

## **WEAVING TRADITION AND MODERNITY**

### **Bedouin Women in Higher Education**

The Center for Bedouin Studies & Development Research Unit

Center for Regional Development

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Academic research and theorising on indigenous or tribal people's relations with modernity have burgeoned since the 1990s, with more recent influences on their education in the tertiary sector growing in the past decade. For those with a new interest in the area, *Weaving Tradition and Modernity* offers a robust and plain-spoken perspective on indigenous women's experiences in higher education and the inter-related array of influences on their own lives and their communities. For those more familiar with indigenous struggles, the book draws attention to the academic, social and political experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of young Bedouin women studying at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. The monograph also deals with the vexed point of identity amongst the students in the University.

The study of relations between indigenous peoples and the modernisation process is concerned with the relationship between language, culture and land; the changing relations which occur in a tribal society; what happens when the people are in various relations of contact, the rise of new languages and cultures, the elevation of hi-tech economy over subsistence farming; a scripted destiny of pain, suffering and exhaustion; and hope for change for the better. The book provides an extremely readable analysis of all of these aspects of living. The style and detail of explanation is such that any interested reader would follow the discussion. At the same time, nothing is simplified for the sake of readability, and the book is a treasure trove of fascinating quotations and graphs. These are always clearly elucidated. As an additional benefit each chapter ends with a reflection upon the content and is considered by the reviewer useful for solo thoughts or talking with friends, colleagues and students about indigenous peoples' cultural marginalisation and educational alienation.

The advice is critical and realistic, and there is a solid theoretical base that experienced academics and researchers will recognise and which is evident in the list of references. The book, also, provides useful references for further readings on indigenous peoples and minority groups' ongoing relationship with modernity. These cover a range of resources from the past fifty years. In a few words, the research in

the six chapters explores educational and political practices, and cultural beliefs confronted in the Bedouin home and the mainstream Israeli university by young Bedouin Arab women (chapter 3), many of which resonate with indigenous Maori students' experiences of centralized planning by the state, a business model of education, and a contextless methodology for educating *all* students in the tertiary education sector in Aotearoa-New Zealand. In Aotearoa-New Zealand, under the banner of culture as a barrier to achievement, diversity is emphasised as a site of tension between the dominant New Zealand European/Pākehā culture, the unique place of the indigenous Māori people in New Zealand society and the diverse cultures that make up of contemporary society. Overall, the book makes for excellent reading and is a valuable resource for graduate students and researchers who have an interest in the area and indigenous teachers, such as Maori, who are familiar with the field and in search of reflections on indigenous peoples' relations with the modernisation process.

Unfortunately, the otherwise excellent quality of the book is marred by the contentious advice, in the concluding chapter, that higher education for the young Bedouin women studying at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel would equip them for a leading role in the ... "indigenising of modernity" (p. 213). The advice is contentious in several ways. One is the increasingly blurred distinction between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous peoples' educational practices, cultural beliefs and knowledges. Another is the impact of the dominant discourses and values that are integrated, comprehended and taken up or not, in the home and the tribe. Indigenous peoples ought to question more the necessity for them to 'indigenise' modernity and in fact question the indigenous/non indigenous duality. Encouraging indigenous peoples to make these interconnections politicises the way the students relate to the learning environment, especially when it is not their people who establish, manage and oversee the curriculum, pedagogy, school and the classroom. The important point ought to be that the modernisation process presents a distinct challenge to be addressed by indigenous peoples in the university. It would seem, then, that the first priority for the teacher (and students) would be to confront questions about *all* students of *all* cultures after which methodological questions can be addressed. These few points notwithstanding, I can heartily recommend the book to anyone interested in higher education for indigenous peoples and the ways education changes and spreads to change all people.