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A demonstration after the pogrom in the Palestinian town of Hawara. At least that brought Israelis out into the street. Credit: Hadas Parush

Opinion

Opinion | Israel Is an Occupation With a Country Attached to It

Israelis have learned to exact a price for every news report about the occupation, every hint that Palestinian blood is as red as theirs



Zehava Galon
Jun 12, 2023 9:15 am IDT

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We're not an occupying country, we're an occupation with a country. The occupation is our major national project, and it has gone on for so long that we can't imagine ourselves without it.

We've given it everything we have, in the knowledge that it will always want more. This has cost us our soul; not now, when the occupation is coming to annex the remnants of democracy that we preserved, but right from the start, as an entrance fee. We knew the price.

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We knew. There were people who warned us. We paid the price anyway, blithely and willingly, our eyes closed.

We gave it the blood of our children. It was for security, we said, when one terror attack followed another and one military operation followed another, and our children patrolled foreign alleys and fields and their lives were sacrificed. We called it "managing the conflict" and "mowing the lawn." We explained that this was as good as it got; somehow it's always as good as it gets, and always "we've changed the equation."

We like to change the balance of power. We've been changing it in Gaza for decades. It works wonderfully. Rounds of fighting, we call them, forcing on our people and the people of Gaza an annual Feast of the Sacrifice.

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We use security to explain the settlements too, as if there's security in sending civilians into the heart of hostile territory, as if you can then speak with a clear conscience about the other side "hiding behind civilians," as if preschools were weapons of war. They aren't, but we were the first to ignore the standards.

We brought in brilliant legal minds who humiliated themselves by wallowing in emergency laws dating from the British Mandate to justify theft, to find an excuse for torture, collective punishment and indiscriminate shelling.

The legal scholars were there when we danced around the theft, the highways for Jews only, the punishment of entire villages, cities and coastal strips. They were there when we mulled how many calories per person Gaza was allowed, so that we could keep it perpetually on the verge of a humanitarian crisis. (Since then, incidentally, we've no longer needed a formula. We know it almost intuitively.)

There was no evil in which the legal scholars and politicians didn't wallow. It's no big deal to dirty your hands a bit when it's for the growing Jewish state.





Israeli soldiers in the West Bank village of Qafin late last month. Credit: Majdi Mohammed /AP

“A fully right-wing government is legislating a declaration that every settlement in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] is part of the State of Israel, and that’s complicated legally?” MK Sharren Haskel of the Benny Gantz's National Unity Party said at a recent meeting of the Knesset Finance Committee.

Haskel knows the legal situation but is relying on her party's voters not to know. How little they know. And how will they know? We’ve created a law that’s a smoke screen, a house of cards, and our lawyers act as if they owned the place.

We have a fleet of lawyers. They do everything from administrative law to international law. They’ll justify anything. They’re strong. Their work is easy. The Supreme Court – serving as the High Court of Justice – approved the evacuation of entire Palestinian communities from the West Bank's Masafer Yatta region because the army urgently needs new training ground right on top of people's homes.

That’s how it is. Someone defended this position in court, and alas, the justices ruled for the army. The justices don't get tough on the army. But now we're defending the court, because it's the last remaining obstacle protecting our rights.

We've enlisted our best advertising people. The stain must be removed. They've woven a tapestry of arguments – “It’s complicated” and “What about Syria?” – that we've self-righteously wrapped around ourselves. We send a fleet of PR people into battle abroad over every map that distinguishes between the West Bank and Israel, but they can’t find on the map the simple thing they’re fighting for: the country's borders.

And because it’s impossible to sell lies to the people around the world while telling the truth at home, we’ve been forced to lie both to them and to ourselves.

And we’re gullible. In this campaign, we're using all our achievements, every liberal accomplishment that was attained with blood and sweat to show that, “Look, we’re actually okay, a progressive country, we have women in the army and vegan battle rations, so there’s no need to talk too much about soldiers who enter people's homes every night, about false arrests, about closures and blood.

At first we called the campaign *hasbara*, basically PR abroad: You don’t understand, that’s

fortune in this struggle. Very soon it grew tentacles at the Foreign Ministry, the army, the Prime Minister's Office, and then of course it was directed at ourselves.

For example, in the name of hasbara we interrogated left-wing activists at the airport, or in "friendly talks" with the Shin Bet security service. We've made opposition to government policy illegitimate, and not for a moment did we think how dangerous that was. Just hold your nose. Or breathe freely, because people quickly get used to a smell.

All in all, we're good at acclimating. The pogrom in the Palestinian town of Hawara brought Israelis out into the street. They saw good Jews praying near the flames of a burning town and were horrified. The other week settlers torched houses in the Palestinian village of Jalud. As usual, the police arrived after the event. As usual, nobody was arrested. Army and Border Police forces arrived too; as usual it ended with Palestinians wounded, this time three.

A year earlier settlers torched five cars in Jalud; it was revenge for a shooting attack in the northern town of Hadera, where two Border Police officers were shot to death. But there's no need to go all the way up there. Two weeks ago about 200 Palestinian Bedouin, residents of the village of Ein Samiya, left their home. They said they left because of the children; they could no longer let them live in fear. The attacks were incessant as the police looked the other way, Israel's finest.

Two days later settlers torched a prefab home and several houses in the village of Burqa near Nablus. This time the revenge wasn't for a terror attack. The residents sinned by hosting a delegation from the European Union. Ahh, our old enemy. None of that brought anybody out into the street. It was barely reported. Even the politicians didn't bother to mention it. They did the math and figured that now isn't the time. Now is never the time.

When thousands of fine young men took part in the Flag March on Jerusalem Day and shouted "Let your village burn" in Muslim neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, when Palestinians were beaten in the streets, Israeli politicians told us how moved they were by this day, how important the city has been to them since childhood. "Ten measures of beauty descended to the world, nine were taken by Jerusalem, one by the rest of the world," Economy Minister Nir Barkat wrote on Facebook, quoting the Talmud. He wished everybody "Happy Jerusalem Day and Shabbat Shalom to the whole Jewish people."

Not a word about beatings, spitting on people and songs of revenge. What's this cowardice if not fear of being perceived as considering Palestinians human beings, believing that their pain and lives are important. After the Flag March came the backslapping because another march had "passed peacefully." Not a single Jew was harmed during the event.

One day later – one day! – Israel was in an [illegible]r because TV host Galit Gutman called the

We've created an alternative reality, a delusionary world of our own. We recreate it every day by lying or ignoring things. We conduct loyalty tests and punish those who don't pass. We've learned to exact a price for every news report about the occupation, every mention of it or hint that Palestinian blood is as red as ours.

Politicians and journalists know this and act accordingly. When you get use to walking bent over – and in Israel we get used to everything – in the end your back bends all by itself.

The occupation is 56 years old. Happy birthday.

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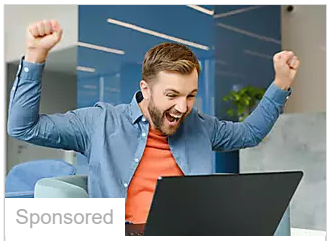

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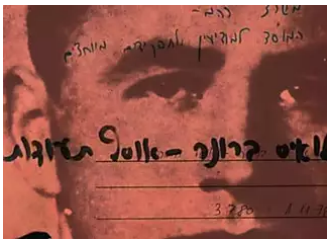

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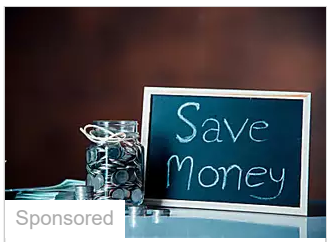

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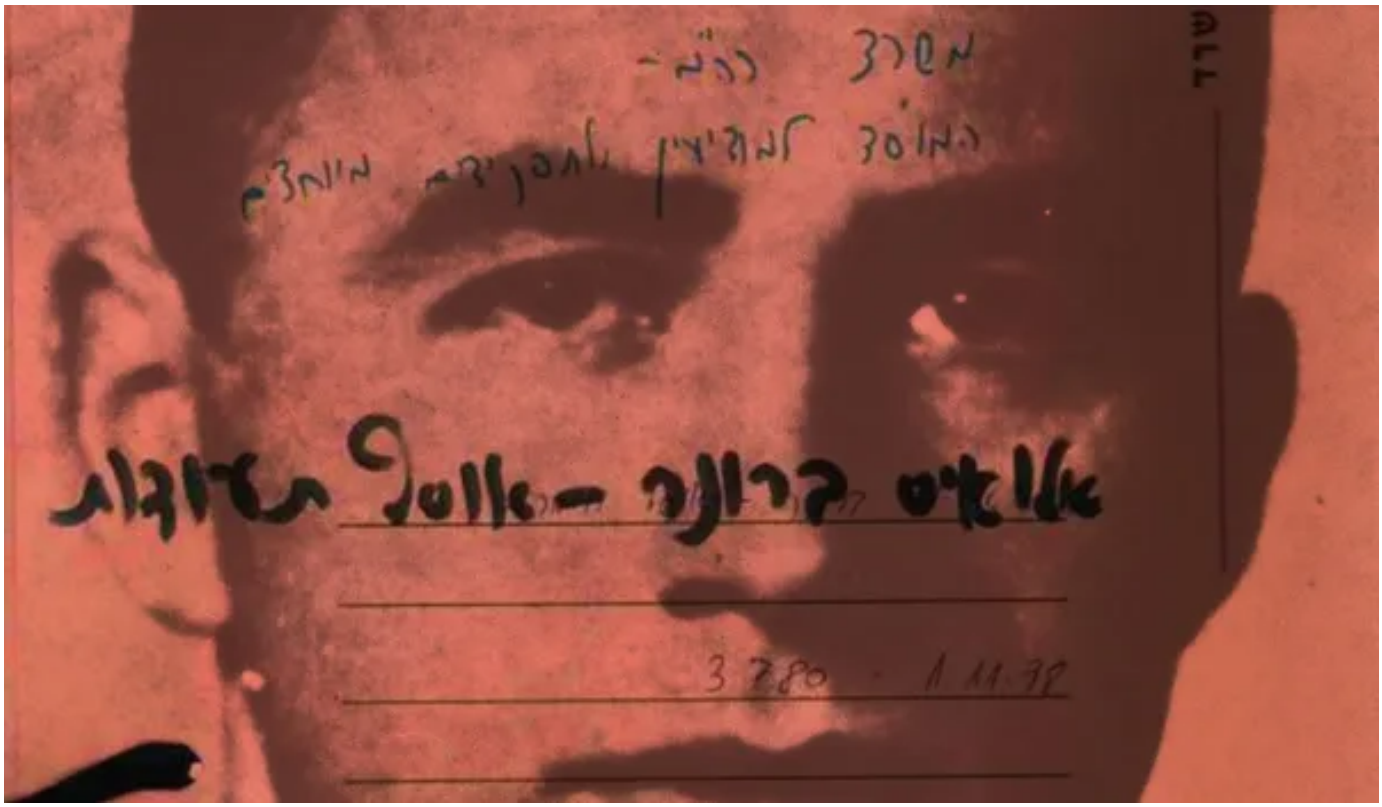

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