

The Hebrew online media's treatment of Arab citizens in the Negev

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the online Hebrew media's representation of the Arab population of the Negev. It analyzes the content of articles relating to this population and the online responses of those who read these reports. I argue that the Arab population of the Negev suffers from double discrimination in the media due, on the one hand, to their exclusion from media coverage in general and, on the other hand, to the inflammatory stereotypes presented to Israeli media consumers when they are covered in the media. Furthermore, I show how positive, or even neutral, media attention is rarely given the Arab population of the Negev; instead, the media coverage of this group is characterized primarily by prejudice, stigmas and generalizations. This distracts the debate from the essence of the problem (the issue of lands) between the Negev Arabs and the government and adds new layers to the crisis by exaggerating the threat posed by this population.

Introduction

In his examination of the coverage of weaker political groups by major media outlets, Gadi Wolfsfeld develops the idea of "entrance through the back door." According to him, minority groups attract mainstream media limelight through irregular conduct, while representatives of majority groups get into the media through the main entrance by normative modes of behavior (Wolfsfeld, 1997:1).

This idea sheds light on the style of coverage received in Israel by Arab society (considered a marginalized sector in terms of mainstream media reporting) in general, and by the Arab population of the Negev in particular. It is interesting that, when these minority groups do enter the realm of mainstream media, and especially when their leaders appear, they are almost invariably forced to play by the rules of the majority in terms of presentation and discussion. It is the representatives of the majority who usually set the parameters of the presentation, its terminology and even the way the discussion between the representative of the minority group and

the interviewer is conducted. The interviewee finds himself suddenly speaking the language of the majority and representing its interests.

The root of this is perhaps that one way the hegemony tries to preserve its position is by taming different or dissenting voices. It should be noted that sometimes the voices of minorities and marginalized groups are broadcast in a deliberate attempt to weaken them. For example, the mainstream hegemony chooses to give to air time to those representatives of the minority who could be considered watered-down archetypes, collaborators and "pet" public figures. This effectively silences the sectors demanding fair representation and weakens the voices of subversive groups by "taming them" to toe the line of the dominant ideology.

In recent years, a number of studies have examined the coverage received by Arab citizens of Israel in the Hebrew-language media outlets, especially on television (see, e.g., Avraham, Pirset, and Elefant-Lefler, 2004). The research has shown that this population group's access of media attention is indeed via the back door. Were it not for conduct which the representatives of the majority consider unacceptable or even seditious, it can be assumed that they would probably not appear in the mainstream media at all.

The Hebrew-language media's coverage of Arab citizens is in some ways similar to its coverage of marginalized Jewish groups in Israeli society. Nevertheless, the basic assumption is that the reciprocal relationship between the Hebrew media and the Arab minority is fundamentally different from the reciprocal relationship between the Hebrew media and other groups in Israeli society. This is almost certainly primarily due to the deep schism that exists between the majority Jewish population and the minority Arab population living side-by-side within the State of Israel. While it should be noted that Israeli society suffers from many social schisms, there is no question that one of the deepest and most fundamental of them is the Arab-Jewish divide.

In his article, "The question of 'the other': Difference, discrimination and the post-colonial discourse," Homi Bhabha writes:

The power of ambiguity gives the currency of the colonial stereotype its value. It ensures that this stereotype can be changed again and again in accordance with shifting historical circumstances and other factors affecting the discourse. The power of ambiguity feeds the strategies which the colonial stereotype uses to distinguish between individuals (individuation) and to push them to the margins: It creates an impression of a probable and predictable truth, which, in the case of the stereotype, must always be beyond what can be proved by experience or deduced by logic.... The recognition of a stereotype as an ambiguous form of knowledge and power calls for a theoretical and political response that challenges the determinist and functional characteristics of the relationship between discourse and

politics and raises questions about dogmatic and moralist positions related to the meaning of oppression and discrimination (Bhabha, 1994:145).

Bhabha then suggests a new reading of this discourse:

The reading of the colonial discourse that I propose shifts the point of intervention from identifying images as positive or negative to understanding the processes of subjectification, which are made possible (and acceptable) through the discourse of stereotypes (Bhabha, 1994:145).

In line with this approach, the current paper investigates the online Hebrew media's representation of the Arab population of the Negev, analyzing the content of articles relating to this population and examining the responses of those who read these reports. It should be noted that research into journalistic discourse on the Internet is still in its infancy. Very few researchers have addressed this subject in the Israeli context, especially with regard to majority-minority relations in Israeli society.¹

The Arab population of the Negev (which is an integral part of the general Arab-Palestinian society in Israel) currently numbers some 170,000 people. With regard to its treatment in the media, this community is considered one of the only populations in Israel to suffer from a double dose of exclusion in terms of media coverage and the stereotypes presented to Israeli media consumers. The reason for its exclusion is ethnicity and its marginalized geographical and social circumstances. With regard to ethnicity, like the rest of the Arab population in Israel, the Arab population of the Negev suffers both from exclusion and from stereotyping. The exclusion and disregard of this social group is expressed in the fact that it does not attract media limelight except in cases involving the disruption of public order, criminal activity or fatal traffic accidents. When an incident does reach the headlines on radio or television or in the printed and online newspapers, it usually falls into one of several categories, discussed below.

Stigmatization and negative stereotyping

A report published on the nrg website (part of the *Ma'ariv* newspaper group) under the headline "Protection money for cellular antennas" states:

Bedouins from the south are collecting "protection money" from the cell phone companies for their antennas. The costs amount to thousands of dollars per antenna per month.

The cellular companies have recently encountered a difficult problem in the Negev: Bedouin residents of the area are demanding "protection money" from them to ensure that their antennas are not damaged. The bases of antennas belonging to companies that do not pay are torched using a burning tire. Since it is very expensive to repair a burnt out antenna, many in the industry prefer to keep silent and pay out sums amounting to thousands of dollars per month (Sayag, 2005).

The questions that need to be asked are whether the reporter bothered to adequately investigate the identity of the perpetrators and whether they are all really members of the Arab population of the south? It can be assumed that the discovery of other individuals involved in this case would reduce the news value and dramatic impact of this journalistic "scoop," which refers to "protection money," a term that has been often applied in reference to this population over the years. The article's confident tone, which betrays no doubts nor any identifying details, not even partial ones, about the perpetrators as proof for its assertions, raises many questions. If the reporter seems to be showing sensitivity by protecting the privacy of the individuals involved, this sensitivity is misplaced when considering that he thereby points the finger at an entire population group that numbers tens of thousands of people.

In order to make absolutely clear that this problem is a serious threat, the reporter continues: "But this is not the only threat to antennas in the south: Due to the relatively high price of iron, the companies are also dealing with attempts by local residents to dismantle cellular antennas in order to sell the metal" (Sayag, 2005). Of course, the writer does not state with any degree of certainty that it is young Bedouin men from the Negev who are stealing the metal. Yet the juxtaposition of this problem with the "protection money" story creates a menacing image of the "local residents." It is reasonable to assume that the reader would come to the conclusion that the two matters are related and it is not unlikely that this will add more fuel to their stereotyped image of the Bedouins.

Another way that such negative stereotypes are propagated is through the attempt to attribute the increase in traffic accidents in the Negev to the region's Arab residents. In his article entitled, "Few Bedouin—Lots of accidents," journalist Moshe Pri'el writes the following for the nrg news site:

A shocking accident yesterday in which three Bedouin children were killed came as no surprise to the residents of the south. Official figures, police experience and the terrifying stories of residents all testify to this phenomenon—despite their relatively low number among the population of the south, young Bedouin men are involved in more road accidents than any other group (Pri'el, 2006).

A report using this style of language almost certainly perpetuates the widespread prejudices against the Arab population of the Negev, referred to by the majority of opinion-makers in the Hebrew media as “the Bedouin sector” or “the Bedouins” for short. The writer relies on previous (unspecified) experiences of southern residents and backs them up by mentioning official sources, police experience and the terrifying stories of residents. Perhaps there is a measure of truth in the data that indicates a disproportionate involvement of young Arab men in fatal road accidents in the south and this should be given due attention. However, there are questions that need to be raised about the contribution of other population segments to these kinds of accidents, too. Is the involvement of these other sectors described in the same melodramatic terms employed by this reporter in speaking of “terrifying stories of residents”?

Quoting an “official source,” the reporter cites the words of Supt. Rehavia Umasi, Head of the Negev Traffic Bureau, who explains the phenomenon by saying:

Fifty percent of the fatal accidents are caused by members of minority groups. Many fathers accidentally cause the deaths of their children with their cars due to the lack of play areas. The children are forced to play among the cars. Many Bedouin drivers exit the dirt roads that run through the area and lead to the main highways in a wild fashion. Others simply do not obey traffic lights and signs, such as “Stop” and “Yield” (Pri’el, 2006).

Umasi then dons a sociologist’s hat and gives sociological explanations for the behavior of those drivers and attributes it to “the pervasion of defective norms among this group.” He says on the matter:

From an early age, a young Bedouin boy sees his brothers and his father driving without a license and in a vehicle that is not roadworthy. In addition, the infrastructure in their residential areas is inadequate, they have no street signs, and a driver gets used to driving in these ways on the main highways, too (Pri’el, 2006).

In order to give Umasi’s portrayal and explanations more credibility, the reporter quotes sources from within the Arab population of the Negev itself. For example, he cites the words of a “respected sheikh” from one of the Negev towns (who, for some reason, he decides not to identify), who says: “We can’t control our youth anymore. We have problems of alcohol, drugs and absenteeism from school. The Bedouin tradition is not what it once was. They are rebelling against us and we can’t stop them” (Pri’el, 2006).

Not satisfied with the words of the “respected sheikh,” the reporter also quotes MK Taleb al-Sana, of the United Arab List, who is termed by the reporter as “a Bedouin himself.” It can be understood from his words that he agrees with the

description of the situation and blames it on the government's inadequate treatment of the Arab settlements in the Negev. He says:

The lack of educational resources in the sector and the prolonged sense of frustration cause a young driver to feel that he has nothing to lose. Nothing scares him, not even the police. I have warned the government ministries of the seriousness of the situation. Young people feel that the government has abandoned them with no present and no future and their anger is expressed through their driving (Pri'el, 2006).

Even in cases where reporters make the attempt to understand the Arab population of the Negev and to break free of stereotypical labels and stigmas, they often do not succeed. For example, see the analysis (discussed in-depth below) by social commentator Ron Ben-Yishai, who tries to describe the severity of the "Bedouin problem" faced by the government and its attempts to solve this problem. He writes:

The State of Israel hoped, and continues to hope, to achieve a number of objectives by concentrating the Bedouins in permanent urban settlements: To remove the Bedouins from thousands of dunams of land that the state has designated for other uses and to reduce the birth rate through education and improved standards of living. However, the seven Bedouin towns established over the past 30 years have been a disappointment in every respect. The Bedouins have not flocked to them, since the first towns were planned without taking their unique lifestyle into consideration. In addition, the standard of living has not improved because [government authorities] did not invest enough funding in education and employment opportunities. Nowadays, the Bedouin towns are at the bottom of the ladder according to all social indices (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

The correlation repeatedly made by many researchers (though still unproven) between high birth rate and low standards of living and education, as well as the belief that raising these two latter standards will lower the birth rate, apparently serves to counterbalance, so to speak, Ben-Yishai's critical tone at the start of the article. But he cannot maintain this balance for long and soon begins to parrot explanations and prejudices that generalize about and malign the Arab population of the Negev. He also brings up the sense of anxiety and exaggerates the level of threat involved in this situation:

The "Bedouin sprawl," on the other hand, has mushroomed and become something akin to a new Wild West, full of crime, illegal construction and illicit grazing of livestock. The Bedouins have already gained a near

monopoly on car theft, metal theft and various kinds of smuggling in the south, including smuggling of weapons and terrorists from Gaza and Egypt. “See how unsuccessful the Egyptians are in controlling the terrorist hothouse of worldwide Jihad that has flourished in Sinai, and you will understand what this will cost us in a few years time,” claims one senior security figure (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

The Shai Dromi case as a symptom

On January 16, 2007, Shai Dromi, a farmer in the Negev, opened fire on several people who were attempting to break into his farm and killed one of them. This story caused much more of a stir than would be expected of a regular criminal case due to the ethnic identities of the gunman and the man he shot to death. After it was revealed that the intruder was a Negev Arab, the incident moved out of the realm of a criminal case involving a farmer who shot a burglar, and mushroomed into a broad-ranging discussion of relations between the Arab population of the Negev, their neighbors and the government.

It is revealing to investigate the media frenzy that surrounded this incident and the way the press treated the two individuals primarily involved. Almost no one bothered to find out personal details about the intruder shot by Dromi and instead made do with the fact that he was a “Negev Bedouin.” Meanwhile, a website (<http://www.shai-dromi.org.il>) was established on behalf of Shai Dromi as part of a massive drive to collect signatures for a petition calling for his release from house arrest and even the dismissal of the legal case against him. There was also a fundraising campaign to raise money for his legal defense. On these websites and others (e.g., <http://www.fresh.co.il>) that addressed the case, Dromi was portrayed as a victim of “Bedouin burglars from the Wild West.” For example, Ran Farhi and Michal Nisanson wrote on the day of the incident:

This region is the State of Israel’s own “Wild West.” In most cases, the police do not even bother to enforce the law, certainly not in relation to the Bedouin population. Residents prefer to pay protection money to criminals, many of them Bedouins, rather than submit complaints to the police that are not properly dealt with (Farhi and Nisanson, 2007).

This article sympathetically acquitted Dromi and turned him into an icon of “Jewish self-defense” in the face of “the Bedouin scourge,” and a symbol of “might” and “courage.” A few of the people who responded to this article in the online forum could not pass up this opportunity to attack the police and law enforcement authorities with the claim that they have “abandoned the Negev and handed it over

to lawless Bedouins who are terrorizing the residents of the south.” As it said in one response, which bore the title, “The state has given up on the Negev”:

Why are we afraid to say that the Bedouins make most of their money from stealing goods and cars, drugs, protection money, weapons and drug smuggling, and trafficking in women for prostitution and rape. And what are the police doing about it other than closing files and ignoring crimes (Farhi and Nisanson, 2007)?

Over time, Shai Dromi's heroic image on these sites became more pronounced. For example, he was described on the website established in his honor as follows:

Shai Dromi is a man of the land and the spirit, warmhearted, loyal and loving. His love encompasses all the trails and vistas of the Land of Israel, as well as the people and neighbors that populate it. Despite the financial difficulties he experienced, he always tried to give and to help others, whether it was the children in distress to whom he lent a listening ear or the many young people who made their way to his farm in order to learn from him and be helped by his extensive experience in tending sheep.

Shai believes that we must never give up our connection to the land, because when we cut off the roots, the soul will wither. He saw people who came to visit him on the farm in order to take a break from the pressures of city life, from the unremitting daily grind of work and home. Some of them would stay on the farm for varying lengths of time in order to learn and to relax, and Shai would welcome them with love. Over the years, he forged excellent relations with his Bedouin neighbors, and they continue to help one another and meet socially until this very day (<http://www.shai-dromi.org.il>).

This point about Shai Dromi's excellent relations with “his Bedouin neighbors” did not discourage a large percentage of those who identified with his plight and donated to his cause, as well as readers who responded to this article and joined the discussion of the case, from launching unbridled diatribes against the Arab population of the Negev, describing it in the most ugly and wantonly generalizing terms.

The Negev's Arab population as a threat

A central motif repeatedly used by influential voices of the majority (most of them from the Right) in their representation of the Arab population of the Negev is the

idea of “the demographic threat.” For example, a report published on the nfc website and distributed by Roni Flamer, director of the Or Movement, which aims to encourage Jewish migration to the Negev, presents demographic figures about the Negev to MK Uri Ariel and his staff. He says: “Some 320,000 Jews and some 160,000 Bedouins live in the Negev today. The Bedouin population doubles its size every 15 years, and by the year 2020 it is expected to become the majority in the Negev” (Aviv, 2004). It is not hard to guess the kind of impact this report has on the opinions of its readers regarding the Arab population in general, and with regard to the struggle of the dozens of unrecognized villages to gain official recognition from government authorities in particular. This recognition would finally earn them the right to receive basic services and amenities.

Another theme that is constantly repeated by writers and commentators debating the threats implied by the conduct of the Negev’s Arab residents are warnings against the “immanent Bedouin Intifada.” This threat is perceived in light of the ongoing land dispute between this group and the government, particularly the Israel Lands Administration, as well the appalling socioeconomic situation of the Arab residents of the south.

There are those who would say such portrayals (which do sometimes seem exaggerated and alarmist) are designed to deliberately thwart hopes for understanding and integration of this population in the civic life of the state in general, and in the southern region in particular. When the masses are inflamed by the prospect of riots and a violent uprising, it is easy to eliminate any good intentions about resolving the problems and hardships suffered by the Arab population of the Negev. In this way, “the punishment precedes the crime.”

An excellent example of this is an analysis by the well-known strategic commentator for *Yediot Aharonot* and Israeli television, Ron Ben-Yishai, which appeared under the headline: “The Negev Bedouins: A time bomb in Israel’s backyard.” Anyone who carefully studies this article cannot fail to come away without an ominous sense of foreboding and perhaps a sense of hopelessness regarding all efforts to address the burning issues regarding relations between the Arab population of the Negev and the government. Ben-Yishai writes:

In the center of the Beer Sheva valley rises a tall hill, known as Abraham’s Shoulder. Anyone who takes the time to ascend it will understand within minutes that the State of Israel has a problem. Not just a problem, but a ticking demographic, social and security time bomb. Surrounding the hill, literally as far as the eye can see, are thousands of clustered tin shacks and plastic sheds that are home to tens of thousands of Bedouins. Without water, without electricity, without roads, without sanitation and without sources of income. A hothouse of poverty and crime which law enforcement authorities have a hard time controlling (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

Ben-Yishai's opinions on security are clear throughout the article and especially in the last two sentences quoted above. What interests him is the privation of the population and the implications of this situation for relations with the majority society (i.e., the government's powerlessness to enforce the law among people living in the tin shacks and plastic sheds). He does not address the circumstances that created the situation he describes from the crest of the hill called Abraham's Shoulder.

Ben-Yishai's choice to gaze down from a height on those clusters of shacks encapsulates the point of view of the representatives of the majority—a patronizing standpoint that sees those shacks as blocking and blemishing the panorama they wish to see. He fails to enter those shacks and sheds in order to see and feel what goes on inside them, which is the reality of tens of thousands of people living in destitution under circumstances reminiscent of the slums of previous centuries. This failure is precisely the symptom that characterizes the approach of the State of Israel and its institutions to the day-to-day problems of the Arab population of the Negev. This attitude is built on the attempt to use cosmetic measures to solve things from afar without getting too deeply into the problems and seriously treating their root causes. The solutions suggested by Ben-Yishai at the end of his article are not so different from the same old increasingly elaborate techniques that signify an attempt to skirt the problem rather than confront it head on in a way that is satisfactory to all parties. Ben-Yishai concludes his article with recommendations on how to continue to address the problem:

What can be done? A single administrative body must be established that has an adequate budget at its disposal and the ability to ensure that the various government ministries implement the agreements that it reaches with the Bedouin tribes. This body must represent the Bedouins, similar to the way the SELA Administration cares for [the needs and interests of] the Gaza Strip evacuees. We must also stop addressing Bedouin land claims in the courts, and enter into expedited negotiations to reach a compromise with each of the claimants. Then the land problem can be resolved and every thing will move ahead rapidly (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

Ben-Yishai's comparison between Gaza Strip evacuees and the Arab residents of the unrecognized villages is fundamentally problematic and unfortunate. The writer sincerely intends to suggest, through this comparison, a possible avenue for dealing problems which are similar. But in doing so, he plays right into the hands of the readers responding to the article, who demand that drastic measures be adopted against the Arab population of the Negev. There were 78 responses, the vast majority of which used aggressive and hostile language and rhetoric against this group. Among these responses are some which are nothing short of blatant and unambiguous incitement, such as "If we don't hurry up, the Negev will belong to the

state of Bedouistan,” or “Transfer, my friend, transfer—that’s the solution,” or “They are criminals who live off welfare and lawbreaking” (Ben-Yishai, 2006). Then there are those who take a hard line but try to justify their position by attempting to scare the other readers, such as the following response:

One good thing that came out of the [Gaza Strip] disengagement is that apparently there are signs that a change is on the way here. The evacuation of the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip made clear to the Bedouins that sooner or later they are bound to get into a violent confrontation with the state that is likely to lead to a similar step being implemented against them (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

Besides the patently belligerent responses, there are a small number of responses that use a different tone, even though in the final accounting their conclusions are not so different. For example, one of the responders tries to link the distress of the Arabs in the south to the situations of other sectors of the Israeli population that suffer from a lack of government attention. But after making this more balanced point, he can no longer restrain himself and is swept away in a more antagonistic direction, writing:

Now the Negev is being taken away from us. There are Bedouins everywhere, there are mosques everywhere, there is filth everywhere. They are killing us on the roads, stealing, threatening us. Who is protecting us??? This wouldn’t happen in greater Tel Aviv (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

In another response, the writer makes a distinction between “Bedouins” and “Arabs” and he describes the former as follows:

They are not enemies—and we shouldn’t make them into enemies. The Bedouins have never been against us. The opposite is true. Even in the days when Petah Tikva was young, there were many stories of Bedouins who helped us. When the Arabs were about to attack us, they would try to inform us that the Arab gangs were closing in. So if we make the effort to help them get ahead, maybe we can stop a Bedouin Intifada in 20 years time within the Green Line between Ramat Hovav and Hadera (Ben-Yishai, 2006).

The “From your mouth I will judge you” technique

The aggressive rhetorical attacks on the Arab population of the Negev, both by reporters and those responding to their articles, has created a hostile atmosphere,

especially in the forums conducted by the online Hebrew newspapers about this topic. One of the techniques used by journalists to create an appearance of balanced reporting is to quote an Arab personality, sometimes under the vague title of "a respected sheikh," or one of the public figures active among the population, or even one of the Bedouin academics. Usually the thrust of what the "authentic" voice has to say is basically supportive of the content of the article, i.e., it is aligned with the mainstream tendency to condemn the conduct and carryings on of the Arab population in the south. For example, see the response of a traditional leader to the proliferation of road accidents involving young Arabs in the Negev, or the remarks of MK Taleb al-Sana in the same context (noted above).

Another case where journalists turned their attention to this population was the story of a number of young Arabs from the Negev who were infected with AIDS by a Beer Sheva prostitute. In an article published by Uri Binder on the nrg website, he quotes the opinions of anonymous community leaders who were involved in an emergency meeting called to discuss the issue. One of the organizers of that meeting says:

Her contact information was passed around by word of mouth, and so she gathered a large number of Bedouin clients. As far as we know, dozens of Bedouins have already been infected and most are too afraid to get medical treatment. There are those who are planning to kill this young woman because we know that she did this intentionally. We want to ask the police to arrest her soon in order to save her life, and also so that she will pay the price for her actions and stop spreading fatal diseases (Binder, 2007).

In order to give these voices academic credibility, the reporter interviews Prof. 'Alayyan Al-Krenawi, head of the Department of Social Work at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, who, in addition to his expertise in the field, is a member of the Arab community in the Negev and thus also has "insider" status. Prof. Al-Krenawi tells the reporter that he is not surprised by the story, and comments: "When a traditional society lives within a modern society, of course they are going to be impacted by the modern world" (Binder, 2007). He also says:

The globalization process has an impact on traditional societies. When a woman who knows that she has AIDS continues as a way of taking revenge on men, this meets a psychological need for that woman. It could be vengefulness against men in general. The Bedouin sector is lacking in sex education, which could have saved these men. It's a sensitive topic that is not discussed (Binder, 2007).

Isolated attempts to investigate and discuss the issues in depth

In contrast to the inflammatory tone of most of the debate, there are a few isolated voices trying to understand and discuss the issues in a more in-depth and less aggressive and provocative fashion. An article written by Shlomo Swirski and Yael Hasson, which was published on the *nfc* news website, shows an attempt to get to the root of the problem and analyze its implications and possible solutions. For example, the unique nature of the population is described in the opening of the article:

The Bedouins of the Negev are the only Arab-Israeli group which, despite having been displaced from the original lands on which they lived at the establishment of the state, still maintains an ownership connection to those lands to a reasonable extent, a connection that the state officially denies in principle, but recognizes in practice (Swirski and Hasson, 2005).

Further on, the writers present the unique aspects of the citizenship of the Negev Arabs, and the source of the hardships and obstacles that prevent them from integrating into the regional civic life of the south in particular and of the state in general. The writers not only focus on the unrecognized settlements, as most addressing the issue do, but comprehensively discuss the neglected state of the recognized settlements. Although the recognized settlements were established by the government, the standard of living there is not much higher than that in the unrecognized ones (Swirski and Hasson, 2005).

Unfortunately, few articles in the online Hebrew media discourse about the Arab minority in the Negev adopt the approach of Swirski and Hasson. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that their article and the few other similar ones do not resonant with or garner many responses from the readership. Their voice is hardly heard.

Conclusions

The arena of online journalism is one of the most interesting forums in which the discourse about the relations between the Negev's Arab population and the state is conducted. In recent years, this has become one of the most inflammatory and controversial topics in the broader context of relations between the State of Israel and all its Arab citizens. For the most part, the journalistic discourse in the online newspapers seems to abound with aggressive and hostile rhetoric, fed primarily by prejudices, stigmas, generalizations, fears and anxieties. This distracts the debate from the essence of the problem (the issue of land), and adds new layers to the crisis by exaggerating the threat posed by the population in question. It thereby obstructs

the possibility of coming to a solution, which should be possible despite the prophets of doom who foretell an inevitable head-on collision.

NOTE

¹ Among recent books discussing this issue, the following should be singled out: Samuel-Azran and Caspi (2008) and Schwartz Altshuler (2007).

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