



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

Staff Papers Series

P83-27

December 1983

BEDOUIN, JEWS, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR
CO-DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEGEV DESERT:
DIFFICULT RESEARCH LESSONS FROM ISRAEL

by

Charles R. Adelberg



Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

University of Minnesota
Institute of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108

Bedouin, Jews, and the Potential for
Co-Development of the Negev Desert:
Difficult Research Lessons from Israel

Charles R. Adelberg*

* Charles R. Adelberg, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, University of Minnesota.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance provided during the course of my research by Daniel Bromley, Vernon Ruttan, Lee Martin, Yoav Kislev, Eitan Hochman, Ford Runge and the Harold Scott Quigley Center for International Studies of the University of Minnesota.

Staff Papers are published without formal review within the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics.

Introduction

In July, 1981, I embarked on an ambitious project in the Negev Desert region of southern Israel. I undertook to examine the social and economic well-being of the Israeli Bedouin Arab population as active participants in the region's rapid economic development. I was particularly interested in Bedouin property rights and land-use in the Negev, and received an invitation to work with an anthropologist under the auspices of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for Desert Research in Midreshet Ben-Gurion, Israel. The first Dunn Scholarship for Research Contributing to International Peace enabled me to take advantage of this opportunity.¹

Unfortunately, no amount of preparation ensured complete success in this risky undertaking. During the months preceding the research, I received academic as well as political arguments against undertaking this project. The most notable was from an eminent European anthropologist who warned me against proceeding on research in Israel because doing so would bar me, in all likelihood, from research in any other Middle Eastern country. He also expected that the results of the research would be suspect by scholars in any of these countries just because the research was undertaken in Israel.

Nevertheless, I was determined, with risks considered, to study the difficult problems of this region. As a Jew with a strong religious and cultural identity, I realized that I never would be allowed to proceed with (nor want to proceed with) later research in Arab countries unless significant progress toward peace in the region was achieved. Other experiences and background contributed to a deep interest in the problem. An uncanny interest in the relationship between human practices and natural resource conditions has infused my coursework and research endeavors ever since I began undergraduate

studies. An interest in problems of desert and arid regions stems from my training in meteorology. Natural resource economics training, especially advanced coursework taken while a CIC Traveling Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, expanded my awareness of resource conditions of pastoral nomadic peoples inhabiting semi-arid regions.² Combined with a strong and long established interest in Israel and the Middle East, I chose naturally to study the problems of Bedouin of the Negev.

After several months of preparation and several additional months of field work, I realized it would not be possible to return to the University of Minnesota with research results satisfactory for writing a dissertation in agricultural economics. I returned, however, with a greatly increased perspective on international development efforts and on the difficulties and realities of an interdisciplinary approach for such research. During the months immediately following my return to my department, these lessons were applied to preparing a report on the difficulties encountered on many international development aid efforts.³

I also returned with a less optimistic perspective on how much effort and how long it would take to achieve peaceful and understanding co-development between different cultures in one land. As the two peoples were Jews and Bedouin in the Negev, and both have full citizenship in Israel, the perspective gained in my research cannot easily, nor appropriately, be translated into generalities about the potential for peace between Israelis and non-Israeli Arabs living in the West Bank and Gaza. I only hope that the opportunity for research to achieve co-development of the Negev that I found was missing during my research experience there does not become the standard for the future development of Israel.

Background

In my research, I examined a case of social conflict concerning the ownership of natural resources. The setting is the Negev Desert, in southern Israel.⁴ Some 53,000 Bedouin, who are citizens of Israel and one of Israel's Arab minorities, are vying for property rights in a rapidly shrinking area of marginal grazing and agricultural land in the northeastern quarter of the Negev Desert. The issue had become timely by the 1980's, as a law providing compensation for Bedouin who were being resettled in the region has just passed the Knesset - the Israeli parliament. When I arrived in the region to begin on-site research, several cases utilizing the law were already in the court system. In addition, a military airbase that would displace a sizable number of Bedouin was being built. This base replaced one in the Sinai that Israel was evacuating due to the Camp David peace accord. The airbase necessitated a relatively large and flat area, and the only area suitable in the northern Negev was right in the middle of Bedouin territory and on some of their best land.

During the months preceding on-site research, I acquired a historical perspective on the settlement of pastoral nomadic peoples of the Middle East, in general, and of the Bedouin, in particular. In brief, the Bedouin have been a major pastoral nomadic group in the Middle East for thousands of years. Widespread processes leading toward more sedentary-based economies (sedentarization) currently characterize many Bedouin populations.⁵ During sedentarization, the access to scarce natural resources and the control of various trading routes is at stake. Economies of the Bedouin depended on the multiple use of productive resources. Pastoralism was the mainstay, but farming, gathering, smuggling, making handcrafts, transporting, raiding, and until recently, making war on their own account or for others characterized nomadic Bedouin populations. Uncertainties related to ecological conditions of semi-arid regions (i.e., drought, flood desertification, etc.) necessitated at least some movement of the household during the yearly cycle of productive activities.⁶

Nomadism, as practiced by Bedouin, represented a political and economic adaptation requiring dominance over other groups for surviving on the precarious resource base of semi-arid regions. Ottoman demise of the Bedouin as a dominant force in Palestine opened the way for both Jewish and Arab settlement of territory seasonally grazed and controlled by the Bedouin. The political dispute between Arabs and Jews that emerged, in part, from the resulting settlement pattern, later would have profound implications for Bedouin of the Negev.

Demilitarization of the Bedouin began in the late 1870's. The Ottoman government, worried about European intrusion into the empire as a result of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, wanted to increase control over the area. The reduction in power of the Bedouin tribes, who fell to the stronger Turkish forces prior to World War I, occurred first in northern and central Palestine and later in the southern (Negev-Sinai) region. This opened a power vacuum in the Galil (northern Israel) and coastal plain areas which were seasonally grazed by Bedouin. The battle between the desert and the sown had been fought in these areas for centuries. As long as Bedouin controlled these areas, peasant Arab farmers were largely confined to the hilly terrain in the area of Palestine now known as the West Bank.⁷ Only the urbanized port cities of Jaffa, Acco, and later Gaza supported significant Arab populations in the coastal plain. Furthermore, control over trading routes between the ports and the farming areas in the hilly regions provided a significant source of income for the Bedouin, who obtained fees for providing protection and transportation services.

The sedentarization and loss of control of the Bedouin over the Galil and coastal plain areas allowed Arab migration from the hilly region to these more fertile areas. Peasant Arabs generally became poor sharecroppers and farm tenants in the newly opened areas, as the elite urban Arabs had been quick to secure title to large tracks of the land from the Ottoman authorities prior to this time.

During the same period, the first wave of Jewish immigration (or aliyah) of the Zionist movement began. As Arabs were migrating in Palestine from eastern

hills westward, Jews were arriving at coastal ports and migrating eastward into the same region. The Jewish Agency sponsored agricultural settlements in Palestine by buying title to the land from Arab elites. Often additional compensation was provided separately to peasant Arab tenants that were working the land. Large tracts of land in the areas which later became part of Israel were uncultivated (and uninhabited) at the time due to widespread areas of swamp-land and mosquitos.

The political decline of the Bedouin tribes resulted in major changes in their economic resource base. For Bedouin of the Negev, settlement of central and northern Palestine caused the disappearance of and decreased access to grasslands that helped provide them with sustenance during frequent drought periods. British security during the first major period of transformation (1920-1947) provided the Bedouin with major relief measures during times of drought. Rapid sedentarization occurred during this time.

Finally, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War was accompanied by the fleeing of approximately 80% of Bedouin who inhabited (at least part of the year) the Negev region. Most departed to Jordan (including the West Bank) and to Egypt.

Only 12,000 Negev Bedouin remained as of the 1952 Israeli census, but since then, their numbers have grown to more than 53,400 (April, 1981). The combination of British maintenance of security and order and post-1948 Israeli policies resulted in the transformation of Negev Bedouin to a state which closely resembles that of "contemporary pastoral nomadism" in the Middle East:⁸

1. Economic resources formerly obtained through political and military dominance (by the Bedouin) became too costly because of increased punitive capacities of the state ... (demilitarization ended raids on settled populations, demanding protection fees etc.),
2. Increased productivity in the agrarian sector... (both within the Bedouin sector and in nearby Jewish communities) has provided new options for Bedouin tribesmen, and
3. There has been a greater dependence on market transaction.

Most of the changes prior to 1963 are described in detail in Bedouin of the Negev.⁹ In all likelihood, the changes since then have been much greater,

as the ensuing 20 years have allowed Bedouin to become integrated into the Israeli economy in Beersheva and the surrounding region. More than 80% of Bedouin men now work in Israeli industries in the non-agricultural sector. Some have become doctors, lawyers, engineers, and technicians.

The Social Problem:

Bedouin are perceived by Israelis, in general, and ministry planners, in particular, as obstacles to modern development of the Negev. The region which the Bedouin inhabit is semi-arid. The carrying capacity of the land for grazing is limited and subject to long run decline from overgrazing. While Arabs usually look upon the Bedouin as "sons of the desert" and as representative of the true Arab, Israeli Jews tend to look upon the Bedouin as "fathers of the desert", who have contributed to the process of desertification through mismanagement and overgrazing. Evidence often cited includes the decline of the Nabatean cities of Avdat and Rehovot. In these central Negev cities, elaborate systems of dams and canals allowed run-off type agriculture to flourish. The cities fell to decline soon after the Bedouin conquest of Palestine in the 7th century C.E.¹⁰ Widespread erosion of topsoil is also commonly cited, and disputed by other experts, (but I also could not help but notice the widespread erosion and gully formation caused by modern road building in the Negev).

Bedouin currently own about 200,000 sheep and goat, some of which are grazed throughout the notheast quadrant of the Negev, where there is natural spring pasture in hilly regions, and a dryland wheat crop raised by the Bedouin. Other Bedouin herds graze in areas of the West Bank and more graze on stubble from fields of kibbutzim and moshavim north and west of the Negev. The feasibility of improving the productivity and economic product from these herds has been studied, most notably by Noy-Meir.¹¹ Other scientists have also studied many methods to increase the productivity of animal husbandry in the Negev, including various feeding experiments, using new plants to increase the carrying capacity of the land, and developing new, mixed modes of production. Some of this work was being

pursued in the physical science units at the Institute for Desert Research, although Bedouin were not perceived by most project scientists as the main beneficiaries of the research. Similarly, two scientists (one an economist) at the Agricultural Research Organization (Volcani Center) in Bet Dagan were in the process of designing a feasibility analysis, using linear programming, to identify and select technology that would optimize sheep husbandry and dryland farming in the semi-arid region.

Yet, all plans for developing more intensive sheep and goat livestock enterprises in the Negev are targetted for Jewish settlements. As the linear programming model in the Volcani Center feasibility study completely divorced itself from social organization and political feasibility, development planners appear to have divorced as impractical and politically unfeasible the involvement of Bedouin in any future development of the Negev specializing in advanced animal husbandry techniques. This seems like a very ironic policy, both from the ecological and social viewpoint. The Bedouin have already demonstrated great adaptability to changing economic conditions. Development plans have already been implemented to resettle Bedouin from the area of the new airbase to two new settlements - Aro'er and K'seifa -- which are to be based on intensive, irrigated agriculture. This is the first time that any intensive agricultural settlement had been targetted for Bedouin.¹² Yet at the same time, some 12,000 dunum (3,000 acres, approximately) of land seasonally grazed by the Bedouin and just north of their primary settlement area is being targetted by the development agency for a grazing ranch that would be managed by Jewish settlers. Why should development plans for Bedouin be based on intensifying agriculture in a very water scarce region? It seems that technology for more intensive husbandry has already been tested in the Negev that could provide for a much more "appropriate" development option for the Bedouin.

The Research Problem:

The difficulties I faced trying to gather information and support that would make this a feasible research problem proved to be very exhausting and

and finally overwhelming. First was the problem of approach. I was invited to Israel and worked with anthropologists. It became apparent soon after I arrived that the real intention of the anthropologist who invited me to join the social sciences unit was to turn me into an anthropologist. Unless I approached my research on Bedouin in a purely inductive, anthropological manner (as an anthropologist there was expected to do), my research would be considered biased from the beginning. I strongly favored a combination of inductive and deductive analysis for my research. The problem appeared quite urgent. The land conditions and the property rights of the Bedouin were changing rapidly. Unless the research was undertaken in a manner which allowed for modelling key components of the changing system in a systematic way, I felt that the results of the research might be obsolete or moot by the time I completed the research. I felt there was great potential to utilize as much existing data and anthropological information as possible to integrate social science research with the research of the scientists at the Volcani Center and the institute. Linear programming models exploring technological options that would optimize sheep husbandry and dryland agriculture (mixed production) systems in the Negev region could be integrated with models explaining social behavior and institutional arrangements of the production systems being studied implicitly. Three different types of social organization were arranged with regard to animal husbandry and dryland farming in the Negev: the kibbutz, the moshav, and the Bedouin tribal system. How these systems and the people who controlled them could interact for the future development of the Negev was a most relevant question.

The anthropologists at the institute, however, dismissed my ideas. They claimed that the other (non-anthropological) observations and tentative conclusions were invalid. They maintained, instead, that Bedouin behavior and land-use in relationship to grazing and seasonal cultivation is all propelled by political considerations. Their recommendation for me was to separate myself from findings of other scientists, take to the field, live with the Bedouin for a few years, and when I finally have collected all my observations, come back

and write a thesis.

By that time, I reiterate, the land use and land rights problems of the Bedouin may not be solvable. Development, I observed, was proceeding somewhat rapidly in Bedouin areas. Furthermore, the research course recommended would have necessitated much more training in anthropology that I did not want to undertake. And I had reservations about the efficacy of such a research approach for satisfying doctoral dissertation requirements in agricultural and applied economics.

More importantly, I felt that a major opportunity for co-equal Jewish and Bedouin development of the Negev was about to be passed up, especially by the Institute for Desert Research. The institute was yet very young (having been dedicated only one month prior to my arrival). The social science unit was just being organized and the opportunity existed to integrate the social sciences with a few of the physical science units to launch an interdisciplinary project of the type I envisioned. Much of the research on desert ecosystems was conducted under the auspices of the institute. These included research on forage and food crops that could be most successfully grown and harvested in the Negev utilizing run-off agricultural systems. An experimental forage area for sheep had been set up utilizing run-off techniques in a nearby wadi. Another scientist from the algology unit proposed utilizing algae that was processed in experimental ponds at the institute to supplement the feeding of sheep and goats. Furthermore, a geographer had just arrived at the institute who was designing a system for mapping the desert ecosystem by water basin patterns. He was very much interested in applying his work to the problem I envisioned, as basin mapping was essential to run-off agriculture.

I am convinced that a system of natural grazing during the winter rainy season and spring combined with feeding in run-off cultivated areas during summer and autumn has great potential for a viable mixed cultivation-grazing economy in the Negev. Modern supplemental feeding techniques using the resources of the

desert such as those being studied in Midreshet Ben-Gurion could enhance the system and make it a showcase. But adapting such a system to Bedouin needs, involving them in its development and implementation, and developing an appropriate political framework in which to iron out property rights issues necessitates a concerted and well directed effort that was just beyond the capability of the Institute for Desert Research when I was there. Effective leadership and foresight just did not exist. Even in a very small academic setting with a research staff of approximately 50, division rivalries and mistrust of alternative approaches barred any effective interdisciplinary research between the social and physical sciences. Most unfortunately, there was no other institute in Israel, perhaps in the world, that was in the position to lead such an effort.

In this environment, I explored options for research, but could not identify any that sustained my interest as the problem discusses above. I found that without a Ph.D. and a lot of outside funding, I was in a very poor position to influence any policy at the institute or to find another research position and base. Furthermore, not being an Israeli, nor having been in the country long enough hindered my ability to argue persuasively in Hebrew. I was looked upon as a naive, perhaps misdirected observer, by many, but encouraged to persevere by others. While I certainly plan to persevere in resource policy issues, the conditions of my research in Israel were not sufficient. I returned to the university after a few more months in Israel.

Conclusions:

Although this research problem was, in the final appraisal, the wrong challenge for me, I nevertheless believe it is an important problem. The war in Lebanon has, undoubtably, stalled many development projects in Israel for some time. Human and capital resources required to develop the Negev have been diverted to sustain the effort in Lebanon. Perhaps this problem can still be tackled. I certainly hope so.

But I expect that domestic political problems probably will hinder such an effort for the foreseeable future. The attention given to the continuing controversy concerning Israeli settlements in the West Bank precludes much attention being given to Bedouin-Jewish relations and potential co-development of the Negev. There is a human rights group based in Beersheva that focuses on Bedouin problems and well-being in the Negev, but it is as yet small and of limited expertise on Bedouin problems. It has been helpful in promoting the extension of the Israeli welfare system to Bedouin areas,¹³ but I doubt it could be instrumental in changing the development tide in the Negev.

Yet I find that I must end on a more hopeful note. I left the Negev feeling very strongly that, somehow, the Bedouin will find a way to take care of their own problems and protect their own rights and future stake in Israel. I developed this perspective while living with them, meeting them in market, and just observing them. They impressed me with their adaptability and their ability to successfully mix together two different environments - the Israeli one and the Bedouin one. They had exploited the Israeli education system well enough to provide themselves with lawyers and doctors. The extremely strong cultural and social ties of the Bedouin community ensures that these Bedouin will remain to serve the community, protect its long run interests, and help it to interact better with Israeli society as a whole. The problem of the "brain-drain" - the loss of trained professionals to developed countries - that plagues development of many Third World countries is not applicable to Israeli Bedouin. The access of Bedouin professionals to the modern world is as close as Beersheva. They have already found positions there within the Israeli establishment -- especially within the Ministry of Agriculture and the land development authority. I am confident that their influence will continue to grow in the next few years.

Footnotes

- ¹ Awarded June, 1981 by University of Minnesota Harold Scott Quigley Center of International Studies
- ² A paper on this topic, entitled "Institutions, Technology, and Income Distribution: A Socio-Cultural Conception of Agricultural Transformation," was presented at the Seminar in Economic Development, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, University of Minnesota, May 7, 1980.
- ³ Ruttan, Vernon W. and Charles R. Adelberg (1983): "Improving the Quality of Life in Rural Areas," Chapter 10 in The Impact of Development Assistance, edited by Anne O Krueger and Vernon W. Ruttan (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Economic Development Center, March)
- ⁴ The Negev is a semi-arid to very arid triangularly shaped region of southern Israel, constituting 60% of Israel's land area (pre-1967 borders). It extends from the 'Aravah, the northern extension of the Great Rift (between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Eilat) to the international border between Israel and Egypt, and is contiguous with the Sinai peninsula.
- ⁵ Bedouin (Arabic: badu (pl.) or badawai (sing.)) is a general term for all tribesman that live in the desert (Arabic: badiyah) whose livelihood is based on pastoral nomadism. Today, however, those considered Bedouin can range from nomadic to sedentary. Salzman (Salzman, P. C. et al. (1980): When Nomads Settle (Brooklyn: Bergin), pg. 1, 10-11) describes the terms sedentarization, sedentarism, and nomadism as they apply to Bedouin.
- ⁶ See P.C. Salzman, p. 10-17, and D.R. Aaronson, pp. 173-184 ("Must Nomads Settle? Some Notes Toward Policy on the Future of Pastoralism") in Salzman, P.C. et. al. (1980: When Nomads Settle (Brooklyn: Bergin) for more description. D. Chatty (1978): The Current Situation of Bedouin in Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Their Prospect for the Future. (London: Conference on Nomadic People in a Changing World, Commission on Nomadic People) also describes sedentarization of Bedouin in the Arab Middle East.
- ⁷ The West Bank was formed as a result of the 1948 Israeli-Arab War. Its boundaries (prior to 1967) were the demarcation lines between Jordan and Israel.
- ⁸ The conditions of "contemporary pastoral nomadism" are outlined in N. Swidler (1980: "Sedentarization and Modes of Economic Integration," in When Nomads Settle, edit. by P.C. Salzman (Brooklyn, Bergin), pp. 21-34).
- ⁹ Marx, E. (1967): Bedouin of the Negev (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press). See also A. Schmuely (1980): "The Bedouin of the Land of Israel: Settlement and Changes," Urban Ecology, 4: 253-286.
- ¹⁰ C.E.: during the Common Era; equivalent to A.D.

¹¹Noy-Meir, I. (1975): Primary and Secondary Production in Sedentary and Nomadic Grazing Systems in the Semi-Arid Region. Report for the Ford Foundation (Jerusalem: Hebrew University).

¹²Prior to this, only urbanized planned settlements, such as Tel Sheva, have been built. See E. Stern and Y. Gradus (1979): "Socio-Cultural Considerations in Planning Towns for Nomads," Ekistics, 277: 224-230, for more detail on urban settlements planned for Bedouin in the Negev.

¹³Negev Bedouin are already served by the Kupat Cholim, Israel's national health service. Because of the distances involved in their dispersed settlement pattern, new, mobile types of health care services have been designed and recently implemented. Most notable was a infant nutrition program, which consisted of a team of professionals which travelled by van throughout the Bedouin settlement areas, providing both educational and medical services for infants and young mothers.