

'We call it a tea cake. But the whites call it a Slave's Head.' The child is asked if she is offended by how 'the whites' refer to it. 'I cry,' she says



FESTIVE MOMENT: A black Bedouin woman dancing. Her people are often insulted as 'slaves' by 'white' Bedouin

Picture: EYAL OFER

In the shadow of bondage

Centuries after they were brought to Palestine as slaves, a film shows how black Bedouin still face discrimination, writes **Khadija Bradlow**

IT WAS what filmmakers the world over call "the Moment". The little girl with glittering earrings and ruffled hair stands before the camera in a precocious and confident pose; hand on one hip. Squashed in her fist is a piece of chocolate confectionary. "What are you eating?" asks a voice behind the camera. "Krembo," responds the child, looking down at the contents of her hand: a chocolate-coated biscuit covered with egg-foam. Then the girl hesitates, as though correcting herself. "La, la, Ras Abed." (No, no, it's a Slave's Head.) "We call it a tea cake. But the whites call it a Slave's Head." The voice behind the camera asks the child if she is offended by how "the whites" refer to it. "I cry," says Iman. The scene opens a new film by Israeli filmmaker Uri Rosenwaks on the black Bedouin of the Negev. *The Film Class* narrates the personal history of a group of women from the predominantly Bedouin town of Rahat in southern Israel — women who, together with their grandmothers and great-grandmothers, live in the shadow of a stigma few will openly discuss. Their ancestors were originally brought to Palestine as slaves. For inasmuch as the humanist spiritual teachings of Islam place high value on the equality of men before God — as historian Ronald Segal notes in his book *Islam's Black Slaves* — both Christian and

Muslim societies in the past "long sanctioned the capture, sale, ownership and use of men, women and children from black Africa". The descendants of these black Africans brought to the Middle East in bondage are part of the black diaspora. Their very existence is denied, although they survive in substantial numbers, as Segal writes. A distant bell shrills as Nahjah Abu-Zaylah, 30, walks into the Steps Forward Centre in central Rahat. She strides purposefully through the reception and flops down in a chair in the adjacent lecture room. Her heavy bags contain the tools of her trade: a digital video camera, a tripod and a lighting kit. The married mother of three, who was raised by a mother who herself never worked outside the home, shot Rosenwaks's film. She is joined in the room by friends Siham Al-Kmalat, Hurriya Abu-Zaylah and Kamla Abu-Zaylah. All the women feature in the film, which takes them on a literal journey to "discover" their origins. The camera travels from Rahat in Israel to Senegal and Britain. The women speak to tour guides at Goree Island, off the Senegalese coast — and are told of the conditions of the slaves in the subterranean chambers before they were shipped off. This is presumably for atmosphere, as the Islamic slave trade was overland. For some of the women, it was the first time they understood what was really meant by a term they thought was a mere jibe directed at them by their father-skinned fellow Bedouin. In Arabic, there is no specific word for referring to blacks in a derogatory way. The term used is *abed* — slave. It's a word that black Bedouin are accustomed to hearing for as long as they can remember. Kamla Abu-Zaylah, a sloop-eyed and ebony-skinned beauty who is the most confident speaker of the women in the room, remembers overhearing a conversation between two of her friends when she was at university. One woman, a "white" Bedouin, was talking about a black Bedouin woman and referred to her as "the slave". "I realised that they could as well have been talking about me," she says, adding that when she confronted the women, they laughed it off. "Anee lol!" (Not you) the women joked. "But this same friend, when she flunked a test, said to the teacher in front of the class: 'How is it that I failed, and not the slave?'" Segal notes in his book that

alongside the history of slavery in the US, for instance, "the history of Islam emerges with some credit", for reasons related to the emphasis on freeing slaves as a religious virtue, and the fact that blacks, slaves or otherwise, were not subject to racial discrimination in Islamic law. The filmmaker says he stumbled onto the subject by accident. A native of the town of Beersheva, near Rahat, he first visited Rahat two years ago in fulfilment of a promise he made to his high school principal — to use his education to advance the community in which he grew up. White, Jewish and Israeli, Rosenwaks struck up what they

been spared the Israeli state's policies of land dispossession, forced removal, denial of basic services and the like suffered by thousands of Palestinians. Not all black Palestinians originally came to this part of the Middle East in bondage. Throughout Islamic history, there have been Africans in Arabia. In a history of black Palestinians, anthropologist Susan Beckerleg writes that, owing to the region's location at a crossroads between Africa, Asia and Europe, "trade, war, colonisation and pilgrimage all ensured that the peoples of northern-eastern Africa and Arabia mingled". The Negev Bedouin, an indigenous ethnic group that had, until the establishment of Israel in 1948, been largely pastoral and nomadic, regard themselves as "asli" (authentic) Arabs and have for centuries remained steeped in a rich history, tradition and culture, well documented by historians. Less well-known, however, are the origins of the black Bedouin: the subject of Rosenwaks's documentary. As the clips in the documentary interviewing "white" Bedouin community leaders in Rahat show, there is largely denial both of the origins of the black Bedouin and of the charge by the women in the documentary that they are looked down upon. Black Bedouin make up 10% of the total population of 40 000 of Rahat. Though no legal barriers separate them, black Bedouin live in separate areas and socialise in separate amenities. The black areas are clearly more impoverished and deprived: a situation, some of the women charge in the documentary, that is the result of discrimination in the workplace against blacks by the "white" Bedouin majority. Many of the black Bedouin women, even more are studying — and some even drive cars. That the women in the film are seemingly light years ahead of their mothers and grandmothers was born of necessity, says Majid Al-Kmalat. "Because we have traditionally been poorer, women have to work outside the home to support the family — and in this strange way the women are becoming more advanced [than the 'white' Bedouin]." With a sweep of the arm, he gestures around the room, containing black Bedouin women who are teachers, camera operators, instructors and various other kinds of "working girls." "These women are pioneers," he says proudly.

In Arabic, there is no specific word for referring to blacks in a derogatory way. The term used is 'abed' — slave

both claim was an instant rapport with Rahat community leader Majid Al-Kmalat. Rosenwaks wanted to "give back" to the community, so Al-Kmalat suggested he teach a group of women from Rahat how to make films.

The Telkom/Telcordia issue: putting the facts straight

Sequence of events

1999

Telkom appoints Telcordia to supply technical support in the Operations Support System arena.

2001

Telkom cancels its contract with Telcordia. Telcordia initiates arbitration proceedings. Telkom proceeds with a counter-claim.

2002

Arbitrator issues a partial award in favour of Telcordia.

2003

Pretoria High Court sets aside the partial award.

2004

Pretoria High Court dismisses an application by Telcordia for leave to appeal. Supreme Court of Appeal grants Telcordia leave to appeal.

2006

Supreme Court of Appeal upholds Telcordia's application. Telkom files leave to appeal to the Constitutional Court.

2007

Constitutional Court dismisses Telkom's application. Arbitration proceedings to re-commence.

Since November 2006, media reports have highlighted the ongoing Telkom/Telcordia dispute. On 21 February the issue took another turn with the Constitutional Court dismissing Telkom's application for leave to appeal. This development has elicited more comment and speculation, some of which questions the Company's governance practices.

This communiqué is intended to advise interested stakeholders of the current situation, taking into account the facts. Telkom also wants to assure its investors that it has stringently adhered to International Financial Reporting Standards and exercised all internal control measures. What follows is a breakdown of the allegations being made, followed by the factual situation.

Allegation on the amount involved
There has been much hypothesizing about the amount of the Telcordia claim, with media reports mentioning vastly differing amounts. The amount payable will only be determined during the arbitration process.

Fact
It is fruitless to speculate about an amount. Firstly, because the award issued to Telcordia by the arbitrator in 2002 was only a partial award, and secondly because the amount is far from finalised, and must still be negotiated during the upcoming arbitration proceedings. It must furthermore be noted that neither the Supreme Court of Appeal nor the Constitutional Court has made any pronouncement on the amount of the Telcordia claim.

Allegation on our leadership
It appears as if the ability of Telkom leadership is being questioned. In particular, it is alleged that Telkom failed to make provision for the potential cost of the Telcordia claim.

Fact
Since 2004, Telkom has been disclosing the Telcordia issue as a contingency. The reason for this stems from the 2003 Pretoria High Court ruling that set aside the partial award issued to Telcordia in 2002. Because

the partial award was set aside, the Company no longer expected an outflow of economic benefits, a situation that has removed the requirements for the provision of a liability in terms of the International Financial Reporting standards.

Telcordia, however, still had a right to appeal. According to accounting standards this situation constitutes a contingent liability and was thus disclosed as such.

Prior to 2004, Telkom made provision for a liability in its financial reports. This was done in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards which requires a reasonable expectation of an outflow of economic resources to be disclosed as a liability.

This provision was comprehensive and included the Telcordia claim, interest and legal fees.

Telkom wants to make it clear that the Company has never omitted or incorrectly disclosed the issue in any financial report. Moreover, leadership has, throughout the process, ensured the strictest adherence to internationally recognised and accepted reporting standards.

Our commitment to you
Telkom has committed itself to the principle of customer centricity. This is a vast concept that goes beyond service delivery and satisfaction levels. It also includes the provision of new services and products and the establishment of world-class infrastructure.

Telkom is committed to this strategic imperative in all its facets and will continue with all its initiatives. The Telcordia issue will in no way detract the Company or hinder it in delivering on the goals it has set itself. Our customers still come first.

Going forward, the Company will conduct itself professionally and with integrity during the arbitration proceedings. Complying with the principles of corporate governance requirements will, as always, remain a non-negotiable priority.



www.telkom.co.za



Touch tomorrow

FREE Nokia 1600 plus
15 FREE SMS's* for only R44 pm! (Incl. VAT)
Delivered FREE to your door!

FREE

Total monthly cost

R44 pm

(Incl. VAT)

On MyCall100 FOR 24 MONTHS!

LIMITED OFFER

FREE

- 15 Peak minutes pm
- 85 Off-Peak minutes pm
- *15 Anytime Local SMS's pm

FEATURES

- 65k Colour Screen
- Speaking clock
- Animated colour screen savers

INTRODUCE A FRIEND TO MOBILE XPRESS AND WIN **R200** CREDIT ON YOUR ACCOUNT!

NEW! Now placing an order is just a click away — visit www.altechmobilexpress.co.za

Get it all with just one call!

FREE SIM!

FREE CONNECTION!

FREE DELIVERY!

FREE DELIVERY WITHIN 4-7 WORKING DAYS!

14 DAY MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!

0860 083 084

Ref. Code MX2428

Standard terms and conditions apply. Subject to credit approval and a new 24 month contract. Whilst savings/monthly subscription reflected above reflect a fixed monthly discount on the subscription charge, such charges (as well as call and other charges) are subject to increases in accordance with the tariff published by the Networks from time to time. Free minutes as applied to each tariff, are subject to the rules as determined by each of the Networks from time to time and are subject to change. Offers are valid for a limited period only and are subject to change or withdrawal without notice. Call 0860 083 084 and have your bank account or credit card details and I.D. handy. Deal direct weekdays 9:30 - 17:00. All prices include VAT, 15%.