
Bedouin society in northern Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria and its social, cultural and leadership systems

Muhammad Sami Nujeidat
Bar – Ilan University – Israel

Citation: Muhammad Sami Nujeidat (2022) Bedouin society in northern Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria and its social, cultural and leadership systems, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.10, No.9, pp.34-43

ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to identify the nature of the life of the Bedouin community in northern Israel and some of their customs and social behaviors, the Bedouin leadership systems, and the professions they undertake to secure their living requirements, most notably herding and agriculture. The Arab Bedouin of Israel and the Israeli-occupied West Bank have been subject to a series of human rights violations, including forced displacement, since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. They have been classified as a 'security threat' and branded as 'squatters' on state lands. Successive Israeli governments have sought to expropriate their land and concentrate them into townships. The Israeli authorities refuse to recognize them as an indigenous group and thereby withhold from them the full range of rights provided to indigenous people under international laws. Though forced displacements are not necessarily illegal, they are if they are arbitrary or discriminatory. Bedouin in Israel's Negev desert live in some of the poorest conditions in Israel, deprived of basic rights, including the right to water, shelter and education. They live with the constant threat of eviction and home demolitions, under enormously stressful conditions that have a serious effect on their health and well-being.*

KEYWORDS: Bedouin society, Northern Israel, and leadership systems.

INTRODUCTION

Bedouin or badawi, in Arabic: singular are nomadic Arab tribes who have historically inhabited in the desert regions in the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, the Levant, and Mesopotamia, however, the Arabian Peninsula is the historic and original homeland of the Bedouin Arabs. The English word Bedouin comes from the Arabic badawi, which means "desert dweller", and is traditionally contrasted with ḥāḍir, the term for sedentary people. Bedouin territory stretches from the vast deserts of North Africa to the rocky sands of the Middle East. They are traditionally divided into tribes, or clans (Losleben & Elizabeth, 2003). Bedouins have been referred to by various names throughout history, including Arabaa by the Assyrians (ar-ba-a-a being a nisba of the noun Arab, a name still used for Bedouins today). They are referred to as the "Araab" (أعراب) in arabic, while many Bedouins have abandoned their nomadic and tribal traditions for a modern urban lifestyle, many retain traditional Bedouin culture such as the traditional "asair" clan structure, traditional music, poetry, dances (such as saas), and many other cultural practices and concepts.

Urbanized Bedouins often organize cultural festivals, usually held several times a year, in which they gather with other Bedouins to partake in and learn about various Bedouin traditions—from poetry recitation and traditional sword dances to playing traditional instruments and even classes teaching traditional tent knitting. Traditions like camel riding and camping in the deserts are still popular leisure activities for urban Bedouins who live in close proximity to deserts or other wilderness areas (Suwaed, & Muhammad, 2015).

Bedouin Society Leadership:

A widely quoted Bedouin apothegm is "I am against my brother, my brother and I are against my cousin, my cousin and I, are, against the stranger", sometimes quoted as "I and my brother are against my cousin, I and my cousin are against the stranger" (). This saying signifies a hierarchy of loyalties based on the proximity of some person to oneself, beginning with the self, and proceeding through the nuclear family as defined by male kinship, and then, in principle at least, to an entire genetic or linguistic group (which is perceived as akin to kinship in the Middle East and North Africa generally). Disputes are settled, interests are pursued, and justice and order are dispensed and maintained by means of this framework, organized according to an ethic of self-help and collective responsibility (Andersen, 2002).

The individual family unit (known as a tent or "gio", typically consisted traditionally of three or four adults (a married couple plus siblings or parents) and any number of children. When resources were plentiful, several tents would travel together as a goud .

While these groups were sometimes linked by patriarchal lineage, others were just as likely linked by marriage alliances (new wives were especially likely to have close male relatives join them). Sometimes, the association was based on acquaintance and familiarity, or even no clearly defined relation except for simple shared membership within a tribe. The next scale of interaction within groups was the ibn 'amm (cousin, or literally "son of an uncle") or descent group, commonly of three to five generations. These were often linked to goums (Suwaed, 2015).

But where a goud would generally consist of people all with the same herd type, descent groups were frequently split up over several economic activities, thus allowing a degree of 'risk management'; should one group of members of a descent group suffer economically, the other members of the descent group would be able to support them (Bitar, 2020).

Whilst the phrase "descent group" suggests purely a lineage-based arrangement, in reality these groups were fluid and adapted their genealogies to take in new members. The largest scale of tribal interactions is the tribe as a whole, led by a Sheikh (Arabic: *šayḥ*, literally, "old man"), though the title refers (to leaders in varying contexts. شيخ) The tribe often claims descent from one common ancestor—as mentioned above. The

tribal level is the level that mediated between the Bedouin and the outside governments and organizations. Distinct structure of the Bedouin society leads to long-lasting rivalries between different clans (Suwaed, 2015). Bedouin traditionally had strong honor codes, and traditional systems of justice dispensation in Bedouin society typically revolved around such codes. The bisha'a, or ordeal by fire, is a well-known Bedouin practice of lie detection. See also: Honor codes of the Bedouin, Bedouin systems of justice Losleben, 2004).

Herding:

Livestock and herding, principally of goats, sheep and dromedary camels comprised the traditional livelihoods of Bedouins. These were used for meat, dairy products, and wool. Most of the staple foods that made up the Bedouins' diet were dairy products. Camels, in particular, had numerous cultural and functional uses. Having been regarded as a "gift from God", they were the main food source and method of transportation for many Bedouins (Holes, 2004).

In addition to their extraordinary milking potentials under harsh desert conditions, their meat was occasionally consumed by Bedouins.^[33] As a cultural tradition, camel races were organized during celebratory occasions, such as weddings or religious festivals, some Bedouin societies live in arid regions. In areas where rainfall is very unpredictable, a camp will be moved irregularly, depending on the availability of green pasture. Where winter rainfall is more predictable in regions further south, some Bedouin people plant grain along their migration routes. This proves a resource for the livestock throughout the winter. In regions such as western Africa, where there is more predictable rainfall, the Bedouin practice transhumance. They plant crops near permanent homes in the valleys where there is more rain and move their livestock to the highland pastures (Cohen, (2006).

Bedouin Early history:

Historically, the Bedouin engaged in nomadic herding, agriculture and sometimes fishing in the Syrian steppe since 6000 BCE. By about 850 BCE, a complex network of settlements and camps was established.^[35] A major source of income for these people was the taxation of caravans, and tributes collected from non-Bedouin settlements. They also earned income by transporting goods and people in caravans pulled by domesticated camels across the desert. Scarcity of water and of permanent pastoral land required them to move constantly (Abu-Rabia, 2001).

The Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta reported that in 1326 on the route to Gaza, the Egyptian authorities had a customs post at Qatya on the north coast of Sinai. Here Bedouin were being used to guard the road and track down those trying to cross the border without permission. The Early Medieval grammarians and scholars seeking to

develop a system of standardizing the contemporary Classical Arabic for maximal intelligibility across the Arab phone areas, believed that the Bedouin spoke the purest, most conservative variety of the language. To solve irregularities of pronunciation, the Bedouin were asked to recite certain poems; hereafter consensus was relied on to decide the pronunciation and spelling of a given word (Burns, 2005).

Bedouin in Jordan:

Jordan, 1918–46. The British installed King Abdullah of the Hashemite family (of Hijaz mercantile lineage, allied to Bedouin tribes) as ruler of Jordan in 1918. Following skirmishes and raids by Ibn Saud in 1925 a border was established by military force in southern Jordan and in 1930 a Desert Patrol was established under John Bagot Glubb.⁶⁹ The new borders circumscribed the Bedouin ability to migrate annually and eventually led to the end of raiding (Ghazu) (Etheredge, 2011). This was part of a general trend across the Middle East whereby Bedouins became more sedentary and took to sheep instead of camel rearing. During the 1920s the population of Jordan was estimated at 300,000, of which some 120,000 were semi-nomads and 50,000 were nomads (Etheredge, 2011).

The Jordanian regime was built upon the support of the Bedouin. Besides enrolment in military units such as the Desert Patrol and the Arab Legion, the state distributed largesse to the tribes. Tax relief and land grants (50,000 dunams in al Muwaqqar and 70,000 in the Jordan valley to the Bani Sakhr and Adwan) were provided to Bedouin. Sir Arthur Wauchope said in 1936 that ‘in order to avoid the spread of [the Palestine] disturbances to Transjordan, we must begin to subsidize the Bedouin tribes [including the] minor Bani Sakhr sheikhs camped near Amman [including] payments to Bedu Sheikhs’ (Buessow, 2008).

With Sheikh Mithqal Al-Fayez of the Bani Sakher, William Seabrook wrote about his experience of a ghazzu from the Sardieh tribe on Mithqal's 500 Hejin racing camels. The ghazzu was intercepted by Mithqal when he was notified about the Sardieh tribe's intentions from a man from the Bani Hassan tribe, who rode continuously for over 30 hours to reach Mithqal before their plot matured. Mithqal, using the information, prepared a trap for them, which resulted in the imprisonment of one of the Sardieh warriors. William notes that although the warrior was a prisoner, he was nonchalant and was not treated aggressively, and that the ghazzu wasn't a war, but a game in which camels and goats were the prizes (El Shamayleh, 2012).

Governmental policies pressing the Bedouin have in some cases been executed in an attempt to provide service (schools, health care, law enforcement and so on—see Chatty 1986 for examples), but in others have been based on the desire to seize land traditionally roved and controlled by the Bedouin. In recent years, some Bedouin have

adopted the pastime of raising and breeding white doves (El Shamayleh, 2012). while others have rejuvenated the traditional practice of falconry.

In 1929 a Bedouin Control Law was enacted in order to make this system run more smoothly. It permitted the government to intervene in all issues pertaining to 492 R. Kark & S.J. Frantzman Downloaded by [Hebrew University] at 01:41 30 September 2012 nomadism. One aspect of the Bedouin Control Law and its Bedouin Control Board was that it declared its intention to give the Bedouin 'a fixed stake in immovable property in the country, which will be not only an economic insurance but also a social anchorage'. Dowson was employed by the Mandate to design a land regime that would encourage settlement after the implementation of a modern survey (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2012).

The Law of Land Delimitation, Survey and Evaluation of 1930 replaced the land law of 1927 and between 1930 and 1935 some 243,389 dunams were registered. It was this law that settled the Adwan and Ghazzawiyah tribes on 108,000 dunams and 46,000 dunams, transferring land to private (mulk) ownership. By 1949 3.3 million dunams of land (including all the musha or communally held land) were 'settled' or divided and a previous class of state land (miri) was defined as mulk (Buessow, 2008).

During the period 1918 to 1946 Jordan underwent a revolutionary transformation from a largely semi-nomadic/nomadic populace to a state with numerous settlements. The British introduction of modern survey and registration methods, coupled with the existing Ottoman system, resulted in the registration of large blocks of land in the name of individual Bedouin. The British also inaugurated irrigation projects that had as their goal the settlement of the Bedouin and the improvement of their lives (Buessow, 2008).

Iraq, 1918–32. The British occupied Iraq and established King Faisal as its Hashemite monarch. It took several years to pacify the country due to the 1920 revolt in which 131,000 Bedouin tribesmen were believed to have participated. In the course of hostilities John Bagot Glubb, then a British commander in Iraq, estimated that 8,450 Bedouin tribesmen were killed (Joudah, 1987). In a report to the League of Nations in 1931 regarding the period between 1920 and 1931, the British acknowledged the severe crises of land settlement and registration in Iraq. Everywhere 'disputes as to boundary and even as to the elementary rights of ownership or tenure (Bitar, 2020).

Dowson noted that many of the Bedouin in Iraq believed they possessed the land in common but had only rarely secured any rights through registration to their land.⁸¹ From 1933 deeds to land were given to the leaders of various tribes, whereas the tribesmen received no rights to their land.⁸² A Land Settlement Law of 1932 revised the Ottoman Land Law of 1858 but preserved the land categories. New land laws

known as the Lazmah Law No.51 of 1932 and the Settlement of Land Rights Laws No.50 and No.29 of 1938 (amended by Law No.36 of 1952) (Al-Damurdashi, 1991).

Created a lazmah type of land and in theory put most agricultural land into state hands. Some state lands could be acquired by showing evidence of ten years' use. Law No.36 of 1952 reduced this to three years. Law No.73 of 1936 and No.20 of 1939 allowed for the land to be acquired from the state for a simple fee if the ten years had not passed.⁸³ By 1958 some 32 million dunams were privately held (see Table 1). Hanna Batatu writes that 'the phenomenon of private or semiprivate property in Iraq was, to a predominant extent, the consequence of the land policy initiated in 1932'.⁸⁴ The British policy of privatizing state land was part of a larger process of privatization that was also carried out in Palestine where huge blocks of government land (in some cases former Abdul Hamid II's estates were allocated (through sale or concession) to individuals or organizations (Naguib, 2009).

Jordan, 1946–present. From the earliest days of King Abdullah's rule in Jordan he understood that the Bedouin would form the most important pillar of his administration. Jordan 'admitted a large proportion of the tribes' young men to the Desert Patrol'.¹²⁶ According to Norman Lewis, the army pay and pensions constituted 'the most important source of income of nearly every family [among the Bani Sakhr]' (Losleben & Elizabeth, 2003).

Jordan founded new villages for the Bedouin. It established new schools and 'roads were built between these new villages and also between them and the capital'.¹²⁸ These projects began in earnest in 1959. Jabbur noted that there were 113 villages for 112 clans for the Bani Khalid, al-Sirhan, al-Sardiyah, al-Masaid, al-Uzaymat, al Sharafat, al-Shara and the Bani Sakhr.¹²⁹ Some 11 settlement schemes were embarked upon by the Jordanian government between 1960 and 1980.¹³⁰ This was an attempt to sedentarize the last portion of Table 4. Selected land owned by Syrian Bedouin tribes (1956).

| Population | Land area (dunams) | Tribe | Population | Land area (dunams) |
|--------------|--------------------|---------|------------|--------------------|
| Al Ruwala | 20,000 | 81,321 | Al Sba'ah | 18,000 |
| Fidan | 13,000 | 129,095 | Shammar | 20,000 |
| Bani Khalid | 8,000 | 233,888 | Fawa'ira | 3,000 |
| Hadidiyin | 30,500 | 385,640 | Mawali | 16,000 |
| Al Bu Khamis | 2,500 | 20,300 | Mhayd | 2,000 |
| Byar | 2,300 | 61,500 | Waha | 4,300 |
| | | | | 44,340 |

Source and notes: J.S. Jabbur, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) (Magness, 2003).

This is from a report by Ahmad al Akkam, representative of the Directorate of the Tribes in the Syrian Chamber of Deputies, he compiled this list in reaction to various measures enacted and rescinded between 1950 and 1956 regarding taking away special rights for the tribes and attempts to confiscate their lands. The study noted that while there were only 140,000 Bedouins they owned some 3 million denims of land. 498 R.

Kark & S.J. Frantzman Downloaded by [Hebrew University] at 01:41 30 September 2012 Jordan's population that remained nomadic (7 per cent in 1978). Small communities were established.¹³¹ One of the criteria for establishment was the sanitation of the new apartments. The government built mosques, wind shields, schools and markets. Some projects were unsuccessful, such as one among the Bali tribe in which only 25 per cent of the Bedouin remained on the land given them (Heidemann, 2005).

Fawal, who analysed the various projects, identified three types of settlement: imposed settlement, independent settlement and joint settlement. He concluded that the 'best way is the independent settlement followed by a joint settlement project'. The Bani Sakhr tribe was almost completely sedenterized by 1985 and one of its sheikhs, Mithqal al Faiz, became one of Jordan's largest landowners.¹³⁴ There were a few disturbances among the Bani Hasan in 1983 and in southern Jordan around Ma'an in 1989 due to land price increases, but generally the Bedouin have remained a pillar of the state.¹³⁵ In eastern Jordan, the most deserted region of the country known as the Badiyah, there remained some 2,000 Bedouin households in the 1990s.¹³⁶ Recently they built stone houses 'for consolidating land rights following state legislative challenged to tribal diras'.¹³⁷ One study in 1976 estimated that 6 per cent of the Jordanian population was nomadic (i.e. 30,000 nomads).¹³⁸ In 1929 the population was said to number 130,000 'settled' people, 120,000 'semi-nomads' and 50,000 'nomads'.¹³⁹ It would appear that Jordan is an excellent case study of the almost complete sedentarization of Bedouin (Khalidi, 1992).

The Jordanian government provides the Bedouin with different services such as education, housing and health clinics. However, some Bedouins give it up and prefer their traditional nomadic lifestyle. In the recent years there is a growing discontent of the Bedouin with the ruling monarch Abdullah II of Jordan. In August 2007, police clashed with some 200 Bedouins who were blocking the main highway between Amman and the port of Aqaba. Livestock herders were protesting the government's lack of support in the face of the steeply rising cost of animal feed and expressed resentment about government assistance to refugees. Arab Spring events in 2011 led to demonstrations in Jordan, and Bedouins took part in them. But the Hashemite's did not see a revolt similar to turbulence in other Arab states. The main reasons for that are the high respect to the monarch and contradictory interests of different groups of the Jordanian society. The King Abdullah II maintains his distance from the complaints by allowing blame to fall on government ministers, whom he replaces at will (Bitar, 2020).

Bedouin in Israel

Palestine, 1918–48. During the British Mandate (1917–48), enactment of a series of laws and regulations affected the Bedouin (i.e. the Mawat ordinance of 1921). The Bedouin who were most affected, in the sense that they became more sedentary and their movements more restricted, by these early British policies were those who lived in parts of Palestine with higher population densities such as the Galilee. The Bedouin Control Ordinance of 1942 was used to compel tribes to stay within certain areas (Shafir, 1989).

It provided for the punishment of entire tribes rather than individuals for certain crimes. Due to the extension of greater government control and policing, some Bedouin tribes, such as the Arab Subiah in the Galilee, found their movements so restricted that they consequently registered their land and became sedentary.⁹¹ The British administration did not resolve issues of land tenure in the Negev, where the majority of the Bedouin resided. The British did not survey the Negev or submit it to land registration during the Mandate, viewing most of it as Mawat land. Furthermore, most of the Bedouin did not officially lay claim or register their land claims (Bedouin of the Negev. 2011).

Israel, 1948–present. After the 1948 war the remaining 11,000 to 18,000 Bedouin were concentrated by the government in an area (Sayigh) of 1.2 million dunams north-east of Beersheba.¹⁵¹ In 1960 the military eased its control of the Bedouin, who returned to the labour markets from which they had been restricted since 1948. A 1969 census counted 36,800 Bedouin in Israel (1.3 per cent of the total population), who lived in 44 settlements.¹⁵² Because of the unique situation of Israel and the division of its various ethnic and religious communities, the Bedouin in southern Israel, where most of them live, were not able to move to Jewish towns or villages. In northern Israel Bedouin settled in Israeli-Arab villages such as Tarshiha, or exclusively Bedouin villages such as Tuba-Zangariya and Shibli (Shafir, 1989) (Anderson, 2013).

The Israeli government built seven towns specifically for the Negev Bedouin between 1969 and 1985. By 2006 some 83,000 Bedouin resided in these towns whereas the rest (76,000) lived in 45 unrecognized settlements.¹⁵³ The legally ‘unrecognized’ Bedouin village is not unique to Israel but the phenomenon is pronounced there. Out of a population of around 7.5 million in Israel in 2009 (not including the West Bank and Gaza Strip) there were 193,000 Bedouin, about 2.5 per cent of the population. In the West Bank the Bedouin population was estimated at 50–300,000.¹⁵⁴ In the absence of good estimates, Bedouin may constitute as much as 10 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip (Cohen, 2006).

Prior to the 1948 Israeli Declaration of Independence, an estimated 65,000–90,000 Bedouins lived in the Negev desert. According to Encyclopedia Judaica, 15,000 Bedouin remained in the Negev after 1948; other sources put the number as low as

11,000.^[69] Another source states that in 1999 110,000 Bedouins lived in the Negev, 50,000 in the Galilee and 10,000 in the central region of Israel.^[70] All of the Bedouins residing in Israel were granted Israeli citizenship in 1954 (Cohen, 2006).

The Bedouin who remained in the Negev belonged to the Tiaha confederation^[72] as well as some smaller groups such as the 'Azazme and the Jahalin. After 1948, some Negev Bedouins were displaced. The Jahalin tribe, for instance, lived in the Tel Arad region of the Negev prior to the 1950s. In the early 1950s, the Jahalin were among the tribes that, according to Emanuel Marx, "moved or were removed by the military government". They ended up in the so-called E1 area East of Jerusalem (Joudah, 1987).

About 1,600 Bedouin serve as volunteers in the Israel Defense Forces, many as trackers in the IDF's elite tracking units. Famously, Bedouin shepherds were the first to discover the Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of Jewish texts from antiquity, in the Judean caves of Qumran in 1946. Of great religious, cultural, historical and linguistic significance, 972 texts were found over the following decade, many of which were discovered by Bedouins (Shafir, 1989).

Bedouins Rahat School:

Successive Israeli administrations tried to demolish Bedouins villages in the Negev. Between 1967 and 1989, Israel built seven legal townships in the north-east of the Negev, with Tel as-Sabi or Tel Sheva the first. The largest, city of Rahat has a population of over 58,700 (as of December 2013), as such it is the largest Bedouin settlement in the world. Another well-known township out of the seven of them that the Israeli government built is Hura. According to the Israel Land Administration (2007), some 60 per cent of the Negev Bedouin live in urban areas, the rest live in so-called unrecognized villages, which are not officially recognized by the state due to general planning issues and other political reasons. They were built chaotically without taking into consideration local infrastructure. These communities are scattered all over the Northern Negev and often are situated in inappropriate places, such as military fire zones, natural reserves, landfills, etc. On 29 September 2003(Goering, 2011).

Israeli government adapted a new "Abu Basma Plan" (Resolution 881), according to which a new regional council was formed, unifying a number of unrecognized Bedouin settlements—Abu Basma Regional Council. This resolution also regarded the need to establish seven new Bedouin settlements in the Negev, literally meaning the official recognition of unrecognized settlements, providing them with a municipal status and consequently with all the basic services and infrastructure. The council was established by the Interior Ministry on 28 January 2004.

Israel is currently building or enlarging some 13 towns and cities in the Negev. According to the general planning, all of them will be fully equipped with the relevant infrastructure: schools, medical clinics, postal offices, etc. and they also will have electricity, running water and waste control. Several new industrial zones meant to fight unemployment are planned, some are already being constructed, like Idan HaNegev in the suburbs of Rahat, it will have a hospital and a new campus inside. The Bedouins of Israel receive free education and medical services from the state. They are allotted child cash benefits, which has contributed to the high birth rate among the Bedouin of 5% per year. But unemployment rate remains very high, and few obtain a high school degree (4%), and even fewer graduate from university (6%).

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