

## Women, Education, and Control<sup>1</sup>

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In this speech, I intend to discuss what is called planning and urbanization for minorities. I will focus on two aspects of planning, one hidden and the other visible. The hidden aspect of planning relates to control, and the visible aspect to modernization. I shall discuss the definition of these two aspects, and examine their effects in the context of gender and culture in Arab Bedouin society.

### 1. Control

Oren Yiftachel defines planning, and in particular planning and urbanization for minorities, as a means to control subjugated populations and ethnic minorities who are different from the dominant population.<sup>3</sup> He argues that, in a multi-cultural society like Israel's, the government uses planning to control ethnic minorities. The policy of control tends to retard the economic and social development of ethnic minorities, restricts their geographical expansion, and excludes them from positions of power and decision-making at both the state and local levels. In planning terms, the result is "top-down" – the population for whom the planning is intended is left out of the planning process.

Control by planning is achieved in three spheres:

- A. The territorial sphere: segregation and cessation of development.
- B. The procedural sphere: exclusion and marginalization.
- C. The socio-economic sphere: dependence and scarcity.

#### A. The Territorial Sphere

This sphere determines the location of towns and villages, neighborhoods, industries, and employment and social services, and also defines the borders of towns and villages. It is the nature of territorial policy to be used as a means of control and monitoring. In the case of the Arab Bedouin, this nature is particularly obvious. Contending that the Arab Bedouin are living illegally on their lands, Israel has established seven permanent Arab Bedouin towns in which they have concentrated much of the Arab Bedouin population. By separating and isolating them from the Jewish population, which lives in nearby communities, Israel has limited the Arab Bedouins' right to expand territorially, and their rights to legally own land.

#### B. The Procedural Sphere

This sphere relates to the formulation and implementation of planning policy. Control in this sphere is achieved through controlling access to the decision-making process. Within this sphere, a barrier is created between the local authorities and the public, with government officials refusing to give the relevant ethnic minority any role in establishing planning policy or in the planning process itself. Israel has consistently kept the Arab Bedouin out of the planning process, and especially Arab Bedouin women, depriving them of the chance to present their needs. The effect is the exclusion and increased marginalization of the ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a summary of remarks delivered at Adalah's conference, "Planning, Control and the Law in the Naqab", held on 6 December 2004 in Beer el-Sabe (Beer Sheva). Sarab Abu Rabia-Queder spoke on a panel entitled, "Between Politics, Law and Society."

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<sup>3</sup> Oren Yiftachel, "The Dark Side of Modernism: Planning as Control of an Ethnic Minority," in Sophie Watson & Katherine Gibson (eds.), *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 216-243.

minority. In implementing this top-down control mechanism, the cultural traditions and needs of the Arab Bedouin are totally ignored.

C. The Socio-Economic Sphere

This sphere relates to the long-term effect of planning on socio-economic relations between different groups within the population. In the case of the Arab Bedouin in the Naqab (Negev), planning is used to make this community dependent on the Jewish markets. It accomplishes this objective by failing to provide the necessary jobs within the Arab communities, while creating a wealth of jobs in Jewish towns and villages. This dependence protects the interests of the majority and maintains its dominance. Through its creation of scarcity, planning policy becomes a means through which to control the Arab Bedouin population.

**2. Modernization**

In this open aspect of planning, planning is used to serve as the long arm of modernization. In fact, the goal of planning for the Arab Bedouin is to take their lands, under the cover of modernization, for the purpose of housing the largest number of Arab Bedouin on the minimum amount of land. Even within this process of ostensible modernization, the state does not allow the Arab Bedouin in the Naqab to partake in planning and decision-making. Modernization is Western in orientation. It views the process of change as universal, and ignores local, cultural, and gender-related phenomena. Thus, modern planning policy is perceived as an automatic process of change, and not as the product of the integration of cultural, social, and economic elements, social and tribal relations, and social outlooks. Israel's assumption in attempting to modernize the Arab Bedouin is that the population will change with the passage of time, and that their codes and norms will conform to the values and goals of modernization.

This lack of consideration for the unique needs and characteristics of the Arab Bedouin particularly affects the world of women in different areas, including space, employment, psychological welfare and education. I shall discuss these areas, focusing especially on education.

Space

The first element that expresses planning as a mechanism of control is the lack of opportunity for the Arab Bedouin living in the Naqab to design the nature of their communities as they wish. They are not given the option of choosing between a traditional community, an agricultural settlement, or an urban environment. Thus, while Jewish citizens are offered these choices, in the form of the moshav, kibbutz, city, or village, the form of community the Arab Bedouin live in is fixed and unalterable.

Regarding the modern division of space, the planning process fails to take into consideration the division of space within Arab Bedouin culture, in which gender places a major role.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly true in the recognized towns. This cultural division of space distinguishes between men and women, the permitted and the forbidden, the private and the public, where, according to traditional norms, the private is viewed as the domain of women, and the public is viewed as the domain of men. The modern spatial division of villages or towns creates public spaces to be open to the entire population, but the lack of consideration for cultural and gender-related norms make these spaces forbidden for Arab Bedouin women. For example, a public park built in the middle of the village cannot be used by women. Similarly, a club for women situated on a main road or in the main neighborhood of a community, will

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<sup>4</sup> Tovi Fenster, "Space for Gender: Cultural Roles of the Forbidden and the Permitted," 17(2) *Society & Space* (1999), pp. 227-246.

not fulfill the purpose for which it was intended, because of traditional customs regarding modesty and shame.

### Employment

The stated aim of modernization and urban planning for the Arab Bedouin – that is, moving them to modern permanent towns – is to transform the Arab Bedouin into a modern people and to generate massive change. In practice, however, the only changes which have been realized are the connection of the residents' homes to a water network, an electricity grid, and a sewage system. The process of modernization has neglected to supply work places within the town, especially for women. Most jobs in Arab Bedouin towns held by Arab Bedouin women, principally educated women, are in the areas of education, social work, and nursing care. Left out, however, are Arab Bedouin women from the first two generations, who experienced the move from the desert to the permanent towns, and who lack the basic education or training necessary to be able to integrate into modern society.

As a result of the scarcity of employment, the women have become dependent, as has the entire population, on state services. The lack of jobs within the Arab Bedouin communities, and especially of jobs suitable in terms of culture and gender, is a means of controlling the Arab Bedouin in general, and Arab Bedouin women in particular. Whilst Arab Bedouin men are permitted to work outside the community or state at any time, Arab Bedouin women do not have this freedom. Women are also excluded and marginalized because of their dependence on the male who provides for them, and on the benevolence of state institutions.

As a result, Arab Bedouin women suffer from the highest unemployment rate in the country. The situation is even worse in the unrecognized villages, where no jobs are available for either men or women. Moreover, the unemployment rate among Arab Bedouin women is not fully documented as a result of the lack of transportation services in towns, and thus, the inability of women to reach the state employment office in Beer el-Sabe (Beer Sheva) to register as unemployed, or because they do not know that the employment office exists. The unemployed women experience frustration. When they were living in the desert, they at least played an important productive role. This role was taken from them when they moved to the permanent towns, and they were left to play the role of wife and mother without any additional productive function. How did this move to the permanent modern towns affect the psychological experience and welfare of Arab Bedouin women?

### The Psychological Welfare of Arab Bedouin Women

The research of Majid Al-Atawneh and others indicates that the exposure of Arab Bedouin women to the modern world engenders conflict.<sup>5</sup> According to these researchers, the higher her level of education, the more a woman has to deal with difficulties, because she lives in a traditional society and acts according to local norms, but perceives the outside world to be better. This situation has created a split between the traditional duties required of her in the home and those of the modern world to which she has been exposed by the media and her experiences outside of the village.

### Education

The state's approach to modernization in the area of education creates control, leads to the segregation of Arab Bedouin women, and makes them dependent. I shall discuss the problems with this approach and suggest alternative approaches.

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<sup>5</sup> Majid Al-Atawneh, *Welfare of Bedouin Women in Social and Cultural Transition*, doctoral dissertation for the Department of Philosophy, Bar-Ilan University (2002) (Hebrew).

The state's way of dealing with the Arab Bedouin minority reflects its "monolithic" concept of modernization. Modernism is perceived as something separate from, and even the opposite of tradition. According to this approach, modernism encompasses everything that is enlightened, innovative, and free of tradition, whereas tradition is particular, local, archaic, mythical, and something primitive, which must be eliminated.

The modern approach in education is apparent in the planning of elementary schools, and even more so in the high schools which have been established for the Arab minority in the Naqab. These schools testify to the exclusion and marginalization of the Arab Bedouin minority, and stand in sharp contrast to Jewish education system. The Jewish educational system is divided on the basis of the degree of religious attachment within this Jewish population. Thus, there is a state-secular school system, a state-religious school system, a system for the Ultra-Orthodox, and independent schools. The overall educational system testifies, ostensibly, to the pluralistic approach of the state towards various cultures within it. While the state's approach to the Jewish education is pluralistic, for which reason it is divided according to gender in the Jewish religious education system, this pluralistic basis is absent in the Arab education system in the Naqab, which is monolithic. Boys and girls study together in all the Arab schools in the permanent towns, which conflicts with the culture of the local society that separates the genders. This failure to segregate the sexes primarily harms female Arab Bedouin students, among whom the drop-out rate increases with age.

One of the reasons for female pupils' dropping out is the conflict between the needs of the modern planner and the needs of the majority of the Bedouin population. This phenomenon is consistent with post-structuralist theory, whereby modern planning, in which control is exercised from above, encounters resistance from below. The price for this resistance is paid by the Arab Bedouin girls, who drop out of school.

A large percentage of traditional Arab Bedouin in the Naqab do not send their daughters to school out of fear of an encounter between the sexes in school. This is especially true for girls of high school age who live in the unrecognized villages, which have no high schools. The girls have to be sent to schools in nearby villages, where they feel alienated for tribal, gender-related, and cultural reasons.

Despite many complaints and requests, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has failed to take into account the cultural needs of the local Arab Bedouin population, as illustrated by the following examples:

- In a letter of 19 August 2001 to the Southern District Director of the MOE, the head of the parents' committee in Alfura wrote, "Many parents hesitate to send their daughters who have completed primary school to continue their studies in Kseiffe. As a result, many girls drop out of the education system before completing high school. For this reason, we ask you to establish a secondary school in our town."
- In a letter of 7 May 2001 to the MOE, the head of the parents' committee in Al-Azazmeh suggested, "If for any reason you are unable to grant our request and establish a secondary school in our town, we ask you, as an alternative, to split the big school into two schools [one for boys and one for girls]."
- The Ministry of Education replied to this letter on 10 May 2001 stating that, "Following pressure from the Southern District and the Bedouin Education Authority, it was decided to leave them [the schools] as they are for the time being because of the special-traditional characteristics of the Bedouin community in the Negev."

However, this response does not detail the special-traditional features of the Arab Bedouin in the Naqab. If the MOE recognizes the unique needs of this population, the question is what steps has the ministry taken to meet these needs.

- In a letter of 2 June 2003 to the Southern District Director of the MOE, the principal of a school in the unrecognized village of Al-Atrash stated that, "Every year, only one-third of the girls in the school in our community go on to study at the high school in the nearby town of Hura. Following consultation with the community and the pupils' parents, we ask you to open a tenth grade class for girls only, which will enable them to go into the tenth grade and will greatly reduce the dropout rate and increase the level of education."
- On 12 June 2003, Attorney Morad El-Sana from Adalah's office in Beer el-Sabe, wrote the following in a letter to the General Director of the MOE, "In Al-Atrash [an unrecognized village], more than 76% of the girls do not continue their studies because it is not possible for them to study in schools outside the village. In the 2002/2003 school year, only seven girls managed to continue their studies. These pupils and their parents point out that it would be possible to prevent these girls from dropping out if a class for girls only were established in the existing school, which would enable them to study in the village rather than have to travel elsewhere to attend school."

Research that I conducted in the Arab Bedouin town Rahat, in which I interviewed girls who are studying in schools, girls who have dropped out of school, and mothers and fathers with daughters from these two groups (a total of 60 interviews), also indicates the existence of a conflict over the necessity of girls' education, with the fathers of daughters who dropped out holding one set of beliefs, and the state holding another set altogether.<sup>6</sup> The fathers explained that: "After ninth grade, we do not send our daughters to study because there are young boys who distract them from their studies"; "School is a place where boys and girls party together"; "Throughout the Arab world, boys and girls study separately. Only in Israel do they make things hard for us." It should be mentioned that some of the girls who dropped out returned to school once they were married and had children. They attended a school in the village, for women only, that was set up to enable them to complete their education.

During the tenure of Minister of Education Yossi Sarid (from July 1999 to June 2000), the state promised to build two high schools, one between Beer el-Sabe and Dimona, and the other between Beer el-Sabe and Arad. At a Knesset session held on 23 May 2001, Member of Knesset Nawaf Masalha called on the state to fulfill the government's promises regarding Arab Bedouin education and to deal with the problem of dropping out in Arab Bedouin schools. In reply, Deputy Education Minister Avraham Ravitz said, "I only want to say that the sector that I represent is discriminated against in most sections of the ministry, but I have to tell you, and you should listen, in the sector that I represent, the Ultra-Orthodox sector, despite the discrimination, there is no dropping out. This shows that the phenomenon of dropping out is not tied to discrimination...." Or is it?

## **Conclusion**

The above discussion demonstrates how women in traditional society are passive victims of the meaning of modernism in the eyes of the planners. The Arab Bedouin experience shows that the modern state, in its attempts to provide an education for Arab Bedouin children, ignores the needs of Arab Bedouin women in the community, the education of whom is of little value in traditional Arab Bedouin society. The state creates an internal conflict within the

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<sup>6</sup> Sarab Abu Rabia-Queder, *Bedouin Girl Dropouts from Schools: Exclusion, Discrimination and Others* (Jerusalem: Institute for Arab Society Research, Van Leer Institute, 2004) (Hebrew).

Arab Bedouin community and fails to assist women to deal with it, even though this conflict is the reason why a large number of Arab Bedouin girls drop out of school.

This reality gives one the impression that the planners, in this case the state, have created an additional limitation on women, which does not exist for men, and has established educational institutions based on a modern worldview, that are not suitable for Arab Bedouin society, in which women cannot be seen in public. In establishing mixed schools, the state has actually extended the limitations that are placed on women from the private sphere to the public. Despite modern planning, tradition continues to exist, and does not disappear. However, the state continues to ignore it.

The postmodern approach, which I favor, is one that challenges the traditional modern approach. The postmodern approach emphasizes the particular and the local, and the culture, values, and beliefs of particular groups.<sup>7</sup> This approach holds that modernization does not necessitate that tradition be discarded; rather, it continues to exist through the guardians of tradition. Only meaningful dialogue between the two sides can bring about a gradual development toward modernism.

Planning, according to the postmodern approach, is not solely a matter of territory; it is also a cultural issue. Space is not viewed as territorial, but as cultural, and should include the local-cultural characteristics of the local population. The feminist post-colonialist approach further holds that consideration of cultural needs is not sufficient. Women must also be brought into the decision-making process, and their specific needs as women, which sometimes differ from those of the culture as a whole, must be taken into account.

In the educational sphere, in cases where mixed education is harmful to women, as in the case of the Arab Bedouin, the state must consider establishing separate schools for boys and girls for those individuals and families who want the sexes to be separated at school. It may also be necessary to establish women-only schools, for women who are willing to complete the education they failed to obtain as children. In this way, the control, exclusion, and dependence of women on the mercy of their culture and governmental institutions will end; the women will not be violating their tradition, and yet they will be able to return to an educational framework in which they can realize their aspiration to study.

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequence of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).