



From congruent to non-congruent spaces: Dynamics of Bedouin production of space in Israel



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ABSTRACT

The speed with which the Negev Bedouin have been undergoing processes of change through induced sedentarization and urbanization provides a rare opportunity of revealing the dynamic nature of the production of space. Following the Lefebvrian framework of the production of space, attributes of perceived, conceived and lived facets of production of space are investigated in relation to economically distinct Bedouin communities (semi-nomadic pastoralists, sedentary farmers and urban wage laborers) that represent different stages along the transition process. We offer a distinction between Bedouin endogenously oriented space and exogenously oriented space and analyze the dialectical nature and dynamics of the production of hybrid spaces. The context within which such dialectical movements occur affects the congruence between the three facets of Bedouin space and, as a result, their ability to maintain a structured coherence between society, environment and economy.

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1. Introduction

The space of society is dynamic, and economic, cultural or political influences emanating from within or outside society can alter (at times radically) its qualities and attributes. When such alterations occur without the perceived control of society or under conditions of diminished economic, cultural or political capacity, they may result in dire social consequences (Rapoport, 1978). Such is the case with indigenous peoples' spatialities worldwide, where centuries of administration by colonial settler and nation states have caused displacement, forced migration and resettlement into specially established reserves. The de-spatialization of socially constructed indigenous space, coupled with the ongoing effects of colonization, dispossession, disempowerment and successive policies and practices of governments, have severely impacted the lives of indigenous peoples (Coates, 2004; Harris, 2002).

Although there is no accepted and agreed upon definition of indigenous peoples, the Bedouin of the Negev in southern Israel, numbering ~200,000 people and comprising approximately 2.7% of the country's population (~35% of the Negev region population), fall within this general category. Despite the recent internal debate in Israel (Frantzman et al., 2012), many accept that the Bedouin constitute an indigenous Arab-Muslim ethnic minority within the State of Israel, carrying many of the characteristics of a settler society (Yiftachel, 2006). In recent history, many of the once semi-no-

madic pastoral Bedouin of the Negev in southern Israel have experienced profound transitions due to the processes of sedentarization, forced displacement and induced urbanization. These transitions and processes were extensively studied from economic (Abu-Rabia, 2000), social (Dinero, 1997; Meir and Ben-David, 1993) and spatial perspectives (Meir, 1997) and were mostly framed within the broader context of nation-state vs. indigenous politics (Dinero, 2010; Nevo, 2003; Yiftachel, 2006, 2008). Recently, Bedouin research has begun to explore critical social theories that focus on human agency as a venue for the analysis of Bedouin spatialities and their reciprocal relations with social practices, constructed identities and sense of place (Abu-Rabia-Quider and Karplus, 2013; Ben-Israel, 2009; Karplus, 2010; Meir and Gekker, 2011).

These studies have enriched the field of indigenous geographies. In this field, researchers consider the ways in which historical and contemporary practices of nation-states have failed to silence or remove indigenous peoples and acknowledge the significance of indigenous peoples' representations of their own geographies (Howitt et al., 2009). Indeed, the discourse of indigenous geographies has been predominantly concerned with the specific, sustained and viable relationships indigenous people have with their particular social and physical environments in the face of political, economic and environmental pressures (Frantz and Howitt, 2012). Such a focus, which is critical of the enduring legacies of colonial regimes and sympathetic to indigenous plights, redirects scholarly attention from the articulation and analysis of 'traditional' and 'authentic' indigenous (i.e., indigenous knowledge,

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cultural performances, economic systems and spatial practices) into concepts of cultural diversity, ontological pluralism and indigenous rights, which receive center stage (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006; Roberts, 2012; Turnbull, 2005).

However, rather than remain fixed in bygone settings, indigenous peoples have experienced profound transformations through modernity, continuously reconstructing their traditional and authentic geographies through negotiation, resistance and selective appropriation (Shaw et al., 2006). In this work, we suggest that an appreciation of the manifestation of indigenous social spatiality requires not only a consideration of its traditional traits but also of its historically dynamic nature and the changing agency of communities to construct their space. In the case at hand, indigenous Bedouin space is thus conceived as a product of both the present social environment (economic, cultural and political) and the dialectical sediments of past spaces. With this in mind, we aim to shift the discourse on tradition away from registers focusing on authenticity towards an analysis that depicts dynamic processes of the Bedouin production of space following a transitional course from semi-nomadism to urbanity.

To best capture the workings of such dynamic processes, it is important to conceptually frame the relations between Bedouin society and its space. A partial outline for such an analysis is contained in the Lefebvrian conceptual model of the production of space (PoS) (Lefebvre, 1991[1974]), which is an analytical tool for understanding human-space relationships. The dynamics of Bedouin PoS connotes a wide array of themes present in the huge corpus of Lefebvre's works. These include the significance of industrialization, technology and shifts in 'modes of production' vis-a-vis transformations of space (Elden, 2004; Lefebvre, 1991[1974]) and his examination of rurality from synchronic (sociological/horizontal) and diachronic (historical/vertical) perspectives (Lefebvre, 2003[1953]). However, the intention of this paper is to offer new insights into Bedouin PoS processes and necessitates a much narrower engagement that primarily concentrates on one of Lefebvre's most influential contributions, namely, the conceptual triad of perceived, conceived and lived space. Offering an expanded account of the circuits of the production of space, we suggest that the dynamics of PoS are generated both internally, through social differentiation that results in contradictions and tensions within a space (Lefebvre's triad), and externally, through the differentiation between coexisting spaces.

This paper begins with an introduction of Lefebvre's model through which different facets of Bedouin PoS may be brought together and analyzed. The model is then operationalized empirically to depict the spatial traits of three distinct Bedouin communities representing different stages in the overall social transition from subsistence pastoralism to a wage-labor economy. We then consider the dynamic nature of Bedouin PoS and some of the socio-spatial challenges that arise from the present tension between Bedouin and state PoS. Finally, we discuss the conceptual value gained from a greater understanding of the dynamic nature of PoS processes.

2. A conceptual framework for investigating Bedouin PoS

The idea of social spatiality as developed by Lefebvre (1991[1974]), Harvey (1973) and Soja (1989, 1996) suggests that space is a product shaped and transformed by social agents in relation to their economic, cultural and political/power structures. In particular, Lefebvre (1991[1974]) offers an essential foundation for a conceptual engagement with the different spatial facets that comprise such production processes.

Lefebvre is concerned with the interrelations between paradigms and disciplines and the need to bring diverse strands of thought together to fully comprehend the human condition (Lefeb-

vre, 2009, 1991[1974]; 2004[1992]). Thus, when approaching spatio-analysis (1991[1974], 404), he aims to reconnect different elements of space analyzed individually (Merrifield, 2006; Shields, 1999). For Lefebvre, a central aspect of any social PoS is its multiplicity of facets, with space produced simultaneously as a concrete and abstract entity that is both perceived, conceived and emotionally infused with symbolism and meaning. Thus, Lefebvre offers a model for the social PoS based on a conceptual triad comprised of 'perceived,' 'conceived' and 'lived' spaces.

Perceived space is linked to the production and reproduction of economy and society. It is concrete physical arrangements and characteristics of a society's land-use patterns; a material space "secreted" by society (Lefebvre, 1991[1974], 38) and built upon the sediments of historical spatialities. Conceived space is an abstract formation that imposes order upon concrete space through laws, assigned values and the demarcation of jurisdictions. Lived space embodies the total experience of inhabitants in their everyday life. Through its use, space is produced, modified and invested with symbolism and meaning and offers a resolution of concrete (perceived) and abstract (conceived) concepts without being reduced to either, with space remaining as real and imagined. The latter may denote an emotional bonding agent between society and its space: an ideology of space and a sense of place. The former may denote an arena for spatial appropriation by groups from within the society who hold alternative or even subversive perceptions, conceptions and ideologies of the established space.

While each facet may be separately analyzed from a certain disciplinary perspective, it is their inter-relatedness that ultimately offers a more unitary and cohesive understanding of space. It is important to note, however, that given the ongoing dynamic nature of PoS and the fact that such analytical projects can seldom escape their inherently partial, positioned and contingent perspectives, even with the deployment of the Lefebvrian triad, space will always remain partially elusive.

Nonetheless, Lefebvre's approach to social spatiality gave birth to numerous theoretical and empirical works (e.g., Charnock and Ribera-Fumaz, 2011; Elden, 2004; Gottdiener, 1993; Halfacree, 2007; Light and Smith, 1998; Merrifield, 2000; Soja, 1989). Scholars found new insights in Lefebvre's conceptualizations of the mechanisms of urban capitalist economic space and gained an avenue to further conceptually develop and empirically analyze power relations and social struggles (cf. Morris and Fondahl, 2002; Soja, 1989; Yacobi, 2003).

Many of these studies were directed towards the spatial configuration of the producing society, which is usually manifested by the urban scale (reflecting Lefebvre's own interest), and not that of the producing society itself. The spatial focus enables the study of different aspects of complex urban settings as they physically manifest themselves and are conceived through the consensual or coerced appropriation of space by leading or dominating hegemonic agents (Gramsci, 1971; Hart, 2002) and through the re-appropriation of urban settings by opposing agents in class, race, gender and self-determination struggles. Thus, a frequent approach is to regard space as a tool and key contributor in shaping societies, producing social inequalities and providing opportunities for counter-hegemonic resistance (cf. Borden, 2001; Purcell, 2001). This approach holds great value in highlighting the 'turbulent' process of PoS (Gregory, 1994, 356) and directs our attention to environments of contestation where social heterogeneity and stratification lead to struggles for controlling space as local actors sense a disparity between their everyday experiences or ideals of space (how space is lived or should ideally be) and the way space is being materially and conceptually produced.

Such turbulence brings out the dialectical element of the PoS (a thorough contextual reconstruction of Lefebvre's dialectic approach is offered by Elden (2004) and Schmid (2008)). Lefebvre's

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