportant, important, very important) in comparison with the range of identities.
- 3 Al-Qalam Facebook page <https://he-il.facebook.com/QalamYouthAcademy>
- 4 An analysis of the publications and invitations for July weddings in the Negev showed that nearly a third of the weddings were outside the family and/or the tribe.

- 5 The data were gathered from reports by elected officials in the various local authorities in the Negev, websites of the local authorities, and the personal websites of the elected officials.
- 6 Section 176 of the Criminal Code -1977, *Book of Laws* 1977 No. 846, August 4, 1977, p. 226.
- 7 *Summary report—The Ministerial Committee for Dealing with the Negative Consequences of Polygamy*, July 2018.
- 8 Letter by Atwa Elhubra to the Minister of Religious Services, February 9, 1975. State Archives GL11/17094.
- 9 Abatement of Nuisances Law—1961, *Book of Laws* 5721, p. 58, and Prevention of Noise Regulations—1992, *Protocol File*, 5753 No. 5474, October 5, 1992, p. 8, Regulation 3(A).
- 10 A report by the Knesset Research and Information Center mentioned one case in which a court convicted a muezzin of violating the law and fined him, Knesset Research and Information Center (2011). “Use of Loudspeakers to Broadcast the Call of the Muezzin: A Comparative Review,” p. 5; bills were brought to the Knesset Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee for discussion in June 2018. They included a bill for prevention of nuisances (amendment—forbidding the use of a public address system in houses of worship), 2015, in the framework of a preparation for its first reading, and a bill for prevention of nuisances (amendment—prevention of noise from a public address system in houses of worship), 2016.
- 11 For enforcement of construction laws in 2019, see a report by the Southern Administration for Coordinating the Enforcement of Land Laws, [https://www.gov.il/he/departments/units/unit\\_land\\_law\\_enforcement\\_negev](https://www.gov.il/he/departments/units/unit_land_law_enforcement_negev); for the struggle against house demolitions, see H. Noah and M. Marcus (Eds.). (2020). *About (in)equality and demolition of homes and buildings in Bedouin Arab communities in the Negev*, Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality.