

PALESTINIAN ACTIVISM IN ISRAEL

Middle East Today

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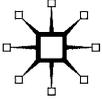
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A BEDOUIN WOMAN LEADER IN A CHANGING
MIDDLE EAST

Henriette Dahan-Kalev and Emilie Le Febvre
with Amal El'Sana-Alh'jooj

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PALESTINIAN ACTIVISM IN ISRAEL

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We would like to dedicate this book to our grandmothers and mothers:

*Dina Waknin—Marrakesh, Morocco,
Freda Dill—East Prairie, Missouri, USA,
and
Hajja Rukia El-Sana—Al-Naqab, Israel*

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CONTENTS

List of Map, Tables, and Plates	ix
Notes on Transcriptions	xi
Arabic Transcriptions	xiii
Introduction	xix
1 Activism in the Middle East: A Focus on al-Naqab Bedouin Women in Israel	1
2 A History of Bedouin of al-Naqab: <i>Tiyāha Qdeirāt al-Şāne‘</i>	29
3 Three Generations of al-Şāne‘ Women	69
4 From <i>‘Ashā‘īr</i> to NGOs: Changing Sociopolitics in al-Naqab Bedouin Society	113
5 Mediations of a Leading al-Naqab Bedouin Female Activist	145
6 Concluding Analysis: The Activist Biography and Strategic Identification in Third Sector Fields	189
Epilogue: The Politics of Emotions: Difficulties of Collaboration	223
Notes	235
Bibliography	239
Index	255

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LIST OF MAP, TABLES, AND PLATES

MAP

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | Location of the Pre-1948 Tribal Confederations and the <i>Siyag</i> Reservation between 1951 and 1966 | xvi |
|---|---|-----|

TABLES

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Six Generations of Al-Ṣāne‘—Amal’s Family | xvii |
| 2 | Tiyāha Qdeirāt Al-Ṣāne‘ Lineage Affiliations | xviii |

PLATES

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | Photograph of Amal at the 2011 Prawer Protest (d. October 2011, Amal’s personal collection) | xxx |
| 2 | Photograph of Karīm, Ḥājar, N’ama, and Amal (baby) al-Ṣāne‘ (d. 1974, Amal’s personal collection) | 91 |
| 3 | Photograph of Amal, second from the right, at school (d. unknown, Amal’s personal collection) | 99 |
| 4 | Photograph of Amal and other al-Naqab Bedouin women and girls at the 2011 Prawer Protest (d. October 2011, taken by E. Le Febvre 2011) | 173 |

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NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTIONS

The transcription of Arabic into English varies with each publication. The Arabic transcriptions in this work loosely follow the transliteration conventions set out by *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. For an excellent account about al-Naqab Bedouin local dialect, please see Rosenhouse (1984). All questions regarding terminology, words preferences, and elucidation of specific phrases were discussed between Amal, Henriette, and myself. Together, we decided to present places names in al-Naqab in transcribed Arabic. However, the names of locations outside of al-Naqab, international countries, and geographical features are written in English. We also use the word “al-Naqab” to describe Israel’s southern desert region rather than “Negev,” which is frequently presented in both Hebrew and English scholarship. Place names are not italicized in this text. Readers should also know that we fully recognize the political importance of displaying place names in Arabic rather than in Hebrew or English in the Israeli and Palestinian context. This choice reflects our prescribed viewpoint and does not represent the opinions or perspectives of the organizations or persons in the following chapters.

Along with place names in al-Naqab, we also transcribed important tribal lineages, family surnames, and first names of local individuals described in the text. For purposes of clarification, we identify all al-Şāne‘ tribal members by their first names. In addition, relevant phrases, concepts, and nouns are transcribed from Arabic with diacritical marks and italicized. Diverging from *IJMES* standards, we have also included diacritical marks in our transcriptions of al-Naqab place, personal, and family names. However, well-known Arabic words (such as Shaykh, Arabic, and Bedouin) are not transcribed and written in common English. The surnames of references, political parties, and organizational names (NGOs) are presented as they are published in English. Per Amal’s request, her quotes are referenced as “El’Sana-Alh’jooj,” her preferred English spelling. Throughout this project, the phrase “al-Naqab Bedouin” will be employed when describing Amal’s society at large and “Negev Bedouin community” will be used

to indicate occasions wherein they are referred to as ethnic community mostly by outsiders, Israeli state officials, and various al-Naqab Bedouin representatives speaking and publishing in English. Finally, for purposes of simplification, Hebrew words are presented as they are published in English. In addition, the following section outlines our basic Arabic transcription guide. We also provide a brief dictionary of terms that may be useful when reading the preceding text, especially for alternative transcriptions of specific places and names as presented in various direct quotes.

ARABIC TRANSCRIPTIONS

CONSONANTS

ب	,
ت	b
ث	t
ج	th
ح	g or j
خ	h
د	kh
ذ	d
ر	dh
ز	r
س	z
ش	s
ص	sh
ض	ṣ
ط	ḍ
ظ	ṭ
ع	ẓ
غ	‘
ف	gh
ق	f
ك	q or g*
ل	k
م	l
ن	m
ه	n
و	h
ي	w
ا	y
آ	a or at

*In al-Naqab Bedouin Arabic dialect, “q” is often pronounced “g” and sometimes “k”.

VOWELS

Long

\ ā

و ū

ي ī

Short

ا a

و u

ي i

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

We use “al-“ for the definite article ال. In Arabic this definite article is connected to specific consonants. We connect “al” to particular nouns such as “al-Ṣāne” as they are regularly presented in al-Naqab.

TERMINOLOGY AND COMMON ALTERNATIVE
TRANSLITERATIONS

‘Arab = General term used between Bedouin members when referring to themselves in the Middle East

‘Arab as-saba’ = Customary phrase used by al-Naqab Bedouin when referring to themselves

‘Ashīrah (pl. ‘ashā’ir) = Tribe

‘A’ila = Term to describe family

Aṣl = Honor code based on ancestry/origin/nobility

Badū (sing. badawī) = Term used by non-Bedouin or outsiders to describe those who live a “desert or nomadic” way of life (English: Bedouin)

Bi’r al-Sab‘ = Main metropolis of al-Naqab (Hebrew: Beer Sheva; English: Beer Sheba; Alternative Arabic: as-Sab‘)

Fallaḥ (pl. fallāḥīn) = Term used to describe an agricultural worker, farmer, or villager in al-Naqab

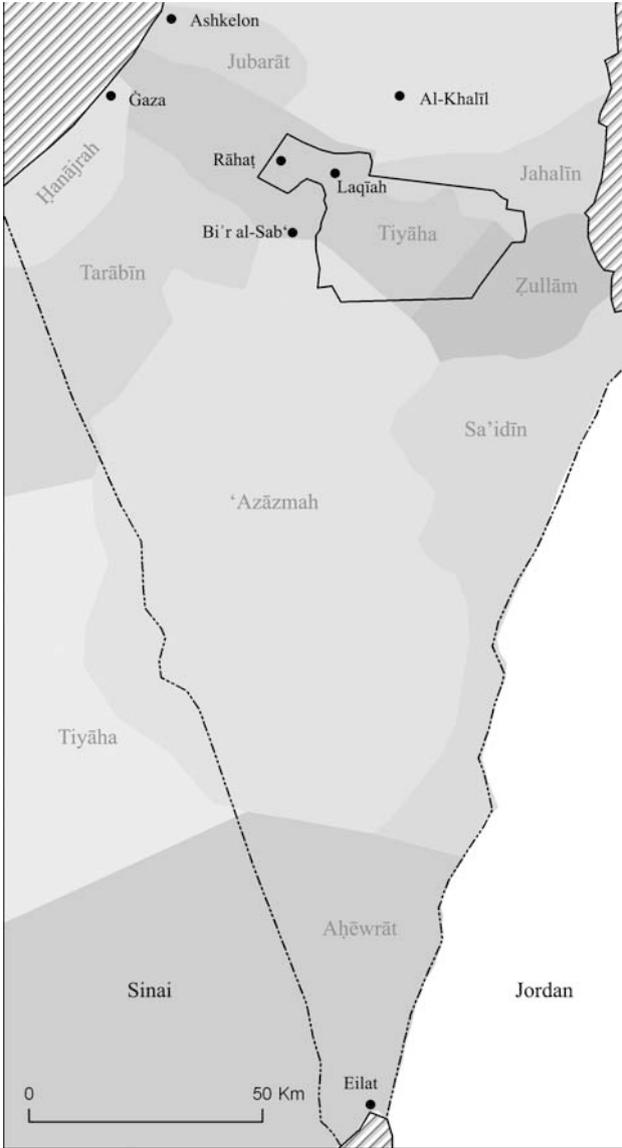
Gabīlah (pl. gabā’il) = Word used to describe a confederation of tribes in al-Naqab (Alternative transcription: qabila)

Gāwya = Wilful girl

Ḥaj (male), Ḥajja (female) = Title given to a person who went to Mecca

Al-Ḥjūj = Amal’s husband, Anwār’s, family name (Alternative transcription: Alh’jooj)

- Khams = Term used to describe co-liable group bound by matters of “blood” usually related by a common ancestor five generations removed (Alternative Arabic term: ḥamūlah)
- Laqīyah = Term used to describe an al-Naqab Bedouin village located northeast of Bi’r al-Sab‘. Amal’s family’s village built by the Israeli government in the 1970s during the urbanization program (Alternative transcription: Lakiya, Laqiya, and Laqye)
- Mawat = Word used in the 1858 Ottoman Land Code to describe uncultivated and unhabituated land more than one and a half mile from any village, which could be classified as state property
- Al-Nakba = Term meaning “the catastrophe” now used by Palestinians to describe the Israeli-Arab War
- Al-Naqab = Southern desert of Israel (Hebrew: Negev or Negeb)
- Qdeirāt = Subsection of the Tiyāha confederation. A group of politically and territorially affiliated tribes of which al-Ṣāne‘ are a part (Alternative transcription: Kiderat, Gderat)
- ‘Ruba‘ (pl. rubū‘) = A term meaning quarter or sub-tribe, composed of a core Bedouin group and associated *fallāḥ*, *‘abd*, and other smaller families. Core group provides the name of ‘*ruba*’ and the Shaykh of tribe.
- Al-Ṣāne‘ = The name of Amal’s tribe and lineage (Alternative transcriptions: es-Sani, al’ Sana, el-Sana)
- Siyag = Hebrew for fence and used to describe a military zone or reservation located northwest of Bi’r al-Sab‘ established for al-Naqab Bedouin between 1951 and 1966
- Taḥashsham = Broadly meaning to express propriety
- Tanzimāt = An Ottoman policy or edict recentralizing state power throughout the Empire
- Tiyāha = Name of the Qdeirāt al-Ṣāne‘ tribal confederation (Alternative transcriptions: Tiāhā Teyaha, Teljaha)



Map 1 Location of the Pre-1948 Tribal Confederations and the *Siyag* Reservation between 1951 and 1966

Source: Adam P. Dixon (2012) adaptation of map in E. Biasio (1998).

Table 1 Six Generations of Al-Şāne‘—Amal’s Family

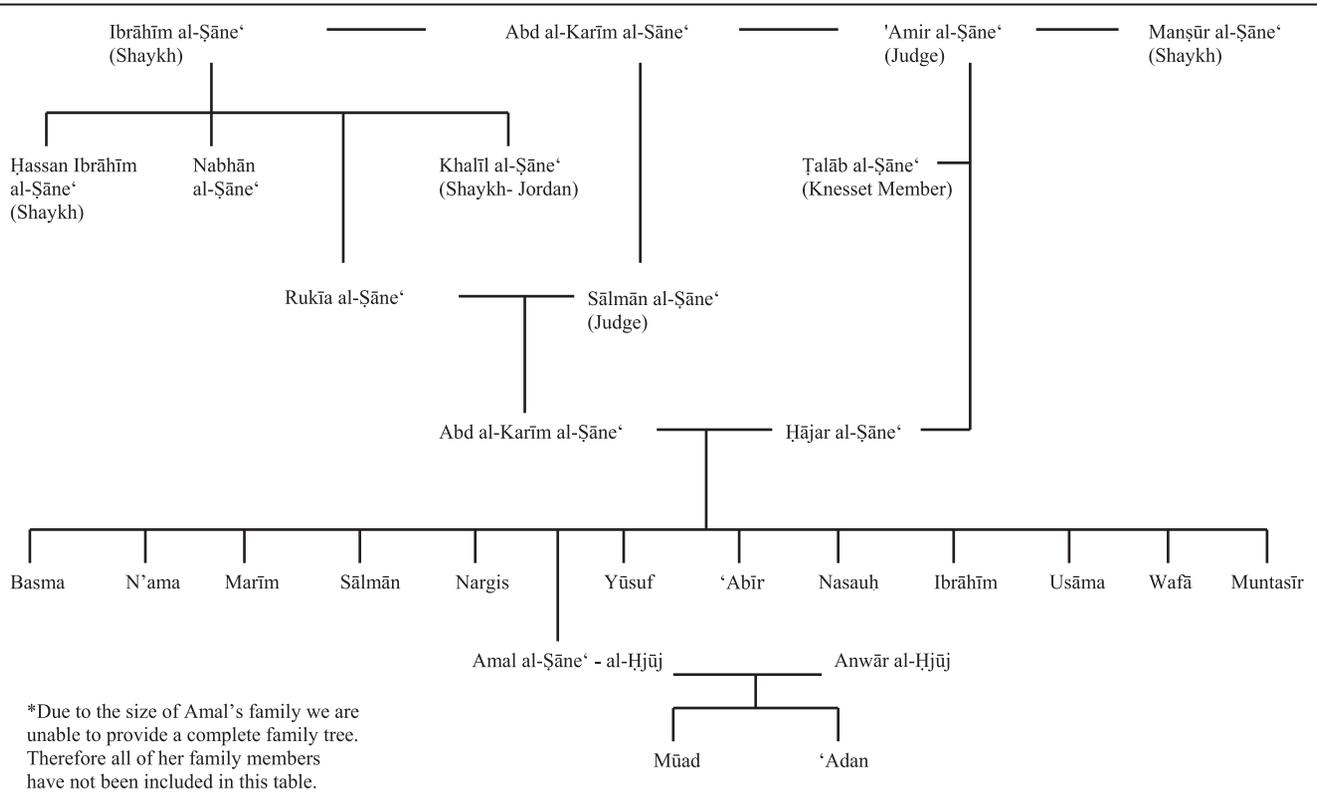
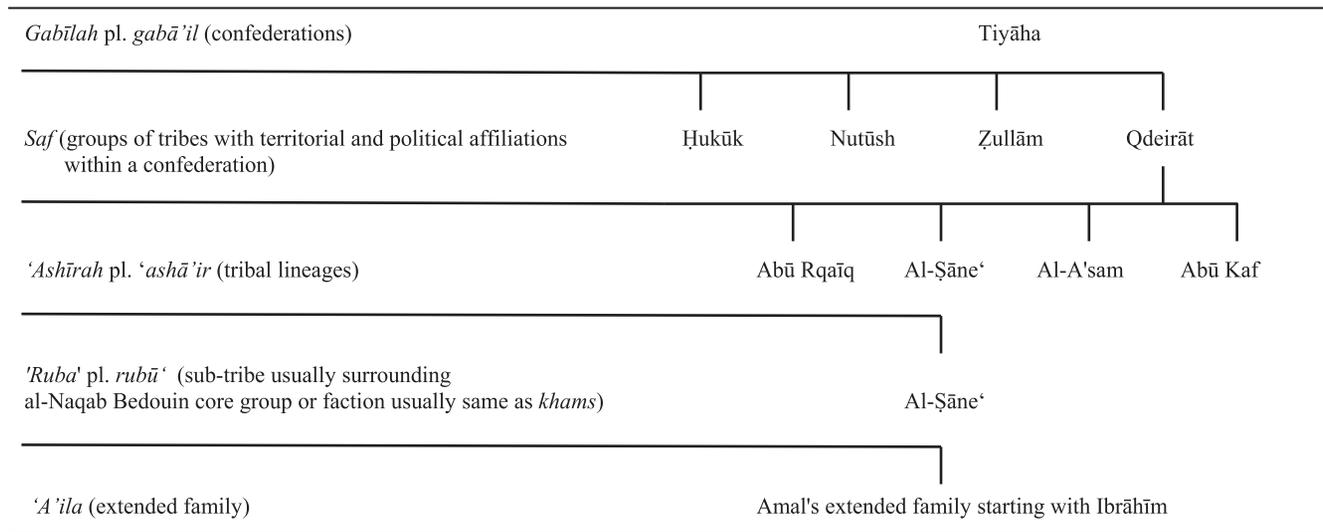


Table 2 Tiyāha Qdeirāt Al-Şāne‘ Lineage Affiliations



INTRODUCTION

CREATING AMAL AL-ŞĀNE‘-AL-ĤJŪJ’S ACTIVIST BIOGRAPHY

Our response to these dilemmas was to say that cross-cultural understanding, like any social understanding, is but an approximation, variably achieved through dialogue, that is, a mutual correction of understanding by each party in the conversation to a level of agreement adequate for any particular interaction.

(Marcus and Fischer 1986, 29)

OUR SETTING

Al-Naqab (Negev) is a triangular-shaped region located in southern Levant in what is now the state of Israel. Its eastern border lies directly west of Jordan and southwest of the Judean Mountains along the geographical demarcation of the Arabah Valley. The point of the triangle is positioned directly north of the Gulf of Eilat located on the coast of the Red Sea. Its northern boundary runs from the Gaza Strip to the shores of the Dead Sea, a frontier roughly determined by transition from the fertile land found in the Judean Mountains to the more arid, rocky landscape characterizing the southern al-Naqab. In the past, al-Naqab was considered Sinai’s northern frontier as its western border joins the Peninsula and throughout history it has historically served as an important land bridge between Asia Minor and North Africa. As a direct consequence of its geographical position, al-Naqab, like many places in Middle East, hosts a long and contested social history. Notably, over the past several centuries, the region’s inhabitants have been subjected to complex and changing political proclivities that have defined and redefined the region’s national boundaries and administrative dealings.

Since the postwar Camp David Agreement between Israel and Egypt, al-Naqab’s borders officially lie within Israel’s 1949 ceasefire

agreement establishing its well-known cartographical triangle shape. Presently, the region of al-Naqab is formally recognized as Israel's southernmost district occupying approximately 12,500 square kilometers, roughly three-fifths of the entire state. Despite its relative size to the rest of the Israel, however, the events and the people residing in al-Naqab often go unnoticed by international news amidst the ongoing turbulence in Israel's metropolis and conflict along its contested borders with the Palestinian Territories. Unlike areas in Israel such as the Golan Heights and Jerusalem, the legal status of al-Naqab remains characteristically undisputed and the people living in the area maintain Israeli citizenship. Notwithstanding, al-Naqab has a unique social history of its own, one that has produced a complex demographic landscape composed of a diverse range of people whose sociopolitical relationships are complicated yet inherently intertwined as residents of this large desert setting.

The first time taking the train from the north to al-Naqab, on their journey many visitors are immediately confronted by the contradictory images of poverty and prosperity found alongside the dusty edge of railroad-owned land. Traveling along the southbound rail line, the first views framed by the plastic windows of the spacious and well-air conditioned Israel Railway's train car provide quick glimpses of local residents hanging laundry on barbwire protecting railroad land and wandering children from the high-speed onlookers. Upon arrival to Lod's train station, a mixed Jewish and Muslim town located southeast of Tel Aviv, the train car that was initially filled with mostly students, professors, *kibbutzim*, and young Israeli soldiers speaking Hebrew are increasingly joined by new passengers and the sound of Arabic conversations. Once the doors close, the train resumes its journey further into Israel's southern desert and the views gradually change from urban sprawl to a more open landscape with rolling hills, irrigation units, and fields planted with various trees and crops. Here, the occasional small Jewish village with its red-titled roofs can be spotted in the distance of the northern al-Naqab.

About an hour in their train ride, visitors will notice the landscape framed by the windows has changed once again. Depending on the time of the year, travelers are typically presented with brown, arid scenery, a landscape that from the train car appears to be a relatively empty and rural space. Since the creation of Israel, the region of al-Naqab has been routinely promulgated by the young state via local media, travel journals, and state propaganda as a vacant place defined by harsh, rugged cliffs, and dry desert awaiting development and modernization by Israeli citizens. As a result, from the 1950s

onward, *Ashkenazi* residents have established *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* such as Revivim Kibbutz in the more fertile areas, while other *Mizrabi* immigrating mostly from surrounding Middle Eastern countries were concentrated into urban development towns of Dimona, Arad, Mitzpe Ramon, and Bi'r al-Sab'. As of 2011, al-Naqab is now home to approximately 630,000 people, of which around 75 per cent are Jewish who moved there like so many settler pioneers throughout the world (CSB 2011).

The train eventually encroaches upon a newly planted wooded area protected by barrier fencing and exercising soldiers. After a few minutes of greenery, the desert landscape opens once again, the trees become sparse, and the land returns to its brownish hue. About 30 minutes from Bi'r al-Sab' the scene framed by the windows starts to include pillowing black clouds and metallic spots reflecting light on the horizon and nestled within small valleys of the desert. Only upon further appraisal does an interloper realize that these are small Bedouin homesteads dispersed throughout al-Naqab. Among these one can distinguish the occasional shepherd tending sheep in the fields, people driving loaded trucks to and from their homes, and sometimes an occasional child wandering in and around the domiciles. The fast-moving train only allows glimpses of these desert inhabitants along its journey, with only brief picturesque sights of Bedouin women and men walking through the rocky landscape. This is when one begins to understand that there is a second, older social history located in this southern desert, one often romanticized or marginalized by the region's new citizens. It is here when al-Naqab's Bedouin come into a visitor's line of sight.

Bedouin have lived in al-Naqab over the past several centuries and now compose 25 per cent of the region's population (CSB 2011). Their presence in al-Naqab becomes more evident when the train stops to let passengers disembark and board from the third station outside of Bi'r al-Sab'. The speakers on the train announce in Hebrew and English that they have arrived to Lehavim, a small Israeli development town located east of the station, and Rāhaṭ. Wonder at the word Rāhaṭ encourages a visitor to look west and several miles in the distance they will see the tops of several mosques with their green lights and large concentration of white, concrete buildings composing Israeli's largest Bedouin township. However, as one begins to comprehend the size of this "Bedouin village," the train doors quickly close again as the locomotive nearly completes its trip to al-Naqab's largest city of Bi'r al-Sab'. At the second to last station on this southern railway, the train stops at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, an

imposing sight of large modernist buildings surrounded by security fencing. Just northeast of the university campus, one can get a brief sight of Bi'r al-Sab's wealthy suburbs, where large numbers of university faculty, staff, and expates reside. Surrounding the university on the southwest are large block apartment buildings containing influxes of Israeli, international, and growing numbers of Bedouin students completing their lessons.

The final destination of this train ride is Bi'r al-Sab's city center, al-Naqab's main urban municipality hosting a diverse population of around 200,000 people (CBS 2011). The city itself is a juxtaposition of old, Ottoman architecture, modern municipalities, commercial sprawl, and large concrete apartments with their enclosed, shuttered balconies, and air-conditioning units decorating the high street facades. It is here, in central Bi'r al-Sab', where the train service ends in the south. If one wants to travel further through the sparse heart of al-Naqab toward Eilat, an Israeli resort town on the coast of the Red Sea, they must do so by bus or car. Disembarking the train, one exits the newly built train station onto a busy parking lot. The sightseer's view includes the usual market-town chaos composed of shoppers, taxi drivers, customers drinking coffee in the local cafes, and people queuing in security lines waiting to enter municipalities to conduct their daily bureaucratic necessities. However, along with these usual sights, most visitors to the city quickly notice the demographic diversity of Bi'r al-Sab's population, one not often observed inside Israel's urban streets in cities such as Tel Aviv.

Bi'r al-Sab' hosts a large and diverse population of *Mizrabi*, Russian, and North American immigrants who recently arrived to Israel, and the country's largest Bedouin population, an amalgam of people typically recognized by their ascents and mummers of Hebrew, Russian, Arabic, and English. Passersby don a range of styles from the young Jewish scouts dressed in beige uniforms carrying heavy backpacks to the fashionably dressed women from Eastern Europe. Past the Hebrew and Russian, you can also hear Arabic conversations rising from groups of Bedouin boys walking among the shops sometimes followed by women of an older generation who proudly wearing their colorfully embroidered black dresses and white headscarves. Amidst these crowds you can also see the younger Bedouin girls with their hair covered in tightly bound head wraps, wearing the latest fashion for the modern but modest woman. Finally sojourning from the nexus of the university and dispersed among al-Naqab region's permanent residents, visitors will discover a small but growing number of English-speaking internationals and expatriates. Outfitted in their

Tevas and air-breathing NorthFace shirts, many of these visitors are international students at Ben Gurion University and imported staff members supporting what are becoming emergent third sectors in the region. Since the 1990s, al-Naqab has witnessed a considerable increase in the number of foreign activists, visiting funders, NGO staff, international volunteers, and traveling scholars working with the university or one of several hundred organizations operating in al-Naqab. However, most importantly for our purposes, it is the demographic diversity of al-Naqab's administrative center—the Ottoman turned Israeli outpost of Bi'r al-Sab' and numerous surrounding Bedouin homesteads—that not only provides backdrop to this book but the complex sociopolitical landscape of Amal al-Şāne'-al-Ĥjūj's life story.

OUR ENCOUNTER

The information and stories imparted in the following pages were collected from 2006 to 2011. It began when I was an American graduate student who had recently arrived to Israel to study a master's degree at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. Between my classes among the imposing structural buildings comprising BGU's campus, I met Dr. Henriette Dahan-Kalev, a professor of Gender and Political Studies at BGU, collaborating-founder of Achoti (My sister) and local activist. Born in Morocco, she is a *Mizrabi* woman whose family immigrated to Israel in the late 1950s and among the hundreds relocated to the development towns throughout Israel upon their arrival to the newly created state. Over the last 20 years she has taught in Bi'r al-Sab' and worked as a consultant for several gender-based initiatives and development projects focusing on improving the socioeconomic and political status of women living in southern Israel. I made Henriette's acquaintance in one of those characteristic yet significant moments in any graduate student's career—the occasion when you found yourself sitting in a cramped office with your research proposal in hand trying to convince a prospective faculty member to become your thesis advisor. After our conversation, Henriette and I began our professional relationship, one characterized by shared interests and mentoring. This came at a time when my academic research was becoming increasingly focused on the growing number of women and girls I was meeting from al-Naqab Bedouin demos engaged in activism. Upon discussing my interests, Henriette suggested that I meet a prominent al-Naqab Bedouin activist named Amal al-Şāne'-al-Ĥjūj.

During her career teaching at BGU and working with the relatively small, activist network in al-Naqab, Henriette was introduced to Amal—a young and extremely charismatic woman from the Bedouin village of Laqīah. Amal and her family are al-Naqab Bedouin, a population like other Palestinian groups in Israel who have experienced extreme transformation as a result of successive interventionism ranging from the Ottoman Empire to the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. Amal was born in 1972 and at a young age was inspired to challenge the state-based discriminations characterizing her life and that of her family and other al-Naqab Bedouin. Consequently, she began a career as an activist at the age of 14. By the age of 17 she established a Bedouin women's organization in al-Naqab seeking to improve the educational and economic situation of female relatives and neighbors in her village. Upon completing high school, she was one of the first al-Naqab Bedouin women to attend BGU. After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in social work, she went on to study for a Master of Arts in community organizing at McGill University in Canada. In 2000, Amal began her professional career as the director of the Arab-Jewish Center for Equality, Empowerment and Cooperation (AJEEC), a division of the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development (NISPED).

Because of her work at AJEEC and personal activism, Amal has become an important participant in the growing third sector discourses emerging in al-Naqab and among other Palestinian groups in Israel. She is the leading female figurehead and public spokeswoman for al-Naqab Bedouin people. She has had several media productions about her life, leadership, and community organization and has actively contributed to the growing discourse on community volunteerism in the region. Today, Amal is one of the key shapers of public opinion and policy-making regarding the status of Palestinian minority women in Israel. Subsequently, over the past several years Amal has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards. In 2011, Amal was invited to speak about her life experiences in venues such as TEDx Jaffa. The Institute of International Education awarded her the Victor J. Goldberg IIE Prize for Peace in the Middle East in public ceremony in Rāhaṭ. In 2010, she was chosen by *The Marker* as one of 101 most influential people in Israel. In 2008, Amal was a keynote speaker at the Goldman Sachs Global Leaders Institute and in that same year the date November 7 was proclaimed “Amal El'Sana-Alh'jooj Day” in Hartford Connecticut. In 2005 she was a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize within the framework of the One Thousand Women submission and in 2003 she won the Lady Globes Career Women of the Year

award. Up until today, Amal continues to work with local residents, regional NGOs, politicians, international funders, and aid providers in a range of grassroots projects and activisms promoting humanitarian, poverty, eco-conservation, educational, health, and women rights among al-Naqab's Bedouin people.

OUR RESEARCH

In 2007 as part of my master's thesis and under the supervision of Henriette, Amal agreed to share her life story so that I might document her personal experiences with activism in Israel. The project began with the premise that there are little to no detailed, contemporary accounts about women's individual experiences with activism in al-Naqab Bedouin society. We suggest that despite the increasing efforts by scholars to refocus analyses on the uniqueness of women's sociopolitical experiences in the Middle East from stories of oppression to ones of contribution, many descriptions gloss over the micro-narratives of the women they set out to record. Our project puts forward that this has inadvertently created a situation whereby al-Naqab Bedouin women in Israel, such as Amal, and their localized activisms have become regularly overlooked in current discourses on Palestinian women's struggles in Israel. This book expands on this initial enterprise and sets out to explore the particularities of one al-Naqab Bedouin woman's pronounced negotiations, identities, and instrumentalities distinguishing her third sector work in this region. During our research we realized that Amal's activisms routinely navigate a complex world, one that demands she mediate considerable power differentials; bridge enormous social, political, and economic gaps; and negotiate various pluralisms between Israeli Jewish, Palestinian, al-Naqab Bedouin, and international representatives. In response, Amal, Henriette, and I have set out to create a "reading" of Amal's life story, a study about a contemporary Bedouin female activist and her work with developing notions of civil society and strategic identifications in Israel's al-Naqab Desert.

The proceeding narratives were produced in collaboration between Amal, Henriette, and myself; however, each of us contributed to this book in our own way. Thus the research presented here was negotiated effort, one marked by our differences, relative expertise, and shared interests in activism, people's relationships in al-Naqab, and women's broader engagement with social protest in the Middle East. Henriette guided the research process and it was only through her experiences as a scholar and activist, but her incredible mentorship that

helped this project to come to fruition. Most of the empirical data presented in this book is largely a product of conversations between Amal and me, which consisted mostly of interviews, participatory observation, and biopic research deriving from archives, documentaries, and other information. My role in this project is one of a graduate student developing her own familiarity about research and writing. To a large extent, the research topics were directed by Amal, as she opened her house and office to me so that I might participate in her everyday work activities. Most of the information, conversations, and participatory accounts within this book were selectively chosen by Amal herself, a process that was made possible by her open attitude toward this project in which she has shared and continues to generously share her life experiences with those interested in what she has to offer. It was also Amal's outstanding personality and her incredible life story that led us to believe that her experiences are an exceptionally important part of al-Naqab Bedouin's contemporary sociopolitical narrative.

Most interchanges about her personal life were recorded in Amal's apartment, during visits to her family's home in Laqīah, and occasions when I accompanied her to various work places. Information regarding her public activism was acquired through observations made during Amal's women workshops for AJEEC, located in the main hotel in Bi'r al-Sab', al-Naqab Bedouin women's graduation ceremony in Rāhaṭ, 2011 Praver Bedouin Protest, and several other local NGOs venues. Finally, some of Amal's stories and opinions about her "Jewish and Arab" collaborations were gathered from public speeches directed at international audiences during award ceremonies, lectures, and personal conversations with her friends, family, co-workers, and peers. Documentation processes consisted of audio recordings, personal field notes, and photographs. A fundamental complication for our project was language. Most interviews were conducted in a combination of English, Hebrew, and Arabic; however, it is important to note that Amal is extremely competent in all three languages. Nevertheless, the project itself was initially created with an international audience in mind and is thus written in English. Translating between Arabic, Hebrew, and English posed particular problems as words and phrases can lose their specific meaning, but at the same time purposeful slippages between them or selective use of each language is itself an important political practice among Palestinian activists in Israel.

The research project set out to maintain strong ethical standards encouraging principles of subject-to-subject reciprocity between three women from very different backgrounds. We acknowledged what Haraway terms as the "politics and epistemology of location," arguing

that positionality provides only partial knowledge claims but through reflexivity can also allow for multiple viewpoints (1991, 153). Most importantly, we endeavored to share Amal's life experiences, our conversations, and subjective interpretation of her tales in the most sensitive manner possible. Understanding that one can never be free from one's social positions, our project is irrevocably influenced by our different access to resources, ambitions, political commitments, and limits of language. Thus, it is important to acknowledge some of our own orientations here: Amal's as a Palestinian- Bedouin- Israeli, Muslim, feminist, scholar, and al-Naqab activist; Henriette's as a *Mizrabi* feminist, scholar, and Jewish activist from Israel; and mine as an American graduate student from a secular Missouri family conducting fieldwork in al-Naqab. Our subjectivities are furthered by our shared female gender, education levels (all holding graduate degrees), and similar political views, yet we are from different ethnic, religious, economic, and social backgrounds. We believe that this is indicative to most research encounters as the interactions between informants, scholars, students, their advisors, extended networks, and other stakeholders are typified by power, personality, social positioning, and scholastic orientations, which enviably shaped the information relayed in these pages.

While seeming excessively transparent, issues of difference must nevertheless be addressed in what is basically an effort to transform an individual's life experiences into text for broader consumption. This process was saturated with representational sensitivities and power differentials despite well-intentioned labors to consciously address issues of hierarchy and "power." We must recognize that research focusing on the lives of underrepresented women continue to be a major point of contention in women's studies, anthropology, political science, and broader social sciences. As Spivak points out, subaltern studies must confront the impossibility of representing oppressed people as more often than not textual representations continue to mirror historical and contemporary exploitative relations (1988). Regardless of our sensitive handling of Amal's tales, this research project involved erudition part in parcel to power relations (Said 1989).

Despite our efforts to constantly identify issues of "power," my inherent positioning as a Western researcher, Amal as the research subject, and Henriette as an Israeli scholar indelibly presented each of us with disparate social positioning, associative ascriptions, and differentiated experiences during our time together. For example, during a trip to the city center, Amal said that many Jewish Israelis would find it strange that an American and a Bedouin woman would be

shopping together. On the other hand, my presence at Amal's workshops with local Bedouin women in Rāhaṭ was also met with equal speculation. In all, it is important to understand the events, subsequent dialogues, and conclusions presented in this project, could be viewed, conceptualized, and applied differently by others. Thus, the following presentation reflects our particular negotiations, dialogue, and viewpoints.

It is important to also note that the information relayed in this project can not be considered a rigorous ethnography about al-Naqab Bedouin society. Alternatively, it is a politically focused study recording Amal's personal experiences as a Bedouin female activist in al-Naqab who considers herself both Palestinian and Israeli. In particular, this book focuses on how Amal, as an activist, selectively communicates her own and her people's narrative outside of al-Naqab Bedouin society in different ways in order to advocate and defend her community. To do so, it describes Amal's life story. In particular, it presents the stories or tales that one individual tells to others about herself and thus are selective constructions about her experiences (Behar 1990). At the same time, however, this project cannot be regarded as an exact account of Amal's life or partially equivalent of her own internal narratives. This comes as life history conscriptions often portray themselves as authoritative cultural texts depicting individual experiences and in doing so often speak past subjects (Behar 1990). Instead, this study explicitly renders itself an oral life history production—an edited text created by researchers who present a selected set of narratives about Amal's life. In addition, others readers with different insights or opinions may regard the information presented in this work as untrue or distorted, but this does not make it any less valid than official histories concerned with similar topics and issues. Alternatively, we have tried to consistently coordinate our representations of al-Naqab Bedouin society and history with Amal and present her particular point of view about these topics.

In order to place Amal's tales in particular times and places, we have also used secondary scholarship to pragmatically inform readers and contextualize her experiences. In doing so, we describe important structures and changes occurring in al-Naqab Bedouin society but focus on Amal's and her relatives' descriptions about particular events. This effort required a comprehensive literature review of relevant academic research and oral narratives focusing on historical background, marginalization processes, anthropological studies, contemporary socioeconomic issues, and studies about

al-Naqab Bedouin women. The literature review was done primarily with English resources and occasionally draws on Hebrew, French, and Arabic documents. While this work focuses on scholarship about al-Naqab Bedouin women to contextualize Amal's tales; a cogent summary about their position in Bedouin society is essentially beyond the scope of this project. In conclusion, we hope you find in the following chapters a sensitive attempt to retell stories about how Amal al-Ṣāneʿ-al-Ḥjūj through her determination and skillful mediation has become a figure of inspiration for Palestinian, Bedouin, and Israeli women, stories constructed into a biographical account, which ultimately bourgeoned from the complex, social encounter between an activist, an academic, and a student who met in Israel's southern desert. This was a happenstance that was only made possible by the incredible support given to us by our friends, family, and peers who all played an important role in creation of this book.

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Emilie Le Febvre, University of Oxford, 2012



Plate 1 Photograph of Amal at the 2011 Praver Protest (d. October 2011, Amal's personal collection)