

# Opinion | Israeli Protesters, Instead of 'Democracy,' Chant 'Apartheid'!

Michael Sfard Jun 7, 2023  Follow

This week, we are marking the end of the occupation's 56th year. The fact that so much time has passed means that the vast majority of the millions of human beings living under the Israeli occupation grew up in it.

They have never experienced a single day without oppression and dispossession, and they aren't acquainted with a reality in which they are citizens who participate in making the decisions that affect their lives.

Some of them already have grandchildren, who were also born into a world in which an Israeli with a gun decides everything – whether they will be able to go abroad, whether they will be allowed to access the family's orchard, whether they will be able to pray in Jerusalem, whether the Gazan son will be allowed to say goodbye to his dying mother who lives in the West Bank.

But the soldier isn't the only problem for the people living under occupation. Because alongside the armed Israeli in uniform, there is also a Jew with a gun, or a club or a stone who is not wearing uniform. And the Jew without uniform steals their land, uproots what they have planted, harms their flocks, burns their homes, wounds them and even kills them. The Jew without uniform is waging a total war to annihilate Palestinian life in the West Bank's open areas.

Here is an incomplete survey of the events that took place in the course of four days a week ago. It shows that the Jews without uniforms have a productivity that wouldn't embarrass the antisemitic gangs from our history.

On Monday, lawbreaking settlers completed their ethnic cleansing of the small Al-Samia Bedouin community northeast of Ramallah. These 27 families had leased the land and settled there 40 years ago, after having suffered a series of forced displacements, the last of them to enable the establishment of the settlement of Kochav Hashahar.

I visited them around a year and a half ago together with members of the humanitarian organization Comet-ME, which installed a solar electricity system and thereby helped them live there with at least minimal dignity. During that visit, they told us how violent settlers from two farming outposts that were erected on nearby hilltops were preventing them through severe violence from grazing their flocks, were vandalizing their fields and desecrating their living space with clubs and dogs.

Over the last two years, the attacks had become wilder and incessant. That Monday, they had had enough. Another nighttime attack on their homes and fear for the safety of their children led them to decide to dismantle their meager shacks and tents themselves and go, the devil only knows where. While they were still loading their belongings onto a truck, a settler had already started grazing his flock in their wheat field.

On Wednesday of that same week, settlers perpetrated a mini-pogrom in the village of Burqa, on whose lands the outpost of Homesh squats. They torched a caravan and a few houses in retaliation for the residents of the village having hosted a delegation from the European Union.

On Thursday, settlers illegally began work to smooth out Burqa's lands, as part of their plan to rebuild Homesh and prevent the land's Palestinian owners from returning to it. The de facto governor of the West Bank, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, ordered the authorities not to enforce the law and not stop the work.

The next day, the settlers torched cars and agricultural land in two villages northeast of Ramallah. They also shot a Palestinian, seriously wounding him.

And that's how the one in uniform and the other without uniform strip the Palestinians, layer by layer, of everything that makes life humane – the ability to maintain a family life, earn a living, enjoy security and make the choices that comprise every person's journey to realizing his or her talents and attaining his or her happiness. Whoever is willing to live like this, please raise your hand.

Something else happened that week. The editors of the Hebrew edition of Wikipedia rejected a proposal to bring back the entry on “settler violence.” That entry was taken down in 2019 (it still exists in the English version, under the name “Israeli settler violence”), on the grounds that it reflects “an arbitrary segmentation of the population and political bias,” and because the violence in question “isn't characteristic only of settlers.”

Rejoice and be glad, sing and dance, there's no need to eradicate the phenomenon that soils Israel's image among the gentiles! We can simply erase it from Wikipedia.

But unlike science fiction films, in real life, erasing that entry won't bring the residents of Ein Samia back to their village, remove the bullet from the wounded man's body, replant the tens of thousands of olive trees that settlers have uprooted over the years or restore the sooty cars, homes and stores in Hawara to the state they were in before that nighttime fascist orgy of racist violence in February.

It may be a cliché, but one can't resist the temptation to say that the editors of Wikipedia in Hebrew are like that baby who covers his eyes and is certain that the world no longer exists. Except that the baby is innocent, and they are not. He is only covering his own eyes, while the Wikipedia editors are trying to cover everyone else's.

In the end, they are just other Israeli Jews, this time with keyboards, who are participating in the erasure of Palestinian life. Not with clubs or cans of gasoline, but with an offensive political act of erasing – and thus denying – their victimhood.

Nevertheless, there is some truth hiding behind the removal of the entry on “settler violence,” albeit not for the reasons cited by those nationalistic editors. Because it’s not only the erasure but also the excessive emphasis on the settlers as the source of the violence toward the occupied nation that distorts a proper characterization of the occupation’s evil.

The Israeli violence toward the people living under our domination is state violence. It’s a national project – a joint venture by all parts of the nation, each according to their abilities and talents.

The hundreds of settlers who torched Hawara did so with the help of the thousands of police officers who weren’t there and the battalions of soldiers who were there but didn’t do anything. The theft of Ein Samia’s fields happened thanks to an army and police force that neither prevented it nor arrested the culprits afterward, and that as a matter of policy don’t put Jewish robbers on trial.

But turning a blind eye is merely the authorities’ minor sin. The amount of land stolen from the Palestinians and transferred to the settlers through the official mechanisms of expropriation and allocation is a thousand times greater than the amount stolen through “privatized” violence. The resources looted from the occupied territory by Israel’s business sector are a thousand times greater than those looted by the violent farming outposts. Attorneys and judges, both military and civilian, have done more to entrench the elimination of basic human rights for millions of people than all the abuses of the settler “hilltop youth” put together.

The Israeli Jews with rifles, clubs, keyboards, pens and wallets are the ultimate occupiers. And even if many of them can be found among the protesters demonstrating against the government's planned legal upheaval on Tel Aviv's Kaplan Street, over there, in the realm of the occupation, they really aren't in favor of "democracy," as they chant in Tel Aviv. There, they entrench, reinforce and enforce apartheid.

Welcome to the 57th year.

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