Editors’ Introduction

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In this special volume we focus our sights close to home, and examine how issues that plague minority populations residing in the periphery—acute deprivation, cultural marginality and systematic exclusion—play out in the Israeli Negev region among the Bedouin community. This is literally our own backyard. As Israelis, as residents of the Negev and as editors of a journal published at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, we and many of the contributors to this volume live our lives, teach, work and raise our families in one of the poorest regions of Israel, where impoverished Bedouin towns are established in the midst of dispersed shanty towns (referred to in Israeli formal speech as unrecognized villages).

The essays included in this volume develop, from a range of disciplines and perspectives (including a photographic essay), a critical understanding of the different paths of resistance adopted by this subaltern community and of the manner in which memory, identity and gender relations are played out in the daily lives of people remote from power. The introductory chapter written by Prof. Ismael Abu-Saad provides a necessary updated background for the detailed examination offered by the individual essays. The closing essay written by Prof. Oren Yiftachel lays out the theoretical concepts for a critical and politically engaged analysis of such study.

This volume of scholarly articles is therefore intended as a contribution to the general growing knowledge of subaltern people, their plight, their difficulties in the global world and their resistance in the face of state oppression; it also serves as an example of engaged critical research aimed at highlighting troubling social issues of exclusion and inequality. Taken together, the essays included in this volume explore new ways of thinking about the issues of human rights and social justice.

As editors of Hagar, we are pleased to invite you to read this thought-provoking, well researched and theoretically informed work. We see it as the best example of the kind of scholarship we in Hagar hope to encourage.
Introduction: State rule and indigenous resistance among Al Naqab Bedouin Arabs

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Throughout the Middle East, the indigenous desert-dwelling Bedouins have formed an integral component of Arab society. As the Arab world went through the colonial and formally “post-colonial” eras, no community was so dramatically affected as that of the Bedouins. This was particularly true of the Bedouin-Arab community in Al Naqab. In addition to the changes brought about by global processes of “modernization,” this community was greatly affected by the European-based Zionist movement to settle Palestine, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent transformation of the indigenous Palestinian-Arab population into a minority in a Western/European-oriented Jewish state.

Al Naqab Bedouins are among the indigenous Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after 1948 and who are today a part of the Palestinian minority in Israel. They have inhabited Al Naqab Desert from early periods (Maddrell, 1990) and were traditionally organized into nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes that lived by raising sheep and engaging in seasonal agriculture.

Historical background

Prior to 1948, estimates of the Bedouin-Arab population in Al Naqab ranged from 65,000 to 90,000 (Falah, 1989; Maddrell, 1990). They were engaged in animal husbandry and seasonal agriculture and cultivated over two million dunams (494,200 acres) of land, primarily in the northern Naqab (Falah, 1989; Marx, 1967). Approximately 90 percent of them earned their living from a mixture of agriculture and pastoralism; the rest subsisted solely on raising livestock (Falah, 1985, 1989).

During the course and aftermath of the 1948 war, the vast majority of Al Naqab Bedouin Arabs were expelled and became refugees in the surrounding Arab countries/territories (e.g., the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Egypt); thus, by 1952, only about 11,000 remained in Al Naqab (Falah, 1989; Marx, 1967). The Israeli authorities took control of most of the land there, so the Bedouin Arabs lost the freedom to move around with their herds and cultivate their lands. Twelve of the 19 tribes were removed from their lands, and the whole population was confined to a specially designated Restricted Area in the northeastern Naqab, representing only...
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ten percent of the territory they had controlled before 1948. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities imposed military government on the areas of the country that had large indigenous concentrations. The regulations of the military government typified traditional imperialist attitudes for dealing with the native population of a colony. They gave the authorities extensive and extremely rigorous powers, and their enforcement resulted in the nearly complete loss of individual freedoms and property rights. They impinged upon virtually every aspect of life, from control over freedom of speech, movement, means of transportation and freedom of the press to the expropriation of property (Jiryis, 1976).

Using these expanded powers, the Israeli authorities closed most of the land in Al Naqab to the Bedouin Arabs and forbid them from migrating seasonally with their herds and cultivating their lands (Lustick, 1980). Furthermore, the military regulations imposed upon the Bedouins isolated them from the Arab population in other parts of Israel and required them to obtain special permits to leave their designated sections of the Restricted Area to access jobs, education, markets, health care services and the like (Marx, 1967). These restrictions represented a form of forced sedentarization, which virtually ended their traditional way of life.

During the tenure of the military government, the authorities also took great care to prevent the migration of the Bedouin Arabs out of the Restricted Area. Bedouin men who were given permits to work in the Jewish sector were not allowed to bring their families with them, thus ensuring their return to the Restricted Area. Even within the Restricted Area, a Bedouin of one tribe could not visit the area of another tribe without the permission of the military governor (Marx, 1967). The Israeli authority’s record during this period was one of intimidation and violence, in which collective punishment against Al Naqab Bedouin Arabs was common. Falah (1985) documented several massacres, as well as several cases of expulsion of Bedouins after the establishment of the state. Jiryis maintained that “More than any other group, Al Naqab Bedouin Arabs suffered the full and unrestrained harshness of military rule” (1976:122). As one Bedouin sheikh stated:

...the land expropriation and the forced expulsions without compensation or the right to return... brought the Bedouin to a situation which [was] difficult both psychologically and materially, and to a lack of security unlike anything they had previously known (cited in Lustick, 1980:13).

Subsequent to their transfer to the Restricted Area, Al Naqab Bedouin Arabs were largely neglected by the planning authorities for 20 years. No residential, agricultural or economic development plans were prepared for this region. As a result, over the course of these 20 years, dozens of Bedouin Arab villages were formed. The seven tribes that originally lived in the Restricted Area settled on their own lands, while those who had been transferred to the Restricted Area by the government settled in the areas in which they had been placed. These settlements were characterized by tin shacks, cabins or tents because no permanent building
activity (e.g., stone or concrete structures) was allowed in the Restricted Area (Yiftachel, 2003, 2006). These “spontaneous” (from the perspective of state planning authorities) villages were denied recognition by the government and, as a consequence, were also denied basic infrastructure and services, such as electricity, running water and roads (Abu-Saad, 2000; Marx, 2000; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006).

Confiscation and Judaization of the land

The Judaization of the land in Palestine has its roots in pre-1948 Zionist settlement methods that attempted to create contiguous chains of segregated Jewish localities, particularly in areas with an Arab majority, such as the Galilee and the northeastern Naqab (Yiftachel, 1999). Settlement in these regions was considered one of the valued achievements of Zionist activity. As Al Naqab represented nearly 60 percent of the country’s total land mass, the northern portion of which (some 2,560,000 dunams or 640,000 acres) consisted of good soil suitable for irrigation, it was central to the Zionist settlement project. As David Ben Gurion once wrote:

Negev land is reserved for Jewish citizens, whenever and wherever they want…. We must expel Arabs and take their places ... and if we have to use force, then we have force at our disposal, not in order to dispossess the Arabs of Al Naqab, and transfer them, but in order to guarantee our own right to settle in those places (in a letter to his son, Amos, October 5, 1937, cited in UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2003:5).

After the establishment of the state, the Israeli government continued to engage in massive efforts to Judaize the land. In some respects the entire country became a frontier, and the glorification associated with settling the frontier assisted in the construction of a unified national Jewish identity, as well as in the actual conquest of the physical space in which that identity could be territorially constructed. These frontier regions were often internal places within the state, with predominantly Palestinian populations, over which the government attempted to assert its hegemony (Yiftachel, 1999). Al Naqab continued to be a major Zionist frontier icon, the Jewish settlement of which was passionately called for by Zionist leaders.

The Judaization of the land entailed its de-Arabization, and thus the relationship between the Bedouin Arabs and their land was almost entirely expunged from Zionism’s “official story.” Following the war of 1948, David Ben Gurion appointed a committee whose job was to provide “Hebrew names to all places, mountains, valleys, springs etc., in the Negev.” In a letter addressed to the members of the committee, Ben Gurion wrote:
We have to remove the Arabic names for political reasons; as much as we do not recognize the political ownership of the Arabs over the land we also do not recognize their spiritual ownership [of the land] and their names (State Archives; Prewar Archive, C/2613, cited in Benvenisti, 1997:8–9).

Moreover, as Shamir stated:

A host of historians, geographers, reporters, engineers, policymakers, and educators emphasize the rootless character of Bedouin life and describe the Bedouin as lacking the fundamental and constructive bond with the soil that marks the transition of humans in nature to humans in society (hence, for example, the distinction between “planned” and “spontaneous” settlements). One aspect of this official story emphasizes the emptiness of Al Naqab, while another aspect discovers the Bedouin nomads as part of nature. Both aspects ultimately converge into a single trajectory: an empty space that awaits Jewish liberation, and a nomadic culture that awaits civilization (1996:236).

The desert was empty only because the Zionist colonizers chose not to see its indigenous inhabitants, in the same way that British colonizers chose not to see Australia’s indigenous population and could thus declare it to be terrus nullius (an empty land, not owned by anyone) (Yengoyan, 2001). Similar to other colonial projects, the next task was to physically and materially empty the territory of the indigenous communities by removing them from their lands, removing any trace of their presence and way of life, and removing all possibilities of their return to their land and former livelihood. This Zionist version of history, which insisted that Al Naqab was empty and uninhabited, was instrumental to facilitating the enactment of numerous laws and regulations of land confiscation. Once confiscated, the land was given a new identity through the renaming of its places and the building of new Jewish towns and agricultural villages (moshavim) and cooperatives (kibbutzim) (Abu-Saad, 2005, 2008; Falah, 1989; Shamir, 1996; Yiftachel, 2006).

The most dangerous aspect of the land expropriation following the initial wave of expulsion is that it was (and continues to be) done through legal channels and is therefore an “acceptable” and “modern” way of cleansing the space in Al Naqab. In 1950, the Transfer of Property Law made the government custodian over the property of “absentee owners.” Then, in 1953 under the Land Acquisition Law, which was modeled after the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 and did not officially recognize Bedouin landholdings, the State of Israel expropriated 93 percent of Al Naqab land (Arab Association for Human Rights, 2004; Yiftachel, 2003). It is important to note that it was only after the creation of the state that the old Ottoman land categories became a powerful and effective means of expropriating land. No compensation was offered for these confiscated lands, as the land was required for “positive development needs.”
The classification of Naqab Bedouin-Arab lands as “state lands” gave their confiscation an unprecedented permanence due to the unique pattern of land ownership in Israel. The Israel Land Authority (ILA) administers state lands in Israel jointly with the Jewish National Fund (JNF), an international non-governmental organization representing the interests of the Jewish people worldwide, rather than the interests of all citizens of the State of Israel. Nevertheless, the JNF has been given quasi-governmental powers with regard to land administration in Israel (Abu-Saad, 2000; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006).

When military rule over Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel was ended in 1966, some Naqab Bedouins attempted to reclaim or return to their lands. According to Falah (1989), the Bedouins used the following four arguments as proof of their ownership of the land: (1) they had worked and cultivated the lands for a long period and were in possession of official tax as well as traditional documents; (2) the Turkish government purchased approximately 2,000 dunams from the ‘Azazmah tribe in 1900 to build the town of Beer Sheva, thereby proving Bedouin claims to the land; (3) the Israeli authorities recognized the purchasing claims of individual Jews in Al Naqab before 1948; and (4) the Israeli authorities do recognize Bedouin land ownership, but only when the Bedouins agree to sell the land to the state.

Due to the policies of “Judaizing the land,” the Bedouin Arabs’ attempts to win recognition for their historical land rights through the Israeli justice system have been unsuccessful. The court offers no protection for their lands. For example, in 1974, when the Al-Hawashleh family challenged the confiscation of 36,000 dunams (9,000 acres) of their land in order to establish the Jewish town of Dimona, the court ruled that this land belonged to the state. Furthermore, the court accepted both arguments made by the state: firstly, that the Bedouins as nomads had no attachment to the lands and so could not possibly own them; and, secondly, that these were state lands that the Bedouins had invaded (Al-Hawashleh, 1974).

Another major land confiscation occurred in 1980. Due to the ever-increasing military needs of Israel, the Israeli Army insisted on establishing new airfields and military bases in Al Naqab to replace those which were closed in the Sinai after the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt. The Law of Requisition of Lands conveniently authorized the expropriation of 82,000 dunams in the Restricted Area. The compensation offered for these lands was much less than that given to the Jewish settlers who were removed from the Sinai during the same period. In addition, the above stated land law denied the Bedouins the right of appeal in the court system (Abu-Saad, 2005, 2008; Shamir, 1996).

Sixty years have passed since Israel’s establishment, but there has been little or no change in its land policies, despite its lack of success in completely removing the Palestinian presence from the land. According to official government policy, the Bedouins residing on and using their traditional lands are invaders and criminals, as was clearly and openly stated by Avigdor Lieberman (himself an immigrant from the former Soviet Union) while he was the Israeli Minister of Infrastructure in 2002:
We must stop [the Bedouins’] illegal invasion of state land by all means possible. The Bedouin have no regard for our laws; in the process we are losing the last resources of state lands. One of my main missions is to return the power of the [Israel] Land Authority in dealing with the non-Jewish threat to our lands (cited in Cook, 2002:2).

The attitude Lieberman expresses, which reflects the public discourse, is that Al Naqab Bedouins have no rights to “state lands,” despite their status as Israeli citizens, because “state lands” are in actuality “Jewish lands,” and the Bedouins are reduced to the illegitimate and dehumanized status of “the non-Jewish threat.” After more than half a century as citizens of Israel, they remain illegal invaders and a threat to the vision of Zionism.

Despite the government’s unrelenting Judaization/de-Arabization land policies, the Bedouins continue to resist the confiscation of their land, and the tension involving Bedouin-Arab land ownership remains a central issue. Ninety five percent of their land claims have not been settled, covering approximately 800,000 dunams (Mena, 1996). Half of these lands are in areas settled by Jews. The compromises reached so far between Naqab Bedouin Arabs and the state account for only 30,000 dunams. This low figure reflects not only the slow pace of the Israeli legal system, but also the ongoing Bedouin-Arab resistance to the next stage in the evolution of state policies, which attempted to link the settlement of land disputes to their relocation and urbanization (Abu-Saad, 2008; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006).

The impact of the land confiscation upon the Bedouin Arabs in Al Naqab cannot be overstated, and its detrimental effects are ongoing. The total loss of land deprived the entire Bedouin-Arab population of their means of production, physical resources and economic autonomy. They were denied the resources to retain their traditional means of subsistence (herding and agriculture), except under tightly controlled conditions directed toward coopting selected Bedouin Arabs rather than restoring their means of production and economic autonomy. The government land confiscations severely impoverished the Bedouin community, and the effects of this deprivation have perpetuated their state of impoverishment up to the present (Abu-Saad, 2005, 2008).

**Forced urbanization**

In the late 1960s, the Israeli government formulated a program for the resettlement of the Naqab Bedouin-Arab population into planned, urban-style towns. The core rationale for the program of urban settlements was based upon the ideological nature of spatial planning in Israel (Falah, 1989; Gradus and Stern, 1985; Kimmerling, 1982; Marx, 2000). Dispersion of the Jewish population throughout the land continued to be one of Israel’s major national planning goals. Furthermore, the
Bedouins’ widely dispersed settlement and extensive land use even within the Restricted Area, not to mention their land ownership claims, represented an obstacle to the ongoing Zionist conquest and cultivation of “frontier” desert areas (Gradus and Stern, 1985; Marx, 2000; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006). Thus, the governmental plan to remove the Bedouin Arabs from the land and settle them in higher density towns was designed to further decrease the extent of their claim on the land and to stem their “spontaneous” settlement activities (Abu-Saad, 2008; Falah, 1989; Law-Yone, 2003; Marx, 2000; Shamir, 1996; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006).

On another level, by the 1960s, the rapidly developing Israeli economy required growing numbers of workers (Marx, 2000). As such, the unskilled Bedouin-Arab workforce, who would no longer have the land resources to maintain their traditional livelihood in urban-style towns, could participate as low-wage workers in the industrial and economic development of the Jewish towns in Al Naqab. As Moshe Dayan stated during his term as the Minister of Agriculture in 1963:

> We should transform the Bedouins into an urban proletariat—in industry, services, construction and agriculture. Eighty eight percent of the Israeli population are not farmers; let the Bedouins be like them. Indeed, this will 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 head lice in public. The children would go to school with their 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 Bedouins will disappear (Haaretz interview, July 31, 1963 [Hebrew]).

The government-expressed rationale for this policy has been multifaceted and often cast in the benevolent light of desiring to “modernize” the Bedouins and enable more efficient provision of services. This rationale is belied by the fact that an explicitly urban and highly concentrated settlement model was selected that represented the complete destruction of the Bedouins’ traditional lifestyle. If the goals of the government were in actuality only to modernize and provide the Bedouins with services more efficiently, both aims could have been achieved by planning agricultural villages or cooperatives with a land base (such as the Jewish moshavim and kibbutzim) for them. This would have coincided with Bedouin demands for their own development and would not have required the complete alienation from their land and traditional lifestyle that urbanization entailed (Abu-Saad and Lithwick, 2000; Abu-Saad, Lithwick and Abu-Saad, 2004).

There were, in fact, strong cultural factors that made urban settlements unattractive to the indigenous Bedouin Arabs. As Law-Yone explained:
Hierarchies of space based on tribal social structure were replaced by repetitive lots of uniform size, shape, and orientation. Gradations of proximity, enclosure, and openness of the desert were replaced by the spatial logic of European urban form. New and strange definitions of private and public spheres were grafted onto a society that had its norms, which were no longer considered valid (2003:181).

In 1968, the Housing Ministry launched the first town, Tel-Sheva, by building 49 small houses (70 square meters) on 400 square-meter lots each (Lewando-Hundt, 1979). Each Bedouin family was to receive a renewable 49-year lease for the lot; at the same time, they were expected to sign away all claims to land owned in the past. The houses were built in a linear pattern, extending out on both sides of a central commercial area, consisting of a few shops, a school and a clinic (Gradus and Stern, 1985; Marx, 2000). The small houses were unsuitable for large families with an average number of 8–9 children, and the high density of the town itself stood in conflict with the Bedouins’ traditionally widely dispersed settlements. From the Israeli government’s perspective, the high density advanced the Zionist aim of reduced indigenous land requirements/control, as well as the economic goal of more cost-efficient service provision. These considerations took priority over concerns about how gravely the high-density urban model disrupted the Bedouins’ traditional way of life, socially, culturally and economically (Abu-Saad, 2005).

The predominant Bedouin response was refusal to move to Tel-Sheva. Due to the failure of this initiative, the Israeli government planners who initiated a second settlement, Rahat, in the early 1970s, made a limited effort to take some Bedouin lifestyle and cultural factors into account, while still maintaining an urban model and advancing the Zionist aims of reducing the amount of land occupied by the Bedouins. In Rahat, Bedouin tribes were placed in different sections of the town according to their traditional relations, territorial distribution and willingness to move. Each street and lane was identified with an extended family, and its households were concentrated on adjacent lots (Falah, 1983, 1985; Gradus and Stern, 1985; Marx, 2000; Stern and Gradus, 1979). Furthermore, instead of providing small lots with small two-room houses, as was done in Tel-Sheva, the Ministry of Housing allowed people to purchase/lease a “large” vacant lot (800 square meters) for each household within an extended family. The Bedouins were then free to build their houses according to their own budgetary resources and household and social needs. The planning model used in Rahat was extended to new neighborhoods that were added to Tel-Sheva, as well as to the additional five planned Bedouin towns that were established during the 1980s and 1990s (see Table 1).
Table 1. Year of establishment and population of Bedouin government-planned towns in Al Naqab, December 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Population in 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rahat</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>42,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel-Sheva</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’rara Banegev</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>12,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ksayifa</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>10,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hura</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>10,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laqiya</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segev-Shalom</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>6,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics (2008); Marx (2000).

Over time, the Bedouin-Arab families that had been rendered landless by the removal from their traditional lands and relocation to the Restricted Area, as well as those who had been landless before 1948 or were affected by a new wave of displacements in the 1980s, moved to the planned urban settlements. For the Bedouins without land, moving to the towns was preferable to their ambiguous, temporary status on lands classified as “state land” or, according to Bedouin law, land belonging to another family/tribe (Abu-Saad, 2001; Marx, 2000). This process has moved slowly, for as Marx explains:

While the planning model adopted in Rahat and replicated in subsequent towns succeeded in reducing some of the socio-cultural barriers related to allocation of space that had caused the first model to fail, it did not address the employment needs of the population. With no local industry, local employment was non-existent beyond small grocery shops and work for the local government councils. The planned Bedouin towns never became more than dormitory communities with large numbers of men leaving very early in the morning for their places of employment and returning late at night. A survey commissioned by the Rahat Municipality in 1997 found that of the 66% of men over 18 who were employed, fully 64% worked outside Rahat in construction, trucking, industry, agriculture and services (2000:113).

Furthermore, aside from the provision of basic services (water, electricity, telephone hook-up, schools and clinics), the towns lacked essential urban characteristics. In his 2002 Report, the State Comptroller reported that none of the Bedouin towns had a completed sewage system, even though the settlements had
been in existence for many years and thousands of families had already paid for this essential system. In four of the seven towns (Hura, Laqiya, Tel-Sheva and A’rara Banegev), the sewage system was not operational at all. In the words of the Comptroller:

Reasonably paced implementation of development and infrastructure in the Bedouin towns has not been carried out for many years. The settlements were populated with minimal infrastructure, and subsequently the level of resources invested for establishing and completing the infrastructure was insufficient, particularly with regard to sewage systems, streets and sidewalks. As a result of the many years of neglect in investment in the infrastructure, the settlements are suffering from great negligence. Moreover, there is a severe shortage in the domain of public institutions (e.g., recreational facilities, community centers, libraries, etc.), as well as public parks, sports fields, etc. (Israel State Comptroller, 2002:109).

Unlike their neighboring urban settlements in the Jewish sector, they also lacked intra- and inter-city public transportation services, banks, post offices, public libraries, public parking lots, recreational and cultural centers and the like (with the exception of the largest town, Rahat, of nearly 42,000 inhabitants, which has only one bank) (Abu-Saad, 2003, 2008; Lithwick, 2000; Swirski and Hasson, 2006).

**Government-planned Bedouin towns: Perpetuating dependence and underdevelopment**

The seven Bedouin towns in Al Naqab are among the youngest government-established towns in Israel, with the local governing body of the oldest (Rahat) established in 1980 and of the youngest (Hura and Laqiya) in 1990. All of their local councils were headed by non-resident Jewish mayors appointed by the Interior Ministry for many years, because the Bedouins were not considered capable of governing themselves in their new urban context. It is the standard procedure of the Interior Ministry to appoint a council ostensibly of professionals for an initial period (e.g., until the next local council elections, scheduled nationally every four years) in all newly established towns in order to facilitate their initial development. One of the first appointed mayors to head the Bedouin town of Laqiya previously worked for the military administration over Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, making one wonder just what type of "professional" skills the Interior Ministry deemed were essential to establishing and developing a Bedouin town. Furthermore, the “initial period” of an appointed council in the case of the Bedouin towns stretched on for over ten years in all cases, until the Bedouin inhabitants of the towns themselves challenged it in the Israeli High Court, and the High Court ordered the Interior
Ministry to allow the Bedouin towns to hold local elections. The first elections for local authorities in Rahat and Tel-Sheva were held in 1988 and 1992, respectively, while elections in the remaining five Bedouin local authorities were held in 2000, again only after the involvement of the High Court (Abu-Saad, 2005, 2008).

Despite the formal apparatus of locally elected government, it is not possible to talk about self-governance or autonomy in the Bedouin towns for a number of reasons. First, their access to and control over land is so circumscribed that they barely have enough land to meet the needs of their local population growth by replicating the same high-density urban model; they cannot begin to consider any other development or land use options. This further underlines the fact that the government rationale for urbanizing the Bedouins had more to do with the land than “modernizing” the population. As Swirski and Hasson (2006) explain:

The Bedouin urban localities are characterized by small areas of jurisdiction…. Although the population of these localities constitutes 16% of the total population of the Beer Sheva subdistrict, their area of jurisdiction (60 sq. km.) makes up just 0.5% of the area of the subdistrict, which covers 12,945 sq. km. …

These facts are particularly striking when Bedouin localities are compared with Jewish ones: Dimona, whose population is smaller than Rahat’s (33,700 and 34,100 residents, respectively, in 2003) has an area of jurisdiction of 30.6 sq. km.—3.5 times that of Rahat (8.85 sq. km.). Omer, whose population is around half of that of its Bedouin neighbor, Tel-Sheva, has an area of jurisdiction which is 2.7 times that of Tel-Sheva (Adalah, 2004:7, cited in Swirski and Hasson, 2006:58).

Second, the budgets of the government-planned towns are the lowest in the entire country (Lithwick, 2000; Razin, 2000; Swirski and Hasson, 2006). One of the main reasons for this is that the low socioeconomic status of the Bedouins living in the towns, together with the lack of local economic activities, translates into a very low income from property and local business taxes. Extra budgetary support from the government, despite often-voiced official concern for improving the conditions and attractiveness of the towns, has not been sufficient to alter the fact that the Bedouin towns’ budgets remain the lowest in the country. Furthermore, governmental authorities have done nothing to address the clear need for large-scale investment in educational and economic infrastructures or to generate local places of employment, even though a detailed development plan for the seven towns, created through a joint Bedouin-university initiative, was submitted to the government (Abu-Saad and Lithwick, 2000). Such investment would generate a higher level of self-funding and could thus be translated into greater capacity for independent indigenous development, but the national government’s lack of support for any such
initiatives suggests it prefers the status quo of urbanized Bedouins who remain impoverished and dependent.

Education, health and social welfare services in the Bedouin towns are supplied by and controlled through national government channels, and as with other governmental provision, receive minimal and often insufficient funding given the scope of the needs (Abu-Saad, 2008; Abu-Saad et al., 2004; Golan-Agon, 2006; Jabareen, 2006; Swirski and Hasson, 2006). Many small (and even competing) nongovernmental organizations dealing with a wide array of issues have sprouted up in the Bedouin towns in the past few decades. However, the fact that, in most cases, both their organizational missions and their funding sources are determined by members of the Israeli majority, has tended to cripple their ability to develop indigenous models of service provision and support in the urban context, or to begin confronting issues of decolonization (Abu-Saad, 2008; Swirski and Hasson, 2006).

At the same time that the governmental urbanization policy was actively being pursued in order to “modernize” the Bedouins so that they could be integrated into the Israeli labor market and society, the government-planned Bedouin towns were being excluded from the broader development plans for the region. In several key regional plans, both for Al Naqab and for the Beer Sheva metropolitan area, (including the 1972 District Plan, the 1991 “Negev Front” strategy, the 1995 Beer Sheva Metropolitan Development Plan and the 1998 renewed District Plan), the areas of Bedouin towns and unrecognized villages were either left blank, as if they were non-existent, or designated for public uses such as sewage plants, recreational forests or industrial zones (Abu-Saad, 2008; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006). Important new infrastructure developments, such as the new Trans-Israel Highway, recently improved rail facilities and even inter-city bus services have taken virtually no account of the Bedouin-Arab towns and their needs.

While the urbanization of the Bedouins suited the policy goal of reducing the Naqab Bedouins’ de facto use of and control over land resources, it is clear that no real attempt has been made by the state to integrate the new Bedouin towns into the national infrastructure in a viable and meaningful sense (Abu-Saad et al., 2004). Neither were they given sufficient resources for independent development, because Israeli government policy toward the indigenous Palestinian minority has consistently aimed at maintaining their dependence upon the Jewish economic and power structures in order to maximize the state’s control over them (Lustick, 1980). As such, the towns of the Israeli government planned for the Bedouins bear less resemblance to urban centers of economic, educational, service and social activity than they do to the typical colonial model of reservations, only with urban-style density, built to ensure that the land is reserved for someone else.
Governmental dismantling of traditional villages

Four decades after the initiation of the urban resettlement program, the total Naqab Bedouin population numbers approximately 200,000, making up 25 percent of the regional population, but only about half of the Bedouins live in the government-planned towns. The numbers of those refusing to move to the government-planned towns has grown to nearly 100,000 people, constituting Israel’s most marginal and deprived community (Abu-Saad, 2000; Shamir, 1996; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006).

Due to Bedouin resistance to the urbanization program, the Israeli government has placed numerous pressures on the inhabitants of unrecognized localities in an effort to coerce them to move to the government-planned towns (Abu-Saad, 2005, 2008; Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin, 1999; Swirski and Hasson, 2006; Yiftachel, 2003, 2006). The unrecognized villages and hamlets are denied services such as paved roads, public transportation, electricity, running water, garbage disposal, telephone service, community health facilities and, in many cases, schools. The residents of the unrecognized villages are acutely aware of the discrimination in the government’s policies toward them. As a resident of the unrecognized village of Tarabin al Sana (located next to the Jewish town of Omer) stated:

Look how we live. We live like animals in the mud. Then walk through that gate into Omer and see how nicely they live there. Our kids have to get up at 6:15 to be bussed to school in one of the recognized townships. Next door the kids of Omer walk out the door at 7:50 a.m. to be at the local school at 8:00 a.m. But they still want to get rid of us. Why can’t we become residents of Omer? I’m an Israeli citizen, I have been living in this village all my life, this is my home, why can’t I keep living here? (Human Rights Watch, 2008:22).

Bedouins in the unrecognized villages are also denied licenses for building any sort of permanent housing. All forms of housing (except for tents) are considered illegal and are subject to heavy fines and demolition proceedings (Abu-Saad, 2005; Falah, 1989; Maddrell, 1990; Shamir, 1996; Yiftachel 2003, 2006). From 1992 to 1998, a total of 1,298 buildings were demolished and 869,850 NIS (approximately $220,000) in fines were paid, due to the “illegal” status of these buildings (Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin, 1999). This phenomenon is ongoing, with demolition of hundreds of houses over the past few years (Arab Association for Human Rights, 2004; Ginsburg, 2003).

Over the past year, government house demolition activities have escalated, and in a new development, entire villages have been destroyed. For example, on June 25, 2007, all dwellings in the village of Um al-Hiran were demolished, leaving 150 people without homes. In addition, all of their possessions were confiscated, including medicine, children’s books and school materials, and food. The village,
Twail Abu Jarwal, which had around 100 residents, was demolished in 2006. The villagers responded by rebuilding their homes, and government forces have since destroyed their village another sixteen times (RCUV, 2008).

The unrecognized villages are denied their own representative authorities and have no official local councils. The effect is that they are denied two clear rights: a local authority to provide them with basic services and the right to elect local representatives. The majority of residents of the unrecognized villages live in areas devoid of any municipal authority. Even those who do live in an area under a municipal authority—such as those villages within the jurisdiction of Jewish regional councils, like Bnei Shimon and Ramat Hanegev—do not receive services from these bodies or vote in their elections. Rather, the residents of the unrecognized villages are governed by a number of administrative structures and units set up especially for the Bedouin Arabs. These include most notably the Bedouin Advancement Authority, the Bedouin Education Authority and the Green Patrol (for more details, see Swirski’s article in this volume).

Community resistance

In 1997, the Bedouin Arabs who lived in the unrecognized villages formed their own regional council as a grassroots community movement, which drew up and submitted its own plans for regional development to the Ministry of the Interior. The Interior Ministry did not accept the proposed plan of the Council of Unrecognized Villages for more appropriate, rural settlement models and has remained intent upon going ahead with the same unsuccessful urban model with only superficial improvements, but it faces serious and organized resistance from the Bedouin community. The first level of resistance is that people are refusing en masse to move to the planned towns, despite the many coercive measures used against them. In addition, they are expanding their dwellings to meet the needs of their natural population growth, as well as building small business and other community structures (e.g., mosques, soccer fields). Many have begun building more permanent structures (e.g., cinderblock and stone houses, rather than tin shanties), and their response to house demolitions is to rebuild rather than to relocate. Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail in the following section, the government has drawn up plans for “recognizing” and developing some of the unrecognized villages, but as it has become clear that the government still intends to resettle their inhabitants in high-density urban style around government-constructed service centers, people are refusing to cooperate with the plans and insisting upon an agricultural-based development model.

As a second level of resistance, various local Bedouin community organizations, along with nationwide organizations representing the indigenous Palestinian minority, have begun launching proactive legal action. They have been
finding cracks in the Israeli legal structure that can be used to oppose the discriminatory practices driven by Judaization policies which contradict the tenets of law and governmental responsibilities to its citizens (Yiftachel, 2006). For example, during the 1990s, the government’s responsibility to provide compulsory education to all children ages 3–16 was used in successful appeals to the Israeli High Court to obtain permission to build preschools and supply electricity (generator-powered only) to elementary schools in the unrecognized villages. At the same time, the High Court denied appeals to build high schools in the unrecognized villages. In addition, a lawsuit brought against the Ministry of Health to have public maternal and child health care clinics was successful and resulted in the opening of such clinics in a small number of the unrecognized villages (for further details, see http://www.adalah.org/eng/legaladvocacyoverview.php). More recently, the High Court ruled that the planners of the new regional Beer Sheva Metropolitan Plan must make an official commitment to include Bedouin concerns, opinions and representation in the planning process (though in the Bedouin community, there is quite a bit of skepticism about how this will actually be done and what will actually be done, since their request for agricultural villages was denied and they were told they had to “be more realistic”). In addition, the decision to expand the municipal boundaries of the Jewish town of Omer by annexing the land owned and occupied by Bedouins in several adjoining unrecognized villages was challenged in the High Court, with the result that the expansion was nearly totally cancelled (Yiftachel, 2006). Since 2000, however, there have also been a number of failed efforts to use the legal route, with, for example, the denial of appeals to provide a point for obtaining drinking water to an unrecognized village and to provide electricity to cancer patients and others with life-threatening illnesses in unrecognized villages (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

The third level of resistance to develop was the formation of an alliance of local Bedouin community and Jewish-Arab non-governmental organizations called The United Forum for Equality and Growth. This alliance coordinates a range of self-help and NGO programs for community empowerment, education and legal representation (Abu-Saad, 2005; Yiftachel, 2006).

In light of the Naqab Bedouins’ continued resistance to the government’s urbanization policies, the role of Green Patrol and other paramilitary measures are gaining increasing importance in the governmental effort to de-Arabize the land of Al Naqab (Cook, 2003; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2003; see also Swirski and Gottlieb in this volume). These measures, which are being intensified under the most current (Sharon and Olmert) governments, perhaps foreshadow a fallback to the days immediately before and after the 1948 war when military measures were used to “empty” the land for Jewish settlement.
**The scope of the special issue**

This introduction provides an overview of the conflict; the development policies and their socioeconomic and political consequences; the community initiatives and resistance; and the future uncertainty that are further explored in this special issue of studies in policy, resistance and development in Naqab Bedouin-Arab society. The first group of articles deals with how the issues of space, government policy and community resistance are actualized and intertwined. The second group locates Naqab Bedouin-Arab society in the broader contexts of Israeli society and the globalized human community, as they explore economic, educational and media issues.

In the first article, “Transparent citizens: Israel government policy toward the Negev Bedouins,” Shlomo Swirski examines how the State of Israel still regards the Bedouins as transparent citizens, refusing to recognize their rights to the lands they inhabit and insisting on dealing with them through the intermediation of state agencies established for the express purpose of keeping them under control, while at the same time setting them apart from the rest of Israeli citizenry. Swirski discusses the major milestones in the formation of state policy concerning Bedouin lands and the main specialized agencies created to control the Bedouin community. He concludes that, as Israel approaches the end of its sixth decade, the day when it will be possible to say that All Naqab Bedouins are citizens just like other Israeli citizens is still a long way off. The Bedouins were and continue to be a “problem” in search of a “solution.”

Nora Gottlieb, in her article, “Reconstruction: The voices of Bedouin-Arab women on the demolition of their homes in the unrecognized villages of the Negev,” explores the government policies of forcefully altering Bedouin space via house demolitions through the eyes of Bedouin women who are impacted by these policies. Gottlieb investigates how house demolitions in the unrecognized villages violate Bedouin women’s basic rights and impact their well-being from a human and health rights perspective. She also discusses the meaning of home life under the threat of a pending demolition order, the act of the demolition and its aftermath, the physical and emotional trauma, and the resources Bedouin women bring to resistance and reconstruction. Gottlieb argues that house demolitions in the unrecognized villages have unique and especially severe implications for women, which are related to gender roles and the division of space and labor in the Bedouin-Arab communities. The State of Israel ignores the human and female-specific aspects of its house demolition policy. It thus actively violates the most fundamental rights of an especially vulnerable group, to whom it promises special protection and support. Bedouin-Arab women are very aware of the larger political context; thus, in their eyes, the destruction of their homes translates into the destruction of their belonging and reinforces a deep sense of alienation from state and society.
The article, “Renaming space and reshaping identities: The case of the Bedouin town of Hura in Israel,” by Arnon Ben-Israel and Avinoam Meir, takes a more classic Israeli Jewish academic approach to studying the Bedouins, defining and exploring the issue of naming space in the government-planned town of Hura and interpreting the implications of this process for Bedouin identities. The authors explore several layers of spatiality in the government-planned Bedouin town of Hura and illuminate the process of constructing spatial meanings and representations. They claim that Bedouins in Hura prefer two basic arenas of associations for naming places in their new spatial context. The first arena, which dominates institutional and residential spaces, is Islamic. The second arena, which dominates economic-business spaces, is business oriented in a Western-capitalist adaptation to the Israeli context. Ben-Israel and Meir rely primarily upon the writings of mainstream Israeli “scholars of the Bedouins” and other Western academics for framing and interpreting the results of their exploration of these Bedouin naming processes. They conclude that, after a long period of non-naming in the new government-planned space, these recent and ambivalent naming trends might suggest that positive bonds to local space have been developed among some residents of Hura.

In “Between memory and resistance, an identity shaped by space: The case of the Negev Bedouins,” Safa Abu-Rabia illuminates the issues of space, memory, naming and identity from a Bedouin perspective and, in a sense, answers the fundamental questions that proceed, and that are left unasked, in Ben-Israel’s and Meir’s article. She explores the connections to the spaces that were taken away and how the maintenance of those connections is a means of resistance both to the reshaping of their space and to the authorities’ remaking of their identities. The governmental relocation of the Bedouins transformed their identity into that of expellees and strangers living outside their native space; however, over the years, they have developed practices that return them to their original space, reviving it through the search for relics of the life from which they were removed. As such, their old space has become a basis for memory, while their new space has become an arena for resistance, expressing their protest against and rejection of the present lifestyle that has been imposed upon them. Furthermore, Abu-Rabia asserts that the Bedouin exile identity is expressed through a constructed sense of alienation toward the place in which they are currently compelled to live, coexisting with a cultivated sense of emotional and physical belonging to their tribal lands, which they consider their real home.

The second group of articles begins with Suleiman Abu-Bader’s and Daniel Gottlieb’s paper, “Education, employment and poverty among Bedouin Arabs in southern Israel,” and explores how these factors position them vis-à-vis Israeli society at large. Abu-Bader and Gottlieb examine the relationships between educational attainment, employment and poverty among the Bedouin Arabs in the government-planned towns and the unrecognized villages of Al Naqab. Furthermore, they discuss the Bedouin Arabs’ economic status compared to the rest of the Arab minority in Israel, as well as the effects of recent developments in
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Educational attainment on employment opportunities in the Bedouin towns. The authors demonstrate how the lack of basic infrastructure is responsible for the low level of education, the lack of employment opportunities and the higher poverty rate among Al Naqab Bedouin Arabs. They argue that the vicious cycle of poverty will be perpetuated, unless the Israeli government takes a number of serious measures to break it, such as improving the access to infrastructures, attracting private investment to the Naqab Bedouin sector, improving the quality of education, and reducing job discrimination, especially in the public sector, for Bedouin-Arab university graduates.

The importance of the right to quality education is reinforced and placed in an international context by Norma Tarrow in her article, “Human rights and education: The case of the Negev Bedouins.” Tarrow examines the relationship between demographic, socioeconomic and political factors, on the one hand, and the universal human right to education, on the other hand, in the context of Al Naqab Bedouins. In light of Israel’s responsibilities as signatory to various international agreements, it is obligated to provide equal rights to its citizens, including the right to education. In exploring the fulfillment of this obligation to Al Naqab Bedouin Arabs, Tarrow examines educational objectives, budget, staffing, dropouts and the role of non-governmental organizations dedicated to ensuring the right to education and education about human rights.

Mustafa Kabha, in his article, “The Hebrew online media’s treatment of Arab citizens in the Negev,” investigates how the Hebrew online media represents the Bedouin-Arab population of Al Naqab. He argues that the Bedouins suffer from double discrimination in the media due, on the one hand, to their exclusion from media coverage in general and, on the other hand, to the inflammatory stereotypes presented to Israeli media consumers when they are covered in the media. He shows how positive or even neutral media attention is rarely given the Arab population of Al Naqab; instead, the media coverage focuses on cases involving the disruption of public order, criminal activity or fatal traffic accidents. Kabha analyzes the content of several online articles relating to the Arab population of Al Naqab and examines the responses of those who read these reports.

The first Open Spaces essay in this special issue, by Mazin Abu-Mahfouz, is entitled “The odyssey of the Abu-Mahfouz tribe: From Al-Naqab to exile.” In this piece, Abu-Mahfouz gives an account of the historical development of the Abu-Mahfouz tribe from the seventh century and its roots in Al Nagab in southern Palestine. He relates the odyssey of his family and tribe after going into exile beyond the borders of the Israeli state formed in 1948. His story provides insights into how they have preserved their social order, identities and memories in exile, and how, similar to what Abu-Rabia found among Bedouin exiles who remained in Al Naqab, they have maintained a strong sense of emotional and physical belonging to their tribal lands in Al Naqab.

Amara’s piece, “The Goldberg Committee: Legal and extra-legal means of solving the Naqab Bedouin case,” reflects upon the Israeli government’s recent
attempt to resolve the land conflict through the formation of the Goldberg Committee. Amara argues that the government should establish independent and impartial specialized institutions with a comprehensive and integrated mandate that can address Bedouin-Arab claims by providing remedies for ownership, security of tenure, resettlement, compensation and development. He also calls for these institutions to acknowledge the Bedouin-Arabs’ historical and cultural ties to the land, and to foster their participation, consultation and representation through transparent processes.

Oren Yiftachel’s epilogue to the special issue succinctly summarizes the main approaches that have been taken to study the Bedouins in Al Naqab and proposes developing a colonial scholarly paradigm. Yiftachel highlights three perspectives within the “colonial” paradigm with great potential for advancing the future study and understanding of Bedouin-Arab society in Al Naqab: settler society, indigeneity and “gray space.”

Thus, this special issue brings together the writings of many scholars, who cover a broad range of fields. They offer a variety of perspectives on critical historical and current issues facing Bedouin-Arab society in Al Naqab, as well as promising directions for future research.

NOTES

1 In the 1931 Census of Palestine, 89.3% (42,868 persons) of the Bedouins of Al Naqab were recorded as living from agriculture and 10.7% (5,113 persons) were recorded as occupied solely in raising livestock. See Falah (1985).

2 The Decree for Local Councils includes two key provisions. First, it is the council’s task to offer municipal services according to the needs of the residents. According to the Local Council Law, one of the tasks of a local authority is to establish and maintain services, enterprises and institutions that, to its knowledge, offer benefits to the public. Second, according to Article 3 of the Local Council Law, those who have the right to be elected are those who at the determining day, and for six months previously, have maintained their place of residence in this area.

3 See, for example, the writings of Emmanuel Marx, Gideon Kressel, Avinoam Meir and Joseph Ben-David.

REFERENCES

Introduction


Transparent citizens: Israeli government policy toward the Negev Bedouins

SHLOMO SWIRSKI

ABSTRACT

The story of the Negev Bedouins after 1948 is one of expulsion, displacement and land confiscation. Displacement is an ongoing process, as the state pushes for concentration of the Bedouins in urban communities, on a small portion of their lands. At the time of this writing, 60 years after 1948, a settlement of the status of the Bedouin lands is still not in sight. Throughout, Bedouins have been denied full citizenship status, both on the collective level, by withholding municipal incorporation of most of their villages and encampments, and on the individual level, by forcing Bedouin citizens to deal with the state mostly through special and separate state agencies, thus setting them apart from the rest of Israeli citizenry.

Introduction

The Negev has long ceased to be a frontier area, roamed by nomads suspicious of state authorities. Unlike the Ottomans and the British, the Israeli state has managed to establish control over the area and to make extensive use of its economic and military potential. Yet the state still regards the Bedouins as transparent citizens, refusing to recognize their rights to the lands they inhabit and insisting on dealing with them through the intermediation of state agencies established for the express purpose of keeping them under control, while at the same time setting them apart from the rest of the Israeli citizenry. Sixty years after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Bedouins do not have full and equal citizenship, nor do they enjoy the entire gamut of public services offered to other citizens. For the six decades that have passed since the establishment of the State of Israel, both issues—the title to lands and the specialized structure of control—have acted as high walls preventing the Bedouins from becoming first-class citizens and from taking part in the economic and social growth that Israel as a whole has experienced. Following a review of the upheavals that the Bedouin community of the Negev experienced in
1948 and during the first years of Israeli rule, this paper surveys the major milestones in the formation of state policy concerning Bedouin lands, and then examines the main specialized agencies created to control the Bedouin community.

1948

The 1947 United Nations decision to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, left large chunks of the Negev outside the boundaries of the Jewish state. The Arab state was assigned a swathe of Negev land the width of today’s Gaza Strip. It stretched from a point north of what is now the city of Ashdod, southwards along the coastline past today’s Gaza Strip, and continuing further south, along the present-day international border between Israel and Egypt, to a point south of Nitzana, where the strip became particularly wide, stretching as far as the center of the modern-day Israeli Negev. The city of Beer Sheva, together with its hinterland in the direction of the Hebron Hills, was also included in the territory that was to belong to the state of Palestine under partition.

The Zionist leadership expressed great interest in the Negev well before 1948; and during the fighting at the end of that year and at the beginning of 1949, in the final stages of the war, it made major efforts to conquer it (see Oren, 1986). The efforts proved successful, but obtaining international recognition of Israel’s possession of the Negev turned out to be a more difficult task, since Israel was not the sole claimant. Prior to the war, the British had expressed strategic interest in maintaining control over the Negev even after the Jewish/Palestinian partition came into being in the northern part of the country. As an alternative to British rule, they suggested that the Negev be transferred to the Palestinian Arab state (Biger, 1986:57–58). As the fighting continued, Count Bernadotte proposed to the UN Security Council that the Negev be handed over to the Hashemite Kingdom (Oren, 1986:114–115). After the war, both Egypt and Jordan laid claim to sovereignty over the Negev (Porat, 1993:120, 1998:195). Following the signing of ceasefire agreements with the belligerent Arab countries, the Israeli government was careful not to stir up discussion about the status of the Negev. In the early 1950s, when Egypt and Israel explored the possibility of a peace accord, the Egyptians demanded a land corridor to Jordan, through the Negev (Porat, 1993:138). Lastly, from the end of the 1948 war up to the 1956 war, the Negev, and in particular the area of the Israeli-Egyptian border, saw frequent military clashes. In fact, it was only after the 1956 war—in which Israel, in partnership with Britain and France, successfully attacked Egypt—that doubts about Israel’s sovereignty over the Negev ceased (Porat, 2000:420).
The Bedouin lands

Prior to the founding of the State of Israel, the Bedouins—some 70,000 (for higher figures, see Falah, 1985:37)—were the main inhabitants of the area, concentrated mainly in the northern and northwestern parts of the Negev. The 1948 war brought about a dramatic change in this situation. During the fighting, most of the Bedouins—over 50,000—were driven out, or abandoned the area, leaving their land behind (Ben-David, 1996:47; Lustick, 1980:134). At the end of the fighting, the Israeli government under Prime Minister David Ben Gurion opposed the return of the Bedouins from Jordan and Egypt (Ben-David, 1996:47), just as it opposed the return of most of the other Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, Ben Gurion also wanted to expel the small number of Bedouins—11,000 or so—remaining in the Negev. Eventually, Ben Gurion changed his mind, holding that the remaining Bedouins would not pose an obstacle to Jewish settlement in the Negev (Porat, 1993:133). However, most of these Bedouins were then uprooted from where they had been living and moved forcibly to the northeastern Negev, to the area called the “Siyag.”

As indicated above, the land on which most of the Bedouins lived up to 1948 was in the northwestern part of the Negev (Ben-David, 1996:50). Estimates vary as to the extent of their land: Porat (1997:405) cites sources indicating some 1.8 million dunams (1 acre = 4 dunams) “which were previously worked by the Bedouins”; in a later reference, Porat cites the figure of 2 million dunams of workable and grazable land (Porat, 2000:421). On the other hand, Razi Falah gives a figure of 2.7 million dunams of grazing and habitation ground, 900,000 dunams of which the Bedouins worked from year to year (see Porat, 1997:405).

Once the Bedouins were transferred to the Siyag, their original habitation was declared a military area, which the Bedouins were banned from entering (Arab Association for Human Rights, 2004). Later, these lands—of both the Bedouins who were displaced to the Siyag area and of those Bedouins who fled or were deported from Israel—were expropriated through the 1950 Absentees’ Property Law, which was designed to enable Israel to control the lands of Palestinian refugees. Three years later, this expropriation was retroactively endorsed by the 1953 Acquisition of Land (Confirmation of Deeds and Compensations) Law. The land was transferred to the Development Authority, a body set up by the government in 1952 in order to administer Palestinian refugees’ lands and make them available to the state for its development plans (Yiftachel, 2000:11). For its part, the Development Authority made the lands available to the State of Israel’s settlement bodies.

For the Israeli government, these lands constituted an attractive option for settling many of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had flocked to the new Jewish state during this period. These were the northern Negev’s most fertile lands, and they were made even more attractive after the Yarkon-Negev water line was extended to this part of the country. In fact, within a few short years, some 50
Jewish settlements were established on these lands (Yiftachel, 2003:33). The chain of new Jewish settlements helped to strengthen the claim of Israeli ownership over the Negev.

The Bedouins who remained in the area were transferred to the confines of the Siyag, in the northeastern part of the Negev, smaller in size than their original area of settlement. Within a few years, therefore, the Bedouin Negev community crumbled, most of its number finding themselves outside Israel’s borders, and the remaining few confined to a new area.

The Siyag area is located between Beer Sheva, Arad, Dimona and Yeruham. Eleven Bedouin tribes (Falah, 1989:78) were moved here, joining the six Bedouin tribes living there prior to 1948. According to Ministry of Agriculture figures, in 1955, two thirds of the residents of the Siyag area were Bedouins who had been displaced from the northwestern Negev, and one third were Bedouins who had inhabited the area prior to 1948 (cited in Porat, 2000:452). According to 1960 Ministry of Agriculture figures, the Siyag area totaled 1.2 million dunams (Porat, 2000:468). Of this total, cultivable land amounted to some 400,000 dunams, or about 20% of the tillable area available to the Bedouins before their expulsion and displacement from the northwestern Negev (Porat, 2000:421).

The fact that the Bedouins were confined to the Siyag area never meant that they were in full control of it: over the years, the state has expropriated large swathes of the Siyag lands in order to meet its needs. Ben-David (1996:50) lists four major expropriation operations amounting to 235,000 dunams: one of 88,5000 dunams in the 1950s in order to establish Jewish settlements and to achieve “essential development objectives”; another of 45,670 dunams in order to set up government-planned townships; the expropriation of some 50,000 dunams in the Beka area for various military projects; and an operation expropriating 65,000 dunams in 1980 in order to build the Nevatim military air base.

Title to the land

Given that their original lands were taken from them, can it be said that the new lands, those of the Siyag, belong to the Bedouins? Can the Siyag lands be seen as compensation for the loss of the original lands? The answer is negative: in the view of the state, the Bedouins own no lands whatsoever. Throughout the years, the state has maintained that all of the Negev lands, including those on which the Bedouins lived up to 1948 and those to which they were relocated after 1948, are state lands.

In making these claims, the state relies on legal precedents from the Ottoman and British periods. In 1858, the Ottoman authorities issued a lands ordinance which was designed to regulate ownership over the lands of the Ottoman empire. Inter alia, the ordinance related to uncultivated lands, which were classified as “dead” land (mawat in Arabic). Mawat land was defined as land located approximately 1.5 miles.
from the closest place of residence. In 1858, there was not a single permanent settlement in the entire Negev; the city of Beer Sheva, the first permanent locality, was not founded until 1900. This meant that the lands ordinance made all of the Negev lands *mawat*, and hence state land (Israel High Court of Appeals, May 15, 1984, Civil Appeal 218/74; see also Falah, 1989:78). The Ottoman authorities expected all of the Empire’s subjects who used *mawat* lands—including the Negev Bedouins—to present themselves at government offices in order to register the land in their names and receive title deeds. However, having their own ownership arrangements, the Bedouins failed to comply with the authorities’ edicts. As for the Ottomans themselves, they did not demonstrate much interest in the Negev’s destiny, and even when they did, the focus of their interest was neither Bedouin land nor developing the area, but what the British were up to in the Suez Canal area in neighboring Egypt. Given this situation, the Bedouins were able to continue running their lives on the basis of their traditional land arrangements.

After World War I, in 1921, the British Mandate government promulgated its own lands ordinance, based on the Ottoman one. The British proclaimed a two-month period during which residents holding and cultivating *mawat* land were asked to register it in their names; those who failed to do so would lose their ownership rights to the land. Most of the Bedouins in the Negev did not respond to this call, whether because of problems of access, because of their traditional suspicious attitude to any form of government, or out of fear of taxation or conscription. On the other hand, the Bedouins still had no real reason to worry, because the British promised that there would be no infringement of the rights of those holding land in accordance with traditional Arab law (Yiftachel, 2000:9). Moreover, the British, like the Ottomans before them, did not display any great interest in the economic development of the Negev (Ben-David, 1996:40; Biger, 1986:55–57). In addition, although the British initiated a campaign for registering and regulating real estate in Palestine, this was undertaken from north to south, and when the British left Palestine in 1948, they had not yet managed to reach the Negev (Yiftachel, 2003:32).

The establishment of the State of Israel changed this picture. Unlike previous rulers, Israel attached great value to the Negev—as an area for settling Jewish immigrants and deploying military bases, as a reservoir of natural resources and as a corridor to the strategic southern port city of Eilat. In view of these needs, the new state made use of both the Ottoman and the British lands ordinances and declared that all the land on which the Bedouins lived, past and present (with the exception of the few tracts whose owners did manage to prove ownership), were state lands and that the Bedouins had no other rights to them other than “usufruct” (Ben-David, 1995:66–67; Meir, 1999:18). The state’s position has not varied since 1948.7

In order to put into effect its self-proclaimed rights to the land, the state needed a legally grounded process. The main reason was that, as the years passed, it had less ability to do as it saw fit—like it had done in 1948: large-scale expulsions and transfers were gradually ousted from the basket of the possibilities available to it.
Furthermore, with the passage of time, the Bedouins stood up to struggle for their lands, often with the support of Jewish left-wing parties, first and foremost Mapam (Porat, 2000). These struggles, even if they failed to change the basic government attitude, may nevertheless have blocked the most extreme measures.

Thus, the government came to adopt the practice, in force to this day, of evictions in return for compensation: the Bedouins are offered the chance to move off the lands on which they had been settled, into government-planned townships, in return for compensation. The legal machinery for land settlement was established in 1969 and became fully elaborated six years later by the Albeck Commission (see below): Bedouin claimants of title or a right of ownership of land had to submit a claim to the Land Settlement Officer at the Ministry of Justice (Israel State Comptroller, 2002:115). Bedouins submitted some 3,000 ownership claims for 991,000 dunams. Most of these claims were filed at the beginning of the 1970s.

Bedouins who agree to the compensation conditions offered by the state sign a waiver, are evacuated from the land, receive the compensation and move to one of the government-sponsored localities. Bedouins who do not claim ownership and are prepared to move to one of these townships are offered a plot by the state.

From the Bedouin point of view, the settlement that the state is offering them—in terms of both the level of compensation and the standard of living in the recognized townships—does not constitute an acceptable alternative to their present living arrangements, nor a sufficient reason to renounce the lands on which they were settled. The state, on the other hand, acting presumably on the assumption that Bedouins’ needs are lower than those of their Jewish neighbors, firmly believes that the conditions it is offering them are quite adequate.

During the three decades that have elapsed since the introduction of the legal machinery, the process that the state calls “settling the land question” has made very little progress. The state has reached a settlement with the Bedouins only for some 140,000 dunams (Israel State Comptroller, 2002:115). Most of the 3,000 claims are pending to this day. The claims not yet settled total some 650,000 dunams (Israel State Comptroller, 2002:115).

The issue of title to the land never came to a rest. In fact, it came up in at least three junctures—once before the executive branch of the state, once before the legislative branch and once before the judicial branch. As shown below, all three branches of the Israeli state reiterated the position taken up by Israel after 1948—namely, that all of the Negev lands are state lands.

1975: The Albeck Commission

In 1975, six years after setting up the land settlement machinery, the government fully elaborated its position for the first time. In October 1975, a government commission headed by Ms. Plia Albeck, director of the Civil Matters Section of the
Shlomo Swirski

State Attorney’s Office, submitted recommendations for land settlement in the Siyag and the northern Negev. The government adopted the recommendations in just under a year (Israel Government Cabinet Resolution 968 [Ayin/1], August 15, 1976). The Albeck Commission’s recommendations became the basis for all subsequent government proposals for settling the question of Bedouin land in the Negev.

The Albeck Commission based its recommendations on the Ottoman precedent, namely, that all of the Siyag area lands were mawat. Therefore “the Bedouins are unable to acquire any rights [in the Siyag area lands], not even by virtue of protracted possession and cultivation, and hence all of the lands are state lands” (Albeck, 1975). However, having said that, the Commission went on to assert:

It is unacceptable from the human point of view, and it must be assumed that the Supreme Court will not endorse this either when the land settlement comes before it for consideration, for the Bedouins to be evicted from the entire Siyag area without any compensation in the framework of the land settlement, despite the many years that they have lived there, solely in light of the argument that no rural or urban settlement was built there in 1858 (Albeck, 1975).

Hence, the Commission devised an arrangement going “beyond the letter of the law,” whereby the state would give the Bedouin compensation “in return for their removal from those areas which are in their possession or which were in their possession in the past and to which they claim rights” (Albeck, 1975). Thus, the Albeck Commission put into words the three principles underlying state policy to this day: first, non-recognition of any right of possession by the Bedouins to the lands inhabited by them now or in the past; second, the government’s willingness to offer compensation to the Bedouins for their land “beyond the letter of the law,” following the argument that it is “unacceptable from the human point of view, and it must be assumed that the Supreme Court will not endorse this either”; and third, conditioning compensation on abandoning the land and moving to one of the localities planned by the government.

The significance of the Albeck Commission’s recommendations was straightforward: renunciation by the Bedouins of most of their land, in return for a not particularly generous compensation (see Swirski and Hasson, 2006:21–22). Just four years later, the Israeli government offered far more generous compensation to Jewish settlers evacuated from Sinai with the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt.

The Bedouins rejected the Albeck Commission recommendations, as they did not relish the prospect of relinquishing their lands, which guaranteed minimal subsistence at least. According to the prime minister’s adviser on Arab affairs, they viewed the government’s proposal as “aggravated larceny” (cited in Falah, 1989:77; see also Arab Association for Human Rights, 2004). Once the details of the proposal became known, the Bedouins began taking steps to prove their ownership of the
land: cultivation, olive tree planting and large-scale construction activities (Ben-David, 1995:73).

1980: “The peace law”

In 1979, with the signing of the peace agreement with Egypt, Israel undertook to remove all of its civilian settlements and military bases from the Sinai Peninsula. The Israel Defense Forces began looking for a suitable site in the Negev for an air force base, and found it at Tel Malhata in the Bedouin Siyag area, where today the Nevatim base is located. Initially, the state wanted to expropriate 300,000 dunams for this purpose, but in the end, following Bedouin protests, it made do with just 65,000 dunams (Meir, 1999:31).

Construction of the Nevatim air force base required the evacuation and resettlement of some 5,000 Bedouins (Ben-David, 1993:31). The government offered compensation to these Bedouins in the spirit of the 1975 Albeck Commission recommendations. However, at the same time, the government was negotiating with the Jewish settlers who were about to be evacuated from Yamit and the Rafiah salient. The Bedouins, aware of the level of compensation available to the Jewish settlers, considered the compensation they themselves were offered to be ridiculous (Ben-David, 1996:87).

The state then adopted an approach available to it—using legislation as a means of forcing its conditions on the Bedouins. Accordingly, it set a figure for the cost of the evacuation—some 600 million Israeli pounds, or around NIS 245 million at 2005 values (Israel Government Cabinet Resolution 179 [Bed/1], November 18, 1979). This amount was intended to finance the evacuation of some 750 households, totaling around 7,000 individuals (Falah, 1989:80; Yiftachel, 2003:34). The amounts paid to the Sinai settlers were far higher: according to figures published by the Bank of Israel, the cost of compensation to the settlers totaled NIS 3.4 billion (at 2004 values). Another NIS 2.1 billion should be factored in for the establishment of 19 agricultural localities to which the settlers were evacuated (Bank of Israel, 2005; see also Tzidon, 2005). The settlers comprised 1,840 households, and the number of individuals involved cannot have been much over 5,000 (Truan, 2005:6).

The settlement for evacuating the Bedouins from Tel Malhata was eventually approved in the framework of the law which is officially called the Acquisition of Land in the Negev (Peace Treaty with Egypt) Law, 5740/1980, but is known by its abbreviated name as “the peace law.” The law itself slightly improved the conditions offered by the Albeck Commission (see Swirski and Hasson, 2006:24–25).

“The peace law” contained renewed recognition of the Bedouins’ ties with the lands of the Siyag, as it acknowledged the government’s willingness to pay compensation for the land that it wished to expropriate (Meir, 1999:31). “The peace law” may also be said to have placed the legislature’s seal of approval on the
“beyond-the-letter-of-the-law settlement,” which until then had been grounded in the Albeck Commission recommendations and the government decision of August 15, 1976.

The Albeck Commission recommendations and the “peace law” established a conditional Bedouin ownership interest in the lands: the state recognizes Bedouin ownership only if and when the Bedouins are prepared to renounce their ownership, and the condition for state-level recognition of this relationship or interest is that they renounce ownership. As far as the state is concerned, the lands have indeed been declared to be its lands, but at the same time it has been determined that it cannot use them without the agreement of those living on them, and such agreement is to be given in return for compensation. As the State Comptroller recently observed, “The areas for which no settlement has been made and are the object of ownership claims are, in practice, unavailable for use by the state until a settlement has been reached” (Israel State Comptroller, 2002:115). It is nevertheless clear that, in the case of the Tel Malhata lands, this was not a voluntary settlement, but an agreement imposed by means of legislation.

1984: The Supreme Court

By 1980, then, two of the three state authorities had ruled that the Siyag lands belonged to the state and not the Bedouins. The only branch left was the judiciary, but if any of the Bedouins still harbored hopes about the possibility of receiving assistance from the legal system, these faded in May 1984 when the Supreme Court, sitting as Supreme Court of Civil Appeals, ruled unanimously that the state is the owner of all mawat lands in the Negev, as defined in the 1858 Ottoman lands ordinance and the 1921 British lands ordinance, unless the Bedouins have legal title deeds (Israel High Court of Appeals, May 15, 1984, Civic Appeal 218/74).

The Supreme Court had become involved after thirteen residents from the Bedouin village of Al Hawashala near Dimona petitioned it, in the wake of the refusal of the land settlement clerk to register plots on which they lived in their names. The Supreme Court not only ruled that this was mawat land belonging to the state, but also rejected the Bedouin argument that they had “revived” the land and hence it was no longer mawat-class land. From this viewpoint the court’s ruling not only coincided with, but also endorsed the state’s official position since 1948, to the effect that Bedouin land was state land pure and simple.

The court’s ruling brought to a definitive end the possibility of state recognition of Bedouin habitation on the Siyag lands. The Bedouins now faced a solid phalanx comprising all three branches of government.

However, the court’s ruling could not stop the procedures that had started prior to the handing down of the judgment—in other words, the settlement “beyond the letter of the law.” The upshot, therefore, is a stalemate. On the one hand, the
Interim summary

Sixty years after the establishment of the state, the question of the Siyag lands is still very far from being solved. The Bedouins are not prepared to give up what they perceive as a better, and certainly no worse, source of existence than what the state is offering them. For its part, the state feels no need and no urge to change its policy.

The Bedouin land question is today far from an agreed-upon solution. The state is acting in this area as if it were still in the pre-1948 period, when the Jews were fighting for every single dunam of land, with the aim of securing the Zionist claim to Palestine/Eretz Israel. According to this approach, the Israel Land Administration (ILA) acts as a guardian overseeing the 93 percent of Israel’s land which is defined as belonging to the Jewish people. In this matter, Yosef Ben-David has written:

The Zionist national perceptions of redeeming the land—views that are deeply rooted in the consciousness of the government clerks who deal with Bedouin land issues—preclude any possibility of demonstrating generosity when allocating land to the Bedouins…. When it comes to giving compensation to non-Jews, the state is diligent in guarding its economic assets: hence the “frugality” (not to say miserliness) that characterizes the
government’s compromise proposals…. The government’s proposals, which are presented as a “compromise settlement,” are no more than unilateral proposals that are unacceptable to most Bedouin landowners (Ben-David, 1996:87).

Structures of control

Even after the transfer of the Bedouins to the Siyag and the stabilization of the Negev’s international status in the wake of the 1956 war, the fate and status of the Negev Bedouins were far from being decided. In fact, it was only then that the Israeli government began to formulate its policy. All of the proposals considered by the government shared a common denominator: reducing to a minimum the area on which Bedouins would be settled within the Siyag region. Opinions differed as to how to do this. One school of thought argued that the Bedouins should be transferred yet again, this time to the center of the country, so that the entire Siyag area could be expropriated by the state. This school was led by Moshe Dayan, Southern Area commander and later chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces during the 1956 war, who on retirement from the IDF was appointed Minister of Agriculture. Dayan suggested settling the Bedouins in mixed Jewish-Arab localities in Israel’s center, along the lines of Jaffa and Ramle, where they would become urban laborers. The second school maintained that the Bedouins should be concentrated within the Siyag area itself, in two or three large townships. The head of this school was Yigal Alon, commander of the forces that conquered the Negev in 1948, who in the early 1960s served as Minister of Labor (Bauml, 2002:310–315). Alon’s proposals prevailed, and in the early 1960s the government began the process of concentrating the Bedouins in government-planned townships within the Siyag. At the present time there are seven such townships: Tel-Sheva (founded in 1969), Rahat (1971), Segev-Shalom (1979), A’rara Banegev (1982), Ksayifa (1982), Laqiya (1985) and Hura (1989). In 2006, the total population of the seven townships amounted to approximately 100,000. The rest of the Negev Bedouins, approximately 75,000, live in localities which are not recognized by the state authorities, thus lacking planning, infrastructure and basic government services.

Despite the only partial success in the government’s effort to concentrate the Bedouins, the basic strategy adopted in the early 1960s has not changed. As Avinoam Meir puts it, the state has maintained a policy of shrinking to the smallest figure possible the area in which the Bedouin are to live, in order to intensify political control over them, and in order to reduce to a minimum the cost of physical and social infrastructure in the areas populated by them (Meir, 1999:20).
In the words of Dr. Amer Al-Huzaiel, former strategic adviser to the Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Villages,

It is no secret that the purpose of Israeli planning on the national and regional level is the Judaization of the planning space by concentrating the maximum number of Arabs in the minimum amount of land and dispersing the minimum number of Jews over the maximum amount of land (Al-Huzaiel, 2004:1).

Unique mechanisms of control

From the state’s point of view, “dealing with the Bedouins” is a unique undertaking, one that differs from dealing with the rest of Israel’s citizens, and it is handled by special bodies that operate independently of and largely in isolation from other government bodies. From the Bedouin point of view, the Israeli state is an amorphous and remote body that has little to do with them: “the state” is not the government, the Knesset or the district offices of the various government ministries, but rather those bodies that have been set up by the state in order to deal with them and with them alone.

This state of affairs is reminiscent of the relations that existed in colonial times between metropolitan states and the natives in their colonies, with a special commissioner or a special government ministry being appointed to deal with the latter. It is also reminiscent of the situation of Native Americans, responsibility for whom lies, to this day, with the Bureau of Indian Affairs—a branch of the US Department of the Interior, which manages the land of the reservations where Native Americans have been located, and whose responsibilities also include the development of forestlands, leasing assets on these lands, directing agricultural programs, protecting water rights, developing infrastructure and providing educational services (http://www.doi.gov/bureau-indian-affairs). As will be shown below, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has a counterpart in Israel—the Bedouin Advancement Authority, or in short “the Bedouin Authority,” which operates under the aegis of the Israel Land Administration.

In what follows I focus on five such agencies: the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the Israel Land Administration (ILA), the Bedouin Authority, the Green Patrol and the Bedouin Education Authority.
The military government

For almost two decades, from 1948 to 1966, the Palestinians that had become citizens of Israel in 1948, including the Negev Bedouins, were under the rule of the IDF’s military government apparatus. The Bedouins thus shared the fate of all Palestinians, but it appears that the military control exercised over them was more extensive and that it lingered on much longer.

The Bedouins in the Siyag area were dependent almost entirely on the goodwill of the military government (Porat, 2000:421). Up to the 1956 Suez War, which settled the diplomatic dispute over the Negev, the IDF remained the state’s most important representative in the area. Throughout that period, characterized by constant military tension, mainly on Israel’s border with Egypt, the Bedouins lived in constant fear that Israel would not allow them to remain in the Negev area and that the IDF would expel them across the border, to Jordan or Egypt (Porat, 2000:433).

During this period, the IDF acted as the government’s sole representative for every single matter and issue that arose. In contrast to other citizens, who dealt directly with each of the various state agencies, depending on the particular issue at hand, for the Bedouins, the Negev’s military governor and the military government division of the Defense Ministry came to represent the entire Israeli government (Marx, 1974:34; Porat, 2000:431). It should be noted that the military government’s status was more crucial to the Negev Bedouins than to the Arabs in the northern parts of the country, either because the latter were more educated and more familiar with the military government’s rule, or because it was easier for them to bring political pressure to bear and make use of the courts (Marx, 1974:39).

The military government’s unique status began to weaken in the 1960s, and it was eventually abolished in 1966. However, its abolition did not bring an end to treating the Negev Bedouins as an issue with security implications. As late as 1999, the ministerial commission on matters relating to Israel Arab citizens decided “to ask the committee secretary to apply to the Southern Command commander with a request that he stop dealing with civil matters relating to the Bedouins in the Negev” (Israel Government Cabinet Resolution 384 [Arab/2], September 30, 1999).

The Israel Land Administration (ILA)

The abolition of military government did not presage regular citizenship for the Negev Bedouins. Instead, a debate began as to which of the civilian government ministries would now be responsible for them. The initiative was taken by the agriculture minister, who decided that a special authority was to be set up at the Agriculture Ministry, to have exclusive power to deal with settling the Bedouins (Porat, 2000:469). The role was conferred on the Israel Land Administration, created

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in 1960 as a division within the ministry. The ILA contained the three major bodies that had previously dealt with the land issue in Israel: the Jewish National Fund, which had been involved with acquiring land from Palestinians before 1948; the Development Authority, set up in 1950 to administer the lands expropriated from Palestinians during and subsequent to the 1948 war; and the State of Israel, as the British High Commissioner’s heir to state lands. Although the ILA was set up in the Agriculture Ministry, responsibility for its activities was entrusted jointly to the ministers of finance and agriculture. During its first 30 years, the ILA operated out of the Agriculture Ministry; in 1990, it was transferred to the Construction and Housing Ministry; in 1996 it moved yet again, this time to the Ministry of National Infrastructures (www.mmi.gov.il). It should be noted that, during a good part of this period, the minister responsible for the ILA was Ariel Sharon, who ensured that whenever he moved, the ILA portfolio went with him: from the Agriculture Ministry to the Construction and Housing Ministry, and from there to the Ministry of National Infrastructures. When Ariel Sharon became prime minister, he assigned the national infrastructure portfolio, including the ILA, to Ehud Olmert, a man he trusted. On January 10, 2005, when the Labor Party joined the coalition headed by Ariel Sharon, Olmert moved the ILA, together with himself, from the Ministry of National Infrastructures—now headed by Binyamin Ben Eliezer—to the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Employment.

Since its establishment, the ILA has played a major role in dealing with the Negev Bedouins: until 1986, it constituted the senior partner in government committees dealing with the Bedouins; since 1986, it has acted as a key government institution for Bedouin affairs, through a body called the Bedouin Authority.

The Bedouin Authority

In 1986, after completion of the Tel Malhata evacuation in order to construct an IDF air force base, the government set up the Bedouin Development Authority better known by its abbreviated name, the Bedouin Authority, under the aegis of the ILA. The Bedouin Authority was set up primarily to conduct negotiations with the Bedouin inhabitants who submitted land title claims. In the intervening years, however, despite various upheavals, the Bedouin Authority has become a powerful government agency that concentrates powers in all matters relating to the Negev’s Bedouin inhabitants. It has been described as a “state within a state” (cited in Hasson, 2005).

The Bedouins are the only community in Israel for whom a special government body is in charge of their “advancement.” The Bedouin Authority has a monopoly on planning in the Bedouin sector, making it responsible for establishing new neighborhoods in recognized townships and setting up new townships. Furthermore, the Bedouin Authority also has complete control over water allocation to the
Bedouins—a subject for which the Bedouin Development Authority’s Water Committee is responsible (RC-HRA, 2003; ILA, 2004:167). It is also involved in decisions about the location of health services for the Bedouins (Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2001).

The monopoly position that the Bedouin Authority enjoys today would appear to be the upshot not only of the ever more invasive and controlling tentacles of bureaucracy, but also of the shortcomings and failings of the other government bodies. Apparently, when it comes to performing their duties in Bedouin locales, other ministries sometimes prefer not to earmark sufficient resources to do so and instead get the Bedouin Authority to do the job. As Ya’akov Katz, the head of the Bedouin Authority, puts it, the other ministries found it convenient for the Bedouin Authority to exist, and let it “drive itself mad” with Bedouin affairs (Ya’akov Katz, interview, June 23, 2005).

Over the years the Bedouin Authority has attracted considerable criticism, both from the Bedouin themselves and from other organizations and bodies. Within the government itself, criticism of the Bedouin Authority has also been voiced. Over the last decade, apparently in the wake of criticism, a number of attempts have been made to abolish the Bedouin Authority or curtail its powers. Thus, for instance, in October 1997 and November 2000, the government decided to curtail the Bedouin Authority’s powers in all matters relating to lands, town planning and the marketing of housing units in townships. It was subsequently stipulated that the Coordination and Control Division in the Prime Minister’s Office would be the body to handle townships and provide inter-ministry coordination. However, nothing has changed, and the Bedouin Authority remains the central body that handles the Bedouin population’s affairs (Israel State Comptroller, 2002:102).

The Green Patrol

Apart from being responsible for the Bedouin Authority, the ILA is also the chief financer of the Green Patrol—a government policing unit which, although its function is defined in the most general fashion, seems to focus most of its efforts on the Negev Bedouin population. Defined as “the open-areas supervision unit,” the Green Patrol was set up in 1976 by the Agriculture Ministry in order to “supervise and safeguard the state’s lands, water sources, the landscape and the environment in the country’s open spaces” (Tabibian-Mizrachi, 2004). In a document written by the Knesset Information and Research Center, the Green Patrol is described as

the unit which operates to prevent squatters and trespassers from impairing land title in various ways, such as flocks trespassing on pastureland, unauthorized mining and quarrying, settlement without a permit, erecting buildings in breach of the law, taking possession of land by means of
cultivation, stealing water, dumping refuse, destroying vegetation and so on. The Unit also undertakes its own actions to gain possession of land and to ensure that suitable activities are undertaken on the land so as to prevent trespass, and allocates tracts for various needs, principally grazing (Tabibian-Mizrachi, 2004).

Officially, the Green Patrol is located in the Environmental Affairs Ministry, but it operates through a committee of directors-general on behalf of the IDF, the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the Agriculture Ministry, the Defense Ministry, the Interior Ministry and the Construction and Housing Ministry (ILA). The Green Patrol’s funding also comes from five bodies: ILA (49%), JNF (12%), Agriculture Ministry and Village Development (13%), Defense Ministry (26%) and the Mines and Quarries Unit in the Ministry of National Infrastructures (1%). This is operational funding that is earmarked for routine supervisory activities. Before each enforcement operation, the unit sends a funding request to the body on whose behalf it is acting (Tabibian-Mizrachi, 2004). In practice, therefore, the Green Patrol operates in the name of the government body on whose behalf it carries out its duties.

The Bedouins themselves call the unit the “Black Patrol” (Campbell, quoted in Abu-Saad, 2000), accusing it of using force, including destroying buildings and driving flocks of sheep off firing ranges and military land. The flocks are impounded and only released in return for costly payments (Mena, 1996). In addition, the Bedouins view the Green Patrol as a body whose activities are not subject to the law: over the years, many reports have been filed about Green Patrol harassment of the Bedouins—destroying tents with their jeeps, shooting in the air to intimidate people, beating up Bedouins and killing their livestock (Ben-David, 1996:78–79).

The Bedouin Education Authority

The Bedouin Education Authority, an anomalous governmental body unique to the Bedouins, was set up in 1981 to introduce compulsory education in the unrecognized Bedouin villages, which lack municipalities capable of providing such services. The Bedouin Education Authority is responsible for setting up, building and maintaining schools; assuring appropriate and adequate teaching personnel; taking care of furniture and equipment; supplying water; providing funding and teaching materials; and so on. In addition, the Authority is responsible for registering students and determining registration areas (Barak-Medina, 2001:4). Despite this limited mission statement, in practice, the Bedouin Education Authority has become a key player in all matters relating to Bedouin education in both the unrecognized and the recognized localities. It should be noted that, in connection with the Bedouin Education Authority, a similar problem arose to that referred to
earlier with regard to the Bedouin Authority: Jewish local authorities whose boundaries encompassed Bedouin inhabitants shirked their responsibilities and referred Bedouin parents to the Bedouin Education Authority, even though in formal terms the Authority is not responsible for them (see, e.g., petition by the ACRI and Adalah versus the Ramat HaNegev Regional Council: Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2000).

As is the case for all the special authorities set up for the Bedouins, ever since its inception, the Bedouin Education Authority has been headed by a Jew. For years, its head was Moshe Shohat, a man with no background whatsoever in education, who was appointed without a tender (Barak-Medina, 2001; RC-HRA, 2003). In June 2001, the man was cited in The Jewish Week, published in New York, as saying that the Bedouins are “bloodthirsty” people whose children do not know how to use toilets (Hasson, 2004). Following publication of these remarks, the Adalah organization petitioned the Supreme Court to have Shohat removed from his post.

Lately, the Bedouin Education Authority has been attached to the Abu Basma Regional Council, a new regional council that was set up to handle the municipal affairs of some of the Bedouin villages in the process of being recognized. The Bedouin Education Authority still functions much as before and is still headed by a Jew.

A look at the future

As Israel approaches the end of its sixth decade, the day when it will be possible to say that the Negev Bedouins are citizens just like other Israeli citizens is still a long way off. The Bedouins were and continue to be a “problem” in search of a “solution.”

As far as lands are concerned, the “solution” that the government has proposed for the last 30 years does not contain much that might lead to a breakthrough. Much more significant progress has been made with regard to government recognition of “unrecognized” villages, as the number of Bedouin localities recognized by the state is approaching 20: the seven existing townships, plus another ten localities going through the recognition and planning process. In addition, two of the existing localities are about to be expanded markedly. But the progress of recognition, and especially implementation of the steps that should follow—local and regional planning, laying out of roads, water and energy infrastructure—is very slow. In addition, there are another 30 localities that have not yet made it to the government planning table.

From the viewpoint of the country’s leaders, concentrating the Bedouins in townships is still the major solution. For them, it has clear advantages, the chief among which is to reduce the visibility of “the problem.” The Bedouins will be neatly confined in their townships, and scattered camps and tin shacks will no longer
be visible to those traveling the Negev highways and byways. However, it is a moot point whether this will suffice to solve “the problem,” since all the problems that today trouble the residents of the recognized localities can be expected to resurface: the low standard of infrastructure and public services, the absence of economic development and the dearth of employment opportunities.

The Israeli state has been dragging its feet for six decades. It is high time that it faced up to its responsibility and took bold decisions that would bring the Negev Bedouins into the mainstream of Israeli society to be full partners in the future development of the Negev.

NOTES

1 This paper is largely based on Invisible Citizens: Israel Government Policy Toward the Negev Bedouin (Swirski and Hasson, 2006).
2 Emanuel Marx (1974:17) gives a figure of 55,000–65,000.
3 Estimates vary between 11,000 and 18,000, depending on the source; see Porat (1997:400).
4 A number of English writers spell the name Siyagh, hinting at an Arab source, but the name is Hebrew (see Falah, 1989:78) and means fence or demarcation. Arabic has a similar word, sayej, also meaning fence.
5 Porat (2000:457) gives the number as 12. See also Ben-David (1996:50).
6 Ben-David (1996:49) gives a figure of 1.5 million dunams.
7 For a legal and sociological analysis of the state’s position, see Shamir (1999); for an analysis of international law, see Kedar (2004).
8 Ms. Plia Albeck also held this position in the 1980s, during which she issued permission for the establishment of more than 100 Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories, citing as justification their location on state lands (Ben, 2004).

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Transparent citizens


Reconstruction: The voices of Bedouin-Arab women on the demolition of their homes in the unrecognized villages of the Negev

NORA GOTTLIEB

ABSTRACT

Forty five Bedouin-Arab villages in the Negev are deemed illegal settlements by the State of Israel; thus, the residents’ homes are subject to demolition. In 2007, more than 200 buildings were destroyed. Based on in-depth interviews, the study investigates the impact of house demolitions on Bedouin-Arab women. It shows that, related to socioeconomic and sociocultural factors, the family’s home is of essential meaning for the lives and identity of Bedouin-Arab women. The state policy of house demolitions therefore inflicts terror and severe trauma on women, exacerbated by the manner in which these demolitions are executed. Moreover, women bear the main burden of rebuilding homes and family life. The forms of resistance that Bedouin-Arab women find—despite limited resources and contradictory gender norms—strongly reflect their role as mothers. They thus transform alienation and enmity against a state that is perceived as discriminatory, oppressive and hostile into constructive forces of caretaking and rebuilding.

Introduction

It’s not just the destruction of the home; it’s the destruction of humanity and the individual. It is destruction of life, future and dreams…. The individual whose house is destroyed is oppressed and abused, her foundation is destroyed. There is no life after a house demolition, no family like there was before. It is possible that the family is crushed because it lost the most important and most basic [thing] (Woman No. 4 from anonymous writings by the participants of a women’s group; cited in Almi, Forthcoming).

Forty five villages in the Negev, inhabited mostly by Bedouin-Arab citizens, are not recognized by the State of Israel as legal settlements, even though they existed prior to the state’s establishment. The authorities pursue the goal of making the villages’ residents move to designated government-planned townships and turning their lands.
into (Jewish) urban development, agricultural or industrial areas or military zones. House demolitions are a violent means to force the Bedouin-Arab communities off their lands, compared to other means of “subtle coercion,” like the denial of infrastructure and even basic services—e.g., water, sewage, electricity, roads and transportation, not to mention social and health services (Almi, 2003; Yiftachel, 2002). According to non-governmental organizations the state has demolished nearly 500 buildings in the so-called “unrecognized villages” since 2001, including homes, businesses, agricultural structures and mosques. According to the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev (RCUV), the Negev Coexistence Forum (Dukium) and Human Rights Watch (2008), 227 buildings were destroyed in 2007 alone. These were not simply illegal structures; they were the homes and personal spaces of individuals and families.

The goal of our study was to investigate how, from a human and health rights perspective, house demolitions in the unrecognized villages violate women’s basic rights and impact their well-being. For this purpose, we conducted in-depth interviews with residents of the unrecognized villages who have experienced the destruction of their homes or whose homes are threatened by pending demolition orders. The interviews addressed the specific meaning of the home for Bedouin-Arab women and the repercussions of Israel’s house demolition policy. Our data and analysis are additionally based on Orly Almi’s (Forthcoming) research on the impact of house demolitions on the residents of the unrecognized villages. We expected to find that house demolitions inflict a unique and especially severe burden on Bedouin-Arab women, related to socioeconomic, sociocultural and sociopolitical processes and norms.

The opening sections of this paper provide background in terms of the position of international and Israeli legislation on the right to housing and on house demolitions; data illustrating the magnitude of Israel’s house demolition policy in the unrecognized villages; a brief description of the current socioeconomic and sociocultural context of a woman’s life in an unrecognized village; and a review of existing literature on woman-specific implications of house demolitions. Subsequent sections provide our analyses of testimonies from affected persons in the unrecognized villages. Our analysis was mainly guided by key issues as they emerged from our interviews: the meaning of a home; life under the threat of a pending demolition order; the act of demolition and its aftermath; physical and emotional trauma; and resources for resilience, resistance and reconstruction.
Background

The right to housing in international and national legislation

The human right to adequate housing, which is thus derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, is of central importance for the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights (General Comment 4(1), UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991).

The right to housing is guaranteed under a number of international covenants, emphasizing the integral connection of housing to the right to health and the right to live in dignity. According to General Comment (GC) 4 to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the right to housing should be interpreted in a broad sense as “the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity” (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991). Israel’s policy of house demolitions clearly breaches these regulations by interfering with the villagers’ enjoyment of fundamental health and human rights.

The above covenants have not been incorporated into Israeli law. However, the right to adequate housing is recognized as an element of the right to human dignity, which is enshrined in Israeli Basic Law. The Israeli Supreme Court’s former president Aharon Barak affirmed:

Human dignity is injured when a person is forced to live in humiliating conditions that negate his inherent humanity and transform him into an object…. The right that one’s basic needs for human existence be met constitutes part of human dignity and liberty (cited in Almi, 2006:5).

Nevertheless, Israeli legislature has passed a number of resolutions, laws and amendments to justify and fund house demolitions (Swirski and Hasson, 2006; Yiftachel, 2002; Zaher, 2006).

Israel’s house demolition policy

The Ministers’ Committee sees the need for a comprehensive and interdisciplinary solution for the Bedouin sector… [that] will encourage the relocation from the dispersion to permanent settlements…. In parallel, the state will work diligently to protect its right to the Negev land, against invasion and illegal construction…. Treatment of the problem in the Bedouin sector in the Negev will be given priority. In order to implement this decision, special budgets have been allocated (Ministers’ Committee for
The policy of house demolitions in the unrecognized villages revolves around the question of land ownership, an issue that has remained unresolved since Israel’s establishment. Academics, political activists and, last but not least, the villagers themselves agree that the government’s policy towards the Bedouin-Arab communities of the Negev serves an ethno-political agenda of Judaization by minimizing the space they occupy and reallocating their lands (Almi, 2003; Yiftachel, 2002). The government’s terminology reflects its approach to the residents of the unrecognized villages as a “problem” whose aspired “solution” is the population’s concentration in government-planned townships. The status of non-recognition denies these communities the essential requirements for legal construction (as defined by the regulations and standards of the Israeli Building and Construction Law of 1965): a local authority to issue building permits and an established master plan that allocates land. In the same way, possibilities for “legal construction” in Arab-Israeli communities in general has been undermined (Amnesty International, 2004). In a July 2007 letter to Human Rights Watch, the Ministry of Justice identified 45,000 illegal buildings in Bedouin-Arab communities, adding that 2,000 legal procedures and 700 valid demolition orders were pending (Human Rights Watch, 2008). This exorbitant number fails to explain that these homes are erected “illegally” not by choice, but in absence of an alternative due to discriminatory policies that leave Bedouin-Arab families without any option to build homes in a legal manner.

Amendments and legislative decisions have incrementally legitimized house demolitions in the unrecognized villages and provided the authorities with means for their execution:

- 2001: Creation and funding of the “Green Patrol” under the Unit for Surveillance on Open Spaces with the mission of “preserving the state’s open spaces”; i.e., detection of construction activities and execution of demolitions (Decision 898, November 11, 2001).
- 2003: Merging of all surveillance and enforcement agencies and creation of a geographical information system to enforce the Planning and Construction Law (Decision 85, March 25, 2003).
- 2003: Enactment of a five-year plan, prioritizing enforcement of Planning and Construction Laws in the Bedouin-Arab sector (Resolution Arab/15 of the Ministers’ Committee for Matters of the Non-Jewish Sector, September 17, 2003; and government decision [resolution 881], September 25, 2003). Out of the 2003 budget whose purpose is “To alter and improve the situation of the Bedouin population in the Negev [and] relieve its distress…,” 40% is allocated
to house demolitions and relocation. Execution by a special task force under the Israeli police is to be established in the following year. There is no earmarking of funds for the construction of new housing (Zaher, 2006).

- 2005: An amendment to the 1981 Public Lands Law strengthens the Israel Land Authority’s means to implement its ownership. “The amendment is expected to have an adverse effect mainly on the Negev Bedouin” (Swirski and Hasson, 2006:69).

These resolutions endorse house demolition in the Bedouin-Arab communities despite an inter-ministerial committee’s recommendation to apply fines as means of enforcement rather than house demolition: “…enforcement should be implemented by mechanisms such as collection agencies (and not by bulldozers)” (Knesset Center for Information and Research, 2005).

**House demolitions in the unrecognized villages**

If they really wanted us to move to another place, they would offer, but they want to destroy and destroy and destroy. To destroy you from the inside, you…. It’s a mechanism to destroy the actual person (Muna A. K., Bir Alhamam).

In recent years, the policy of house demolitions in the communities of the unrecognized villages has gained speed and magnitude. After the allocation of new budgets, massive forces have been leveling homes and entire villages nearly every week (see Figure 1). Since 2005, it has been possible to place a demolition order against a structure without the family’s presence or knowledge. The government justifies this by claiming that house demolitions are directed against an “illegal” building rather than its inhabitants, but this policy actually reflects Israel’s continued refusal to recognize the very existence of the persons and families whom it renders homeless. Contrary to the government’s claims, none of our interviewees characterized the demolition as property damage, but as a means of terror that inflicts severe individual and collective trauma.

Some families whose homes are destroyed are fined for their “offense.” To avoid these fines and the violence surrounding the act of demolition, some families destroy their homes themselves after receiving demolition orders. Based on governmental data, Human Rights Watch reports 213 such demolitions between 2004 and 2006 (Human Rights Watch, 2008), but one must assume that not all “preemptive demolitions” are included in the statistics and thus their true extent is unknown.
Source: Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages of the Negev (RCUV).

**Figure 1: Number of buildings demolished in the unrecognized villages (2001–2007)**

**Literature review: Women and house demolitions**

The home is where women most acutely invest their time, build their safety nets, advance their talents and hobbies, carry on their work of looking after the family, and carry on with their life responsibilities. Once the home is destroyed, women are left with the metaphoric and symbolic burdens—which are no less real than the material loss of a safe place to live—of not having a sense of safety and place of belonging…. The destruction of the home changes women’s previous gender roles sharply and requires them to face new challenges, carry the burden of rebuilding a new house/home and cope with all the inconveniences of moving, with the entire economic, social and psychological load it entails (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006).

Most literature on house demolitions in the region focuses on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) (Amnesty International, 2004; B’tselem, 2004; IHLRI, 2004; Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, www.icahd.org). The situation of the residents of unrecognized villages differs in that they are Israeli citizens, yet they are subject to constant and violent attack from part of their own state against their property, families and most fundamental rights. Nevertheless,
much can be learned from the published literature on the impact of house demolitions on women in the OPTs.

The domestic sphere constitutes the center of Arab women’s lives, in contrast to men, who spend more time outside the home due to work and social engagements. Arab women feel inextricably connected to their homes and, in turn, experience the trauma of an intrusion into or the demolition of their houses as an assault against the most personal and intimate space: “Every time they invaded my home, I felt totally naked… as if they raped me... they actually raped my home” (quoted in Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003:122). House demolitions transform the most private sphere into a political space and impose spatial dominance, demonstrating that “there are no safe havens left” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005, 2006).

Gender roles in Arab communities assign to women—concretely and metaphorically—the work of rebuilding the household and family life “out of the rubble” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005; Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel, 2005). Prior to the (physical) reconstruction, women have more difficulty in finding alternative housing arrangements. Palestinian Arab women explain that

It was easier for their sons or brothers, who could at least sleep over with family or friends; but for them or their daughters (mainly due to the social restrictions on girls), who were vulnerable, it was always much harder to survive these violent dislocations (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006).

A significant increase in tensions and conflicts within the family, including higher occurrence of violence against women, has been documented for the period following the home’s destruction (Amnesty International, 2004).

**Women in the unrecognized villages**

[House demolitions impact] us more. We are the ones who build the tent (Sausan A. T., Laqiya).

While the men can go to Beer Sheva, we are here. The home is the most private thing. It is where I feel most comfortable (Dunya E. N., Bir Almashash).

The Bedouin-Arab communities are the most impoverished population group in Israel. Deprivation of their lands has led to rapid socioeconomic transition and loss of livelihoods. This has stripped Bedouin-Arab women of their previous productive roles in herding and agriculture, and thus also of their economic powers. Today, their role is largely restricted to the fulfillment of responsibilities in the household, as
Reconstruction: The voices of Bedouin-Arab women

a mother and caretaker of the family’s well-being. Very few Bedouin-Arab women work outside the domestic sphere, compared to about 80% of Jewish Israeli women aged 15–54 (Abu Bader and Gottlieb, 2007; Cwikel, Lev-Wiesel, and Al-Krenawi, 2003; Israeli Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, 2006; Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel, 2005).

Up to 77% of Bedouin-Arab girls drop out of school. This is related to the absence of schools, especially beyond the elementary level, in the unrecognized villages: sociocultural norms and restrictions do not allow girls to pursue their education by commuting to a distant school. Survey results on illiteracy rates among women from the unrecognized villages vary between 35% and 80% (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2006; Gottlieb, 2005; Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel, 2005). Fertility rates among Bedouin-Arab women are amongst the highest worldwide (Shoham-Vardi, 2004); morbidity rates reach approximately 57% for urinary tract infections and 47% for anemia; and 48%-66% suffer from gender-based violence. Prevalence rates of psychological conditions like depression, anxiety and somatization are around 30% (Al-Krenawi, 2004; Cwik el et al., 2003). Infant mortality rates (IMR) persist at threefold averages compared to the local Jewish population: in 2007, they were 12.5 per 1,000 live births, compared to 3.9 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Various studies have found that 47% of Bedouin-Arab women forgo seeking health care in case of need, and only 2% use mental health services (Abu-Saad et al., 1999; Al-Krenawi et al., 2004; Cwik el et al., 2003; Gottlieb, 2005).

The meaning of a home

The house is the safest place. It is the most intimate and personal… The destruction of a house is the destruction of the most personal thing (Jamila A. H., Um Bateen).

…the significance of house demolition is the termination of a sense of security. The house ends. The house, which is the most important thing that a person has. It protects us. When we lose the protection, we break down, we collapse and are destroyed. We lose the security, we get lost and we live in fear of loss. House demolition is the real death (Woman No.1 from anonymous writings by the participants of a women’s group; cited in Almi, Forthcoming).

The home is equated with intimacy, security, future hopes and dreams. It represents a Bedouin-Arab woman’s private and social domain. It is the place around which her personal and social life revolves, where she spends much of her time, where she works and invests her energies and ambitions, and where she builds a home for her
family and her children. Our interviewees emphasized the connection between home and their personal identity. Hence its demolition violates the Bedouin-Arab woman’s sense of self and privacy. It is experienced—and imprinted in the individual and collective memory—as a physical injury, as a traumatic loss and as death.

Life under constant threat

They break your hope that you can do anything. You create something new and they break your motivation…because you know that at any moment they can come and destroy…[I feel] not stable. I never buy anything for my house…. If I want something nice like a dining table, the thoughts are always “Don’t buy because we will have to move, it’s just temporary”…. If I want to plant trees or flowers, [I think] “Why would I do such a thing if I am not going to stay here?” (Muna A. K., Bir Alhamam).

Not only does the violent act of the demolition itself cause physical and mental injury, but uncertainty and fearful anticipation also impair daily life. Our interviewees expressed a constant sense of insecurity. Some families never unpack their belongings, which they have saved from their demolished homes. Amira’s family now lives in a metal shack with walls built from water pipes covered with cloth. The closet is still in pieces in the corner and the clothes are still in boxes. Once when women heard of a nearby demolition, “They took everything out of the houses because they were scared they are coming to demolish [here]. Then they brought things back inside. They just hear that demolitions are occurring, and they take everything outside” (Suleiman A. A., husband of Amira, Atir-Umm al-Hieran). Assia describes how when her relatives hear bulldozers, they throw everything onto the pile of rubble left over from previous demolitions “so that the policemen will think that there is nothing left to destroy…. We are scared to leave, because they may come to demolish” (Assia A. A., Atir-Umm al-Hieran).

The forces that arrive to place a demolition order are also sources of violence and trauma. Raniya explains, “They come with huge forces and frighten the children. Really huge forces and surround the entire village” (Raniya A. A., Atir-Umm al-Hieran). Thus, even before the bulldozers roll into the village, the policy of house demolitions and the manner of its execution instill fear and terror in the entire community that permeate daily life down to the level of decisions about if or when to leave the house, how much food to buy and whether to invest in one’s home, family and standard of living.
Demolition and the aftermath

The last demolition was two months ago. They arrive at the house in the early morning when the man is gone and only the woman and children are here. They come especially when just the women and children are here, it’s intentional.... Five thousand [soldiers] came next to the school. The children saw all of this. It is a method to scare them in order to control them. When my child sees an officer or soldier, he is scared (Muna A. K., Bir Alhamam).

It’s like a war (Layla A. A., Atir-Umm Alhieran).

Demolitions usually occur in the morning hours when the men have left for work. Therefore, the women and children experience the aggressive act of the demolition directly and most intensively. Our interviewees recount how bulldozers, thousands of armed police officers and helicopters encircle and invade their village. They describe feeling under siege. The militant execution of house demolitions reflects the state’s view on residents of the unrecognized villages as criminals who have usurped state lands.

Soon it’ll be winter and where will we go then? … Your dog couldn’t live here.... The tents do not protect from the sun.... There is no water. No electricity.... I was stung twice by a scorpion. [Q: What do you do in winter?] We wrap with plastic. We were here last winter and you need plastic to cover everything (Sausan A. T., Laqiya).

After a demolition most families have to move in with relatives. For a Bedouin-Arab woman, the deprivation of her own place implies also a deprivation of status and power. Other families build a temporary shack or tent, until funds can be raised to build more permanent housing. These improvised accommodations fail to protect from heat or cold and may lack adequate hygiene. Living conditions are characterized by overcrowding, inconvenience and stress, reinforcing the trauma and tensions within the family, thereby also increasing the risk of conflicts and violence against women and children: “They came and destroyed everything. And took our things [Ali]. Took our water [Zarab]. The containers you see, they tried to make holes, break them and spill the water on the ground [Aeish]” (Ali, Zarab and Aeish A. K., Atir-Umm al-Hieran).

The demolitions exacerbate the lack of infrastructure in the unrecognized villages. If the residents had laid water, gas and electricity connections, these are cut. Interviewees explained that they had difficulties to ensure food safety, because they were left without options for proper storage and preparation. Women often carry the burden of rebuilding not only in terms of workload, but also with regard to funding.
It is important to emphasize that the government does not provide any alternative solution, after rendering families and entire villages homeless; neither are the affected families offered any material or psychosocial assistance, redress or support. After the bulldozers drive off, they literally leave nothing behind.

**Physical and emotional trauma**

The child was in my womb when they demolished…. I was eight months pregnant and they beat me and also my grandmother (Najah A. G., Atir-Umm al-Hieran).

There is an old woman whose sons’ homes they demolished. She came to hit a policeman and they returned her beatings. [She is] 70 years old (Dunya E. N., Bir Almshash).

Several interviewees reported incidents of physical violence and assault in the course of house demolitions. For instance, in August 2007, during the demolition of two homes in the village of Alsurra, sixteen persons, including two pregnant women, were injured by police forces and had to be evacuated by ambulance (Greenberg, 2007).

It impacts me psychologically. I experience it as humiliation. We don’t have rights. They ridicule us and humiliate us; they steal our lands and it affects me in a negative way because I see this country as racist that excludes us (Woman No. 2 from anonymous writings by the participants of a women’s group; cited in Almi, Forthcoming).

When you see that they are destroying your house… it says that the government doesn’t care about you…. It gives people a feeling of discrimination…. Any person, if he suddenly lost his house, even if it’s due to a natural disaster, it’s a bad feeling. But when it’s [destroyed] by people, it’s even worse. People feel like they don’t belong if [the state] doesn’t care about them (Muhammad A. A., Wadi Alna’am).

One of the results of house demolition in the unrecognized villages is deep distrust of and alienation from the state. In our interviews, feelings of humiliation and loss of belonging prevailed, as interviewees expressed that they were denied recognition, respect and protection. Demolitions are viewed as just another manifestation of discrimination, oppression and exclusion. Resorting to house demolitions to push through political goals—rather than promoting dialogue—further widens the chasm between the Bedouin-Arab communities and the state. It
demonstrates very dramatically that, even though on paper the Bedouin-Arabs are Israeli citizens, in reality there is no place for them to live in dignity either in the Negev, or in the Israeli state and society.

Impact on children, impact on mothers

The children are in shock. They see police officers as the enemy. I don’t know how to educate the children that this is their country. What sort of belonging can they have? When a police officer comes with a gun to destroy his house? … When a child doesn’t have a country, he doesn’t feel like he belongs. He feels like everyone is an enemy and everyone comes to destroy. They don’t let us live in peace. I don’t know what to do with a child that grows up to hate the country and who hates the people who belong to the country (Abir A. N., Bir Almshash).

You feel everything that your children suffer…. It hurts her more because she feels what can happen to her children if her house is destroyed. The house is something basic. How do you live without a house? It doesn’t make any sense (Muna A. K., Bir Alhamam).

Bedouin-Arab women emphasized the impact of house demolitions on their children, and secondarily on themselves as their main caretakers. They were especially concerned about how to raise children who experience such violence and trauma at a young age and who consequently develop fear and hatred towards the police and the military forces—and towards the state and society as a whole.

Resistance, resilience and reconstruction

The police removed the children from the house when they were all still asleep. I didn’t want them to take the beds, so I tried to approach and they wouldn’t let me. In the end they pulled the child and I pulled from the other side and in the end nine men and a woman hit me. My brother came and pulled me away from the police officers. I asked them, “I have seven children, where will I put them?” They said, “It’s not our problem” (Hiba A. B., Atir-Umm al-Hieran).

It is remarkable that Bedouin-Arab women describe acts of active resistance only for the sake of their children. These are mainly attempts to defend some sort of home and sense of security, be it symbolically by saving objects that represent
continuation of family life. Likewise, the discourse with which the women approach
the executing forces reflects the inner world of a caretaker.

I feel I have pressure in my head. That there is no will to live…. We won’t
build again because it is a waste of time and money. They said it was okay,
a small tent like this (Itaf A. T., El-Araqib).

My uncle’s wife is in shock. She really has mental issues, depression from
all the building, demolishing, building, demolishing. Is that a game?!…
“There’s nothing you can do,” she now says, “I won’t oppose anything”
(Muna A. K., Bir Alhamam).

Some interviewees expressed complete hopelessness and helplessness.
Bedouin-Arab women’s general deprivation of material and social means should be
borne in mind, together with the fact that gender norms do not encourage them to
play an active, let alone a confrontational role in the public sphere. The above
accounts point to a complete depletion of material, social and individual resources to
oppose or cope with continuous retraumatization. Together with this, our
interviewees describe their surrender, after having lost any conception of a better
future.

We won’t move. Only if they give us another place. They will demolish, we
will build, until they give us a place. Until they give a solution. Where
should we go? (Sausan A. T., Laqiya).

We will stand for what is ours. I will stay here even between rocks…. To
hell with a state that doesn’t treat its citizens equally. We will stay here
even if they [try to] throw us into the Dead Sea…. Even if they demolish,
you build again and thus continue your life. Emotionally it’s more
complicated… [but] like our parents who lived here, we will continue to
to live. They demolish and we build. They demolish and we build. We
continue to live (Dunya E. N., Bir Almshash).

Other interviewees seem to draw resilience and strength precisely from the
traumatic experiences that are inflicted on them by their home’s demolition. The
sense that “there are no other options” is underpinned with the historic and political
concepts of the Bedouin-Arab communities’ collective struggle for lands and
identity. The women perceive house demolitions as yet another manifestation of the
state’s discriminatory policies against the Bedouin-Arab communities in the context
of Israel’s enmity against Arabs in general. This provides the basis for transforming
trauma and despair into sources of resilience, strength, cohesion and collective
identity—defined, however, in opposition to a hostile and oppressive Other.
Conclusions

Israel’s house demolitions in the unrecognized villages have unique and especially severe implications for women, which are related to gender roles and the division of space and labor in the Bedouin-Arab communities. The State of Israel ignores the human and gender-specific aspects of its house demolition policy. It thus actively violates the most fundamental rights of an especially vulnerable group, to whom it promises special protection and support (Israeli Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, 2006; Kalay-Klaitman, 2004). The home occupies a central role in Bedouin-Arab women’s lives and identities. Genderized division of space and labor modulate the differential impact of house demolitions on Bedouin-Arab men and women; on the latter, demolitions inflict especially traumatic pain and loss. Before the actual demolition, constant insecurity, helplessness and terror permeate women’s daily lives. The aftermath confronts them with the practical and metaphorical burdens of rebuilding their family’s life under highly difficult circumstances.

In accordance with Almi’s (Forthcoming) conclusions, our results indicate that Bedouin-Arab women are very aware of the larger political context, and that they see Israel’s house demolitions as just another drastic manifestation of the state’s marginalization and oppression of their communities. House demolitions demonstrate, concretely and symbolically, that there is no place to live in peace, security and dignity for the residents of the unrecognized villages, either in the Negev or in Israeli society (Almi, Forthcoming). The destruction of homes translates into the destruction of belonging, especially for women, thus reinforcing alienation from state and society, and their rejection as a whole.

Bedouin-Arab women have at their disposal very limited means to effectively resist their home’s demolition or to cope with repeated uprooting, traumatization and the burdens of reconstruction. Understandably, some react with frustration, despair and surrender. Others seem to draw psychosocial resources—mainly identification with a joint cause, a collective narrative, belonging and struggle—precisely out of the experience of their home’s demolition and the lack of any alternative or solution. This identity is shaped in opposition to the state as the hostile Other. This finding is, ironically, supported by a study which the Israeli army conducted on the “effectiveness” of house demolitions in the OPTs, against families of persons involved in terror acts. It came to the conclusion that, even from this perspective, house demolitions did more harm than “good” “because the deterrence, limited if at all, paled in comparison to the hatred and hostility toward Israel that the demolitions provoked” (Harel, 2005).

Nevertheless, it is first and foremost in their role as mothers and caretakers that Bedouin-Arab women actively resist house demolitions, in order to defend or save some sense of home and security for their children. Shalhoub-Kevorkian comes to similar conclusions when she writes about women in the OPTs:
By utilizing very limited resources, they managed to defy Israel’s policy, continuing to search for new ways of coping with the extreme sense of loss, fear and sadness…. Women were found to construct new counter-discourses and counter-spaces to cope with the constant and unpredictable changes affecting the family…. Women’s ways of fighting back were not based on physical confrontation, but rather on using their own powers to protect their families (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005).

Thus, in the face of the violent destruction of their family home, it is actually—and paradoxically—through the fulfillment of their role as mother that Bedouin-Arab women change gender norms and take up active roles in the resistance against oppressive and destructive policies that target their families and communities.

NOTES

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2 In the absence of one official source of reliable data, this paper relies on various sources that provide slightly divergent figures. According to governmental sources, the number of demolished houses in the unrecognized villages in 2004–2006 was 322 (168, 22 and 132, respectively); during the same period, 213 structures (64, 81 and 68, respectively) were destroyed by the owners and families themselves (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

3 Names have been changed in order to avoid identification.

4 The right to housing is outlined in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 14(2) of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and Article 11(1) of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR).

5 Known as the Gazit Committee, this inter-governmental committee was established to examine illegal construction in Israel.

6 Eighty percent of families in the unrecognized villages live under the poverty line, compared to 25% among the general Israeli population.

7 The unrecognized villages have a population of 59,000–84,000 persons (Ministry of Interior and Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages, cited in Weissbley, 2006), of which 60% are under the age of 18. Yet, there are only 24 elementary schools and, just recently, two high schools there (Al Krenawi et al., 2004; Weissbley, 2006).
Bedouin fertility rates in 2007 were 7.1, compared to 2.7 among the local Jewish population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

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**FIGURE CAPTION**

Figure 1: Number of buildings demolished in the unrecognized villages (2001–2007)
Renaming space and reshaping identities: The case of the Bedouin town of Hura in Israel

ARNON BEN-ISRAEL and AVINOAM MEIR

ABSTRACT

By exploring several layers of spatiality in the Bedouin town of Hura, this paper illuminates the process of constructing place and identities in the Bedouin community in the Negev. For this purpose we integrate two central themes in human geography—place naming and sense of place. We begin by locating these two theoretical issues in the experiential context of the Bedouins as a multi-marginalized displaced minority. In the empirical stage, we present three spaces of place naming in the town: institutional, residential and economic. We then discuss the “sense of place naming,” that is, we interpret the cultural process which underlies the mechanisms of constructing spatial meanings and representations in Hura. Under harsh and hastened urbanization, urbanized Bedouins seem to prefer two basic fields of associations as a new indoctrination tool to their spaces. First and foremost is a “powerful Islam,” which dominates institutional and residential spaces. The second is the Israeli-Western-capitalistic inclination, which dominates the economic-business arena. After a long period of non-naming occurrences, these new and ambivalent naming trends suggest that positive bonds to local space have developed among some residents of Hura. However, two major worlds of meaning which prevailed in Bedouin spatiality in their more nomadic phases in the past—tribal-kinship and ecological-natural—are excluded from their contemporary new representation, indicating new urban Islamic non-tribal culture ideals and identity aspirations.

Introduction

Coercive settlement of pastoralists in rural and urban communities by modern states has been a major concern in recent decades (Khazanov, 1994). Settling processes, as a multi-dimensional transformation, raise some questions about the new spatiality of pastoralists in these new settings, such as how they develop a sense of place and reconstruct their space, and what mechanisms reconcile this space with their inherent sociopolitical territorial structures and cultural codes. One of the possible
mechanisms in such processes is naming and renaming of space, producing an “archeology of meanings” whereby “The names of locations within areas record the forms of human experience that have occurred within them…” (Stewart and Strathern, 2003:6). Given that pastoralists represent one of the most primary phases of human spatiality, these questions have received very little attention. In particular, studies of sedentarization have largely disregarded spatio-consciousness implications of changes in pastoral mechanisms of constructing space and place.

Hura was established in the late 1980s by the State of Israel in the northern Negev. To date, those two thirds of the designated population who have moved to the town have experienced various processes that inhibit the emergence of attachment to the place. In this paper we explore spatial naming in Hura as a mechanism through which the Bedouins mitigate various conflicts in search of a positive sense of place. We begin with a theoretical discussion of naming places, followed by a contextualization of our case study within recent Bedouin spatial history, the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict and place-naming politics in Israel. In the main analysis we present as raw data the process of naming town space. Finally we analyze the major social, political, cultural and historical dimensions through which this process can be understood and further studied.

Understanding these processes can contribute to further theoretical understanding of the issue of sense of place in human geography, as well as how this can be interpreted in development programs and planning for indigenous peoples. Furthermore, analyzing place naming among this ex-pastoral nomadic indigenous group may highlight cultural and political processes as they sedentarize and urbanize, as well as the emergent spatiality under conditions of marginality and resistance.

**Sense of place and naming place**

The issue of place names is related to that of “sense of place,” which has become a super-term hosting the entire complex of feelings and perceptions that are involved in the interactions of human beings with their space (Entrikin, 1991; Lobo, 2004; Low and Altman, 1992; Relph, 1976; Salvesen, 2002; Tuan, 1979). Viewed broadly, naming a place is a necessity without which its proper construction and human existence in it would be vague (Casey, 1993). The underlying assumption is that once a piece of space is named, it becomes a meaningful “place,” as it expropriates space from its uniformity, anonymity and neutrality. Language thus recreates place (Tuan, 1991); it loads space with extensive social and cultural meanings and deploys a web of networks of meanings over it. These reflect inner thoughts associated with the place, feelings and emotions of owning it and belonging to it, and even wider and fundamental ideologies about it (Relph, 1976).
Place names connect people to space at all levels—from the subjective-intimate to the collective and political. Two major perspectives have been adopted to examine this existential process. The first, the ethnographic-cultural approach, concerns naming space among indigenous peoples, first nations and nature cultures. The naming of a site among them implies its existential significance, whether for improving spatial orientation (Cassidy, 1984), organization of land and territory (Barleant-Schiller, 1991), access to physical resources or pursuing rituals. Studies on this indigenous naming process by geographers and anthropologists attempt to expose these groups’ patterns of attachment to their space, and interpret them primarily through their practical and ritual-spiritual experiencing of their environment. Understanding these naming processes exposes the cultural codes of spatial organization and thus adds a significant layer to the complex of unique cultural perceptions, values, customs and genre de vie of these peoples (Basso, 1984, 1996; Jett, 1997).

A second major perspective in studying place names, originating mostly from political and historical geography, is political. It focuses on the interactions between political processes, space and landscape. Place names are found to reflect political, religious and social symbols that function as “warehouses of meanings” (Geertz, 1973). They embody ideals and establish collective consciousness and identity that serve political and religious institutions (Cohen and Kliot, 1992). Moreover, renaming a place is capable of eradicating its past meanings by imposing new ones that may originate from a mythical past or an anticipated future (Peterson, 1977; Tuan, 1991). Obviously, contested spaces are subject to a harsher political naming process.

The boundaries between these two perspectives on place naming have recently been crossed. Studies highlight the political perspective and the “right for place naming” of indigenous, migrant and ethnic groups (Alderman, 2000; Hay, Hughes and Tutton, 2004; Nash, 1999). Place naming is increasingly recognized as a vehicle in sociopolitical reconstruction of space. It is viewed as part of establishing a legitimized hegemonic social order and delegitimizing various others (ethnic, racial, gender minorities). At the same time, these groups have been awakening to resist this form of hegemony through alternative place naming, thus exposing the issue of power relations hidden in place names (Berg and Kearns, 1996). Critical research suggests a new reading of space that also exposes the poetic geography of names (Darzia, 1993). That is, the imagined and interpretative context of place naming is revealed, such as in yearnings of migrants or refugees for their homeland. All these socioethnic categories well conform to the case of the Bedouins in Israel.
Bedouin settlement: Historical contexts

An understanding of Bedouin spatiality is rooted primarily in their de facto control of the territories in the Negev under the weak Ottoman Empire up to the late nineteenth century (Kressel, 2003). The subsequent immigration of landless fellahaen (farmers) enhanced the agricultural economic value of pastoral lands, the social status of the Bedouins as their owners and their process of sedentarization (Ben-David and Gonen, 2001; Meir, 1997). However, the 1948 War of Independence of Israel undermined the emergent Bedouin settlement structure entirely, with considerable cross-border flight and expulsion and subsequent relocation of the remaining 11,000 Bedouins into an enclosure (the seig). Until 1966 this area was militarily administered by the State of Israel, with heavy mobility restrictions, thus destroying the Bedouins’ historical hegemony in the Negev (Meir, 1999; Yiftachel, 2006). These harsh events, shared by other Arab groups in Palestine as well, are referred to by the Palestinians as the Nakba (catastrophe, disaster), a rhetoric infiltrating Negev Bedouin discourse in recent years as an empowering extroversion of the nationalistic-Palestinian component of their identity formation (Yona, Abu-Saad and Kaplan, 2004).

Thus, since 1948 the struggle for control over land and other territorial, material and symbolic resources stands at the root of the tense relationships between the Arab-Palestinian minority (Bedouins included) and the state. Barring the return of uprooted Bedouins to their territories, legal determination of Bedouin lands as mawat2 and their massive nationalization by the state (Kedar, 2001; Meir, 2006) inverted many of the previous “masters of the desert” into marginalized landless and resourceless internal refugees. Referring to them as intruders on state land, the state denied state-supported development of infrastructure and services from their squatter villages in the seig. Initial provision of these public goods began only after 1966 with the lifting of the military administration and state initiation of a semi-urban system of townships. Up to the late 1980s, seven towns, planned as semi-suburbs, were built for the Bedouins. While access to educational and medical services thus improved, farming and industrial opportunities were not offered there, further downgrading Bedouins socioeconomically into a proletariat. Half of the Bedouin population, primarily previous landowners, preferred to remain in their villages to protect their ownership claims over their historical territories (Ben-David, 2004), relying on their traditional tribal law and their power of holding. In the deep land dispute with the state, each side has been anchoring its claims in an entirely different interpretation of the basis of Bedouin spatiality (Meir, Forthcoming).

The principle of “seven towns” served the needs of the state rather than those of the Bedouins. By separating them from the Jewish settlements, building few places of residence, and exerting pressure on the Bedouins to relocate again, the state sought to maximize its territorial control in order to meet the targets of its Zionist Project (new Jewish settlements, military zones, afforestation and natural reserves).
Yiftachel (2006) framed this process within the ethnocratic context of the State of Israel. The state imposed many hardships on the Bedouins, thus enhancing their sense of deprivation, discrimination and alienation. It also ignored the symbolic needs of its Arab minority, Bedouins included. Memories of their lost private and national home, difficulties integrating internal refugees within Arab communities that remained intact, and efforts to erase the memory of uprootedness by state indoctrination mechanisms caused deep feelings of uprootedness and placelessness among them (Kassem, 2006; Mahmud, 1994). These emotions, in turn, encouraged attempts for insurgent and informal establishment of memorial sites or sites of belonging. They also enhanced trends of Islamization and Palestinization in the identity formation of the Bedouins (Hujeirat, 2003; Yona et al., 2004), which were already growing due to spatial social and economic proximity to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Political place naming in Israel

Political place naming in Israel has been studied extensively from the instrumental perspective adopted by the Jewish Zionist Movement to reestablish the attachment of the Israeli “new Jews” to their new-old moledet (homeland), Tzion (Zion), and Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) and to appropriate space for Zionist purposes (e.g., Cohen and Kliot, 1992; Katz, 1998). In contrast, Arab place naming as a political process has received little attention. In common with Jewish processes, this issue assumes a substantial role in the national-political struggle over spatial interpretation and the fixation of the “true” geographical memory. Various organizations are active in enlivening the pre-1948 map of Arab villages by restoring names of places destroyed during the Nakba,3 pursuing it by a map of their own which ignores Jewish existence in Israel and challenges the Zionist map (Cohen and Kliot, 1992; Rubinstein, 1990). Studying uprooted Arab women, Kassem (2006) claims that by preserving pre-1948 place names in their daily language, they articulate their resistance to Zionist discourse. Similarly, Arabs in mixed towns protested in 2006 against Jewish-Zionist naming of their neighborhoods and streets, demanding participation in this process to guarantee proper representation of their unique identity.4

Research on Negev Bedouin place naming is not much different. An exception is a study by Bailey (1976), who examined place naming among the Sinai Bedouins, describing their close association with environmental pastoral resources, particularly pasture and water, as well as some topographical features and wildlife. We refer to this as an environmentalized place naming.

In contrast, in a recent study on the Bedouins’ struggle for state recognition in their unrecognized settlements, Meir (2003, 2005) describes a tactic they adopted of enlivening place names that are argued to be the historical place names of Bedouin
tribes, sub-tribes or families. Similar to other basic resources, place names and naming have thus become another scarce symbolic resource within the tense negotiation between the state and the Bedouins. We refer to this as collateralized, socialized and politicized naming processes. The nature of these cases can serve as the basis for understanding place naming among the Bedouins.

Methodology

Hura was planned and established in the late 1980s to absorb several unrecognized villages and hamlets. Its target population (~14,000) was to originate from many tribal and agnatic groups that are highly variegated socially, culturally and economically. Actually, its population is now only ~11,000, the rest remaining in their pre-1948 villages or in the places that were given to them by the state in the 1950s. The town is divided into nine neighborhoods, each at a different stage of development and housing.

While Hura represents all ill products of historical governmental Bedouin policy regarding land, infrastructure, housing and development resources, its choice for this study lies in its uniqueness among Bedouin towns. That uniqueness lies first and foremost in having a central group which is historically of genuine noble Bedouin social lineage and which is relatively more educated and developed. This group was exceptional also in supporting the establishment of the town and in its longstanding active participation in its municipal affairs. Furthermore, land claims within Hura are relatively rare, facilitating the development of internal town spaces in the best public interest. Hura is unique also in its stable political structure, led by an Islamic Movement-affiliated municipal party. All these have awarded it a highly esteemed image. Thus, an examination of place naming can be pursued relatively independent of the heavy screening generated by the deep deprivation and underdevelopment generally common of Bedouin society.

This study was conducted using a phenomenological-qualitative methodology. Data were collected through a survey of all business units in Hura and their names, along with data on religious and educational institutes from official town sources and archives. A participant observer method was employed with respect to advanced stages of activities of Hura’s Neighborhood and Street Names Committee (NSNC), the results of which were publicized in winter 2007. Finally in-depth interviews were conducted with officials in the municipality, the educational system and committee members as well as with lay inhabitants of Hura. Data were then analyzed and interpreted for their social, cultural and linguistic meanings.5
Naming Hura

Four different areas of naming and renaming in Hura are examined here: naming the town itself, and naming/renaming its institutional, business and residential spaces.

Naming the town

The term “town” (Hebrew: a’yarah, plural a’yarot) was attached by the state to the seven planned settlements (“Bedouin towns”), uniquely distinguishing them within Israeli geographical semantics. Its meaning is not neutral, as it underlies the Israeli establishment’s desire to render Bedouin communities an urban nature under the “Bedouin modernization through urbanization” project (Meir, 1999). It is noteworthy that the only settlement type in Israel to share this term with Bedouin settlements is the “development town” (Hebrew: a’yarat pitu’ah). Both categories are consistently situated in the lowest ranks of standard of living indices in Israel.6 In Hura, however, the term “town” has been omitted by its inhabitants, who say “I am living in Hura” in most cases, or “I am living in Hura village,” if the inquirer insists on clarifying the settlement type (Hebrew: kfar Hura; Arabic: qariat Hura).

The name “Hura” was determined by the state authorities. It originated in the pre-1948 name of the region and was taken from the local archeological site of Khirbat Hor or Tal Hor. The verbal meanings of Hor and Hura are not unequivocal, although they carry positive connotations implying eye-beautiful, a beautifully eyed woman, etc.7 (Sharoni, 1995). An attempt at the name Hawara (of the same radical) was ruled out flatly by representatives of the future inhabitants, fearing their place would be mistaken with the Palestinian village near Nablus in the West Bank (K. Abu al-Qia’an, local council spokesman, 2007, personal communication). The process of naming the town as Hura was successful and penetrated unopposed into the local daily jargon, probably as it represented safe continuity, which is highly crucial during far-reaching spatial transformations.8

Naming institutional space

By institutional space, we mean all public and private institutions, such as schools, kindergartens and mosques, that provide social and cultural services to various population groups. As primarily urban constructs, these institutions were relatively uncommon among the pre-urban ex-nomadic Bedouins.


**Naming schools and kindergartens**

The few schools that existed before the establishment of Hura were named after the dominant local tribe. For example, al-Afenish School and al-A’tawna School were located in their respective tribal places and territories, built as temporary soft structures. With the establishment of Hura, they were not abolished but supplemented with new permanent hard-structure buildings in situ, as well as new structures for kindergartens and new schools built within town. However, under the influence of state authorities, who wished for social inter-tribal integration within town, tribal affiliation and identity were replaced by neutral, technical and all-encompassing urban names, such as Hura School, Hura Elementary A and Hura Elementary B, common elsewhere in Israel.

Recently, several principals have begun renaming their schools. For example, al-Biader School (lit. granary) is the name of a new elementary school established in the early 2000s; al-Majd School (lit. glory, splendor) is the name of the elementary school in the civic center established just recently. In contrast, the al-A’tawna Elementary School in the oldest neighborhood retained its traditional tribal name.

There are two high schools: al-Nur Comprehensive (lit. light) and Rabin A’mal Comprehensive. The latter was established in the mid-1990s when the town was still administered by a committee appointed by the Ministry of Interior and composed of state officials and local representatives. The name it gave to the school commemorates the assassinated Prime Minister Izthak Rabin. Renaming of streets, squares and institutions after Rabin has been very common in Israel in the recent decade. Among the Bedouins, however, this is not self-evident:

> They chose this name thinking it would bring in funds, but funds were made available only for the name sign at the entrance to the building, a few thousands shekels, that’s nothing…. This name does not originate in our culture; in my opinion it should be replaced (A. Abu-al Qia’an, manager of the Community Center, 2005, personal communication).

The speaker, a prominent figure in Hura’s leadership, looks upon this not as an expression of sympathy with the historical national figure and his legacy, but rather as a failed attempt to raise funds, explaining this name as an instrumental choice of the then externally appointed Jewish mayor.

There are two systems of kindergartens in Hura. The public municipal system has 39 kindergartens, only 17 of which have names. The second is a new system owned and run by a civil association for children who live in the vicinity of Hura; all six kindergartens have names. All kindergarten names can be classified by types of representations:

- Botanical nature (flowers): al-Narğes (narcissus), al-Wurud (roses);
• Hope for change and a better future: al-Nuar (full of light); al-Salam (peace), al-Šuruk (sunrise) and al-Amal (hope);
• Traditional cultural assets: al-Hikmah (wisdom), al-Šuala (flame);
• Place names: Names of the unrecognized villages A’tir and Um al-Hiran were given to two of the association’s kindergartens. These kindergartens are located in a residential house within Hura. In contrast to the others, whose names do not protrude or are not posted at all, the names of these two kindergartens are posted proudly (see Figure 1). They represent their uniqueness and their spatial attachment to their original territory, as well as political protest, restating the issue of the unrecognized settlements.

Figure 1: Um al-Hiran kindergarten, whose name serves as a protest against state policy of non-recognition of the majority of Bedouin villages

In setting up kindergarten names, the coordinator of the association, who was also among the leaders in setting the optimistic symbolism latent in most of these names, explained: “We want change … the purpose is for the next generation to be more successful and the citizens to have light and recognition” (R. Abu al-Qia’an, coordinator of the association’s kindergartens in Hura, 2006, personal communication).

The essence of the renaming process as transpiring from this data is the change from tribal naming to arbitrary neutral naming (mostly conjoining the town’s name), and recently, further to cultural and political values and religious content capable of blurring tribal boundaries. The present educational and municipal leadership has
been leading this trend, rejecting meanings and representations imposed externally by the state.

**Naming mosques**

Mosques, even more than schools, have been novel to the Bedouins, as under nomadic pastoralism, congregation for daily prayer was impossible due to their low-density spatial genre de vie. Urbanization in high-density permanent places facilitated prayer congregation in sufficient numbers to afford building mosques as private ventures.

All neighborhood inhabitants, often also from adjacent neighborhoods, have participated in fundraising for building and running the neighborhood mosques. Establishing a mosque is one of the very few events in Bedouin’s public life that can mobilize wide local communal forces from different neighborhoods and opponent groups. In Bedouin eyes, this voluntary community spirit and action is unusual in town life. Unlike other components of urban life, the mosque is not necessarily an exclusive neighborhood property, as all Muslims are most welcome in all mosques. Islam is thus approaching its pious Bedouins through pious comradeship, bypassing tribal-family networks where spatial group seclusion is traditionally highly immanent. Yet, there is considerable silent competition between groups and neighborhoods over their mosque’s luxury and splendor, and higher muezzin towers represent in Bedouin eyes the extent of funds invested in them and their value to their respective neighborhood residents.

There are three formal mosques in Hura, with names given already at the fundraising stage. Ibn Taymiya Mosque in Neighborhood 3 is named after a fourteenth-century Islamic philosopher of the conservative Hanbali School—al-Madhhab al-Hanbali—and one of the ideological fathers of the Wahhabia Islamic branch. The name of al-Taqwa Mosque in Neighborhood 10 implies God-fearingness and extreme orthodoxy. Hittin Mosque in Neighborhood 1 is named after the mythical victory of Salah al-Din al-Ayubi over the Crusaders in 1187 at the famous Battle of Hittin (near the Lake of Galilee). Thus, the names of these new holy institutions in Hura most naturally originate in the relevant religious heritage of Islam, and in common with other religions, tend somewhat towards the more heroic and militant wing of this cultural tradition. Appealing thus to the widest audience, the tribal-neighborhood dimension of the mosques is repressed by their names.

**Naming business space**

In contrast to naming the town or its institutions, there is no involvement of political or semi-political organized bodies in naming business space in Hura. Naming a
business outlet and posting it openly reflects the owners’ business interests and attitudes. An analysis of Hura’s business arena suggests three types of sub-spaces:

- **Major arterial roads**: These include Regional Road 31 at the edge of town and the main streets within town (see Figure 4 below). These arteries, from which family neighborhood internal roads branch off, are not assigned to particular families or tribes, and thus allow for relatively unconstrained competition. These constitute extensive and dynamic concentrations of spontaneously erected business establishments, some of them in existence even before Hura itself. These businesses are owned by townspeople and people of the various tribes living in villages in the area. The business mix includes small manufacturing shops, clothing stores, school supplies, groceries, private clinics, a gas station, car sale lots, a restaurant, a hairdresser and so on.

- **The industrial zone**: This is a planned zone established in 2004 and located at the entrance of town, near Road 31. Business establishments include car sale lots, small manufacturing shops, mechanic shops, a cement factory, replacement parts, upholstery, a flour mill, a tire shop, a small mall and the like. Most business name signs, all in Hebrew, face the main regional highway rather than inward to town (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Hura’s small industrial zone**

- **Neighborhoods**: Belonging to the lowest hierarchical level, these businesses are very small, primarily selling groceries and building supplies. Most businesses inside the neighborhoods are named after the
agnatic tribal or family group, in contrast to only four out of 40 in the previous spatial categories. About 15 of them have added the suffix of “Hura” to their names (e.g., Minimarket Hura). According to Hura’s lay people and businessmen, adopting a non-familial name enables an outreach to the wider public and greater clientele. One of them asked rhetorically, “Who would walk into a business named [his own Bedouin Arabic last name]...?”13 Another analyzed it using ethnic terminology:

The businesses are aiming at the least problematic identity. The objective is to maximize profit; therefore they are blurring those identities perceived as distancing and separating. This is like the Bedouin businesses in Beer Sheva.14 They, too, are blurring their Bedouin names and are Hebraizing them in order to attract Jewish clientele.

The same economic logic that appeals to the consensual identity rather than to sub-ethnic ones works also among businesses located along Road 31. Some businesses there have even been posting the Israeli national flag. One of the owners commented about a business outlet there torn down by state authorities for illegality: “One should not go head on. Look, see that other business on the other side, he is of the same tribe, but he is smart, he posted the national flag, he is appealing to the consensus.”

Thus, among most businesses in Hura, economic considerations outweigh sociocultural ones highlighting tribal, ethnic or Arab-nationalistic linkages that could be harmful for business and profits. This is true not only in the Jewish-Arab arena but presumably also in the intra-Bedouin sub-ethnic one (see Meir and Baskind, 2006). In the economic arena, the dominant principles of naming are market-oriented, making identities more flexible and concealing from foreigner’s eyes the internal Bedouin sociocultural boundaries which are otherwise irreconcilable within Bedouin space.

Another complementary component of business naming in Hura is that of the language chosen for posting name signs. Among extra-neighborhood businesses, there is a process of hybridization, as many (21 out of 40) have chosen Hebrew exclusively (being the language of the well-off clientele; see Figure 2) and ten more use both Hebrew and Arabic, the rest using only Arabic. A closer look at the latter group reveals that for cultural-ethnic reasons they would not benefit much from using Hebrew signs, as their lines of business do not cater to Jewish clientele (see Figure 3).
Given current relations of dominance and prestige in the Negev space as a whole, introducing Hebrew into business naming in Hura and adopting common Israeli patterns of business naming enable Bedouin business owners to upgrade their image in order to attract Jewish clientele and promote their economic interests. As Hebrew is the language of the majority, of the dominant group that is strongest economically and politically, Hebraizing business names labels this place considerably higher in Bedouin businessmen’s eyes. This is a highly instrumental, linguistically “Israelicized” economic arena, resembling many other places in Israel, not the least of them Arab towns and villages.

Naming residential space

Residential space is perhaps the most important arena of naming and renaming, as it touches upon the closest personal level of sense of place. This may explain the trialectic of non-naming, naming and renaming among the Bedouins. Non-naming is very prominent in residential space, perhaps a necessary phase in the process of reaching place maturity that led to the recent process of naming this space.
Non-naming residential space

Upon establishment, Hura’s residential space of neighborhoods and streets was not included in the literal naming process. Each neighborhood received a serial number in the town’s zoning plan according to planners’ arbitrary decisions, whereas streets remained entirely nameless. This non-named residential space remained effective until very recently, and neighborhood numbers have struck roots as local spatial signifiers. This is somewhat odd considering the very strict traditional sociopolitical spatial and territorial ordering within Bedouin society at large and Bedouin towns in particular. In fact, having constituted the first significant socio-spatial political arena for the new settlers within town, neighborhoods are viewed by them as separate communities and therefore are highly segregated and sharply distinguishable by extensive open spaces which function as boundaries.

Naming residential space

This is the most significant arena of naming in Hura. The state-appointed town council that ran Hura until 2000 attempted unsuccessfully to cope with this vacuum by nominating in 1999 a Committee for Improving Townscape. This committee submitted a draft proposal for naming neighborhoods and streets in coordination with neighborhood committees. The proposal was circulated to all town inhabitants and responses ranged from acceptance to indifference and rejection. Consequently, this initiative was aborted.

It took five more years and two major turnovers in Hura’s political leadership before the naming initiative was resumed. The newly elected leadership established the Neighborhoods and Street Names Committee (NSNC) in 2005. Although legally required by the Local Council Ordnance, the NSNC would remain futile without significant pushing by this new vibrant leadership who were determined to pursue an organized naming procedure. Interestingly, while the committee was composed of representatives of all neighborhoods, the committee head was from a village in the area, but registered as a town resident. This implies that despite actually living outside town, some groups are considered an integral part of Hura’s social, cultural and political life, and in fact are highly involved in it.

The committee distributed a call to all inhabitants for proposals. Public reactions to this naming initiative were again mixed, ranging from indifference and criticism to full support. Those viewing this innovation indifferently saw it as simply useless for their routine life, where spatial and territorial sociocultural codes of a desert milieu are still quite dominant. As put by a resident of Neighborhood 1: “The Bedouins never had street names; they only spoke of pieces of land and to whom they belonged…. We don’t need this today; the committee does not represent the public but only the authorities, this is all for the protocol [lit. minutes].” To him,
naming residential space is counter productive, part of the compulsive spatial order imposed by the state via its agents in Hura’s local government. It contradicts pastoralist and Bedouin traditional codes related to avoiding exposure to and contact with the authorities (see Fratkin and Meir, 2005; Khazanov, 1994), particularly considering the tense relationships with the State of Israel. For others, naming streets and neighborhoods is merely procedural: “There is no need for this; it serves nobody. This is only part of the book of Municipal Laws, and if not for this, no one in Hura would ask for it” (resident of Neighborhood 1). In contrast, a resident of Neighborhood 10 views the process positively from a practical perspective: “Instead of telling someone to go until he hits the mosque and then take the third turn to the right, I simply tell him the name of the street.”

The non-supportive and critical part of public reaction is explained differently by the mayor, who resorts to lack of sense of community (“we have not yet become accustomed to partnership,” M. al-Nabari, 2006, personal communication), insisting thus on public participation, as “…it is futile otherwise”. The difference between these views is reflective of the more general conflict between the lay people and the leadership concerning the real and most pressing survival issues within the new urban setting.

Aside from the demands of the law, the mayor explains the effort of renaming town space by his desire to “…issue Hura an ID card,” and adds: “I want no numbers [for neighborhoods and streets]. You develop belonging to this settlement by naming” (2006, personal communication). For him, numbering represents lack of comprehensive place identity and therefore a lower level of individual identification and sense of belonging. His logic is that it is difficult to become attached emotionally and cognitively to a number and develop a positive emotion toward it. The very process of naming, that is, the public deliberations and decisions by the people, has already been enhancing identification with names and places. The spirit of this logic is expressed by a community worker and activist in Hura’s Community Center: “We wish to make a linkage between belonging to town and to the place and a name; they are linked by the name, both the place and the name will belong to the place” (R. Abu al-Qia’an, 2006, personal communication).

The motivation of the mayor to initiate and push ahead the process of naming and renaming derives from his familiarity with neighboring Jewish settlements. “Yes, copying. This is how one learns. They have street names and organized [name] posting there.” His vision is of a model of “public order” that will shape the Bedouin town. A senior municipal official also suggests that renaming may reduce prejudices concerning neighborhoods: “This is like in Neighborhood A and Neighborhood B in Beer Sheva; they have a stigma.”

After publicizing the naming project, the task of preparing a tentative list of names was given to the NSNC. Each member was responsible for his own neighborhood. The committee’s work was concluded in mid-2006 by suggesting names for eight neighborhoods (Figure 4) and 87 streets including planned future spaces. The list of names was approved by the city council and forwarded to the
Ministry of the Interior for formal approval with the aim of changing personal addresses in state records and on individual ID cards and for posting name signs.

Figure 4: Hura renaming map

The naming and renaming process embodies an attempt to cast a new ethos upon Hura’s people. The most prominent motive in the restructured interpretation of residential space, as transpiring from the new names, originates from the Islamic-Arabic heritage at large: “I want the names of figures who had a positive fingerprint on history,” says the mayor. One group of names reflects the glorious Islamic-Arabic history, such as A’li Bin Abu-Taleb, Abu-Bakr al-Sadik, Salah al-Din and others. Another group represents terms and phrases in the Qur’an expressing religious morality and burning belief in Allah, as revealed by al-Taqwa (lit. fearness
of God and extreme orthodoxy), al-Majd (lit. glory, splendor), al-Furqan (lit. al-Qor'an), al-Israa (lit. Muhammed’s pilgrimage to heaven), al-Hikmah (the wisdom), etc. A third category of names is that of heroic and famous battles of Islam and holy places, and includes al-Madina (Medina), al-Quds (Jerusalem), Hittin (see above), Bader and al-Qadsia.

An absolute majority of the names are those directly and indirectly representing the victorious Islamic Golden Age, as illustrated by Neighborhood 4. The neighborhood was renamed Tabuq which, according to the traditional narrative of the Abu al-Qia’an tribal group, is its nineteenth-century place of origin in the Arab Peninsula. Streets were named after Haifa (once an Arab town in Palestine, now a Jewish metropolis in Israel), Harun al-Rašid (an A’basi khaliph, 786–809 AC), al-Hijra (the famous migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina), al-Mua’tas’em (an A’basi khaliph, 833–842 AC), Hamza (Ibn A’li al-Mtaleb of the al-Sahabe—Muhammad’s companions). Similarly, Neighborhood 8 was named for abu-Hamed al-Gazaly (an eleventh-century Sufi theosophist), and the streets there were named after Ahmad bin-Hanbal (founder of the conservative Hanbali School), A’li bin abu-Taleb (the last of the first four khaliphs), Muadh ibn Jabal (one of the first supporters of Muhammad in Yathrib-Medina), al-Furqan (the Qor’an) and Abu Samara, the pre-1948 tribal territory of the groups that inhabit this neighborhood.

The process of naming the residential space was set in motion by a popular leadership identified with the Islamic Movement in Israel. Members of this group belong to the educated young elite of school teachers and principals, advocates and academics. A leader of the process in one of the neighborhoods remarked that some of the residents were fearful that the Islamic-Arabic nature of the naming would be interpreted as subversion against state authorities: “They were shocked; it was inconceivable to them that this is permitted. They said ‘[the authorities] will regard Hura as Hamas; Hura is not Um al-Fahem’…’ but we demonstrated to them what pluralism is, that this is permitted, and ever since they went along.”

Glorious Islamic-Arabic naming is perceived as assuming nationalistic dimensions, particularly by the elderly, whose memories of the constraining Israeli military administration in 1948–1966 are still fresh. In contrast, members of the younger educated generation perceive the nature of this naming as part of legitimate freedom of speech within a democratic state. Yet, all groups share a realization that blatant nationalistic Palestinian representations are taboo.

Thus, the new geography of names in Hura’s residential space is one of mythological geography drawing primarily upon Islamic-Arabic identity. It ranges from “al-Andalus” to “al-Madina,” highlighting religious-national motives in their wider national and transnational meanings.
The sense of place naming in Hura

Thus far, we have described the processes of non-naming, arbitrary naming and renaming of Hura’s institutional, economic and residential spaces. Although each has its own internal semantic naming codes, some broader cultural processes are discernible, related to the communal maturity sought by the political leadership. In the following discussion, we frame the three naming types as one process of generating place attachment in Hura, cast within the more general theoretical framework.

The process of naming in Hura reveals two theoretical issues: duration of root striking by the inhabitants (Hay, 1998; Tuan, 1977) and their freedom of choice of their particular place (Brown, Perkins and Brown, 2002; Fried, 2000). When these properties assume considerable positive dimensions, they may yield positive place attachment. This is not the case of Hura, particularly not in its earlier years following the nature of its establishment and the very long and tense negotiations with the state. For these people, who were uprooted again three decades after their first uprooting from traditional territories, the solution offered by authorities did not constitute a fulfillment of their deep wishes, but rather a least bad compromise. Therefore, the phases of non-naming of residential space (particularly streets) and arbitrary naming of institutional space (particularly schools), along with the technical rather than symbolic nature of names (including that of neighborhoods), may be conceived of as a negative response to the constitutive spatial constraint of establishing the town and the difficulties in accommodating the subsequent spatial changes. Non-naming thus reflects ill attachment to a relatively new place constructed under conditions of compulsory organization of space and passive acceptance of external dictates. Rejection of naming and indifference about it, which resurfaced recently in the public discourse, indicate that for some, Hura does not evoke strong feelings of attachment even 18 years after its establishment.

In contrast, the contemporary phases of naming neighborhoods and streets, renaming schools and variegated naming of businesses (with the town’s name as a dominant element) indicate the onset of a positive sense of place and buds of attachment to and pride in the place. The very internal desire to award unique meanings to space and redefine attachment to it reflects people’s attempts to further establish a positive sense of place and thus link space to the layout of their identities (see Casey, 1993; Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996). Therefore, a ripened naming process reflects, at least for some of Hura’s residents, processes of place longevity, communal maturation and the onset of renegotiating, acceptance and overcoming of past harsh spatial events. Generating a positive attachment to place and sense of home are not luxuries, but a universal existential need (Lewis, 1979). Thus, despite a disrupted initial sociocultural infrastructure in attaching to Hura, its people have, over time, begun to search for their particular points of connecting to this place,
manifested inter alia by shifting from technical to symbolic naming and renaming of their space.

At this phase, they are faced with four alternative worlds of representations as sources of spatial meanings: the sociopolitical tribal-group territorial organization; their pastoral-nomadic-farming natural environment; the glorious Islam; and modern-capitalist Israel. The first two of these worlds represent the traditional Bedouin-oriented identity. Kinship has been fundamental in Bedouin territoriality, spatial organization, inter-group boundary demarcation and management of sociopolitical relationships (Marx, 1967; Meir, 1997). The map of kinship social organization was interwoven into the imagined geographical map such that the tribe, sub-tribe or extended family functioned as geographical demarcating devices and as place names.

The natural environment supplemented this “geography of blood relations” as an additional vital source of spatial meanings and signs. Shortage of pastoral and farming resources in the arid desert environment rendered environmental knowledge extremely important to a point of symbolizing it into place names. This is reflective of the intimate existential linkages between the Bedouins and their natural environment, as demonstrated by the Sinai Bedouins during the 1970s (Bailey, 1976, 1984).

Furthermore, both mechanisms—the kinship territorial system and the natural environment—have been central in the Bedouin’s spiritual life. They consisted of ritual pilgrimage to the graves of ancestors, as well as rich mystical animism interacting symbolically with natural objects, such as trees, animals, rocks and landscape features (Bar-Tsvi, Kressel and Abu-Rabia, 1998; Marx, 1988). Apparently such an authentic sensing of place, as put by Relph (1976), was prevalent among pre-sedentarization Bedouins, similar to other stable cultural systems of nomadic pastoralists (Casey, 1993).

Under enhanced sedentarization, urbanization and modernization, the natural environment ceased being a major part of daily routine experience among the Negev Bedouins. Uprooting and spatial relocation resulted in loss of cultural-political hegemony in this region to the extent of becoming local or internal refugees (Abu-Rabia, 1994, 2002), followed by disruption of traditional mechanisms of sensing place. Detached thus from their natural environment, they were left with the kinship network as the sole mechanism for spatial organization and production of places. In Hura’s early years, its nature as a semi-urban place only intensified tribalism and inter-group frictions and rivalries by evoking inter-group competition over new resources. When the kinship-tribal mental map of the neighborhoods was self-evident and familiar to all, a map of new names was redundant, as manifested by non-naming of the tribally imagined space.

However, growing involvement of the urbanizing Bedouins in the Israeli labor market and in the culture of consumerism has exposed them to Israeli-Western capitalistic lifestyle, leading them to adopt its values as far as they could economically afford. They have also been exposed to “Israeli” mechanisms of
naming space. This is revealed in their emerging motivation to name and rename their residential space and by adopting Israeli patterns of naming their businesses. Moreover, the planning concept of Hura was adopted directly from the Israeli-Western suburban pattern, adding its share to the Westernization trend of cultural experiencing. These processes superimposed a new Western conceptualization of space upon Hura. Adopting the terminology of Descola and Palsson (1996) and Short (1991), which dichotomizes nature and culture, these processes have prioritized cultural dominance over nature.

For the Bedouins, urbanization and Westernization imply distancing away from their natural environment, but also de-spiritualization and secularization of their space. Traditional rituals and practices, which represent a holistic culture-nature approach of living with nature and being an immanent part of it, are no longer dominant in their experience. This partly explains the absence of the immediate natural-geographical environment from the new names of neighborhoods and streets in town.

Thus, with detachment from the natural environment and increased exposure to the Israeli-Westernized consumer culture, the ex-pastoral nomadic Bedouins are experiencing a spiritual void. The formal Islamic legacy becomes a legitimate cultural-spiritual compensation offering a reservoir of names for constructing Hura as a place and developing a sense of place. It serves as a value and moral platform, an alternative consciousness infrastructure offering the most appropriate emotional attachment to the place. As a grand and universal ideology, formal Islam conceives of the animistic rituals of natural objects as inferior and inappropriate worship (Lazarus-Yafe, 1985). Islamic naming thus attempts to fill this void by producing mechanisms for sanctifying the secular space, awarding the previously non-named residential space of Hura with religious content and a touch of sanctity.

Furthermore, formal Islam also rejects tribalism, sectionalism and ethnic sub-identities (Lazarus-Yafe, 1985), such as “Bedouin” identity. This is coupled by socioeconomic individualization and state cooptation under urbanization and modernization. These processes have contributed to weakened tribalism and its derivatives as major symbols in Bedouin culture, both in their historical commemoration and in their contemporary experiential dimensions (Marx, 2006; Meir, 1997). Thus, elements of traditional Bedouin identity and tribal legacy were also weakened in the renaming process. This heritage is no longer sufficiently appreciated to become a project for cultural indoctrination. As remarked by a senior municipal official, the elimination of neighborhoods’ tribal affiliation by non-tribal renaming is vital for producing a more integrated, less tribally fractioned community.

In reinterpreting their space, Hura’s namegivers wish to produce a new spatial dialectic for channeling positive emotions between the “big,” wide, prideful, identifier, mythological Islamic-Arabic place and the “small” homely place. The prosperous small place will be grasped as part of the strengthening and success of dar al-Islam (the world of Islam) and the entire nation of pious Muslims, which
dialectically will project its spirit back onto this small place. By imagining a proud Islamic ethos, namegivers construct the place as a sphere of alternative to the Zionist spatial hegemony, an articulation of collective resistance within the borders of the 'permitted' expression.

The religious mythological renaming process is employed by the new leadership in an attempt to consciously disengage the town from both the close administrative-bureaucratic embracement of the State of Israel and past sociopolitical tribal constraints, laying the foundations for a greater, supra-tribal integrative identity. This newly produced imagined space constitutes a new interpretation of both their internal relationships within the Bedouin community and their external relationships with the state. And yet, the Islamic naming should not be interpreted as an attempt to close Hura to its neighboring Jewish population. By rendering this place an honorable Islamic identity, Hura’s leadership wishes to welcome visitors. The new well-designed map printed (in Hebrew, Arabic and English) and distributed to the residents means to offer visitors an easy and safe orientation within town (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Image on the cover of the map of new street names, distributed by the local council to all residents immediately before the A’id al-Adha (Holiday of Sacrifice)—the most important annual religious event. This image was designed as a triple lens that emphasizes the town’s three large mosques.**

The process of naming in Hura reflects an actively growing powerful local leadership attempting to lead a major social and cultural change by casting new moral and integrative meanings for their town. They wish to shape a new ethos for a place whose current positive one, if any, is rather weak and whose contextual political framework, that of non-recognition of villages and compulsory urbanization
by the state, is perceived mostly as negative. This new ethos, they hope, will shape a
new and positive place identity and sense of place for the people of Hura.

Conclusion

The process of reestablishing sense of place through naming and renaming Hura’s
space is complex and disrupted. From a perspective of institutionalized cultural
alternatives (see Salzman, 1981), and given the major cultural changes, it turns out
that the Bedouins’ historical and contemporary cultural reservoir contains four major
identity dimensions as legitimate sources for place naming: ecological (their
intimate natural environment); social (their traditional tribal, sub-ethnic, and
economic and political group structure); cultural (their religious Islamic-Arabic
affiliation but also social and economic modernization); and national-political
(Israeli state and society and global effects).

The first two of these dimensions, highly dominant throughout Bedouin history,
are perceived as irrelevant and inappropriate for their contemporary and future-
imagined lifeworlds. On the other hand, all symbols and representations associated
with the national-political dimension of the Israeli state, a highly encompassing and
dominant framework in their daily life, are excluded from the new system of
meanings and identities. The almost exclusive source of naming remaining for their
institutional and residential spaces is the world of Islam.

Thus, from places which were uniquely Bedouin in the past, whose previous
interaction with Islam was not dominant in their pastoral-nomadic genre de vie,
contemporary Bedouins have become highly embedded in this more universal world
for reproducing their particular sense of place. Yet, they do not entirely exclude
from their place-naming scheme the other part of their cultural dimension—that of
economic modernization and Westernization. This reflects a degree of dualistic
identity, namely emotional identification with Islam together with instrumental
connection to Western culture and “Israeliness.” It thus conforms to wider trends

Several questions deserve further investigation. First, the maturation of the
naming process in Hura is not necessarily self-evident elsewhere in Bedouin towns.
A comparative study across Bedouin society of both the process of naming and its
sources of legitimacy may shed light on degrees of uniformity or difference in
reconstructing space within this society, revealing more fundamental sociopolitical
dimensions.

A second issue rests within the sociocultural level. It refers to the extent to
which the Islamic component in naming is capable of bridging the internal inter-
tribal, inter-ethnic and inter-group boundaries and barriers still dominant in the
political and social practices of this society. This is particularly important under the
unique sociopolitical conditions of the Bedouins, who bitterly struggle internally for meager external public resources.

Third, there is a more practical issue. Assessing the contribution of positive sense of place through place naming to a healthier growth and development of these communities may be quite useful. This is particularly significant in the wake of the upcoming second wave of ten Bedouin towns planned by the State of Israel. Integration of naming procedures into the development programs and planning processes at their initial implementation phases, with full public participation, may serve as a useful tool for generating positive sense of place at early stages and an improved process of building healthier communities than those established in the first wave (until the 1990s).

The final issue is the relationship between this particular case study and a general understanding of sense of place and how it is reconstructed in human geography. Generally speaking, studies of pastoral nomads in their sedentarization processes may shed much light on understanding early evolutionary phases of spatiality by humankind. The question that remains is the relationship between this particular case study and those of other indigenous groups that have gone through this process. Taken as a dynamic process, this reconstruction draws considerably on the archeology of meanings, and understanding place naming and renaming by these peoples may contribute considerably to the general understanding of spatial reconstruction.

NOTES

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2 Turkish for “dead land,” which therefore belongs legally to the state.

3 See, e.g., “Agudat HaArbaim” (http://assoc40.org) and “Women remembering” (http://nakbainhebrew.org) (Hebrew).

4 See report in Yediot Akharonot (http://ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3336083,00.html) (Hebrew).

5 We are grateful to Dr. Alexander Borg, a linguistic anthropologist at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, for his generous advice on Bedouin dialect particulars of the Arabic names.


7 *Huria* is the Arabic surname for a very beautiful woman, such as those virgins who are awaiting men in Heaven according to popular Islamic belief.
With the exception of Rahat, all Bedouin towns were named after a locally familiar site.

Amal is a national network of vocational high schools.

Due to lack of appropriate infrastructure in the unrecognized villages, Israeli law prohibits running kindergartens there. This vacuum has been filled by five private associations that rented buildings within town in order to enable the children from the unrecognized villages to use those services. The name of the association which operates kindergartens in Hura is “Mahat.”

This Islamic branch preaches literal interpretation of the Qur’an, asceticism, seclusion, closure to the external world and militant Jihad (religious war against agnostics).

Bedouin territorial cultural codes dictate spatial separation of groups (tribes, sub-tribes, extended families, etc.) to guarantee internal social order (Meir, 1997). Under the new urban settings, neighborhoods are separated along the same principles. However, the highly dense spatial circumstances there are devoid of bypasses. This requires developing a new cultural code of safe throughroads in neighborhoods which allow trouble-free traffic by members of all local groups and foreigners.

For purposes of confidentiality, we dropped his and other respondents’ names.

Beer Sheva is the regional Jewish metropolis.

The same spatial procedure was adopted for the development towns and some other Jewish cities established after 1948.

A famous battle against the Sassanid Empire occurred in 637 AC during the Islamic-Arabic conquest of Iraq and Persian regions.

This Arab town in northern Israel is known as the center of the northern wing of the Israeli Islamic Movement. The northern wing is considered to be more radical in its political agenda than the southern wing that has become dominant in the Negev.

Among the 95 names, only nine draw somehow upon Bedouin heritage: Jamama (a street named after the “fathers’ space” of the al-A’tawna tribe 20 km northwest); Tabuq (the name of Neighborhood 4); al-Khansa (a street named after a pre-Islamic Bedouin female poet), abu Samara (a street named after the “fathers’ space” of the al-A’ssaiby tribe 15 km northwest), al-Wadi (a dry stream), al Haraba (a natural stockpile of water), al-Za’atar (a mixture of indigenous spices) and al-A’ukba (name of a tribe).

In Bedouin society, there are two major social-ethnic groups: the real Bedouins, who controlled most of the territorial resources, and the fellahaen Bedouins, who were landless. Their respective self and mutual perceptions of their roles within Bedouin culture and society vary greatly (see Ben-David and Gonen, 2001).
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Renaming space and reshaping identities


Between memory and resistance, an identity shaped by space: The case of the Naqab Arab Bedouins

SAFA ABU-RABIA

ABSTRACT

Based on interviews of Arab-Bedouin informants from the Naqab, including Arab-Bedouin men of the 1948 generation and their children, from recognized and unrecognized villages, the paper examines the effect of space on identity construction. It considers how forcible spatial change since the events of 1948 has structured the Arab-Bedouin identity, and how attachment to their original lands serves as the basis of construction of their displaced identity, building feelings of conscious and physical alienation from the new space, which becomes an arena of resistance and protest. Whether relocated to recognized or unrecognized settlements, the Naqab Arab Bedouins have attempted to build an exile identity among family members by constructing a collective communal memory about their “magnificent” past, as well as internalizing a lack of belonging and feelings of uprootedness from the place they live in today. Their aim is to protest and oppose their present situation and express their continuous aspiration to return to their previous way of life, on their original lands. The reality of their transitory and unstable existence helps them to construct these feelings and reinforces their demand for the longed-for return. As such, their exile from their former space has not remained a mere memory for the generation of 1948, but instead has been transformed into an exile identity among the second and third generation. It now seems that the fourth generation is also characterized by this transient mentality, which cries out from the misery of their current living conditions. All this shapes the Arab-Bedouin struggle for their lands, for their future and for the future of their children.

Introduction

Today’s Arab Bedouins choose to define themselves as “expellees,” giving expression to a sense of lives lived in a new space and not on their own land. This term is heard repeatedly in both recognized and unrecognized Arab-Bedouin villages in Israel, regardless of the conditions under which the residents live.
The relocation of the Arab Bedouins from their previous space reshaped their identity into one centered on a lack, into an identity of expellees and strangers living outside their native space. Over the years, the Arab Bedouins have developed practices that return them to their original space, reviving it through the search for relics of the life from which they were removed. As such, their old space has become a basis for memory, while their new space has become an arena for resistance, expressing their protest and rejection of their present lifestyle, which has been forced upon them and which they adamantly refuse to accept.

This article seeks to examine the impact of this spatial shift on shaping the identity of the Naqab Arab-Bedouins. I address the implications of their relocation from their ancestral lands to their new space, the construction of their identity as expellees from their homelands, and the conversion of their original space into a basis for memory, as well as their new home into an arena of resistance and protest.

This article presents part of the extensive research I conducted for my master’s thesis, and is based on interviews with Arab Bedouins from the Naqab who lived through the events of 1948. These people experienced the spatial transition and the change of sovereignty in 1948, and live with the consequences and implications of these shifts to this day.

**Historical background**

The impact of the 1948 war on the lives of the Arab Bedouins is most starkly characterized by the decrease in numbers and dramatic changes they experienced as a result of the conflict. In 1947, the Arab-Bedouin population was estimated at 50,000–70,000 people, most of whom belonged to the three biggest Naqab confederations: Al-Tayaha (27,609), Al-’Azazma (16,505) and Al-Traben (33,064) (Ashkenazi, 1957; Ben-David, 1986; Morris, 1997). The Arab Bedouins constituted only a small percentage of the Arab population of Mandatory Palestine, and were concentrated mostly in the Naqab.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 fundamentally changed their reality, most notably on the demographic plane. Their population shrank from 70,000 people from seven confederations and around 100 different tribes to one seventh of this number—a mere 10,000 people from 17 tribes, chiefly the Al-Tayaha tribe. Most of the others were either expelled by the Israeli authorities or fled to Egypt, Jordan and the West Bank, assured that they could return after the conflict stabilized (Ashkenazi, 1957; Ben-David, 1986; Morris, 1997).

Another change that occurred was the establishment of the military regime, which was part of the new state’s policy toward its non-Jewish population and mainly involved confining the Arab Bedouins to an area termed as the Ezor Siyag (Restricted Area), under military rule. This refers to a tract of barren land located north and east of Beer Sheva, where some 11,000 people were forcibly relocated by
the military by 1966 (Ben-David, 1986; Yiftachel, 1999a, 1999b). The transfer of Arab Bedouin tribes to the Restricted Area, without this area being divided up in organized fashion, led to the creation of a large number of tribes and partial tribes that lacked a “tribal territory,” as opposed to those who originally lived in the Restricted Area on their own lands. It should be understood that land constitutes the basis for social stratification in Arab-Bedouin society, representing the primary source of power and prestige. As a result, two levels of status were created—those with land and those without—and this impacted the internal political dynamics of the tribes (Ben-David, 1986; Yiftachel, 1999a, 1999b).

In this article, I discuss the impact on the Arab Bedouins of the loss of their lands, which represented their source of livelihood and the only way of life they had known for generations. Concurrently, I address how the Arab Bedouins have shaped their present identity and future aspirations in the shadow of this loss.

The Arab Bedouins and space in academic discourse

The connection between the Arab Bedouins and space has been examined in a paternalistic, detached, establishment-type discourse, classifying the Arab Bedouins under social-cultural categories that cut them off from the historical discourse and the human and political environment that surrounds them. This has been done by portraying them as wanderers who are not permanently attached to any space.

The understanding of the Arab-Bedouin connection to space has evolved over time, from the early school which perceived a lack of any connection to the land, to the study of the transition to permanent settlements as part of an imposed process of modernization, and to the examination of the identity-roots relationship between the Arab Bedouins and space by a new school which criticizes the earlier scholarship. My research belongs to the latter school.

The nomadism discourse

Many scholars (Ashkenazi, 1957; Bar-Zvi and Ben-David, 1978; Ben-David, 1972, 1986; Clinton, 1974; Epstein, 1933; Marx, 1956, 1961, 1967) who researched Arab-Bedouin society during the early years of the State of Israel focused on Arab-Bedouin nomadism as the defining characteristic of their lifestyle. These scholars helped construct an image of rootless wanderers, part of a culture frozen in time and space that embodied anti-modernism. They emphasized their functioning as a society run according to rigid internal laws that maintained its homogeneity. These tribal laws were depicted as unvarying, passed down from generation to generation, and binding on the individual. The social group was seen as a systematic structure
with clear functions, whose existence was self-sufficient, and which was dependent on the external geological environment.

The maintenance of internal social cohesion was the first priority, and therefore ties of kinship constituted the central component in family continuity and the upholding of the group structure over the generations. The individual was portrayed as passive in the face of established and unchallengeable behavioral norms, his main function being to maintain group continuity. Homogeny and uniformity characterized the descriptions of individuals, who were classified according to age and in a utilitarian manner with a view to the perpetuation of the entire system.

Additionally, the internal descriptions of Arab-Bedouin society were collective, quantitative and graphic, anchoring the people and their behavioral patterns according to precise parameters used to examine Arab-Bedouin behavioral models in general. These depictions isolated Arab-Bedouin society as frozen in time and detached from contact with other cultures, such as the Israeli and Arab-Palestinian societies in Israel.

With the end of the military rule over the Arab Bedouins and the establishment of permanent settlements by the state in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a different scholarly discourse developed. This school supported their transfer from a nomadic to a modern lifestyle, as embodied by the state-built permanent settlements.

The modernity discourse

Tal-Alsabaa’, the first Arab-Bedouin town, was established in 1967, and was followed by six other towns: Rahat, Kseife, Ar’ara ba-Naqab, Shgeeb A-Salam, Hura and Laqiya. All of them were planned in a distinctly urban style (Ben-David, 1995). Following their transfer to the permanent settlements, the modernization of the Arab Bedouins was evaluated on a scale created by representatives of the “advanced” and “modern” West, in the guise of the State of Israel. The Arab Bedouins were categorically positioned on the low end of the scale, gradually moving up toward its Western, civilized end through the adoption of technological innovations and improved living conditions characteristic of a Western lifestyle.

This gradual shift offered a broad platform for many scholars (e.g., Dinero, 1997; Meir, 1986, 1987, 1990a, 1990b; Soen and Samuel, 1987) who examined the process of “urbanization” of the “traditional” Arab Bedouins. They maintained that their transition from a nomadic lifestyle to permanent dwellings in towns built by the state signified an improved standard of living, according to the sociodemographic parameters of modern life, such as construction, consumption, migration, urbanization, education and increased income. Other indicators used to evaluate progress from a Western point of view were reproductive habits and shrinking family size (Bar, 1985, 1988; Bar-Zvi, 1991; Ben-David, 1976, 1996a, 1996b; Dinero, 1997; Kagan, 2001; Meir, 1993, 1999; Meir and Ben-David, 1989).
This school saw these as indicators of the impact of the transition to town life on behavioral patterns and as signifying the adoption of Western values, such as independence, empowerment and self-determination, and therefore indicating the decline of the collective tribal structure in the face of growing individual power (Soen and Samuel, 1987; Stern and Gradus, 1979). In addition, it was claimed that the participation of girls in education was an important indicator of shifting social and cultural norms, which elevated the status of the Arab-Bedouin woman from a prolific producer in the nomadic society to a consumer in an urban society (Meir, 1986). The home contents and new type of dwelling planned in the Western style, which signified their new social status and their integration into the new urban lifestyle, were also examined in this fashion (Jakubowska, 1992).

As such, these scholars claimed that the transition from nomadic life to modern life, through relocation to permanent settlements, was a desirable, logical, correct, positive and natural process. Through it, the Arab Bedouins moved from a traditional, unchanging and homogeneous lifestyle and culture to a Western lifestyle, which was perceived as more beneficial for them. In doing so, these scholars isolated the Arab Bedouins from the human environment that surrounded them and analyzed their way of life based on cultural characteristics only. These scholars also contributed to the construction of the view of the Arab Bedouins as wanderers, cut off from civilization and waiting for the state to rescue them through its permanent settlements.

The critical discourse

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new wave of scholarly research emerged that examined the representation of Israel’s Arab Bedouins in a critical fashion. This critical discourse suggests that the distinct classification of the Arab Bedouins under nomadism and modernity was motivated by the goal of presenting the Naqab as a desolate wasteland which the nomadic Arab Bedouins clung to in a state of rootless chaos. Furthermore, by categorizing them as nomads who are invisible in the eyes of the law, the state becomes entitled to register their lands as its own and prevent title claims to the contrary, while giving the Arab Bedouins the status of portable objects that the state may freely move around. As a result, the state’s position in its dispute with the Arab Bedouins is justified in ethical terms. The state’s interests gathered great momentum thanks to the portrayal of the Arab Bedouins as anti-modern and anti-civilization, and as proponents of unlawful chaos—casting them in the role of the primitive, disordered “them,” as opposed to the Jewish-Zionist Western “us.”

The new discourse criticizes this self-interested construction for incorrectly identifying the social and cultural needs of the Naqab Arab Bedouins, and thereby contributing to their degradation (Bailey, 2000; Falah, 1989; Shamir, 1996; Yiftachel, 1999a, 1999b, 2002; Yiftachel and Kedar, 2000). This school claims that
The relocation and resettlement of the Arab Bedouins was motivated by the Zionist agenda to Judaize the Naqab, and was part of a government strategy to control the Arab Bedouins by severing their connection to their lands by transferring them to new locations. The relocation was made “so easy” due to their vagrant image—after all, they still lived in tents and hadn’t even learned to build real houses.

Furthermore, the critical discourse emphasizes the state’s failures in planning the Arab-Bedouin towns, despite claiming they were successful. It lists problems such as poverty, unemployment, crime, social tensions and limited opportunities for social mobility and development. It also points to severe overcrowding and lack of economic infrastructure, which has led the settlements to deteriorate into slums, segregated from Jewish towns. It paints a bleak picture where only about 45% of the population live in permanent settlements and the remaining 65% live in settlements unrecognized by the state, lacking any economic, social or other infrastructure whatsoever (Lithwick, 2002; Nathanson et al., 1999; see also reports produced by organizations such as the Arab Association for Human Rights, 2004; Physicians for Human Rights [Almi, 2003]; Shatil, the Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages, 2003).

My research is part of this critical discourse, but goes a step further by examining the historical context of the Arab Bedouins in the Naqab and the impact of the spatial shift on the shaping of their reality. This is expressed through a sense of exile, which they have developed while living just a few kilometers away from their former lands.

The study

Research population

This research was conducted among Arab-Bedouin interviewees from the Naqab, chiefly men who lived through the events of 1948 and their children, as well as one Arab-Bedouin woman. They were largely landholders before 1948, though some of the men were landless. Today, some of them live in recognized settlements and some in unrecognized settlements.

Methodology

The questions which my research raised led me to delve deeper into the surrounding Arab-Bedouin space in order to get a clearer picture of the historic experience of the events of 1948. This space primarily involves the transplanted generation who experienced the events of 1948 firsthand, and who can provide information from
their memories of life on their original lands before their enforced exodus to the space that they currently occupy.

In the course of my research, I conducted in-depth interviews with older Arab Bedouins who experienced life prior to 1948, and they were the central focus of my work. During the interviews, other family members, usually the children of the interviewees, joined in and offered their points of view.

I initiated the interviews and conducted them in the homes of the interviewees, as arranged by my father, who set up the meetings and even accompanied me. The informants generally met with us at the men’s meeting place, known as the sheeg, which is a half-built room outside the main family home where the men usually get together and receive guests. The interviews were mostly run by my father, who would usually begin by presenting general information about the goals of the research. He explained that the interviews would focus on the old way of life, the informants’ life stories from that time until the present day, the impact of the old lifestyle on them and their children today, and the role it plays in shaping their aspirations and hopes for the future.

Additionally, I conducted participant observation at two main locations: I initiated visits at a variety of Arab-Bedouin living situations in the Naqab, including both recognized and unrecognized villages, as well as meetings at specific Arab-Bedouin forums in Beer Sheva. Furthermore, throughout the research period I conducted impromptu, informal conversations with Arab-Bedouin men and women whom I encountered in various contexts—university students, teachers from the school in Rahat that I attended, friends, social activists from Arab-Bedouin organizations in the Naqab and groups of women, young and old, whom I encountered through my work as the coordinator of an Arab-Bedouin women’s empowerment program for Shatil in Beer Sheva and in Arab-Bedouin towns.

This approach helped me to gather a great deal of information in an informal fashion. These three methods came together through the research process as a source of information about the character and characteristics of Arab-Bedouin society. These methods allowed me to penetrate deeply into the world of the Arab Bedouins in an attempt to understand the factors that shape their lives, their connection to the past, their present lives and implications for the future.

Findings

The relocation of the Arab Bedouins from their previous space reshaped their identity into one centered on a lack, into an identity of expellees and strangers living outside their native space. Over the years, the Arab Bedouins have developed practices that return them to their original space, reviving it through the search for relics of the life from which they were removed. As such, their old space has become a basis for memory, while their new space has become an arena for
resistance, expressing their protest and rejection of their present lifestyle, which has
been forced upon them and which they adamantly refuse to accept.

The next section begins with a presentation of the memory of the Arab-Bedouin
place in the Naqab, as seen through the eyes of the informants. Thereafter, I will
focus on how this remembered space has been constructed and the purpose it serves.
Subsequently, I will describe the new space as an arena for resistance and protest, by
focusing on the Arab Bedouins’ conscious cultivation of a sense of estrangement
from the space which they are now forced to occupy.

The construction of spatial memory

Morphy (1995) notes that the memory of a bountiful land in the minds of people
who once lived there renders it a source of reference for feelings in the conceptual
life, so that the land itself constitutes a part of their memories. This connects them
with their former land on both the personal and social levels, with ties of blood and
origin to their ancestors that lived there. Therefore, the individual will speak of the
land in the context of their blood ties, referring to themselves as “entitled” to be
there and as its direct owners (Morphy, 1995).

The Arab-Bedouin memory is based on belonging, tradition, history and
practices—a connection to the tribal lands on which they dwelled throughout their
lives and which was their source of livelihood over the years. It follows that their
profound identity-based memories will focus on the fundamental tribal source
represented by the land, the lives they lived upon it in the past, and its significance
and meaning for them before they were forced to leave it. In this way, the Arab-
Bedouin spatial memory is rooted in the specific tract of land from which they were
uprooted and for which they continue to yearn. As the writer Anton Shammas notes,
the Palestinian dream is the home on the other side of the border: “A person usually
lives in a particular place, while among the Palestinians the place lives in the
person” (cited in Rubinstein, 1990:14).

Scholars have noted that the Palestinians have not let go of their roots, and that
they perceive their lost homeland in the most direct, tangible and simple terms: a
field, an olive tree, a balcony, a well. The traditional, localized sense of belonging
that was the main source of their strength, as far as they were concerned, is
represented by a deep attachment to their homes and villages, and is even embodied
by it. They reinforce this through the documentation of their lives in their destroyed
villages and lost lands, not just as it was in the past, but also as it is today, placing an
emphasis on dispossession and displacement (Hirsch, 1995; Slymovics, 1998).

The Arab-Bedouin memory is the personal narrative of individuals who
preserve their past by remembering their way of life on their former land, focusing
on the personal and emotional impact of the loss of the land. It is by nature an
autobiographical account of events that they personally experienced in the past, and
the individual plays a significant role in its understanding (Brewer, 1988; Halbwachs, 1992; Rubin, 1996; Rubinson, 1988). As Al-Sane’a, one of my interviewees, puts it: “El-Shariya, that’s our land, it was an inheritance, it wasn’t bought, we were landowners, it was ours… it was ours…”

As such, the Arab-Bedouin memory is individual to those who bear it and collective on the tribal level. As Halbwachs (1992) points out, the individual’s memory is a part of the collective memory, since the collective memory relies on the individuals as a group of co-rememberers. They come together to form the collective thinking of the group. In this way, memory is constructed and the past is created (Halbwachs, 1992).

The Arab-Bedouin spatial memory is collective; the entire tribal kinship group participates in its handing down. Each tribe is careful to claim “our land” from which they were displaced and to focus their memories on their particular experiences and their life in the shadow of its loss. Abu Siam puts it well: “Everyone had their own piece of land and would live on it. We had land and our place was called Al-Stariya.”

Shryock (1997) claims that tribal memory is handed down within the tribe from generation to generation, and in this way tribal history is drawn from earlier sources, whose narrators pass along what they received from their forefathers. This tribal-genealogical information shapes the past and present at once, and represents a way of passing on and talking about history (Shryock, 1997). In this case, it is also defined by the tribal border, and, as such, each tribe possesses its own history and truth. To take his words a step further, the Arab-Bedouin memory is composed of a collective autobiography, which is remembered on a tribal level and includes personal memories.

Its personal style entails emotional partiality and sentimental imagery, as Al-’Uqbi notes: “Benhen lilwatan—We yearn for our land, so that [our children] will know it and will know their past and their origin.” With firsthand testimony, the subjects who remember it are those who played an active part in it, and it is considered the personal property of the one who experienced it. It is very precious to them and is more often recounted than other events. It generally deals with an atypical event that is recounted over and again, and thus withstands the test of time, especially if it was a traumatic or unpleasant event (Larsen, Thompson and Hansen, 1996; Lowenthal, 1985). A., the son of Abu Siam, expresses this very well: “This history also includes how my father suffered”; i.e., his memories include the displacement from their land and the suffering he experienced with this displacement, which prevented them from living the life that they had always known.

Additionally, the Arab-Bedouin memory is carried and transmitted by individuals who experienced the events of the past and who serve as agents of memory and as witness-bearers of a past existence. Through their memories and their lives, they form the link to a life that is no more. Besides being the documenters and narrators, they are the ones who pass the memory on to the next
generation, so that they can become secondary agents of memory and can continue the job of memorializing what happened to their fathers. This is true especially in light of the fear that the demise of the fathers will cause the history and traditions they remember to disappear (Barclay, 1988; Ben-Ze’ev, 2005; Dajani, 2002; Espanioly, 2002; Halbwachs, 1992; Rabinowitz and Abu Baker, 2002; Rubin, 1996).

The Arab-Bedouin spatial memory is also characterized by an oral-narrative component that is remembered as words and sometimes stories of the smallest things that express an immediate emotional-intimate connection (Rubin, 1996). As Abu Siam says:

We were from Al-Stariya, there were the tribes of Abu Siam, the Abu Hatab tribe, the Abu Sabiah tribe, Abu Magireb, and there were another 4–5 tribes… we lived there…. In 1948 I was about 15 years old. I was aware and mature. I know exactly how the problem started, with the expulsion and all those things….

It is the oral narrative which, according to Slymovics (1998), embodies the words of the forefathers, their family stories and legends, and is based on historical experiences that are literary and folkloristic, and which revive the past and uncover its symbolism through the spoken word. Due to the internal diversity and contrast of the multitude of Palestinian political and historical experiences, this comes together to create different narratives that are expressed in the nature of the memory carried in the present (Nassar, 2003).

At the same time, the Arab-Bedouin memory is shaped and crystallized by events that influence it and guide its direction. The memory begins with the establishment of the State of Israel and the impact of this event on their lives, as Al-’Azazma says:

Right after the occupation, in the 1950s, the 1950s… one day Abu Dahud [a representative of the Israeli military government] came to us and said that there will be a drill and you need to leave… and when we left, they did not let us return… Since then we haven’t returned and everything has changed….

In this sense, the state’s policies and military operations have had a direct, and perhaps acute, impact on shaping and forming the memory of place. As Lavie (1990) maintains in her study of the Arab Bedouins in Sinai, in contrast to the romantic image of the Arab Bedouins living in total harmony with nature, a relic of a biblical lifestyle, their identity has been developing and shaped in the shadow of the changing governments, which have had a deep political, economic and social impact on their daily lives.
As such, with the establishment of the state, the concept of time in the Arab-Bedouin memory changed from abstract to concrete and became of prime significance in the construction of their personal and collective awareness. Until that date, time was perceived as circular, ongoing and continuous. After 1948, they began to perceive time in an entirely different manner: the past now meant the era before the establishment of the state for those who experienced it, as opposed to the transitory present, which is the new life of displacement from their land and from their previous existence. The future signifies the return to the life of the past and the resumption of the lifestyle that was lost. As Al-‘Ukbi states: “And I saw that as long as Israel exists, we would not be able to return, it would be difficult to return, but we never stopped dreaming and hoping that we must return to our lands. Now we are refugees in our homeland.…”

Space as a basis for memory

The remembered space has been constructed by the transplanted generation, who experienced the uprooting personally. In order to make the original space into a place of memory for them and to stake their claim to it, the Arab Bedouins make use of spontaneous and informal practices, which over the years have become family institutions, as a way of preserving and passing on an awareness of the past to the new generation. They do this primarily through visits to their former lands, which symbolize for them, above all, the life of the past.

They usually make these visits in the springtime, on special occasions and on Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israel’s Independence Day, which in their minds represents the date of their displacement:

We visit our place, our houses are still there, and our graves are there. It’s an outing, in order to get to know the area where we lived. We have a picnic there and our parents show us how they lived. They explain to us how to find the place and show us: we lived here, the well was here, here we would sit at night, here we would do our laundry, here we would cook… memories, how we would dance the Al-Dhahiya, the times when we stayed up until morning and the night would be lit by the full moon, and we would play the lost bone [a children’s game]… (Abu-Shareb).

The visits are an attempt to reconstruct their former day-to-day lives by recounting their daily routines on their land. The visits include detailed descriptions of their way of life on the land, commemorating their former lifestyle for the sake of their children, demonstrating the importance of the story of the past for them.
Every year we go there to visit my grandfather’s house there, the old houses there. Every year in the springtime we take the children and tell them the memories, sometimes we have a barbecue and sit down on our land. We explain that this is diarna [our land and our home]. Here we were born and here we lived on this land, here we planted lentils and here wheat, and here we made a sadeh [an earthen dam to catch the rain water] with a jerafa [backplow] pulled by a camel, and here we worked on the road. That’s how I explain it to my children (Al-’Azazma).

Halbwachs (1992) notes that a conversation about the remembered past is conducted in the social circle that owns that past, so the descriptions generally revolve around ordinary daily life by explaining and showing what was where: the field was here, the well was there, here we would sit at night, there we raised our livestock, here we grazed them. In this way, reconstruction of the past through its remembrance is carried out by locating remnants which bear perpetual historical witness (Lowenthal, 1985). As Al-’Uqbi says:

Our land is in Al-Araqib, the Al-’Uqbi people say, we always visit it: we take our children with us… we visit in the springtime, on special occasions, during the holidays… we take the children and explain to them… this is A’s land, and that is B’s land. Benhen lelwatan – we yearn for our land – so that they will know it…. When we visit it, we say to the children, we lived here and there… this is our land, so that they will get to know it….

Additionally, the family members make efforts to preserve “proof” of their ownership of their lands, and they took care to show me old land registry documents which they say prove their presence on their lands. They also keep maps and aerial photographs from the British Mandate era: “In my papers it says exactly what were the northern borders of A’s and B’s land, as well as C and D from the south… I have it all organized…” (Abu-Shareb).

The goal of perpetuating the spatial memory

These commemorative practices serve to preserve the past among Arab-Bedouin families in the Naqab. Relics are used to illustrate the memories, creating what Zerubavel (1995) calls an “archive of the present,” as it is perceived and constructed among them; in fact, the land itself serves as relic, as “eternal realms of memory” (Nora, 1989). The need for these “realms of memory” and the preoccupation with them is connected to the sense of loss (Nora, 1989).

The creation of these realms of memory reconstructs the history of the Naqab Arab Bedouins and gives it prime ideological significance for the children, who
receive a sense of direct connection as secondary landowners. The creation of secondary agents of memory has become a ultimate goal of the generation of survivors, who seek to inform their children of what belongs to them:

When I die the children will know what they have, they are taking note. What is registered under their name is not enough, they need to see it with their eyes as well… that will give them continuity to prove their ownership of the land, no more and no less. I take them to show them where I was born, where I would drink water, where I lived my life. I pass on this information so that they will know why we are not getting our due, and why we are still here without the right to our land. I want them to know that we have been denied our right. They shouldn’t forget where they came from, they need to know that they were not born in Tel Sheva, we are not from habalad – this land. Asalna – our origin – and Amlakna – our property, are in a different place and the government is withholding it from us (Abu-Rqaeiq).

In other words, by informing the next generation of exactly where their land is located, they aim to enable them to prove their ownership of it in the future, as well as to keep the hope that they will one day return alive:

The papers are title deeds… because this is our land that we planted… our land is empty today, and we have proof that it is our land that we own. It is marked. This is my ownership, so one of these days, when perhaps I will die and their mother, too, this is what they will have left. They need to tell their children that there is land, and I have documents and photocopies. I photocopied those documents a few times and arranged them in my folder. I put all my papers away, in order (Abu-Shareb).

The revival of the memory of the past in spatial terms, according to Fenster (2004), creates a sense of ownership that connects people to their land by marking the territory through daily actions and through the investment of emotional significance. In this way, space is owned in a practical, worldly, intimate, personal and daily way (Fenster, 2004). Massey (1995) upholds this theory by presenting the relationship between a home and a place in the context of territorial ownership based around a geographical location, by means of mutual identification between the land and the people who are connected to and identified with it. It follows that a sense of exclusive ownership of a place, and the connection between the place and the people, are bound together in the physical and natural environment (Massey, 1995).

In this way, the Arab Bedouins are reviving their past by nurturing their connection to place and rendering it an emotional and physical space, towards which they have developed a sense of ownership through a realm of memory that prevents
them from forgetting. The importance of this is expressed especially in regard to the children, who are the second and third generation since the displacement, who did not live through 1948 and who have never known the significance of life on their own land. In order to inculcate within them the implications of the exodus from the lands of their forefathers, the parents make a practice of telling them of the past in an idyllic fashion and visiting those places in order to enable them to feel it in a physical sense and to develop a sense of emotional ownership: “They visit the land…. They feel the land, they kiss it. They feel and sense the land so much and become attached to it….“ (Abu-Shareb).

This is done both among those who live in recognized settlements and those who live in unrecognized settlements, with the goal of imbuing their current situation with a sense of transience. The difference between them is that, in the recognized settlements, the cultivating of the past aims to diminish the attachment that the younger generation feel toward their present surroundings for reasons of convenience. They aim to implant a memory of the past within them and thereby transmit a sense that their current living situation is not ideal for them, that the option of the past is better, and that they should aspire to return to it: “So that they won’t forget that they weren’t born in Tel-Sheva, our origins are not on this land…” (Abu-Rqaeiq). Memory is constructed as part of the daily routine, which could otherwise lend itself to complacency and forgetting: “We’re living here on lease and that’s it...” (Abu-Shareb). Also: “…but he knows, he knows that this is not his, this area is not his. This is what we feel … I have no peace of mind here…” (Abu-Jarabe’a).

In the unrecognized settlements, the children are born into a different, harsher reality, which intensifies the thirst for a better life. The return to their lands, which signifies an escape to a better reality and a way out of their present situation, is part of their day-to-day identity due to the transience that already characterizes their lifestyle. Redefining the past as an ideal for their children’s future is perceived as a way to bring the memory of the land alive in their hearts (Issa, 1997). The visits turn back the clock as the parents return to the life of the past, reconstructing the pieces of information about their previous existence. The land represents for them the remnant of the space of the past, in which they search for relics of their lives there years ago, as a living memento of a life that is very real to them.

In addition, the construction of their identity based on the land is connected to continuity, which begins with an unknown, eternal point in time and contrasts their present transient existence. As such, the space represents the past, which is retold by those who lived before the displacement, the generation of 1948 who experienced it. They emphasize the disruption of this continuity in the present day, resulting in the current lifestyle of transience. This is viewed as something that is going to change in the future, through the act of connecting the past with the future, to ensure the resumption of the continuity that was disrupted.

Therefore, in order to symbolically revive the past and the remnants of that life, they try to preserve that which they recognize from the earlier life:
We took the children there because we want our children to live in hope; we took our children there so that they would know that they had a balad – a homeland! The goal is that they should know their history, that they had land, that they should know where they came from, the place, because everyone needs to know these things (Abu-Shareb).

The conceptualization of the past by concretizing the place has been the subject of a great deal of research with regard to the Palestinians. It has been said that the picture of a Palestinian pointing his finger at evidence of a Palestinian presence at the sites of former homes and lands, at the site of villages where his parents lived, moves the idea of Palestine from the realm of the abstract to the actual by arousing feelings towards the place and a better understanding of the life of the past. An encounter with the remnants perpetuates the past in the present era, besides the fact that memories of events convince those who visit that these memories belong to them (Ben-Ze’ev, 2005; Halbwachs, 1992; Slymovics, 1998). As Abu-Shareb puts it:

When we go there, we are bringing its stones, and bringing its sand…. It is important to me that even the smallest boy will know, will know that we had land, when we take him to the land, his mother tells him—this was your land! Once it was ours and we were expelled from it and the place where we live now is not our land, rather this is our land. We are connected to this land.

Another reason for visiting the old village is to explain the situation which the Arab Bedouins of the Naqab find themselves in today. An understanding of Arab-Bedouin history flows from a statutory ownership of the land, imparted through the construction of a sense of ownership and pride in self and one’s status, as expressed through the words of A. Abu Siam, the son of one of the interviewees:

This is not the first time that he has told us the history, he tells us this all the time. Why do you think that I know it by heart? Because he tells it to us at every opportunity in order to explain to us why we have problems today in Lajjya, why we have no land, why we live today on the land of others. We cannot move forward, and so it hurts. The problem of the land according to the story and the way they were expelled from the land, and how they lived after that. Today we have a problem; families around us have land, so why do we have no land? Why do we have no land?
Space as an arena of resistance

The displacement from their homes, land and birthplace is still being experienced by the Arab Bedouins today, in that they choose to refer to themselves as “expellees.” This term is heard over and over in both recognized and unrecognized Arab-Bedouin villages in Israel, regardless of the conditions under which the residents live. From their point of view, the loss is both mental and physical, personal and collective, and has changed their world forever. This loss means a transient life in their present space and a sharp drop in status from being landowners to landless, as expressed by Al-‘Uqbi: “We are considered expellees, landless, we have no land here.” This lack is expressed by their estrangement from their present space, even though their current location is just a few kilometers from their former land, as N. Al-‘Uqbi, a relative from the same tribe, explained: “We are strangers in our homeland.”

The Arab Bedouins’ sense of estrangement towards the place they live in today is the main way they resist and protest their present situation. They live an existence of exiles, characterized by transience and instability, with about half of the Arab-Bedouin population living in unrecognized settlements and the other half living involuntarily and dissatisfied in the recognized settlements. These circumstances make it “easier” for them to really live the emotional and physical connection to the past of life on the lost land, and the “utopian” and “idyllic” way of life that represents.

This sense of urba—exile—which they experience is multi-faceted. On the one hand, they live in the same geographic area, not far from their original lands; on the other hand, they feel a sense of exile due to its loss. Their original lands represent for them their utopian past, which is connected to the future through memories that are characterized by perfection, peace and the hope for a better life through the return to their land and to “themselves.” As such, the Arab Bedouins of the Naqab are living in exile no less than people who were left outside of the borders of the State of Israel as a result of its establishment. Their physical presence within the borders of the state certainly does not reflect their inclusion in it, since the new borders of the Israeli space have defined them as strangers. As they themselves say: “We are strangers in our homeland, the big homeland. It affects everyone and we can’t do much about it…. But there is something that is connected to me personally, to myself. And that which is connected to me personally, to myself, we lost by force, and we want to go back to it” (Al-‘Uqbi).

As such, the uniqueness of the Arab-Bedouin exile is expressed also through their relations with the new government that brought about this situation. The moment that Israel took control, the borders were reshaped, and they took the Arab Bedouins out of their natural setting in order to redefine the space to suit their needs. This impacted the Arab Bedouins’ physical, social, economic and political situation, creating a sense of physical and emotional alienation among them.
This sense of exile is expressed on two main planes: the physical plane, in that they are removed from the land, which is the focal point of the life they yearn for and idealize, and the emotional plane, through feelings of estrangement and a sense of incompleteness, an absence of rootedness and belonging. This physical and emotional exile is expressed in practice through the construction of a memory around the focal point—the native lands from which they were uprooted.

**Expressions of resistance**

Wedeen explains that a protest constructed on the cognitive plane may not be externally apparent, but this does not mean that it doesn’t exist. The use of particular language and words is a clear indication of resistance against a power, and the style of speech and the words chosen reveal its existence (Wedeen, 1998).

Speech is a primary way that the Arab Bedouins express their resistance to their present situation. They use it to protest the circumstances of their life, as shown by the words of Al-‘Uqbi:

Zionism does not look at us as citizens or as holders of rights; rather it is busy with settlers and new arrivals and Jewish immigrants. Instead of our being a burden on the state and its economy, each family could be productive if they could get a plot on their original land in order to farm, since most Bedouins are farmers. This is what we want…. The Zionists—every dunam of land for the immigrants that will come…. The Bedouins—land and water. It’s the height of racism…. Our land could wait 100–150 years for the Jews who might come… it’s discrimination…. They look at the Arab citizen one way and the Jewish citizen another way… it’s not the same…. The Jews want to keep their national lands away from the non-Jewish citizen…. Give it to the camel owner, the goat owner, the she-camel owner so they will live and improve their economic situation, so they will have dignity and a good standard of living…. We are right, there is no democracy and no nothing…. The Jewish people don’t know the truth.

The Arab-Bedouins view the state as an entity which is working against them, as a deeply embittered Abu-Shareb says: “The state has raped our lands and has taken our most precious possession…. Today we are a tribe against the state….”. As such, the powers that be hold the advantage in this struggle, in which the Arab Bedouins view themselves on a tribal basis. As a powerless tribe, they have little chance of overcoming the state: “We lived on the tribal level, we could fight with the wind and fight with the sun. Now we are fighting against another way of life, different, with different people. Our nature is different, they are different” (Al-‘Azazma).
From their point of view, the state is making use of their tribal identity in order to disconnect them from their native lands and cut off their roots in it. As Abu-Shareb says:

If it was listed on our identity papers, “Al-Jamama,” they could not expel us. Why? Because then we would be on the land that we owned…. We all have listed on our identity papers: “Al-Atawana Tribe.” Why? For them [the state] you have nothing, you are with the tribe and belong to the tribe, you have no land of your own, so that you won’t be able to prove that you live in a particular place and that this is our place. And so we are wanderers with the tribe.

The implication is that their exclusion by the state has been accomplished not just by taking them away from their original land and transferring them elsewhere, but also through an attempt to disconnect them from their land and to claim that they are rootless and basically from nowhere by officially classifying them according to tribe.

Another expression of resistance is their nurturing of the vision of return to their lands as such a significant part of their present reality. They invest great effort in building a tangible and inviolable connection with the past, as Al-’Uqbi expresses best: “We have never stopped dreaming or hoping that we will go back to our lands.” In this way, cultivating the vision of return is the Arab-Bedouin’s primary goal in preserving the memory, aiming to inculcate the children with the goal of returning to the place that the parents left. The strong faith that ultimately they will succeed in returning, one way or another, allows them to impart to their children the vision of return in an emotional and physical fashion, and to implant a strong sense of connection in them.

In this sense, the past for them is not just a living memory; it is their one and only hope for leaving their present situation and having a better life. For them, the return to their land and all that this symbolizes is perceived as a realistic vision, and their hope of realizing it is integral to the reality of their circumstances under Israeli control. As Al-’Uqbi says: “We must return at any price, we must return to our homes, especially those of us who agreed to be citizens of the State of Israel. We accepted this on the condition that we would live on our land, in our homes.”

The return to their land constitutes an integral part of their future existence, and it shapes their aspirations and guides them with real direction. According to them, their vision will be realized in no uncertain terms, regardless of the government. For them, the return is the most real thing, the focal point of their tribal connection and identity on their tribal land, to which they remain connected no matter who runs the country. Abu-Shareb expresses this as follows: “If we get our rights in the Israeli era, that will be good. If not, we’ll get it later.”

Their other primary expression of resistance and protest of their present situation and their holding onto the past for the sake of a future hope is the
cultivation of an exile identity in their current setting and the conscious reinforcement of the sense of alienation and estrangement which they feel towards their current location, be it in recognized or unrecognized settlements. This was best expressed by Al-’Uqbi:

This land is owned by the state, not by us. We were not born here, we are connected to our land. We won’t live here, we don’t belong to Hura, even if we live here 100 or 1,000 years we will not give up our lands. We will stay connected to our lands and we won’t live here. We are not connected to this area, I know that it is not my land. I feel that it is not mine. I don’t sow it or anything. It is forbidden to sow this land here.

This is evident through their failure to develop their present location:

My connection to the land of my father is stronger than my connection to the place where I was born, since I know that it is not mine. And so I don’t build as I should, and I don’t make more effort to improve my standard of living, I don’t even try, since this is temporary…. Even when they [relatives] visit from Jordan, we go to see our land (Al-’Azazma).

As such, the families express as much resistance as they can, by whatever means available to them. As Al-’Uqbi puts it: “Even if they move me to Hura and allow me to build, I will not build there. We don’t want to move to Hura, we want to move to our land, we want a village on the land itself.” Their total disinterest in investing in their present location, not even to temporarily improve their standard of living, expressed by their lack of desire and absolute refusal to build in a place not their own, to the point that they are not even willing to lay down flooring, so as not to give any sort of permanence to their presence. Al-’Uqbi expresses this well:

My father would sit and drink coffee and we would talk. I would urge him, let’s lay down a floor in this room. He would say, “no, we don’t want to build on other people’s land.” This isn’t our land, and we don’t want it. We have no connection to this land, we can’t stay here on other people’s land. This land is not ours. We didn’t buy it. We want our land, which we lived on for hundreds of years, generation upon generation; our fathers, grandfathers, and grandfathers’ grandfathers lived on it for hundreds of years.

As far as the Arab Bedouins are concerned, the construction of the return mentality demands every effort to prevent the past from being forgotten, in order to perpetuate their efforts to return in the future to the only place they call home. In the meantime, the transplanted generation uses every available means to reconstruct the
past by building positive images of life on their own land, in order to create an enduring, constant sense of unbreakable connection to it among their children.

The Arab-Bedouin memory is perpetuated through the emotional connection which keeps the place alive in their awareness, an existence that is supported on the physical level through visits and the documentation of that past. Thus, the memory, which comes into existence and is shaped by the need for a history of the present, turns the timeless continuity of the past into a reality in today’s transient era (Warner, 2002).

Conclusion: “Between here and there”—On the significance of home

Scholars have explored the deep contrast between “roots” and “routes.” “Roots” symbolize belonging and a deep connection to native lands, while transitory “routes” symbolize a fleeting journey, without any real effort to settle down and with the hope of return to the former home never abandoned. In this sense, the land of the fathers of exiled peoples represents for them the ideal home and the only place that they and their descendents ultimately want to reach (Clifford, 1994; Levy, 2000).

The Naqab Arab Bedouins do not feel any less of a sense of exile than those who crossed the state borders. Their displacement from their land with the establishment of the state in 1948 turned their world upside down and snatched away their essential identity, which had been shaped up until that moment by the lands of their forefathers that they inhabited for generations. Despite their relocation just a few kilometers from their former lands, in the same geographic area, the state-induced change of space has excluded them and made them strangers in their homes.

The Arab-Bedouin exile identity is expressed through a constructed sense of alienation toward the place in which they are currently compelled to live, which coexists with a cultivated sense of emotional and physical belonging to their tribal lands, which they consider their real home. This is made especially clear by the constructed distinction between their present location—“here,” and their former land—“there.” This distinction succinctly summarizes the ideological symbolism of the lost land, as opposed to the transient exile in which they find themselves today.

From the Arab Bedouins’ point of view, the former land symbolizes their roots, which the state refuses to recognize. Their land is the origin of their tribe and the essence of their existence, where they hope to live out the ideal, utopian life in the home that has been denied to them. That space represents their past, their land, their human, social and class dignity, as well as their traditional connection to a place where they can live their lives according to their customs, unfettered and unhindered. This was the place where their personal and collective-tribal self-determination was clear and absolute. Furthermore, it is the place which they themselves and other tribes recognize as their rightful location, the place of origin to which they have historically belonged.
On the other hand, their lives in their present location, which they call “here,” represents temporality, transience and instability, an interminable present which will eventually come to an end, allowing them to step back into the cycle of timeless continuity. The present symbolizes a life with no foreseeable future, fraught by restrictions on mobility and personal and social development, contrasting starkly to what they were formerly accustomed to. This is epitomized by their having been denied the opportunity to work the land and to be sustained by its produce, or to live on their tribal lands as they did in the past. Additionally, they lack the stability that comes from lives spent travelling along a familiar and well travelled path. This sense is palpable even among the second generation, as is explained by A., the son of Abu Siam: “We live here just like we are living in a refugee camp, we are displaced, we are not permitted to build or expand, we have no space, we are living on top of each other.”

According to Abu-Jarabe’a: “All these places that you call Bedouin towns are all refugee camps, they [the authorities] did not get any Bedouins involved in planning them.” The dominant feeling towards their current location is estrangement and impermanence. These themes are used to illustrate a situation where, despite being citizens of the state, they feel a lack of wholeheartedness in their state-run existence, and where they persistently long for their former land.

They also express a reluctance to live on the land of others, i.e., land that historically was owned by other tribes. This is especially true of those who live in temporary settlements. Add to this their inability to determine their own future, since in their perception the future is connected to a past that has been uprooted and that they are powerless to return to, and so the future is also seen as lacking. As such, the disinterest in settling in their current location, even if just to temporarily improve their lot, shows their adamant refusal to build in a place that is not their own, to the point where they are unwilling to give any sort of permanence to their residence there. Their current place of residence is seen as a transitory setting they are forced to inhabit for the time being. This is contrasted to their homes on their lost land, which symbolize their roots and the continuity of kinship ties.

In this sense, they consider themselves to have only one home—their former land. No other space could possibly take its place for them, regardless of the living conditions in which they find themselves. Hammond (2004) asserts that a person can have more than one home at the same time—the original home of the past, as well as the home that provides them with their current economic, social and political needs. Yet, the Arab Bedouins express their deep and direct connection to one and only one home, and that is the place where they always lived—their tribal lands to which they yearn to return.

Their identity as strangers and outsiders is reinforced by those practices that revive the past life of their former land, including visits to the land, the recounting of the past way of life, and the preservation of the documents that they feel prove their ownership of their lands. The goal is to transmit a clear message to their children that they have a better alternative, which they must aspire to and aim for in all they
do. They also root their identity in the place from which they were uprooted and stubbornly refuse to accept life in a space other than their own.

The reality of their transitory and unstable existence actually helps them to construct these feelings and reinforces their demand for the longed-for return. As such, their exile from their former space has not remained a mere memory for the generation of 1948; instead, it has been transformed into an exile identity among the second and third generation. It now seems that the fourth generation is also characterized by this transient mentality, which cries out from the misery of their current living conditions. All this shapes the Arab-Bedouin struggle for their lands, for their future and for the future of their children.
NOTES

1 Another version of this paper will be published in H. Yacobi and T. Fenster (Eds.) (Forthcoming), Remembering, Forgetting and the Construction of Space. Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute.

2 The nominal category of “Arab Bedouins” relates to their definition as part of Arab-Palestinian society in Israel.

3 A confederation is a broader unit of Arab-Bedouin social identification which includes a number of tribes. In Arabic it is known as Kabail (Ashkenazi, 1957).

4 The research population consisted of 17 Arab-Bedouin informants from the Naqab. The interviewees came from eight families, seven of which were landowners prior to 1948 and one family that owned no land at that time. Currently, five of the families live in recognized settlements, two live in unrecognized settlements and one lives in an unrecognized neighborhood of a recognized settlement.

REFERENCES


Between memory and resistance


Education, employment and poverty among Bedouin Arabs in southern Israel

SULEIMAN ABU-BADER and DANIEL GOTTlieb

ABSTRACT
Over the past five decades, impressive progress in schooling has taken place among the Bedouin-Arab community in southern Israel. Nonetheless, in 2004, less than 9% of females participated in the labor force, more than 20% of males were unemployed, and 79% of the population in the unrecognized villages and 61% in the recognized villages were living in poverty. This study describes the progress in educational attainment over the past five decades, the current status of employment and their relation to the high poverty rates in the Bedouin-Arab localities. We conclude that, due to the absence of adequate infrastructures, especially with respect to employment, the progress in education has not sufficiently translated into better economic well-being.

Introduction
Over the past decade, the poverty gap between Jews and Arabs in Israel has been widening, with an increasing number of Arab households living in poverty. A notable increase in the poverty rate, particularly among the Bedouin Arabs in southern Israel, occurred following cuts in child benefits and other public cash transfers in 2003. Ironically, the deterioration of the economic status of Arabs in Israel is happening at a time when the Israeli economy is experiencing high economic growth even when compared to the rich Western economies.

The low public investment in Arab settlements over the past five decades has resulted in a lack of employment infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of young people. The discrimination in the Jewish labor market against educated young Arabs, especially in sophisticated industries (Asali, 2006; Gera and Cohen, 2001; Klinov, 1999; Lewin-Epstein, Al-Haj and Semyonov, 1994), and the low level of education in these settlements has created a situation where many Arab workers are unemployed or employed in low paying jobs in the traditional sectors of the economy. The leading growth sector has been in hi-tech, where highly skilled Arabs are strongly underrepresented. Together with the low female labor market...
participation rate, Arab households are earning low incomes and have a high probability of being poor.

The economic well-being of Arabs in Israel is unevenly spread geographically. Education attainment is higher in northern Israel, especially among Christians, as is female participation in the labor market. Access to higher employment opportunities is higher in the center, and the quality of basic infrastructures is better in the north and center. The Bedouin-Arab localities in the south are highly disadvantaged in all these respects. The focus of this paper will be on the economic well-being of the Bedouin Arabs in southern Israel, whose population in 2004 was 170,000, or 15% of the total Arab population in Israel.

In 1948, the population of Bedouin Arabs living in the Negev was about 90,000, with inhabitants mostly living in the northwestern area of the Negev (Falah, 1989). Like other Arabs, most of these were forced to leave, left voluntarily or escaped the country to neighboring Arab countries (Jordan, Syria and Lebanon) or the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Most of the remaining Bedouin Arabs, who lived in the northwestern part of the Negev until 1948, were relocated in an area in the northeastern section of the Negev that was referred to as the Siaj. This area constituted only 10% of the land that the Bedouins had inhabited prior to 1948. They were joined to the remaining Bedouins who had been living there, and together accounted for about 15,000 inhabitants after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

During the period of 1948–1966, a military regime prevailed, and movement of Arab citizens outside their localities required a special permit from the military governor. Such a permit entailed a bureaucratic process and was difficult to obtain. The restrictions imposed by the military regime and the lack of basic access to education, health and public transportation prevented the Bedouins from integrating into the Jewish labor market.

Until the end of the military regime in 1966, only a few elementary schools were built in the Bedouin localities. The fact that the Bedouins were scattered over a large area, cultural preferences concerning girls’ education and the absence of basic infrastructure, especially transportation, made elementary school accessible only to those who lived close by. As a result, most children, especially girls, did not have the chance to attain even an elementary education. Until the late 1960s, when the first high school was built for the Bedouin community, young people who wanted to acquire a high school diploma had to move to the center or to the Galilee to study.

After the military regime was lifted in 1966, the Bedouin Arabs of the Negev were brought into greater contact with Israeli society. This contact resulted, in the best case, in a partial integration into the Jewish labor market, mostly in low skilled jobs. Nonetheless, the economic well-being of the Bedouin population deteriorated significantly relatively to that of the Jewish population. The low level of incomes and the absence of access to adequate public schooling has affected living standards ever since. Under these circumstances, it has been extremely difficult to create the
human capital, based on higher education and work experience, needed for successful integration into the Israeli economy and society.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Israeli government initiated a program to resettle the Bedouin-Arab population in the Negev in seven permanent urban settlements: Tel-Sheva, Rahat, A’rara-Banegev, Ksayifa, Segev-Shalom, Hura and Laqiya. The declared rationale was to “modernize” the Bedouins and to provide these towns with the necessary infrastructure in education, health, running water, electricity, telephone, roads and so forth. However, this urbanization process was forced on the Bedouins. These towns were planned without taking into consideration the Bedouin lifestyle. The Bedouins were not consulted, and the employment infrastructure was neglected. As a result, these towns were a huge failure in that they offered no employment opportunities for the inhabitants to replace their traditional livelihood or a lifestyle that could be maintained. Furthermore, the supply of infrastructure has remained limited and is remarkably inferior to that in similarly sized Jewish towns. These conditions have discouraged Bedouins living outside of these towns to relocate there. As of today, about half of the Bedouin population (more than 85,000 people) still lives in villages unrecognized by the State of Israel.

As unrecognized and therefore “illegal” localities, these villages lack public services of any kind. Moreover, government agencies refuse to allow Bedouin Arabs living in the unrecognized villages to build any permanent structures whatsoever. Any residence other than tents is considered illegal. In recent years several regional elementary and middle schools have, nevertheless, been opened in some of the unrecognized villages, requiring children from other localities to commute to schools that have long walking distances. The difficulty of commuting has resulted in high dropout rates among high school youth, especially girls. The recent establishment of two regional high schools in the unrecognized villages has served to significantly lower dropout rates.

In this paper we utilize a comprehensive socioeconomic survey of the Arab population in Israel carried out by the Galilee Society in 2004 (Galilee Society and Rikaz, 2005). This is the first thorough attempt to collect data on the Bedouin Arabs living in the unrecognized villages. The purpose of this paper is to discuss their economic status compared to that of other Arabs living in Israel. We discuss the effects of recent developments in education attainment on employment opportunities in the Bedouin villages. We then show how the lack of, or deficiency in, basic infrastructure is responsible for the low level of education, the lack of employment opportunities and therefore the higher poverty rate. Specifically, we describe the poverty profile of Arabs in Israel in 2004, focusing on the Bedouins in southern Israel; the progress in educational attainment in the Bedouin community over the past five decades, compared to those in other Arab towns, focusing on differences between recognized and unrecognized Bedouin villages; and the employment status of the Bedouins and its relation to educational attainment.
**Poverty profile of Bedouin villages in southern Israel**

In 2004, according to the half-median poverty line, the poverty incidence in the Arab community reached 52%, a large part of it chronic. As Figure 1 shows, poverty levels among the Bedouins in unrecognized villages reached 79%, the highest among the various population groups in Israel, followed by that of the Bedouins in the recognized villages (61%). The Bedouin Arabs in southern Israel were the poorest, when compared to other Arab communities in the center and the north of the country. Poverty incidences in the unrecognized and the recognized villages were respectively 5.3 and 4.1 times that among the mainstream (non-orthodox) Jewish population. Not only poverty incidence, but also poverty severity, as measured by the Sen Poverty index, was highest among the Bedouin Arabs. In the unrecognized villages, the Sen index was as high as seven times that among the mainstream Jewish population in 2004. Even though data on Bedouins in the unrecognized villages are available only for 2004, an analysis of data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics suggests that the trend of increasing poverty among Arabs in Israel (from 1997 to 2006) was common for all Arabs in Israel, in the north as well as in the center and south. Therefore, we believe it is also true for the inhabitants of unrecognized villages, the less advantaged group. Furthermore, the Bedouin Arabs in the Negev were (together with ultra-orthodox Jews) the group most negatively affected by the 2003 cuts in child benefits, since they have the highest average number of children per household (Achdut, Cohen and Endweld, 2005, 2006; Gottlieb, 2007).

**Figure 1: Percentage of households below the poverty line by household characteristics (2004)**

*Figures inside the boxes are the ratios of the specific group Headcount Index to that of mainstream Jews.*
The 2004 poverty profile of Arabs in Israel shows that household poverty incidences differ according to the demographic, geographic, socioeconomic, cultural and religious characteristics of the household. Table 1 shows that the poverty incidence is higher the larger the household size, the lower the schooling attainment of the household head and the lower the number of income earners per household. For example, more than 80% of Bedouin households in the unrecognized villages with a family size of at least five persons live in poverty, compared to about 45% among small households. At any family size, poverty incidence is the highest in the unrecognized villages compared to that among other Arab households, including Bedouin Arabs in recognized villages. Even though higher schooling of the household head lessens the likelihood of household poverty, 61% and 69% of households in the recognized and the unrecognized Bedouin villages, respectively, where the head has a high school diploma, nevertheless live in poverty. Moreover, poverty is prevalent not only among households with no wage earners, but even among households with two wage earners. About a third of the Arab households (38% in the unrecognized villages) with two wage earners live in poverty.

Table 1. Poverty profile of Arabs in Israel (%, Headcount Index), 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bedouins in Unrecognized Villages</th>
<th>Bedouins in Recognized Villages</th>
<th>Other Arabs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household Size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 4</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 8</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Head’s Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage Earners Per Household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td>70.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Galilee Society and Rikaz (2005).
As all aforementioned household characteristics are mutually correlated, a multivariate analysis is needed to isolate the effects of these characteristics on poverty. For example, when Christian households have the lowest poverty rate, they also have the highest education attainment, the highest female participation rate in the labor market and the lowest family size among all Arabs in Israel. On the other hand, Bedouin households, where the poverty rate is the highest among all Arabs, are characterized by low education attainment, large family size and a very low female participation rate in the labor market. Therefore, it would be misleading to infer that poverty is determined by cultural characteristics. The differences in poverty incidence and severity are likely to be due to objective determinants, such as access to labor market and public infrastructures. Abu-Bader and Gottlieb (2008) used a multivariate logistic model to estimate the partial effects of a large set of variables related to household characteristics on the probability of a household to live in poverty. Those variables that were found to significantly affect that probability were household size, the education attainment and occupation of the household head, and the number of employees and quality of the basic infrastructure in the locality. Religious, cultural and geographical characteristics were found to be statistically non-significant after controlling for the other household characteristics. In the rest of this paper we describe in detail the evolution of education over the past five decades, the employment opportunities in the Bedouin-Arab villages and the involvement of the Bedouin Arabs in the Israeli labor market.

**Education trends**

Education is crucial for building the human capital necessary for the attainment of high paying jobs. Therefore, it is crucial to study the evolution of education attainments and employment opportunities and their interaction among the Bedouin Arabs when discussing the socioeconomic status of this population.

Figures 2 and 3 depict the evolution of educational attainments of Bedouin females and males, respectively, over the past five decades by comparing age groups. As can be seen from these figures, for any age group the distribution of schooling attainment differs between the two genders. Among women aged 45 and above, the percentage with twelve years of schooling is nil. At most, 5% of women in this age group managed to complete eight years of schooling. For women in the 35–44 age bracket, there is a moderate improvement over their older counterparts, with almost 11% having finished high school and 4.5% continuing on to a higher education and attaining a college or university degree. Among females 15–18 years old, less than 3% did not obtain any kind of schooling. It follows that there has been an impressive change over the past five decades in the percentage of females attending school and pursuing a higher education. The availability of schools in the Bedouin
villages, especially high schools in recognized villages, and the awareness of Bedouin-Arab parents of how vital education is for their children as a means to achieve economic well-being seem to have contributed considerably to this change (see Abu-Saad et al., 1998).

Figure 2: Educational attainments of Bedouin females by age group (2004)

Figure 3: Educational attainments of Bedouin males by age group (2004)
With respect to Bedouin males, Figure 3 clearly shows that the percentage attaining any level of education has increased over time, particularly with respect to middle and high school. Among high school graduates in the 45+, 35-44 and 25-34 age groups, 58.3%, 29.6% and 21.9%, respectively, also earned a college or university degree. In comparison, 42.1% and 36.9% of females in the 35-44 and 25-34 age groups, respectively, earned a degree. These numbers show that the percentage of high school male graduates who pursue a higher education has decreased over time, whereas there was a drastic increase among females two decades ago, but the percentage has mildly decreased since then. The numbers also show that the gap between the percentages of degree holders among females and males is widening, with a larger proportion of women continuing on to a higher education.

Despite the impressive increase in schooling attainment, the data reveal that there is still a high percentage of youth who do not complete their formal schooling. Table 2 depicts dropout rates in 2004 among Bedouin Arabs in the unrecognized villages, the recognized villages and other Arab groups in the center and north of the country. A comparison of dropout rates for the 45 and over age group with those aged 20 and below indicates a substantial decrease, especially among females. The most drastic reduction occurred among females in the recognized villages. As already mentioned, among Bedouin females age 45 and over, none had more than eight years of schooling, and less than 5% actually completed eight years of schooling. In comparison, only 30% of females in the 18–20 age group from the recognized villages did not finish high school, and less than 15% did not complete ten years of schooling. Despite this drastic decrease in dropout rates from schools in the recognized villages, they are still very high compared to rates for non-Bedouin Arabs: the female high school dropout rate in the recognized villages is three times as high as that for other Arabs in Israel. Among Bedouin-Arab females in the unrecognized villages, 61% of 18-20 year-old females did not continue their high school education and 39% did not finish middle school. Obviously, the high dropout rates among females can be attributed somewhat to cultural restrictions on girls’ education. However, it is more likely to be due to the lack of middle and high schools in their own villages or in a nearby Bedouin locality. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of an infrastructure of paved roads between the unrecognized villages and other villages in the area, which makes commuting to high schools located in recognized villages practically impossible.
Table 2. Dropout rates among Arabs in Israel (%), 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dropped Out Before Finishing X Years of Schooling</th>
<th>Christian Males age 45 and above</th>
<th>Druze Males age 45 and above</th>
<th>Muslim Males age 45 and above</th>
<th>Bedouins, Recognized Villages Males 20 and below</th>
<th>Bedouins, Unrecognized Villages Males 20 and below</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: In each cell, the figures are relative to the relevant age group. For example, 14.2% of females in the unrecognized villages in the 14–20 age-group dropped out before finishing eight years of schooling, and 61.3% in the 18–20 age group dropped out before finishing twelve years of schooling. Source: Based on Galilee Society and Rikaz (2005).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abu-Bader and Gottlieb (2008) found that more than 75% of the population in the unrecognized villages live more than one kilometer from an elementary school and more than 63% live more than five kilometers away. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of access to public transportation. About 80% of the population in the unrecognized villages lives more than five kilometers from the nearest public transportation stop. They also found that the gap in dropout rates between recognized and unrecognized villages is entirely attributable to the lack of basic infrastructures in the latter.
To sum up, the absence of basic infrastructure in the unrecognized villages prevents more than half of Bedouin females from finishing high school and therefore from obtaining a higher education and participating in the labor force. This in turn has a long-term effect on household income and household poverty status. In the next section we discuss the relationship between education and employment in the Bedouin community, paying special attention to the importance of education for increasing female participation in the labor force.

**Employment trends**

Table 3 presents labor force participation rates and unemployment rates by Arab community group and gender for 2004. Participation rate in the labor force among Bedouin Arabs in southern Israel is 32%, compared to 47% for Arabs in the center, and 44% for Arabs in the north. The low rate among the general Arab population in Israel can be attributed largely to female participation rates. The highest female participation rate is in the center (26%); the lowest is among Bedouin-Arab females in the unrecognized villages (less than 7%). In the recognized villages, the rate is 10%. However, while the labor force participation rate among Bedouin females is particularly low, among Bedouin males it is very close to that for the general Israeli population (60.6%; see Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics for 2004): it is 55% in the recognized villages and 57% in the unrecognized villages. The data also shows that, whereas unemployment rates among Arabs in the north and center are close to those among the general Israeli population (9.5%; see Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics for 2004), unemployment rates are 22% among Bedouin males, 21% among females in the unrecognized villages and 13% among females in the recognized villages.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Indicators of the Arab labor market in Israel (%), 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Arabs in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Bedouins in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Muslims)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages (Muslims)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognized Villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males and Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Labor force = labor force participation rate; Employment = employment rate, calculated as percentage of the population of working age (15 years and older); Unemployment = unemployment rate.
Source: Abu-Bader and Gottlieb (2008:Table 8).

Abu-Bader and Gottlieb (2008) found that the major factors determining Bedouin female participation rates in the labor market include schooling, the number of small children at home, marital status, age and the level of basic infrastructure in the locality. They also found that the higher the education level of the female, the higher the likelihood of her participation in the labor force, but only for females with at least 12 years of schooling. The likelihood of a female with middle or elementary schooling to participate in the labor force is not significantly different from that of a female with no schooling at all. This finding is related to the absence of diverse job opportunities in the Bedouin localities and the fact that the only available jobs are ones that require higher education degrees. The absence of nearby daycare centers for children could also be a serious handicap.

Table 4 shows the distribution of work locations of Bedouin-Arab employees from the recognized and the unrecognized villages in 2004. Among all employed Bedouin-Arab women, 73% work inside their own village and 16% work in a nearby Bedouin-Arab village. The distribution differs between recognized and unrecognized villages: whereas 82% of the employed women in the recognized villages work inside their village, only 44% of employed women from the
unrecognized villages work in their own villages and the rest work in a nearby recognized village.

Table 4. Work location of Bedouins by gender (%), 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Location</th>
<th>All Bedouins</th>
<th>Recognized Villages</th>
<th>Unrecognized Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same locality</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab locality, same region</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish locality, same region</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab locality, different region</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish locality, different region</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Galilee Society and Rikaz (2005).

The majority of employed Bedouin-Arab women hold higher degrees from either a college or a university, which allows them to be employed in education and social services. As Table 5 shows, the probability that a higher educated female will be employed as a teacher is almost 100%.
Table 5. Distribution of jobs by gender and education degrees (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Employees</th>
<th>Employees with College Degree</th>
<th>Employees with Univ. Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those, middle or high school teachers</td>
<td><strong>44.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>88.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>81.8</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and freelance</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those, elementary school teachers</td>
<td><strong>77.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>72.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and services</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing, construction and other professional jobs</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-professional</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those, middle or high school teachers</td>
<td><strong>88.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and freelance</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those, kindergarten/elem. school teachers</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>94.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and services</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing, construction and other professional jobs</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-professional</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Galilee Society and Rikaz (2005).

In contrast to women, most Bedouin-Arab men work in the Jewish labor market. In 2004, about 55% of the employed Bedouin-Arab males were working in a Jewish town, mostly in the same region where they live (Table 4). Among these, 80.3% were employed in the low-tech sector with low-paying jobs: 21% worked in transportation, 9% in construction services and 22% in other non-professional jobs (the remainder worked in low-paying professional jobs). Less than 40% of employed men work in the same village where they live or in a nearby Bedouin-Arab village. As in the case of females, most locally employed males work in the education sector, while a small fraction of them work in jobs provided by local councils.

Among educated males, 83% of university degree holders and 73% of college degree holders work in the education sector (calculated as a weighted average of elementary, middle and high school teachers; see Table 5). Therefore, teaching can be thought of as a last resort for educated Arabs in general and Bedouin Arabs in
Education, employment and poverty among Bedouin Arabs in southern Israel

particular. This is because they are highly segregated from the Jewish labor market both geographically and occupationally. The consequences of this situation are that future generations of young people will not pursue a higher education. In turn, this will thwart the cultural changes that the Bedouin society needs to emerge from the vicious circle of poverty and to integrate into Israel’s modern economy.

Concluding remarks

We have described the relationship between educational attainment, employment and poverty among Bedouin Arabs in the recognized and unrecognized villages in southern Israel. In doing so, we utilized a survey that, for the first time, offers comprehensive socioeconomic data on the Bedouins living in the unrecognized villages. The data reveal that, over the past five decades, there has been impressive progress in formal education attainment, especially among females in the recognized villages, but lesser progress in the unrecognized villages. However, these achievements do not translate into a better socioeconomic status of their inhabitants, due to the lack of employment opportunities and basic infrastructure. The urbanization process initiated by the Israeli government in the late 1960s did not bring the promised improvement in the livelihood of Bedouin Arabs. The seven recognized villages are ranked lowest in the socioeconomic ranking of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. Poverty incidence among Bedouins is the highest in Israel, with 61% of the population in the recognized villages and 79% of those in unrecognized villages living in poverty in 2004. Unless serious measures are taken by the Israeli government to improve access to infrastructure, to attract private investment to Bedouin towns, to improve the quality of education and to reduce job discrimination, especially in the public sector for Arab academics, the vicious cycle of poverty will continue.

NOTES

1 Swirsky and Hasson (2005) describe Israel’s government policies toward the Bedouin Arabs since 1948 in detail.
2 The majority of females in this age group graduated from a teachers college. Only in the past decade have a notable number of Bedouin females started pursuing higher education in universities.
3 Most individuals in the 45+ age group were living in unrecognized villages at the time of their formal schooling, since the first planned town was established only in 1967. Thus, the schooling of individuals in this age group is similar. Any difference in schooling is due to current educational attainments.
See Abu-Rabia-Queder (2006) for further discussion of the reasons for the high dropout rate among female Bedouins.

REFERENCES


Human rights and education: The case of the Negev Bedouins

NORMA TARROW

ABSTRACT

This paper builds upon research conducted in 1977, presented at the WCCES World Congress in London (published in Bernstein-Tarrow, 1978), as well as subsequent research and publications in the field of human rights and human rights education. Based on the assumption (reinforced by numerous international agreements) that education is a human right and that education about human rights is their ultimate sanction, the paper analyzes the situation of the Bedouins of the Negev 30 years later, examining the relationship between demographic factors, socioeconomic factors and political issues, on the one hand, and human rights in general and the right to education in particular, on the other. In terms of Israel’s responsibilities as signatory to various international agreements, assuring equal rights to its citizens, consideration is given to such issues as educational objectives, budget, staffing, dropouts and the role of non-governmental organizations dedicated to ensuring the right to education and education about human rights.

Introduction

In 1977, at the WCCES World Congress in London, I presented the paper “Education of the Negev Bedouin in the context of radical socio-economic change,” later published as Bernstein-Tarrow (1978). Active involvement in the field of human rights education resulted in numerous articles in this field and in what has been considered seminal work on the relationship between education and human rights, based on the assumption:

…that human rights are held equally by all persons simply by virtue of being human; that they go beyond the basic rights of life and liberty to include cultural, economic, social and political rights essential for the maintenance of human dignity … and that education is not only encompassed within the concept of human rights, but is the ultimate...
sanction and guarantee of all the others (Ray and Bernstein-Tarrow, 1987:3).

Thus, not only is education a right “guaranteed” by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as subsequent covenants and conventions, but it is only through education that people become aware of their rights and empowered to insist on their fulfillment. In regard to the Negev Bedouins, any analysis of how they are progressing in their struggle for education as a human right must also consider how they are faring regarding related political, economic, social and cultural rights that impact education, as well as how they are using their knowledge of their rights in an effort to attain them.

The following provides a brief background of Bedouin history under different political regimes—Ottoman, British Mandate and State of Israel—with particular emphasis on the genesis and non-resolution of the “land issue.” It is clear that this issue relates to political, economic, social and cultural rights and, particularly, to the right to education. Comparing the situation today with that analyzed 30 years ago, I highlight both advances and lack of progress, leaving the reader to assess how well teachers, parents, administrators and politicians are doing in providing Bedouin children with the right to education.

Background

Bedouin history is too long for more than a brief overview. Most scholars agree that Bedouins have inhabited the Negev since at least the fifth century. Abu-Rabia identified three known migration periods into this area, in the seventh, ninth and 16th–17th centuries. The last period witnessed tribal clashes establishing power and territorial rights (Abu-Rabia, 2006). Until the late 1860s, Ottoman rulers paid scant attention to the Bedouins. With the construction of the Suez Canal (1858–1869), Ottoman authorities took measures to impose order in the Negev, intervening in internal disorders, establishing an economic and administrative center (including a post office and livestock market) on the site of Byzantine Beer Sheva, appointing an important sheikh as mayor and building an elaborate mosque, a water system and the first school for Bedouin children, in which Turkish was the language of instruction, and which lasted until the end of World War I (Abu-Rabia, 2001).

A critical legacy of the Ottoman era that has socioeconomic, political and educational ramifications to the present day, originates in 1858 Turkish law defining as mawat (dead land) uncultivated land that did not belong to anyone and was located more than 1.5 miles from the nearest government-planned township (Falaf, 1989). This constraint, combined with Bedouin tradition, kept most Bedouins from registering their land during the Ottoman era, lasting until 1917. During the subsequent Mandate era (1917–1948):
The Bedouin did not register their land in Tabu (the Land Registry Office) for the following reasons: (1) fear of the burden of government taxes; (2) aversion to publicizing details about private property; and (3) failure to see the need to record land on a piece of paper as proof of ownership. In that period, proof was, literally, through the sword (Abu-Rabia, 2002:205).

In this same period, the Jewish National Fund (established in 1901) actively pursued a policy of land purchases in Palestine, largely from absentee Arab landowners, for settlement of the Jewish population during the remaining years of Ottoman rule and throughout the era of the British Mandate. In 1947, the United Nations recommended partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, a plan rejected by Arab leaders. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and its victory over five invading Arab armies in what Israel calls the War of Independence marked the beginning of events referred to by the Arabs as Al Naqba (the Catastrophe) and the development of two totally different (Israeli/Arab) narratives. For the Arab population as a whole, this abrupt change in status from a majority with national aspirations in mandatory Palestine to one of a dominated minority within the Israeli state was, and remains, traumatic.

In 1948, the Bedouins constituted the vast majority of the population of the Negev (Naqab in Arabic), numbering about 60,000–100,000 people. After the war, there were only about 11,000 Bedouin Arabs left in the Negev–Naqab, the rest having left or been expelled to Jordan and Egypt (the Gaza Strip and Sinai). Those who remained were divided into 19 tribes, whose heads were recognized as sheikhs by the government (Abu-Rabia, 2002). Twelve of these tribes were immediately removed to a “reservation” where, under military governance, there was large-scale confinement to the designated area.

Abu-Saad points out the imposition of curfews, special permits required to leave villages, physical and administrative separation of Jews and Arabs, and a separate military court system with no right of appeal. He describes control techniques including lack of a representative share in policy-making and planning, dependence on the Jewish sector for employment, and co-optation of Bedouin elite who determined appointment of teachers, as well as access to secondary education, colleges and universities. He claims that, although the military government was dismantled in 1966, the government developed other means of maintaining a strategy of segmentation, dependence and co-optation (through the creation of urban settlements), thus perpetuating the legacy of the military government (Abu-Saad, 2006b).

Confined to the above-described military controlled area from 1948 to 1966, followed by removal (starting in 1968) to government-planned urban settlements, the Negev Bedouins experienced the impact of migration in a most powerful way: without actually leaving the land they considered to be theirs, they lived in a “new” country surrounded by an alien culture, with borders and boundaries defined by the
new inhabitants. Thus, “they arrived in a new and strange land without the physical journey” (Givati-Teerling, 2007: Introduction).

As those who refused to move off what they considered to be their land continued living in what the government refers to as “unrecognized villages,” they were not—and still are not—entitled to basic services. The provision of services internationally understood as essential for health and education (such as paved roads, running water, garbage collection, sewage, medical clinics and schools) is contingent upon relinquishing claims to land and acceding to a policy of moving into government-planned settlements. Currently, it is illegal to build permanent structures in “unrecognized villages”; those who do so risk heavy fines and home demolitions. It is also illegal to graze flocks or plant crops on land that the Bedouins consider theirs, while the state regards them as interlopers on government land and thus justifies crop destruction through chemical spraying. As will be seen below, this affects more than 40% of the current Bedouin population. The rest of the Bedouin population of the Negev resides in the seven government-planned “permanent settlements” (or “recognized villages”) built from the late 1960s to the 1990s.

From 1967 to the present, the government has been attempting to move the Bedouins into these planned settlements with the stated objective of providing municipal services—including education. Excluded from consultation, 40%-60% of Bedouin families affected have resisted this policy, claiming its objective is to secure land rather than supply services. Factors that have had a major impact on the Bedouin community’s right to education include:

- educational policies towards Arab citizens in general
- a slow-to-develop interest in education on the part of the Bedouin community
- land acquisition policies allocating social and educational services only to those Bedouins willing to relinquish land claims (with what they view as minimal compensation) and relocate into concentrated urban settlements
- demographic issues: keeping up with a population that doubles every 13–15 years
- geographic issues: providing services over a vast geographic area containing widely scattered small settlements.

Although the government claims these permanent (government-planned) settlements were formed in order to facilitate provision of services, such as medical clinics and education, to what had been a nomadic or semi-nomadic population, these urban settlements were created without involvement of the Bedouins themselves, and the outcome, according to Bedouin civic organizations, has not been positive. The towns were planned as urban centers, giving little or no consideration to the traditional Bedouin-Arab way of life. Consequently, the forced urbanization of this population has been disastrous: unemployment is high, and the Bedouin-Arab
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towns rank among the country’s ten poorest municipalities (Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, 2006:7).¹

In January 2004, the Abu Basma Regional Council was established by government decision. It operates under the direction of a Jewish former director of the Interior ministry with three Bedouins in administrative positions. It has responsibility for both recognized and unrecognized villages. Currently, there are nine newly recognized settlements (30,000 people),² with two more about to be recognized. Including the 30–45 still unrecognized settlements, there are about 80,000 people under their jurisdiction. The original seven government-planned townships³ operate independently, outside of their jurisdiction, and are responsible for social services including (since 2006) all educational services.

Demographic and socioeconomic factors

In 2008, the population estimates of Bedouins in the Negev vary between 150,000 and 200,000, doubling every 13–15 years (depending on which set of statistics one consults.) The birth rate of Negev Bedouin is one of highest in the world, with 56% of the current population under age 14! According to Abu-Saad, the Bedouins have twice as many children and half the per capita income than the Jewish sector, with a population growth rate of 4.5% (Abu-Saad, 1997) or 5.6% (Abu-Saad, 1995). Taking into account the rate of population growth, the forecast for the increase of the Bedouin population by the year 2020 is well over 350,000. Most significant for those concerned with educational issues is that almost half the current population is in the cohort of preschool and elementary school children (47% under the age of 12). Another 11% are in the age cohort of secondary school. Obviously, the educational system must absorb large numbers of students (figures supplied by Municipality of Rahat, 2007).

Based on information from the Abu Basma Regional Council (in 2006), more than 66% of the population is between the ages of 0–18, approximately 60% of the population lives in the existing government-planned townships and over 60% of Bedouin families live below the poverty line. Clearly, the large number of preschool and school-age children and low socioeconomic status has a direct impact on education. Table 1 compares the socioeconomic ranking of the government-planned urban Bedouin settlements to Jewish towns in the same geographic area. There can be little doubt that the government-planned townships created (as claimed by Israeli authorities) to better serve the Bedouin population are at the bottom of the scale. If statistics for the unrecognized settlements were available, they would, of course, fall far below those of the urban government-planned townships.
Table 1. Socioeconomic ranking of Bedouin and neighboring Jewish localities in the Negev

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bedouin Towns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ksayifa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel-Sheva</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahat</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’rara Banegev</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segev-Shalom</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laqiya</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hura</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Towns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimona</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arad</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer Sheva</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metar</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lehavim</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omer</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1 denotes the lowest ranking among the 198 local authorities in Israel.

Givati-Teerling claims that 65% of the Bedouin population live below the poverty line and that forced lifestyle changes have impacted a variety of aspects of Bedouin society, including education:

Through forced alteration of their traditional lifestyle and the unnatural pace of sedentarization, the Bedouin community lost power over their traditional spaces, livelihood and social structure. The setting in which their culture had been rooted for the entire depth of their collective memory was destroyed. The changes have led to instabilities in social structure, economic patterns, political dimensions and gender roles—forces which have had their impact on attitudes towards education and its role within Bedouin society (Givati-Teerling, 2007:2).
Abu-Saad (2001) points out that, despite the government’s stated aim of improving and modernizing the lives of the Negev Bedouins through its resettlement program, the Negev Bedouin community has the lowest socioeconomic status in Israel. Unemployment is estimated at 55% of the work force (30% men and 80% women), and those who are employed are in low-status, low-paying occupations. All sources agree that the Bedouin community has the lowest socioeconomic status of any group of Israeli citizens.

The Israeli government, however (in 2006), claims that they have allocated more than NIS 1 billion to improve the infrastructure of existing Bedouin towns. The largest town (Rahat) is to be doubled in size with 10,000 new housing units and land allocated for women’s employment centers, parks and playgrounds. Further, “All planning and implementation are in cooperation and coordination with the local Bedouin population … represented by Bedouin members of the local and district committees for planning and construction” (“The Beduin of the Negev,” 2006:4).

Current political issues

The land

Abu-Saad, Lithwick and Abu-Saad (2004) identify the issues of land and urbanization as the most profound source of ill will between the Negev Bedouins and the Israeli state. The government, seeking land for settlement, security and military purposes, has attempted to buy most of the land claimed by the Bedouins—unsuccessfully, for the most part, due to what the latter view as unfair terms.

Israel argues that all desert land belongs to the state by virtue of the mawat (dead) category of land title introduced in 1858 by the Ottoman authorities. Israel will only acknowledge land ownership in the Negev if a landowner can present a document issued by the British Mandate administration in 1921, a period when hardly any Bedouins registered their landholdings due to traditional reluctance to cooperate with external authorities, fear of taxation and lack of concern that anyone would pose a challenge to their continued use of the land (Koeller, 2006:39).

Today, most of the land in the Negev is held by the Israel Lands Authority (ILA). Of the approximately 2 million dunams cultivated by the Bedouins before the establishment of Israel, the ILA currently holds 1.82 million. After the repeal of military rule in 1966, most Bedouins continued to live in the former closed area. Some tried to use their original land for grazing, coming into conflict with the authorities. Further conflict occurred after the peace treaty with Egypt and withdrawal from Sinai, in reference to the site chosen for construction of new alternative airfields on what the Bedouins consider their land. As noted by Maddrell, such conflict is not unique to the Bedouin-Israeli situation:
Conflict and great hardship is frequently caused to minorities and indigenous peoples by the unilateral imposition of a “modern” legal framework often demanding documentation that previously had been unnecessary and therefore non-existent (Maddrell, 1990:1).

The government’s viewpoint is that a comparison of Bedouins in Israel to that in Arab countries indicates that Israeli Bedouins “enjoy conditions that their brethren lack, mainly in two areas: welfare and land ownership” (Ben-David, n.d.:4). Further, in the 1970s, “Israel let the Negev Bedouin register their land claims and issued certificates as to the size of the tracts claimed. These certificates served as the basis for the ‘right of possession’ later granted by the government” (Ben-David, n.d.:4).

However, an alternative view is expressed by civil rights activists and Bedouin leaders:

…the policy of establishing “planned Bedouin townships” evolved as a step serving the state objective of gaining control of Bedouin land rather than “modernizing” or “westernizing” the Bedouin community. The situation regarding the provision of basic services in the existing townships is highly unsatisfactory and in no way comparable to that in any of the neighboring Jewish towns in the region (Falah, 1989:88).

For the Bedouins, whose livelihoods traditionally derived from livestock and agriculture, the disregard of requests for the creation of agricultural settlements similar to those established for the Jewish community and their relocation into strictly urban settlements was especially traumatic. This was compounded by the failure to receive adequate infrastructure—local industry, roads or public transport to areas of employment, banks, community centers and adequate social services:

In their gradual transition from a nomadic to a more urban lifestyle, [the Bedouins] have faced major challenges. Their communities have high rates of crime and unemployment. Bedouins have considerably worse health and education services than their fellow Israelis. And their infrastructure can be appalling or even nonexistent, especially in “unrecognized villages.”… (“Unrecognized villages” is the term used for Bedouin areas that Israeli authorities do not officially acknowledge. Israel does not provide these areas with basic services, hoping that families will agree to move to one of the “recognized” Bedouin villages and towns in the Negev.) (Kraft, 2007:18).

As one researcher points out, there has been overwhelming inequality in every sphere—economic, social, cultural and educational:
There is simply no doubt whatever that the guilt for the failure of urbanization belongs squarely with the governments of Israel present and past. The programs they have prepared and continue to prepare do not reflect the needs or interests of the Bedouin community. The Bedouin have had no part whatever in the planning process. Moreover, government commitments to redress distortions in priorities and funding, and government promises to end systematic discrimination, have for the most part not been honored (Abu-Saad, 2003:7).

**Equality(?) as citizens**

Swirski and Hasson note that there are at least three areas in which Bedouins living in unrecognized villages are treated differently from all of Israel’s other citizens:

- Relations between them and the state are not based on a direct link, but mediated through special institutions.
- They do not enjoy independent local government institutions.
- As they do not have an official address, they lack the right to vote, to run for local office or to register a precise address on their ID card.

Moreover, they exist in a kind of legal-political bubble: they are forbidden to erect permanent housing, excluded from local government and prevented from receiving full government services or buying/selling a home. In addition, those living in government-planned townships (recognized villages) exist in a political-economic bubble, deprived of adequate infrastructure and employment opportunities and excluded from government development plans (Swirski and Hasson, 2006).

As a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Israel is required to submit regular reports to the UN committee charged with monitoring the parties’ adherence to its principles. Responding to the report submitted by Israel in 2003, the UN committee response stated:

The Committee continues to be concerned about the situation of Bedouins residing in Israel, and in particular those living in villages that are still unrecognized (1998 concluding observations, para. 28). Despite measures by the State party to close the gap between the living conditions of Jews and Bedouins in the Negev, the quality of living and housing conditions of the Bedouins continue to be significantly lower, with limited or no access to water, electricity and sanitation. Moreover, they continue to be subjected on a regular basis to land confiscations, house demolitions, fines for building “illegally,” destruction of agricultural crops, fields and trees, and systematic harassment and persecution by the Green Patrol, in order to force Bedouins to resettle in “townships.” The Committee is also concerned that the present
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compensation scheme for Bedouins who agree to resettle in “townships” is inadequate (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2003:Section D, para. 27).

Also responding to Israel’s report, a coalition of the Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages⁵ and the Arab Human Rights Association⁶ point out that 85% of the Negev is currently zoned as off-limits to the Bedouins, preventing them from practicing their traditional pastoral lifestyle or economy. The denial of access to water, combined with the policy of crop destruction (on lands defined by Israel as belonging to the state) and the demolition of houses built without permits (as no permits are available in unrecognized settlements), have condemned the Bedouins to poverty, hunger and unemployment—which are largely invisible, as the unrecognized villages are not registered in government statistics (Arab Association for Human Rights, 2003).

According to a 2006 report filed by a coalition including the Regional Council for the Arab Unrecognized Villages of the Negev and Physicians for Human Rights⁷:

The State report misrepresents the real State policies towards the Arab-Bedouin minority in the Negev-Naqab. Despite the attempts to present a considerable improvement in the elimination of racial discrimination against members of this group, State policies, and mainly those regarding the social, economic and cultural rights (protected by Article 5 of the ICERD), remain racially discriminatory (Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, 2006:5).

The right to education

Regarding the right to education, Bedouin children should be protected by a variety of international agreements, as well as by Israeli legislation. One author enumerates some of these official documents that should apply to Bedouin as well as Jewish citizens of Israel:

So, Israel has brought “civilization” to the Middle East with the Compulsory Education Law (1949) mandating the right of every Israeli child to 12 years of free education, and the State Education Law (1953). Israel also has instituted provisions under the Principle of Equality, the Special Education Law (1988), and the Pupils’ Rights Law (2000). Further, Israel has signed a host of international laws and treaties guaranteeing the universally recognized right to education, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on

Israel has been singled out repeatedly by various United Nations agencies for not living up to the spirit or the letter of international agreements. The Israeli Ambassador to the UN, however, commenting on the disregard of human rights violations on the part of numerous signatories to these documents (some of whom are represented on the Human Rights Council), noted that:

Since inception, the Council has focused primarily on Israel, subjecting it to 12 discriminatory, one-sided resolutions and three special sessions. This reflects nothing less than the immoral, automatic majority enjoyed by some (Statement by Ambassador Dan Gillerman, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, Third Committee, Agenda Item 65, Report of the Human Rights Council, November 6, 2007).

How have these international agreements affected the Bedouin children of the unrecognized villages in the Negev? Abu-Saad claims: “Government officials have used the education system as a means of control to force Bedouin Arabs living in the unrecognized villages to move to the failed permanent towns set up for them” (Abu-Saad, 2004a:1). Moreover,

According to the law, the government is responsible for providing Bedouin children with education; however, it has subordinated this responsibility to its goal of concentrating the Bedouin Arab population in designated settlements (Abu-Saad, 2003:113).

The Bedouin Education Authority (BEA) was established in 1981 to enforce compulsory education law in the unrecognized villages. It was charged with setting up, building and maintaining schools; assuring appropriate and adequate teaching personnel; providing furniture, equipment, water and teaching materials; and handling student registration (Swirski and Hasson, 2006). In 1998, a special Investigatory Committee on the Bedouin Educational System in the Negev presented a report requested by the Minister of Education and submitted to the General Director of that ministry. The committee’s main recommendation was that Bedouin education should receive equitable material and human resources—modern facilities, a full range of educational services, special programs, identification of
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gifted and disabled children and provision of appropriate programs for them. Thus, the government was called upon to:

- recognize the needs of unrecognized settlements and build facilities
- train and increase the number of qualified teachers
- provide free preschool education for children aged 3–4
- develop and implement programs for parents
- address the dropout issue (consider separate education for girls and boys; hire truant officers, counselors and social workers)
- update curriculum and textbooks, making them more relevant
- institute special enrichment programs
- provide technical and agricultural education
- develop stronger ties between schools and the community and enhance parental involvement
- include Bedouin educators and community leaders in the southern district Bedouin Educational Authority (Katz et al., 1998).

Based on the review of extensive literature that has accumulated, statistics available from various sources, field work including school visitations and interviews conducted in 2007, I can conclude that there has been progress on the first two items. As noted below, the newly formed Abu Basma Regional Council has begun to respond further, to some degree, to the needs of the unrecognized settlements. As of 2006, the Council has assumed responsibility for education in all areas under its jurisdiction and has initiated a school-building program. Local teachers are being prepared at two teacher-training institutions in the Negev, although population growth still requires the employment of large numbers of Arab teachers from the north.

The Ministry of Education now has a special department for Bedouin education (apart from the department dealing with Arab education in general) and has appointed a Bedouin (from the north) as its director. It is clear that, while the number of schools, classrooms, schoolchildren, teachers and others serving these children has grown exponentially, so has the population of the region (from an estimated 11,000 in 1948 to 150,000–200,000 today). Thus, the growth in provision of facilities and services merely reflects growth in the school population. The authorities are struggling to keep up with the population growth, in an era when budgetary constraints have led to a strike in the Jewish sector that closed all secondary schools for more than six weeks of the 2007–2008 school year. According to one educator:

In recent years, there has been a huge expansion of the educational system in response to an approximately 6% growth in birth rate. In each village, there needs to be a new school every year. About 60%–70% of the population is under age 16. The system simply cannot cope with such growth (Interview, College President, June 2007).
Yet, “while accessibility to education has improved greatly over the last 30 years for Negev Bedouin children (and especially for girls), the quality and success rate of the Bedouin schools remains very low” (Abu-Saad, 1997:35). Abu-Saad cites the main problems as unqualified teachers, weak links between school and community, a curriculum that is irrelevant to students and the “barrier” of the bagrut (matriculation examination), as the low rate of success eliminates incentive for completing high school.

The Center for Bedouin Studies at Ben Gurion University estimated in 2004 that one third of the classrooms in the seven then recognized localities for Bedouins in the Negev were unsound. Moreover, in both recognized and unrecognized villages, there were fewer libraries, sports and recreational facilities, laboratories, health agencies and social service agencies than in the Jewish sector. Many unrecognized villages lack a school of any kind, and, according to some reports, more than 6,000 Bedouin children must travel dozens of kilometers to school every day. Long travel distances from the local village to the nearest educational institutions tends to disparately impact the ability of girls to attend school (Coursen-Neff, 2004).

As of 2007, the Director of the Abu Basma Regional Council points out that nine of the formerly “unrecognized” settlements have been “recognized,” and educational facilities have been provided in all of them. Two additional settlements are about to be recognized and provided with educational facilities, with more to follow. Since education was added to its responsibilities in 2006, the Council is now in charge of 24 elementary schools with a population of 12,117 students, 122 preschools and kindergartens serving 3,650 children, and two high schools serving 305 pupils in grades 9–12. According to the Director, transportation is provided for 20,550 pupils within the area.

Based on fieldwork in 2007, there is evidence of current and future building. Three schools have been completed, including a state-of-the art, two-story high school that opened in 2007 in the newly recognized settlement of Abu Krinat. Its electricity is supplied by generator, water is available on site and a road is under construction. (A visit to this school confirmed the existence of computer and science laboratories, but these were still empty of equipment at the time.) Another high school about to open will further supplement the existing high schools in the original government-planned settlements of Rahat, Laqiya and Tel-Sheva.

To overcome the reluctance of fathers to allow girls to attend secondary school, the technological high school in Hura offers an option of single-sex facilities. The school (grades 9–12) employs 25 certified teachers, all teaching the subjects they were trained for, according to the Director. More than half the staff members are Bedouins; the rest are Arabs from the north. Curriculum includes options for nursing and electrical professions. The school has computers, a laboratory for mechanics and automobile repair and a library. It also has a program for children with special needs (primarily in reading and writing) in a separate building. According to the Director, while the top students want to go on to university to prepare for careers in high-tech
industries, the psychometric examination (the Israeli equivalent of the SAT, determining eligibility to specific universities and programs) appears to be even more of a barrier than the bagrut (matriculation exam).

Israel’s formal educational objectives (established in 1949 and amended in 2000) continue to emphasize Jewish values, history and culture, with no parallel aims for the education of Arabs in Israel based on their heritage (Abu-Saad, 2006a). Alienation of students is the norm as, within the schools, there is little attention to their own (Bedouin/Arab) culture (Abu-Saad, 2005). Confirming that disregard of the Palestinian-Arab narrative lessens the relevance of educational experience for all Arab students, Brous notes that most of what Bedouin youngsters learn in school will never be of real use to them. “Despite extensive High Court rulings, reports from the State comptroller, media exposés and the continuous work of NGO pressure groups, Israel has failed to change its ethnocratic educational system” (Brous, 2005:260).

Abu-Saad highlights discrimination in budget allocation from the Ministry of Education, which spends more per child in the Jewish sector even though these schools receive additional state and state-sponsored private funding for special programs. He claims that five-year plans of the Ministry of Education designed to correct imbalances were never fully implemented and, in any case, would not be enough to equalize the gap between the two systems without some form of affirmative action (Abu-Saad, 2004b). While there are Bedouin school administrators, in 1995 there were no Bedouin educators involved in policy, curriculum, resource management and/or budgetary decisions at the level of the Ministry of Education (Abu-Saad, 1995). Recently, however, a special department for Bedouin Education was formed, under the direction of Dr. Muhmad Al-Haip, a Bedouin from the north.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Israel regularly submits status reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In its 2004 report, the government acknowledged that it spends about 60% of what it spends on Jewish education on the education of Arab children. In addition, at every grade level, fewer teaching hours are allocated for Arab children. The teacher–pupil ratio is significantly lower in Jewish schools, and the number of kindergarten children per full-time teacher in Arab schools (39:3) was double that in Jewish kindergartens (19:8). Data show that each year officials at the Ministry of Education consciously decided to allocate core education funds unequally, and each year the Knesset approved a budget that makes this unequal allocation explicit (Coursen-Neff, 2004:750).

Keeping children in school is one of the biggest problems facing educators in the Bedouin sector. Yet counselors trained to deal with students who have dropped out or are about to drop out of school (and their parents) are rare in the Bedouin community. According to Coursen-Neff:
In January 2005, the Supreme Court found that counselor positions were assigned unequally to Bedouin towns in the Negev and that the difference in dropout rate between Jewish and Bedouin pupils made that inequity even more severe (2004:785).

**Education about human rights: The role of non-governmental and other organizations**

Frustrated by the slow pace of change within the system and empowered by educated members of their own community, numerous non-governmental organizations have arisen in recent years to educate the Bedouins about their rights and to press for action in terms of political economic, sociocultural and educational rights. Comprised of activists in both Bedouin and Jewish sectors, these groups have utilized the media, demonstrations—including a tent pitched in front of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament)—and legal briefs through the judicial system of Israel. The following is a brief list.

- On an international level, Teachers Without Borders attempts to “bridge the education divide with programs that focus on women’s leadership, after-school programming, teacher training and literacy,” while the Bernard Van Leer Foundation has several projects through the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development. Their Parents as Partners program attempts to bridge the cultural distances between the home and the formal institutions by setting up mother’s groups and cooperative preschools, using culturally appropriate learning materials and run by Bedouin women trained as counselors. They have also piloted community playgrounds in unrecognized villages.

- Physicians for Human Rights (Israel branch) is actively engaged in a campaign to connect all residents of unrecognized villages to a water supply. They point out the direct link between water accessibility and infant mortality, whose rate among the Bedouins of the Negev is the highest in Israel. They note that 80,000 citizens are denied their basic right to water and that the State of Israel is using this right as a weapon against its citizens to further state policies related to land acquisition. They ask that the Ministry of Health recognize the right to water as an inseparable part of the right to health and initiate actions with the agencies responsible for it by law. The residents of unrecognized villages also lack sewage lines, garbage collection services, electricity, roads, health services and educational services. Physicians for Human Rights has also
been active in demanding additional medical clinics for the unrecognized villages.

- In 2001, the Adalah organization, together with seven villages and non-governmental organizations, petitioned the Supreme Court about the denial of their right to water. The court rejected the petition, adopting the policy of the state, which refuses to recognize the villages as a collective entity. Thus, the villages are still not connected to water—or electricity. The electric company refuses to officially hook the unrecognized villages to the grid. Therefore, there is no street lighting and no way to refrigerate food or medicine without individual generators.

- Shatil (The New Israel Fund’s Empowerment and Training Center for Social Change Organizations in Israel) supports a Bedouin education campaign to promote preschool education and mobile library services, to improve inadequate facilities, to empower Bedouin women, and to address the high dropout rates of Bedouin secondary school students. The Coalition for the Advancement of Bedouin Education, including civil rights activists from over 30 organizations, was brought together by Shatil. Utilizing an effective combination of advocacy, media and community activism, they have achieved the opening of new schools, physical improvements to existing facilities and new allocations of millions of shekels. In 2006, Shatil’s Umbrella Forum for Bedouin Education in the Negev convinced the High Court of Justice to demand new and safer roads to schools in the Negev’s unrecognized villages. While cosmetic changes were made, forum coordinator Dr. Awad Abu Freih claims that nothing was really changed. In November 2007, the forum organized a strike, closing ten schools representing 9,000 students in unrecognized Bedouin villages, to protest the death of a child run over by a school bus on a narrow road.

- The Adva Center makes detailed analyses of the implications of the government’s budget for the various sectors of Israeli society, assists other organizations promoting social change and publishes extensive reports dealing with inequalities.

- The Parents Committees of Five Schools and Umbrella Forum for Bedouin Education has filed formal legal appeals and has gained immediate repair of safety hazards in five schools, as well as a timetable for fulfilling other demands, including a new elementary school in Ksayifa.

- Mosawa: The Advocacy Center for Arab Palestinian Citizens of Israel strives to effect change in Israeli government policies and practices that appear to discriminate against Arab citizens.
primary area of activity has been budget analysis and identification of inequities as they are expressed in terms of budget allocations.

- The Association of Bedouin Women to Promote Education works to enable women to access and complete higher education. At the village level they have organized mobile libraries, tutoring and textbook exchange.
- Gush Shalom is working through the judicial system to fight crop destruction.
- In addition to these non-governmental organizations, a central goal of the Center for Bedouin Studies and Development (established at Ben Gurion University in 1997) has been to increase the number of Bedouin university students and graduates, with an emphasis on women. During the 1990s, there was a significant rise in the number of male Bedouin students and graduates. By the end of the 1990s, the number of female graduates had increased to 22, primarily as a result of a (privately funded) pilot intervention program that began in 1993 and provided financial and academic support to a small group of female Bedouin students. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of female Bedouins with Bachelors degrees jumped to 112, representing a more than sixfold increase from the number of graduates in the previous five years (Abu-Saad, 2007:1).

**Education as the ultimate sanction of human rights: Conclusions**

What is the situation in regard to human rights for the Negev Bedouin citizens of Israel? In particular, is the right to education being implemented as fully as possible?

Certainly, the newly implemented Regional Council is attempting to build schools in a “better-late-than-never” situation. Yet, this is still being carried out under a Jewish administrator with very limited participation of the Bedouins themselves. Considering the inattention to provision of schools for children of unrecognized villages over the last decades, compounded by the Bedouins having one of the highest birth rates in the world, there is difficulty in keeping up with the needed physical space. Schools still appear to be inadequately supplied with libraries, playgrounds, computers and science equipment.

There is still a great need to deal with the problem of a society that has not had a tradition of taking charge of education, but rather tends to accept educational services that have come from authorities—whether Ottoman, British and now Israeli. While Jewish municipalities and parents are supplementing the budget of the Ministry of Education, to provide enrichment education and materials, this has not been inherent in Arab culture in general, nor in Bedouin culture in particular. It must be remembered that this society has only recently begun to value formal education.
and this is only true for some parts of the society and not yet universally valued for girls.

In terms of economic and social rights, it is clear that what is needed is some kind of affirmative action program providing greater, rather than lesser, budgetary allocations to this sector, combined with community and parent programs to encourage participation and responsibility. Concurrently, there is a need for programs to build the economic self-sufficiency of Bedouin men and women, i.e., provision of employment opportunities, transportation to employment centers, opportunities for those who wish to continue their agricultural/pastoral lifestyles, vocational training for youth and the like. In the words of Abu-Saad:

To fulfill this responsibility vis-à-vis the Bedouin community would require re-visioning development ideology that not only includes the Bedouin, but that the Bedouin are partners in shaping, that entitles them to the use of land and other national resources on a basis equitable to that of all other citizens of the state, and that provides them with multiple educational and development opportunities, including modern pastoralism and agriculture (Abu-Saad, 2006a:156).

Israeli authorities are attempting to meet the problem of shortage of teachers. Yet, there are still too many teachers from the north, who view their positions as temporary, and in some cases do not invest in improving conditions in their schools or with the community, and even have been demeaning of Bedouin parents. They could certainly benefit from programs to build knowledge and respect for Bedouin tradition, history and culture and should be encouraged to connect with parents and the community.

Educational objectives, curriculum and textbooks continue to reflect the government aim to build loyalty to the State of Israel. At every level, however, all three are alienating Bedouin students and need to be revised to also respect and reflect the Arab/Bedouin narrative. As Abu-Saad states:

One can only question whether this situation of discriminatory and antagonistic separation is, indeed, in the long-term interests of the state, which, notwithstanding its ideology and mythology, is in fact a multi-ethnic state, with an indigenous minority that makes up nearly one fifth of the population…. [A]s the sense of bitterness and alienation grows within the Palestinian Arab population, so does the threat of political and civil instability (Abu-Saad, 2004b:124).

The State of Israel passed a Compulsory Education Law in the earliest period of its existence. Cognizant of the difference in valuing formal education between Israeli Jewish and Bedouin societies, the authorities must still address issues of
erratic attendance and dropouts through provision of parent education and involvement, school counselors, truant officers and adequate special education services to ensure the right of these children to education. Further, attention must be directed at the culturally discriminatory entrance examinations and financial difficulties that act as a barrier for many Bedouin youth to continue into higher education.

Most important is the relationship between the right to education and the conflict between the government and the Bedouins over land ownership and use. There must be an end to the practice of home demolition and crop destruction, denying Bedouin citizens the right to adequate housing and means of earning a living. However this is ultimately resolved, children of unrecognized settlements must not be held hostage to the land issue. Every unrecognized settlement should be provided with access to electricity, water and transportation, which would honor their rights to employment, health and a reasonable standard of living. Every unrecognized settlement should be provided with adequate facilities, materials and staff for elementary education and transportation to appropriate facilities for secondary and post-secondary education. Furthermore, the Bedouin community must be helped to deal with issues and practices that contribute to their remaining at the bottom of every socioeconomic index—such as unbridled population growth, polygamy, unemployment and violence.

Finally, all of the above must be carried out with the involvement of locally respected leaders, not with a few token and often co-opted government-approved and appointed Bedouin from the “right” tribe or with the “right” connections. Only then will education as a human right be fully implemented.

Education about human rights needs to reach into the Bedouin community from preschool through post-secondary, community, adult and parent education programs. Human rights education requires a climate respectful of human rights in schools, communities and in interaction with authorities, as well as knowledge of rights “guaranteed” by national legislation and international agreements. Clearly, any meaningful advancement will require assisting the Bedouin community in utilizing all appropriate means to achieve these rights.

NOTES

1 The forum (Dukium in Hebrew) promotes understanding and cooperation between the Jewish and Arab populations of the Negev.
2 According to the Abu Basma Regional Council, the nine recognized settlements are: El Sayed, Tarabin, Abu Krinat, Kaser a Ser, Drigat, Abu Kaf, Beer Adag, Al Arash and Mariet.
3 The permanent government-planned settlements are: Tel-Sheva, A’rara-Banegev, Laqiya, Rahat, Hura, Segev-Shalom and Ksayifa.
A dunam is an area of measurement used in Ottoman lands and equal to 1000m².

The Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages (also known as the Regional Council for the Arab Unrecognized Villages of the Negev) is a non-governmental community organization representing residents of 45 unrecognized villages in the Negev. These villages contain 500–5,000 inhabitants, for a total of 70,000 people ineligible for municipal services and representation.

The Arab Human Rights Association is a non-governmental organization in the service of human rights for the Palestinian minority in Israel.

Physicians for Human Rights is an organization of health professionals dedicated to eradicating abuses of human rights.

REFERENCES


The Hebrew online media’s treatment of Arab citizens in the Negev

MUSTAF A KABHA

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the online Hebrew media’s representation of the Arab population of the Negev. It analyzes the content of articles relating to this population and the online responses of those who read these reports. I argue that the Arab population of the Negev suffers from double discrimination in the media due, on the one hand, to their exclusion from media coverage in general and, on the other hand, to the inflammatory stereotypes presented to Israeli media consumers when they are covered in the media. Furthermore, I show how positive, or even neutral, media attention is rarely given the Arab population of the Negev; instead, the media coverage of this group is characterized primarily by prejudice, stigmas and generalizations. This distracts the debate from the essence of the problem (the issue of lands) between the Negev Arabs and the government and adds new layers to the crisis by exaggerating the threat posed by this population.

Introduction

In his examination of the coverage of weaker political groups by major media outlets, Gadi Wolfsfeld develops the idea of “entrance through the back door.” According to him, minority groups attract mainstream media limelight through irregular conduct, while representatives of majority groups get into the media through the main entrance by normative modes of behavior (Wolfsfeld, 1997:1).

This idea sheds light on the style of coverage received in Israel by Arab society (considered a marginalized sector in terms of mainstream media reporting) in general, and by the Arab population of the Negev in particular. It is interesting that, when these minority groups do enter the realm of mainstream media, and especially when their leaders appear, they are almost invariably forced to play by the rules of the majority in terms of presentation and discussion. It is the representatives of the majority who usually set the parameters of the presentation, its terminology and even the way the discussion between the representative of the minority group and
the interviewer is conducted. The interviewee finds himself suddenly speaking the language of the majority and representing its interests.

The root of this is perhaps that one way the hegemony tries to preserve its position is by taming different or dissenting voices. It should be noted that sometimes the voices of minorities and marginalized groups are broadcast in a deliberate attempt to weaken them. For example, the mainstream hegemony chooses to give to air time to those representatives of the minority who could be considered watered-down archetypes, collaborators and “pet” public figures. This effectively silences the sectors demanding fair representation and weakens the voices of subversive groups by “taming them” to toe the line of the dominant ideology.

In recent years, a number of studies have examined the coverage received by Arab citizens of Israel in the Hebrew-language media outlets, especially on television (see, e.g., Avraham, Pirset, and Elefant-Lefler, 2004). The research has shown that this population group’s access of media attention is indeed via the back door. Were it not for conduct which the representatives of the majority consider unacceptable or even seditious, it can be assumed that they would probably not appear in the mainstream media at all.

The Hebrew-language media’s coverage of Arab citizens is in some ways similar to its coverage of marginalized Jewish groups in Israeli society. Nevertheless, the basic assumption is that the reciprocal relationship between the Hebrew media and the Arab minority is fundamentally different from the reciprocal relationship between the Hebrew media and other groups in Israeli society. This is almost certainly primarily due to the deep schism that exists between the majority Jewish population and the minority Arab population living side-by-side within the State of Israel. While it should be noted that Israeli society suffers from many social schisms, there is no question that one of the deepest and most fundamental of them is the Arab-Jewish divide.

In his article, “The question of ‘the other’: Difference, discrimination and the post-colonial discourse,” Homi Bhabha writes:

The power of ambiguity gives the currency of the colonial stereotype its value. It ensures that this stereotype can be changed again and again in accordance with shifting historical circumstances and other factors affecting the discourse. The power of ambiguity feeds the strategies which the colonial stereotype uses to distinguish between individuals (individuation) and to push them to the margins: It creates an impression of a probable and predictable truth, which, in the case of the stereotype, must always be beyond what can be proved by experience or deduced by logic.... The recognition of a stereotype as an ambiguous form of knowledge and power calls for a theoretical and political response that challenges the determinist and functional characteristics of the relationship between discourse and
politics and raises questions about dogmatic and moralist positions related to the meaning of oppression and discrimination (Bhabha, 1994:145).

Bhabha then suggests a new reading of this discourse:

The reading of the colonial discourse that I propose shifts the point of intervention from identifying images as positive or negative to understanding the processes of subjectification, which are made possible (and acceptable) through the discourse of stereotypes (Bhabha, 1994:145).

In line with this approach, the current paper investigates the online Hebrew media’s representation of the Arab population of the Negev, analyzing the content of articles relating to this population and examining the responses of those who read these reports. It should be noted that research into journalistic discourse on the Internet is still in its infancy. Very few researchers have addressed this subject in the Israeli context, especially with regard to majority-minority relations in Israeli society.1

The Arab population of the Negev (which is an integral part of the general Arab-Palestinian society in Israel) currently numbers some 170,000 people. With regard to its treatment in the media, this community is considered one of the only populations in Israel to suffer from a double dose of exclusion in terms of media coverage and the stereotypes presented to Israeli media consumers. The reason for its exclusion is ethnicity and its marginalized geographical and social circumstances. With regard to ethnicity, like the rest of the Arab population in Israel, the Arab population of the Negev suffers both from exclusion and from stereotyping. The exclusion and disregard of this social group is expressed in the fact that it does not attract media limelight except in cases involving the disruption of public order, criminal activity or fatal traffic accidents. When an incident does reach the headlines on radio or television or in the printed and online newspapers, it usually falls into one of several categories, discussed below.

**Stigmatization and negative stereotyping**

A report published on the nrg website (part of the Ma’ariv newspaper group) under the headline “Protection money for cellular antennas” states:

Bedouins from the south are collecting “protection money” from the cell phone companies for their antennas. The costs amount to thousands of dollars per antenna per month.
The cellular companies have recently encountered a difficult problem in the Negev: Bedouin residents of the area are demanding “protection money” from them to ensure that their antennas are not damaged. The bases of antennas belonging to companies that do not pay are torched using a burning tire. Since it is very expensive to repair a burnt out antenna, many in the industry prefer to keep silent and pay out sums amounting to thousands of dollars per month (Sayag, 2005).

The questions that need to be asked are whether the reporter bothered to adequately investigate the identity of the perpetrators and whether they are all really members of the Arab population of the south? It can be assumed that the discovery of other individuals involved in this case would reduce the news value and dramatic impact of this journalistic “scoop,” which refers to “protection money,” a term that has been often applied in reference to this population over the years. The article’s confident tone, which betrays no doubts nor any identifying details, not even partial ones, about the perpetrators as proof for its assertions, raises many questions. If the reporter seems to be showing sensitivity by protecting the privacy of the individuals involved, this sensitivity is misplaced when considering that he thereby points the finger at an entire population group that numbers tens of thousands of people.

In order to make absolutely clear that this problem is a serious threat, the reporter continues: “But this is not the only threat to antennas in the south: Due to the relatively high price of iron, the companies are also dealing with attempts by local residents to dismantle cellular antennas in order to sell the metal” (Sayag, 2005). Of course, the writer does not state with any degree of certainty that it is young Bedouin men from the Negev who are stealing the metal. Yet the juxtaposition of this problem with the “protection money” story creates a menacing image of the “local residents.” It is reasonable to assume that the reader would come to the conclusion that the two matters are related and it is not unlikely that this will add more fuel to their stereotyped image of the Bedouins.

Another way that such negative stereotypes are propagated is through the attempt to attribute the increase in traffic accidents in the Negev to the region’s Arab residents. In his article entitled, “Few Bedouin—Lots of accidents,” journalist Moshe Pri’el writes the following for the nrg news site:

A shocking accident yesterday in which three Bedouin children were killed came as no surprise to the residents of the south. Official figures, police experience and the terrifying stories of residents all testify to this phenomenon—despite their relatively low number among the population of the south, young Bedouin men are involved in more road accidents than any other group (Pri’el, 2006).
A report using this style of language almost certainly perpetuates the widespread prejudices against the Arab population of the Negev, referred to by the majority of opinion-makers in the Hebrew media as “the Bedouin sector” or “the Bedouins” for short. The writer relies on previous (unspecified) experiences of southern residents and backs them up by mentioning official sources, police experience and the terrifying stories of residents. Perhaps there is a measure of truth in the data that indicates a disproportionate involvement of young Arab men in fatal road accidents in the south and this should be given due attention. However, there are questions that need to be raised about the contribution of other population segments to these kinds of accidents, too. Is the involvement of these other sectors described in the same melodramatic terms employed by this reporter in speaking of “terrifying stories of residents”?

Quoting an “official source,” the reporter cites the words of Supt. Rehavia Umasi, Head of the Negev Traffic Bureau, who explains the phenomenon by saying:

Fifty percent of the fatal accidents are caused by members of minority groups. Many fathers accidently cause the deaths of their children with their cars due to the lack of play areas. The children are forced to play among the cars. Many Bedouin drivers exit the dirt roads that run through the area and lead to the main highways in a wild fashion. Others simply do not obey traffic lights and signs, such as “Stop” and “Yield” (Pri’el, 2006).

Umasi then dons a sociologist’s hat and gives sociological explanations for the behavior of those drivers and attributes it to “the pervasion of defective norms among this group.” He says on the matter:

From an early age, a young Bedouin boy sees his brothers and his father driving without a license and in a vehicle that is not roadworthy. In addition, the infrastructure in their residential areas is inadequate, they have no street signs, and a driver gets used to driving in these ways on the main highways, too (Pri’el, 2006).

In order to give Umasi’s portrayal and explanations more credibility, the reporter quotes sources from within the Arab population of the Negev itself. For example, he cites the words of a “respected sheikh” from one of the Negev towns (who, for some reason, he decides not to identify), who says: “We can’t control our youth anymore. We have problems of alcohol, drugs and absenteeism from school. The Bedouin tradition is not what it once was. They are rebelling against us and we can’t stop them” (Pri’el, 2006).

Not satisfied with the words of the “respected sheikh,” the reporter also quotes MK Taleb al-Sana, of the United Arab List, who is termed by the reporter as “a Bedouin himself.” It can be understood from his words that he agrees with the
The description of the situation and blames it on the government’s inadequate treatment of the Arab settlements in the Negev. He says:

The lack of educational resources in the sector and the prolonged sense of frustration cause a young driver to feel that he has nothing to lose. Nothing scares him, not even the police. I have warned the government ministries of the seriousness of the situation. Young people feel that the government has abandoned them with no present and no future and their anger is expressed through their driving (Pri’el, 2006).

Even in cases where reporters make the attempt to understand the Arab population of the Negev and to break free of stereotypical labels and stigmas, they often do not succeed. For example, see the analysis (discussed in-depth below) by social commentator Ron Ben-Yishai, who tries to describe the severity of the “Bedouin problem” faced by the government and its attempts to solve this problem. He writes:

The State of Israel hoped, and continues to hope, to achieve a number of objectives by concentrating the Bedouins in permanent urban settlements: To remove the Bedouins from thousands of dunams of land that the state has designated for other uses and to reduce the birth rate through education and improved standards of living. However, the seven Bedouin towns established over the past 30 years have been a disappointment in every respect. The Bedouins have not flocked to them, since the first towns were planned without taking their unique lifestyle into consideration. In addition, the standard of living has not improved because [government authorities] did not invest enough funding in education and employment opportunities. Nowadays, the Bedouin towns are at the bottom of the ladder according to all social indices (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

The correlation repeatedly made by many researchers (though still unproven) between high birth rate and low standards of living and education, as well as the belief that raising these two latter standards will lower the birth rate, apparently serves to counterbalance, so to speak, Ben-Yishai’s critical tone at the start of the article. But he cannot maintain this balance for long and soon begins to parrot explanations and prejudices that generalize about and malign the Arab population of the Negev. He also brings up the sense of anxiety and exaggerates the level of threat involved in this situation:

The “Bedouin sprawl,” on the other hand, has mushroomed and become something akin to a new Wild West, full of crime, illegal construction and illicit grazing of livestock. The Bedouins have already gained a near
monopoly on car theft, metal theft and various kinds of smuggling in the south, including smuggling of weapons and terrorists from Gaza and Egypt. “See how unsuccessful the Egyptians are in controlling the terrorist hothouse of worldwide Jihad that has flourished in Sinai, and you will understand what this will cost us in a few years time,” claims one senior security figure (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

The Shai Dromi case as a symptom

On January 16, 2007, Shai Dromi, a farmer in the Negev, opened fire on several people who were attempting to break into his farm and killed one of them. This story caused much more of a stir than would be expected of a regular criminal case due to the ethnic identities of the gunman and the man he shot to death. After it was revealed that the intruder was a Negev Arab, the incident moved out of the realm of a criminal case involving a farmer who shot a burglar, and mushroomed into a broad-ranging discussion of relations between the Arab population of the Negev, their neighbors and the government.

It is revealing to investigate the media frenzy that surrounded this incident and the way the press treated the two individuals primarily involved. Almost no one bothered to find out personal details about the intruder shot by Dromi and instead made do with the fact that he was a “Negev Bedouin.” Meanwhile, a website (http://www.shai-dromi.org.il) was established on behalf of Shai Dromi as part of a massive drive to collect signatures for a petition calling for his release from house arrest and even the dismissal of the legal case against him. There was also a fundraising campaign to raise money for his legal defense. On these websites and others (e.g., http://www.fresh.co.il) that addressed the case, Dromi was portrayed as a victim of “Bedouin burglars from the Wild West.” For example, Ran Farhi and Michal Nisanson wrote on the day of the incident:

This region is the State of Israel’s own “Wild West.” In most cases, the police do not even bother to enforce the law, certainly not in relation to the Bedouin population. Residents prefer to pay protection money to criminals, many of them Bedouins, rather than submit complaints to the police that are not properly dealt with (Farhi and Nisanson, 2007).

This article sympathetically acquitted Dromi and turned him into an icon of “Jewish self-defense” in the face of “the Bedouin scourge,” and a symbol of “might” and “courage.” A few of the people who responded to this article in the online forum could not pass up this opportunity to attack the police and law enforcement authorities with the claim that they have “abandoned the Negev and handed it over
to lawless Bedouins who are terrorizing the residents of the south.” As it said in one response, which bore the title, “The state has given up on the Negev”:

Why are we afraid to say that the Bedouins make most of their money from stealing goods and cars, drugs, protection money, weapons and drug smuggling, and trafficking in women for prostitution and rape. And what are the police doing about it other than closing files and ignoring crimes (Farhi and Nisanson, 2007)?

Over time, Shai Dromi’s heroic image on these sites became more pronounced. For example, he was described on the website established in his honor as follows:

Shai Dromi is a man of the land and the spirit, warmhearted, loyal and loving. His love encompasses all the trails and vistas of the Land of Israel, as well as the people and neighbors that populate it. Despite the financial difficulties he experienced, he always tried to give and to help others, whether it was the children in distress to whom he lent a listening ear or the many young people who made their way to his farm in order to learn from him and be helped by his extensive experience in tending sheep.

Shai believes that we must never give up our connection to the land, because when we cut off the roots, the soul will wither. He saw people who came to visit him on the farm in order to take a break from the pressures of city life, from the unremitting daily grind of work and home. Some of them would stay on the farm for varying lengths of time in order to learn and to relax, and Shai would welcome them with love. Over the years, he forged excellent relations with his Bedouin neighbors, and they continue to help one another and meet socially until this very day (http://www.shai-dromi.org.il).

This point about Shai Dromi’s excellent relations with “his Bedouin neighbors” did not discourage a large percentage of those who identified with his plight and donated to his cause, as well as readers who responded to this article and joined the discussion of the case, from launching unbridled diatribes against the Arab population of the Negev, describing it in the most ugly and wantonly generalizing terms.

The Negev’s Arab population as a threat

A central motif repeatedly used by influential voices of the majority (most of them from the Right) in their representation of the Arab population of the Negev is the
idea of “the demographic threat.” For example, a report published on the nfc website and distributed by Roni Flamer, director of the Or Movement, which aims to encourage Jewish migration to the Negev, presents demographic figures about the Negev to MK Uri Ariel and his staff. He says: “Some 320,000 Jews and some 160,000 Bedouins live in the Negev today. The Bedouin population doubles its size every 15 years, and by the year 2020 it is expected to become the majority in the Negev” (Aviv, 2004). It is not hard to guess the kind of impact this report has on the opinions of its readers regarding the Arab population in general, and with regard to the struggle of the dozens of unrecognized villages to gain official recognition from government authorities in particular. This recognition would finally earn them the right to receive basic services and amenities.

Another theme that is constantly repeated by writers and commentators debating the threats implied by the conduct of the Negev’s Arab residents are warnings against the “immanent Bedouin Intifada.” This threat is perceived in light of the ongoing land dispute between this group and the government, particularly the Israel Lands Administration, as well the appalling socioeconomic situation of the Arab residents of the south.

There are those who would say such portrayals (which do sometimes seem exaggerated and alarmist) are designed to deliberately thwart hopes for understanding and integration of this population in the civic life of the state in general, and in the southern region in particular. When the masses are inflamed by the prospect of riots and a violent uprising, it is easy to eliminate any good intentions about resolving the problems and hardships suffered by the Arab population of the Negev. In this way, “the punishment precedes the crime.”

An excellent example of this is an analysis by the well-known strategic commentator for Yediot Aharonot and Israeli television, Ron Ben-Yishai, which appeared under the headline: “The Negev Bedouins: A time bomb in Israel’s backyard.” Anyone who carefully studies this article cannot fail to come away without an ominous sense of foreboding and perhaps a sense of hopelessness regarding all efforts to address the burning issues regarding relations between the Arab population of the Negev and the government. Ben-Yishai writes:

In the center of the Beer Sheva valley rises a tall hill, known as Abraham’s Shoulder. Anyone who takes the time to ascend it will understand within minutes that the State of Israel has a problem. Not just a problem, but a ticking demographic, social and security time bomb. Surrounding the hill, literally as far as the eye can see, are thousands of clustered tin shacks and plastic sheds that are home to tens of thousands of Bedouins. Without water, without electricity, without roads, without sanitation and without sources of income. A hothouse of poverty and crime which law enforcement authorities have a hard time controlling (Ben-Yishai, 2006).
Ben-Yishai’s opinions on security are clear throughout the article and especially in the last two sentences quoted above. What interests him is the privation of the population and the implications of this situation for relations with the majority society (i.e., the government’s powerlessness to enforce the law among people living in the tin shacks and plastic sheds). He does not address the circumstances that created the situation he describes from the crest of the hill called Abraham’s Shoulder.

Ben-Yishai’s choice to gaze down from a height on those clusters of shacks encapsulates the point of view of the representatives of the majority—a patronizing standpoint that sees those shacks as blocking and blemishing the panorama they wish to see. He fails to enter those shacks and sheds in order to see and feel what goes on inside them, which is the reality of tens of thousands of people living in destitution under circumstances reminiscent of the slums of previous centuries. This failure is precisely the symptom that characterizes the approach of the State of Israel and its institutions to the day-to-day problems of the Arab population of the Negev. This attitude is built on the attempt to use cosmetic measures to solve things from afar without getting too deeply into the problems and seriously treating their root causes. The solutions suggested by Ben-Yishai at the end of his article are not so different from the same old increasingly elaborate techniques that signify an attempt to skirt the problem rather than confront it head on in a way that is satisfactory to all parties. Ben-Yishai concludes his article with recommendations on how to continue to address the problem:

What can be done? A single administrative body must be established that has an adequate budget at its disposal and the ability to ensure that the various government ministries implement the agreements that it reaches with the Bedouin tribes. This body must represent the Bedouins, similar to the way the SELA Administration cares for [the needs and interests of] the Gaza Strip evacuees. We must also stop addressing Bedouin land claims in the courts, and enter into expedited negotiations to reach a compromise with each of the claimants. Then the land problem can be resolved and every thing will move ahead rapidly (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

Ben-Yishai’s comparison between Gaza Strip evacuees and the Arab residents of the unrecognized villages is fundamentally problematic and unfortunate. The writer sincerely intends to suggest, through this comparison, a possible avenue for dealing problems which are similar. But in doing so, he plays right into the hands of the readers responding to the article, who demand that drastic measures be adopted against the Arab population of the Negev. There were 78 responses, the vast majority of which used aggressive and hostile language and rhetoric against this group. Among these responses are some which are nothing short of blatant and unambiguous incitement, such as “If we don’t hurry up, the Negev will belong to the
state of Bedouistan,” or “Transfer, my friend, transfer—that’s the solution,” or “They are criminals who live off welfare and lawbreaking” (Ben-Yishai, 2006). Then there are those who take a hard line but try to justify their position by attempting to scare the other readers, such as the following response:

One good thing that came out of the [Gaza Strip] disengagement is that apparently there are signs that a change is on the way here. The evacuation of the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip made clear to the Bedouins that sooner or later they are bound to get into a violent confrontation with the state that is likely to lead to a similar step being implemented against them (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

Besides the patently belligerent responses, there are a small number of responses that use a different tone, even though in the final accounting their conclusions are not so different. For example, one of the responders tries to link the distress of the Arabs in the south to the situations of other sectors of the Israeli population that suffer from a lack of government attention. But after making this more balanced point, he can no longer restrain himself and is swept away in a more antagonistic direction, writing:

Now the Negev is being taken away from us. There are Bedouins everywhere, there are mosques everywhere, there is filth everywhere. They are killing us on the roads, stealing, threatening us. Who is protecting us???? This wouldn’t happen in greater Tel Aviv (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

In another response, the writer makes a distinction between “Bedouins” and “Arabs” and he describes the former as follows:

They are not enemies—and we shouldn’t make them into enemies. The Bedouins have never been against us. The opposite is true. Even in the days when Petah Tikva was young, there were many stories of Bedouins who helped us. When the Arabs were about to attack us, they would try to inform us that the Arab gangs were closing in. So if we make the effort to help them get ahead, maybe we can stop a Bedouin Intifada in 20 years time within the Green Line between Ramat Hovav and Hadera (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

The “From your mouth I will judge you” technique

The aggressive rhetorical attacks on the Arab population of the Negev, both by reporters and those responding to their articles, has created a hostile atmosphere,
especially in the forums conducted by the online Hebrew newspapers about this topic. One of the techniques used by journalists to create an appearance of balanced reporting is to quote an Arab personality, sometimes under the vague title of “a respected sheikh,” or one of the public figures active among the population, or even one of the Bedouin academics. Usually the thrust of what the “authentic” voice has to say is basically supportive of the content of the article, i.e., it is aligned with the mainstream tendency to condemn the conduct and carryings on of the Arab population in the south. For example, see the response of a traditional leader to the proliferation of road accidents involving young Arabs in the Negev, or the remarks of MK Taleb al-Sana in the same context (noted above).

Another case where journalists turned their attention to this population was the story of a number of young Arabs from the Negev who were infected with AIDS by a Beer Sheva prostitute. In an article published by Uri Binder on the nrg website, he quotes the opinions of anonymous community leaders who were involved in an emergency meeting called to discuss the issue. One of the organizers of that meeting says:

Her contact information was passed around by word of mouth, and so she gathered a large number of Bedouin clients. As far as we know, dozens of Bedouins have already been infected and most are too afraid to get medical treatment. There are those who are planning to kill this young woman because we know that she did this intentionally. We want to ask the police to arrest her soon in order to save her life, and also so that she will pay the price for her actions and stop spreading fatal diseases (Binder, 2007).

In order to give these voices academic credibility, the reporter interviews Prof. ‘Alayyan Al-Krenawi, head of the Department of Social Work at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, who, in addition to his expertise in the field, is a member of the Arab community in the Negev and thus also has “insider” status. Prof. Al-Krenawi tells the reporter that he is not surprised by the story, and comments: “When a traditional society lives within a modern society, of course they are going to be impacted by the modern world” (Binder, 2007). He also says:

The globalization process has an impact on traditional societies. When a woman who knows that she has AIDS continues as a way of taking revenge on men, this meets a psychological need for that woman. It could be vengefulness against men in general. The Bedouin sector is lacking in sex education, which could have saved these men. It’s a sensitive topic that is not discussed (Binder, 2007).
Isolated attempts to investigate and discuss the issues in depth

In contrast to the inflammatory tone of most of the debate, there are a few isolated voices trying to understand and discuss the issues in a more in-depth and less aggressive and provocative fashion. An article written by Shlomo Svirski and Yael Hasson, which was published on the nfc news website, shows an attempt to get to the root of the problem and analyze its implications and possible solutions. For example, the unique nature of the population is described in the opening of the article:

The Bedouins of the Negev are the only Arab-Israeli group which, despite having been displaced from the original lands on which they lived at the establishment of the state, still maintains an ownership connection to those lands to a reasonable extent, a connection that the state officially denies in principle, but recognizes in practice (Swirski and Hasson, 2005).

Further on, the writers present the unique aspects of the citizenship of the Negev Arabs, and the source of the hardships and obstacles that prevent them from integrating into the regional civic life of the south in particular and of the state in general. The writers not only focus on the unrecognized settlements, as most addressing the issue do, but comprehensively discuss the neglected state of the recognized settlements. Although the recognized settlements were established by the government, the standard of living there is not much higher than that in the unrecognized ones (Swirski and Hasson, 2005).

Unfortunately, few articles in the online Hebrew media discourse about the Arab minority in the Negev adopt the approach of Swirski and Hasson. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that their article and the few other similar ones do not resonate with or garner many responses from the readership. Their voice is hardly heard.

Conclusions

The arena of online journalism is one of the most interesting forums in which the discourse about the relations between the Negev’s Arab population and the state is conducted. In recent years, this has become one of the most inflammatory and controversial topics in the broader context of relations between the State of Israel and all its Arab citizens. For the most part, the journalistic discourse in the online newspapers seems to abound with aggressive and hostile rhetoric, fed primarily by prejudices, stigmas, generalizations, fears and anxieties. This distracts the debate from the essence of the problem (the issue of land), and adds new layers to the crisis by exaggerating the threat posed by the population in question. It thereby obstructs
the possibility of coming to a solution, which should be possible despite the prophets of doom who foretell an inevitable head-on collision.

NOTE

1 Among recent books discussing this issue, the following should be singled out: Samuel-Azran and Caspi (2008) and Schwartz Altshuler (2007).

REFERENCES

Epilogue: Studying al-Naqab/Negev Bedouins—Toward a colonial paradigm?¹

OREN YIFTACHEL

The epilogue to this special issue briefly charts the main approaches to the study of Bedouins in the Naqab/Negev² and argues for forming a colonial scholarly paradigm. The essay highlights three promising perspectives within this paradigm—settler society, indigeneity and “gray space”—to form an initial step in redefining the field. The epilogue does not claim to be exhaustive, and the ideas presented here undoubtedly need further elaboration, substantiation and reflection. Neither are they entirely new, as some authors have used the colonial paradigm in the case at hand, although they have remained few and far between.

Let us start with the present issue of Hagar, which includes a rich set of articles that add significantly to a growing body of knowledge on Bedouin Arabs in the Naqab. To the best of the editors’ knowledge, this is the first volume of an international social science journal to be devoted to this community. This not only speaks volumes for the (regrettable) lack of past research on Bedouin mobilization, identity and politics in the context of Israel/Palestine, but also illustrates a new surge of interest. The latter is in part due to the growing influence of relevant fields of study dealing with minorities, Islam, indigenous peoples and the margins of Palestinian and Israeli societies, to name but a few. In this respect, the current volume makes a very important contribution on its own. However, it also illustrates the limits of existing paradigms for studying Bedouin society, which have been framed, in the main, by the concepts of modernization, urbanization, politics of identity and gender, and most recently globalization.

The limitations of past studies begin with the definition of “Naqab Bedouin society.” This “society” constitutes small remnants of the Arabs living in the region prior to 1948. It continues to be embedded within far wider networks in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, in Jordan and elsewhere in Israel (Parizot, 2004, 2005). The usage of this category should therefore be constantly problematized as reflecting a forced division of the Naqab Bedouins from other parts of their own society. I have chosen to use the term “Naqab Bedouins” in this paper chiefly because it is most commonly used by the community itself, both in Arabic and Hebrew. However I use the term with full acknowledgement of the Bedouin existence as an integral part of broader Palestinian and Arab societies.
A common scholarly approach has treated the Bedouins, previously locally known as Arab a-Sab’a (Arabs of Beer Sheva), as nomads undergoing a process of sedentarization. Rich studies have traced their subsequent modernization and urbanization, and the resultant family, economic, political and societal transformation (e.g., Abu-Rabia, 2001; Al-Ham’amde, 1997; Ben-David, 2004; Dinero, 1997; Kressel, 1993; Marx, 1967, 2000; Meir, 1994, 1997; Porat, 2006). These have dealt with key issues, such as immigration (Ben-David and Gonen, 2001), housing, economy, community transformations and—most importantly—the question of land (Kedar, 2004; Kressel, 2007; Meir, 2005).

Great attention has been devoted in academic and professional literature to the planning of Bedouin settlement, according to the “best” modern knowledge (Ben-David, 1991; Gradus and Stern, 1985; Kliot and Medzini, 1985; Medzini, 2007; Razin, 2000; Soffer and Bar-Gal, 1985; Stern and Gradus, 1979). In later years, more critical studies have conceptualized the Bedouins as a peripheral minority within a centralizing, ethnic state, experiencing multiple deprivations and marginalities (see Abu-Bader and Gottlieb, as well as Tarrow, in this volume; Abu-Rabia, 2001; Ben-David, 1993, 1999; Meir, 1988; Nevo, 2003; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2003). These studies have focused on patterns of discrimination against the Bedouins and their geographical, economic and political marginalization (e.g., Abu-Saad and Lithwick, 2000; Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin, 1999; Swirsky and Hasson, 2006). Other studies have linked Bedouin marginality to a series of communal crises and pathologies, such as growing crime rates, communal violence and pervasive alienation (Abu-Rabia, 2001; Ben-David, 2004; Meir, 1997).

Another recent approach has treated the Bedouins as part of the divided Arab or Palestinian nation, embroiled in an ongoing struggle with the Israeli state. The focus has been on land, identity, Arabness, culture, Palestinization (e.g., Abu-Saad and Yonah, 2000; Abu-Sitta, 2001; Bar-On and Kassem, 2004; Cook, 2003; Falah, 1983, 1989; Parizot, 2004) and most recently on the Naqba—the 1948 “disaster,” during which two thirds of the Arabs in Palestine were driven out of Israel—and its ever-present impact on Bedouin life (see Abu-Rabia and Abu-Mahfouz in this volume). An offshoot of this approach, but from an opposite political and ideological perspective, sees the rapidly growing Bedouin community as part of the Arab and Palestinian geographic and demographic threat to the embattled Jewish state. This is common Israeli discourse articulated academically in the works of Soffer (2007; see also Krakover, 1999).

Bedouin society has also been studied in recent years using critical gender and globalization perspectives. The former places gender relations, and especially the plight of Bedouin women, at the center of inquiry, showing the prevalence of deep chauvinism, as well as increasing signs of mobilization and resistance among Bedouin women (see Gottlieb in this volume; see also Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2008; Al-Krenawi and Graham, 1999; Fenster, 2002). The globalization perspective explains the effect of economic and cultural trends on the Bedouins, linking it, intra alia, to
the accelerating pace of social transformation, to a marked decline in community cohesion and to growing Islamism (Gradus, 2008; Meir, 2005).

The need for a new perspective

The above approaches, sketched here very briefly, explore and explain key aspects of Bedouin life and grievance in the Naqab. Yet, past research appears to largely skirt a fundamental factor—the existence of the Bedouins as a colonized indigenous people residing within a settler state. This factor underlies much of the Bedouin experience since 1948 and has impacted every aspect of their lives. Colonialism, I argue, critically informs the modernization, dislocation, discrimination and gender inequality described by the other main perspectives.

Israeli scholarship by and large considers the state’s democratic, modern and Western character as a given. This is based on its European origins, the self-perception of the state-founding elites and the existence of partial and superficial democratic “features” that have glossed over a structural process of “ethnocratic” colonization (Benvenisti, 1997; Yiftachel, 2006). To buttress this problematic perception, Israeli scholarship has used a set of erasure practices, including the near total dismissal of the Palestinian Naqba. Most historical and social science accounts skip over the events of the 1948 war and its consequent massive ethnic cleansing and destruction of Arab society in Palestine.

The routine treatment of Israel as Western and democratic has also “necessitated” the bracketing out of the Palestinian refugee issue from analyses of Israeli society. In later years, the post-1967 occupation has been treated as temporary while awaiting resolution as part of a “peace process.” In this vein, the Bedouins, too, have been presented in many studies as “only” a peripheral community struggling to adjust to life in a modern Western society. An extension of this analysis refers to Bedouin political detachment from the history of the Naqba and the daily reality of the occupation—both critical foundations of the Judaization policy that also directly affects their life in the Naqab.

Hence, as already noted, the treatment of Bedouin society as a marginalized modernizing minority, important as it is, ignores a central factor in shaping Bedouin existence since 1948—namely, Israel’s ethnic colonialism in their region. This has led directly to dispossession, forced movement, refugees and constant struggle with Israeli authorities for land, development and housing rights. Bedouin concentration into planned “development towns” has been marked by poverty and social degradation (Abu-Saad, 2001; Yiftachel, 2003). Under the Israeli regime, Bedouins have become “invaders” of their ancestors’ land and “obstacles” to development. Past scholarship has been unable to answer a simple question: why are the Bedouins discriminated against more than other minorities in Israel/Palestine?
The answer lies in two critical goals pursued by Zionist settler society: land and demography. Bedouins present acute impediments to Israel’s “ethnocratic” regime (Law-Yone, 2003; Yiftachel, 1999, 2006) and its consistent push to Judaize (and hence de-Arabize) the territories under its control, both in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Prior to 1948, the Bedouins in the Naqab held vast expanses of lands, estimated at 3–5 million dunams in varying types of possession (Kedar, 2004). This explains the particular severity of the ethnic cleansing of this region, whereby some 80–85 percent of Arabs were driven outside the state boundaries during the 1948 war and the following years.

This has enabled Israel to “legally” appropriate their land and allocate it for Jewish use. The Bedouins who remained in Israel have been strictly controlled, and their traditional land ownership system has been disregarded (Kedar, 2004; Shamir, 1996), allowing the state to claim total territorial control. Demographically, the Bedouins are commonly accused of “dangerously” high fertility rates, which putatively threaten the modern and enlightened way of life sought by the architects of Israeli society. In these respects, an overtly racist discourse has developed, essentializing the Bedouins as different and inferior.

The above must be qualified, because the colonization of the Bedouins has not been the only face of Israeli policies, which display other characteristics, at times progressive and enabling. Moreover, Israeli policies have not been homogeneous, embodying competing approaches towards the management of local Bedouins. Yet, it is imperative to understand that the Judaization approach has provided a hegemonic meta-narrative for most policy directions and has provided relatively clear limits for policymakers for over six decades.

Looking again through a colonial lens: Settler society, indigeneity and “gray space”

Given the above, I suggest that scholars re-examine their approaches to the study of Bedouin Arabs under the Israeli regime. Credible research should no longer avoid engagement with the issue of the Israeli ethnocratic regime in general, and Jewish colonialism in Palestine/Israel in particular. Analysts and policymakers need to use the most comprehensive and robust frameworks of analysis that can best account for community dynamics (for some beginnings in this direction, see Abu-Rabia in this volume, as well as Abu-Saad, 2003; Al-Krenawi, 2004; Meir, 2008; Yiftachel, 2006:Ch. 8). This does not mean, of course, that studies taken from other angles are of lesser value, but rather that they would benefit from dealing seriously with the colonial dynamic. It also means that the credibility of studies using the colonial angle would also be tested by their engagement with other scholarly perspectives that highlight the complexity of societal processes beyond the colonizing-indigenous binarism.
Scholarly accuracy, however, is not the only aspect here: adopting a colonial framework is also a political act, which unveils vitally important forces in a critical and possibly liberating manner. The use of the colonial “angle” also exposes the previous scholarly “politics of depoliticization,” as it shows how the overlooking of the colonial setting conceals state and ethnic oppressions—hence, my call for a scholarship that would not only be accurate, but also amend the distortions of the power–knowledge nexus of previous studies.

There is no room here to discuss in detail the nature of colonialism and its various types (see Fredrickson, 1988; Kipfer, 2007; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). Suffice it to define it as a systematic collective project of seizing and expanding control over contested lands, people, resources and power. The critical issue here is that the other important aspects of Bedouin life, such as modernization, urbanization, patriarchy, education, tribalism, human rights, gender and globalization, cannot be separated from this “meta” colonial point of reference (Arab Association for Human Rights, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Consequently, I suggest three main scholarly perspectives, through which the colonized experience of the Bedouins should be studied: settler society, indigeneity and “gray space.” This is not an exhaustive list by any means, but a suggestion for a preliminary research agenda able to tease out the profound impact of colonized subordination. As noted, these directions are not entirely new: previous research has followed Zureik’s (1979) pioneering study and framed Zionism within the colonial framework (Kimmerling, 2004; Shafir, 1996; Yiftachel, 1992; Yuval-Davis and Abdo, 1995), and several studies even analyzed practices of “internal colonialism” towards Israel’s Palestinian citizens (Falah, 1989; Yiftachel, 1996). However, apart from a few exceptions (Abu-Saad, 2003; Yiftachel, 2003), very few scholars have connected the two fields of knowledge and used these colonial perspectives to understand the Bedouins of the Naqab.

**Settler society**

The settler society approach has long informed the study of the “new world” and developed concepts critical to understanding the process of societal construction through “frontierism,” immigration, settlement, new nationalism and rapid development. Several important studies started to analyze Israeli society within this framework, most notably headed by Kimmerling (1982, 2004), Shafir (1989) and Yuval-Davis and Abdo (1995), who focused mainly on the sociology and political economy of the immigration-settlement process, largely neglecting the geography and planning aspects.

But geography, needless to say, is highly relevant for the interaction of the Bedouins with the institutions, practices, legalities and discourses of Jewish/Zionist settler society. The suggested research angle could focus on these interactions and
interfaces, where lofty ideas of development and progress meet the naked “internal colonialism” project which typifies all settler societies. In Israel, as is well known, the state has promoted longstanding goals of “conquering the wasteland,” “making the desert bloom” and “Judaizing the periphery.” This is a force initially imposed on the Bedouin community from the outside, but over the years has diffused into its inner workings and protocols. Although settling the southern frontier has declined in recent years as a societal value, Judaizing the region has remained high on the Israeli government agenda. For this end, new policy efforts have focused on land control, selling of land to single-family Jewish farms and attempts to restrict Bedouin construction and cultivation (Yiftachel, 2006:Ch. 8).

The most visible and painful interaction has been the practices of land dispossession and forced relocation, accompanied by segmentation and cooptation, to be discussed below. Since 1948, Israel has conducted a concerted policy to Judaize the Land of Israel, or historic Palestine, building close to 1,100 Jewish settlements between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. At the same time, it has destroyed over 400 Arab villages and forbidden Arabs to build new localities anywhere in this territory. The only exception has been the (coerced) urbanization of the Bedouins in the Jaleel/Galeel (in English: the Galilee) and the Naqab, for which the state has built to date 28 Bedouin towns and villages. The Bedouin experience must be studied within this highly relevant geopolitics. In the Naqab region, the state has worked to minimize Bedouin land control, block the return of refugees and marginalize Bedouins in terms of planning, development, education and local government status.

Importantly, however, settler societies are not identical, and a credible use of this perspective necessitates scholars to also engage with the specific nature of Zionist colonialism. This begins with the troubled history of persecution and genocide, which drove Jewish refugees and forced migrants to Palestine, making Zionism a “colonialism of ethnic survival” (Yiftachel, 1997). The attitude of profound insecurity still prevails among many Jews and Israeli policymakers, despite massive augmentation in Israeli and Jewish power since the early Zionist days. This constitutes the basis of the enormous importance attached to “security” within the Israeli regime and its governing apparatus.

Another important feature of Israeli settler society is the strong sense of Jewish belonging to the land. Zionism did not only aim at finding a safe haven for Jews, but carefully chose the ancient Hebrew homeland (believed to be the cradle of Judaism) as its target territory. It therefore mobilized to liberate Jews from their subaltern diasporic existence, creating a strong sense of indigeneity among the settlers. An additional factor is the intensifying diversity of Jewish society, which has deepened in recent years with the large-scale migration of ethnic Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia and with growing economic liberalization and the associated socioeconomic gaps. The above aspects, mentioned here only briefly, should be explored seriously as scholars ask questions about the interaction of Bedouins with the Jewish settler society.
To complicate matters, the Naqab Bedouins were also formally included in the Jewish state, receiving formal citizenship in 1949–1950. This has allowed them to campaign for rights and equality and organize politically in a way not possible for Bedouins under other regimes. In some important ways, the Naqab Bedouins have used the spaces of mobilization offered in Israel, most notably in the local politics of planned towns, which have created a process of democratization. Yet, outside their small enclaves, Bedouin citizenship remains only formal—a method of registration, organization and surveillance, offering negligible political clout. It has never allowed for genuine participation in state or regional affairs, or as a platform for receiving a fair share of public resources. The Bedouins have remained, as noted by Swirsky in this volume, “invisible citizens,” observing the settler state mobilizing massive resources for Jewish seizure of their ancestors’ lands. The meaning of minority citizenship in such a settler society is still awaiting serious exploration.

Typical of colonial engagements, the interaction of the Bedouins with the Zionist settler society has made them subject to policies of division and identity manipulation. In order to minimize their resistance, the state has attempted to emphasize their “Israeliness” (though, of course, not Jewishness), divide them from other Palestinian communities in Israel/Palestine and consequently “de-Palestinianize” and even “de-Arabize” their identity (Yonah, Abu-Saad and Kaplan, 2004). Bedouins have been commonly constructed in Israel as culturally “unique”: an exotic people whose loyalty belongs to the desert and not to any particular culture or nation. While the Naqab Bedouins do possess their own cultural and ethnic features, they have always been part of the general Arab world, and undoubtedly belong to the Arabs of Palestine. Their natural inclusion as “Palestinians of Bedouin origins” within Palestinian societies in exilic locations attests to this orientation, as clearly shown by Abu-Mahfouz in this volume.

The divisive colonial strategy has been accompanied by a system of partial cooptation, whereby the state has attempted to incorporate the Bedouins while keeping them on the margins. In the Naqab settings, this has received support from some local Arab leaders, who have enshrined their leadership over towns and tribes with the aid of the state’s colonizing apparatus. But state support has come at a price—the severing of ties with Palestinian and other Arab or Muslim groups, encouragement to serve in the Israeli army and condoning of the Judaization of the region outside its Arab enclaves.

This identity regime has also operated “inside” the communities with attempts to segregate Bedouin society internally by supporting the traditional patriarchal tribal system, and by condoning practices such as marriage of close relatives and minors, pervasive polygamy (Al-Krenawi and Graham, 1999) and internal racism. The Israeli state even quietly supported, until the late 1980s, the highly conservative Islamic movement, which was seen as providing a “softer” locus of identity to nationalizing Palestinian movements. Here lies a paradox: settler societies, including Israel, commonly represent themselves as modern and Western, yet they are reactive in prolonging and deepening reactionary practices among the local populations.
These aspects have rarely been studied, and their exploration is critical to the interaction of the settling state with the indigenous population.

Finally, another important interaction worth studying in the working of a settler society is the rise of civil society. Specifically, Arab–Jewish organizations have begun to articulate a joint struggle for the Naqab’s various ethnic communities. This has surfaced in joint regional struggles around environmental hazards, investment incentives and tax concessions. While this is still a minor phenomenon against a history lacking cooperation, the influence is gradually reaching regional discourses and policies. Recently, several key civil society organizations with considerable funding have begun to construct a common Arab–Jewish space and struggle, in which the democratization of a colonial settler society can be imagined, debated and planned.

*Indigeneity*

An important field of study, highly relevant to the Bedouin experience, has lately developed around the experience of indigenous peoples and the concept of indigeneity. A range of theoretical, historical and empirical studies have now accumulated into a burgeoning body of knowledge about people residing in colonized regions and states, who have subsequently become “indigenous.” This field illuminates the plight of minorities commonly “hidden” under the previous state-centric approaches of knowledge generation. It has politicized the traditional anthropological and Orientalist approaches of studying these people as exotic phenomena to be “documented” prior to their likely disappearance from the stage of history through modernist assimilation. The politicization has constructed the category of “the indigenous” as an agent of history, a perpetrator of development and struggle, no longer a passive recipient of colonial policies.

While there is no one definition of “indigenous,” most studies and legal approaches emphasize the following features:

- primary occupation and use of colonized homeland regions
- maintenance of traditional customs, laws, language and cultures
- unbroken residence in the colonized region (save forced evictions)
- widespread land dispossession
- loss of pre-existing sovereignty.

Indigeneity under the new approach has become a claim for power, self-determination, culture and place (Howitt, 2006; Smith, 1999; Tsosie, 2001). It combines scholarly approaches with an anti-colonial surge, equipping colonized people not only with a critique of the powers ruling over their lives, but with substantive knowledge about their history, struggles and resistances. This body of knowledge has found its way to a wide range of forums in which indigenous peoples have developed strategies to turn their subordination into more equal coexistence.
with other groups now residing in “their” territory, while rebuilding their culture and sovereignty (Abu-Saad and Champagne, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007).

A particularly rich area of inquiry has revolved around different forms of indigenous legalities, customary laws and regulation systems, and the ability to imagine and design “multiple sovereignties” between indigenous groups and the modern nation-states established on their territories (Burrows, 2005; Daes, 1999; Kedar, 2004). In addition, “indigeneity” has inspired new epistemologies, drawing on native “ways of knowing” and traditional methods of managing indigenous lives (Louis, 2007; Malone, 2007), and new perceptions of politics, culture and identities (Riseth, 2007). The political climax of this genuinely global campaign has been the adoption in September 2007 of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples, which identified a range of protections for the culture, land and sovereignty of indigenous peoples (UNPFII, 2007).

The relevance to the Naqab Bedouins is clear. This is a group that resided on ancestral land for centuries prior to Zionist settlement, while subsequently facing dispossession and marginalization. Prior to Israeli rule, the Bedouins had a system of tribal governance, as well as a set of well established traditions and customary laws, which operated largely uninterrupted under previous Ottoman and British colonial regimes. In important ways, therefore, the Bedouins’ plight is similar to other indigenous peoples, such as the Maoris in New Zealand, Aborigines in Australia and Zapatistas in Mexico; all lost their self-determination, but have continued to struggle to regain land control and cultural autonomy (Abu-Saad, 2008).

The indigeneity angle can develop these comparisons and investigate fascinating questions, such as the impact of indigenous consciousness on the Bedouins’ struggle, the rise of indigenous globalization and the intertwining of indigenous awareness and Islam. In addition, research can explore the sensitive relations between the various segments of Bedouin society itself, in which stratification is often based on an internal “indigeneity order,” whereby Arab immigrants and farmers (fellahaen) who mainly came to the region during the nineteenth century enjoy a lower social status than those perceived as original land owners (asliyeen). Another sensitive issue is the relations between the general Palestinian and specific Bedouin senses of indigeneity, as the two coexist in the struggle for a post-colonial future for Israel/Palestine.

“Gray space”

Another angle in which to study Bedouin existence is the recent developments in political geography, globalization research and urban studies, which explore the growing phenomenon of urban informality. This refers to enclaves, populations and economies only partially incorporated into their “host” society. I have termed this phenomenon “gray space,” positioned between the “whiteness” of
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legality/approval/safety and the “blackness” of eviction/destruction/death. Gray spaces are neither integrated nor eliminated, forming pseudo-permanent margins of today’s urban regions, which exist partially outside the gaze of state authorities and city plans (Yiftachel, Forthcoming).

In the urban policy sphere, including planning, gray spaces are usually quietly tolerated, while subject to derogatory discourses such as “contaminating,” “criminal” and being a “public danger” to the desired “order of things.” Typically, the concrete emergence of “stubborn” informalities is “handled” not through corrective or equalizing policy, but through a range of delegitimizing and criminalizing discourses. This creates boundaries that divide urban groups according to their status: a process of “separating incorporation” and “creeping apartheid.” This double-edged move tends to preserve gray spaces in a state of “permanent temporariness,” concurrently tolerated and condemned, perpetually waiting “to be corrected.” A multitude of informalities has come to characterize a vast number of metropolitan regimes to the extent that more than half the population can be classified as “informal” (AlSayyad and Roy, 2004; Davis, 2004; Neuwrith, 2005; Roy, 2005).

The relevance to Bedouin society is obvious. Around Jewish Beer Sheva, gray spaces have rapidly grown into sprawling expanses of Bedouin-Arab shanty towns and villages, constructed of tin and wooden shacks (Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2004). This is a clear byproduct of Israeli policies, which have refused to recognize Bedouin ancestral land ownership, effectively turning them into “invaders.” Gray space is also evident in the planned Arab development towns around Beer Sheva, where squatters are increasingly occupying public open space situated on disputed land. There is also a growing number of “temporary” Arab residents in the metropolis of modern Jewish Beer Sheva, where they mainly reside in the dilapidated Ottoman-Arab city center and the adjacent impoverished neighborhoods. While around 1,000 professional Arabs are permanent residents of the city, a few thousand others constitute an “urban shadow” and are usually not registered as city dwellers, nor are they represented in its local government. Subsequently, they are denied basic communal services, such as Arab education facilities, places of worship and political representation.

The Bedouin experience around Beer Sheva can thus be compared to the plight of indigenous urbanizing populations in vast regions of the global south, such as South America, Asia, Africa and other areas of the Middle East. Studies have shown that, in such regions, new types of ethno-class relations have been formed in today’s cities, based on new spatial configurations of residence, power and capital resources. This emerging urban order may be conceptualized as the “new colonialism,” which constitutes a de facto form of metropolitan governance, facilitating the expansion of dominant interests through exploitation, denial and segregation (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004; Roy, 2007).

In this sense, the existence of most Naqab Bedouins within the globalizing Beer Sheva metropolitan region exposes them simultaneously to both “old” and “new”
types of colonial relations. The former alludes to the ethno-national expansion “from above” described earlier, whereby the dominant population has seized control over indigenous groups and their resources, while the latter points to a new phase of “centripetal” colonialism, during which marginalized populations create gray spaces “from below.” In this way they become subject to exploitation and segregation and are unevenly incorporated in the latest product of capitalist globalization—urban “creeping apartheid” (Davis, 2004; Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004). It is time to explore this aspect of Bedouin existence as they face a new “layer” of exclusion, namely the economic relations forged under the current neo-liberal age.

**Sumood**

Importantly, processes of colonization, old and new, are never unilateral. In most cases, including the Naqab Bedouins, they meet resistance and change, which should be studied and analyzed to complete the understanding of such settings. Recent international studies have shown that, in a wide variety of cases, colonized populations find resourceful ways to challenge, penetrate and even prevail over oppressive power relations. Bayat (2007), for example, notes the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” into spaces of opportunity in such new settings, while Perera (2002) notes a process of inverse “indigenization” of colonial infrastructure. Angotti (2006), Appadurai (2001) and Roy (2007) show how local politics are organized in today’s slums and shanty towns, and how these are creating new hubs of globalizing civil society networks, often with surprising effect on tempering centralized power.

The Bedouin Arabs, like most indigenous populations, have not been passive recipients of colonial and globalizing forces. A notable process of self-empowerment and politicization has taken place during the last couple of decades, with a stubborn struggle of *sumood*—the Palestinian-Arab term for “hanging-on” and surviving against persistent crises and difficulties. In the Bedouin case, *sumood* has meant holding on to their ancestral land and rebuilding their communities after numerous rounds of evictions and dispossessions. This has been promoted through the formation of several civil bodies and institutions, most notably the voluntary Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages (RCUV), which has assumed a leadership role in guiding the Bedouin struggle.

Like most indigenous politics, which operate under the coercive, fragmenting and luring attraction of colonial power, Bedouin politics have been highly volatile. It has waxed and waned between the need to present a united front against a dispossessing government and the deeply rooted tribalism, chauvinism, cynicism and tensions emanating from the differing agendas and personalities. Another source of tension exists vis-à-vis northern Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian national cause, all steeped in profound uncertainties and divisions, but framed within a
common struggle and a post-colonial vision. For indigenous Bedouin communities, there are powerful and confusing forces at work daily as they negotiate their position within their traditional and colonized homeland.

Finally, resistance and survival under a colonizing regime also involves positive elements, such as the nurturing of cultural traditions and community spirit. As Connell (2007) and Ehrenreich (2007) remind us, celebration and joy have always been a central part of native and minority life and survival, not the least among Palestinians (Serhan, 2008). Somewhat removed from the direct political arena, communal events such as weddings, holidays, youth activities, women’s groups, plastic art, poetry, music and the valorization of public interaction sustain the various Bedouin communities and display their ability to enjoy and celebrate survival under harsh circumstances. This, too, can be a promising line for future cultural-political research.

A final word

Let me conclude by illustrating the centrality of the colonial experience to the understanding of Bedouin life with a typical story, one of hundreds, told during the eighth session of the Goldberg Commission, on March 4, 2008. This official commission was appointed in 2007 by the government to offer a solution for the Bedouin settlement and land problems. Below is an exchange which took place during the testimony of Ahmad Nasasra, representing the unrecognized village of al-Sirra:

Nasasra: I came here to ask the committee to resolve a terrible problem… After 60 years of Israeli rule, we are suddenly asked to move.

Attorney Yoram Bar Sela (a committee member): Why “suddenly”? Didn’t you know this for a long time? Didn’t you read the plans?

Nasasra: No, this is news to us…. We thought we would be allowed to stay….

Judge Eliezer Goldberg: I don’t understand. What is your complaint? Tell me clearly, please.

Nasasra: …We have been living on our own land for centuries and were never asked to move…. In 1973 we registered our claim for 400 dunams…. During the late 1970s, Israel built a huge military airport near us, and evicted thousands of Bedouins, but not us, so we thought we were safe… Eight months ago we were suddenly surrounded by dozens of policemen
and building enforcement units…. They told us all our houses are illegal and we have to move…. When we said that this has been our land for centuries, they showed us papers that it was confiscated in 1980 and is now classified as “land for army planning needs” … but nobody ever told us…. Now we have demolition orders on all buildings in the village and two have already been demolished…. We wish, first and foremost, to stay here….

NOTES

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2 Negev and Naqab are the Hebrew and Arabic names, respectively, for the region which is now southern Israel. I use the latter in this paper because it focuses on the Bedouin-Arab community.

3 It is recognized, of course, that the entire Palestinian population is indigenous. The approach here is to highlight the specific characteristics of the Bedouin indigenous struggle, as part of the broader Palestinian anti-colonial campaign.

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