

Chapter 8

Segev Shalom—A City on the Edge of Forever?

People like to romanticize the bedouin lifestyle. They spend time with us, but they still write based upon their initial expectations, the fantastic things they hear about us. Even bedouin academics end up writing about the fantastic side of bedouin culture; they take things that do exist, but they exaggerate them. So people don't realize how we're developing, how our society has changed.

—Muhammad (Abu-Tarek) Hamamdi, Segev Shalom, Israel,
10 December 1992

The issues raised in the preceding chapters now bring me back to the question, once again, of the role of planning in the bedouin sector today, and how/if/whether it is even reasonable or fair to believe or to expect planning to be the interlocutor in resolving what appears, prima facie, to be such an intractable set of political, economic, and social problems in this minority sector. In order to answer this question, I wish for the moment, and for the sake of deconstructing what is so clearly a highly charged issue, to change the subject (though in truth I am doing nothing of the kind), to an area that is seemingly unrelated: the world of science fiction. Using the realm of fantasy as a momentary digression, I will then return to the issue at hand, and will argue that the bedouin condition today could easily be viewed as just as “disorienting” (see Dinero 2009) and multi-layered in some ways as an experience out of an episode of Rod Serling’s 1960s television series, *The Twilight Zone*.

Conceptualizing Multiple Visions of Possible Futures

The genre of science fiction and the realm of New Town Planning are not very far apart. As Kumar (1987) cogently argues, notions of utopianism and the belief that human beings are capable of controlling and socially engi-

neering the physical environment can be traced as far back as Greek and Roman times—if not sooner. From the moment humans began to believe that Utopia not only existed, but that they also could play a role in making such environments an actual reality, the earliest beginnings of Planning were born.

In humanity's desire to control the environment, to master natural and social forces through the planned community, however, unanticipated consequences are, some writers have suggested, seemingly inevitable. Thus, whether it be Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *1984*, or various other novels, which became required fare in high school English classes across the United States in the latter part of the twentieth century, the message is clear: "Be careful what you wish for." As Kumar shows through his analytically critical lens, many (though certainly not all) Utopian visions as presented by these and other authors quickly degrade into the dystopian malaise that comes from the realities of human behavior and circumstance. That is, Planning can go just so far—human beings are not programmable robots.

This conceptual framework is developed further in Kumar's discussion and critique of B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*. Kumar notes that Skinner's work reflects an ideology of humans striving to control and to manipulate one another—that is to say, that relations between individuals are based largely upon the desire to persuade and influence, and that we should "not fear control, but make of its exercise a science for the improvement of the human condition" (1987: 372). Such a science, needless to say, might be called "Planning." And yet, he notes that there is an inherent contradiction in such efforts that renders Planning ineffectual, or at least, impractical, by its very nature. He writes:

There can be, in a strict sense, no 'planning for the future,' for planning can be only in terms of current realities and current knowledge. In the face of an unknown future, the only hope lies in preserving as many varieties of thought and practice as are compatible with survival. We do not know, but one or some of these practices may turn out to be the successful response in an altered environment. But such practices are necessarily, in the present, inefficient and 'irrational,' and as such, anathema to the benevolent elite. There is therefore a persistent tendency, in a society governed by a rationalizing elite, to suppress or eliminate them. With every such suppression the species or society launches itself further along the path to extinction. (Kumar 1987: 377)

In other words the only way, one might conclude, that Planning can be successful under these assumptions is to know ahead of time what the out-

come will be—and if the outcome is a given, then why does one need to plan? Is the outcome not “inevitable”? Or put differently, are there multiple futures or just one, already predetermined, set, and immutable? For, only if there are multiple possible outcomes can Planning play a role in influencing what the future in fact will hold.

Perhaps one of the most well-known examples in which such concepts were presented and addressed was during an episode of the popular *Star Trek* television series, *City on the Edge of Forever* (1967; StarTrek.com). In the episode, the crew of the *Starship Enterprise* steps through a “time portal” and in so doing goes back in time to the 1930s. There, they meet a social worker, Edith Keeler, who, they discover, will play a key role in history. In the “first version” of history, she dies after being struck by a car; due to the crew’s presence in the past, however, they save her from the oncoming car and the accident is averted. As a result, in the “second version” of history, she lives, and soon thereafter plays a role (inadvertently) in the Nazi conquest of Europe and soon thereafter the rest of the world. Thus, the *Starship* crew discusses and determines their role in the situation; they plan what they can and *cannot* do before determining that they must return to the ship and step through the “portal” an additional time in history *before* the car accident was to occur. This time they purposely stand idly by as the car approaches, for in order for the “original” version of the future to be restored, a better future for all of humanity, themselves included, *Edith Keeler must die*.

How then might one reconcile the views, ideals, and fears expressed within the fantasy world of science fiction with the purview of New Town Planning? While both may think in utopian terms, planners must plan for the unanticipated, as contradictory as that may sound. They must think not only of what they *want* to occur, but what is also *likely* to occur, that is, to consider a variety of scenarios, a variety of futures. For in truth, like the multiple pasts of Edith Keeler, there are also multiple futures. Planners who believe that the present is fixed, that there is only one way to view things, and that there are not a myriad of ways of seeing, ways of knowing, and ways of understanding the present, are also predestined and predetermined to believe that there is only one possible future, that this future is already a given, and that present constraints are also future barriers. Not only are such people particularly uncreative and culturally insensitive, but I would go a step further by suggesting that they are not really planners; they are bureaucrats.

In the present case, when accusations fly and charges are made about the failures inherent in the bedouin new town initiative, it is, more often than not, the bedouin who are accused of being the most “fatalistic” about life, the most sanguine and resigned to whatever outcomes the future may

hold. But Israel's planners do not have this luxury, and there are a number of plans in the works for the Negev being discussed and in various stages of implementation. And yet, what appears to be true about all of these plans is that once again, the concerns of the bedouin are not considered as central to the Negev planning agenda. Yet clearly, bedouin concerns must be addressed—for the good of the bedouin as well as for the good of the state—if the future is to be a utopian dream and not a dystopian nightmare. More to the point, as I will argue in greater detail below, the town of Segev Shalom, as one of the more successful of the first seven planned towns, can and must play a central role in the future development of the region.

Planning for the Bedouin of the Negev in the Twenty-first Century

Concerns over development of the Negev Desert, some 60 percent of Israel's land base excluding the West Bank, are hardly new. Israel's Founding Father and first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, was a staunch believer in the potential of the Negev and had long believed that the future of the State of Israel was to be found there. His home in the Negev community of Sde Boqer was a testament to his commitment and belief in desert living.

Many believed, following the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt as a part of the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1979, that this signaled a likely shift in policy and a refocused commitment to investment and development in the Negev. A similar sentiment was anticipated upon the Israeli military withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and pending negotiations for a resolution of the Palestinian crisis.

And yet, as the land mass of the State of Israel becomes increasingly smaller, the assumption that the Negev will grow in importance, and that, once and for all, investment will finally come to this peripherally and greatly overlooked region has not come to fruition. Nonetheless, since the year 2000, a number of governmental plans have been disseminated that seek to guide the future planning and development of the Negev region. Projects such as the construction of Route 6, a North-South transit corridor connecting the Negev to the Tel Aviv-Haifa-Jerusalem urban agglomeration/city-state, have given the residents of the south reason to believe that their future may be a brighter one than historically has been the case.

For example, a new district plan for the Negev region, which explicitly addressed bedouin concerns, was approved by the government on 23 January 2000. Among this plan's goals was the desire to more effectively "integrate the Bedouin population in the south" (United Nations Economic and Social Council document, <http://www.unhcr.ch>). Although most of the

plan's initiatives were oriented toward the Jewish sector, the government did seek, for example, to increase the geographic area of Rahat and of the six other recognized towns.

The bedouin response to this plan, however, was to petition Israel's Supreme Court, contending that it did not reflect the community's need to maintain a balance between rural and urban settlements in the bedouin new town system. Only with the 2004 proposal to create the Abu-Basma settlements, and the recognition on the part of Israel's planners that such a balance was essential to bedouin social and economic development (see Moshe, 15 February 2007, Chapter 2), would this issue finally begin to be addressed.

An alternative plan put forward by Abu-Saad and Lithwick of Ben Gurion University that same year (2000) sought to include the agricultural sector within the urban development context, given its historic and cultural significance in bedouin economic and social development. And yet, the authors suggested, "there are significant potential benefits to be derived in many of the [bedouin new] towns from a concerted and high-powered effort to *modernize* the agricultural base of the Bedouin economy ... What we are proposing in particular are hi-tech applications for agriculture" (Abu-Saad & Lithwick 2000: 45; emphasis added).

Overall, the primary emphasis of their plan was centered upon an economic development agenda, which, they believed, would be acceptable to both the bedouin and Jewish communities (Abu-Saad & Lithwick 2000: 24–25), and which was premised upon the concern for "economic viability" of the towns:

Without jobs and businesses, incomes are low, the tax base is virtually non-existent, and very little can be done by the towns to help themselves. This makes them dependent on [the] government, whose policies when forthcoming have been seen to be more a source of the problem than the solution. The inevitable conclusion is that the heart of any approach to urban policy must lie [in] an economic development strategy. (Abu-Saad & Lithwick 2000: 21)

Abu-Saad and Lithwick enumerated several "preconditions" for this development, which include, among other inputs, improvements to regional transportation links, communications links, energy development, and greater human resource/labor development (most especially through improvements in bedouin education) and investment in job creation (2000: 28–35). They also called for further investment in urban infrastructure, roads, and housing. Essentially, they sought what amounted to an overhauling and retooling of the entire bedouin town.

The centerpiece of this economic development initiative was to view the bedouin towns as economic “poles.” Using a revised version of Central Place Theory, which provided the foundation of Israel’s Jewish new town initiative, this plan used the seven existing towns (and, presumably, extrapolating further, the nine that have since been added under Abu-Basma), as centers of growth, development, and innovation, which would eventually trickle out in spider-web like patterns to the surrounding areas.

The end result, as envisioned both in the generic theory and in the plan put forward here, was to develop a bedouin town network supported by these economic poles within which everyone could benefit, thrive, and grow. Thus, Rahat, it was suggested, would perform a major role as an Administrative center in such a network, while Tel Sheva might perform the role of “Economic Pole” (Abu-Saad & Lithwick 2000: 46–48). The smaller towns had other roles they might play as well. Nevatim Airfield, built in the context of the Tel Malhata project, remains a military base, but if/when it would finally be converted into a civilian facility as has been discussed over the years (Abu-Saad & Lithwick 2000: 50), nearby towns, especially Arara and K’seifa, could benefit, as these towns emphasize such economic sectors as produce processing and packaging.

In a later publication, Lithwick again repeated this emphasis upon the need for transportation and communication links, particularly focusing on the need for “regional development,” in which the bedouin towns would be encouraged to “develop strong linkages with nearby Jewish towns and rural settlements, and most importantly with Be’er Sheva” (2002: 16). While such an emphasis of interaction with Jewish Israeli communities makes a great deal of sense—as one of the greatest weaknesses of the bedouin town initiative is the degree to which this settlement system is virtually separate from Jewish Israel and both, one might contend, would be strengthened by greater integration with the other—such emphasis also creates further dependency between the bedouin community and the Jewish sector, as there is no parity between the two at present and further integration is unlikely to change this.

Further, he reiterated that the civilian use of Nevatim as a hub for transportation would benefit the entire Negev and would likely serve as a significant center for job creation, especially for the nearby bedouin communities of Arara and K’seifa (Lithwick 2002: 25). And yet once again, a classically ironic situation would arise, in which the bedouin who were forced off of their traditional lands and who now live in the communities that were created as a result of the construction of the Air Force base would have the opportunity to work at the very same facility.

To be sure, these plans have some merit, suggesting, for example, the need to create a “Marshall Plan” for the bedouin community (Abu-Saad

& Lithwick 2000: 16), drawing in major capital investment to the region at a time when many Jewish Israelis barely give the community a second thought. And yet, nowhere in such plans is there any recognition that the towns are independent actors or that they are home to separate families and tribes with different and sometimes competing and conflicting views and interests; the ideas expressed seem to assume that, like the Jewish development towns of the 1950s and 1960s, a command economic approach can be presented to the population and can be used, in effect, to economically and then, in time to socially, integrate and assimilate the bedouin in order to address some of the Jewish Israelis' concerns, such as the "demographic explosion" (Lithwick 2002: 10). Moreover, little recognition of the role of market forces is made, and yet as was seen above (Chapter 3), it is these forces that appear to be making the greatest impact in the economic development of communities, such as Segev Shalom, today.

More recent plans for the Negev released in mid decade (2000–2010) similarly seek to address the growing "bedouin problem." "Blueprint Negev" is a project of the Jewish National Fund, a quasi-governmental agency entrusted with the primary responsibility of holding and facilitating the development of Israel's land base. Through the use of \$4 billion of investment, the plan seeks to draw 250,000 new residents to the Negev, to reside in twenty-five new communities by 2015. These include English-speaking communities for North American immigrants who have not learned Hebrew. In the "Blueprint's" 12-point plan, one, point eleven, concerns the bedouin, noting that "improving the educational and economic opportunities for the Bedouin must be addressed" (JNF.org). It should be noted that the destruction of the homes at Hiram/Attir (see Chapter 7) was implemented in the context of the building of one of the new settlements under JNF's "Blueprint Negev" initiative.

The "Daroma 2015 Plan" also offers a comprehensive master plan for the social and economic needs of the Negev region, Jewish and bedouin residents alike. It is centered upon the premise that by drawing a "strong population" to the Negev from the center of the country over the next decade (i.e., 2005–2015), development can be generated, the likes of which have not been realized in decades of previous planning (Swirski 2007: 95).

The plan is premised upon the assumption that with new transportation and communications links now being developed (improved rail services, Route 6, and the like), new Negev communities offering large lots, expansive houses, and amenities will provide a draw; one will be able to access and afford to live a comfortable lifestyle not easily found in the country's center, yet will also be able to commute into the Tel Aviv conurbation each day for work and other needs that desert living cannot meet. The plan has been called the "most comprehensive" effort to foster Negev regional de-

velopment in recent years (Swirski 2007: 101). Thus, three goals will be accomplished simultaneously: 1) the population will be drawn away from the Tel Aviv-Haifa-Jerusalem conurbation; 2) the Negev will get a needed economic “shot in the arm;” and, 3) the Jewish population in the Negev will be increased in order to offset the rising Jewish/Arab demographic imbalance caused by the high bedouin birthrate.

In other words, the concerns of the 1950s and 1960s, which fed into the creation of the “Development Towns,” are once again at play in the “Daroma 2015 Plan.” In this new initiative, however, the utopian ideology feeding this planning initiative is not one of Socialist Labor Zionism (building the state, absorbing immigrants, developing Israeli identity through the demanding efforts of working the land). Rather, the “Daroma 2015 Plan” is premised upon an ideology of privatization, individualism, and bourgeois capitalist consumerism.

As for the role of the bedouin in this plan, 1.8 billion NIS (\$450 million) was earmarked for infrastructure to the seven original planned towns, plus those of the Abu Basma localities. No money was designated for the unrecognized towns (Swirski 2007: 88). Moreover, the “Daroma 2015 Plan” identifies the bedouin as the source of the Negev’s environmental difficulties (as opposed to the Ramat Hovav Industrial Site, a notoriously hazardous area that is in the news on a regular basis (see, for example, “Bad Air in Base City,” 18 March 2008) due to its numerous accidents and violations of Israeli environmental law). This, it is contended, is because of their high birthrate, low socioeconomic status, and spatial expansion.

Blaming the bedouin for the Negev’s environmental problems is difficult to understand, notes Swirski:

given the fact that since the establishment of the State of Israel, the wide open spaces of the Negev have [been] altered almost beyond recognition as a result of activities undertaken by *Jews*: the construction of roads, landing strips, high tension wires, urban housing projects, army camps, firing ranges, sites for chemical and radioactive waste, exhaust fumes from vehicles and aircraft, jeep tours, and so ... it is hard not to interpret [this] focus on the Bedouin, of all people, as an expression of racism or, alternatively, as the reflection of a desire common to many government bodies: to force the Bedouin to abandon their lands and move into a small number of recognized localities. (2007: 85-84)

Indeed, one cannot feel that, if nothing else, such emphases blame the victim, not the perpetrator, of so many of the Negev’s present-day difficulties. It is virtually impossible to separate the challenges the bedouin face from those faced by the regional prospects of the Negev as a whole. For

decades, the region has been viewed and treated as the literal and figurative trash bin of the State of Israel—the region one must tolerate driving through on the way to Eilat—and the bedouin, as its peripheral minority residents, were doubly damned as a result. While some aspects of these various plans put forward for the Negev may hold some promise, the fact that there is no one single, regional development initiative for the area, but rather a hodgepodge of programs, sponsored by differing agencies with different agendas and with no singularity of purpose, gives one pause. Beyond this, the primary planning agency for the bedouin is the Bedouin Authority, which falls between the cracks of all of these agencies. Thus, the bedouin community may be excused for being skeptical—or worse—of state planning motives, experiencing a nagging sense of *déjà vu* as yet another set of new plans is announced out of Tel Aviv or Jerusalem that purportedly include a “bedouin development component.”

Finally, so long as the forty-plus communities of the so-called “*pezurah*” remain illegal, unrecognized, and lacking in many of the most basic of public services, including high schools, fully operating health clinics, running water, sewerage, electricity, and paved roads, no member of the bedouin community—whether residing there or in one of the planned towns—will trust or believe that the state truly recognizes the rights of this minority community. While there is no doubt that those yet residing in the *pezurah* are often distinguishable from those who have relocated in a variety of ways, ultimately, the Negev bedouin community is one community, albeit much divided based upon tribe, *hamula*, and the like. By helping to foster development in these communities (including in many cases full legalization and the provision of all municipal services in recognition of the need for far more towns than the present number, given the community’s growing population), the entire bedouin settlement system—planned and unplanned alike—can be strengthened. This is not a counterintuitive argument. For unless and until the *unrecognized* communities’ concerns are resolved in a manner that is viewed as fair and equitable by the community at large, including government recognition of historic land ownership, if, when and wherever possible, the success of the *planned* bedouin town initiative as a whole will remain jeopardized.

Future Prospects for Segev Shalom and Recommendations

The economic and social development planning for Segev Shalom/Shqeb, Israel, must be placed within the context of the comments noted above. If the town’s future is a captive to its present—a product of its past—then why even bother to plan? But *if*, alternatively, there are multiple possibili-

ties, and numerous potential futures, and *if* each outcome depends upon what Israel's State planners, Negev regional planners, Segev Shalom *Roshei Ha'Moatzah* (Hebrew: Heads of Council, i.e., "Mayors"), Local Council members, residents, and other interested parties do now—today—then the future of Segev Shalom may not be what it used to be.

Abu-Saad and Lithwick, for example, note that Segev Shalom's close proximity to Ramat Hovav may (ironically) have possible *positive* ramifications. They suggest that the town may be able to take advantage of its location by developing "environmental industries," such as recycling (2000: 50), a sector that is increasingly drawing interest in Israel today.

Moshe Moshe (15 February 2007) adds that the town's location has other benefits. He points out that the road just north of *Shekhuna Bet* that leads out to the Industrial Zone is eventually going to be extended (see Map 2.1) and will, once some informal/non-recognized bedouin settlements near Emek Sarah are removed and the residents relocated, join up with the cut-off road that bypasses Be'er Sheva to the south and eventually links up with Route 25. This will, in effect, connect the Segev Shalom Industrial Zone with the Emek Sarah Industrial Zone, as well as the other economic activity (much of it automobile related) located throughout the southern side of Be'er Sheva on the southern side of the Dimona Road.

He points out as well that a car inspection site has been developed in Rahat and it has transformed the city's economic base.

There's an office to have your car tested, and it's even open on Shabbat (Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath when shops in Jewish Israel are closed). Today, if you're in the Negev, you go to Rahat for car repairs, and believe me, you can't get in there. It's filled with Arabs and Jews too, filled with cars. There's a million people in there. And ten meters from the testing center are the repair garages. So if something's wrong with your car you can immediately have it taken care of and go back for the test. And you can get your groceries and clothes [in the nearby market], all at the same time. That's the way it's going to be in Segev Shalom, plain and simple. That's the way it's going to be five or ten years from now.

Ilan Sagie of the Ministry of the Interior reinforces this perspective (24 March 2007). He suggests that:

the town's location, it's proximity to Be'er Sheva, gives it an advantage. There's less unemployment, people can find work easier, and they are closer to centers of industry in Be'er Sheva. There's another advantage to Segev Shalom that they haven't exploited yet, and that's the fact that as close as Segev Shalom is to Be'er Sheva, Be'er Sheva is also close to Segev

Shalom. What do I mean by that? That if they would just take advantage of it, they could bring to Segev Shalom the idea of a *shuk* (Hebrew: marketplace) on Shabbat (Hebrew: Jewish Sabbath; Saturday), a bedouin *shuk*, an Oriental *shuk*. In Segev Shalom, there's a much better chance of success with such a thing than there is with any other bedouin settlement. In the other settlements in the area they don't have very good reputations. If you are in Be'er Sheva, would you go to Tel Sheva? You wouldn't because it has a bad reputation. In Segev Shalom, there's a better reputation, from the perspective of the Jews, I mean. They're less afraid to travel there. But that, in my opinion, is something that [the residents of Segev] haven't yet taken advantage of.

And lastly, Ilan Yeshuran of the Bedouin Authority confirms this sentiment (10 May 2007). He states: "Segev Shalom is unique. It is built for a single tribe, the Azazmeh. Its proximity to Be'er Sheva is very important. The other towns, other than Tel Sheva—are much further away. Some would say [being further out] is a good thing, but for Segev Shalom, they benefit by being like Omer and Meitar, a part of Metro Be'er Sheva. It's convenient to reach, [and thus] to bring industry there as part of Greater Be'er Sheva."

In general, Segev Shalom's reputation among government officials and within the bedouin community alike is a positive one. But the town cannot function alone. Rather, it is part of a rapidly growing community of minority Israelis who today are experiencing considerable social and economic need—and the outlook for tomorrow is no different. But what is quite clear is that the community enjoys a comparative advantage in a number of areas, and that these areas can and must be exploited for the good of the bedouin, as well as for the state within which they are an increasingly significant minority group.

First, while historically, the bedouin labor force was largely weak and uneducated, this is beginning to change. Not only are bedouin men accessing skills and training equal to their Jewish counterparts, but bedouin women are beginning to acquire these skills as well. This is not to suggest that the need to continue to work toward the betterment of improvements in bedouin education are not huge, but it is to suggest that the bedouin are accessing a higher quality education and higher levels of education every year, and that the number of those who are educated but are unable to use the skills they have acquired and are not finding their education an asset are, in fact, growing—and for the state, it is this issue that is already becoming a long-term liability. To think then of the bedouin as weak and uneducated herders is to underestimate their potential, both for the positive contribution many can make to the economic development of the society as a whole

or, alternatively, for the negative impacts that such a highly educated and yet disgruntled population can have upon society as large.

Second, bedouin healthcare provision has come a long way since the days of the *siyag*—and also has a long way to go. Privatization in the healthcare arena is something that must be considered in the long-term planning concerns of the bedouin. As more wealthy and more successful bedouin are able to acquire higher quality care, a bifurcated system is now developing in which those who can afford healthcare are getting the specialized treatment needed in such unique living environments, while those who cannot are competing for poorer quality care in regional clinics, or worse, are reliant upon the Soroka Hospital Emergency Room in Be'er Sheva as their primary care giver. This is not good for the bedouin in the long-term, nor is it good for the state.

Third, infrastructural development in the towns is far better than in the past. And yet once again, superficial changes will not do. Efforts must be made to make the bedouin towns clean, attractive, and worthy of being referred to as “towns,” and not “slums,” “ghettos,” and the like. Basic services such as regular trash pickup can go a long way in making the towns magnets to resettlers, rather than ill-designed “Bantustans” that provide all of the elements of disincentive (high taxes, high unemployment, limited lands for flocks), and few of the elements paralleling similar towns of similar size in the Jewish sector.

But above all, planners must be willing to dream. Why not, for example, use the comparative advantage that these communities have, namely, the strong social, cultural, and economic ties with the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza (Palestine), Jordan, and to a lesser degree the Sinai (Egypt)? Farsighted planning would consider and encourage these ties as well, rather than to discourage and dismiss them out of hand as unrealistic or farfetched—or worse, dangerous.

One area of cooperation and economic development can be found in the travel and desert tourism industry. Were the Nevatim Air Base privatized as Abu-Saad and Lithwick have suggested (2000: 28), for example, rather than the state continuing to pursue a policy to further encourage greater militarization of the Negev (“Bad Air in Base City,” 18 March 2008), visitors from around the world could, in theory, fly directly to the Negev rather than into Tel Aviv’s Ben-Gurion Airport. Further development and expansion of Israel’s rail and bus service out of Be’er Sheva offers numerous tourism and trade-based potential as well.

In other words, Be’er Sheva might be developed into a hub through which visitors could travel to various destinations in the frontier of the Negev and beyond; connecting flights, trains or buses would take visitors

throughout the nearby Middle East to capitals in Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, and possibly elsewhere. The Negev, in other words, literally would connect Israel to the Arab/Muslim world, and the bedouin community would play a key role in that process.

As but one example, not long after the signing of the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed a joint venture with Jordan in 1997 centered on the shared Jordan River Valley (i.e., the JRV; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997). In brief, the proposal stated that: “the objective of this project is to maximize benefits to the tourism industry in both countries while maintaining the regions archeological and environmental integrity. A pre-feasibility study conducted on the projects estimates that, given the number and diversity of attractions in the region, tourist stays to the region can be lengthened to an average of two to three nights.” The idea of the project was to draw in visitors to spend more time in the southern regions of both countries, and to enjoy the wealth of attractions for local and international tourists that were to be found on both sides of the river.

A number of bedouin tourism opportunities were included in the proposal. For example, it was suggested that the Nabatean Spice Route, an historic trade route that passed through what is today Israel and Jordan, be developed by the two countries as a joint initiative. The route passes through Avdat and other renowned bedouin regions in the Negev, as well as parts of Jordan and the Sinai. In the proposal, it was noted that: “alongside the sites it will be possible to set up lodging facilities and restaurants which recreate the ambiance of the region’s history. Centers featuring Bedouin culture and lifestyles can be incorporated into the tourist development of this area.”

Clearly such an enterprise requires substantial financial support and upfront economic inputs. The Ministry projected that US\$119 million in public funding would be required for this project, with an additional US\$166 million worth of investment coming from private sources. More to the point, no joint venture such as this is possible without goodwill; while such opportunities are numerous in the Negev and while the bedouin can play a key role in their development, none can occur without a welcoming political climate. At the same time, however, such enterprises can foster good relations, adding value to an already worthy endeavor. Thus, although two new border crossings between Israel and Jordan were created soon after the signing of the treaty to facilitate travel across the Valley, little has been done, like much of the planning between Israel and her neighbors, to facilitate regional cooperation (Ezrahi 2003: 21).

One final recommendation then need not rely upon other regional actors, although it is the contention here that its success would be improved

through regional cooperation. Significantly, however, it does not require a change in bedouin cultural ideals, huge educational inputs, or other constraints. What it does require, however, is some imagination, and a willingness to think beyond the confines and limitations of today's circumstances. But more significantly, it requires a re-ordering of land-use priorities, at least in the Northern Negev region, which may be delineated by Bir Hadaj to the southwest and Dimona to the southeast.

Lithwick and Abu-Saad have noted that Segev Shalom has potential in the area of "Agricultural Development" (2002: 52, 73), an acknowledgement of the strong connection that the Azazmeh hold to their flocks and to the land. What is notable, however, is that whenever agricultural production and herding are referred to, the assumption is that one is referring to sheep and goat holdings (see, for example, Abu-Rabia 1999; Degen 2000). Rarely if ever does one see the potential in camel herding or production and yet, I would contend, this sector may provide a niche market well suited to bedouin economic and social development interests.

The retention of flocks and a resistance to undertake dry farming has often been seen as a limitation, as the Azazmeh were the last to surrender their animals and many still retain flocks despite living in an urban environment. It is notable also that Segev Shalom—and its as yet largely empty Industrial Zone—is ideally located at the confluence of the Eilat Highway and the Dimona Road, along which a substantial number of non-recognized bedouin towns are located, all of which hold flocks of various sizes, comprised of sheep, goats—and camels.

Increasingly, the camel (Illustration 8.1) has come to be viewed in the Negev by many as a problematic animal and a nuisance more than anything else, with questionable purpose or use, and has been at the center of more than one controversy due to a number of traffic accidents involving wayward, un tethered animals ("Negev: Car Strikes Camel...", 11 September 2007). And yet, many bedouin continue to retain them, for cultural if not economic purposes.



Illustration 8.1. Could This be the Face of the Future?—Tel Sheva, 2007.
Source: Photo by Steven C. Dinero.

The plan I wish to propose, the genesis of which can most closely be associated with Ben Gurion University physiologist Reuven Yagil, is to return to the use of the camel as one possible foundation of bedouin economic support and livelihood—a foundation that many never left. Yagil's three decades of research and consultancy on behalf of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) is centered upon one basic premise: that camel milk and dairy products offer developing communities in desert environments, where camels are culturally appropriate, physical well-being and, simultaneously, the potential for substantial profits in the form of marketing and sales.

According to the FAO, for example, camel's milk has three times the vitamin C and up to 10 times the iron content of cow's milk. In recent years, camel milk has cost about a dollar per liter in African markets, and it is believed there is the possibility of a global market for camel dairy products worth \$10 billion ("Milking the Benefits from Camels," 21 April 2006). Thus, Yagil has traveled throughout Africa and Asia meeting with local herdsman and entrepreneurs in an effort to both research the "medicinal" properties of camel dairy products, but also to encourage the further development and possible commercialization of camel milk production ("Camel Milk Transforms Mauritania's Herding Lifestyle," 20 August 2007).

There are limitations and uncertainties that must be considered, however. The camel population of Israel dropped somewhat between the early 1990s and the late 2000s; in 1990, the FAO reported the population at 10,000 (though others reported as high as 20,000; see "Israel's Dr. Dottle...," 23 May 2007); this number has recently stabilized to somewhere around 3,000. Still, Yagil suggests that these numbers have begun to increase slightly as camels are "smuggled in from Sinai for an extremely low price" (22 March 2008).

Degen (25 March 2008) concurs, estimating that there are about 2,500 camels in the Negev region. He notes, however, that "the number today is a very rough estimate from Veterinary Services of the Ministry of Agriculture [as] many Bedouin do not vaccinate (register their camels) and there are [also] many ... that are smuggled in from the Sinai." As for how many camels are being raised in planned settlements as compared to those in the *pezurah*, Degen notes that it "is not easy as well [to determine this number]. I would say there are more in the *pezurah*—my estimate [is] about 60–70 percent."

Given this camel population decline relative to the past, Yagil has sought to pursue the possibility of fulfilling the increasingly high demand for camel dairy products locally by formulating a joint program with Jordan. Like Israel, Jordan has experienced a precipitous decline in its camel population throughout the 1990s, numbering over 30,000 in 1991 to somewhere be-

tween 5,000–13,000 by 2000 (Awawdeh et al. n.d.). According to Hussein Migdadi of the National Center for Agricultural Research and Technology Transfer, University of Jordan (30 April 2008), the exact number of camels in the country is unknown. A general consensus, however, is that the total number is 8,000 head (20 percent are male). Further, he offers that “the potential for camel dairy production in Jordan is 360kg milk/head/year” and that “more attention nowadays [is being] directed to camel raising and breeding, and especially activities regarding nutrition and manufacturing the product” as camel milk in Jordan is fetching “the highest prices.” He concludes with the speculation regarding developing the camel dairy industry that, “yes, I think through official and preplann[ing] there is potential.”

Thus, a joint project would take advantage of the strengths, skills, and collective herds of the two bedouin communities, those in the Negev and those of southern Jordan, and would use the camels not only in dairy production, but also to “carry tourists over ancient desert highways, including the ‘spice route from Petra to the Mediterranean” (“Desert Dessert,” 1 September 1999).

And yet, such a project to this point has faced resistance. As Yagil explains it, “the Jordanians are keen but not our [Negev] Bedouin. They refuse any control set up concerning the number of camels [they may utilize],” (22 March 2008). Despite his efforts over the years, he contends that “the Bedouin are very ‘touchy’ when you suggest camels. ‘Is that all we are fit for?’ ... [They say] that for them the camel is like a TV—you sit and [just] watch them.”

Nancy Abeiderrahmane, the entrepreneur and developer of the Mauritania-based camel dairy *Tiviski*, also encountered some uncertainty and resistance when she initiated her now very successful and internationally recognized camel dairy in Nouakchott, noting that she did not fully appreciate or understand the concerns of the camel herders of North Africa. She notes: “I did not realize how bad it was that there was a traditional reluctance to sell milk, you would call it a taboo ... selling milk in the desert is considered miserly. It is considered mean and they say it leaves poverty as a heritage. Anyone who has any pride would never dream of selling milk. I suppose it is like water and air. Something God gives and you share it around, you do not sell it” (“Camel Milk Transforms Mauritania’s Herding Lifestyle,” 20 August 2007).

The question is whether, like the nomads of Mauritania, the post-nomadic bedouin of the Negev might seek to create such an enterprise (which may also include meat sales), the reluctance and skepticism that Yagil experienced among some sheikhs in the 1990s notwithstanding. It is clear that in today’s Negev, the bedouin are increasingly moving into the fields of medicine, engineering, law, and numerous other professions. And yet, not

all are able to nor do they have the desire to make such a transition to the professions. The world of business—in this case a business that has cultural and historical associations that offers potential inclusion with a number of sectors both within the planned town and *pezurah* communities—is a direction that many bedouin, given the opportunity and support, can pursue today, not in ten or fifteen or twenty years.

Perhaps there is already reason for cautious optimism. Degen notes that he has witnessed increasing bedouin interest in recent years in developing camel milk products, albeit on a small scale. He notes that “a plant making skin cream from camel milk has opened up at Kibbutz Lahav and the product is being marketed in Europe (through German agents)” (25 March 2008). In addition, a small enterprise has been developed by a bedouin woman in Tel Sheva called “*Bat Midbar*” (Hebrew: “Daughter of the Desert”), in which she makes soap and other related products out of camel milk. As of 2007, however, her market was limited to Israeli buyers.

Ultimately, this business idea may face some initial skepticism or even prove to have limited interest or success. But weak economic development in the Negev bedouin sector over the last several decades has shown that though there may be no single silver bullet that can be used to address the concerns of the bedouin community, a variety of possibilities ought to at least be considered. Just as Jewish society is economically and socially stratified, so too is the bedouin community, and a multiplicity of ideas and opportunities recognizing this diversity should be considered. At a time when the Negev bedouin community is struggling economically while experiencing drastic social change, it is the planner’s responsibility—and opportunity—to at the very least, pose the most hypothetical and yet powerful of queries: “What if?”

Conclusions

The purpose of this book is not to be overly nostalgic or romantic about the past, to criticize the powers of globalization, or to blame the government of the State of Israel for every woe that exists in the bedouin community in the Negev today. Rather, the goal here has been to examine and assess how, over forty years after the resettlement initiative was created and nearly thirty years after Segev Shalom was developed, this unique and aggressive planning project may be evaluated.

The previous pages reveal that the answer is at best mixed. On the one hand, there is no doubt that in numerous ways, social and economic measurement indices all seem to point skyward. The bedouin community is in many ways a healthier, stronger, more educated community than it has ever

been in recorded history. The bedouin Quality of Life today is, by and large, higher than ever before.

Ask most bedouin community members on the street how they or their families are fairing, however, and the answer almost to a person will not be positive. While the state can see this initiative as “successful,” showing numerous signs of “development” and “modernization,” many of the bedouin community members themselves would describe the resettlement initiative thus far in terms of “failure.”

The previous pages also suggest that this could have been avoided. More community member buy-in from the start, a greater sense of planning *with* the bedouin rather than *for* the bedouin, a greater sense that the community was being resettled for their own good and not the good of the state and in the context of a land-grab—these reasons and more help to explain the present malaise that is the resettlement initiative in the early part of the twenty-first century. The question is, can this planning initiative be salvaged, and if so, how?

I have attempted in this chapter to offer some possible solutions and ways out of the rat’s maze that is bedouin planning in Israel today. As a non-bedouin and non-Israeli, I am both advantaged and disadvantaged; I am able to see things in perhaps a light that the players themselves cannot see, for they are simply too close to the issue to be truly objective. On the other hand, as an outsider to the issue, I am not fully experiencing what it means to be a bedouin in Israel today—or a Jewish administrator in a government office, for that matter. And thus, there are elements of the picture that I can never fully appreciate.

Still, there is one thing that I, as an outsider, can attest to after fifteen years of studying the growth and development of Segev Shalom, and that is this: the mistrust, fear, and yes, hatred that can be found between the government and Jewish people, on the one side, and the Negev bedouin community on the other, is both palpable and is only growing. It was somewhat apparent in the early 1990s when I initiated this research; fifteen years on, it is everywhere, as thick and as toxic as is the black smoke that billows out of the factories at Ramat Hovav each day. And it is just as poisonous. During the period that I undertook this study, relations between the Jews and the bedouin of Israel seemed to worsen by the day, concomitant with improvements in education rates, access to healthcare, and so on. As the aforementioned statistics suggest, such correlations are not coincidental, nor are they easily ignored.

Thus, Israel’s planners have a considerable role and responsibility to play in the years ahead, for they must begin finally to understand that in the bedouin community, settlement in one of the planned towns may suggest “victory” from the state’s perspective, but it is nothing of the sort from the

bedouin's perspective. Rather, settling in a town such as Segev Shalom is in truth viewed as a *loss*, something which in time may change, but for the moment at least, is still stigmatized with the sense that the community has surrendered, has given up its lands, its pride and independence, its social and economic systems, its way of life—indeed, its very identity. True, this is something that is now being carried out, especially among the younger generations, voluntarily and with increasing alacrity.

Still, this phenomenon is not yet something a bedouin—any bedouin—should be expected to celebrate or fully embrace without a certain degree of trepidation. Having been the “Stranger in a Strange Land” themselves numerous times over the millennia, the Jewish people should understand this.