

Human rights and education: The case of the Negev Bedouins

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ABSTRACT

This paper builds upon research conducted in 1977, presented at the WCCES World Congress in London (published in Bernstein-Tarrow, 1978), as well as subsequent research and publications in the field of human rights and human rights education. Based on the assumption (reinforced by numerous international agreements) that education is a human right and that education about human rights is their ultimate sanction, the paper analyzes the situation of the Bedouins of the Negev 30 years later, examining the relationship between demographic factors, socioeconomic factors and political issues, on the one hand, and human rights in general and the right to education in particular, on the other. In terms of Israel's responsibilities as signatory to various international agreements, assuring equal rights to its citizens, consideration is given to such issues as educational objectives, budget, staffing, dropouts and the role of non-governmental organizations dedicated to ensuring the right to education and education about human rights.

Introduction

In 1977, at the WCCES World Congress in London, I presented the paper "Education of the Negev Bedouin in the context of radical socio-economic change," later published as Bernstein-Tarrow (1978). Active involvement in the field of human rights education resulted in numerous articles in this field and in what has been considered seminal work on the relationship between education and human rights, based on the assumption:

...that human rights are held equally by all persons simply by virtue of being human; that they go beyond the basic rights of life and liberty to include cultural, economic, social and political rights essential for the maintenance of human dignity ... and that education is not only encompassed within the concept of human rights, but is the ultimate

sanction and guarantee of all the others (Ray and Bernstein-Tarrow, 1987:3).

Thus, not only is education a right “guaranteed” by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as subsequent covenants and conventions, but it is only through education that people become aware of their rights and empowered to insist on their fulfillment. In regard to the Negev Bedouins, any analysis of how they are progressing in their struggle for education as a human right must also consider how they are faring regarding related political, economic, social and cultural rights that impact education, as well as how they are using their knowledge of their rights in an effort to attain them.

The following provides a brief background of Bedouin history under different political regimes—Ottoman, British Mandate and State of Israel—with particular emphasis on the genesis and non-resolution of the “land issue.” It is clear that this issue relates to political, economic, social and cultural rights and, particularly, to the right to education. Comparing the situation today with that analyzed 30 years ago, I highlight both advances and lack of progress, leaving the reader to assess how well teachers, parents, administrators and politicians are doing in providing Bedouin children with the right to education.

Background

Bedouin history is too long for more than a brief overview. Most scholars agree that Bedouins have inhabited the Negev since at least the fifth century. Abu-Rabia identified three known migration periods into this area, in the seventh, ninth and 16th–17th centuries. The last period witnessed tribal clashes establishing power and territorial rights (Abu-Rabia, 2006). Until the late 1860s, Ottoman rulers paid scant attention to the Bedouins. With the construction of the Suez Canal (1858–1869), Ottoman authorities took measures to impose order in the Negev, intervening in internal disorders, establishing an economic and administrative center (including a post office and livestock market) on the site of Byzantine Beer Sheva, appointing an important sheikh as mayor and building an elaborate mosque, a water system and the first school for Bedouin children, in which Turkish was the language of instruction, and which lasted until the end of World War I (Abu-Rabia, 2001).

A critical legacy of the Ottoman era that has socioeconomic, political and educational ramifications to the present day, originates in 1858 Turkish law defining as *mawat* (dead land) uncultivated land that did not belong to anyone and was located more than 1.5 miles from the nearest government-planned township (Falah, 1989). This constraint, combined with Bedouin tradition, kept most Bedouins from registering their land during the Ottoman era, lasting until 1917. During the subsequent Mandate era (1917–1948):

The Bedouin did not register their land in Tabu (the Land Registry Office) for the following reasons: (1) fear of the burden of government taxes; (2) aversion to publicizing details about private property; and (3) failure to see the need to record land on a piece of paper as proof of ownership. In that period, proof was, literally, through the sword (Abu-Rabia, 2002:205).

In this same period, the Jewish National Fund (established in 1901) actively pursued a policy of land purchases in Palestine, largely from absentee Arab landowners, for settlement of the Jewish population during the remaining years of Ottoman rule and throughout the era of the British Mandate. In 1947, the United Nations recommended partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, a plan rejected by Arab leaders. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and its victory over five invading Arab armies in what Israel calls the War of Independence marked the beginning of events referred to by the Arabs as *Al Naqba* (the Catastrophe) and the development of two totally different (Israeli/Arab) narratives. For the Arab population as a whole, this abrupt change in status from a majority with national aspirations in mandatory Palestine to one of a dominated minority within the Israeli state was, and remains, traumatic.

In 1948, the Bedouins constituted the vast majority of the population of the Negev (*Naqab* in Arabic), numbering about 60,000–100,000 people. After the war, there were only about 11,000 Bedouin Arabs left in the Negev–Naqab, the rest having left or been expelled to Jordan and Egypt (the Gaza Strip and Sinai). Those who remained were divided into 19 tribes, whose heads were recognized as sheikhs by the government (Abu-Rabia, 2002). Twelve of these tribes were immediately removed to a “reservation” where, under military governance, there was large-scale confinement to the designated area.

Abu-Saad points out the imposition of curfews, special permits required to leave villages, physical and administrative separation of Jews and Arabs, and a separate military court system with no right of appeal. He describes control techniques including lack of a representative share in policy-making and planning, dependence on the Jewish sector for employment, and co-optation of Bedouin elite who determined appointment of teachers, as well as access to secondary education, colleges and universities. He claims that, although the military government was dismantled in 1966, the government developed other means of maintaining a strategy of segmentation, dependence and co-optation (through the creation of urban settlements), thus perpetuating the legacy of the military government (Abu-Saad, 2006b).

Confined to the above-described military controlled area from 1948 to 1966, followed by removal (starting in 1968) to government-planned urban settlements, the Negev Bedouins experienced the impact of migration in a most powerful way: without actually leaving the land they considered to be theirs, they lived in a “new” country surrounded by an alien culture, with borders and boundaries defined by the

new inhabitants. Thus, “they arrived in a new and strange land without the physical journey” (Givati-Teerling, 2007:Introduction).

As those who refused to move off what they considered to be their land continued living in what the government refers to as “unrecognized villages,” they were not—and still are not—entitled to basic services. The provision of services internationally understood as essential for health and education (such as paved roads, running water, garbage collection, sewage, medical clinics and schools) is contingent upon relinquishing claims to land and acceding to a policy of moving into government-planned settlements. Currently, it is illegal to build permanent structures in “unrecognized villages”; those who do so risk heavy fines and home demolitions. It is also illegal to graze flocks or plant crops on land that the Bedouins consider theirs, while the state regards them as interlopers on government land and thus justifies crop destruction through chemical spraying. As will be seen below, this affects more than 40% of the current Bedouin population. The rest of the Bedouin population of the Negev resides in the seven government-planned “permanent settlements” (or “recognized villages”) built from the late 1960s to the 1990s.

From 1967 to the present, the government has been attempting to move the Bedouins into these planned settlements with the stated objective of providing municipal services—including education. Excluded from consultation, 40%-60% of Bedouin families affected have resisted this policy, claiming its objective is to secure land rather than supply services. Factors that have had a major impact on the Bedouin community’s right to education include:

- educational policies towards Arab citizens in general
- a slow-to-develop interest in education on the part of the Bedouin community
- land acquisition policies allocating social and educational services only to those Bedouins willing to relinquish land claims (with what they view as minimal compensation) and relocate into concentrated urban settlements
- demographic issues: keeping up with a population that doubles every 13–15 years
- geographic issues: providing services over a vast geographic area containing widely scattered small settlements.

Although the government claims these permanent (government-planned) settlements were formed in order to facilitate provision of services, such as medical clinics and education, to what had been a nomadic or semi-nomadic population, these urban settlements were created without involvement of the Bedouins themselves, and the outcome, according to Bedouin civic organizations, has not been positive. The towns were planned as urban centers, giving little or no consideration to the traditional Bedouin-Arab way of life. Consequently, the forced urbanization of this population has been disastrous: unemployment is high, and the Bedouin-Arab

towns rank among the country's ten poorest municipalities (Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, 2006:7).¹

In January 2004, the Abu Basma Regional Council was established by government decision. It operates under the direction of a Jewish former director of the Interior ministry with three Bedouins in administrative positions. It has responsibility for both recognized and unrecognized villages. Currently, there are nine newly recognized settlements (30,000 people),² with two more about to be recognized. Including the 30–45 still unrecognized settlements, there are about 80,000 people under their jurisdiction. The original seven government-planned townships³ operate independently, outside of their jurisdiction, and are responsible for social services including (since 2006) all educational services.

Demographic and socioeconomic factors

In 2008, the population estimates of Bedouins in the Negev vary between 150,000 and 200,000, doubling every 13–15 years (depending on which set of statistics one consults.) The birth rate of Negev Bedouin is one of highest in the world, with 56% of the current population under age 14! According to Abu-Saad, the Bedouins have twice as many children and half the per capita income than the Jewish sector, with a population growth rate of 4.5% (Abu-Saad, 1997) or 5.6% (Abu-Saad, 1995). Taking into account the rate of population growth, the forecast for the increase of the Bedouin population by the year 2020 is well over 350,000. Most significant for those concerned with educational issues is that almost half the current population is in the cohort of preschool and elementary school children (47% under the age of 12). Another 11% are in the age cohort of secondary school. Obviously, the educational system must absorb large numbers of students (figures supplied by Municipality of Rahat, 2007).

Based on information from the Abu Basma Regional Council (in 2006), more than 66% of the population is between the ages of 0–18, approximately 60% of the population lives in the existing government-planned townships and over 60% of Bedouin families live below the poverty line. Clearly, the large number of preschool and school-age children and low socioeconomic status has a direct impact on education. Table 1 compares the socioeconomic ranking of the government-planned urban Bedouin settlements to Jewish towns in the same geographic area. There can be little doubt that the government-planned townships created (as claimed by Israeli authorities) to better serve the Bedouin population are at the bottom of the scale. If statistics for the unrecognized settlements were available, they would, of course, fall far below those of the urban government-planned townships.

Table 1. Socioeconomic ranking of Bedouin and neighboring Jewish localities in the Negev

Locality		Rank
Bedouin Towns	Ksayifa	1
	Tel-Sheva	2
	Rahat	3
	A'rara Banegev	4
	Segev-Shalom	5
	Laqiya	7
	Hura	8
Jewish Towns	Dimona	95
	Arad	109
	Beer Sheva	118
	Metar	193
	Lehavim	195
	Omer	197

Note: 1 denotes the *lowest* ranking among the 198 local authorities in Israel.
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2003).

Givati-Teerling claims that 65% of the Bedouin population live below the poverty line and that forced lifestyle changes have impacted a variety of aspects of Bedouin society, including education:

Through forced alteration of their traditional lifestyle and the unnatural pace of sedentarization, the Bedouin community lost power over their traditional spaces, livelihood and social structure. The setting in which their culture had been rooted for the entire depth of their collective memory was destroyed. The changes have led to instabilities in social structure, economic patterns, political dimensions and gender roles—forces which have had their impact on attitudes towards education and its role within Bedouin society (Givati-Teerling, 2007:2).

Abu-Saad (2001) points out that, despite the government's stated aim of improving and modernizing the lives of the Negev Bedouins through its resettlement program, the Negev Bedouin community has the lowest socioeconomic status in Israel. Unemployment is estimated at 55% of the work force (30% men and 80% women), and those who are employed are in low-status, low-paying occupations. All sources agree that the Bedouin community has the lowest socioeconomic status of any group of Israeli citizens.

The Israeli government, however (in 2006), claims that they have allocated more than NIS 1 billion to improve the infrastructure of existing Bedouin towns. The largest town (Rahat) is to be doubled in size with 10,000 new housing units and land allocated for women's employment centers, parks and playgrounds. Further, "All planning and implementation are in cooperation and coordination with the local Bedouin population ... represented by Bedouin members of the local and district committees for planning and construction" ("The Beduin of the Negev," 2006:4).

Current political issues

The land

Abu-Saad, Lithwick and Abu-Saad (2004) identify the issues of land and urbanization as the most profound source of ill will between the Negev Bedouins and the Israeli state. The government, seeking land for settlement, security and military purposes, has attempted to buy most of the land claimed by the Bedouins—unsuccessfully, for the most part, due to what the latter view as unfair terms.

Israel argues that all desert land belongs to the state by virtue of the *mawat* (dead) category of land title introduced in 1858 by the Ottoman authorities. Israel will only acknowledge land ownership in the Negev if a landowner can present a document issued by the British Mandate administration in 1921, a period when hardly any Bedouins registered their landholdings due to traditional reluctance to cooperate with external authorities, fear of taxation and lack of concern that anyone would pose a challenge to their continued use of the land (Koeller, 2006:39).

Today, most of the land in the Negev is held by the Israel Lands Authority (ILA). Of the approximately 2 million dunams⁴ cultivated by the Bedouins before the establishment of Israel, the ILA currently holds 1.82 million. After the repeal of military rule in 1966, most Bedouins continued to live in the former closed area. Some tried to use their original land for grazing, coming into conflict with the authorities. Further conflict occurred after the peace treaty with Egypt and withdrawal from Sinai, in reference to the site chosen for construction of new alternative airfields on what the Bedouins consider their land. As noted by Maddrell, such conflict is not unique to the Bedouin-Israeli situation:

Conflict and great hardship is frequently caused to minorities and indigenous peoples by the unilateral imposition of a “modern” legal framework often demanding documentation that previously had been unnecessary and therefore non-existent (Maddrell, 1990:1).

The government’s viewpoint is that a comparison of Bedouins in Israel to that in Arab countries indicates that Israeli Bedouins “enjoy conditions that their brethren lack, mainly in two areas: welfare and land ownership” (Ben-David, n.d.:4). Further, in the 1970s, “Israel let the Negev Bedouin register their land claims and issued certificates as to the size of the tracts claimed. These certificates served as the basis for the ‘right of possession’ later granted by the government” (Ben-David, n.d.:4).

However, an alternative view is expressed by civil rights activists and Bedouin leaders:

...the policy of establishing “planned Bedouin townships” evolved as a step serving the state objective of gaining control of Bedouin land rather than “modernizing” or “westernizing” the Bedouin community. The situation regarding the provision of basic services in the existing townships is highly unsatisfactory and in no way comparable to that in any of the neighboring Jewish towns in the region (Falah, 1989:88).

For the Bedouins, whose livelihoods traditionally derived from livestock and agriculture, the disregard of requests for the creation of agricultural settlements similar to those established for the Jewish community and their relocation into strictly urban settlements was especially traumatic. This was compounded by the failure to receive adequate infrastructure—local industry, roads or public transport to areas of employment, banks, community centers and adequate social services:

In their gradual transition from a nomadic to a more urban lifestyle, [the Bedouins] have faced major challenges. Their communities have high rates of crime and unemployment. Bedouins have considerably worse health and education services than their fellow Israelis. And their infrastructure can be appalling or even nonexistent, especially in “unrecognized villages.”... (“Unrecognized villages” is the term used for Bedouin areas that Israeli authorities do not officially acknowledge. Israel does not provide these areas with basic services, hoping that families will agree to move to one of the “recognized” Bedouin villages and towns in the Negev.) (Kraft, 2007:18).

As one researcher points out, there has been overwhelming inequality in every sphere—economic, social, cultural and educational:

There is simply no doubt whatever that the guilt for the failure of urbanization belongs squarely with the governments of Israel present and past. The programs they have prepared and continue to prepare do not reflect the needs or interests of the Bedouin community. The Bedouin have had no part whatever in the planning process. Moreover, government commitments to redress distortions in priorities and funding, and government promises to end systematic discrimination, have for the most part not been honored (Abu-Saad, 2003:7).

Equality(?) as citizens

Swirski and Hasson note that there are at least three areas in which Bedouins living in unrecognized villages are treated differently from all of Israel's other citizens:

- Relations between them and the state are not based on a direct link, but mediated through special institutions.
- They do not enjoy independent local government institutions.
- As they do not have an official address, they lack the right to vote, to run for local office or to register a precise address on their ID card.

Moreover, they exist in a kind of legal-political bubble: they are forbidden to erect permanent housing, excluded from local government and prevented from receiving full government services or buying/selling a home. In addition, those living in government-planned townships (recognized villages) exist in a political-economic bubble, deprived of adequate infrastructure and employment opportunities and excluded from government development plans (Swirski and Hasson, 2006).

As a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Israel is required to submit regular reports to the UN committee charged with monitoring the parties' adherence to its principles. Responding to the report submitted by Israel in 2003, the UN committee response stated:

The Committee continues to be concerned about the situation of Bedouins residing in Israel, and in particular those living in villages that are still unrecognized (1998 concluding observations, para. 28). Despite measures by the State party to close the gap between the living conditions of Jews and Bedouins in the Negev, the quality of living and housing conditions of the Bedouins continue to be significantly lower, with limited or no access to water, electricity and sanitation. Moreover, they continue to be subjected on a regular basis to land confiscations, house demolitions, fines for building "illegally," destruction of agricultural crops, fields and trees, and systematic harassment and persecution by the Green Patrol, in order to force Bedouins to resettle in "townships." The Committee is also concerned that the present

compensation scheme for Bedouins who agree to resettle in “townships” is inadequate (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2003:Section D, para. 27).

Also responding to Israel’s report, a coalition of the Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages⁵ and the Arab Human Rights Association⁶ point out that 85% of the Negev is currently zoned as off-limits to the Bedouins, preventing them from practicing their traditional pastoral lifestyle or economy. The denial of access to water, combined with the policy of crop destruction (on lands defined by Israel as belonging to the state) and the demolition of houses built without permits (as no permits are available in unrecognized settlements), have condemned the Bedouins to poverty, hunger and unemployment—which are largely invisible, as the unrecognized villages are not registered in government statistics (Arab Association for Human Rights, 2003).

According to a 2006 report filed by a coalition including the Regional Council for the Arab Unrecognized Villages of the Negev and Physicians for Human Rights⁷:

The State report misrepresents the real State policies towards the Arab-Bedouin minority in the Negev-*Naqab*. Despite the attempts to present a considerable improvement in the elimination of racial discrimination against members of this group, State policies, and mainly those regarding the social, economic and cultural rights (protected by Article 5 of the ICERD), remain racially discriminatory (Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, 2006:5).

The right to education

Regarding the right to education, Bedouin children should be protected by a variety of international agreements, as well as by Israeli legislation. One author enumerates some of these official documents that should apply to Bedouin as well as Jewish citizens of Israel:

So, Israel has brought “civilization” to the Middle East with the Compulsory Education Law (1949) mandating the right of every Israeli child to 12 years of free education, and the State Education Law (1953). Israel also has instituted provisions under the Principle of Equality, the Special Education Law (1988), and the Pupils’ Rights Law (2000). Further, Israel has signed a host of international laws and treaties guaranteeing the universally recognized right to education, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2001), Israel's Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty (1992), and the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1961) requiring that if Israel has separate educational systems for Jews and Palestinian Arabs, the two systems must maintain the same standard of education (Brous, 2005:258).

Israel has been singled out repeatedly by various United Nations agencies for not living up to the spirit or the letter of international agreements. The Israeli Ambassador to the UN, however, commenting on the disregard of human rights violations on the part of numerous signatories to these documents (some of whom are represented on the Human Rights Council), noted that:

Since inception, the Council has focused primarily on Israel, subjecting it to 12 discriminatory, one-sided resolutions and three special sessions. This reflects nothing less than the immoral, automatic majority enjoyed by some (Statement by Ambassador Dan Gillerman, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, Third Committee, Agenda Item 65, Report of the Human Rights Council, November 6, 2007).

How have these international agreements affected the Bedouin children of the unrecognized villages in the Negev? Abu-Saad claims: "Government officials have used the education system as a means of control to force Bedouin Arabs living in the unrecognized villages to move to the failed permanent towns set up for them" (Abu-Saad, 2004a:1). Moreover,

According to the law, the government is responsible for providing Bedouin children with education; however, it has subordinated this responsibility to its goal of concentrating the Bedouin Arab population in designated settlements (Abu-Saad, 2003:113).

The Bedouin Education Authority (BEA) was established in 1981 to enforce compulsory education law in the unrecognized villages. It was charged with setting up, building and maintaining schools; assuring appropriate and adequate teaching personnel; providing furniture, equipment, water and teaching materials; and handling student registration (Swirski and Hasson, 2006). In 1998, a special Investigatory Committee on the Bedouin Educational System in the Negev presented a report requested by the Minister of Education and submitted to the General Director of that ministry. The committee's main recommendation was that Bedouin education should receive equitable material and human resources—modern facilities, a full range of educational services, special programs, identification of

gifted and disabled children and provision of appropriate programs for them. Thus, the government was called upon to:

- recognize the needs of unrecognized settlements and build facilities
- train and increase the number of qualified teachers
- provide free preschool education for children aged 3–4
- develop and implement programs for parents
- address the dropout issue (consider separate education for girls and boys; hire truant officers, counselors and social workers)
- update curriculum and textbooks, making them more relevant
- institute special enrichment programs
- provide technical and agricultural education
- develop stronger ties between schools and the community and enhance parental involvement
- include Bedouin educators and community leaders in the southern district Bedouin Educational Authority (Katz et al., 1998).

Based on the review of extensive literature that has accumulated, statistics available from various sources, field work including school visitations and interviews conducted in 2007, I can conclude that there has been progress on the first two items. As noted below, the newly formed Abu Basma Regional Council has begun to respond further, to some degree, to the needs of the unrecognized settlements. As of 2006, the Council has assumed responsibility for education in all areas under its jurisdiction and has initiated a school-building program. Local teachers are being prepared at two teacher-training institutions in the Negev, although population growth still requires the employment of large numbers of Arab teachers from the north.

The Ministry of Education now has a special department for Bedouin education (apart from the department dealing with Arab education in general) and has appointed a Bedouin (from the north) as its director. It is clear that, while the number of schools, classrooms, schoolchildren, teachers and others serving these children has grown exponentially, so has the population of the region (from an estimated 11,000 in 1948 to 150,000–200,000 today). Thus, the growth in provision of facilities and services merely reflects growth in the school population. The authorities are struggling to keep up with the population growth, in an era when budgetary constraints have led to a strike in the Jewish sector that closed all secondary schools for more than six weeks of the 2007–2008 school year. According to one educator:

In recent years, there has been a huge expansion of the educational system in response to an approximately 6% growth in birth rate. In each village, there needs to be a new school every year. About 60%–70% of the population is under age 16. The system simply cannot cope with such growth (Interview, College President, June 2007).

Yet, “while accessibility to education has improved greatly over the last 30 years for Negev Bedouin children (and especially for girls), the quality and success rate of the Bedouin schools remains very low” (Abu-Saad, 1997:35). Abu-Saad cites the main problems as unqualified teachers, weak links between school and community, a curriculum that is irrelevant to students and the “barrier” of the *bagrut* (matriculation examination), as the low rate of success eliminates incentive for completing high school.

The Center for Bedouin Studies at Ben Gurion University estimated in 2004 that one third of the classrooms in the seven then recognized localities for Bedouins in the Negev were unsound. Moreover, in both recognized and unrecognized villages, there were fewer libraries, sports and recreational facilities, laboratories, health agencies and social service agencies than in the Jewish sector. Many unrecognized villages lack a school of any kind, and, according to some reports, more than 6,000 Bedouin children must travel dozens of kilometers to school every day. Long travel distances from the local village to the nearest educational institutions tends to disparately impact the ability of girls to attend school (Coursen-Neff, 2004).

As of 2007, the Director of the Abu Basma Regional Council points out that nine of the formerly “unrecognized” settlements have been “recognized,” and educational facilities have been provided in all of them. Two additional settlements are about to be recognized and provided with educational facilities, with more to follow. Since education was added to its responsibilities in 2006, the Council is now in charge of 24 elementary schools with a population of 12,117 students, 122 preschools and kindergartens serving 3,650 children, and two high schools serving 305 pupils in grades 9–12. According to the Director, transportation is provided for 20,550 pupils within the area.

Based on fieldwork in 2007, there is evidence of current and future building. Three schools have been completed, including a state-of-the art, two-story high school that opened in 2007 in the newly recognized settlement of Abu Krinat. Its electricity is supplied by generator, water is available on site and a road is under construction. (A visit to this school confirmed the existence of computer and science laboratories, but these were still empty of equipment at the time.) Another high school about to open will further supplement the existing high schools in the original government-planned settlements of Rahat, Laqiya and Tel-Sheva.

To overcome the reluctance of fathers to allow girls to attend secondary school, the technological high school in Hura offers an option of single-sex facilities. The school (grades 9–12) employs 25 certified teachers, all teaching the subjects they were trained for, according to the Director. More than half the staff members are Bedouins; the rest are Arabs from the north. Curriculum includes options for nursing and electrical professions. The school has computers, a laboratory for mechanics and automobile repair and a library. It also has a program for children with special needs (primarily in reading and writing) in a separate building. According to the Director, while the top students want to go on to university to prepare for careers in high-tech

industries, the psychometric examination (the Israeli equivalent of the SAT, determining eligibility to specific universities and programs) appears to be even more of a barrier than the *bagrut* (matriculation exam).

Israel's formal educational objectives (established in 1949 and amended in 2000) continue to emphasize Jewish values, history and culture, with no parallel aims for the education of Arabs in Israel based on their heritage (Abu-Saad, 2006a). Alienation of students is the norm as, within the schools, there is little attention to their own (Bedouin/Arab) culture (Abu-Saad, 2005). Confirming that disregard of the Palestinian-Arab narrative lessens the relevance of educational experience for all Arab students, Brous notes that most of what Bedouin youngsters learn in school will never be of real use to them. "Despite extensive High Court rulings, reports from the State comptroller, media exposés and the continuous work of NGO pressure groups, Israel has failed to change its ethnocentric educational system" (Brous, 2005:260).

Abu-Saad highlights discrimination in budget allocation from the Ministry of Education, which spends more per child in the Jewish sector even though these schools receive additional state and state-sponsored private funding for special programs. He claims that five-year plans of the Ministry of Education designed to correct imbalances were never fully implemented and, in any case, would not be enough to equalize the gap between the two systems without some form of affirmative action (Abu-Saad, 2004b). While there are Bedouin school administrators, in 1995 there were no Bedouin educators involved in policy, curriculum, resource management and/or budgetary decisions at the level of the Ministry of Education (Abu-Saad, 1995). Recently, however, a special department for Bedouin Education was formed, under the direction of Dr. Muhmad Al-Haip, a Bedouin from the north.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Israel regularly submits status reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In its 2004 report, the government acknowledged that it spends about 60% of what it spends on Jewish education on the education of Arab children. In addition, at every grade level, fewer teaching hours are allocated for Arab children. The teacher-pupil ratio is significantly lower in Jewish schools, and the number of kindergarten children per full-time teacher in Arab schools (39:3) was double that in Jewish kindergartens (19:8). Data show that each year officials at the Ministry of Education consciously decided to allocate core education funds unequally, and each year the Knesset approved a budget that makes this unequal allocation explicit (Coursen-Neff, 2004:750).

Keeping children in school is one of the biggest problems facing educators in the Bedouin sector. Yet counselors trained to deal with students who have dropped out or are about to drop out of school (and their parents) are rare in the Bedouin community. According to Coursen-Neff:

In January 2005, the Supreme Court found that counselor positions were assigned unequally to Bedouin towns in the Negev and that the difference in dropout rate between Jewish and Bedouin pupils made that inequity even more severe (2004:785).

Education about human rights: The role of non-governmental and other organizations

Frustrated by the slow pace of change within the system and empowered by educated members of their own community, numerous non-governmental organizations have arisen in recent years to educate the Bedouins about their rights and to press for action in terms of political economic, sociocultural and educational rights. Comprised of activists in both Bedouin and Jewish sectors, these groups have utilized the media, demonstrations—including a tent pitched in front of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament)—and legal briefs through the judicial system of Israel. The following is a brief list.

- On an international level, Teachers Without Borders attempts to “bridge the education divide with programs that focus on women’s leadership, after-school programming, teacher training and literacy,” while the Bernard Van Leer Foundation has several projects through the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development. Their Parents as Partners program attempts to bridge the cultural distances between the home and the formal institutions by setting up mother’s groups and cooperative preschools, using culturally appropriate learning materials and run by Bedouin women trained as counselors. They have also piloted community playgrounds in unrecognized villages.
- Physicians for Human Rights (Israel branch) is actively engaged in a campaign to connect all residents of unrecognized villages to a water supply. They point out the direct link between water accessibility and infant mortality, whose rate among the Bedouins of the Negev is the highest in Israel. They note that 80,000 citizens are denied their basic right to water and that the State of Israel is using this right as a weapon against its citizens to further state policies related to land acquisition. They ask that the Ministry of Health recognize the right to water as an inseparable part of the right to health and initiate actions with the agencies responsible for it by law. The residents of unrecognized villages also lack sewage lines, garbage collection services, electricity, roads, health services and educational services. Physicians for Human Rights has also

been active in demanding additional medical clinics for the unrecognized villages.

- In 2001, the Adalah organization, together with seven villages and non-governmental organizations, petitioned the Supreme Court about the denial of their right to water. The court rejected the petition, adopting the policy of the state, which refuses to recognize the villages as a collective entity. Thus, the villages are still not connected to water—or electricity. The electric company refuses to officially hook the unrecognized villages to the grid. Therefore, there is no street lighting and no way to refrigerate food or medicine without individual generators.
- Shatil (The New Israel Fund's Empowerment and Training Center for Social Change Organizations in Israel) supports a Bedouin education campaign to promote preschool education and mobile library services, to improve inadequate facilities, to empower Bedouin women, and to address the high dropout rates of Bedouin secondary school students. The Coalition for the Advancement of Bedouin Education, including civil rights activists from over 30 organizations, was brought together by Shatil. Utilizing an effective combination of advocacy, media and community activism, they have achieved the opening of new schools, physical improvements to existing facilities and new allocations of millions of shekels. In 2006, Shatil's Umbrella Forum for Bedouin Education in the Negev convinced the High Court of Justice to demand new and safer roads to schools in the Negev's unrecognized villages. While cosmetic changes were made, forum coordinator Dr. Awad Abu Freih claims that nothing was really changed. In November 2007, the forum organized a strike, closing ten schools representing 9,000 students in unrecognized Bedouin villages, to protest the death of child run over by a school bus on a narrow road.
- The Adva Center makes detailed analyses of the implications of the government's budget for the various sectors of Israeli society, assists other organizations promoting social change and publishes extensive reports dealing with inequalities.
- The Parents Committees of Five Schools and Umbrella Forum for Bedouin Education has filed formal legal appeals and has gained immediate repair of safety hazards in five schools, as well as a timetable for fulfilling other demands, including a new elementary school in Ksayifa.
- Mosawa: The Advocacy Center for Arab Palestinian Citizens of Israel strives to effect change in Israeli government policies and practices that appear to discriminate against Arab citizens. A

primary area of activity has been budget analysis and identification of inequities as they are expressed in terms of budget allocations.

- The Association of Bedouin Women to Promote Education works to enable women to access and complete higher education. At the village level they have organized mobile libraries, tutoring and textbook exchange.
- Gush Shalom is working through the judicial system to fight crop destruction.
- In addition to these non-governmental organizations, a central goal of the Center for Bedouin Studies and Development (established at Ben Gurion University in 1997) has been to increase the number of Bedouin university students and graduates, with an emphasis on women. During the 1990s, there was a significant rise in the number of male Bedouin students and graduates. By the end of the 1990s, the number of female graduates had increased to 22, primarily as a result of a (privately funded) pilot intervention program that began in 1993 and provided financial and academic support to a small group of female Bedouin students. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of female Bedouins with Bachelors degrees jumped to 112, representing a more than sixfold increase from the number of graduates in the previous five years (Abu-Saad, 2007:1).

Education as the ultimate sanction of human rights: Conclusions

What is the situation in regard to human rights for the Negev Bedouin citizens of Israel? In particular, is the right to education being implemented as fully as possible?

Certainly, the newly implemented Regional Council is attempting to build schools in a “better-late-than-never” situation. Yet, this is still being carried out under a Jewish administrator with very limited participation of the Bedouins themselves. Considering the inattention to provision of schools for children of unrecognized villages over the last decades, compounded by the Bedouins having one of the highest birth rates in the world, there is difficulty in keeping up with the needed physical space. Schools still appear to be inadequately supplied with libraries, playgrounds, computers and science equipment.

There is still a great need to deal with the problem of a society that has not had a tradition of taking charge of education, but rather tends to accept educational services that have come from authorities—whether Ottoman, British and now Israeli. While Jewish municipalities and parents are supplementing the budget of the Ministry of Education, to provide enrichment education and materials, this has not been inherent in Arab culture in general, nor in Bedouin culture in particular. It must be remembered that this society has only recently begun to value formal education

and this is only true for some parts of the society and not yet universally valued for girls.

In terms of economic and social rights, it is clear that what is needed is some kind of affirmative action program providing greater, rather than lesser, budgetary allocations to this sector, combined with community and parent programs to encourage participation and responsibility. Concurrently, there is a need for programs to build the economic self-sufficiency of Bedouin men and women, i.e., provision of employment opportunities, transportation to employment centers, opportunities for those who wish to continue their agricultural/pastoral lifestyles, vocational training for youth and the like. In the words of Abu-Saad:

To fulfill this responsibility vis-à-vis the Bedouin community would require re-visioning development ideology that not only includes the Bedouin, but that the Bedouin are partners in shaping, that entitles them to the use of land and other national resources on a basis equitable to that of all other citizens of the state, and that provides them with multiple educational and development opportunities, including modern pastoralism and agriculture (Abu-Saad, 2006a:156).

Israeli authorities are attempting to meet the problem of shortage of teachers. Yet, there are still too many teachers from the north, who view their positions as temporary, and in some cases do not invest in improving conditions in their schools or with the community, and even have been demeaning of Bedouin parents. They could certainly benefit from programs to build knowledge and respect for Bedouin tradition, history and culture and should be encouraged to connect with parents and the community.

Educational objectives, curriculum and textbooks continue to reflect the government aim to build loyalty to the State of Israel. At every level, however, all three are alienating Bedouin students and need to be revised to also respect and reflect the Arab/Bedouin narrative. As Abu-Saad states:

One can only question whether this situation of discriminatory and antagonistic separation is, indeed, in the long-term interests of the state, which, notwithstanding its ideology and mythology, is in fact a multi-ethnic state, with an indigenous minority that makes up nearly one fifth of the population.... [A]s the sense of bitterness and alienation grows within the Palestinian Arab population, so does the threat of political and civil instability (Abu-Saad, 2004b:124).

The State of Israel passed a Compulsory Education Law in the earliest period of its existence. Cognizant of the difference in valuing formal education between Israeli Jewish and Bedouin societies, the authorities must still address issues of

erratic attendance and dropouts through provision of parent education and involvement, school counselors, truant officers and adequate special education services to ensure the right of these children to education. Further, attention must be directed at the culturally discriminatory entrance examinations and financial difficulties that act as a barrier for many Bedouin youth to continue into higher education.

Most important is the relationship between the right to education and the conflict between the government and the Bedouins over land ownership and use. There must be an end to the practice of home demolition and crop destruction, denying Bedouin citizens the right to adequate housing and means of earning a living. However this is ultimately resolved, children of unrecognized settlements must not be held hostage to the land issue. Every unrecognized settlement should be provided with access to electricity, water and transportation, which would honor their rights to employment, health and a reasonable standard of living. Every unrecognized settlement should be provided with adequate facilities, materials and staff for elementary education and transportation to appropriate facilities for secondary and post-secondary education. Furthermore, the Bedouin community must be helped to deal with issues and practices that contribute to their remaining at the bottom of every socioeconomic index—such as unbridled population growth, polygamy, unemployment and violence.

Finally, *all* of the above must be carried out with the involvement of *locally respected* leaders, not with a few token and often co-opted government-approved and appointed Bedouin from the “right” tribe or with the “right” connections. Only then will education as a human right be fully implemented.

Education *about* human rights needs to reach into the Bedouin community from preschool through post-secondary, community, adult and parent education programs. Human rights education requires a climate respectful of human rights in schools, communities and in interaction with authorities, as well as knowledge of rights “guaranteed” by national legislation and international agreements. Clearly, any meaningful advancement will require assisting the Bedouin community in utilizing all appropriate means to achieve these rights.

NOTES

¹ The forum (*Dukium* in Hebrew) promotes understanding and cooperation between the Jewish and Arab populations of the Negev.

² According to the Abu Basma Regional Council, the nine recognized settlements are: El Sayed, Tarabin, Abu Krinat, Kaser a Ser, Drigat, Abu Kaf, Beer Adag, Al Arash and Mariet.

³ The permanent government-planned settlements are: Tel-Sheva, A'rara-Banegev, Laqiya, Rahat, Hura, Segev-Shalom and Ksayifa.

⁴ A dunam is an area of measurement used in Ottoman lands and equal to 1000m².

⁵ The Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages (also known as the Regional Council for the Arab Unrecognized Villages of the Negev) is a non-governmental community organization representing residents of 45 unrecognized villages in the Negev. These villages contain 500–5,000 inhabitants, for a total of 70,000 people ineligible for municipal services and representation.

⁶ The Arab Human Rights Association is a non-governmental organization in the service of human rights for the Palestinian minority in Israel.

⁷ Physicians for Human Rights is an organization of health professionals dedicated to eradicating abuses of human rights.

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