

Education as a Tool of Expulsion from the Unrecognized Villages¹

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The Bedouin community in the Negev is part of the Arab Palestinian minority that remained in Israel after the war of 1948. The Arab Bedouin have lived in the Negev since the fifth century BCE. They have traditionally been a nomadic, or partially nomadic, people, subsisting by grazing their flocks and working in traditional kinds of farming.

It is estimated that prior to 1948, 65,000 to 90,000 Arab Bedouin lived in the Negev (Falah, 1989; Maddrell, 1990). During and following the 1948 war, many Bedouin were expelled from the Negev, and became refugees in neighboring Arab countries (in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, in Jordan, and elsewhere). In 1952, only 11,000 Bedouin were living in the Negev (Marx, 1967; Falah, 1989; Masalha, 1997). The State of Israel took control over most of the land in the Negev, and the Arab Bedouin living there lost their freedom to move from place to place with their flocks and to work their land. Israel forced the Arab Bedouin to live on unfertile and far off land, so that they would not obstruct the rapid settlement of Jews in the Negev. In effect, the Arab Bedouin population was concentrated in an area that was referred to as the "reservation," in the northeastern section of the Negev, which constituted only ten percent of the land that the Bedouin had controlled prior to 1948. This article deals with the urbanization of the Arab Bedouin and the use of education as a tool to expel them from the unrecognized villages.

Urbanization of the Arab Bedouin in the Negev

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the government initiated a program to resettle the Arab Bedouin population in the Negev in seven permanent urban settlements – Tel Sheva, Rahat, 'Arora, Kseiffe, Segev Shalom, Hura, and Lagiya – without giving any consideration to their traditional way of life, and without involving them in choosing the kind of communities being built. This urbanization process has been problematic. The urbanization process has been forced on the Arab Bedouin. The urbanization plans were ostensibly intended to create the conditions necessary to provide basic services for the Arab Bedouin population. However, the real objective was to concentrate them in urban communities and prevent them from working, settling, and claiming ownership over their land, which Israel had confiscated. That is, the Arab Bedouin were dispossessed of their property and separated from the land that served as their source of livelihood. The policy of Israel's various governments regarding the Arab Bedouin in the Negev has been based on their mass and systematic transfer to towns and the registration of their lands as state land. This policy is part of a national vision of a Zionist home - the Negev is seen as being empty (a "state without a people") that has to be revived. At the same time, Israel portrays Arab Bedouin life as a failed culture about to disappear from the world's stage (Shamir, 1996).

The provision of services such as schools, community medical clinics, running-water networks, paved roads, and telephone connections were used to draw the Arab Bedouin into the towns built by the government. Most of the unrecognized towns and villages are denied these services. As a result of the urbanization plans, and the loss of their traditional livelihood, the Bedouin sought new areas of employment, for which they had neither the know-how nor the expertise to enable them to succeed. They became town employees and increasingly dependent on Israeli jobs to earn a living. Indeed, the dream of the policymakers and decision-makers was realized: the Arab Bedouin no longer live off their land, and have become an urban

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people. The Bedouin "phenomenon" is gradually becoming extinct. As Moshe Dayan pointed out:

We should transform the Bedouins into an urban proletariat – in industry, services, construction, and agriculture. 88% of the Israeli population are not farmers, let the Bedouins be like them. Indeed, this will be a radical move which means that the Bedouin would not live on his land with his herds, but would become an urban person who comes home in the afternoon and puts his slippers on. His children would be accustomed to a father who wears trousers, does not carry a Shabaria [the traditional Bedouin knife] and does not search for vermin in public. The children would go to school with their hair properly combed. This would be a revolution, but it may be fixed within two generations. Without coercion but with governmental direction ... this phenomenon of the Bedouins will disappear. (Moshe Dayan, *Ha'aretz*, 31 July 1963).

The seven urban towns that the government established without involving the Arab Bedouin in the process were bound to fail. High rates of unemployment prevail, services provided to the residents are poor, and government allocations are meager. Unlike neighboring communities in which Jewish citizens live, the Bedouin towns have no sources of employment within them and no economic infrastructure or public transportation system, intra- or inter-city, to facilitate access to work in other cities. Further, these seven towns do not have banks, post offices, sewage systems, public libraries, or places for entertainment or cultural activities (except in the largest town, Rahat, with its 40,000 residents, which has one bank and one post office).

Despite the government's declared objective "to improve and modernize" the lives of Arab Bedouin in the Negev by resettling them, they nevertheless find themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in Israel. The following table compares the seven permanent Bedouin communities in the Negev with Beer Sheva and other nearby Jewish communities. The seven Bedouin towns are among the eight lowest-ranked local authorities in Israel. Rahat, the largest town, is ranked second to last. Many of the nearby Jewish communities, on the other hand, such as Omer, Meytar, and Lehavim, are ranked among the highest. Beer Sheva is ranked in 115th place, slightly above the middle of the list. Dimona, one of the poorest development towns in Israel, is ranked lower than Beer Sheva. Arad, one of the more "successful" development towns, is ranked slightly higher than Beer Sheva.

Socio-Economic Rankings of Bedouin and Jewish Local Authorities in the Negev

		Rank
Bedouin local authorities	Kseiffe	1
	Rahat	2
	Tel Sheva	3
	Segev Shalom	4
	'Arora	5
	Hura	7
	Lagiya	8
Jewish local authorities	Beer Sheva	115
	Dimona	82
	Arad	119
	Meytar	201
	Lehavim	205
	Omer	209

Note: The table ranks 210 local authorities, the lowest ranking being 1. Source: *Israel Statistical Yearbook*, 2002.

Unrecognized Villages

Since the beginning of the government's plan to urbanize the Bedouin, only some fifty percent of the Bedouin in the Negev - from a total number of 150,000 individuals - have moved into the urban settlements. The remaining half of the Bedouin population (75,000) continues to live in unrecognized villages. Most of them continue to live on their land, and have not been uprooted by the Israeli government because their lands are located within the reservation set aside for the Bedouin in the 1950s.

The government of Israel continues to put heavy pressure on the inhabitants of the unrecognized villages to move to the urban Arab Bedouin towns established in accordance with the government plan. Ben David and Shahar, journalists with *Ma'ariv*, reported on the policy being formulated by the present government to demolish buildings belonging to the Arab minority, and the Arab Bedouin in particular:

At a meeting of the Ministerial Committee on the Non-Jewish Sector, held two weeks ago, the Prime Minister [Ariel Sharon] stated that, "We are losing the land on which we are not settling." Sharon slammed his hand down on the table and demanded that the ministers accelerate the handling of illegal construction in the Arab sector. Following this demand, ministers Olmert and Hanegbi met and decided to establish an administrative body to execute the orders to demolish illegal structures in the Arab sector. The administrative body will be charged with handling three areas in which the illegal construction and building violations are especially common: in Bedouin villages in the Negev, in Arab villages in the Galilee, and in [Arab villages] the Triangle ... Senior officials pointed out that, "every new structure built in the Arab sector will be demolished immediately. Later on, hundreds of other structures that were built illegally on state land will be demolished. (*Ma'ariv*, 29 September 2003).

The unrecognized villages lack public services, such as an educational framework for preschool children, elementary and high schools, paved roads, public transportation, electricity, in many cases running water, garbage collection and disposal, telephone connections and community medical facilities. Also, government agencies refuse to allow Arab Bedouin living in the unrecognized villages to build any permanent structures whatsoever. All residences, except for tents, are illegal. Persons who build are heavily fined and the structures are demolished. From 1992-1998, Israel demolished 1,298 structures and imposed fines totaling NIS 869,850 (approximately US \$220,000) for building these "illegal" structures (Statistical Yearbook of the Negev Bedouin, 1999). The destruction has increased substantially over the last two years, with more than 200 houses being demolished and some 29,700 dunams of wheat and barley destroyed by chemicals (Ibrahim, 2004; Ginsburg, 2003).

Despite these actions and the pressure placed on them, the Arab Bedouin are determined to stay on their lands to prevent its physical seizure and confiscation through the legal system. Most of them are at least partially dependent on their traditional sources of livelihood – raising animals, working the land, and processing animal products to supplement their income or as their basic source of income – but the government also places restrictions on these activities. Government inspectors carefully monitor the size of the herds and the grazing areas, and a special police unit regularly patrols the area and seizes sheep and goats.

Temporary Schools – Using Education as a Tool for Expulsion

Sixteen elementary schools presently serve 45 unrecognized villages in which some 75,000 Arab Bedouin live. The unrecognized villages still do not have a single high school. High school students from the unrecognized villages go to high schools in the permanent Bedouin towns. The state considers the schools set up in the unrecognized villages as "temporary" because it

has a plan to move their residents into the urban Bedouin towns. Therefore, these "temporary" schools (which, as noted, do not go past the eighth grade) are located in tin, wooden, or cement structures, with insufficient classrooms, laboratories, offices, and accessory rooms. In general, these structures are not connected to running water or the electricity grid, even though some of them lie near to water pipes and electric power lines. Extensions are rarely added to the schools, and maintenance is poor. Not being connected to the electricity grid, the schools are poorly equipped, and have no audio-visual equipment, computers, laboratories, or sports equipment.

Schools in the unrecognized villages are under the supervision of the Bedouin Education Authority, which was established by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1981. The head of the authority is a Jewish individual, who represents the interests of the ministry more than the interests of the population he should be serving. This situation results, in part, from the government's policy to compel the Arab Bedouin to move to the permanent communities. Although the government is charged, by statute, with providing an education to Arab Bedouin children, it acts in a contrary manner, and exploits the educational system as a means of exerting pressure on the Arab Bedouin in order to concentrate them in the seven permanent towns.

The value of state education for Arab Bedouin in the Negev, as well as its ability to survive, is questionable. Educating children, particularly Arab Bedouin children, is greatly affected by policy considerations that are deemed more important than providing the wide breadth of knowledge and expertise of the kind they need to succeed on socio-economic terms in Israeli society, and in an economy that is becoming increasingly global in scope.

The Israeli educational system treats Arab Bedouin as outsiders. Therefore, the educational services provided are few. Education can offer Arab Bedouin a chance to advance and acclimatize to modernization, and to integrate into Israeli society. However, the educational system has failed to develop, and Arab Bedouin children in the Negev find themselves at the bottom rung of the educational ladder. They have the highest dropout rate in the country (37%) and the lowest success rate on the Bagrut exams (26%) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2004).

In summary, since the establishment of the state, governmental policy toward Arab Bedouin in the Negev has been characterized in large part by oppression in all areas of life, and particularly in formal education. Government officials have used the education system as a means of control to force Arab Bedouin living in the unrecognized villages to move to the failed permanent towns set up for them. This policy is aimed at gaining control over the Arab Bedouin in the education, social, and political spheres, and thus, creating a submissive minority willing to accept its inferiority in the face of the Jewish majority, and at legitimizing the state's Zionist ideology.

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