

Al-Naqab Bedouins

Finding New Ways of Resisting Policies of Displacement and Israelization



By Ra'fat Abu-Ayesh
Translated by Elias Khayyo

A

good eight months have passed since the Naqab uprising against the Israeli afforestation policy that aims to seize the land in the Naqa' area east of Bir al-Sabe'. And a year and a half have passed since the Dignity Uprising took place in 1948-occupied Palestine, during which Israel arrested thousands of Palestinian Bedouin youth in the Naqab and flooded the streets with police officers and their vehicles. It also doubled house demolitions and court cases to gratify the extremist Israeli groups, among them the Sayeret Barel militia, which roam the streets of Bir al-Sabe' and call for the ethnic cleansing of Arabs from Israel. In the meantime, these groups have chased Palestinian Bedouin youths simply for being in the city, and the Israeli municipality has increased its public activities in the courtyard of Al-Masjid al-Kabeer (Great Mosque) in Bir al-Sabe', aiming to show great disrespect to the Palestinian Bedouins, who are passionate about their mosque.

In recent months, Israel has persecuted Arabs, kept scores of youth behind bars, demolished houses, and kidnapped students from the university campus of Bir al-Sabe' because they

expressed their Palestinian identity. The Israeli government went to extremes in inciting against the Naqab's Palestinian Bedouins, publishing writings that attempt to brand the Naqab Palestinians as invaders and criminals. Furthermore, it announced that it is implementing eleven development schemes in the Naqab and opening twelve new settlements for Ukrainian and European Jews, usurping the land from its Bedouin owners in the Naqab and threatening with displacement more than 100,000 Naqab Palestinians.

The humanitarian crisis that is evident in the Naqab has been initiated by the occupation authorities to appease the Israeli fascists who despise the shape, color, dress, and originality of Bedouins. These forces deny Bedouins the right to own and access their land, refuse to acknowledge the justice of the Bedouin cause, and instead compel them to abandon their land through oppression and displacement policies.

Years ago, in response to the expansion of Israeli settlements that cut into Palestinian lands and hearts, Palestinian youth in the West Bank attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish Bab al-Shams (Gate of the Sun) village in the hills of Area C.

In addition to the oppression, harassment, and fascism, Israel's traditional chiefs and the proponents of the so-called new approach continue their desperate attempts to destroy Arab awareness and impose a false concept of citizenship,

I suppose from the internet. I'm trying to get original photos of images for Bedouins resisting the occupation.





Resisting the occupation.

linked for them with the complete abandonment of traditional lifestyles. The most dangerous aspect of these measures is the attempt to erase the values that prompted the Dignity and Naqab afforestation uprisings from the collective awareness of the young generation of Bedouins living in Israel. In mere weeks of heroism, patriotic action, and sacrifice, Bedouin youth have managed to obliterate close to 30 years of Israelization efforts and billions in funds spent to create the “Israeli Arab.”

The occupation authorities hoped that oppression would result in submissiveness, and that lack of building permits and the deprivation

of water, electricity, and infrastructure in Bedouin villages would lead to voluntary displacement. But the occupation authorities failed to displace even a single Arab family from its land in the Naqab, even though they demolished 14,000 houses in only six years. They also wagered that the plundering of Al-Masjid al-Kabeer in Bir al-Sabe’ and its conversion to a museum, as well as the suppression of the Palestinian Arab presence in the city – which means the world to Naqab Bedouins! – would make them forget their cause and accept the situation. They hoped that the Bedouins would become weak and incapacitated, but the opposite is true.

Among tents with wooden poles, where the noise and smell of an old gasoline electric generator mixes with mountain air and the talk of residents and visitors, the tent owners speak angrily yet with dignity and natural patriotism about their suffering. They explain how and why they moved to the mountains when their city was seized by Israel and its residents were displaced.

Naqab residents had only two ways to return to their land. Both constitute first-rate cases of patriotic practice.

Take the honorable members of Al-Dabsan family. Today, they welcome guests and talk about the

suffering they have endured since the occupation displaced them from their land during *Al-Nakba*. Initially, they lived on land that belonged to others because they found no alternative. But as the family grew, the crisis was exacerbated. When the family saw no possibility of a solution, they refused to fall victim to the crime of “forced urbanization” and moved back to their former unrecognized village. This has caused disputes with their neighbors on land where they are considered guests, and they have to withstand unremitting demolitions.

Indeed, the Israel Land Authority (ILA) has spared no attempt to divide and rule, pushing the original inhabitants to fight internally over artificially restricted resources, which has led to disintegration and weakened their unified resolve. The aim is to make them forget the real cause of their suffering: the occupation.

The second case of patriotic action is not family-based. In Rahat, the second largest Arab city in the country and the largest Bedouin city in the world, young couples suffer from great hardship. Over 12,000 young couples and families in the city have been waiting for building permits since the city was established in the 1970s when Naqab Bedouins were forced by Israel to give up their nomadic lifestyle. Racist ILA policies stipulate the expansion of the city’s suburbs and neighborhoods, in measures planned since its establishment, to displace members of unrecognized villages to the city in further forced (re)settlement practices. In suburb 1, the ILA plans to force-settle and displace the families of Al-Zarnuq village, which negatively affects Rahat’s residents who are unable to find housing. The Israeli authorities’ rationale is to force a maximum number of residents to



Suppressing citizens and razing their agricultural lands in Al-Maasara area, east of Bethlehem, 2014. Photo by Abdel Rahman Younis.

live on a minimum area of land, and they have no objection to the creation of poor neighborhoods and ghettos for Palestinian Arabs. In response, scores of youth from Rahat formed a group to protest and reject this plan. They created their own suburb, have moved and remain there, defying the ILA, which on a regular basis destroys not only their homes but also the tents of Al-Dabsan family.

What makes these two cases exceptional is that the affected individuals took action and created facts on the ground instead of hoping for sympathy from the colonialists. In the past, only Israel imposed realities in its colonial effort to usurp the land, for example, by

establishing settlements on top of Bedouin villages. A similar case is the afforestation of land around Bir al-Sabe', carried out by the Israel National Fund, which aims to prevent Bedouins from grazing their livestock in areas owned by Bedouins.



Thus, imposing a de facto situation on the ground has ceased to be an Israeli monopoly but rather has become a patriotic act practiced by the Palestinians who live in the Naqab. In more than one case, the Palestinian Arab presence returned to the space of struggle. An example is the return of the Naqab Arabs to pray in front of their mosque that has been usurped in Bir al-Sabe', and to demonstrate for its restitution even though the town's Israeli population has formed armed militias and the government persecutes Palestinian Arabs. The people of Bir al-Sabe' – i.e., the Naqab tribes gathered in Bir al-Sabe', which forms the Naqab historical center – have returned and demonstrated in the heart of Bir al-Sabe', the town that was invaded

by armed settlers who searched for Arabs to assault and kill only eight months ago.

The instinct of the Palestinian Bedouins who live in Bir al-Sabe' District and the Palestinians who live inside Israel places dignity above the considerations of livelihood, as was evident in the Dignity Uprising.

Instinctive patriotic action in Bir al-Sabe' has become a reality. Its organization must take place within a knowledge framework that exposes the Israeli attempts to cloak existential battles in the guise of provision of services. The Naqab Bedouins' battle is against the occupation and not for the improvement of its conditions! The attempt to isolate them intellectually from the one and only Palestinian destiny, namely national independence, under the ruse of improving the living conditions must be seen for what it is: an attempt to improve the conditions of slavery and erase the position of the Palestinian people that has been underscored by blood and steadfastness. This makes the battle for awareness as important as the battle for land and existence.

Ra'fat Abu Ayesh is an activist, tour guide, and educator from the Naqab. He has worked in journalism, writing, and international advocacy.

SCAN
TO SHARE

