

Crossing Social and Spatial Boundaries for Claiming Gender Status: Israeli-Palestinian Bedouin Women in the Land Struggle

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The participation of young, educated Bedouin women in the struggle for land and against the Israeli government was largely inspired by events of the Arab Spring. In this paper, we examine whether, within the rigid social structure of Bedouin society, they could attain enhanced spatial mobility through participation in the struggle by crossing gender, race, class and spatial boundaries, and whether this participation could be harnessed back into their communities for their own social liberation. Interviews with women and men active in initiating, mobilizing and demonstrating were analyzed to better understand how they perceived the implications of this action for Bedouin women's presence, identity and power in these public spaces. A complex process is revealed in which there are considerable contradictions between their perception of relative success in claiming status within the public space of struggle against the state, as well as importing some components inwards into tribal spaces, and their conscious choice not to pursue it further as an internal struggle against patriarchy.

Keywords: *Bedouin women, land dispossession, political agency, intersectional identity, patriarchy, Israel*

I... stood at Lehavim Junction to protest against the destruction of the village of Al-Araqib. The locals looked at us really weirdly, treating us as we did not belong... asking "what exactly are you doing here?" I really remember their look especially at me... That look was first of all because I'm a woman, and secondly because I'm black and we... don't own land, so they actually asked [with their eyes], "why are you here?" It's like they own the land and it's their own business... only they are allowed to struggle for it... And I just wanted to express solidarity and empathize with them (AAK).

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A significant issue in the Bedouin struggle over land in the Negev (Naqab) region in Israel is expressed by the above quotation in which AAK, a black woman from a Bedouin town, reflects on her experience while participating in a demonstration against the demolition of Al-Araqib. Al-Araqib is an unrecognized Bedouin village known for having been demolished many times, thereby becoming a symbol in Bedouin struggle for land rights. It poses a key question that has shaped this struggle: who has the social legitimacy to be part of the struggle for land? AAK belongs to a landless, black Bedouin group, hence her identities intersect with gender, race and social status. Her participation confronts both the derogatory views of the male Bedouin landowners who embody the patriarchy and therefore “own” the struggle, and the colonial, white view of the Israeli public, which constructs the Bedouin as (post-) nomadic, primitive, devoid of connection to the land and homogeneous.

Voices such as hers are not often heard in studies on Bedouin women. In dealing mainly with legal aspects (e.g. Yiftachel et al., 2012) Israeli Bedouins’ well-publicized struggle for land has been reduced to a male, patriarchal perspective. Presenting proof of their indigeneity, these studies focus on claims to ownership from the default perspective of male landowners, seeing society as genderless. Gender and intergenerational gender perspectives of Bedouin women are absent from this discourse. We seek to fill this gap, and suggest that the struggle of current, third-generation Bedouin women is a direct extension of the struggle of first and second generations of women (their grandmothers and mothers). However, earlier generations struggled for land from private, female tribal spaces using oral and spatial practices (e.g. affinity for land and illustrative site visits). In contrast, the third generation has begun to struggle in public spaces alongside men, thus also challenging and undermining the hegemonic authority of those perceived socially and scientifically as “owning” both the land and the struggle for it.

This article deals with the young, highly-educated, third-generation Bedouin women who played an active, leading role in the struggle for Bedouin land in 2013, as part of the youth movement *Al-Hirak Al-Shababi*. We are particularly interested in highlighting its influence on participants’ discourse on gender relations within Bedouin society, and the boundaries of social change, by arguing that this participation challenges the implicit views of the boundaries of their gender status and femininity through two key practices. The first is the creation of a new internal social space for change, a protest movement of young Bedouin, also known as “*Hirak Prawer*,” which transects age-old gender, tribal, class, and racial hierarchies. They perceive, we suggest, this new social space as challenging and capable of changing social and gender boundaries within Bedouin society. The second practice is the egalitarian penetration of women into public patriarchal spaces, initiating, mobilizing and demonstrating against state policy, and joining male-run committees and decision-making processes.

The article begins by reviewing the theoretical structures relevant for Bedouin women’s struggles and their contexts: the Mideastern Arab Spring and the local

struggle against dispossession of their lands. We focus on the unique characteristics of Nakba's third-generation women struggling against both dispossession and patriarchy. Within this are embedded significant gender issues of supervision, gaze and women's body. We then present the methodology of this research and our findings. Our discussion of these findings reveals the Hiraq movement as a space for social and gender change, in which the male gaze and masculinity are challenged by the bodies and voices of women in public spaces. We conclude by suggesting further research questions relevant to understanding the mobilization of this political agency towards claiming gender status within Bedouin society.

THEORETICAL AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Participation of Bedouin women in the land struggle may be understood through several enveloping circles and two more directly contextual ones. There are three enveloping contexts: the Arab Spring events of 2012, Bedouin land dispossession since the Nakba, and the transfer of the Nakba's heritage from older to younger Bedouin women. The more direct contexts are recent processes of empowerment among Bedouin women, and issues of supervision of Bedouin women's conduct and body by men.

Gendering the Arab Spring

Women's place in the Arab family and society has always attracted attention. Although traditionally situated as agency-less care givers, women played a significant role in resisting colonial forces. That said, their liberation has always been accompanied by restrictions on education and employment (Zubaida, 2014). Arab women have been disenfranchised from decision-making forums and snubbed by governments and the Muslim religious establishment. The Arab Spring (2010-2012) was different; women played an active role and demanded political change (Manea, 2014). It changed their image as they entered public spaces, changing the body of knowledge and power that shaped them, as well as perceptions of their bodies. Their presence also was significant in fighting patriarchy and women's exclusion associated with colonialism and post-colonialism. This required expanding democratic public spaces and producing counter-knowledge. Objecting publicly to the humiliation of their lives, they disrupted the long-standing patriarchal myth used to justify gender inequality. Hence, using public space, (which previously "belonged" to the government) for making this myth visible symbolically and physically (ibid.), allowed these groups to turn it into a resistance site that produced a counter-hegemony. The public sphere has subsequently become a symbol of a shared vision that challenges both government and the public (ibid.)

Women not only supported men but were also actively involved in public and spatial forums as protesters in the street and media, as well as decision-makers.

Hafez (2014) argues that the female body during the Egyptian Arab Spring served as a visible marker of sociopolitical values and norms, contrary to normative symbols of women themselves. A women's body had been understood as an object (and perceived of as fragile). However, it resisted and pushed back against oppressive forces. Thus, when marching against state violence, women's body became heroic.

Coming from all walks of life to establish grass roots movements, women in the Arab Spring risked their lives when demanding dignity, freedom and democracy to reshape their future. Therefore, the Arab Spring may support understanding women's rights as human and civil rights. Women's organizations began to demand that attention also be paid to issues that involve social change, e.g., sexual harassment, sexuality, mixed gender spaces and homosexuality. The younger generation of activist women thus sees no limits to women's achievements in the changing Arab world (Khamis, 2011). However, women's voices and rights continue to be obscured by power structures and national political agendas (*ibid.*); more democracy did not guarantee them more rights. Whether this process leads to social change or not, the protests undermined traditional perspectives on gender and women's rights (Manea, 2014).

Israeli Bedouin Land Dispossession: A Gender-Deficient Discourse

A second context is Bedouin land dispossession that has been taking place for several decades. Research on the Negev Bedouin, primarily by categorizing them as historically rootless and landless, has largely excluded them from the wider Palestinian Nakba discourse. They were constructed by Western researchers as passive and homogenous tribal nomads (Ben-David, 1986) who own no land (Ashkenazi, 1957). As shown (Dinero, 1997; Jakubowska, 1992; Soen and Shmueli, 1987), Bedouin towns established by the State of Israel since the 1960s, have been framed within a broader process of forcible acculturation into Western urban modern life to "rescue" them from their primitive consciousness. Emergent modern individualistic values (Meir, 1997) have also been used to justify concentrating Bedouin into towns.

Recently, the discourse portraying urbanization as a desirable and natural transition towards Western culture's ultimate good has been criticized. The main criticism has been that it was used to camouflage the state's desire for "better," orderly spaces and a hidden interest in constraining and containing the Bedouin, preventing their return to (and farming on) their historical lands (Abu-Rabia, 2005; Meir, 2009; Yiftachel, 2006; Yiftachel et al. 2012). The Bedouin themselves have utterly rejected their profiling as landless nomads, and their struggle for land has been recently framed within their Indigenous right to relate to their territory as they see fit (Meir, 2005; Karplus and Meir, 2010; Yiftachel, 2012).

We argue, however, that these discourses portray Bedouin society as homogenous, monolithic and – most importantly from the present paper's perspective – genderless. They ignore recent dynamic social processes and a wider critical discussion that raise dilemmas of internal gender identity and value as well as individual-tribe relationships, as revealed by Fenster (1998), Abu-Rabia-Queder (2005a, 2005b,

2006, 2007a,b), Ahmed-Khassem (2002), Pessate-Schubert (2003) and Trieger and Davidson (2000). This new body of scholarship focuses on fundamental issues such as female status, mobility within the family and community, women's reproductive roles, production and consumption within the family, spatial mobility, and access to modern higher education, employment and other social resources, all of which constitute the skeleton of social order. Yet, despite the fact that struggles for the right for land and recognition of their villages as official spatial entities are so central to contemporary Bedouin life, none of these studies has examined the active involvement of Bedouin women in them, and specifically, the interaction with cross-generational, patriarchal and intra-tribal social relations.

Nakba's Women Generations and the Land Struggle

The third contextual circle is the representation of local Bedouin women in the historical event of the Nakba. As shown by Forbes-Martin (2004) and Northcote et al. (2006), displaced/uprooted women often suffer the heaviest negative impacts, particularly among Arab/Muslim groups where patriarchal hierarchies are most entrenched. Given these hierarchies, the question is the sources of knowledge for younger women regarding their historical roots, and particularly in cases of forced displacement from historical lands that serve to motivate their mobilization into action. Because Bedouin men do not view women as deserving such knowledge, this role is often taken by older women. Studies of knowledge transference from first-generation women to younger ones, who then themselves become tellers of these stories, reveal that they seek to educate younger women in terms of place attachment and spatial identity, thus challenging their representation by male authority as passive agents (Kozma, 2003; Baker, 1998; Sayigh, 1998; Walls and Whitbeck, 2012). Only one study of Bedouin society investigates inter-generational female power (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007a), but does not discuss issues of uprooting and displacement.

We rely, therefore, on Abu-Rabia's work (2005, 2008, 2013), which is perhaps the first attempt to tackle inter-generational knowledge transfer within the Bedouin's land struggle, particularly the role of the Nakba's first generation (adult Arab Bedouin women who actually experienced the 1948 Israeli War of Independence). The voices of these women surface freely only within their private, female-exclusive gathering spaces. Yet, it turns out they have never been passive in what has customarily been regarded as male-exclusive arenas; rather they play an active role as historiographical agents. For example, through expressing anguish at the loss of their past life on their land and telling their stories of eviction, they have educated their daughters into a sense of historical place identity, attachment and memory. Furthermore, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge involves spatial practices such as visits to these historical sites and informally reclaiming their historical names.

By highlighting the role of land within communal discourse, Abu-Rabia's work shows these women's power in reconstructing Bedouin identities. This internal

discourse, performed exclusively within female circles, constitutes a quiet rejection of their “dual social construction”: externally (by state-originated discourse) as history-less and landless nomads, and internally (by men) as lacking historical knowledge or ability to convey it. These notions supplement other critical ones of conventional wisdom regarding the power of Bedouin women. First, a study of domestic design (Meir and Gekker, 2011) questioned the focus of Western-biased feminist research on Bedouin women’s presence in public spaces as their sole manifestation of power. Second, Abu-Rabia-Queder (2007a; 2007b) challenges the construction of Orientalist categories of Bedouin women by Western scholars (Hundt, 1988; Goren, 1992; Stuart, 1988) as weak, passive and oppressed.

Bedouin Women’s Empowerment

While the above three contextual circles are of an enveloping nature, Bedouin women’s empowerment is more directly related to participation in the land struggle. In recent decades, interactions between the Bedouin and the greater Israeli society have increased significantly, facilitating female participation in higher education and the labor market, as well as the proliferation of civil society organizations (Meir, 1997). These processes cracked gender boundaries in several ways. First, several women’s organizations were established to promote feminist issues and women’s empowerment (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007a; Marteau, 2015). Second, the inter-generational transfer of the struggle shifts the spotlight onto women of the third generation, who were educated about the Nakba by their grandmothers thus shaping their identities. We assume that their active involvement in the conflict, built through inter-generational transfer, reflects their imagined and real attachment to past places. However, in contrast with their predecessors, a growing number are now more educated, some with higher-education (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007, 2016; Abu-Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levi, 2008) and connected to social networks and media. They are also far more self-aware socially and politically, in part through exposure to activities of Bedouin feminist organizations (Marteau, 2015). They are part of “the upright generation” of young Palestinian Arab women in Israel (Rabinowitz and Abu Bhaker, 2002) whose most fundamental experience is the struggle – both with the state externally, and internally in terms of class, generation and gender.

However, while these issues are common among Arab-Palestinians in Israel, they are considerably more complex within Bedouin society. This complexity is related externally to the history of multiple uprootings and lasting non-recognition of land rights and settlements, and internally to tribalism. Many third-generation women carry a compound identity. Beyond their Bedouin, Arab and Muslim identities, many are well-versed in Israeli Western culture and society, and have begun to adopt some Western values of freedom of speech and thought, social justice and equality; and while absorbing their grandmothers’ notions of being historically uprooted, they also experience conscious exclusion from the Israeli national historical narrative that positions them as oppressed and passive.

Supervision, Gaze and Body

These issues are compounded by the supervision of women's conduct and body, an additional direct context of their participation in the land struggle. In general, as Massey (1994) explains, space is perceived in everyday life, as in social relationships, as divided into opposing realms, between women and men. In certain contexts, limiting women's mobility becomes a critical means of subordination and restriction to domestic space. Furthermore, gender segregation is essential for masculine control of the binary social order, and is monitored by spatial means (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, socially-defined traits that are perceived as feminine are also seen as deviant. This principle excludes other possible combinations between bio-sex and social assignments, and its very essence as a hierarchical binary is an expression of male dominance (Ortner, 1996). Most important for our purposes here is the public-private divide that binds women to the domestic sphere (Massey, 1994). Hence, events in the public sphere are viewed as socially, economically and politically expressive of power, whereas events in the private sphere are invisible, personal, economically and politically uninteresting, making them "other," weak and peripheral (Fraser, 1989). As a result, the ability of people and groups to move between the binary public/private spaces, and thus cross social boundaries, reflects social norms and the legality of the social organization (Joseph, 1997; Ahmad, 1992).

Therefore, in Bedouin patriarchal society constructing the home as "the place of women" implies stability, reliability and authenticity, while the very act of women exiting the confines of home is perceived as a threat. The "tribal space" outside of the home is identified as forbidden. The Arabic term "*horma*" (derived from "*haram*," "forbidden") is significant here, as it requires a complete separation between women and men. Therefore, the practice of men accompanying women in the public space ("*mihram*"), refers to a family male member who must supervise and escort a woman in the public sphere, while monitoring her behavior.

Extending private/public space is related to the issue of female body. Feminist literature on the female body and its construction as discourse and performance portrays a system of disciplining and enforcing boundaries on the body, turning it into an object and weakening it. However, it also highlights how the female body pushes back against oppressive forces. Political and religious movements perceived the female body as intransigent, uncontrolled, unruly and undisciplined. Brooks (1993) argues, therefore, that male gaze controls the boundaries of the public sphere. Women trying to challenge these boundaries may be excluded from the discourse or punished. Gender narratives have created a counter-discourse that might successfully picture the woman's body differently in public spaces. For example, Bordo (1997) claims that the female body challenges hegemony and becomes a strategy of resistance. According to Hafez (2014) women work on the political body through the symbolic meanings of the physical body. She argues that during the Arab Spring in Egypt, the body served as a visible marker of socio-political values and norms and contradicted normative symbols.

Thus, the female body is encoded by physical control, and the encoded body imposes a consciousness of being controlled on the subject. This process is at the heart of retaining patriarchal and imperialist control. When the Muslim woman's body is built by the politics of poisoning, it becomes a tool of resistance. According to Butler (2004), the body itself is not merely an arena of cultural meanings but also a construction of gender subjectivity. In this context, then, changing the social order means rebuilding the body in terms that lie outside its hegemonic forms. Therefore, creating alternative spaces and crossing the boundaries of bodies can crack the power system that controls society.

Based on insights about these direct and indirect contexts, we submit that participation of third-generation Bedouin women in the land and village-recognition struggle exposes significant, and hitherto unexamined, layers of their role within their community. They struggle against masculine and Orientalist social forces that represent control, discipline, supervision and social boundaries which restrict their voices and consciousness. In this article, we try to understand their discourse of participation in the struggle to impede the state's policy of dispossessing Bedouin of their land and gain recognition of their villages, particularly how they harness their participation to restructure gender relations within their society.

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on young Bedouin women's and men's narratives, in order to reveal their experiences from their own perspectives as participants in the struggle. We employed a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews (Spector-Marzel, 2010). Through these interviews with young Bedouin women and men, we adopt a "shift the center" approach (Collins, 2000), moving from Bedouin men towards the women's voices. These voices express notions of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), articulating their narratives in terms of gender, status, generation and race. This article aims to raise epistemological questions about the affinity between knowledge production and hegemonic groups in Bedouin society by focusing on the "illegitimate," and presenting an empirical and methodical alternative to the traditional story of the struggle for land and its impact on Bedouin society. The interviews were conducted between the years 2016-2018 with seven Bedouin women and six Bedouin men, ages of 30-37. They were held on the campus of Ben-Gurion University in Be'er Sheva and in the offices of various NGOs. The interview materials were first analyzed qualitatively, searching for common and repeated themes. The next step was to define the categorical themes that would form the basis of our arguments in the article. The purpose of this analysis was to reveal patterns of action and insights into processes that allow us to expose links between the findings and theory, the extent to which the finding contradict the theory, and how they support or supplement it.

FINDINGS

Al Hirak Al-Shababi and the Arab Spring

The Al-Hirak Al-Shababi protest movement is also known as “Hirak Prawer” (after the government official in charge of a Bedouin resettlement plan in 2011). Inspired by the Arab Spring, it was initiated in mid-2013 and began with using Facebook to protest, with slogans like “Prawer will not pass” and “Days of Fury”. Soon, five young men and women in their thirties became more organized, and expanded to a founding core group of 15-20 highly-educated members. They belong mostly to landed groups evacuated from their historical lands onto land belonging to other tribes, in formal, recognized Bedouin localities. This core group then mobilized a larger group from both recognized and unrecognized localities, particularly those threatened by house demolitions. Some of the people participating in the demonstrations originated in the non-Bedouin Arab-Palestinian community in northern Israel.

One of their major objectives was to promote an alternative to the prevailing Palestinian political discourse of the Bedouin in the Negev, that was previously dictated by men. They successfully managed to make their way into meetings of the men-led Higher Follow-up Committee of the Arab Community in Israel at large, but “early reactions were of complete disregard....” (HAS_f) (f=female).

The organization was flexible, allowing for open discussion aimed at exposing failures and achievements, while organizing politically in local and regional contexts. The term “*hirak*,” according to Azzem (2019), refers to activism in the sense of a group and gatherings of young people, as opposed to a more institutionalized movement with organized and committed members. This form of action became common after 2011, and reflects intense popular activity. Its further meanings relate to the following issues: independence of partisanship and sectarianism; rejection of central leadership or clear organizational infrastructure; collective decision-making; direct activity rather than plans and ideology; and lack of continuity, while constantly searching for a way to move into the post-Hirak phase:

Decision-making was [done as] a group, there was one goal, common things among all.... We shaped our identity as we struggled. Everyone had a background in community work. There was representation for all. (RAA_m)
(m=male)

We had no budget...we asked organizations like AJECC and Sidreh [Bedouin-oriented civil organizations] to fund buses for demonstrations, we operated only from unpaid ideology. We are... not a non-profit organization, we are a single-purpose group of volunteers. They [the traditional leaders] feel threatened by us. (HAO_f)

The emphasis was to “not become institutionalized, neither partisan nor local” (FAO_m). Similarly:

We must not institutionalize, because we are part of a revolutionary state, of a state of chaos... we do not belong to social organizations, do not work from

an organized establishment. Anyone who participates is on a voluntary basis only. (RAA_m)

The Arab Spring had a huge impact on Hirak:

January 25, 2011 greatly influenced our struggle...the barrier of fear was broken when we saw Arab youth shape their future... [O]ur language is ultimately the same language, the reality that is imposed on us is the same reality. (RAA_m)

This led them to political action:

When the Arab Spring began in Egypt and Tunisia ...it gave us awareness of the possibility that young people could lead change and rebel against the government.... A lot of demonstrations were inspirational and motivational. (WIB_t)

We were inspired by the Arab Spring that gave us support and power. If young Egyptians [can] remove a president... we can, too. (FAO_m)

Al Hirak Al-Shababi and Gender-social Change

One of the main strategies of Hirak was to rouse the Bedouin community through intense solicitation in unrecognized villages, raising awareness, organizing and leading popular rallies, working with local media and creating country-wide and international social networks. The latter has been significant in raising awareness of Israeli Palestinians in the Negev and northern Israel.

FAO_m noted that Hirak “was working to re-center the Negev in the national consciousness,” including the Israeli establishment:

Instead of citizenship discourse, only demanding our rights, we brought Palestinian discourse... this was a new discourse... and not limited in the negotiations with what the Israeli establishment would accept or not... we try to force an alternative discourse. (HAS_t)

Hirak expresses another voice that is different [in] content and discourse. The discourse expresses our belonging to the Palestinian identity. We have stopped talking about the “return,” the institutional and political discourse that provides citizenship, this is an Israeli discourse... let’s stop talking about the Negev in Israeli terms. (RAA_m)

Through focusing on the Negev and its place within the wider Israeli Palestinian discourse, the goal of Hirak was to create a new discourse to force social change:

Our social awareness is our responsibility to society. We are involved in what is happening in our society and... we have become responsible for our society, our history, our narrative, our future, our children. (FM_m)

To achieve these goals, activists realized the need of raising awareness also among women in the Bedouin villages:

We invested a lot in people, this was our opportunity to make social change, by forcing it on the reality of society, and showing them that it is a natural process and it is not a disaster. (FM_m)

We would go into the villages without asking for the approval of the males... [to] talk not only with the men but also women. (HAS_f)

The Hirak movement constituted thus a kind of utopian social space that allowed women to be an equal and integral part in leading and creating change. This required establishing a utopian alternative of social organization:

We [are from] the Al-Hirak Al-Shababi “tribe,” which also included people from outside the Negev, which means we created a tribe that is unfamiliar, by our customs, and its structure was very different from what we used to know. (FAO_m)

The Hirak modeled social and gender change that begins with the struggle for both land and against patriarchal hegemony. One of the key actions was enforcing full gender equality, starting in the utopian alternative space they created. For example, Hirak’s spokesperson and most members are women:

The national struggle gave [women] legitimacy and... women went out on the streets – old women! The women were brave... The women... in Al-Araqib proved to be [strong] in front of the bulldozers... Women play an important and active role, being at the forefront... [In] Rahat all demonstrations were full of women. (AAQ_m)

A new picture began in the Negev spaces. We were aware that our society would have to change. (FM_m)

Women’s massive presence in demonstrations was an opportunity

[t]o allow visibility, to show a gendered face to the struggle... [We created] another discourse, not a political discourse, but a discourse of people who tell their story. Our goal is to create diversity. (AAQ_m)

These practices show that change is made by forcing it on society as something natural and self-evident. As HAS_f says, “I want to leave my mark... not only within the circle. I am allowed to by my society.”

In the same vein, the equal presence in decision-making and leadership was also seen by women as self-evident despite, or perhaps challenging, male hegemony. Its actual implementation within the Hirak space – as a transformational movement that enables such changes – is related to their age, the ideology that underpins their motivation and their perception of social change. Thus, women in Hirak expressed firm positions on gender equality in terms of leadership and decision-making, including within hitherto male-exclusive committees and other decision-making arenas:

[Men] bothered me [as] a woman. They told me, “what do you want to do? What can you do, if anything? Go to court [Court House Square]

demonstrations, go raise your daughter... go cook something good for you[r family]. I spoke at meetings... I made my voice [heard] despite their opposition. They [told me to] shut up. (RAOf)

Look at the committees in the unrecognized villages... no women... The Council of Unrecognized Villages... [is also] men only. This reality needs to change. Activist women argue that they should be part of... the struggle, all the discourse was masculine... no women at all. (AASf)

Body and Voice: Intruding Patriarchal Spaces

Members of HIRAK penetrated patriarchal spaces in Bedouin society, inserting a female presence of voice and body in spaces previously identified as masculine, especially regarding political and national struggles:

I remember the first big demonstration... when we arrived, we were the young, the leadership was barely there, and no one heard their voice. In contrast, we were organized, came with posters, megaphones, well-prepared... I started calling slogans and the women would call after me, and then, one of [the men] start[ed] yelling at me, “your voice is *a’owra*, go hide yourself, you *horma*.” (HASf)

“*A’owra*” means an intimate part of the body that must be hidden. For men, it refers to the region between the belly and the knees; for women, it applies to the entire body. Women are viewed as sexual, shameful creatures that must be entirely concealed from men’s eyes and removed from public space. *A’owra* and *horma* reflect Bedouin patriarchal hegemony over public spaces that excludes women, attempting to associate their very body and voice with the violation of norms in public spaces. HASf continued:

I told him, “I am not *horma*, and this struggle is not [only] yours. This is a Palestinian struggle, not just for the Negev people.” The second demonstration... focused on Al-Araqib... you know how it is in our society: men in front and women in the back... then [the] Shaikh [who leads the struggle in Al-Araqib] came, grabbed my hand and brought me forward. (HASf)

[W]e were [present at the meetings of] the steering committee with no women-members, and we expressed our positions, they ignored us, but at least we were present, broke into their space. Islamic discourse was taking over, and when we entered, we introduced a new discourse to the Negev... you need to be strong enough to make that change and believe in what you do. (HOSf)

There are two types of infiltration into patriarchal spaces, related to the physical presence and voice of women through the veil, thus preserving the binary boundary between women and men, and through preserving gender hierarchy and male domination. This was reflected in the demonstrations attended by the women:

The younger generation is more aware and... the NGOs have done a lot of work among this generation... Today there are more women attending

rallies and demonstrations, and you can see how women and men, young and old and small children participate... Whole families are coming. Women are veiled, so their presence in public spaces is a struggle by itself... we have an awareness of the land and it is our duty as Arabs to confront the state. (WAB_f) We are a threat to men... when I demonstrate and raise my voice... [in] a political space that usually belongs to men... it is unacceptable... As a woman you are allowed to express your opinion and criticize the government but you must not criticize the [existing] social structure... We must not say in demonstrations that men behave primitively... Men were in the front and women were in the back, and women are more than *mujahabat* and *munaqqabat* ["women wearing niqab"]... the men began to call women to participate with them and this became something normal for them, it happened when more and more women began to stand in front of men and side by side. (HAO_f)

Participation in the public sphere while wearing the *niqab* gave women power:

Personally, it gave me strength to be present in public sphere because it was part of who I was... My mother was very scared that I went to the demonstration... The tribal space is determined and managed by the man: he sets the political boundaries and how many women will participate in it politically. (HAS_f)

In fact, the *niqab* serves as a defense and platform for participation in the public domain, as RAO_(f) said: "Women go out veiled so no one would know about them." Participation of women expanded and deepened, despite objections:

In all public spaces in Rahat, young women stood and shouted... Women were [escorted by men] in public spaces according to the traditional patriarchal culture... Dozens of women sometimes come from an unknown village, but no one said a word, or left [them] behind in demonstrations. (RAA_m)

Today there are more women in the public sphere, they have more legitimacy for change, they are more active in the social media that gives them a voice... They can speak and act and be present, they are confronted with sensitive issues. Today it is easier for them to be present in the public space because they have received visibility... The male gaze society has begun to change. (AAQ_m)

It is the rebellion of the women against the boundaries through direct confrontation that is expressed in, for example, the organization of mixed-gender demonstrations:

This was the first rally where we see women with us and the young men go like this as a delegation... We had a meeting that was held together. (MAF_m)

The first arrest was [of] a woman, which drew harsh reactions as to why women are let out... At first we were able to get five women to the demonstration, and the next time we took 200 women from the north and that is how people started going out on the street and that became a normal thing... we took very old women out to the street and they became a symbol. (MAF_m)

It is expected that in the confrontation between women and the establishment there will be those who are harmed, and we Bedouin... provide patriarchal protection for the women. When [one of the women] was arrested, we were also arrested, fourteen young men were arrested for seeing her arrested and beaten... When I jumped on the soldiers [policemen] with the young men and beat [one of them] with blows, no one jumped in to protect me. (FM_m)

Women's leadership in demonstrations was also highlighted. Women are at the forefront of the struggle:

It was difficult for [the traditional leadership] to see women [for the] first [time] leading the rally... They have become accustomed to seeing [one woman] in interviews because they are used to her... she is a new, threatening, young body. (HAO_f)

The people on the street contained and embraced the Hirak... [The] Shaikh, who is a symbol of the popular struggle held the hand [of a female protester] and told her... "People like you should be at the front..." which legitimized her place... The woman led a whole rally of men, women and children. (HOB_f)

Implications for the Wider Bedouin Society

The entry of women into patriarchal spaces has profound implications for Bedouin society at several levels. Bedouin women have become a legitimate part of the national political struggle:

Participation of women in the struggle for land gave them power to participate in... more struggles and even write about it on Facebook... Today women from the unrecognized villages actively participate in demonstrations, organize themselves... and thus began to break barriers directly and indirectly. Women's struggle in the demonstration also gave [other] women power to... demonstrate. (MAF_m)

Bedouin women began to speak about the land struggle in public, thus turning male space into a common space where they have voice and influence:

Hirak had one and only one purpose. We wanted to change the perception, so women can talk about land... (HAO_f)

Improving women's status has... raised their political awareness and strengthened their affiliation with the Negev, and national identity as well as feminist identity, sitting in a group debating and expressing opinions and positions on political issues, and not sitting silently. (WAB_f)

Gender balance in society has also changed in their eyes:

We want a critical change in women's role and leadership in the popular struggle. At the same time as the institutionalized work of women's associations and their large role in organizing mass demonstrations, women today have the legitimacy to speak, to use their voice, to represent an issue that is more political than gender. (AAQ_m)

However, while some women feel a lesser need to seek male permission, there are still constraints for some women about some issues:

We focused mainly on the struggle for the land and did not want to intervene in other issues... Polygamy is a headache we did not want to interfere with... It is a legitimate and accepted practice of religion to marry four women... We did go out against murder of women. (HAOf)

When you deal with land... you have no fear, or argument. When you talk about sensitive issues [such as] polygamy... they [men] feel threatened. (HAOf)

When I went to a demonstration in Lod, I told [my husband] that I was going to Lod, I did not feel the need to ask for permission. (AAKf)

Other issues are very sensitive, we can't deal with them openly... We held demonstrations [outside] courthouses against women's murder, that day they [men] attacked us... We have room [to act] on political issues, not gender issues. (HASf)

Major changes have begun in the villages themselves. In very conservative villages, which suffer the destruction of homes under the Praver program, women participated in demonstrations in an acceptable and even natural way:

Today, women come out to show [their feelings], there is a presence, they mostly stand behind and never speak... Men are taking women to demonstrations now because quantity matters... Our society is patriarchal...and you have no legitimacy to fight... [only against] the Israeli establishment... My job is, from their perspective, to work in the kitchen and laundry. (AAQf)

Even when I was working in the women's organizations, they demanded that I wear a veil, and I refused, and this is a feminist organization, whether you accept me as I am or not. Today, the [*niqab*] is my passport to society. (AASf)

Finally, for these women, breaking the boundaries of patriarchy and participating in local decision-making alongside men was even more challenging than struggling against the Israeli establishment:

You can criticize the Israeli establishment, but within [Bedouin] society there are barriers... you must not talk about... women's participation in decision-making positions. Educated men also prevent women from sitting at decision-making [forums] and make it more difficult for women to participate in the political space... It is only for men to decide. We have more legitimacy as women to participate in the political but not the social space. (WABf)

Facing the Israeli establishment is easier... Because the borders are clear, the issues clear, the definitions known. When it comes to social criticism and place of women, internal criticism has been postponed... Let's open all issues. (FAOm)

When the issue is related to land and home, there is permission from husbands and men... Women... should be at the forefront and it is a courageous act in my opinion to speak on issues of women's murder and violence. (AASm)

CROSSING SOCIO-SPATIAL BOUNDARIES, POLITICAL AGENCY AND CLAIMING GENDER STATUS: DISCUSSION

The questions we posed are whether, within the rigid social structure of Israeli Bedouin society, the participants perceive enhanced mobility of women across social boundaries as attainable through participation in the struggle for land against the Israeli government, and whether this participation could be harnessed and turned towards their own internal social liberation. We found that challenging fixed, ascribed identities, as both nationally-marginalized Bedouin and oppressed females in a tribal society was facilitated within mixed-gender, inter-generational and socio-political contexts. Al-Hirak Al-Shababi as a concrete movement, but also reflecting socio-political consciousness, created a new spatial opportunity for women's participation in the struggle outside tribal space. Yet, their political consciousness did not originate there. These women were previously exposed to the struggle through the informal education within the silent struggle of their grandmothers and mothers (the Nakba's first and second generations). However, the latter's struggle was conducted within private and tribal spaces, and within the traditional, hierarchical patriarchal structure of hegemony and approval. It was thus shaped and constrained by what Kandiyoti (1996) refers to as "bargaining with patriarchy."

This knowledge was further enhanced through its intergenerational transfer to women of the third generation, who now entered the direct, frontal struggle with the state in open, public space. Deeply inspired by the Arab Spring, this arena in fact became an extension of the Nakba-generation women's struggle within the private space, but now led by their daughters and granddaughters. Within this space they opted to challenge traditional-conservative tribal norms by flattening inter-tribal representations of diverse origins (e.g. women of landed groups, women of landless groups, and women descendants of black, formerly enslaved, landless groups, all alongside Bedouin men from landowner groups). This gave them public visibility, and self-legitimacy as socially and politically equals, taking their place in an equally prominent public space that can contain their various identities.

Furthermore, as a vehicle for dismantling inter-tribal and inter-group boundaries, they created an imagined, novel and utopian social class and space for a supra-tribal, supra-place and supra-regional "tribe" entity with novel mixed-gender leadership. Joining forces with women from diverse unrecognized Bedouin villages and Arab-Palestinians from throughout Israel allowed them to circumvent the traditional-conservative tribal structures, as well as class and race boundaries, and gain legitimacy to participate in public space demonstrations alongside men of other tribal origins. Even further, they expanded the narrow sense of the struggle against the state for land from the landowners' struggle for their personal land rights to a struggle for place in the sense of state recognition of their unrecognized villages. These mobilizations were highly significant achievements.

However, by participating in this struggle alongside Bedouin men, they faced a great challenge breaking boundaries of consciousness, gender and class. Beyond

struggling externally with the state, women point out the internal struggle with traditional male leadership still obstinately entrenched in rigid and almost impenetrable patriarchal domains. Women's penetration into educational and work circles had previously caused gradual cracking in these domains, as shown by Abu-Rabia-Queder (2016). Al-Hirak Al-Shababi then began to affect various other circles of agency, such as participation of women in struggle-related committees and group forums, which has further increased their pride, social status, and power to initiate change. However, it seems that the external spatial opportunity afforded by struggling against the state is the only avenue through which women were "allowed" to challenge the highly patriarchal and traditional conventions, and thereby become legitimate political agents.

This is illustrated through the complex identity of these women. Common to women's struggle and movement in space in general (Collins, 2000), this process in fact produced an intersected identity. The participation of landless women, including landless black women, in the demonstrations alongside landed men and women generated a composite gender, class, and race identity. They began breaching boundaries of social hierarchy between innate and entrenched separate identities that hitherto shaped their mind and behavior. However, beyond this tri-sectional identity, spatial identity has also become a significantly emergent composite layer of gender identity. On the one hand, through Al-Hirak Al-Shababi's struggle, less-educated and non-educated women from the unrecognized villages were given legitimacy to leave their traditional physical and social boundaries, and participate publicly in the struggle. However, within this public space, the architecture of the demonstrations, with men in the front and women separated behind, meant that the ideal of demonstrating alongside men assumed a contradictive spatial meaning. This became somewhat dystopian, mirroring the old patriarchal social structure.

Thus, beyond the foundation of Bedouin, tribal and racial identities, a further four-tier structure of women's spatial identity has emerged: private home space; intra-tribal, public space; extra-tribal public demonstration space; and within the latter, the retreat of uneducated women from the unrecognized villages into a segregated, gendered space. This was manifested in one of the founding gendered moments in Al-Hirak Al-Shababi's struggle, namely the social legitimacy received from the elder, male leader of the demonstration who vehemently ushered one of the more vocal women to the forefront of the group. This act was perceived by the women as empowering and necessary. Yet, it conflicts with their attempt to challenge the prevailing traditional patriarchal social structure, because it showed that there still a need for approval from the patriarchy to work their way forward into forbidden male spaces.

Resonating with Hafez (2014), these multi-tiered social and spatial identities of women are further manifested by mobilizing their body and language as tools for resisting patriarchal hegemony. Concealing women by having them wear *hijab* or *niqab* to facilitate their presence in public space still requires enhancement in

order to rebuild the body within the new terms of participation in demonstrations. The language used by these women, rejecting their representation by men as *horma* (“forbidden in these public spaces”), reveals that they still experienced considerable social rigidity, alienation and strangeness and expresses their counter-attempt to reconstruct their gendered subjectivity.

This complex socio-spatial identity structure was also manifest in a complex, contradictory social mobility. On the one hand, following participation in the struggle for land, some women continued to further develop this feminist consciousness. They did this by affiliating with feminist organizations and pursuing their further struggle to participation in protesting violence towards women, murder of women for reasons of “family honor” and polygamy. Some, particularly the less-educated, noted that upon returning to the tribe they were given a new voice as an authoritative source of knowledge and experienced activists, who other women asked to advise then on participating and organizing further demonstrations and committees in the land struggle. On the other hand, most women and men from the Al-Hirak Al-Shababi refused to openly participate in the profoundly feminist struggles against polygamy and murder of women. They stated explicitly they did not want to lose legitimacy in the struggle against the state for land, which is the prime definer and shaper of their identity as simultaneously confined and groundbreaking. These contradictions, as well as those elaborated earlier, reflect the tension between liberal and conservative-traditional forces found within the Israeli Palestinian community at large (Jamal, 2018), but are far more acute among the Bedouin.

CONCLUSION

Our study has shown that gender, class, race and spatial boundaries have been crossed by Bedouin women who participate in the struggle for land. This process does not exist in void. As shown, it is surrounded by a host of other recent processes that form the tailwind in Bedouin women’s struggle for empowerment, either by participating in various women organizations or by increasingly gaining higher education and expanded employment in the labor market.

However, the mobilization of their political agency for claiming gender status, as described above, is Janus-faced. On the one hand, Bedouin women perceive their participation in the struggle for land as being within the public space, bringing them to the forefront as its “face” (if veiled), and their acceptance as political agents by men, is legitimated within this arena but only by an *insitu*, muted patriarchy. While not necessarily intended by most of the women who participated, this groundbreaking activity served as a significant catalyst for social and gender change within Bedouin society, primarily in the way they view themselves and their roles, that is, their identities therein. Their groundbreaking social mobility still needs support of the patriarchy to succeed, yet their perspective is that the Bedouin patriarchy can

no longer ignore their presence and power within this political public-space arena. Furthermore, within this arena women's agency also became a catalyst for lowering historical inter-tribal, inter-class and inter-race barriers within Bedouin society.

Conversely, the impact of this political public space *within* Bedouin society is perceived as quite contained. Women activists could indeed import their external agency inwards for use in the *political* struggle against the state for Bedouin land rights and recognition of their villages. However, this seems to be the sole impact; their self-esteem and confidence versus the state is still overshadowed by patriarchy. They voluntarily created a conscious wall against pursuing their new power further, and struggling for internal gender liberation from highly critical, *social* issues – murder and violence against women and polygamy – or the more mundane issue of equalizing women's rights to inherit *land* to those of men. While participation in the struggle in the public space may be understood as a more “country-wide” issue of Arab-Palestinian community, those social issues are no less critical for them as individual subjects. In fact, “bargaining with patriarchy” over these issues, which could emanate from their external success, are yet to meet the test of reality.

Hence, while participation in the struggle for land has in fact acted to liberate these women's consciousness and enhance their social mobility, the questions that await further study relate to the impact of women's participation in struggles for land on their struggle for status *within* tribal spaces. These questions refer to internal and external circumstances. Internally, to what extent has their reach in this particular political public space strengthened their place in the tribe, and how is this expressed? Has this impact reached the second circle of women, the uneducated, unemployed women, young and old, from the unrecognized villages? Are there any differences between the latter group and women who have already become urbanized in urban Bedouin communities? Externally, has women's involvement within the public political space had an impact on their participation in other *non-political* public spaces such as social, economic or cultural ones (e.g. higher education, work and leisure)? How does this participation impact the public space concept of Bedouin women? Should it be restructured along with further expansion of their intersectional identity? Finally, and more broadly, what are the implications of the Al-Hirak Al-Shababi's struggle, as a youth protest movement, for Bedouin society at large? To what extent has the traditional male hegemony of the landowner individuals and tribes subsumed the power of these young women and men who established their status and social consciousness within the public space?

These questions have significant relevance not only for Bedouin women but for the entire Bedouin community. Similar questions might be posed regarding Bedouin communities elsewhere in the Middle East. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples worldwide are experiencing similar political conflict and struggle circumstances with state governments. Crossing social boundaries through mobilization of political agency by women for claiming gender status may be an acute question in other communities, too. The question of whether the separate impact on gender of

the external political struggle against the state and the internal social struggle against patriarchy is unique to Israeli circumstances or is a common reality elsewhere would be of conceptual-theoretical interest.

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