

Change and Preservation in Life Stories of Bedouin Students

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Abstract: This paper deals with the life stories of one specific group—Bedouin students in a teachers' education college, and investigates the reason for their success where others have failed. The Bedouin students are a minority and have studied in an educational system suffering a high drop out rate from school. Nevertheless, they managed to overcome many hardships and gain entrance to a college. The article claims that these students' ability to strike a balance between preservation of the culture from which they come, and a selective adoption of Western culture, is the key to their success.

Life stories of five students were analyzed. Life stories were used because they are a powerful method for revealing covert personal and cultural assumptions of the narrators. Based on these stories, the paper will present a description of these students, the place of their family, their life as a traditional minority society within a Western majority, and the place of education in their lives. We believe that understanding the success of these students can enlighten us regarding Bedouin students in particular and minority students in general.

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with the life stories of one specific group—Bedouin students in a teachers' education college—and investigates the reason for their success where others have failed. The article claims that these students' ability to strike a balance between preservation of the culture from which they come, and a selective adoption of Western culture, is the key to their success. The paper is based on a description of their characters, their family and general culture education, and their existence as a minority within a majority population, as revealed in their life stories. [1]

Interest in the life stories of a particular societal group requires bibliographic attention to two areas: life stories, and a description of the group's social background. [2]

1.1 Research into life-stories and their connections to socio-cultural background

In this article we present five Bedouin students and their life-stories. A "life story" is a unique type of story that describes a sequence of events, which the narrator views as the story of his or her life. The life story draws a thread through the narrator's past, present and future, assigns to the sequence significance beyond the bald list of facts, and constitutes a central stratum of the person's identity. [3]

Recently, the concept of using the story as a legitimate area for research has gained considerable momentum. Many researchers have accepted the idea that the story represents a type of knowledge, which grasps, in a unique way, the richness and nuances of the meaning of human events. Research into stories facilitates a deep understanding of human phenomena. Moreover, one can understand both the individuals and the properties of their environment (see, for example, SABAR-BEN YEHOASHA & DARGISH, 2001; KAINAN, 2002). [4]

As a subcategory, there are studies of the personal histories of those involved in teaching. Some studies relate to the influence of personal histories on the teacher's point of view, on the decision to take up the teaching profession, and on the attitudes of new teachers to teaching (KNOWLES & HOLT REYNOLDS, 1994; KAGAN, 1992; ZEICHNER & GORE, 1990). In parallel, CARTER (1993) and JOSSELYN (1993) discuss the importance of the narrative in educational research, and CARTER and DOYLE (1995) stress the importance of story as a tool for research into teaching. CARTER (1995) addresses the notion of story as a framework that helps the teachers organize their personal understanding of their craft. She uses prominently-remembered events as a bridge between personal understanding and educational knowledge. CONNELLY and CLANDININ (1990) note, that such reflection allows teacher to review situations, understand them better and subsequently improve their work. In addition, it can enrich our understanding of teaching. Regarding personal narratives, CARTER and DOYLE (1995) find that the personal understanding of teaching is both systematic and theoretical. Learning to teach is a negotiated process, and that mastery in

teaching takes a long time. In another article DOYLE and CARTER (2003) suggest that the teacher-education curriculum should be rearranged on the basis of stories. In this paper, we, too, use students' life stories to understand some aspects of teacher education. [5]

This paper discusses life-stories as cultural texts that reflect mutual relations between personal and social aspects, which the narrators find as significant in their life. The life story is not just an individual story; it also expresses a cultural context and is influenced by it, while simultaneously giving it form (LOMSKY-FEDER, 1998). Thus, the life story embeds a combination of personal and social meanings (BILU, 1986), facilitating the understanding of the culture in which it takes place (PASTA-SHUBERT, 2000; KAINAN, 2002). When people recount their lives, they always organize and arrange their personal memories, anchored in the communal memories of the group in which they live. BOURDIEU (1987) claims that via the presentation of our life as a story, the hegemonic cultural world view existing in the narrators' environment finds expression, a view of which the narrators are unaware, but which encompasses their own views of reality and determines their basic assumptions. [6]

Since the life stories of this specific group of minority students reflect on social as well as personal significant issues, we hope to apply some of the findings and insights gained from their stories, to the success of other minorities. [7]

1.2 Societal background

The students whose stories are presented in this article belong to a group of some 110,000 Bedouins, living in the southern Negev region of Israel. The Bedouins are Muslims and constitute 2% of the Arabs in Israel (who make up 22% of the total population). They are undergoing a transition from a nomadic way of life to one of permanent settlement (MEIR, 1997). [8]

The Bedouin have inhabited the Negev region since the 5th century. Their transition to settlement began at the beginning of the 19th century, under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, continuing under the British Mandate for Palestine (1919-1948). Starting from 1948, major process of transition in permanent settlements has occurred within the state of Israel. The process of settling the Bedouins and supplying them with services, was largely imposed upon them. [9]

Researchers are divided regarding the percentage of Bedouins still half-nomads in the Negev periphery, versus those who are permanently settled. AMIRAN, SHENAR and BEN DAVID (1979) cite about one-tenth in peripheral encampments, with rest in permanent townships. Later researchers, such as DINERO (1997), speak of some 65% in the periphery, while ABU-RABIA (2000) cites some 40% in the periphery with the other 60% in the townships. [10]

The Negev Bedouin are organized in nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, traditionally living from their herds and seasonal agriculture. The transition to urbanization and the limitation of pasturelands have forced many Bedouin into

manual labor, without professional training. The unemployment rate of the Negev Bedouin is double that of the Jewish population of the region. About 42% of the Bedouin work outside their settlement, 99% of them for Jewish employers, as unskilled "blue-collar" workers. Nonetheless, the range of Bedouin employment has widened and now ranges from agricultural workers and tractor drivers, to clerks, lawyers, doctors, and teachers. Such employment often earns them more than sheep, goat and camel breeding. The attraction of higher standards of living leads to greater consumption, and to poverty, unemployment, petty crime and drug abuse. The problem is even greater for women. Their traditional role of herding the flocks has all but vanished. The older women, for the most part lacking formal education, have become housewives, dependent on the men for their livelihood. Nevertheless, the younger women, by virtue of their better education, learn a profession, such as teaching or secretarial work, allowing them to work and contribute to the family income (ABU-RABIA, 2000). [11]

MEIR (1997) claims that, for the Bedouin, the creation of the State of Israel meant a transition from a Middle Eastern Arab culture to that of the modern West. The Bedouin are a minority within a Jewish majority, which is, itself, a minority within the overall Arab majority in the Middle East. Such a situation is unique in terms of the size of the cultural gap and the double framework of minority/majority. In other nomadic societies, the social, economic and cultural gaps between them and the surrounding society is smaller, while that surrounding society is similar enough to permit a slower rate of adaptation to Western culture. [12]

ABU-SAAD, YONAH, and KAPLAN (2000) consider that the cultural gap between the minority and the majority creates an identity crisis for the Bedouin, while the special conditions in which they live as a minority in Israel make it hard for them to find solutions to this problem of identity. Thus, studies on their identity show that the Bedouin regard themselves as different from other Arabs (SAMOHA, 1995). ABU SAAD, YONA and KAPLAN (2000) found that 56% regarded themselves as Israelis and 61% as Palestinians. [13]

One of the symptoms of this phenomenon is to be found in the attitude to schooling: schools represent institutions trying to spread modernity among a traditional society, but the emphasis on achievement is viewed as contrary to tribal loyalty and social status. While traditional concepts rule the home, the school promotes a different and contrasting set of concepts (ABU-SAAD, 1991). This situation exists despite the fact that the schools are local, within the Bedouin townships and education is in the Arabic language. In Israel, the educational system is totally segregated (up to school leaving age) (SWIRSKI, 1995). On the one hand, the population of school children has greatly expanded and both boys and girls are included. MALITZ (1995) reports a growth of Bedouin schoolchildren from 6,205 in 1977, to 27,100 in 1995. GLOBERMAN and KATZ (1997) report a 33% growth from 1977 to 1992, and in the Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin, 1999, the total number of pupils is listed as 32,562.¹ [14]

¹ There are no fully accurate data on the numbers of pupils and the numbers are in dispute, but the published figures reflect a reasonably accurate picture.

However, in parallel with the growth, there is a problem of school drop out. ABU-RABIA, ALVADOR and ALATOONA (1996) present drop-out rates of boys for the years 1988-1993 and show that in the upper grades the rate reached 56% (9th grade = 10%, 10th grade = 26%, 11th grade = 22%, and 12th grade = 17%). In a special educational supplement, The Ha'aretz newspaper (31.12.2003) reported a 25% Bedouin student success rate in the matriculation examinations. One can thus conclude that while relatively many Bedouin children commence schooling, only a few complete their studies and even fewer continue onto institutions of higher education.² [15]

In a system suffering high drop out rates and other problems, the Bedouin students in Israeli higher-education institutions form an elite group. Not only have they succeeded in completing their schooling and passing their matriculation exams, they have also succeeded in gaining entrance to Israel's' big town. In the case of our college, some 500 apply each year, but only 90 are accepted. [16]

1.3 Research procedure

The research population consists of 5 Bedouin students from a college of 1,800 students serving as the main Teachers' Education College in the South of Israel. The students presented here are: Mussa and Latif (male), Zainav, Zoheera, and Abir (female). They were chosen from among the students in the college in a proportional stratified sampling by scanning through the name lists and randomly choosing names from each department. The departments were chosen as a base for sampling to include students from various academic levels and subjects. They were then interviewed by the research team. An interview is an unequal situation from the outset and in every interview there is the problem of power relations (SEIDMAN, 1991). In our case, one has to take into consideration even more complicated power relations between the interviewers who are Jewish women belonging to the ruling group in Israel and teachers in their College, and the interviewees who are members of a minority group in Israel and students at the College. Also hovering is the war situation in the Middle East, which we tried to disregard as much as we could. Nevertheless, there is no direct connection between the Bedouin students and us, since they study in a different section of the College. In addition, this college is known for its warm and friendly relations between teachers and students. It is, however, impossible to assess just how far this complex situation influences the students' input. Nonetheless, this interview system does allow the interviewees to choose what they want to present as the story of their lives. It can be assumed that what they choose to tell us is essentially true even though it is not the whole story. The interviews were conducted in Hebrew, which is not their mother tongue, but is the language in which they study at the college and all of them speak it fluently³. From our

2 A study that compared Jewish and Bedouin students in a college found that the average age of the Bedouin student was 20 years, with 12 years of schooling, all had been born in Israel, the years of the fathers' education mostly ranged from 0 to 8,97% of the mothers were housewives, and 44% of the students were also working (FISCHEL, 2002). Our students in this study meet these criteria.

3 Translation note: Since the interviews were transcribed literally, they contain many inconsistencies of language, hesitations, partial sentences, and so on. We have tried to retain

experience, many interviewees find it is easier talking to an interviewer who has no connection to their social and cultural group. [17]

During the interview the research topic was first explained and only after the position was made clear and their agreement obtained, did the researcher proceed to the next stage. All the names used here are aliases, and other identifying elements have been distorted, in order to protect the privacy of the participants. [18]

The interviews follow the form of a narrative interview as developed by Fritz SCHÜTZE (ROSENTHAL, 1993). In the first part, the students were asked to tell us the stories of their lives, without any interruption, while in the second part, the interviewer asked narrative questions, only to clarify information told earlier. In this way, the narrators have the maximum control over their own stories. The interview was recorded and then transcribed and the text obtained provided the material for analysis. Each story was individually analyzed for content and was then analyzed according to themes that appeared in all the narratives. Due to cultural differences between the researchers and the students, we consulted experts in Bedouin society regarding topics that were raised, and expressions not fully understood. In addition, the findings and conclusions were presented to the Bedouin teachers of the college, who are experts of the Bedouin culture and know this population well. The teachers agreed with the portrayed picture and with its analysis. [19]

2. The Protagonist and Their Families

2.1 The protagonists

In this article, we present the societal characteristics shared by the group of students. At the same time, each of the participants is an individual, with his or her own personality and way of life. We therefore think it proper first to present the reader with a brief description of each of them. Since a complete picture is impossible, we focus only on their central features. [20]

2.1.1 Zoheera

Zoheera is her parents' first-born daughter, a fact that is a source of pride for her, just as she is proud that both her father and grandfather were first-born and thus have a special place of honor in the family. The central figure in Zoheera's story is her father, and she reiterates the close mutual relations between them, which, she claims, are unusual in her society. [21]

Her father adopts Western manners in a number of ways. Zoheera knows that just because his behavior is somewhat uncommon, she has to prove, again and again, that she is a "respectable" girl who behaves decently and dresses modestly, as is customary in this society. The central concept in her life is that of

this oral style in translation, except where the result would be incomprehensible, in which case, some minimum editing has been employed.

dignity. She emphasizes the great respect everybody accords her in every place, and it is clear that she does all in her power to preserve her father's honor. [22]

Nevertheless, things are not as simple as they appear on the surface and they place her in an awkward and complex situation of contrary demands that are difficult to meet. Her father had declared that he alone, together with Zoheera, would decide who would be chosen as her prospective husband. Her father then chose a man for her, in contradiction to custom, an act that roused much opposition in the rest of the family. He persuaded her that the chosen groom was the most suitable for her. She doesn't really want this groom, but to preserve her father's "dignity," and because of his great love for her, she has agreed. Despite her declaration that hers is a "good life," Zoheera is caught in a power struggle with which it is hard for her to contend. [23]

2.1.2 Mussa

Mussa comes from a family that follows a traditional way of life and his father has two wives and 21 children. They live within their extended family and earn their livelihood from sheep farming, following the herd during pasture times. When the father goes out in the spring to visit the flocks in places far from home, Mussa's mother goes with him, together with all the younger children who do not yet go to school. The older children of both wives stay with the other wife and she looks after them all. The father's financial situation is quite bad and there is no spare cash at home. When he was still at high school, Mussa had to work very hard at various jobs (tractor driver, watchman, supermarket worker) in order to pay for his studies. He is young and stubborn and determined to achieve his goal despite the difficulties. When he was younger, conditions in the local school were poor, with beatings and violence being part of the schooling. Thereafter, he was transferred to a better high school in a more distant township, and insisted on making the daily journey in order to succeed. He was insulted by some local kids in this school, but despite the resentment he felt, he continued his studies, skipped a grade and completed his matriculation exams with success, and then made it into the college. [24]

Mussa identifies with the tribal family way of life, and wants to return after his studies. Also, he sees himself as bringing education to the tribe, thus engineering some change, while preserving the essential tribal traditions. [25]

2.1.3 Zainav

A sense of sorrow and hopelessness pervades Zainav's story, which is wholly permeated with grief without redress, because her father has left home and married another woman. The father appears as the central pivot of her life, a pivot which broke away, leaving her with a feeling of displacement, lack of direction or road to follow. [26]

The father's abandonment of them, and in its wake, poverty and loneliness, exposed the weakness of the women in the familial and social circle, and the lack

of family will or lack of means to offer them solidarity or support. Her mother is the only person who remained devoted to Zainav, who reiterates and emphasizes the mother's lack of means to help her pay for her studies. It also appears that her love for Zainav is insufficient to ameliorate the pain of the betrayal. Despite this, through Zainav's story, the strength of her mother, who has taken it upon herself to take the place of Zainav's father, is evident. She encourages her to study and borrows money from the neighbors to enable her to do so. But while the money Zainav had earlier received from her father had given her a sense of security and respect, even when he was sometimes unemployed, the money she takes from her mother fills her with shame. The mother support her daughter in her studies—studies upon which the realization of their shared dream may depend, the dream of earning the respect of the society and regaining their financial independence. For the daughter, her mother's calamity is also her own, while for the mother, her daughter's success is also hers, in the family and in society. [27]

2.1.4 Lateef

Lateef's family is in good economic condition. The father owns a transport company and supports the whole family himself. Lateef can allow himself to behave as a maturing youth whose concerns are similar to almost all other young men in Israel or other Western countries. He is mostly concerned with social relationships, to which he devotes much time. Lateef loves company. He lives in the suburbs of a large township and complains that the long distance from the center makes it hard for him to meet his friends. [28]

As a result, the family has built a five-a-side soccer pitch in the back yard, where they play twice a week. During school, he spent much time with his pals up to the final year of school, when he sat down and studied seriously to pass the exams. In the college, he has friends who also come from the township, as well as new friends he has met in the college. [29]

Girls are a no less important interest—in high school he had a girl friend about whom he talks openly, despite the social taboo on the subject which prohibits any contact between the sexes until marriage. Now, he is concerned with the romances of others. His relations with the girls in his family, especially his sisters, are good. Contrary to custom, he does not ask the girls for favors, does not demand services from them, and he is the one who is ready to bring them things. Lateef dreams of going abroad on a trip with friends. His world consists of his family, friends, and studies, and he regards his life as easy and pleasant. [30]

2.1.5 Abir

Abir's story reveals an unusual Bedouin girl, in her determination and resolve to achieve, by her own powers, and against all odds, the goals she has set herself since childhood—a better life. Abir comes from a large and poor family. Her father's temporary jobs and economic distress have forced the family to move from place to place. Already at the age of twelve, Abir had to go to work as an

agricultural laborer, to help her father support the family. Nevertheless, she was considered such an outstanding pupil that one of the teachers actually denounced her and told her parents it was unfitting for a girl to be so prominent. She quit her schooling in the 8th grade and became a full time agricultural worker for seven years. On her cousin's advice, she then decided to take the matriculation exams on her own, taking only one course in mathematics, and studying all the other subjects by herself. Two years later she passed her exams. She applied to the college and was accepted. To pay for her studies, she continues to work in the agricultural field on the weekends. She stays with local relatives, and takes loans, which she hopes she can repay by doing extra work during vacations. [31]

Abir has not forgotten her childhood hardships, but her special personality has turned them into a source of strength. Her defiance of her arduous existence has pushed her on to overcome all her handicaps—to achieve independence, escape from poverty and a life of hard agricultural labor. [32]

In this section, we have presented a brief description of each student. In the coming sections, we shall present the common characteristics of the members of the group. [33]

2.2 The parents

The life-stories of all the Bedouin students center on the relationships between them and their families, and on the events that, for good or ill, take place in the family context. The nuclear family is the center of the life cycle, around which revolve all the uncles and cousins of similar age. The broadest circle is the tribe, which is a significant defender of the way of life and each member's place in the family hierarchy. The tribe is mentioned as a most important factor, especially in the story of Mussa, who lives in a traditional framework, as well as that of Zoheera, whose grandfather is the sheikh (clan leader). On the other hand, in the case of Abir and Zainav, the tribe is only mentioned by the way, and it does not appear that these two students expect alleviation of their hardships from this source. As for Lateef, the tribe is not mentioned at all. [34]

The nuclear family is mentioned in all the stories: all the participants are children of large families with a minimum of ten children and a maximum (Mussa's family) of 21. In all cases, the mothers are housewives. In some cases, they also perform additional work, such as helping the father during the flocks' spring pasture time, as does Mussa's mother, or making traditional embroidery, like Abir's mother. The educational level of the parents is low (with the exception of Zoheera's father) and some of the mothers are totally illiterate. The father is the main income provider, although in the poorest families, such as those of Mussa and Abir, the children must also work from an early age. In most of the stories, the father has a higher level of education than the mother, although there are differences, both in origin and attainment. However, in terms of the demands of a Western background, the fathers' education is lowly. [35]

The father is a central factor for all the Bedouin students, influencing all aspects of the lives of sons and daughters—emotional, economic, and social. The sense of stability and security in their lives depends on the father's closeness to or distance from them, and their social status depends on him. [36]

Lateef is very proud of his father, who looks after the family, takes upon himself the burden of providing for them and helps his children to the utmost of his ability. Zoheera presents her father as being a friend and standing at the center of her life. And Mussa says: "since I was born, my father has been close to me ... to this very day ...". More than anything, the absence of a father reflects his position in the family, and Zainav is jealous of the other girls in the college because they have a father. [37]

The father's influence and power find particular expression in the area of schooling; it is he who pushes for education and provides support, emotionally, and in some cases, financially. In a few cases, the father is a model to imitate, or gives help in other fields. From all the stories, the basic influence of the father, due to his understanding of the importance of schooling, is obvious and he is a source of strength in facing the economic and intellectual difficulties studying involves. On the other hand, if problems arise or have arisen in the students' path to schooling, they blame the father one way or another. Each of the fathers has demonstrated a basic positive attitude to education. The students perceive this attitude as a most important factor in their concept of the importance of education. [38]

Thus, Zainav says: "I had no problems in high school, because my father was here." In contrast, after her father left, "if there's no reinforcement, no encouragement at home, you can't learn in such a state." Mussa tells how his father, although he could not help financially, pressured him to go to a good high school. He was involved in his decisions and helped him at crucial points. [39]

In Zoheera's case, the father provides a model to copy, together with economic and emotional support in her studies. Abir tells of her father's effect on her studies. He presented his children with an image of an educated man interested in his children's schooling, who believed in them:

"we'd come home, he'd open the books, listen to what we had done that day, in Hebrew, in English and ... we thought he knew. Finally we understood he didn't know, but when we came and opened the books, he was learning from *us* ... in the end, he said, I never learned English or that, but I learned from you." [40]

In other words, the father showed the kids an imaginary figure with which they could identify and which they could take as a model. [41]

To sum up, one way or another, all the fathers have been a positive and encouraging factor in their children's education. [42]

The mothers have a different representation. In the male students' life-stories, there is no expression of the mother's influence, or her role in their life. Lateef doesn't mention his mother at all, while Mussa only mentions his description of family life. It is possible that the reason for this omission may relate to the mother's honor—one should not expose her to public gaze. However, it is difficult to establish any firm reason for the absence of the mother from the male students' stories. [43]

In the case of the female students, on the other hand, the mother appears as the most significant character. In two out of the three, the mother is shown as pulling the daughter towards a conservative, traditional woman's life. These two mothers regard work as a housewife as having the greatest importance for a woman, and they value education much less, and even, directly or indirectly, reject it. [44]

Abir's mother does embroidery and tells her that among the Bedouin, embroidery is the most difficult in the world, and that to be a housewife is harder than teaching. On the other hand, she is now learning to write. Between Zoheera and her mother there are arguments over what's more important, the housework and looking after the children, or studying. [45]

Unlike the other two women, Zainav's mother does her very best to help her daughter continue her college education. She is willing to give up her daughter's help around the house and supporting her by bringing food and drink when she is studying. While this motherly approach may seem exceptional within the group of three girls, one can explain it by the special family situation and the absence of the father. [46]

2.3 Brothers and sisters

The students come from large families with many brothers and sisters. This fact affects the groups' self-awareness in various ways, since they measure themselves against their many siblings, whose presence in their lives is usually intimate and constant. The students apply differing criteria in their self-definition and evaluation in relation to their siblings, some of whom are prominently mentioned several times in the life-stories. Criteria include their status in the hierarchy, types of role in the family according to gender and age, and their place as youngsters among their brothers. Other criteria include the family situation of the siblings, their employment and economic status, and most importantly, their attitude to their siblings' level of education, in comparison to their own. [47]

Generally, the students indicate that there are good relations of mutual help between them and their siblings and, even in the case of Zainav, when that assistance is not forthcoming, this is seen as unworthy. The older brothers sometimes take on the role of proxy parents for their younger brothers, helping with homework, physical attention, solving conflicts, and so on. Some older brothers or cousins also offer practical help, with information, or advice on how to overcome obstacles in the way of their studies. Except for Zainav, the conflicts with siblings that they report are few or childish, such as with Lateef's young

brother. A possible explanation for this omission may be the customary family hierarchy that allocates a status to each member. [48]

In Section 2 we presented and analyzed the life stories of five Bedouin students. The students differ between themselves not only in gender and personality, but also in their social and economical status and their positions towards the traditional Bedouin way of life. Nevertheless, there are some common features which may explain their choice to pursue academic education. In all stories the fathers expressed their positive attitude towards their child's college education, unlike most mothers' passive or and even reserved position. The siblings and cousins were not only supportive and helpful but also served as criteria by which the students evaluated themselves. People outside the nuclear family—teachers, community leaders' or even school friends—were not mentioned as having a significant role in their choice and effort to achieve high education. [49]

3. Minority Within a Majority

The situation the stories reveal is that the Bedouin live—physically and culturally—in a separate Bedouin society with its own language, traditions, living conditions and culture. They are born, they grow up, marry and raise their families among themselves. Although the narratives indicate that many changes are taking place in their environment, they do not talk in terms of changes in society as a whole, and do not find a common link with the surrounding Jewish society. That encircling society is not described at all. It is difficult to claim whether this is a deliberate disregard or whether the significant elements in their lives are embedded in Bedouin society, while the Jewish society is seen as merely an unconnected fact of life because of the problematic context of the interview. [50]

As researchers, it is clear to us that the deep changes taking place in their way of life are an outcome of a minority living within a Jewish majority with a Western way of life, and the necessity of adjusting to such conditions in order to exist. [51]

The spheres of isolation and influence are related in the stories. The stories describe the students' life stages such as birth, childhood and adolescence which take place in the family and the settlement in which they live. All Bedouin life takes place within this environment. [52]

Zoheera and Zainav were both born and grew up in *Rahat* and Lateef in *Lakiya*, both of which are permanent townships, while Abir moved with her family from place to place, probably in search of employment. She was born in *Tel Arad* and then moved to *Lakiya*. The family lived at a nursery plantation near *Rehovot* (a Jewish town in the center of the country), at an orchard near *Jawarish* (a Bedouin neighborhood in the Jewish town of *Ramle*) and elsewhere. Mussa lives with the Al Abir tribe near the southern Jewish town of *Dimona*. All five studied at a local elementary school, while the boys had to go elsewhere for their high school studies. Mussa and Abir tell us that the standard of education in the local elementary school, as well as in some of the high schools is low. [53]

The stories show that there is physical separation between the Bedouin and Jewish populations, and this separation, it seems, is agreed upon by both sectors. However, since the state builds the schools in the settlements, Western institutions and schooling in particular, penetrate the closed Bedouin society. At the same time, despite being an arm of the state, the educational system is organized as a kind of sub-unit, distinguished from that of the Jewish sector. When there is no school in the village, the children are bussed to another Bedouin settlement, rather than to a Jewish one, even if that is closer. [54]

3.1 The concept of "good life"

This separation between majority and minority does not prevent changes occurring in the Bedouin way of life and in differences of opinion regarding which way of life is desirable. Thus, within the isolation sphere, the view of the term "a good life" is changing, as it is in practice. The students talk of a desire for a "good life"—a wish common to most of them. For Zoheera, a well-ordered family with healthy relationships is at the core of a good life. She also positively refers to the family's (relatively) good economic situation. Lateef has a similar family life. He, too, regards his current life as good. At the same time, he would like the freedom to travel abroad with friends. "I thought, Egypt, Jordan," so, for him, a good life includes both family and travel. [55]

Zainav displays a longing for the "good life" she once enjoyed. About her mother she says,

"[y]ou know what it's like ... her man married someone else and abandoned her? The man has all the responsibility and she has no money, she has nothing, just troubles—perhaps 1500 shekels [i.e., a month. equivalent to about \$320]. How can she manage on that?" [56]

But she remembers other times: when her father spoke about a car, a computer, a separate room, and studies. All of these are symbols of affluence in Western society, merging together with her dream of a united family. [57]

Abir's family moves from place to place and is sometimes helped by the extended family. For her, the good life means easier work, shorter hours and less moving around. The way of life for Mussa, who comes from a strong and traditional family, is very different. He explains: "The whole tribe is there, living side by side, in the family. You see father's house in the middle with the sons all around. " [58]

From the stories it can be seen that the concept of "the good life" varies from the traditional tribe, to the much more Western oriented—with a nuclear family and various accompanying material elements. [59]

3.2 The majority within which they live

The Bedouin settlements where our students live are situated beside or near Jewish neighborhoods. Governmental institutions are penetrating the Bedouin

communities in the form of school, post office, bank, health clinic, community center, and local authority, and these institutions are causing changes. Mussa says: "They brought in a school and a health clinic and also sewerage that brings lots of mosquitoes. There are things that bother us and things that help." The children come to school with books in Hebrew and English. Zoheera, who works in the post office, meets people there she never met before and is aware that a mother needs education, if only to help the children with their homework. Zainav tells us that she has sometimes found solutions to her problems by reading the newspaper. "I read the paper, sometimes look for a problem I have and for suitable solutions. Perhaps one should go to a psychologist ... stuff like that." [60]

Abir tells us at length of the period she spent in agriculture. The story focuses on the type of work and type of place. There is no mention of the people she met, or worked for, no discussion or reference to a different kind of life, the scenery or anything else. [61]

The students' descriptions of what is happening to them in the College indicate that in this setting, too, they exist, in practice, as a minority within a majority, but behave as if the majority does not exist. Zoheera says, "When I entered the college it was a bit hard. Because it's a [new] place for me. It's strange, because I was never here before. And I only knew the College a very very little." In her first semester, she was scared of the examinations and thought she would fail. Then she told herself she had to make an effort and she was successful. By the second semester she already had greater confidence. Zainav, too, feels strange in the College: "I don't know the advisor. I'm only in my first year here, there are many things I'm not familiar with. Will the advisor help me? How? I don't even know where her room is." The college is a new kind of school for Zoheera too. Their discussion of their problems at the College does not relate to the fact that this is a Jewish institution, nor do they mention that fact, or its implications. [62]

So from their stories, it is difficult to learn much about their life as a minority within a Jewish majority different from them, both in society in general and in the College. The Jewish society has determined that changes occur in their way of life, and forced a transition from pastoral nomadism to permanent settlement, from a tribal to an urban framework, from tent to constructed house. This is a significant revolution in their way of life dictated by the majority. But the stories indicate that, despite this fact, there are Bedouin families who feel that it is *they* who are leading the way to change, that they themselves are deciding what to change and what to preserve. [63]

4. Bedouin Students in the College

Their studies are presented as an obstacle course one has to successfully overcome. Points, grades, the diploma and earning the diploma are seen as goals that must be attained. The road to this end is through serious study, but in addition, they use other accepted means, such as appealing exam results, repeating courses or retaking exams. One can distinguish the better-off students, Zoheera and Lateef, who achieve better grades and for whom the obstacle

course is easier, from the less well-off students, who have to work harder to succeed in their studies. [64]

Abir, who did not go to high school, quickly learned the rules of the game and uses them to succeed. So, for example, she appealed one of her exam grades and won extra 4 points that improved her situation. She also changed one of her subjects in order to obtain her matriculation: Zainav explains how she repeated courses and exams in order to gain entry to the college. Mussa describes the process of repeating the preparatory exams in order to obtain admission: "I did a preparatory exam ... a year ago I got a 73 (out of 100). I said ... Then I took it again and got an 88 or 82." (The passing mark was 80 out of 100.) [65]

Zoheera is a good student, who has not needed to retake exams or appeal any grades. She presents the goal of the difficult obstacle course, the diploma she will earn in the end and will allow her to work. "That's the way it is. I'll study and afterwards get my diploma and then I'll work. Work will come if I have a diploma, if I have a diploma, there's work. If not, not." [66]

The subject of money, particularly the tuition fees, appears in all the stories. They emphasize the business of payments and the heavy financial investment needed to complete the studies. They have to overcome the financial burden and the many hurdles in order to become teachers. Teaching is one of the very few options they have to escape the cycle of heavy physical labor, unemployment and poverty, or, in the case of the women, if fortune smiles on them, to be housewives. Teaching, then, is a sign of success and represents a hope for a better life. [67]

Abir, Mussa and Zainav are examples of those whose lives may be significantly improved as a result of the heavy investment in studies and teaching. Abir, who had been an agricultural laborer, explains why she prefers teaching.

"There are two months when I can stay home, and there is the weekend. When I can do what I want in the afternoons it's not like all the time working from six in the morning, working till seven in the evening. Like, a fixed place where I can work." [68]

Mussa gives a similar description. In high school "I worked when I was in the 12th grade, even during the period of the exams. I worked shifts, night shifts, it was hard. I'd work for 24 hours, sometimes 36 hours ..." He came to the college after his brother told him: "What? Are you going to spend your whole life like that, on a tractor? So go and study." He compares his situation to that of the pupils who went to the local school and failed to pass the matriculation exams. They have two options: hard physical labor, or unemployment. [69]

For Zainav and even more for her mother, her college education is the way out of their conditions of poverty and humiliation. Becoming a teacher is her only means of getting a stable source of income and of regaining any sort of social status. Zainav views the studies as an investment and if she doesn't keep going till she gets her diploma, and obtains work, then it will all have been for nothing. If the

completion of Zainav's studies were not to have a practical outcome, she would regard it as wasted effort. [70]

But the students whose financial situation is satisfactory also regard teaching as the key to a better world. The investment in money and effort is worthwhile, because they will return a profit in the future. [71]

Zoheera says about her father that he "loves for me to study, that I'll make something of my life. That I'll have a good life." Lateef's father is the only supporter of a family of 13. Lateef and two other brothers are studying, and it is the father who helps them. It is clear to Lateef that he has to study and succeed. He notes with pride that he has a brother studying law abroad, and his wife is also a university graduate. [72]

In the case of the female students we can see another point—Bedouin women are not supposed to go out of the house, certainly not out of the settlement. Teaching is one of the few professions that can be pursued close to home, and from which one can return home quickly before the evening sets in. Thus, the woman can go out to work without infringing traditional custom. [73]

Research dealing with purpose for choosing teaching offers many reasons, two of which are worthy of particular mention: a sense of social vocation and the love of knowledge and education (see, for example, LORTIE, 1975). Three of our students implied that their motivation for choosing the teaching profession is social vocation and love of knowledge. [74]

Of them, Mussa is most obvious, his dream is to return to the tribe and teach, to give the children an opportunity to learn in a good way, so that they, too, may lead successful lives. He describes the currently low standards and believes he is capable of changing the situation. He says: "I'll bring out excellent students from there. They'll study and find the treasure." [75]

Abir, too, dreams of helping and says: "I love being a teacher, contributing to others ... I wanted to [bring about] change ... I can make a bit of a change." She describes the dreadful teachers she has known and adds "that because of the shortage, we don't have enough teachers." [76]

Zainav mentions briefly that she taught reading and writing to analphabetic women at her home settlement: "I had a good time with them. I'd like to continue with them but there's no [money]." [77]

The general approach to studying is purely practical, an investment of time and resources, so the quality of life can be improved learning for learning sake, or as a way of satisfying curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, is never mentioned. KRESSEL (1988) speaks of a culture in which no attention is paid to the special proclivities of a boy, and certainly not of a girl. There is hardly a single bookshelf at home for the pupils, and there is very little demand for books to read beyond those needed for studies. It is not customary to buy toys for the children and

presents are usually in the form of clothing or shoes. He explains this fact as an outcome of the style of living, the crowded conditions of large families in which the consumption is of basic necessities, and there is no privacy. [78]

Against this background, the choice of teaching is one of the most practical alternatives for young people, and they regard it as such. Teaching is primarily an entry ticket to better life, in the most straightforward meaning of the word—affording permanent work, regular salary, work close to home, and limited working hours. [79]

5. Discussion

From the description by MEIR (1997) of the process of urbanization of nomads in general and of the Bedouin in particular, one could expect the stories told by our students to center on the process of individualization. The stories should indicate a breaking up of the traditional societal institutions, such as the family and the tribe, the adoption of Western ideology, a strong dependence of the minority on the majority and what ABU SAAD et al. (2000) have defined as a state of conflict and loss of identity. Also, from descriptions of the functioning of minority-born populations, failing groups, or immigrants in schools, one could expect similar conclusions: many studies focus on attempts to explain why members of these groups fail in school. Thus, for example, researchers such as WILLIS (1977), and MACLEOD (1987), explain the failure as a result of the resistance of pupils to those factors in the schools that do not represent their values. Others, such as OGBU (1991), claim that there is a combination of these two theories, on the one hand there is the majority society, keen to preserve the lowly status of the minorities, and on the other hand, the pupils themselves, who create a culture opposed to that of the school. [80]

The two areas of research, both those studies dealing with urbanization and those dealing with majority-minority relations in school, report on much failure and offer explanations for the failure of many minority groups. The group of Bedouin students we interviewed constitutes a similar instance. They also belong to a minority with a difficult societal, political, and economic background, so one could apply the accepted explanations of failure to them. However, these students are people who have succeeded within the Bedouin elementary and high school educational system and gained entrance to a teachers' education college. So, what are the traits common to the members of this special group and how can their success be explained? [81]

In the framework of Bedouin society, these students are a unique minority within their age group, in that they have passed all the hurdles on their way to higher education. They emphasize that their chief supporter in overcoming these obstacles has been the father, who sustains and encourages them. On the other hand, the mother is presented as a major influence for the preservation of Bedouin customs and traditions. [82]

The main impetus behind their success is the fact that the students see education as the key to entry into the middle class, which sustains itself through stable employment and steady income. Joining the modern economic and social structure—a structure that does not characterize the life style of most Bedouins—indicates an independent attitude and different view of the future. At the same time, they do not seem to regard Western education, which is the main content of their studies, as having any revolutionary significance for them. The students describe the education they are acquiring mainly as a tool in the achievement of their ambition to improve their standard of living, quality of life, and social standing. Even their vocation as teachers, in so far as they relate to it, is seen as a way of helping other Bedouin children make similar progress. We can sum up by saying that our students coexist in two worlds. They identify with the tribal world but also turn to Western values in an effort to get better life. Managing these two lifestyles simultaneously is the secret of their success. [83]

GIBSON (1988) and MEHAN, HUBBARD and VILLANUEVA (1994) focused on successful pupils in minority groups and asked what characteristics they have, and how they succeed, despite the generally poor conditions in school. GIBSON (1988) investigated the children of Sikh immigrants to the USA, who were successful in their studies and explained it by the concept of "accommodation without assimilation." MEHAN, HUBBARD and VILLANUEVA (1994) investigated the application of this ideology within a program for Latino- and Afro-Americans that encouraged them to succeed in their academic studies. The explanation they offered is as follows: "They affirm their cultural identities while at the same time recognize the need to develop certain cultural practices, mutably achieving academically that are acceptable to the mainstream" (p.105) Further on, they state: "Strictly speaking, their ideology was neither conformist nor assimilationist" (p.112). [84]

In general, the Bedouin students here interviewed have adopted the "accommodation without assimilation" perspective. That is, they are totally committed to their Bedouin society, but at the same time, in certain aspects of their lives they operate within Western cultural ideology, "taking" from it, using it, and certainly being influenced by it. On the conscious level, this is all "just" accommodation, without assimilation. They have accepted the Western ideology of the majority population in Israel, in terms of the need for academic achievement and professional success. It is the entry key to a better life. [85]

From this small group of Bedouin students, we hope to learn about the path to success of the many Bedouin students studying in the teachers' education colleges. Also, being only one minority out of several, these findings may enlighten us about the studies of other minorities. [86]

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