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Bedouin  
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Imagine being displaced from your home. Your land is gone, your family history is threatened and you are forced to adapt to a foreign land and new enemies. Welcome to Bedouin.

Bedouins are found on the desert belt of the Sahara up to the Arabian desert.

The Bedouins did not accept Israel's financial offer to sell their land, and were forced to move to another area of the Negev.

According to the peace accord between Israel and Egypt in 1970s, Israel committed to evacuate the Israeli military bases in Sinai, located in Egyptian Lands. The Israeli government decided to confiscate portions of land from the Bedouins for military use.

A negotiation committee was established in order to financially compensate the Bedouins for the loss of land in South Israel. The committee suggested paying 2,500 ILS (about US\$600) per dunam (1000 m.) and suggested 10 dunam for every 100 dunams. While some refused the offer, some have yet to receive compensation for the offer they accepted.

Eventually the Bedouin tribe found its way to the Arab village of Qalansawa in central Israel.

As the story is told, Israel appointed a directorate to compensate those who lost their land and help them adjust to their new circumstances.

Today the Bedouin community in Taibeh, Israel, remains disenfranchised. They are underrepresented in the Taibeh municipality, a situation which significantly constrains any efforts of the Bedouin community to improve the conditions in which they live. No voice, no future. Who will speak for them?

Many Arab residents view them as traitors for forfeiting their land to the State of Israel, as if selling the land would have given them more pride in their heritage. No one wants to hear them speak. But if you listen, Bedouin is whispering.

The Bedouin neighborhood, in Taibeh, is both one of the largest neighborhoods in Taibeh and one of the poorest and most neglected.

Despite their rights to basic services as both Israeli citizens and as victims of a government-forced displacement, the people of the Bedouin neighborhood of Taibeh suffer continuously from a lack of basic infrastructure, including: running water, a sewage system, proper housing, dependable electricity, local educational services, and basic health care services.

However, the town remains curiously strong.

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For many Bedouin girls and women, the educational system does not provide knowledge which seems relevant to their lives. In addition, social attitudes which stress female protection cause parents to refuse to send their daughters to far away schools due to the dangerous paths.

Illiteracy takes a social toll on its residents due to their inability to speak, read, or write Hebrew.

Without formal education and a social environment, Bedouin women are discouraged from working outside the home and most are financially dependent on husbands and fathers.

Infrastructure in the Bedouin neighborhood discourages local business initiatives and deters any outside businesses from entering the neighborhood. As a result, just less than half of the neighborhood population is unemployed.

Many residents of Bedouin feel emotionally and socially displaced in an environment which does not value or need the nomadic household skills which previously allowed them to be productive members of their society. There is a determination among some of the Bedouins to change their outlook on life and become interactive with the world around them.

Today, Bedouins are thought of as burdens to their community.

The intense relationship between Bedouins and Arabs continues to be a hardship. The Arabs in Taibeh view themselves as high society and feel that interacting with Bedouins is below them. In 1988, the local municipality decided to destroy all of the stone homes in the Bedouin neighborhood, because they were built without permits. No additional structures have been torn down since, but social tension continues to exist between the two groups.

Within the community itself, there is a continued struggle to bridge a generation gap between nomad elders and modern youth; to integrate the children into the local educational system; and to deal with a host of other problems, including unemployment, crime, sanitation, and nutrition.

The Bedouin neighborhood looks more like a third world country, than a developing community. Streets and walkways are completely absent, and residents live in an odd mix of tents, makeshift metal shelters, and stone houses of various sizes and shapes, scattered amidst dirt, weeds, piles of trash, and a collection of farm animals.

The environment is changing though. The Bedouin community has been slowly transitioning from nomadic to urban life. The youth are seeing a global perspective now.

If you look closely you will see a small association that has vowed to bring advancement to the region and it starts with the youth.

Saeed Azbarga, the director of the Bedouin Association for Education & Health Development, believes that every child in Bedouin has the right to receive proper education and an equal opportunity to develop his or her skills and become educated. Furthermore, that every citizen has the right to access governmental services such as education, health care and social security. As a result of its activities, the Bedouin Association for Education & Health Development has created wide-spread community support among the younger generation and is the only association with accomplishments in community building and in youth education in the Bedouin Neighborhood of Taibeh.

Since transitioning from a tribal, nomadic life in the desert to sedentary life in Taibeh, the Bedouin community has experienced intergenerational tension and social fragmentation. There is a serious disconnect between the elder generation of community members, raised in accordance with the rules of the desert in southern Israel, and the younger generation, which is more familiar with the lifestyle and customs of central Israel.

Lack of communication and intergenerational understanding is a serious challenge to achieving harmony within the community, as well as an obstacle to development and effective collective action.

Roughly 40% of the Bedouin community in Taibeh belongs to the older generation, which has led the community since its relocation. According to the traditional Bedouin culture and the rules of the desert, the elders are recognized as the natural leaders of the community. Unfortunately, however, this generation is illiterate and has had serious difficulty coping with the new reality of life in Taibeh and in official institutions in Israel as well, which involves interacting with new governmental systems and integrating into the culture of central Israel.



After 25 years, the community still lacks basic infrastructure for water, sewage, schools, and a community center. While the elders struggle to maintain their status as community leaders, dissatisfaction among the younger generation intensifies.

The younger generation, which now consists of the majority of the community's population, has had a drastically different set of experiences. Exposure to lifestyles and values different from those of a traditional Bedouin desert society has encouraged many members of the community to expect and demand different things.

This segment of the population places a higher premium on privacy, maintains a different attitude towards work and engagement with state institutions, and could greatly benefit from increased resources for health and educational development.

Thus, the generation gap and the different values and expectations that accompany it, present a serious challenge for the future of Taibeh. Tension has arisen concerning social change and development, including access to education for girls and women, work for the younger generation, and the improvement of local infrastructure.

While the elder generation should still feel honored and respected, the younger generation also wishes to play a more active role in community decision making and advocacy for development.

The Bedouin Association for Education & Health Development (BAEHD) seeks to establish a debate and discussion center to encourage inter-generational exchange and serve as a venue for constructive dialogue on issues affecting the Bedouin community of Taibeh.

This center will help to bridge the gap between the generations in Taibeh, lowering intra-communal tension through better communication and education. Building on the Debate in the Neighborhood model developed by IDEA-NL, BAEHD seeks to train members from different age groups in techniques of debate and dialogue, establishing a debate centre where people have a safe place to discuss different issues and come closer to understanding each other.

It has become apparent that the youth (which includes those aged 40 years and younger) value privacy, rights, and increased economic power. While the elders, aged 45 and up, value freedom, homage, and respect.

The youth would like to make many changes, including improvements to the neighborhoods infrastructure, education, and health. The elders believe that a tent is better than a stone home and often fight change. Saeed believes that time will be the best cure to most ailments.

Although there are many infrastructure problems (sewage, clean drinking water, etc.) the Bedouin Association decided to tackle education first.

Nobody opposes education, Saeed said. When our pupils have education, this is the starting point for any social change.

The youth of Bedouin are learning more with each effort made by the association. As the youth learn, so do the elders. Many elders did not know that they were deserving of rights and education. Bedouins were once described as powerless. Now, the association intends to raise peoples awareness to social justice, hold community lectures about laws, and educate people to demand their own rights from local and State authorities.

The community is finding power in their voice now, and the credit is owed to the youth. According to a school teachers testimony, "I feel that there is a change among the Bedouin pupils in the class. They speak freely. This thing was not before."

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