the future of pastoral peoples
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the future of pastoral peoples

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Several characteristics mark Jordan's experience in the resettlement of its Bedouin population. The most important is the fact that the settlement was self-generated rather than enforced by government. In assessing whether the formal or informal processes have been more important, one cannot but conclude that the informal factors have been paramount. The Bedouins were lured to settlement, not forced. Government direct efforts, although important, were secondary to the other factors that acted, and continue to act, as attractions: contact through army service, education, proximity to urban life, and personal contact between the monarchy and other government agencies and tribal chiefs.

The combined effect of the formal and informal factors has reduced Jordan's Bedouin population drastically. In today's Jordan the Bedouin peoples constitute less than 7%; of these, few are tent-dwellers permanently. The Bedouins have adjusted to the new lifestyles. In fact, in many cases, they demanded change. Their demands on government ranged from a request for building roads to requests for clinics, schools, and social services centres. The proverbial Bedouin independence has been reduced, and some decision-makers at times remark about the increasing Bedouin demands.

Large parts of Jordan have always supported a sizable Bedouin population, and Ottoman archives since the 16th century substantiate this fact. Before the 1940s the tribes were, by and large, rather free in their movements, and raiding among them was common. Further, some of the tribes encroached on the settled areas and exacted from these the khawah, tribute paid by the weaker tribes or the fellahin peasants.

The spread of the authority of the national government and the steady increase in law and order over the desert areas, coupled with successive government efforts at resettlement, education, and urbanization, caused Bedouin influence and power to wane, and many turned to other styles of life.

In Jordan, the army played a decisive role in reshaping the life of the Bedouins. Army recruitment of Bedouin youth started as early as the inception of the state in 1921. Since military or paramilitary traditions and mores were part of Bedouin tradition, the army became a major employer of the Bedouins, augmenting their meagre resources and teaching them new skills. More importantly, through the army's acting as a medium or as the transitory stage between nomadism and settlement, the Bedouins were slowly integrated into Jordan's society.
Their loyalty to the regime is still undoubted, and having become the backbone of the army and the state, they have defended the regime against serious upheavals and turmoil that have marked Jordan's political scene since the 1950s.  

By the early 1960s, sizable portions of the Bedouin population were already settled or in the process of settlement. Still in the process in transition, many maintained their bait shair, hair tent, next to a mud adobe or cement house, thus physically portraying the process of settlement from the primitive to the semimodern: nomadic to sedentary. Many became only part-time Bedouin, Bedouin for only certain seasons of the year. Their herds of camels almost completely disappeared, and the size of their sheep and goat herds was also substantially reduced.  

To augment their income many turned to the army and in the process became less and less independent, later demanding government subsidies, jobs, and services. Government response was positive though not always sufficient; the previously dynamic economy of the badiya — the desert home of the Bedouins — with its interdependence with the rural and town economies deteriorated greatly.  

Today's Bedouins participate in Jordan society in a variety of ways. Many have left their original habitat looking for job opportunities in urban and industrial areas; some are employed by the government and occupy prominent positions in the army or the bureaucracy; others have adjusted to new lifestyles. Unfortunately very few Bedouins return to their original areas after receiving an education or after having served in the army or bureaucracy. The drain on human resources has been and continues to be the most important factor in the continued underdevelopment of the badiya.  

Although the Bedouins constitute only a small percentage of the total population of Jordan (about 7%), they have continued to play a major role in its affairs. Not the least of their diverse roles is that they have given Jordan a certain attractive image, in addition to the acculturation process, whereby many Bedouin mores, traditions, and values have filtered throughout Jordanian society.

the pacification of the tribes  

Since the establishment of the state, Jordanian authorities have worked hard and patiently to pacify and absorb the once fiercely independent tribes. In assessing how this was accomplished, one wonders at the depth and breadth of the success. Not only pacified, the tribes became and continued to be the mainstay and the backbone of the regime. The role played by King Abdullah (1921–51) was essential. His patience with the Bedouins and his courting and sensitivity to their needs, both physical and psychological, were incredible. Raised among the tribes in Saudi Arabia, as was the tradition of his family, he developed a fair amount of sympathy for, and empathy with, the Bedouins and their needs. Under his guidance and direction, the commander of the Jordanian army, J.B. Glubb, too, developed a technique for dealing with the Bedouins, slowly but surely acculturating them to a more disciplined life with a more sophisticated hierarchy and a central national authority. At first, the King, himself, was viewed as a super chief, a sheikh of sheikhs. King Abdullah, and throughout his reign King Hussein as well, courted that image, frequently visiting the tribes, consulting with the sheikhs
or soliciting their help or advice whenever the occasion or the need arose. Honouring the tribes, their culture, mores, and also their sheikhs was a major method of absorbing the tribes into the national machinery; reference to Bedouin mores and values was another method. Extolled are the special traits of valor, generosity, open-mindedness, and loyalty of the Bedouins. Also, the central government granted some of the tribal sheikhs and their tribes monthly stipends, subsidies, and frequent favours. Slowly and hardly noticed even by the Bedouins themselves, the sheikhs and their families were tamed, institutionalized, and absorbed. In fact, they have become the most important supporters of the national government.

**bedouin settlement**

Bedouin settlement or resettlement in Jordan has followed a certain sequential pattern. To some degree, this pattern can be observed in many other countries of the Middle East, especially those that have neither followed nor attempted a compulsory Bedouin resettlement program.

For the Jordanian Bedouins, the pattern of transition from nomadism to settlement has been a first contact of now indeterminate origin with outside influences, a rethinking of one’s position and appraisal of lifestyle, followed invariably by seminomadism or rather semisettlement and eventually by complete settlement or perhaps a loss to the forces of modernity. Throughout these stages, the Jordanian government has played a major role. Often the role is hardly noticeable. The building of a highway through a previously inaccessible area has a tremendous impact on the lifestyle and destiny of the people of that area. Neither the government nor the people needs to acknowledge this fact; both may welcome the new highway for different reasons. Yet, the fact remains that life in that area is never the same. A specific example of this phenomenon is the changing lifestyle of the Bedouins of the Wadi Araba region in South Jordan. Not only are the indigenous Bedouins coming in contact with outsiders and outside influences hitherto unknown to them, but, ironically, they have established a rapport with the Taiwanese contractors constructing the highway. A new highway creates demands. Not only are the people more accessible, but they demand services from the contractors and the government — services like better medicine, housing, and water supply.

It needs to be emphasized that the Jordan government has never attempted a compulsory resettlement program. Saying this is not to negate the governmental efforts directed toward Bedouin resettlement throughout Jordan — efforts that have had, in our opinion, more lasting, humane, and attractive results. These efforts included the construction of schools, rural highways, clinics, hospitals, piped water and electrical supplies, artesian wells, or even pools in remote areas; inclusion of Bedouin youth in the army; scholarships for some of the Bedouin students to study abroad; and finally the perpetuation through the mass media of the value and worth of the Bedouin culture, customs, and mores.

The contact between the Bedouins and the forces of modernity takes place in a variety of ways through the schools, the radio, the press, television, shrinking distances, cousins' working in cities or coming home on leave from the army. The oral tradition has always been very strong in Jordan. News of importance and of economic, political, or social implications travels fast and
wide. The point is that contact cannot help but be made with the news of the outside world and its developments. News of the fruits of education for the children, better health facilities, better dietary intake, better services is indeed very attractive.

laws and organizations

In 1936, the first law specifically dealing with tribal affairs in Jordan was enacted. This law stated that the commander of the army was responsible for "exercising control and supervision over all nomadic tribes through the observation of their movements and the determination of these movements," and he was empowered to "investigate any unlawful action a tribe or any member of a tribe might commit."

The law ostensibly was aimed at keeping a tight control over the tribes and bringing them closer to the mainstream of society. It was enforced to maintain peaceful coexistence among the tribes themselves, on the one hand, and between them and the villagers and authorities, on the other.

Though the law had profound effects on law and order in tribal and neighbouring territories, it was by no means the only factor. To be sure, other governmental actions and programs contributed, especially settlement schemes in the area and the provision of various public services.

The law, however, was repealed after 40 years. And, interestingly, the tribal sheikhs were loudest in objecting to its repeal on the grounds that the civil law, unlike the tribal law, did not incorporate Bedouin traditions, customs, and mores.

In 1972, the government established the Council of Tribal Sheikhs, which was composed of 12–15 heads of tribes. The council was entrusted with the tasks of recommending to authorities programs and actions concerning tribal affairs such as administration, justice, health, economics, agriculture, education, and social services. This tribal council was administered by an educated member of one of the largest clans in Jordan and was headed by Prince Muhammad, brother to King Hussein.

The idea underlying the establishment of the council was that tribal sheikhs were eminently qualified to assess Bedouin needs, and they were asked to suggest ways and means to fulfill the needs. However, the council was short-lived, dissolved in 1973. Several factors were responsible for the ill fate of the council. First, a few tribes were not represented in the council and hence took a negative attitude toward it. Second, the younger and more enlightened Bedouins felt that a council composed exclusively of Bedouins would ultimately isolate them from society. Finally, many Bedouins and others saw in the sheikhs a symbol of backwardness and self-interest. Many educated young Bedouins laid part of the blame for this state of affairs on the sheikhs. The position of the sheikhs has declined, and they no longer command the respect and loyalty that they once had.

The Bedouins of Jordan are represented in the political institutions of the country. Since the enactment of the 1928 Organic Law, the Bedouin tribes have been represented in the state machinery in the executive and legislative branches. The Bedouins were represented in the five legislative councils elected between 1928 and 1947. When a new constitution for Jordan was promulgated in 1947, an election law was enacted to provide for Bedouin representation in the new Parliament. The Elections Law of 1947
allocated two parliamentary seats to the Bedouins. In 1960 this law was amended to increase the number to three deputies. On the executive level, the Jordanian cabinet has almost always included one or more Bedouin members.

These developments were meant to offer the Bedouins some representation on the national scene and hence bring about their integration. Though the objectives have been partly achieved, the measures have had a negative effect on the tribes. Rivalry among tribes intensified for representation in government institutions; tribes not represented usually felt insulted and undermined. Tribal heads benefited at the expense of the other members of the tribe. They improved their material lot, educated their children at urban schools, and, probably, lost touch with their tribes. The sheikhs lost some, and in some cases most, of their credibility — a fact that caused a further weakening and at times a breakdown of the fabric of the tribal structure.

settlement schemes

In the early 1960s, government took a more active role in settling members of tribes. The efforts started with a pilot project in Jafr in the eastern desert and were accelerated in the 1970s within the framework of the national development plans. The settlement projects were designed along two lines: the first involved the construction of housing units and the second, irrigation systems for cultivating reclaimed land.

Housing projects were either totally or partially funded by the government and totaled about 10 with an average of 30 units each. Houses were either rented or distributed to beneficiaries who were all tribal members. Most projects had an on-site clinic, school, and a post office; a few had piped water; and all had access to clean drinking water. Houses were in parallel rows on both sides of unpaved paths. Each unit averaged 60 m and was composed of one or two rooms, a kitchen, and a toilet, and some had a small, walled-in yard.

Agricultural projects largely involved irrigated farming of reclaimed lands. Few projects, however, were owned by individuals, and few were used for tree cultivation. Completed and planned irrigation projects included about 15 schemes incorporating a total 15,000 dunums, or about 1500 ha. Underground water was pumped to reclaimed farms averaging 25 dunums (2.5 ha). In the final stage, projects were supposed to be turned over to government-sponsored cooperatives that were to operate and supervise the schemes under the direction of a committee comprising representatives of various government agencies and the beneficiaries.

The Ministry of Agriculture was principally responsible for the projects, cooperating when necessary with other agencies. The ministry determined the pattern of cultivation and the area allocated for each crop. In almost all cases, 40% of the area was cultivated with forage and 60% was devoted to grain and vegetables. The ministry, moreover, trained tenants in agricultural works and provided agricultural services, some without charge.

Potential tenants were selected from the tribes around the projects through a screening process. The tenants were required to work on the project as trainees for 2 years for a daily wage. After this initial training, the successful trainees were allowed to rent farm units (typically 25 dunums each) for another 3 years, after which they became eligible for equity. During
their tenancy, they received some ministry-provided extension services free but were charged for irrigation, mechanized services, and construction.

The housing schemes were based on the government’s intention to settle members of tribes, and most of them should be viewed as having this single purpose. The blueprint for the projects, however, departed markedly from the traditional camping pattern where tents were sparsely pitched all over the landscape. Although the clustering of houses in a small area made the task of providing basic services much easier and cheaper, this represented a radical change from the Bedouin’s revered freedom. Many settlements were constructed on traditional camping spots so that tribal members just moved from tents to concrete houses. But the housing units were not adequately designed and equipped to house the animals, and people kept the herd in tents near the scheme. Finally, the settlement projects apparently neglected the social and economic aspects of life and did not provide for a gathering ground and shops. Although improvements in design that incorporated more open space and that combined cost and efficiency considerations could have made the projects more attractive, in general, these projects were a considerable improvement over tents, enabling the population to benefit from on-site services that would otherwise have not been available.

Irrigation projects, either already implemented or still in the pipeline, will probably bring about settlement of 600 families (close to 4000 persons) on farm units of about 25 dunums each, a few with houses. These projects have been completely funded by the government, and it has been planned that some of the construction costs will be recovered from the tenants’ agricultural income.

An objective evaluation of the irrigation schemes should, however, shed some light on the human and administrative problems. First, settlers, all of whom were selected from among local tribes, were excellent at herding but very poor at farming because of either lack of agricultural skills or dislike for the occupation. Highly sophisticated knowledge and experience were called for and the settlers possessed neither. Although tenants were closely supervised for about 5 years, the time was not sufficient for them to master the advanced agricultural techniques needed. Unfortunately, many settlers viewed the process as a net gain, and they evaded paying back project costs. There was ample evidence that farm units were neglected after the 5-year trial, and the signs of sand encroachment into the landholdings were abundant everywhere. Settlers had become so dependent on government help that they were totally lost when titles were transferred. The result was that the few hundred beneficiaries wound up on government welfare, for they were not herders any more than farmers. Graft was apparent in the choice of tenants, and some of the units were distributed to tenants who never served as trainees. Also, it proved difficult to recruit skilled labour, especially mechanics to serve in project areas, and, finally, at various stages of project development and implementation, as many as seven agencies were involved, too many to cooperate successfully.

conclusions

The Bedouins’ development to date in Jordan has been charted by several forces, including urbanization. The traditional territory of many
Bedouin tribes was close to major urban centres, which expanded to incorporate these territories. Land prices skyrocketed, and the tribes were absorbed into urban life and its amenities. Education, moreover, contributed its share in enlightening the young Bedouins about alternatives and opportunities. The educated youths left the tribes to seek employment and often to bolster family income. The army absorbed a large number of Bedouin youths, providing them with a regular source of income and, in the process, institutionalizing them. Finally, government efforts at providing social services and installing resettlement schemes had their marked effects.

The fruits of progress brought with them the loosening of tribal bonds and the weakening of the sheikhs’ position. A new breed of leaders has emerged, who are educated and more aware of the Bedouin role in the national scene.

discussion

Khogali: This good paper gives rise to a number of important questions, the most important of which is: If most of the nomads are settled, how is the badiya land used at present? Also, how do nomads perceive living in a manufactured house? You may recall the ancient Arab poet who mentioned that a tent where ghosts live was better to him than a palace. And why is it unfortunate that educated nomads do not return to their nomadic areas?

Gharaibeh: First, there is some formal effort to regenerate the vegetation in some areas of the badiya, but this job is mostly left for nature. Second, the Bedouin wanted to move into modern houses to use the services provided. Many still maintained their tents but erected them close to the housing settlements to gain access to water. Third, I think the loss of educated people is unfortunate because the region should develop from within; development cannot come from without, and teachers should not have to come from the outside. Development cannot be sustained unless carried out by the local population. So the drain of educated people retards rural development.

Marx: From R. Antoun’s Jordanian Village, we learn that another problem besets the Bedouin settlements: practically all the men serve many years in the army. When they retire to the village they cannot herd sheep because that has become the work of boys and girls. Therefore the flocks will not range far from the village, and the area around the village will soon be overgrazed. This will inevitably reduce the number of animals raised and may even mean the end of pastoralism. For men retiring from the army there will be little employment.

Gharaibeh: Men at certain ages are in short supply in the area. They have gone elsewhere for lack of job opportunities in the badiya. Thus the herd is entrusted to the very old, very young, and women, which makes a negative impact on the grazing grounds and the herd.

Awogbade: What is the average household number, and to what extent does the government consider the household developmental cycle of the Bedouin before opting to build them one- or two-bedroom houses?

Gharaibeh: The average number in the household is about six. Unfortunately, this aspect of Bedouin household development was not carefully
studied. Therefore, we found these people did not feel comfortable in their housing.

Salih: In favourable political and socioeconomic circumstances, do they have a choice either to settle or continue as Bedouin?

Gharaibeh: The Bedouin have decided to settle because of the spread of education. It is a small country, so all the rural areas are close to towns; many Bedouin have been recruited into the army. They settle because they consider that sedentary life is good, especially after the spread of urban values in the country.

Salih: What has happened to those who settle? Do they change their occupation to mixed farming, or do they get rid of their animals altogether? If the latter, how have they replaced their meat and milk? Do large-scale ranches develop?

Gharaibeh: Actually, there has been no replacement of pastoral functions, and the total number of animals is gradually decreasing. Ranches are owned by the elite, and nearly all the country's meat is imported.

Marx: It appears that the settlements for the Bedouin in the rural areas were not successful. However, the villages with integrated farms were probably a success. At least the Negev Bedouin would like to live in such villages.

Gharaibeh: The housing projects were successful only if we look at them as points for the provision of services. Meanwhile, the irrigation projects are viewed differently. They are production centres and are supposed to provide an income sufficient for the Bedouin to live on. In that sense, they are self-sustained schemes and appear to be more attractive.

Ole Kishoiyian: Could the decline of the numbers of Jordanian Bedouin have been caused either by external pressures, by neighbours in the same nation, or by the government or other agencies for anthropological reasons?

Gharaibeh: The decline in number was due to several factors. Paramount among them was economics. The prolonged drought in that area diminished considerably the economic base. In addition, the provision of various government services prompted the Bedouin to settle. This limited their movement, and after a while some of them became identified with the rural population. So I think anthropology had little to do with this phenomenon, especially if one considers that the Bedouins are not ethnically different from the surrounding population.