The problems of minorities in general, and indigenous peoples in particular, have received close attention in a variety of colonial, postcolonial, postnational, and ethnocentric studies (Anderson 2000; Penrose 2000; Yiftachel 1999). Such studies have involved new interpretations of state-minority relations, closer attention to identity issues, and a renewed interest in the reciprocal relations between space and ethnic relations (Paasi 1999; Taylor 2000; Watson and Gibson 1995). The present paper aims to analyze a protracted struggle for control over lands between the state of Israel and the indigenous Bedouin Arab population in the state’s southern Beer-Sheva region (fig. 1). For centuries this area was the main grazing and habitation ground for the Bedouin Arabs, but since 1948 it has become subject to conflicting demands and part of an escalating conflict. On the one hand, the state wishes to “Judaize” the region by constructing suburban and semirural Jewish developments and by diminishing Arab land control. To that end, it devised a plan to urbanize the Bedouin Arabs into seven towns on the fringes of the Beer-Sheva urban area. On the other, the Bedouin Arabs still living on the land wish to maintain their traditional lifestyle and resist migration into the seven planned towns. State authorities and Bedouin Arabs are at present in a deadlock over this issue.

Beyond local circumstances, the case at hand is a prism through which we can study the consequences of an explicit policy of territorial expansion and control by an “ethnicizing” state over a peripheral (yet not powerless) minority. Given the longevity of the struggle and the considerable resources and energy devoted by all sides, it has now become a test case for both the
Israeli government and the Arab minority. In that sense, the (yet unresolved) state-Bedouin conflict represents a notable watershed in the evolution of ethnic relations in Israel. I argue that the inability of the state to impose its plans upon the Bedouin Arabs signals a process of fragmentation and weakening which results from an embedded contradiction in the ethnocratic state: the more it attempts to ethnicize lands and control minorities, the more it faces organized, often militant resistance from peripheral (or subaltern) minorities.

**INDIGENOUS MINORITIES IN SETTLER STATES: THEORETICAL ASPECTS**

**Settler Societies, Ethnocracies, and the Control of Indigenous Minorities**

Theoretically, I wish to explore the political consequences of state policies of territorial domination over indigenous minorities. The focus here is on “pure settlement colonial societies,” which sprang up around the world as a result of European colonialism (Shafir 1993; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995). Pure settlement colonialism saw the new settlers attempting to recreate a...
European white society in the new geographical setting, a process that often entailed a systematic dispossession and exclusion of indigenous groups. The theoretical point of departure in this paper is the inherent tension between the political and territorial reality of nation-building in settler states, and the place and identity of indigenous minorities. The settler state is generally expansionist and ethnocratic, usually encroaching on the territorial and symbolic resources of the previous inhabitants of the land. In addition, it generally excludes the locals from its nation-building projects, thereby creating a structural condition of embedded conflict. In the long term, this conflict is likely to fragment and weaken the state (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995; Samaddar 2000).

In settler societies the relations between ethnic majorities and indigenous peoples are thus a particularly problematic part of nation-building efforts. The tensions associated with these relations have intensified in recent decades as a consequence of parallel processes of democratization, economic restructuring, and the globalization of both economic markets and local ethnic revivals (Escobar 2001; Gurr 1993). As shown below, these tensions and conflicts appear clearly in the case of Israel.

“Pure” settler states, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Israel, South Africa, and New Zealand, have relied on waves of immigrants attracted to the economic and political opportunities of these nascent societies. Their economies quickly expanded using the vast resources appropriated from the indigenous peoples, most notably land. The governments of such societies have continuously attempted to construct new collective identities and cultures in order to create a nation from the disparate array of ethnic groups assembling under their jurisdictions (Anderson 2000; Jacobs 1997; Mann 2000). The ongoing expansion of white settlement and the “frontier ethos” that accompanied that settlement therefore served two purposes: enlarging the state’s territorial base (thereby making room for further waves of immigrants) and forming a major cultural pillar around which a new nation could be built (Kimmerling 1983; Yiftachel 1996).

Clearly, these colonial endeavors ran largely counter to the needs, rights, and aspirations of indigenous peoples (Anderson 2000). As Kellerman (1993) notes, settling societies had three main options in dealing with indigenous groups: genocide, tight control, or (a degree of) partnership. The selection of these options mainly relied on the power balance among the groups. In New Zealand, for example, where the Maori population was relatively strong, the 1840 Waitiki Treaty guaranteed a degree of power-sharing between Europeans and natives (Pawson 1992). In Australia, to cite a different example, where the indigenous Aboriginal population was far weaker, the early British colonies used a mixture of genocide and control methods (Bennet 1989). These strategies were later transformed gradually into control-oriented public policies.
following the establishment of a (democratic) Australian Commonwealth and
the transformation of colonies into states in 1901 (Mercer 1997).

In most pure settler-colonial societies, nation-building projects excluded
indigenous groups, which could not (and often did not wish to) be incorporated
into the white national identity. In cases where significant conflict persisted
between the settling group and the indigenous population, the regime often
developed into an ethnocracy, a distinct regime type established to enhance the
expansion and control of a dominant ethno-nation in multiethnic territories. In
such regimes, ethnicity, not citizenship, forms the main criterion for distributing
power and resources. As a result, they typically display high levels of uneven
ethnic segregation and a process of polarizing ethnic politics. Ethnocratic
regimes developed in most European settler societies during the nineteenth cen-
tury, for example, in Australia, the United States, and South Africa.

Today, ethnocratic regimes can be found in states such as Sri Lanka,
Latvia, Malaysia, Estonia, and Israel/Palestine. They combine a degree of
political openness and formal democratic representation with political struc-
tures that facilitate the seizure of contested territory and polity by a dominant
ethno-nation and its diasporas. During this process, the dominant group
appropriates the state apparatus and marginalizes or excludes peripheral eth-
ic, indigenous, and national minorities (Yiftachel 1996, 1999). In the course
of establishing and maintaining an ethnocratic rule, ethnic logic is often dif-
fused into the political discourse, receiving legitimacy as an acceptable form
of political organization.

This diffusion creates two notable processes. The first is the formation of
ethno-classes among both majority and minority communities, where a leading
founding group (usually white Protestants in Western settler societies) estab-
ishes a dominant economic, cultural, and political standing within the new
nation while immigrant groups of other ethnic backgrounds are relegated to
inferior positions. The second is the emergence of organized resistance to the
ethnocratic order emanating from disgruntled minorities. These minorities often
use cracks in the system, such as the legal system or changing international
norms, to challenge the dominance of the settling group and hence constantly
destabilize the ethnocratic political order (Jacobs 1997; Yiftachel 2000).

Control, Territory, and Planning
The role of ethnic territory (that is, land with practiced, desired, or contested
group control) is important to consider in the context of settler societies and
their treatment of indigenous minorities. The control over such minorities is
often associated with a relatively firm territorial order of exclusion, segrega-
tion, and ghettoization, with most control over the state’s land resources
being expropriated from the original inhabitants (Mann 1999; Sibley 1995;
Sack 1986). This process often continues even after a settler society gains
independence, prompting analysts to observe an ongoing creation of internal ethnic frontiers (Kellerman 1993) and majority strategies of internal colonialism (Ross and Drakakis-Smith 1983; Zureik 1979).

Given the above, the issues of land, land use, and spatial planning have been absolutely central to the mechanisms of control over indigenous minorities in ethnocratic states. Land regulation has been a prime resource over which continuous ethnic and racial struggles have been staged, essential for the expansionist colonization efforts as it provided significant assets for the settling societies, as well as a means to segregate indigenous populations. Yet, at the same time, it has provided the material and spiritual basis for the very survival of indigenous cultures, identity, and economy (Anderson and Gale 1992; Fenster 1997). This dual setting has exposed an inherent conflict in settler societies between nation-building projects and indigenous peoples. While the creation of a new nation demanded full state control over land, indigenous minorities were usually excluded from participating in the identity-building process, thus making them even more attached to their ancestors’ land. This inherent conflict has plagued pure settler societies since their inception, and has resurfaced in recent years as these societies attempt to enter into a postcolonial era (Jacobs 1993, 101; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995).

Given the importance of land, urban and regional planning—which generally regulates land use, housing, and development policies—became a major instrument of state control over minorities in settler societies. As shown elsewhere (Flyvbjerg 1998; Yiftachel 1998) planning and land policies can be explicitly and implicitly used to control ethnic minorities through territorial containment, socioeconomic deprivation, and procedural exclusion. The Bedouin case study below demonstrates the critical role of planning and land policies in shaping the lives of indigenous people.

A theoretical understanding of control policies cannot, however, be complete without addressing the dynamic and ever-changing relations between states and minorities. Public policies centering on controlling minorities can rarely remain unchallenged for long periods, with popular resistance likely to emerge as an inherent part of the contemporary sociopolitical order (Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; Penrose 2000). The Israeli case study that follows shows how state policies affecting the territorial containment of an indigenous group were implemented and contested, thereby generating a protracted interethnic conflict and political instability.

It has thus been argued that given such circumstances, the modern state is currently under siege, being exposed to intensifying pressures both “from above” by national and international capital, and “from below” by an increasingly politicized civil society, characterized by an ever-increasing number of community pressure groups (Taylor 1994; Sassen 1998). These
pressures are gradually limiting the state’s ability to implement its policies, including its spatial plans and development programs.

The proliferation of community and locality groups is of particular relevance to the issue. These groups have increasingly challenged state policies, using their ability to mobilize popular support against both government and (less frequently) capital. As a result, and possibly as a countermove to the growing openness of the world economy and politics, intrastate politics have been marked by the emergence of new collective identities along locality, ethnic, gender, and ideological lines (Castells 1997). The role of territory and place has been central to the formulation of many of these identities, as foci for mobilization and identity-building on both urban and regional scales, most evidently in the fluid conditions of postcoloniality (Comaroff 1998; Keith and Pile 1993).

This social and political fragmentation and the growing recognition of the importance of place and territory have given indigenous groups new platforms from which to launch their struggle against their material and spiritual dispossession. In rejecting patronizing notions of “trickle-down” benefits flowing from modernization and economic growth, indigenous peoples have entered a new stage in their campaigns that revolves around rediscovering (and even reinventing) their collective traditions and building rival collective identities to the ones offered by the modern nation-state and its hegemonic culture (Escobar 2001; Jacobs 1997). Therefore, since the 1960s, conflict has been more open, direct, and confrontational. Some policy gains have been made, for instance, by groups such as the First Nations in Canada, the Maoris in New Zealand, and the Aborigines in Australia, especially in the areas of land rights and self-governance (Anderson 2000; Jacobs 1997; Mercer 1993; Pawson 1992).

But despite these moves and challenges, settler states have generally managed to preserve and reproduce the hierarchical societal order by using more sophisticated (and often formally “democratic”) mechanisms to maintain the majority’s hold over state power and resources, directing most political and material benefits to the already powerful rungs of society (Harvey 1992). This is especially so in the case of ethnocratic regimes in which ethnonationalism is a dominant political order. In such situations, fragmentation occurs mainly among minorities who mobilize against the state but generally without major gains. In such circumstances, too, urban and regional planning has become a central governmental tool in reproducing a stratified social order and in widening the gaps between ethnic majorities and minorities, centers and peripheries, rich and poor (Friedmann 1992; Sandercock 1998).

Within this scholarly context, the present paper aims to explore the consequences of ethnic control policies exercised by an ethnocratic settler state and the inherent conflict typifying pure settler societies between the state and indigenous peoples. Can indigenous people effectively challenge well-established...
patterns of majority domination? Can the modern settler state reconcile the inherent tension between state control and indigenous (territorial, cultural) aspirations? The following account of the struggle over Bedouin Arab lands in the Beer-Sheva region of Israel may provide some answers.

A Settling Ethnocracy in Israel/Palestine

Israel is an ethnocratic settler state, where Jews have settled and gained control over most regions during the last one hundred years. During this process, the indigenous Palestinian Arab inhabitants of the land (which include the Negev's Bedouin) have lost most of their land resources. The Israeli state maintains to date three main pillars of a settler society: it continues to facilitate only Jewish immigration into the country, maintains a land regime of centralized Jewish control, and continues the construction of Jewish settlements. While the intensity of these components has waned in recent years, they still form a major force in the current shaping of Israel's political geography. The state thus enables, assists, and promotes the central Zionist project of Judaizing Israel/Palestine.

The ethnocratic characteristics of the Israeli regime are quite vivid. Rights and powers in Israel are largely stratified according to an ethno-class configuration (Shafir and Peled 1998), and state protection of the country's Arab minority against the tyranny of the majority is quite limited (Ghanem 1998; Kretzmer 1990; Gavison 1999). In addition, there is no distinct Israeli demos. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the existence of Jewish settlements in these partially annexed territories, along with the sovereign roles accorded to diaspora Jews and their representative organizations in Israel, results in Israel's lack of clear political and territorial boundaries (Yiftachel 1999; Kemp 1997).

The Judaization strategy is at the heart of Israel's settling agenda. It has its roots in pre–1948 Jewish settlement methods, which attempted to create contiguous blocks and chains of segregated Jewish localities, mainly along the coastal plains and northern valleys. But the project swung into full force only after 1948, backed by the legal planning and violent powers possessed by sovereign states and condoned by the international community. The Judaization and parallel “de-Arabization” of the space employed a range of strategies following the flight and eviction of some 700,000 to 750,000 Palestinian refugees in the 1948 Naqbah (disaster). These included the prevention of their return, the destruction of some four hundred Arab villages, and the expropriation of some 50–60 percent of the land owned by Arabs who remained in Israel. A central policy also promoted Jewish settlement in areas considered as internal frontiers, mainly those with an Arab majority, such as the Galilee and the Beer-Sheva area in the northern Negev (see the Beer-Sheva region in fig. 1).
A Culture of Judaization
What made the massive Judaization project possible? Clearly, military force, violent imposition of state rule, and international political clout played their part, as did the toughness and resilience of Zionism resulting, inter alia, from decades of anti-Semitism, the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust, and intensifying Arab hostilities. I have elsewhere characterized pre–1948 Jewish settlement in Palestine as colonialism of collective survival (Yiftachel 1998), yet we also need to account for the powerful process of cultural construction that enabled Jewish leaders to proceed with the dispossessing project while presenting it internally and externally as moral, necessary, and essential to modern planning.

Above all, the Judaization project has been driven by the Zionist premise that Israel/Palestine is a territory that “belongs” to, and only to, the Jewish people based on their presence on the land during biblical times, their subsequent eviction from the homeland, and their sufferings during exile. It was hence constructed as an ideological and moral project to offer a solution to the history of murderous anti-Semitism in the Jewish diasporas. The Zionists thus built Israel based on their belief in an age-old Jewish “right” to a country and strove to fill it with the majority of the Jewish people. In the process, they attempted to marginalize, ignore, or erase centuries of continuous Arab residence on the land. The Judaization of the “empty” land has thus become an official policy, as noted by Israel’s first national plan (Weitz 1952, 3–7):

Modern nations all over the world attempt to decentralize their population, so they do not become dependent on central congested cities. . . . In Israel this task is more urgent but also easier . . . because unlike Britain, we do not require to move existing populations, but simply settle new immigrants in the country’s empty regions [emphasis added]. Israel can thus decentralize its population to the north, Jerusalem corridor and Negev regions, as part of the only rational way to develop this country.

The combined discourses of nationalism, modernity, and professional planning put into practice during the late 1940s and 1950s represented an exclusive form of Jewish territoriality, aiming to quickly “indigenize” immigrant Jews and to conceal, trivialize, or marginalize the prior existence of Palestinian Arabs. The “frontier” and “internal frontier” became central icons, while the planning and implementation of frontier settlement was considered one of the highest achievements of any Zionist activity. In some respects the entire country (within whatever borders) became a frontier. Regarding the need for settling Jews in the Negev, the region to which I devote the second part of this paper, David Ben-Gurion, the longtime leader of the Zionist movement and Israel’s first prime minister claimed, “The people of Israel will be tested by the Negev . . . only by settling and developing the Negev can
Israel, as a modern, independent and freedom-seeking nation, rise to the challenge that history put before us. . . . All of us—veterans and olim (new immigrants, OY), [? CHECK QUOTE] young and old, men and women—should see the Negev as their place and their future and turn southwards” (quoted in Gradus 1984).

In a similar spirit, Yossef Weitz, chairman of the Jewish National Fund, the main Zionist arm of land purchase and settlement, claimed on 19 January 1948, “the Hebrew state will have to embark on a wide settlement strategy in its first three years . . . big part of it in the Negev. . . . In the Negev we’ll be able to implement immediately our development laws, according to which we shall expropriate land according to a well-designed plan” (Mapai conference, quoted in Weitz, 1950, 367). Such sentiments, pertaining to the entire state and specifically to the Negev region, were translated into a pervasive program of Jewish-Zionist territorial socialization, expressed in school curriculum, literature, political speeches, popular music, and other spheres of public discourse. Settlement thus continued to form a cornerstone of Zionist nation-building, well after the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state.

The state’s planning apparatus has been crucial in implementing the Judaization process in Israel. First, Israel enacted a series of land laws and established land institutions that transferred most Arab lands to the Jewish state and prevented their return to Arab hands. These steps included, first, the transfer of all refugee property to the state, which amounted to more than half the land of the main population areas. Second, the state exploited the transition between British and Israeli legal systems, with the latter not recognizing any previous title to land, apart from individual private title (tabu) (Kark 1995; Kedar 1998). Given the multiple possibilities to own and use land prior to 1948, this was a major tool in dispossessing Palestinian Arabs. As shown later, such policies significantly harmed the Bedouins because their land was classified in such a way that allowed its “legal” expropriation by the state. Third, the land policy system was put in place by Jewish decision-makers who included representatives of world Jewry in key decision-making positions without including or consulting local Arab citizens. The result was a massive and unidirectional transfer of land from Arab individuals to the (Jewish) state. Currently, more than 96 percent of land is in state or Jewish ownership.

The state’s planning and settlement policies have complemented the land system in facilitating the Judaization project. They planned and facilitated the construction of some seven hundred Jewish settlements while prohibiting Arabs from building new localities (except for Bedouin sedentarization and concentration, as discussed below). In addition, these systems of public policy-making methodically excluded Arab citizens from any position of influence. As a result, the land ownership patterns and settlement landscapes were thoroughly transformed, making Israel a conspicuous case of a dynamic
and effective settling regime (Benvenisti 2000; Yiftachel and Kedar 2000). This is the historical, political, and geographical context within which the Beer-Sheva region in the northern Negev developed.

THE BEER-SHEVA REGION

Beer-Sheva was established by the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century as a small urban service center for the Bedouin Arab population of the Negev (al-Naqab) region. It remained a small Arab town of 5,000 to 6,000 inhabitants until its conquest by Israel in 1948. Since then it has become an icon of Israel’s efforts to settle, develop, and Judaize the “internal frontier” of the northern Negev.

Beer-Sheva was planned by the Israeli authorities as an exemplar of a modernist, national city (Gradus 1984). The vast majority of its population was comprised of immigrants from Muslim countries (Eastern Jews, or Mizrahim) who formed the social, economic, and political margins of Israeli-Jewish society. Beer-Sheva was planned as the capital of southern Israel, and became the center for a series of small frontier towns and agricultural settlements in what Gradus and Stern (1980) termed the “Negev Regiopolis.” Part of this regiopolis has been a large and loosely settled Siyag area, northeast of the city, into which most of the Bedouin Arabs of the Negev were forcefully moved during the 1950s.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the city began to suburbanize, with the middle classes moving either to new low-density, higher-quality neighborhoods or to relatively wealthy satellite towns mainly north and east of the city. A further transformation occurred during the 1990s, when a massive influx of migrants, arriving mainly from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, congregated in several newly built neighborhoods, chiefly in the city’s western areas. The Beer-Sheva region has thus become dominated by binational (Arab-Jewish) and multicultural (intra-Jewish) divisions, many of them expressed spatially (Gradus 2000).

In the present analysis, I will focus on the indigenous Bedouin Arab areas of the Beer-Sheva region north and east of the city (fig. 1). These areas have not been included in the Beer-Sheva plans, but rather are administered by a different set of authorities and institutions. Consequently, the Arab localities enjoyed very little of the economic or physical development of the region while increasing their dependence on its urban functions. This led to a lack of compliance with the region’s plans and the classification of many such settlements by the regional government’s planning authorities as illegal, unrecognized, or spontaneous. At the end of 2000 the “illegal” localities accommodated an estimated population of 65,000, with no planning recognition. A further population of the same size currently resides in impoverished and partially planned “Bedouin” towns (Abu-Saad and Lithwick 2000).
The Bedouin Arabs and the Judaization Process

Some 130,000 indigenous Arabs reside in the northern Negev, mostly within the Beer-Sheva metropolitan region. Until the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel, this previously seminomadic community relied primarily on cattle, herds, rain-fed agriculture, and commerce for its livelihood (Ben-David 1991). During and immediately following the 1948 war, roughly 80 to 85 percent of the Negev Arabs either fled or were expelled by Israeli forces to Egypt, Jordan, and the West Bank. Approximately 11,000 remained in Israel and were transferred to an area immediately northeast of Beer-Sheva called the Siyag (fence), known for its low agricultural fertility. Twelve tribes were relocated into the Siyag, joining six tribes who already lived there. This area, controlled by military rule until 1966, stretches over a tenth of the Negev area (fig. 1). No stone or concrete building activity was allowed in the Siyag, forcing most tribes to erect localities made up of shacks and tents.

The Siyag’s infertile lands, the shrinking grazing and agricultural space, and the urban proximity have dramatically transformed the lifestyle of Bedouin Arabs. From controllers of the desert region, they became fringe dwellers of the growing, modernizing Beer-Sheva region. At the same time, the military government, which severely restricted the Bedouin Arabs’ mobility outside the Siyag region, hampered their (already limited) ability to compete in the Beer-Sheva labor market. During the first decade, most of the Bedouins in the Siyag returned to a traditional self-sustaining lifestyle, but later began to seek employment and commerce with the surrounding Jewish localities (Falah 1984; Meir 1997).

The exclusion of the Arabs from military-controlled areas was officially justified on the basis of security considerations, but it resulted in preferential treatment of Jewish immigrants in the area who could obtain employment with little competition from local Arabs. The immigrants were mainly low-income Mizrahim who were settled by the government in the peripheral Negev, often against their will. Their absorption into the labor market was particularly important for the authorities, who aspired to create an integrated Jewish-Zionist nation and to minimize intra-Jewish political and social tensions (Gradus 1984; Yiftachel 1998).

The Land Question

The majority of land in the Negev was classified as mawat (“dead,” or uncultivated land). The roots of this classification are found in the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, which designated uncultivated lands surrounding villages (usually beyond a radius of 1.5 miles from the last house) as mawat. As part of the Tanzimat modernization program, the Ottoman authorities intended to encourage the revival of such land by granting close to full ownership (miri)
in return for its cultivation. Mawat land was considered the property of the sultan, who retained ownership in the name of and for the benefit of population in the area (Kedar 1996).

The British Mandate Government reissued the Mawat Ordinance in 1921, but this time the intention of the law was different. Instead of encouraging land reclamation and acquisition by the cultivator, it served to consolidate land in the hands of government. The British gave the holders and cultivators of mawat two months to request to register cultivated mawat land in their names. At the end of this period, holders lost their right to revive such uncultivated land, and the land was classified as state land. This legal move permanently blocked the possibility of ownership by local holders, whether to meet the needs of growing villages or for the sake of establishing new Arab settlements. However, most Arab land holders in the Negev did not register their lands in 1921 due to a number of factors, including: (1) the age-old Bedouin tradition of not cooperating with government authorities; (2) lack of knowledge regarding the system of registration due to the decentralized and uneducated nature of the population; (3) a desire to steer clear of the authorities’ demands for fear of taxation and military conscription; and (4) an overall indifference towards administrative processes, which is characteristic of peripheral populations.

The British authorities created an additional problem for the Arabs of the Negev. The comprehensive process of land registration implemented by the British proceeded from north to south and never reached the Beer-Sheva sub-district. For this reason, even land in the Negev that was recognized by the Ottomans as private property was not registered in an organized manner, and the many Arab settlements that already existed in the area were never marked on the map. However, while these legal moves occurred during British rule in Palestine, the authorities never attempted to use the new regulations to evict or control the Arabs of the south. For decades, the new land laws did not impact the traditional forms of Bedouin Arab land possession and ownership, which was usually clearly demarcated, whether verbally or through documents signed by neighboring tribes and communities. The intrusive use of these laws was left to the Israeli government.

Under Israeli control, nearly all lands held by Negev Arabs prior to 1948 were declared state property. In a series of legal moves, the land was reconfirmed as either “dead” (mawat) or “absentee” property, belonging to refugees who “left” the state during the 1948–49 war. These legal classifications gave the state permission, under its own rules, to nationalize the land (for detail, see Ben-David 1995; Kedar 1998; Lustick 1980). Given the self-declared composition of Israel as Jewish and the active involvement of worldwide Jewish organizations, such as the Jewish National Fund and the Jewish Agency, in the official state apparatus of land administration, the declaration
of these areas as state lands meant their exclusive use by Jews. Indeed, the lands were subsequently allocated to some fifty Jewish settlements that were established in the Beer-Sheva metropolitan region as part of the Jewish effort to settle the internal frontier. The land was allocated mainly to small “development towns” and communal rural villages whose farms stretched over most lands previously held by Palestinian Arabs and beyond.

The classification of the vast majority of the Negev as state land blocked virtually every possibility of any land use registration in the name of Arabs, who had held it for generations (Kedar 1998). In addition, Israel’s 1953 Land Acquisition Law expropriated the land of all persons who were not residing upon or cultivating their land on one decisive date, 1 April 1952. Because the vast majority of the Negev Bedouins had been forcibly removed from their land prior to this date, they lost their rights to land even when possessing documented proof of ownership (Babai 1997). In this way, the pre–1948 Arab community of the Negev—external refugees and locals citizens alike—lost more than 95 percent of their landed property. This loss was reflected in the bitter statements made at a 6 December 1997 meeting with A. Burg, chairman of Israeli Knesset, by Hassan abu-Quidder, a Bedouin activist, protesting against Israel’s land policies: “Only in one instance shall the Bedouin Arabs get their full and equal rights in the Jewish State: only if miraculously we’ll stop occupying, needing or using any land. Then we shall receive what we truly deserve—full air rights.”

But local Arabs did not accept this legal situation. Those who became Israeli citizens have since submitted 3,200 legal claims to their expropriated lands, based on traditional Ottoman or British records that attest to their past holdings. To date, however, not even one Arab claimant has been awarded full ownership rights. The Israeli legal system consistently followed legal precedents, refusing to award ownership without documented proof of individual title (Shamir 1998). On the other hand, the state recognized partial holding rights for the Bedouin Arabs, either in accordance with land arrangements practiced before 1948 or according to regulations agreed upon by the state and the traditional Arab elites after the transfer to the Siyag area (Babai 1997; Ben-David 1995; Shamir 1998). However, these rights have remained vague, thus depriving the Arabs of basic development and planning capabilities.

Five decades later the tension involving Bedouin Arab land ownership is still a central issue in the Beer-Sheva region. Ninety-five percent of Arab claims to land have not been settled, covering approximately 800,000 dunams (Mana Commission 1997). Half of these lands are in areas settled by Jews. The compromises reached so far between Negev Arabs and the state amount only to 30,000 dunams. This low figure reflects not only the slow pace of the Israeli legal system, but also the steadfast Arab resistance to state policies.
Israeli legal practices have attempted to link the resolution of land disputes with forced relocation into seven planned towns within the Siyag region. The two sides are now at a political, legal, and planning deadlock, causing widespread urban squatting and “illegal” settlement in the Beer-Sheva region.

It should be reiterated that the forced concentration of Arabs in the Siyag area was an integral part of a broader state policy to Judaize the entire disputed territory of Israel/Palestine, following the same logic as Israel’s policies elsewhere of concentrating the Arabs and dispersing the Jews (Yiftachel 1996). In the Negev, however, Israel recognized virtually no Arab land rights. In other areas, like the Galilee and the Triangle, Israel respected private Arab ownership based on British documentation. But even in these regions the state often used its powerful planning capabilities to expropriate private Arab lands.

Following the population transfer, the Siyag was largely neglected by planning authorities for twenty years. In several key regional plans, either for the Negev or the Beer-Sheva metropolitan area—including the 1972 District Plan, the 1991 Negev Front (Kidmat Negev) strategy, the 1995 Beer-Sheva Metropolitan Development Plan, and the 1998 renewed District Plan—the Bedouin Arabs’ informal settlements were either left blank, as if they were empty, or designated to public uses such as sewerage plants, recreation forests, or industrial zones. No settlement, agricultural, or industrial plans were prepared for this region, causing the emergence of widely spread forms of urban and rural informality. Dozens of “spontaneous” Arab localities evolved characterized by tin shacks, cabins, and tents. The vast majority of these localities are denied basic infrastructure and services such as electricity, running water, and roads. By late 2000 their numbers have grown to encompass 65,000 people, constituting Israel’s most marginal and deprived community.

During the same period, parallel arms of the Judaization strategy continued to operate in the region, with the establishment of twenty Jewish towns and rural localities around the Siyag, thus creating an Arab enclave. Later, Jewish development also penetrated into the Siyag region, first when a large military airport was built twenty kilometers east of Beer-Sheva during the early 1980s (resulting in the forced resettlement of 7,000 Arabs; see Fenster 1993), and later with the establishment of Jewish suburban localities such as Metar and Livna (see fig. 1) as well as the expansion of older Jewish settlements.

**Consolidating the Frontier: Planning for the Bedouin Arabs**

A further step in the effort to Judaize the Beer-Sheva region was the mid-1960s plan to urbanize the Siyag’s Bedouin Arab population. The plan was first mentioned in 1959 when Ben-Gurion announced in the Knesset a general five-year plan for the Arab sector in Israel, in which “the government will bring down legislation to move and concentrate the Bedouins into permanent settlements” ([NEED AUTHOR NAME] 5 August 1959). Later, an intense policy
debate ensued focusing on two main positions. Moshe Dayan, then minister of agriculture and a dominant force in shaping Israel’s policy towards the Arabs, represented the first by strongly advocating for the urbanization of Bedouin Arabs into mixed cities, mainly Beer-Sheva, Jaffa, Lod, and Ramla. Yigal Alon, then minister of Labour and a central government member with strong ties with Bedouin communities, pushed for a more gradual urbanization strategy, mainly in the southern Siyag area (Boymel 2000; Falah 1984).

Eventually the latter strategy won the day, although segments of the Dayan plan were also implemented with the settlement of 4,000 Bedouins in Lod and Ramla in the Tel-Aviv region. In the Negev, seven towns were established into which Arabs in the region were supposed to relocate—Rahat, Laqiya, Hura, Tel-Sheva, Kseifa, Arara, and Segev-Shalom. The government aimed to decrease further Arab land control and to concentrate Arabs permanently in urban localities. It attempted to implement a top-down Judaization and modernization program for the Bedouin Arabs through the lure of modern services such as housing, roads, schools, clinics, and electricity.

The Arabs who agreed to relocate into the towns received heavily subsidized plots of state land and connection to roads, water, and electricity. But this allocation depended on the cessation of all disputes over lands elsewhere in the Negev. The deal, therefore, was clear: accept fully registered, planned, and (partially) serviced blocks of land in a new Arab town while withdrawing all claims against the state, or remain in an “illegal,” unserviced locality subject to constant danger of house demolition and exposed to a wide range of legal penalties.

As a result, most Arabs who actually relocated into the towns were landless falahin (farmers) who lived for generations under the protection of Bedouin tribes. The new towns allowed them to bypass their social inferiority within Bedouin Arab society by breaking centuries-old forms of patronage and dependence, by achieving political dominance in several towns, and by modernizing their living standards. Therefore, the state’s urbanization policy, not accidentally, deepened the tensions between the various Arab ethno-classes by allocating privileges and resources (such as cheap serviced lands) to the landless and weaker group and by making life miserable for the upper echelons of the Negev Bedouin Arab society (Meir 1999).

But due to the low socioeconomic status of most urbanizing Arabs, and despite their promise of modernization, the planned towns evolved quickly into pockets of deprivation, unemployment, dependency, crime, and social tension. Although one should not underestimate the power of modernization to form a foundation for social and political mobilization, relocation to the towns also set in motion destructive processes of social disintegration (Meir 1997). The towns positioned the Arabs in spatial isolation, with few opportunities for personal mobility or development (Fenster 1993; Lithwick 2000).
thus the seven towns became, as potently described by Bedouin activist and lawyer Schadeh Ibben-Berry, suburban ghettos.

By relocating the Arabs into these towns at the periphery of the Beer-Sheva region and by separating them municipally from the stronger Jewish areas, Israeli planners laid a long-term structure for the marginalization of the indigenous Bedouin people. This was coupled with a total lack of services within the main Beer-Sheva city area, which could have attracted urbanizing Bedouin Arabs. Hence, no Arab schools, religious facilities, or community centers are available in the main Beer-Sheva city area. As a result, only around 3,500 Arabs now reside in Beer-Sheva, spread over a number of distant neighborhoods, without notable residential, cultural, or religious centers (Negev Center 1999).

The uneven separation imposed by the region’s planners and leaders has created a near total Arab-Jewish segregation, backed by planning and institutional rationales. Needless to say, not all segregation is negative, and many Bedouin Arabs do wish to remain in homogenous localities so as to protect their culture and communal cohesion. But the highly segregated human landscape of the region ensured the control of Jews over the economic, political, and cultural resources of this binational metropolis. The Beer-Sheva metropolitan region has thus incorporated unevenly the seven planned Arab towns and a large number of unrecognized (informal) Arab localities.

Israel’s strategy to remove the indigenous Arabs’ unrecognized villages and coerce their migration into the planned towns was accompanied by a range of pressure tactics. On the institutional level, special government authorities were set up especially for this task, including the Authority for the Advancement of the Bedouins (note the Orwellian connotation), the Implementation Authority, the Green Patrol, and Rotem, a police unit charged with law enforcement among the Arabs. All special bodies were established, at least in part, for the task of concentrating the Bedouin Arabs in the planned towns and controlling their informal spaces.

On a planning level, beyond pervasive neglect, the state also initiated a series of other pressure tactics to urbanize the Bedouin Arabs. These have included:

- strict nonrecognition of existing settlements located outside the planned towns and the subsequent denial of most municipal services routinely provided to other citizens (water, electricity, telephone, health and public services, accessible educational services)
- intensive legal penalties against unauthorized homes
- actual demolition of some 1,300 homes and structures between 1990 and 1998 (Negev Center 1999)
- the frequent issuing of eviction notices and fines in order to remove “Arab invaders” from state land
delay of land-settlement proceedings which have often lasted more than three decades, intending to make Arabs give up on their hopes to win back lands

- heavy environmental restrictions on grazing and the subsequent seizure and destruction of most Bedouin herds
- the poisoning of fields planted on disputed land
- activation of the state’s tax authorities against problematic” Bedouin Arabs.

The state’s drive to concentrate the indigenous Bedouin Arabs was reinforced by two other aims. First, geopolitically, Israel was worried about the Siyag forming an Arab land bridge between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, thereby threatening the contiguity of Jewish land control. Second, the state was concerned about the costs involved in recognizing, planning, and servicing a dispersed population. The use of planning to control a weak minority was thus justified by geopolitical and economic reasoning.

**Policy Enforcement Deadlock**

Despite the consistent, harsh, and often violent pressure exerted by all Israeli governments since the 1960s to implement the “seven towns” strategy, only 55 percent of the region’s Arabs have actually moved into these towns. A significant and rapidly growing group has remained on the land in the “illegal” or unrecognized semi-urban localities. To reiterate, the “illegal” Arab localities exist today due either to their residence in the area in 1948 or as a result of forced government relocation, that is, not through any form of illegal invasion. Hence, the attempt to consolidate the population is testimony to the discrimination associated with the ethnocratic state and its regional extensions. This has caused widespread alienation among Bedouin Arabs and recent mobilization towards Palestinian nationalism or, more commonly, Islamic traditionalism and fundamentalism (Abu-Saad et al. 2000). To illustrate this process, in the 1999 elections the Arab party associated with the Islamic movement (The Arab List) received 64 percent of the Arab vote in the south, eight times more than any other party, while the rest of the votes went mainly to parties supporting Palestinian nationalism (Negev Center 1999).

Currently, the legal status of the unrecognized localities is complex. Most are located in areas with no municipal jurisdiction and hence have no outline planning scheme, which results in an absurd situation, where building activity is impossible because permits are granted only for areas with approved plans. In this way, all construction—even in a settlement that has existed for centuries—is regarded as illegal. A vicious cycle is set in motion: municipal status is denied, no plans can be approved, and all buildings are deemed illegal. Policymakers then refrain from granting recognition and municipal status, which may be seen as capitulating to criminal elements.
who violate state laws, thereby forcing the Arabs to continue building illegally to accommodate natural growth, and so on.

Unauthorized Arab building has increased tensions across the entire state of Israel. In 1987 the government adopted the recommendations of the Markowitz Report, which aimed to solve the problem of unauthorized building among Israel’s Arab populations. The report introduced a new classification of gray zones, in which de facto recognition would be granted to thousands of unauthorized buildings in Arab settlements, while future building in these zones would continue to be outlawed. Although fourteen years have passed since the adoption of these recommendations, this “temporary” policy is still in force, disallowing permanent (stone and wood) construction in unrecognized localities. In most regions, this policy has been enforced with rigor, with some 1,800 homes being demolished in the Arab sector since 1987. Yet during the same period the Arab population has grown by about 53 percent (Negev Center 1999), thus creating unbearable pressures on the typically small “temporary” homes. The gray zone policy has thus forced the villages to remain frozen as clusters of unserviced dilapidated dwellings, neglected environments, and high residential density, being the poorest, most run-down communities in Israeli society.

Finally, a qualification is in order: the distress of the Arabs in the Negev region does not only stem from Israel’s planning policies; it is also part of a profound transition of a traditional, seminomadic community into a modern, industrial age. This transition has been accompanied by geographic uprooting and monumental changes in community structure, family relations, and gender roles (Fenster 1998; Meir 1997), which have created a severe internal crisis, reflected in rising crime rates, poor economic and educational achievements, and paralyzing political divisions (Abu-Saad 1998; Falah 1984, 1989; Lithwick 2000). Still, the state’s planning policies have played a major role in deepening this communal crisis. Let us turn now to several recent examples of such policies, and to the emergence of organized Arab resistance.

Persisting Ethnocratic Myopia and Local Resistance

A recent and telling example of Israel’s ethnocratic dynamic was a March 2000 decision by the Israeli minister of the Interior to expand the municipal boundaries of the Jewish suburban town of Omer, abutting Beer-Sheva to the east. The minister nearly doubled Omer’s municipal area, annexing en route several “illegal” Arab localities accommodating some 4,000 people. Omer’s mayor defined these Arab residents as “trespassers,” despite a documented local history of some communities stretching back to the Ottoman period.

Following the annexation Omer’s mayor refused to extend the well-developed services of this wealthy town to its new Arab residents, claiming
that they needed to leave the area, “according to government policy” (Kol Hanegev 11 July 2000). Local Arabs and some Jewish residents of Omer have since begun a political and legal campaign against the forced annexation, which could lead to the evacuation of Arabs from their forefathers’ land or, alternatively, to serious violence. This conflict, which is yet to be concluded, attests to the ongoing ethnocratic elements in the region’s planning policies which still attempt to pressure the Bedouins to relocate into permanent towns.

Like Omer, most other councils whose municipal areas cover the unrecognized villages have ignored this population in their planning or service provision, including Bnei Shimon, Merhavim, Har Hanegev, Arad, and Dimona, where Bedouin Arab residents have never had the right to vote. The Arab residents of these localities, many of whom inhabited the area before the Jewish councils were established, have thus become transparent. This denial of “the right to the city,” to use Lefebvre’s term (1996), seriously undermines the content and meaning of their local and Israeli citizenship, and now forms the platform for gradual, centrifugal withdrawal from the state and its institutions (Meir 1997).

In another policy arena, various Israeli governments have periodically inaugurated new efforts to eliminate the so-called Bedouin problem. In 1997, a new strategy was announced by the Netanyahu government, which initiated a series of steps to increase the pressure on Arabs to relocate into the seven planned towns. The strategy included measures to contain the spread of the scattered Arab population, prevent further invasion into state land, and tighten the enforcement of the state’s planning and construction laws (Ha’aretz 2 September 1997).

During the three years following the introduction of these steps, four new Jewish settlements were constructed in and around the Siyag region. These small suburban-like satellites were built according to a recent plan titled the “Hebron Ring,” under which ten more Jewish settlements are planned for the next decade. The Hebron Ring plan expresses clearly, once more, the ethnocratic and discriminatory nature of Israeli policies in the region: Bedouin villages hosting more than one thousand inhabitants are often asked by planners to relocate into the towns because these villages are “too small,” while at the same time Jews are allowed to establish smaller localities. Another discriminatory aspect of the policy is the link between land ownership and planning rights. The authorities deny planning and infrastructure rights for Arabs in the region, officially due to land disputes with the states. However, land disputes also exist between Jewish localities and the states, but planning in these settlements proceeds normally, and communal facilities are duly provided.

This systematic inequality has not escaped the eyes of residents in the informal localities who have increasingly mobilized and organized to
counter the Israeli Judaization strategy. A number of bottom-up planning initiatives have recently been launched, aimed at influencing the planning in Arab areas. In the mid-1990s, locally drafted plans were prepared for a number of unrecognized villages, such as Darijjat, Al-Sayyad, and Umbattin, and presented to the public as alternatives to state plans and as an expression of a new Arab assertiveness vis-à-vis the authorities. While none of these plans has been approved, they managed to influence the public discourse and raise consciousness among Jewish circles concerning the need to change the plight of the informal dwellers.

Another notable bottom-up initiative was the 1998 establishment of the Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages (known as al-Una), a voluntary body representing most villages. In December 1999 it submitted a plan for the recognition and long-term planning of forty-five villages as an amendment to the recently approved district plan. Finally, an Alliance of Bedouin Organizations has been formed. It coordinates a range of self-help and non-governmental organization programs for community empowerment, education, and legal representation of the Beer-Sheva informal sector.

The Bedouin Arabs have also begun to launch proactive legal action that aims to find cracks in the Israeli legal structure in order to oppose its one-sided policy of Judaization and control. Most notable here are two recent high-court challenges, one against the recent regional outline plan on the grounds of unduly and unjustly ignoring Bedouin Arab citizens, and the other against the decision to enlarge Omer’s municipal boundaries and coercively annex rightless Bedouin communities. Both have received positive interim rulings by the Supreme Court, with a final decision expected in early 2003 [HAS THIS DECISION BEEN MADE?].

In conjunction with grassroots pressure, the problems of implementing official plans for the area have recently begun to influence the Negev’s planning authorities. These concessions may be the first signs of the weakening of Jewish ethnocratic rule. The metropolitan development plan of Beer-Sheva (adopted in 1998), in a significant symbolic move, defined the region as a “binational metropolis.” While this definition has remained declaratory, it reflects some legitimacy of the Arab existence in this urban region.

Further, in October 1999, the District Committee approved an amendment to district plans that added—for the first time in thirty years—three new Arab towns. This has broken the seven-towns-only strategy that strictly guided Israeli policy in the region for three decades and that has been the source of numerous conflicts and tensions. Based on initial reactions, however, the locations of these new settlements are problematic, since they still require the Bedouins to move from their existing villages. Hence the new plan is not likely to receive wide support, except for breaking the state’s rigid seven-towns-only planning concept.
The issue of informal settlement in the Beer-Sheva region has thus entered a new stage, with the old seven-town policy deeply discredited but with no new policy to direct near-urban settlement among the Bedouin Arabs. The ethnic map of the region is still determined by the contours laid down during the 1950s with Jews concentrated in the region’s central, northern, and western parts, while Arabs are settled mainly in the east. Even in the unlikely event that Israel recognizes most of the Arab “illegal” settlements, citizenship and capabilities will continue to be unequal between Jews and Arabs. Jews are likely to continue to enjoy greater access and powers, while various forms of Arab informality, old and new, are likely to persist, albeit in a more controlled and constrained manner. But what is more likely to occur is a piecemeal, gradual, and conflict-riddled process of adjustment, whereby the state will gradually recognize some Arab land rights, but attempt to minimize its compromises.

**Concluding Remark**

What can we learn from the case of Bedouin Arabs in the Beer-Sheva region about the dynamics of ethno-spatial control, the role of land, and the mobilization of indigenous minorities vis-à-vis an ethnocratic (“pure”) settler state? In general, the case demonstrates the pattern of relations typical of settler societies, which includes the promotion of internal frontiers by the ethnocratic state, the systematic dispossession of indigenous peoples coupled with a degree of modernization and politicization, the formation of indigenous economic dependence, and an ensuing complex, long-term conflict. Therefore, the case of the Beer-Sheva region lends support to the argument regarding the inherent conflict between the settler state and the local minority, and the likely emergence of broad resistance against the government and its policies.

While in most settler societies the leading groups and territorial projects have maintained their powerful status, they are losing legitimacy. The ethnocratic ideology of most nation-building projects tends to intensify and reify the ethnic identity, mobility, and resistance among peripheral minorities, as has been the case in Israel (Yiftachel 1996). This paper’s argument about the embedded conflictual elements in settler societies between indigenous minorities and expansionist regimes is thus well illustrated by the evolution of struggle between Israel and the Negev Bedouin Arabs.

As shown in the paper, the Israeli settler state has attempted for five decades to minimize Bedouin land control, first by shifting them into the Siyag area, and later by attempting to urbanize the entire indigenous population in the Negev into seven towns, which led to a protracted conflict and later to a deadlock between the state and the Bedouin. Another lesson from the Bedouin struggle is the tremendous mobilizing power of land and
territory for both majority and indigenous groups. This power stems mainly from the pervasive political ideology that sees absolute ethnic control over land as a basis for sovereignty and collective identity (Mann 2000; Taylor 1994). The Bedouin Arabs—who are excluded from Israeli nation-building due to their ethnicity—have been developing a counter-ideology, pinning much of their own collective identity on the land as a remaining icon of communal bondage. The Jewish settler ethnocracy, on the other hand, is intransigent in its attempt to exert total land control in order to facilitate its main historical project of Judaizing Israel/Palestine. What ensues in such circumstances is a protracted, acrimonious, and occasionally violent struggle.

Finally, the struggle between the state and the Bedouin Arabs demonstrates clearly that policies of territorial control and oppression over indigenous minorities cannot be self-sustaining in the long run. Policymakers should therefore be aware of the limits of their power in a multiethnic setting and shift their strategies towards reciprocity, power-sharing, and equitable development. These are the only paths to achieve just coexistence, stability, and prosperity in the complex ethnic landscapes of settler societies.

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Notes

1. It is worth noting that some characteristics of the Zionist movement were not typical of other European settler movements, notably in its lack of a powerful metropolitan state and in the fact of the ethno-religious significance of the settled land for Jews. In addition, most Jewish settlers were forced to leave Europe following persecutions. However, these circumstances made little difference to the indigenous Arab people of Palestine.

2. The ethnocratic regime also has far-reaching repercussions in other areas (for example, gender relations, the environment) whose analyses will have to await another article (see Yiftachel and Kedar 1999).


4. A dunam equals 1,000 square meters, or a quarter of an acre.
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