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## **From Exclusion to Co-operation – The Subversive Action of the Urban Camp**

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## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

Since the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century camps have been used as an instrument in order to suspend, control and administer land and population in Israel/Palestine. In a state of emergency, when the normal law is suspended, the camp is a quick translation of a political agenda or a humanitarian crisis into an ad-hoc act of construction where civic life and military action interacts. Within a specific context, the paper will analyse two neighbouring settlements in the southern Negev desert; **Yerucham** - created in the 1950s by the Israeli government as a Jewish immigrant absorption camp and eventually turned into a minor development town, and the neighbouring **Rachme**, an ‘unrecognised village’ which was created in the 1960s as an informal camp by the indigenous Bedouin population and is now struggling for government recognition. The paper will examine the relations between Yerucham and Rachme, which in opposition to the Israeli policy of ethnic segregation manage to act together in order to improve their own difficult reality. The paper will argue that camps have become a site for the emergence of new subjectivities which use legal, spatial and political actions to resist the oppressive power of the state, and that the abandonment and suspension of these two populations has expedited their resourceful co-operation in challenging the modes of traditional governance.

## Introduction

Prima facie, there is little in common between *Yerucham*, a development town established in the 1950s as a Jewish immigrant absorption camp, and *Rachame*, an ‘unrecognised village’ which was created in the 1960s as an informal camp by the indigenous Bedouin population and which is now struggling for government recognition. According to the usual Israeli ‘script’, these two ethnically different neighbouring settlements should have been embroiled by now in a bitter conflict or at least maintaining cool, estranged relations, keeping a safe distance from one another. Segregation and separation are the prevalent approaches of the Israeli authorities, both socially and spatially,<sup>2</sup> reducing any possible contact between two

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<sup>2</sup> Yacobi (2007).

different communities – between rich and poor, orthodox and secular but especially between Jews and Arabs.<sup>3</sup>

This is the reason why the joint public consultation held in April 2013 at Yerucham's local community centre, entitled 'The regularisation of the Bedouin settlement in the area around Yerucham', was not a predictable event. The proposal presented and discussed was the allocation of land within the town's municipal territory to the Bedouin community in order to temporarily include this community within the town until such time as Rachame is officially recognised as an independent Bedouin settlement. This event could be dismissed as another populist act of local leaders promoting themselves in terms of a national political leadership. But it may also indicate the rise of a new political strategy of local co-operation and with it new subjectivities evolving among the residents and leaders of both Yerucham and Rachame. It illustrates a shift from separate mobilisations of two marginalised ethno-classes in Israel – the Mizrahi Jews, who migrated to Israel from the Muslim world, and the indigenous Bedouin population – towards local co-operation which is developing against the ethnocratic national mechanisms which created Yerucham and Rachame as two separate camps.<sup>4</sup>

This paper aims to advance two main theoretical arguments; first, that 'the camp' is a spatial-political instrument that allowed the creation of these two settlements and that it is commonly used by Israel to suspend, control and administer land and different populations in order to pursue the government's territorial and demographic interests; second, that new subjectivities emerge in these camps which use legal, spatial and political actions against their exclusion and by doing so challenge the state's traditional modes of governance.

### **The common camp in Israel/Palestine**

Several characteristics distinguish 'the camp' from the 'normal' civic environment: it is perceived as a **temporary space**,<sup>5</sup> it is created and exists **outside the normal juridical**

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<sup>3</sup> Two recent examples can be used: (1) in a pamphlet titled 'Natzrat Ilit – Jewish Identity Forever', the mayor presented his actions to maintain the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in the town - <http://mondoweiss.net/2013/04/publishes-demographic-deterioration.html>; (2) a central amusement park in Israel used separate days for Jews or Arab only – <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/superland-amusement-park-to-reconsider-arab-jewish-segregation-policy.premium-1.526792>

<sup>4</sup> Yiftachel (2009).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that camps may eventually become permanent places – like the Roman military camps which sometimes turned into civil settlements in order to impose order after conquests of new territories (Grimal, 1982:11-12), or transient sites which exist for decades – for example, the Palestinian refugee camps created in the early 1950s have existed for more than 60 years.

**order**, and its inhabitants or detainees usually have a **specific identity**, whether ethnic, cultural, socio-economic or ideological. While hegemonic built environments are defined by territorial distinction, historic continuity and state legislation, ‘the camp’ is a spatial-political instrument where temporariness and facts replace the law.

Since the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, camps have been used as an instrument to control and manage populations and territory in Israel/Palestine. During the years of the British Mandate (1923-1948), camps were erected to detain political activists as well as illegal Jewish immigrants, while Zionist settlers constructed the fortified ‘Tower and Stockade’ camps in order to seize lands in hostile areas. The rapid territorial and demographic changes in Israel’s early years (1948-1950s) also precipitated the creation of civic camps. The *Ma’abarot* absorption camps were created ‘top-down’ by the government in order to deal with the waves of Jewish immigrants on the basis of strategic distribution. Other camps, constructed by displaced local Palestinian and Bedouin populations, were based on ‘bottom-up’ tactics, with an accumulation of makeshift structures forming according to agreements and needs. During the same period, The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) opened the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and in Arab neighbouring countries. As the geopolitical map changed, additional camp types appeared including: the Jewish outposts in the occupied territories; the transit camp for African refugees adjacent to the Israeli-Egyptian border; and the Palestinian protest camps erected (and demolished) in the E-1 zone near Jerusalem.

### **Spreading and excluding: Yerucham and the formal *ma’abara* camps**

Yerucham was established in 1951 in the Negev desert by the Jewish Agency as a part of the *Ma’abaras* project.<sup>6</sup> The *Ma’abaras* were provisional immigrant and refugee absorption camps created in Israel for two main reasons: to provide accommodation for the waves of Jewish immigrants who came to the new state during the ‘mass immigration’ period (1948-1951), and to spread the population across the country. For this purpose 98 such camps were erected next to existing settlements and 31 were constructed as isolated settlements.<sup>7</sup> In the

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<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew word *Ma’abara* (singular) derives from the word *ma’avar*, meaning transit.

<sup>7</sup> Shuval (1998).

first three years of the establishment of Israel, the Jewish population doubled from 650,000 to 1.2 million,<sup>8</sup> and by the end of 1951 more than 220,000 people lived in the *ma'abara* camps.

Yerucham was created with the intention of building “a city in the Negev, in the desert, in a desolate area which creates passage for infiltrators and smugglers from the Gaza Strip to Jordan”.<sup>9</sup> The first camp inhabitants were Jewish immigrants from Romania – 269 men, women and children – most brought directly from the ship in Haifa to what was then the first Jewish settlement which was created south of Be'er-Sheva.<sup>10</sup> The residents of Yerucham were designated to work as miners at ‘The Large Crater’ and in other adjacent mines. Rudy, the manager of the camp in its first years, recalls the day that the first immigrants were brought:

The road was long [...] At the beginning they were in a good mood, but after a while, when hardly any settlements were seen, the mood dropped [...] After Be'er-Sheva we drove another half an hour on the road to Egypt, then we had to turn to a dirt-track. No sign for a settlement, the buses continued in the dark, we couldn't see a thing, not a plant, not a tree, nothing. People started to become hysterical, pulling their hair, shouting at me – ‘you are Hitler! You are bringing us to a death camp’ [...] Many refused to get off the bus and spent the night on it. In the morning some wanted to go back [...] around thirty percent stayed with me.<sup>11</sup>

Both the first immigrants from Romania and the ones who arrived later from North Africa were brought, sometimes against their will, to Yerucham. The immigrants who came during the 1950s and early 1960s tell a recurring story about an arrival to the isolated settlement after darkness and a refusal to get off the trucks and buses. As it was clear that no one would willingly agree to move to Yerucham, lies and deceit were commonly used in order to bring new settlers, as testified by many. As narrated by A.B., who came from Kazablanka:

We arrived with the ship to Haifa in January 1956, they asked us – ‘where do you want to go?’ my parents replied – ‘to Jerusalem’. They said – ‘ok’, but brought us all to Yerucham. We arrived at night, it was dark and freezing and my father refused that we

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Jewish Immigration by Country of Birth’, 1948, 1949, 1950. Statistical Abstract of Israel No. 2 (Jerusalem, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1950/1951).

<sup>9</sup> These are the words of Giora Josephthal, the head of the absorption department of the Jewish Agency, describing to Rudy the security needed to create Yerucham; Rudy was a Kibbutz member and a Zionist activist who had volunteered for the challenge (Zair 1980:113).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p. 115-117.

<sup>11</sup> Gefen (1995:242-244).

will get off the truck. The driver said – you all have to get down but in a few minutes I will come back to pick you up. Years later – just before my father passed away, he said to me – I am still waiting for that truck to return.<sup>12</sup>



FIG 1. *Tel-Yerucham Ma'abara, 1951.* (Yerucham Archive)

The *ma'abara* camp was made of timber huts surrounded by barbed wire for protection, with no paved roads or electricity. Water was brought by the inhabitants from an adjacent well<sup>13</sup> and food was brought by a truck every few days from Be'er-Sheva. As in the other *ma'abarats*, the education and health services were poor, as documented in a government report from 1955: “in Tel-Yerucham there is no phone and the nearest doctor is 53 kilometres away[...] garbage is collected once every two weeks.”<sup>14</sup> While the spatial temporariness and

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<sup>12</sup> An interview with A.B., 22 August 2012. 20 interviews were conducted between 2010-2013 in Yerucham and Rachame. They were conducted in Hebrew, with around half the speakers being native Hebrew and around half native Arabic speakers. The interviews were transcribed in Hebrew and subsequently translated into English.

<sup>13</sup> According to local stories, this was the biblical well that Hagar found in the desert.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Committee for the Coordination of Social Services in the Maabarats’ (in Hebrew), Ministry of Labour, July 1954, document G 5558/3903, Israel State Archives (in Kozlovsky, 2008:151). Kozlovsky mentions that ‘child

poor conditions were difficulties common to all the *ma'abara* camps, the location of Yerucham in the remote and rough geographical area was experienced as particularly difficult:

They put people here [in Yerucham] like in a cage. The desert was the bars of the cage. Some eventually succeeded not to see the bars and to feel at home. But some couldn't, so they left.<sup>15</sup>

The harsh conditions, the isolation and the institutional neglect prompted most of the first settlers leave Yerucham, but the Jewish Agency and later the Israeli government continued to send new immigrants, although “in the institutions there was no plan to develop the place. They have seen it as a transitory place which will eventually vanish”.<sup>16</sup> Levi Eshcol, the then head of the settlement department of the Jewish Agency, sent a letter in August 1953 to Golda Meir, the then Minister of Labour, in which he shared his doubts regarding the future of Yerucham: “... unfortunately, according to our tests, the soil of Tel-Yerucham is too salty and therefore unfit for agriculture [...] who will be responsible for the existence of such a settlement? [...] the settlement department hereby declares it draws back any responsibility for Tel-Yerucham”.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, between 1954 and 1957, around 5,000 people were brought to the place. There was an attempt to turn the camp into a village and small permanent houses were built, but this attempt failed and at the end of 1957 there were only 880 inhabitants in the settlement. During the early 1960s, when immigrants from India, Persia and North Africa joined the remaining immigrants from Romania and Morocco, the total population reached 1,700, and Yerucham was declared as a Local Council.<sup>18</sup> In 1962 another *ma'abara* camp was erected, adding more than 1,000 immigrants to Yerucham, mainly from North Africa;<sup>19</sup> similar methods of deceit were used to bring them to the distant settlement.

The process started in the modern era by which natural life begins to be included in the mechanisms of state power,<sup>20</sup> and politics turns into *biopolitics*,<sup>21</sup> is expressed by two main

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mortality rates in the *ma'abara* camps were so high that, in the early 1950s, they contributed to the doubling of the national child mortality rate’.

<sup>15</sup> An interview with A.B., 7 April 2013.

<sup>16</sup> From the diary of Shlomo Tamir who was sent to manage Yerucham in 1952 on the behalf of the Jewish Agency (Tamir, 1978:173).

<sup>17</sup> The Israeli State Archive, file 6171/16-ג, Document 1 (30.8.1953).

<sup>18</sup> Motzafi-Haller (2012:17), *The Development Towns in the Negev*, Ben-Gurion Heritage Institute, pp.11-14.

<sup>19</sup> *The Development Towns in the Negev*, The Ben-Gurion Heritage Institute, p.12

<sup>20</sup> Arendt (1998 [1958]:320-321)

<sup>21</sup> Foucault (1981 [1978]).

technologies, the disciplinary and the regulatory techniques, which apply the **norm** “to both a body one wishes to discipline and a population one wishes to regularize”.<sup>22</sup> When the normal order is suspended in a “state of exception”,<sup>23</sup> ‘the camp’ appears as a spatial arrangement for the state to control the nation’s biological life.<sup>24</sup> While the *ma’abara* camps are presented in Zionist discourse as improvised transitory spaces which were erected following the necessity to create shelters quickly for the new immigrants, it is clear that the well-being of the immigrants was not the first priority of the authorities. The *ma’abaras* had a crucial territorial, social, economic and political role in the newly established modern state, which used temporary architecture as an instrument to manage land and populations. The *Ma’abara* was a temporary spatial-social unit which enabled the status of its inhabitants as autonomous citizens to be suspended,<sup>25</sup> while using the newly arrived immigrants as people possessing the ‘right’ Jewish ethnicity to build and inhabit the frontier as peons in the state’s territorial struggle.<sup>26</sup> As stated by Ben Gurion, the first Israeli prime minister: “we have conquered territories, but without settlements they have no decisive value... Settlements – that is the real conquest! The future of the state depends on immigration”.<sup>27</sup>

The temporary suspension of the political agency of the new immigrants in the *ma’abara* camps enabled the government to implement the decentralising policy and the ‘New Towns’ plan<sup>28</sup> and to avoid land ownership problems.<sup>29</sup> The dependence of the *ma’abaras* inhabitants on the government and the Jewish Agency in all aspects of life – from work to permanent housing – was an inseparable part of its temporariness and isolation, creating unequal power relations and initiating a process by which the Jewish population in Israel became ethnically divided.<sup>30</sup> Many scholars argue that the ethnic discrimination was built up deliberately<sup>31</sup> and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Schmitt (1985:5-6).

<sup>24</sup> Agamben (1998).

<sup>25</sup> Kozlovsky (2008:140).

<sup>26</sup> Many of these frontier territories were populated by Palestinians and Bedouins prior to the 1948 war, and the result of the counter-flow of the Jewish and Arab populations was the simultaneous appearance of two parallel, although ideologically opposed, temporary spaces: the Israeli *ma’abaras* and the Palestinian refugee camps. Between 1948-1951 685,000 Jewish immigrants entered Israel and approximately 700,000 Palestinians became refugees (Kozlovsky, 2008:143, 159).

<sup>27</sup> Ben Gurion to Foreign Ministry Staff, 12 April 1949, in Segev (1989:97).

<sup>28</sup> Which were used in order to achieve three main objectives: (1) security and defense of the new territory; (2) absorption of immigrants; and (3) the incorporation of economic development in the national policy of population dispersion (Altman and Rosenbaum 1973:319).

<sup>29</sup> Kozlovsky (2008:140, 149-151).

<sup>30</sup> Kozlovsky (2008:153). This division was caused by the spatial separation between the veteran society which was predominantly Ashkenazi (European Jews) and the immigrants in the *ma’abaras* which were comprised



that the Development Towns, initially formed by the *ma'abara* camps, served as an instrument for social engineering, constructing the unequal socio-spatial structure of the state and leading to the extreme ethnic segregation in Israel.<sup>32</sup> The *ma'abara* camps were a state-led, ethnic-oriented biopolitical mechanism that enabled politicians and experts to treat land and people as blank, abstract entities for the creation of a modern, ethnocentric nation-state,<sup>33</sup> without going to the effort of negotiating personal interests and needs.



FIG 2. *Yerucham 2012. Photograph by the author.*

### **Chasing and fencing: Rachame and the informal, unrecognised villages of the Bedouin**

*Rachame* is an unrecognised Bedouin village comprising some 170 families (about 800 people), located around Yerucham, mostly within the town's municipal border. Before the establishment of Israel, the land in the area was used for pasture by the *Sawahana* Bedouin

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predominantly of Mizrahi Jews – 72 percent of Mizrahi Jews versus 22 percent of Ashkenazi origin (Kachensky 1986:75).

<sup>31</sup> Yiftachel (2000), Kemp (2002), Tzfadia and Yiftachel (2003).

<sup>32</sup> Khazzom (2005).

<sup>33</sup> Yiftachel-Meir (1998), Yiftachel (2006).

tribe. With the establishment of the state, most of this tribe escaped to Jordan and Egypt. The remaining families continued living from pasture and seasonal agriculture. Most of the other families in Rachame are of the *Sarachin* tribe, and were transferred to the area from a southern area closer to the Israeli-Egyptian border, by the Israeli army during the years of the martial law, in the late 1950s.<sup>34</sup>

The houses of Rachame are makeshift structures made out of light and cheap materials such as corrugated steel, fabric and plastic sheets as well as re-used building parts. Most of the houses are without running water and use a water-tank, and none of them is connected to the electricity network or to land-lines of communication. Solar panels are mostly used for electricity while mobile phones are used for communication. There is moreover no connection to any sewerage or garbage collection system. Rachame residents visit Yerucham for basic state services such as health and postal services, and the older children go to school in the neighbouring Bedouin local council district 30 kilometres away.



FIG 3. *Rachame 2012. Photograph by the author.*

<sup>34</sup> A Social Survey of the Bedouin dispersion around Yerucham (Rachame), Report of the Authority for the Regularization of the Bedouin Settlement in the Negev (January 2011:5).

Although some Rachame residents lived in the area before the state was established, most of them were moved there by state authorities. Nevertheless Israel denied Rachame residents the right to inhabit the land, declaring them to be ‘invaders’ and their houses illegal, thereby putting them under a constant threat of demolition. During the past three years (2010-2013), a policy of ‘building freeze’ has been enforced, and the government is preventing the construction of new houses.<sup>35</sup> As S.Z., who was born in Rachame and now lives there with his own family, describes:

I built this house myself – it’s very easy. You buy the materials – timber structure, corrugated steel panels. No engineers, nothing. I decided where to build it. With the Bedouins it is important that there will be plenty of distance. Not tight. Everybody needs their own quiet place [...] Today it is impossible to build, to extend. They look down here from the satellites – and that’s it. It is impossible to renovate, to change anything [...] All of these house demolitions... they came with an extensive police force and demolished my neighbour’s house. There was a total mess. And for what? It creates a very bad feeling. A man serves thirty years in the Israeli Defence Force and then they demolish his house [...] They came with tractors, with their special units, soldiers. They are doing too many horrible things... they push you to a corner.<sup>36</sup>

Rachame’s residents are not an exception. The 1948 war and the establishment of the Israeli state had a dramatic effect on the Bedouin population; 80 percent of the 70,000 Bedouin in the Negev escaped or were expelled to Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan and northern Sinai. The Israeli policy regarding the fraction of tribes that remained in the Negev was based on two ‘basic practices’: firstly their concentration under martial law in a limited geographical area known as the *Siyag*,<sup>37</sup> and secondly the declaration of the entire Negev area as unregistered land which therefore belongs to the state. Although the Bedouin of the Negev were semi-nomadic,<sup>38</sup> most did not register their land during the periods of Ottoman and British rule,<sup>39</sup> a

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<sup>35</sup> The Goldberg Commission was set up by the Israeli government in 2007 to end the long-running land disputes between the state and the Bedouin living in the Negev. The Commission issued its report in November 2011 and recommended that most of the 46 unrecognised villages be recognised and most of its illegal structures be declared legal, on condition that they suit Israel’s development plans in the area. Since these recommendations, a policy of ‘building freeze’ has been adopted. In 2011 the Prawer Report suggested how the Goldberg proposals could be implemented, in terms of the transfer of 30,000 villagers to government townships.

<sup>36</sup> An interview with S.Z. 10 April 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Loosely translated *siyag* means ‘enclosure’, ‘fence’ or ‘reservation’. Eleven different tribes joined the existing population of six tribes in the *Siyag*, an area of 1,600 square kilometres in the northern part of the Negev. This was done during the early 1950s due to the security situation on the Israeli-Egyptian border (Ben-David, 1982, 1993, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> Increasingly relying on rain-fed agriculture and trade for their livelihood (Meir, 1988).

legal fact which allowed the Israeli land policy to be executed. Guiding this policy is a cultural-political vision in which the Negev desert is a deserted area which needs to be revived and the Negev Bedouin represent a disappearing primitive culture.<sup>40</sup> Since the 1960s, Israel has established seven purpose-built townships to which it hoped to transfer the Bedouin population, uprooting them from their pastoralist culture and turning them into city dwellers.<sup>41</sup>

Today the 180,000 Negev Bedouin are composed of three main sub-groups: those urbanised into modern planned towns (around 50 percent), those living in their ancestral land (mostly in informal, unrecognised localities) and those evicted from their original villages and transferred to new, informal towns and villages.<sup>42</sup> Today there are 46 unrecognised, informal Bedouin villages struggling for legal recognition from the Israeli government. While other forms of settlement are usually either recognised by the state or are evicted and destroyed, the unrecognised Bedouin villages are in an intermediate situation. On the one hand, they are illegal and thus do not receive the basic provisions which the state is obliged to provide as equal rights to its citizens; and on the other hand, without an acceptable agreement, the state cannot evict them, leaving them abandoned in time and space.<sup>43</sup>

As a non-Jewish indigenous ethnic minority which did not fit into the Zionist concept, the Bedouin remained excluded from the nation-building process, and isolated in the geographic, economic and social margins of the state who denied their arguably legitimate claim to cultural-spatial difference. Their concentration in the *Siyag* zone, and the effort to transfer them into towns or abandon them in unrecognised settlements, are violent actions conducted as a part of the Israeli effort to Judaise and de-Arabise land development. The current enforcement of the 'building freeze' accompanied by tight surveillance and house demolition deeply affects all aspects of their everyday lives – marriages are postponed and existing

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<sup>39</sup> This is due to a variety of reasons, mainly the existence of a well-functioning customary land system and a historical perception that foreign rulers would prove temporary (Ben-David, 2004; Falah, 1989; Kedar, 2004; Meir, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Stasilius & Yuval-Davis (1995).

<sup>41</sup> See Falah (1983). The Bedouin had a dual response to this policy; those who did not own any land moved to the planned settlements which were not attractive to the land owners, who built their own villages. In the mid-1980s there were about 100 of these villages scattered over a wide area (Kliot & Medzini, 1985). In a 2003 study by the Center Bureau of Statistics, Israel, all seven of the planned settlements were among the poorest settlements in Israel.

<sup>42</sup> See Goldberg (2008).

<sup>43</sup> Noah (2009). Also see the concept of 'grey spacing' as the practice of indefinitely positioning populations between the 'lightness' of legality, safety and full membership, and the 'darkness' of eviction, destruction and death (Yiftachel, 2009).

houses become overcrowded with children – all as part of the state pressure to control, re-shape and reduce the Bedouin space. The helplessness of the Bedouin towards the violence of the state, together with the imposed adjustment to modern life, creates different responses which vary between anger and acceptance, and uncertainty and fear of the unknown.

Foucault argues that the greatest transformation that the political right underwent in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the replacement of the old sovereign right to kill<sup>44</sup> – “the right to take life or to let live”, by the opposite right, namely, the power to “make” live and “let” die.<sup>45</sup> As the great public ritualisation of death started to disappear,<sup>46</sup> the purpose of the modern state became to optimise and improve the state of life;<sup>47</sup> thus was “the power of regularization” connected to the power over human life. Biopolitics, as the power technology of the modern nation-state, creates a new threshold between life and death which is well expressed in ‘the camp’. The population, which is legally protected under normal juridical order from the direct violence of the state as a sovereign, is also biologically protected by the state’s regulatory mechanisms. In ‘the camp’, this legal and biological protection of the state is withdrawn, and detainees/residents are abandoned to die either by the state’s direct violence or by the absence of state ‘life supporting’ mechanisms such as infrastructures (water, electricity), institutions (health, education) and economic resources (working places). The very different spatial manifestations of the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ camps show the same relation to the norm in an opposite manner: while the formal camps are rigid spaces of unlimited control by the state, the informal camps are spaces of complete abandonment by the state. These spaces have become the modern means of the state sovereign to constitute itself as such; in place of arenas for the historic death rituals of the sovereign who killed individuals in order to constitute its power, ‘the camp’ has arisen as the space in which whole populations are left to flounder.

### **Two stories of co-operation**

In January 2011, both Rachame and Yerucham residents participated in a local event – a ceremony which celebrated the official opening of a new kindergarten for Rachame’s children as a happy-ending to a joint local grassroots struggle in which members of both the

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<sup>44</sup> A concrete manifestation of this power could be seen in the great public ritualisation of death in the spectacular ceremonies performed in the colosseums and in central squares (Foucault, 2003:240-241).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 241.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 247.

<sup>47</sup> This was made possible by the development of medicine and infrastructures concerned with public hygiene, vaccinations, coordinated medical care and eliminating accidents and other random elements (Ibid. p. 244, 248).

Jewish and Bedouin communities took part. This followed a District Court Ruling in May 2010, which ordered the Ministry of Education and the Yeruham Local Council to establish a kindergarten in Rachame. This decision was made in response to a petition submitted by a civic action group from Yerucham called ‘*Mirkam Ezori*’ (regional fabric) and the legal department of the ‘Association for Civil Rights in Israel’, together with the head of Rachame’s village committee, as part of a joint struggle by the residents of Yerucham and Rachame to acquire the right to education for Rachame’s children. The petition stated that the lack of educational framework for children between the ages of three and six<sup>48</sup> constituted a violation of the children’s right to education and equality and the residents demanded the establishment of a kindergarten close to their homes.<sup>49</sup>

Two previous, independent attempts to establish a kindergarten for the children of Rachame were made by the two groups and failed due to the physical limitations and legal restrictions. Established in 2008, the first kindergarten was a provisional tent whose daily function was limited by the tough environmental conditions,<sup>50</sup> while the second one was erected in a tin structure that was demolished by the authorities on the grounds that it was built illegally.<sup>51</sup> In response to the ruling, Uday Zenon, head of the village committee in Rachame and one of the petitioners, stated: “This court ruling has finally reminded the Ministry of Education and the Yerucham Local Council that these children are also citizens, and that the Compulsory Education Law applies to them as well”.<sup>52</sup> Gil Gan-Mor, the attorney who represented the petitioners, reported that “The Court ruled decisively today that the authorities cannot hold children hostage in the struggle over the unrecognized villages”.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, the kindergarten was built inside Yerucham’s statutory boundary with approval for a divert usage of a plot of land originally designated for industrial use but geographically close to the village. The approach adopted by both Yerucham and Rachame activists was to tackle a specific problem (the children’s education) and achieve an *ad hoc* solution (the kindergarten), rather than to reach an inclusive resolution to the problem of the unrecognised villages as a whole.

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<sup>48</sup> The alternative proposed by the authorities - to attend the kindergarten in another village, 30 kilometers away - was not an adequate solution due to the young age of the children and the unsafe journey on dirt roads.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/Jerusalem-Report/Kindergarten-conflict>.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.acri.org.il/en/2010/06/06/court-state-must-open-kindergarten-in-unrecognized-bedouin-village/>.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.1315300>.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.box.com/shared/hofe72jxr9>.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.acri.org.il/en/2010/06/06/court-state-must-open-kindergarten-in-unrecognized-bedouin-village/>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

The aforementioned joint public consultation held in April 2013 at Yerucham's local community centre, entitled 'The regularisation of the Bedouin settlement in the area around Yerucham', seemed to adopt the same tactics. Instead of waiting for an official recognition of the Bedouin settlement as promised in the Goldberg Report, the residents sought a temporary solution for the current, acute problem of the 'building freeze' in order to bypass temporarily the bureaucratic and political obstacles. In this instance, it is not only Yerucham's residents who are assisting Rachame but also the town's municipal authorities which promoted this initiative together with Rachame leaders, and presented it as a temporary solution to policy-makers in national level. The policy-makers adopted the proposal, as stated by the former minister Benny Begin and Yehuda Bachar of the Ministry of Construction and Housing:

We are 40 years late [...] it is no longer possible to wait [...] we have to approach a solution [...] and the plan presented here is a wise plan of giving and receiving [...] instead of illegal houses – construction in organised plots. This is a beginning of a solution. If Yerucham will be the pioneer in this area, and will show the way – other signs, other beginnings will follow. This is why I recommend Yerucham's residents and Rachame's residents to accept this outline, as this is the beginning of the solution to everyone's problems.<sup>54</sup>

The new settlement should be an example and a role model of Jewish-Bedouin relations. We must not let this opportunity slip away.<sup>55</sup>

As mentioned above, good mutual relations between Jewish and Arab citizens and local authorities are rare in the Israeli socio-political landscape. The examination of the background of these two initiatives reveals that they were based on the relatively solid foundations of the good social relations between the Jewish and Bedouin communities. In the main street of Yerucham, in the weekly market and in the local shops, the health clinic and the post office, residents from both settlements are readily identifiable. In addition to this quotidian coexistence, there is evidence of good personal relations between individuals from both communities;<sup>56</sup> some know each other from childhood, and others from local encounters or from military service. Such an acquaintanceship has led to the creation of the '*Mirkam*

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<sup>54</sup> The former minister Benny Begin speaks at the public consultation in Yerucham, 9 April 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Major Police General Yehuda Bachar, currently the head of 'The Authority for the Regulation of the Bedouin Settlement in the Negev', Ministry of Construction and Housing, speaks at the public consultation in Yerucham, 9 April 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Based on more than twenty in-depth interviews with both Yerucham and Rachame residents, conducted 2012-2013.

*Ezori*' group which was formed in 2006 as a study group for Bedouin issues by Yerucham residents – some of whom were born in the town or arrived there as immigrant children, while others moved there as part of an ideological group of conservative Jews with the aim of supporting the peripheral settlement. One of the founders of the group, which later became the action group that initiated the kindergarten project, describes how relations developed between him and one of Rachame's leaders:

My first meeting with 'U' was a coincidence, in a reserve duty at the army. 'U' was a Bedouin tracker. I didn't know he is from here. After that I saw him at a local election meeting in Yerucham. In the army, he was a senior tracker, at a very high status [...] In the position in Yerucham, he looked completely different. A kind of a neglectedness in relation to the military polish and splendour. I barely recognised him [...] We started talking and it went well with the idea of the study-group. We got an image of what's going on there [in Rachame] – and we decided to focus on education.<sup>57</sup>

This acquaintanceship, which was triggered by the gap between a military identity and a civic one, was translated into the need to act and assist the deprived neighbours. Other interviews suggest that there is another layer of identification between Yerucham and Rachame, one which is based not only on local encounters but on a local identity related to the temporariness and marginalisation common to the past and present camp-dwellers, as Yerucham's mayor argues:

Yerucham wants to have influence on national challenges which are relevant to the global world in which distance has no meaning and only the community has strength [...] In the modern age, we see withdrawal from responsibility to other people. Sustainability means the man and the land, how to maintain them, how to respect them [...] how to respect the foreign, the different, the weak in the society. People say "Why say Bedouins? Moroccans? We are all the same". This is not true! We are not the same! Whether in a *ma'abara* or in a permanent settlement, every identity needs a place, every social group needs to be treated individually. The Bedouins are here during the last sixty years. They are desperate people, with no hope. We have to treat them under the same principles we treat ourselves [...] Yerucham is conceived as weak. But in relation to the Bedouins it is strong. We have a lot to give [...] I am an Arab-Jew. I really identify with them. We have a common denominator [...] Most of the families here are poor, they were

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<sup>57</sup> An interview with A.V. 3 April 2013.



brought to the *ma'abara* [...] the temporariness hurts the community, the family strength, but the desert, the distance, the perspective, the survival in accepting the other, to do your best for the other – is one of the foundations of the town.<sup>58</sup>

The description of the difficult historic situation created by the state which brought the two communities together, along with the continuing good local relations – is used in order to legitimise the political co-operation between the two settlements:

Yerucham's people were brought here in the 1950s at night, they were told – you have to get down, and the truck continued without them. They were put in huts, in tents; when they woke up in the morning – they saw the Bedouins, so they thought they are still in Morocco ... when they put their sheep and goats out to pasture – they met the Bedouins. Rachame is a place, it is a real name.<sup>59</sup> Since then, good relations were created [...] people here grew up together [...] Michael [Biton, the mayor] is not afraid [...] he said to them [the authorities] – its either we are talking seriously or not at all. Don't speak to me and Uдах in different languages [...] he wants a real solution [...] what forced the state to agree is Yerucham and the tribe, the populations that grew up together [...] it's better to find a solution at the local level.<sup>60</sup>

### **From exclusion to local co-operation: The subversive action of the urban camp**

What is the basis for the co-operation between Yerucham and Rachame? Can their joint past and present experiences of the camp help in explaining the motivation for their alliance?

As argued in the first part of this paper, the camps, with their different formal and informal spatial manifestations, have several significant joint characteristics. They are temporary spaces in which the time of their respective inhabitants is suspended. They are created and managed outside the normal order; and they are constructed for or by specific populations because of their identity. 'The camp' is an instrument of exclusion and separation between its inhabitants and the hegemonic society; it is included within the state territory but abandoned outside of the normal order.

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<sup>58</sup> An interview with Yerucham's mayor, Michael Biton, 11 April 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Some of the unrecognised Bedouin villages are named after a family, a sheik or a tribe (like Abu-Sulb, Twail Abu-Jerawel, etc.)

<sup>60</sup> An interview with Rachame's head of village committee, Uдах Zenon (11.4.13)

In the Yerucham and Rachame camps, such exclusion was and still is ethnically based, in terms of the Mizrahi Jews and Bedouins respectively. ‘The camp’ allows the hegemonic society to ignore the personal needs of its inhabitants and manage them as objects of the ethnocentric Israeli policy. In addition to the humiliation of the camp inhabitants and the abuse of their identity by the state, ‘the camp’ also ignores the place itself in terms of where it is constructed; it is a “dislocating localization”<sup>61</sup> in which the land is an abstract territory to be conquered or an empty space in which the state can discard unwanted populations and “let them die”.<sup>62</sup> The camp is a space where locality, temporality, identity and normal law are suspended; a tool which transforms land into a territory and people into human objects that will either serve as construction material for the ‘nation building’ project<sup>63</sup> or be rejected due to their ethnicity.

The establishment of the kindergarten and local co-operation towards the new Bedouin neighbourhood has emerged against a reality of separation, neglect and exclusion imposed by the state on the two groups. But the formal camp that later transformed into a marginalised development town did not follow the expected scenario in which deprived ethno-classes mobilise against their government and/or rival groups.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the Bedouin inhabitants of the informal camp and the unrecognised Bedouin villages also did not adopt a radicalising antagonistic approach as a reaction against the demolition policy.<sup>65</sup>

As seen in the interviews, the joint actions of Rachame’s and Yerucham’s residents and leadership, as well as their own interpretation to these actions in the interviews, stand diametrically against the reality of the camp and its common characteristics; they demand to be included in the normal juridical order (the kindergarten and education laws, the neighbourhood and the building laws); they resist their suspended temporariness by the demand for the responsibility of the state to their next generation (the kindergarten); they resist their dependency on discriminating state policies and initiate local change; they struggle against their alienation for a place (mainly Yerucham’s residents) in the creation of a new locality which includes their neighbours; and most importantly, they resist their

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<sup>61</sup> Agamben (1998: 175).

<sup>62</sup> Foucault (2003:241).

<sup>63</sup> Kozlovsky (2008: 153).

<sup>64</sup> See for example Tzfadia-Yftachel (2004).

<sup>65</sup> Yftachel (2009) analyses the spatio-political dynamics which are a part of the struggle related to the Bedouin informal spatiality, describing *Sumood* (hanging on), memory building and autonomous politics as three of the ways in which the Bedouin resist evictions and fight for government recognition.

ethnically based separation by their co-operation, and initiate a process of political mobilisation which affects not only the local level but the national level as well.

Any interpretation of Yerucham and Rachame's actions should first acknowledge the local level as a significant site of struggle, and uncover the complexity of the politics of the subaltern in its effort to attain cultural and political autonomy from the policies, regulations and disciplinary powers imposed on them by the state and its institutions.<sup>66</sup> Political mobilisation is deeply connected to place and identity, and the dynamic role of a place, which is composed of multi-layered relations to the 'national' and 'local', develops from constantly changing sources of identity and political power.<sup>67</sup> The politics of identity is based on the demand for recognition,<sup>68</sup> often through its relation to difference, and is also based on locality as a sense of belonging to a place (my town, my neighbours).<sup>69</sup> The decision of Yerucham's people to support their neighbours, and that of Rachame's people to politically act through their local relations rather than their ethnically-related ones,<sup>70</sup> means that both groups perceive an advantage in their locality and use it as a resource when they approach the national level. Yerucham can situate its identity in the local sphere as the stronger community supporting the weaker one (and act differently from the state which abandoned the weaker community), while Rachame can use its good local connections with a Jewish community to bypass the restricting regulations. The recognition that the two settlements receive at the national level is based on the local co-operation which they themselves created, rather than on their oppressive territorial and ethnic roles which were imposed on them through 'the camp'. The local sphere, based on cross-ethnic co-operation, is the tool of both communities to subvert the oppressive national setting imposed on them, and their local mutual sense of responsibility is a reaction against their national abandonment.

The new political subjectivities that emerge in the oppressive environments of Yerucham and Rachame present an alternative model to antagonism towards and mobilisation against an oppressive government and/or rival groups; they develop in relation to each other, co-operate at the level of municipal and local politics and approach national-level politicians and policy-makers with new suggestions which present new ways of acting in order to improve their

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<sup>66</sup> Bayat (2000:542, 548).

<sup>67</sup> Massey (1994), Yiftachel (2004).

<sup>68</sup> Taylor (1995).

<sup>69</sup> Castells (1997).

<sup>70</sup> For example, 'The Regional Council for the Unrecognised Villages' which is a Bedouin NGO which acts for government recognition of the villages.

condition. As current and past communities which were created and functioned outside the normal order, they approach the state with the demand to be included in it, but by their own conditions, and thus they effectively change and stretch the norm itself, together with the traditional modes of governance as “true liberation requires counterhegemonic strategies for democratic, socialist self-determination that rest on a **socio-spatial alliance** that does not replicate colonial spatial arrangements”.<sup>71</sup> The abandonment and suspension of both Yerucham and Rachame in the temporary environment of the camp has thus expedited their resourceful co-operation, and dynamics of the camp controlled by the state has brought them to act locally and challenge the modes of the traditional Israeli governance which usually deals separately with Jewish and Arab population, with no relations to the population’s local fabric.

“The *raison d’être* of politics,” asserts Hannah Arendt,<sup>72</sup> “is freedom” and freedom is the main aim of political action and the reason people live together in any political organisation. Freedom is identified with the subject, and, when it is translated into self-determination, subjectivity is realised.<sup>73</sup> The alliance between Yerucham and Rachame dwellers contests their exclusion through the politics of engagement, and seeks to transform the relationship of both communities with the state “from one of abandonment to one of accountability”.<sup>74</sup> This is the background which prompts the population of the camp to act as “the subversion of an existing order is the search for a fullness that the latter is preventing”.<sup>75</sup> As David Harvey argues – “The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is [...] one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights”;<sup>76</sup> the political relations and co-operation created between Yerucham and Rachame enable them both to realise their freedom and subjectivities at the local and national levels; the mutual claim of this freedom is the absolute resistance to the erasure of their space/time and their human identity in ‘the camp’.

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<sup>71</sup> Kipfer (2007:716).

<sup>72</sup> Arendt (1960:28).

<sup>73</sup> Laclau (1994:12).

<sup>74</sup> Menon (2010:161).

<sup>75</sup> Laclau (1994:36).

<sup>76</sup> Harvey (2003:939).

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