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'Bedouin Boy With Camel': An Analysis of Archival Photographs of Bedouin Children in Palestine

Edna Barromi-Perlman [a,b] and Ruth Kark[c]

[a]University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel; [b]Kibbutzim College of Education, Tel Aviv, Israel; [c]Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes photographs found in historical archives of Bedouin children in Palestine from over a hundred years ago. The Bedouin children were photographed in their natural environment by foreign European photographers touring the Holy Land. Young children were photographed held by their mothers, at work, on a path, or near the tent. The research unravels the context in which the pictures were constructed, documented, and archived. The study explores how colonialist photography in the region generated tropes of presentation of Bedouin children and examines its effects on forms of representation of their childhood of the time. The Bedouin women's inferior status in society and its impact on the documentation of women and children are also examined. The study highlights notions of other children dressing up as 'Hebrew Bedouins' for studio portraiture as part of an orientalist cliché.

KEYWORDS

Bedouin; photography; children; childhood; culture; colonialism; postcolonialism; palestine

Introduction

In this study, we analyse from a postcolonial perspective the photographic presentation of nomadic Bedouin children in Palestine from the mid-nineteenth century, when photography was invented, and up to the mid-twentieth century. The underlying premise of postcolonial analysis is that 'photography itself serves as a vehicle for establishment power mechanisms based on systems of oppression, and is used as a tool to convey ideology and to manufacture narratives, myths, and national terminology' (Sela 2014, N/P). A postcolonial approach inquires how interests and practices of representations cohere (Said 1993). In the negligible existing number of photographs of Bedouin children in the period under study found in our research, the children appear only from afar. Moreover, these pictures were archived and categorized according to the Western forms of categorization and classification. These archival systems and photographic tropes, that did not reflect the children's authentic culture or way of life, shaped the viewers' perception of these children. On the face of it, there is little information in the photographs regarding childhood among Bedouin tribes in Palestine. This lack of information and scarcity of

CONTACT Edna Barromi-Perlman Edna.barromi@smkb.ac.il; Ruth Kark ruthkark@mail.huji.ac.il University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel; Kibbutzim College of Education, Tel Aviv, Israel; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel

images, accompanied by the fixed style of photographing children, served as an incentive for our study. We wondered, why do the children appear from afar, do not fill the entire frame, and are not dressed up for portraiture? Why are the photographs categorized in such a manner?

Background for the Research

During the period under study, from the end of the nineteenth and during British Mandate rule in the first half of the twentieth century, Western tourists photographed in Palestine for leisure and personal endeavours. They were not under obligation to note the specific location and data regarding the photographed people, tribes, and individuals. Furthermore, there existed a desire to create biblical reproductions, in which people were presented as backward, primitive beings, ethnic types, and idle men in dilapidated surroundings (Barromi Perlman 2017). Sela explains that a general colonial gaze characterized this type of photography, particularly in the Holy Land, where indigenous people were often presented in a biblical context or 'seen from a patronizing point of view' (Sela 2007, 108).

In these pictures, the Bedouin nomadic tribes living in the desert were perceived as living an exotic life. They were photographed in their natural environment in or around their tents or on desert paths. In the photographs taken usually from a distance, the children appeared small; they did not create direct eye contact, often lacking a return of the gaze. Many of these images of children found their way into archives under generic categorizations such as 'Bedouin boy' of 'Bedouin child'. Our survey of historical archives of photographs of Bedouins in Palestine during this period has shown that the children were rarely the focus of the pictures. We claim this was a form of 'non-representation' of children (Ledin and Machin 2018), which is a choice to omit a person or people, which results in a lack of presentation, or non-presentation. Our argument is strengthened by the omission of Bedouin children as a distinct category in the archives. This void in the categorization system served as a basis for a particular socio-historical viewing of the images, as is explained by Graham-Brown:

> When looking at photographs in the context of social history, other forms of meaning must be taken into consideration. These include the context in which the photograph was taken, the relationships of power, and ideological considerations which affected the photographer's choice of subject and the way the photograph might be interpreted by its viewers in a particular historical period. (Graham-Brown 1988, 3).

Western photography at the time observed people in colonial countries through their own lens, resulting in a Western format of documenting reality. 'The critique of colonial photography is that it subjugates the indigenous inhabitants in the eyes of the Western viewers. It manipulates scientific, realistic documentation into forms of control by creating systems of categorization' (Barromi-Perlman and Kark 2019, 29). Sheehi (2016) asks: 'How does looking at photography from the 'East' allow the photograph to be read differently? … [M]ust photography not 'look' and be looked at differently in the context of the Middle East? (N/P). Building on Sheehi, we argue that foreign photographers in Palestine, who documented the Bedouin children, did so according to Western structuring and viewing codes, as is shown in this study. We claim that this archiving

practice that has remained to this day, potentially perpetuates an ideological and hegemonic world view among Western viewers, who are the primary audience of these archival images.

As demonstrated in Figure 1, this approach perpetuated a dismissive attitude towards Bedouin children, as far as viewing and reading photographs are concerned. Figure 1 shows one of the few photographs in the Matson collection categorized under 'children'. In general, archives incorporate 'texts and images that create connotations by association, conveying ideological messages' (Barromi-Perlman 2011, 13). In the case of Figure 1, the words 'costumes' and 'characters' precede the word 'children'. Furthermore, the children are referred to as 'Children on Camel', so that decoding the image of children with the text contextualizes them not as children, but as 'on camel'. In addition, 'costumes' and 'characters' are the first and second textual signs in the caption, making 'children' less significant than costumes and culture. This categorization ranks the children's importance as last before the camel and creates a particular referent. It is not simply any child; it is a nameless Bedouin child on a camel. 'The very joint apperception of the photograph and of the connotative textual message behind it is a process that binds together the spectators as referents … capable of reading the archive's codes, identifying them, and interpreting them as visual symbols' (Barromi-Perlman 2011, 14). This example shows how foreign photographers and archivists helped create visual social templates of Bedouin children employing codification and categorization methods.

Most of the photographs selected for this study were taken more than a hundred years ago, during the Ottoman Empire and the first two decades of the British Mandate in

Figure 1. 'Costumes, characters, etc. Bedouin children on camel.' 1900–1920. Library of Congress, G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection. https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.15115/.

Palestine, beginning in 1920. At the end of the nineteenth century, the development of photography and the unstable political situation in the Ottoman Empire enabled the new technology to influence concepts of land ownership in Palestine. This new medium drew the attention of the Western world and Europe to the region's potential economic development.

The European middle class that emerged following the industrial revolution had the means and leisure to travel on Grand Tours. A growing number of its members responded to the attraction of Palestine, which served as a magnet for photographers, pilgrims, tourists, missionaries, and painters (Kark 2020; Bar and Cohen-Hattab 2003; Hannavy 2008). In the period under investigation (1850- 1948), the region's sites, ruins, and peoples had been widely documented by European exploration expeditions. Sela writes that 'Expeditions that included government and military officials, academic researchers and scientists, writers, religious institutions, and commercial bodies were sent to explore the region, with participating photographers and illustrators translating imperialist aspirations and Western interests in the Near East into visual language' (Sela 2021, 198).

It is important to note that the explorations and scientific expeditions during this period prepared the ground for the transfer of control in the region from Ottoman to British rule in 1917, by exploring, photographing, measuring and excavating the land and archeological sites. The majority of the period's photographs were found in institutional archives that are a product of British imperialism of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. The pictures reflect the distinct colonial style of photographing and portraiture of indigenous populations. This form, which is based on notions of appropriation and entitlement towards the locals that developed throughout the British Empire (Barromi-Perlman and Kark 2019), applies to the photographs of the Bedouins in Southern Palestine.

Archival Photographs of Children

This paper analyses eleven photographs of children selected from the fruits of extensive research of archival material. We chose photographs that reflected our major themes for analysis: children at work, mothers and babies, and Bedouin families outside their tent. For comparative purposes, we chose a studio photograph of a child created by Avraham Soskin, a professional photographer in Tel Aviv; a studio photograph of a family portrait made in Europe; and three photographs of Jewish children from a private photo album. The criteria for the selection were designed to generate a discussion on the distance from the object, its background, proximity, angle, return and control of the gaze, composition, categorization system, and contextual information.

The visual analysis used in this study incorporates different ways of selecting, interpreting, and analysing data found in archives, publications, exhibits, and catalogues. We have extensively mapped and surveyed academic publications of children's images and created a typology of photographs for this research.[1]

On top of the visual data, our analysis deals with the photograph's surface and its materiality. Materiality relates to the archival textual data on the image's surface beyond the information in the picture. It includes captions written on the frame, besides or on the reverse side of the image. The relevant text of the filing system and categorization records that engage with the past are also analysed.

Our survey of the material created within the timeframe of this research (1850-1948) revealed approximately 100 historical photographs of Bedouin children in Palestine. They were either stereoscopic photographs, glass plates, or thirty-five-millimeter film photographs. We found that across all the archives, these children were photographed similarly in their natural settings: in the field, walking on a path, near the family tent, in proximity to their mothers, and grazing areas; infants usually appeared held by the mothers. We have not found any close-ups or portraitures of children in the ordinary sense of the word in this time frame, in which the child's image or face fills up the frame.

Photography of Bedouin Children in Palestine

Photography in Palestine played a part in spreading Eurocentric colonialism that entailed establishing political, social, and cultural superiority over lands and peoples. 'For the European powers — the British and French in particular — the nineteenth century was a century of discovery during which they extended their economic, political and cultural hegemony over most of the non-industrialized world' (Nassar 2006a, 326). Assi (2018) writes that the British considered the Bedouins a destructive race of foreign invaders and illegal intruders involved in a constant struggle against modern forms of settlement, progress, and economics.

The expansion of European colonialism was accompanied by efforts to create an objective, scientific categorization of the local population. Pultz explains that Europeans exerted social control over colonized peoples by describing their bodies: 'Photographs seemed to be truthful, uninflected restatements of the world. The fact that the power of the photographs to control and stereotype was invisible made them especially insidious tools in the establishment and maintenance of colonialism' (Pultz 1995, 21). Waites (2018) offers photographs as visual evidence combined with contextual appraisal, since far from being objective photographs are open to readings and interpretations that can be manipulated and coerced. In this context, colonial photography was used as a tool for a combination of visual appropriation of land and control over its people (Barromi-Perlman 2020). These power relationships, created by means of documentation, are explained by Rizzo, stating that photographs can 'be interpreted as documents, as material products resulting from a social interaction, or as an encounter between photographer and photographed at a particular moment in time. Yet, it is an asymmetrical relationship, dictating the terms under which subjects get access to the means and mode of production and objects are constituted within particular knowledge regimes' (Rizzo 2005, 705–6). Nassar explains that 'These relationships incorporate not only aesthetic considerations but ideological ones as well. In this sense, the photograph is a tool of power and authority by which both the photographer and the viewer through their gaze conquer the world of the subject and assign meanings to it' (Nassar 2006a, 318).

Figure 2 from The Library of Congress collection shows a Bedouin child in a stereograph. The Bedouin child is standing near a camel, holding its rein. The child is photographed from a few metres away, so it is hard to discern his features or facial language. There are large rocks in the image's foreground, which create a visual barrier. This barrier combines a visual and cultural separation between the child and the viewer. His clothing is undiscernible, and he is barefoot. Photographing from afar

Figure 2. Bedouin boy with camel, 1900–1920. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

objectifies the child by creating a visual distance that connotes belonging to a remote culture.

However, it should be noted that the distance and separation from the child can also be explained by technical factors. Cumbersome photographic equipment and technology affected the spontaneity of the photographers. The heavy equipment of glass-plate cameras used till the end of the nineteenth century prevented spontaneity, flexibility with angles, and positioning of the cameras. This hindrance did not allow the photographers to skip over rocks or follow the children on the path as we would today with our cameras and smartphones. A different approach by the photographer might have included lowering the camera to the children's eye level, capturing their smiles, group playing, or being content with their families. Such an approach would humanize them and generate a liking and empathy towards the children and their lifestyle. What the viewer is left with is a rigid image with an archival caption stating merely 'Bedouin boy with camel'. The text indicates that the image is not of a boy, but a 'boy *and* a camel' referred to equally. To the Western eye, the visual connotation of the caption is that of a child roaming barefoot in the desert, working at a young age.

Despite the uniqueness of each colonial region and country, the similarities in styles, approaches, and genres of colonial photography of inhabitants culminated in photographs that 'invaded European and American homes that contributed to the shaping in the European mind of an image of Palestine' (Nassar 2006, 326). Azoulay describes this as an imperial grammar of photographic archives and suggests non-imperial modes as an alternative (Azoulay 2019, 19). Azoulay argues that colonial power and hegemony both shape and are shaped by Western forms of knowledge. As a result, certain

representations of colonial subjects and the native population have served as a legal and moral justification for European domination overseas (Azoulay 2019, 8). Behdad explains that the camera, as a mechanical means of documentation, 'ought to be viewed as an actor that made significant contributions to the orientalist network (Behdad 2017, 373). He adds that 'The availability of photographic albums of Middle Eastern antiquity and the Holy Land, the common display of photographs of the region in the world exhibitions, and the reproduction of images by photographic studios provided many people with a glimpse of "the Orient"' (Behdad 2017, 373–374).

Characteristics of Bedouin Childhood

Due to photographic technology, the portraits of Bedouins by foreign photographers from this era were black and white. Consequently, the technical limitations of the era prevented the traditional rich Bedouin colours of embroidered clothing from being shown nor appreciated. The pictures show that the children were not dressed up for the occasion, groomed, cleaned, or combed. Actually, Bedouin culture did not develop children's clothes. In Arabia, for example, '[T]he costumes of children are similar to those of adults in terms of the design, the fabric, the decorations and the colours' (Alajaji 2012, 517). The traditional children's costumes in the Najd Bedouin settlements (Saudi Arabia) are miniature adult costumes. The costumes of Bedouin children in Arab countries are characterized by a lack of attention to decoration, due to economic and social factors (Alajaji 2012, 516).

This description aligns with Bedouin norms of childcare in the period under investigation. Ashkenazi's research in 1938 showed that Bedouin boys were often semi-dressed and barefoot until they reached puberty. At birth, a baby boy would be massaged with female camel urine (a custom that later changed because of its shortage). In winter, babies were not bathed; in summer, they were washed once a week or every other week, and the head and hair were not cleaned before the baby was one year old (Ashkenazi 1938; 1957). Thus, Western photographers encountered a culture with customs of hygiene that involved children with dishevelled hair. These children might have been privileged members within their tribes but probably appeared filthy, vulnerable, and neglected for Westerners viewing such photographs.

In general, in historical archival photographs, Bedouin children appear connected to the adult world surrounding them – near their parents or attending to chores. Modern nineteenth-century Western notions of childhood, in which children are protected, educated, and allowed time for play and recreation, were uncommon among the Bedouins. Hence, their images do not conform to Western notions of childhood in which children are seen playing games or holding toys. 'Playing suggests having fun, messing around' (Katsap and Silverman 2016, 38). Huss and Alhaiga-Taz (2012), who studied Bedouin children's experiences, advocate a holistic understanding of childhood. They explain that '[C]hildren's experience from a social and cultural perspective is understood as ecologically embedded within and shaped by specific physical and social contexts, in addition to inherent character traits and direct family interactions' (Huss and Alhaiga-Taz 2012, 1).

As in all pre-industrial societies, Bedouin children were socialized to perform specific gender roles of labour from the young age of four or five. Fernea writes that among

the Bedouins, '[C]hildhood was not seen as a specific bounded time period, and adolescence, as perceived in modern western thought, scarcely existed. One moved from babyhood through childhood to puberty and adulthood' (Fernea 1995, 10). She adds that 'there is little evidence of carefree childhood or indeed childhood as an important stage in itself … the period of childhood is a nuisance, and childhood activities, especially play, are a waste of time' (Fernea 1995, 10). Katsap and Silverman (2016) describe how nowadays Bedouin children's games are attuned to sand and specific desert conditions, such as playing with pebbles and stones. Games can include physical skills, as in combat or hunting. But we have not found photographs of leisure, games, or play of Bedouin children from that period. It stands to reason that a photographer at the time would not find an allotted physical space or place for children, such as an outdoor playground. The children's place in a physical and visual sense is absent. None of the archival photographs indicate childhood other than proximity to the mothers.

The physical distance of the children from the photographers in the pictures was possibly a result of cultural superstitions; Bedouin boys are taught to keep a distance from strangers. According to Abu-Rabia, the Bedouins believe that baby boys are more susceptible to the evil eye than girls. The newborn baby is thought to be vulnerable (*najmih khafif, hassas*) to the gaze of a stranger or even a strange look by someone familiar to the family that may cause harm and bad luck (Abu-Rabia 2005, 248). Belief and superstition play a significant role in Bedouin culture, and fear of the evil eye 'is tied to the fear of envy and jealousy in the eye of the beholder. It is said to be conveyed by a strange gaze' (Abu-Rabia 2005, 241). He adds that the power of the evil eye is so strong that 'a covetous look towards the baby can potentially jeopardize the child's well-being. It is also believed that undesirable traits can be transferred to the baby through an alien gaze, touch, or kiss (2005, 248).

Irrespective of the children's recoil from foreigners, notions of childhood are reflected not only by what is present but also what is absent in the images, such as signs of affection, smiles, laughter, frolicking, or being children rather than miniature adults. This created a void in the presentation of Bedouin childhood, caused by the absence of a comprehensive reflection of Bedouin society's fabric.

Le Febvre (2015) explains another aspect of understanding the fabric of the Negev Bedouin society, that relates to their local historicity which derives from the division of tribes, status, and lineage. It is an internal cultural perception that can only be understood from within, by the members of the Bedouin society; only they are familiar with their rituals, principles, customs, and performances. This is another example of how the western visual style of documentation of Bedouin culture was not involved in reflecting the society from within, but rather objectified the people and particularly the children in this case, by not engaging with the children's tribal status or lineage and by omitting information and data in the archival records, limiting the description to 'boy' or 'child'.

Mothers and Children in Photographs

Bedouin culture is a patrilineal, male-oriented system (Abu-Lughod 1999). Tribal segments can only grow through the addition of males, and power is measured by their number (Abu-Lughod 1999, 122). Marx explains that Bedouins tribes are 'firmly organized in relatively small corporate groups of men, whose members are recruited by patrilineal

descent' (Marx 1973, 413). The marginalization of women in Bedouin society conflated the superstitions mentioned above. Fischel and Kark explain that 'Bedouin women avoided meeting and speaking with men, in particular strange men. Furthermore, they did not walk alone along the roads' (Fischel and Kark 2012, 84). This resulted in photographs of Bedouin women hidden behind clothing and ornaments, often in passing near a well or working in a field:

> Bedouin women carried a large burden of the herding, watering, and feeding of camels, goats, and sheep raised by their tribes. They also maintained the upkeep of their tents or shacks and made cheese and other goods to sell for cash needed by their clans (Fischel and Kark 2012, 83).

In this patriarchal culture, women were expected to be 'invisible' and hide their faces when encountering strangers and photographers. The primary source of female inferiority lies in the association of femininity with reproduction. The women are considered tainted by menstruation and sexuality; their path to gain respectability is by having sons and being modest. As raising the young children is their responsibility, they appear together in the documentation. 'Mothers and daughters are close and interdependent', according to Abu-Lughod (1999, 122). They spend a great deal of time together while daughters help their mothers with chores and work. Therefore, we expected to see that a child photographed in proximity to a mother would be a daughter. Yet, there seemed to be no clear visual distinction between male and female infants in the photographs.

Figure 3. Bedouin woman, with her children, 1938, Southern Palestine, standing before their tent. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

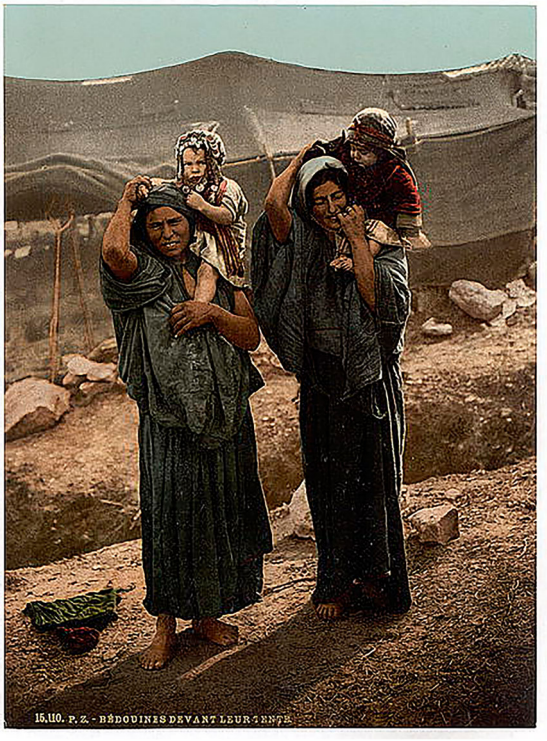


Figure 4. Bedouin women and children, 1890–1900. Holy Land. Creative Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bedouins_and_children_outside_tent,_Holy_Land-LCCN2002725066.jpg.

In Figures 3 and 4, the formal construction and visual codes of presentation are similar, though they were taken forty years apart. In Figure 3, we see the mother standing in front of a tent, holding a baby in her arms and touching the older child's head lightly with her other hand. The mother's face is covered and turned sideways. The head is not only inclined but also turned away from the photographer.

In Figure 4, the mothers are holding their children and each child is seated on the mother's left shoulder. They are posed in front of a tent. It is not clear if the subject matter is the mothers, the children, or an image of both. The women are looking back at the photographer but not communicating with him. It does appear that the women could influence the final product despite being its subject. The tent in the background shows that the photograph was taken close to home. The colour photograph of Figure 4 made the pictures more appealing to the viewers and promoted its sale as a postcard, portraying an exotic culture. In both images, the mothers appear protective of their babies, shielding and protectively holding them. Furthermore, in observing these pictures there appear similarities; the mothers are barefoot, wearing amulets, and so are the children.

As in most of the archival photographs of the Bedouin people, in this case, too, there is a lack of information about the names of the women, their tribe, status (wives or slaves), location, and precise date. The information is limited to 'mother, children, and tents'. It should be noted that missionaries or tourists often took these kinds of photographs in the Holy Land. They were not part of ethnographic or scientific expeditions or had

scholarly purposes though some wrote journals or published articles (Behdad 2017). Thus, their pictures differ from the photographs of archeological sites taken by scientists on surveys expedition or excavations. Scientific research expeditions and surveys of Palestine, such as those undertaken by the Palestine Exploration Fund (founded in 1865), were driven by imperialist aspirations and religious or scientific motivations. They were nurtured by entitlement that feeds into the 'cosmopolitan imaginaries that were at play in the British Empire' (Vokes 2010, 378).

The phenomenon of tourist travellers explains the lack of ethnographic, historical, geographic, or cultural data in the case of Bedouin children, such as those found in Edwards' *Anthropology and Photography* (1992). Scientific anthropology was harnessed for colonial domination all over the British Empire, mainly by the Royal Anthropological Institute. Enjoying the expansion of the 'power of knowing', colonial domination was transformed into a rationalized, observed 'truth' (Edwards 1992, 6). Ultimately, the unprofessional and biased lack of attention to detail, as in the writing of 'Bedouin' or 'camel' alone, erases the people's individuality and features. The lack of information limits the possibilities of the photograph to portray a so-called 'truth' or to serve as fact-gathering classificatory evidence, mainly because the textual data necessary for proof does not exist. Furthermore, we have found a consistent similarity in the form of presentation of the Bedouin children in this timeline, even though the photographs were taken fifty years apart. Hence, we are convinced that the images of Bedouin children by foreign photographers in Palestine, from before the direct British Mandate, carry similar traits, which are based on Western colonial notions towards children.

Photographs of Bedouin Families in a Comparative Perspective

Figures 5 presents a Bedouin family, found in the Keystone View Company archive, which historically purchased negatives for their archives. It appears in the library of congress archive under subject categorization of 'Children, Dwellings, Families'. The letter P indicates that the image is classified as part of an educational series of the

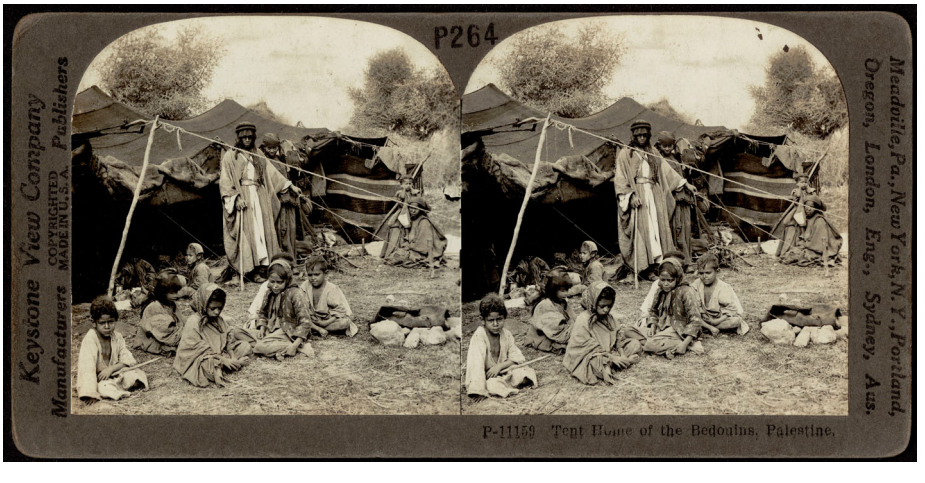
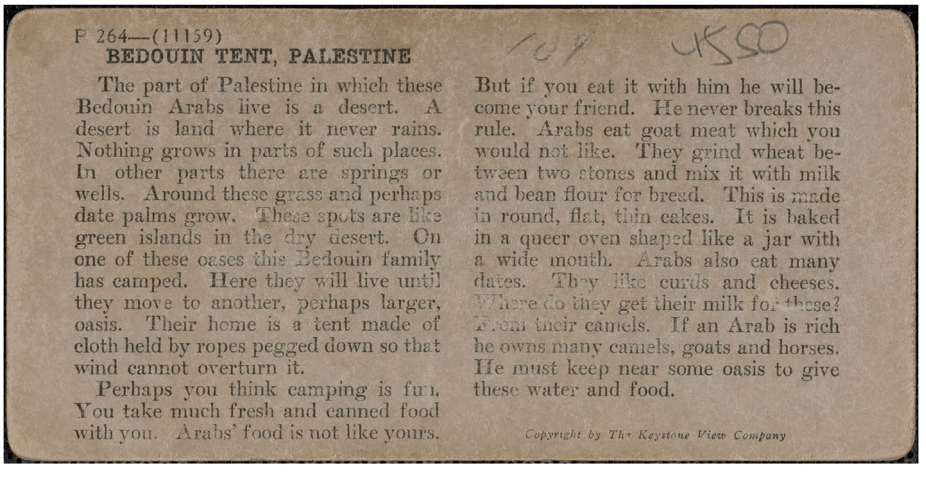


Figure 5. Tent home of the Bedouins. Palestine [ca. 1879–1930] (front) Creative Commons https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:02871 × 12g.

company's education department, intended for elementary school children. The children are seated on the ground in the image while the man is standing in the background, shielding a woman behind him. Another woman is sitting holding a child in the background. Seven children appear in this stereograph. They take up a small section of the frame because of their height. While the two wives are hidden in the background, the man is tall, holding a cane stretching out his hand. The children are barefoot, wearing tattered clothes, and seated on the ground, ignoring the photographer.

The standing adults and seated children, the children's lack of a returned gaze, and their overall appearance make them appear of lesser significance. The children are not the focus of the image. They appear in a context referred to in the caption: 'Tent home of the Bedouins'. This photograph, in which the parents stand and the children are exposed at the forefront of the frame, is labelled, 'A Bedouin family portrait'. The text does not specify the family's tribe or the number of men and women, children, or gender. The generic term 'Bedouins' extends the visual social distancing into a literal one since the categorization mechanism objectifies them. This image-making is not intended to reflect the fabric of this Bedouin family – their nomadic culture and forms of parenting in a culture geared toward preserving traditional familial values (Abu-Lughod 1999).

Palestine's Bedouin culture and lifestyle were rooted in the region's nomadic history. Their history counts back to waves of immigration to southern Palestine from Arabia, Transjordan, the Sinai Peninsula, and Egypt for 200 years. The nomadic economy was based on grazing sheep, goats, and camels. In the Ottoman period, the Bedouin retained their nomadic lifestyle, moving their mobile tents to different locations during the seasons (Bailey 1980). Goering (1979) wrote that the life of the Negev Bedouin remained unaltered in a 'world without time' although a few tribes shifted to semi-nomadic life after the end of the Ottoman period in Palestine in 1918; a century and a half ago, censuses were uncommon. '[B]y the end of the British Mandate, there were seven Bedouin tribes that included some 95 sub-tribes. Their population size was estimated at between 73,000 (1922) and 49,000 (1945)' (Kark and Frantzman 2012, 77). It is difficult to determine the total population of Bedouins at the time of the pictures researched; most were


P 264—(11159)
BEDOUIN TENT, PALESTINE

The part of Palestine in which these Bedouin Arabs live is a desert. A desert is land where it never rains. Nothing grows in parts of such places. In other parts there are springs or wells. Around these grass and perhaps date palms grow. These spots are like green islands in the dry desert. On one of these oases this Bedouin family has camped. Here they will live until they move to another, perhaps larger, oasis. Their home is a tent made of cloth held by ropes pegged down so that wind cannot overturn it.

Perhaps you think camping is fun. You take much fresh and canned food with you. Arabs' food is not like yours. But if you eat it with him he will become your friend. He never breaks this rule. Arabs eat goat meat which you would not like. They grind wheat between two stones and mix it with milk and bean flour for bread. This is made in round, flat, thin cakes. It is baked in a queer oven shaped like a jar with a wide mouth. Arabs also eat many dates. They like curds and cheeses. Where do they get their milk for these? From their camels. If an Arab is rich he owns many camels, goats and horses. He must keep near some oasis to give these water and food.

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Figure 6. Tent home of the Bedouins. Palestine [ca. 1879–1930] (back) Creative Commons https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:02871 × 12g.

nomads, and some were semi-nomadic, affecting the differing census counts. As amplified in Figure 6, the Bedouin appeared in records only as 'Others' in some cases, and in general, classified as nomadic. Figure 6 is the reverse of the stereograph of Figure 5 and includes the following statements: 'Perhaps you think camping is fun. You take much fresh and canned food with you. Arab's food is not like yours. But if you eat it with him, he will become your friend. ..'. This caption delineates the 'other.' You and Us. We, Westerns, like camping with canned foods. They are not like you; their food is different. But it is easy to befriend 'them' by partaking of 'their' food. This description of the Bedouin's foreign culture oversimplifies the social differences and the way of life of the people in the image which, in this case, was done as part of an educational kit.

It may be argued that this is a 'thick description' – giving meaning to the image in simple terms for the children's understanding through an interpretation of the culture (Geertz 1973). This derives from the understanding that thick descriptions are designed to make cultural outsiders understand social actions and pay attention to everyday arbitrary events that can convey important social notions and are intended for broad audiences of readers (Ponterotto 2006). Geertz argues that 'The notion that one can find the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up in so-called "typical" small towns and villages is palpable nonsense. What one finds in small towns and villages is (alas) small-town and village life' (Geertz 1973, 319). The caption of Figure 6 represents a misconception that by acquiring so-called knowledge of other cultures' small towns, the cultural differences between different worlds can be transcended. Instead of acknowledging the world's colonial order from which the images stem, similarities between the Western and Bedouin cultures are assumed, promising that they will 'become your friend' by eating their food.

The same conceptions underlay the American *National Geographic* magazine, which although not European, carries a similar attitude of Western entitlement. It is rich with feature stories and photographs of remote cultures and peoples but has developed superficial knowledge among its readers (Neuhaus 1997). Neuhaus argues that the 'Other' is secured a smooth place in the American melting pot by equating seeing with understanding in this magazine. This conception is part of 'tourist stance behind a camera' culture (Neuhaus 1997, 21) that implies 'that there was never much difference in the first place' (Neuhaus 1997, 7). This approach paved a particular path for citizens' journey in the hegemonic world. Similarly, the sentence, 'perhaps you think camping is fun' (in Figure 6 above) was probably written to create a common ground of pleasure. Yet, at the same time, other sentences express the hegemonic position by reminding the readers that they would not like goat meat and that the oven's shape is 'queer', as appears in the original text.

European Bourgeoisie

The cultural gap between the Bedouins and the Western bourgeoisie could not have been wider. In nineteenth-century Western societies, the children of the wealthy were photographed as individuals, particularly if they were perceived as future heirs, carriers of the family name, or expected to inherit a title. Unlike the documentation of the Bedouins by tourist photographers, the British Victorian style of children's portraits that influenced the entirety of Europe, involved commissioned photographs that entailed portraiture

Figure 7. Family portrait, Rome 1899. Courtesy of Author.

codes and aesthetics of photographic studios. It also became more common to integrate children in family portraits. Figure 7 shows a family portrait in which five siblings are photographed with their mother. The youngest child in this photograph is seated on a high stool to prevent stark differences in height. Each sibling is dressed in their attire, and the body language of each is distinct. The photographer stages the photograph. The governing principle of such a family portrait is to allow each member a distinctive appearance and show that the family is bonded while also enabling their own space. They are all gazing intently at the camera, indicating that the staged family portrait was planned and controlled.

The Extension of Orientalism: Dressing up as Bedouins in Palestine

Orientalist portraiture clichés influenced Western styles of children's portraiture. They emerged in the nineteenth century, involving stereotypes and tropes of Middle Eastern populations. The use of costume in photographic portraiture in that period presented a form of modernity, a fluidity of identities, and an indicator of the social status of the sitter. People were dressed up in costumes selected by photographers for photographing in their studios. Costumes presented foreign cultures that were exotic and erotic.

Woodward (2009) describes how orientalist photography recycles familiar stereotypes and clichés. The stereotypes create fictional worlds that assure audiences of their superiority. Hannoosh explains that 'the use of costume allowed for a "trying on" of different identities during a period of dramatic transformation in Ottoman dress and social practices, identities which could change as easily as the sitter's clothes' (Hannoosh 2016,

16). It was common to dress up as Turks, Greeks, Arabs, and Bedouins. The garb worn by sitters in professional studios had the same function as the props and the background. The photographers created an illusion of a tangible connection with distant lands and remote peoples for the sitters.

Orientalism in studio-portraiture of children was adopted by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to Palestine during the early twentieth century. The photographer Avraham Soskin, who immigrated to Palestine from Russia in 1904, provides an example. Soskin's studio was located in Tel Aviv (founded in 1909), the most modern Jewish city in pre-State Israel. Composed of a diverse, mainly immigrant population, Tel Aviv developed an urban culture. Soskin's portraits visualized the Orientalist yearning of the Jewish pioneers in Palestine to be absorbed into a form of Middle Eastern 'Arabism'. Sela writes about the trend of 'staging "exotic"' studio portraits of Westerners or local Jews dressed up in Palestinian clothing with Oriental-looking objects in the background; scenes which catered to Eurocentric fantasies of an enchanted Orient' (Sela 2021, 204). Orientalism presented a patronizing Western world attitude towards the Arab people in Palestine, which the local Zionists adopted. According to Guez, the Zionists in Palestine imagined the Levant as a possible future identity for the Zionist project (Guez 2015, 132). In the studio portraits that Soskin created, the sitters often wore Arab and Bedouin garbs such as kufiyahs, abayas, and more.

In Soskin's studio, children could choose costumes or various garbs and props, as shown in Figure 8. The boy is in full dress with every detail thought out: the hands holding the knife, the angle of the portrait, and the length of the body in the frame. Hannoosh writes that such photographs contained a 'mixed character, bringing together photographers of diverse origin practicing in different places, photographs produced in one place and made available in others, mass-produced images sold across the region' (Hannoosh 2016, 27). Soskin photographed local Jewish European immigrants in oriental attire, integrating diverse origins, practices, and places in his photographs. This practice aligned with the Zionist attempts to 'to pose with those Arab accessories … designed to embody the success of the Zionist project in transforming children who were exilic Jewish victims to natives who have become part of the local landscape' (Zerubavel, 2008, 315). As part of the attempt to create a new prototype of Zionist Jewish children in their promised land, a new hybrid visual construct, the 'Hebrew Bedouin', was created (Zerubavel, 2008, 316). In the eyes of those Zionists, who portrayed themselves as courageous Bedouin warriors, the Bedouin culture and lifestyle presented a 'symbolic link to the ancient Hebrew' and the biblical past (Zerubavel, 2008, 319). The *kufiya* and *abaya*, the men's headdress and cloak, resembled portrayals of ancient Hebrews, displaying a local identity. Soskin's photograph of a Jewish boy dressed up as a Bedouin adult male (Figure 8) epitomizes this idea.

Nassar explains that this practice of orientalist photography also applied to non-Bedouin Arabs in Palestine, beginning with Christian Arab families and later extending to Muslim families. Interestingly, within the local Arab culture, the Bedouins were considered exotic and different but situated at the bottom of the social scale amongst local Muslim and Christian Palestinians. The Bedouins are a distinct group within the Arab population, being nomads and semi-nomads and because of their kinship networks, social structure, language, culture, history, lifestyle, heritage, and Sunni Islam. According to Nassar: 'It appears that the newly emerging class of urban aristocracy had fully adopted European attire and lifestyle and, along with it, the perception of peasants and Bedouins

Figure 8. Photograph of a boy by Avraham Soskin, 1922. Courtesy of Piki Wiki. https://www.pikiwiki.org.il/gallery/?s=%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%9F&page = 2.

as exotic Orientals' (Nassar 2006b, 147). Photographs by the Armenian and Arab photographers Krikorian and Khalil Ra'ad in the 1920s in their Jerusalem studios portray Arab women dressed as Bedouins. The photographers 'had a number of costumes at the disposal of their customers who could choose to be photographed in the guise of other "more exotic" locals' (Nassar 2006b, 147).

However, the Bedouin themselves were not a subject of portrayal for the local Arab photographers. There were also no known Bedouin photographers and publications of Bedouin tribes' pictures by either Bedouin or Palestinian photographers in Palestine at the time. Unsurprisingly, no photographs of or by Bedouins were included in Walid Khalidi's book, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948* (Khalidi 2010). In the book, the Jerusalem-born historian Khalidi compiled photographs by Palestinian photographers which portray Palestine as a thriving country culturally and economically, thus undermining the conventional stereotype of the Palestinians' backwardness.

Portraits of Bedouins were not captured by local Jewish institutions either. Jewish photographers were hired by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) to photograph Jewish pioneers' Zionist endeavour of land settlement on Kibbutzim for fund-raising and land acquisition. The JNF archive contains photographs of Bedouins from 1901-2013, but less than fifty are dated before the establishment of Israel in 1948. Additionally, most were not taken by Jewish photographers and are available in other archives. Five of those photographs show children, of which two are girls' portraits. Most of the photographs of groups of Bedouin children in the JNF archive are from Bedouin schools from 2005 onwards. The style of photography in all of them is consistent with the findings of this research.

Private Photographs from a Family Album of Jewish Children Dressed as Bedouins

Figures 9 present personal family photographs of Dr. Yehudah Ben Assa's children. Ben Assa was a Jewish physician who treated the Bedouin population of the Northern Negev in Israeli governmental clinics from 1953 to 1966 (Barromi-Perlman and Kark 2019). In these photographs, his children are dressed as Bedouins on the Jewish holiday of Purim, when Jewish children traditionally dress up in costumes and are photographed. Dr. Ben Assa befriended the Bedouins and was known among them as 'Abu Assa' (the father of Assa); he spoke their language, and along with his children and family, was hosted by them. As an amateur photographer, Ben Assa's photographs were a private collection, not exposed to the public eye and mainly intended for medical records and private family albums. Although those children's photographs dressed up in original Bedouin clothes follow the principles and style of Soskin, they create a cultural distinction between being Jewish and the reality of the Bedouin children. Unlike Soskin's studio portraits, Ben Assa's photographs do not present a condescending eye on Bedouin apparel or Bedouin culture.

However, the clothes in Ben Assa's photographs are not devoid of Israeli Orientalism, as described by Guez (2015). The backdrop of the photograph is Ben Assa's house in a modest middle-class neighbourhood of the family residence in Beer Sheba and the Negev desert. This residence signifies the Jewish settlement that introduced modernity and urbanism to the desert. The set of photographs demonstrates the extension of Bedouin culture into Israeli culture in the early years of the state, but with cultural distancing and lack of

Figure 9. Photographs of Ben Assa's children dressed up as Bedouin on the Jewish holiday of Purim.

integration. Bedouins continued to be someone 'you dress up as'. The fashion has since diminished as tensions between the Bedouin and the Israeli state have increased.

Conclusion

This research on the photography of Bedouin children in Palestine surveyed historical archives from over a hundred years ago, creating a database of a total of about 100 pictures. When we set out to explore this topic, we were expecting to find different forms of documentation, which would reap several categories of style and structure of photography. However, contrary to our expectations, we found consistency in style in all our data. Other than a handful of close-up portraits that proved insignificant, the entire body of work of photography on this subject had the same structure. Therefore, the focus of this study shifted to an attempt to shed light on this disturbing phenomenon and explain it from various angles.

The principal finding of the research is that Bedouin children and their families in Palestine's desert in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were photographed by Western photographers as 'others' in a consistent style, form and structure. The analysis of archival photographs uncovers the visual mechanisms that constructed the 'otherness' of the children. The documentation that was part of the imperial social order involved visual distancing from the children and physical nonintervention by the photographers.

As shown in this study, the outlook, gaze, and perspective of photography at the time developed into a trope and style that visually subjugated the Bedouin children in the viewers' eyes. The distancing prevented viewers from interacting closely with what they were looking at and consequently developing little understanding of the children's society and their childhood in that society.

The Bedouin population could not engage in image-making, and no published commercial studio photographs were commissioned by the tribes' chiefs at the time. But even the processes of change surrounding them (modernization under the British Mandate, influx of European travellers and Jewish pioneers, and a growing Palestinian population) did not push the Bedouin society towards image-making. The Bedouins lacked the agency to construct their own photographic documentation. They were subject to foreign photographers' style and genres with no control over the process, their presentation, and the viewing by the public.

The asymmetrical relationship resulted from a hierarchy in which Bedouin children were the not only subordinate subjects in foreign documentation but also within their own culture. Furthermore, images of children can be associated with notions of vulnerability and dependency. Viewing images of a foreign culture that ostensibly neglects its children because they appear filthy and barefoot contributes to a visual disempowerment of this group. Regardless of how the Bedouin society perceives childcare, parenting, child-rearing, and childhood, the intentional presentation of visual signs of neglect connotes subordination of these children. The original categorization system with captions and titles of 'Boy with Camel', which is still online and in digital archives, perpetuates the same notions of otherness and a sense of superiority towards Bedouin children. The danger lies in the comfort zones of the modern-day viewers; what we see, wish to see, and how we see it derives from our culture and conventions. Our viewing needs to be challenged to promote awareness and change.

Note

1. We explored archives of public and private collections. The public archives we consulted include the 1893 photographic albums of the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, the Israeli Government Picture collection, the archives of the University of Haifa, Piki wiki, the California Museum of Photography, UC Riverside, the PEF online archive and Flickr photographs, the Magnum archive, and the American Colony Archive and The Matson collection in the U.S. Library of Congress. The private collections we used are The Ken Jacobsen Orientalist photography collection, and the private archive of Dr. Yehuda Ben Assa. We also consulted the personal collection of John D. Whiting of the American Colony in Jerusalem, who photographed people, locations, and events in the Middle East from 1890–1954. Whiting created Diaries in Photos (1934–1939). Additionally, we surveyed books and academic publications.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on Contributors

Edna Barromi-Perlman is a research fellow of the Institute for Research of the Kibbutz and the cooperative idea in the University of Haifa, and an Honorary Research Associate of The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, at Brandeis University. USA. Her research focuses on archival photographs in Palestine and Israel, personal historical albums and analysis of gender and photography in Judaism. Her work appears in academic journals such as *Social Semiotics*, *Journal of Israeli History*, *Journal of Visual Literacy*, *Journal of Landscape Research, Journal of Media and Religion*, *Photography and Culture*, *Journal of Landscape Ecology*, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. She received her PhD at the University of Sussex, and her MFA in Goldsmiths College in the UK. Her book *Photographs of Childhood and Parenting on Kibbutz: Collective Memories and Private Memorials* was published in 2020. Edna is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Visual Literacy in Kibbutz College of Education in Israel.

Ruth Kark, Professor Emerita at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has written and edited 27 books and 200 articles on the history and historical geography of Palestine/Israel. Her research interests include among other topics, land and settlement activity, policy and law, Western civilizations and the Holy Land (consuls, churches, missionaries, modern technology), women and gender, museology and ethnographic museums, as well as the Bedouin in the Middle East.

ORCID

Edna Barromi-Perlman http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6405-8525

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