ORAL TRADITIONS OF NAQAB BEDOUIN WOMEN: CHALLENGING SETTLER-COLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH EMBODIED PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The Naqab Bedouin have faced—historically and today—various Israeli settler-colonial practices and discourses aimed at erasing their status as natives of the land. Israeli representations of the Naqab Bedouin often stereotype them as roaming nomads without any links (and consequently rights) to the land or to other Palestinian communities. Naqab Bedouin women’s oral and embodied traditions constitute an important challenge to such settler-colonial representations. Women’s songs, oral poetry and performances contain important historical counter-narratives, and they also function as embodied systems of learning, teaching, storing, and, to a certain extent, transmitting this community’s indigenous memories, knowledges and ways of being.

KEYWORDS: Naqab, Bedouin, Palestine, women, oral traditions, Zionism, settler-colonialism, song, poetry, resistance

Introduction

In one of my recent fieldwork trips to the Naqab, I visited the Israeli Museum of Bedouin Culture in the Jewish-Israeli Kibbutz Lahav. The
Museum had often been mentioned to me by Naqab Bedouin women and men who live in the nearby Bedouin townships. These townships, where I had been conducting my fieldwork on Naqab Bedouin women’s oral histories since February 2014, were established from the late 1960s onwards by the Israeli state to sedentarise the Bedouin population of the Naqab. When asking township residents about Naqab Bedouin oral cultures, performances and historical narratives, many referred me to the Museum as a place where I could find such information. Their recommendations suggest that the coloniser’s Museum has begun to acquire an authoritative standing among the indigenous population. I went to the Museum in spring 2015 to find out more about the kinds of representations displayed there. The Naqab Bedouin have been, and continue to be, key in the Israeli drive to gain ownership of knowledge production. What representations does the Israeli regime employ in an institution such as the museum to cement this image? And how are these images countered, but perhaps also sometimes internalised, by the local indigenous Bedouin population on whose lands the Museum, and the state as a whole, was built? What counter-representations and forms of resistance are possible for the colonised in such a context?


2 This research project was funded through an AHRC Early Career Fellowship (2014–2016), entitled ‘Gender and Settler Colonialism: Women’s Oral Histories in the Naqab’. I thank the AHRC for their financial support, and everyone I interviewed, spoke to and worked with in the Naqab, especially my host family, for their generous help, hospitality and friendship. I am very grateful to the participants in and co-organisers of the project’s two workshops which took place at Columbia University in April 2015 (in particular Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Boyd) and Exeter University in October 2015 (in particular Rosemary Sayigh, Ilan Pappe, Ahmad Sa’di, Cedric Parizot, Ahmad Amara, Richard Ratcliffe and Mansour Nasasra) for their very valuable and instructive comments on earlier versions of the paper. I also benefited greatly from the very useful comments I received from Leyla Neyzi when presenting parts of the paper at IFEA in Istanbul, and Randall McGuire when presenting it at the 2015 AAA meeting in Denver. My final thanks are to Yiannis Kanakis for encouraging me to search and look beyond discourse. All mistakes are mine.

3 I use the term ‘indigenous’ in its most common understanding of referring to native inhabitants of a given territory who have occupied this territory prior to subsequent waves of settler colonisation. I understand indigeneity to be historically contingent and socially constructed—there is no ‘authentic’ Naqab Bedouin indigenous culture or identity, but this indigeneity evolves and adapts in time and place. Indigeneity and cultural endurance, as Clifford has argued, is not a state of being, but it ‘is a process of becoming’ in which people ‘reach back selectively to deeply rooted, adaptive traditions: creating new pathways in a complex postmodernity’ (2013: 7). For a critical debate on the notion of indigeneity in different contexts, see, among others, Barcham (2000) on the Maori or Simpson (2000) on the Mohawk. For a debate on the advantages and disadvantages of using the term for legal purposes in the Naqab case, see, among others, Amara (unpublished paper), Yiftachel (2008), Nasasra (2012).
where not only the land, but memories, knowledges, histories and other representations are being colonised?

The Museum holds various items related to ‘Bedouin culture’, which are arranged to stimulate the visitor to develop a concept of the Bedouin as exotic, savage and possibly dangerous. Following a classic Orientalist narrative, the Museum constructs the native as Other, relying on folklorising elements (Bedouin tents and rugs), the ‘exotic’ (the camel), the ‘magic’ (Bedouin folk traditions), and the ‘dangerous’ (Bedouin men’s weaponry). As regards the gendered aspects of the Museum’s displays (the veiled, beguiling woman closed up inside the tent and concerned with ‘family issues’), these seem designed to reinforce stereotypes. These representations project an image of the Museum as a modernist, civilising institution engaged in ‘saving’ the Bedouin and their distinct traditions, which are, however, claimed to be extinct.4 It is the settler-coloniser, who—in this narrative—had to come and salvage, save, record and archive the artefacts of the savage ignorant native which otherwise would have been lost forever.

Patrick Wolfe (1999, 2006) has characterised settler-colonialism as an ongoing structure whose primary aim is the elimination of the native to secure settler control over the land. The ‘elimination of the native’ takes various modalities: expulsion and killing, assimilation, and various forms of discursive elimination. The Israeli regime has been exercising different modes of eliminating Naqab Bedouin presence: not only has the state attempted to expel, displace and ethnically cleanse them (see Pappe 2006), but there have also been assimilationist gestures (e.g. citizenship and inclusion of the Bedouin in the army),5 as well as a whole set of attempts discursively to eliminate them as natives of the land. The settler-colonial project of assimilation and elimination thus functions not only at the material level (occupation and settlement of indigenous lands), but also at an epistemic level of knowledge production. If, however, elimination is

4 See Dinero (2002) for a more elaborate discussion of the Lahav Museum, and, among others, Boniface and Fowler (1993) or Nash (1996) for critical discussions in the anthropology of tourism, heritage, folklore and museums in other contexts. Indeed, Clifford’s insightful analysis of museums as ‘contact zones’ (2013: 184) highlights that museums, given the various funding pressures they are subjected to and the different audiences they cater to, are more than the objects they display. An in-depth analysis of the Museum would thus need to read it as a space of (different and varied) performances. Given the scope of this paper, I focus here not on the Museum itself (and the various processes and dynamics that happen there), but on Naqab Bedouin women’s oral and embodied performances.

5 See Kanaaneh (2009) for a detailed discussion of Israeli assimilationist policies, in particular the inclusion of Palestinian citizens of Israel, including the Naqab Bedouin, in the Israeli army.
the aim of the settler-colonial project, why does the Museum present and ‘preserve’ Bedouin culture and tradition?

Although the stated aim of the Museum—to preserve Bedouin culture and tradition—might seem plausible at first, I argue that, in fact, it denies, erases—or ‘eliminates’ in Wolfe’s terms—the native. As such, it serves not to counter, but to execute the dual settler-colonial strategy of elimination and assimilation. Israeli representations traditionally have relied on two main strategies—Orientalist and modernist. Both narratives are also cornerstones in the Museum’s display, where they perform their dual function of eliminating and assimilating. Modernist discourse assimilates—the indigenous Bedouin community by ‘civilising’ and ‘uplifting’ them to the standards of modernity: from illiteracy to literacy, from oral to written, from live/performed to recorded/archived. Orientalist tropes eliminate Bedouin lived indigeneity by folklorising the indigenous community and presenting it as a dead, vanished thing from the past. Settler-colonial institutions, such as the museum, or the archive, thus serve to ‘freeze’ the native, their living traditions, practices and memories, in an undefinable, vague, past (cf. Tedlock 1991, see also Barcham 2000: 142, Clifford 2013). Naqab Bedouin lives as lived before 1948 are presented as gone forever. They are gone, because they were not written down. These kinds of epistemic erasures highlight the fact that settler-colonisation is not merely a colonisation of the land, but a much deeper project aimed at eradicating the native population, their lifestyle, habitus and knowledge.

With this understanding of settler-colonial epistemic erasures in mind, I focus in this article on the counter-narratives and representations as produced embodied and enacted by the colonised themselves. More precisely, I discuss Naqab Bedouin women’s oral and embodied traditions, and trace how they compare and provide a challenge to settler-colonial erasive representations of which the Museum is but one example. My data is drawn from the living oral and embodied traditions, such as dance, song or oral poetry, of Naqab Bedouin women (predominantly from the Nakba generation) which I heard and saw recited and performed during my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015 in Rahat, Laqiya and Shqeeb as-Salam, three of the seven Bedouin townships. These women, who are part of ca. 200,000 Naqab Bedouin Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel (Abu-Saad 2010) have faced different settler-colonial policies aimed at eliminating them as natives of the land. Not only has the state subjected them to various waves of military assaults, expulsion and displacement, eventually forcibly settling them in the townships from the late 1960s onwards, but also at the level of representation their lived indigeneity

6 Representations of the Naqab Bedouin have undergone important historical shifts; see Ratcliffe et al (2014).
has been denied. Yet, as I will argue, Bedouin women’s lived indigeneity is not extinct: through their performances of poetry, dance and songs, women continue, maintain, re-shape and, to a certain extent also transmit, indigenous memories, knowledges and ways of being—but in oral, embodied, not written and recorded ways. As such, oral and embodied traditions constitute an important challenge to the settler-colonial attempt at eliminating the native.

**Sedentarisation and Education**

Among the largest threats to Naqab Bedouin oral traditions are enforced sedentarisation/urbanisation and state-led centralist schooling and education. Both are part and parcel of the Israeli ‘modernisation’ project which started from the late 1960s onwards

With the establishment of Israel in 1948, the large majority of Bedouin from the Naqab region were expelled to Gaza, Jordan, the West Bank and Egypt. The ca. 11,000–13,000 who remained were placed under military law, displaced from their ancestral lands and moved to an enclosure zone, the *siyaj*, in the Northern Naqab region (Marx 1967; Falah 1989). After military rule, and from the late 1960s onwards, the Israeli state further expropriated Naqab Bedouin land, restricted their pastoral and agricultural activities, and moved them into seven townships (Falah 1989), the largest of which is Rahat. The Bedouin have resisted this forced urbanisation: only ca. 50% have settled in townships. The other half continue to live on their land in villages that are unrecognised, and are under constant threat of demolition by the state. Both the forced concentration of the Bedouin in an enclosure zone during the military rule and the later policies of sedentarisation are part and parcel of the Israeli settler-colonial project (see Falah 1989; Yiftachel 2006, 2008; Nasasra 2012), in which the settler state expropriates Bedouin ancestral lands, transfers them to the Jewish settler majority, and resettles Bedouin in reduced urban space with an extremely high population density.

In the official Israeli discourse sedentarisation has been legitimised as a ‘development and modernisation project’, ‘freeing’ Bedouin from their ‘backward’ ‘tribal’ norms and integrating them into the economic and political structures of the modern nation-state. In order to achieve this aim, the state established local councils in the townships, and tasked the ‘Bedouin Development Authority’ and the ‘Bedouin Education Authority’ with the ‘development’ and ‘modernisation’ of the Bedouin. Through such institutions, the government claimed to provide more efficient services, such as housing, roads, clinics, water, electricity, schooling, etc. The aim of forced sedentarisation and urbanisation—to discipline and, to a certain extent, assimilate and thus eliminate—the
Naqab Bedouin as natives of the land was clearly expressed by Moshe Dayan in a 1963 *Haaretz* interview:

> We should transform the Bedouin into an urban proletariat—in industry, services, construction, and agriculture. 88 per cent of the Israeli population are not farmers; let the Bedouin be like them. Indeed this would be a radical move which means that the Bedouin would not live on his land with his herds, but would become an urban person who comes home in the afternoon and puts his slippers on. His children would be accustomed to a father who wears trousers, does not carry a Shabaria [the traditional Bedouin knife] and does not search for vermin in public. The children would go to school with the hair properly combed. This would be a revolution, but it may be fixed within two generations. Without coercion but with governmental direction... this phenomenon of the Bedouin will disappear.


Presumably, the ‘disappearance’ referred to in Dayan’s last sentence in this interview extract is achieved as the Bedouin become modern, sedentarised citizens.7

Wolfe maintains that elimination can take various modalities, one of which is assimilation. ‘Indeed, depending on the historical conjuncture, assimilation can be a more effective mode of elimination than conventional forms of killing, since it does not involve such a disruptive affront to the rule of law that is ideologically central to the cohesion of settler society’ (Wolfe 2006: 402). The Israeli state, by discriminating against its Palestinian citizens, including the Naqab Bedouin, has, of course, not adopted an assimilationist strategy in practice. Sedentarisation did not result in more egalitarian structures, nor did it bring about development for the Bedouin. On the contrary: economic infrastructure and employment opportunities are lacking in the towns, and Bedouin men and women are not integrated into the labour market. If ‘modernisation’ really had been the aim, the government would have needed to provide land bases, as it did for the Jewish moshavim and kibbutzim (see Masalha 2005: 125). The language of ‘modernisation’ thus serves to disguise land expropriation, resettlement and sedentarisation, which, in fact, all aim at executing the settler-colonial regime’s policies of denying and severely restricting native access to the land.

Wolfe (2006: 397) has maintained that one major tool in the settler-colonial assimilationist strategy is the isolation of the individual from the tribe, and—relatedly—the transferral of tribal land to individual property. The Israeli state’s programme of sedentarisation directed at the Bedouin aimed at achieving exactly that: In the townships, the government allowed

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7 Israeli scholarship also often adopts a similar modernist approach, studying how ‘traditional’ Bedouin adapt to the ‘modern’ urban environment (e.g. Meir, 1997).
Bedouin to purchase or lease a vacant lot to build according to their own budgets. Each smaller family unit thus became the owner of its individual property, a development which served to bury larger tribal land claims. By transforming Naqab Bedouin into private owners and establishing them as individual property-owning liberal subjects who, as citizens, entertain a direct contract through rights and duties with the state rather than with tribal or other affiliations, the process of eliminating the native proceeded.

Sedentarisation also had specific impacts on Bedouin women: while some, from the second and third generation, managed to enter the labour market, mainly as school teachers or nurses, the great majority were transformed into housekeepers. The complete destruction of, and alienation from, their traditional lifestyle of semi-nomadic pastoralism, which included the cultivation of their lands, an activity in which women had played a significant role, has meant that their social, political and economic involvement has shrunk significantly in the townships (see Lewando-Hundt 1978; Abu Rabia Queder 2006; Dinero 2010). More importantly for the focus of this paper, sedentarisation also threatened to extinguish Bedouin women’s (and men’s) living embodied and oral traditions: as contact among women became less and people stayed in houses with doors closed and had less free time, women’s social life suffered. While the more official rituals such as weddings still provide occasions for exchange, the frequency of occurrence of everyday discussions, recitals and performances of oral poetry and songs, like other traditionally shared activities, has decreased.

Alongside the process of sedentarisation, the Israeli state also started to roll out a more comprehensive schooling and education system in the Bedouin townships from the 1970s onwards. The implementation of a centralist state-led schooling system cemented the shift from orality to literacy among the Bedouin community in the Naqab. This is especially true for women. While most of the Bedouin women who are old enough

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8 Tell as-Saba, the first township built in the late 1960 employed a different model, in which the government built houses for Bedouin families.


10 Abu Athera (1995), studying tribal poetry of the Tarabin and Huwaytat tribes, found similar links between sedentarisation and decrease in oral traditions.

11 Education, as such, was not an entirely new phenomenon: while the British Mandate had already established schools (mainly for sons of sheikhs and notables), most schools in the South were closed during the Israeli military period, and Bedouins had to obtain special permission for education and employment from the military authorities (see Abu Rabia Queder 2006, 2008; Abu Saad 2001).

12 Orality and literacy are not to be regarded in fixed binaries; they co-exist, in the current context of the Naqab as elsewhere. The Naqab Bedouin, however, until recently constituted a largely oral community, with only very few male leaders having acquired
to have experienced the Nakba as young girls are illiterate, many of their daughters and most of their granddaughters received schooling if they grew up in one of the seven Bedouin townships.

The question of whether and how education contributes to increasing the possibilities for women to lead a better life has dominated gender and development approaches. A liberal modernist position argues that education is key to women’s empowerment, and such a stance is also often taken with regard to Naqab Bedouin women (see e.g. Abu-Rabia Queder 2006; Pessate-Schubert 2004). Some studies, however, point to more ambiguous dynamics (Abu Rabia Queder 2008; Abu Saad 2001), highlighting, for example, that what matters is not merely access, but rather the quality and nature of the education. In the Naqab, schools are insufficiently staffed and lack space and facilities. The quality of education that Naqab Bedouin students, both boys and girls, obtain is much lower than that offered in Jewish schools. Young Bedouin women thus do not graduate from high school equipped to compete in the labour market of the Jewish state.

Moreover, implicit in the modernist project of schooling is a fixing of hierarchies: educated over uneducated, literate over illiterate, etc. The 2005 Arab Human Development Report (UNDP 2005), for example, celebrates education as being the path to women’s empowerment, and places those without schooling at the lower end of what it constructs as a human hierarchy. It finds that those without schooling ‘are unable to read or write and thus express themselves—and have never heard of their human rights. This erodes their very human status’ (UNDP 2005: 119, quoted in Abu-Lughod 2009: 88). In communities such as those of the Naqab, which have experienced the transition to education and literacy for all within a condensed period of time, the younger educated generations sometimes adopt a similar derogatory attitude towards those who have not benefitted from schooling (see Abu-Lughod 1993: 205–42; Abu-Lughod 2009: 87).

Many of the younger girls and women that I met in the Bedouin townships tended to pay little attention to the oral histories of their mothers and grandmothers, sometimes dismissing them as untrue, and their illiteracy as a sign of ‘unawareness’ and ‘backwardness’. Given the schooling. The shift from orality to literacy thus is particularly pronounced along the lines of generation and gender in the Naqab.

13 Liberal assumptions tend to make several positive causal links between education and women’s ‘empowerment’, such as, for example, that rising female education correlates with less population growth, fertility rates and child mortality. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, as well as the AHDR (UNDP 2005) all argue that women’s literacy and education is key to empowering women.
younger generations’ education in Israeli state schooling and sometimes also university, the contrast not only between the modes of knowledge production and transmission (oral/written) but also the factual content of the different generations’ narratives is marked. Younger women would often dismiss my wish to hear from older women about their memories and lived experiences of the Nakba, of the subsequent military rule and of the sedentarisation period. Rather than listening to the gibberish of the older women, many young people told me, I should read books or visit the Museum in Lahav. The books they directed me to were either written by local folklorists, some of which fall into the trap of self-Orientalising, or by Israeli scholars, which largely deny the existence of the Israeli policies of ethnic cleansing, expulsion and elimination of the native population during the Nakba and subsequent periods. Among the younger generation, the state’s project to install modernist values that prioritise the written over the oral has thus started to take hold.

In the Naqab the state-led modernist project of schooling and sedentarisation has forced a sudden shift from orality to literacy, rendering the Bedouin indigenous oral traditions, knowledges and modes of knowledge production invalid in the new ‘modern’ system. Oral embodied traditions in this modernist understanding are deemed untrue and valueless, because they are ‘just oral’—not written down, not registered, not recorded, not archived and displayed in the museum. The museum, where indigenous artefacts are categorised according to a Western concept of heritage is thus but one institution serving the settler-colonial project of eliminating the native. Smallacombe (2000: 160) discussing the instrumentalisation and folklorisation of Aboriginal art and culture in Australian nation-building has argued that ‘[w]estern concepts of heritage are based in the construction of hierarchies and classifications that are imposed, through colonising process on the knowledge and cultural systems of indigenous peoples, thus rendering them subordinate to Western systems.’

Additionally to museums and other heritage institutions, schools and universities can also form an important part in this colonising process: by fixing meanings and epistemes, state-led schooling, education and literacy

14 More recently Naqab Bedouin students, especially girls, have enrolled in Palestinian universities in the West Bank, especially Hebron. Whether and how this trend might impact on this generation’s historical and political narratives and identifications in the future deserves further scholarly attention, but is hard to determine at the moment.

15 See e.g. Salih Ziyadna’s two folkloristic books on Naqab Bedouin women (2014a) and Naqab Bedouin music and song (2014b). For a similar dynamic in contexts other than the Naqab, see Prager (2012) who analyses what she terms ‘Auto-Orientalism’, Büssow (2012) who researched written Bedouin tribal history books in Syria, and Shryock (1997) on Bedouin tribal history in Jordan.
entails a homogenisation of thought and modes of expression—one that reaffirms and strengthens the settler-colonial system and places Bedouin knowledges and ways of being in a subordinate, or even claimed as extinct, position. As such literacy does not necessarily mean development or ‘empowerment’, but rather allows for increased state control.

‘The Repertoire’ of Arab Oral Traditions

Although the shift to literacy enforced through state-led schooling and sedentarisation constitutes a severe challenge for Bedouin orality, and for the maintenance and transmission of indigenous knowledges and subjectivities contained within this episteme, these have not been eliminated altogether. Oral and embodied traditions continue to be recited and performed and are being adapted, re-shaped and endowed with new meanings in the changing context. Bedouin women, particularly from the older generations, have a wealth of short poems at the tip of their tongues, and are always ready to comment on different situations, such as the arrival of guests, problems between husband and wife, unruly children, disputes between families, memories of the past, and much more. Rather than being unaware, backward and having had their human status ‘eroded’, as the AHDR claims, these illiterate women demonstrate with their eloquent comments and critiques a wealth of information and skills for communicating within and shaping their community. Abu-Lughod put this succinctly in her critique of the AHDR:

The many articulate, creative, witty, and sharp uneducated women I have known in rural Egypt (granted living in less dire circumstances than those deplored in the report for the poorest and most marginal groups)—women who are creative poets and storytellers, astute moral reasoners, energetic participants in their community’s social and political affairs, and quick to bristle at infringements of their customary or religious rights—would be surprised to hear that they or their daughters are less than human. (Abu-Lughod 2009: 87–88)

Oral traditions, poetry and song, form a central part of Bedouin, as well as more broadly Arab, everyday social worlds and interactions (see Abu-Lughod 1986/1999: 237–8). They are performed in everyday scenarios as well as in the more ritualised settings, in which the younger also regularly participate. Oral traditions in the Arab world have been studied extensively by folklorists and literary scholars who have tended to put emphasis on the poem’s content and narrative.16 In contrast to this, and in line with

16 There is a rich literature on Arab oral traditions. Folktales, songs, proverbs, and poetry have been studied by, for example Granquist (1931), Bushnaq (1987) or Muhawi and Kanaana (1989).
anthropological, ethno-musicological and performance-based studies.\textsuperscript{17} The approach that I am following here places oral traditions in their everyday social and political context and emphasises their performed (and performative) aspect. Oral traditions are both discursive and performative formations. Discourse here is not confined to a narrow linguistic approach, but rather refers, in Foucault’s (1980) sense, to oral or speech acts as well as to practices, beliefs and ideas, which together constitute a discourse which serves to structure and construct women’s subjectivities and their worlds. The term ‘performance’ is also adopted in its widest sense, i.e. not as Goffman (1959/1990) would use it as referring to individuals rationally ‘performing’ behaviours to conform to social standards and norms, but rather stressing the performative role that oral, sonic and embodied performances play in constituting individual and communal identities. Performances and articulations of living oral and embodied traditions thus are, as Clifford has remarked, ‘less a matter of preserving traditions for the salvage ‘record’ than of enacting them in new social contexts—a new gathering up of the self in a mode of engagement’ (2013: 174).

More specifically, I am interested in the social and particularly political functions that indigenous oral and embodied traditions can play in a context of settler-colonial policies of erasure, such as that directed at the Naqab Bedouin. To what extent and how can Bedouin living traditions—as non-exclusively verbal, but also embodied and performative discursive formations that shape and re-make indigenous communities—challenge or even resist different modes of epistemic settler-colonial violence? As I argue below, these lived oral and embodied performances can and do provide a dual challenge to the Israeli settler-colonial project aimed at eliminating the native. Women’s songs and oral poetry not only contain very valuable historical details and memories of the past (e.g. details of specific places, lands, values, historical events, etc.), but they also function, in a very different way than written or recorded sources do, as embodied, live systems of learning, storing, and transmitting indigenous knowledges and memories (see Taylor 2003). One of the striking differences between the recorded, written archive and the oral and embodied traditions of the Naqab Bedouin is that the latter do not freeze the Bedouin in a foregone past but instead they maintain, enact, adapt and reshape indigenous knowledges and modes of knowledge production in the here and now with a view to the future. These living traditions perform, as Clifford (2013) put it, the process of ‘becoming indigenous in the twenty-first century’.

\textsuperscript{17} See e.g. Abu-Lughod (1986/1999: 186); Meeker (1979); Seeley (2013).
In her 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor stresses the importance of orality and embodied performances, such as dance, oral poetry, or songs, for the maintenance and transmission of cultural memory and knowledge, especially among indigenous peoples. Performance, according to Taylor, ‘functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis’ (Taylor 2003: 182). She employs the term ‘repertoire’ to explain the crucial and unique features of embodied and/or oral performances:

The repertoire, [in contrast to the archive], enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non reproducible knowledge. [...] The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there’, being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning. (Taylor 2002: 603)

Oral and embodied traditions are thus live and living performances, not frozen, displayed artefacts in the museum. Each performance is different; it is improvised according to who is present, who is performing, which historical context the performance takes place in, and many other variables.

**Flexibility and Adaptability**

The flexibility of oral narratives is well captured by one of the small songs that Hajja Fatima, one of the grandmothers in my host family in Rahat, sang on various occasions. Hajja Fatima was born some years before 1948 in the Western Naqab, close to what is now the border to Gaza and the Erez checkpoint, where her father had, as she told me, vast agricultural lands. In 1948 she was, together with her family, expelled from their ancestral lands and became a refugee in Gaza. Here she grew up, playing an important role in the family economy through her work as a seamstress and raising her four brothers, given an illness of her mother. After the 1967 war she married back into the Naqab, like many Bedouin women of her generation who were expelled to Gaza in 1948.

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18 For approaches based in performance studies additional to Taylor’s, see, among others, Turner (1987), Roach (1996) or Schechner (1995).
19 All references to Taylor (2002) are kindle locations, not page numbers.
20 All informants’ names have been changed to guarantee their anonymity.
The basic line of this short sung poetry is the following:

Mandeeli, mandeeli, ya Abu Mohammad, mandeeli
Mandeeli [my headscarf], mandeeli, Abu Muhammad, mandeeli
Albas akwa arawih asaafir al-khaleeli
I wear it and go travelling to Khalil [Hebron]

And some of the variations I heard were:

Shashaati, shashaati, ya Abu Mohammad, shashaati
Shashaati [white scarf worn by older Bedouin women], shashaati, Abu
Muhammad, shashaati
Albasakwaarawih asaafir al-bashaati
I wear it and go travelling to the Pasha

or:

Jakeeti, jakeeti, ya Abu Muhammad jakeeti
My jacket, my jacket, Abu Mohammad, my jacket
Albasakwaarawih asaafir al-Kuwaiti
I wear it and go travelling to Kuwait

The basic melody and the song’s simple but different end rhymes testify to it, most probably, being a long-lived, versatile and adaptive tradition. All women who knew and sang this song explained to me that they had learned it from their mother or grandmothers as young children. It thus seems plausible to assume that women have sung it in the past and have adapted it to different historical moments. Al-Khaleel (Hebron) still constitutes an important economic centre for the Naqab Bedouin, even though it is now formally within the Occupied Palestinian Territories and can only be reached by crossing Israeli border checkpoints (see Parizot 2004; 2006); the reference to the Pasha in the second verse provides some historical dimension, probably taken from Ottoman times, while the destination of Kuwait in the last verse takes the listener to the period of modern nation-states in the Middle East. Oral traditions such as this one thus are flexible, they can be adapted to time and space.

This means that oral traditions, contrary to representations in the museum or archive, also resist essentialisation. The Lahav Museum I visited provides a good example of such an essentialist imagination of the Bedouin. Already its name—the Museum of Bedouin Culture—stresses the Bedouin as a frozen, separate and distinctive community, different from other urban or rural Palestinians and with their own ‘Bedouin’ as opposed to Palestinian culture. Bedouin distinctiveness is also often upheld in scholarly works. Early anthropological works on Bedouin culture

21 I have adopted a simplified transliteration system without diacritics that seeks to approximate the Naqab Bedouin dialect as used in the songs and poems.
(e.g. Marx 1967; Kressel 1992) as well as those on Bedouin poetry and oral traditions (Bailey 2002) often rely on such essentialising, orientalising and folklorising stances (see Ratcliffe et al 2014). For example, Clinton Bailey’s foundational work on Naqab Bedouin poetry (2002), whilst providing a very rich source on mainly men’s oral poetry in different pre-1948 periods, fails to mention how this poetry evolved after the Bedouin were subjected to Israeli settler-colonial policies, nor does it establish the links between Bedouin and other Palestinian communities’ oral traditions. Bailey’s work, by focusing on Bedouin warfare, tribal structures and honour codes as contained in Bedouin poetry thus reinforces Bedouin distinctiveness and overall remains caught in an Orientalist de-politicised analytical frame.

Such Orientalist stances negate the fact that the Naqab Bedouin were an integral part of and identified with the pre-1948 Palestinian community and space. Failing to contextualise Bedouin Palestinian traditions, they reinforce and feed into Israel’s ‘divide and rule’ policies. Most of the Bedouin women from the Nakba generation to whom I spoke referred regularly to ‘Ayyam Falasteen’ or ‘Ayam al-Blad—the days of Palestine—when speaking of their pre-48 life. Although there were, of course, differences in lifestyle and customs, Naqab Bedouin from the Nakba generation consider themselves as part of historic Palestine and its social and political community. Until today they maintain a clear attachment to the land, a land that they themselves designate as Palestine. They also speak of the various economic, social, cultural and political links that they entertained, and continue to nourish, with other Palestinian communities (see also Parizot 2004, 2006).

This becomes apparent when one looks at women’s popular national songs (aghani wataniyya) which in today’s Naqab are sung and remembered particularly, but not exclusively, by Naqab Bedouin women who, like Hajja Fatima, grew up in Gaza. In Gaza many women from this generation spent their youth in refugee camps, or the towns and villages of Egypt-administered Gaza, where the atmosphere of national resistance was omnipresent and was more publically expressed than was possible in the Naqab under Israeli military rule. When, after the 1967 war, refugee Naqab Bedouin women married back from Gaza into what had become Israel, they brought the aghani wataniyya with them. It is therefore the Naqab Bedouin women who grew up in Gaza and later ‘returned’ to the

22 Most aghani wataniyya that I heard were sung in the melodies and genres of what women referred to as ila-dal bina, short rhythmic songs with a clearly identifiable melody. On that type of song, see e.g. Ghaban (2002).

23 See also Nasasra (2014: 137) who refers to a case of Naqab Bedouin women singing aghani wataniyya under the military rule to protect Bedouin refugees who had been displaced across the border to Jordan but were trying to return to their lands.
Naqab through marriage practices who today are most likely still to know, sing and recite *aghani wataniyya*. These small songs often contain very specific references to different places and sites of historical importance everywhere in Palestine, not just the very crowded urban spaces in the Naqab to which the Israeli regime has forcibly confined these women’s lives over the last decades.

Hajja Fatima, for example, sang the following song:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Yahrîm ālayylabismandeel al-ghazza} \\
\text{Wearing the beautiful headscarf is forbidden to me} \\
\text{ili qataloo fi ‘ard al-areesh} \\
\text{Because of those who were killed in the lands of al-Arish} \\
\text{Yahrîm ālayyqus ash-shaleesh} \\
\text{Cutting my hair is forbidden to me} \\
\text{ili qataloo fi ‘ard al-khaleel} \\
\text{Because of those who were killed in the lands of Hebron} \\
\text{Yahrîm ālayyqas mandeel} \\
\text{Wearing the headscarf is forbidden to me} \\
\text{ili qataloo fi ‘ard al-khaleel} \\
\text{Because of those who were killed in the lands of Hebron} \\
\text{Yahrîm ālayyqas mandeel} \\
\text{Wearing the headscarf is forbidden to me} \\
\text{ili qataloo fi ‘ard al-areesh} \\
\text{Because of those who were killed in the lands of al-Arish} \\
\text{Yahrîm ālayyqas mandeel} \\
\text{Wearing the headscarf is forbidden to me} \\
\text{ili qataloo fi ‘ard al-areesh} \\
\text{Because of those who were killed in the lands of al-Arish} \\
\end{align*}
\]

This song, similarly to the one cited before, demonstrates the flexibility of oral sung poetry through its changing end rhymes. Moreover, the song’s references to different places, most of which are towns and villages now renamed in Hebrew and largely out of reach for most Naqab Bedouin women, strongly contest the Israeli divide and rule policies which separate and control Palestinian spaces and communities with the aim of fragmenting and weakening their national cohesion. Bedouin women had and have strong connections to different places everywhere in the Naqab, not just the townships that they are forced to reside in now. The fact that multiple forced displacements and continuous interactions between Bedouin, rural and urban Palestinian communities are mirrored in today’s Naqab Bedouin mixed and hybrid repertoire of oral sung poetry should function as a reminder to be wary of claims of Bedouin authenticity or distinctiveness. Naqab Bedouin traditions, despite their unique features, form an integral part of the larger repertoire of Palestinian oral traditions. This connectedness is further reinforced by the fact that the song sung by Hajja Fatima forcefully reminds the listener of the Israeli attacks on
different Palestinian villages and towns in 1948, naming each of these with their original Arabic names and highlighting their political significance for the entire Palestinian population, no matter whether Bedouin, rural or urban.

**Counter-Narratives**

The repertoire of Bedouin women’s songs and poems provide oral counter-narratives to hegemonic Israeli history-writing. Women remember and continue to mention Arabic place names, their memories and lived experiences of 1948, their ties to other Palestinian communities, as well as their own presence on the land. It is, in particular, with regards to the Bedouin land struggle that the settler-colonial regime has tried to dominate knowledge production by fortifying an image of the Bedouin as roaming nomads without links (and consequently claims and rights) to their native lands. The regime’s strategy of nomadising the Bedouin was also evident in the Museum’s display, which includes one section entitled ‘bedouin agriculture in the Negev’. The exhibited material (a camel plough and other basic agricultural tools) gave the impression of primitive, inefficient Bedouin use of the land and thus implicitly celebrates the settlers as those who had to come to ‘make the desert bloom’. In my interview with one of the Museum’s Israeli-Jewish staff members this representation was further reinforced:

> Before the first world war the Bedouin here and in Jordan and in Syria they were nomads and they used to travel […] from the Negev up to Syria, Lebanon, down [to] Jordan, all the way down to Amman, and back up again. And that could take between 3 and 5 years. (Interview, Museum for Bedouin Culture 2015)

Representations in the Museum (as well as in other public Israeli institutions) turn the native Naqab Bedouins who cultivated their ancestral lands into rootless nomads. As roaming nomads, the Bedouin not only constitute the ideal exotic Other for the colonialist (i.e. ‘the savage in need of civilising’), but also more specifically for the settler-colonialist. Wolfe notes:

> The new Jew’s formative Other was the nomadic Bedouin rather than the fellaheen farmer. The reproach of nomadism renders the native removable. Moreover, if the natives are not already nomadic, then the reproach can be turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy through the burning of corn or the uprooting of fruit trees. (Wolfe 2006: 396)

As Wolfe confirms, it is only certain kinds of natives, those that prove native presence on and usage of the land, that need to be eliminated in the settler-colonial narrative. This elimination should not be understood as
proving settler unawareness of the Naqab Bedouin’s agricultural activities. Settlers knew, and know, that the Bedouin had delineated tribal lands, and were engaged in agriculture, crop farming, and other rural activities (see e.g. Nasasra 2012; Amara, unpublished). Zionists of the second Aliya, such as Israel Balkind for example, even urged young Zionists to seek Bedouin ‘advice on agriculture and herding’ (Pappe 2014: 75, referencing Sadan 2006: 105–13). The fact that the Bedouin were not strictly nomadic, but cultivated their tribal lands, however, had to be erased. To do so, Israeli forces did indeed burn some Bedouin families’ crops in 1948 and after, as several Nakba generation Bedouin women told me.

References to tribal lands and agricultural activities are not only contained in oral history testimonies, but also in Bedouin oral poetry. For example, the following 2-hemistichs line from an iqtaar, a specific tradition of Bedouin women’s poetry sung in a monotone voice with long-stretched vowels, functions as a reminder of the lands of the Tiyaha tribe:

\[
\text{atTiyahawazracoo al-ˈard (or al-blaad)} \\
\text{min ghaza l-
-al-areesha waqhaad} \\
\text{The Tiyaha were farming the land} \\
\text{from Gaza to al-Arish and further}
\]

This line of the iqtaar makes not only specific reference to Palestinian place names, but also confirms Bedouin tribal control over and agricultural usage of the land, thus providing a powerful counter-narrative to settler-colonial representations of the Naqab Bedouin as roaming rootless nomads.

In addition to such specific references to historical events, place names and pastoral, rural lifestyles, the Naqab Bedouin women’s sung oral poetry contains intimate memories that speak about social connectedness across later constructed national borders, or functions as reminders of how life was like before forced sedentarisation. Two short poems that I heard in various versions sung by different women illustrate this:

\[
\text{Al-yoomahlim al-layali tan ˈedzaykaan} \\
\text{Today I am dreaming that the nights return as they used to be} \\
\text{Wa aruh ghaza wa waqf fi krum al-khaan} \\
\text{And I go to Gaza and sit in the orchards of Khan (Yunis)}
\]

and:

\[
\text{Yamaq ˈad al-beitwa-
-l-umumkthaar} \\
\text{You who stays inside and has many worries} \\
\text{Tala ˈti-
-l-khalla (or variation: srihti al-ghanam) btawal al-
-bmaar} \\
\text{If you go out in the open (or variation: if you graze the sheep),} \\
\text{that lengthens life.}
\]
These short poems actualise and bring alive Bedouin traditions, memories and histories in a very different way than the frozen representations displayed in the Museum. Not only do these recitals speak of intimate relations to specific—including urban—places (in Gaza), but also of a different relationship with land and space, one that the Naqab Bedouin were so violently robbed of by Israeli settler-colonial dispossession, sedentarisation and urbanisation policies. The songs contradict the Israeli modernist developmentalist discourse, which depicts the settler-colonialists as civilisers, as those developing and uplifting the ignorant natives to the standards of modernity by sedentarising them and recording and preserving their traditional lives, lives now claimed to be extinct. In contradiction to this claim, the content of these women’s songs proves that women harbour and cherish their memories of a pre-urbanised life, and continue to advocate, to the extent possible, a life not restricted to idleness in the urban confines of houses, walls and streets but rather fi-l-khalla, in the ‘open’.

**Continuity and Resistance**

The importance of women’s indigenous oral and embodied traditions (in contradistinction to the archive) lies in their performativity and actuality. Actuality means that performed oral traditions are irreproducible: they can never be repeated in exactly the same way. As a constantly evolving, but culturally-specific episteme, embodied, performed and oral traditions contain a certain informality and ambiguity.

It is probably for this reason that most women I spoke to and spent time with preferred to relate politically-sensitive information or their memories of traumatic events, such as Israel’s atrocities in 1948 or after, through song or poetry rather than regular speech. Many women were at first reluctant to talk directly about events of 1948 and their past, but later revealed their political awareness and expressed their barbed political comments and critique through several short songs. They knew and recited to me oral sung poetry which covered a range of topics and events, and were not only about 1948, but also about the Sabra and Shatila massacre, about Moshe Dayan and even Sharon.

In a context such as that of the Naqab Bedouin in Israel, where state control and censorship is prevalent, oral and performed traditions acquire an important socio-political role. Most Naqab Bedouin have lived all their lives under omnipresent and harsh Israeli control and censorship, particularly during the military period (see Sa’di 2013). Political silencing,

24 Studies in other contexts have similarly shown that it is often through song and oral poetry, not regular speech, that politically oppressed groups express oppositional political sentiments (see e.g. Kanakis 2013, on the Kurds in Turkey).
including self-censorship, has therefore, to a certain extent, become embedded in Naqab Bedouin socio-cultural structures and codes of communication. The fact that Naqab Bedouin women continue to express political critique through a channel other than regular speech, points to a functioning of the song and orality as ‘anti-structural’, i.e. running counter to the Israeli-imposed hegemonic system of control and censorship.25 This anti-structural function is particularly true for women’s oral poetry. Given that in Bedouin society it is usually men who take the role of authoritative public speakers, women’s use of song and poetry to make their voices heard is doubly anti-structural, challenging and finding ways around both gendered and political control.

Colonial powers have historically shown a great discomfort with ‘the repertoire’ of those they colonise. Oral traditions, but also embodied and vocal performances, are flexible and context-dependent. Their meanings, interpretations and perceptions differ from one performance, from one viewer, from one context to the next. This makes them both more difficult to censor and harder to decipher for colonialist powers (Taylor 2003). With their ‘repertoire’ the oppressed and colonised are able to evade colonial or state censorship more easily than they could with fixed written sources (Taylor 2003: 559).

Songs, however, are not only flexible and informal and as such harder to control, but they are also ambiguous and difficult to understand. The language used in sung poetry is highly symbolic and tends to be saturated with rare and idiosyncratic terms. Combined with the performance-based element of oral traditions, i.e. the embodied, corporeal and culturally-specific codes of performances, this channel of communication often remains undecipherable for outsiders. Diana Taylor explains the important indigenous resistance strategy of indecipherability in the following way:

Indecipherability […] has long been a strategy for combating the exigencies that everything be transparent, available for immediate decoding. Ambiguity subverts the demand for decipherability and strict compliance. In a social situation demanding strict gender and sexual formation as integral to the political performance of national ‘being’, not being available for easy reading was both a danger and a form of civil disobedience. (Taylor 2002: 3926)

Naqab Bedouin women’s embodied codes, whether enacted through oral performances, song or dance in everyday life or in ritualised settings

25 I borrow here from Abu-Lughod’s analysis of the Awlad ‘Ali’s ghinnawa. Abu-Lughod describes the ghinnawa, a ‘poetry of personal sentiment’ (Abu-Lughod 1986/1999: 181), as ‘anti-structural’, i.e. as functioning as ‘the discourse of opposition to the system’ (1986/1999: 251). My analysis is, however, less concerned with the question of whether and how women’s songs and poetry are ‘anti-structural’ to Bedouin cultural codes, but rather traces the ways in which these living traditions might transgress, challenge and resist Israeli political censorship and control.
contain a wealth of knowledges and information that are not easy to access, understand and decipher. What is clear, however, even to an outsider, is that these living traditions do contain not only narratives, but also specific corporeal codes that are different to and even opposed to those that the Israeli state tries to impose on this indigenous community through its urbanisation and schooling projects. Taylor’s notion of the ‘repertoire’ goes beyond a simplistic divide of the written vs. the oral to also include and stress the importance of the body, the performed and the lived, which, just as oral speech, can maintain higher degrees of flexibility, ambiguity and indecipherability than the written and recorded:

The repertoire, whether in terms of verbal or nonverbal expression, transmits live, embodied actions. As such, traditions are stored in the body, through various mnemonic methods, and transmitted ‘live’ in the here and now to a live audience. Forms handed down from the past are experienced as present. Although this may well describe the mechanics of spoken language, it also describes a dance recital or a religious festival. It is only because Western culture is wedded to the word, whether written or spoken, that language claims such epistemic and explanatory power. The writing = memory/knowledge equation is central to Western epistemology. (Taylor 2003: 668)

Performances thus transmit values, knowledges and memories in an embodied way in the here and now, live. Most women and men who practice the Naqab Bedouin ‘repertoire’ of oral and performed traditions are very aware of the importance of the body for cultural, political and social memory and transmission. Khaled, for example, a rababa26 player in his mid-40s from Laqiya, expressed this aspect well when I interviewed him after he had recited various oral traditions in a gathering in Rahat in 2014:

If a human being has in his hands the rababa, he has substance, morals, gallantry, noble-mindedness, self-worth... This is what distinguishes us and we must look after it. Not just look through photo albums, and that’s it. This life must be with us. I want this culture to live, and to last as well, and pass from generation to generation... It’s something we’re proud of. (Interview, Khaled, Rahat 2014)

Oral embodied traditions are not only living cultures that establish the people of the community themselves as tellers of their own past, present and future, but they also form and construct that community. Playing the rababa establishes the player (the one who ‘has in his hands the rababa’) as someone specific and significant (someone with ‘morals, gallantry’, etc.). In a performance, these modes of being are not merely communicated, but also taught and transmitted live to the listener, who, in this process,

26 The rababa is a bowed string instrument.
can learn to perform and decipher the different culturally-specific, often ambiguous, codes contained within the tradition. The audience thus is not simply the recipient of information, as might be more strongly the case in writing, but rather is implicated directly in the act of performance, and, as such, becomes a participant and a witness to both the process of knowledge transmission and that of maintaining, constructing, and (re-) shaping the community.

Naqab Bedouin women, particularly but not exclusively those from the Nakba generation, have maintained their flexible repertoire of traditions which rely on the live, the oral and the performed/practiced, rather than the recorded, the archived and the text. It is the flexibility, actuality and ambiguity inherent in these traditions which has enabled them to maintain their own indigenous spaces of social and political power outside of, and alternative to, settler-colonial state control. By relying on their culturally-specific episteme of performed and oral traditions, Bedouin women counteract and resist the coloniser’s project of shelving away safely their lives, knowledges and modes of being in the museum or archive. The attempt to shift the Bedouin oral community to the realm of the written, recorded and registered through schooling, surveying and archiving is thus less about modernising, but rather aims to expand colonial power and erase Bedouin lived indigeneity. It strives to make the indigenous community legible, and, as such, also more easily manageable, controllable and governable. What is presented as ‘modernisation’ in fact means assimilation and elimination: once his/her outlook has been shifted to embrace fully the episteme of the written and registered, the native, whose subjectivity relies on and is constituted by orality and performance rather than script, would cease to exist, as he/she has now become part of modernity. The Naqab Bedouin women’s repertoire, however, continues to carry and enact their lived embodied indigeneity. It brings alive, performs, and constructs communities and selves very different from the sedentarised, docile and decipherable subjects that the Israeli modernisation project aims for.

Conclusion

Naqab Bedouin have faced—historically and today—various settler-colonial practices and discourses aimed at eliminating them. Not only did the Israeli army brutally attack, kill and expel them in 1948, but also later, during military rule, they were displaced from their ancestral lands and concentrated into a segregation zone in the Northern Naqab. These policies of dispossession and land grab continued with Israeli sedentarisation policies from the 1970s onwards, and are still enforced
today through the state’s attempted forced removal of Bedouin residents from their lands in the unrecognised villages.

Additionally to such material settler-colonial policies aimed at transferring native land to the settlers, the Israeli settler-colonial regime also works at an epistemic level towards eliminating the native. It is one particular native that needs to be erased: the one with links to the land. Through Orientalist narratives depicting Naqab Bedouins as roaming nomads who neither entertained links to the land, nor were able efficiently to make use of it, but also through promoting modernist representations that claim an assimilation and integration of the Naqab Bedouin into the structures of the modern nation-state, thus de-nativising them, the discursive strategy of eliminating the native proceeds. The mode of knowledge production used to master this strategy is the written and recorded, implemented through centralised state-led (or state-funded) institutions such as archives, museums, schools or universities. The written, as a central element of Western modernity, is in this context also, as de Certeau has claimed, ‘colonial in principle’ (1988: 216), as, in contrast to orality, it not only ‘preserves the past’ but also ‘conquers space by multiplying the same signs’. The indigenous ‘repertoire’ (Taylor 2003) of performed and oral traditions, on the other hand, depends on the live: it cannot be expanded, exported or multiplied in the same form.

Nevertheless, and despite this seeming superiority of the written over the oral and performed, I have argued in this paper that Naqab Bedouin women, by maintaining and re-crafting their own alternative spaces in which they continue to practice their community’s indigenous ‘repertoire’, challenge the expansionist settler-colonial project aimed at effacing them. Of course, women with their oral sung poetry or other embodied performances cannot reverse the material dispossession that their community has suffered and continues to suffer at the hands of the settler-colonial regime, nor can they actually dismantle the archive. But they can curb its expansionist reach, and its aim of erasing Naqab Bedouin lived indigeneity. Women’s songs and oral poetry contest the Israeli official discourse directly, by providing very valuable, historical counter-narratives (such as references to Palestine, to Bedouin tribal lands, to specific places, norms, events, and lived experiences and memories of their pre-urbanised and pre-1948 lives, etc.). But beyond the narrative, they also function as embodied systems of learning, teaching, storing, and, to a certain extent, of transmitting indigenous knowledge. The corporeal and oral modes of knowledge production which women use in this process are both difficult to censor and to decipher for the coloniser. As such, Bedouin women from the Nakba generation have managed to evade the colonisation of their bodies and of their own orality and of their performance-based discursive spaces. They have not been de-nativised, and their indigenous
subjectivities have not been eliminated, but rather are in a ‘process of becoming’ (Clifford, 2013: 7), of being constantly remade.

One urgent question arises: there is a need to enquire as to whether this analysis also holds true for younger generations. With sedentarisation and comprehensive schooling, but also with the influence of the digital revolution, what role can indigenous embodied and oral knowledges of the Naqab Bedouin still play in challenging and resisting settler-colonial representations and practices aimed at erasing them? It is certainly true that writing and digital communication (which both relies on but can also replace writing) has taken hold in the younger generations. But this does not mean that embodied and oral performances no longer exist, nor that they have become insignificant in the transmission and constitution of Naqab Bedouin social memory, knowledge and identity. Rather, the fact that Naqab Bedouin rely on a mix of written, oral, digital and embodied performed modes and codes of communication highlights that simplistic binaries of oral vs. written, traditional vs. modern, and backward vs. progressive cannot capture the complex, creative and innovative ways through which indigenous peoples shape and remake their communities.

Yet, it remains crucial to trace the particular function that oral and embodied traditions perform in this process of ‘indigenous becoming’. Clifford (2013: 28) suggests the notion of indigenous ‘historical practice’ which, he argues, can:

help expand our range of attention, allowing us to take seriously the claims of oral transmission, genealogy, and ritual processes. These embodied, practical ways of representing the past have not been considered fully, realistically, historical by modern ideologies that privilege literacy and chronology. Historical practice can act as a translation tool for rethinking “tradition,” a central process of indigenous survival and renewal.

Taylor (2003: 960), who similarly is interested in the role that the body, ritual, performance and practice play in historical transmission, has pointed out one important comparative advantage of the ‘repertoire’ over the ‘archive’. She argues that the ‘repertoire’, given its live performance and enactment, not only represents (i.e. functions as something), but also presents, i.e. it enacts and constitutes—and thus is something in and of itself. Butler’s understanding that gender identity is ‘an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts’ (1988: 519) is useful in this regard. However, Butler’s conceptualisation of performativity also seems to privilege verbal discourse (speech, words and language) over practice in the constitution of identities (Butler 1997). Taylor’s (2003: 342) critique that ‘[i]n [Butler’s] trajectory the performative becomes less a quality (or adjective) of ‘performance’ than of discourse is thus valid, particularly when studying traditionally oral
communities such as the Naqab Bedouin. By looking at ‘the repertoire’ of embodied and oral performances, rather than texts, narratives and speech, Taylor aims to reclaim the performative for performance, moving away from a focus on verbal written discourse characteristic of ‘Western logo-centricism’ (Taylor 2003: 342). Oral and lived traditions, whether performed in a more ritual way at weddings and other ceremonies or at home with friends and family, are performative; they, in contrast to the recorded and scripted, not only represent something, but also present, constitute and enact identities.

If we accept this premise—that the body, the oral and performance/practice (i.e. Taylor’s ‘repertoire’ rather than ‘the archive’) are foundational to modes of knowing and being—then this also points to their potential for resistance. This is not a resistance that takes over, but one that maintains and ‘becomes’. Unlike writing, embodied, performed and oral discursive formations cannot be multiplied and exported in exactly the same way. But they can maintain, reproduce, regenerate and transmit alternative cultural spaces in a participatory, embodied and affective way, to the young as well as to older people. This crucial performative and constitutive role that the body and the voice play in transmitting, reshaping and enacting local indigenous knowledges and identities is difficult to erase and ‘overwrite’—its potential lies in its actuality: it is rather than represents something. Scholarly efforts in solidarity with the Naqab Bedouin thus need to move beyond the modes of knowledge production common and comfortable to much of Western and colonial science—the text, the archive, the museum. This does not mean that these channels should be abandoned, but they need to be ‘defrosted’, brought alive and oriented towards the future. Furthermore, there is also, and complementarily, a need to start from, listen to, support and prioritise the community’s own indigenous epistemes and ways of being in the world, which, in their own immediate and actualised way, function as an important challenge and resistance to settler-colonial erasure.

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Erratum

Dr Sophie Richter-Devroe: Oral Traditions of Naqab Bedouin Women: Challenging Settler-Colonial Representations through Embodied Performance http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/hlps.2016.0128

The Editor and publishers deeply regret proofreading inconsistencies in this article which resulted in errors in some of the Arabic transliterations when it was first published in Volume 15, Issue 1 (May 2016) and extend their apologies to the author.

The correct versions are reproduced below.

On page 43:

Mandeeli, mandeeli, ya Abu Mohammad, mandeeli
   Mandeeli [my headscarf], mandeeli, Abu Muhammad, mandeeli
Albasak wa arawih asaafir il-khaleeli.
   I wear it and go travelling to Khalil [Hebron].

Shashaati, shashaati, ya Abu Mohammad, shashaati
   Shashaati [white scarf worn by older Bedouin women], shashaati, Abu
   Muhammad, shashaati
Albasak wa arawih asaafir il-bashaati.
   I wear it and go travelling to the Pasha.

Jakeeti, Jakeeti, ya Abu Mohammad, Jakeeti
   My jacket, my jacket, Abu Muhammad, my jacket
Albasak wa arawih asaafir il-Kuwaiti.
   I wear it and go travelling to Kuwait.

On page 45:

Yahirim alayy labis mandeel al-ghazza
   Wearing the beautiful headscarf is forbidden to me
Il qataloo shahada ghaza.
   Because of the martyrs who were killed in Gaza.
Yahirim alayy qus ash-shaaseeh
   Cutting my hair is forbidden to me
Ili qataloo fi 'ard al-areesh.
Because of those who were killed in the lands of al-Arish.

Ya h r i mcalayy tazhir al-khirqa
Colouring [a special kind of] scarf is forbidden to me

Ili qataloo fi-barqa.
Because of those who were killed in Banqa.

Ya h r i mcalayy labis mandeel
Wearing the headscarf is forbidden to me

Ili qataloo fi-'ard al-khaleel.
Because of those who were killed in the lands of Hebron.

Ya h r i mcalayy al-kohl fi-l-cain
Wearing kohl on my eyes is forbidden to me

Ili qataloo fi-Wadi Hunayn.
Because of those who were killed in Wadi Hunayn.

On page 47:

At-Tiyaha wazracoo al-'ard (or al-blaad)
The Tiyaha were farming the land

Min ghaza l-al-areesha wa ghaad.
From Gaza to al-Arish and further.

Al-yoom ahlim al-layali tanceed zay kaan
Today I am dreaming that the nights return as they used to be

Wa aruh ghaza wa waqf fi krum al-khaan
And I go to Gaza and sit in the orchards of Khan (Yunis).

Ya maq ha al-beit wa-l-humun kthaar
You who stays inside and has many worries

Tala fi-l-khalla (or variation: srihti al-ghanam) btawal al-bnaar
If you go out in the open (or variation: if you graze the sheep), that
lengthens life.