

Storytelling as an Approach to Conflict Transformation:

The Jews and Bedouin of the Negev

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Abstract

Although the Bedouins and the Jews of the Negev live in the same locale, they operate by a different set of values and beliefs; however, they share many commonalities. Both come from underprivileged communities in Southern Israel and have difficulty rising above the poverty line. This paper will focus on the effects of **storytelling** between representative sections of Jewish and Bedouin communities in the Negev as a means to limit conflict between communities, and to enhance the well-being of the Bedouins within the Negev area. This paper describes how the feelings of people from both communities have changed and broadened through storytelling methods. Furthermore, storytelling has convinced citizens of both communities that through open dialogue they can broaden their context of understanding.

Throughout the development of the State of Israel, the Shekhunath Dalet neighbourhood of Beer Sheva has been the home of mainly Oriental and Russian Jews. The Ashkenazi elite, in the past, have deemed these peoples as second-class Jews. Throughout the years, institutions have failed to develop effective social and economic infrastructure for these communities, leaving 4,719 of the 184,500 people unemployed. The government grants continual economic assistance to some 26,469 people. (Wikipedia)

Similar to these Beer Sheva Jews, the Bedouins of the Negev have faced great adversity as well. The Bedouins have lived in the Negev (southern part of Israel) for

many centuries. The Bedouins of the Negev, originally a nomadic tribal society, have been going through a rapid process of transition during the last 55 years (Abu Saad, 2000), which has put them in a position of *social exclusion*. Today, there are approximately 155,000 Arab-Bedouins in the Negev, of which 60% live in seven permanent townships, and the remaining population resides in "illegal" settlements (Israel, 2003). Today's Bedouin population can be divided into two main groups based on their lifestyle and living arrangements in particular. Roughly, 40% Arab-Bedouin population – about 84,000 people – reside in 45 unrecognized localities (Abu Saad, 2000; Israel, 200).

The Bedouin are a collectivist social group, since their roots emanate from a tribal society. Pre-existing tribal structures were preserved and emphasized by the state of Israel after its establishment in 1948 (al-Krenawi, 2002). After the 1948 War, the number of Bedouin who remained in the Negev decreased from about 55,000-65,000 to 9,000-11,000. The Bedouin who remained in the Negev were grouped into 19 tribes officially recognized by the State of Israel. The government allocated a specific area of the Negev located mostly east and south of the town of Beersheba to the Bedouin. Any of the 19 tribes living outside of the area allotted to the Bedouin, which was known as the "saig," were forced to relocate into it (Marx, 1967). The Bedouins were relegated to wage work, since their ability for traditional subsistence living by cultivating their land was substantially reduced. Since 1966, the Israeli government began a settlement policy of the "Saig" Bedouin area (Meir, 1999). Thus, half of the Bedouin population is concentrated in the seven government-built villages of Tel Sheva (12,500), Rahat (37,400), Hura (8,800), Kseifa (9,400), Arara (11,700), Laquia (7,600) and Segev Shalom (5,900) (Israel, 2003, 2004). The towns were planned as urban centers, giving little to no consideration of the traditional

Arab-Bedouin lifestyle. Consequently, the forced urbanization without any work infrastructure of this population has been disastrous: unemployment is high, and the Arab-Bedouin towns rank among the country's ten poorest municipalities. Even though the State of Israel recognizes these villages, they still suffer from poverty, unemployment, crime, health problems, and inequitable education facilities (Abu Saad, 2000).

Storytelling has become a means to bring these disadvantaged communities together, stimulating self-confidence and decreasing inter-group conflicts. This innovative method was pioneered by Professor Dan Bar-On of Ben-Gurion University for the last ten years. The success of the storytelling method in the Negev indicates its potential for success in other poor socioeconomic and conflict-ridden areas around the world. Along with my Jewish partners, I have been facilitating the program from Beer Sheva for the past two years.

The program brings together groups of young adults from both communities. Each group begins with meetings within their ethnicity, and are later brought together for intercultural dialogue. In each meeting, individuals recount the stories of their lives. As I have seen, the groups relate the stories of both themselves as individuals and themselves as a collective representation of their culture. Young adults explain how they feel about identity, as well as their feelings of belonging or lack thereof to both their groups and the Israeli state. The stories serve to create personal processes for development and empowerment among themselves and their peers. With time, the young adults learn to deal with obstacles and frustrations. When the two groups are brought together, they discuss the complexities of symmetry and asymmetry within the group and outside the group, and they also question the levels of similarities and differences among the group on the personal and on the group level, particularly as

these two collectives come from the margins of Israeli society. The two communities come to see their similarities and differences, and learn to connect and empathize with one another. In this presentation, I will discuss a unique case study of how the storytelling approach eased the conflict between Bedouins and Jews and I will outline the process that the groups went through.

Introduction:

People can differ on verifiable, measureable facts. They can also differ about pragmatic, or realistic non-confirmable ones... But the most difficult of all are those concealed, painful experiences, which some people cannot relate, and others try to devalue. (Bar-On, 1999:288)

The concept of storytelling as an approach for dealing with groups in conflict is based on an understanding that storytelling can help one to reconstruct an essential question: "who am I?" The sharing of a personal story with outsiders enables us to open a dialogue inside and outside of the story's framework that portrays a collective group identity. Professor Dan Bar-On developed this model with a pioneer research project in Germany. Studying the psychological effects of the Holocaust on the descendants of survivors and perpetrators; a meeting was proposed to enable these two groups to engage in group dialogue. The model brought participants together to share their personal stories as a way of dealing with emotions and to extend these emotions to the opposite group, creating a bridge between the peoples. (Dan Bar-On)

The last three years, I studied the methodology of storytelling as an approach to resolve conflict with Professor Dan Bar-On at the Korber Foundation. The model

of storytelling allows people to tell stories from a personal point of view creating empathy and an ability to recognize that one can identify with the story of others without losing one's self-identity. (Dan Bar-On)

Under the supervision of Prof. Dan Bar-On, Dr. Tal Hirsch and Dr. Lena Knowlocki I will describe the process the two groups underwent throughout the duration of the program and how the dynamic between the groups reflect relations in the wider society between Bedouin and Jews in Israel.

In this project, Dr. Uri Bloch, a trained group facilitator, and I wished to arrange two groups from the Shechunath Daleth neighbourhood of Beer Sheva; a group of Jews and Bedouins of all ages.

Jewish participants were recruited with the help of the organization, "Shekum Shechunot" (Repaired Neighbourhood). As we interviewed the potential participants, we could sense that some had reservations about the project. We selected participants who we felt would make a powerful contribution to our group discussions.

Recruitment of Bedouin women proved to be a challenge due to cultural differences in the women's sphere. However, Bedouin men were recruited without an interview.

Implementation of the Groups

In January 2007 we held our first meeting with the Bedouin group. There were two women and five men at the meeting, though I had invited more. We started by asking for permission to record the meeting. After much discussion, the group agreed. We were all very curious to see how it would proceed, and although there were many disagreements, the meeting went well.

In February we started the Jewish group meeting. Five of the eight participants showed up. Once again, we obtained permission to record the meeting. We established a set of rules for the meetings: confidentiality (which was a hot topic in our first meeting), eye-contact, listening, empathy, etc... Following each meeting, we would discuss obstacles and the progress that was occurring. We encountered several perpetual problems with the meetings: absence and tardiness. Indeed, our Jewish group shrunk to four by the time of the second meeting. Despite the small numbers, I felt fulfilled by the participants' responses to how they felt at the end of each meeting.

Bedouin Uni-national Group

We continued with the individual group meetings throughout the year. Unfortunately, no female Bedouin had attended more than one meeting and none had spoken because of the cultural roles of women and men. In addition, it was clear that many of the newcomers were coming to these meetings because of loyalty to me, rather than for personal contribution or gain. In many ways, Uri's position as a foreigner to the Bedouins complimented my position by providing an opportunity for practice in speaking in front of outsiders. Additionally, Uri commanded a level of respect because of his age and as a reputed doctor that changed the dynamic positively whenever he was present.

It was not until the third meeting when we began to see real progress in the group – we had a strong core group and still had newcomers every meeting. The four core members of the group had told their stories. Each of the stories was deeply moving and inspired the rest. These people had told prior strangers things that they

had never revealed before. For example, one member told his story of standing up to his father and what that meant to him, another told of how he has learned to accept the Bedouin way of life instead of trying to change it, and one participant even told his "love story:"

I was to be married in 2005. Not a love story. Love comes after marriage, love before is a lie. She studied with me in 1998, and was about my age. Now, in our culture I cannot promise marriage because I still cannot guarantee her a house and a proper income within the coming three years. I had to stop everything as my father became ill. Meanwhile her family pressured her to marry and several young men proposed. So I explained to her my situation, because I did not want her to suffer. I gave up on her and we separated. I had forgotten the story, prior to this group discussion.

These stories created cohesiveness within each group.

Jewish Uni-national Group

With the Jewish participants, we were able to establish a core group from the start. This core group was always very supportive to newcomers, however, new members never stuck with the whole process. The Jewish uni-national group supported each other tremendously, despite gender and age differences. For example, during the meetings one of the participants was married and still returned to all the sessions. One of the participants lost her sister during the year and the other members supported her through this difficult time. One of the participants shared his family's story. His story was followed by questions from the group. At first, the questions were aggressive, putting the storyteller on the defensive. He proceeded to admit that he was a better listener than talker as he grew up as a lonely child. Interestingly, he proposed to add to his story by answering questions from the members and this system seemed to work more smoothly. Prior to the questions, the speaker had avoided talking about

his army service; however, when prompted by the group, he revealed an intense personal struggle on how best to serve his country that ultimately led him to join this very group. As the discussion came to a close, he confided that he had been afraid to talk, but was appreciative that the group did not judge him and supported his account. They discussed family issues, education and work problems and tried to help each other to deal with these problems.

As a facilitator, I felt very close to this group and grew very fond of them and their journey together.

Pre-Bi-National Meeting Discussions

Before meeting the other national group, each group was allowed to speak freely about their fears and stereotypes of the other group. By chance I was absent for the final Jewish group meeting to talk of their notions of the Bedouin community, so my Jewish co-facilitator was able to lead the group about their hesitations. The Bedouin group had many similarities to the Jewish group in the fact that they grew accustomed to their own group. Although the reservations each member may have had with the other culture, the positive experiences prevailed, and they all agreed to meet.

The Bi-National Meeting

The two groups met for the first time in December 2007. The Bedouins appeared more excited to meet the Jewish group. At the first bi-national meeting, all of the Bedouin group showed up and almost all of the Jewish group showed up late.

At the appointed time, only one of the Jewish participants had shown up and she sat on her own, appearing to be cautious and perhaps slightly scared until her colleagues arrived. The Bedouin group was very dominant and appeared to be serious about making a good first impression on the other group. Both sides were clearly curious about one another. The atmosphere was positive from the beginning. The first two meetings were pre-planned and were dedicated to establishing a comfort zone between the new acquaintances.

During this time, we received another Bedouin woman – a friend of the only woman in the group. This helped allay the feeling of loneliness and isolation previously held by the woman. The third meeting was named "Building Trust", which was the central theme of the essay. The meeting started an hour late because of latecomers and it was a short meeting where we discussed speaking freely, the participant's commitment and their feelings about the process. The newcomer, the friend of the Bedouin woman, said she felt confidentiality was the most important issue. The Bedouin participants were much more sharing in this meeting. They discussed family and cultural issues and this in turn made the Jewish participants more curious about them. One of the Bedouin participants shared with us his fears about troubles within his tribe and some violent incidents that have occurred which have affected his work and study.

This meeting was a turning point in the process of the two groups getting closer to each other. They discussed important issues with each other and shared their burdens. This was very encouraging and I was very touched by this reaction.

We continued to start each meeting by asking the participants what had happened in their lives since the last meeting. This alone was important in understanding how the participants thought of each other between meetings and how

the members learned more and more of each other. For example, the group asked the Bedouin participant who had talked about violence in his tribe in the previous meeting and what the situation currently was. They offered their support to him.

The ensuing meetings focused on the telling of Bedouin experiences to the bi-national group. This occurred due to the un-spoken yet apparent interest that the Jewish group showed in the Bedouin experience. Also, the focus may have turned to Bedouin experiences because the Bedouin members were a minority in Israel, but in the group sessions they were a majority and felt more confident in sharing.

One of the Bedouin participants told his life story:

"His childhood was in an unrecognized Bedouin village near Ar-Ara. He feels that his childhood and the rest of his life are similar. His childhood was lonely. He is the fourth in the family and was good in school despite being alone and without support from his parents or family. Ali asked him what caused him to be a lonely child. He mentioned that lack of caring and support contributed and that his brother got support more than he did. When he asked for something from his parents, he got it but he feels there was a sadness in his childhood. He finished high school and discussed his life with his father. He wanted his father to be a part of his life. He enrolled as an engineering student at the Technogit College. He finished and started another diploma in Kay College and finished after two years. He wanted to talk to us about how he felt many years ago when he helped a girl during his study and started a relationship with her. He gave her a lot and the relationship was secret between the families. She was his life but after three years of a relationship it was not all he expected. He began to feel that everything was not good. He began to feel depressed, lonely and alienated. Everyone felt he had changed. When people asked about the relationship, he would just ask why they were questioning him; "who cares?" He cannot believe that he stills feels hurt from this relationship, even now. During that relationship, she was involved with another man. She got engaged to him and this feeling was horrible for him because he had sacrificed many things for her and then he got stabbed in the back. After this experience, he has just recently got engaged to a girl. Her

parents asked for him and her to get together. They met three times and then got engaged. He feels his two relationships are very different. He does not give himself over to his fiancé as he did to his previous girlfriend. He has less confidence. His fiancé is part of his life but he needs to overcome what he passed through and he said the most beautiful years of his life were the last three years of his life. Ali asked what does he remember up until the age 19. He talked about schools, trips and his poor economic situation that prevented him from going on school trips. Jaqueline, a Jewish participant, asked if he is angry with his parents. He said no. Ali asked if there was something he wanted to do in his childhood that he never did. He said he never went on the school trips and that he was angry with himself, it was because of himself that he did not go. Abdallah asked what he does now. He says he works in the community centre and in the gas station. Abdallah asked why he does not work as a teacher. He answered that he feels it is not his field. Ali said he should not be angry with himself; he will be able to give his children the things he missed. Roni, a Jewish participant, mentioned that Ahmed chose his way; he did not want to go on the school trips, whereas in Roni's case his family could not afford for him to go. Ahmed said he did not feel comfortable to go to the trip. Sarab said that the community, the environment, the society and maybe the class made it hard for him to feel included. Ahmed said that nobody cared or encouraged him to come out and feel included. Roni said that maybe he was not born into a good environment and he is maybe still scared that people might hurt him. Ahmed said that something happened to him recently but that he cannot talk about it. He did something and lives in fear as a result everyday. It is a life and death issue. This is his life and it happened here in the library in the university. It's related to marriage and to saying goodbye to someone. He didn't do this thing he is accused of but someone has laid a trap for him. Michal, another Jewish participant, asked if it is related to his girlfriend or his environment. He said it is related to revenge. Michal asked why he is afraid. He said it is something to do with girls and a trap. Ahmed says that this problem still continues and he is afraid his fiancé will find out and end their relationship. Michal asked if it is something that his fiancé would not be able to live with and if it is something criminal. Ahmed said it is not something criminal but he's not sure. Sarab said that it is very

hard for a girl to leave the house. Aisha tried to be sympathetic with this part of the story, she said she hoped Ahmed would pass this time in his life. Sarab wished him success in life. Then Michal mentioned that everyone in the world has painful stories about divorce and love. There are many people that need to look forward. She advised Ahmed to look forward and make his marriage in a correct and appropriate way. He should make a break in his life and then move forward. Roni mentioned that he is worried about this part of Ahmed's story but that hopefully time will take care of this. If issues remain open and are not taken care of they cause problems. Roni invited Ahmed to meet him to talk to him. Ali said that he heard his story and that he wanted to help him. Ahmed said it is a trap without direction or conscience. Rami said he is repeating himself but that he has friends who can take care of him. I remembered that in an earlier meeting, when they told their story and chapter titles and one of the female Jewish participants felt so connected to Ahmed and felt sad and moved by him. This female participant was absent when he told his story.

Following meetings were full of Bedouin stories about the trials of life, thwarted love, and emotional reactions from all the members. One young Bedouin man, who fit the typical Bedouin stereotype of crime and recklessness, told his story of his motivations and adventures with this lifestyle. The whole group, Jewish and Bedouin, reacted very positively. They admired his free spirit and sense of joy and freedom. Some still advised him to "grow up," but as constructive criticism.

Cultural Differences

Frequently during the meetings, participants discussed their personal lives and their communities. Through discussing their cultural differences, participants were able to break down preconceived notions of one another and deconstruct stereotypes. Here we have an example of one such session in which cultural differences

highlighted dynamics within communities represented by the individuals in the group and ended with relief, support, sympathy, empathy and mutual support for one another. This session featured four participants, two Jews (Eyal and Miri) and two Bedouins (Tareq and Ali).

"We need to form a political party ourselves! And we will need a name for this party." Ali had commented on this, saying that the name of a party is very important in order to recruit and to raise funds. The whole group began talking to Tareq now, asking why he had not been attending meetings. They were concerned about this and about his family. Tareq explained that he was very busy because of the family problem and also that he had gotten a special permit from the university for his time to take exams. And he said that the family problem had been resolved.

Ali mentioned the local elections in one of the Bedouin villages. He was sharing about how two tribes were fighting there over the elections. And it all stemmed from an argument between two children. A child from one tribe stabbed a child from the other tribe with a knife and the child died. The family of the child who committed the act was no longer leaving their homes. Some of them tried to get out at night – the only time when no one would find them. And in wake of this many children are not going to the school because of the election argument. The police also cannot intervene in the situation because there are social norms which demand that the person who kills must be killed by the other tribe. This discussion of the blood feud and the responsibility of honor – it is very difficult. One must kill in return or they would experience shame. Imagine if this had happened among close neighbors – it would be very difficult! People sometimes move out of their homes because of these things. Especially among young Bedouins, they are very hot-blooded when it comes

to these customs. Someone in the group then made the comment that the whole problem was really stupid, because it all stemmed from a fight that was in a school. They talked about a controversy which arose through an accident on a school bus (I did not follow this entire story).

Miri and Eyal then said to Tareq, "Enough! Get off of all of the problems! What does your father do with you?" Miri also said, "You should get out of this problematic environment. It's very harmful when there is a family with a crime." Ali responded by saying that the family is not just children and father and mother but also other relatives who together form a tribe. They are all connected by their own blood, even though there are a few families which become alienated from the tribe. At this point the discussions of the group followed this theme of families, tribes, and Bedouin tribes.

Now the group dynamic jumped to another stereotype. Miri introduced the thought that there are many people Bedouin people who come to the neighborhoods of Beer Sheva with loud music playing and neon lights on their cars. Ali responded by saying that they don't know where to go out, so they make their own discotech in their own car. They have nothing to do. Tareq said, "Yes, of course they do that, because no one allows them to enter the nightclubs." Miri said, "But according to your life, you are not allowed to drink alcohol, right?" And she said, "Some of the Mizrahi Jews here are not allowed to enter the Forum nightclub." Ali brought up how in Haifa, they do let Arabs into the clubs. "Maybe because they are from the north and they look nicer looking with lighter skin. Not here in the desert." Eyal and Tareq discussed the possibility of going to Tel Aviv and entering any nightclub. Eyal then warned about the danger of someone bringing guns into a club. Tareq exclaimed, "I

want life, I want to have fun and join in with my friends. I don't want to only bring my friends to the beach in Ashkelon. One time when I was there the undercover police came up to me and told me to never come back again. The officer talked with the girl trying to convince her to complain about me, that maybe I had raped her. But really I do not make trouble." Tareq then mentioned that he was in Jordan and that he had a lot of fun there.

Tareq continued by explaining, "I am a very optimistic person; I hope to have a family with a wife and I want my children to be safe." At this point the conversation turned to the political relationship between Israelis and Arabs. Ali claimed that Ben-Gurion said that when Arabs stand in single-file line at a bus stop, you should be afraid of them. A mild argument ensued between Ali and Tareq. For example, it was said that when you are on the bus, you get up and move for an older person who gets on. And also you cannot rape a young child who is five years old – something we hear of from Western societies. The argument continued to the question of what one gains as a minority in a Jewish state. "If you cannot be in the majority you cannot be the Prime Minister." "There is no benefit to be a minority in a majority ruled state. There is no equality." Somebody said it takes two hundred years to approach the status of equal. Ali said, "But I have rights, I need to claim them!" This discussion between Ali, Tareq, Miri, and Eyal continued and one Arab participant said, "If you bring me and Eyal to be arrested in the police office, we will be treated very differently. The interaction will be very different between Arabs and Jews." Ali argued, "Even if you became head of a municipality you would be changed, because there are different interests." Eyal said, "If I were to come to your village with loud music playing in my car, what would happen to me? But there are

Arabs who do this in our neighborhoods." Ali said, "They would beat you." He went on, "There are different mentalities and different expectations." Tareq responded, "But I was also born here."

This particular session had a nice atmosphere. It was touching at times to see their support for one another despite their differences, raising in a comfortable way, without judgment, their own fears, showing respect to one another. They spoke freely without causing one another any harm. This session took place approximately one week before the recent war in Gaza began. Note the contrast between this session and the following one which took place during the war in a bomb shelter.

Meeting Under Threat of Rockets

Uri and I had been uncertain about how this particular meeting would unfold, in light of the dire circumstances. Tensions were high due to the violence in Gaza. I was worried about doing this meeting under the threat of emergency. I was worried that people would decide not to attend. Uri and I laid our worries aside in order to prepare for the meeting. Finally we went to the room and welcomed the participants: Yitzhak, Noa, Eyal, Miri, (four Jews) and Fatima, Ali, and Tareq (three Bedouin). Initially the meeting started off as usual. Each participant checked in on one another and made inquiries as to why others were not present. Then the session began with one of the Bedouin participants asking about their fears due to the war.

Tareq asked Noa, "How do you feel about the rockets here in Beer Sheva? One of them just fell in Shuna Dalit. And another in the dorms in Gimel. Another at the high school in Beer Sheva." Noa said, "This is a time when we stick together. I stopped

working and there is a lot of fear. Even my child – you could see in him his fear when I close the windows and the doors and when he hears the sound of vans and trucks." Fatimah confirmed to Noa, "It is true – among my neighbors there are many children. I could see how they act when they hear any noise outside."

Miri then heard some noise outside and said this is "warning siren" – but it wasn't an alert at that time. It was just a noise.

Yossi talked about "post-trauma syndrome." He spoke about people who had "shock" and he said to Miri, "Maybe you could be one of the people who has shock." Miri answered Yossi, "I studied at Sapir College for a long time and I have lived in this kind of situation before. One day there was someone killed because of this, right in front of me. I was really shocked at that time I had long-term psychological treatment. Now I moved to Yavneh and I experience the rockets also there. They are coming all around. It is not just in Sdrot. Many children from there went to the north." Fatimah then said, "All of what is happening now is horrible." Tareq answered and developed a discussion about Al-Jazeera. Noa said that she could not see how people could watch Al-Jazeera – it was too horrific to see all of the images. Fatimah said, "I cannot see what is really happening in this war, even on the Israeli Channel 10." Noa said, "I saw something on Al-Jazeera and I was shocked. They showed children's bodies. I just cannot watch that. I cannot imagine myself sitting for hours and hours in front of Al-Jazeera." Tareq said that there are people who get heart attacks from seeing this kind of thing, even people who live abroad.

Noa insisted that there were babies and children and poor people dying because of what has happening now and that this was happening because they gave Hamas leadership in Gaza. Fatimah said that people who are dying are not the ones to blame:

"A total city has been demolished and this is because of Israel's actions. The local population is dying in this war. You could not imagine a child, twelve years old without legs. There are so many like this." Noa said, "This time I am not exaggerating, the people there deserve this." She continued, "Israel had so many goals in fighting with terrorism and the Palestinians had only one thing they wanted to show to the world – those pictures. Hamas used and abused the citizens." Fatimah asked, "This is all because of the rockets?" Yossi continued, "They chose Hamas, they should have to pay." Miri interrupted, "Hamas purchases the citizens." Noa said, "They left their own faith." Then Yossi stated, "There are a lot of badly wounded people and there are horrible pictures of them." Fatimah continued, "I saw a mother whose child died right in front of her eyes. This was a child the parents waited for for twenty-two years." Tareq spoke saying that there were "eight children now without a mother and father with no one to care about them." Noa responded, "There is a lot of death and there are many bombs." Fatimah continued, "There is a lot of hate that is starting to grow even more." Then Tareq said, "There are many killers and criminals and in this environment, no one cares..." Yossi said, "There are many anti-Semitic families. They want to kill the Jews. This is what they are educated in." Fatimah interrupted, saying, "The major reason for this is the occupation, and there are other reasons too."

Fatimah said, "I would be happy for this situation to end." Tareq: "This war causes me problems in my university and my work." Miri said, "I am scared to walk at the university because there were Arab students protesting and some were arrested." Tareq said, "There were also Jewish protests and there is a group of Jews who are very right-wing." Noa said, "I saw a demonstration in Turkey that was against the Jews." Fatimah said, "I was on bus five at the university and there was someone on

the bus who was yelling, screaming against Arabs. His eyes were on me and I was very scared. I have so many fears. I went to the BIG (a shopping center) in Beer Sheva and everyone stared at me, thinking I was with Hamas, but I am not. Everyday I am in Beer Sheva." Tareq agreed, "Even amidst studying here there is a lot of anger and tension. Students look at me like there is something wrong and the whole environment is not good..." Awatif continued to resonate with these issues. Tareq said, "I can understand how there are children whose parents were killed who then grow and look for revenge." Noa said there should be trauma treatment for everyone who suffers because this is a scary and serious situation. "There are a lot of suicides because it affects peoples' minds."

Miri said, "Last Saturday I visited my neighbor's son who was wounded as a soldier. I visited him in Soroka and I saw four soldiers and many people from all over Israel giving things to the soldiers: food, treats, pizza, and the whole place was full of gifts. This is the most beautiful part of what has happened now, that we are all together, that we all have love for one another. And on television, the youth of Benai Akeva were singing Israeli songs." Noa: "The son of one of the physicians was sick and there were many visitors. It was a very moving moment." She continued, "Also Rahat has experienced rockets." She then spoke about her son, that she was watching the news and he said to her, "This is like a real-life game." She said that one of the rockets came in Lehavim (a suburb just outside of Beer Sheva).

Although a portion of the session was intense, there was still empathy between the participants. Although strong opinions were exchanged, the session never even came close to developing into a full blown argument or shouting match. The participants remained cordial and listened to each other politely.

As a facilitator, I felt fulfilled at the end of meeting. It was a productive meeting – the participants were together for two hours and talked about everything. They showed care from the beginning, first wondering about the people who were not there, then moving on to loud discussion of their own fears and issues in this troubling situation, the horrible things which might happen. It was a dialogue – honest and not constrained. And there was some understanding of differing views. And in the end they talked about personal things, dealing with their own losses. Still I would say that all of the group handled it very well.

These group experiences, made us realize that we had managed to create a more cohesive and supportive environment for all of the members. They all listened attentively to each other, were supportive to one another, and tried to understand each others experiences.

Conclusion

Using the storytelling method in a practical way succeeded in moving me. It was a very worthwhile experience to be able to get such a close glimpse into the personal lives of the participants and to be able to help them discuss their problems, and their lives, in such an intimate setting. I related very closely to the stories told, especially when issues such as schooling or overcoming obstacles were discussed. However the participants were volunteers and I could never make demands of them, so I always appreciated people's participation in these meetings. Commitment was

always a problem, as was finding a set venue for the meeting. Also, by bringing the Jewish and Bedouin groups together, we were all able to witness how similar they truly are, and how similar the problems they face are. It is an unbelievable situation that there are two groups of people living so close to each other, yet with such huge fears of each other. The first bi-national meetings inspired me, and gave me strength to continue. When people meet within this kind of framework, the process is not spontaneously understandable. Even the result of such meetings is not easy to predict or understand. As I look back, I realize that I myself went through important changes just by opening my eyes to the other people and communities around me

These two core groups opened themselves up during this process and shared their lives with each other. During the final group meeting, some of the members volunteered some final remarks and reflections.

A Jewish female participant said, "I really loved the sessions. At the beginning of every meeting and during each meeting my heart was bursting. It was such a supportive group and was fun. Throughout the whole period in which we met with the other group we listened to different opinions and there was no bad argument and no animosity between us. We listened to the other group and we knew how to listen to them. And the other knew how to listen to us. And the circle ended by understanding one another, even though we do not agree with each other. This is the most beautiful thing in the world. There is hope that we can continue, that we can succeed, and that we can live together. This gives me a lot and I will miss everyone here."

A male Bedouin echoed some of the same feelings; "In the beginning of this project Jamal approached me, asking me to join the group. He spoke of a dialogue and of coexistence. It was not very defined and even after joining I was skeptical that

it would work. During the unicultural group, some people came for one meeting and then left. It was a big process. In the meetings we told parts of our life stories.

Although we came with the same mentality we are still different people and were able to learn new things. Each one of us has something very unique which characterizes him. By the time we reached the bicultural meetings I was not surprised that I would tell my story again to the new group. I told the story of my life despite the fact that I never told it before to them. I felt at home in the group, like in a warm home. I was not scared when I got to the new group. I enjoyed every minute. There were different opinions and this makes you think about the background the others are coming from. What were common between us were society and community, my community and your community. You could find a lot in common, especially economically. In the political sphere, I learned how to reach conclusions. I felt committed to this group, although I missed some meetings. I made an effort to be present because I felt committed to the process."

These two reflections are testaments to the power of storytelling to open individuals and groups up to understanding people different than themselves. Many of the other participants shared similar feelings. There was a consensus that the program was a success and that everyone benefited from the group sessions.

In a way the process the participants underwent reflects on my own life for the last three years. Similarly, the stories reflect my own stories and the groups were like mirrors to my own life. Issues such as love, family, culture, personal growth, fear, identity, empathy, struggles with education, motivations to succeed, economic and social situations were all discussed, and they are all issues which both the participants and myself deal with everyday in our personal lives.

Also, the supervision we received from Prof. Dan Bar-On, Dr. Tal Hirscht and Lena Inowlocki played a key role in this. Their thoughts always gave a new perspective to our work and also they were able to identify problems and issues that we couldn't see, and I thank them for this. Unfortunately, Prof. Dan Bar-On has since passed away but his legacy will continue on in this program and through others that utilize his pioneering storytelling method for dialog.

Co-facilitating the process of the uni-national meetings was a process of learning, on both sides. "We began to admire the way they coped with their difficult situation. But I also realized how very different we are." (Uri's Reaction)

. Some Bedouin women attended one meeting but then never returned. They mentioned that it is not easy for them to tell their stories in front of men. There is a hierarchical structure in their society that they found hard to break out of. Issues such as commitment meant that the meetings of the Bedouin group were not always easy, but despite this, I felt content and relieved by the process. People did open up, and reflected on their stories, realizing that they could tell their stories in confidentiality. It was a process of growing.

I realize now how it is possible to use the storytelling of all sides involved – the minority or the majority – to bridge the gaps of society. Listening to the views and narratives of the other community is the first step to recognizing the legitimacy of these views and narratives.

Learning about the storytelling method has also helped me to better understand and acknowledge how to push for social change in my society. This practical knowledge has brought me the tools to understand more clearly how to mediate and bridge between two societies through storytelling. Looking back on both my life and my recent work with Uri and our storytelling project, I think that perhaps

this is a defining concept in my life and my work, that I am a person who exists
between two societies.

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