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RETURNING TO PASTORALISM: THREE CASES FROM THE NEGEV BEDOUIN

by Dan Boneh

Modern anthropological literature on the process of sedentarization has taken the view that sedentarization is a typical phenomenon among pastoral nomadic societies. Barth was perhaps the first to demonstrate the extent to which sedentarization of certain segments of the Basseri is a feature typical of the pastoral nomadic mode of subsistence which helps to maintain pastoral nomadism rather than comprising a threat to its very existence (1961: 124). The concept of sedentarization came to be regarded as any change which falls along a continuum from nomadism to sedentism, the latter being defined as the settled and immobile location of a social group. «Sedentarization» refers to the change from nomadism to sedentism, or a shift in degree from nomadism to sedentism (Salzman, 1980:10). The distinction between «sedentism» and «sedentarization» denotes the former as being a product of the latter. Sedentarization is thus the process while sedentism is its end result.

A common scholarly approach towards sedentarization views the process as a uni-directional change from the traditional practices of pastoral nomadism towards the gradual replacement of pastoralism with wage labor and other non-pastoral occupations. Even Barth's example of sedentarization among the very wealthy and the very poor of the Basseri demonstrates the shift away from pastoralism rather than a movement back and forth between the two subsistence patterns. Scholars have thus expressed their concern about the threat to pastoral nomadism and the possibility that it is a disappearing mode of subsistence (see The Future of Pastoral Peoples, Galaty et al (ed)-1981). The common assumption seems to be that sedentarization is a process that is hard to reverse and that its consequences ultimately change the texture of pastoral nomadic groups so that a return to their previous mode of subsistence is virtually impossible. There are however some studies, prominently those which highlight uncertainty as a phase in the process of social change, in which sedentarization does not seem to be an absolute event. Uncertainty stemming from the political status of pastoralists and the uncertainty in the economics of wage labor is evident in Marx's description of Bedouin in South Sinai. Marx shows how in the face of political and economic uncertainties the Bedouin found it necessary to keep traditional economic alternatives open despite their relative insignificant returns (1980:111). The maintenance of agro-pastoral activities allows for the continuation of cultural traditions, the enhancement of social relationships, and is a source of employment for women and elders. Indeed, Salzman suggests that sedentarization is neither irreversible nor absolute and that shifts between available alternatives and options better describe the sedentarization process (1980:14).

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the way in which individuals shift back to pastoralism under certain circumstances. The cases are about Jaraween Bedouin, whose group, El Jaraween, has experienced forced relocation from its tribal territories due to the political events of 1948. Since then, the group has gone through a process of sedentarization and is currently located in the vicinity of the Bedouin town of Tel Sheva.¹ Before its designation as a town for Bedouin residents (1966), the Tel Sheva area was populated by a large congregation of Bedouin and Fallahi (Arabs of peasant origin).

The Jaraween group is not fully settled in the approved town plots belonging to the town of Tel Sheva. In spite of their early arrival to the area, they never settled their land dispute with the Israeli government and insisted on returning to, or re-gaining rights over, the tribal areas which they had vacated. They therefore never considered themselves, or agreed to become, legal residents of the nearby town of Tel Sheva. They are presently anxious to resolve their land problem with the government, which would yield for them some financial rewards and alleviate so they hope, their predicament of living amidst uncertain circumstances (Boneh 1983b).

One of the fundamental changes from Jaraween life in the North West Negev, (from which they were relocated), concerns the increasing reliance on wage labor occupations. In earlier days, when the Jaraween lived in their tribal territories and practiced pastoralism to a greater extent, wage labor comprised but one of the multiple resources utilized by the group. Today, while living under sedentary circumstances with constraints stemming from the unresolved status of their tribal territories (such as the reluctance to divide property, land and livestock, as inheritance), Jaraween youth are largely wage laborers while elders continue in the pursuit of agro-pastoral production.²

In the following case a single household is examined through the occupations of its male members. An attempt is made to trace occupational changes through time so that a trend can be established concerning the tendencies towards wage labor and the shift back to pastoralism at a later stage in an individual's developmental cycle. (All names used in the cases are fictitious.) Case # 1:

Hasan's Household

Hasan's household is composed of the nuclear families of six brothers and one married son. The household-head, Hasan, died in 1975 but the household has remained intact since then. The various activities of Hasan's household members point to its cooperative nature. The older brother, Hseen, is 51 years old while the youngest brother, Salem, is 20. Five other brothers are spread between those two age brackets with an approximate difference of 4-6 years between one another. Hseen, the older brother, is primarily a herd manager and cultivator. His herd is one of the largest among Jaraween pastoralists. The same brother also has a share in the ownership of a tractor used in construction by one of the younger brothers. Hseen also leases from the Israeli Land Authorities a 40 Dunam plot for seasonal cultivation of wheat and barley.

The second brother, Muhseen (45), owns 30 head in the family herd (managed by the oldest brother, Hseen) and cultivates 80-120 Dunams each year. The third brother, Hasan (39), engages in livestock-trading but keeps only a few head of livestock in his older brother's herd. Hasan also works in a near-by vineyard as an agricultural wage laborer. The fourth brother, Abed (34), works with a tractor in construction and agricultural wage labor jobs. The fifth brother, Suliman (31), is a machine operator in a Negev chemical factory. The sixth brother, Adnnan (25), works as a teacher while the youngest brother, Salem (20), is a student at the Beer Sheva Technological Institute. The following table details the occupational histories of each of the seven brothers:

						student
7. Salem						-----/-----
						teacher
6. Adnan						-----*/-----
						Industrial W.L.
5. Suliman						-----/*-----
						W.L. (const. & agr.)
4. Abed						-----/*-----/-----
						W.L. Herd. & W.L.
3. Hasan						-----/*-----/-----
						W.L. W.L. & Agr. Agr. & Herd.
2. Muhseen						-----/*-----/-----/-----
						Herding, agriculture, livestock trade
1. Hseen						-----/*-----*-----
						-----T-----T-----T-----T-----T-----T-----
Year at Birth	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980

* year of marriage
/ years spent in occupation

In the reconstruction of occupational histories of the three older brothers we see some parallels in the patterns. The oldest brother, Hseen, born in 1931 grew up in the Jaraween's tribal areas in the North West Negev before evacuation to the Beer Sheva Basin. At the time of evacuation Hseen was already a married man. His entire subsistence related activities were in the areas of herding, seasonal agriculture, and livestock trade. His younger brother, Muhseen (45), worked in 1955 (when he was approximately 20) in several Negev Kibbutz settlements as a wage-labor agriculturalist. The third brother, Hasan (39), worked in seasonal wage labor jobs as well as in various construction jobs.

The second and third brothers Muhseen (45) and Hasan (39), worked in wage labor jobs but with the passage of time have returned to occupations within the Jaraween settlement. From wage labor jobs sought elsewhere in construction and agriculture, the two brothers shifted to herding and seasonal cultivation at a later stage in their lives. The second brother, Muhseen, worked between the ages of 20-36 in various wage labor jobs but since 1972 he joined his older brother in herd management and seasonal private agriculture. In the period between 1950-1959 Muhseen was primarily engaged in agriculture wage labor; from 1959 until 1972 he combined construction, wage labor and seasonal agriculture as his major subsistence activities.

If an analysis of occupational distribution would have been carried out in 1959, Muhseen as a wage laborer would have been in a position similar to his younger brother, Suliman, who works in wage labor today (1980). If an occupational distribution would have been plotted then, a distinction could have been made between the older brother's agro-pastoral pursuits and the younger brother's reliance on wage labor. The occupational distribution examined at a fixed point in time would seem to reflect a trend in occupational change from traditional Bedouin subsistence activities to subsistence derived primarily from wage labor occupations. But these cases of shifting occupations of individuals returning to pastoral activities, demonstrate the mistake in such a view. Changes in occupation suggesting a 'sedentary' tendency must not be drawn from a fixed point in time.

A developmental cycle model, utilizing the reconstruction of occupations over time, shows that the undertaking of wage labor employment may not be an indication of increased sedentarization. In the case described here, all younger brothers under the age of 35 are engaged in wage labor jobs. But the conclusion that the present occupational distribution indicates a shift to an exclusive reliance on wage-labor employment in the future has to be seriously questioned. In the case of the seven brothers, Muhseen (45), utilizes traditional Bedouin resources at present in spite of the fact that he worked as a wage laborer for 16 years before making the decision to return to agro-pastoral pursuits. In his case, the shift back to those pursuits reflects changes in personal development cycle which brought Muhseen to the 'elders' category of the Jaraween group.

The tendency towards wage labor employment is not only a result of the changing circumstances stemming from the shift from a former, more semi-nomadic existence, to the present day situation of sedentary subsistence. Rather, changes in employment suggest a generational life cycle phenomenon as well.

In the developmental cycle of a Bedouin man, the years immediately following his marriage are a time when wage labor occupations are an attractive option for employment. At the time of a man's marriage, his parents are likely to be economically active in herd husbandry and seasonal agriculture. One choice open to a young man is to pursue the same occupations as his parents, usually via the communal household herd. But due to various limitations on grazing, Jaraween herds are rarely allowed to grow to optimal size, and access to land plots is limited to the amount available to individuals through leasing from Israeli authorities. It is therefore difficult for young adults to find satisfactory employment in agro-pastoral pursuits.

A young man after marriage is often proud of his ability to find a profitable wage labor job. Elders among the Jaraween tell with pride of the time they had worked for the British Mandate authorities before the creation of the state of Israel. They were employed in road construction and as guards. Elders also mention their experiences of working for the early Kibbutz settlements in the Negev where they were employed as seasonal wage laborers. Some Bedouin found employment as guards, or scouts for the Israeli army. But they pursued such activities as young men. As their status changed and their families grew, these men, who are today's elders, began to prefer employment activities in the Jaraween settlement. From among eight agro-pastoralists over the age of 45, only two never worked in wage labor jobs as young adults while one still partly works in agricultural wage labor. When

those individuals achieved elder's status, usually after the birth of their first grandchild, they phased out their involvement in wage labor occupations and increased agro-pastoral activities.

Thus, in addition to traditional productive activities as insurance against instability in other sectors, suitability for elders is a major reason for the maintenance of herding and agricultural pursuits by the Jaraween. Members of the group acknowledge that agro-pastoral pursuits allow the employment of older individuals to whom wage labor, especially in its modern version, is no longer a viable option. But herding and agricultural activities are practiced by elders not because these pursuits are phasing out along with the elders who practice them. Rather, in the period of elderhood, such activities are more viable, profitable, and socially adequate. When a man becomes a household-head, various conditions make agro-pastoral subsistence production more attractive. At that time, a man can rely on his sons and daughters as a labor pool and on various other services (transportation, veterinarian, etc.) that can be facilitated with the help of his younger brothers or his own mature sons.

The «return» to agro-pastoralism is thus partly a reflection of a man's developmental cycle. This prospect is seen in the case of some contemporary young adults whose experiences in wage labor indicate a shift later in life.

Case # 2:

The Multiple Pursuits of Farhan

Farhan is a young married adult (age 29). He graduated from high school in the Arab city of Taybe in Israel's north. Following his graduation and return to his tribal settlement, he married and established living quarters in his father's household. Farhan took the job of school secretary for which he was hired due to his high school diploma. Farhan decided to continue his education and started a program for a building engineer degree at the Beer Sheva Technological Institute. In addition to his job as school secretary, Farhan also participates in the cultivation of 40 Dunams (1 Dunam=1/4 Acre), owns four bulls which are grown for slaughter, and has seven animals in his father's herd. In 1980 Farhan's nuclear family included three young children.

Farhan tried to work in the engineering and construction field without a formal degree. His attempts were mostly unsuccessful. He was never offered a position better than the one he has as a school secretary. In the Negev, jobs for engineers are scarce for those with formal diplomas and they are virtually unavailable for those without a completed degree. When I asked Farhan about his various activities he expressed sorrow at not having finished his engineer's degree. With almost 9 years since he started the program his chances for completing the degree or working as a building engineer are slim. When I asked him about the length of time he expects to work as a school secretary, he responded with realistic irony: «Here, only young people work. As long as I am young they will want me, then another principal will come and bring with him another secretary. If I stay they will probably make me the janitor.»

Farhan is well aware that he can not expect to continue as school secretary for many more years. When I asked him about options for future

occupations, if forced to terminate work at the high school, he responded: «They will have to give me compensation and I will buy sheep or bulls, or do something with the money.» Lacking other alternatives, Farhan is aware that he may spend the later years of his life in pastoral and agricultural pursuits. He already has four bulls which he raises for profit, a number of livestock in his father's herd, and a 40 Dunam plot which he cultivates each year. Unlike older members of his household, Farhan is not excited about such prospects and would rather take a professional occupation instead. Other young Jaraween adults, who presently work in manual wage labor, are less concerned about the prospects of a future as agro-pastoralists. Many of them work hard in city jobs at the present. They make occasional references to a future of relaxed and less demanding lifestyle typical of those who are presently engaged in agro-pastoral activities.

A process by which pastoral and agricultural pursuits becomes more attractive at the later phases of an individual's developmental cycle is indicated in the cases described above. Farhan may find himself engaged in agro-pastoral pursuits as the only viable subsistence activity left. The notion that the «western-dressed building engineer» has left the Bedouin herd and entered the modern employment market for good, has to be evaluated against the unstable condition of wage labor jobs, the lack of professionalism among most Bedouin wage laborers, and other limitations. Although many young adults aspire to a different occupational future, they frequently admit that when they become elders, they will participate in household activities and possibly phase out their present wage labor pursuits altogether.

A further manifestation of the same phenomenon can be found also among adults in the 35-45 age bracket. The following table represents changes in occupational activities of 15 Jaraween adults of this age bracket:

<u>Major Occupation</u>	<u>Ten Years Ago (1970)</u>	<u>At Present (1980)</u>
1. Wage Labor	11	4
2. Herding	2	4
3. Agriculture	2	7
	—	—
Total	15	15

The table shows that from among eleven wage laborers in 1970, only four continued their employment in those jobs in 1980. Seven adults have shifted with time to agriculture (5) and herding (2). It is significant that the majority shifted to agriculture and not to herding. This is due to the fact that leased land can be made available to young adults whereas the herd is usually still controlled by the household head and thus the pastoral option is less attractive to individuals in the 35-45 age bracket.

The transition from the pursuit of wage labor to that of pastoralism and agriculture can result from various unpredictable circumstances. Since most wage labor jobs are unskilled ones, and since several workers are employed on contractual basis, the termination of a wage labor job can result from a number of factors. But in each instance when a wage laborer is faced with the need to find a new line of employment, the option of undertaking independent agro-pastoral activities is always available and in some ways attractive.

The most common reason for termination of a wage labor job is lack of work. Such a situation occasionally necessitates work termination of wage labor employees, and the unskilled Bedouin are the first to leave. The following case represents the transition made by one person from a wage labor job back to traditional Bedouin subsistence.

Case # 3:

From Chemicals to Livestock: Abed's Shift to Pastoralism

Abed was employed for nine years at one of Beer Sheva's chemical factories. An accident at the plant in 1977 caused him to stop working. Abed developed an allergy to certain chemicals and suffered severe abdominal disorders. Following the termination of his work, he was paid compensation and was told to seek employment elsewhere. After a long period of unemployment, throughout which he collected some benefits, Abed began to develop a herd from among the few animals he owned in his father's herd. He also arranged to lease a sizeable plot for cultivation.

Abed's attempt to expand his herd and cultivate wheat and barley had put him in close contact with Jaraween elders who are the major pursuers of such activities. His visits to the tribal meeting hut (the Shig) became a daily event. From a carefree young adult, only partly involved in household affairs, he became a Shig attendant voicing his opinions on important issues facing the tribal group. From an individual indifferent to religion, he became a dedicated follower of the group's religious leader, an attendant of prayer sessions, and a religiously committed Bedouin.

Since the loss of his wage labor job, Abed's alternatives for employment were limited. For a period of three years he was mostly unemployed. He traded in livestock when the Beer Sheva market was active and some money could be made from his trade. Throughout the time of his unemployment, he was still trying to find a wage labor job suited to his qualifications. Reluctantly he realized that no such opportunities existed and that the only option available was to intensify his agro-pastoral pursuits to the point of being able to derive an adequate livelihood from them.

Abed's new interest in herd development, husbandry and agriculture brought him into frequent contacts with Jaraween elders. Such contacts are necessary in all matters relating to leasing of lands, purchase of animals, and access to grazing. Abed recruits labor from his household but needs the help of several agro-pastoralists belonging to other Jaraween households in regard to matters of animal health, preferred sex ratio in the herd, market prices of sheep and goats, and other matters. His reliance on the help and advice of other household-heads, mostly elders, demands that Abed's social status and behaviour be agreeable to those elders. Consequently, his participation in ceremonies and Shig meetings increased, his dress code changed, and he began to take responsibilities as a host on behalf of the faction of the Jaraween tribe to which he belongs. Along with the shift from wage labor employment to agro-pastoral activities was also a transformation of Abed's social identity and social responsibilities. While the initial reason for the termination of his wage labor career involved an unfortunate accident and was beyond his control, his reinvolvement in agro-pastoralism demanded a shift in his social status and the creation of a different social network. His decision to rely on agro-pastoral pursuits demanded that he show concern about Jaraween politics and social relations.

Here is what Abed himself had to say about the differences between his present status as an adult and the time of his wage labor youth:

When I was younger, I did not go to the Shig. I was busy working in town and I came home tired. I also used to think that all the stories told by the elders at the Shig were fantasies. So I stayed out. But now I am older myself, so I understand the elders better; now I have time to listen to them. Now I go to the Shig because that is where my friends are, and we do not tell stories like the elders used to; there are only a few elders anyway and they are so old, sometimes they are too tired to talk.

Abed himself acknowledges that he has entered into an adult status. In an earlier time, he too worked in wage labor jobs, wore western-style clothes, and had minimal participation in Jaraween community affairs. His attitude towards the elders at the time of his young adulthood was also less accepting of ideas (referred to in the text as «fantasies») expressed by the elders.

Abed's case represents an example of the transition made by other adults of the 35-45 age bracket. In all cases, the taking up of agro-pastoral pursuits followed from the termination of wage labor employment. In all cases, the undertaking of agro-pastoral activities was an option kept viable through the organization of the household and the assets maintained by the older generation. In all seven cases presented in the table, the shift occurred in conjunction with family growth and took place during the period of adulthood, i.e. between 35-45 years of age. Individuals who still work in wage labor are mostly younger adults; though they may continue their wage labor employment in the future, the option of shifting to traditional Bedouin economic pursuits is open to them as well. Whether or not they will in fact follow this path is partly dependent on the prospects for continuing their present wage labor employment. If for some reason such employment is no longer available, a shift to agro-pastoralism such as described, remains a possibility for Jaraween adults.

Conclusions

The three cases presented above point to an important phenomenon. While Jaraween occupational distribution indicates a tendency for young adults to prefer wage labor employment, examination of the developmental cycle shows that with the advance of age, a move towards greater reliance on agro-pastoral resources takes place. In the pattern of occupational pursuits over time, a return to pastoral and agricultural activities is evident. There are therefore two seemingly contradictory processes taking place. On the one hand, a move away from pastoral and agricultural activities is typical of young men; on the other hand, as young adults grow older and their families grow larger, their economic link to agro-pastoral resources is strengthened. Since households at the Jaraween continue to operate as economic units, and since wage labor employment is often insecure and temporary, the taking up of agriculture and herding remains a possibility which is realized by many adults.

An important demographic factor accounts for the possibility of combining wage labor and agro-pastoral pursuits as two complementary, rather than opposing, modes of subsistence. Jaraween households are typically very large with an average of almost five nuclear families in each household.

The seven brothers in Hasan's household are quite typical and there are households with 9 and 10 nuclear families in each unit as well. A large household is not only characterized by the number of its members, but also by the age differences between its male members. A spread of siblings over a substantial period of time (the temporal sequencing of brothers at Hasan's household spans over 30 years) allows the household to guarantee the contribution of its young adults in response to the ongoing needs of the household. The temporal sequencing of siblings occurs for the following reasons: (a) long nursing period responsible for a 1-2 year spread between siblings; (b) the likelihood of female birth (51%) who leave the household as adults; (c) refusal of any form of birth control on religious grounds, and (d) polygamous marriages in some cases. This temporal sequencing of siblings allows the household to recruit labor for agro-pastoral activities in times of necessity and draw upon the diversification of various wage labor jobs pursued by younger household members. The division of responsibilities among brothers, their respective roles in household activities, and the variety of specializations which they together possess, give the household a more effective form of interaction with its sedentary environment.

The continued importance of compound household organization, facilitated partly by the tribal form of social organization, works to maintain traditional agro-pastoral activities. Individuals are never separated from their household even if they find employment elsewhere in the wage labor market. Due to the insecurity of wage labor jobs, and for reasons stemming from individual life cycle developments, a return to pastoral and agricultural activities takes place among some household members at a later stage in their lives. This conversely helps the household to remain as an economic unit despite the seeming drift towards wage labor so typical of younger generation Bedouin.

The implications of these phenomena are of importance to a clear understanding of the sedentarization process. It is evident from the examples provided that sedentarization does not abruptly eliminate the viability of pastoralism. Sedentarization is often induced by political circumstances which prohibit mobility and the utilization of large amounts of land for grazing and migration. But it is rarely the case that substitute forms of economic subsistence become viable. Rather, as I suggest elsewhere, the sedentarization process confronts the social group with an uncertain phase in which the direction of change is not always apparent (Boneh, 1983). It is to be expected that pastoralism will continue to be an attractive option as long as some economic or social viability remains with this pursuit. The examples above showed the viability of pastoralism as a form of employment which is particularly attractive to individuals at a later stage in their developmental cycle in spite of the tendencies towards wage labor evident at an earlier stage. The process of 'returning to pastoralism' not only negates the scholarly tendency to view sedentarization as an absolute and irreversible process, it ultimately explains the adherence to traditional forms of social organization and the reaction of pastoralists to uncertainties imposed upon them by sedentarization. Pastoralism, at least in the Bedouin case described here, ultimately allows the social unit to adhere to its form of social organization, to continue to practice Bedouin customs and traditions, to utilize available labor and contribute thereby to the preservation of Bedouin identity.

NOTES

1. Fieldwork was carried out for 18 months in 1980-81. Support was provided by the Jerusalem Center for Anthropological Research, Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

2. This paper is based upon Chapter 4 of my Ph.D. Dissertation, FACING UNCERTAINTY: THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF FORCED SEDENTARIZATION AMONG THE JAROWEEN BEDOUIN, NEGEV, ISRAEL, 1983, Brandeis University.

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