Naqab/Negev Bedouins and the (Internal) Colonial Paradigm

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The concluding chapter to this volume charts the main approaches to the study of Bedouins in the Naqab (Negev) and argues for re-situating that study within an internal colonial scholarly paradigm. In such a paradigm, Bedouins can be defined as an indigenous community subject to a process that began as colonialism imposed from the outside and has continued as “internal colonialism” since the end of military government in the late 1960s. This chapter highlights three promising perspectives within this paradigm—settler society, indigeneity, and “gray space”—that form an initial step in redefining the field. The ideas proposed here undoubtedly need further elaboration, substantiation, and reflection, and the review presented below is not exhaustive. Neither are the ideas entirely new, as some authors—albeit very few—have already used the colonial paradigm for the Bedouin question.

Indigenous (In)Justice makes an important contribution to the field by treating the Bedouin Arabs of southern Israel/Palestine as an indigenenous group, subjected in recent times to the regime of a modern settler state. To the best of the editors’ knowledge, this is the first scholarly book on the Bedouins to take this approach, which is most notable

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in the chapters by Ismael Abu-Saad and Cosette Creamer (chapter 1), Ahmad Amara and Zinaida Miller (chapter 2), Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Ahmad Amara (chapter 4), and John Sheehan (chapter 6), but which runs as a theme in the other chapters as well.

However, the novelty of our volume further highlights the limits of existing paradigms for studying Bedouin society. These paradigms have been framed chiefly by the concepts of modernization, urbanization, politics of identity and gender, and, most recently, globalization. The settler-indigenous axis—so central in understanding the Naqab—is by and large absent (see Karplus and Meir, forthcoming).

The limitations of past studies begin with the definition of “Naqab Bedouin society.” This “society” is part of a wider Arab society that lived in the region until its eviction in 1948. While the Bedouins of the Naqab share distinct cultural, geographic, and ethnic characteristics, they continue at the same time to be embedded within far wider networks in Sinai and Transjordan, the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, and of course Israel itself (Parizot, 2004). The usage of this category should therefore be constantly problematized as reflecting a forced separation of the Naqab Bedouins from other parts of their own society. I have chosen to use the “Naqab (Negev) Bedouins” terminology in this chapter chiefly because it is the name most commonly used by this community itself, both in Arabic and Hebrew. However, I use the term with full acknowledgment of this community’s existence within the larger Palestinian and Bedouin Arab societies, and not as a marker of distinct existence.

The most common scholarly approach has treated the Bedouins, previously locally known as Arab a-Sabi’a (Arabs of Beersheba), as nomads undergoing a process of sedentarization. Rich studies have traced the Bedouins’ subsequent modernization, urbanization, and family, economic, political, and societal transformation (see, e.g., A.
Abu-Rabia, 2001; Al-Ham’amde, 1997; Ben-David, 2004; Dinero, 2004; Kressel, 1993; Marx, 1967, 2000; Meir, 1994, 1997; Porat, 2009). These works have dealt with issues such as immigration (Ben-David and Gonen, 2001), housing, economy, community transformations (Ben-Yisrael and Meir, 2008), and—most importantly—land (see Kressel, 2007; Kedar, 2004; Meir, 2005, 2009; Levin, Kark, and Galilee, 2010; Franzman and Kark, 2011).

Much attention has been devoted in academic and professional literature to the planning of Bedouin settlements according to the “best” modern knowledge (see Ben-Arie, 2009; Stern and Gradus, 1979; Gradus and Stern, 1979; Ben-David, 1991; Kliot and Medzini, 1985; Medzini, 2007; Soffer and Bar-Gal, 1985; Razin, 2000). More critical studies have conceptualized the Bedouins as a peripheral minority within a centralizing, ethnic state, experiencing multiple deprivations and marginalities (Abu-Bader and Gottlieb, 2008; Tarrow, 2008; A. Abu-Rabia, 2001; Fenster, 1993, 1999; Meir, 1988; Nevo, 2003; Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, 2003). These studies have focused on patterns of discrimination against the Bedouins and on their geographical, economic, and political marginalization (see, e.g., Abu-Saad and Lithwick, 2000; Swirski, 2008; Swirski 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 (A. Abu-Rabia, 2001; Ben-David, 2004; Meir, 1997).

Another recent approach has treated the Bedouins as part of the divided Palestinian Arab nation, embroiled in an ongoing struggle with the Israeli state. This approach focuses on land, identity, Arabness, culture, Palestinization (see, e.g., Abu-Saad, Yonah, and Kaplan, 2000; Cook, 2003; Falah, 1989; Abu-Sitta, 2001, 2010; Bar-On and Kassem, 2003; Parizot, 2004; Hameissi, 2009; Human Rights Watch,
2008), and, most recently, the Nakba and its ever-present impact on Bedouin life (S. Abu-Rabia, 2008; Abu-Mahfouz, 2008). An offshoot of this approach, but coming 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 supposedly embattled Jewish state. This common Israeli-Jewish discourse is led by the works of Arnon Soffer and by a variety of analysts associated with Israeli land and planning authorities (Soffer, 2007, 2009; see also Altman, 2009; Zandberg, 2009; Krakover, 1999; for empirical analyses, see *Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin*, 1999, 2011).

Bedouin society has also been studied in recent years through the lenses of gender and globalization. The former places gender relations, especially the plight of Bedouin women, at the center of inquiry, showing the prevalence of deep patriarchy and observing increasing signs of mobilization and resistance among Bedouin women (Al-Krenawi and Graham, 1999; Abu-Bader and Gottlieb, 2008; Fenster, 2002; Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2008). The latter lens, the globalization perspective, explains the effect of worldwide economic and cultural trends on Bedouin life, linking them to an accelerating pace of social transformation, a marked decline in community cohesion, and growing Islamism, among other things (Gradus, 2008; Meir, 2006).

**The Need for a New Perspective**

The existing approaches, sketched above only very briefly, explore and explain key aspects of Bedouin life and grievance in the Naqab. Yet, they appear to largely skirt around a fundamental factor: Bedouins’ existence as a colonized indigenous people residing within a settler state. This factor underlies much of the Bedouin experience since 1948 and has affected every aspect of Bedouins’ lives. Colonialism, I argue,
critically informs the modernization, dislocation, discrimination, and gender inequality experienced by the Bedouins.

Most Israeli scholarship considers the state’s democratic, modern, and Western character as a given. This assumption is based on Israel’s European origins, the self-perceptions of the state-founding elites, and the existence of formal and partial democratic and liberal “features” that have glossed over an ethnocratic state structure (see Yiftachel, 2006). To buttress this position, Israeli scholarship has used a set of erasure practices, including the near total dismissal of the Palestinian Nakba (the 1948 “disaster” during which two-thirds of Arabs in Palestine were driven out of Israel). Most historical and social science accounts skip over the events of the 1948 war and discussion of ethnic cleansing and destruction of Arab society in Palestine.

The routine treatment of Israel as Western and democratic also “necessitates” the bracketing out of the Palestinian refugee issue from analyses of Israeli society. In Israel, the post-1967 occupation was treated as temporary while awaiting resolution as part of a “peace process.” In this vein, many studies have presented the Bedouins as “only” a peripheral community struggling to adjust to life in a modern Western society. An extension of this analysis has disconnected Bedouins from the history of the Nakba and daily reality of the occupation—both critical foundations of the Judaization policy, which also directly affects Bedouin 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 Bedouin existence since 1948—namely, Israel’s ethnic internal colonialism in the Naqab. This colonialism has led directly to dispossession, displacement, and constant struggles with Israeli authorities for land, development, and housing rights. Bedouins’ con-
concentration into planned “development towns” has been marked by poverty and social degradation (see 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, 2006) and its consistent push to Judaize (and hence de-Arabize) the territories under its control, both in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Prior to 1948, Bedouins in the Naqab held vast expanses of lands, estimated at three to five million dunams in varying types of possession (Kedar, 2004). This helps explain the particular severity of what some scholars call the ethnic cleansing in this region, whereby some 80%–85% of Arabs were driven outside state boundaries during and after the 1948 war.

This enabled Israel to “legally” appropriate most of the Bedouins’ land and allocate it for Jewish use. The Bedouins who remained in Israel were strictly controlled and their traditional land ownership system disregarded (see Kedar, 2004; Livnat-Raanan, 2010; Shamir, 1996), allowing the state to claim total territorial control. Demographically, the Bedouins are commonly accused of having “dangerously” high fertility rates that threaten the modern and enlightened way of life sought by the architects of Israeli society. In this respect, an overtly racist discourse has often existed, essentializing the Bedouins as different and inferior.

The above observation 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 toward the management of Bedouins. Yet, it is imperative to understand that the Judaization approach has offered a hegemonic meta-narrative for most policy directions and has provided relatively clear limits for policy makers for over six decades.

Looking Again through a Colonial Lens: Settler Society, Indigeneity, and “Gray Space”

I suggest that scholars reexamine their approaches to the study of Bedouin Arabs under the Israeli regime. Credible research should no longer sidestep the issue of the Israeli ethnocratic regime, particularly Jewish colonization of Israel/Palestine. Analysts and policy makers should use the most comprehensive and robust analytical frameworks that can best interpret community dynamics (for some beginnings in this direction, see Abu-Saad, 2003, 2009; S. Abu-Rabia, 2008; Yiftachel, 2003, 2009b; Livnat-Raanan, 2010).

This does not mean, of course, that studies taken from other angles are of lesser value—rather, such studies would benefit from dealing seriously with the internal colonial dynamic. Further, the credibility of studies using the colonial angle would 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 an act of mobilization that 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 overlooking the colonial setting conceals state and ethnic oppressions. Hence, my call is for a scholarship that would not only be accurate but also amend the distortions of the power-knowledge nexus of previous studies—that is, open up the scholarly discussions to approaches removed from state power, agenda, and vocabulary.
Let us move to some necessary definitions. Colonialism is, of course, a much-discussed and debated term. Space does not allow us to enter these debates here (see Fredrickson, 1988; Kipfer, 2007; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995; Gregory, 2006: ch. 3). For this chapter, and based on the definitions provided by these scholars, suffice it to define colonialism as an external group’s systematic project of seizing, appropriating, and expanding control over contested regions, lands, people, and resources. In colonial relations, the incoming group is placed “above” the land’s previous inhabitants. Colonialism is not limited to the European form prevalent during “the colonial era.” Throughout human history, other colonial systems have developed—most notably territorially contiguous systems of expansion, appropriation, and domination over neighboring groups and regions.

Colonialism can be both “external” (and hence often imperial), expanding beyond the boundaries of sovereignty, and “internal,” affecting internal frontier areas. Internal colonialism is particularly important for this chapter. It implies the adoption of development, land, and planning policies that discriminate, exploit, and displace minority populations in frontier areas within the sovereign state. As developed by the works of Michael Hechter (1975), Elia Zureik (1979), Pablo Gonzalez Casanova (1965), and David Walls (2008), the relationship between settlers and an area’s native population is similar to a colonial relationship between nations. The formal citizenship of the indigenous group, if such citizenship exists, is emptied of much of its content through a series of discriminatory laws and regulations. The internal colony produces resources and power for those ethnically or economically close to the government and generally alienates the indigenous population, which is different in its ethnic, religious, or racial identity.

With regard to studying the Bedouins, I suggest that important aspects of Bedouin life—such as modernization, urbanization, patriarchy, domination, education, tribalism, human rights, gender, and
globalization—cannot be separated from this “meta” colonial point of reference. Consequently, I propose 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 rather a suggestion for a preliminary research agenda that can tease out the profound impact of colonized subordination. As noted, these directions are not entirely new: previous studies have followed Zureik’s pioneering study (1979) and framed Zionism within the colonial framework (see Kimmerling, 2004; Shafir, 1996; Yiftachel, 1992; Yuval-Davis and Abdo, 1995). Several studies have even analyzed practices of “internal colonialism” toward Israel’s Palestinian citizens (see Falah, 1989; Yiftachel, 1996). However, as noted, apart from a few exceptions (see Abu-Saad, 2003; Yiftachel, 2003; Stavenhagen and Amara, chapter 4, this volume; Sheehan, chapter 6, this volume), very few scholars have used these colonial perspectives to explain the plight of Bedouins of the Naqab.

**Settler Society**

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

But geography, needless to say, is highly relevant for the interaction between Bedouins and the institutions, practices, legalities, and discourses of a Jewish 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 that typifies settler societies. In Israel, as is well known, the state has promoted long-standing goals of “conquering the wasteland,” “making the desert bloom,” and “Judaizing the frontier.” Although settling the southern frontier has declined in recent years as a societal value, Judaizing the region has remained high on the Israeli government’s agenda. New policy efforts have thus focused on increasing state land control, the allocating of land to Jewish settlements, and attempts to restrict Bedouin construction and cultivation (see Yiftachel, 2006: ch. 8).

The most visible and painful interaction between Bedouins and the Israeli state has been the practice of land dispossession. This has involved a denial of ancestral land rights, massive forced relocation, and persistent segmentation. 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 destroyed over 400 Arab villages and forbade Arabs to build new localities anywhere in this territory. The only exception was the (coerced) concentrating of the Bedouins in the Jaleel/Galeel1 and Naqab, for which the state has built twenty-eight Bedouin towns and villages to date. These localities offer urbanizing Bedouins a path of modernization and access to many urban services lacking in traditional Bedouin settlements. Despite this, however, the planned Bedouin localities have remained isolated and impoverished. As a result, most Bedouin landowners (claimers) have remained on their ancestral lands rather than move to the planned localities. The Bedouin experience must therefore be studied within these highly relevant geopolitics. This is particularly relevant to the Naqab region, where the state has worked to minimize Bedouin land control, block the return of refugees, and margin-
alize Bedouins in terms of planning, development, education, and local government status (see Abu-Saad, 2003).

Importantly, however, all settler societies are not identical, and a credible use of this perspective necessitates engaging with the specific nature of Zionist colonialism. This begins with the troubled history of persecution and genocide that drove Jews to Palestine, making Zionism in effect a “colonialism of refugees” (Yiftachel, 1997), with Israel being a recognized and sovereign Jewish state. Yet, an attitude of insecurity still prevails among many Jews and Israeli policy makers, 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.

Scholars should also note the variety within Zionist groups and over time with regard to the colonization of Israel/Palestine. Several Zionist groups, such as Brit Shalom and the Communist Party, actively opposed the movement’s colonialist attitudes and programs, while others, such as Etzel (the Irgun), promoted for decades not only the Judaization of Israel/Palestine but also Jewish control and settlement on the East Bank of the Jordan River. The variety of historical periods is also meaningful—Zionism’s early stages were marked by legally legitimate methods of immigration and colonization, centering around land purchase and development programs coordinated with the colonial British regime. During these early periods, relatively little contact existed between Jews and Bedouins, and when it occurred it was generally amicable (Meir, 2009). The later stages of the Zionist project, on the other hand, were increasingly violent and outwardly colonial, peaking with the hotly contested occupation and illegal settlement of the West Bank.

Another important feature of Israeli settler society is the strong sense of Jews belonging to the land. Zionism not only aimed to find a safe haven for Jews but carefully chose the ancient Hebrew homeland
(believed to be the cradle of Judaism) as its target territory. It mobilized to liberate Jews from their subaltern diasporic existence, thereby creating a strong sense of indigeneity among the settlers. In that respect, one may conclude that in terms of self-perception, both Bedouins and Jews in the Naqab see themselves as indigenous.

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 Israel’s growing economic liberalization and the associated socioeconomic gaps. These aspects—mentioned here only briefly—should be explored seriously as scholars ask questions about the interaction between Bedouins and the Israeli society and economy.

To complicate matters, the Naqab Bedouins were also formally included in the Jewish state, receiving formal citizenship in 1949–1950, which came into effect (at least formally) with the lifting of military government in the late 1960s. Citizenship has allowed Bedouins to campaign for rights and equality and to organize politically in a way not possible for Bedouins under other regimes. In some important ways, the Naqab Bedouins have used the spaces for mobilization offered by the Israeli system, most notably in the local politics of recognized towns, which have created a process of gradual democratization, built local autonomy, and hence mobilized the population.

Yet, outside their small enclaves, Bedouin citizenship remains largely formal—a method of registration, organization, and surveillance, offering negligible political clout. It has not allowed for genuine participation in state or regional affairs, nor has it served as a platform for receiving a fair share of public resources. The Bedouins have remained, as noted by Swirski (2008), “transparent citizens,” observing the settler state mobilizing massive resources for Jewish seizure of their ancestors’ lands (see also Noach, 2009; Livnat-Raanan, 2010; Tzfadia and Katz, 2010). The meaning of minority citizenship in such a settler society still awaits serious exploration. It is noteworthy
that most Israeli scholars who study Bedouin land and resources have adopted the state’s interpretation—that the indigenous population possesses no land ownership rights. They have written this explicitly (see Ben-David, 2004; Levin, Kark, and Galilee, 2009; Franzman and Kark, 2011; Kressel, 2007) or, more typically, have remained silent on the issue.

Characteristic of colonial engagements, Bedouins’ interaction with the Israeli settler state 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,” divide them from other Palestinian communities in Israel/Palestine, and consequently de-Palestinianize and even de-Arabize their identity (see Yonah, Abu-Saad, and Kaplan, 2004). Bedouins have been frequently constructed 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 Mazin Abu-Mahfouz (2008).

Scholars have also explored how Israel’s divisive strategy has been accompanied by a system of partial co-optation whereby the state has attempted to incorporate the Bedouins while keeping them on the margins. In the Naqab, this strategy received support from some local Arab leaders who enshrined their leadership over towns and tribes with the aid of the state’s colonizing apparatus. But state support came at a price: the state severed Bedouin ties with Palestinian and other Arab and Muslim groups, pressured Bedouins to serve in the Israeli army, and effectively obligated Bedouins to condone Judaization of the region outside its Arab enclaves (see Livnat-Raanan, 2010).

This identity regime has also attempted to segregate Bedouin society internally by supporting the traditional patriarchal tribal system
and by condoning practices such as the marriage of close relatives and minors, pervasive and increasing polygamy (Al-Krenawi and Graham, 1999), and internal racism. The Israeli state even quietly con- doned, until the late 1980s, the activities of the highly conservative Islamic movement, which was seen as providing a “softer” locus of identity than the national Palestinian movements’ identity, which highlighted Palestinian national identity. Here lies a paradox: settler societies, including Israel, commonly represent themselves as modern and Western, yet they take actions to prolong and deepen reactionary practices among the local populations. These aspects have rarely been studied, and their exploration is critical to the interaction of the sett- tling state with the indigenous population.

Finally, another important interaction worth studying is the rise of civil society. Specifically, Arab-Jewish organizations have begun to articulate a joint struggle on behalf of the Naqab’s various ethnic com- munities. This has surfaced in joint regional struggles around environ- mental hazards, investment incentives, and tax concessions. While this is still a minor phenomenon, it is gradually influencing regional discourses and policies. Recently, several key civil society organiza- tions with considerable funding have begun to construct a common Arab-Jewish space and struggle, in which the democratization of a (post)colonial settler society can be imagined, debated, and planned (see Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, 2011).

**Indigeneity**

An important field of study, highly relevant to the Bedouin experi- ence, has recently developed around the experience of indigenous peoples and the concept of indigeneity. A range of theoretical, histori- cal, and empirical studies have accumulated into a burgeoning body of knowledge about people residing in colonized regions and states who have subsequently become or been labeled “indigenous.” This field
illuminates the plight of minorities commonly ignored by 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 through modernist assimilation. This politicization views “the indigenous” as an agent of history and a perpetrator of development and struggle—and 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:

- prior occupation and use of colonized homeland regions
- maintenance of customs, laws, language, and cultures different from those of the colonizing group
- unbroken residence in the colonized region (save forced evictions)
- dispossession and economic marginalization
- loss of pre-existing self-rule

Indigenous status under the post-colonial approaches has become a claim for power, self determination, culture, and place (Smith, 1999; Tsosie, 2002; Howitt, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007). It combines scholarly approaches with an anticolonial 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 fora in which indigenous peoples have developed strategies for turning their subordination into more equal coexistence with other groups now residing in their territory, while rebuilding their culture and sovereignty (see Abu-Saad and Champagne, 2006).

A particularly rich area of inquiry has revolved around different forms of indigenous legalities, customary laws, and regulatory sys-
tems, as well as the ability to imagine and design “multiple sovereignties” between indigenous groups and the modern nation-states established on their territories (see 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 (see Malone, 2007; Louis, 2007) and on new perceptions of politics, culture, and identities (see Riseth, 2007). The political climax of this genuinely global campaign was the 2007 adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which identifies a range of protections for the culture, land, and sovereignty of indigenous peoples.

This surge has led to a variety of political, legal, and cultural struggles in which indigenous peoples have begun to rally around their history, identity, and resources. One of the major achievements was the Australian High Court’s famous 1992 *Mabo* decision, which recognized for the first time the existence of native title in Australia and hence repealed the *terra nullius* doctrine used for over a century to annul aboriginal land rights (see Howitt, 2006). *Mabo* has had a major influence on indigenous peoples’ land struggles worldwide, including the Bedouins in the Naqab, who have used the example of this Australian breakthrough in their dealings with Israeli authorities and courts (see Meir, 2009).

The relevance of the *Mabo* decision to the Naqab Bedouins is clear. Like Eddie Mabo’s community, the Bedouins are a group that resided on ancestral land for centuries prior to Zionist European settlement, while subsequently facing dispossession and marginalization. Prior to Israeli rule, the Bedouins had a system of tribal governance and a set of well-established traditions and customary laws, which operated largely uninterrupted under the Ottoman and British colonial regimes (see Bailey, 1980, 2009; Luz, 2008; Avci, 2009; Meir, 2009; Falah, 1983, 1989; Abu-Sitta, 2003, 2010).
The history of every group is of course unique, but Bedouin history—particularly the manner in which Bedouins interact with the new rulers of their land—resembles in important ways that of other indigenous peoples, such as the Maori 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 (see Abu-Saad, 2008; Stavenhagen and Amara, chapter 4, this volume; Sheehan, chapter 6, this volume).

The indigeneity angle can develop these comparisons and interrogate fascinating questions regarding the impact of indigenous consciousness on the Bedouins’ struggle, the rise of indigenous globalism, 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 (fellaheen), who came to the region mainly during the nineteenth century, enjoy a lower social status than those perceived as original land owners (asliyeen). Another sensitive issue is the relationship 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 legality/approval/safety and the “blackness” of eviction/destruction/death. Gray spaces are neither integrated nor eliminated, forming pseudo-
permanent margins around today’s urban regions that exist partially outside the gaze of state authorities and city plans (see Yiftachel, 2009b).

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. While this phenomenon is deeply rooted in colonial times and urban planning (Perera, 2009), its recent manifestation in cities of the global South has amplified to the extent that more than half the population can be classified as “informal” (see Davis, 2006; Neuwirth, 2005; Roy, 2005, 2009; Yiftachel, 2009b).

The relevance to Bedouin society is obvious. Around the city of Beersheba, gray spaces have rapidly grown into sprawling expanses of Bedouin Arab shanty towns and villages, constructed of wooden and tin shacks (Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2004). This is a clear byproduct of Israeli policies, which have refused to recognize Bedouin ancestral land ownership, effectively turning the Bedouins into “invaders.” Gray space is also evident in the planned Arab development towns around Beersheba, where squatters are increasingly occupying public open spaces. There is also a growing number of “temporary” Arab residents in the metropolis of Beersheba, who reside mainly in the dilapidated Ottoman Arab city center and the adjacent impoverished
neighborhoods. While around one thousand professional Arabs are permanent residents of the city, a few thousand others constitute an “urban shadow.” These people are usually not registered as city residents, nor are they represented in the city’s local government; subsequently, they are denied basic communal services, such as Arab education facilities, places of worship, and political representation (see Abu-Saad, 2009; Yiftachel, 2009a).

The Bedouin experience around Beersheba could thus be more thoroughly studied and compared to the plight of indigenous urbanizing populations in vast regions of the global South. 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 “inverse colonialism,” which constitutes a de facto form of metropolitan governance, facilitating the dominant interests through limited minority mobility, alongside exploitation, denial, and segregation, within growing neoliberal metropolitan regions (see Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004; Roy, 2007).

In this sense, Naqab Bedouins’ existence within globalizing Beersheba exposes them simultaneously to old and new types of colonial relations. The first alludes to the ethno-national expansion “from above,” described earlier, whereby the dominant population seizes control over indigenous groups and their resources. 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 into the latest product of capitalist globalization (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004; Davis, 2006). It is time to explore this aspect of Bedouins’ existence and this additional layer of exclusion—namely, the economic relations forged under the current neoliberal age.
Importantly, processes of colonization—both old and new—are never unilateral. In most cases, including that of the Naqab Bedouins, these processes meet resistance and change. 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. Asef Bayat (2007), for example, notes the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary”; that is, the gradual, un-heroic movement of residents, traders, and workers who continue to pour into urban space as sites of opportunity. Further, Nihal Perera (2000) notes a process of inverse “indigenization” of colonial infrastructure. Arjun Appadurai (2001), Ananya Roy (2007), and Tom Angotti (2006) show how local politics are organized in today’s slums and how they are creating new hubs of globalizing civil society networks, often with a surprising effect on tempering centralized power.

The Bedouin Arabs, like most indigenous groups, have not been passive recipients of colonial and globalizing forces. A notable process of self-empowerment and politicization has taken place during the last few decades, with a stubborn struggle of sumood—the Palestinian Arab term for “hanging on” and surviving against persistent crises and difficulties. In the Bedouins’ case, sumood has meant the daily and non-heroic effort to hold on to their ancestral land communities after several rounds of evictions and disposessions (see Abu-Frich, 2010; Noach, 2009; Yiftachel, 2009a). This has been promoted through the formation of several civil bodies and institutions, most notably the voluntary Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages, 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. They have 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 differing agendas and personalities. Another source of tension exists vis-à-vis Northern Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian national cause, both 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 Bedouins negotiate their position within their traditional and colonized homeland.

Finally, resistance and survival under a colonizing regime also involve positive elements, such as the nurturing of cultural traditions and community spirit. As Barbara Ehrenreich (2007) and Raewyn Connell (2007) remind us, celebration and joy have always been a central part of native and minority life and survival, not least among the Palestinians (Serhan, 2008). Somewhat removed from the direct political arena, communal events such as weddings, holidays, youth activities, women’s groups, art, poetry, and music sustain 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.

Indigenous (In)Justice is indeed a major step in generating knowledge about the dynamics of settler-indigenous relations through the lens of the Bedouin Arab communities of southern Israel/Palestine. Yet, as this chapter illustrates, more is needed in order to unpack, understand, and challenge the (internal) colonial relations currently existing in the Naqab and, equally important, to construct ways to transform Naqab society into a post-colonial stage of indigenous injustice. This is a major challenge for future research and policy development.
REFERENCES


Altman, G. (2009). “The young Bedouin generation learns the advantage of violating the law and is brought up to disrespect and disregard the state’s requirements.” *Karkah* 66:42–49 (Hebrew).


NOTES

1. “Galilee” in English.