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## Negev Bedouin *daḥīyah* Songs: Celebrating Brotherhood Above War and Love

**Abstract** While much attention has been paid to several dialectal Arabic narrative and poetic genres, Negev Arabic (NA) *daḥīyah* songs (NA *diḥḥīyyih*, also known as *daḥḥa*) have received little scholarly attention. I report here eight traditional Negev Bedouin *daḥīyah* songs, one neo-*daḥīyah*, and one *haḡin* (NA *hiḡnih*)—recorded during personal meetings with informants from 2017 to 2019—in transcription and translation with some stylistic and linguistic comments. Background information is provided on the characteristics of this vernacular genre—its performance, contents, and scope—and its evolution. *Daḥīyah* has profoundly changed in content, language, and form in the transition from traditional Negev Bedouin society—before the establishment of the State of Israel—to the present. Originally a form of martial collective chant and dance mainly performed at wedding celebrations, the *daḥīyah* has gained popularity in neighboring sedentary Palestinian communities, where it has become an expression of identity, resistance, and revolt on various festive occasions. Today, several closely interconnected *daḥīyah* types coexist in the Negev, from songs that adhere to traditional models in terms of composition and performance to neo-*daḥīyah*.

**Keywords** Negev Arabic, Bedouin Arabic, *daḥīyah*, Bedouin folk songs, Palestinian folk songs, neo-*daḥīyah*



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## 1 Introduction: The Arab Negev and Negev Arabic<sup>1</sup>

The word *negeb* was used in Biblical Hebrew to designate both the region located to the south of the area of influence of the ancient Israelite powers and the southern direction (Cerqueglini and Henkin 2016). The pre-desert/desert region called the Negev (Arabic *an-Naqab*)<sup>2</sup> is the southernmost area of the State of Israel and covers more than half of its land area. The Negev stretches twelve thousand square kilometers from the Egyptian-Israeli border in the southwest and the Gaza Strip in the west to the Arava valley in the east. Its northern line runs approximately between Gaza and Ein Gedi and its southern boundary is in Eilat, on the Gulf of Aqaba.

The spaces of the Negev are still inhabited by various Bedouin tribes and lineages, grouped in five main confederations: ‘Azāzmih, Tarābīn, Ḥullām, Gdērāt, and Tiyāha (al-‘Atāmīn 2011; Shawarbah 2012). Tribal genealogical accounts claim different geographical origins for the different tribes (Cerqueglini 2015). From a linguistic point of view, different origins are reflected in some tribe-specific linguistic traits still identifiable in the varieties spoken by the elders but progressively fading away from the language of the young. Despite these significant, yet minor, differences, the language spoken by the Bedouin groups living in the Negev can be identified *grosso modo* as a variety of Bedouin Ḥiḡāzi (Palva 1991; de Jong 2000), first described by Blanc (1970), who labeled it ‘Negev Bedouin Arabic’. The label ‘Negev Arabic’ used here was proposed by Henkin (2010) and adopted by Shawarbah (2012). The various Negev Arabic tribal dialects have been and continue to be subjected to the sustained effect of a centripetal force that leads them progressively towards ever-stronger koineization—and to leveling on the models of Palestinian sedentary varieties—as Henkin (2010) aptly describes.

However, not all Negev Arabic tribal and family varieties are influenced to the same extent by external patterns, contact with other varieties and languages, and education. Even today, the lifestyles of the

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<sup>1</sup> I sincerely thank the two anonymous readers who have significantly contributed to improving this article.

<sup>2</sup> Non-English proper names of people, tribes, political groups, and places are rendered in transcription, with the exception of those that have a common, accepted, version in the Latin alphabet, e.g., Khaled, Cheb Mami, Mama Hosni. Transcriptions follow the norms of pronunciation of different Arabic dialectal and standard varieties. The term *daḥiyah* has been ‘normalized’ in this transcription because its pronunciation varies greatly within the Negev (*dihḥiyiyih/dihḥiyih/dihḥiyiyih/deḥiyeh*) and outside it (*deḥiye/daḥiye/daḥiya*) in different social and generational groups.

Bedouin groups of the Negev vary greatly. Some reside in recognized villages around Beer-Sheva, while others live in villages that lack infrastructure in the desert diaspora (*bzuráh*, from the Modern Hebrew term *pzurah* ‘dispersion’, which indicates the scattered presence of Bedouin groups across the Negev). Some are open to formal education and even to marriage with other Arab groups. Others resolutely resist contact with the outside world. Much depends on the decisions made by each group and even by individual families regarding social and educational policies and conduct.

It should be recalled at this point that the events of the last twenty years have led large sectors of the Arab society of the Negev—and outside it—to withdraw inward and become closed to the outside world. This process is often accompanied by religious extremism with connotations of political resistance to Western models. Increasing numbers of women wear completely black dresses and veils and cover their faces, often even with a full *burga*.<sup>3</sup> According to accounts provided by elderly informants, these customs were foreign to the local traditional Bedouin culture and may be considered, at least in part, the result of a worsening of the confrontation with the outside world.<sup>3</sup> Talking about the events of the last twenty years, especially in the region that this article addresses, I am referring—in addition to the events of the Arab Spring—to the Second Intifāḍah or Intifāḍat al-Aqṣā, the ongoing conflict between Gaza and Israel that began in 2005, the storm of riots against building speculation in the Israeli Arab neighborhoods ignited by events that took place in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Šēx Garrāḥ in May 2021, and the Third Intifāḍah or ‘Knife Intifāḍah’, which began in 2015 and is, tragically, ongoing.

In the sociopolitical climate of the troubled last two decades, customs have changed among the Negev Bedouin (Nasasra et al. 2015) and even their traditional, folkloric literary genres—handed down orally and/or improvised—have been transformed, as happened in the case of the *daḥīyah* chants. From personal conversations held with authoritative voices in the panorama of contemporary Negev Bedouin *daḥīyah*,<sup>4</sup> I learned

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<sup>3</sup> Certainly, in the Negev the veil is also an important symbol of honor, as in all Bedouin cultures (Abu-Lughod 1986), but Negev Bedouin women traditionally wore a white veil that barely rested on the head.

<sup>4</sup> As studies devoted to *daḥīyah* in the Southern Levant are scarce, this article is largely based on data from a dedicated fieldwork campaign and the writer’s direct observations. Opinions of the interviewees are reported for their social and anthropological value in the field of local folk music. Therefore, I am deeply indebted to A.-Y. Abū-Bnayyah (‘Azāz-mih), M. Tarābin aṣ-Šāni, S. Abū-‘Aziz (Tarābin aṣ-Šāni), A. Zaydna (Tarābin), and the other informants who wished to remain fully anonymous for sharing not only lyrics, but also more general information on the local musical traditions.

that today two kinds of *daḥīyah* coexist and, to a certain extent, are intertwined: traditional and contemporary *daḥīyah*. The musical instruments are different, the language has been updated, and the themes and even the occasions of the performance have been diversified. Political themes more or less directly and openly related to the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict have entered contemporary Negev *daḥīyah*, probably following the example of non-Bedouin Palestinian Arab society.

## 2 Negev *daḥīyah* texts: Linguistic variation

In this section, I report eight traditional Negev Bedouin *daḥīyah*, one neo-*daḥīyah*, and one *haḡīn* (NA *hiḡnih*) songs recorded during personal meetings with informants from 2017 to 2019 in transcription and translation with some stylistic and linguistic comments. I want to begin this discussion with some linguistic observations related to dialectal differences that are well highlighted in texts or verses that have similar contents and prosodic structures.

*Daḥīyah* texts often highlight dialectal and sociolectal differences attributable to different tribal and rural dialects and sociolects, for example, the vocalization of the definite article and the morphological pattern of the following word in Text 2.1, verse 8: *ad-diḥḥīyyih* vs. those in Text 2.8, verse 4: *id-daḥīyah* ‘the *daḥīyah*’.

The Negev linguistic geography is varied and includes several traditional tribal varieties (Shawarbah 2012), Bedouinized rural dialects, and intermediate forms (Henkin 2010). Furthermore, progressive modern koineization has introduced words and forms from the sedentary Arabic dialects spoken in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This linguistic, social and generational puzzle is reflected in the texts of the *daḥīyah* chants, which are executed today in the whole Negev and beyond, and therefore often performed in intertribal contexts and at mixed events, i.e., in the presence of non-Bedouin singers and audiences. Dialectal and sociolectal differences are found in both traditional and neo-*daḥīyah* texts.

Regarding the traditional texts presented here, internal variations stem from several main factors according to which they can be classified: (a) inter-tribal dialectal differences, (b) Bedouin vs. rural dialectal models, and (c) cross-generational variations.

- a. All cases in which diphthongs produce different outcomes belong to the first category. One example of this phenomenon is the height of the long vowel obtained from the contraction of the diphthong *-ay-* in Text 2.1, verse 11 and Text 2.8, verse 7: *Bēd* vs. Text 2.4,

verse 3: ‘*Bīd* ‘Ubayd’, the diminutive form of the personal name ‘*Ābid*’<sup>5</sup>. A striking case of such cross-dialectal alternation is found in the name of one of the Negev Bedouin confederations, pronounced both *Gdērāt* and *Gdīrāt* (from the pattern \**Qudayrāt*), following the tribal affiliation of the speaker. Regarding the differences in the contraction of the diphthongs, Palva (2008: 405) states that in the dialects of the eastern Northwest Arabian Arabic branch (i.e., east of Wādī al-‘Arabah and southern Sinai), the reflexes of \**aw* and \**ay* are the well-established monophthongs *ō* and *ē*, usually after back and after emphatic consonants as well. In most dialects of western Northwest Arabian Arabic (Negev and northern Sinai), \**aw* and \**ay* have been partially monophthongized, but the new monophthongs fluctuate with long phonemes: *ō* ~ *ū*, *ē* ~ *ī* (Shawarbah 2012: 77).<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, systematic research on tribal dialectal differences in the Negev and their consequent classification are not available at present, with the only remarkable exception of some comparisons provided by Shawarbah (2007; 2012). According to the provenance of the songs presented here, the form ‘*Bēd*’ is used by ‘Azāzmih singers (Texts 2.1 and 2.8), while the form ‘*Bīd*’ appears in the lyrics recorded among the Tarābīn (Text 2.4). It should be noted, however, that today the alternative use of (\**aw* >) *ō* ~ *ū* and (\**ay* >) *ē* ~ *ī* appears as a common, cross-dialectal feature.

Numerous cases of alternative vocalizations of the same words are also part of the koineized landscape of today’s Negev, in which their tribal origins are difficult to trace:

- *ḥumāmīt* (Text 2.1, verse 11) vs. *ḥamāmīt* (Text 2.4, verse 3) ‘dove (of)’,
- *gulbī* (Text 2.1, verse 11) vs. *galbī* (Text 2.4, verse 3) ‘my heart’,
- *simī*<sup>c</sup> (Text 2.1, verse 1) vs. *samī*<sup>c</sup> (Text 2.2, verse 1) ‘rumor’,
- *muṣṭ* (Text 2.1, verse 5) vs. *maṣṭ* (Text 2.8, verse 1) ‘breeze’.

<sup>5</sup> In general, the form *fu‘ayl* is rather considered the diminutive form of the *fa‘al* pattern, while *fu‘ayyil* is the diminutive form associated to the *fā‘il* pattern (Shawarbah 2012: 150–151).

<sup>6</sup> To clarify the question, according to Palva (2008: 405), the diphthongs *ay* and *aw* are preserved in the more conservative Bedouin dialects of Najd primarily in back environments. In the Bedouin dialectal peripheries such as the Negev and Sinai they monophthongize to *ē* ~ *ī* and *ō* ~ *ū* respectively, mainly in front environments, but even in back environments in many cases.

Another interesting point is the different transcriptions *-īy-/-īyy-*, which reflect different pronunciations. Even though the first alternative, *-īy-*, is less typical for Negev Arabic, both forms, once dialectal allomorphs, are used today as almost free variants. For example, in the texts presented here, *diḥhiyyih* alternates with *daḥiyih* in many occurrences (Text 2.1, verse 8 vs. Text 2.8, verse 4); *maḡwiyyih* ‘obscure’ (Text 2.7, verse 6) with *-īyy-* is used in the same metrical/syntactic type of verse as *mahawīyih* ‘lost’ (Text 2.9, verse 1 and 2) with *-īy-*. Apropos this last pair of words, the use of the vowel *-a-* in the second syllable *-ha-* in *mahawīyih* is probably due to ‘*gahāwah* syndrome’,<sup>7</sup> yet interestingly this phenomenon is not manifested in the analogous phonetic context in *maḡwiyyih*.

- b. The most productive area of grammatical alternations found in the texts here is the one that results from the intertwining of local Bedouin and rural dialects. It should be recalled that in pre-modern Negev Bedouin society, some families absorbed female members from the rural Palestinian world from both the coast and the hinterland. Furthermore, the Negev has historically been home to peasant groups whose members worked the Bedouins’ lands. Their dialects show a rural basis with strong Bedouin influences (Henkin 2010). Furthermore, for decades, the Bedouin dialects of the Negev have been subject to the assimilating force of the rural and urban dialects of Palestine: classes are often given by non-Bedouin staff members<sup>8</sup> who inevitably spread non-Bedouin linguistic features to the younger generations, and local Arab media use educated sedentary dialectal patterns in addition to Standard Arabic.

Among the numerous Bedouin vs. sedentary alternative forms, the following features are found:

- definite article *al-* (Bedouin) vs. *il-* (sedentary),
- final *imālah* feminine singular nouns *-ih* (Bedouin; Text 2.1, verse 4: *Širī‘ih*) vs. *-ah* (sedentary; Text 2.2, verse 6: *Širī‘ah*),

<sup>7</sup> ‘*Gahāwah* syndrome’ is a feature typical of Bedouin dialects in which a short vowel *a* follows a morpheme-internal back spirant (X) whenever this X is preceded by *a* (De Jong 2011), as in the word *gahāwah* meaning ‘coffee’, from *gahwah*. This type of vowel insertion was dubbed ‘*gahāwah*-syndrome’ by Blanc (1970: 125–127).

<sup>8</sup> Teachers often come from the central and northern Arabic-speaking regions of Israel, i.e., the Muṭallaṭ and the Galilee.

- the vocalization of the imperfective prefix *yu-* (Bedouin; Text 2.1, verse 8: *yultaff*) vs. *yi-* (sedentary; Text 2.8, verse 4: *yiltaff*),
  - the form of the suffixed first singular pronoun after the preposition: *-li* (sedentary; Text 2.1 verse 11) vs. *-lay* (Bedouin; Text 2.8 verse 7).
- c. Given that the texts reported are performed in the contemporary era with a language already different from what the original must have been—according to what the poets themselves admit—some words remain in active use, but their meanings change in different generations. The semantic ambiguity generated by this phenomenon has an undeniable poetic force in some passages. So, for example, the verb in Text 2.1, verse 10: *nitgalla*‘ means for the elders ‘we will go away’, while among younger generations ‘we will get lost’ (physically and emotionally) is by far the most common interpretation.<sup>9</sup> The word *rukayyib* in Text 2.6, verse 2 also has a different interpretation: it is a diminutive form possibly meaning ‘small knight’, or ‘small traveler/visitor’ or indicating a type of bird.

Some final notes must be added regarding specific features of poetic language. In the Negev dialectal tradition, as in others, nunation and preservation of the nominal declension are apparent in poetic compositions. An example is found in Text 2.1, verse 1: *harġin* ‘[of a] slander’. Another interesting feature is the addition of a (sometimes non-grammatical) *-i* vowel in a word’s final position for metrical reasons. Examples of this feature are found Text 2.1, verse 2: ‘*Arāġibi* instead of ‘*Arāġib*<sup>10</sup> and in Text 2.1, verse 6: *maġnūni* instead of *maġnūn*. Nunation and final prosodic *-i*, both in non-syntactic fossilized form (*-i*, *-in*) are both well-known features of Nabaṭi poetry, a masculine Bedouin poetic genre (Henkin 2010; Holes and Abu Athera 2011).

Finally, I must specify that my translations tend to be as literal as possible and that the texts reported here have been to some minimal extent ‘normalized’ to make them comprehensible. These lyrics, due to the rapid rhythm and improvisational nature of the performance, showed elliptical syntax and *ad sensum* grammatical agreement in various passages, while the pronunciation of some syllables was non-grammatically shortened or lengthened in accordance with metrics and rhythm.

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<sup>9</sup> I sincerely thank Hiba ‘Ammāš and Salām ‘Eydeh, who belong to different generations and dialectal areas, for having generously provided and discussed with me their different translations and interpretations of the texts reported here.

<sup>10</sup> In this case, it could be justified as the grammatical form of a retained genitive.

## 2.1 ‘Let the hand twist: Hand is core to our *daḥiyah*’

This text was recorded among the ‘Azāzmih tribe. In these lyrics, the *daḥiyah* genre is explicitly mentioned and celebrated alongside unity and agreement among tribal men (see Texts 2.3 and 2.8). Originally, percussion was obtained by clapping the hands or using domestic tools. The addition of electronic percussion was initiated by the singer Ašraf Abū-Layl in 2016 and led to the entry of many non-Bedouin artists from the *hidāyah* tradition, such as ‘Išām ‘Umur, Rif‘at Asadī, and Šādī al-Birūnī, into *daḥiyah*. In this chant, social, political, and love motifs intertwine and flow into each other continuously.

1. <i>yā ‘ēni lli biddami‘</i> Oh my eye who is crying tears	<i>min harġin smi‘ti simi‘</i> as you heard a rumor of slander
2. <i>w-ġanamki w-ašir li-ġanamki</i> your (f.) goats, for your (f.) goats	<i>ḏīb miżḏalli ‘a-l-‘Arāġib(i)</i> I will be a wolf lurking in ‘Arāġib
3. <i>w-yōmin takkēna l-ġizān</i> one day we moved across the mountain	<i>w-al-miliḥ yabri l-ġizlān</i> and salt cures all deers
4. <i>wiḥna ‘urbān aš-Širī‘ih</i> we are the Arabs of Širī‘ah	<i>allī mā byuḏḏug binbi‘ih</i> the one who is not loyal, we will sell him
5. <i>w-ṣubḥ w-al-muṣṭ mnaddī</i> one morning while the breeze is moist	<i>l-āxiḏ ‘šēri wa‘addi</i> I shall take my beloved and come by
6. <i>yā yumma māni maġnūn(i)</i> my dear mother: I am not insane!	<i>w-al-ġinn min allī laḥġūni</i> The demon of madness is from those who caught me
7. <i>war-rāġil min dūn rġālih</i> a man without his folk	<i>tākil ‘ašāha l-wāwiyiyih</i> wolves will eat (him) for dinner
8. <i>a‘tūni l-kaff xallih yultaff<sup>11</sup></i> give me the hand and let it twist	<i>w-al-kaff ‘mār ad-diḥḥiyiyih</i> hand is core to (our) <i>daḥiyah</i>
9. <i>yā rbū‘i yā šāša lbī</i> oh my people! You are my headband	<i>ḥālāti min dūnkuw ziriyah</i> my condition <sup>12</sup> without you is miserable
10. <i>‘a-allah ya‘tūni iyāha</i> by God, may they give me her,	<i>niṭgalla‘ anā wiyāha</i> we will escape, she and me <sup>13</sup>
11. <i>yā ‘ammī ‘Bēd iftīl-li ga‘d</i> oh Uncle ‘Ubayd, solve my problem!	<i>ḥumāmīl gulbi tuwwā‘ah</i> The dove of my heart is obedient.

<sup>11</sup> It is not clear what the verb *yultaff* means here. To explain to me what action this verb refers to in this context, a young female informant took my hand and began to rotate her wrist in and out, so that our hands rotated together. Maybe it is a way of marking the rhythm. However, the same verb is also used in association with the drum, in Text 2.8, verse 4. The exact interpretation of this action requires further study.

<sup>12</sup> Plural in Arabic.

<sup>13</sup> Lit. ‘I with her’.

## 2.2 ‘We are the Arabs of Širī‘ah’

This text was recorded among members of the ‘Azāzmih tribe. The celebration of collective identity starts in this song from distant memories of the village of al-‘Arāgīb. Al-‘Arāgīb refers to a hilly area between Beer-Sheva and Rahaṭ. Two large families, al-‘Ugbī and at-Tūrī (Tayāha), lived there until 1948, when the inhabitants were expelled to Ḍahirīyah, in the southern West Bank. One year later, some families were allowed to return. In 1951, the Israeli government ordered the residents to leave their homes for six months, but after this period they were not yet allowed to return. Thus, most members of at-Tūrī family resettled near Rahaṭ, while the al-‘Ugbī family was resettled near Hūrah. In the nineteen seventies, both families began filing claims for land ownership. In 1998, some fifty Bedouin families decided to return to al-‘Arāgīb. Since then, the confrontation between the residents and the State of Israel has escalated. By January 2021, al-‘Arāgīb had witnessed over 182 demolitions that targeted shacks, tents, mobile homes, and water tanks.

1. <i>yā ‘ēni hillī b-id-dami‘</i> Oh my eye, start crying (many) tears	<i>min harġin smi‘ti sami‘</i> since you heard rumors of slander
2. <i>w-aṣīr li-ġanamki</i> I will become for your goats	<i>ḍīb(i) miẓẓalli ‘a-l-‘Arāgīb(i)</i> a wolf lurking in al-‘Arāgīb
3. <i>w-aṣīr li-ġanamki</i> I will become for your goats	<i>ḍīb(i) miẓẓalli ‘a-l-‘Arāgīb(i)</i> a wolf lurking in al-‘Arāgīb
4. <i>w-yōmin takkēna al-ġizān</i> when we crossed the mountains	<i>w-al-milḥ yabri l-ġizlān</i> salt cures all deers
5. <i>w-yōmin takkēna al-ġizān</i> when we crossed the mountains	<i>w-al-milḥ yabri l-ġizlān</i> salt cures all deers
6. <i>w-aḥna ‘urbān aš-Širī‘ah</i> we are the Arab of Širī‘ah	<i>allī mā byuṣluṭ binbī‘ah</i> the one who has no power, we will sell him
7. <i>yā rabḥī kif widdi asawwī</i> my Lord, what should I do?	<i>yā dmū‘i ġudrān al-ġawwī</i> oh my tears, for the betrayal that is inside (me)!

## 2.3 ‘Let’s do *daḥiyah* until the morning star rises’

This text was recorded among the ‘Azāzmih tribe in Sġīb as-Salām (Segev Shalom). This short composition is a poetic celebration of *daḥiyah* itself and is strongly correlated with ironic mockery of both old men marrying—while young men are rejected, probably by the brides’ families—

and young men going around exhausted by their sexual desire, as if in a literally ‘frying’ state of heat. The issue of elderly men investing family resources to organize their own weddings to the detriment of their sons is very sensitive in Negev society, especially among the ‘Azāzmih, most of whose sectors consist of remote, conservative groups among which polygamy is still widely practiced. This situation still represents one of the reasons for serious family conflicts.

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| 1. <i>allī nte ḥāy yā šāyib</i><br>whoever you are [living], old man!             | <i>lā yā zahat ad-dihḥiyiyih</i><br>May <i>daḥiyah</i> live and flourish!        |
| 2. <i>‘īyyētu w-axaḏtu šāyib</i><br>you got tired and took the elderly            | <i>w-šubb kan gā‘id fi-ziggah</i><br>while a young boy was sitting in the corner |
| 3. <i>law dāhī yā m‘arrid dāhī</i><br>please, <i>daḥiyah</i> singer, keep singing | <i>lu tiṭla‘ an-niḡmih aš-šubbāhīh</i><br>until the morning star rises           |
| 4. <i>amma l‘izub mašthum giḏub:</i><br>the single men, their going is mad:       | <i>byigzdīru f-al-gilyālīh</i><br>they walk around in the intense heat.          |

## 2.4 ‘I found next to me a beautiful, tall girl’

This text was recorded among the Tarābin tribe. At the center of this composition is the inner conflict between the desire for a woman who is too beautiful and the attachment to the male brotherhood and its collective identity. The poem is resolved with a request to the maternal uncle to restore order in the chaos of such conflicting desires. Probably the uncle will grant his daughter in marriage and thus appease the young man and at the same time strengthen his belonging to the tribal clan.

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| 1. <i>laggēt ḥaddī bānah,</i><br>I found next to me a beautiful tall girl    | <i>lagger w ḥālna</i><br>and they found out our situation                    |
| 2. <i>maddī bānah zayha,</i><br>I don’t want a girl like her                 | <i>w-ilnā, maddī bānah zayha</i><br>and for us, I don’t want a girl like her |
| 3. <i>yā ‘ammī ‘Bīd ifṭīlik-lay</i><br>oh Uncle ‘Ubayd, bring me luck!       | <i>ḥamāmit galbī ṭayyārah</i><br>The dove of my heart flew away              |
| 4. <i>ḥamāmit galbī ṭayyārah,</i><br>my heart’s dove flew away,              | <i>w-rbū‘ih<sup>14</sup> šābit rāsī</i><br>and an intense cold hits my head  |
| 5. <i>ḥālātī dūnkūw ziriyah,</i><br>my condition without you is meaningless, | <i>ḥālātī dūnkūw ziriyah</i><br>my condition without you is meaningless.     |

<sup>14</sup> The word *rbū‘ih*, translated by the informant as ‘intense cold’, may be related to *al-arba‘īniyyih* ‘the forty days denoting the cold period of winter, which lasts until late February’ (Shawarbah 2012: 420).

## 2.5 ‘You are in a foreign land, and I am in my homeland’

This text was recorded among members of the Tarābīn aṣ-Ṣāni‘ tribe. According to the explanations I received from the informants, it belongs to the *haḡīn* (NA *hiḡnih*) genre. Compared to *daḥīyah*, the contents of *haḡīn* are more intimate and sentimental, and the rhythm of the percussion is slower. In these lyrics, the poet is mourning the absence of his mother. Apparently, her absence is due to some geographical distance. However, strangely enough, the mother appears to be in a foreign land, as the last verse indicates. In fact, in the Bedouin culture, *al-ḡurbah* ‘the land of the West’, or ‘the land of the exile’, also refers to the afterlife (Cerqueglini and Henkin 2016). Therefore, perhaps, in this poem, distance is to be understood as synonymous with extreme separation.

1. <i>yā ‘ēni yā allī bkēti</i> Oh my eye, (oh) who cried	<i>bkāki w-eš ‘āyid minnih?</i> your cry, what (can ever) come back because of it?
2. <i>bkāki mā yirudd al-ḡāyib</i> your cry won’t bring back the absent	<i>w-allī zāra-lnā ḡannih<sup>15</sup></i> or the one who visited Paradise
3. <i>ruddī ‘alayya yumma</i> respond to me, oh mother	<i>w-anā ‘alēki anādī</i> when I call on you
4. <i>w-inti fi-blēd al-ḡurbah</i> while you are in a foreign land	<i>w-anā fi-ḥay blādī</i> and I am in my country.

## 2.6 ‘Zamzam well is watched over by a sleepless guardian’

This text, recorded among members of the Tarābīn tribe, elaborates on some of the themes seen in the previous composition (Text 2.5) but this time in the form of a *daḥīyah* song. The well of Zamzam, a spring near Mecca, is mentioned. Then the poem suddenly becomes an appeal to the mother of the singer, who lives far away in her homeland, while the son is in exile. In this case, the distance between the two may refer to actual geographic separation.

1. <i>bēr Zumzum ‘alēh</i> Zamzam well, on it	<i>ḥāris mā yinām</i> there is a sleepless guardian
2. <i>w-ar-rukayyib ‘alēh</i> and a small knight is on it	<i>miṭl ruḑ‘ al-ḥumām</i> beautifully thin as a dove

<sup>15</sup> Lit. ‘who visited to us Paradise’. The dative ‘to us’ here is an expression of the singer’s emotional participation and pain.

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| 3. <i>ruddī ‘alay yā yumma</i><br>respond to me (my) mother       | <i>w-anā ‘alēki banādī</i><br>when I call on you           |
| 4. <i>w-anā fi-blād al-ğurbah</i><br>while I am in a foreign land | <i>w-inti fi-ḥay blādī</i><br>and you are in the homeland. |

## 2.7 ‘The violin’s voice brought back my years’

This poem, recorded among members of the ‘Azāzmih tribe, is also about the village of al-‘Arāğīb, evoked as an obscure place (verse 6). The area of al-‘Arāğīb includes two cisterns (*al-Biḥērēn*, lit. ‘the two small lakes/cisterns’).

The elegiac voice of the violin awakens nostalgia for the abandoned place, lost in time. Nostalgia and homesickness are evoked by the images of domesticated animals that escaped far from their homes. The head, suddenly unveiled, symbolizes a sudden revelation: the image of the beautiful woman at the pool triggers familiar memories of loved ones, appearing to the eye of the composer like a hallucination.

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|---|---|
| 1. <i>ḥiss al-kamān kard ‘a-’ağiyāl</i><br>The violin’s voice brought back the generations    | <i>w-it‘addā byūt al-ahalēn(i)<sup>16</sup></i><br>and passed among the homes of the two families |
| 2. <i>ḥiss al-kamān kard ‘a-’ağiyāl</i><br>the violin’s voice brought back the generations    | <i>w-snūni ruddha ‘a-l-Biḥērēn(i)</i><br>and brought back my years to the Two Cisterns            |
| 3. <i>tērī saraḥ w-ab‘ad al-mesraḥ</i><br>my bird flew, went away from its place              | <i>āh yā ḥalālātī yā tērī</i><br>oh my livestock! Oh my bird!                                     |
| 4. <i>šawwaḥtna<sup>17</sup> w-ab‘ad al-mišwah,</i><br>you went freely far away from the farm | <i>kuṭrāt ‘ala-‘ēni w-‘ala gērī</i><br>too much on my eye and on other’s                          |
| 5. <i>yā yumḡā rāsī radd al-ḡāb</i><br>oh dear mother, my head uncovered                      | <i>w-šuft az-zīnih ‘a-l-ḡayyih</i><br>and I saw the beautiful one on the water (pool)             |
| 6. <i>‘ēni titxāyal samār ibyaḡ</i><br>and my eye imagines black and white                    | <i>šarg al-‘Arāğīb(i) al-maḡwiyyih</i><br>east of the dark al-‘Arāğīb.                            |

<sup>16</sup> The *-a-* vowel in the second syllable of the word *ahalēn* may be considered as a manifestation of the ‘*gahāwah* syndrome’.

<sup>17</sup> This verb means ‘to wave the hand, the head scarf’ (Shawarbah 2012: 434), probably in the meaning of ‘greeting (goodbye)’. A play on words is apparent in this verse, between *šawwaḥtna* ‘you greeted us (goodbye)/you left us’ and *mišwah* ‘farm’.

## 2.8 ‘Give us the drum, let it twist: The drum is core to our *daḥiyah*’

This poem, collected from the ‘Azāzmih, contains a variation of the motif of hand clapping seen in Text 2.1. In this case, the percussion representing the rhythmic core of the *daḥiyah* is said to be the drum. The celebration of male tribal brotherhood is juxtaposed with the love theme and the request to obtain the hand of a girl, either by intercession or through the direct intervention of Uncle ‘Ubayd. The state of mind in which love has led the poet is represented by the image of the heart in love, hearing the sounds of crickets in the wadis.

1. <i>w-aṣ-ṣubḥ w-al-maṣṭ mnaddī</i> And the morning, when the breeze is moist	<i>l-āxiḍ ‘išīri w-a‘addī</i> I will take my people and come by
2. <i>yā yuḥma māni maḡnūn(i)</i> oh dear mother, I’m not insane!	<i>w-al-ḡinn min allī laḡūni</i> And the demon of madness is from those who caught me!
3. <i>w-ar-rāḡil min dūn rḡālih</i> when the man is without his tribe	<i>tākil ‘ašāha al-wāwīyah</i> wolves will eat him for dinner
4. <i>a‘tūna ad-daff xallīh yiltaff</i> give us the drum, let it twist	<i>w-ad-daff ‘mār id-daḥiyah</i> the drum is core to (our) <i>daḥiyah</i>
5. <i>yā rbū‘ī yā š-šāš al-biyaḡ</i> oh my people with white turbans <sup>18</sup> !	<i>ḡālī min dūnkuw zirīyah</i> My condition without you is meaningless
6. <i>‘aḷa aḷlah yi‘tūni iyāha</i> I wish to God that they would give her to me	<i>niḡgalla‘ anā wiyāha</i> so she and I could leave
7. <i>yā ‘ammī ‘Bīd iftill-lay ga‘d</i> oh Uncle ‘Ubayd, solve my problem!	<i>ḡamāmit galbī ṭawwā‘ah</i> The dove of my heart is submissive
8. <i>yā ‘ēni hillī b-id-dami‘</i> my eye cries many tears	<i>min harḡin smi‘ti sami‘</i> since you heard a rumor of slander
9. <i>ḡalbi yā sab‘ al-widyān</i> my heart, oh seven valleys	<i>kull wādī tasma‘ širšārah</i> in each valley you hear the voice of a cricket
10. <i>ḡalbi yā sab‘ al-widyān(i)</i> my heart, oh seven valleys	<i>kull wādī tasma‘ širšārah</i> in each valley you hear the voice of a cricket
11. <i>yōm innī šuftha ‘iriftha</i> when I saw her I knew her	<i>l-aḡmīki yā llī mā ‘arīfha</i> I shall protect you. Oh, who doesn’t know her!

<sup>18</sup> Singular in Arabic, ‘turban’. Shawarbah (2012: 434) reports *šāš* pl. -*āt* ‘white head shawl (for woman)’. Young informants today interpret the word as the basic word for ‘turban’.

## 2.9 ‘My eye dreams of black tents east of al-‘Arāgīb, which is gone’

This poem, collected from the ‘Azāzmih, is probably the most poignant of those dedicated to al-‘Arāgīb in this series. The first verse has the same structure, yet different wording than the one in Text 2.7, verse 6: ‘*ēnī titxāyal samār ibyaḏ*’ ‘my eye is imagining black and white’. Here the poet imagines black tents, i.e., the Bedouin camp, as if it is still standing. Furthermore, while at the end of the verse in Text 2.7, verse 6 *maḡwiyyih* ‘obscure’ is used, here the word *mahawīyih* ‘lost’ appears. Al-‘Amādīb is remembered, alongside the assonant al-‘Arāgīb, as another historical landmark, as is al-Ġihānīn, mentioned toward the end. The song is full of references and symbolic elements, not all clear to a foreign audience, and hardly explicable today even within the Negev. The song refers to the arrival of a dark army with a black partridge among it (actually ‘blue’, *sīnih*) and a long march to the limits of the unsustainable. Then memory turns to two ‘joys’ or ‘festive occasions’ (*yād*), described as ‘brilliant in their veils’. This positive image shifts the scene to the love motif and to that which apparently would seem a fantasy of a life together. Then again, a distant or lost or destroyed place, al-Ġihānīn, is evoked by the sound of a violin, and, finally, a dream of love is revealed as being cursed and unfulfilled.

1. <i>w-‘ēnī titxāyal samār(i) byūt</i> My eye is imagining black tents	<i>šarg al-‘Arāgīb(i) al-mahawīyih</i> east of al-‘Arāgīb, which is gone
2. <i>w-‘ēnī titixāyal samār(i) byūt</i> my eye is imagining black tents	<i>šarg al-‘Amādīb(i) al-mahawīyih</i> east of al-‘Amādīb, which is gone
3. <i>w-ḡibtha-lī<sup>19</sup> ‘askar sōdā</i> you brought a black military camp	<i>ma‘ha ad-draḡ as-sīnih min bēnha</i> with the black partridge among them
4. <i>w-ad-darb(i) ṭalat w-anā ‘aṭšān</i> the road became too long and I’m thirsty	<i>w-aḡbar b-al-mašī byiṭawwil</i> and I’m enduring the long walk
5. <i>yā ‘yādī yā mšarrīdīn iṭnēn</i> oh my two fugitive joys	<i>yā mzahharīn il-manādīl(i)</i> oh you (pl.) shining in your veils!
6. <i>w-anā min ḥubbak lā‘ib az-zēn</i> and I, because of your love, am playing beautifully.	<i>w-irkab ‘ēnak ‘ala ‘ēnī</i> (And) get [keep] your eye on [with] my eye
7. <i>w-yā ḥisīn, yaḷlah w-anā wiyāh</i> How good, let’s go, he and me,	<i>w-‘a-qbayyil nizra‘ basātīn</i> we will very soon plant orchards
8. <i>w-nazra‘ la-Mḥammad ṭalāt wardāt</i> and let’s plant for Muhammad three flowers	<i>w-asḡḥīn min mayyit al-‘ēn(i)</i> and I will water them with spring water

<sup>19</sup> Lit. ‘and you brought her to me’. The order of the object and dative morphemes is unusual. In general, the basic form for ‘you brought her to me’ is *ḡibt-lay (iy)yāha*, lit. ‘you brought to me her’ (Shawarbah 2012: 195).

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| 9. <i>w-ḥiss al-kamān karbarağ yā ‘yāl</i><br>and the violin’s voice is loud, children!  | <i>w-yit‘addā byūt iğ-Ğihānīn(i)</i><br>and is passing among the homes of al-Ğihānīn      |
| 10. <i>w-ḥiss al-kamān karbarağ yā ‘yāl</i><br>and the violin’s voice is loud, children! | <i>w-snīnī yirudd ‘al-Bihērēn(i)</i><br>and brings my years back to the Two Cis-<br>terns |
| 11. <i>w-al-bāriḥa fi-manām al-lēl</i><br>and yesterday in the night’s dream             | <i>ğānī walīfiy w-anā ğētah</i><br>my beloved came to me and I went to him                |
| 12. <i>allāh yixawnak yā ḥilm al-lēl</i><br>God damn you, oh night’s dream!              | <i>mā ğānī wallāh walā ğētah</i><br>He didn’t come to me and I didn’t go to him.          |

## 2.10 ‘And I will go up in the airplane’

This last piece, recorded among the ‘Azāzmih, is a neo-*daḥiyah* song that I want to add here to provide a taste of the difference between traditional Negev *daḥiyah* lyrics performed by modern singers and the neo-*daḥiyah* style. The passage below is not politically committed, nor does it talk about the passions of the heart, love, or nostalgia. It is a very popular piece that has been circulating for some time in the Negev and beyond. Its metric, stylistic, and lexical characteristics are different from those observed so far in the traditional texts.

The occasion of the composition of this song is the celebration of traveling by plane. The humorous note of unscrewing the bolts of the plane, however, reveals the attempt to exorcise the fear of the challenges associated with traveling toward a distant destination, from the fear of flying itself to trepidation around encountering diversity.

1. *w-aṭṭla‘ ‘a-ṭ-ṭayyāra fōg w-aḥallil barāğīḥa w-aḥallil barāğīḥa*  
And I will go up in the airplane and pull out its screws and pull out its screws
2. *w-iš-šabāb aškāl alwān yā salām yā rā‘īḥa w yā salām yā rā‘īḥa*  
and young people are of different shapes and colors, how beautiful is its sponsor<sup>20</sup>,  
how beautiful is its sponsor
3. *w-aṭṭla‘ ‘a-ṭ-ṭayyāra fōg w-aḥallil barāğīḥa w-aḥallil barāğīḥa*  
And I will go up in the airplane and pull out its screws and pull out its screws
4. *w-iš-šabāb aškāl alwān yā salām yā rā‘īḥa w-yā salām yā rā‘īḥa*  
and young people are of different shapes and colors, how beautiful is its sponsor,  
how beautiful is its sponsor.

<sup>20</sup> The sponsor of the plane.

### 3 Chasing the wind back to the sources: On the origin and etymology of *daḥīyah*

The origins of this Bedouin poetic and musical genre probably date back to the pre-history of Arabic. Although a solid nucleus that consists of some recurring poetic themes and structures exists, the Bedouin *daḥīyah* exists in the dimension of oral performance and transmission, entrusted to the traditional techniques of improvisation. I am unaware of any published collections of *daḥīyah* texts from the past or contemporary times, from the Negev or beyond it. Some notions regarding the origin of the genre, however, come from oral traditions and direct anthropological observations. In her study on Gulf Bedouin societies, Al-Noaimi (2021) defines the *daḥḥa* and the *ʿarḍa* as male collective dances that accompany the poetic performance of individual poems in meter in front of a male audience around the motifs of raiding and warfare (Sowayan 1985).

In her essay on female singing traditions in Iraq, Hassan (2010) reports that in Lower Iraq, local Bedouins still perform dances in which young girls with uncovered hair dance before a row of men to encourage them. She also states, following al-Kamālī (1975), that in some ancient types of Mesopotamian Bedouin *daḥḥa*, members of both sexes danced together; a young man asked a girl to dance with him while she, in return, asked for a poem to be addressed to her. The dance between the two took the form of a sword fight in which the young man could kiss the girl, while she had the right to wound him with her sword. Of the people I spoke to, none remember any specific *daḥīyah* tradition in which a woman and a man dance together, either in the Negev or in the regions immediately adjacent to it (Sinai, Jordan).

Regarding the description of a typical traditional Negev *daḥīyah* performance, Shawarbah (2012: 377) reports that ‘the *daḥḥa* or *dihḥīyyih* is a type of Bedouin dance performed by Bedouin men at wedding ceremonies. It consists of an evening entertainment during which a group of men sing, improvise Bedouin poems, and clap their hands monotonously in a line while usually one woman, called *ḥāšiy* (lit. young she-camel), dances in front of them’.

Today, the fully covered female figure dancing in front of the men’s line is said to be not a girl, but a man in disguise, since it is not considered appropriate for a girl to dance in front of men. This ‘modern’ *ḥāšiy* is the subject of jokes. Indeed, at the weddings I have attended in the Negev in the last twenty years, the separation of the sexes is very strict. The *daḥīyah* is performed in the place where the nuptial *šigg* (‘men’s tent’) is erected for the occasion, in an open space in front of the tent itself. There should

be no other women here except the dancer, yet the fact that a woman dances alone in the presence of men is today considered so dishonorable as to be strictly avoided. Therefore, the dancer is a man in disguise. Needless to say, according to custom, the *daḥīyah* is strictly out of bounds for women. However, it is said that during weddings, Negev women perform a form of song and dance that mimics the style of the *daḥīyah*, as well as of the *badʿ*,<sup>21</sup> parallel to that of men and in secret. In terms of poetic style, *daḥīyah* is improvisational, constructed based on short verses intertwined with rhymes and/or assonances.

Regarding the roots and cultural meanings of *daḥīyah*, a possible interpretation of the etymology of the term supports the origin of this practice in the male world of tribal military brotherhoods. The word *daḥīyah*, indeed, may be etymologically related to *dīḥyah* ‘chief of a group of soldiers’ (Lane 1863–1874: 3, 857), of military unity of the kind that might have been represented by the men from the same large family (Kressel 1996). This origin could be supported by the martial, violent, and impetuous characters of some sub-genres and themes of *daḥīyah*, in both its traditional and modern forms. The execution of *daḥīyah* performances at weddings, therefore, in addition to celebrating the youth, beauty, and love of the newlyweds, seems to have mainly served the function of supporting the groom in a male rite of passage towards sexual and social maturity and his entry into tribal male society, intended as a combat unit, a military ‘brotherhood’ in the literal sense. At the same time, the other members of the group had the opportunity to confirm and strengthen mutual bonds and celebrate their familiar, collective warrior identity.

According to local anthropological sources (Ziyādnaḥ 2011), rather than symbolizing love and passion, the female presence of the *ḥāšīy* dancer roused the warrior virtue of the male tribe members for the benefit of the protection and prosperity of the entire tribal group. Traditional Negev wisdom seems to recognize that marriage and love do not always belong to the same sphere. A collective celebration of a wedding is a social fact, while the expression of one’s passions is entrusted to other private poetic forms, lyric and elegiac. It should also be remembered that Bedouin marriage in the Negev today is still practiced in a regime of strict endogamy, in which the woman is chosen, generally by the groom’s mother, preferably from among the paternal first cousins (Kressel 1999; Sacchi 2009).

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<sup>21</sup> *Badʿ* is the name of a poetic form considered by some of my Negev informants almost synonymous with *daḥīyah*, while it is considered by others as the initial section of *daḥīyah* compositions. In Bedouin traditions other than those of the Negev, however, *badʿ* is distinguished from *daḥīyah* by its exclusively vocal performance, i.e., by the absence of dance, and by the schema of a poetic duel, according to which it can develop.

Thus, Negev men who danced *daḥīyah* in the past and who dance *daḥīyah* today at the same wedding have a very high probability of being close relatives. The entire system of traditional values expressed by this genre can be summarized by saying that brotherhood is celebrated in *daḥīyah* above love and even above war. ‘Brotherhood’ in the Bedouin society means both familiar ties and ‘alliance’/‘protection’. Loyalty is the highest value. The culture-specific meaning of ‘brotherhood’ as alliance/protection seems to have characterized the core of Bedouin customary laws and social practices since ancestral times (Borg 2019).

In Texts 2.1 and 2.8, the collective dance and entertainment offered by the *daḥīyah* performance celebrate the value of harmony among all members of the group. The theme of tribal identity and pride of belonging is expressed in Text 2.1 in verse 4: *wiḥna ʿurbān aš-Širīʿih allī mā byuṣḍug binbīʿih* ‘we are the Arabs of Širīʿah the one who is not loyal, we will sell him’. The same theme, with a slight variation in the verb of the second hemistich, is also found in Text 2.2, verse 6: *w-aḥna ʿurbān aš-Širīʿah allī mā byuṣluṭ binbīʿah* ‘we the Arab of the Širīʿah, the one who has no power, we will sell him’. The tribal group also offers each member protection from a very dangerous fate of loneliness and defeat, as stated in Text 2.1, verse 7: *war-rāḡil min dūn rḡālih tākil ʿašāha al-wāwīyyih* ‘a man without his folk, wolves will eat (him) for dinner’.<sup>22</sup> The singer often reminds the audience that his condition without them is miserable, as in Text 2.1, verse 9: *yā rbūʿi yā šāša lbi ḥālātī min dūnkuw zirīyah* ‘oh my people! You are my headband, my condition without you is miserable’, in Text 2.4, verse 5, and in Text 2.8, verse 5: *yā rbūʿi yā š-šāš al-biyaz ḥālī min dūnkuw zirīyah* ‘oh my people with white turbans! My condition without you is meaningless’. Similarly, in some cases, the theme of tribal identity and history replaces the theme of love. Thus, the motif of the secret and romantic departure imagined by lovers in the early morning (Text 2.1, verse 5) becomes an imaginary, collective return of the tribe (Text 2.8, verse 1).

Again, with respect to the etymology of the word *daḥīyah*, the root d.h.y/w, from which the word derives, seems to be connected to Biblical Hebrew *dāḥā* ‘to push, thrust’ (Brown et al. 1975: 190) and, following Borg (2021: 157), to Late Egyptian *ḥdy* ‘umspannen, fliegen, ausbreiten (von Himmel)’ (Erman and Grapow 1926–1961: 3, 205; Calice 1936: 75). The ‘sky-spreading’ action found in Late Egyptian semantically echoes the Biblical Hebrew *נִתְּחַם כְּרִיכָה* *transcription* ‘(God) spreads out the heavens like a curtain’ (Psalm 104: 2) and etymologically fits the Quranic meaning of *daḥāha* ‘(God) stretched/unfolded it (the earth)’ in Sura 79, *an-Nāziʿāt*, verse 30: *وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا* *transcription* lit. ‘and the earth, after

<sup>22</sup> The same motif also appears in Text 2.8, verse 4.

that, He spread it out', or 'as for the earth, He spread it out as well'. The meaning of 'to spread' is the one reported with the greatest number of *hadīṭ* and poetic examples in *Lisān al-ʿArab* (vol. 3) and Lane's dictionary (1863–1874: 3, 757) for both d.h.w and d.h.y.

Classical Arabic *dahā* is attested as 'poussant violemment en portant à quelqu'un un coup par derrière' (Kazimirski 1860: 1, 676). In Murtaḍā az-Zabīdī's *Tāğ al-ʿarūs min ḡawāhir al-qāmūs* the root appears as the verb 'to roll' in the sentence *تَدَحَّتْ الإِبِلُ فِي الأَرْضِ tadahḥat al-ibl fī l-ard* 'the camels roll on the soil'. Interestingly, the root d.h.y is largely employed in the realm of industrial design in Modern Standard Arabic, in meanings of both 'rolling' and 'stretching'. Both meanings appear in the noun given to two industrial machines called *midhātun*, one intended as 'roller for precise and even spread of ink on the print page' and the other as 'plank used to spread and smooth the sown land'.<sup>23</sup> The expression *dahī al-ʿaḡīn* is used in online demonstrations of the operation of industrial bakery machines with the meaning of 'rolling the dough',<sup>24</sup> yet, at least in Levantine dialects, the verb *laff* is used in this context, while *daha* is not.

In the Arabic vernacular space, the following meanings are attested: Daḡīna *dahā* 'étendre' (Landberg 1920–1942: 1, 715); Aleppo *daha* 'faire disparaître; dissuader qqn de qqc' (Barthélemy 1953–1969: 166); Marāzīg *dhe* 'écarter, enlever de sa place pour s'y mettre' (Boris 1958: 166); Morocco *dha* 'pousser pour faire entrer, introduire, fourrer, enfoncer' (Prémare IV 230); al-Andalus *dahani* 'he pushed me' (Corriente 1997: 174).

To date, I have not found definitive statements concerning the origin of the word *dahiyah* in Western scholarship. The impetuous and encouraging character of the dance and song seems to go well with the meaning 'pushing' which is found for the root d.h.y in the vernacular Arabic facies. In addition to the metaphorical meaning of 'pushing' as 'inciting', and in a more physical sense, while dancing in a row, the participants literally push each other sideways with their shoulders and upper bodies, which remain in constant contact.

Yet, consulting Arabic sources on local customs, the etymological concerns seem to be easily dissolved. The word *dahiyah*, pronounced in the Negev *dihhiyah*, is claimed to derive from the verb *dahḥā/ yidahhi* 'to clap the hands' palms, to applaud', which is exactly the characteristic, repeated movement executed by those who participate in a *dahiyah* performance, unlike what happens in the *bad*<sup>c</sup> and other poetic types (al-Faranḡī 2009;

<sup>23</sup> From *al-Maʿnā: Arabic-Arabic Online Dictionary*. Accessed 25 August 2022. <http://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/دحية/>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ālat taqīʿ wa-dahī al-ʿaḡīn*. Accessed 25 August 2022. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71cs0ldzQ7w>.

Ziyādnaḥ 2011). The verb *daḥḥā/ yidaḥḥī* appears in the dictionary *al-Muʿjam al-wasīṭ* (Anīs 2004: 42), where it is defined as ‘to slap, to hit by the palm of the outstretched hand’. As shown in Text 2.1, verse 8, the clapping of the hands is considered a fundamental and characteristic element of the *daḥīyah* style, a type of basic percussion, alternating with drums—which are mentioned in Text 2.8, verse 4—and just as important as they are.

#### 4 Traditional Negev *daḥīyah*: ‘Tribal encyclopedia’, improvisation, and ‘mnemonics’

Asking Negev Bedouins about the best and most famous *daḥīyah* singers always leads to debate. People from recognized villages, such as ʿArarah and Rahaṭ, prefer Ayman al-Aʿsam, representative of progressive and innovative tastes, while the most conservative Bedouin groups in the desert diaspora would contend that Fūʾād Abū-Bnayyah and Yūsif aṣ-Ṣarāyʿah are the ones who brought the original *daḥīyah* back to life, including old words and traditional practices.

In any case, different tastes depend greatly on the cultural background of the different groups. The ʿAzāzmih, especially the Bīr Haddāḡ population, and the Tarābīn, whom I had the chance to meet in the *bzurāh*, are poorly acquainted with Arab and non-Arab foreign culture and people and prefer the traditional style. Elderly members of other groups, however, such as the Gdērāt, the Abū-Grēnāt, the Ḥullām of Tel Sheva, and most of the groups that reside in the recognized villages in general, accept neo-*daḥīyah* ‘as a matter of fact’, and as a way in which an old genre can survive in modern times.

The traditional *daḥīyah* texts reported in this article were collected by singers from different tribes. Nonetheless, despite their heterogeneous tribal origins, these texts share a common heritage of rhymes and syntactic and melodic structures and represent a ‘tribal encyclopedia’ of the entire Negev today.<sup>25</sup>

According to the singers, just as the historical and political events of different tribes have become the common heritage of all Negev *daḥīyah*—as in the case of the collective mourning over al-ʿArāḡīb, originally a Tiyāha village—words, rhymes, and verse patterns circulate today throughout the Negev and beyond. The repertoire of rhymes, words, and verse patterns of the traditional *daḥīyah* was vast and different for each tribe. Thus, the ex-

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<sup>25</sup> The term ‘tribal encyclopedia’ was coined by Havelock in reference to the Homeric poems (1963) to define a repository of cultural memory preserved and perpetuated by an entire populace (Dunn Neeley 1998). I use this expression here in this sense in an attempt to convey a sense of the contemporary, ‘intertribal’ nature of the traditional *daḥīyah*.

amples of traditional lyrics revealed to me represent a residue of traditional *daḥīyah*, rather eroded by time from both lexical and poetic perspectives. The most evident problem in the preservation and revitalization of the traditional *daḥīyah* is the loss of the traditional lexical repository. As mentioned above, one of the main reasons for the birth of the modern *daḥīyah* was the need to make lyrics comprehensible to generations who do not know how to interpret the traditional songs. The lexical impoverishment and fossilization of the traditional *daḥīyah* heritage are clear in the texts, as the careful conservation of the final parts of the verses to minimize the alteration of the inherited rhyming system demonstrates. Altering the rhyming system would involve inserting different words and rearranging entire verses.

Linguistic and stylistic erosion make the traditional *daḥīyah* lyrics sung today thematically and linguistically similar to each other: Variations are mainly due today to personal choices or the pressure of oral performance and improvisation, rather than related to different tribal traditions.

#### 4.1 Poetic Alternation

The oral, improvisational, character of the traditional *daḥīyah* performance leads to the creation of alternative versions of the same verses, very similar and assonant. Compare, for example, Text 2.1, verse 1: *yā ‘ēnī lli biddami’ min harġin smi’ti simi’* ‘oh my eye who is crying tears as you heard a rumor of because of the rumors of slander’ and Text 2.2, verse 1: *yā ‘ēnī hilli bi-d-dami’ min harġin smi’ti sami’* ‘oh my eye, start crying (many)tears since you heard rumors of slander’.

In this pair of verses, the alternation is produced by *lli biddami’* ‘who is crying (‘eye’, f.)’ and *hilli bi-d-dami’* ‘burst (f.) into tears!’ It may be said that these verses are alternative versions of a single model not only because of their linguistic similarity in terms of sounds and motifs, but also because of the ‘strategic’ positions that they occupy in all compositions, either at the beginning of a composition (*incipit*), as in both cases just mentioned, or at the beginning of a new thematic section in multi-thematic performances (‘bridging verses’, as in Text 2.8, verse 8).

Other examples of alternative versions of the same type are:

- Text 2.1, verse 8. *a’tūnī l-kaff xallīh yultaff w-al-kaff ‘mār ad-dihhiyyih* ‘give (pl.) me (the palm of) the hand and let it twist, hand is core to (our) *daḥīyah*’, to be compared to Text 2.8, verse 4 *a’tūna ad-daff xallīh yiltaff w-ad-daff ‘mār id-daḥīyah* ‘give us the drum, let it twist, the drum is core to *daḥīyah*’. In this pair of verses, the alternation is produced by the words *kaff* ‘hand’ and *daff* ‘drum’, both used for percussion in this musical style.

- Text 2.1, verse 5 *w-ṣubḥ w-al-muṣṭ mnaddī l-āxiḍ* ‘šēri wa‘addī ‘one morning while the breeze is moist, I shall take my beloved and come by’, to be compared to Text 2.8, verse 1 *w-aṣ-ṣubḥ w-al-maṣṭ mnaddī l-āxiḍ* ‘išīri w-a‘addī ‘and the morning, when the breeze is moist, I will take my people and come by’. In this pair of verses, the alternation is produced by the words ‘šēri ‘my beloved one’ and ‘išīri ‘my people (my paternal lineage)’.<sup>26</sup>

Another aspect of alternation between the verses is seen in the construction of the temporal reference. In Text 2.1, verse 5 *w-ṣubḥ* means ‘[and] one morning’, expressing a wish to be realized on some undefined future occasion, a collective hope projected toward the future. In Text 2.8, verse 1 *w-aṣ-ṣubḥ* ‘[and] the morning’ refers to the part of the day in which the ‘hero’ (the singer) sets out on his private, sentimental undertaking. Thus, Text 2.1, verse 5 is more suitable for a sentimental context, while Text 2.8, verse 1 seems suitable for songs with political ones. Indeed, in improvised oral performances, verse alternations of this type may be related to the occasion and motif of the performance.

Furthermore, the existence of a repertoire of verses with alternative versions is a necessary constituent of ‘mnemonics’, memorization methods used by poets in traditional oral contexts (Parry 1971). These methods make improvised performance possible through the provision of a reservoir of verses and their variations immediately available to memory during spontaneous singing.

Constraining the number of syllables and the rhyming/assonance system aids memory, on the one hand, and, on the other, forces the composers to seek poetic solutions for different contexts. It is important to have sets of words that provide the same rhyme so that they can be used alternately when the message of the verse must be changed. One example of this rhyme/assonance alternation is observable in Text 2.1, verse 11:

*yā ‘ammī ‘Bēd iftill-lī ga‘d*  
oh Uncle ‘Ubayd, solve my problem!

*ḥumāmit gulbī tuwwā‘ah*  
The dove of my heart is obedient

compared to Text 2.4, verse 3:

*yā ‘ammī ‘Bīd iftilik-lay*  
oh Uncle ‘Ubayd, bring me luck!

*ḥamāmit galbī ṭayyārah*  
The dove of my heart flew away

in which *tuwwā‘ah* ‘obedient’ and *ṭayyārah* ‘flew away’ (lit. ‘is flying [away]’) represent two alternative words in the final position in a pair

<sup>26</sup> The presence of a semantic alternation here was clarified by the singers, as the *ē/ī* opposition cannot be considered phonological in today’s Negev koine.

of verses that follow the same model, i.e., the appeal to Uncle ‘Ubayd to intercede for the man so that a girl will be granted to him. In this pair of verses, the first hemistich also has two alternative versions: *iftill-lī ga‘d* ‘solve my problem’ (lit. ‘untie for me the situation’, Text 2.1, verse 11) and *iftilik-lay* ‘bring me luck’ (Text 2.4, verse 3). As for these verbal forms, they represent two alternative choices made due to personal, stylistic, and rhyme preferences. After consultations with the informants, in the first case the verb *iftill* has been interpreted as an imperative, in the eighth form, from a root f.l.l., which conveys the meaning of ‘to set free’, both in the sense of ‘untying (hair)’ and in the sense of ‘solving’. Shawarbah (2012: 383) reports *fall* ‘to escape’, *fililih* pl. *falāyil* ‘long and unkempt hair’. The other word, *iftilik*, is the imperative in the eighth form, from the root f.l.k., ‘to have/to bring good luck’ (Shawarbah 2012: 383 reports *falāk* ‘luck’). The formation of both verbs in the eighth form may not have a strictly grammatical or semantic reason, but may simply be due to the need of similar forms in the same metric and prosodic position.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4.2 Celebrating *daḥiyah*

A final point to note is that in three texts reported here—2.1, 2.3, and 2.8—the genre of the performance is explained and celebrated within the lyrics.

In Text 2.1, verses 7–9, the exhortation to collective *daḥiyah* exorcizes the fear of being abandoned by the group of tribal men, a cause for concern often mentioned in these texts:

7. *war-rāḡil min dūn rḡālih tākil ‘ašāha l-wāwīyyih*
8. *a‘ṭūnī l-kaff xallih yultaff w-al-kaff ‘mār ad-dihḥīyyih*
9. *yā rbū‘i yā šāša lbī ḥālātī min dūnkuw ziriyah*

‘A man without his folk, wolves will eat (him) for dinner.

Give me the hand and let it twist the hand is core to *daḥiyah*.

Oh my people! You are my headband. My condition without you is miserable’.

In Text 2.3, verses 1 and 3 are dedicated to the celebration of *daḥiyah*. In verse one, the ‘old man’,<sup>28</sup> is invited to take part in the *daḥiyah*, to make

<sup>27</sup> Notably, young informants consulted about the meaning of these verbal forms did not interpret them as derived from f.l.l. or f.l.k., as these roots are not familiar to them. They rather suggested that both verbal forms may derive from l.f.f. ‘to turn’, interpretable as ‘to reverse (the situation)’, becoming f.l.l. through metathesis. Nevertheless, morpho-syntactic explanations made me lean towards the option of the two distinct roots proposed here.

<sup>28</sup> According to some of the informants, this should probably read as ‘honorable man’ and translated as ‘oh my guest’. Nonetheless, the use of this word is significant, as the

it flourish. In the third verse, the *daḥīyah* singer is invited to sing with increasing intensity (*mʿarrid*)<sup>29</sup> all night long, until the morning star rises:

1. *allī nte ḥāy yā šāyib lā yā zahat*<sup>30</sup> *ad-diḥḥīyyih*  
(...)

3. *law dāḥī yā mʿarrid dāḥī lu tiṭlaʿ an-niḡmih aš-šubbāḥih*  
‘Whoever you are [living], old man! May *daḥīyah* live and flourish!  
(...)

Please, *daḥīyah* singer, keep singing until the morning star rises!’

In Text 2.8, verses 3–5 show the same intertwining of motifs as Text 2.1, verses 7–9, with some lexical variations. The exhortation to collectively perform the *daḥīyah*, mentioned alongside its traditional attribute (*ʿmār* ‘foundation, core’) of drum percussion, is framed between two verses that celebrate the unity of the male group and warn of the state of loneliness as the worst existential condition, celebrating brotherhood and tribal ties above any other value:

3. *w-ar-rāḡil min dūn rḡālīh tākil ʿašāha al-wāwīyah*  
4. *aʿtūna ad-daff xallīh yiltaff w-ad-daff ʿmār id-daḥīyah*  
5. *yā rbūʿī yā š-šāš al-biyaz ḥālī min dūnkuw zirīyah*  
‘When the man is without his tribe wolves will eat (him) for dinner.  
Give us the drum, let it twist, the drum is core to (our) *daḥīyah*.  
Oh my people with white turbans! My condition without you is meaningless’.

## 5 *Smiʿt šōt al-bārūd* re-mastered: *Daḥīyah*’s recent evolution within and outside the Negev

It seems that in today’s Negev the execution of *daḥīyah* still allows the group members to collectively identify with the extended family (*ʿēlih* or, rather, *ʿašīrih*) and to strengthen family ties. However, *daḥīyah* performance is a festive, entertaining, exciting, and engaging occasion, even for those who are only joining the celebration of the bachelor party.

As these texts demonstrate, the sense of collective identity and unity today in the Negev goes beyond traditional tribal boundaries. The fate that has united the Bedouins of the Negev in recent decades has forged

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opposition between old and young age seems to be the leitmotif of the composition, probably hinting at a specific case in which an old man took a certain woman as his wife instead of a young man who had been waiting for her.

<sup>29</sup> According to some of the informants, this participle, mainly used to define someone gaining strength after being weak or sick, is used here to invite the singer to infuse increasing strength into the singing.

<sup>30</sup> An optative perfect form.

a communion of experiences and hopes. Thus, the ‘Azāzmih and Tarābīn aṣ-Ṣāni‘ informants interviewed in this research identify in their *daḥīyah* songs with the Arabs of Širī‘ah, although Širī‘ah seems to have been home to Gdērāt and Ma‘āniyīn groups (Cerqueglini 2022). These ‘Azāzmih and Tarābīn aṣ-Ṣāni‘ informants mourn over the ruins of al-‘Arāgīb, which was a Tiyāha village. Together with motifs and themes, the oral encyclopedia of verses and rhymes traditionally belonging to each tribe has probably also become a common legacy of the Negev. In sum, the old tribal conflicts appear to be forgotten in a new Negev Bedouin political koine that has been created by recent history and seems to reach beyond the Negev borders.

Indeed, since 2021, the Palestinian public has been involved in a discussion of the spread of *daḥīyah* outside its traditional Bedouin contexts in the non-Bedouin Palestinian popular sphere, where it has recently acquired a reputation as a means of inciting violence and the use of weapons among young people and has been compared to the Western ‘death metal’ and ‘black metal’ musical streams, generally thought to inspire violent and nihilistic beliefs.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, some Palestinian intellectuals have launched a campaign to renounce its performance on festive occasions, based on the fact that, after all, *daḥīyah*, as part of Bedouin heritage, is not part of sedentary Palestinian folklore, while *zaḡal* and *ḥidāyah* are perceived by the sedentary community today as the original local genres traditionally used to express positive values and patriotism.<sup>32</sup>

The *daḥīyah* genre is, undoubtedly, of Bedouin origin (Urkevich 2015). I could appreciate the Negev Bedouin *daḥīyah* because it is still performed by men during wedding celebrations. I watched the dances from afar and unseen, as the Bedouin young women sometimes do. Yet we should not allow the wedding context to which the traditional Negev Bedouin *daḥīyah* is confined today to mislead us regarding the themes of *daḥīyah* compositions, which are not centered on marriage and love, as already said. The repetitive, hypnotic rhythm of *daḥīyah*’s music and movements is certainly a celebration of male physical power, originally and above all to be understood in terms of strength in warfare.

With its aggressive, exciting, enthralling masculine character, the *daḥīyah* inspires collective values and is extremely amusing and enter-

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<sup>31</sup> Some Palestinians seem particularly concerned about negative values and violent talk spread through *ad-daḥīyah al-‘aṣrīyah* ‘the trendy *daḥīyah*’ when this pretends to take on the tones of the ancient *daḥīyat as-silāh* ‘the sword *daḥīyah*’, but ends up fomenting anger and aggression among young people, who sing phrases such as ‘hit him and break his brain’, from lyrics by the popular Wum‘in al-A‘sam (‘Inbatāwi 2020).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Inbatāwi (2020).

taining on social occasions. It has spread from the Bedouin lands and is performed and enjoyed in non-Bedouin Arab societies—in particular in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. The introduction of the electronic piano backing track, which took place on a large scale starting in 2013, contributed enormously to the diffusion of *daḥīyah* among young people. These musical developments in the *daḥīyah* performance are reminiscent of the birth of the techno-popular genre in Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in conjunction with the attempts of the inhabitants of the poor neighborhoods to change the models of popular celebrations.

The electric piano has now replaced the original Bedouin instruments—*rbāb*, *simsimiyah*, and *ḡurn al-gahāwah*<sup>33</sup>—in the Negev and outside of it. Rhythm has become more important than words and it has become easy to adapt texts to the modern tastes of the new, wider public, as is evident in the compositions of Mūsā al-Ḥāfiẓ and Abū-Bassām Jalmāwī. The predominance of rhythm rather than lyrics has facilitated the spread of *daḥīyah* outside the Negev, on the one hand, and led to the rejuvenation of the poetic language in the Negev itself, on the other, as in the lyrics composed by Qāsim an-Naḡḡār, a famous and particularly appreciated neo-*daḥīyah* Negev performer and composer. Indeed, as the artists I interviewed explained, the lexicon of the traditional texts of the *daḥīyah*, handed down orally, is obscure and incomprehensible to the majority of young Bedouins. Finally, the addition of electronic percussion initiated by Ašraf Abū-Layl in 2016 led to the entry of many non-Bedouin artists from the *ḥidāyah* tradition, such as ‘Išām ‘Umur, Rif‘at Asadī, and Šādī al-Bīrūnī,<sup>34</sup> into *daḥīyah*. The inauguration, or rather the ‘baptism of fire’, of the neo-*daḥīyah* genre took place on the occasion of the performance of the first *daḥīyah* by Mūsā al-Ḥāfiẓ, a Palestinian singer from the tradition of *zaḡal* and *ḥidāyah*. The title of the song, performed in 2014, was *smi‘t šōt al-bārūd* ‘I heard the voice of gunpowder’. This title is particularly significant because the voice of gunpowder evokes both war contexts and the customary rifle bursts fired at sunset to warn over long distances of the start of a Bedouin wedding party and the distribution of food.

Many of the Palestinian singers who entered the *daḥīyah* genre have participated together with Negev Bedouin *daḥīyah* artists, such as Sālim

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<sup>33</sup> The last two were originally domestic tools used for grinding sesame and coffee, respectively, as can be understood from their names. Since these tools produce percussion, they have entered the field of music.

<sup>34</sup> This last singer has recently become renowned among Palestinian youth for having cursed Saudi Arabia, which is considering establishing peaceful relationships with Israel, during a *zaḡal* poetic competition circulated on Twitter.

Wumʿin al-Aʿsam from Tel Sheva, in animating weddings. These joint occasions have provided the ground for a sustained exchange of ideas and ideals, musical and poetical traditions, forms, and tastes between Negev and sedentary Palestine, which eventually led to the birth of the neo-*daḥīyah*. Somehow, the revisiting of the *daḥīyah* genre, albeit in new forms, by young Negev Bedouin artists recalls the rediscovery by young Algerian artists such as Khaled, Cheb Mami, and Mama Hosni in the nineteen nineties of *rāʾī* music, which until then had been confined to the Algerian provinces of Oran and Tlemcen.

The original *daḥīyah*, with its emphasis on war and comradeship, seems to have taken on a tone that incites armed conflict once it infiltrated the Palestinian popular music mainstream. ‘The people of the north (the sedentary Palestinians) have injected their blood into *daḥīyah*’, a young Negev singer I met in Rahaṭ expressively explained.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, this new type of warlike *daḥīyah* has also developed in the Negev. In particular, this martial neo-*daḥīyah* type has rapidly spread in circles of young Bedouins who support the ideals and the activities of the fight against the State of Israel. An example of the newly politicized *daḥīyah* is the song by Yūsif aṣ-Ṣarāyʿah titled ‘*a-l-ḥaṭṭ aṣ-ṣahrāwī* ‘On the Desert Line’, in which the singer takes inspiration from the traditional motif of the desert battles, but turns it against the Israeli military recruitment of Bedouin youth, saying: *rāḥat blādak w-blādī w-al-ḥukm f-īd al-yahūdī, bidūnak f-al-ḡeš taṭawwiʿ aṣān tašīl al-bārūdī* ‘your country and mine have gone, and the rule is in the hands of the Jew, without you the army volunteers to raise gunpowder’.

Another *daḥīyah* song, composed by Sālīm Wumʿin al-Aʿsam during the conflict between Israel and Gaza in May 2021 and titled *Abū-ʿUbaydah muʿaḍḍibhum* ‘Abū-ʿUbaydah is tormenting them’, aroused much wider security concerns, especially on the Israeli side. The piece was a tribute to ‘Abū-ʿUbaydah, a leader and spokesperson of the Palestinian resistance, particularly active during the events of 2021. It seems, according to Palestinian sources, that the composer has been interrogated by the Israeli intelligence services and faced imprisonment for three months because of the contents of this *daḥīyah* song, especially for having disseminated it on Youtube and TikTok, where singers from Nablus and other Palestinian cities posted songs in response to and in support of Sālīm Wumʿin al-Aʿsam’s *daḥīyah* for ‘Abū-ʿUbaydah, calling the leader ‘Honorable brother and protector’.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> I wish to thank A. Z. from Rahaṭ, born in 1990, for his cooperation and for his colorful artistic talent.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Bi-l-fidiyū: Bi-sabab daḥīya’ (2021).

According to the traditional Bedouin singers I encountered in the Negev, all in their fifties, this new *daḥīyah*, which strays far from traditional taste and tones, is despised by the elderly, who perceive it as a profanation of the customary taste and values. Nonetheless, not everyone agrees that the modern *daḥīyah* should simply be condemned, because many contemporary Bedouin and non-Bedouin authors continue to practice it outside the forms of the military style (*daḥīyat aṣ-ṣilāḥ* ‘the *daḥīyah* of the sword’) and within its customary themes and tones, following what they claim is the very nature of the genre. According to this view, the *daḥīyah* originally arose from the *haḡīn* genre, whose original themes were conversations with natural elements and animals, and which later developed into *haḡīn ṣaḥrawī* ‘desert *haḡīn*’ and *haḡīn ḡazālī* ‘gazelle *haḡīn*’ whose central motifs are love, separation, and the self-alienation experienced by the Bedouin in modernity, rather than war and violence. Among the contemporary young singers who perform *daḥīyah b-haḡīn*, lit. ‘*daḥīyah* in the *haḡīn* style’, Amīr Abū-‘Ābūd, was mentioned to me by the singers with whom I spoke.<sup>37</sup>

A comparison of the final verses of the *daḥīyah* Text 2.6 and the *haḡīn* Text 2.5 in this paper reveals that in the traditional Negev Bedouin oral culture, both *daḥīyah* and *haḡīn* draw on the same sources of poetic formulas and rhyming, thus merging spontaneously in similar content by sharing formulaic verses commonly used by composers in improvisation as bridges between different themes, as sequence closures, or as ‘rest areas’ in which to catch the breath and organize new verses.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the same poetic verses, such as ‘the dove of my heart flew away’ (2.4), ‘oh my eye, start crying (many) tears’ (2.2), and ‘oh my eye, (oh) who cried’ (2.5), are also parts of the elegiac songs of mourning that elderly women still sing today when the pain of loss is strongest, usually on the first day of mourning, spontaneously passing from crying to lamenting, and then to singing. It happens so fluidly that crying seems to find meaning and consolation in the rhythm of the song, which reconciles tragedy with life.

In reality, as Texts 2.1, 2.2, 2.7, and 2.9 demonstrate, politics does enter even the Negev *daḥīyah* texts considered traditional and recited by elderly singers. Yet, it does so in a lyrical and elegiac disguise. Thus, the poetic scene in 2.7 describes the sound of a violin that stirs childhood memories, bringing the listener back to the ruins of the village of al-‘Arāḡīb, between

<sup>37</sup> For a taste of the *daḥīyah b-haḡīn*, here is the link to the YouTube video of the song *Tal‘ab bi-galbī w-ana aṭī‘ak* ‘Play with my heart, I obey you’ by Amīr Abū-‘Ābūd. Accessed 25 August 2022. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lg2n1enjwMk>.

<sup>38</sup> These traditional oral composition techniques were observed by Milman Parry among the Slavic bards. He used them for the first time to study the Homeric versification system. Formulaic techniques of the organization of lyrics for oral performance can be considered a common heritage of traditional improvisation (Parry 1971).

Beer-Sheva and Rahaṭ, and its two ‘small lakes’ (two small cisterns). Al-‘Arāgīb is notorious for having been demolished by the Israeli authorities and rebuilt by its Tiyāha dwellers (mostly al-‘Ugbī and Ṭawārah families) more than one hundred times (Amara 2013). The sad events of ‘Arāgīb have become emblematic of the ongoing territorial disputes between the Israeli State and the Negev Bedouin tribes (Nasasra 2017; Nasasra et al. 2015). In Text 2.1, Širī‘ah is mentioned. This place, situated along the wadi of the same name, close to the border between Israel and Gaza, is often mentioned in tribal accounts as belonging, in the pre-State era, to various Negev clans, mainly Gdērāt and Ma‘āniyīn, which spent spring and summer in the irrigated fields of Širī‘ah planting vegetable seeds and harvesting crops (Cerqueglini 2022). When Beer-Sheva and the surrounding territories came under Israeli control in 1948, several Bedouin groups took refuge in Širī‘ah and were later moved to Tel ‘Arād.

It appears, thus, that both the surviving traditional musical *daḥīyah* genre and its modern evolution play an increasingly strong role in shaping the identity of the Arab population between Israel and Palestine, and that music, more generally, is playing an increasingly significant role in the experience of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict among Bedouin and non-Bedouin Arabs. The poetic elaboration of political events, even in harsh tones, is part of the local popular tradition (Shachmon 2013). In addition, music has the extraordinary power to arouse emotions beyond words and circulates today with great intensity in the media. On May 4, 2019, Hamas initiated a rocket launch against the cities of southern Israel, declaring that the attack was due to the protest against the international Eurovision song contest that took place that year in Tel Aviv, after the victory of Neta, an Israeli singer, in the previous year. Simultaneously, a digital movement in support of the Palestinian cause pledged to cause the Israeli event to fail, admonishing social media audiences to boycott it. In the last several decades, musical performances have become powerful tools in influencing and orienting the public and in consensus building on many issues. Due to its vastness and complexity, a more extensive treatment of the neo-*daḥīyah* genre, both in the Negev and in the Palestinian Authority, will be addressed in a separate study.

## 6 Conclusion

In this article, I have presented and commented on some *daḥīyah* texts performed following traditional models and a neo-*daḥīyah* text. I have provided the general lines of the description and evolution of this vernacular genre in the southern Levant, from its original Bedouin milieu to its recent spread into rural and urban Palestinian Arab society. I hope that

this study has contributed to the promotion of the research on the *daḥīyah* genre in the Negev and the southern Levant in general. Indeed, many of its aspects remain to be investigated while it is still possible to interview the representatives and heirs of the traditional genre. Much more material and information could be collected on both the traditional genre and its evolution as well as the vitality of traditional performances and their link to the contemporary neo-*daḥīyah* phenomenon.

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