ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

# Transitions

## Russians, Ethiopians and Bedouins in Israel's Negev Desert

*Edited by*
Richard Isralowitz
Jonathan Friedlander

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## *Russians, Ethiopians and Bedouins in Israel's Negev Desert*

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*In memory of Joseph Friedlander*

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| ***Richard Isralowitz*** | ***Jonathan Friedlander*** |
| --- | --- |
| *Ben-Gurion University* | *University of California* |
| *Be'er Sheva* | *Los Angeles* |

# Contents

# Introduction

## *Richard Isralowitz and Jonathan Friedlander*

Israel today continues to address a fundamental principle of Zionism, settling Jewish people from all corners of the world within its borders. The country has experienced several waves of immigration in its history, the most recent occurring between 1989 and 1991, when some 360,000 Soviet and 40,000 Ethiopian Jews emigrated. In just four years Israel, about the size of New Jersey, added proportionally as many newcomers to its population as the United States did between 1970 and 1990.

Immigration and settlement are hallmark features of Israel, and especially in its arid southern region, the Negev. Since the mid-20th century, the Negev has been a gathering point for waves of new Jewish immigrants, beginning with the hundreds of thousands who came from North African and Middle Eastern countries. From the 1960s onward, Israeli government policies have accelerated the settlement process of indigenous Bedouins as well. More than 80,000 Bedouins now live in the Negev, about half in towns created for them and the rest scattered throughout the region.

Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, believed that settlement of the Negev was essential to the future of the nation. Under Ben-Gurion's government the Negev flourished. New towns were developed and the national water system was extended to address the needs of the region. Following his retirement, however, the Negev lost its status as a focal point of attention, especially after the 1967 Six-Day War when new development opportunities became available in the territories acquired by Israel.

The arrival of Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia was seen as a blessing for the sagging prospects of the Negev. Essays in this volume reveal, however, that government-sponsored settlement of the three groups—the Russian, Ethiopian and Bedouin—has not always been based on principles of self-determination or free of prejudice related to race, culture or religion. Such differential treatment has also influenced the manner in which newly settled members of the three groups regard and relate to one another, contributing to the perpetuation of existing bias and misperception.

Yehuda Gradus and Richard Isralowitz introduce the Negev and its history since 1948, identifying organizational strategies that can address the region's lack of successful development coordination. In a meditative essay on his hometown of Yeruham, Haim Chertok explores this pioneer community established in the 1950s for immigrants and recently revitalized by an influx of new Russian arrivals. Russian Jews, whose considerable numbers have allowed them to mobilize political power and social presence, have been relatively successful in quickly adapting to Israeli society and finding decent jobs—so much so that Chertok fears they may abandon Yeruham for opportunities in the central and coastal regions of the country.

David Newman,Yehuda Gradus and Esther Levinson examine the impact of the early 1990s

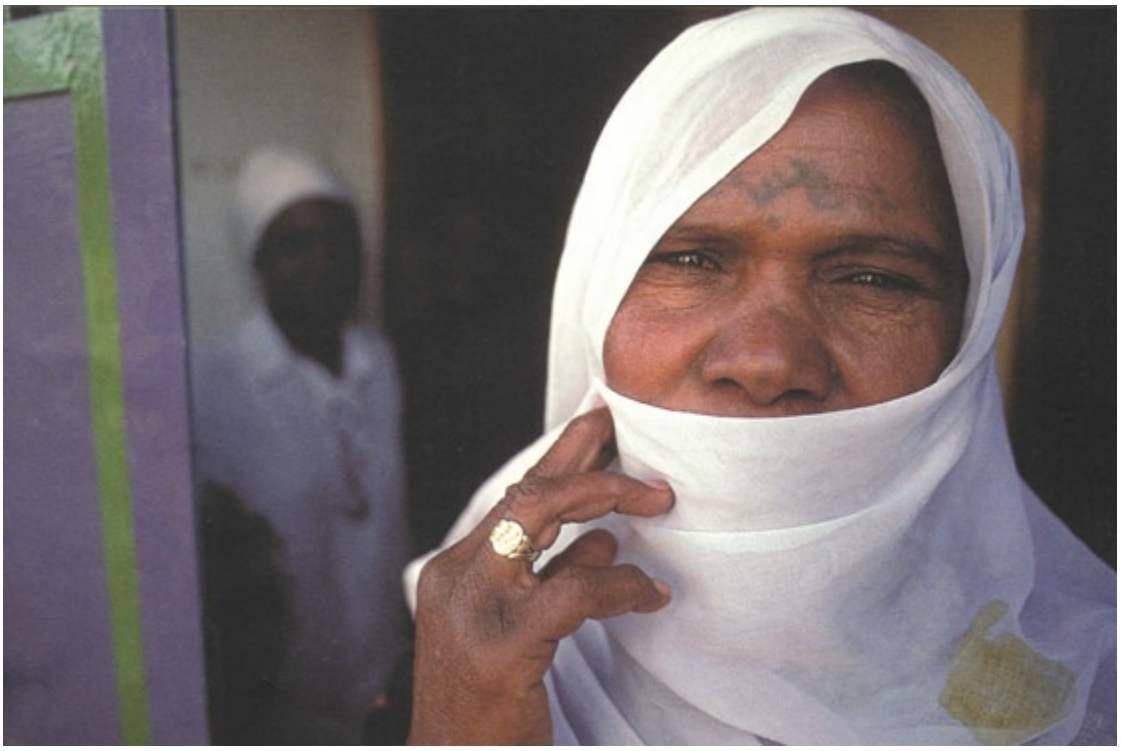
mass migration on the Negev. The authors point to the strain on municipal infrastructure and employment resources caused by rapid population growth and the dependence of small development towns on the regional capital, Be'er Sheva. The frustration immigrants attribute to government policies and their feelings of social isolation are articulated in a compilation of interviews with Russian and Ethiopian residents of Nahal Beka, which at the time of the interviews in the early 1990s was the largest temporary settlement in the Negev for newly arrivied immigrants.

In "Competition, Discrimination and Conflict," Isralowitz and Ismael Abu Saad discuss the anxiety and resentment expressed by Sephardi Jews and Bedouin Arabs alike toward Russian immigrants over perceived economic and social advantages. Esther Hertzog, who studied the organization and interpersonal relations of an absorption center for Ethiopian immigrants, finds a powerful and controlling dynamic between designated "caretakers" and the residents who are made vulnerable and dependent. She describes the forceful way that Ethiopians are taught about jobs, health care and lifestyle.

Julie Cwikel presents a comparative study of changing health behavior among Russians, Ethiopians and Bedouins, addressing issues of preventive health care, education, family planning and neonatal care. She examines how cultural responses to illness differ and how they influence adaptation to health behaviors encouraged by the dominant culture.

During the final stages of preparing this book, issues of Bedouin land rights in the Negev generated international attention. Haim Chertok describes the tensions between Jewish residents living in affluent residential communities and Bedouins who have chosen to settle on land peripheral to the isolated townships established for them by the Israeli government. Considered illegal by the authorities, the independent settlements of the Bedouins are subject to razing by the government and disputes with nearby Jewish communities seeking to expand their domains. In the last chapter, Abu Saad takes a look at educational opportunities for Bedouins in the Negev. He closes with suggestions for improvement, both within the framework of the Jewish and Arab educational systems, and by addressing the specific needs of the Bedouin community.

The multidisciplinary perspectives presented in this volume reflect the varied academic and professional training of its contributors and their diverse backgrounds. It is noteworthy that the majority of the authors are themselves immigrants to Israel. The textual component of the volume is matched by a visual interpretation offered by Ron Kelley, an American photographer and author whose published works on displaced populations anchor his bittersweet portrayal of the life and times of Russians, Ethiopians and Bedouins in the Negev.

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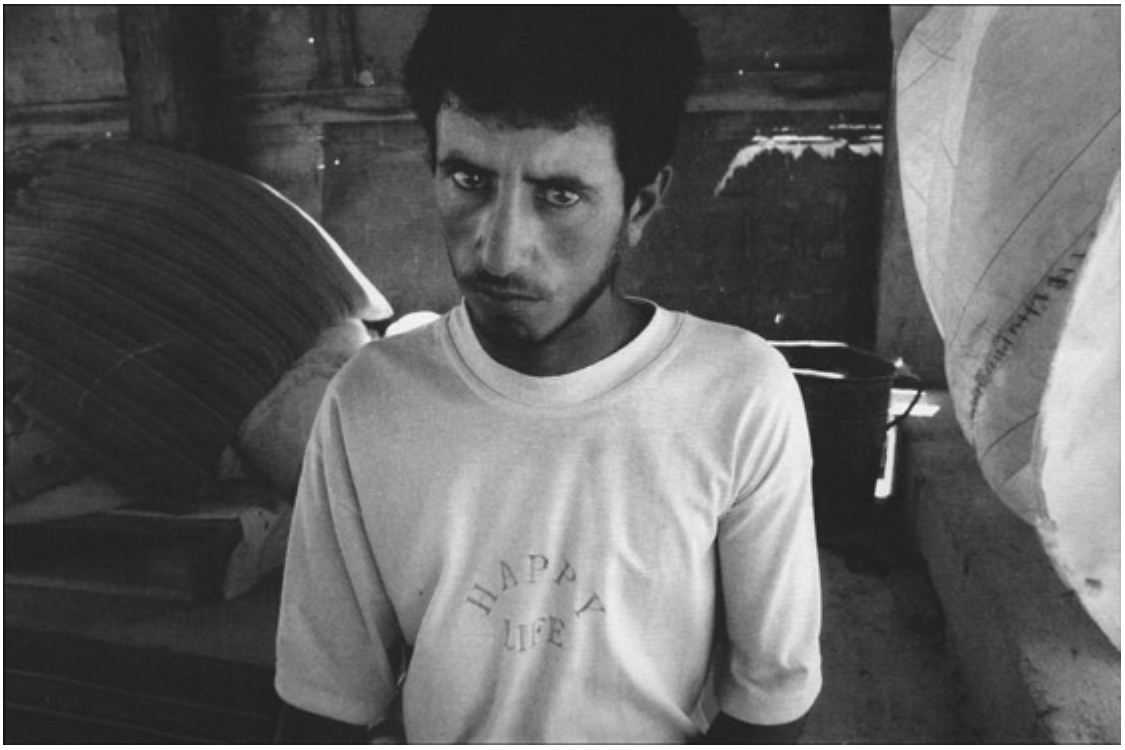
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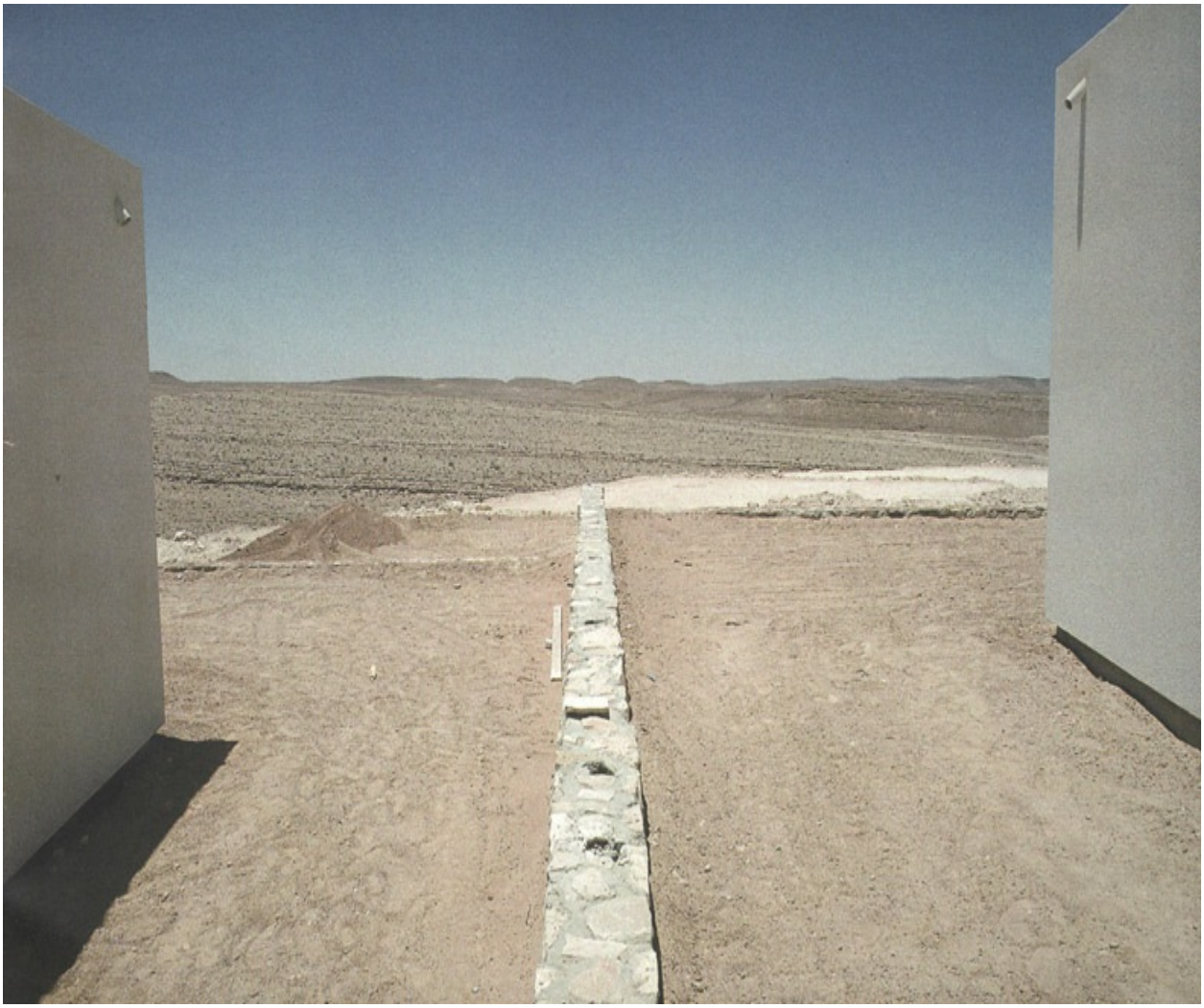
# 1

# *Living on the Edge*



Chapter 1

# The Negev: A Region on the Periphery of Israeli Social and Economic Development

***Yehuda Gradus and Richard Isralowitz***

## The Negev in Retrospect

The Negev, it is said, is where God first spoke to Abraham and where monotheism began. It is the "land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass" (Deuteronomy 8:9). As early as the fourth century B.C.E., the Nabateans formed large communities in the Negev based on artificial irrigation and carefully devised schemes for storing and using available water.

From the end of the Nabatean period (106 B.C.E.) until Israel's independence, the Negev remained a neglected territory characterized by arid wastes and the tent settlements of nomadic Bedouin. Even the first Zionist leaders showed little awareness of the region's potential contribution to the future of the Jewish State because of its inhospitable conditions and lack of sufficient water to support agriculture. But David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, worked throughout his life to reverse centuries of prejudice against settlement in the Negev. He believed that "without the settlement of the…Negev, [Israel] cannot be secure, and [will] not succeed in attaining economic independence." Furthermore, he believed this could not be done without the "transformation of the facts of Nature…" (Ben-Gurion, 1963, 201–202). He valued the Negev not only for its potential contribution to Israel, but also as a model for development of desert science and technology, an issue of extreme importance, since one third of the world's land mass is desert. The concept of leadership by personal example was a hallmark of Israel's first prime minister. His belief in the Negev inspired his steadfast support of Sde Boker, a kibbutz in its early stages of development, located in the remote wilderness of the region.

## The Region and Its Development: An Overview

Shortly after the War of Independence in 1948, the Negev, constituting nearly two thirds of Israel's territory, had only a few thousand Jewish settlers, living mostly in the ancient city of Be'er Sheva and on kibbutzim in the northern part of the region. With Ben-Gurion as prime minister, the Negev took on considerable importance as an essential component of the new

state's social and economic development. For example, from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, the government established ten new towns for the mass arrival of immigrants who were predominantly from Middle Eastern and North African countries. Large government-owned companies, such as Negev Phosphates, Ltd., the Dead Sea Works, Ltd., and its subsidiary the Dead Sea Bromine Company, Ltd., as well as a few smaller enterprises for mining copper, gypsum, and kaolin, were established to exploit the Negev's raw materials.

Attention was also focused on the region because of its strategic location. The Negev bisects the Arab world, with Asia to the east and Africa to the west, and also serves as a natural land mass connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. During the "Ben-Gurion years," the National Water Carrier System was designed and built, an undertaking that served as a catalyst for the establishment of many new agricultural settlements in the Negev and a subsequent increase in the region's population.

The decade of the 1960s was a period of rapid industrialization in Israel, designed to meet the pressing need to create jobs for the country's swelling immigrant population. Lor the fledgling Negev towns of Arad, Dimona, Yeruham, Mitzpe Ramon, Netivot, Sederot, Ofakim and Eilat, industrial development posed many problems because of the lack of infrastructure to support such activity. Among the challenges to be addressed were: the difficulty of travel on a system of narrow, poorly-surfaced roads; the long distances between the country's major population centers and markets; the inadequate system of financial and banking institutions and service facilities in the region; and the absence of skilled manpower. The government took the initiative in meeting these challenges, primarily through the promotion of capital investment; for example, making inexpensive land available to developers, subsidizing contractors, building new highways, improving water and communications systems, and providing a variety of exemptions from taxes and customs duties. Lrom 1950 to 1964, the residents of the Negev grew from less than 0.5% of the nation's population to 6.5%, nearly 200,000 people having been settled in the Negev during the era of Ben Gurion's leadership. The construction of Israel's major nuclear facility near Dimona, and the establishment of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, whose primary mission is pioneering the scientific and technological development of the Negev, contributed much to giving the region new status among national priorities.

The subsequent decline of the Negev during the 1970s and 1980s may be attributed to two major factors: first, the resignation of David Ben-Gurion as prime minister and chief advocate for the region; and second, the Six Day War in 1967, which resulted in the acquisition of new territories for Israeli development. With most projects still incomplete, the Negev was neglected in favor of other regions whose advocates were closer to the personal and political ideologies of the new national leaders. The shift in government attention began with members of Ben-Gurion's own political party (i.e., Eshkol, Meir and Rabin), but it was more strongly reoriented by the Likud Party under the leadership of Menachem Begin beginning in 1977, when Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) became the focus of government attention. The Negev, once envisioned as a pioneering frontier land of promise and potential, was forced to accept a government posture of benign neglect. Its future could wait.

Over the years this waiting period has revealed that certain building blocks in the region's earlier development were in fact fragile and unstable. The industrial foundation, established during the 1960s with massive capital investment to provide work for unskilled immigrants, proved to be highly labor-intensive and the jobs poorly paid. Government efforts to encourage new industries to locate in the Negev included various incentives, but these, which had initially been viewed as attractive, became almost meaningless once a similar package of incentives was

offered for location in an alternative area (i.e., Judea and Samaria) that was closer to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, where there is greater access to skilled manpower and markets for finished products. Science-based industries with an emphasis on research and development (e.g. aircraft, computer, electronics, etc.) did not, therefore, locate in the Negev, leaving the region to fall further behind in Israel's race to modernize and upgrade its quality of life.

There is an ever-increasing gap between the nation's central region and the Negev in terms of industrial activity. Average wages in the south tend to be lower than those paid elsewhere. Limited employment opportunities in the region's industries and support services are causing skilled workers, including science and technology graduates of Ben-Gurion University, to seek employment outside the region. While there were high expectations that the Negev's population would increase over time, demographic statistics show that, for the decade prior to 1989, there was no significant rise in the number of regional residents except for Eilat, a resort center that has grown because of the availability of employment, especially to young people. The massive influx of Russian and Ethiopian immigrants between 1989 and 1992 has precipitated a growth spurt in the region's capital city of Be'er Sheva and other population centers throughout the region. As yet, however, the area lacks sufficient job opportunities to attract newcomers to make the Negev their permanent home.

It is clear that Ben-Gurion's departure from political life left a vacuum in the Negev's advocacy base. The concept of regional representation is meaningless to the Negev because of Israel's highly centralized unitary political system which ignores territorial dimensions. Since voters in the Negev do not choose individual candidates to represent their interests on a regional, city, or town level, they have little or no influence on the formation of major policies and government decisions affecting the region's development. Within the area itself, population centers including kibbutzim, moshavim, development towns, Be'er Sheva, and Bedouin settlement towns have each put their own special political and economic interests before those of the Negev as a whole, resulting in a crucial lack of unity and cooperation around key regional issues.

The Negev's planning and development are a direct reflection of the nation's political organization which is structured to fulfill centralized aims. In the existing "top-down" regional development approach, interaction among the various bodies charged with implementing policy is limited and uncoordinated. For example, each ministry involved with the region determines its own set of priorities and distributes its budget and resources accordingly. Because decisionmakers are located in the center of the country, far removed from the Negev, their actions are often unrelated to the problems that must be addressed at the regional and local levels. One prime example was the redeployment of military personnel and installations from the Sinai after the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt. Expectations were high that the transfer of Israel Defense Forces bases to the Negev would be a significant reason for career officers and other army personnel to relocate their families and places of residence to the region. Such action would have stimulated a demand for attractive low-cost housing and generated interest among businesses and industries in establishing operations in the Negev, thereby creating new work opportunities and encouraging the development of improved social, educational and recreational services in the region. Centralized government decision-making, in this case by the Ministry of Defense, ignored the Negev's need for development, and few attempts were made to involve the region's leadership in planning. The impact of the resulting redeployment has been minimal at best.

A more recent oversight was the lack of planning by the Ministry of Housing during the large-

scale immigration from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. Approximately 25,000 housing units were built in the Negev from 1980 to 1992 to accommodate the anticipated influx of new immigrants. These units were located throughout the region without regard to basic support services or access to employment opportunities necessary to facilitate the absorption of the newcomers. In the absence of a proper infrastructure to support the sudden population increase, thousands of apartments remain empty to this day, as new immigrants relocate to urban centers in the north where they have a better chance of finding work.

## The Future: Regional Advocacy

To attract favorable government policies and funding support for the Negev, its city and town mayors, regional council officials and others have portrayed the region as being in a state of constant disrepair and crisis. This tack has won little success; worse, it has perpetuated a negative image of the Negev as a "loser," inhibiting rather than promoting investment and development. A "new Negev" must be promoted, a Negev whose appeal is high and whose inhabitants are involved, a Negev that commands substantive support from current and potential advocates. These factors are important for attracting new immigrants, business and industry, and creating jobs. Morale may be lifted if success can be achieved initially, but the critical issue will be to maintain motivation and sustain achievement. Such achievement will depend on the ability of officials to develop a practical plan for regional development and to secure the resources necessary to promote implementation, coordination, cooperation, and follow-up among the area's varied interest groups, its capital city of Be'er Sheva, and its development towns, rural and agricultural settlements and Bedouin communities.

Chapter 2

# Ruminating Over Fifty Years of Negev Settlement

## *Haim Chertok*

**"I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert"**

**Isaiah 43:19**

The Negev, from its southern tip at Eilat running north to the Coastal Plain and the first rise of the Judean Hills, is a tapering triangle that embraces six topographical regions. Its parched 12,000 square kilometers constitute fully 60% of Israel's land mass. For many Israelis, it is difficult to maintain a proper perspective on these dimensions, but it is critical to bear in mind that we are talking about an area which, though it harbors the only open space remaining in the country, is considerably smaller than the state of Connecticut. Once dotted with Nabatean fortress-cities, several of them inhabited by tens of thousands of people, the Negev steadily declined after the Arab conquest of the seventh century. In 1948, with the founding of the Jewish State, the Negev was home to around 11,000 Bedouin.

Between 1949 and 1952, the Jewish population of Israel more than doubled its pre-state figure of 750,000, fueled by the arrival of large numbers of survivors from the slaughterhouses of Europe and then by the mass immigration of Jews expelled from Arab countries. Both strategic and ideological aims dictated that as many as possible of the newcomers should be channeled to settle in the harsh terrain of the Negev. Nearly half a century later, the identical policy remains in force for new arrivals from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. To the extent that this policy has succeeded, which can be measured by how many of these reluctant pioneers and their children have "stuck it out," a qualitatively different degree of human pressure has been exerted on the fragile texture of the Negev than formerly. And over the years it has only intensified.

How should Israel protect and how should it exploit its precious open space? This problem has simmered since the beginning of statehood; only occasionally, as with the now blunted campaign to construct a towering Voice of America transmitter in the southern Negev, has it boiled over into public consciousness. But there has been constant tension between the needs of the military, of mining and extracting operations, of the Bedouin, of kibbutz-based farmers, of environmentalists, and of those bent on establishing manufacturing and industrial plants so that the predominantly immigrant populations of Be'er Sheva and its satellite development towns, like Dimona, like Arad, like my own Yeruham, should have something to do. Especially when the issue narrows to land use, to these competing, irreconcilable claims on the land, does the spacious Negev seem to dwindle appreciably.

It was on a trip to Eilat that David Ben-Gurion first viewed Kibbutz Sde Boker, some fifty kilometers south of Be'er Sheva. The encounter would alter the remainder of his life. The kibbutz had been established as an agricultural settlement in 1952. Here in the heart, in the heat of the desert, ex-army pioneers had planted orchards of plums, peaches and apricots and some field crops and begun to raise poultry. (Only later would a factory to manufacture adhesive tape be established.)

Presumption? To be sure. But Ben-Gurion's response was immediate, his enthusiasm characteristically immense: "I was so full of pride in these youngsters who had come here to settle, proud that the spirit of challenge and pioneering was so alive. What they were committed to…was the ideal that had drawn me to this country half a century ago: starting it right from the beginning."

It was here, to the Negev, that Ben-Gurion came to live out his years of retirement. It is near that very spot where he lies buried. I more than merely comprehend his excitement. In my way, I have participated in it. I myself first saw Kibbutz Sde Boker in 1974 as a tourist when I was brought to visit Ben-Gurion's final home, his so-called "hut." Against the barren, undulating hills, the green sward of the kibbutz is a potent stimulus to the imagination. Could not I too practice swardmanship? Reify my own pioneering vision? Two years later my family and I left California and arrived in the Negev in order to make—to remake—our lives.

Toward the end of breakfast one day in 1993, during Passover week vacation from school, my fifteen-year-old son, Shai, sprang his great notion for the day: "Dad, let's you and me hike out into the desert today. I'll carry the heavy stuff."

There were other things to do—there are always other things that need doing—but this was a proposition worth serious consideration. First, some clarifications: "the desert" completely surrounds Yeruham, the north Negev town of nearly 8,000 souls where I have lived all but one of the past seventeen years. The current figure is the town's all-time peak, swollen by what is now an ebbing tide of perestroika-pried Russians.

It was largely by chance that my wife and I landed in this town, an unplanned, butt-of-all-jokes kind of a place thirty-five kilometers southeast of Be'er Sheva. Israel's first "development town," it was established in 1951 as part of a plan for major settlement of the Negev. Industry was supposed to follow. And follow it did, fifteen years later when the first of Yeruham's four major factories finally opened its doors. By that time, most of the town's initial arrivals, predominantly Romanians, had gravitated to the center of the country. Left behind were principally the less mobile, less educated immigrants from Morocco, who were joined in the late 1960s by a large contingent of Jews from India and a smaller number from Iran.

Yet for far more time than we could stand New York, for double the years that we remained in California, it is in Yeruham that we have raised our second round of family, Yeruham where we have remained. Obviously, much about this place corresponds to our disposition and inner needs: relative isolation and smallness, against-the-grain roughness, and the piquancy of daily interaction with my fellow proletarian "pioneers." Indeed, we have found its very problematic character one of its major attractions. Today's Yeruham is somewhat more heterogeneous than in the past, but it could never be confused with a metropolis, a garden suburb, or a bucolic retreat in the countryside. Nevertheless, anomalous Yeruham conforms to my quirky notion of Israel as much as Jerusalem or Tel Aviv does. Its history is paradigmatic of modern Jewish settlement of the Negev.

For my first baker's dozen years in the Negev, summer was the crudest season. Early in the

morning during July and August, rickety trucks would roll in and pull up in front of this house, that apartment building. Another family was moving away to Petach Tikva, to Ariel, or merely to Be'er Sheva. Some of the departing families had long threatened to move. Most had not.

For those of us who had not merely washed up on these inland shores but had consciously chosen to come, for whom Yeruham was our Zionism, leaving was not the same as shifting from one Tel Aviv suburb to another. It was more like the abandonment of a personal commitment, the cancellation of a vow. An aura of desertion pervaded each departure, no matter how objectively justified. Indeed, one family with whom we had been friendly did not inform us or anyone else of their intention until their very last day in town!

Departees contrived good and adequate-sounding reasons. Justifications. There were few who did not level blame against the inadequacies of the schools, the local administration, the dearth of cultural opportunities. Who could deny the large measure of truth in all of this? Like ourselves, some of these people had originally come to Yeruham to make a mark, to effect fundamental changes: in the schools, in the mayor's office, even at the music conservatory. Nearly all felt frustrated. Yeruham needed talented people, but myoh-my, how wondrously it unmanned them!

Until the quiet, salutary, revitalizing tide of Russians of the early 1990s, every summer witnessed the departure of essential, nay, irreplaceable people from Yeruham. In 1986, official unemployment was 28%, and 40% of the apartments were empty. Led by the mayor, the town officially went on strike to protest government neglect. Throughout the 1980s, variations on this summertime drama in Yeruham were replayed in half-our-size Mitzpe Ramon fifty kilometers to the south, and in almost all the towns of the Negev. Indeed, worst hit of all was Be'er Sheva itself, which throughout the decade suffered an outflow of population and a severe loss of self-esteem.

As melancholy hovered over Yeruham, as another irreplaceable family left, someone would surely repeat the old, tired comment: how, like grains of sand through a net, tens of thousands of persons had "gone through" Yeruham or Dimona or another development town like Netivot in the western Negev—as if hundreds of thousands have not "gone through" Jerusalem…or New York.

It happened every summer. I used to harbor resentment toward those who for reasons good and sufficient according to their lights had skipped out. Until I noticed that the sinking ship did not go down. It seems that a preponderance of talented, productive people have always remained. Moreover, if those on the way out have always been far more conspicuous, an unheralded flow of fresh recruits has never ceased to arrive. And so, even during the years when Yeruham and the Negev were not growing—when, by the artificial norms imposed by city planners and professional bureaucrats, they were failing to meet goals and expectations—by quite another set of norms, they may be said to have held their own, and their residents may even be viewed as remarkably tenacious, adaptable…successful.

The "desert" starts just up the road, just down the road, in every direction no more than a kilometer or so from the center of town. It's not sandy, it's not a Sahara. Rocks, loess, scattered shrubs—it's that kind of terrain. The "heavy stuff" to carry would be three one-and-a-half liter containers, formerly of Coke, now of water, and four grapefruits in a backpack. The corollary "lighter stuff" for the old man would be a camera and some sandwiches. Morning: sunny, achingly clear, seductively inviting. Things to do, there were always other things to do, but the call of the open Negev was irresistable. Still, as a matter of principle, a show of resistance.

"But this is a vacation week; half the country will be out on the trails. Why go hiking when Nature'll be rotten with herds of daytrippers nosing around 'scenic spots,' driving all over driven

together in guided caravans."

"So we'll cut through the back country. You can still do it, Dad. I'll go to Haim's *m akolet* and pick up some cookies. You get ready!"

What a tactician!

As on most mornings for the past sixteen years, by 7:00 I had returned from my foray to our corner store, Makolet Laluz, bearing milk, cottage cheese, jam and freshly baked baguettes. Back in 1961, Aharon Laluz, an unlikely pioneer, had come straight from Morocco to Yeruham. Since his death some five years ago, the store has been run by his son Haim, but my wife and I still sometimes announce to each other that we're dashing out to "Aharon's" for pita bread or an extra sack of sugar.

It was just a few weeks earlier that I'd noticed an oddly-shaped sign, crammed with text, newly affixed to an upper corner of the building that houses Makolet Laluz. It hung to the left of the familiar, overarching placard of the Noga ice cream smiling cow and high above the cartons of Carlsberg beer stacked in the front window. The new sign looked official, non-commercial… and permanent.

The low, concrete structure that houses "Aharon's" seems as out of place as ever in our neighborhood of adjoining, one-story houses. It pre-dates the construction of our Ben-Gurion Quarter by nearly two decades. For a number of years, in fact, Makolet Laluz had stood like an abandoned fortress. The Ben-Gurion neighborhood, you see, had been erected over ramshackle *ma'abara*: transit housing for the Moroccan immigrants who arrived on the scene from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s. By the time we arrived in town, Aharon was already over sixty. He embodied the archetypal qualities of the Moroccan immigrant who, by government fiat, was settled willy-nilly in the Negev.

After the *m a'abara* had been leveled, after nearly all of Aharon's customers had relocated and even the nearby kindergarten had been closed for lack of clientele, Aharon, the remnant of an earlier time, remained at his station. Customers must have been exceedingly scarce in those years between the demolition and the arrival of us newcomers to the Ben-Gurion quarter. But his *m akolet* was all that Aharon had, and so hold out he did.

Whatever the season, whatever the weather, Aharon opened for business never later than 6:00 a.m. so as to catch those few faithful regulars who would come to shop a distance from home. Throughout that lean period, his earliest, steadiest customers were construction workers, mainly Arabs from Gaza, who bought cheese, salami and drinks on credit against their pay. Sometimes Aharon would mutter when one failed to appear at the end of the month. The store's busiest stretch came between 9:45 and 10:15 a.m., when students on break between classes at the nearby high school crowded in, buying or filching rolls, ice cream and candy. Taking off only for lunch (served one of his sons) and a brief nap, Aharon remained open until 8:30 or 9:00 at night.

Day or night, Aharon's cramped domain was illuminated by the unsteady glow of a single fluorescent fixture. Entering the premises was something like lowering oneself into a cavern. Lacking even an electric heater, the old man in winter warmed himself with innumerable drafts of tea. In summer the one ceiling fan twirled lackadaisically, and the acrid smell of spoiled milk permeated the air. Still, Aharon made no improvements to his store, and from behind the scarred counter, the dour Moroccan "miracle rabbi" Baba Sali, cowled in gabardine, peered down from a picture on the wall.

To us Aharon was Morris Bober, Bernard Malamud's Polish grocer, in Moroccan guise: his *m akolet* was his fate. More to the point, it seems to me that as much as any pioneering kibbutznik, Aharon Laluz was the very prototype of the Jewish settler of the Negev.

Thirty minutes later, visors shading our heads, Shai in hiking shoes, his father-the-amateur in Reeboks, we set off eastward down the road: past Yeruham's heavy industry zone to our left, its light industry zone to our right, past the new cemetery. Five minutes later, local traffic to our rear, the road virtually belonged to the two of us. If we looked straight down the road or to the hills on the left, if we averted our gaze from the right side of the road, why, you might have put feathers in our caps and called us macaroni.

South of the road, however, lay a malignant, tumorous smutch on the desertscape: the Yeruham dump. We trod and we stared mournfully, impotently at the reflected glare of half-buried auto parts and broken appliances, at mounds of corrugated containers laced with discarded plastic containers identical to the kind in my son's backpack, and at miscellaneous other garbage —Yeruham's non-biodegradable effluent of solid waste.

Were it not for one idiosyncrasy, it could be Anytown's dump. The source of distinction is Phoenicia Glass, of late going through hard times, but for many years Yeruham's premier industry. Its furnaces still glow around the clock, seven days a week, 365 days a year (overtime for Shabbat, double overtime for most Jewish holidays, double-double for Yom Kippur), turning out bottles for Gold Star and Maccabi, Israel's two national beers. Yeruham's main drag is even called Zvi Bornstein Street, named for the son of the president of Phoenicia who was killed years ago when his company plane crashed not far from town. Phoenicia's signal contribution to Yeruham's detritus? Heaps and more heaps of broken glass, a paradise for archaeologists yet unborn.

At first glance, if only from a distance, Phoenicia makes our dump glitter like the window at Tiffany's. It's unfortunate that no company has bothered to figure out how to base itself on recycling Yeruham's endless river of broken glass. With such an unnatural resource so readily abundant, it should surely be possible. Equally sad, it would surely be economically feasible to recycle those eternal-life plastic soft drink containers were there only a law that no more than one kind of plastic could be used. But Israel has no such legislation, and so the outskirts of all of its cities and settlements bristle with gaudy, waste-generated anti-sculptures. Climate and topography combine to make these Negev sites masterpieces of decadence: permanent, scabby, running sores on the land.

Upon reflection, even the reverse image of Tiffany's-inthe-Negev—that kibbutz oasis that dazzled the imagination of David Ben-Gurion—may prove something of a problematic achievement, even something of a mirage. Its fresh water, life-blood of the greening of the desert, is pumped all the way from the Sea of Galilee. It is highly subsidized by the national treasury. Generally speaking, this means that the more plums or tomatoes Sde Boker and other Negev kibbutzim produce, the more money it costs the Israeli taxpayer. Even if greening the Negev with more agricultural settlements were environmentally desirable, which is far from clear, Israel simply could not afford it.

Ben-Gurion, however, never lost his immense faith that technology could make good on man's presumption. In 1957, the Blaustein Institute for Desert Research, then called the Negev Institute for Arid Zone Research, was founded three kilometers south of Kibbutz Sde Boker. Today it is home to more than one hundred resident scientists and their families. At its inception, Ben-Gurion verbalized his vision of the Negev while mandating the new institution's guiding purpose:

> *Only men of science and of research who reside at the gateway to the Negev and commune with its great expanses…can succeed in uncovering all the treasures concealed in the bosom of the earth and in the salt sea. Only they can perceive that*

*the skies, the sun and the upper reaches contain an infinite wealth of energy, of dew, of wind, and of blessed rays. These treasures will go to waste unless we acquire the skill to use them to make the desert bloom, until we tap the riches of the sea, the thirsty soil and seemingly scant vegetation. The Negev Institute will decode the hidden message of nature in this region and provide us with the key which will enable us to make the wastelands blossom and change the age-old order in the southern half of our state.*

Indeed, the Institute has scored considerable success in decoding Nature. Among the most visible of its achievements has been so-called savannization, a reversal of the desertification process in scattered patches of the Negev. Less than half of the four to ten inches of the Negev's annual rainfall percolates down into the soil and reaches the water table. The rest is generally lost, but this runoff rainwater has been channeled and collected in numerous small dams and reservoirs constructed by the Jewish National Fund in the northern Negev. The result has been areas of shade and greenery as well as soil that does not run off and erode.

The most promising agricultural achievement has been the development of species of plants capable of tolerating saline water, large reservoirs of which lie underneath the Negev. In the Negev's southern reaches—the Arava—kibbutzim have succeeded in producing commercial quantities of fruits and vegetables. What never seems to have occurred either to Ben-Gurion or to Aharon Laluz, however, and what appears to occur rarely to the scientists at the Institute for Desert Research or the kibbutzniks of the Arava, is that the Negev is worth treasuring essentially for itself; that in the so-called wasteland are values worth securing in their own right; worse, that the relentless pursuit of settling and developing the Negev might also entail its gradual undoing.

It is true that this desert once sustained tens of thousands of Nabateans who channeled the runoff from winter rains into small cultivated fields. An experimental farm at Avdat has demonstrated that much might yet be achieved in this line, but while Avdat has attracted attention, it has yet to be imitated. Viewed less kindly, Sde Boker and Avdat may each in its own way turn out to be less a model worthy of emulation than a technological stunt.

At a turn in the road, Shai and I spied fifty or more sheep being herded by a Bedouin woman on a knoll. Young, old…there was no way to tell. No matter that it was surely unrequired, who can resist a wave of greeting?

We headed toward Israel's so-called Great Crater, the Makhtesh Ha-Gadol, that mammoth scoop in the earth that begins barely five kilometers out of town. Before reaching the point of descent, Shai and I noticed a new turn-off angling to the right. A sign that looked freshly painted announced that after a kilometer visitors would find a recently developed access train rising to the top of Mount Avnon, at 586 meters the highest point in the region. A detour we could not resist.

Even with the heavy pack, Shai plowed ahead. Higher and higher we mounted. Suddenly, at a turn in the trail, the panoramic view to the south stopped our ascent in mutual, unvoiced consent. Below, falling off dramatically to the south, lay a flat, seemingly endless plain. Makhtesh Ha-Gadol: a shelf of gorgeous gorge, twice as long as wide. Yeruham's *m akhtesh* plummets in a nearly straight vertical drop from a high point of 2,350 feet to a low of less than 1,000. No, it is not as precipitous nor as spectacular as the Ramon Crater at Mitzpe Ramon, or the third crater, Makhtesh Ha-Katan, the "Small Crater," farther to the east.

Makhtesh Ha-Katan had been in the news that very week: A report was leaked to the press that a small quantity of nuclear waste from Israel's nuclear generator at Dimona had been accidentally dumped into a dry river bed or wadi. Government assurances were hastily offered that the amount was negligible, that the public had nothing to worry about. It was perfectly safe. Nevertheless, radioactivity levels in parts of Makhtesh Ha-Katan are such that for the present

they have been closed to the general public pending further investigation.

Less glorious was the remainder of our climb up Mount Avnon. A group of twenty to thirty hikers, like beads strung on a string, appeared below. Yes, it was damned selfish of us to want to be alone with our unspoiled panorama, but there it was. Redoubling our efforts, we skirted a parking area and another clutch of people who had driven up to this scenic point, and shrub by shrub, rock by rock, we scampered the final fifty meters to the top and our reward: a magnificent view of Makhtesh Ha-Gadol.

Every day during the spring and summer of 1990 brought reports of Russians arriving at Ben-Gurion Airport via Budapest, Bucharest and Warsaw. In short order one could not help hearing Russian conversation floating over the pavements of Be'er Sheva, and soon rental housing in the Negev capital was depleted. It was in August that we began to hear the muffled noise of hammering from within some of Yeruham's dilapidated, deserted apartment units. Still, life in our town carried on just as if nothing extraordinary were happening elsewhere. We were another Lake Woebegone, the town that time forgot.

The gentle invasion occurred in the early fall, during the Sukkot holiday period. Virtually overnight, old women in babushkas, WW II veterans displaying barrel-chestfuls of medals and decorations, infants in odd-looking leggings, women with blond children, young couples—over one hundred in one fell swoop—were delivered by busses direct from the airport or from hostels in Tel Aviv. They were housed temporarily at the Eli Cohen Youth Center where rows of army cots lined either side of the indoor basketball court. There they sat, as if posing for cinema verite, little family groupings with nothing but suitcases. Not even sheets between cots for privacy. But speaking in quiet tones, the exhausted, disoriented newcomers seemed content merely to have arrived.

Over a period of several months, this Sukkot contingent, augmented by the arrival of parents, spouses, children and friends from the Old Country, moved into those rehabilitated, low-rent, government-owned apartments. Throughout the ensuing years, around three hundred Russian families have moved to Yeruham. Soon, at our town's Tuesday outdoor souk, Moroccan vendors were hawking *kapusta* and *kartofel* at *chetireb* or *piat* shekels a kilo. At the Yeruham post office (*p och ta*), husbands were sending parcels and letters stuffed with photos to wives or parents still awaiting passage from Russia. And in the early evening cool, elderly couples from Kishinev and Pinsk rested and gossiped on the wooden benches that line palm-shaded Zvi Bornstein Street. For the first time in more than a decade, Yeruham was feeling plump, more a plum than a raisin.

Three years later, most of Yeruham's Russians have completed their Hebrew language courses. More and more have either found work or taken retraining courses. Their kids are in local schools with which most Russians are dissatisfied. Some of the less fortunate, especially men and women in their fifties, have become, in effect, early retirees. Little by little, quite a few younger Russian couples have moved from Yeruham to the center of the country where they have found more appropriate work. Russians had come to Yeruham in the immigration wave of the early 1970s as well; in time, all but one family had deserted the town. It may happen again.

My son and I paused at the top of Avnon. A wisp of mist streaked the mid-horizon. Or was it residual smoke—pollution brought on by the industrial development of the Negev. When we first came to the Negev we lived for nearly a year in Be'er Sheva. Its population then was about 120,000. In the mid-1950s it had been 20,000. Back in 1948, 2,000. Built outwards from the core of the Arab town in the 1950s, the city is considered a planning blunder, a negative example. An "English garden city" was ordained, as if water were plentiful. The result was a city spread too

thin with too many open, dusty brown spaces. Today, with more than 150,000 inhabitants, Be'er Sheva continues to sprawl but is also filling in some of its blanks. Yitzhak Rager, its energetic former mayor, spoke with considerable justice about its being the only city in Israel with room for unlimited growth: a city of one million! He spoke much less about water.

Back in 1976, however, whenever a wind blew over the city from the south or the east, the chemical stench issuing from the industrial zone was so noxious it made people physically ill. The worst offender was indisputably Makhteshim Chemical Works. Public complaints produced nothing. Finally, a committee of Be'er Sheva residents appealed to Israel's High Court of Justice (Supreme Court) for relief.

The company moved its more offensive operations to Ramat Hovav, a new industrial park about eight kilometers south of the city that was specially designed to treat toxic waste materials. Out of smell, out of mind: for most Be'er Sheva residents, the problem was "solved." Today, Ramat Hovav operates a "self-sustaining plant" that employs detoxification systems and neutralizing pools and one way or another disposes of about three-fourths of Israel's hazardous wastes. But what actually happened to Makhteshim's toxic industrial waste in those first years at Ramat Hovav? It was dumped untreated into adjacent wadis that leap to sudden life with the winter rains, with the predictable result that it has seeped into the water table, contaminating land and water over an extensive area.

Even today, lacking an incinerator designed for organic wastes, Ramat Hovav buries them underground to prevent fires. Closer examination of that "self-sustaining" plant suggests that much remains to be done. Daily, special pipes direct the 35,000 cubic feet of industrial waste generated by Makhteshim's plant in Be'er Sheva to isolated sites designated by the Israeli army. There, propelled through fifty-foot high sprinklers, the wastes are converted into steam. Droplets that do not evaporate are supposed to fall into a giant, polyethylene-lined pool. Such is the theory. In fact, when the Negev breezes blow, pollutant-packed droplets spray over land and water for miles around.

Biological means such as chemical-gorging strains of bacteria have now been widely recognized as the most desirable, least detrimental means of waste disposal. Unfortunately, much of the damage already inflicted on the fragile Negev is probably irreversible. An equally frightening specter is the future industrial development required to support a city of one million. This is not mere political boosterism. Ignoring the ramifications of the Negev's most salient fact —its sparse annual rainfall—the government is already committed to gradually shifting Israel's military-related factories, the nation's largest industry, from concentrations in the center and the north down to the Negev.

After descending Mount Avnon, Shai and I silently marched down the precipitous road to the floor of the *m akhtesh.* After only fifty meters we cut from the main highway onto a bumpy, rut-ridden path off to the right. This was Ma'ale Avraham, Abraham's Pass, where we paused to drink. After about four kilometers we reached a dry river bed, a *nahal*, and began to follow its course to the east. The sun was higher now and hotter. According to my son, the *nahal* would intersect the highway after perhaps fifteen kilometers.

The bedrock of the *nahal* was curious: it was cut as if by a master craftsman into very broad ledges, each of which took us two or three steps to negotiate. It was as if they had been carved out for men who were ten feet tall. No other hikers came this way, but piles of sheep and goat droppings at almost every step testified to this way being familiar to Bedouin herders.

Shai spotted a small snake. I gave it a wide berth, though assured it was benign. After another six or seven kilometers we stopped under a tree by a rocky ledge to eat our grapefruit and

sandwiches and to drink. It was now quite hot. The scenery was bland. But we had solitude and the pleasure of trudging in each other's company. Soon the trail rose and we lost track of time. Suddenly we heard voices. Trucks in the distance, some sort of quarry, perhaps a gravel pit. Our trail widened to a dirt road. Twenty minutes later, we emerged out of the brush onto a proper road and waved a holiday greeting to a startled crew of workers.

Here the road intersected the highway at the much-visited point in the *makhtesh* where deposits of multi-colored sand line the riverbed and a solitary eucalyptus tree, famous locally, stands like a beacon for travelers. It was now nearly 3 p.m. Dozens of children were scaling the rocks and filling clear bottles with layers of colored sand. Passing a crew of Bedouin at work "improving" the parking area with new cement barriers, we seated ourselves at a concrete picnic table and silently finished off what was left of our provisions. Our map declared that we'd trekked about twenty-two kilometers. I felt it. Shai did not object to my modified plan to hitch a lift back to Yeruham.

Yeruham and Arad, the raw egg and the omelet. In striking contrast to other Negev development towns, Arad was Israel's first planned town. Construction began in 1963. Arad was to be inhabited by an integrated mix rather than an exclusive population of new immigrants: a first, pioneering wave was joined by army veterans and immigrants. In those early years more than ten times the number of people applied to come as the place could accommodate. To ensure stability, only married couples were permitted at first. And in contrast to towns like Yeruham, Netivot and Dimona, with nearly two-thirds of their population of Sephardi origin, about half the residents of Arad were Ashkenazi, the other half Sephardi.

Although the well-landscaped town has since spread out, Arad (in contrast to Be'er Sheva) was conceived from the start as a compact, protective refuge against a hostile desert: paved walkways are shaded by buildings, greenery is planted in small, easy-to-maintain concentrations. Its main thoroughfares are boulevards. Streets and walkways are clear, litter receptacles abundant. The main shopping plaza is spacious. There are several gift shops catering to tourists, an important factor in the local economy because Arad is perched on a plateau 1,000 feet above and overlooking the Dead Sea to the east. Visitors are housed in a hotel zone. In the middle of the plaza stands a massive sculpture of a menorah projecting eight concrete branches toward the heavens. Arad's own Stonehenge in the Negev.

Nearby Bedouin use the town's health and commercial facilities. A small number live in Arad. In sharp contrast to Yeruham, Arad could boast good schools and cultural amenities from the start. Yet despite the fact that since the early 1950s the government has offered incentives for people to settle in the Negev, despite rebates of up to 10% on income taxes, despite the availability of housing loans convertible to grants after five years, despite all the special advantages that Arad had going for it, even this model city could barely stem the erosive ebb tide afflicting the entire Negev during the mid-1980s.

According to its master plan, Arad's population today should be something between 50,000 and 75,000. With the recent influx of Russians, the city's current population approaches 20,000. Oddly enough, that is barely double the population of Raw Eggville, with all its deficiencies.

Later in the day, I returned to inspect the strange sign that now distinguishes our neighborhood *m akolet.* Crenelated in its corners, it bore a close resemblance to a rook on a chessboard. It was an historical marker, the standard sort which the Society for the Protection of Land and Nature authorizes for natural and historical sites. The marker, one of seven in Yeruham, declared that this was the site of Yeruham's second *m a'abara,* inhabited by immigrant settlers from

Moroccofrom 1962 until its demolition.

Mine are, I know, ambivalent, minority observations on these fifty years of settling the Negev. As a resident of the region, I have long cheered the arrival of new faces, new neighbors, new immigrants. Indeed, from the start, Israeli governments have deposited waves of new immigrants in its outer regions. They have also encouraged an ideology of pioneering among the country's more veteran population. Claiming to pursue a policy of decentralization, government policy toward its hinterland has, in fact, fluctuated between paternalism and neglect.

Economically, the south of Israel has become something like the south of Italy—a producer of raw materials rather than of finished goods; an area where wages and rents are depressed, but also where educational, occupational and cultural opportunities are lower. It is an internal colony of the rest of Israel. Experience to date has proved uniform: for a variety of reasons, some wonderful people choose to live in the Negev, but a great many of the mobile, the ambitious, and the able gravitate toward the greater opportunities of the center.

From time to time, government policy makers have tried to alter the situation by injecting a big economic fix. They have tried to lure major industrial plants, generally factories employing large numbers of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. In hard times some have gone belly-up, leaving their workers unemployed. Notably absent in the Negev is an interlocking network of small, innovative enterprises that produce new products and replacement parts for each other. The thing is, Israel's economy is of such dimensions that even if water were abundant in its South, the country still could not sustain more than one serious city with the synergy, facilities, and educated manpower to generate its own economy.

In short, every city in Israel craves to become a center of high-tech enterprise, but such is the nature of things that there can only be one Tel Aviv. And that, I think, is both normal and healthy. I recognize, however, that it is not necessarily inevitable. Technology could yet make the transformation of the Negev feasible. On May 27, 1993, in his first official appearance outside of Jerusalem as the new President of Israel, Ezer Weizmann spoke in Yeruham's Cultural Plaza. His Ben-Gurionesque theme: between Be'er Sheva and Eilat, the Negev should be developed for a population of two million Jews.

Well, it has taken me years to reconsider, but I am no longer a naive follower of Ben-Gurion's vision. Even one million Jews in the Negev, an enthralling prospect to some, could well be something of a nightmare. For it is, in truth, a small desert, and I believe that in the long run only small dreams will turn out beautifully. Who knows? Massive settlement entailing massive investment and development may yet come to pass, but I sense all too clearly what it would likely mean: the wholesale destruction of the Negev I have come to love.

Chapter 3

# The Impact of Mass Immigration on Urban Settlements in the Negev

***David Newman, Yehuda Gradus and Esther Levinson***

Between 1990 and 1996, Israel's settlement pattern experienced significant growth resulting from the rapid absorption of more than 700,000 new immigrants. By the end of 1995, Israel's population had reached 5.6 million inhabitants—a 5% annual growth during the years 1990 and 1991, 2.7% in 1992, and over 10% total growth in the first half of the decade. While no totally new settlements were founded, nearly all existing communities saw the addition of new neighborhoods, in some cases resulting in significant physical expansion. The impact of this sudden growth has been felt most strongly in peripheral areas and development towns, where the necessary physical, social and economic infrastructures have not always been adequate to accommodate such a major increase.

In view of the government policy favoring widespread population dispersal, this mass immigration was perceived as a unique chance to bolster the relative demographic weakness of Israel's frontier areas. Short-term functional difficulties which might be experienced by the various municipal authorities in meeting the increased demand for urban services would, so it was held, be offset by the long-term benefits of renewed growth and development.

Be'er Sheva is a major urban center in the Negev with seven surrounding development towns which were included in this study: Yeruham, Dimona and Mitzpe Ramon (southeast), Ofakim, Netivot and Sederot (northwest), and Arad (east). In addition the region includes three major exurban communities, seven Bedouin communities, and approximately 100 rural communities (kibbutzim and moshavim). As the region undergoes its own internal growth dynamics, Be'er Sheva will develop all the characteristics of a regional urban capital with a geographically expanding urban hinterland (Gradus, 1978 and 1992). The region as a whole will gradually become less dependent on the external influences of the metropolitan center of the country, and will function as Israel's fourth metropolitan region, after Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa.

## History of Changing Settlement Patterns in the Northern Negev Region

During the 1950s and 1960s, the existing Arab town of Be'er Sheva was transformed into a

major Israeli urban center that included important regional institutions such as government offices, a hospital and a university. The 1950s also witnessed the founding of six development towns around Be'er Sheva. These towns served a dual purpose: they provided places of residence for the North African and Asian Jewish immigrants who had arrived *en masse* during the years immediately after the founding of the State of Israel, and they enabled the government to encourage the national policy of population dispersion into the frontier regions of the country. In the early 1960s, another development town, Arad, was founded to the east between Be'er Sheva and the Dead Sea. In addition to the urban settlements, the whole of the northern Negev became home to numerous agricultural communities—kibbutzim and moshavim—especially to the north and west of Be'er Sheva.

Initial intra-regional competition among the urban development towns proved detrimental to the development of the region as a whole, and to Be'er Sheva in particular (Krakover, 1979). The later decision to focus on Be'er Sheva as a regional capital resulted, over time, in the growth and development of significant functional links between the separate settlements. By the late 1970s, this growth can be perceived as providing the basis for the emergence around Be'er Sheva of a "regiopolis," a term coined by Gradus and Stern (1980) to describe a single functional region which is different from other forms of metropolitan growth in that it consists of "islands of small and medium-sized urban communities and industrial complexes, separated by arid vacant land and connected by a network of roads… The pattern suggests that we are dealing with a mobile interconnected system of shared interests, which acts as both a single labor market area and a single service unit… From a national point of view, the Negev regiopolis is a single growth area."

While the 1980s did not see the expected level of growth necessary for development of the theorized "regiopolis," significant changes nevertheless took place. These included the emergence of new suburban, middle-class communities to the north of Be'er Sheva, the founding of a number of permanent settlements for the Bedouin population of the region, and the gradual transformation of some agricultural villages (moshavim) into rural communities characterized by stronger links with the urban centers.

A more detailed look at the northern Negev settlement network of the early 1990s allows us to distinguish five major settlement categories:

1. The urban center of Be'er Sheva is the economic and administrative capital of the Negev region. Between 1978 and 1989 (on the eve of the mass immigration from Russia), the city's population grew from 103,300 to 113,700. This relatively slow growth takes into account natural growth balanced by net out-migration of residents to the metropolitan center of the country. The boom period of the 1970s, during which Be'er Sheva experienced significant growth and development, had been replaced during the subsequent decade by a slowdown in growth. The lack of employment opportunities, together with the lack of low density housing conditions, resulted in a major outflow of population, both to the center of the country and to the newly founded exurban communities to the north of the city. As a result of mass immigration beginning in 1989, the city grew to over 150,000 inhabitants by the end of 1995, causing a growth and development rate previously unknown.
2. Seven development towns are located to the north, south, and west of Be'er Sheva (the town of Kiryat Gat, 50 kilometers to the north of Be'er Sheva, was not included in the present discussion, since its proximity to the center of the country makes it atypical of towns in the Negev region). Between 1978 and 1989, the total population of these seven towns grew from 72,150 to 80,400. This growth was unevenly distributed; the largest increase was

experienced by Mitzpe Ramon, followed by Arad. On the whole, these towns were generally characterized by relatively high levels of unemployment and correspondingly low levels of socioeconomic development. As such, they did not become centers for investment, with the result that much of the able-bodied population moved to the center of the country in search of better opportunities. The weakness of these towns also stemmed from the old problem of "too many, too small and too near" within a relatively small geographical space (Gradus and Stern, 1980). Arad, founded in the 1960s with a planned population mix that included a high proportion of post-army, young, Israeli-born couples, has displayed a stronger socioeconomic base than other development towns of the region. By the end of 1995, the combined population of these towns had jumped to 120,000, an increase of 33% over the 1989 figure.

3. Three major ex-urban communities have grown up north of Be'er Sheva. The largest and oldest of these is Omer (6,700 inhabitants), located on the fringes of Be'er Sheva since the 1960s and characterized as an affluent suburb of the city. During the 1980s, the two new middle-class residential communities of Lehavim and Metar were founded, together comprising 7,300 residents, the vast majority of whom are exurbanites from Be'er Sheva. These communities are continuing to grow at a rapid pace (although both Omer and Lehavim are restricted due to the lack of available land for expansion), and they display all the classic characteristics of independent residential, commuting communities within the urban hinterland (Applebaum and Newman, 1989). While these communities have not directly absorbed any of the new immigrants, they have grown due to a secondary effect caused by the area's changing housing market. Be'er Sheva and the development towns bore the full impact of absorbing large numbers of immigrants, and many veteran residents took advantage of the opportunity to sell their apartments at inflated prices and move upscale to these three exurban communities within easy commuting distance of their places of work.
4. Seven Bedouin communities have been designated by the government to provide permanent homes for the slowly sedentarizing Bedouin population of the region. The largest of these, Rahat, has more than 26,000 inhabitants and has attained full city status. The other six—Lakiya, Hora, Segev Shalom, Kasyfeh, Aro'er, and Tel Sheva—together comprise approximately 25,000 inhabitants. These communities continue to grow at a rapid pace resulting from both high natural increase and the continuing settlement of previously nomadic families. According to Ben-David (1993), the major development is concentrated in Hora and Lakiya, while the other communities have been experiencing relative stagnation. The demographic structure of the Bedouin communities has not been affected directly by the mass Jewish immigration. However, the perceived demand for additional land on which to expand Jewish communities and build new settlements has resulted in increased pressure on nomadic Bedouin living in tents or temporary villages on their traditional lands to vacate in favor of the established townships.
5. The rural hinterland of the northern Negev is organized into six regional councils consisting of approximately 100 rural communities with a total of 35,000 inhabitants. Over the past decade, these communities have undergone a process of increasing regional interlinkage, resulting from the decreasing role of agriculture in Israel's economic structure and the growing role of outside employment in neighboring urban centers as the economic mainstay for many rural residents. This suggests that the functional barriers which previously existed between the rural and urban sectors throughout the country are gradually being broken

down, and that many of these communities are being transformed into an integral part of regional urban networks. While many rural communities did absorb new immigrants, the total number is too small for this to have had a major impact on the existing processes of change.

While it is the sum total of this varied settlement structure which explains the changing intra-regional dynamics, it is the first two categories of settlement—Be'er Sheva and the development towns—which have borne the brunt of virtually all immigrant absorption in the region.

# The Process of Immigrant Absorption

## Urban and Regional Planning

Israeli governments and planners have generally favored a settlement policy promoting population dispersal, and over the years have combined a mixture of planning policies and investment incentives to persuade both population and industries to locate in peripheral regions of the country. This policy, however, has only been successful in times of mass immigration, when there was a high degree of government intervention in the planning and housing construction process, or as the result of the flow of resources and population during periods of "national emergency." The founding of development towns in the Negev and Galilee regions during the 1950s was the result of mass immigration and the government's desire to bolster the demographic composition of those peripheral regions.

During interim periods of settlement consolidation, however, the peripheries have consistently lost population to the central metropolitan region around Tel Aviv. The lack of employment opportunities and the low socio-economic profile of the development towns, in contrast to the generally more attractive ambience of the metropolitan center, has meant that both the Negev and the Galilee populations have grown at a far slower rate than the country's population as a whole.

The mass Russian immigration of 1990 and 1991 provided a new opportunity for government planners to check the decline of outlying populations. The National Plan for Immigrant Absorption proposed increasing the relative weight of the population in the southern region from 7% (317,000 in 1989) to 9% (550,000 by 1995). The Be'er Sheva metropolitan region would increase from 185,200 to 348,300 residents, and the population of the Tel Aviv region would, according to this blueprint, decline from 23% to 19.7% during the same period. From our own initial survey data, it would appear that during the initial phase of immigrant absorption the Negev has, in fact, absorbed a higher percentage of immigrants in proportion to the region's population than the overall national figure. Indeed our data show that the Be'er Sheva subdistrict has experienced one of the largest percentage increases in population of any administrative area in the nation. At the same time, it is too early to determine whether all of the new immigrants will remain within this region, faced as they are with unemployment and a lack of economic opportunities.

It should be noted that the availability of land in the periphery, especially the Negev, has made this region more suitable for the establishment of new settlements and the large-scale expansion of existing towns. Land reserves were, and remain, available in large quantities in the Negev. At

the regional level, official government plans for the south of the country emphasize the centrality of Be'er Sheva as the capital city of an ever-expanding functional region (Israel, District Committee for Planning, 1993).

By expanding its economic, social and cultural base, and concentrating investment in regional industry, Be'er Sheva will be able to provide a counter-attraction to the metropolitan center, thereby preventing the outflow of newly settled immigrants and other residents from the region.

## Demographic Growth

Between 1989 and 1991, the average annual population growth rate in the Be'er Sheva administrative subdistrict (5.3%) was far above the national demographic growth rate for the same period (3.5%). Clearly, much of this rapid growth is the direct result of immigrant absorption. By May 1992, the urban settlements of Be'er Sheva subdistrict (including Eilat) consisted of more than 38,000 new immigrants; more than half were to be found in Be'er Sheva itself. Also, by May 1992, the new immigrants accounted for 17% of the total population of the urban communities surveyed—four times higher than the percentage of immigrants in the total population of the nation. Between May and October 1992, the immigrant population of the region increased a further 16%, reaching a total of 48,700 inhabitants. Especially high percentages of new immigrants are to be found in Netivot (21%), Be'er Sheva (19%), Yeruham (20%) and Mitzpe Ramon (40%).

## Housing and Town Planning

One of the most immediate problems of mass immigrant absorption was to provide sufficient short-term and long-term housing solutions. At the time of the

immigrant influx, the country's housing stock barely met the needs of the existing Israeli resident population, especially at the lower end of the housing market for young couples and first-time buyers. At the same time, there were vacant housing accommodations, especially within the private sector. A study of vacant housing in four development towns, carried out on the eve of the mass immigration, shows quite clearly the availability of housing in these towns. More than

12% of the total housing stock in Dimona and more than 8% of the housing stock in Ofakim were empty. Within these and other low-profile development towns throughout the country the extent of empty housing was growing as veteran residents migrated to the metropolitan center. However, the absolute total of housing stock was small when compared to the sudden influx of hundreds of thousands of new immigrants. In Dimona and Ofakim, for example, the percentage figures noted previously accounted for no more than 1,300 apartments.

To fully exploit this housing potential, and also in an attempt to avoid the 1950s style of overreliance on temporary immigrant neighborhoods, the government opted for a policy of direct absorption. Under this policy, new immigrants were encouraged to go straight into existing rental accommodations, and thus become integrated directly into the host society. The Ministry of Absorption, together with The Jewish Agency, covered the cost of rent for the first year. (One unfortunate result of this policy was a sudden increase in rental prices in privately-owned housing units to take advantage of the public-sector funding.)

The Housing Ministry implemented both short-term and long-term emergency solutions, including the mass importation of prefabricated caravan dwellings and the planning and construction of new neighborhoods in towns throughout the country. This massive emergency housing construction resulted in a sudden glut of new housing capacity. From 1989 to 1991, the number of housing starts throughout the country rose from 20,000 to 84,000. Approximately 130,000 housing units were completed during 1990–1992. This has gradually provided sufficient permanent accommodation for most of the immigrant population.

As a result of this rapid increase in construction activity, there has been a major increase in housing supply in the urban settlements of the northern Negev. In extreme cases, such as Netivot, Sederot, and Ofakim, towns increased their housing stock by over 50%, and, with the single exception of Dimona, none of the towns studied increased their housing stock by less than 25%. In fact, the increase in housing stock far outstripped the increase in population.

Throughout the country, the large-scale construction activity carried out by government-authorized building contractors has been characterized by three major types of housing unit:

1. Apartment blocks consisting of six to twenty units. While these make for high density living conditions, they have mainly been built to far higher and more spacious standards than the apartment blocks built during the 1950s and 1960s.

2. Low-density, single housing units made of concrete, enabling the owner to double the size of the house by adding on a second floor as economic means permit. The initial size of these houses was on average 60–70 square meters.
3. Low-density, single housing units made of quickly assembled wooden elements and industrial materials, mostly imported from outside Israel. These units were considered to be the most advanced type of housing, radically different from the building types previously constructed in the country.

In most urban communities all three types of housing were constructed, giving rise to a varied landscape of new neighborhoods. When put on the market, the low-density expandable units proved to be an attractive proposition, especially for veteran residents seeking to improve their living conditions. Apartments were purchased by both new immigrants and first-time Israeli buyers, while those left unsold on the market were subsequently (1993) offered by the government to the general population at low prices. These were rapidly purchased, many of them as an investment by Israelis already possessing housing.

The imported units, while more attractive superficially, proved to be relatively unsuccessful in attracting purchasers. This was partly due to the perceived flimsiness of wooden construction in

a country where, traditionally, all construction has been of solid concrete. Many young Israeli couples refused to purchase this housing on the grounds that it reminded them of the transit camps of the 1950s, which were transformed over time into homogenous low-profile neighborhoods. In addition, the price differential between a wooden house and a concrete structure was not great ($39,000 for the former, $44,000 for the latter). The imported housing units were not well suited to expansion; therefore, most buyers preferred to widen their future options by purchasing concrete housing even though it required a larger initial investment. This situation brought about the emergence of "ghost neighborhoods," entire neighborhoods of imported houses remaining uninhabited. In only two cases—Arad and parts of Be'er Sheva—was the imported housing purchased in reasonably large quantities.

It must be remembered that the original emergency housing plans anticipated a mass immigration of one million immigrants within the space of three to four years. No account was taken of the possibility—which, in fact, occurred—that the immigration would slow down to far more manageable levels by the end of 1991. As a result, the government found itself committed to massive investment in construction along with a surplus of housing.

At the same time, the increase in housing stock enabled some Israelis to buy into the housing market for the first time. For veteran homeowners, the availability of new housing enabled them to improve their living conditions by selling their current apartment to new immigrants or young first-time buyers, and moving into low-density housing estates on the fringes of the city. Many of the immigrants were only able to buy into this secondhand housing market. This was by no means an undesirable phenomenon. It meant that a significant number of the immigrants resided in apartment blocks inhabited by veteran Israelis, rather than populating totally homogeneous immigrant neighborhoods. One assumes that this will contribute positively to the absorption process of these immigrants.

In many cases, the immigrants chose to remain in caravans rather than move to permanent accommodations. The reason for this was financial: immigrants enjoyed low-rent or rent-free conditions in the caravan sites, while moving to more permanent housing required a substantial investment or a mortgage loan at a monthly repayment rate far higher than the caravan rental levels. Moreover, many of the immigrants were not prepared to invest in permanent housing while they remained unemployed. Living in temporary housing gave them greater mobility if an employment opportunity presented itself elsewhere. Finally, the absorption authorities provided numerous social and welfare services in these caravan sites, offering a support system they would not receive elsewhere. However, a decision by the Housing Ministry, made in early 1993, to gradually phase out and demolish the caravan sites so as to avoid creating new urban slums, left the immigrants with no choice other than to move to permanent accommodations.

Another problematic factor concerned the location of new neighborhoods with respect to the rest of the town. New neighborhoods were established by national emergency planning committees set up to bypass lengthy bureaucratic procedures imposed by statutory planning committees. Authorization for location of new neighborhoods was often imposed upon a town with little regard for existing development plans. In all but one of the development towns in northern Negev, new neighborhoods were constructed at a considerable distance from the built-up area, separated from the town by large open tracts of land. As a result, residents found themselves virtually cut off from the town, especially if they lacked private transportation, while the municipality had to stretch its existing service infrastructure to reach these distant residential tracts, making maintenance costs extremely high. These problems were magnified in the Negev owing to the region's semi-arid climate. The increased glare of the sun's rays in large exposed

areas, the difficulty of walking long distances in the summer heat, and the problems involved in landscaping in desert conditions, all multiplied the discomfort incurred by constructing the new neighborhoods in relatively distant locations.

This lack of foresight is all the more surprising in view of the fact that similar problems had occurred during the 1950s as the result of mass construction activities. Then, low-density "garden-town" concepts were adopted by the planners, with neighborhoods located at great distances from each other and from the town center, causing problems of transportation and communication. It would appear that, in the rush to implement housing solutions for the mass immigration of the early 1990s, the lessons of past mistakes were ignored. Furthermore, emergency construction regulations focused on the need for speed. The authorization process for new plans was reduced to a maximum of sixty days, the transfer of land to the contracting construction companies was made for only 20–30% of its real value (or at no charge in the case of development towns on the periphery), and the government signed commitments to purchase all unsold housing units from the construction companies.

## Economic Opportunities and Employment

A second major problem of immigrant absorption was the need to create sufficient employment opportunities for the newcomers. Before their arrival, unemployment rates in Israel had risen during the previous decade because large numbers of young people were joining the labor force for the first time. In addition, the normal process of mechanization had resulted in large numbers of unskilled workers being laid off. Finally, many of the more menial jobs, especially in the construction and agricultural sectors, were taken up by underpaid, cheap and willing laborers from the Occupied Territories.

Unlike the metropolitan center of the country, the Negev is characterized by a lack of employment diversity. The region's industrial sector is mainly composed of the chemical and mining industries, and textile and clothing factories. The chemical industries utilize the region's mineral resources, such as potash and bromine extracted from the Dead Sea, as well as phosphates mined in the Nahal Zin area. These industries are highly profitable and provide a major source of national income. However, their capacity for creating new employment opportunities is limited, owning to the capital-intensive nature of their activities. The textile and clothing industries are labor-intensive, but have been in decline during the past two decades as a result of competition from Third World and Asian countries. To remain competitive, these industries have lowered their wages to levels unattractive to most new immigrants. Most of the region's companies are public and fully or partially owned by the government. Small private industries, often a catalyst for regional economic and social development, are largely lacking in the Negev. The region also suffers from a lack of science-based industries, although there have been recent attempts to develop subsidized high-tech "incubators" in which some immigrants have been employed.

Not only did the Russian immigration result in a sudden increase in the number of job-seekers, but the immigrants' unique educational and professional profile made it difficult to provide them with adequate employment opportunities. The Russian immigrants included an extremely high percentage of skilled, professional manpower, such as medical doctors, engineers, academics and performing arts professionals. The demand for these skills in the already crowded Israeli workplace was and is limited, especially when taking into account the fact that the newcomers

are often less advanced in their technological and professional skills than their Israeli counterparts. While the majority of immigrants who have not found suitable employment are not prepared to take up menial labor, many of them are in any case physically unable to do so because of age or lack of stamina. Some Russian immigrants have taken these jobs on a temporary basis; however, there is a clear disincentive for doing so because the Israeli social security system grants the unemployed a monthly income which is not much lower than the wages offered for menial labor. Despite the lack of workers in unpleasant menial jobs, especially in the agricultural and construction industries, employers have been unsuccessful in their attempts to fill these jobs with unemployed Israelis, both veteran and immigrant residents. This has resulted in various governmental moves, including relaxation of the total ban on Palestinian labor within Israel and the importation of foreign laborers, many of whom are skilled construction and farm workers from Eastern European or Third World countries such as Thailand and the Philippines.

The relative priority of housing vis-a-vis employment has become a major point of contention among policy makers. It is often argued that there is no sense in investing all of the short-term resources in providing an adequate housing supply, while little investment takes place in creating new employment opportunities. This point, it is argued, is even more significant in those communities which already experience substantial unemployment, such as many of the towns of the northern Negev, where the lack of jobs results in an outflow of immigrants to the center of the country as soon as their initial adjustment period ends. It is this fact which explains government policy not to direct all of the new immigrants to the periphery, and to allow major housing construction ventures in the center of the country as well—a policy that drew much criticism from those who argued that the government was squandering an opportunity to further bolster the demographic presence in the periphery.

Having solved the housing problem for the foreseeable future (assuming continuing but not mass immigration), it is clear that the present Israeli government should focus on directing substantial investment toward the creation of a viable industrial and employment infrastructure in the towns of the periphery—towns such as those in the northern Negev—if these communities are to retain their recently arrived immigrant populations. Without this development, the demographic growth of the region will be seen by historians as a short-term increase brought about by the immediacy of the situation, similar in many respects to that which resulted from the mass immigration of the 1950s.

## The Transportation Infrastructure

Even before the mass Russian immigration during 1990–1991, the road infrastructure in Israel had fallen below the standards quantitatively and qualitatively necessary for the smooth flow of consumers and workers. The rapid increase in private car ownership, together with the general increase in personal mobility, far outstripped the capacity of the existing infrastructural network. Investment in road expansion had not been a high priority for the Israeli governments of the 1980s. The entrances to most towns, especially in the metropolitan center of the country, have become daily bottlenecks, while poor maintenance standards were in part responsible for the high rate of road accidents in the country.

This infrastructural undercapacity is particularly noticeable on the routes into Be’er Sheva, where an increasing number of the region’s inhabitants work and shop. Of the four major routes

into the city, three bring in daily commuters from the surrounding urban and rural settlements, while the fourth connects Be'er Sheva to the center of the country. This last has been substantially upgraded, but the other three routes suffer from severe overloading. The high unemployment rates of the region's development towns and the population increase throughout the region have resulted in a growing flow of daily travelers to Be'er Sheva, as well as a limited amount of reverse commuting.

In addition, the concentration in Be'er Sheva of government activities, including those concerned with immigrant absorption and education, means that a large number of new immigrants commute there daily. Many new immigrants do not yet have private means of transportation, and make use of the efficient public transportation system linking Be'er Sheva to its region.

Following the change in government in 1992, a redirection of resources away from the Occupied Territories and into major public works within Israel brought renewed investment in major national infrastructures. Of the major transportation routes to be expanded and upgraded, three are in the southern part of the country, two of which are the western and northern routes linking Be'er Sheva to its immediate region. At the same time, considering the sudden increase in regional demographic mass, and extrapolating these trends into the immediate future, the planned improvements to the roads are unlikely to provide more than a temporary solution. To ease pressure on Be'er Sheva would require the construction of additional routes both into and around the city (thus enabling all travel now going through the city to completely bypass it), as well as the development of alternative means of transportation, such as a regional, suburban rail link between Be'er Sheva and its urban hinterland. Most of the plans for such development already exist. What is required is a central government decision to divert investment into these projects.

## Municipal Services

The urgency of providing housing for the immigrant population left little room to assess how the daily impact of mass immigrant absorption would affect local government units. The housing projects were dispersed throughout the country in virtually every medium-to-large size municipality, regardless of the relative ability of these communities to provide a reasonable level of municipal services to their residents.

Municipal budgets in Israel consist of three major components. Self income includes all local taxation on residential, commercial and industrial premises. Transferred income consists of central government transfers for those services which are the responsibility of the central government, but which are administered by the local governments (for example, education and welfare services). Finally, most local authorities also receive a government grant which covers special needs of the individual municipality, as well as occasionally covering budgetary deficits. The government grant is not allocated evenly or according to any general criteria, and it is mainly used to help weak municipalities such as the development towns.

The influx of thousands of new immigrants placed a severe strain on the municipal budgets and service infrastructures. While municipalities were obligated to provide basic services to the new households, they were unable to support this increased spending because the newcomers were either unemployed or undergoing retraining courses, which meant that they were mostly exempt from local taxation. In addition, new immigrants are entitled to various tax concessions

during their first years in Israel. Accordingly, local authorities argued that without a significant increase in central government assistance to compensate them for this increased level of service provision, they would be unable to fulfill their municipal obligations.

Despite the general outcry on the part of local authorities, an examination of the changing structure of municipal budgets between 1987 and 1992 shows that, in real terms, nearly all of the country's local government authorities experienced substantial fiscal growth during this period. In most cases these increases were far in excess of the percentage increase in population. In some cases, such as Sederot, Netivot and Dimona, the budgets more than doubled, while in no case has the increase been less than 50% in real terms. This is true of each of the three major components of the budget mentioned previously.

This increase occurred for two reasons. In the first place, there has been a general shift away from providing central government grants to all local authorities; the grants are no longer given to the large, well-established towns, but are redirected to the weaker development towns. As a result, the weaker municipalities were receiving larger government transfers than had previously been the case, despite the fact that this policy was formulated before the mass immigration of the 1990s and was implemented regardless of the actual numbers of immigrants absorbed by any one municipality.

At the local government level, the central government's transfer of income for education and welfare services showed a significant increase during 1992, after having decreased, or in some cases remained static, at per capita levels for 1991. Since government transfers are based on user criteria, this component of the budget was clearly destined to increase in line with the growth in the number of school children, welfare cases, etc. Another factor to consider is that the demographic structure of the immigrant population was such as to place increased demand on specific services. The large percentage of elderly people increased the need for senior citizen welfare and health services. The greater demands on the welfare service infrastructure have probably been felt much more than the need for expanded educational services, because the latter was expected, whereas the former had not been taken into account. The demand for additional social workers was often a direct result of the problems encountered by many of the immigrants in the transition process itself. Similar problems have been felt within the health system, which is confronted with an increase in elderly persons requiring treatment.

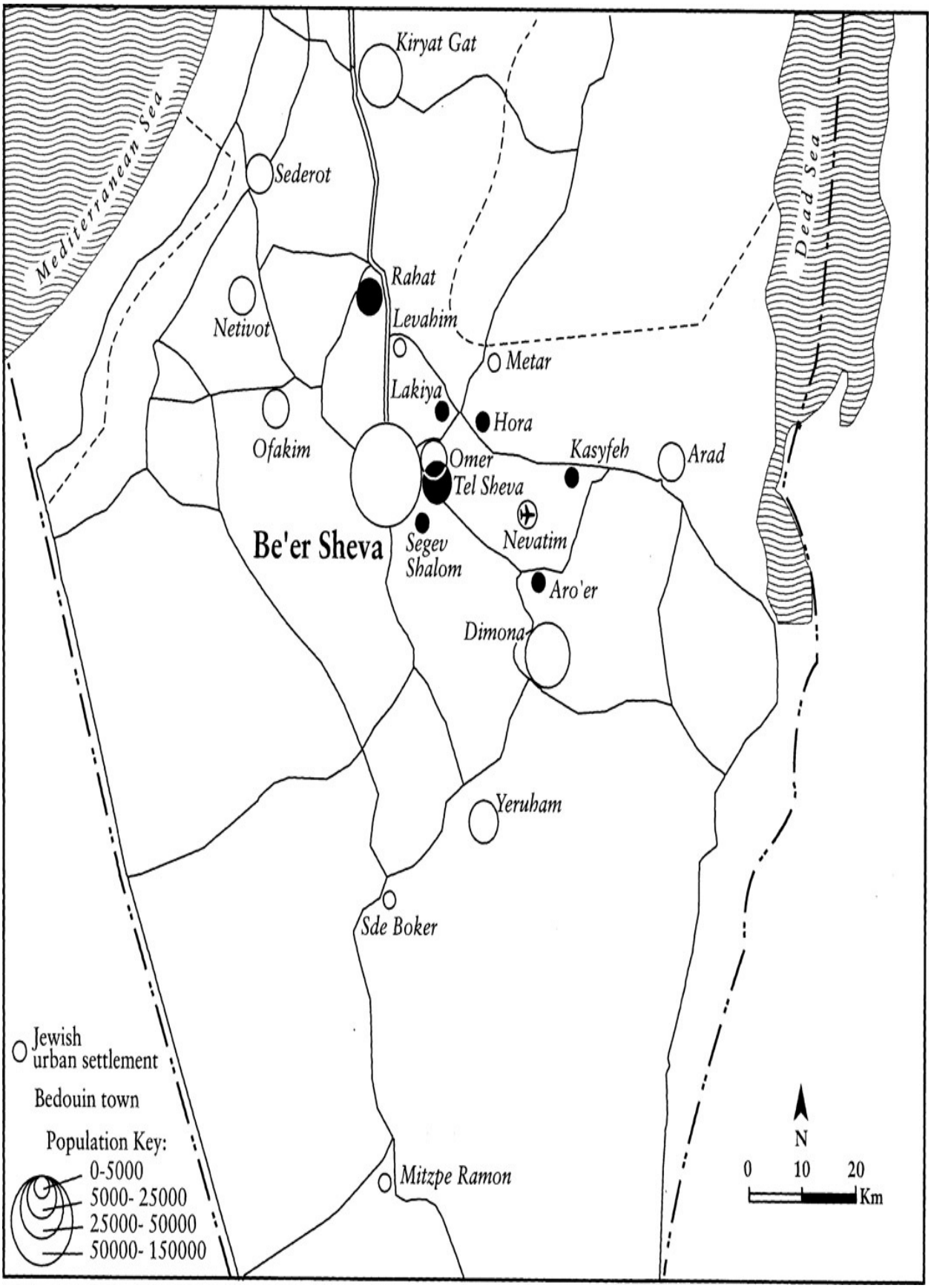
It is clear that any further increase in the rate of immigrant absorption would place all of the Negev municipalities under even greater strain. Long-term investment in service infrastructure is therefore needed to cope with anticipated immigrant absorption in the coming decade. New factories could provide new sources of local budgetary income. Higher levels of employment opportunities provided by industry would enable a larger number of residents to pay local taxes, thereby increasing municipal tax revenues, while at the same time decreasing the number of people receiving welfare services from the local authorities.

Special note must be made here of Be'er Sheva. As the region's major city and focus, Be'er Sheva should be able to compensate for some of the facilities and services lacking in the surrounding towns. But, apart from its absolute size, Be'er Sheva displays a fiscal structure as weak as the development towns in the regional network. Until recently, Be'er Sheva had one of the highest per capita budgetary deficits of any local authority in the country. For Be'er Sheva to fully realize its desired role within the region, it is essential that it strengthen its own functional efficiency.

# Conclusion

The mass immigration in the late 1980s and early 1990s has had a major impact on the growth of Israeli settlements. Nearly every urban community throughout the country has experienced substantial population growth. At the same time, the relative size differential between large and medium-sized towns has remained the same—in other words, the overall pattern has not undergone any substantial change. But growth has brought with it a number of long-term structural and functional problems which require urgent attention. Without major improvement in industrial and employment infrastructures, many of the shortterm demographic gains may be offset by long-term population out-migration. This is especially true of the peripheral regions and their development towns, where the economic conditions were weak even before the arrival of the new immigrants. Were these immigrants to leave the peripheral regions after their initial phase of absorption, the impact on the development towns would be devastating. The vacant housing and the underused service infrastructure capacity would, under such conditions, be much worse than their situation (however weak) before the arrival of the immigrants. The 1995 census data indicate that the towns in the periphery have largely retained their immigrant population though there continues to be pressure on the housing market.

The impact of the immigration on the Negev settlement network has been felt particularly within Be’er Sheva and the surrounding development towns. The overall effect has been to intensify intra-regional social and economic linkages, providing an additional factor to help Be’er Sheva emerge as a regional focal point. Be’er Sheva, with its university, medical school and technological college, has become a major center for Russian immigrant absorption and retraining, especially for academics and medical personnel. As such, the Be’er Sheva region has attracted a relatively high percentage of new immigrants. Indeed, the National Outline Plan for Immigrant Absorption (TAMA 31) defines Be’er Sheva as Israel’s fourth metropolitan city (after Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa). Taken together with other changes in the local patterns of settlement, the gradual development of a northern Negev “regiopolis” is taking place. Given adequate economic growth to enable most of the immigrant population to remain within the Negev, this region may yet fulfill its role as the gateway to Israel’s frontier development.


Kiryat Gat
Mediterranean Sea
Sederot
Dead Sea
Rahat
Netivot
Levahim
Metar
Lakiya
Hora
Ofakim
Omer
Kasyfeh
Arad
Tel Sheva
Be'er Sheva
Segev Shalom
Nevatim
Aro'er
Dimona
Yeruham
Sde Boker
Mitzpe Ramon
Jewish urban settlement
Bedouin town
Population Key:
0-5000
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25000- 50000
50000- 150000
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**Urban Settlements in the Northern Negev**

Chapter 4

# The Nahal Beka Experience: Ethiopian and Soviet Immigrant Jews in a Caravan Absorption Center

***Richard Isralowitz***

The Nahal Beka caravan absorption center, located outside of Be'er Sheva, was one of the largest facilities of its kind to house Ethiopian and Russian immigrants in Israel during the early 1990s. Established as a temporary "way station" to permanent housing and absorption, the facility has been compared to the *ma'barot* (transit camps) created for immigrants from Arab countries who flooded into Israel during the 1950s and 1960s.

During the peak period of immigration to Israel in the early 1990s, these immigrants, who were distinctly different in terms of culture, education, work experience and other background characteristics, lived in close proximity to each other under similar conditions. The following stories about residents of Nahal Beka illuminate their reasons for coming to Israel, their experience of the absorption process, and their hopes for life in their new homeland.

♦ A 56-year-old grandmother from the Crimea and her 3-year-old granddaughter were living together in Nahal Beka, while her son, his wife, and his youngest daughter, still a baby, were living at a caravan site in another part of Israel because of the shortage of housing and jobs in the Be'er Sheva area. This separation meant that the granddaughter's parents had to come to Nahal Beka once a week to visit their child.

The grandmother was a warm and intelligent woman, a piano teacher by profession who could not find work in Israel. She had to leave her piano behind. Her caravan was well cared for, with pictures, tablecloths and curtains creating a very homey atmosphere. She had immigrated without her husband who was not Jewish and did not want to come to Israel. She felt lonely, but had no time to seek friends because she was busy taking care of her granddaughter. She had been in Israel for two years at the Nahal Beka site, studying Hebrew on her own, and was optimistic about the future.

♦ A 19-year-old from Tajikistan had been in Israel for a year and a half with his parents and four brothers. He was the eldest son. He said that his father was "preparing for skill reorientation" and that his mother was unemployed. The family observed seemed to be suffering. They had made *aliya* because of the difficult situation in the former Soviet Union and war in their region.

The son said his family "escaped" to Israel, not because of any Zionist bond to the country, and without sufficient preparation. Having passed through the "honeymoon stage" of absorption,

he

viewed himself as being exploited by the Israelis and expressed hostility and suspicion. His few friends were also new immigrants. He saw Israelis as egoistic in contrast to Russians, whom he characterized as altruistic. “The Israelis exploit the *olim.* They think that we are no-gooders. Nevertheless, I am optimistic about the future,” he said.

♦ A 35-year-old man from Belarus, an electrical engineer by profession, was unexpectedly unemployed and had certainly not expected to be living in a caravan with his wife and child. He was troubled that education in Israel was inferior to that in the former U.S.S.R., and that there was not enough discipline in the schools. Also, he was unhappy that nobody cared about the lack of public transportation to the caravan site, which magnified his feelings of detachment from the city.

It was necessary “for the government to have a brain,” he said. He complained about the government with regard to living conditions; about the fact that he and his family had lived for more than two and a half years in a caravan. “I feel like in a ghetto here.” In terms of social life, he felt separated from Israelis: “There we were Jews, and here we are Russians.” The social ties he and his wife had were mainly with other *olim* from the former Soviet Union. He met Israelis

when he worked, but he formed no social ties after work hours. He felt there were Israelis whose attitude toward the *olim* was bad. He was especially critical of employers who exploit newcomers.

This bad attitude was shown toward women as well, he went on. There was an impression, created by the media, especially the press, "that all Russian women are prostitutes." This was not the case at all, he protested, and the false image aggravated difficulties in the integration process.

When asked about immigrants from Ethiopia, his first response was, "We and they move in parallel lines. We are two lines that will never meet." He explained his disassociation by saying that nobody did anything to get closer. He claimed Ethiopians had no motivation to work, yet the government's policy favored Ethiopians over Russians. "The government discriminates against us by giving them a larger absorption basket and more help in getting a mortgage."

Asked how he coped with the Hebrew language and with Israeli culture and mentality, he responded that it was possible to cope with the language. In his opinion, if the Hebrew teachers were old-timers from Russia, it would speed up the learning of Hebrew. He also recommended separating age groups, because, he said, the learning ability of a youth is different from that of a retired person.

His view of the future? "We [personally] have a future. As for others, I don't know. For the elderly, the situation at present and in the future is much more difficult. However, the most important thing is that we are optimistic and realistic."

The section where the Ethiopians lived was noticeably different from that of their Russian counterparts. The

fences around their yards were improvised from a variety of boards, wires, tires, etc. Creativity and imagination were recognizable at every turn. Many children strolled in the yards, played football, and rode on bikes. The ends of burned wood were to be found everywhere. These were the residue of bonfires used for baking *injira* (Ethiopian bread).

♦ A 36-year-old woman had come to Israel in 1991 from an Ethiopian village in the Gondar region. She had no formal education, and was a housewife both there and in Israel. Her husband had a job picking oranges. Seven people lived in the caravan, which was unbearably overcrowded. When a party of researchers entered, the children gathered around and stared at them with curiosity. The caravan was filled with a combination of old and new things: jars made of clay in strong, primary colors, trays of brass in various sizes on shelves, a huge picture on the wall of an Ethiopian woman preparing coffee, new furniture and appliances (beds, a television, an oven).

During the conversation, the woman's daughter translated and also contributed her share to the discussion. First, the woman described the way of life in Ethiopia, talking mostly about the Sabbath and how strict she and her family were in keeping it. She mentioned the string that was stretched around the village so that the Jews would not cross the "Sabbath limit." She also mentioned the wonderful rest from the week's labor and the common prayers. She seemed very

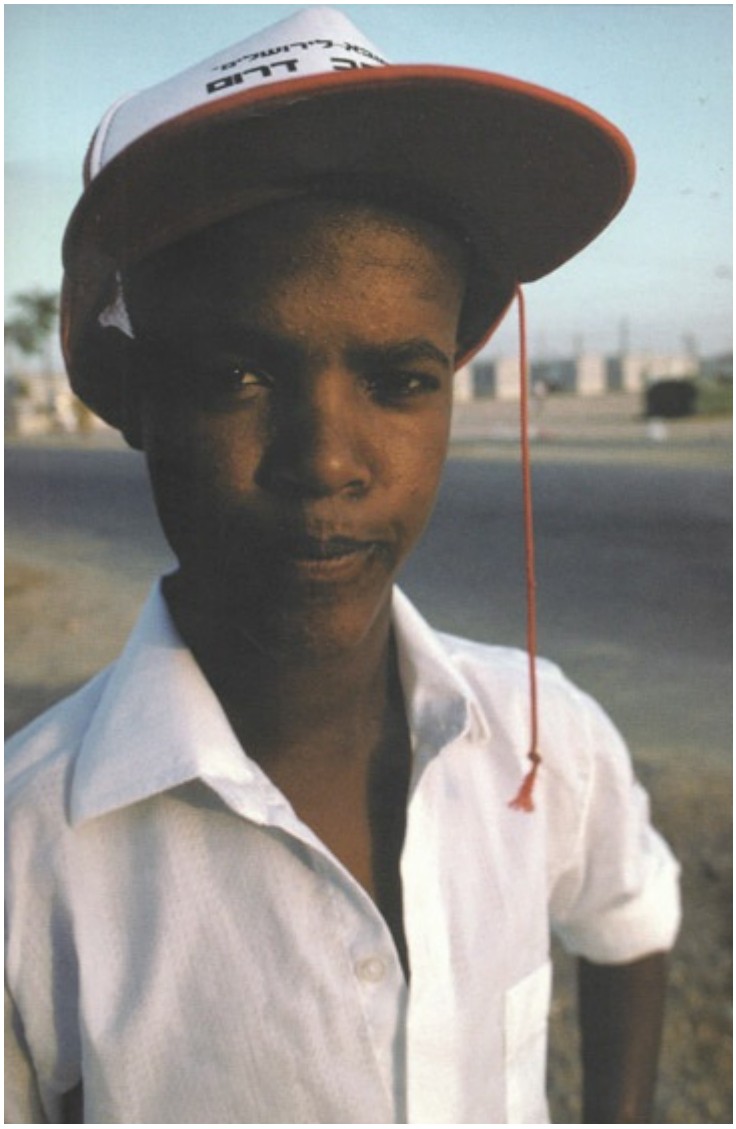
excited by it all.

She was asked about the traditional dress in Ethiopia. Her 12-year-old daughter ran into the room and brought us a very colorfully embroidered white garment called a *dam is*, and explained that it was a holiday dress that they had brought from Ethiopia. The woman described the yearnings they had had for the Holy Land and their sense of great joy upon their arrival. Her animated face and the tone of her voice when she spoke about *ally a* conveyed these feelings.

As for the absorption in Israel, she said that Israel was "nice," and that their main concerns were the future of their children and making a living. She kept saying, "Israel is good, Israel is good," simultaneously asking her daughter to translate her hand movements—both hands joined tightly, meaning "here we are not alone." She seemed to indicate that just as in Ethiopia a family was one's main support, so Israel in its entirety is strong and supportive.

She expressed interest in forming relationships with Israelis, but she claimed that there were no relations with the Russians, because "we are black." She was strongly optimistic about the future.

♦ Uri's little caravan seemed well tended, with carpets on the floor, many pictures—some artistic—on the walls, a bookcase full of books in Russian, and ornaments on the shelves. Uri was 42 years old and married with one child. He had been a chemical engineer in Russia, but had been unemployed since immigrating to Israel. At times, he worked at whatever he could find. He said he could not get used to the new situation because he was used to working, and in Russia there was no such thing as unemployment. He thought the government should provide jobs. "Everything will be okay," he kept saying.



When Ethiopians were mentioned, he showed much hostility toward them. He explained that it was difficult to live as their neighbor and get used to the smell of their food. He spoke of them as primitive. He then said, as if imparting a secret, “There is no such thing as black Jews.”

♦ Moshe, a 20-year-old Ethiopian, was sitting on the stairs of his small caravan. He looked bored. He was unemployed and glanced aimlessly at passers-by. Inside, the caravan seemed almost empty of contents, the walls without pictures except for one clipped from a newspaper, a plain sofa next to a table with two chairs. In the bedroom, where the walls were also empty and sad, there was just a little closet and a bed in a corner. Everything seemed to lack a caring hand to give it a feeling of home. Moshe lived in the caravan with his younger brother. They had immigrated to Israel alone, leaving their immediate family and most of their extended family in Ethiopia. He was angry about their absorption. In his opinion, the state had to improve the process by taking care of everything connected with studying Hebrew and finding jobs. “If it were possible to return to Ethiopia and get all that I had there, I would go back,” he said. His younger brother entered the conversation at this point, and he too expressed anger and disappointment.

♦ A young woman, 19, lived alone with her one-year-old son in a caravan. Her extended family members also lived on the site in other caravans. There was little in the caravan: a regular bed, a baby bed, a chair, and an electric stove. The house was decorated with sukkah-like decorations and children's pictures, family photos, and postcards written in Amharic. The place did not feel permanent, but rather like a transition station. She was a shy, single parent with no education who had emigrated from a village in Ethiopia. Her husband had deserted her, and she was living in Nahal Beka because other members of her extended family lived there.

She described her *aliya* as an act she did not regret. She made no complaints; indeed her answers were all optimistic and positive. But there was a feeling that she was not sure whether her words would be used against her. Her message was, "It is nice that you show interest in me, that is something I miss, but I am also afraid of you."

Chapter 5

# Competition, Discrimination and Conflict: Perspectives on Russian Immigrants in the Negev

*Richard Isralowitz and Ismael Abu Saad*

An important dimension of immigration patterns is the reception of newcomers by the host society. Even in a country such as Israel, which has maintained a strong commitment to the absorption of Jewish immigrants throughout its history, the entry of newcomers has tended to increase competition and conflict over available resources such as employment, housing, health, education and social services.

Prejudice and discrimination toward immigrants and conflict among groups of diverse origins have been a focal point of concern and social investigation since the founding of Israel in 1948. Jews from Arabic-speaking countries and the Near and Far East (Sephardim) have been described as targets for prejudice and discrimination by Jews of European origin (Ashkenazim). It has been argued that the earlier immigration of Jews of European origin and their subsequent control of resources enabled them to extend preferential treatment to members of their own group.

Discrimination toward later immigrants has been linked to their lower incomes, work and educational opportunities, and to changes in the allocation of entitlements due to newcomers. Researchers have noted that in the 1950s, for example, European arrivals were more likely than their North African counter-parts to be able to choose their place of residence upon arrival, and that most Moroccan immigrants were assigned to less urbanized areas on the periphery of the country.

Recently, a decline in institutional discrimination toward Sephardic Jews has been reported. The effects of policies and practices that were prevalent during the 1950s and 1960s, however, have had longterm effects, including a public perception that ethnic discrimination continues to exist and is widespread. In this context, some researchers have maintained that cultural differences or “deficiencies” of immigrants are a major factor in ethnic conflict and the lack of social cohesion, while others believe that the state and its absorption agencies are the source of the problem, primarily through discrimination and exploitation. Between these two polarities, there is another approach which focuses on understanding the reality of ethnicity and ethnic inequalities as well as the normative pressures and institutionalized policies that support the desire to create a “melting pot.”

Absorption policies and practices of the 1950s reflected a period of cultural dominance by Ashkenazim that translated into prejudicial and discriminating actions against “out” group immigrant populations. With hindsight, it may be said that environmental and developmental

conditions during this critical stage in the country's survival dictated such measures. Israel was a small, economically limited society fighting for survival. Between 1948 and 1952, the population of 650,000 was called upon to absorb 700,000 newcomers, many of whom were traumatized victims of Nazi violence or immigrants from underdeveloped non-Western countries. Naturally, mistakes were made. Based on experience, however, the oversights should have been corrected thirty or forty years later. While certain ameliorative measures were taken during the 1989–1992 wave of immigration, essentially, the absorption process did not reflect significant change.

For Ethiopian immigrants, the pattern of absorption reform appears to have fallen by the wayside, reflecting four problem areas: the uncompromising melting pot concept; the elimination of culture as an adaptive vehicle; the channeling of immigrants to the periphery of society, such as the Negev; and the authoritarian control exerted over the immigrants by the absorption bureaucracy.

Regarding the attitudes of veteran residents of the Negev (i.e., Jews and Bedouin Arabs) toward Russian immigration, research shows that differences are influenced by ethnic and socio-economic factors. For example, the attitudes of low-income Sephardic Jews in Be'er Sheva tend to be closer to those of the Bedouin than of Jews from middle and high-income suburbanlike communities and kibbutzim in the region.

Low-income Jews perceive Russian immigrants as recipients of services, benefits and other opportunities that they as long time citizens have not received. Therefore, competition for limited resources has become an intervening factor that negatively impacts their support for an open-door, unlimited immigration policy, regardless of its relation to Jewish nationalism and Zionism. Residents of higher socioeconomic status communities, on the other hand, consider immigration to be a functional event, one that has a positive influence on the ability of people to solve their own problems, overcome apathy, promote creativity, and contribute to the future success of the country. This sector of Negev society supports unlimited immigration as long as it does not jeopardize their job security or quality of life.

Bedouin Arabs (compared to Jews) have a more negative view of the impact of Russian immigration in terms of their security, opportunities and place in society. This is not surprising since the Bedouin have historically been at a low level in the socioeconomic strata of Israeli society. The Bedouin economy is primarily based on wage labor in the Jewish sector. Since there is a limited economic base among the Bedouin, their economic vulnerability has been increased by limited access to opportunities that exist on a nationwide level. During the absorption of the Russian immigrants in the early 1990s, statements by Israeli officials about using "Hebrew Labor" (i.e., new Jewish immigrants) to replace Arab employees, including the Bedouin, further increased their awareness of the threat Russian immigration posed to their economic status. This state of insecurity was felt by Bedouin professionals as well as skilled and unskilled workers. According to Al-Haj (1992), the influx of highly-educated Russians was expected to have a particularly negative effect on Arabs in higher-ranking positions, such as medical doctors, and on other professionals in the health sciences, and in jobs requiring academic credentials.

Ethiopian immigrants tend to share elements of all these points of view. They express conflict with their Russian counterparts for many reasons. Competition over scarce resources and the need for economic security are among the key reasons for the conflict-related attitudes expressed, especially among men. These findings come as no surprise since they are viewed as part of the natural order among people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and values.

Israel is a nation of limited resources committed to an open-door policy of unlimited immigration for Jewish people. The immigration process and its related policies are seen as

sources of social conflict particularly by segments of society that have traditionally experienced low socioeconomic status, limited opportunities, and high rates of unemployment and under-employment. Few constructive inroads for improving social cohesion and reducing social conflict can be expected unless major policies and programs addressing the needs of the underclasses are implemented in areas of education, employment and housing. These programs could then lead to better quality of life and more complete integration into the opportunity structures of the country.


מזנון


URBAN
GUERRILLA


נרבוני
GOLDEN LADY

# 2

# *Confronting Change*

Chapter 6

# Bureaucratic Patronage of Ethiopian Immigrants

***Esther Hertzog***

## Introduction

I lived with my two-year-old son in a caravan at an immigrant absorption center that we called "Galuiot," where I worked as a volunteer helper to the cultural and educational coordinator. This role, in addition to the fact that I was a woman with a young child living on site, enabled me to participate in everyday life. When this anthropological field research began, East European immigrants were gradually leaving the center and 330 Ethiopian immigrants were settling into the evacuated caravans under the supervision of a greatly enlarged human services staff of social workers, instructors and others.

The study presented here was based on the premise that a social system closed through various means—including those of a physical, organizational and conceptual nature—produces power-dependence relations. Closure and separation were shown to be key elements of the bureaucratic control of Galuiot and its Ethiopian residents.

### Closure of Absorption Centers and Transit Camps

There are only a few studies concerning absorption centers for immigrants. The concept of closure in terms of physical borders that contain people is common to most of these centers. Separation is seen as justified for a variety of "good reasons." It has been suggested by Horowitz and Frenkel (1975) that absorption centers try to offer a complete framework capable of addressing immigrants5 needs by providing services and personal and social safety. They see this framework as an autarchy, with its own dynamics and laws—an isolated as well as spiritually and socially detached society.

Absorption centers are seen as a system existing to provide immigrants with "a soft landing" and to facilitate the absorption process. They have also been described as a closed system analogous to the family, with bureaucrats acting as concerned parents. In their study of the absorption center for Ethiopian immigrants in Be'er Sheva, Ashkenazi and Weingrod (1984) suggest that closure and separation are related to the needs and actions of bureaucrats and not necessarily to those of the immigrants. They point to the different functions attached to the

absorption center and argue that "in the case of Ethiopian immigrants it was done in such a way that the center will function as a Total institution5 that provides and therefore controls most if not all the immigrants5 needs." They also suggest a connection between the closed and separate image of the center and the concentration there of resources meant for the immigrants. This situation produces dependence on the center bureaucrats, enhancing their control over the inhabitants' lives. "The center presents a picture of 'total institution': it isolates its inhabitants from the larger social environment, provides most of their needs and to a large extent it controls their lives…they [the Ethiopian immigrants] essentially are isolated from independent life in Israel." (Ashkenazi and Weingrod, 1984:10).

## The Absorption Center — Closed or Open?

The physical characteristics of the Galuiot Center reflected closure, separation, and autonomy. This appearance was achieved in several ways:

1. The categorical separation between inside and outside was clearly seen in the location, appearance and structure of the center. Separated from the neighboring town by the main road, the center was hidden by thick bushes from those driving by.
2. The center appeared to be protecting its residents: it was surrounded by wire fencing; the entrance was guarded; and the office was situated opposite the entrance to the center and used to control access to the facility.
3. The appearance of an autonomous and independent community came from the fact that many essential services provided by the bureaucrats in charge were found at the center: language school (*ulpan*), furnished caravans, employment and vocational training, social work, kindergarten, schooling assistance, housekeeping instruction, electricity, water, garbage removal, postal services, the arrangement of religious rituals such as circumcision, etc.

The closed image of the center created a sense of distance between people as "insiders" or as "outsiders." It also created a belief, in the eyes of those coming from the outside, that the place was controlled by those in charge. This belief induced "outsiders" to address those in the office for permission to enter and to negotiate with them about everything that concerned the center. The center's physical separation between its residents and outsiders also encouraged residents to obtain many of their needs from the outside through those in charge.

My first visit to the center illustrates how people from the outside were made to feel like "strangers" in order to maintain a sense of control, distance and ownership over the place and the people. [Note: pseudonyms are used in order to preserve anonymity.]

> **In this visit to the center, I went with a photographer, Efraim, who had permission from The Jewish Agency to take pictures of Ethiopian immigrants in various absorption centers. When we entered the center, the guard did not ask us anything, though I was prepared to be stopped at the gates, having no formal permit to enter. We headed for the office, which was directly in front of the gates. A woman, who we later learned was the director, came toward us and asked what we were looking for.**
>
> **When we had identified ourselves, Fanny, the director, invited us to join her in the office. There she again asked about the purpose of our visit. She told us that it was strictly forbidden for journalists to enter absorption centers. As the photographer was showing her his written permit to take pictures in the absorption center of Galuiot, Fanny grew very annoyed and told him that "the immigrants [*olim*] are now starting to get organized and the problem is the damage journalists are causing."**

**She went on to criticize journalists and spoke about a documentary film on the immigrants that had been shown on TV a few days earlier. Fanny claimed that only in a few years' time should a film about the Ethiopians be shown to the public—"only after they are integrated in Israel and have a chance to prove themselves and not look like primitives."**

**Going over the letter Efraim handed her, Fanny phoned the offices in Tel Aviv to make sure the permission was given by her superiors. Finally she was convinced that it was all right. Then she turned to me, asking why I had come there. When she heard that I intended to do a research study of Ethiopian immigrants, Fanny exclaimed, "There are many who are hanging around with all kinds of research and this is a little bit problematic."**

**When I confessed that I was familiar with the problem and that I had already spoken to the head of social services in The Jewish Agency, Fanny explained that that was not enough. She instructed me to get permission from two others, higher in the Jewish Agency hierarchy. When Fanny heard that the research was anthropological, she explained the difficulty of conducting studies on human beings as if they were animals in a zoo to watch and study. She said, "People with good intentions come here and then they leave because they can't take it for very long."**

**Later on in the conversation, Efraim told her that it was not his first visit to the place. He had come a few weeks earlier to interview and take pictures of people in the center for an English journal. Fanny interrupted him angrily, "You should have asked me for permission." Efraim admitted that he knew that, but did not have time to come in the morning when the office was open. She said, "It doesn't matter. You could have gotten the guard in trouble and you should not have done that."**

**Efraim told Fanny that he was interested in meeting a young family for his project. She explained that it could be arranged, but she was not sure that it was right. He urged her to call the spokesman again and get permission. She did so and permission was granted. Then she said, "Now I am covered," and added, "You still have to speak to Dani, who will instruct you on how to do the job."**

**Efraim said, "I have no intention of criticizing anyone. All I want to do is take some pictures and add a few words to them." Fanny answered, "I don't care if they write anything bad about me, but I would never allow any damage to be done to the Ethiopians and I couldn't care less if a journalist**

**comes with permission. For example, a journalist from a neighboring town came here to write about the Ethiopians and I didn't let him in."**

**Efraim spoke again about the young family he wanted to meet and added that he wanted to socialize with them, invite them to his home, and so on. Fanny explained that it was impossible at that time. "Don't rush," she said. "Do you know how shy and suspicious they are? It took them some six months to open up to me. I got closer to them very slowly. At first I had to prove that I was reliable and could be trusted. It is as if you have come from another planet, like in the story that was on TV about creatures from another world who built the Aztec temples in South America and the pyramids in Egypt. One should do it very slowly. Only recently, as they grow to see me as their mother, I meet with them regularly every week and we talk about anything they want."**

**I asked Fanny what they talked about and she said, "For instance, we had a strike in the center and they didn't come to learn in the *ulpan.* The strike started for several reasons. Some of the children had lice, so they were put in**

**quarantine and were not sent to school for some five weeks. Then there were cases where people from the neighboring town were yelling at them, 'You are niggers' *[kushim]*. Don't you think they [the Ethiopians] are right? Of course they are. The local council is not happy with them. The council is afraid that the Ethiopians will be left here. They are also right. I myself am not interested in how their permanent housing will be decided."**

**Later she said something else: "I am very hesitant about the way in which the Ethiopians should be settled. Sometimes I think they should be settled in the cities and sometimes I think they shouldn't. If they are sent to towns, they will have severe problems of loneliness and they may get lost. On the other hand, if they stick together in groups they could feel stronger and help each other."**

**I asked Fanny how the strike ended. Her answer was, "The strike ended when I assembled them and told them: 'Jerusalem was destroyed for hatred and if you fight here it will bring a disaster on the state.' Well, they are naive, so they believe everything I tell them."**

The meeting between Fanny, Efraim, and me illustrates an interaction between people who see two sides with a border in between. Fanny behaved as if she belonged to the place and the two of us acted like strangers who did not belong there. To us, it seemed to be a closed place, where the entrance was not free, but rather depended on the owner's permission. The two of us recognized Fanny's ownership and her responsibility for the place and everything in it. As the owner, Fanny interrogated us again and again, both near the gates and in her office. She inquired about our purposes in coming and expected us to tell her what we wanted from the immigrants. We reacted as expected, explaining and complying obediently. We accepted her construction of the situation.

In the meeting, Fanny made it clear through words and actions that she was responsible for the immigrants. She was like their mother and worried about their future as if she owned them. That is why she kept out the dangerous journalists. We accepted this patronage as a self-evident reality: meeting the immigrants had to take place through her. The closure had been explained on ideological grounds. The Ethiopians were described as a homogeneous category—as people very different from ourselves. Fanny became the expert in terms of their uniqueness and special problems. That made her a valuable intermediary between them and us.

Sometimes "outsiders" preferred their connection to be only with those in charge. This saved them the need to deal with the immigrants individually. Relating to the immigrants as a category served their interests better in negotiations for resources. The following examples illustrate this point:

**When volunteers came to the center, they usually entered the office and asked for the director. The director would send them to the cultural coordinator. When a class of children came to the center one morning with paintings and sweets for the immigrants, they entered the office with their teacher who asked for the director. As neither the director nor the cultural coordinator were present, the secretary sent them away, telling them that she had no one to accompany them to meet the immigrants.**

**The army came with two projects that were said to benefit the immigrants. The first was a program to check the immigrants' teeth and the other was a gynecological test for the women. Both of these projects were organized through the office. Permission was given by the head office in Tel Aviv and the bureaucrats in the center made all the necessary arrangements. They prepared the place, invited the immigrants, and even brought in an Ethiopian nurse to convince the women to go through with the test. A local school headmaster sent a class of Ethiopian children away from his school, claiming that he did not have enough rooms. The children stayed in the center and studied there for a few months. Treating the children as a group and regarding the bureaucrats in the center as responsible for the children collectively, the headmaster, together with the local council, used the children to put pressure on higher authorities to get money for needed classroom sin their school. The same headmaster did not issue books to the Ethiopian children in his school, insisting that officials in the absorption center should pay for the books. He explained that he would not deal with the Ethiopian parents individually, since he regarded the bureaucrats as their "father and mother."**

**Two non-Ethiopian representatives of the Jewish Ethiopian Council who came to the center one day did not even try to meet the immigrants. They walked straight to the office and asked for Fanny, the director. When the secretary explained that Fanny was not there, they went into the director's room with the secretary. They asked for her opinion about the immigrants' problems and gave her a telephone number *to* get in contact with them in case she had any idea**

**for women's vocational training needs. They gave her booklets to be issued to the immigrants and then left.**

**The heads of the Jewish Agency used to send buses with Jewish tourists and potential contributors. The director of Galuiot Absorption Center once said, "They are sending me buses to take pictures of the zoo."**

Ethiopian immigrants, being black, Jewish and poor in a socially controlled and closed environment, were a valuable resource for fundraising among bureaucrats.

## The Emergence of Social Categories in Absorption Centers

Services to immigrants are bound up with preferences for some groups or categories of people over others. In other words, organizations differentiate between families and individuals, males and females, the young and the old, and between the educated and the uneducated when providing services. Experience tends to reflect a preference for families, men, the young, and the educated.

Vocational training is an example of this point. Based on gender and age, decision-makers were inclined to restrict women to their homes, consequently making them dependent on their husbands as providers. Documents describing the vocational training project for immigrants refer to "providers" who are "adult immigrants of working age." Needless to say, these are neither women nor older men.

The discrimination against women in vocational training is rationalized by citing the traditional and cultural background of the immigrants and the patterns of life they had in Ethiopia. The arguments used by bureaucrats to defend their position include: women have to care for children; they lack education; and cultural and traditional norms do not allow women to leave the home for work. The fact that women used to work outdoors and indoors in Ethiopia and that some 30% have gone out to work in Israel shows that there is a degree of prejudice and discrimination against them among absorption policy and program decision-makers.

## Power-Dependence Relations in Galuiot Absorption Center

Two events involving the same senior official, whom I shall call David, illustrate the influence of the bureaucracy on power-dependence relations. One of these events is viewed as bureaucratic and the other as non-bureaucratic.

The first of two meetings between David and the immigrants occurred in the communal hall during a seminar intended to prepare the immigrants to leave the center and move to permanent housing. David lectured them about the "rights and obligations of new immigrants." The second meeting took place between David and several young couples in a caravan.

### David's Lecture in the Communal Hall

**The lecture was planned for 2:30 in the afternoon. Beginning about 3:00 p.m. and continuing for about half an hour, announcements of the meeting were made in Amharic through loudspeakers spread around the center. At 3:20 p.m. the first people entered the hall.**

**Men entered from one entrance, and some of them kissed the *mezuza.* Women entered from the other entrance, some of them accompanied by or carrying small children. Most of the men sat in the first two rows on the right side of the hall. The women sat together in the back on the left side of the hall.**

**Entering the hall, David shook hands with men who were sitting close to him. More men approached him to shake hands as well. Women did not. He spoke in Amharic with the men; however, when he lectured, David spoke in Hebrew and was translated into Amharic.**

**During the whole meeting, the people listened. When it ended, the men asked questions and even argued with David over immigrants' rights as described by him. The women sat passively through the whole meeting.**

## David's Meeting with the Young Couples in the Caravan

**The second meeting was held some two weeks later. About ten immigrants, aged twenty to forty, were present at the meeting. It was held in the caravan of one of the participating couples. There were also two babies present.**

**David had been invited to the meeting by Fanny (the director) to try to explain why the immigrants had not received their subsistence money. The immigrants wanted to discuss their situation with David, hoping to get his help as an official in The Jewish Agency.**

**When I entered the caravan with David and Fanny, men and women were already sitting there on two beds in the "living room." Shlomo, a 25-year-old immigrant, was sitting next to two young women. One of the women held Shlomo's baby, Eitan. Fanny approached her and took Eitan into her arms and then sat next to Shlomo. David invited me to sit next to him. When Shlomo's wife, Zehava, entered the caravan, I invited her to sit next to me and David. David remarked that Ethiopian women are used to sitting apart. Then he got up, went over to Zehava and kissed her as the Ethiopians do, a few times on each cheek. He was talking and sharing jokes with the people in Amharic. Fanny was murmuring affectionate words to Eitan, who fell asleep in her arms.**

**David opened the conversation in Amharic and then switched to Hebrew. He said, "I hear from Fanny that there are problems with money." Shlomo explained that there had been serious problems with the subsistence aid since responsibility for the payments was transferred from the secretary to the social worker.**

**During the discussion, David interrupted Shlomo's explanations many times aggressively and impolitely. He defended the social worker and accused the immigrants of being rude to her.**

**On his way out, David was surrounded by the men and women. They were all very anxious to hear about their relatives who had arrived that night. He answered them patiently and warmly.**

A comparison between the two meetings illustrates the sense of distance and social control maintained by bureaucrats toward immigrants. The meeting in the hall took place under the auspices of those in charge of the center. They are responsible for the hall; they clean and prepare it for events, arrange the meetings and determine the lecturers for the center's inhabitants. The announcements heard all over the center illustrate the control bureaucrats have over the facility and the events that take place there. The manner in which the immigrants respond, in this case arriving at the hall on an intermittent basis and in small numbers, reflects a rather passive acceptance of what the bureaucrats plan for them.

In the hall, David controlled the situation. And in the caravan, although it belonged to the immigrants, David felt free to control the situation there as well. His control over the situation in the hall derived from his status as the lecturer. He spoke and the immigrants listened. They asked questions and he answered them. He stood at the front behind the table and they sat opposite him. He decided when to start and end the meeting. His use of both Hebrew and Amharic alternately indicated the distance he asserted in his relationships with the immigrants. Even though he could speak in their language, David switched from Amharic to Hebrew when he started lecturing. He made the distance even greater by using an interpreter. At that time, the immigrants had already been in Israel half a year and could understand some Hebrew.

In his lecture, David did not mention concrete issues or vital details that would have required accurate understanding. It appears that he manipulated the use of language to get closer to the immigrants or to create a distance between himself and them. This seemed even more apparent in the caravan meeting where the substantive conversation was held in Hebrew without any translation. The situation in the caravan shows even more clearly that switching languages is

used to create distance and demonstrate authority. Until the money problem was raised, David spoke Amharic with the immigrants. Then he switched to Hebrew, preferring to do the “serious talking” in his “home court.” Manipulating the language appeared to give David an advantage in the uneasy interaction. There is a further point to be made here. Both warmth (as a reward for talking about acceptable matters) and impoliteness (showing disfavor as a punishment for questioning a bureaucratic arrangement) are used in the process of creating distance and authority.

People showed a greater closeness in the caravan than in the communal hall. This was expressed in their seating patterns. In the caravan, in contrast to the hall, David and Fanny (the bureaucrats) sat together with the immigrants. Fanny behaved like a member of the family, holding the sleeping baby in her arms. David, too, expressed closeness to the immigrants, kissing Zehava, chatting in a friendly way with the immigrants, telling them about the arrival of their relatives with much

sympathy. In the hall, shaking hands was part of the formal behavior expected on formal occasions, controlled by bureaucrats. In the caravan, kissing emphasized both the informality and the reduced social distance.

Although the immigrants could pose a threat to the officials and force them to negotiate, as in the case of the caravan meeting, they were still weak and dependent on the bureaucrats. They

needed the subsistence money to live; thus they were easy to control, even in their own home.

Another example of control is found in the way the bureaucrats related to immigrant men and women. In the hall, physical contact occurred only between David and the men, in hand-shaking. Only men approached him. It seems that all participants, including David, expressed acceptance of the different behaviors expected from men and women. In the caravan, where things were less formal, David approached Zehava, kissed her, and talked with the women. When he started to talk business however, the men were his interlocutors. Everyone—men, women and David—regarded the men alone as partners for the serious conversation.

## Immigrant Women: An Example of Bureaucratic Socialization

Various welfare workers are involved with the socialization of families through the women. The role of one specific worker, the paraprofessional homemaker, or women's instructor (*somechet*), is especially important in this process. Through her relations with Ethiopian women, the welfare worker influences the status of immigrant women and their role within the family. The following illustrates this point:

> **The secretary in the absorption center explained to me how she chose the *somchot* (six or seven of them worked with about seventy Ethiopian families). She said, "Do you know how I picked the *somchot*? I didn't know a thing about what a *somechet* is and what is expected of her, so I asked each of them if she had children."**
>
> **One day while I was chatting in the office with a *somechet* and another official, an Ethiopian woman came in. The *somechet* turned to her aggressively and told her, "Enough with the coffee. You sit for two hours with one woman, then she sits with you for two more hours at your place." She (i.e., the *somechet)* turned back to us and added, "Instead of drinking coffee all day long, she should wash her child's head. What do I do? I comb my daughter's head and check it every day. Even the child says, 'M a, look and see if I have any lice.'" I asked her what was wrong with drinking coffee with your friends, commenting that I do the same. She answered, "Well, we have this problem too [where she lives], but I'm not like that. With me the house has to be clean before I do anything else." Then she turned to the woman and said, "Enough coffee," pushing her slightly in her back toward the door.**

My resentment of the immigrant woman's humiliation does not imply a denial of the assumption that it is women who must clean and take care of the children. Nevertheless, these examples illustrate the humiliation immigrant women endure at the hands of bureaucrats who control the center. It includes *somchot* who, almost on a daily basis, enter the caravans of immigrants without knocking and criticize them about dirt, cooking and child care.

> **Zehava (mentioned above), a young Ethiopian woman with whom I became friendly, once told me, "Nava [her *somechet]* is not good. All the time she says, 'Why don't you clean up?' I tell her I am pregnant, my back hurts and I can't stand," but nothing changes her attitude. Zehava went on to tell me about the other *somchot.* "They come to women who have had many guests and say, 'Why is it dirty? Why don't you clean up?' The women answer, 'I am tired now; I shall clean in the evening.'"**

Criticizing the cleanliness of immigrant women creates a social distance, strengthening the authority and control of the *somechet.* At the same time, the interference weakens the position of immigrant women in their families.

The case of Edna and her baby illustrates the influence *somchot* have on the distribution of resources and the maintenance of power through dependence relations.

> **Edna had difficulties in breast-feeding her premature baby. When her *somechet* wanted to provide her with Matem a powder (an infant milk formula), she was told by the matron that she must try to convince Edna to breast-feed the baby. The *somechet* said she had tried it already "and [the mother] does not want to hear about it." The matron said,**

**"You have to tell her she must breast-feed the baby. She is such a lazy and a pathetic person. She always has been. She must try. Give her Materna only if there is no choice. Tell her that if she does not breast-feed the baby, he will die."**

## Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that much can be done to improve the absorption process in terms of promoting the integration of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society. The absorption centers tend to create social distance between the immigrant inhabitants and their environment. This situation enables bureaucrats to control access to services and social relationships and to develop a sense of dependency among the immigrants. As a result of these relationships, it appears that bureaucrats and their organizations are shaping Ethiopian immigrants to be a dependent underclass in Israeli society.

A policy of "direct absorption" into Israeli society has been applied to Russian immigrants who arrived in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Perhaps this approach, with appropriate supports, would have been more suitable in promoting the successful long-term adjustment of Ethiopian immigrants.

## Notes

1. Closure is used here as defined in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Sociological studies that have discussed "social closure" or "closure" include, for example, Parkin (1974) and Murphy (1986).
2. The term "power-dependence relations" used in this article is consistent with the work of Emerson (1962), who suggested that power-dependence is a reciprocal relationship and that power is not an attribute of a person or group. He argued that "social relations commonly entail ties of mutual dependence between the parties," and that "the power to control or influence the other resides in the control over the things he values… In short, power resides implicitly in the other's dependency" (p. 32).
3. A *somechet* (plural: *somchot)* is a housekeeping teacher or a women's instructor. They were employed by The Jewish Agency and by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to teach a range of household subjects and skills.
4. A *mezuza* is a small cylinder affixed to the doorpost of the home or workplace of observant Jews. It contains a parchment on which is written one of the names of God and the biblical text commanding Jews to put the "name of God upon your doorposts…" Observant Jews touch it with their fingers and then kiss their fingers when entering or leaving a building. Very religious Jews may kiss the *mezuza* itself. Observance of this ritual is widespread in Israel, as well as in Jewish communities worldwide.

Chapter 7

# Changing Health Behavior Among Populations in Transition

***Julie Cwikel***

## Introduction

Most people are well aware that they should take care of their health, and can cite a number of behaviors they regularly perform to preserve and promote it. These include a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, engaging in some physical activity, not smoking, not drinking alcoholic beverages in excess, and having leisure-time pursuits. However, while the notion that one must take specific actions to safeguard health is widely accepted, there is wide variance among cultures as to what are considered desirable health behaviors and habits. For example, in some cultures alcohol consumption is a regular part of meals and social interactions; in other cultures it is prohibited. Even within a specific culture or social group, preventive health behaviors are weakly correlated; the person who exercises regularly does not necessarily take flu shots or wear a seatbelt. However, access to health care services has a positive influence on health behaviors when health care services such as immunizations and well-baby check-ups are required.

Some health behaviors, such as family planning, fertility control and prenatal care, may be governed as much by cultural and religious influences as they are by medical concerns for the health of mothers. Due to the private, personal nature of reproductive behaviors, it may be very difficult for health care practitioners to explore these issues and promote more healthy behavior patterns. Thus, the degree of access to the medical care system is a very important moderator of preventive health behavior. Examples of how the health care system tried to intervene among three populations living in the Negev to promote better infant care, family health and family planning are presented here to illustrate the dynamics of how culture and health care interact.

## Description of the Populations in Transition

The three populations that are of interest include the Bedouin, the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants and the immigrants from the former Soviet Union who have settled in the Negev region. For each population there is a unique story to tell about how culture, health behavior and the Israeli health care system interact. The demographics of each group are covered in more detail in other

publications, but it is useful to summarize them very briefly here.

1. The Bedouin society began moving into townships in the 1960s, and this process of settlement has continued into the 1990s. An estimated 80,000 Bedouin live in the Negev, about half in townships and the rest scattered in small encampments and communities with difficult access to health care. In the Be'er Sheva district, the Bedouin birthrate is one of the highest in the world: 53 per 1,000, compared with a Jewish birthrate of 21 per 1,000 (Israel Bureau of Statistics, 1992).
2. Ethiopian Jews immigrated mainly in two large airlifts: Operation Moses (1984–1985), which brought Ethiopians primarily from the refugee camps in Sudan, and Operation Solomon (1991), when some 14,400 were airlifted to Israel in one historic weekend. Of the 40,000 immigrants from Ethiopia who have arrived in Israel since 1980, more than 8,000 were settled in the Be'er Sheva area (Israel Bureau of Statistics, 1992). Many of those who immigrated suffered the loss of family members, either through death or long-term separation, and extreme physical hardship during the trek out of the highlands to reach evacuation points.
3. The mass exodus of Soviet Jews began in late 1989, and by June 1992 some 360,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union had immigrated to Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics Special Supplement on Immigration, 1992). The city of Be'er Sheva had about 122,000 inhabitants; from late 1989 to the end of 1991, the city absorbed some 15,000 new immigrants, an increase in population of about 14%. A high proportion of those who immigrated were either physicians or allied health professionals. About 25–30% were women of childbearing age (Be'er Sheva Municipality, 1991).

Concepts of health and illness and strategies for coping with health problems exist in all cultures. In non-Western developing societies, treatment by natural healers within folk medicine traditions can exist side-by-side with Western, scientific medicine. For any given health problem, people may treat themselves, or they may seek advice, support and care from close family members, or they may have recourse to members of more diffuse social networks, natural folk or religious healers, or the formal medical care system.

In most ethnic communities in Israel, use of the formal medical care systems may co-exist with visits to a traditional healer who may also be a religious figure. The Bedouin may seek the advice of a dervish or the tribal sheikh in medical problems. Religious decrees from the Qur'an, such as the prohibition against alcohol consumption, may also guide health behavior. Among Ethiopian immigrants, traditional healers who use herbs, phlebotomy (bloodletting) and exorcism, and religious leaders who prescribe special charms and amulets were responsible for treating health problems before the community immigrated to Israel. Among Israelis of North-African origin, visits to religious figures such as the Baba Sali of Netivot (a development town in the northern Negev) are a common way to solve physical and mental health problems (Bilu, 1977). Many new Soviet immigrants seek massage and acupuncture as adjuncts to modern medicine.

It is important to understand how these diverse cultures, living together in the Negev and using the same medical facilities, handle health problems. How does each culture's approach to health and illness affect the way the health care system meets their needs? In order to decide how to prioritize health care programs, one needs to understand how each cultural group determines when a person is in good health or is ill; how they view the value of good health in relation to other values in the culture, such as family solidarity or religious observance; whether they

believe that illness can be prevented and understand how that might be achieved; and, finally, whether they recognize a distinction between physical illnesses and mental/emotional illnesses, and, if so, whether they treat these illnesses using different methods and different care practitioners (Randall-David, 1989).

While the answers to all these questions would require an extensive anthropological study, some research in these areas already exists. Among the Bedouin, for example, patients commonly express pain and discomfort with the phrase "*Kuli bouzga*" ("I hurt all over"), apparently not given to being more specific. Ethiopians express emotional difficulties through somatic complaints. For Ethiopians, cultural solidarity and community awareness are cardinal values, and family and community therefore take precedence over personal problems or needs. For new Soviet immigrants, work takes paramount importance over health.

**Table 1 Characteristics of Ethnoculture and Health in Three Populations in Transition**

| Population | Scientific Orientation | Health Value | Expression of Pain | Other Health Systems |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bedouin | low | after religious | diffuse in body | dervish, tribal |
| Ethiopian | low | after community solidarity | somatization of emotions | herb healer, Zar spirit healer |
| Soviet | medium low | after work/profession | stoic, symptom-specific | massage acupuncture |

In all three cultures, therefore, while health and health care are important, they are likely to be secondary to other values. The three cultures also differ in their approach to Western scientific medicine, to authority figures, and in their use of alternative medical systems, as shown in Table 1.

## Implications of Culture on Health Education

Health status is determined by four interacting factors: genetics, environment, health care services, and health behavior (Blum, 1976). Thus, while all three groups live in the same general physical environment, their cultural and social environments are very different, leading to unique interactions with the health care system.

Adult immigrant absorption is characterized by two processes: socialization to the new culture and resocialization away from dysfunctional modes of behavior that were learned in the society of origin and are not functional in the society of adoption (Bar-Yosef, 1969). When this notion is applied to the health education of populations in transition, we find that the two processes of health education and health re-education take place.

Entry into the health care system often comes as a result of maternal and child health problems. There are strong cultural influences on attitudes, beliefs and health behaviors related to pregnancy, childbirth and sexual behavior. There may be taboos against certain behaviors and foods or contact with certain people. Some health behaviors may have been appropriate to the social environment in the country of origin, but in Israel they are not health-promoting. Delivery of appropriate care to diverse ethnic groups requires attention to the cultural side of health behavior. Table 2 shows how attention to unique health problems and health education needs and

to cultural diversity led to diverse types of health education programs, each tailored to a specific population in transition.

**Table 2 Needs for Health Education in Three Populations in Transition**

| Population | Health Care System's Contact Point | Type of Health Education Needs | Type of Health Education Program |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bedouin | high infant morbidity | specific maternal education | diarrhea prevention, use of video for instruction |
| Ethiopian | high rate of infectious diseases | general health education for disease prevention | health activist community program |
| Soviet | high demand for abortions | specific health re-education | family planning services and counseling |

## The Israeli System of Health Care

Israel has a very highly developed health care system based on modern Western medicine. Through widespread sick funds, the system provides preventive and primary care through a network of community clinics. The structure and functioning of the Israeli medical care system is rooted in both the Jewish medical tradition and the health care system that was established prior to statehood in 1948. Over the centuries, medicine has been a favored occupation among Jews, and the Jewish State has the highest ratio of physicians per capita of any nation in the world.

Prior to statehood, the groundwork was laid for two types of medical care systems: one was focused on prevention and health promotion (now concentrated in the Ministry of Health), and the other was based on the medical treatment of ill persons using sick funds that were established by political parties to cover the workers' needs. The largest of these funds is the Histadrut (or General) Sick Fund, established in 1920 by the Histadrut (the major labor organization in Israel). Today it is the largest health care provider in Israel, covering some 80% of the population (Porter and Seidelman, 1992).

Major differences exist, however, between coverage for the Jewish population and for the Bedouin of the Negev. For example, in the early 1980s, only 50% of the Bedouin community were covered by the General Sick Fund, compared to 90% of the Jewish population. This gap has narrowed somewhat as more and more Bedouin join the labor force. However, among Bedouin who have taken a second spouse, there are problems with insurance coverage of the second wife through their employers. This uneven coverage may mean that some Bedouin women do not get adequate prenatal and perinatal health care.

New immigrants have rights to health insurance as part of their absorption package, and the various health funds compete in attracting new members. Both the General Sick Fund and other smaller sick funds (such as the Maccabi) have health education departments that have focused on the needs of new immigrants for this kind of service.

The only medical center in the Negev is Soroka Hospital, which is part of the General Sick Fund. Both the General Sick Fund and the Ministry of Health's well-baby clinics cover all segments of the population, both Jews and non-Jews. While prenatal care, immunizations and developmental follow-up of infants continue to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, the bulk of primary care treatment remains in the hands of the General Sick Fund. For example,

family planning, gynecological care, and therapeutic abortions are handled formally through the Sick Fund medical care system. However, until very recently, since family planning was considered preventive health care, the Sick Fund tended not to cover it explicitly. For immigrant women, or for women from minority ethnic groups, this dichotomy in the medical care system between prevention and treatment in maternal and child health is confusing and creates unnecessary barriers in accessing health care.

The Israeli health care system has been concerned since its inception with addressing the influx of immigrants and the absorption of immigrant doctors. The health care system's concern for providing services to immigrants in a way that will be respectful of cultural differences, while at the same time providing high-quality health care, mirrors the priority that immigration and absorption are given in the national sociopolitical agenda.

## Description of Health education Programs in Three Populations in Transition

In response to specific health problems among transitional populations in the Negev, new programs for health care and education have had to be designed. Three such programs are described here.

### Bedouin Breast-feeding Promotion Program

Health care for the Bedouin community is a challenging endeavor. Many Bedouin families live in semipermanent encampments at a substantial distance from transportation and health care clinics. The prevailing attitude toward health is a sense of fatalism—illness is caused by fate or God's will. The Bedouin culture does not allow women to leave their homes unaccompanied by a male family member. This means that a man must lose work days in order to take a female relative to visit the doctor. This is an economic disincentive for making repeated visits to well-baby clinics. A mobile Bedouin clinic, which does cover some maternal and infant care, makes visits to outlying areas, but lack of adequate prenatal is implicated in both infant and maternal morbidity.

Between 1969 and 1991, there were 166,410 births in the Negev region, with 119,130 deliveries among the Jewish population and 47,2 80 deliveries among the Bedouin. There were seven maternal deaths among Jews and six maternal deaths among the Bedouin. The death rate was 4.6 per 100,000 for women with prenatal care, but 39.1 per 100,000 for women without prenatal care. The rate of infant mortality (death during the first year) was 11.8 per 1,000 for Jewish babies, and 22.9 per 1,000 for Bedouin babies, and a major risk factor was inadequate prenatal care, which was much more prevalent among the Bedouin (Leiberman et al., 1993a; Leiberman et al., 1993b).

During the years 1988 to 1990, the Department of Neonatology at Soroka Hospital initiated a health education project to promote exclusive breast-feeding of Bedouin newborns for the first six months of life. This was the natural outgrowth of extensive data collected in the Bedouin Infant Feeding Study, conducted between 1981 and 1984 to examine the relationship between

infant-feeding practices and the growth and morbidity of Bedouin infants in the Negev. The purpose of the study was to document the effects on infants of the change from exclusive breast-feeding to increased use of bottle and solid feeding that occurred with the transition to settled communities and access to shops with milk substitutes.

The relationship between education and breast-feeding is not a linear one. Among urban poor and rural groups in developing countries, the greater the education of women, the lower the incidence of breast-feeding. Among educated women in developed countries, as education increases, so does the incidence of breast-feeding, and Israeli Jewish women are no exception. Among urban Jewish women who gave birth, 72% initiated breast-feeding, and 40% completed at least three months of breast-feeding. Both high educational level and orthodox religious beliefs were significantly associated with the decision to begin and continue breast-feeding. By comparison, in the United States, only 58% of new mothers breast-feed, and only 36% are still breast-feeding after three months. This low level of breast-feeding in the U.S. is explained in part by the lack of a national policy guaranteeing maternity leave.

Research shows that among Bedouin mothers who delivered at Soroka Hospital in 1981 (97% of all deliveries were in the hospital), 86% breast-fed their infants, 11% breast- and bottle-fed, and 3% bottle-fed at birth. By their baby's second month, 72% of mothers had introduced the infant to bottle feeding. Most of the mothers who stopped breast-feeding felt that they did not have enough milk. This was more common among women who delivered during spring and summer months, when it is dry and water is harder to obtain. Other data show that with modernization, the traditional forty-day rest period for new mothers has been reduced or eliminated, while settlement has brought kin physically closer. This means there is more family visiting, which generates more household work for the wife. This lack of rest in the initial postpartum period has been implicated in women weaning their infants early. Another reason for early weaning is that women's social status is determined by the number of children they have, and thus a woman may stop breast-feeding in order to more quickly become pregnant again (Forman et al., 1990).

Two known risk factors for infant morbidity include increased bottle feeding under unhygienic conditions, which can lead to diarrheal disease, and limited maternal education and familiarity with the modern health care system, which can lead to inadequate use of or access to health care.

The Bedouin Infant Feeding Study also showed that exclusively breast-fed infants under the age of six months were less likely to be hospitalized than those who were weaned or received supplements (Naggan et al., 1986). At the same time, modern health care may challenge the authority of accumulated folk wisdom and traditional healers, so that other sources of information on how to handle child-care problems are undermined.

Based on the epidemiological data collected, a health education project was developed to promote exclusive breast-feeding for the first six months of life. Taking into consideration the low level of education among the Bedouin women (94% are illiterate), the hospital developed educational methods that were independent of reading and writing skills. A 15-minute video was shown to mothers during their postpartum hospital stay, while mothers who had also delivered infants constituted a control group. The mothers were interviewed pre-intervention, immediately after intervention, and at three and six-month follow-ups. The video stimulated conversations with Bedouin mothers who volunteered to dramatize real-life situations that could occur in the home, the well-baby clinic or the hospital. A respected Bedouin physician also appeared in the video and spoke about the benefits of exclusive breast-feeding. An older woman spoke of the value of traditional breast-feeding methods for the health of mother and child. The intervention

emphasized that breast-feeding during a subsequent pregnancy would not harm the infant or the fetus, and that it is an important way to prevent infants from contracting diarrhea and requiring hospitalization.

Results from the project evaluation showed that while overall knowledge rose immediately after the exposure to the video, and remained consistently higher among the intervention group compared with the control group, this knowledge was not translated into exclusive breast-feeding. By three months after their babies' birth, 44% of the intervention group and 51% of the control group were exclusively breast-feeding and 44% and 34% of each group respectively were breast-feeding with supplements. Younger mothers and those who could either read Arabic or speak Hebrew tended to retain their acquired knowledge better than mothers who were older and lacked education. Twenty percent of the mothers in this evaluation study could read—significantly more than were observed in the original study by Forman et al. (1992). The authors of this study concluded that there is a need to reinforce the knowledge gained through intervention by further contact with new mothers during their first visit to the well-baby clinic between 30 and 40 days postpartum.

## Ethiopian Health Activist Program

The health activist program was designed to help Ethiopian immigrants make the transition from traditional health care in a developing country to a modern health care system.

Ethiopian Jews believe that many illnesses, including infectious diseases such as typhoid and tuberculosis, are the result of the casting of the Evil Eye. Thus the appropriate preventative is an herbal charm worn around the neck or waist. Miscarriage or the birth of a deformed child may also result from such interference, especially when the couple have had intercourse during the unclean period specified in Jewish purity laws. In Ethiopia, Jews strictly observe religious restrictions on sexual contact during days of menstruation and during the forty-day period of abstinence after childbirth. Thus, religious views on health behavior coexist with magical traditions (Kahana, 1985).

The health problems of Ethiopian immigrants who arrived in Israel during Operation Moses (1984–1985) were primarily infectious and tropical diseases, such as malaria, pneumonia, tuberculosis, intestinal parasites and Hepatitis B. Malnutrition and anemia were common. An immunization program was initiated throughout Israel, and after about one year, most communicable diseases had been treated and ceased to be a public health problem. Hospitalization was required for 16% of the immigrants before 1990, but only for 4% of those who arrived in 1991. The improvement in health status was partly due to a medical care program established in Addis Ababa by Israeli health care professionals prior to the Ethiopians' emigration (Nachmias et al., 1993).

Ethiopian immigrants viewed those involved in the absorption process as authority figures and expected that promises made would be fulfilled (Ben-Ezer, 1985). Because they were accustomed to the authority of traditional healers, whose relationship with the patient was based on the patient's faith and belief in the healer's powers, Ethiopian immigrants transferred their trust to Israeli physicians, whom they expected to bring about immediate miracle cures for all ailments. This was, or course, unrealistic.

Prompted by the awareness that there were many areas of misunderstanding between Israeli health care practitioners and the Ethiopian immigrants, an ongoing program of health education

was initiated after Operation Moses (1985) and was reinforced after Operation Solomon (1991). The program was directed as much at medical teams and community workers as it was at the Ethiopian community. The medical and community workers attended lectures and seminars about Ethiopian history and culture, with a special emphasis on the different approaches to symptoms, health and illness.

The strategy used with the Ethiopian community developed a cadre of Ethiopian health activists who acted as agents of health education within their own community. This took advantage of natural lay leaders interested in health and working with the health care system. After screening volunteers from the Ethiopian community, the program trained sixty Ethiopian health activists in two different courses. Instruction combined frontal teaching, group discussions and role-playing, and using an experienced health educator, a community nurse, and an infectious disease physician who had had extensive contact with the Ethiopian community immediately after their arrival in Israel (Bental et al., 1993).

The goal of the health activist courses was to have these committed individuals act as disseminators of health information in small groups in the community. The content of these courses included body systems and physiology, and common infectious diseases and their prevention and control. Basic material in communication and behavioral sciences was included in order to enhance the activists' ability to communicate with their social contacts in the community. Among the topics covered using the health activists as facilitators were: use of the Israeli health care system, accident prevention and safe use of home appliances, food preparation and nutrition, prevention of diarrhea and venereal diseases, baby and child care, pregnancy and childbirth, and family planning and contraception. Emphasis was placed on self-care of minor conditions and the use of first aid when appropriate. Altogether, health activists, with the help of a health education staff, reached 985 Ethiopians.

The health activists continue to be in contact with the teachers of the course, who have acted as consultants in helping them deal with the health education problems that they bring from the community. The success of the health activist program was evident when participants in the formal courses continued to meet together on an informal basis with para-professional community workers. Some of these health activists eventually found employment within the health care system as paraprofessionals themselves.

Formal written evaluation of the project was not possible from the beginning, since the participants were not familiar with the questionnaire mode of data collection. The coordinators of the course, however, felt that frontal teaching was less successful than group discussions.

The health activist approach continued to be used in the Negev, employing the infrastructure created during the 1980s, and taking advantage of trained Ethiopian facilitators who can communicate with newcomers in their own language.

This same approach was the basis of a national health education program for the Ethiopian immigrants of Operation Solomon (1991). This program reached 4,300 new Ethiopian immigrants throughout the country. Another program, which specifically focused on the prevention of HIV (AIDS) and HBV (Hepatitis B), also integrated Ethiopian concepts of disease and health, and trained veteran immigrants (from Operation Moses) to be community health educators (Levin-Zamir et al., 1993; Chemtov et al., 1993).

## Family Planning for New Soviet Immigrants

Family planning in Israel lacks a coherent, national policy, and there is no integration between primary and family health care and planning. In some areas of the country, like Jerusalem, there are a fair number of public, semi-public and private clinics that offer services, but in the Negev there is currently no family planning clinic as such. Abortion in Israel is illegal unless recommended by an interdisciplinary committee that reviews petitions in most hospitals.

Induced abortion has been the most commonly used method of family planning in the former Soviet Union (Popov, 1991). A recent survey of 8,059 educated, urban Soviet women showed that 60% reported an abortion following contraceptive failure, and 41% reported using traditional, low-reliability methods such as withdrawal, rhythm and douching. The yearly rate of abortion among women in the former Soviet Union has been between 87 to 104 per 1,000 for women of reproductive age (15–44), depending on the source of the statistics. The mean number of abortions over the reproductive years is estimated at 3.78, while the mean number of live births is 1.89. By comparison, the number of abortions reported in health statistics in Israel is around 15 per 1,000 women (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 1992).

The extensive, almost exclusive use of induced abortions among Soviet women as a method of family planning and fertility control is due to numerous factors. These include difficulty in obtaining reliable alternative methods; a health policy that does not recognize the importance of preventive medicine; and limited efforts to educate women about the health risks of induced abortion.

Within the first year after the mass influx of Soviet immigrants began, social workers and health care professionals who are members of abortion committees noticed that a high percentage of abortion requests were coming from new immigrant women, far in excess of their proportion in the population (Cwikel and Sofer, 1990). This observation is compatible with the estimated 14% to 24% increased demand for abortions reported in a more recent study made by Sabatello (1992). A group of concerned health care practitioners from the Negev began to investigate this problem with the goal of establishing an appropriate health education program to meet the needs of these new immigrants. A survey was conducted of 117 women who had recently immigrated from the former Soviet Union and were currently studying in intensive Hebrew-language schools *(ulpanim).* During a class break, women were asked to complete a Russian-language questionnaire about their attitudes and behavior concerning family planning.

The respondents were mostly in their 30s (average age was 35.5 years) and averaged 2.7 months in Israel. The typical respondent was of Jewish origin, from a large city (over 100,000), and from the republics of Russia and the Ukraine. About two-thirds of the sample were married and the average number of children among those with children was 1.74. While 18% reported at least one miscarriage, 58% reported at least one induced abortion. The average number of abortions among those who had ever had one was 2.7. Among married women and those with a steady partner (89% of the sample) who might have a need for contraception, only 45 % were currently using any method of contraception. The average number of methods used was 1.8, indicating that among those who used contraception, many used more than one method. The methods of contraception most commonly reported in Israel were the rhythm method (23%), the IUD (23%), withdrawal (18%) and condoms (14%). Use of the pill was reported by very few (3%). This contrasts with past use of contraceptive methods before immigration, when 34% reported using the pill, 24% used the rhythm method, 15% used the IUD and 15% used withdrawal. Condoms were used by only *6%* before immigration. Sterilization, spermicide and diaphragm use were not reported at all, and the sponge was used by 6% before immigration and 3% after.

When queried about current preferences for birth control, 84% (of those for whom this question was relevant) preferred some type of contraception and only one respondent indicated that she preferred to continue to use abortions. However, there were many misconceptions about the adverse effects of the more effective methods of birth control, the pill and the IUD. For example, twice as many agreed as disagreed with sentences stating that the IUD and the pill are carcinogenic. Most of those who answered agreed that the pill is both fattening and increases body hair. A high proportion also felt that the IUD can cause health problems and that the pill can harm a fetus. Many felt that the IUD was an effective means of contraception, while the pill was easier to use but more expensive. This research showed that recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union would prefer to use more effective methods than induced abortion, but there are many areas of uncertainty, anxiety and misinformation about effective methods of family planning.

This survey prompted the health education department of the General Sick Fund to arrange a series of lectures by veteran Russian immigrant doctors and health educators around the issues of family planning and fertility control, within the context of general health education. In addition, provisions were made for special family planning clinic hours for new immigrant women from the former Soviet Union, staffed by Russian speaking personnel.

In Jerusalem, at the SHILO pregnancy advisory service, a similar program has been developed for new immigrant women from the former Soviet Union. It also emphasizes using family planning education to dispel common misconceptions about the more effective types of birth control, and personal counseling to prepare women to seek the type of birth control that is both effective and suitable for their family. This is also being done with Russian-speaking counselors.

## Discussion

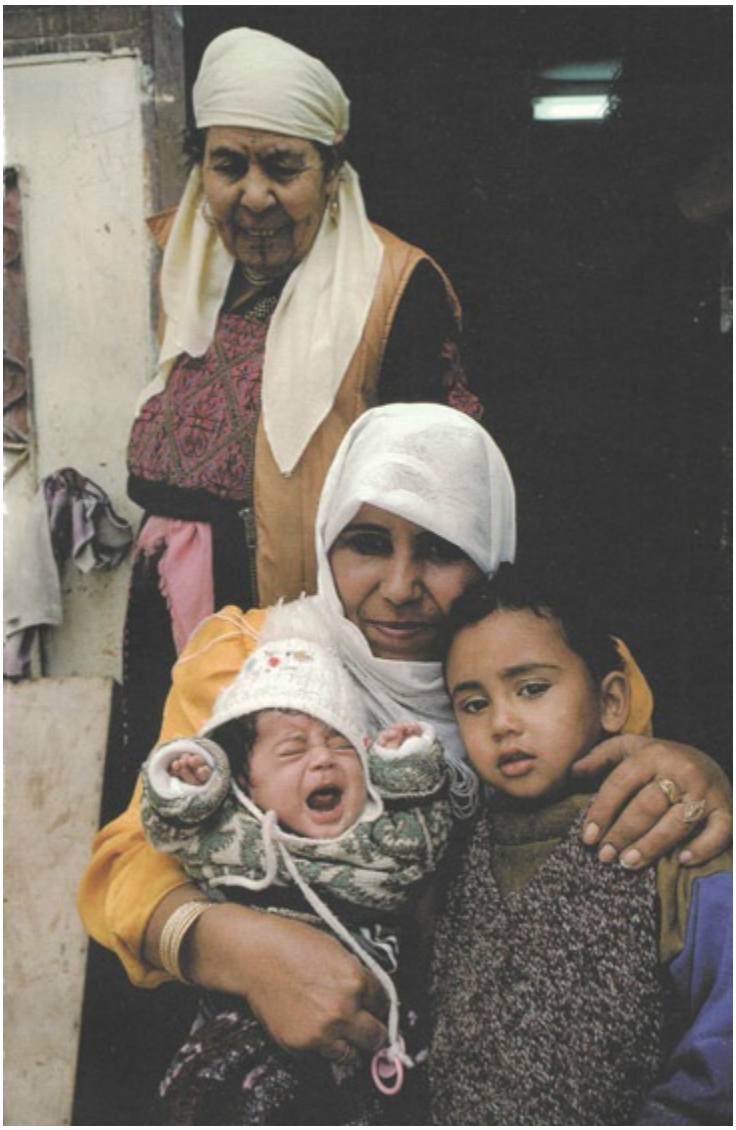
The three health education projects described here speak of findings and outcomes, yet the real story behind the scenes is of the dedication of concerned health care practitioners who work often without a real budget. This story is much more dramatic than the written page portrays. Underlying all the effort, and at times compensating for the frustration of problematic results and tedious data collection, is the belief that high quality health care is the right of all the groups living in the Negev. Altering health behaviors, like most other types of social change, is a slow and awkward process.

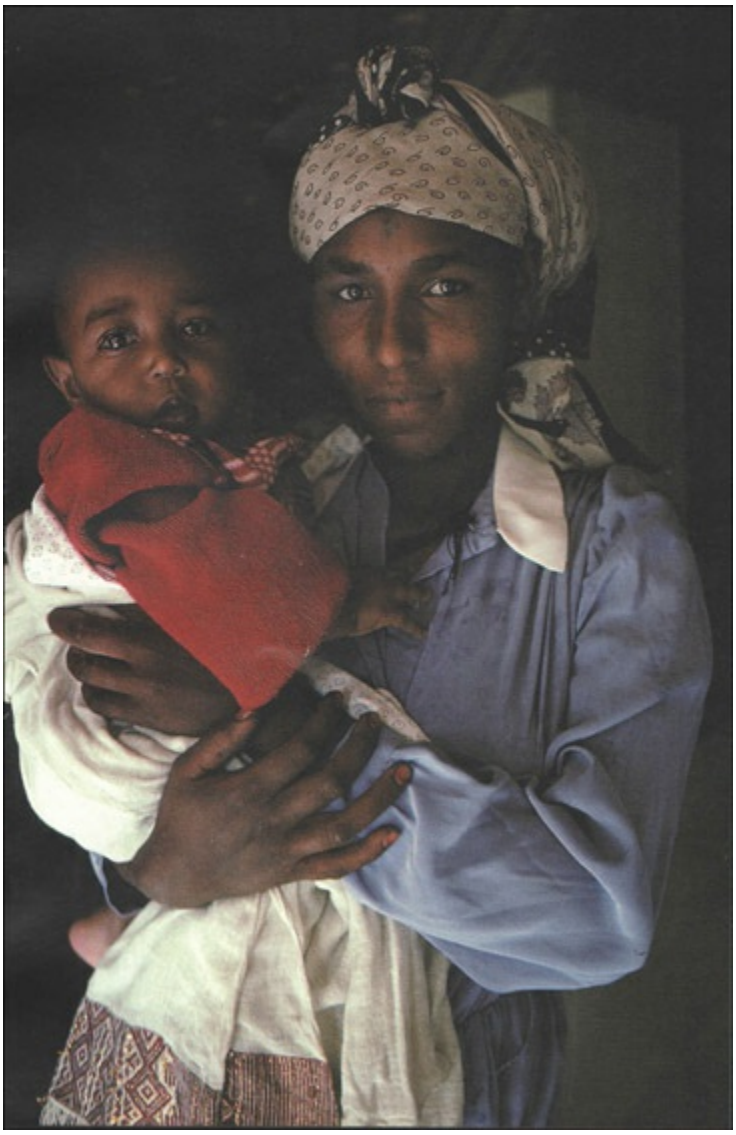
There are many goals still left to fulfill. Bedouin women are beginning the process of improving their level of education, and grappling with difficult problems such as the prevention of cold-injury syndrome in the winter months and dehydration in the summer. The health care system needs to capitalize on the rare occasions when Bedouin mothers can leave the home for visits to the clinic or hospital. Alternatively, small groups of mothers within each tribe can meet with a health educator in a home to discuss issues in breast-feeding and baby care. The challenges that confront the Jewish State in providing care for minority groups have been met in other areas of the country, such as with maternal education courses in Arab villages with low socioeconomic status on the West Bank. Studies elsewhere have also shown that the practice of “rooming-in” (having newborns kept next to the mother instead of in a nursery), which allows for earlier breast-feeding to cement the bond between the newborn and the mother, encourages prolonged nursing of infants. In 1993, Soroka Hospital in Be’er Sheva established a new

maternity ward with rooming-in facilities.

The health activist program for Ethiopian immigrants builds on the strong sense of community commitment and concern that characterizes this ethnic group. The program required a huge investment of time and energy to establish and run, yet the health of the Ethiopian immigrants has gratifyingly improved. Health care workers in family planning have reported the relative ease with which Ethiopian women bring up concerns about child-care, family planning and contaception. By contrast, counselling Soviet immigrant women and dispelling misconsceptions about methods of birth control has been more difficult and frustrating than providing health education to populations that have fewer prior misconceptions. Soviet Immigrants prefer individual or couples counseling, not group education or community-based interventions.

The high level of education of the immigrants from the former Soviet Union dictated a health education strategy that was directed toward very specific types of health re-education. With the Bedouin and the Ethiopian communities, health care practitioners have invested much time and energy in developing trust and learning about the culture and the specific health care problems in that population.





Chapter 8

# Dances with Camels: Al-Okhbi and Rahat

## *Haim Chertok*

Shortly after dawn on the morning of March 4, 1991, jeeps and trucks carrying a detachment of three hundred men arrived at the compound of the families of Mitab Al-Qsasa and Salman Mohammed Abu-Kaf. Their objective? To raze the buildings to the ground. This operation was carried out neither on the West Bank nor in the Gaza Strip. Nor were either Al-Qsasa or Abu-Kaf accused of terrorist activity or incitement to violence, charges which in those areas may lead to the home of the accused being sealed with concrete blocks. No, this even more drastic consequence was meted out five kilometers from Hora, one of seven government-planned Bedouin townships in Israel's Negev. Consequently, it passed unreported by the scores of Jerusalem-based foreign correspondents and rated only meager coverage in the Israeli press.

As is common in such undertakings, the combined force consisted of units from the Border Patrol, the police, the army, and members of the so-called Green Patrol. (This last, ostensibly an ecological service attached to Israel's Department of Agriculture, frequently functions as a surveillance and strike force against the Bedouin settlements in the Negev, particularly those which have not been officially sanctioned with legal status).

So, before the eyes of the thirty-five inhabitants, among them three infants, a twelve-year-old paraplegic, and a woman of seventy-five, the mixed contingent leveled two cement-block houses, six tin huts, one wooden shanty, and two storehouses for sheep feed. Their contents were damaged beyond repair. Rather than acquiesce to relocation to Hora, the families of Mitab Al-Qsasa and Salman Mohammed Abu-Kaf, with the help of friends and neighbors, raised tents on the site of their demolished homes the very next day. There they still reside.

What offense could have merited such severity? According to a spokesman for the Israel Lands Administration, "the Al-Qsasa and Abu-Kaf families inhabited houses that had been constructed without proper license" (Ha'aretz, March 8, 1991). They had built without a license! And suppose the two Bedouin heads of households had followed the rules of the game and applied for proper licenses? Why, they would have been caught fast on the bureaucratic Catch-22 that lurks to snare the Bedouin of the Negev. Building licenses are issued only for construction in government-approved Bedouin townships. As with the Al-Qsasas and Abu-Kafs, so it goes with hundreds of others. The Ministry of the Interior reports that between 1988 and 1990, demolitions of unlicensed Bedouin structures were carried out at the rate of one nearly every other day.

Official Israeli government policy, established in the 1950s, is "to encourage" Bedouin to settle in selected locations. The point, of course, is to remove them from the open desertscape so that military, agricultural and industrial development in the Negev can proceed unimpeded. For several decades this policy was rarely enforced. The situation altered drastically in the wake of

the 1979 Camp David Accords which enjoined the Israeli army to evacuate its bases in the Sinai. The need to relocate training bases and three new air fields within the narrow confines of the Negev made an unmonitored, uncontrolled Bedouin presence more than merely inexpedient.

Expanding township councils, as well as the military, regard the Bedouin as an impediment. Omer is an affluent suburb of Be'er Sheva. It's residents—overwhelmingly Ashkenazi and secular—are mainly professionals, many of them employed at nearby Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. In general elections, a relatively high proportion vote for the left-leaning Meretz Party which proclaims itself particularly concerned with citizens' rights.

Adjacent to Omer sits a fenced-in village of several hundred Bedouin who, after being forced to evacuate traditional lands closer to Be'er Sheva, resettled at this site more than thirty years ago. Naturally, their settlement is illegal. Fields on the south side of the highway, which these Bedouin had once dry-farmed, were expropriated a decade ago and reassigned to a nearby kibbutz.

Omer's city fathers, seeking expansion, have for some time been casting eyes on the "illegal" settlement of their most immediate neighbors. They have petitioned the Israeli courts to evict the Omer-abutting Bedouin. Neither the basically liberal members of the kibbutz nor the advocates of civil rights in Omer have shed noticeable tears at the prospect of trespassing on the civil liberties of these, their fellow Israeli citizens.

For millennia, Bedouin tribespeople have roamed the Negev in search of water and vegetation for their flocks. Over the generations they have become skilled as herdsmen and survivors in semi-arid conditions. Traditionally maintaining a symbiotic relationship with the farmers of the Galilee, the Bedouin drove their flocks to forage over the harvested fields, clearing them of stubble in the process. As long as the Bedouin population was relatively low and empty land abundant, their shepherd economy functioned smoothly.

The founding of the State of Israel marked the beginning of the end for both of these conditions. The Bedouin infant mortality rate had once run to nearly 50%. The introduction of modern medical procedures has reduced it so precipitously that today's Negev Bedouin population of about 80,000 is a high for modern times. At the same time, since all land in the Negev is under the legal jurisdiction of the state, even Bedouin tribes which have lived in the region for many generations retain no legal rights over their traditional lands. Unable to carry on with their traditional economy and encouraged to abandon their nomadic way of life, large numbers of Bedouin over the past decade have sought employment in factories or on agricultural settlements.

And yet, like Al-Qsasa and Abu-Kaf, like the villagers adjacent to Omer, many Bedouin are stubbornly hanging on. Based upon aerial photographs, the government-authorized Markovitch Report (1986) indicated that a total of 5,944 "illegal Bedouin structures" dotted the Negev. Of these, over 98% were classified as "soft," i.e., temporary structures such as tin shacks and huts. The vast majority were on land claimed both by the state and by the Bedouin. Despite the sisyphian efforts of the Green Patrol, the Be'er Sheva-based Association for the Support and Defense of Bedouin Rights—a civil rights organization founded and run by Bedouin—estimates that by 1990 the number of these "illegal" structures had actually increased to around 8,000.

Khalil Al-Okhbi was born in 1956 in Al-Okhbi, a village of around 100 dwellings just off the highway between Be'er Sheva and Arad. Like the Bedouin closer to Omer, the Al-Okhbi tribe had moved in 1951 after being expelled from its settlement nearer to Be'er Sheva. Officially, of course, all are squatters. Like the other 20 or so good-sized Bedouin villages of the northern Negev, Al-Okhbi is not recognized by the Israeli authorities. Officially, it simply does not exist.

Khalil Al-Okhbi is married, and the father of five children. In 1982 he received a court order to destroy his own house. He complied. Subsequently, as Al-Okhbi explained, his wife built another home for the family on the same site. The Negev Regional Planning Authority counterclaimed that Al-Okhbi had merely circumvented the original court order, and it has brought a new case against him. Prior to the case coming to the court, his house was accidentally burned to the ground. Despite the nullity of the house, the state insisted upon arguing the case. For this offense, Al-Okhbi was sentenced to a year in prison (seven months of it suspended) and a fine of 3,000 shekels. The prosecutor has appealed this decision. He wants Al-Okhbi to serve a longer sentence and to pay a fine of 100,000 shekels.

The judicial rationale for these draconian procedures warrants examination. Any Israeli wishing to construct a building on either private or state-owned land must first obtain a permit from his local planning and building commission. Naturally, the land must be zoned residential and situated on a local outline plan that was approved only after a lengthy process at the local, regional, and even national levels. Except for those seven government-planned townships, the Bedouin of the Negev are entirely excluded from this mechanism, utterly removed from the decision-making processes that impinge so vitally on their lives. One should not be too surprised to learn that, although Israeli courts take a grave view of non-compliance with the planning and building laws, enforcement of these regulations is pursued with far greater vigor in the Arab than in the Jewish sector. While infringements of planning code regulations by Jewish homeowners are far from uncommon, it is rare indeed that an Israeli judge issues an order for the demolition of a home belonging to a Jew. Rarer still is its implementation.

Unlike other Israeli Arabs (with the notable exception of the Druze), a significant number of young Bedouin over the years have volunteered to serve in the army, frequently performing invaluable service as trackers along the borders. When missiles rained down on Tel Aviv during the Gulf War, several Bedouin settlements opened their doors to Jewish families who fled for safety from the center of the country. In truth, the problem is not that most Israelis harbor a deep-seated bias against the Bedouin; it’s just that they are largely unmoved by their plight.

Relentlessly, efforts to concentrate all the Negev Bedouin into seven large townships move apace. The lands upon which approximately 30,000 Bedouin resided have been confiscated by judicial means. Their former inhabitants have received monetary compensation and have moved to sprawling conglomerations such as Rahat north of Be’er Sheva. Like Khalil Al-Okhbi, the overwhelming majority of the remaining Negev Bedouin live precarious lives in homes which the state considers illegal. Any sunrise may disclose their homes encircled by the distinctive olive-colored jeeps of the Green Patrol. Every one of these homes is subject to legal demolition.

Realistically, would it not be the better course of wisdom for the Bedouin to cease their unequal struggle, to surrender to superior power, and to move to the relative safety and security of, say, Rahat? Surely the place was worth a visit. But as one discovers, the experience of simply getting to this Bedouin metropolis of the Negev offers an instantaneous total immersion into the Israeli underclass. If one ventures to Be’er Sheva’s central bus station to purchase a ticket to Rahat, here’s how matters are likely to proceed:

“Here’s your ticket—one-way to Shoval,” says the station clerk.

Odd. Shoval is a kibbutz on the secondary highway to Tel Aviv. Perhaps there’s been a misunderstanding. So once again, a request for a ticket to Rahat.

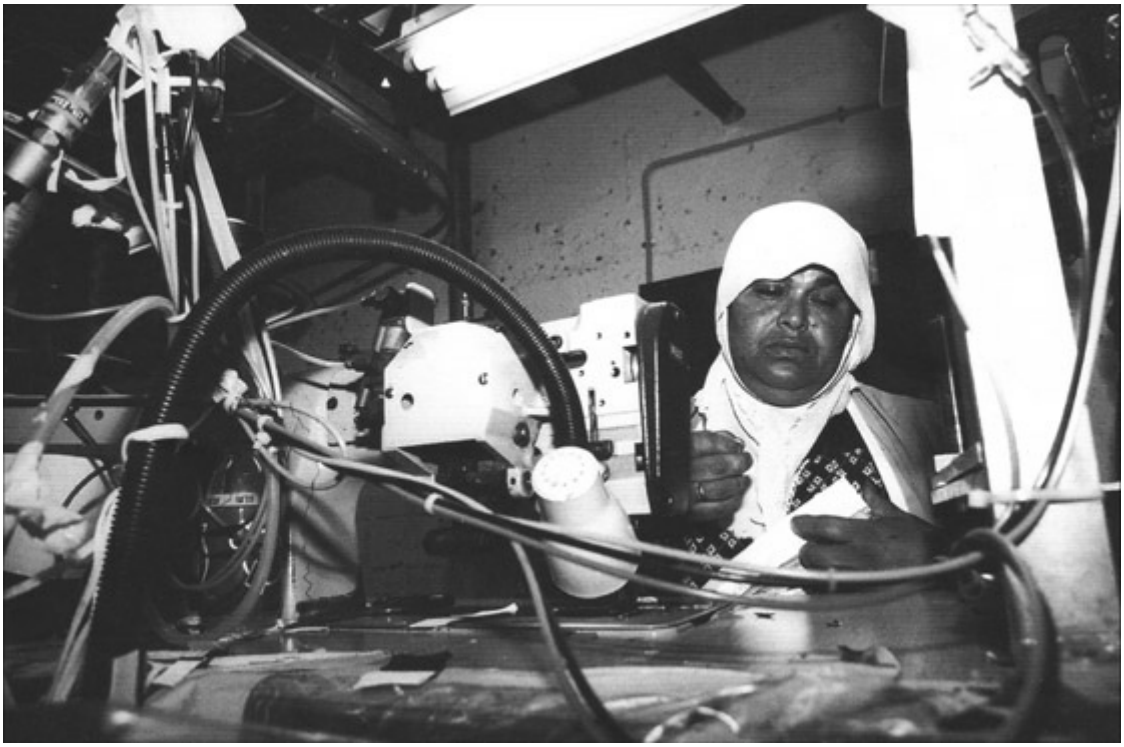
“Sorry, Egged buses don’t service Rahat. Shoval’s as close as we get, so just get off there and the driver will point the way.”

Now, this elusive Rahat is hardly some minor encampment. Its population happens to exceed

that of Kibbutz Shoval by a factor of twenty! Yet, even though most of Rahat's breadwinners commute daily to construction, factory, and agricultural work in Be'er Sheva, Kiryat Gat, Tel Aviv, and neighboring kibbutzim, Egged buses neither enter nor make a circuit of its streets as they do in other towns. Apparently the sovereignty of Egged does not extend recognition or service to what is supposed to be the cornerstone of the government's long-standing policy to concentrate the Bedouin of the Negev in urban enclaves.

At its inception in 1972, Rahat was considered a model of municipal planning. Its residents received financial compensation for leaving their desert holdings. Each neighborhood of the new municipality was divided into units and apportioned according to extended families (*bamulot*). Each clan was granted a dunam (quarter of an acre) on which to build.

Riding north out of Be'er Sheva, however, a search for even a road sign validating the existence of a place called Rahat proved futile. In short, although



from the principal highway between Tel Aviv and Be'er Sheva, one can see the houses and minarets of spectral Rahat stretching for miles on the western horizon, for most Negevites the very quiddity of what is now the fourth largest urban center in the northern Negev is problematic.

Eventually, just as the ticket seller had indicated, my bus stopped on the highway across from Kibbutz Shoval, and the driver did indeed point me toward a narrow road that trailed off to the right. After two dusty kilometers the first buildings materialized, and surprisingly Rahat initially appeared to be a thriving enterprise.

Scattered about, like the buildings in a game of Monopoly after the board has been jarred, were a considerable number of large homes, many quite attractive. Near the municipal offices, Bedouin men, most in everyday Israeli garb but with a good number in traditional robes, entered and left Barclay's Discount Bank. Construction was underway on what looked to be terrain carved out with an ice cream scoop; it would evidently serve as an amphitheater for outdoor musical programs. Nearby stood a large structure that, upon completion, will function as a mini-mall. Several groups of school-aged kids loitered about, but not any more than one might encounter on a Tuesday morning in Jewish Negev towns like Netivot or Dimona. In contrast, however, not many women were in evidence, and those who were had not adopted Western dress.

Neither had Rahat's mayor (at the time of my visit), Gomah Al-Kasasy who, seated behind his office desk and displaying a severe mien, looked imperious in his traditional dark robe and kaffiyeh. A photo of President Chaim Herzog hung reassuringly if somewhat incongruously on the wall. Al-Kasasy had replaced Arye Bar, a functionary from the Ministry of Construction and Housing, who had served as Rahat's unelected mayor for nine years from 1980.

"Yes, until 1989 our mayor was a Jewish appointee," Al-Kasasy explained. "The government claimed that we Bedouin were not capable of conducting a fair, democratic election. We insisted that we could, which," he added with a wry smile, "is exactly what we did."

Al-Kasasy and two other representatives of the eleven-member city council were members of the Islamic Party, which is traditionalist, some would say “fundamentalist,” in outlook. Two council members, including the amiable deputy mayor Moussa Abu-Sehban (attired in Western clothing) adhered to the Democratic Arab Party of Abdul Wahab Darawshe. The remaining representatives included two Labor Party men and four independents.

“I will tell you something of Rahat’s history,” the mayor said. “This city was begun by the government in 1970 after the failure of Tel-Sheva to properly develop as a Bedouin center. Because we have lots of buildings and a far greater population than Tel Sheva, Rahat is widely considered to be a great success. And it is true that, little by little, in some areas we do think we are beginning to make some progress. Our 33 neighborhoods now have a population greater than 23,000, not to mention another 6,000 Bedouin in the immediate area whom we service. But what you

cannot observe simply by walking about is that many families are crammed into their houses like chickens in their coops. In this matter we have not begun to get the cooperation we would like from government agencies or officials.”

Rahat has seven elementary schools, one vocational school, one junior high and one high school, all of which look much like standard Israeli school buildings.

"Yes," commented deputy mayor Abu-Sehban, "the buildings themselves are okay, but today Rahat is at least fifty classrooms short. So, like our homes, our schools are terrifically overcrowded. Our birth rate, as you probably know, is one of the highest in the world: more than three-fourths of the Bedouin are under the age of twenty. Rahat grows by around one thousand children every year. That translates into a need for an additional twenty to thirty schoolrooms every single year; we actually get six or seven, which means that the overcrowding in our schools worsens every September. Is it any wonder so many of our young people despair and do not finish school?"

"A similar situation prevails in Rahat's medical facilities," Abu-Sehban said. "We have plenty of doctors, some of them Arabs who were trained in former Soviet countries, but our clinic is ridiculously small for a place of our size."

Rahat's unemployment rate is supposed to be around 20%.

"It's actually higher," the mayor remarked. "Look at our city plan. These two areas in purple are zoned for industry, but these industrial zones have become a very bad joke. There is no industry in Rahat. Nothing. Why? Do our workers demand high salaries? Are they less skilled than other factory workers? Hardly. It is because the government refuses to designate us as a 'development town,' with the result that, unlike all the other Negev towns—I mean places like Dimona or Kiryat Gat—we cannot offer potential investors or industrialists any tax incentives. Naturally, no one comes."

"Moreover, unlike other municipalities, we receive no help at all from The Jewish Agency. Nevertheless, when I spent three weeks in the United States last fall, I had meetings with successful Palestinian-American businessmen, also Saudis and Kuwaitis, who expressed willingness, even eagerness to invest in Rahat. The trouble is that they are forbidden to deal with us directly. The law requires them to work through the overseas agencies of the State of Israel, which naturally they are reluctant to do."

What about the promise made by Amos Gilboa, aide to Professor Moshe Arens when he was Israel's minister in charge of minority affairs in 1987, that "there will be industrial building in Rahat within one month…half [of the industrial space] will be used for a textile plant that will employ five hundred people?" The rest of the space was supposed to go to small-scale private industries.

"Later we will go and inspect this beautiful-sounding, invisible 'industrial zone' of Rahat together," Abu-Sehban interjected, a bitter grin at the corners of his mouth. "Year after year," he continued, "we dutifully update our five-year development plan and submit it to the Ministry of the Interior. Year after year, nothing happens. We are not taken seriously."

Rahat's total lack of industry has had several unanticipated ramifications. For example, with so many of its citizens commuting daily to work and carpooling in old vehicles, many in need of repair, the number of Bedouin killed or seriously injured in automobile accidents is far out of proportion to their numbers. Second, the chronically unemployed tend to graduate into anti-social behavioral problems, but Rahat's department of welfare is limited to 14.5 workers to service a population of over 23,000.

Rahat lacks a municipal sewage system. Its streets lack sidewalks. "We need so very much," Al-Kasasy added with a hint of a smile, "but what do we get? After twenty-two years, the Histadrut Labor Federation has recently built Rahat a new cultural palace, where nothing cultural happens."

But still Rahat attracts new residents. It grows annually. Houses are spacious.

"All that just proves how deceptive appearances can be," the mayor responded. "If newcomers still gravitate to Rahat, which is so overcrowded and offers no employment prospects, that shows how bad conditions are for Bedouin elsewhere. Our total budget for 1992 was 17 million shekels, of which 6 million was a grant. In comparison, Ofakim, with 13,000 people, received a budget of 35 million shekels. Where is the justice in that? I would settle for 80% of Ofakim's allotment.

"You know, the government promised us Bedouin a Garden of Eden. Where is it? Rahat may look like a success, but the fact is that we are falling farther and farther behind. You want to know the irony of it all? Only about half of Israel's 80,000 Bedouin live in Rahat and the smaller government-sponsored settlements like Lakiya, Kasyfeh, and Tel Sheva. The main reason most of the other half do not move is that those Bedouin see and understand that Rahat is failing. They will continue to refuse to come because they can see how bleak their future would be here. And so, by treating us as poorly as it does, the State of Israel works against itself."

What do Al-Kasasy and Abu-Sehban really want? "Just equality. Simple equality. Look at this," the mayor declared while dramatically drawing out his monthly pay statement from the top drawer of his desk. "I pay 45% of my salary in taxes. My full share. What I want and what Rahat wants is our fair share back."

My guide around Rahat was Moussa Abu-Sehban, who had moved to Rahat in 1974 from a settlement near Kibbutz Revivim.

"Today everyone talks about peace," he began. "I say peace begins at home. When I travel to a town like Arad and see the kinds of public facilities available there, how do you think I feel? For half the school year our children must try to learn while shivering in their coats because, with the exception of several kindergartens, none of the schoolrooms are equipped with heaters. Our football team does not perform in a stadium. We are not demanding luxuries, but it seems that what the State of Israel thinks essential for many Jewish communities does not extend to us."

"This place was founded twenty-two years ago. Fate has decreed that our two peoples should live together. All we Bedouin want from the government is what should rightly come to us. We want to be treated as equals. Just look around. Do you think we get the same treatment as a Jewish town?"

Outside again, en route to the Histadrut cultural center, the place the mayor contended offered no culture, Abu-Sehban chatted with some workmen at an attractive site that will soon be Rahat's city-sponsored alternative cultural center. Stalls were being fashioned to display and market Bedouin arts and crafts, an open air bandshell was nearly finished, and there was a vast tent where visitors could enter a cool, dark world to relax and eat.

The Histadrut's imposing new cultural center is directed by the gregarious Abu-Hani, a Labor Party man. He is very proud of his facility, especially its small but versatile theater—capacity 161—with ten rows of moveable seats. The center offers literacy classes for adults, help for students after school, classes in knitting and sewing.

"At present Rahat has no public library, but we are planning for one," Abu-Hani hastened to add. "We do have three soccer teams. Also, we operate a small-scale employment service from here. A center for elderly Bedouin is in the planning stage."

What about the mayor's charges and evident animosity?

"Look, we've only recently opened. Some people are very impatient. There are also some who feel that public performances, like theater or dance on a stage, are not part of Bedouin culture. I feel differently. I think we can and should leap over a transitional generation and reach the young people. I think it can be done. There are always those who look to the negative side of the

equation, at what we don't have. But the truth is that life in Rahat is better than it was for us in the past. For example, every house has a bathroom. We certainly do not lack problems, but improvements are possible. Of course they take time. Unfortunately, the state doesn't realize that Bedouin are less patient that we used to be."

Abu-Sehban and I entered Rahat's health clinic. It was very small and very crowded; indeed, so small and so crowded with mothers holding sick children that a visitor felt intrusive, in a way. Stepping outside, the deputy mayor pointed to a minor extension of the premises: "The municipality organized a volunteer crew to build this. They worked all night, from three in the afternoon to seven the following morning."

Here we were accosted by a man in his fifties who addressed himself to Moussa Abu-Sehban. It was easy to read the disappointment in the man's face when he heard the response.

"He's asking about his application for permission to acquire a plot of land upon which to build a house," Abu-Sehban explained. "The man has six children. He's been awaiting permission from the Housing Authority since 1988. All his papers are filed and in order. But he simply must wait. You see those large houses over there. Superficially, I know they look like the homes of prosperous families. In fact, each room of each structure houses four or five persons. Can you imagine what living conditions are like, what sort of problems such overcrowding breeds! Can you conceive how we Bedouin, who love space and freedom, must feel? Some applications to build go back five or six years. I know of over 120 outstanding applications. Look around at those fields, those empty spaces. Is there a shortage of land upon which to build? Nonsense. All of it is properly zoned, all the applications are properly filed. Now perhaps you can better understand how frustrated and angry this pointless delay makes us feel."

If, for the typical Israeli, the various governmental agencies present a dense tangle of overlapping bureaucracies, the situation can be hopelessly bewildering for the Bedouin, who operates simultaneously under Israeli law and his own tribal laws and folkways reinforced by tribal elders. It is hard to figure out the rationale behind the government's policy, which seems designed primarily to alienate the Bedouin of Rahat and to increase the power of its fundamentalist political factions.

Have the Bedouin of the Negev no better hope than Rahat, nothing between urban reservations, destined to become the breeding grounds for discontent, and the extra-legal marginality of the squatters' existence? One promising approach has been developed at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev's Center for Grazing Lands Research and presented to the government: a proposal for the modernization of a pastoral means of production.

How would this new plan be implemented? Land in the Negev would be leased to herdsmen and individual Bedouin families for a period of forty-nine years, the standard term for all citizens in Israel. In the past, the Bedouin following their herds from pasture to pasture never had cause to regard the enrichment of desert flora as one of their primary concerns. Becoming lessees could, for the first time, provide them with incentives to care for a particular parcel of land: to fence it, seed it, and cultivate it for fodder. The idea is that by fundamentally altering the Bedouin's relation to the land, it would give them the opportunity to remain attached to it.

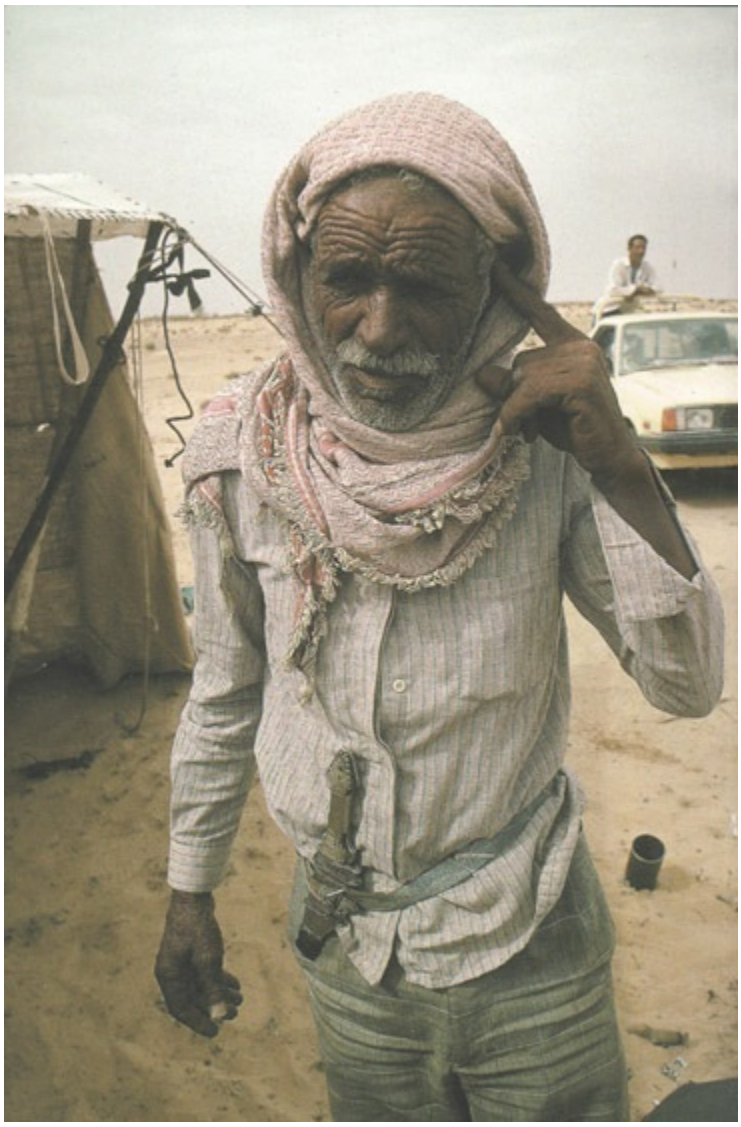
With infrastructure such as roads, water and utilities provided by the government, one can envision a northern Negev dotted with Bedouin villages ranging from sixty to eighty families, each family maintaining up to one hundred sheep (or forty sheep in addition to two or three camels), traveling north with their flocks for the weeks during summer when the fodder gives out. Each of these horticultural/pastoral villages could combine stock-raising with ventures in interior tourism so as to achieve a domestic economy that promises the Bedouin a new measure

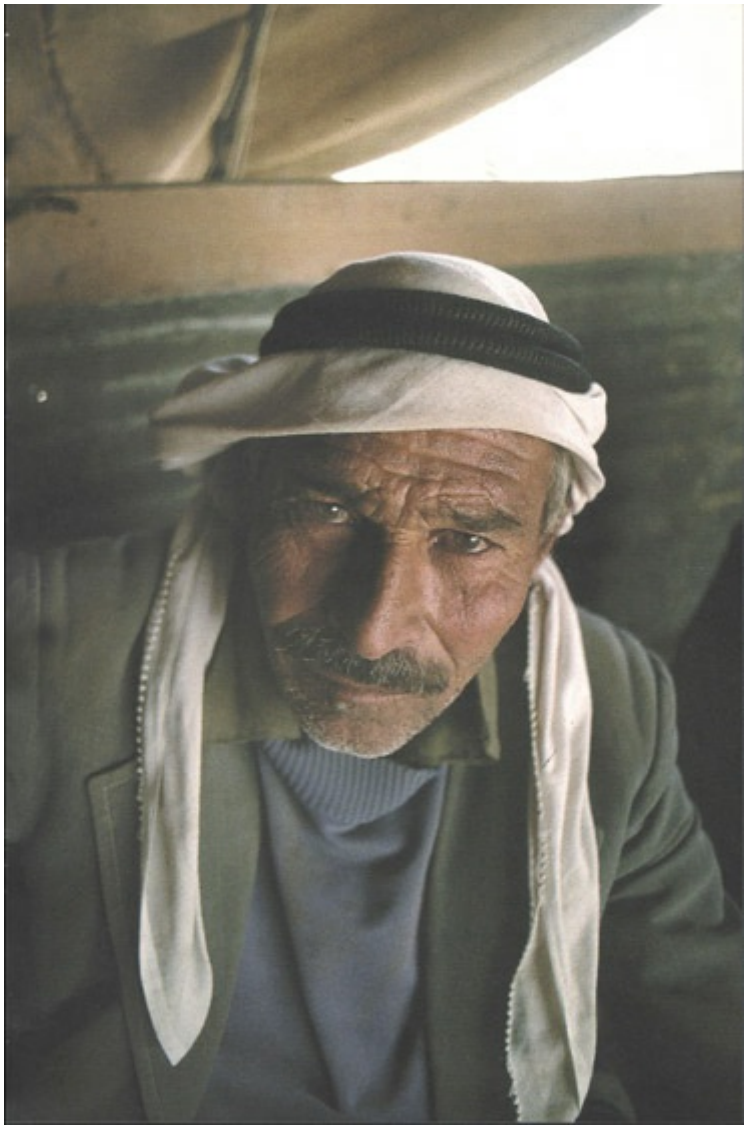
of stability and prosperity.

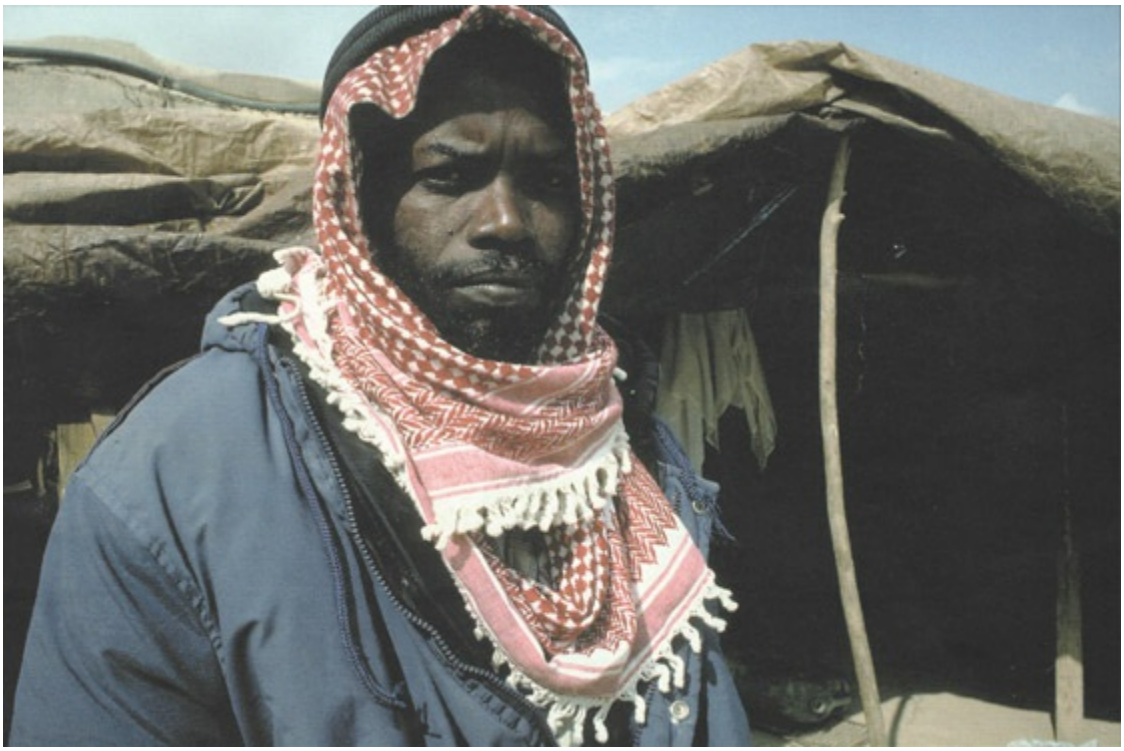
"Of course we recognize that a good many Bedouin nowadays prefer to live in urban centers," remarked Ben-Gurion University anthropologist Professor Gideon Kressel. "What we are suggesting is that a lifestyle in harmony with traditional Bedouin values should be made available as an alternative to the others; the lifestyle of the Bedouin [should] remain essentially rural."

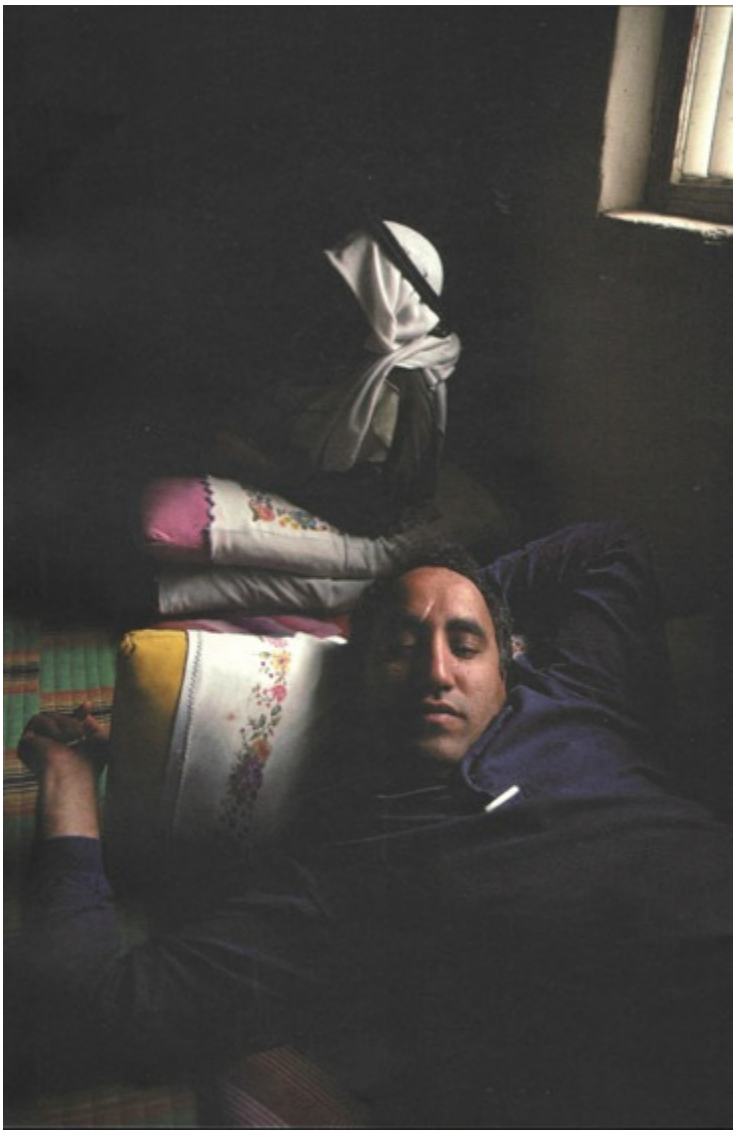
At least two formidable obstacles stand between the current unhealthy situation and the implementation of the Center for Grazing Lands Research proposal. First, although Professor Kressel stresses that Bedouin themselves should be involved at every stage in the decision-making process, when key figures, like those associated with the Association for the Support and Defense of Bedouin Rights, were apprised of this proposal, they could only wonder aloud why they had not been consulted in its formulation. Second, and at least equally daunting, is the long-standing, deeply ingrained lack of sympathetic understanding for the Bedouin or respect for their culture and values not only within entrenched elements of the Israeli bureaucracy, but, sadder yet, among the general populace as well.

[Editor's Note: In June 1994, Rahat was designated a town/city by the Israeli government. This designation will serve as a basis for the promotion of its status and development.]









Chapter 9

# Education, Transition, and the Future of the Negev Bedouin Arabs

***Ismael Abu Saad***

## Introduction

The Bedouin have inhabited the Negev since the fifth century B.C.E. Today, those Bedouin living in the Negev constitute nearly 25 % of the area's population. This community, which represents a traditional, conservative Middle Eastern society, adds yet another element of diversity to the Negev.

The Bedouin are a part of the larger Arab minority in Israel. Traditionally, the Arabs of the Middle East developed three predominant settlement patterns, from which they also take their identity: town dwellers (*medani*), villagers *(qarawi)* and desert dwellers or Bedouin (*badwi*). Desert, village, and city have been intimately related to each other in Arab society culturally, socially and economically. Though the Bedouin constitute only a small and declining proportion of the Arab population, they have played an important role in creating the values of Arab civilization, as well as holding important economic functions. Traditionally, the Bedouin adapted to their harsh desert environment by engaging in pastoral nomadism, and thus they filled the vital role of the stock-breeders of the Middle East. Nomadic pastoralists are classified into two types: nomads who depend totally on their animals (camels, goats and sheep), and semi-nomads who practice a combination of agriculture and herding. Since the majority of Negev Bedouin traditionally derived their subsistence from herding and seasonal cultivation, they fit into the category of semi-nomads.

During the course and aftermath of the 1948 war, the vast majority of the Negev Bedouin became refugees in the surrounding Arab countries and territories (i.e., the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, etc.). Upon establishment of the State of Israel, the indigenous Arabs, including the Bedouin, suddenly found themselves in the ambiguous position of a non-Jewish minority in a Jewish state. As this new state mobilized all available resources to meet the needs of incoming waves of Jewish immigration, the Arab minority lost control over the vast majority of their former land base. Most of the Bedouin who remained in the Negev were subsequently removed from their traditional lands and restricted to specified locations in the "closed area" set up for them in the northern Negev during the period of military administration over Arabs in Israel (1948–1966). The Bedouin's traditional way of life changed dramatically due to the loss of their wide-ranging grazing and agricultural lands, and the community began a spontaneous

sedentarization process.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the government began implementing plans to resettle the Negev Bedouin population into seven urban-style townships (Rahat, Tel Sheva, Aro'er, Kasyfeh, Segev Shalom, Hora and Lakiya). One disincentive to the government's settlement program is that the planned towns were never provided with the necessary means for developing organizational infrastructure and services, such as internal sources of employment, post offices, banks, public libraries or recreational and cultural centers, sewage systems, etc., because national priorities tended to direct the bulk of the country's development resources into the Jewish sector. The planned towns for the Bedouin have unemployment rates of up to 25%, which are among the highest in Israel. Only 30% of the population in the planned towns have a permanent income, while 45% have occasional work. Approximately 80% of those who are employed spend up to five days a week away from home working in the center of Israel.

There remains a wide sociopolitical gap between the traditional society of the Bedouin and the modern, Western-oriented Israeli society. This article focuses on education which, while affected by this gap, has a potentially key role to play in the successful integration of the Bedouin into the mosaic of communities in the Negev and into the larger Israeli society.

## The Broader Context: Arab Education In Israel

Bedouin education must be understood within the broader context of Arab (i.e., minority) education in Israel. The educational system in Israel is designed, directed and financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Jerusalem. It is, de facto, subdivided into an Arab system and a Jewish system (which are further subdivided into religious and secular systems). The schools in the country are organized into six districts, each of which has a Jewish superintendent.

In the 1990–91 school year, 79.9% of the elementary school student population were Jews, and 20.1% Arabs. At the high school level, Jews made up 85.1% of the student population, while Arabs made up 14.9%. These statistics reflect a difference in the drop-out rates between the Jewish and Arab sectors (18.4% and 54.6%, respectively). The State Comptroller's 1992 report comparing Jewish and Arab education in Israel reveals that school budgets, teaching hours, professional resources, and facilities are not equitably distributed between these systems.

In the 1990–91 school year, the annual per capita expenditure of the Ministry of Education and Culture was 308 New Israeli Shekels (NIS) for Jewish students, and 168 NIS for Arab students. Fewer teaching hours were allocated to Arab elementary schools than to Jewish elementary schools, despite the fact that Arab students are required to learn three languages (Arabic, Hebrew and English), while Jewish students are required to learn only two (Hebrew and English). According to the report of the Director General's Committee on Arab Education, submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1985, Arab schools would need 50% more teachers in order to equalize the conditions in their schools with the prevailing conditions in the Jewish schools.

The 1992 Comptroller's Report indicated that 100% of the extra teaching hours allocated to disadvantaged students go to the Jewish sector, despite the fact that Arab students account for more than half of the children living below the poverty level in Israel. In 1990, the Ministry of Education and Culture began to introduce another program for disadvantaged students in selected schools, known as the "long school day" program (which actually amounted to the restoration of

school hours cut in the mid-1980s). Out of the 541 schools chosen for this program, only 11 (2%) were Arab; and of the 135 schools selected in the Negev, not one was a Bedouin Arab school.

The Comptroller's Report also documented differences in the level of professional services and educational facilities in the Jewish and Arab school systems. For example, 95% (207) of the positions for professional subject supervisors (i.e., math, science, humanities, languages, social sciences, etc.) went to the Jewish sector, while 5% (10) were allotted to the Arab sector; 99% (418) of the positions for educational psychologists were allocated to Jewish schools, and only 1% (6) to Arab schools. Out of the 105 positions for truant officers funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, only 9.5% (10) were allocated to the Arab sector, despite the fact that the drop-out rate among Arab students is nearly three times that of Jewish students. Of the centers for students with learning disabilities, 97% (58) were in the Jewish sector, and 3% (2) in the Arab sector. Of the twenty-one major Ministry of Education technological laboratories, twenty are in the Jewish sector, and one is in the Arab sector.

As these statistics suggest, there are differences in the types of educational programs made available to the Arab and the Jewish students, especially in the field of vocational-technological education. In the 1990–91 school year, *55%* of Jewish students and 19% of Arab students were enrolled in vocational-technological programs, which for Arabs were overwhelmingly auto mechanics and sewing courses rather than advanced technological programs. As Mar'i wrote (1989, 91), "One of the most conspicuous inequalities between Arab and Jewish education in Israel exists in the area of vocational-technological education, an inequality leading to, among other things, inequality in economic opportunities."

The differences between the Jewish and Arab school systems pervade all levels of the educational system in Israel. Administrators (such as superintendents, supervisors and principals) are appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and there is a scarcity of Arabs in upper-level administrative positions. In his article, "The ABC's of Arab Education," Al-Haj (1987, 15) stated that "of the 980 senior posts in the Ministry of Education, Arab education was allotted only 40—approximately 4%. Thirty-two of these positions—3%—are filled by Arabs, despite the fact that every fifth student in Israel is an Arab. Furthermore, most of the Arab officials are of low rank; very few are in policy-making circles."

According to data from the Ministry of Education personnel department, there is not a single Arab employee in the textbook unit, the educational television center, the adult education department, the neighborhood rehabilitation unit or the road safety unit. Arabs work only in the division of Arab education and culture.

Furthermore, the Jewish and Arab school systems differ in their aims, goals and curricula. The Arab educational system has been and continues to be governed by a set of political criteria which Arabs have no say in formulating. The 1953 Law of State Education specified the following aims for education in Israel:

> **To base education on the values of Jewish culture and the achievements of science, on love of the homeland and loyalty to the state and the Jewish people, on practice in agricultural work and handcraft, on pioneer training and on striving for a society built on freedom, equality, tolerance, mutual assistance, and love of mankind (Mar'i, 1 978, 50).**

No parallel aims have been set forth for the education of Arabs in Israel, and the goals that have been developed tend to blur rather than enhance the formation of Arab identity. Furthermore, while the overall aims of the educational system, as well as specific curricular goals, require Arabs to learn about Jewish values and culture, they do not in turn require Jews to learn about

Arab values and culture. The results of this are clear in the government-sponsored curricula for primary and high schools. Arab students are required to spend many class hours in the study of Jewish culture and history and the Hebrew language (more in total than they spend on Arabic literature and history), while Jewish students have very little exposure to Arab culture, history and language.

The disparity between the Jewish and Arab school system is reflected in their respective levels of achievement, as reported in the 1992 Comptroller's Report. In 1991, when the Ministry of Education and Culture administered a standardized math test to all fourth-grade students in the country, 70% of Jewish students passed, as compared to 30% of Arab students. In 1989 the success rate on matriculation exams (which students take upon the completion of high school, and must pass if they want to go on to higher education) was three times as high among Jewish students (42.3%) as it was among Arab students (13.7%).

## The Sociohistorical Development of Bedouin Education in the Negev

According to Swirski (1990), who studied educational equity in Israel, the Negev Bedouin are at the bottom of the educational ladder, ranking even lower than the other Arab communities. The sociohistorical background of the Bedouin, as well as the radical changes in lifestyle that sedentary Arab communities did not experience to the same extent, have much to do with the current educational status of the Negev Bedouin.

Historically, schools were not widely developed in the Bedouin community because they did not fit the needs or patterns of the nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. The first schools for the Bedouin were established during the British Mandate period (1921–1948) among the largest Bedouin Arab tribes, but it was primarily only the sons of wealthy sheikhs who had access to formal education. Apart from these schools, there were a few elderly teachers *(khatib)* spread throughout the area. These teachers had a basic knowledge of reading and writing, but no qualifications beyond that. The Qur'an served as the textbook, and the education was finished when the student got through the entire book. The number of literate Bedouin was very low, and since survival under the harsh conditions of the nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life required other skills, literacy was not a high priority for them for many years to come. The establishment of the State of Israel, however, radically changed life for the Bedouin of the Negev, rendering their traditional lifestyle inoperative, and transforming them into a landless minority in a modern, Western-oriented state. This transformation changed the Negev Bedouin's actual and eventually perceived need for formal education.

Shortly after Israel's establishment, the Compulsory Education Law was passed (1949), mandating that every child receive free elementary schooling and making elementary education compulsory for children between the ages of six and thirteen. The state was obliged to provide trained teachers, salaries and facilities. It was also responsible for curricula. However, from the perspective of Israeli educational authorities (which did not differ much from that of other sedentary authorities who had ruled over the Bedouin in the past), the Bedouin were seen as outsiders rather than as an integral part of the society; consequently, the educational services provided to the Bedouin were minimal.

This lack of interest on the part of the authorities was matched by a general lack of interest in education within the Bedouin community; thus, long after passage of the Compulsory Education

Law, the educational system among the Negev Bedouin remained very underdeveloped. During the period of the Military Administration (1948–1966) the majority of schools had only four grades, and the average number of pupils per school was forty. Attendance was low, and nothing was done to enforce the Compulsory Education Law. In 1956, for example, there were only 350 Bedouin students out of a population of 2,000 Bedouin school-age children enrolled in schools. By the end of the school year, only 220 students were still attending school, and all of them were boys. The issue of girls attending school was especially problematic. Traditionally, females were restricted to the world of the extended family, and they carried out many of the responsibilities of the household economy (e.g., herding; milking and processing milk products; making the shearings into carpets, tents, mattresses and pillows; and harvesting crops). They were also considered the bearers of the family honor, and their families therefore preferred not to risk their reputations by allowing girls to travel alone or mix with males from other tribes. Because of this, there was much more reluctance among the Bedouin toward sending their daughters to school than sending their sons, especially when schools were far away.

During the period of the Military Administration, students who wanted to obtain a high school education had to attend schools in the northern Arab villages. It was only feasible for a few students to pursue this option because of the high cost and the difficulties in obtaining a permit to leave their area. Student enrollment remained low throughout this period, but the situation began to change after the Military Administration was lifted in 1966, and there were no further restrictions on travel. The lifting of the Military Administration meant that Negev Bedouin were able to have more contact with the Arab villages and towns in the Galilee and the Triangle, where the educational system was better established. In addition, as Bedouin were more extensively exposed to modern Jewish society and became more involved in its economy, they saw the importance of education for their new context.

Furthermore, following the Six Day War of 1967, Bedouin were able to visit their relatives and tribesmen in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the first time since 1948. The Bedouin who had remained in Israel found that many of their counterparts in the Occupied Territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) were educated and had become teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc., while they themselves, for the most part, had limited access to education, and the vast majority of them remained illiterate. Intermarriage between these two previously separated segments of the Bedouin community resulted in educated women from the West Bank and Gaza Strip (as well as from northern Israel) coming to live in the Negev. These contacts had a tremendous impact on the dynamics of the Bedouin community and led them to send their children, girls and boys, to school in greater numbers. As the demand for education grew, the Israeli government opened more schools, and free education became much more widely available to the Bedouin community. It was not until the late 1960s that the Ministry of Education and Culture had established schools for all of the major tribal settlements in the Negev. The first high school for Bedouin in the Negev was opened in 1969. In 1972, free compulsory education was extended two years throughout Israel to include the ninth and tenth grades (ages fourteen-fifteen). By the end of the 1970s, two more high schools had been built for the Negev Bedouin in government-planned settlements.

The number of schools and Bedouin students has increased over time. In 1993, 23,276 students attended 37 Negev Bedouin schools, of which 29 were elementary schools, 3 intermediate schools, 2 comprehensive schools (grades seven-twelve), 2 high schools (grades nine-twelve), and one a non-academic trade school (Southern District Records, 1993). Nevertheless, the development of the educational system has not received the support and

attention it requires, given its potential importance to the successful adjustment of this traditional Bedouin community to the broader society in which its members now live.

## Challenges Facing the Negev Bedouin School

The Negev Bedouin schools face several major barriers to improving the quality and effectiveness of the education they provide. First, facilities and equipment are insufficient, and in some cases altogether lacking. This is especially true for schools in spontaneous tribal settlements, which the government considers temporary. Currently there are eleven temporary and eighteen permanent Bedouin elementary schools in the Negev. These temporary schools in unplanned settlements are poorly equipped, have low budgets, inadequate facilities and maintenance, poor buildings and furnishings, and few teaching materials. They often suffer from a complete lack of facilities and materials such as audiovisual, laboratory, and sports equipment. They are mostly housed in tin, wooden or concrete buildings with insufficient classroom and office space. In general, they are not supplied with running water and electricity, although some are located next to water pipes or electric lines. This situation is part of an official policy to induce the Bedouin to move into the government-planned settlements. Although the government is required by law to provide Bedouin children with education, it is a contradiction of that law to use the educational system to pursue the goal of concentrating the Bedouin Arab population in designated settlements.

In contrast to the temporary schools of the spontaneous settlements, permanent schools are located in planned government settlements or on the sites of future developments and they are better equipped. Most of them are housed in modern buildings and have electricity and running water. But even they do not have sufficient laboratories, libraries or teaching materials. In addition, most of these schools are overcrowded, since the developers cannot keep up with population growth and increasing enrollment. (It has been noted in previous articles in this volume that the birth rate of the Negev Bedouin is one of the highest in the world, and 56% of the population is under the age of fourteen.) Nevertheless, the physical conditions of permanent schools, generally, are still much better than those of temporary schools.

The issue of teaching staff is another complicating factor. Until 1976, the overwhelming majority of teachers in Bedouin schools were recruited from the northern Arab villages, since the Bedouin community could not provide them. Today, at least 60% of the teachers are Bedouin Arabs, and the remainder are non-Bedouin Arabs.

The Bedouin Arabs experience a scarcity of local teachers, while the Arabs in northern Israel have a surplus of teachers. Faced with this problem, the Ministry of Education and Culture has made it obligatory for Arab graduates of teacher training institutions to work in Bedouin schools for a period of two to three years. This situation is far from ideal, as it only partially addresses the problem of supplying schools with manpower, and also results in a very high turnover rate. Furthermore, such teachers are inexperienced, and as soon as they gain a few years seniority they go back to their own villages in the north.

Local Bedouin teachers form a more stable though less educated group. Many were hired by the Ministry of Education during times of extreme teacher shortages, and have only a high school education. Very few of them have furthered their education. This situation has improved since the opening of a separate class for the Bedouin in the teacher training institution in Be’er Sheva

in 1976, but the percentage of non-local teachers remains very high. The number of Bedouin graduates from the Teachers College is only about thirty to thirty-five per year, which does not keep up with the natural growth of the student population, and is clearly not enough to significantly increase the overall percentage of local teachers. According to 1992 Ministry of Education records, 19% of the teachers in the Bedouin schools are unqualified.

The number of female teachers in the Bedouin schools of the Negev is low and only a few of them are of Bedouin origin. Most of them teach lower grades; the kindergarten staff, for example, is entirely female. The higher the grade, the lower the number of female teachers, with very few teaching in high schools. Gender roles in this traditional society still maintain for the most part that men work outside the home and support their families, while women stay at home. Women are also not perceived as having the authority needed to educate children, so that their entrance into the teaching profession has not been welcomed by all. Gender separation also creates a difficult situation for female students in high schools. They find themselves in an almost completely male environment, which is an unfamiliar situation for them.

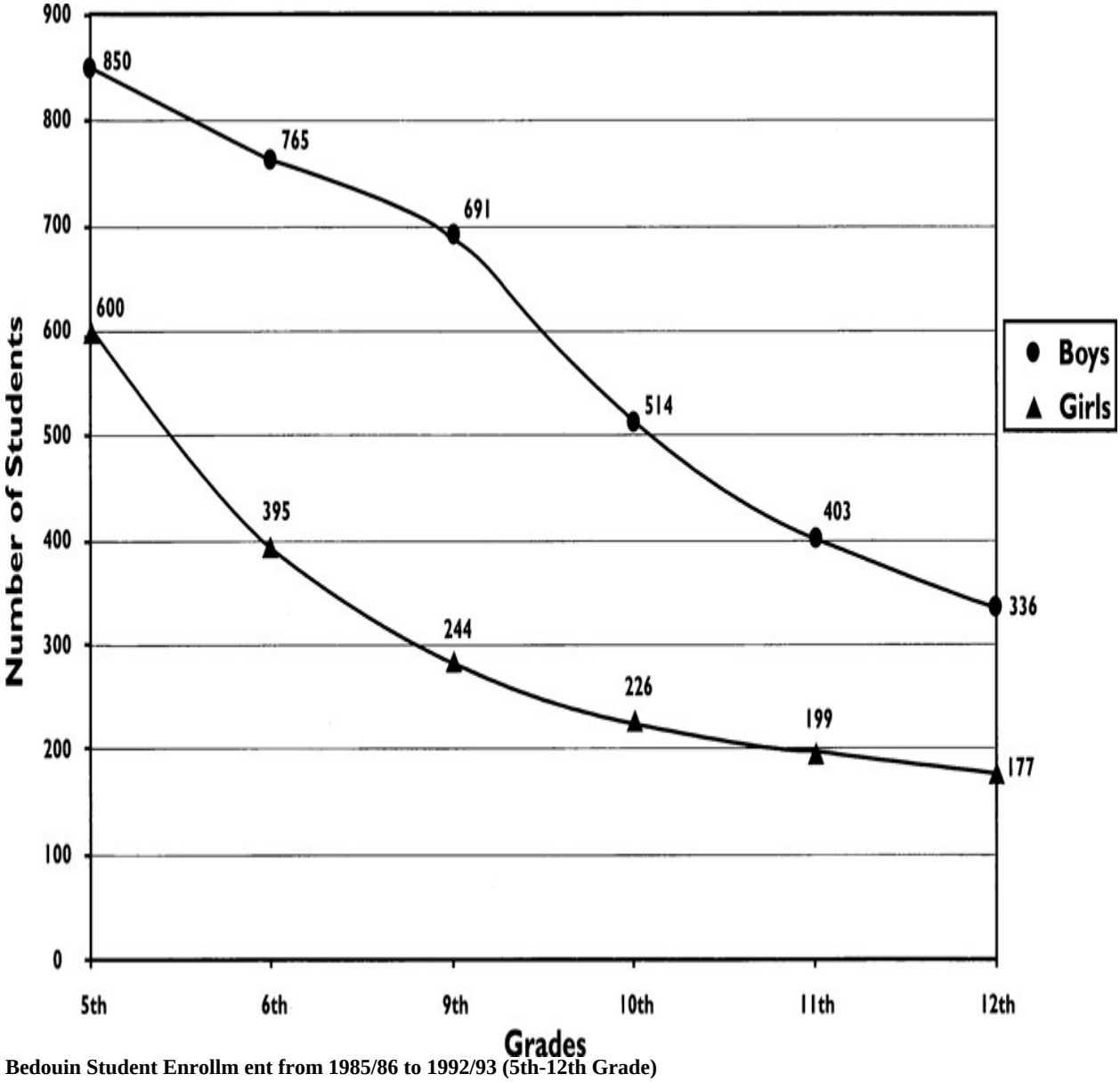
Bedouin personnel in administrative positions at present number two general supervisors, one of whom is local and has a full-time position, while the other is an Arab from the north who holds a half-time position. They are responsible for providing overall supervision for all the Bedouin schools in the Southern District. As it happened in many areas of Israel when the Ministry of Education and Culture was decentralized, the Department of Arab Education was liquidated without any organized effort to fully integrate Arab schools into their respective district offices. So although the Bedouin educational system is formally an integral part of the Southern district, it does not receive an equitable share of the services. Specialized supervisors (who oversee the teaching of subjects such as science, math, languages and sports in the elementary through high school levels) are all Jewish, and are rarely if ever seen in the Bedouin schools.

In addition to facing problems within the educational system, educators find themselves in a unique position in society. Bedouin schools have come to represent institutions devoted to modernization within a traditional community. The emphasis on achievement, as opposed to tribal affiliation and status, is a major revolution in the Bedouin way of life. While traditional concepts are dominant at home, the schools impose a different and contradictory set of concepts on students. The major burden of bridging the gap between the conflicting roles is placed on school administrators and teachers. In most cases, the links between the school and the parents and community are very weak. Considerable research has documented the contributions parent involvement can make to positive education outcomes in such areas as higher academic achievement, students' sense of well-being, student school attendance, positive student attitudes and behavior, student readiness to do homework, and higher educational aspirations among students and parents. If the gap between school and community is to be bridged, there is a need for a comprehensive effort from within the Bedouin educational system to rise to this challenge.

These problems have affected the capacity of the Negev Bedouin schools to retain and educate students. Bedouin schools have the highest drop-out rates in Israel. Ministry of Education statistics show that of the 850 boys and 600 girls in fifth grade in 1985–86, 60% of the boys (514) and 70% of the girls (423) dropped out before completing the 12th grade in 1992–93. Data from the Shoqet Regional Council indicate that, in the government-planned towns of Hora and Lakiya, approximately 70% of the children who should have graduated in 1990 dropped out before completing the twelfth grade.

The graph below illustrates the substantial drop in student enrollment from the fifth to the

twelfth grade. For girls, the most drastic drop occurs during the transition from elementary to middle school, with 34% dropping out between the fifth and eighth grades. For boys, the most drastic drop occurs during the transition from middle school to high school, with 26% dropping out between the ninth and tenth grades.




**Bedouin Student Enrollm ent from 1985/86 to 1992/93 (5th-12th Grade)**

Once in high school (tenth-twelfth grades), there is a lower drop-out rate among girls than among boys. Only a minority of the girls reach the tenth grade, but if their families' traditions and socioeconomic status have enabled them to get that far, there is a strong likelihood of their completing high school. As boys get older, there are both more opportunities, and more economic pressures within many families to drop out of school and go to work. Girls at this age have fewer alternatives (i.e., to stay home or to marry), and so if they are allowed to continue in school, they tend to persevere and complete the twelfth grade.

The low level of academic achievement in Bedouin schools gives students little incentive to

remain in school. In the 1991–92 school year, 4.55% of Bedouin high school students passed the matriculation exams (a prerequisite for going on to higher education), compared to 64.74% of Jewish high school students. Only 6 per 1,000 Negev Bedouin have gone on to obtain a university degree, compared to the national average of 80 per 1,000. The sociopolitical significance of Bedouin students in Israeli society, the economic status of their community, and the poor education system remain major barriers to improving opportunities for higher education.

Efforts to address these problems within the structure of the Ministry of Education and Culture continue to be complicated by the fact that there are no Bedouin educators involved in the higher echelons of the Ministry, where the policy, curriculum, resource-management and budgetary decisions are made.

## Future Development of Bedouin Education: Goals and Objectives

Bedouin Arab education in the Negev is at a critical juncture today, and the formulation of goals and objectives for its future development is of utmost importance. Society cannot afford to allow Bedouin education to take the undirected, evolutionary course it has in the past. The new social reality facing the Bedouin community requires an educated populace which can produce sophisticated and innovative solutions to their development and integration needs. This article points to several specific educational issues that must be addressed immediately.

One of the most obvious basic issues is the overall need for the equalization of Arab and Jewish education in Israel. Bedouin education should receive equitable material and human resources, and should be equipped to provide its students with the skills and abilities they need to face the future as equals of their Jewish counterparts. Therefore, their educational system should offer them, as it offers Jews, qualified teachers, appropriate facilities (buildings, modern labs, libraries) and services (pedagogical supervisors, counselors, truant officers, social workers, special education teachers, nurses), and as in the Jewish sector, it should identify the gifted and the disabled, and provide them with programs relevant to their special abilities and aptitudes. Curricula and textbooks should be updated and revised to make them more relevant to Arab culture and identity and, in particular, to the radical social upheaval the Bedouin community is undergoing. The education Negev Bedouin receive must be closely examined in terms of its relation to the social and economic needs of the community. It must provide young people with security, pride in their heritage, and confidence in the usefulness of their skills for facing the future.

In order to accomplish this goal within the Bedouin community, programs should be developed for increasing the number of Bedouin students in institutions of higher education, especially, though not exclusively, for the purpose of preparing qualified teachers and professional staff for the educational system.

Another important area to be addressed for the future is that of vocational-technical education, where again Arab education generally lags far behind the Jewish sector. It is essential that the Bedouin educational system develop programs which provide basic as well as advanced skills in electronics, computer literacy and telecommunications. However, it is not only highly advanced technology that is needed to make Bedouin education more future-oriented. Vocational-technical training is also important for fulfilling current and future needs in management, business, industry and other such vocations.

In addition, Bedouin educational goals should include the development of agricultural programs. Despite the fact that the vast majority of their lands have been confiscated, agricultural education remains especially significant for the future of Bedouin Arabs in the Negev. Agricultural education in its broadest sense has the potential to help transform the agricultural traditions of the Bedouin into present and future strategies for coping economically and culturally.

In conjunction with strengthening the educational system's resources, services and programs, there is a need for developing stronger school-community ties and parental involvement. The future of Bedouin education is dependent upon the Bedouin community becoming more involved with the programs, policies and decision-making of their schools. This is a matter that is too important to be left to the initiative of individual principals or schools; it should be taken up on a district-wide level and should include training for teachers, administrators and community leaders. There is an urgent need for short and long-range educational planning in general and in relation to the retention of girls in particular. This planning should be done in consultation with Bedouin leaders and educators in order to make the educational system more acceptable and relevant to the Bedouin community.

In order to achieve the goals discussed above, the Bedouin educational system must have professionally qualified and experienced educators and administrators from the community who are able to plan for and provide Bedouin children and youth with the education and skills needed for their future in Israel. Clearly, a new set of policies and practices must be put into action if the Bedouin are to become self-sufficient, contributing members of their own community and of the larger society.


מאפית-
הראשונים

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