

# Commission on Nomadic Peoples

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Nomadic Peoples, Number 24, 1987

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## THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF THE ISRAELI NEGEV BEDOUIN

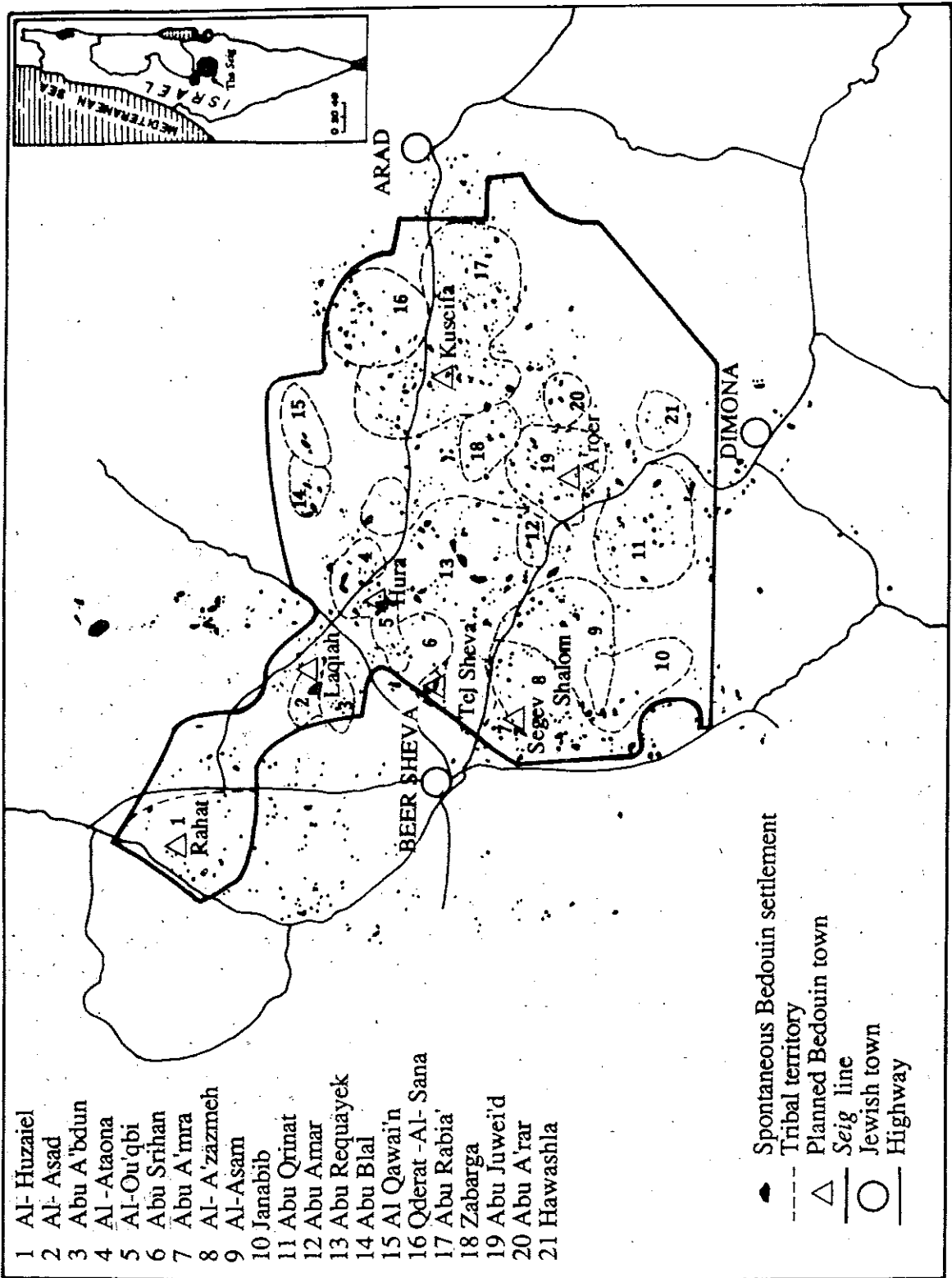
by Avinoam Meir and Dov Barnea

Change within the Israeli Negev Bedouin has been studied intensively in recent decades (Shmueli 1980; Amiran, Ben-David and Shinar 1976; Meir 1984). Emphasis had been placed on various processes, such as sedentarization, semi-urbanization, social, economic, ecological, and demographic change, and adoption of various technological and normative innovations. Such a nexus of change has introduced the Bedouin into a complex integration within the socio-economic and political structure of the State of Israel, and the Negev in particular. There is an intensive interaction with the government, and with public services in particular. Educational services, and the development of the educational system, have had a strong impact upon this society. Studying the development of an educational system may concentrate upon two interrelated aspects: the pedagogical aspect and the structural-functional aspect. This paper deals with the development of the Negev Bedouin's educational system from the latter perspective. Specifically, spatial-related welfare aspects and those of human development (pupils as well as staff) will be examined in order to indicate the system's path toward structural maturity.

### Modernization among the Negev Bedouin

Unlike other pastoral nomads in the Middle East, the Negev Bedouin are a Moslem minority within a modern Jewish state. This situational uniqueness has led to accelerated socio-economic change. Following the War of Independence in 1948, those Bedouin tribes that remained in the Negev (about 12,000 people out of about 65,000) were dislocated into an area in the northern Negev known as the seig. Military administration was imposed on the seig, and was lifted only in the mid-1960s. The total area of the seig is about 1,000 sq km, constituting about 20% of the Negev. The dislocation severely interrupted the traditional pastoral economy, driving the Bedouin toward a combined pastoral and dry farming economy. Due to recurring droughts in the late 1950s and early 1960s, even this pattern could not provide sufficient subsistence means, and the Bedouin were driven further into secondary occupations within the regional economic system. During this period an accelerated process of so-called spontaneous sedentarization began within the seig, taking on a dispersed pattern without any marked modern-type settlement framework. A second phase of planned semi-urbanization (Meir 1987) began in the mid-1960s, and at present about 50% out of a total population of about 58,000 Bedouin have been further dislocated into five governmentally-planned towns (see Figure 1).

Thus, in less than four decades, the Bedouin have undergone considerable change in settlement and occupational pattern. These processes have brought the Bedouin closer to modernization in both its socio-demographic and structural dimensions. Yet, the Bedouin still follow an economic dualism by maintaining a certain combination of extra-pastoral secondary and even tertiary occupations, and pastoral and agricultural sources of income. This dualism, as suggested by Marx (1981), is a socio-economic defense mechanism against uncertainties involved in their integration into the modern labor market. Nevertheless, there has evolved a pronounced change in the social structure, especially in tribal institutions. One dimension of this process is the change in personal and occupational behavior patterns, and reliance on free resources not allocated by the traditional social system. No less important is the increased reliance on public goods, such as public services which, in Israel are allocated by the government. Such growing external reliance of individuals itself indicates a further dimension of change which may be conceived of as an ideological change related to sedentarization, urbanization and adaptation to the Westernized economy and society at the expense of nomadism and pastoral economy and society. Yet, change may not be conceived as absolute (Salzman 1980). Indeed, despite these changes, many traditional pastoral-nomadic elements may still be discerned within the Bedouin.



Understanding these socio-economic processes is essential for analysing the development of the Bedouin educational system. These processes signify the gradual departure from old ideals and the adoption of new ones. Educational ideals are changing and formal schooling and Western education are gradually replacing other ideals with respect to the role of children within society. Nevertheless, reflecting a radical change, this process has been highly complex, as it has been for nomadic societies worldwide (Meir 1985). In the following sections we shall discuss several aspects of the development of the Bedouin educational system in order to demonstrate its complexity.

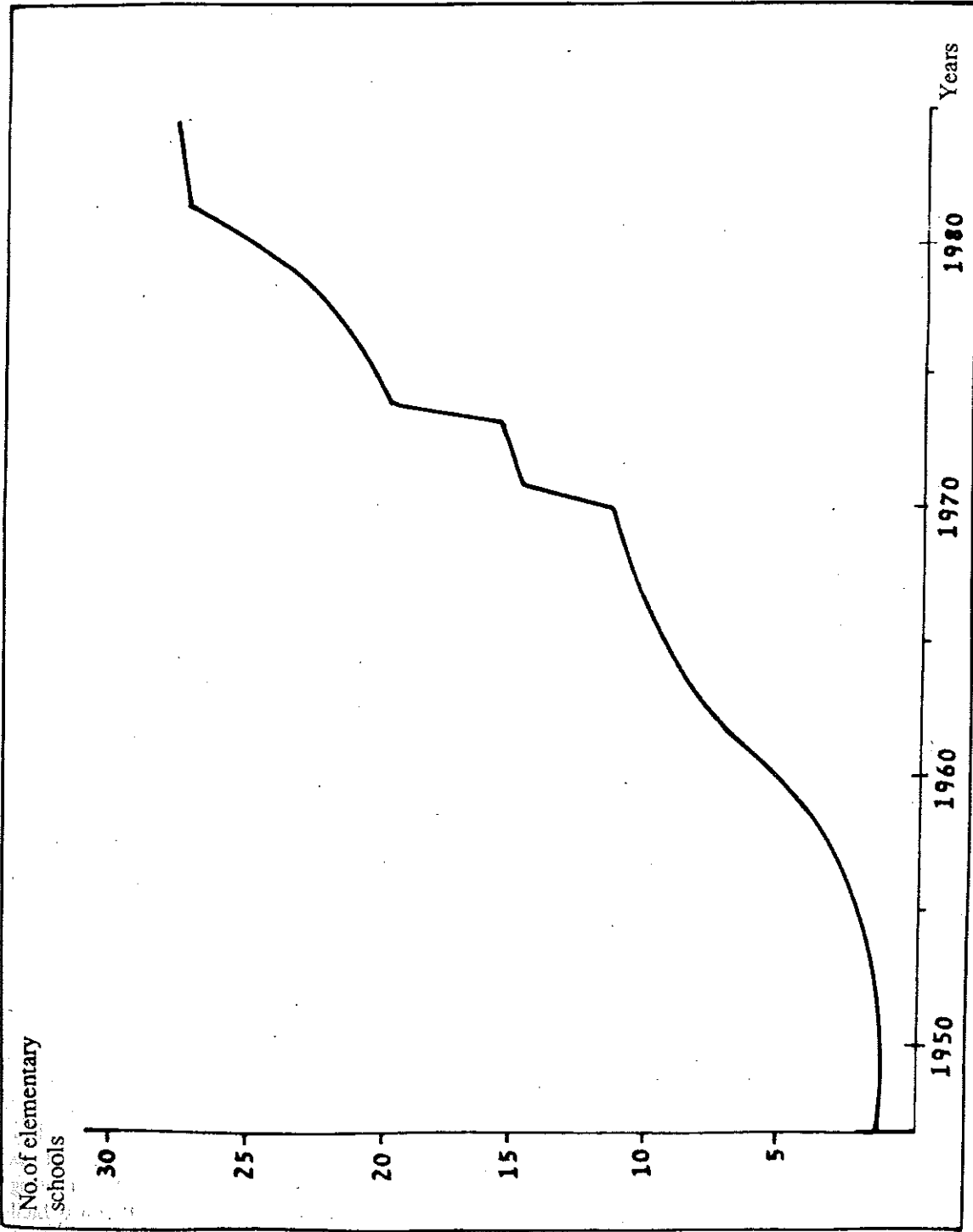
### Spatial Aspects of the Educational System

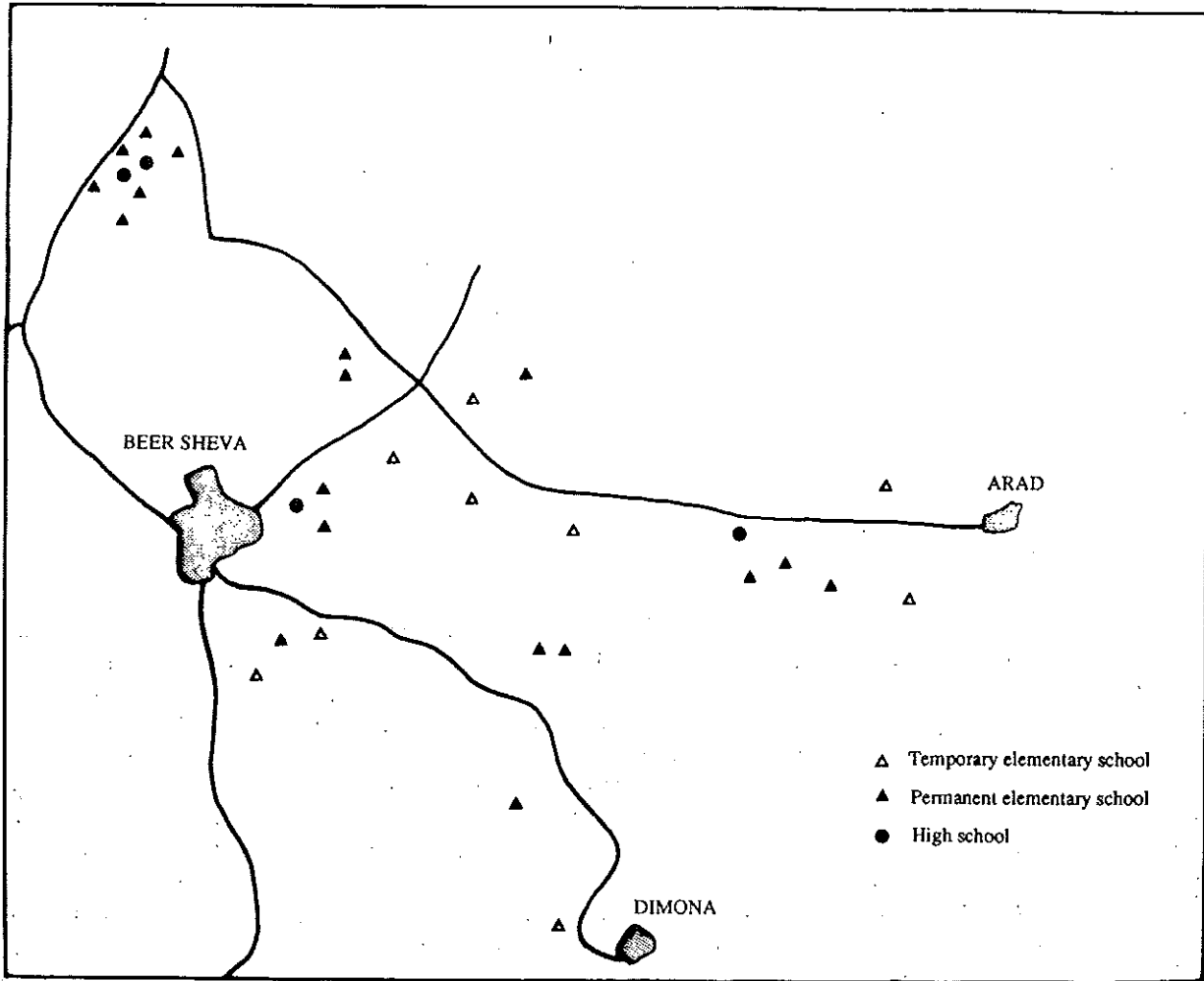
Provision of public educational services to the Bedouin during the 1950s encountered three major difficulties: the extensively dispersed nature of Bedouin spontaneous sedentarization within the *seig*; the non-existence of an appropriate municipal framework for allocation of public funds; and low Bedouin awareness of Western education stemming from the status of children within the traditional labor force, particularly that of girls within this society.

In 1954 the Ministry of Education, together with the military administration, decided to establish a separate Bedouin educational system within the *seig*. Sheikhs were nominated as heads of tribal educational committees with the mainly formal role of mediating between the Bedouin and the government (Marx 1974). At the same time, the authorities began an extensive campaign to persuade Bedouin parents of the importance of Western education and formal schooling. In order to advance this campaign, the authorities sought to impose the compulsory schooling law upon the Bedouin, but its implementation was delayed until the early 1970s due to logistic difficulties and cultural barriers in convincing the Bedouin.

It is common knowledge today that sedentarization marks a critical socio-cultural turn within nomadic societies (Salzman 1980). Indeed, as shown above, the spontaneous sedentarization of the Negev Bedouin generated a structural economic change and a gradual transition toward selective adoption of a Western culture value system. One important dimension is the change in the social status allocation from that of emphasis on inherited status to emphasis on acquired and achieved status. One route to status mobility is education, and the Bedouin have gradually begun to appreciate this, due primarily to exposure via sedentarization to the benefits accruing from education. In this respect, the establishment of schools within the *seig* had a strong visible impact and this was supplemented by growing interaction with Jewish society, especially after the abolishment of the military administration in 1965 (Meir 1983). But sedentarization was also followed by a significant increase in the annual natural population growth rate to a peak of 5.5% in 1970, up from about 3.5% in the 1950s (Meir 1984).

Thus, demand for public educational services grew considerably. In an attempt to meet the demand, the government provided soft structures as school facilities, but it turned out that such provision implied the temporary nature of the school. This later served the government as a strategy in its attempt to persuade various segments of the Bedouin population to further relocate into the planned towns, assuming that they would prefer permanent schooling in permanent hard structures. Nevertheless, the process of establishing elementary schools which had been rather slow during the 1950s, gained momentum during the 1960s and 1970s (see Figure 2). In certain tribes, the process intensified with the establishment of additional elementary and even some high schools. Since 1978, however, new schools of modern building standards have been established only in the new planned towns. The spatial structure of school location changed from highly dispersed to more concentrated (see Figure 3), thus creating two sub-systems: the first, with 60% of the schools, is composed of permanent, building-standard facilities, while the remainder are temporary facilities in spontaneous settlements.





The process of spatial concentration of schools had actually begun before the new Bedouin towns were established. The new concentration implied inter-tribal mix in school utilization, whereas a separate tribal school for each tribe had been important both for prestige and for avoidance of inter-tribal conflict. This latter element affected the development of the Bedouin educational system. Only a few tribes enjoyed a separate tribal school (see Table 1). To a certain degree this reflects the fact that large tribes would for demographic reasons have a separate tribal school, but it also reflects other internal and external political processes. One is that, as the heads of tribal educational committees, sheikhs determined the location of school facilities to benefit their closest affiliates. Another is that the political and security considerations of the authorities during the 1950s and 1960s made certain tribes non-eligible for school facilities.

Table 1

Elementary schools by tribal mix, 1979

Number of tribes participating in the same school.			
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3+</u>
Number of Schools	9	2	7
Number of Tribes	6	4	20

Source: Meir and Barnea 1985.

Increased Bedouin awareness to education and hence the desire to minimize the children's daily school commuting distances played an important role in the sedentarization process and the gravitation of families toward facility locations. This process, however, created a conflict with the capacity of space (given social spacing norms) to absorb populations close to schools, and with the Bedouin's desire to protect their privacy. The interaction between these push-pull effects resulted in disparities in the physical welfare of children and hence in the benefit provided by schools. By 1978, children of most tribes and pupils of most schools commuted over four kilometers each way, although the majority of pupils commuted over shorter distances (see Table 2). That is, most tribes and schools did not enjoy the physical and social benefit that could be realized from proximity to schools. Bussing provided by the Ministry of Education has to a certain extent alleviated the problem. By 1985, more than 1700 pupils were bussed daily. Still, this solution involves social stress as pupils are taken away from the tribal environment. At the same time, the movement of Bedouin children from home to school effects a gradual change in the status of the child within the traditional tribal milieu, and within the domestic labor force in particular.

Table 2

Tribes, pupils and schools by commuting distances, 1978

Distances (in km)	4	4-7	7+
Number of Tribes	7	10*	11*
% of Pupils	63.4	19.4	17.2
Number of Schools	4	11**	9**

\*includes tribes with children commuting over shorter distances.

\*\*includes schools with some children commuting over shorter distances.

Source: Meir and Barnea 1985.

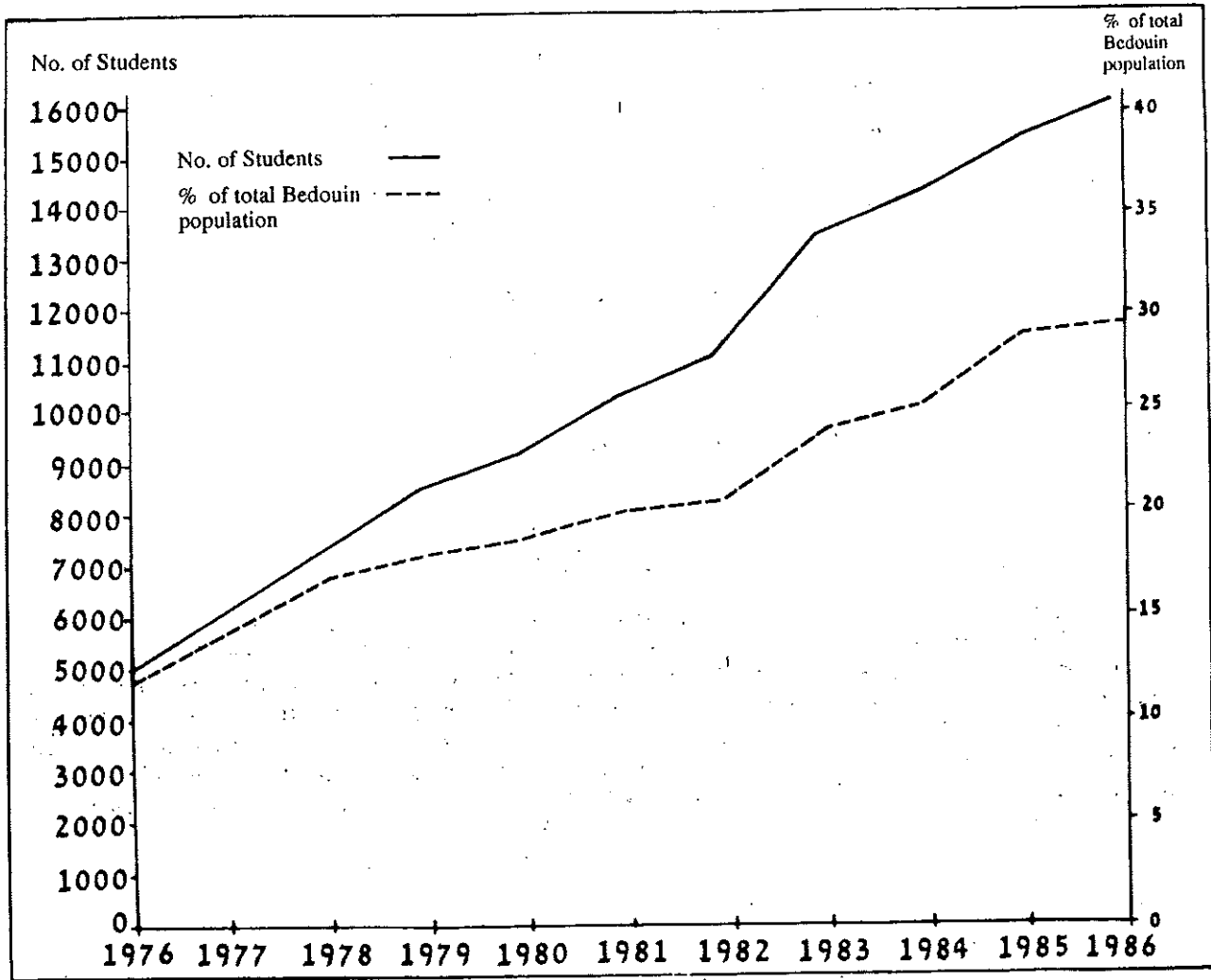
### Structural Aspects

The spatial aspects of the Bedouin educational system have an impact upon its structural elements. This impact was particularly strong in its early and middle phases of development. During these phases, Bedouin awareness of Western education and formal schooling was quite low and was sensitive to any factor that could reduce the socio-cultural and physical welfare of pupils in particular, and of Bedouin society in general. With growing awareness, the impact of this sensitivity on the structural aspects declined. Data related to structural aspects have only been available since the late 1970s, when awareness to education and schooling had already become quite significant. Still, as shown below, it is possible to discern the traits of society in transition.

#### Number of Pupils

Figure 4 presents the absolute and relative growth in the number of pupils between 1976 and 1986. During this decade, the number of pupils tripled to about 16,000 (about 27% of the total Bedouin population). This figure contrasts sharply with the 150 pupils (males only) that attended schools in the mid 1950s. This impressive growth is an outcome of several factors: a massive persuasion campaign by the authorities; increasing awareness of education; gradual improvement in implementing the compulsory schooling law; and an extremely high natural increase rate. Yet, the growth has somewhat slowed down since 1978, presumably as an outcome of the gradual slow-down of the natural increase rate since the early 1970s (Meir 1984).





### Sex-Age Structure

The significance of this structural characteristic is rooted primarily in the status of females in Bedouin society in general, and of girls in the domestic labor force in particular. The status of girls has improved in recent years due primarily to their mothers' drive to ensure a better future for them (Lavendu-Hundt 1980), but also due to the preference of prospective husbands for better educated wives. Female education has thus become an important step towards social modernization. The enrollment of girls in the 1950s and 1960s was nil, but by 1976 they already constituted about 25% of all pupils, with this figure rising to about 33% in 1979, and to 40% in 1986. Moreover, out of the total Bedouin population, the percentage of girls enrolled in school increased in these years by 1.28 times that of enrolled boys. Such a fast rate implies that Bedouin society has overcome the cultural barrier regarding the provision of education to girls in particular, as well as to children in general.

Such an analysis, however, is somewhat misleading as it deals with the female sector aggregately. Several other characteristics may shed more light on the issue. Previous research has noted inter-tribal variations in degrees of social modernization and economic growth (Meir 1983, 1984), which may result in inter-tribal and inter-school variations in sex structure. As indicated in Table 3, female participation in three out of sixteen elementary schools in 1976 was close to zero, and less than one third in an additional ten schools. By 1986, the situation had already changed dramatically, as with female participation had risen to over 40% in about half (15 out of 31) of the schools surveyed. Despite this radical change, however, the relative ranking of schools by female enrollment has not changed: that is, it is not plausible that a tribe belonging to a certain school would undergo a fast change in its perception of the educational needs of girls. The internal conflict between progress and tradition is still strong and the balance tends towards preserving the status of girls.

Table 3

Distribution of Bedouin schools by female pupil percentage, 1976-1986.

Female Percentage	0-10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50+	Total Number of schools
Year							
1976	3	5	5	2	1	0	16
1982	0	2	5	7	10	0	24
1986	0	1	2	13	13	2	31

Source: Meir and Barnea 1985; Barnea (field data for 1986).

Even this analysis, however, conceals an important dimension, that of sex structure by grade. As she gets older, a girl's enrollment in school becomes a burden on her family because of her potentially important contribution to the domestic labor force and because of her exposure in school to the society of young males as they approach marital age. As indicated in Table 4, female participation rates decline

in higher grades, especially from the sixth to eighth grades on. In 1978, for example, the disparity in participation rates between males and females (within a certain grade) expanded considerably from the eighth grade (and even in lower grades) on. These data indicate that by the late 1970s, formal education via schooling for girls, and to a large extent for boys as well, was limited to elementary schools. Thus, culturally it was not yet possible to point clearly towards a change in the status of Bedouin girls as reflected in the educational system. Since then, however, a considerable change has taken place, and by 1986, the female participation rate in, for example, the tenth grade (2nd grade of high school) rose to 27.4%, up from 5.3% in 1978. This process indicates a gradual decline in the rate of female dropouts. Given the semi-urbanization process the Bedouin are presently undergoing, it is reasonable to assume that young female Bedouin status will improve as a consequence of participating in the formal educational process, although girls enrollment saturation in high schools is not expected in the next few years.

Table 4

School participation rates of ages 6-18 out of a total appropriate cohort, 1978 (percentages).

Grade	Boys	Girls	Ratio of boys to girls
1	95.74	64.20	1.48
2	86.93	41.42	2.09
3	83.62	39.24	2.12
4	61.49	25.32	2.44
5	69.76	24.67	2.87
6	61.27	18.04	3.39
7	61.11	18.48	3.30
8	60.00	13.08	4.58
9	46.49	7.00	6.64
10	36.79	5.31	6.92
11	18.62	3.37	5.52
12	10.52	1.17	8.99

Source: Meir and Barnea 1985.

### Standard Grade-Age

This structural aspect of the Bedouin educational system refers to school classes being composed of single-age or multi-age groups, and reflects once again the response of Bedouin society to public educational services. A multi-age class grade can be a consequence of two interrelated effects: a pupil's achievement level that is lower than the requirements for upgrading or late enrollment into the educational system. The second effect may be an outcome of distance from school and low parental awareness of the need for education. This effect, being unique to the Bedouin system, is perhaps dominant and reflects the cultural barrier as well.

Table 5 presents the percentage distribution of pupils in standard age groups between the first and fourth grades for the period 1979-1982. For example, in 1979, there were 6.6% of first graders who were one year (or over) younger, 21.6% who were one year older, and 17.3% who were two years (or over) older than the standard age of this grade, while 54.5% were at the standard age (usually ages 6-7). The table reveals that despite the rather late years in the development of the system, there were still significant deviations from standard age. By 1979, one can witness an increase in percentage of younger non-standard age pupils from first to fourth grade, and a similar trend for standard age (+1). The opposite trend is demonstrated for standard age pupils. While a similar trend still existed in 1982, there are marked differences in magnitudes, and in all grades there was a considerable increase in percentage of standard-age pupils. This change reflects changes in assignment criteria by the Ministry of Education from achievements to age. The change may also reflect improvements in quality, but it certainly reflects a further increase of Bedouin awareness about the provision of education to children according to their age development. These data, however, refer to the first four grades only and it is quite possible that the situation for higher grades may be even more abnormal. Lack of data makes examination of this hypothesis difficult.

Table 5

Distribution of pupils among standard-age groups, 1st - 4th grades, 1979 - 1982 (in %)

Grade	1st		2nd		3rd		4th	
	1979	1982	1979	1982	1979	1982	1979	1982
Standard age (-1) and under	6.6	2.9	9.0	2.0	10.1	5.0	10.4	7.1
Standard age	54.5	68.8	50.0	63.3	49.7	60.4	47.7	56.3
Standard age (+1)	21.6	19.9	23.1	25.0	22.7	24.9	24.4	25.6
Standard age (+2) and over	17.3	8.4	17.9	9.7	17.5	9.7	17.5	11.0
Totals	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

Source: Meir and Barnea 1985.

### Teaching Staff

The significance of this element is rooted in the assumption that the ability of a nomadic and post-nomadic society to produce its own teaching staff reflects a certain degree of maturity in its educational system and also reflects adaptation to a public service delivered by the government. Moreover, reliance on internal teaching staff encourages internal cultural and ethnic solidarity and joint perception of child development in particular and of the society in general between children and parents on the one hand and the teaching staff on the other hand (Meir 1985).

In the early development stages, Arab teachers from northern Israel, and later from East Jerusalem, were employed within the Bedouin educational system. Despite their similar religious origin, the cultural gap between the Bedouin and the Arab teachers created a conflict over mutual respect and perception of the essence of education. Paradoxically, however, this conflict has not prevented the dissemination of Arab nationalistic ideas into certain sectors of the Bedouin society. The involvement of Arab teachers therefore became problematic, and the Bedouin were faced with the need to produce their own teaching resources.

By 1978 only one third (out of 276) of all teachers were Bedouin by origin, out of which two-thirds were non-certified teachers. In that year, the Bedouin educational system was not culturally homogeneous nor educationally competent. It is significant, however, that by that year, only 10% of the 17-18 cohort enrolled in the twelfth grade of high school, which is mandatory for a teaching certificate. In this regard, the number of Bedouin teachers was quite high. By 1986, after a 125% increase in the total number of teachers, Bedouin teachers already constituted 52%, and 75% of this number were already certified. Such a dramatic increase is an outcome of the establishment of a local Bedouin college, which opened up an important avenue for acquiring advanced education and opportunities for breaking out of blue collar occupations that were becoming dominant among the Bedouin. Nevertheless, this change also indicates the ability of Bedouin society to produce internal teaching resources. From this perspective, then, the mid-1980s Bedouin educational system has reached a more balanced cultural homogeneity, and is more forcefully marching towards a higher degree of structural maturity and normality.

### Conclusions

The Negev Bedouin educational system has been undergoing a revolution both in the awareness by the Bedouin of the vitality of the formal educational process and the awareness by the government of the need to advance modernization processes among the Bedouin. Certainly, the system has developed considerably. Growth in the relative and absolute number of female pupils enrolled in elementary schools, in age-standardization of pupils in various class grades, and in Bedouinization of faculty are indeed important indicators.

At this juncture, however, it is mandatory to consider several other issues related to a society in transition. To what extent will Bedouin society maintain Bedouin uniqueness, tribalism and nomadic ideals within the modernization process? How will these be given appropriate roles in the modern educational process, especially in curricula? Will education and schooling contribute positively to social integration within Bedouin society between its various ethnic elements? To what extent will the educational process contribute to further integration between Bedouin society and the surrounding Jewish society? Answers to some of these questions depend on research that will investigate further the topics brought up in this paper. Other questions will be answered by studying curriculum aspects of the system. Providing answers to various pedagogical issues has become a highly important task at a stage in which the Bedouin educational system approaches structural maturity.

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