

A Bedouin Century: Education and Development among the Negev Tribes in the Twentieth Century.
Abu-Rabi'a, 'Aref. New York: Berghahn Books, 2001. 224 pp.

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'Aref Abu-Rabi'a identifies himself as a member of the population under study in this book, the Negev Bedouin. As a child he attended schools within the system he describes, and as an adult he worked within this system, first as a teacher and eventually as the official in charge of education in the Negev District of the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture. In the course of his career, he acquired a Master's degree in public health and a Ph.D. in anthropology, devoting several years to research.

Abu-Rabi'a's stated purpose in writing this book was "to present a snapshot of the Bedouin in the Negev region in the twentieth century from the standpoint of education and development; comparing them with the Bedouin in Arab countries" (p. viii). One brief chapter is devoted to the history of the Negev Bedouin through the Ottoman period, and another to education in the Ottoman era. A third chapter provides an historical overview of the Negev Bedouin under the British Mandate (1917-48), and a fourth describes education during that era. A fifth chapter describes Bedouin education in the Negev during the first fifty years of Israeli control (1948-98). Each of these chapters is followed by one or more appendices documenting some feature of the era: a speech announcing the Ottoman Sultan's decision to establish a school in Beersheba; a list of tribal court judges in 1933; a list of Bedouin schools and principals in 1997-98 and so on. The sixth chapter is essentially an annotated list of tribes and sheikhs, and the final chapter is a survey of education among the Bedouin of Arab countries, based primarily on previously published studies.

The book suffers from a number of deficiencies. As suggested above, much of the text, as well as the appendices read more like research notes than a finished product. There is no explicit theoretical foundation or thesis, and little synthesis or analysis of the information presented. Furthermore, the author presents little in the way of anthropological perspective. Abu-Rabi'a recognizes that education must be seen in social and cultural context, and makes some reference to sociocultural effects of schooling--such as its role in sedentarization, the integration of tribes, and the estrangement of youth from their native environment. He confines his discussion of education to government-sponsored schooling, however, largely dismissing the traditional Quranic schools, as well as informal education. Although he provides statistical data on schools and enrollment and biographical sketches of a few pioneers in Bedouin education, he tells us almost nothing about life in schools and classrooms or even about the formal curriculum.

Even in the most analytical part of the book, an eight-page discussion of dropout rates and their causes, the author fails to cite data supporting the facilitating causal factors he proposes and gives little serious attention to the perspectives of the families or teachers that encourage some children to leave school early. His prescription for this problem is to assign an official of the Ministry of Education to work with Bedouin leaders, schools, and parents and to establish a unit of professionals "to prevent children from quitting school" (p. 103). Although he allows that "there must be no clash with Bedouin parents in the matter of 'authority' over their children, either in what relates to school, or in general" (p. 105) and makes some proposals linked to the specifics of the situation (e.g., develop a secondary school system solely for girls), he never questions the basic value of formal,

government sponsored schooling for all.

Despite the inclusion of some ethnographic as well as historical information on the Bedouin, this book is written much more from the perspective of the educational official than the anthropologist. This is disappointing, especially given the author's training, experience, and access to data. Personally, I would encourage him to write for his colleagues in anthropology and education, if not for others, a more in-depth, nuanced account of contemporary education among the Bedouin of the Negev, reflecting the multiple views of Bedouin leaders, educators, teachers, parents, and the children themselves.

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