Radical Imaginations? Changing Concepts of Agrotourism and Development as a Platform for a Regional Change in Bedouin Villages of the Negev Highlands

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The Negev Highlands, located in Israel's arid zone, have been home to Bedouin tribes for centuries. Families and clans attributed the meaning of their place to this vast area. Within this region, they maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle, moving seasonally in search of pasture and water, relocating and adapting to changing weather conditions. In the early 1980s, these families were forced to settle in parallel with the peace agreements with Egypt and the declaration of most of the Negev Highlands as military training zones or nature reserves. They established villages on the edges of their grazing lands, which were not recognized by the state and, therefore, were not entitled to essential services. Many traditional practices were irrelevant in their new location and quickly disappeared. Our research follows a group of residents from one of those unrecognized Bedouin villages who attempted to imagine a different and better future for their community while staying within their village but transforming it into a Bedouin Heritage Center. Eight in-depth interviews with the Bedouin group's leaders revealed several shifts in their sense of place, which later gave rise to a new spatial identity and spatial socio-political organization. The article follows first how the interviews revealed a local changing sense of place. It then adds a relational geography perspective, articulating the Bedouin changing sense of place with changes in Israel's development policies and economy in the Negev during the early 2000s and with changing global environmental discourses and free market ideas, we claim these articulations gave rise to new regionalism, new regional spatial and political formations within the Negev highland Bedouin villages.

***Keywords**: Bedouin; environmental imagination; sense of place; regionalism; Negev Highland; relational geography; tourism; unrecognized villages*

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INTRODUCTION

Settlement in the Negev Highlands

Route 40 in the section between Kibbutz Sde Boker and Mitzpe Ramon winds through the dispersed settlements in the Negev Highlands of southern Israel. This is a rocky and arid area in the North Hemisphere's global desert belt. In the first decades following the establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish settlements—both rural and urban—were established along this road to strengthen the new state's control over the area. This was accompanied by the development of quarries, new roads, improved infrastructure, and military facilities, all following a wave of mass immigration (Zivan, 2012). The management of Jewish civil life throughout the region was assigned to the Ramat Negev regional council. By the early 1960s, two towns had separated from this council and became independent local councils.

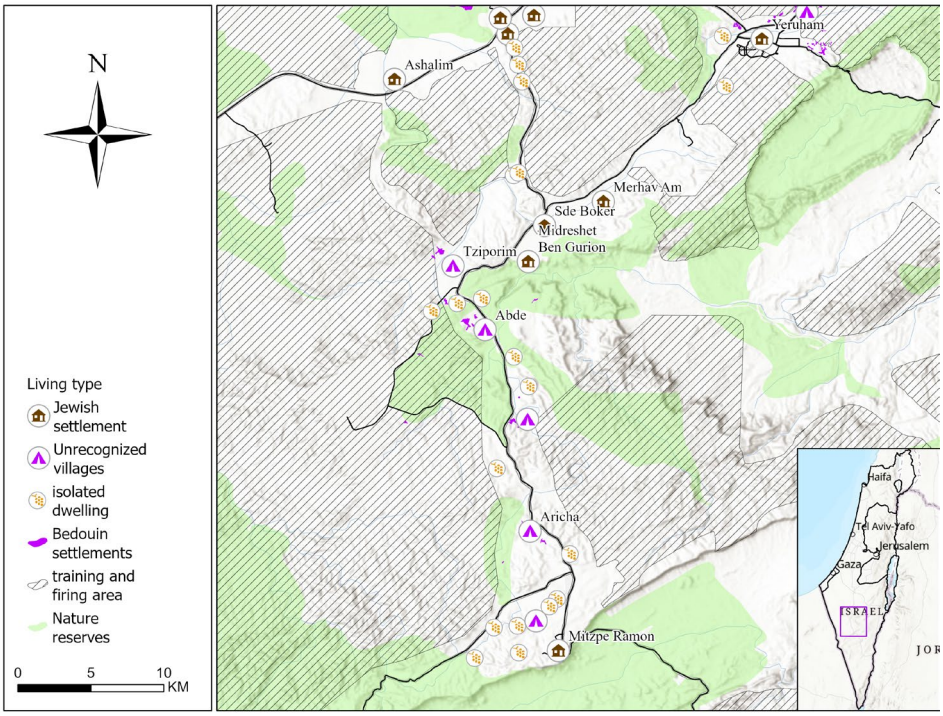
At the same time, the Bedouin inhabitants of the region recorded a relational history. It has hardly been officially documented and relies mainly on interviews with Bedouin leaders and government officials (e.g., Tzachor, 2017; Zivan, 2017), highlighting a lack of regional governance concerning them. Many of the tribes, who have lived in the Negev Highlands since the 18th century at the latest (Bailey, 1985; Kressel, 2003; Yahel et al., 2012), moved to Sinai following the establishment of the State of Israel (Ashkenazi, 2024). Others were required to transfer to the *Sayig* zone, where they lived under a military regime. The region south of the *Sayig*, which includes the Negev Highlands, was portrayed as a 'wild' area (Tzachor, 2017), characterized by ongoing conflicts between the military and young Jewish settlements on one side and the Bedouin shepherds on the other (Zivan, 2017). As semi-nomadic Bedouin shepherds, they used to seasonally migrate within their pasturelands, their *Dira* (Meir & Tsoar, 1996), according to pasture availability (Ashkenazi, 2024; Meir & Karplus, 2018). They lived within a system of inter-clan and inter-tribal arrangements regarding control, ownership, and management of territorial and ecological resources (Meir, 2009).

The return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in the early 1980s led to the declaration of most of the region as military training zones and nature reserves (Avriel-Avni et al., 2019). The Bedouin shepherds were forced to settle on the edges of these areas. They created four distinct Bedouin settlement clusters along Route 40, which were deprived of any infrastructures or rights connecting them to the land, such as water, energy grid, sewage infrastructure, and regulated access roads (Oren, 2012). Each of those communities lacked organizational or economic ties to the others, which consolidated and further established their separated localities. Their mobility was severely restricted, and they were prevented from keeping grazing patterns with their herds in the spaces they have so far treated as the pasturelands of their tribes (Ashkenazi et al., 2015).

The Negev Bedouin communities are currently Israel's weakest socioeconomic group, with the highest underemployment rates, high rates of food insecurity, and school dropouts (Rudnitzky, 2011). House and crop demolitions are the government's

primary (violent) means of stopping the spatial spread and development of Bedouin communities (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). Despite challenging living conditions and ongoing pressure from authorities to relocate to Bedouin towns in the Beersheba Valley, Bedouin communities have continued to live in the entire Negev Highlands (Tzachor, 2017) while preserving some of the traditional knowledge that guided their lives until the early 1980s. The Israeli government, perceiving the persistent presence of Bedouin communities as a threat, responded by initiating and promoting a series of Jewish agricultural-tourist families' farms along the Negev Highlands segment of Route 40 in the late 1990s, later known as "The Wine Route" (Mckee, 2016). Once established, the farms were gradually connected to essential infrastructure and grids, and most of them surrounded themselves by fences to prevent Bedouin expansion into their territory (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The research area



Note: The Wine Trail winds along the isolated dwelling farms. The Tent Road connects the Bedouin village of Ramat Tziporim and the village in the Aricha Valley

Source: Base map from ESRI topographic maps

Our study focused initially on one group of Bedouin from one of the Negev highlands communities along Route 40. At the beginning of the 2000s, this group attempted to transform their unrecognized village into a Center for the Bedouin

Shepherd Heritage. Their initiative wished to manifest publicly the unique traditional and environmental knowledge, skills, and practices treasured within and by their community. We accompanied this initiative with in-depth interviews with the entrepreneurs and documentation of the process.

This paper offers two theoretical perspectives on two empirical phases of this Bedouin initiative that started locally in one Bedouin village but then transformed into a regional project and vision, challenging prevailing imaginaries, power relations, and remaking regional connections between Bedouin and between Bedouin and Jews. The paper first looks at the local village initiatives through the theoretical framework of Sense of Place. Specifically, it draws from Pedaya (2011), which echoes Lacan's mirror theory to describe how social-environmental imagining reshapes perceptions of both self and place. We then attempt to address the development of regional Bedouin development initiatives, using a relational geography perspective. We wish to explain how the Bedouin' 'new' reconfigured sense of place, articulated with regional, national, and global changes through two interrelated processes. The first was the state prioritization of Jewish private forms of settlement in the Negev. The second was a global and national development shifts towards more local agro and heritage tourism practices. The two processes, which practically converged in the rise and the legalization of the "Wine Route," transformed and reworked regional imaginations and social relationships between Bedouin villages and between Bedouin and Jews despite and within limits imposed by state institutions and governance.

Moving along Pedaya's understanding of self and place and towards a relational spatial regional understanding, we wish to emphasize the active nature of social spaces and to show how the single village or the "here-and-now" always exists in relation to elsewhere (Hart, 2018). The local and the regional village's changing sense of place are products of local, regional, and national processes, relationships, and sites through which they are also reworked to reshape new regional social-political space and change.

Sense of Place

The term Sense of Place (SoP), first coined by Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977), has been most broadly defined as the attachment and meaning that people or groups attribute to a geographical space and thereby make it *a place* for them (Masterson et al., 2017). This definition was later developed to claim that place attachment and meaning have a mutual dynamic relationship. Creating a positive meaning toward a geographical location affects 'place-attachment' and vice versa (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012). The development of SoP in social-ecological, environmental psychology, and environmental education scholarships is considered more dynamic. It is personally, socially, and politically contextualized and shaped by social relations within the community (Beidler & Morrison, 2016; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Stokowski, 2002). Scannell and Gifford (2010) suggest a tripartite organizing framework of place

attachment – the person dimension that refers to its individually or collectively determined meanings, the psychological dimension that includes the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of attachment, and the place dimension that emphasizes the place characteristics of attachment, including spatial scale, specificity, and the prominence of social or physical elements. They use this framework to describe the perceptual, mental, social, and cultural processes among people and communities and strengthen their place-attachment. SoP develops through in-depth theoretical and practical knowledge of the social and natural environment, social networks and family connections, a sense of security regarding basic needs, local symbols, and cultural rituals (Hay, 1998; Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2013; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Regarding place meaning, Raymond et al. (2017) have shown that new immigrants quickly develop a SoP when allowed to realize their potential in a new environment. Although, this development is generally perceived as a gradual, long-term process (Pretty et al., 2003; Lewicka, 2013). During this period, individuals cultivate relationships and connections with their social and physical surroundings (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Relocation in voluntary and particularly in forced circumstances such as state-initiated displacement, war, or climate stresses, triggers feelings of alienation towards the new social-ecological environment (Seamon, 2013), which may be perceived and experienced as oppressive or inferior compared to the previous one and creating social ruptures (Hauge, 2007; Kliot & Waterman, 2015). Under oppression or exclusion by dominating classes or ethnicities, or when forced to settle in a foreign site, even Indigenous people may feel 'placeless' and develop a negative outlook toward their geographical site (Guyot & Seetha, 2007; Manzo et al., 2008; Windsor & Mcvey, 2005), as was also demonstrated in regard to Bedouin communities (Alhuzail, 2023; Sedawi et al., 2021). In such cases, people's place attachment may weaken (Carter et al., 2007), and so may their concern for the new locale (Ardoin et al., 2019). At the same time, this negligence is often portrayed from the outside as harmful to the environment (McKittrick, 2011).

Sense of Place and a Socio-environmental Reimagining

Our research follows a Bedouin initiative to transform their community and unrecognized village into a tourism center of Bedouin shepherd tradition. Their future imaginaries—individuals' perceptions or theories about the future (Sullivan-Wiley & Teller, 2020)—included visions of their surroundings' future and who or what will inhabit and shape them. Imagining a positive future for the place (Crumb et al., 2023; Levin, 2000) can enhance people's SoP (Masterson et al., 2017).

We found Pedaya's *Expanses* approach (2011), which draws on Lacans' psychoanalytic theory and focuses on personal-perceptual processes (Gregory, 1995), helpful in understanding the role of imagination in the reconstruction of SoP. Pedaya described people's conceptualized space as the product of interactions between three expanses: the *real*, the *imaginary,* and the *symbolic*. The *real expanse*

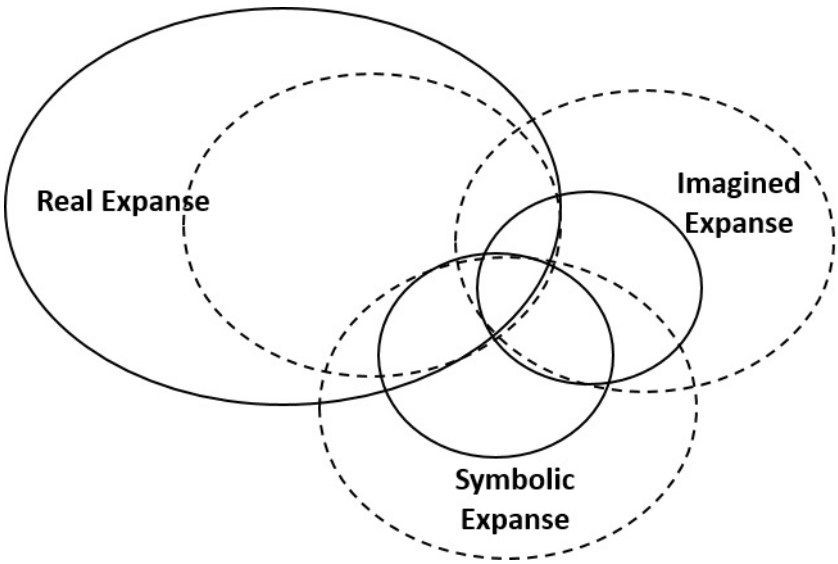
refers to all physical, material, and ecological conditions of space and body. It is an "anatomical, 'natural' order in which humans live, a set of unordered, fragmented raw materials" (Gregory, 1995, p. 23). Although humans are an integral part of this expanse, the *real expanse* gets its meaning through its interaction with the other two expanses: the *imaginary* and the *symbolic expanses*.

The *imaginary expanse* is where the identity of a space is formed. This expanse parallels Lacan's *imaginary order* – the 'mirror stage,' in which the child develops a sense of subjectivity through what he/she sees as others' reflection of him/herself. Likewise, the 'reality' of the geographic site, which is created in our imaginations, is influenced by our reflection on how we are viewed in the eyes of society. For example, our reflection on social power relations and our position within the social order belong to the imaginary order (Gregory, 1995). Pedaya (2011, p. 33) emphasized the values and the cultural aspect of the community expressed in this expanse and described it as "the realm of fantasies of a culture about itself." In doing so, Pedaya extends the definition of the *imaginary expanse* and includes the ability of a community to invent a 'new story' about itself.

The *symbolic expanse* connects symbols and beliefs to space. As symbolism and language give children meaning to the real and imaginary orders, in this expanse, the geographic locale, in its *real* and *imaginary expanses*, undergoes a process of symbolism, allowing it to exist as an independent entity. The *symbolic expanse* includes a meta-narrative that is beyond *real* but also grants meaning and order to existence (Pedaya, 2011).

The relationships between the expanses reflect the shifting perception of one's space. The attenuation of one expanse affects the other, either by 'stretching' its boundaries or by excessive adherence to one of them. In various colonial settings, for example, forced separation from a homeland – the material – *real expanse* – often leads to significant loss of native language, culture, and customs – the *symbolic expanse* – and to difficulty in imagining a better reality (Carter et al., 2007; Hall, 1997). While a balance between the three expanses represents integrity and positive SoP (Pedaya, 2011), such processes can be described as modifying the balance between the three expanses, which impairs the SoP (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Changes in the three expanses after a Bedouin Heritage Centre was envisioned



Note: The solid lines represent the SoP in the unrecognized settlement, while the dashed lines represent changes in the three expanses following the future visioning, which made them more balanced. Note that the relationship between the three spaces following the imagination of the future is very similar to that described during the nomad period.

Relational Understanding of Places and Regions

The much-needed interrogations of the ways Bedouin experience their changing perceptions of self and places locally is limited in explaining how these environments are produced materially and gain meaning in the first place. They are also insufficient to account for the transformation of these local processes into regional political projects. A historical analysis of regions and places and analysis of the ways they are constructed within a broader set of relationships is pivotal in understanding SoP, beyond the self, the local, and more politically.

Since the 1990s, studies that first emerged in critical human geography and were followed by others have questioned early geographers' conceptualization of place from ontological and epistemological perspectives as bounded, fixed, and static. They referred to place and SoP as relational, porous, and active rather than as an entity. This scholarship emphasized, following Lefebvre's conception of social space (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991), places as responsive to and a product of changes in social-ecological, political, and economic processes occurring across different geographical scales (Massey, 2008; Hart, 2018). It thereby emphasizes the interconnected nature of places shaped by colonization and capitalist processes.

Massey (1994) described places as "nodal points" – intersections of far-flung spatial processes – and pointed to the need to understand SoP as also 'global', explaining that the social and spatial relations that make places distinct "stretch beyond them, linking what appears to be inside the place to that which appears external to it" (Massey, 1994, p. 5)

Building on Massey's work, Hart (2006) brought up the implication of thinking geographically about spatio-temporal relations to 'doing' critical ethnography that also aspires to promote social change. Hart highlighted that Massey's intervention was also a call to avoid intellectual enclavism or ethnographies mired in localism:

> Conception of places as nodal points of connection in socially produced space moves us beyond "case studies" to make broader claims: it enables, in other words, a non-positivist understanding of generality. In this conception, particularities or specificities arise through interrelations between objects, events, places, and identities; and it is through clarifying how these relations are produced and changed in practice that close study of a particular part can generate broader claims and understandings (Hart, 2006, 995-996).

This move, towards a relational perspective on the production of space (and place), and the emphasis on spatial or social entities, which may appear separate, as formed through their interconnectedness with one another (Hart, 2018a,b, following Massey, 1994; Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991), informed not only how places but also the ways regions were conceptualized. Looking at regions relationally entails exploring how they gain meanings, are constructed, and reproduced as part of broader socio-spatial transformations. This is against representations of regions in state discourses, projects and institutions as 'regions in themselves,' or merely as territorial units, and despite territoriality being an important power shaping them (Paasi et al., 2018).

However, as critical geographers warn, moving analytically from "place" to "region" and back is not 'jumping between scales' separated ontologically from each other (Smith, 1992; Jones III et al., 2017), or excluding one scale for another (Passi et al., 2018; Jones, 2022). Instead, regions and places are dialectically co-constitutive of each other, and place-making and emerging forms of regional interconnectedness could be seen as produced by processes at all scales, same or different.

RESEARCH SITE AND METHODOLOGY

Research Participants

Aricha Valley (Wadi Raier in Arabic) was created as a "temporary settlement" in the early 1980s following the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. The three clans that settled the valley form the southernmost point of settlement among the four Negev Highlands' Bedouin communities. Like other unrecognized Bedouin villages, being temporary means, the government plans for the village's future is

uncertain. Life is precarious given the government's deprivation of essential services such as sewage or electricity (Gottlieb et al., 2011) or connection to water grids. Food stores, health, and education services exist only in nearby towns. Roads are unpaved. Trash is not collected. The area bordering the village was declared a nature reserve in the late 1980s, and Aricha Valley residents were deprived of their rangelands and livelihood. This challenges Bedouin's traditional lifestyle and livelihood and subjects them to rapid socio-economic decline, socio-cultural transition, and disruption. During the study, the government updated its plan for settling the Bedouin (Goldberg Committee Report, 2009). Consequently, the residents of the Aricha Valley, like other Bedouin communities in the area, faced ongoing pressure to relocate to a town that was to be established on the site of the northernmost village (Ramat Tziporim, in Figure 1).

In 2012, this pressure led a group of male residents in Aricha Valley to initiate the transformation of their settlement into a Bedouin Heritage Centre (BHC). Tourist entrepreneurs from nearby Jewish communities supported the initiative, and tourists began visiting the tents in Aricha Valley. The regional council, Ramat Negev, sponsored two training courses in tourism for local men and women, acknowledging the economic and development potential that Bedouin traditional tourism brings to the area. The new narrative that began to develop in the community was the foundation for our research.

Data Collection

In 2012-14, we conducted 36 in-depth interviews with a group of eight men, residents of the village who led the BHC initiative. We addressed SoP through the stories Bedouin people recount about their place. We were particularly trying to understand what has changed when the people in the village began to reimagine their future on a personal level and how the newly granted social environment met the state's undermining narratives and plans. The in-person and group interviews took place at interviewees' home tents and while visiting their childhood landscapes on field trips. They were asked to describe three life periods: i. their childhood and youth, during which they still lived as shepherds in the tribe's pastureland; ii. displacement, sedentarization, and present life in the unrecognized Bedouin villages; iii. their future in the BHC, as they imagine it. Our interviewees were children aged 8-18 at the time their families were semi-nomadic shepherds. Their perspective as children is enmeshed with and inseparable from the memories of being part of a shepherd society. Often, they would turn to the elderly to seek additional information and recover memories when asked about their past. Additional information was gathered through interviews with leading Jewish supporters of the Bedouin' new vision for the village. Interviews were conducted in In Hebrew, which may have limited communication, as some Arabic-speaking interviewees are not fluent in In Hebrew. Our long acquaintance with the community members interviewed perhaps compensated for these. The villagers' incessant conflict with state authorities regarding

the village's legal status may have also influenced the residents' narratives, who were worried about, to some extent, having their stories passed to representatives of the State. Sharing their concerns, in interview transcripts, we used initials to protect the interviewees' identification and removed obvious identifiers.

The interview transcripts were analyzed through two theoretical approaches; we first described the dynamics and shifts in Bedouin' SoP through the interpretive-inductive approach (Shkedi, 2011). Categories that emerged from the thematic analysis of different interviewees' quotes were organized to present coherent narratives (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). During the second phase, we looked for representations of the three *expanses* to define general categories of the narratives' analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Phrases were sorted by expanse and period to which they correspond. In addition, we sorted phrases that referred to the impact of the environment on the SoP. Hence, we could describe in the discussion section the relationship dynamics between the three expanses and how the environment influences them during the three periods.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Entire Region as the Place of Semi-nomadic Shepherds

According to the residents of Aricha Valley, the clans' pasturelands extended throughout southern Israel, the Negev, and the Arava regions and encompassed several hundred square kilometers. The stories of our interviewees illustrate their deep familiarity and embeddedness within their constantly changing locations.

Embedded in the Desert

… *Yes. This is 'life'* [in the desert]. *What else do I need?!* (P.)

On a tour, A. took us to his childhood landscapes and presented a cave in which they used to store food, tools and clothing as the family wandered according to seasonal availability of pasture. He pulled out a child's old shirt with many little pockets, sewn by his mother when he was three years old, designed for collecting interesting things.

In other interviews, the desert is consistently mentioned as a place that provides most of the shepherds' needs while living as semi-nomads:

> *We had everything. We grew wheat [for] bread, we grew orchards, we drank milk. Everything was organic—the water we drank was organic water—all from the waterholes. Our lives were more peaceful and healthy* (S.).

Similar to other Indigenous communities (Walker & Moscardo, 2016), the description of the Bedouin shepherds' lifestyle and existence as organic to the desert indicates a perception of belonging to and deep-rootedness in the desert and a sense of harmony with the environment.

P. testified that a lifestyle that corresponds with the rhythm and life cycle of the changing seasons in the desert deepened his sense of embeddedness. In his stories, youthfulness and desert embeddedness are entangled and described as a sense of freedom:

> *You feel complete freedom [...]. I went to the pasture with the camels […] almost every week. We grew up and it was fun in the desert [...]. We were special. Talking alone, just to each other, when we need something,* [we] *take it from home and go back to the desert, and then return to routine, to life.* (P.).

The shepherds add a sense of competence and control to this sense of freedom as they describe life in the desert – which they consider borderless and beyond territory. S. for example, told how his older brother managed to capture a wild male camel and ride many kilometers one night, to visit the family:

> *One day a herd of male camels arrived from Sinai [...]. They were strong and noble. My brother was afraid of them, but [*when*] the males raised their heads to smell the females,* [he] *quickly bent down to tie the biggest male's legs. He had to bring food from home, but he knew his female camels would not be able to get there quickly. So, he wanted to ride the big male and went […] all the way [home] [about 60 km] […] and returned soon afterwards to the camels he left tied in the Wadi [...].* (S.).

Beyond illustrating the role of camels in the Bedouin' life, this description shows the Bedouin heritage in the drylands, gender identity, freedom and competence as articulated through the camel. The shepherd's ability to control this massive animal manifests his knowledge and confidence, and his sense of being a 'free spirit of the desert.' The desert that captures this freedom is beyond and regardless of political borders and stretches over the expanses of Sinai. This strong sense of organic belonging to the desert rather than to a territory, the embodied experience of desert seasonal changes, and successful control and self-management of the environment to accommodate their needs, diminishes dramatically with the transition to a sedentarized lifestyle.

Becoming Sedentarized – Life in an Unrecognized Village

Stories about the transition to a sedentarized village express terms and emotions, which starkly contradict the concepts of freedom and confidence that emerged from interviews about the nomadic period.

Loss of Freedom

The men recall the experience of sedentarization as a loss of freedom under external forces (state authorities) that now manage them:

> *They* [the authorities] *told them* [the Bedouin] *to settle at a different spot. [The Bedouin] thought they were going to die. The camels will die, the goats will die,*

> *how will I live? If* [the area] *is mine, I have to wander.* [The Bedouin] *fell between two worlds [...]. You cannot wander freely; you're stuck in one spot [...].* (S.).

The Bedouin territory during the *shepherding period,* described in terms expressing movement, is replaced by a vocabulary expressing forced statism and gradual confinement to a limited territory, Aricha Valley, which feels arbitrary and confusing for the Bedouin.

Our interviewees experienced the forced transition to the valley as a rift from their natural environment, and as a transformation of the important relationship which constitutes the Bedouin identity. The cessation of their environmentally harmonious lifestyle is manifested first and foremost in spatial reorganization and housing needs. According to the interviewees, overcrowding of the valley required the erection of tents in places exposed to wind and floods, increasing their vulnerability to environmental changes, which turns the beloved environment into a threat:

> *This place is not good even for the sheep in the winter. You need a wall, protection, it's open here. Have you been here when it's windy?!* [In the past] *we went* [in the winter] *to deeper places that do not get this wind. We plowed the field* [in Aricha Valley] *and returned here only for harvest time* (M.).

The establishment of a permanent settlement in the valley forced the residents to abandon the traditional tent structures and build tin houses. This transition is described as ill-fitted to the environment and to the residents, as M. described the exposure to what they yearned before—rain—as a weapon:

> *Does this make sense? It's hot in the summer, it's cold in the winter – when it rains it's like Qassam rockets falling on your head. Who builds such a thing?!*

Forgetfulness and Incompetence

Abandoning the nomadic shepherds' lifestyle resulted in the loss of many traditional activities. Stories, legends, and phrases that were cultural legacies became irrelevant or forgotten and were no longer passed on to the younger generation. When asked about a Sheikh's tomb in his clan pasturelands, S. could not remember the story, but only recalled that it is a place of 'magical powers'. Eventually, he acknowledged that he would have to ask his mother. Likewise, F. admitted that he could not remember the customs of Bedouin law and would have to ask his father. This happened also in relation to past practical knowledge. In a goat-shearing workshop held in the summer of 2014, A., a 60-year-old woman, testified that she has not practiced these crafts for thirty years. She described how the young women of the village do not know how to spin thread from wool or how to weave. In the past, S. explained, these skills were passed on to the younger generation through prolonged observation of adults and gradual experimentation with the tasks. Today, he said, they are considered superfluous and are gradually forgotten.

Moreover, elders, who grew up as semi-nomadic shepherds, have lost their self-esteem and their value and roles in the community, since the younger generation

is uninterested in the traditional knowledge, stories, and skills that have become irrelevant to the new reality. Becoming unrecognized does not only signify a legal status but also the process of unrecognizing one's past legacies and collective memory and their value. This mental, emotional, and social incompetence stands in stark contrast to the sense of freedom and competence that characterizes stories of the semi-nomadic times.

Settling down required abandonment of traditional lifestyle and legacies, as well as adapting to a new reality and social expectations. Bedouin mention their lack of essential knowledge and skills regarding housing, unfamiliar technologies, and bureaucracies. P. expressed the Bedouin's inexperience in constructing homes, a new technology that is discordant with the environment:

> *...because of the lack of awareness of the technology, the Bedouin are stuck in [...] all kinds of constructions [... like those] tin things [...].* (P.)

Likewise, most interviewees reflect on the same lack of experience and skill in their pursuit to earn a livelihood. Bedouin men abandoned camel grazing, and since most of them did not receive a conventional education, only low-paying jobs were available to them. A. (a man in his 50s) remembered seeking employment in the early 1980s in the southern resort town of Eilat, when his family settled in the valley:

> *Once I was with the camels [...]. I told him [my friend]: Listen, we have to go to [the town of] Eilat. I did not know where Eilat was; only its name. We'll go and learn... Every time* [he] *told me: "Okay, we should go", his father says: "Where will you go? They'll kill you!".* (A.)

The knowledge and field skills acquired by A. until the age of 18 have become irrelevant; the jobs available to him have led him to the bottom of Israel's social hierarchy and cause him distress:

> [Today] *I work here and there. I do not care. Where there is work, I work [...]. [to clean] bathroom! Clean toilets! Do not think about [the] work!* [Whispers:] *I think I will commit suicide [...] Die! You will not die. They will laugh at you [...]. You go ask for a shekel [panhandle] or you work [...]. It's honor, it's money.* (A.).

Shopping for food at the supermarket has a negative impact on the village's appearance. According to S., food packaging, which was not part of Bedouin culture, is left around the tents. The residents continue to dump rubbish, as they did in the past with biodegradable leftovers. S. explains that this habit is hard to break:

> *Take a drive to ... other* [Bedouin] *villages – look at all the garbage and mess there. Unfortunately, this is the reality.* [I am] *trying to change people!* (S.).

S. refers to the Bedouin villages surrounded by piles of waste along Route 40, an image that has become a marker of Bedouin unrecognized settlements. Littering is another expression of the change compared to the Bedouin's past 'harmony' with

nature. Bedouin, who were once an 'organic' part of their physical environment, are now perceived as contaminators who treat the surrounding desert as a wasteland. As pointed out by McKee (2015), the alienation Bedouin experienced following this radical transition in lifestyle, coupled with the humiliation of being employed as cleaners (as expressed by A. above), discourages residents from cleaning their village.

In general, the men's stories revealed a self-image of an 'empty vessel' in the face of the culture they were required to merge with, but had nothing to offer to, and an environment which used to feel their home but has become a burden. This could indicate the adoption of the image presented to them by the State of Israel and could explain the desire F. expressed to assimilate into the modern Israeli society:

> *Now – people live in another nature. Everything is modern…Some people say: [It's better if] he'll change his [Bedouin]name…something else.*

A Sense of Futility

The transition from being an organic part of the desert to becoming identified with waste and contamination is also evident in how Bedouin describe a physical transformation of their bodies. During the interviews, it sometimes seemed that the Bedouin adopted an external perspective of themselves as an inferior race compared to other groups in Israeli society:

> *Bedouin brain is small. He gets angry fast. He does not think much. Really, he does not think. If you come and curse him, once your camel hits his camel, he gets annoyed with something that should not annoy him. This is not good.* (A.).

F. expressed the physical effects of the technological challenges and economic hardship the Bedouin face as disease-causing dizziness and mental unrest:

> *It's our stuff, it's our disaster. Do you know when the mess started? When we learned how to work and make money. That's when the mess began, I started feeling dizzy.*

S. voiced similar feelings though addressing directly also the notion of progress and modernization:

> *What is this progress? That I have an iPhone? That I use SMS? That I get into all kinds of nonsense, or they drive me crazy at the bank? It's a disease, it's not life, it's not progress!*

Recurring clashes with state authorities are another main factor causing the Bedouin a sense of futility and powerlessness. From being proud and free-spirited landowners, the Bedouin now describe themselves as helpless objects under tight supervision and control, uncertain of their everyday life practices such as moving livestock around. Despite the sedentarization, each family still keeps a small herd of goats, sheep, and camels. During springtime, they migrate to the pastureland, where they live in *Izbe* (temporary villages) for a few months, until the grass dries.

Some of the pasturelands are now firing zones, nature reserves, or both. Illegal grazing and gathering of firewood in nature reserves and firing zones provoked the government and conservation officials to oppose the settlement in Aricha Valley. In the early 1980s, the Green Patrol's (The National Unit for Supervising Open Spaces) supervisors began fining the residents for damage caused to a nearby reserve. As the government's plans to settle Bedouin in permanent settlements progressed, enforcement against residents tending to their herds increased. The loss of movement due to sedentarization and challenging Bedouin's belonging in the desert is a recurring theme in all interviews:

> *As the shepherding changed, I stopped walking with the camels […]. Something has changed at this stage in terms of* [personal] *freedom* (F.).

Once leaders of their herds, Bedouin feel as though authorities' inspectors treat them as livestock – "managing" them, chasing them, limiting their movement, and supervising them:

> [The inspector] *was annoying us all the time, chasing the herd. Once he caught us, took me [...] to the police [...].* [The inspector] *can do whatever he wants*. (H.).

The inspectors are experienced as a manipulative, foreign element harmful to the environment, aiming to reposition Bedouin and camels who were once perceived (by them and by visitors) as integral to desert.

> *Once they took the camels deep into the firing zone to photograph them there. That's how they* [the inspectors] *are, to make a false statement […] and for that they took my father to court, and they succeeded! And he had to pay a fine for him and for the camels, even though he did not enter the firing zone.* (F.).

Although studies show that exposing tourists to indigenous' perception of human-environment connection fosters a sustainable approach (Walker & Moscardo 2016), Negev inspectors treat Bedouin as a threat to the environment:

> *They say that the Bedouin are harming the environment [...]. We had a very strong case this week when an inspector saw camels in the wadi* [nature reserve] *and led them to the road to cause an accident, and then they could say that the Bedouin are upset and dangerous on the road*. (S.).

The lack of cultural and social capital, that set of social features such as appropriate language, ways to approach authorities and clerks, experience with bureaucracies, and social connections, that Bourdieu (1973) described as providing individuals with social mobility and the possibility of changing their hierarchical position in systems, is pivotal to the Bedouin experience with state institutions, and bureaucracies. Communicating with state officials and offices was hard. Contesting the authorities was practically impossible. F. recalls:

> *My father already had problems with the Green Patrol. They did not want us to settle here at all but to move us to Segev Shalom* [A town built for the Bedouin by the government]. *Some* [residents] *went to court a bit, it was a mess, they lost in court [...] Father kept taking care of everything, went from lawyer to lawyer. It was not easy; he does not speak In Hebrew well [...]. You are stressed because you are connected to the desert, to this place. You do not know if they're coming to force you out.*

Struggles with state authorities and agencies emphasize the Bedouin' transformation from independent and capable to helpless, inferior, and alienated when encountering bureaucracies of the new dominating society. Within this oppressive reality, Bedouin felt incapable to imagine ways to alter this reality, or dream of alternative possibilities:

> *The state's plan is [...] to erase the Bedouin tradition and establish permanent settlements.* [I] *do not expect the state to let me live in* [our pastureland] *and live in dignity, I do not expect support […] they chase the shepherds, drive people crazy. At least take this nuisance from us.* (S.).

Other residents of the village added:

> *[...] they* [inspectors] *constantly reduce our territory, so we have nowhere to go.* (H. and T).

An Imagined Bedouin Heritage Centre

In 2004, S. returned to Aricha Valley after years of working in the tourism industry in the Judean Desert. Upon his return, he set up a visitor's tent for tourists. He hosted large groups and offered Bedouin hospitality, according to standard tourism schemes: far from his residential tent and detached from village life. Z., a tour operator from a nearby Jewish town and a close friend of S., started bringing tourists to S. and proposed to host small groups in the family's home. Z. envisioned a concept of "*Tourism that speaks with the Bedouin family and not about the Bedouin*."

Weaving a New Identity

In the early 2000s, the economic value and political prospects embedded in traditional tourism, where tourists encountered village life, gained local popularity. Recognizing the trend, S. began to upgrade his tent's surroundings; he cleaned the area beyond the borders of his private territory, restored old terraces, and improved the landscape. A tourist operator from a nearby town described the change:

> *S.'s actions conveyed a message to the neighbors in the village that one can do things differently - that the area should be kept clean and that this upkeeping is of value to the tourists, the family, and the entire village.* (Z.).

Following the success of his tourism initiative, S. began to weave an idea to transform the Bedouin settlement in Aricha Valley into a tourist-oriented BHC. The idea was to lay the grounds for making the settlement permanent and legitimate in the eyes of the authorities. He was hoping that …*once the village runs appropriately, there will be peace of mind.* However, S. initially found it difficult to interest the residents of his village in the project and repeatedly asked his Jewish friends to assist him with this task. Gradually, Jewish neighbors became more involved in the village, although not as a group but as supportive friends and mediators between men from the village's different clans.

The Bedouin's poor self-esteem and low value attributed to shepherds' knowledge made recovering and reworking traditions complicated. Residents were unsure of the vision of BHC and worried about the Nature and Parks Authority rangers. Their refusal to clean the village made S. affiliate himself with the nature reserve:

> *All the time we survey the area and collect the garbage, a group of thirteen guys in the village. The rest… it does not interest them. I tell them: Are you crazy? It's a nature reserve! Second thing, forget the nature reserve! You (!) are the "nature reserve". It wouldn't happen if we don't take care of the environment.*

A significant change occurred when the head of the Regional Tourism Department of the Ramat Negev regional council recognized the value of the BHC to the local tourism industry and offered tour-guide courses to men and later to women of the village. Even before any material change was evident in the actual space, the group had already begun to see the BHC as a tangible goal. M. pointed to changes in the village and dreamed about a future for the village:

> *A few years ago, it was not clean* [as today]*, as you can see, spick and span. [...] If people come to hear stories, drink coffee, hear about the goats, how to survive in the desert – it's fun, it's not like a hotel, it's something rustic.* (M.).

Environment and ecology are central to the imaginations of a future BHC, beginning with cleanliness, but ultimately and more importantly, recovering the lost connection with the environment. S. best describes this vision as beneficial to the place and to the people:

> *What I'm doing here, the change I'm making here, is an example for all the* [Bedouin] *villages. [...] Imagine that the entire village follows my plan: Everyone builds ecological structures, amazing to see! All orchards go back to how they were…* (S.).

P. expressed the dream of a clean, pleasant ecovillage:

> *We have to tidy up* [the village]*, cover the tins that stick out, something good. We need to change something here, cover them with mud. Stay connected to nature.* (P.).

In S.'s imagination, the shepherds, previously considered uneducated and at the bottom of Israeli society, hold valuable knowledge and become central to the plan. Others also echoed this view:

> *I'm a Bedouin, I learned everything, but without a school. We say: Ask someone with experience, and do not ask a doctor.* (A.).
>
> [In desert education] *Even when you grow into a world, you are already sufficiently educated. You have so much experience that you know how to keep things going. You make mistakes, but you learn for the better because if you live in the desert, you'll be OK. You become educated [...]* (P.).

When P. spoke about his experience with tourists from the United States who visited the village, he noted the foreigners' impression of the ecological approach as further strengthening his own belief in rooting tradition with ecology:

> *I'm not sure they* [the tourists from the US] *saw such things [...]. We thought of promoting this place as an ecological village, all-natural. This tradition is real.*

The sense of futility that was associated with low-paying jobs, lack of training and disharmony with the environment, began to change. Bedouin expertise and traditional education, based on everyday experiences in the desert, once again became a source of pride, a valuable asset and an opportunity for others to learn from the Bedouin:

> *We do not preserve it for ourselves only, but also for schools and outdoor/hiking groups, and all kinds of things. It opens up more options. In the end it will be like a school about our tradition*. (M.).

S. hopes the BHC and its educative potential will act as a springboard for enlisting public awareness and hence the support of regional authorities, and ultimately strives to obtain a legal status for the Bedouin:

> *[...] It's not just for us, it's everyone's tradition. It is important to preserve the tradition [...], and I am gaining strength from the incoming tourism to raise awareness of the village until the whole world hears about the Bedouin's problems. Right now*, the *Regional Council is aware of our problems. The tour guides who can lead groups are the first step.* (S.).

Recovering Traditional Knowledge

The desire to re-establish the village as a BHC led the residents to recall distant memories of everyday practices of their childhood during shepherds' society.

> *Everything started to come back to me [...]. The camels' wool, I found this* [spindle] *now [...] I'll do [...] just like that a piece of wood. [...] When we go back in our thoughts, when you do things, you get back to them. You'll feel better. You start, stop and return* [and then] *you know how to do it*. (A.).

Other future imaginaries, who were still children during the sedentarization, repeatedly turned to the elders to ask about the names of objects used for traditional crafts and medicinal herbs and to hear about past places and traditions. During one of the interviews, H. was asked where his grandfather was born, and when he could not answer, S. told him:

> *I'll tell you where he was born. Your grandfather's father was a well-known wise man and people would come to consult with him even from Egypt, but he had no children. Once he slept under the tree* [a big Atlantic pistachio tree not far from Aricha Valley] *and dreamed that he had a son. After a year a son was born to him. The tree became sacred and even branches of this tree are not burned. The son who was born was the grandfather of H.*

This story, which is reminiscent of traditions from other cultures, indicates the re-development of roots to the place, granting it personal meaning.

Similarly, the agricultural terraces, which were once seasonally cultivated by the Bedouin, represent the Bedouin connection to the desert and to the ancient Byzantines who built them 1400 years ago H. said: *Every summer, at the wheat season [*we would come here*] [...].* (H.). And P. described:

> *I take my children on an outing to Bir Hamad* [Bor Hemet, an ancient cistern], which *is named after their grandfather. I tell them stories so they will be interested. Because if they are not really interested, they will not listen. They ask: How did he dig it? Why did he dig? Was there water? That's how it works. You explain – he dug because they stayed around there, and if they did not dig, there would be no water. And next to the cistern, they plowed. You explain to them something real – it's real work. Now, when I tell them to go to Bir Hamad, they want to go.* (P.).

Other changes in the community relate to the re-emergence of the village's social organization. During sedentarization, the shepherds' tribal structure was preserved. However, the clans did not cooperate. Each clan resided in a different area of the valley. The initiative to establish a BHC strengthened ties and nurtured collaborative efforts. In March 2014, the Bedouin elected a village Board, signifying the beginning of a new era.

Heritage, Agro-tourism, and Evolving Development Discourses as Platforms for Regional Change

The decade since the interviews ended has not brought the anticipated development or recognition to Aricha Valley. The Ramat Negev Regional Council, following the village initiative and its desire to be clean and inviting, has installed garbage bins and began regularly collecting waste from the village. The residents were also connected to a consistent, though improvised, water supply. However, bulldozers were sent to demolish the traditional tent that was set up especially for the inauguration of

the tourism workshops. Signs were posted at the village entrance, designating the area as a military training zone, alerting and trying to prevent groups from visiting the village without obtaining insurance. These actions instilled fear from harsher responses by the authorities regarding any attempts to promote tourism in their village. Tourism in the Aricha Valley once again has become limited and overlooked.

During the same time, a Jewish settlement project of family-based farms, which was yet to be approved by planning authorities and under threat by civic organizations appeals in court, was consolidated with the assistance of the regional council as the "Wine Route" project, promoting small-scale boutique agricultural products and high-end agro-tourism. The Wine Route, a development and settlement project of about 25 single-family farms in the Negev highland (Figure 1), was meant, from a state perspective, to block Bedouin spread and preserve the Negev lands in Jewish hands. From regional authorities' perspective, it was also a development opportunity that may bring income to the Negev in the form of agro-tourism and draw investors to the rebranded Negev – as an area offering European-style high consumption of wine, cheese, and pricy Bed and Breakfast. Many farmers described themselves as doing something European-'like family mansions in France.' Some have even traveled to learn about similar models in Europe. The wine production was mentioned with references to Negev Byzantine heritage, agrarian history, and a continuing rich Jewish productive past. However, at the time of their formation, very few farmers had finalized and fully approved their plans. Regardless, they have proceeded on the ground, based on the promises received by state and regional officials that they would eventually be approved and legalized.

The Wine Route project was, however, a reminder of what the Aricha Valley initiative had imagined and understood earlier–that claiming desert heritage is a terrain of power, that heritage tourism, offering hospitality in rural settings as an asset, and becoming recognized through establishing oneself as such, was not far-fetched. This was clearer, particularly when the farms started a retroactive legalization process and based their recognition on portraying the farms as promoting agriculture and tourism. The farm project was retroactively legalized in July 2010 by a supportive group of Knesset members who saw it as a developing project of 'pioneers' corroborating Jewish presence in the Negev.

In the statement below, parliament member Taleb-al Sana, a non-local Bedouin himself, attended the discussion in which the farms' legalization was discussed in the parliament explicitly begged Jewish parliament members to address Bedouin *and* Jews, relationally and regionally, and to discuss *regional* settlement solutions in the form of agriculture and tourism for Bedouin as well rather than to consider separately ethnic-based solutions:

> *"In the Negev, there are more than 120 different settlements of Jews: Kibbutz, agricultural settlement, community settlement, and development towns… for the Bedouin-- 30 percent of the Negev population there is no one legal settlement to this day, but seven settlements that are all of the same kind-- urban enforced*

> *townships. There is nothing for people who are in agriculture or tourism! Let us go together to find a solution for this problem and finish the division between you and us."* (Taleb al Sana at the solitary farm parliamentary committee, 2010)

Al-Sana highlights similarities and creates one framework for what the Bedouin and the Farmers were hoping to achieve—a recognized space for their development in the form of agro-tourism and heritage tourism. He emphasizes the potential utility of a broad regional agro-touristic heritage discourse for the Negev. However, his statement also implicitly indicates that other ways of conceptualizing the region, or 'other geographical imaginations,' of the region are at work such as imagining a Negev without Bedouin at all or a Negev with highly uneven geographies, legalities, and forms of governance. Al-Sana failed in his effort to include the Bedouin with Jewish residents of the Negev under the same legislative umbrella. However, his citation is already the first attempt to pinpoint the need for a regional analysis emphasizing potential similarities rather than structured differences. It also positioned the local Aricha Village initiative within a broader political and discursive context.

Acknowledging heritage agro-tourism as a potential terrain for material and legal change publicly, along with the local initiatives of Bedouin traditional tourism in Aricha village, which established the Bedouin in the realm of agro-and heritage tourism, inspired similar movements in other Bedouin villages of the Negev highlands. Despite the state's uneven legalization, bottom-up regional and local ties gave rise to traditional hospitality complexes in the area. The Tents Road, lacking state-formal status, was announced first in 2009 by the Jewish Regional Council and has garnered limited sponsorship from various government ministries (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Negev and Galilee Development, Negev Development Authority), aiding in the promotion of Bedouin hospitality along the highway 40 and the Solitary Farm Route.

In 2021, it was decided that the Abde village, north of Aricha Valley, would be a planned central village for Bedouin communities to which they will relocate in the future. In 2024, in cooperation with the Jewish and the (newly established) Bedouin regional councils, a service center (education, a clinic, and a standard access road) was established in Abde. The model suggested by the state Authority for Bedouin Settlement was that Bedouin would not reside in but maintain their villages as tourism and agricultural sites where they could perhaps work. This seemed an important step in which the state acknowledged at least Bedouin skills and potential in agriculture and hospitability. However, the Bedouin received it with disappointment. State insistence on relocating again existing villages from their residency was a misunderstanding of Bedouin lifestyle and heritage. For the Bedouin, agro-tourism was practiced as organic, not as a business distant from their homes. In 2022, a joint Jewish-Bedouin venture was launched to promote, through a local NGO, traditional Bedouin tourism—The Land of Tents, which strengthened the region's branding as a space of traditional tourism.

DISCUSSION

In reality, due to uncertainty regarding the continuity of residence in their location and ongoing pressure to relocate to a town governed by regional authorities, our findings illuminate how future imaginaries (Sullivan-Wiley & Teller, 2020) can reshape the perception of the place within broader prevailing discourses as a Bedouin area of value. We will first describe the internal changes in Bedouin' self-perception and SoP during three phases of the community's life: the semi-nomadic phase, the sedentarized residents of an unrecognized village, and the envisioning of a future BHC, by using Pedaya (2011) expanses approach. Second, we will contextualize these changes within the region's social, political, and economic contexts. This refers to the regional processes in the decade since the interviews ended.

SoP as Semi-nomadic Shepherds

The pasturelands of the different Bedouin clans – their past *real expanse* – were recalled with yearning and intimate familiarity. The Bedouin' intimate local knowledge of the desert and resilience in this challenging environment was integral to their self-identity and pride. Place names, crafts, and shepherd customs, as well as their social organization and customary law, formed a *symbolic expanse* anchored in the *real expanse* and harmonized with it. Like SoP of Indigenous people elsewhere, which weaves human identity and nature together (Walker & Moscardo, 2016), the *real expanse* was perceived as a source of environmental freedom and a sense of control over personal and community conduct. The *imaginary expanse* was also anchored in the former *real expanse*, and together, the three expanses were in a harmonious relationship (similar to the dashed lines in Figure 2), recalled by the Bedouin as balanced and as providing a positive SoP.

SoP in the Unrecognized Aricha Valley Village

The community's new *real expanse* – the material dimension in the unrecognized village in Aricha Valley – disrupted and shifted the relationship between the three expanses. The *real expanse* was repeatedly mentioned as a source of negative experiences, posing threats to everything that had previously secured the Bedouin' environmental identity. The waste, neglect, and exclusion from essential place-based resources and a lack of training and education relevant to the new environment were mentioned in association with 'haunting state authorities' and the Bedouin's image as a 'harmful threat to the environment. 'These processes made the *real expanse* dominant in shaping the community's SoP and detached them from their environment. While the influence of the *real expanse* continued to expand, the *symbolic expanse* deteriorated as the shepherds' social organization, nomadic practices, language, and ceremonies became unnecessary or disruptive.

Within the unrecognized village, a pale Bedouin identity emerged, and the uncertainty regarding their future and social control of their environment shrunk

the *imaginary expanse*. The relationship between the three expanses, shown in Figure 2 (solid lines), illustrates the *real expanse* (the village) as the cause of the decay of the *symbolic* and *imaginary* expanses and as central in constituting the Bedouin's negative SoP.

SoP and Envisioning a Bedouin Heritage Centre

The idea to transform the unrecognized village into a BHC emerged in the *imaginary expanse* without any significant change in Aricha Valley material or legal circumstances. In this vision, the image of the 'incapable Bedouin,' identified with 'waste' and 'degradation' (McKee, 2015), was replaced with a positive self-identity of a proud, 'resilient shepherd,' possessing unique knowledge that is beneficial and profitable in the challenging desert environment. The success of this narrative for tourism produced positive feedback, which expanded the *imaginary expanse* and required the recovery of the *symbolic expanse*. Thus, the community began restoring the language and material heritage, tales, customs, and crafts related to the pasturelands. The elder Bedouin were essential in this process and their role in the community as 'keepers of the collective memory' was restored. The restoration of these two expanses, the *imaginary* and the *symbolic,* made the *real expanse*—Aricha Valley as a biophysical and social environment—less threatening (Figure 2, dashed lines). It became a place where residents could once again manage their space socially and physically.

Adopting Lacanian psychoanalytic (Gregory, 1995) and the "expanses" approach of Pedaya (2011) highlights the emotional-perceptual dimensions of the Bedouin SoP. Through them, we could recognize the Bedouin entrepreneurs' decision to turn their gaze from the mirror – the imaginary expense – the State views of the Bedouin to a new mirror offered by the region's growing (environmental) tourism. While in the first mirror, Bedouin's reflection is of 'backward' individuals lacking the education and skills required to integrate into modern Israeli society, the alternative mirror, which represented shifting development paradigms, revealed the possession of local knowledge regarding dwelling in the challenging desert environment, as valuable and as valorized by 'educated' and 'modern' tourists. The shifting mirrors allowed the settlers to imagine a different future within their place; it challenged their previous SoP and laid a foundation for new ways of local space management. This change in the *imaginary expanse* encourages the community to reconstruct a positive self-perception and may help them become an integral and constructive part of their place again (Christiansen & Haartsen, 2020).

A Relational Geography Perspective to Regional Changes

Pedaya's (2011) model suggests an important lens to the internal and local (painful) process in which perceptions of place and self-change in Aricha Valley. However, it may be insufficient to explain how a local vision that did not materialize

and was even intentionally blocked transformed into a broader regional concept and project in the form of the Land of Tent and the Tent Road and to address the differences between the local (inside Aricha Valley) and regional projects.

A relational analysis that takes local processes and places as "nodal points" within broader "power geometries" (Massey, 2013) rather than in isolation can provide historical and regional analysis and understanding of changing spatialities and imaginaries of Bedouin' struggle over their rights and localities. Considering SoP from a relational geography perspective also expands the (political) utility of the concept.

Al-Sana's call cited earlier about the need to "go regional" was not only about highlighting separation between Jews and Arabs as being morally wrong; it is also an analytical-political perspective. First, a relational understanding of Jewish and Arab spaces is important to understanding the region more dialectically, how difference is produced, and how social and spatial boundaries are consolidated. In addition, situating Aricha residents' environmental imagination within a regional and perhaps even global perspective illuminates important terrains of power through which these differences are established but also undermined.

Environmental imaginaries of the Negev as a desert in need of improvement and development visions of a more productive desert and of mass agriculture were powerful terrains of change since the British mandate. For Bedouin in the Negev, they implied they no longer fit into the desert and even threatened what was perceived as "good ecology" and development (Davis, 2016). These discourses have shifted since the 1990s towards more local, desert-suitable, and perhaps more sustainable (albeit private) forms of development, which now shaped the Negev as a region and Jewish and Arab relationships and spatialities in it.

The Wine Route manifests this shift in development visions, but despite claiming to be a Jewish settlement project, seemingly unrelated to Bedouin's lives, from a relational perspective, it has been no less about framing Bedouin and their belonging to the desert. Bedouin' sociability, agricultural traditions, and hospitalities are overlooked and erased in the farm's vision, which was framed in terms of heritage, hospitality, and local agriculture. The project that reworks old (Western) notions and imaginaries into a renewed reality of private entrepreneurship utilizes geographical imaginaries in which improved and developed (and attractive for investors) means European and Jewish but not Arab. It restores and reworks past Zionist and Western environmental – desert subjectivities of *both* Arabs *and* Jews–, the former by their exclusion from this vision. The farm's project also establishes differences and boundaries not only symbolically but also materially along class and ethnic lines through provisions (and deprivation) of infrastructure, homebuilding (and demolitions), and retroactive legalization (for the farm only). The early initiative in Aricha Valley contested this vision, taking the shift in perceptions of development as an opening, and visualizing agro-tourism, agriculture, and hospitability as Bedouin domains as well. The legalization of the farms and the statement brought above by

al-Sana highlighted not only the political power but also the contradictory vision of heritage development plans. On the one hand, they highlight ancient agricultural heritage, but on the other, they relegate them as Jewish. Al-Sana insisted on seeing Jewish *and* Arab spaces in the Negev in relation to each other, potentially constituting together one diverse agro-touristic space in the Negev.

The rise of the "Tent Road" and the later "Land of Tent" should be seen in relation to tensions within these visions. If the Bedouin lifestyle was disruptive to prevailing understandings of development and environment in past discourses, the new notions of development resonated well with their lifestyle and heritage. The legal framework, however, excluded them from this new vision. Nevertheless, although the Aricha Valley initiative rooted in this realization did not materialize, seeds for Bedouin heritage tourism were sawn. The Bedouin alliance formed in the second decade of the 2000s reorganized the once separated and individualized Bedouin Villages of the Negev highlands through one tourist project that resembled the farm logic. The Tent Road offered, along the lines of the Aricha Valley initiative and the Wine Route, desert heritage tourism. It did not bring state recognition Bedouin were vying for; but it would be wrong to belittle its power to undermine and transform prevalent meanings of the Negev Highlands and their importance as an alternative to the Wine Route. Unlike the highly segregated nature of the Wine Route, the Tent Road initiative was formed as an alliance and a collaborative effort of Jewish *and* Bedouin neighbors, supported by the regional council, acknowledging Bedouin's farming and hosting skills. It was later promoted by a local NGO which named the program the "Land of Tents," providing it an added meaning stating the Negev being a Bedouin landscape, which can be considered a territorial and historical claim.At the same time, both projects, the Wine Route and the Tent Road, issued maps (albeit separated) and set in place, the so-far unmapped Bedouin tourism as a regional experience along Route 40s. The Tent Road and Land of Tent projects mobilize the Bedouin villages of the Negev highlands from a social and economic perspective by physically and practically creating tourist traffic between the villages, bringing income, and connecting the villages to the Jewish, broader public in Israel. They have already revalorized the Bedouin in unexpected ways; the village's platform, which revives and emphasizes Bedouin knowledge and traditions, has sparked, for instance, scientific interest related to climate change challenges and new perceptions of life in drylands. Visits and interest of scientists in the desert Bedouin villages gain (or re-gain) traction. They are based on the understanding that local cultures can better guide living in the desert rather than national greening projects, mass agriculture, or privatizations of precious land.

CONCLUSION

This study traced changes in SoP, particularly place-meaning, of Bedouin who were displaced, relocated, and forcefully settled by the state through two theoretical perspectives. The Expanses model (Pedaya, 2011) highlights the potential power of environmental imaginations to challenge places existing meaning and change them in addition to changing belonging and social and physical structures at the local scale. By adding the perspective of relational geography (Massey, 2008, 2013), we demonstrated that this local environmental imagination always arises from and is shaped by regional geographic and political historical processes, which then create alternative environmental imaginaries in terms of scale and political possibilities. This interaction between local environmental perceptions and imagination and regional social and political processes is dynamic and continues to evolve and change due to new understandings, contradictions, and tensions that arise from them and identified by both Jews and Arabs in these visions. Thus, a seed of the local change in Aricha Valley seems to have developed over the last decade into a regional change in the Negev Highlands place meaning.

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