

THE LAND-OWNERSHIP CONFLICT BETWEEN THE NEGEV BEDOUIN AND THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT

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PREFACE

On March 14, 2002, the long-lasting conflict between the Israeli government and the Bedouin population in the Negev reached a new and worrisome level when the Israeli Minister of National Infrastructures, Avigdor Lieberman (who has since resigned over disputes with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon over the Palestinian-Israeli conflict), ordered the Israel Lands Administration, a department of his office, to exterminate some 12,000 dunams (1 dunam = 0.25 acres) of wheat and barley plants that had been grown by Bedouin illegally on government land.

In recent years, the authorities have claimed that the Bedouin are trying to “take over” the Negev by a massive invasion onto government lands by building homes and staking out grazing and farming areas. The government claims the Bedouin are settling state-owned lands with no permit to do so. The Bedouin claim these lands are theirs as their fathers and grandfathers used to work them long before the state of Israel was established and they say that the state never allotted them adequate land space. They see this most recent move by the authorities as a declaration of war on the Bedouin population.

The Liberman move is a sign that the conflict in the ongoing dispute between the Bedouin and the government over land ownership in the Negev is potentially explosive and must be resolved soon.

The purpose of this paper is to create a better understanding of the long-existing and worsening conflict between the Bedouin population in the Negev and the government. The review explores the origin of the Bedouin population, social and cultural issues of the Bedouin, the relationship between the Bedouin and the government throughout the years, the state of the seven Bedouin towns established by the government, and the phenomenon of the Bedouin “unrecognized villages.” The review will also help us understand who are the main stakeholders in this conflict.



MAP OF ISRAEL

THE NEGEV

Geography. The Negev is an area comprising the southern area of the Land of Israel, which is characterized by a totally arid desert climate, in contrast to the semi-arid Mediterranean climate of the country's center and north. The Negev covers an area exceeding 12,000 sq. km (7,456 sq. miles), which is 60% of the total land area of Israel (21,671 sq. km./13,465 sq. miles) and its population is about 506,000, or 8% of the total population of Israel. The main city in the Negev is Be'er Sheva, with a population 173,000. Most of the Negev population (84%) is concentrated in the Be'er Sheva metropolis. The Negev is also the poorest region in Israel.

The following sub regions are recognizable:

- (1) the Negev Coastal Plain, linking up in the east with the Be'er Sheva Basin;
- (2) the Negev Hills, composed of the northern and central hill regions, the Paran Plateau and the Eilat Mountains;
- (3) the Aravah Valley.

Climate. The Negev is a desert climate – it is hot and arid. The climate has two outstanding characteristics: sharp temperature differences between day and night, and summer and winter, and extremely limited amounts of precipitation. Solar radiation and evaporation are strong during all seasons, and relative humidity and cloudiness remain low. The valley of Be'er Sheva has always been a choice spot for inhabitants because of the water from the nearby Hebron Mountains in the winter and the presence of the water coming from the nearby underground water in the area.

The weather in the Be'er Sheva area is extreme as it is part of the Negev desert. In the summer time the temperature rises up to 42°C (114°F) for many days. In the winter, the temperature can fall to 0°C (32°F) at night. The average annual rainfall is only 206mm. The area north of Beer Sheva until the city Kiryat-Gat (a distance of 25 km), is called “the wheat-growing center of Israel.”



THE ARAB ISRAELI MINORITY IN ISRAEL

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is naturally capturing the headlines these days, but Israel is facing growing conflict on a number of domestic issues relating to tension between various ethnic, political and socio-economical groups. The widening conflict between the Arab Israelis and the government is possibly foremost among them.

The growing disillusionment of the Arab Israeli minority began in recent years to capture the attention of politicians, including former Prime Minister Ehud Barak and former President Ezer Weizman, who recognized the issue and characterized it as a “ticking bomb.”

About 20% (1.25 million) of the total Israeli population of 6.3 million is Arab Israeli - Arabs who were given citizenship at the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and their descendants. Arab Israelis say they have been discriminated against by successive Israeli governments. The facts support their claims: in comparison to Jewish towns, many Arab Israeli towns have received lower budgets for development and education and the government has requisitioned some lands they claim they own. Arab Israelis have witnessed their Jewish neighbors flourish while they continue to lobby the government for equal funding and services. Over time, these factors have caused Arab Israelis to feel frustrated and resentful of the government. Their frustration has increased their sense of unity, nationalism, and their willingness to fight the authorities for equal rights.

THE BEDOUIN POPULATION IN THE NEGEV

In order to begin thinking about the Bedouin land dispute we have to put it in the context of the Arab Israeli issue. The Israeli Bedouin population is considered a minority within the Arab Israeli minority and therefore part of that sector’s conflict with the government. While the Arab Israeli population is comprised of both Muslims (mostly Sunni Muslims) and Christians – three-quarters are Muslim, one-quarter Christian – all Bedouin are Muslim; Bedouin comprise nearly one-tenth of Israel’s Arab Muslims.

Unlike other Arab Israelis, however, many Bedouin serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The government has long considered the Bedouin loyal to the state and, while it doesn't require Bedouin to serve in the IDF, Bedouin may volunteer (unlike most other Arab Israelis) – and many do. However, in a sign of growing discontent and identification with Arab nationalism among the Bedouin, fewer Bedouin are volunteering to serve.

There are some 180,000 Bedouin in Israel:

- 50,000 in the northern part of Israel (the Galilee)
- 10,000 in the center
- 120,000 in the south (the Negev)

The origin of the Bedouin population

Bedouin were formerly nomadic shepherds (MFA, 2002) and are comprised of many tribes. Most of the Bedouin tribes in the Negev hail from Hejaz, a region in the north of the Arabian Peninsula. The expansion of Islam starting in the 7th century A.D. brought Bedouin from the Arabian Peninsula to countries that became part of the Arab-Muslim Empire. For many years the Bedouin were pirates: they attacked villages and towns to loot them, as they regarded themselves as “pure” Arabs, superior to the people whose lands they conquered. They saw themselves as “masters of the lands.”

Classes within Bedouin society: the Bedouin and Bedouin-Falakhin

The Bedouin nomads who had conquered these nations became the land owners – the masters or aristocrats – and the conquered were farmers, who became known as the Bedouin-Falakhin*. The Bedouin were never trained to work the lands and believed that physical work was undignified for “genuine” Bedouin. As second-class citizens, the Bedouin-Falakhin worked for the Bedouin, performed most of the physical labor, and never owned their own land or their own homes. Over time, they adopted many of the values of the Bedouin, and the fusion of the two tribes, one agricultural and one nomadic, resulted in a new, semi-nomadic agricultural-pastoral culture.

Such a symbiotic relationship existed in the Negev, where Bedouin “adopted” hundreds of Bedouin-Falakhin families in the hopes of expanding their agricultural capacity. This relationship enabled the Bedouin to maintain their property, and it enabled financial and physical security for the Bedouin-Falakhin. The Bedouin-Falakhin served their masters by performing all kind of duties that emphasized their inferiority to the genuine Bedouin.

Even today, these two classes don't mix at all: marriages between the two are not permitted; Bedouin refuse to live in the same neighborhoods, villages, and towns with Bedouin-Falakhin; and the Bedouin try to ensure that the Bedouin-Falakhin aren't able to own land. This class and culture divide is at the root of the failure of the urbanization of the Bedouin in the Negev.

***The word Bedouin alone denotes the entire population, including Bedouin and Bedouin-Falakhin, unless when used in the context of relations with the Bedouin-Falakhin.**

THE BEDOUIN IN THE NEGEV AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES

The dispute between the Bedouin and the Israeli government over land ownership is at the core of the increasingly tense relationship and a cause for a number of other bitter struggles between the two parties, particularly during the last two decades. The aforementioned move of the Israeli Minister of National Infrastructures, Mr. Avigdor Liberman, to exterminate with poison spray some 12,000 dunams of illegal Bedouin wheat and barley fields is a prime example of the ferocity of the conflict.

Mr. Talal Al-Kirnawi, the Bedouin mayor of the Bedouin city of Rahat, described the current situation of the land dispute in the Negev as “getting really close to its boiling point” and said that, “we are on the way to a new Intifada [violent struggle], this time, in the Negev.” (“Haaretz”, 2002).

How has it gotten this bad?

The essence of the problem is expressed best, perhaps, by Professor Avinoam Meir from the Ben-Gurion University in Be’er Sheva. He suggests that the centrifugal tendency of Bedouin development creates tension between the Bedouin and the state in the northern Negev. That is, Bedouin, as semi-nomadic people, strive for decentralization and dispersion: they live in tents and make-shift structures and tend to spread out their tribes and families over large swaths of land, and settlements expand in an unorganized way as tribes and families grow.

Furthermore, the Bedouin have very high population growth (up to 5.8% annually) in comparison to other segments of Israeli society (2.7%) – a key factor behind its centrifugal tendencies.

But the government possesses the opposite tendency – a centripetal one – emphasizing maximum concentration of the population (Meir, 1999). The tension between these two forces has increased throughout the years and it has surfaced in the form of increasing protest and demonstrations, some of them violent, by the Bedouin against the government.

Generally speaking, the problem isn’t the first of its kind: many nomadic cultures around the world have faced a very similar problem as they strive to prove their ownership on the lands they settled.

In his research, Meir identifies a four-level hierarchy for the centrifugal-centripetal tension (See chart below). Each level is connected both to those above and below it. The top level – ownership of the land – is the core of the conflict, and the remaining tiers are compounding factors to the conflict.

THE MAIN DIMENSIONS OF TENSION BETWEEN THE BEDOUIN AND THE GOVERNMENT

THE OWNERSHIP OF THE LANDS
SETTLEMENT AND URBANIZATION
FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES
SOCIO-POLITICAL POWER DISTRIBUTION

Source: Meir, 1999

1. OWNERSHIP OF THE LANDS

Ownership of the Bedouin lands became a central issue for the Bedouin population in the Negev with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, but seeds for the conflict were actually planted prior to that. During previous regimes including the Ottoman Empire (1517-1917) and the British mandate (1917-1947), the Bedouin didn't register the lands as their own. The two reasons for that were:

1. Registration contradicted the values of the Bedouin's traditional, nomadic culture which held that a person owned the land he worked with his own hands and no written contract was necessary.
2. The Bedouin tried to avoid paying taxation by not registering as land owners (Meir, 1999).

By the end of the British mandate the roots of a major problem had been formed. Although the British had attempted to initiate a land registration program for the Bedouin, the regime wasn't able to complete it before its mandate ended in 1947. Then, the Israeli authorities adopted some of the Ottoman Empire's regulations regarding the ownership of lands. According to these regulations, a piece of land that wasn't officially recognized as being owned by any private or public entity ("Mawat") became state property and the permit to settle and/or work on it could be given by the authorities themselves.

In 1948, on the eve of the War of Independence, there were some 80,000 to 100,000 Bedouin living in the Negev. By the time the war ended, most of them ran away or were expelled to Egypt or Jordan and only 10,000 Bedouin remained in Israel.

David Ben-Gurion, the first Israeli prime minister, became determined to settle the Negev. He presided over various national projects aimed at the rapid development of the country and expanding its population, including "Operation Magic Carpet," the airlift of Jews to Israel from Arab countries; the construction of the national water carrier; rural development projects and the establishment of new towns and cities. Settling the Negev was his particular obsession: he called for pioneering settlement in outlying areas Israel, but especially in the Negev. "It is in the Negev that the creativity and pioneer vigor of

Israel shall be tested,” said Ben-Gurion: it is one of the most famous things the leader is known to have said – and repeatedly.

In 1950, the military authorities concentrated the Bedouin population in the Negev into an area that was called the “restricted zone” – a triangle-shaped area between the cities of Be’er Sheva, Dimona and the Dead Sea. Bedouin wishing to leave the area for any reason were required to apply for a special permit to do so. During the 1950’s, the “restricted zone” shrank as a result of increased development of infrastructure, the establishment of new Israeli settlements nearby (Arad and Dimona), training zones for the military, and the country’s nuclear research center near Dimona.

Security concerns weren’t the only purpose of settling the Bedouin in the (now-defunct) restricted zone. The government also wanted to eliminate any Bedouin attempt to spread over and settle state lands outside of the restricted zone. Today, the Israeli Lands Administration (a department of the Ministry of National Infrastructures) holds 90% of the lands in the Negev and 55% of the lands that were once called the restricted zone. [In an unusual setup, the government of Israel owns the bulk – 93% - of the country’s land, so buying a house, for instance, actually entails leasing the land from the government. (ILA, 2002)].

The Bedouin consider most of the land in the “restricted zone” theirs according to their traditional ownership system. Two types of Bedouin claim ownership over these lands: One group is the Bedouin who settled and worked those lands even before the “restricted zone” was created. A second group is a mixture of some Bedouin and Bedouin-Falakhin tribes that were forced to move into it. Both groups claim they own these lands as they settled them over 50 years ago and have cultivated them ever since. (Ben-David, 1996).

During the 1970’s the Bedouin claimed ownership for over 800,000 dunams (1 dunam = 0.25 acre) in the Negev. According to Jacob Katz, the head of the Bedouin Administration (a department of the Ministry of National Infrastructures), the government legally purchased some 150,000 dunams (out of the 800,000) from the Bedouin. Of the remaining 650,000 dunams, the Bedouin settled almost 350,000 dunams -- 240,000 of which they claim to own and 100,000 more they lease from the Israel Lands Administration and don’t claim to own.

2. SETTLEMENT AND URBANIZATION AMONG THE BEDOUIN POPULATION

During the 1950’s and 60’s, the Bedouin responded to the process initiated by the Israeli government of consolidating the Bedouin population in the Negev – placing them in the “restricted zone” – by attempting to settle as many lands as possible within the zone. The Bedouin also began settling the portion (55%) of those lands that were officially registered as “state property,” under the authority of the Israeli Lands Administration. The Bedouin policy of expansion obviously contradicted with the government’s Negev development policy.

The authorities were (and are) frustrated with the centrifugal characteristics of the Bedouin's traditional settlements. In order to protect those lands from a further Bedouin invasion, during the 60's the government formulated a new policy. It established seven towns for all the Bedouin of the Negev in an attempt to concentrate the population and thus maximize its own political control over it and minimize the costs involved with developing physical and social infrastructures (Meir, 1999; Gonen, 2001).

The government's plan was for each one of these towns to be semi-urban and to house tens of thousands of Bedouin. The first town, Tel Sheva, was established in 1962 and the last one, Laqya, was established in 1991.

The "restricted zone" gradually dissolved as Bedouin moved into the seven towns, some of which are inside the original zone. But today only 50% of the Bedouin population in the Negev lives in these seven towns. The rest live in what came to be known simply as "unrecognized villages," or, as the authorities call it, "the Diaspora" – villages of tents and makeshift homes inside and outside the original zone.

Gonen and Ben-David (2001) suggest several reasons the Bedouin never found these towns attractive:

1. **Ownership of lands.** The Bedouin who own lands fear that once they moved into the towns they'd lose ownership of those lands.
2. **Cultural issues.** The way of life in the seven towns doesn't suit the Bedouin traditional way of life. The Bedouin have been afraid of losing some unique and fundamental elements of their culture that distinguishes them from other Arab nations.
3. **The Bedouin-Bedouin Falakhin relationship.** Many Bedouin didn't want to move into the towns because the Bedouin-Falakhins were the first to settle them. According to the Bedouin tradition, the Bedouin had priority over the Bedouin-Falakhin regarding land ownership. The Bedouin, as mentioned earlier, regard themselves as superior and didn't want to live side-by-side with their "inferior" brothers. It was only after the Bedouin-Falakhin verbally accepted their inferior status to the Bedouin that the Bedouin began moving into the towns.

The Bedouin-Falakhin had moved into the towns in the hopes of breaking the chains that bound them to their traditional obligation to cultivate the lands and to their inferior status. In fact, over the years, the Bedouin-Falakhin took advantage of the benefits of Israel's democratic society and its liberal economy in many ways, working hard to fit into the Western society. They sought university degrees and other achievements based on Western values. Doing so enabled the Bedouin-Falakhin to demand that their status in society should not be based on their origin only, but rather on their achievements. So the Israeli-imposed

urbanization enabled many Bedouin-Falakhin to achieve emancipation, to some extent, from their Bedouin masters.

4. **Poor economic situation in the Bedouin towns.** The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics published findings in February, 2002, ranking local authorities in Israel according to a socio-economic index. All seven Bedouin towns are the lowest ranked in Israel. The following was the ranking for the seven towns compared with Be'er Sheva and neighboring Jewish towns:

Socio-Economic Ranking Of Local Authorities in the Negev

LOCALITY	RANK
<i>BEDOUIN</i>	
KUSEIFE	1
RAHAT	2
TEL SHEVA	3
SEGEV SHALOM	4
AR'ARA BANEDEV	5
HURA	6
LAQIYA	7
<i>JEWISH</i>	
YEROHAM	72
DIMONA	82
BE'ER SHEVA	115
ARAD	119
MEITAR	201
LEHAVIM	205
OMER	209

Note: 1 denotes the *lowest* ranking among the 210 local authorities in Israel
Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002

The Bedouin town of Kuseife is ranked lowest in the country. In contrast, the Jewish towns which neighbor many these Bedouin towns (Omer, Meitar and Lehavim) rank among the highest in the country. Be'er Sheva ranks 115, just over half way down the list. Dimona, one of the poorer (Jewish) development towns ranks considerably below Be'er Sheva, and Arad, one of the more "successful" (Jewish) development towns, ranks slightly higher – but they are both far above the Bedouin towns.

The Bedouin towns are considered to be failures. Here's why.

3. RESOURCE ALLOTMENT

The issue of federal resource allotment is connected directly with the issue of the settlement and urbanization in the Bedouin society. There are two relevant types of resources: financial and social (Meir, 1999).

The financial level

Land resources. By creating the policy of concentrating the Bedouin, the government tried to minimize the costs of physical infrastructure. But the government's main goal was to take over as much of the disputed lands within what used to be called the restricted zone and use it for its own purposes (mainly, training zones for the military and for the establishment of some new Jewish towns). The government limited the agro-pastoral opportunities for the Bedouin, including creating limits on the sizes of herding zones and restricting the use of some animal species, such as black goats, that were considered harmful to the environment. The restrictions are enforced by the "Green Patrol," a unit established in 1976 that operates under the auspices of the Ministry of National Infrastructures. The "Green Patrol" is also in charge of enforcement of building regulations within the Bedouin rural settlements. This policy resulted in decreased herding and agriculture activities among Bedouin in the Negev in recent decades.

Water, electricity and sewage systems. Water and electricity supply are state-owned resources. Thus, water and electricity supply to the Bedouin is very much dependent on the government's willingness to develop pipeline and wire infrastructures. Although water and electricity supply isn't an issue in the Bedouin towns, as their residents are usually satisfied with the service they get there, the same is not true in the unrecognized Bedouin villages, most of which are not connected to any water and electricity supply. A more recent issue is the lack of a central sewage system in some of the seven Bedouin towns and all of the unrecognized villages. It was only recently that the authorities decided to transfer funds to the Bedouin local councils for this purpose.

Employment. The average rate of unemployment is 30% among Bedouin men, and 80% among Bedouin women. Some 50% of the families within the Bedouin towns receive income supplements from the National Insurance Institute of Israel, and some 60% of the children are living below the poverty line. ("Haaretz", 2002).

Mr. Talal Al-Krinawy, the mayor of Rahat, the largest Bedouin town, says one of the most pressing problems is that there are no job opportunities within or adjacent to the seven Bedouin towns – neither industrial nor agricultural – and therefore residents must commute to nearby Jewish cities and towns to work.

On the one hand, the government encouraged the Bedouin to move into the towns, but on the other hand it didn't create an independent economic base in the towns nor did it create access to alternative work for all those who lost their traditional professions of shepherding and agricultural work. No employment plan for the Bedouin towns exists, and with no available jobs, large numbers of Bedouin live in the towns but continue

working their lands outside the towns. The Bedouin therefore continue to view their land as their source of financial stability.

In adjacent Jewish bedroom communities, residents commute to work in larger cities in the region – in Be'er Sheva, Arad and the Dead sea, Dimona, Qiryat Gat, and as far away as Tel Aviv. But for the Bedouins to attain such jobs they need two support systems: first, appropriate education; and second, the means to get to work. The development of the education system within the Bedouin population in the Negev has been very slow: only 16.7% of Bedouin children complete the full 12 years of schooling and graduate from high school ("Haaretz", 2002).

Public transportation from the Bedouin towns to cities where jobs exist is sorely lacking. Bedouin have to make do with their own poor private services like minibuses or decrepit cars. Bedouin in the unrecognized villages must walk miles, in some cases, to get to a bus stop.

Compounding the problem is that the Negev in general has always had a serious problem of unemployment. And being at the bottom of the educational and social totem pole means that Bedouin are the last to find jobs. "And this would be so even if there were no discrimination. Clearly there is discrimination," says researcher Harvey Lithwick (Lithwick and Abu Sa'ad, 2000). A recent survey of the industries in the Negev confirms that most of the larger, successful firms in the Negev employ few, if any, Bedouin. Bedouin held 2.5% of all the industrial jobs in the Negev in 1998, and a recent follow-up inquiry confirmed that among the biggest firms there was no change (Lithwick and Abu Sa'ad, 2000).

This leaves mostly menial jobs, including construction, gardening, car repair, service trades, and haulage, for the majority of the Bedouin men. These jobs pay little, are unstable, and offer little opportunity for self-improvement.

Below is a chart of the average monthly family salary of the Bedouin in the Bedouin towns compared to Jews in neighboring Jewish towns.

Family Salaries for Bedouin and Jewish Towns, 1996

	Average Monthly Family Salary for the Year	
	<i>NIS (New Israeli Shekels)</i>	Index Beer Sheva=100
Bedouin Towns		
Rahat	3989	45
Arara	3583	41
Tel Sheva	3860	44
Kseifa	3878	44
Segev Shalom	3787	43

Hura	3955	45
Jewish Towns		
Beer Sheva	8792	100
Ofaqim	5593	64
Dimona	7791	89
Arad	9237	105
Metar	16707	190
Lehavim	19048	217
Omer	21739	247

Source: *Lithwick, 2000*.

According to Lithwick (Lithwick and Abu-Sa'ad, 2000), joblessness among the Bedouin has inevitably caused poverty and unemployment. As a result of joblessness, Litwick points out, the Bedouin towns lack revenues derived from taxation and thus have few resources for public services. According to Meir (1999), the Bedouin towns receive a much lower quality of public service than other Israelis, partly for this reason.

It should be pointed out that the federal government does *not* discriminate against the Bedouin towns in terms of funding: the towns receive no less than Jewish towns in proportional terms.

The social level

As for the unrecognized villages, the official governmental policy dictates that the villages are equipped with limited public services – to give them incentive to move into the towns – which worsens conditions in the villages. As a result of this policy, the gaps between Bedouin and Jews, as well as between Bedouin in the towns and in the villages, have grown rapidly.

Huge gaps exist between the Bedouin and other Israelis in education, infrastructure, and funding. Meanwhile, social services are particularly critical for the Bedouin because they lost their traditional social structure with the transition into Israeli society. Still, Bedouin are integrated enough in Israeli society (an increasing number are getting university degrees, for instance) that they are more acutely aware of these gaps – and angry about them.

Here's an example of the gaps in class size and water consumption.

Public Service Gaps between Bedouin and Jewish Towns

	<i>Pupils per Classroom</i>		<i>Water Consumption (M³) per Resident</i>
	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	
Bedouin Towns			
Rahat	33.8	37.2	46
Arara	31.2	32.4	39
Tel Sheva	32.1	32.7	42
Kseifa	n/a	40.7	36

Segev Shalom	33.8	36.7	n/a
Laqiya	35.2	34.1	n/a
Hura	n/a	30.4	n/a
Average	31.3	34.0	
Jewish Towns			
Beer Sheva	27.8	27.0	88
Metar	30.1	n/a	138
Lehavim	n/a	n/a	n/a
Omer	34.2	n/a	128
Average	27.9	31.1	

Source: *Lithwick, 2000*

4. THE DIVISION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL POWER

The limited amount of social and economic resources has created some serious competition between Bedouin over how the resources will be distributed amongst them. These struggles are gradually taking the place of the traditional competition over the agro-pastoral resources. Unlike the past, when competition and struggles over resources were conducted between different Bedouin tribes, it's more likely today that these struggles are happening among different families from the same tribe and between the younger generations and the traditional Bedouin leadership. Then add the ages-old conflict between the Bedouin and the Bedouin-Falakhin – and you've got an unbelievably complex squabble.

During the first few years after the establishment of Israel, the government used the traditional Bedouin leadership as its tool of communication to the Bedouin population. The government gave the Bedouin sheikhs the authority over the way various resources would be distributed. Such resources included herding permits (on government lands); water supply; building permits of private and public buildings (like private houses and schools); etc. It turned out that those resources were distributed unequally and unfairly. In many cases, the closer one was to the sheikh, the more likely it was he'd receive what he wanted. In other cases, the sheikhs charged people for things they should have been given for free.

As time went on, this skewed system of resource distribution created tensions within Bedouin society which were later on directed toward the government (Meir, 1999).

Gonen and Ben-David (2001) suggest that one of the main sources for the more recent tension between Bedouin and Bedouin-Falakhin is related to the fact that as soon as they moved into the towns they became neighbors and therefore had to share the same resources equally for the first time. Suddenly, the two groups had to work together in managing their local town councils. The local councils became, as a result, the main arena for social, cultural and political infighting as each group tried to achieve control over the council and its resources. Gonen and Ben- David (2001) claim that the councils continue to struggle with democratic principles as many Bedouin are still entrenched in traditional, tribal ways of thinking about property ownership and resource distribution. Eventually, the Bedouin and the Bedouin-Falakhin began to cooperate – once the Bedouin realized that to be a necessity if they had any hopes of achieving progress.

For these reasons the authorities have always doubted the Bedouin population's capacity to maintain effective local government. Recognizing the Bedouin's lack of experience in self-governance and the divisions within Bedouin society, the government for many years had the Ministry of Interior appoint the members of each local council. The result: most council members were Jews. But the Bedouin weren't pleased with this arrangement and by the year 2000 succeeded in convincing the government to hand over to them control of some of the councils.

In an environment of competition over few resources, the Islamic Movement has entered the scene to fill the gap, and its influence has grown rapidly in recent years. Its entrance is both a causal factor for and a consequence of a growing sense of nationalism among the Bedouin, paralleling growing Arab nationalism within the greater Arab Israeli minority. Growing numbers of Arab Israelis have become more assertive about voicing their discontent about the socio-economic gap and, moreover, are increasingly identifying with the Palestinian cause.

The Islamic Movement has been actively penetrating Arab Israeli society and has been successful among the Bedouin as well in arousing religious and nationalist identification by providing cheap education, building classrooms and mosques, running summer camps, and providing other services. This clearly has implications for exacerbating feelings of disunity with Israel.

The Bedouin Unrecognized Villages in the Negev

According to the Regional Council for the Bedouin in Unrecognized Villages (a political body that was established in 1996 and represents up to 85% the Bedouin in the unrecognized villages, according to its leaders), many of these villages existed long before the establishment of the state of Israel. The population of each unrecognized village ranges between 600 to 4,000 inhabitants. Around 68,000 people in total live in these settlements, but the Interior Ministry doesn't list the residents with any address as they do with other citizens. Rather, residents are registered only according to tribal affiliation.

Residents of the unrecognized villages don't have even the most minimal of services (public infrastructures) such as connection to water supply, sewage, electricity, access roads and transportation, health services, communication, education, welfare and municipal infrastructure.

According to Dr. Amar Al-Huzayl, strategic planner of the Regional Council for the Bedouin Unrecognized Villages, there are 45 such villages scattered around the area around Be'er Sheva, Dimona and Arad are situated on a total land area of 180,000 dunams (1dunam = 0.25 acre), which the Bedouin claim to own.

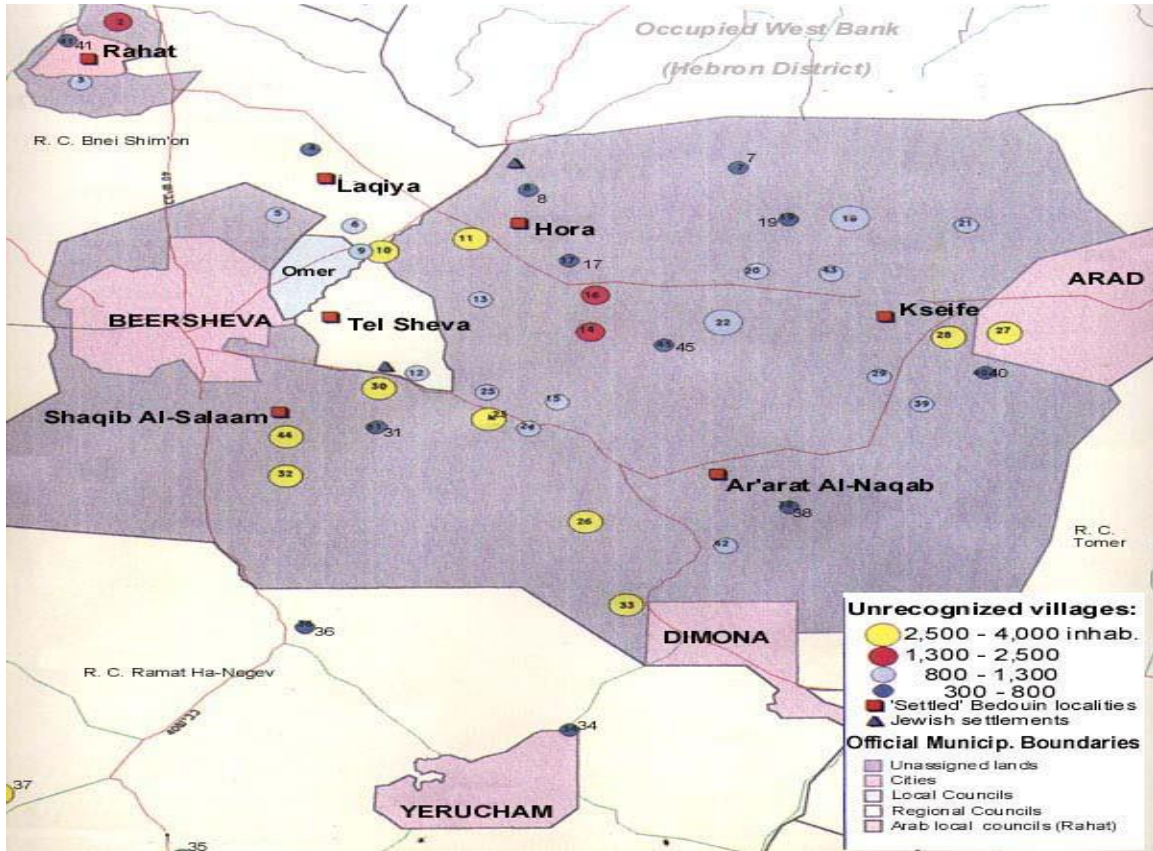
Yaakov Katz, head of the Israel Lands Administration's Bedouin division rejects this claim. Said Katz, "What is a village? A village has a central road, a public area and a

residential area. Most of the Diaspora [the name authorities gave the Unrecognized villages] are not villages, but rather a random distribution of buildings, with no connection between them and with no logic. There are only seven or ten clusters that have signs of a settlement.” (“Haaretz”, 2002)

Nahum Donsky, the head of the planning team for the Be’er Sheva metropolis master plan, refers to the centrifugal tendency of the Bedouin population as problematic. He says that there are between 100 to 150 “centers of significant population with more than 10 buildings.” Donsky says that even 45 towns are too much as, he says, “land and water are

finite resources, agriculture as a financial base is shrinking in the Jewish and Bedouin sectors, and infrastructures cost money.” Donsky believes that a new plan, discussed below, will balance the needs of the Bedouin population and the limits of resources.

MAP OF THE UNRECOGNIZED VILLAGES IN THE NORTHERN NEGEV



SOURCE: Dr. Amer Al-Huzeil, Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages in the Negev, 1999.

THE NEW PLAN

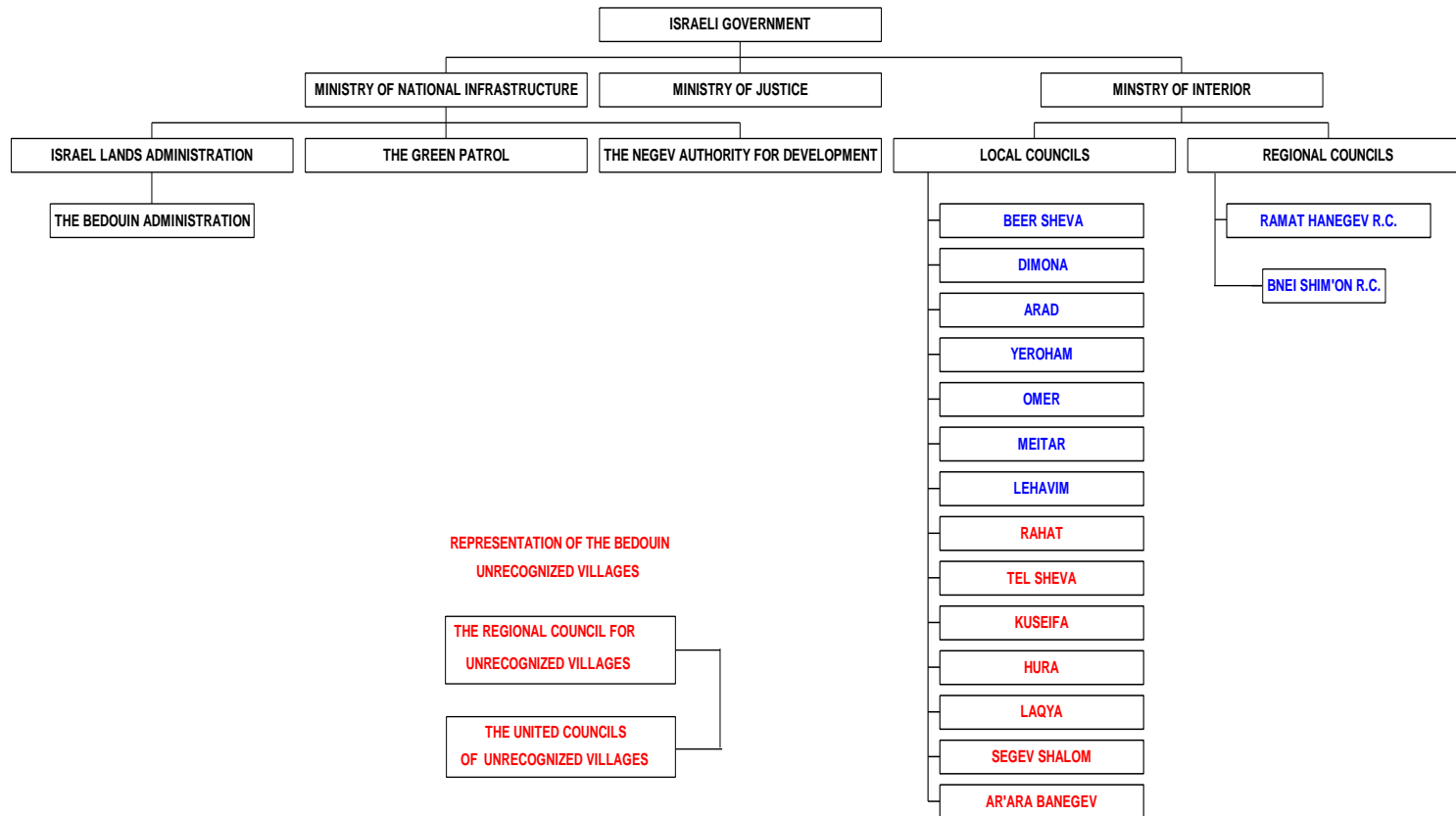
The establishment of new villages for the Bedouin population in the Negev or recognizing some of them – and thereby providing them with a higher level of services – continues to be a major challenge for policy makers.

In 1998, the government approved the establishment of five new agrarian towns (or villages) for the Bedouin population in the Negev: Mari't, Tarabin, Beit-Felet, Hawashla and Be'er-Hail (Gonen and Ben-David, 2001).) In contrast to the seven urbanized towns which had little land space for agriculture, the new towns will have more agricultural land and better public services and housing. The location of each village has already been chosen, and each of the new towns is situated in the geographic center of a tribe on lands occupied by the Bedouin. In addition to these five new villages, the government recognized the previously-unrecognized village of Dreijat.

Planners of the new settlements claim that they have learned from the failings of the first seven towns. This time, they say, the new towns will include existing settlements and will be planned, for the most part, on land which the residents say is theirs and indisputably belongs to only one clan. That will prevent the tension of inter-tribal feuds. The town of Mar't, in a unique setup, will be comprised of five “development nuclei,” each of which will be inhabited by one tribe and separated by “agricultural zones.” Each of the five centers, says Donsky, will include its own schools, kindergartens, a clinic, mosque, sports hall, open-air market, council building, old-age home and an employment center (“Haaretz”, 2002).

Mr. Katz claims that the existing towns, the planned extensions, and the planned towns will house the residents of 38 of the 45 villages for which the Regional Council for the Bedouin Unrecognized Villages is demanding a solution.

THE STAKEHOLDERS



SUMMARY

The conflict between the Bedouin population in the Negev and the Israeli government began in the 1950's, following the formation of the Israeli government's policy to settle and develop the Negev with Jewish settlements. The government concentrated the Bedouin in a restricted area in the northeastern part of the Negev. In an attempt to eliminate continued expansion by the Bedouin, who were quickly spreading out and settling government lands within the restricted zone, the government formed seven towns for the Bedouin population.

To date, only 50% of the Bedouin population in the Negev live in these towns. Several factors discouraged many Bedouin from moving into the towns and prevented the towns' success. Bedouin who owned lands have feared that once they moved into the towns they'd lose ownership of those lands. Bedouin have feared that moving into the towns would mean losing some unique and fundamental elements of their culture that distinguish them from other Arab nations. And Bedouin haven't wanted to live side-by-side with Bedouin-Falakhin, who were the first to move into the towns.

The towns failed for these reasons and more. Primary among them was that Bedouin were not represented on the committee that created the town plans and therefore the population felt that the towns weren't planned appropriately for them and for their specific needs. In addition, no employment plan was formulated and no industry located within or adjacent to the towns. Infrastructure was sorely lacking: no transportation plan was made, sewage systems were not built, and schools lacked basic needs. The towns rank today as the poorest in the country.

Many of the town councils are now headed and well-represented by Bedouin. But fierce infighting continues between the numerous tribes over resources, which are limited partly as a result of high unemployment and thus low tax revenue. Towns are therefore mostly dependent on federal funding.

In an environment of competition over few resources, the Islamic Movement has entered the scene to fill the gap, and its influence has expanded rapidly in recent years. This phenomenon is contributing to growing tension with the government and lessening of identification with Israeli society.

The government has created a new plan for the establishment of several new Bedouin towns, some of which are already in advanced stages of planning; the recognition of existing villages; and the improvement of public services and living conditions. Having learned from its previous mistakes, the government decided to include Bedouin representatives on its planning committee, and the new settlements will have more rural character than the seven existing towns. The plan would preclude inter-tribal feuds by strategically locating tribes at a distance from one another. But the dialogue is still difficult and slow, and exposes harsh disagreements within Bedouin society and between the Bedouin and the government. There is still much more progress to be made.

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