



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

There's a settler in every Israeli

by Amira Hass

ZNet
6 July 2005

The hunting season is at its height, and the settlers are the prey. They have become a target for criticism in the media to an extent whose like is hard to remember. They are criticized for sending their children to block roads, for hitting and cursing soldiers, for the disappearance of blue-and-white ribbons on cars (and sometimes the antennas, as well), for occupying a Palestinian house in Muasi and for throwing stones at a Palestinian youth.

The neighborhood's spoiled brat, who feels he should get it all, has suddenly lost his temper, and the neighbors are losing patience. But the child is spoiled because the entire neighborhood has spoiled him, and he is convinced he should get it all because for years all the neighbors have proved through their actions that this is so.

It began with the tolerance displayed by all Israeli governments, as well as the legal establishment, for the settlers' behavior toward the Palestinians. It reached a peak with Yitzhak Rabin's leniency in 1994, when instead of evacuating the fundamentalist Hebron settlers in light of the general disgust for the massacre perpetrated by Baruch

Goldstein, he imposed a lengthy curfew on Palestinian Hebron. He thereby gave a green light to incessant criminal acts of persecution and expulsion, long before the lynching in Muasi.

It was Israel's governments, ever since 1967, that charted the policy of colonizing the newly conquered territories, from the annexation of some 70 square kilometers of the West Bank to Jerusalem through the Nahal outposts that eventually became cities. Messianic settlers forced the Mapai and Labor governments to agree to the place they had chosen for their colony, and the governments were happy to be forced. The difference is that the messianic settlers also claimed divine authority for the collective Israeli appetite for real estate, rather than relying solely on security doctrines. The settlers are the product of an Israeli policy that enjoyed ever-increasing support from the Jewish-Israeli public, especially after Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon turned the settlements into a mass enterprise from 1977 onward. And throughout the entire Oslo period, even under Rabin and Ehud Barak, it continued to be a mass enterprise.

The generous compensation being paid the 8,000 settlers of the Gaza Strip has not sparked mass social protests in Israel. After all, thousands of Israelis know that Jews have been expelling Jews (and not just Palestinians) for a long time: Families that do not meet their mortgage payments are removed from their houses by good Jews, government officials. Tens of thousands of Israelis know that successive Israeli governments also sent their parents on the national mission of pioneering settlement in outlying areas, and they suffer from discrimination, neglect and chronic unemployment to this day. Yet, this knowledge has not sufficed to cause either the public discourse or government action to deal with the explosive question of why settlers have more rights - not only than Palestinians, but also than their fellow Jews who remained inside the Green Line.

This question has been neutralized of its explosive power because the West Bank settlement enterprise has become a means of socioeconomic advancement for many Israelis. Some 400,000 Israelis live in West Bank settlements. They have hundreds of thousands of relatives and friends who visit them regularly, and for whom the settlements are a natural and formative reality. They know that they, too, can obtain houses in Gilo, Ma'aleh Adumim or Alon Shvut the

likes of which they could not obtain in Israel. For them, this is a way of dealing with the gradual destruction of the welfare state.

Even those who do not intend to move to the settlements benefit from their existence. The settlements ensure Israel's continued control over the West Bank and its water sources, thereby ensuring the continued unfair distribution of the land's water in a 7:1 ratio, to the Palestinians' detriment. Therefore we, the Jews, can be wasteful, as if we lived in a land with abundant water. Major highways are also built on lands stolen from the Palestinians - like the modern ring road around Jerusalem, or Route 443, which provides an additional entrance to Jerusalem, for Israelis only. These roads serve not only the settlers, but also many others, whose developing middle-class consciousness requires convenience, efficiency and time-saving. Contractors, construction companies and architects; employees of the Israel Electric Corporation, the Public Works Department and the Education Ministry; newspaper owners, who publish huge advertisements about new neighborhoods five minutes from Jerusalem - all benefit from the building boom. And that is without even mentioning the fact that the settlements guarantee a continued security threat to their residents and builders, and therefore necessitate the growth of the security industry.

In the heart of every Israeli lives a little settler. Therefore, today's criticism is narrowly focused and completely misses the real point, which is the illegal and immoral colonization policy. This policy ultimately benefits an ever-growing portion of the Israeli public - which is therefore not troubled by the question of what it is doing to the region's future.

***AMIRA HASS** is an Israeli living and working in the Occupied Territories. She is a journalist whose work appears in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz and is author of "Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and Nights in a Land under Siege" (2000).*

Web link

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=8281>