

The Settlers and the State of Israel, the Pullout from Gaza, and the Day After

A Historical Perspective

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The struggle between the “oranges” and the “blues,” the settlers versus Israel's Defence Forces and the police—or between Eretz Israel and the State of Israel—and the violent, hallucinated spectacles, bordering on mass insanity, observed every evening on local and the world's television screens in August 2005, was decided even before it began. Both warring sides knew this—because the thing that unfolded before the onlooking world in southern Israel, around the Gaza Strip, did not pertain ab initio to the fate of the Katif Bloc and concerned neither the future of 1,300 households nor of 7,500 Jewish Israeli citizens but rather something much more material and fateful. The Katif Bloc was abandoned. The genuine human tragedies related to Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip will shortly revert to what they had been, the families' personal affair, and will be forgotten and deleted from the collective memory, as had happened after the evacuation of Yamit in 1982. The inhabitants' homes were demolished in yet another act of the violence that has typified the region for decades. The acts of insanity that accompanied the pullback, originating among the most extreme opponents of the disengagement—the killing of four Arab citizens of Israel in the mixed Arab-Druze town of Shefr-'Amr (Shfar'am) by a newly religious army deserter from the extremist settlement of Kfar Tapuah; the murder of Palestinian laborers at the Shilo settlement by a Jewish settler; the suicide by self-immolation of a woman settler during a demonstration—were fewer than had been foreseen, notwithstanding the severity of each, and thus far have not triggered violent chain reactions. What is more, the Israelis who had settled in the Katif Bloc, in the heart of the Gaza Strip amidst a terrifyingly dense Palestinian population, on land that was not theirs, and carved out of this location an exploitative quality of life and a proprietary mindset at the expense of the 1.5 million Palestinian inhabitants of the Strip, whose cheap labor they milked to the last drop, were forced at the end of a shamefully melodramatic eviction to quit the luxury settlements that they had established and seek new lives within Israel proper. The fact that so hopeless a settlement enterprise, amidst an extremely dense Palestinian population, was realized with the authorization or even on behalf of generations of Israeli governments did not make this colonialist act any more worthy or moral. In fact, it made the deed all the more incongruous and unforgivable, a standing indictment against all Israeli political leaderships for more than thirty years.

In the short term, the big winners of the withdrawal are Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the State of Israel along with its institutions, especially the army and the police, which years of entrenchment and self-defilement in the muck of occupation, proved that under wise and calm command they still have the talent to carry out a complicated and emotion-laden task in an exemplary manner. Sharon proved that he is the only Israeli leader today who can order the instruments of state to carry out, in full, a controversial democratic act against an extreme, fanatic, and messianic group

that for decades has managed the country's political agenda and threatened democracy at every turn. This success, however, should not obscure the fact that the dramatization of the relatively marginal and negligible event of Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip—a marginal and negligible side show in the enormous historical context of thirty-eight years of ongoing Israeli settlement activity and occupation—and the transformation of the partial, minuscule withdrawal into a burning, formative national trauma, an event endowed with “Holocaustic” attributes that will be engraved for ever in the memories of Israelis and the world, were meant to serve precisely this interest that the settlers and Sharon share. They were designed to prove to the world, and to the Israelis themselves, that this is as far as Israel can go and that any further attempt to disengage Israel from the settlements that it had built over the Green Line will lead to a civil war, literally, and to the collapse of the country's fragile democracy.

However, the artfully orchestrated drama that unfolded in mid-August 2005 before the cameras and recording devices of the thousands of media that documented and, concurrently, amplified it also served—unsurprisingly—the settlers and the embodiment of their great disaster, their nemesis, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Indeed, beyond the confrontation over the Katif Bloc and deep in the heart of the turgid wave of hate and incitement that the settlers have been generating and aiming at the Prime Minister over the past two years—a wave that may yet, deliberately or otherwise, lead to the assassination of the Prime Minister or some other act of madness by extremist settlers, in a process that Israel already experienced ten years ago—the shared historical interest of the settlers and Sharon remains as solid as ever. This shared interest is the perpetuation of a maximum number of settlements on the West Bank and the preservation and expansion of the large settlement blocs, on the one hand, and the defeat of any possibility of establishing a viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian state, on the other hand. It follows that if Sharon and the settlers manage to pull off their grand design, Israel's military occupation of the West Bank territories will be extended until perpetuity and the odds of a peaceful resolution to the Israel–Palestinian conflict will remain nil.

The affair has plenty of protagonists; lots of overt and covert forces shaped the steps that brought it about. The main and most conspicuous heroes of the enterprise that has determined the course of Israel's development and its controversial image since the 1970s, however, are Ariel Sharon and the religious ideological settlers. Therefore, any historical analysis of the settlement phenomenon should include a detailed discussion of the cooperative and symbiotic relationship that these sides have maintained for more than thirty years. Only through such a discussion may one understand both the recent developments related to Israel's pullback from the Katif Bloc and Gaza, and the deeper, underlying processes and forces they disguise, and, on this basis to attempt to analyze the events of “the day after.”

Obstacle on the Road to Redemption

The settlers' behavior in response to Sharon's disengagement plan, and in the course of its implementation, is complex, puzzling, and open to various interpretations. However, it should not be surprising to those who have monitored of their modus operandi over the years. If it seems that the State of Israel and its prime minister indeed emerged victorious from the mediagenic standoff surrounding the pullout from Gaza and the destruction of its Israeli settlements, the consequence of this is that the

settlers were the party that got trounced. Most commentators, both in Israel and abroad, have indeed adopted this view in the wake of the quick, successful withdrawal. However, things are not so simple. As people who live in a different time, a messianic, ahistorical time, the settlers perceive the real and stinging defeat that they absorbed in their struggle against the power of the state as just another manifestation of the footsteps of the Messiah in the current political reality, and as an additional and essential test that God has placed on their path to full redemption in order to cast in fire their strength and dedication. This notwithstanding—in another indicative plank of the settlers' modus operandi over the years, based on Godlike intervention in their struggle for the continued existence of the settlements—the settlers did not desist from political activity and do not intend to do so after their temporary defeat.

The settlers' behavior in the struggle against the withdrawal seemed replete with contrasts and contradictions. However, it was only ostensibly so. For, despite the withdrawal plan, which Sharon concocted and implemented with unprecedented resolve and which the settlers perceived as an act of treachery against the whole path that they had walked together, the settlers know very well that they have never had, and will never have, an ally like the incumbent prime minister. Furthermore, the more rational among them knew very well that the fate of the settlements in Gaza had been sealed even before the first Israeli soldier marched in to evacuate them. Thus, the settlers' frenzied struggle was not meant as an attempt to salvage even one home. It was geared primarily for the mobilization of the ranks from within and to encourage and reinforce the young settlement generation for the struggles to come, the real ones. It had another purpose, yet not secondary: to establish for internal and external consumption an emblem of absolute faith in the settlers' ability to alter the course of history, of total adherence to their project, and of tenacious resistance, to the last moment and the last man, in order to avert the inevitable. It was not only their behavior toward the evacuator, in view of the media, that attested to this. Their conduct over the past two years, since the unilateral withdrawal idea was first broached, also provided plain evidence. The construction of new homes until the last moment, in the very midst of the evacuation; the dedication of synagogues, such as that of Kefar Darom, amidst much public ado in May 2005, after the withdrawal plans had been completed; the planting of trees and the opening of kindergartens as the withdrawal proceeded—these were well calculated acts that were meant to demarcate the domain of settler-existence, settler-faith, and settler-activism, a domain that lies outside the ordinary Israeli space, and to amplify the trauma of the displacement and the sacrifice to the greatest extent possible.

On the other hand, since over the years the settlers had become closely acquainted with Sharon's serpentine and duplicitous political conduct, they were the first to express disbelief about his unilateral disengagement plan and mobilized in unison, from the moment it was made public, to torpedo it politically or to delegitimize it. The settlers' struggle against Sharon was devoid of sentiment, in keeping with their past practice toward every prime minister, however allied with their cause, who introduced a policy that clashed with their beliefs and threatened to deal a blow to their enterprise. Since the parties had been intertwined for many years, the struggle against Sharon was accompanied by personal drama. As early as June 2003, one of the settler leaders, Ze'ev (Zambish) Hever, a personal friend of Prime Minister Sharon's and an intimate partner in the latter's actions in the territories, accused Sharon of having fallen captive to the American "road map." Hever warned

that after the evacuation of the “illegal” outposts, which would take place under American pressure pursuant to Sharon’s promise to the U.S. president, more and more settlements and localities would be evacuated. Thus, he urged his comrades to embark on a struggle for each settlement, however small and remote. “The issue is neither the Katif Bloc nor Ariel Sharon,” another settler leader, Uri Elitzur, wrote in the settlers’ magazine *Nekuda*. The process might end with the uprooting of all settlements down to the last one, Elitzur said. “And the more settlements are uprooted, the more international pressure there will be to uproot more, and thus the public’s support of settlement within Israel will steadily diminish,” Elitzur wrote.¹ Hever and Elitzur, recently Sharon’s close allies in the establishment of settlements and outposts on every faraway hilltop in the West Bank, were among the first to come out against Sharon’s scheme and against him personally. Elitzur was also the first settler leader to call for violent resistance to the disengagement process and to urge soldiers to disobey military orders pertaining to the pullout. Hever, in turn, played a very active role in the field during the resistance to the evacuation. Like his comrades in the settler leadership, he materialized wherever struggle was being waged, enflaming spirits and inciting young settlers while conducting interminable smooth-tongued discussions with army and police commanders at the scene—a tried-and-true modus operandi that the settlers had invoked during all their years of relations with the authorities, foremost the army.

The anti-Sharon front was spearheaded again by the Gush Emunim leaders who had led the great settler struggles since the days of Sebastia (1975). Hanan Porat—an iconic vanguard settler and spiritual leader—roused himself from lengthy somnolence and positioned himself at the forefront of the settlers’ mass rallies and the anti-evacuation resistance. Together with him on the ground, along with the thousands of demonstrators and opponents of disengagement, additional leaders of the settlers’ struggles since the days of the pioneering Elon Moreh core group in the second half of the 1970s—personalities who have been part of Israeli politics for more than thirty years—faced the battalions of army and police. The settlement rabbis at their side enriched the struggle by stamping it with a religious seal of approval and providing interpretations of the Divine imperative.

The settlers’ awakening and crystallization as a mobilized, violent fighting force against the withdrawal from the Katif Bloc is typical of their entire history. Struggle itself, coupled with physical, spiritual, and political confrontation, trauma, and the politics of trauma, are the soil from which the settlers have always derived their strength and the power of their legitimacy. It is no coincidence that Gush Emunim came into being after the traumatic Yom Kippur War of 1973 and not after the great military victory of 1967. These young religious people perceived the Six-Day War, the conquest of Eretz Israel territories, and the unification of Jerusalem as yet another phase, an immense and fateful one, in the messianic progression that had begun with the Jews’ return to Zion in the late nineteenth century and had leaped ahead with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. After the great victory, history was on their side, as if unfolding on its own, to fulfill, “with the helping hand of God,” their most tempestuous dreams. In contrast, the Yom Kippur War, with the thousands of deaths and the near-destruction of Israel that it had engendered, presented the messianic reading of the history of the State of Israel with an enormous challenge.

¹ Uri Elitzur, “Migron and Herzliya,” *Nekuda* 267, December 2003 (Hebrew), p. 3.

One of the founding rabbis of Gush Emunim wondered whether the war had in fact been a step backward, whether “the very outbreak of the war, with all of its saddening phenomena, does not suggest the possibility that the Divine progression of the onset of the redemption has suffered a setback.”² Just as the traumatic late 1973 war and its aftermath, Israel’s attempt to attain political agreements that involved territorial retreat, had led to the establishment of Gush Emunim, so did the second Palestinian intifada and its aftermath, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, reawakened the movement. As long as the bloodshed of the Palestinian uprising of 2000–2004 continued and total political standstill prevailed, the settlers felt relatively safe. This was the situation where their historical theory of Israel as the perpetual victim—the “nation that shall dwell alone,” forever surrounded by a hostile and violent world that seeks its destruction—proved to be correct. The governments of Israel even adopted this doctrine as their own.

The Palestinians’ behavior during the intifada, the phenomenon of the suicide-martyrs, and, of course, the problematic presence of Yasser Arafat, whom most Israelis ruled out forever as a negotiating partner, gave the settlers an insurance policy of sorts. The settlers’ opposition to the barrier that Israel had begun to unfurl across the Palestinian heartland originated not only in their realization that the rampart create a path for the partitioning of the country but also in the promise of sorts that it expressed—or the danger, from the settlers’ standpoint—that Palestinian suicide bombers would no longer penetrate Israel sovereign territory and that greater security would result. The higher the price of the Palestinian terror, the stronger the settlers’ status and arguments. Indeed, the ebbing of the intifada and the departure of Arafat had already served the settlers as warning signals. Sharon’s disengagement plan—the outcome, borne with gritted teeth, of Israel’s sense of hopelessness in its struggle against the Palestinian uprising—was a call-up order. Facing the menace of the withdrawal from the Katif Bloc and Gaza, the color returned to the settlers’ cheeks and Gush Emunim experienced a rebirth. However, the settlers’ attempt to invest the struggle with a general Israeli complexion failed abysmally. Even in the mass demonstrations that they had managed to organize at Kefar Maimon, Sderot, the Western Wall plaza, and Rabin Square in Tel Aviv—the place where one of them, ten years earlier, had assassinated the prime minister who had attempted to liberate Israel from the bondage of the occupation and the settlements—the large majority of male participants wore crocheted skullcaps and most women wore long dresses, marking them as settlers or direct adherents. The Israeli public at large stayed at home, went to the beach, or vacationed abroad.

The settlers resuscitated their tried-and-true modus operandi. Their leaders, rabbis, and spokespeople, wielded their apocalyptic rhetoric tools, terming Israel’s departure from the territory and the evacuation of the settlers a crime against Zionism and against humanity, a transfer of Jewish victims. Holocaust analogies and images were harnessed for the struggle against the disengagement scheme. Sharon himself was likened to Nazi leaders or Judenräte (heads of Jewish councils during the Holocaust), in a manner very similar to the incitement campaign that the settlers had conducted ten years previously against Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Prominent settler personalities defined the withdrawal from Gaza as a desecration of God’s name, an affront to God and to the Messiah. “No one, not even Arik Sharon, will

² Yehuda Amital, *A Song of Ascents Out of the Depths*, Jerusalem, 1974 (Hebrew), p. 12.

succeed in this war against the Holy One over the return to Zion,” proclaimed Ya’akov Katz, the Prime Minister’s long-time friend and partner in innumerable illegal settlement maneuvers. Some settlers’ rabbis issued, once again, “rulings” against the Prime Minister and his assistants in the disengagement on grounds of *moser* (consigning holy land to the enemy) and *rodef* (“persecuting” Jews with murderous intent). The inner meaning of such “rulings” might have been construed, surely for some individuals, as a permit to kill. Other rabbis eulogized secular Zionism, which, they said, had “come to the end of the road”—a self-fulfilling wish—and called for “their soldiers” in the army and police to disobey orders to take part in evacuating settlers. The former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, Avraham Shapira, head of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav, the cradle of Gush Emunim, explicitly threatened soldiers who might help to remove settlers from their homes. “Woe unto him and woe unto his soul,” the rabbi said. Members of the Rabbi Shapira’s flock could take such rhetoric literally. Even ostensible moderates among the settler leaders admitted that they were not obliged to obey the law. “I’ve never recognized the supremacy of the law,” Rabbi Ya’akov Meidan, for years considered a partner in dialogue with the secular public, explained. “Justice and morality are much more important to me than the supremacy of the law. When the law clashes with justice and morality, I side with the latter.” These remarks and the settler leaders’ inciteful outcries blurred the lines between center and periphery and between moderates and loony fringe elements and swept up all of the settler society.

The Israeli media, in contrast, lined up almost unanimously behind Sharon’s plan. Everyone acknowledged the numerous flaws of the disengagement plan—its forcible and unilateral nature vis-a-vis the Palestinians, on the one hand, and its function as a smokescreen for Sharon’s “grand design,” on the other hand—and the unsound procedures that Sharon used to obtain democratic authorization from his party, the Knesset, and the Government. Nevertheless, most Israeli journalists, the global press, and world leaders backed Sharon and the plan all the way. Politicians and media figures called for a suspension of proceedings in the criminal affairs attributed to the Prime Minister and members of his family, not to mention his democratically problematic conduct in regard to the disengagement, until after the plan was carried out. Almost the entire media, apart from those associated with the religious and the Right, covered Sharon’s plan and its implementation lavishly and positively, without bothering much to investigate the decision-making processes of Sharon and his confidants and without examining the true, deeply rooted interests that underlie the plan.

At the present writing, Sharon has already reaped handsome dividends from his surprising move, i.e., his decision to leave Gaza unilaterally, his steadfastness against fierce opposition among the settlers and in his own political home, the Likud Party and the Israeli right at large, and the exemplary way in which the evacuation and the pullout were carried out. As stated, even in Israel his action has privileged him with massive support from the center to the Left. More than this, however, the man who for years had been thought of as the Israeli with the world’s worst reputation and public relations, whose entire career was composed of war and violence, is now perceived as a “peacemaker,” an Israeli de Gaulle, and is being received with open arms around the world. His short-term unilateral measure, accompanied by so many violations of democratic process and designed, as stated, to tighten Israel’s grip on territories occupied in 1967, is now being construed around the globe as the first step toward

comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians and the opening of a new, more democratic, and less violent era in the Middle East. This action, however, has additional implications that should be listed (I will discuss some of them at greater length below):

- a. Despite Sharon's covert plan of sacrificing the pawns of Gaza in order to win the entire struggle for Greater Israel, the unilateral disengagement action may already have created a dynamic of its own and allowed forces greater than Sharon and his intentions to enter the game; these forces may ultimately compel Israel to continue the process of withdrawing from the occupied territories.
- b. The events that accompanied the disengagement also prove that, despite the uproar that the settlers and their supporters have generated, Israel still has a solid and stable majority that favors the dismantling of settlements and the termination, albeit partial, of the ongoing state of occupation.
- c. This process also reveals, despite the settlers' attempt to adopt the "velvet revolution" practices of loyalists of democracy and of legitimate civil revolt, the racist and messianic-fundamentalist profile of many of their leaders and rank-and-file, especially among the young generation. Indeed, the gruesome events in the Katif Bloc exposed to the public eye a large violent, lawless, uninhibited group that wages a brutal and crude discourse and treats the rule of the majority and the decisions of the government and the Knesset with condescension and contempt. Alongside the ideological war, the events also revealed the settlers' exploitative "victim politics" and their scandalous use of history, mainly of Holocaust analogies which intermingled with their petit bourgeois values in their struggle for compensation and "villa for villa" replacement of their homes.
- d. Beyond all these phenomena, the recent events illuminated the great, profound truth about the settlers in all their generations, a truth that spreads far beyond the Katif Bloc and even beyond the large settlement blocs in the West Bank. This truth, which the Israeli public had thus far refused to see, let alone to confront, guides the recent events and also explains them. The settlers are waging an entire ideological, political, and cultural revolution, that aims to transform Israel into a Jewish state based on fundamentalist religious law. The events in the Katif Bloc were merely a louder rendition of the settlers' ongoing project of conquering the State of Israel, its institutions, and its public sphere from within. "The revolution has begun," several settler leaders proclaimed upon the eviction from the Katif Bloc.
- e. This rare disclosure by the settlers may ultimately be useful in the struggle for a democratic, civil, and liberal Israel—a struggle that will take place after the current chapter is over if the civil, secular, liberal public in Israel manages to counter the racist settler halakhic state vision with a vision that is comprehensive, cohesive, and valid for most Israelis' lives.

Will We Go to War?

Fifteen years ago, Ariel Sharon wrote the following in his autobiography, *Warrior*: "What will we do once we withdraw from Gaza and find, as we inevitably will that Arafat or his successors have stepped in and the squads of terrorists are again operating from there into Israel, murdering and destroying? What will we do when the Katyusha fire starts hitting Sderot... and Ashkelon... and Kiryat Gat.... Will the television pictures showing us shelling Gaza in return be more palatable than those as

showed us in front of Beirut, or less upsetting than those of Israeli troops battling West Bank rioters? Or what shall we do if U.N. or multinational forces are positioned around Gaza and there is still terrorism? Shall we hit the Italians, or the British, or the Americans? ... These are the times when we will face the real dilemmas. And how will we react? After all those years and all the fighting and all the struggles, what will we do? Institute a modern version of the paratrooper operations of the 1950s and '60s? Will we go immediately to war? What will happen?"³ Is it not another of history's ironies that the author of these remarks—the man who proclaimed time and again, including in recent years, that the fate of tiny settlements in the Gaza Strip such as Netzarim or Kefar Darom was tantamount to that of Tel Aviv and Haifa—is today spearheading the project of uprooting these settlements and pulling Israel out of the region at issue? The irony is all the greater when we recall that Ariel Sharon is the Israeli politician most strongly identified with the construction of the settlements and the cementing of Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip in the early 1970s. It was Sharon who argued until recently, and wrote in his book, that "Gaza is our southern security belt." How, then, did this man come around to the decision to withdraw the Israeli army from the Strip and tear down the settlements that had been built there?

To this day, Sharon himself has never seriously explained, either to the citizens of Israel or to the world, the reasons that prompted him to make his disengagement move. Neither has he revealed his plans for "the day after," the period following the disengagement from Gaza, although these plans seem evident in view of what was done on the ground as the disengagement moved ahead, and what has been done there since. The accelerated construction of thousands of dwelling units in West Bank settlements and the ongoing construction of the crushing separation barrier in the heart of territories earmarked for the Palestinian state—an act that entails massive expropriation of Palestinian lands—are evidence cast in concrete of Sharon's intentions. Here, as usual, Sharon is thinking and acting on his own or in consultation solely with family members and personal confidants who are not accountable to the public. The truism that the political landscape looks different from the Prime Minister's Office than it does from the vantage of a member of the opposition does not explain everything. Historical experience, too, shows that most prime ministers of Israel, even those such as Menachem Begin or Benjamin Netanyahu who had sworn never to relinquish even one square millimeter of holy soil, were eventually forced to discuss the issue with the Palestinians and sign withdrawal accords. Yet there is more. Sharon's twisted, devious conduct in the matter of the disengagement shows that he remains the person that he has always been and that he was not motivated to pull out of Gaza by a trenchant personal reckoning of his past actions or a wish to assume responsibility for what he has done over the years. Here, like in many instances in the past, Sharon is instead responding to his instinct for survival and external pressures.

The decisive factors this time, evidently, were various political programs that rushed into the void that the Palestinian intifada of the 2000s had abetted—especially the Geneva Initiative, which was making major inroads in Israel and around the world. In April 2004, Sharon admitted to the *New York Times* columnist William Safire that in face of so many plans, those of the Saudis, the Arab League's, and the Geneva Plan, he could not oppose without bringing about one of his own.⁴

³ Ariel Sharon with David Chanoff, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon*, New York, 1989, pp. 554–555.

⁴ William Safire, "The Sharon Plan of Disengagement," *The New York Times*, 16 April 2004

Furthermore, Sharon was apparently impressed by the widening circles of soldiers and officers in elite army units who refused to continue serving in the territories and function as occupation soldiers. The army's combat soldiers find resonance in his heart more than anyone else outside of family members. Sharon's close adviser, Dov Weissglas, affirmed this in a very blunt way in an interview with *Ha'aretz*. Commenting on how refusal by officers, pilots, and commandos to serve the occupation and the settlements was influencing Sharon, he said, "And these aren't weird kids with green ponytails and nose rings. They're actually the finest young people we've got."⁵

The demographic arguments that Sharon and those around him have offered as an explanation for the unilateral withdrawal are problematic and unconvincing—not because they are groundless but precisely because the demographic imbalance between Jews and Palestinians is almost as acute in the West Bank as in Gaza. Yet for the time being, Sharon refuses to terminate the Israeli presence in, and control of, the West Bank. There seems to be an additional, different, and little-discussed truth behind the Israeli decision to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. Findings on the ground and studies by Israeli and non-Israeli institutions show that the Katif Bloc settlers' profligate, uncontrolled use of the limited water resources of the Gaza Strip, while making the Katif Bloc flourish and turning its settlers' greenhouses into a goldmine, reduced the entire Gaza Strip to a near-desert condition. The 7,500 Jewish settlers consumed about 8 million cubic meters of water each year, about half of which pumped from dozens of wells that were sunk in the Gaza Strip for the settlers' exclusive use. The rest was pumped to them from Israel territory. Over the years, in per-capita terms, the settlers have consumed more than eight times as much water as the Palestinians (123 cubic meters per year per Palestinian as against more than 1,000 per settler, on average). Israel's water apartheid in the Gaza Strip has strained the water economy so badly that experts have defined it as on the brink of disaster. The salinity of drinking water in Gaza surpasses the permissible limit by far, resulting in one of the world's highest rate of kidney diseases among the Palestinian inhabitants of the Strip. Had there been no pullout, the water situation in Gaza would soon have eradicated the water-intensive cheap-labor agriculture that the settlers had developed there, unless Israel were to provide all the water needed to perpetuate the settlers' agricultural extravagance. The realization that the Katif Bloc gold mine had played out undoubtedly preceded and abetted the decision to withdraw from the area. Thus, Shimon Peres' gesture to the Palestinian Authority, aided by Jewish millionaires and the World Bank—the transfer of some of the settlers' greenhouses to the Gaza farmers who had worked in them—is an empty gesture in this sense. Waterless greenhouses are fictitious greenhouses.

Sharon first disclosed his unilateral withdrawal plan in the "Herzliya speech," delivered in December 2003 at the annual conference of the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya. Several weeks later, in a conversation with Yoel Marcus of *Ha'aretz*, Sharon revealed his intent to evacuate settlements in the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria. "This state of vacuum cannot go on," Sharon said, "so I have given an instruction to carry out the evacuation, pardon me, the relocation of seventeen localities from the Gaza Strip to Israel, and of three problematic localities in

⁵ *Ha'aretz* Supplement, 15 October 2004.

Samaria.”⁶ About half a year earlier, on 26 May 2003, Sharon had blurted the word that his predecessors in the premiership had been very careful to avoid, proclaiming at a meeting of the Likud Knesset faction, “The occupation cannot go on interminably [. . . It is impossible] to continue keeping three and a half million Palestinians under occupation... The situation must be brought to an end.” Sharon uttered the word “occupation” four times at that meeting, sending his party and the media into tumult. After Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein, a not-so-hidden ally of the settlers and today a Supreme Court justice, also protested Sharon’s use of the term “occupation,” the Prime Minister attempted to backtrack. Several days later, appearing before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, he said that what he meant by using the term “occupation” was that “It is undesirable to rule over a Palestinian population.”

Sharon’s zigzagging public statements after these initial “outings” attest to confusion, attempts to obfuscate and mislead, or both. Sharon spoke of “maximum security,” of “minimum friction between Israel and the Palestinians,” and of the “incomparably difficult” move of redeploying some of the settlements, since “in the future arrangement Israel will not remain in all the places where we are today.” In almost the same breath, however, Sharon promised in his speech at the Herzliya conference that “Within the framework of the ‘disengagement plan’ Israel will strengthen its control of those segments of Eretz Israel that will be an inseparable part of the State of Israel under any future arrangement.” While presenting disengagement plan as a first step toward the fulfillment of the American president’s road map, which refers to the establishment of a Palestinian state within a foreseeable future, Sharon admitted that the road map no longer existed as far as he was concerned. “The disengagement plan absolves Israel of having to adopt a political program that would be dangerous,” Sharon claimed to senior political correspondents Nahum Barnea and Shimon Schiffer on the eve of the Jewish New Year 2004. “Even now, we’re not walking toward the road map,” Sharon said.⁷ No one, however, stated matters more clearly and bluntly than Sharon’s trusted aid and close adviser, Dov Weissglas. “The disengagement plan... is the bottle of formaldehyde within which you place the president’s formula so that it will be preserved for a very lengthy period,” Weissglas told *Ha’aretz* journalist Ari Shavit. “[... The disengagement] supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians.” Weissglas also admitted that the withdrawal from Gaza was actually meant to divert global attention from Israel and to preserve Israel’s grip on Judea and Samaria, and that the uprooting of a few thousand settlers here would perpetuate the presence of the hundreds of thousands there.

A Gordian Knot

The Gordian knot between Sharon and the settlers and Sharon’s tremendous contribution to the settlement enterprise are relatively well known. This story has recently been documented at length, including in the book *Masters of the Land: The Settlers and the State of Israel, 1967–2004* (Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar). However, to understand the full significance of Sharon’s recent move and his profound commitment to the greatest enterprise of his life—the settlements—it is essential to

⁶ *Ha’aretz*, 3 February 2004.

⁷ “Interview with Ariel Sharon: ‘I’m Disengaging and That’s That,’ ” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 15 September 2004.

reconstruct here, albeit in a severely abbreviated version, the path that Sharon marched in tandem with the settlers from the mid-1970s to his unilateral disengagement plan.

Groping for a political path to follow shortly after his discharge from military service following the Yom Kippur War, Sharon joined up with the founders of the Gush Emunim movement. Gush Emunim, established by the young generation of the Religious Zionist movement in early 1974, quickly became the ideological and religious engine of the settlement enterprise and, subsequently, the organization that has made the greatest political impact on Israel's history during the past thirty years. Sharon's encounter with the young cadres of religious Zionism took place as part of the struggle against the separation-of-forces and withdrawal plan in Sinai that the American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, had begun to promote at the time. The massive demonstrations during Kissinger's visits to Jerusalem in 1974–1975, which catapulted Gush Emunim to its unique status in Israeli politics, also created an intimate fusion between the Gush and the retired General Ariel Sharon. By undertaking and organizing mass demonstrations and invoking unprecedented operating methods that also manifested themselves in recent events related to the withdrawal from Gaza, the new Gush Emunim constituted itself as an influential political body and gained Sharon's encouragement and support. The unemployed general took part in the secret meetings of the heads of Gush Emunim and became the *eminence grise* of the struggle against Kissinger, the political solutions he had proposed, and the Government of Israel. Sharon demanded "forceful, broad-based measures" against Kissinger and the government, and belligerent action against "those who brought about such an ignoble situation." He called for the disruption of Kissinger's visits, claiming that "we ought to establish settlements every day and show the Americans that the Rabin Government has no popular support for a pullback from Judea and Samaria."⁸

The connection between the opportunistic general, the nonreligious glutton of nonkosher food, and the young religious fanatics proved to be natural, durable, and profitable. Both sides were similar in their self-perception of chosenness, in being bearers of a grander mission than ordinary politicians, acting according to different, higher laws. As for Gush Emunim, from its first day, its leaders regarded themselves as an avant-garde that was destined to lead the entire nation and exuded total confidence in their just, holy path. The members of Gush Emunim, young adults born in the 1940s to traditional religious families, aimed at achieving the central position and status within Israeli society that their parents and teachers never had. In the spirit of the messianic teachings of their mentor, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, they tasked themselves with the mission of Jewish national leadership and the role of collective prophet, so to speak. By force of these self-imposed functions and duties, they inferred their entitlement to privileged rights and acknowledged no earthly obstacle—whether individuals, Jews or non-Jews, institutions, worldviews, governments or the law - that might stand in their way. The vision of Gush Emunim was all-encompassing. Its purpose was to stiffen the Jewish spine, lift the nation from its nadir, and "set in motion a self-awakening for the fulfillment of the Zionist vision in its full magnitude, in the realization that the source of the vision lies in the Jewish heritage and the roots of Judaism, and that its purpose is the full redemption for the

⁸ *Ma'ariv* correspondent, "Sharon: Mess up Kissinger's Visit," *Ma'ariv*, 3 March 1975.

Jewish people and the entire world.”⁹ Gush Emunim wished to “rouse the nation by shock” and extricate Israel “from the despair that is besetting it, from disorientation, from nihilism.”

Even though most Gush Emunim leaders and activists were products of Religious Zionism, alumni of the National Religious youth movement Bnei Akiva and members of the longstanding National Religious Party (NRP), they regarded themselves as above the tides of the country’s defiled and compromising political-party system and refused to be a faction within the NRP. This party, to them, represented the old, marginal religious Zionism that settled for crumbs from the table of secular hegemonic Zionism. The struggle for the indivisibility and settlement of Eretz Israel, too, Gush Emunim said, should be national, transcending politics and unrelated to party affiliation.¹⁰ “The state,” said one of the first settlers and Gush Emunim personalities, Menahem Felix, “is of much greater value than the institutions that represent it.”¹¹

The spiritual progenitor of Gush Emunim was Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, son of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook (founder of the Palestine Chief Rabbinate in 1920) and the head of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav, where the leaders of Gush Emunim sprouted and the worldview that they espoused was shaped. About a month before Gush Emunim was established, “Rabbi Zvi Yehuda,” as he is known, stated, “This entire country is ours, totally, it belongs to us all; it is not transferable to others, not even in part ... Therefore, once and for all, it is clear and absolute that there are no ‘Arab territories’ and ‘Arab soil’ here, but only Jewish soil, the eternal inheritance of our earliest forebears...”¹² Several months later, amidst Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy among the countries of the Middle East, Kook ruled that “The borders, these kilometers of ours, carry Divine sanctity and we have absolutely no possibility of relinquishing them.” He further stated that Eretz Israel belongs not only to the three million Jews who inhabited the country (at the time) but to all the millions of Jews anywhere on earth. “It’s forbidden even to imagine—they haven’t given us a legal power of attorney—the relinquishing of these lands in any way whatsoever! It is a commandment ordained by the Torah—one should rather accept death than transgress it—and no political calculus and complications, no governmental arrangements, and no statements by our ministers will change [this truth] and be of utility in this matter.”¹³ Thus, for the Gush Emunim leaders, the importance of Eretz Israel nullified any political reality and superseded any other religious cause. The absolute right to the land and the duty of settling all of it equaled in importance all the other commandments combined. Hence, the methods to be used in realizing this imperative were also perceived to be sanctified. Thus, in the internal war among the Jews on the issue of the land and in view of the attempts by some transitory government to thwart the settlement imperative, disobedience of the law and use of force are not only legitimate but even tantamount to a religious duty. Eretz Israel overrules laws enacted by the Knesset.

⁹ Hava Pinhas Cohen, “Gush Emunim: First Days,” *Nekuda* 69, 3 February 1984.

¹⁰ Israel Harel, “Gush Emunim: Religious and National—Neither Partisan nor Right-Wing,” *Ma’ariv*, 24 August 1975.

¹¹ Aharon Beker and Yeshayahu Porat, “Panel Discussion with Gush Emunim,” *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 3 October 1976.

¹² Zvi Yehuda Kook, “That All the Peoples of the Earth May Know,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 January 1974.

¹³ Zvi Yehuda Kook, “The Jewish People—Stand Up and Live!” *Ma’ariv*, 6 May 1974.

Sharon made himself into Gush Emunim's emissary to the Israeli political system and the practical implementer of their messianic views. At first, in the years preceding the historical unseating of the political Left in 1977, Sharon stood arm-in-arm with the Kookian settlers against the Government of Israel. The first Yitzhak Rabin Government was likened by Gush Emunim to the British cabinet during the Mandate years. They claimed that this government was scheming to leave Judea and Samaria "Judenrein"—cleansed of Jews—"as Hitler tried to do in Europe." Sharon was the first public figure who urged soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate settlers from unauthorized settlement. His call carried special weight because of his entire military career, and because he had just been discharged from the army at the grade of major-general and wore a halo as the hero who had crossed the Suez Canal in the 1973 war. During one of Gush Emunim's attempts to establish a settlement in the heart of the Palestinian population in Samaria, a violent confrontation broke out between the settlers and soldiers who had been summoned to evict them. Sharon, in the company of far-Right personalities, rushed to the location, not far from Nablus. In the midst of the violent exchange, Sharon wedged himself between the soldiers and the rampaging settlers, who were clinging to the land, and urged the soldiers to refuse to evacuate the settlers. "This is a political matter," said Sharon to the officers, in which the military must not meddle. Thirty years later, Prime Minister Sharon instructed the commanders of the Israel Defence Forces to carry out precisely such an act. This time, the settlers and their rabbis rose up against him, some urging the commanders and soldiers to disobey.

The Gush Emunim invasion of Sebastia, Samaria, in December 1975, was a formative event in the history of the settlements, and here again Sharon played a key role. This was the historical moment when Gush Emunim burst into the Israeli consciousness and engraved itself into the collective memory. Against the background of the chipped stones of the abandoned Turkish railroad station at the site, the young Gush Emunim members circled like impassioned believers of an ecstatic ritual sect, loudly singing their unofficial anthem, taken from the daily prayer service: "Render advice and it will be defeated; offer words and the will not endure... for God is with us," a vision never witnessed before in Israel. The Sebastia event encompassed the entire Gush Emunim phenomenon: a group of young radicals infused with messianic religious faith, trampling the law and the decisions of the elected state institutions as they plowed ahead, mixing together a mystical and irrational worldview with a modern, rational, effective perception of political balance of forces and concrete possibilities of action. This body knew from the very outset to deploy a sophisticated dual tactic of leaping ahead to the endgame and patient and sagacious exploitation of an imperfect reality, amidst a comprehensive ideology of illegalism. Gush Emunim made seven attempts to settle its people at Sebastia and was evicted by the army each time. In advance of the eighth attempt, planned out like a military operation and carefully staged, thousands who had been mobilized from all over the country—families with young children, members of existing settlements, and pro-settlement people from all over the country—moved in and climbed the hill. The intention of the settler hard core was not only to demonstrate against a "weak," "diasporic," "retreatist" Government but also to offer a full-blown, total, politics-transcending alternative to the democratic, law-abiding state, which by definition was flawed and imperfect.

At dusk on the second day of the invasion of Sebastia, a convoy of some 400 supporters arrived from Jerusalem, with Ariel Sharon—by then Prime Minister Rabin’s personal advisor—at their head. The attempts that were made to mediate between the Government’s stance and that of the settlers, orchestrated by Defense Minister Shimon Peres, attested to the Government’s weakness and provided an initial augury of the process that would bring the Government down a year and a half later. In accordance with Sharon’s compromise proposal, thirty settlers were removed to a nearby army camp until the Government could re-discuss their case and the general issue of the settlements. “[Sharon’s] compromise was a great achievement; it opened the door to settlement throughout Judea and Samaria,” predicted the settler leaders Hanan Porat, Benny Katzover, and Menahem Felix, not knowing what they were predicting.¹⁴ Indeed, this was the first step toward massive Jewish settlement in the heart of the Palestinian population of Samaria. By June 1976, the group had built its strength to thirty families and fifty-three children; within a year a collective dining room, a synagogue, classrooms, and an electrical system had been installed. Some would eventually regret their attitude toward the Sebastia compromise. Not Ariel Sharon. Citing his contribution to the precedent-setting compromise at Sebastia, he said in an interview that for it alone his term as a personal adviser to Rabin had been worth it.

Eleven months later, on 17 April 1977, the Rabin Government approved the establishment of a new settlement in the territories, next to the Kadum army base. Kedummim, as it was named, became one of the strongest and most fanatic settlements in Samaria, led to this day by a veteran of Sebastia, a charismatic extremist woman settler named Daniella Weiss. In the general elections for the Knesset on May 17, 1977, exactly one month after the decision to establish Kedummim was made, the Likud, headed by Menachem Begin, trounced the Labor Movement, headed by Peres and Rabin. For the first time in Israel’s history, a right-wing government had risen to power. Gush Emunim played a considerable role in this historic political upheaval. The Labor Government’s attempts to curry favor with the settlers and satisfy their demands did it no good on election day. Days later, Yigal Allon, a member of successive Labor Governments and the patron of the first settlement in the territories, told his friend Israel Harel, one of the most influential settlers and a resident of the leading settlement of Ofra, “We will never forgive you for having unseated us.”

The political upheaval in Israel assured the settlers a new future. Two days after the elections, accompanied by television crews and journalists from Israel and abroad, the prime minister-elect visited Kadum and proclaimed the future establishment of dozens of overt and legitimate settlements in the West Bank.¹⁵ Although the new Prime Minister refused to entrust the defense portfolio to Sharon—he knew the man—Begin did accede to Sharon’s request to be named Minister of Agriculture, a portfolio considered relatively junior and unprestigious. He also assigned Sharon, at his minister’s request, to the chair of the Ministerial Committee for Settlement Affairs, which Sharon transformed into the key instrument for the establishment of new settlements in the occupied territories. American President Jimmy Carter’s objections

¹⁴ Shlomo Nakdimon and Arie Tzimuki, “The Protocols of the Mediators of Kadum,” *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 30 April 1976.

¹⁵ “New Government in Formation Will Urge Youth to Settle in Judea and Samaria,” *Hatzofeh*, 20 May 1977.

to the settlements, Begin's hesitancy, and the view of colleagues in the Government who disapproved of overly blunt, demonstrative, and extreme actions in the territories, left no impression on Sharon, a newcomer to the Likud after the party that he had established, Shlomzion, had won only two mandates in the elections. The man who had incited the settlers against the previous Government now embarked on incessant construction in the territories, disguising new settlements as archaeological encampments and army bases, appropriating land in deceitful ways in order to thwart any future political solution. Typically, he did this in headlong fashion, consulting with no one in government and failing to provide appropriate infrastructure for the consolidation of the new settlements. In late September 1977, Sharon presented the Government with his settlement map for the territories and embarked on his lengthy campaign to redraw Israel's geographic, political, demographic, social, economic, and security map. His position as the head of the Settlement Affairs Committee and his control of the country's land and water resources in his role as Minister of Agriculture were transformed in the hands of Sharon into mighty leverage for the formulation, and implementation, of his own vision of settling the territories.

Sharon's Ministerial Committee chose the location of each settlement; determined its complexion, scale, and size in the short and long terms; set its employment goals; and selected the entity that would be responsible for establishing it. Its decisions also related to the extent of state participation in the allocation of land, infrastructure, and building expenses. Thus, the committee gave Sharon a formidable tool for the takeover, development, and settlement of land in the West Bank under the guise of sound, legal, and calculated governmental activity. Sharon deemed all means legitimate for the advancement of his scheme. The massive, systematic construction of as many settlements as possible within the shortest time frame, dispersed as widely as possible across the West Bank, was Sharon's typical *modus operandi*. This goal crowded out all other considerations, be they related to geography, economics, defense, morality, or ecology. Sharon assured his fellow ministers that two million Jews would be living in the territories by the end of the twentieth century.

Within a few years—Sharon's finest and most fruitful years—the hilly, stony landscapes of the West Bank were strewn with dozens of settlements. The seeds seemed to have been planted randomly but the planter's hand aimed accurately at strategic intersections and the outskirts of the large Palestinian towns, not overlooking a single one. Beit El, Elkana, Halamish, Kedummim, Kokhav Hashahar, Migdal 'Oz, Rimmonim, Sal'it, Shavei Shomron, and Tekoa were established before 1977 was out. Another clutch of settlements were established in 1978 and 1979: Elon Moreh, Ariel, Karnei Shomron, Kefar Tapuah, Mevo Dotan, Shadmot Mehola, Shilo, and Tomer. Following in the next three years, 1980–1982, were 'Almon, 'Ateret, Barkan, Efrata, 'Einav, Elei Zahav, Eshkolot, Giv'on Hehadasha, Hermesh, Hinanit, Homesh, Karmel, Ma'alei Amos, Ma'alei Mikhmas, Ma'alei Shomron, Matityahu, Nahal Elisha, Nahal Hemdat, Naomi, Neveh Daniel, Nokdim, Pnei Hever, Psagot, Shaked, Telem, Vered Yeriho, and Yafit. Although Sharon was no longer Minister of Agriculture by the end of that period, his spirit and plans still influenced the mass production of settlements. In 1983, a member of the ultra-Rightist Tehiya movement, Professor Yuval Ne'eman, became chair of the Ministerial Settlement Committee and held the post until the general elections in late 1984. During this time, the following were established: Alfei Menashe, Asfar, Dolev, 'Emmanuel, Ganim, Karmeit Tsur, Kiryat Netafim, Ma'ale Levona, Metsadot Yehuda (Beit Yattir), Migdalim, Nahal

Avnat, 'Otniel, Sha'arei Tikva, and Yitzhar—some of the most fanatic and extreme settlements, which embittered their Palestinian neighbors' lives.

Sharon had acted quickly and intensively not only because this had always been his way but also in the awareness that the sand in the political and diplomatic hourglass might run out. Shortly after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat paid his historical visit to Israel and delivered his peacemaking speech in the Israeli parliament, thoroughly winning the hearts and minds of most Israelis, Israeli and Egyptian delegations met at Camp David for an American-sponsored summit conference. On the table were proposals in regard to a peace settlement between Israel and Egypt, including a withdrawal from Sinai territories and autonomy for the inhabitants of the West Bank. As Prime Minister Begin sat at Camp David and discussed the plan for Palestinian autonomy in the territories, Gush Emunim drew up a settlement scheme to populate the territories with millions of Jews and, for some time, reverted to demonstrating in the streets.

The first Camp David accord, which prescribed autonomy for the Palestinians, the abolition of military rule in these territories, and the suspension of all settlement activity there for a period of three months, served as wake-up call for Gush Emunim, that launched its largest and most organized campaign to that time, the settlement of the Elon Moreh group in the area of Hawara, south of Nablus. The operation began on 19 September 1978, two days after the Camp David conference ended. The settlers spent three days on the mountaintop, drilled an encampment and a shack into the stony soil, unfurled a flag, and encircled their settlement with a fence. As Begin and Defense Minister Ezer Weizman made their way back from America, the Government decided to evacuate the settlers and sent military forces with resolve and strength that the Labor Government had never dared to invoke. The saga of Elon Moreh, another landmark in the history of the settlements, unfolded for many months on the mountains of Samaria, in the political corridors, and in the courts. Egged on by right-wing ministers and Ariel Sharon, the settlers tried again and again to sink roots in the vicinity of Nablus, despite the opposition of the army and an attempt by the new Government to refrain from opening too many fronts vis-a-vis the Americans. Defense Minister Weizman, the person most responsible for the Likud's historic electoral victory in 1977 and the formation of Israel's first right-wing Government, came out against these demonstrative exertions, which usurped the attention of the Government and the army and harmed Israel's reputation in world opinion. Addressing the Likud Knesset faction, Weizman said, "If we've decided to live here forever, we must learn to get along with the Arabs.... Now it's time to engage in fleshing out the settlements and not in spreading them out. Changes in the region have occurred and have to be taken into account."¹⁶ On 7 January 1979, however, the Begin Government, under pressure from the settlers and their supporters in the Government, took a resolution allowing the Elon Moreh core group to settle in Samaria. The resolution stated that it was the prerogative of the Government to determine the location of the settlement and the timing of the settlement act but that it would show "maximum [consideration] for the wishes of this group." Again, Ariel Sharon did not waste a moment to seek a new location for the settlement. The place was found and the military commander in the area hurriedly requisitioned the land.

¹⁶ Dan Margalit, "Begin Urges Demonstrating Settlers to Disperse; Likud Faction, at His Request, Avoids Resolution," *Ha'aretz*, 5 January 1979.

This time, however, and for the first time, the Supreme Court of Israel, sitting as the High Court of Justice, stopped the process. The Court, petitioned by Palestinian inhabitants whose private land the military commander had expropriated for the Jewish settlement, ruled rather swiftly that the army's seizure order in regard to the Palestinian lands in the area, ostensibly for "security needs," was null and void.

The man who actually brought about this historical ruling and literally "forced" a reluctant Supreme Court to face the truth of the settlements was none other than a settler, who volunteered the admission that in settling at the location and all over the territories he and his comrades had been guided neither by security considerations nor by any other earthly rationale in respect, but solely the command of God. By expressing it this way, he pulled the rug from under an Israeli policy that had been practiced for many years—expropriating Palestinian land for ostensible "security needs"—with the protection and highly regarded seal of the Israeli court. Pursuant to its ruling, the High Court of Justice gave the Government and the army thirty days to evict the settlers from the Palestinian petitioners' land. Six months after they had moved onto the land with government authorization and permission and with army assistance, the settlers were evacuated and their settlement was dismantled. This historical verdict changed the nature of settlement activity on the ground. For one moment, the rule of law and the imperative of justice had triumphed over the organization that had been undermining them so efficiently, with so many accomplices in such high positions, since 1967. That moment, however, was short lived.

It was the settlers, of all people, who understood the full implications of the Supreme Court's ruling, which went down in Israel's legal and settlement history as the "Elon Moreh ruling." In an exemplary worded document, the Gush Emunim people analyzed the legal status of the occupied territories and the settlements with a clarity that no political body had applied before. Although the document was of course meant to decry and debunk this legal situation, it revealed a truth that Israeli society stubbornly refused to see and confront. "Israel has established a regime of *military occupation* in Judea, Samaria, the Jordan Basin, and the Gaza Strip," the document began. "Under international law, military rule can come about only when the occupying power enters a foreign territory *that is not its own* ... The occupying power holds such a territory only temporarily, until peace In foreign territory that has been occupied, the occupier may not create any permanent facts: it may not undertake archeological excavations; it may not transfer its population to the occupied territory; it may not expropriate land; it may do only what is necessary for the needs of the military occupation; it may do only what is necessary for the needs of the local population." By applying the law of military occupation in the heart of Eretz Israel, the governments of Israel—the authors of the document complained—had ruled that "Judea and Samaria are, from our standpoint, a foreign land that has been occupied ... Our presence in Judea and Samaria is temporary only." The document went on to state that the Labor Alignment governments had built the settlements in the territories on land that had been seized "*for military purposes*." They did this "so that they could offer the explanation and the excuse that this settlement activity does not clash with the state of 'military occupation.' The 'security' fiction endured until the Arabs—with American advice and encouragement—seized the High Court of Justice weapon ... In the Elon Moreh ruling, [the Supreme Court found] that *the military needs are temporary and that, therefore, no further permanent Jewish settlement in the heart of*

Eretz Israel is conceivable ...” Thus, the settlers argued, “The rug has been pulled from under the entire Jewish settlement enterprise in the liberated territories. The fate of the 20,000 new settlers, the millions of Israel pounds that have been invested, the security of the State of Israel, which is indefensible without Judea and Samaria, and the fate of the most intimate and beloved places in our homeland—all of these have been suspended in mid-air, so to speak, like Chagall-style Diasporic images, without land.”¹⁷

The hunger strike of the settler leaders, a legitimate act of political protest, launched in an attempt to reverse the Supreme Court’s ruling, was predictable. More interesting was the response of the Minister of Agriculture, Ariel Sharon. Sharon demanded that the Government “appoint a team of lawyers that will render the settlements ‘immune’ to interference by the High Court of Justice,” i.e., to place the settlements above the law, and to do this in a formal legal way. Sharon’s attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court’s ruling failed, for reasons including Prime Minister Begin’s opposition. More than a quarter of a century later, on 30 June 2004, during Sharon’s term as premier, the Supreme Court ruled that the construction of the separation wall should be halted and that the path of the barrier should be changed on grounds of unreasonable harm to Palestinians. Now, as rightists and settlers demanded that the Court’s ruling be circumvented, it was Sharon who insisted that the ruling be honored. From a retrospect of twenty-five years, however, we see that the legal crisis concerning Elon Moreh eventually gave rise to a tremendous surge of settlement construction. Begin’s Government resolved that from then on, new settlements would be established after the Attorney General would rule about the ownership of the land. The Supreme Court would no longer be able to absolve the Government of culpability for the theft of Palestinians’ land; henceforth the Government would handle this by itself, by means of the Attorney General and the State Attorney’s Office.

The next step was the revival of an 1858 Ottoman land law for an overall, far-reaching **change in the status of land** in the West Bank, redesigning large areas of the territory as "state land". According to one of the sections of the Ottoman statute, “Land that is in the possession of no person, i.e., for which no certificate of title can be shown ... and that is so distant from any town or village that a person’s voice at the extremity of the locality cannot be heard there... such as stony mountains, uncultivated fields, and oak forest, is [dead], and any person in need may cultivate it by obtaining a license from the superintendent, at no charge, provided that the right to title remain in the hands of the Sultan.” The “Sultan” in the territory, since the military victory in June 1967, was the Government of Israel. The director of the Civilian Department at the State Attorney’s Office, Plia Albeck, daughter of a religious Jewish family of German origin, a family of lawyers and rabbis, was placed in charge of the matter by the incumbent Attorney General—subsequently the President of the Supreme Court, Professor Aharon Barak. First, Albeck was instructed to look into the status of certain parcels of land for settlements that were already on the drawing boards and that needed land. Yet her successful mission whet the general appetite. Under the auspices of the legal system and the fatherly approval of the Prime Minister, Albeck revolutionized the state of affairs, declaring vast areas, nearly half of the West Bank, as “state land,” thereby creating enough of a reserve to meet Jewish

¹⁷ “The Land Trap: The Legal Situation,” Gush Emunim document pursuant to the Elon Moreh ruling, December 1979 (emphasis in the original).

settlement purposes for more than a century ahead. While taking painstaking care to safeguard the private real-estate holdings of inhabitants of the West Bank, Plia Albeck acted systematically to dispossess the Palestinian people of its collective property—to pull the land from under their feet, literally and figuratively. By so doing, she deprived the Palestinians of the basis for their collective life and their political public space. Thus, during the decade of the 1980s, the West Bank was carpeted with dozens of Jewish settlements, not only to fulfill the Greater Israel vision and ideology but also to make the takeover of the land and Jewish settlement there irreversible.

Peace Is Killing

Amidst all this, the peace process on the Egyptian front, which had begun with Sadat's historic visit to Israel, was moving ahead. On the eve of his departure to the first Camp David conference, Prime Minister Begin assured the settlement leaders, who beseeched him, that "If the topic of uprooting settlements comes up in the negotiations, then I, Menachem Begin, will stand up, pack my suitcases, and come home." The issue of uprooting settlements in the Rafah salient, part of the Sinai Peninsula, did come up for negotiation and Begin, of course, did not leave Camp David. The person who helped him to break his promise to the settlers was none other than the Minister of Agriculture, Ariel Sharon, who told Begin, who had called him from the United States to ask his advice, that "Peace is better than settlements." What is more, when the time came to evacuate the town of Yamit and the entire Rafah salient, it was Sharon, now Minister of Defense in Begin's second Government, who was placed in charge of the withdrawal and the razing of Yamit. Gush Emunim tried to thwart this action in much the way that it would act twenty-three years later in Gush Katif. It struggled for each settlement and each house, knowing that the battle had already been lost and that the real object of the struggle lay elsewhere. "I regard the struggle for Yamit as a struggle for Judea and Samaria," said Yoel Bin-Nun, one of the settlers' most prominent spiritual leaders. Weak resistance by the inhabitants of the salient to their evacuation, said the ideological settlers of the West Bank, could set a precedent that future governments would exploit when the fate of their own territories would come up for discussion.

The Yamit affair was a trauma well organized and staged for the settlers' consumption only. About a month after the 1982 pullout, Pinhas Wallerstein, chair of the Binyamin Regional Council and one of the leaders of the settler rebellion against the withdrawal from Gaza in the summer of 2005, said, "Whoever is responsible for the horrific crime of uprooting settlements shall not be cleansed." Another influential settler termed the evacuation of Yamit "a spectacle... reminiscent of the Holocaust! Except for the bloodshed, this total expulsion of the entire Jewish population, the annihilation of an entire Jewish civilization ... there is no other name for it."¹⁸ Various studies show that the demolition of Yamit did not traumatize the Israeli collective memory. One must bear in mind, however, that several weeks after the destruction of Yamit, in June 1982, to compensate for this pseudo-trauma, Sharon unleashed the Israel Defence Forces for an unjust and unnecessary war in Lebanon. Instead of establishing a "new era in the Middle East," as he proclaimed upon the outset of the war, Sharon and the entire Begin Government mired Israel for many

¹⁸ Elyakim Haetzni, "The Sinai Quartet Shall Not Fall," *Nekuda* 42, pp. 10–11.

years in the Lebanese muck, in a pointless trench war that claimed a horrifying price on all sides.

The peace treaty with Egypt and, above all, the exposure in the mid-1980s of the Jewish terrorist group that had planned to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and, in the meantime, was killing Palestinians and injuring Palestinian mayors, were hard blows to Gush Emunim. The slogan of the Right, “This peace is killing us,” was most valid for Gush Emunim itself. Gush Emunim, which had come together and flourished on the basis of fear-mongering and saber-rattling, and whose entire *raison d’être* was the voluntary secession of the Jewish people, including the State of Israel, from the world and from historical reality, could not endure when confronted with the possibility of peace and in a climate of negotiations and quest for solutions. It also found difficult the transition from the sweeping and uplifting ideology of the days of *Sturm und Drang* to the mundane drabness of settlement life. The difficulties, however, were not evident on the ground. In the aftermath of the High Court of Justice’s ruling in the Elon Moreh case and during the era of the Likud Governments (1977–1984), the mammoth seizure of land in the territories that had been proclaimed “state land,” which delivered about half of the West Bank into Israeli hands, reached its climax. Even after a National Unity Government with the participation of the Labor Party was established, settlements continued to sprout across the territories, although on a reduced scale. Thus, five new settlements were established in 1989 alone.

The dissolution of the Unity Government in 1990 and its replacement by a narrowly based right-wing government removed all inhibitions. Land expropriations in the territories and investment in the settlements broke records. According to Israeli and Palestinian sources, more than 50,000 hectares of land on the West Bank were seized between January 1988 and June 1991. Enormous budgets were transferred to settlements by various kinds of subterfuge and in ways that circumvented the State Comptroller. Sharon, by then the Minister of Construction and Housing, found a new form of bait with which to fish for ordinary, non-ideological Israelis who wished to live in houses as opposed to apartments: free “state land” for all comers. It was all done secretly. Not until the summer of 1991 did the opposition newspaper *Davar* expose the new policy.¹⁹ In addition to the wholesale distribution of Palestinian land to Israel citizens, Sharon offered the new settlers virtually interest-free mortgages that would become grants within a few years. The water, electricity, and sewage infrastructures, along with services such as education and defense, were furnished to the new settlers at no charge. Recent immigrants and young couples who had never subscribed to the idea of the Greater Israel became the next-door neighbors of the Greater Israel loyalists, transforming the profile of the settler community. Eventually, many of them adopted ideological and religious justifications for residing in spacious homes that they had obtained at a quarter of the going Israeli price, and they assimilated into the holy flock.

The settlement-building party in the late 1980s and early 1990s, coupled with a state of corrupt semi-anarchy in government circles, led not only to the suspension of loan guarantees that the United States had promised Israel for the absorption of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the former Soviet Union but also to a

¹⁹ Onn Levy, “Secret Government Decision: Free Land in Judea-Samaria-Gaza,” *Davar*, 26 July 1991.

political reversal in 1992 and the return of the Labor Party to power. A moratorium on construction in the settlements was declared by Yitzhak Rabin at the outset of his premiership. And in September 1993, together with Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn in Washington, he signed the Oslo Accord. To defeat the plan, the settlers braced themselves for a new phase in confrontation with the Government. Gush Emunim launched a cruel war, personal and focused, against Rabin, deliberately meant to destabilize him and radicalize his behavior. “When Rabin is under pressure, he loses his senses,” a lead article in the settlers’ journal explained.²⁰ Arguing from the perspective that “the worse things are the better they are,” some settler leaders claimed that Rabin’s accession would actually be useful for the settlers. “Thus far, the Government has been with us and not with us, for us and against us. One hand fed us carrots and the other whacked us in the face. Sharon built Judea and Samaria and demolished Yamit ... It’s better for the disagreements between ourselves and the authorities to be sharp, clear-cut, clear as day,” a former member of the Jewish terror organization, Hagai Segal, wrote in the national-circulation newspaper *Hadashot*.²¹ Two personalities who spearheaded incitement against the Prime Minister and, even if only inadvertently, played a role in the creation of a climate that abetted extreme violent acts, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon, themselves became prime ministers after the assassination of Rabin.

The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by an individual, a religious and nationalist fanatic Jew, who interpreted literally and simply the seditious and inciteful rhetoric that uninhibited rabbis and irresponsible politicians had unleashed against the Prime Minister, and who took upon himself the mission of saving the Jewish people from the holocaust of the impending territorial retreat, was preceded by another assassination: the massacre perpetrated on 25 February 1994, by a physician, Dr. Baruch Goldstein—a Jewish settler from Kiryat Arba, a settlement abutting Hebron—among Muslim worshippers on Friday, their holy day, at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. The slaughter of twenty-nine Muslim worshippers by the Jewish doctor was meant primarily to thwart the “Oslo holocaust,” but at its root it was also an attempt to set to rights the massacre perpetrated by the Arabs of Hebron against the Jews of that town in 1929. The dual meaning of the massacre, and the death of the murderer at the hands of those among his victims who survived, transformed Goldstein into a martyr among the community of extreme settlers even before his blood had dried. The cult of a martyred hero that his admirers established around him and his tomb persists to this day.

Both Prime Minister Rabin and his young murderer, Yigal Amir, fully understood the significance of what the physician from Hebron had done. “The murderer from Hebron shot innocent people but intended to kill the act of peacemaking,” Rabin stated in the Knesset plenum three days after the massacre.²² Rabin’s murderer, in turn, told police investigators after he had shot the Prime Minister in the back, that the idea that “[Rabin] has to be taken out” had already occurred to him at Goldstein’s mass funeral in Hebron, in which Amir had participated. The tragedy is that Rabin did not act firmly after the massacre of the Muslim worshippers and failed to remove even one Jewish settler from Hebron proper, even though the massacre had created a

²⁰ “In Lieu of an Editorial,” *Nekuda*, 169, June 1993, p. 11.

²¹ Hagai Segal, “My Fellow Settlers,” *Hadashot*, 26 June 1992.

²² Prime Minister Rabin in the Knesset, *Divrei ha-Knesset*, vol. 136, session of 28 February 1994 (Hebrew), p. 4906.

propitious moment for such action and even though it was widely expected, in Israel and abroad. In the meantime, from that day on, the assassin Yigal Amir prepared ceaselessly for his mission of redeeming the Jewish people from the looming catastrophe of Oslo—until 4 November 1995, when at a peace rally in the heart of Tel Aviv he found his opportunity to fatally shoot the Prime Minister in the back.

It is not by chance that the Labor Party and the historical Labor Movement failed to do a thorough soul-searching in the aftermath of the Rabin assassination—immediately after the assassination or later on, with themselves or with their political rivals. Nor is it by chance that the assassination underwent a process of sterilization in the Israeli public domain. Shedding its profound political meanings and its transformative effect on Israel's history, it has become a memory-event that meets the narcissistic nostalgic needs of Israeli society and provides an opportunity to celebrate conciliation and false national unity. It is not by chance because those who laid the foundations for the settlements over the Green Line after the 1967 war, the places that gave rise to Rabin's assassin in themselves and in their formative outlook, were the Labor Movement and the governments that it had headed. It was they who had helped the first settlements get started and established their public and moral fitness and legitimacy. By the time they realized the significance of what they had done, it was too late. The initial seal of approval that they had given to the settlement act was indelible. After Rabin's assassination, they and their successors knew more than anyone else that, indirectly but in a most profound way, they had also been parties to the atrocity. The dry statistics reinforce this claim. Rabin had left behind almost 15,000 new dwellings in the West Bank, including 4,000 begun during the term of the first Labor-Meretz Government and 9,850 begun during the term of the Shamir Government. The population of Jewish settlers in the West Bank leaped during the tenures of the Rabin Government and its successor, the Peres Government, by more than 40 percent, from roughly 100,000 in 1993 to 141,000 in 1996.²³ The “expanded” population of settlers, including the inhabitants of neighborhoods built around Jerusalem after 1967, doubled during the 1996–2005 decade.

Also during the premiership of Ehud Barak of the Labor Party, who had been elected on a peacemaking platform in 1999, the settlements continued to expand and develop. The settlers' initial angst after Barak's landslide electoral victory swiftly gave way to industrial calm, especially after Barak assured the concerned leaders of the Yesha Council²⁴ that he was a “centrist in outlook,” that he “appreciates the settlements,” and that the settlers were closer to his heart than leftists such as Yossi Sarid and Yossi Beilin.²⁵ In the meantime, extremist “hilltop youth” continued to established “illegal outposts” on West Bank hilltops with full backing from the settlers' official institutions and, more important, massive covert assistance from the army and the Barak Government. Apart from the occupants of one especially lawless outpost, Maon Farm in the Hebron hills, the Barak Government did not dislodge even one settler from any existing settlement. Barak even bragged about this publicly, in the Knesset and in other speeches, in an attempt to show that he was every bit as loyal to Eretz Israel as the Likud prime ministers, who had returned territories to the

²³ Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, various years.

²⁴ The Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza—an umbrella organization representing the interests of settlers over the Green Line.

²⁵ Nadav Shragai, “The Government has Changed, Construction Will Evidently Continue,” *Ha'aretz*, 29 June 1999.

Palestinians. Indeed, no factor dictated the positions of the Israeli Government in the first official negotiations with the Palestinians over permanent borders, conducted during Barak's term, more than the settlements and the settlers. Barak's guiding principle in drawing the eastern border was the eviction of as few settlers as possible. He insisted on the annexation to Israel of blocs in which some 80 % of the settlers dwell. Barak's obstinacy in holding the second Camp David conference (July 2000) despite faulty preparations, Palestinian claims that the timing was wrong and the conditions for discussion of permanent status unripe, the uncompromising Israeli stance on the settlement blocs, Barak's crude conduct during the summit, and the lack of parliamentary political backing for his by-now unstable Government—and not necessarily the Palestinians' rejectionist stances at the conference—were the main contributory factors to the failure of the permanent-status talks in September 2000.

Indeed, Barak brought up the Jerusalem issue for discussion at Camp David, thereby breaking a taboo of many years. He also withdrew the army from the hopeless war in Lebanon, into which Sharon had sent it into some twenty years earlier. Both leaders, however, shared responsibility for the eruption of the second Palestinian intifada in late 2000, and many similarities may be drawn between the two generals who had become prime ministers—an overly prevalent trait of Israeli society, which over the years has developed a slick academic and public debate with which to cloak its militaristic characteristics and skirt genuine discussion of the phenomenon. Both men had been raised on the absolute-force ideology that Israel had developed in its early years, in the shadow of utter Jewish helplessness and the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust. Both men, like their contemporaries, regard the world and the region from this perspective only. Neither Barak nor Sharon can understand or identify with the plight of the other; both concern themselves solely with the Jewish fate and the Jewish condition as they were taught to construe it. In their power-centric behavior in both domestic and foreign affairs and their inability to perceive reality as it is, to maintain a dialogue of any kind whatsoever, and to recognize the rival's legitimate rights, however harsh and hostile this rival may be, they represent a very deep trait of practical Zionism—shared equally by Right and Left, Likud and Labor—that while historical and highly pragmatic is also materially ahistorical and unrealistic, in the sense that it considers itself *sui generis*, a phenomenon unlike any other historical phenomenon, to which different rules apply, as Hannah Arendt wrote in the second half of the 1940s in her articles about Zionism.²⁶

In this sense, Right and Left, Sharon and Barak, all were almost equally blind to the reality that the settlements and the Israeli occupation had brought about in the territories, and equally accountable for the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in the autumn of 2000. Barak refused to see the impasse that Palestinian society and the Palestinian leadership had reached and was blind to the buildup of pressure on the ground, even though experts had been warning about it and even though the matter had come up in almost every discussion between Israelis and Palestinians. September 13, 2000, passed without a permanent settlement and without a Palestinian state. The Palestinians' economic situation was worsening steadily, Palestinian prisoners were not being released, the settlements were growing and developing almost without

²⁶ Ron H. Feldman, *Hannah Arendt, The Jew as Pariah, Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, New York, 1978.

hindrance and Israel refused to carry out the third handover of territories pursuant to its undertakings in the Oslo accord and the agreements that followed. All of this was happening under Barak's Government. The violent eruption was handwriting on the wall; one only had to see it. It was Barak, too, who gave the head of the opposition, Sharon, the go-ahead to visit the Temple Mount despite warnings from his own defense officials and his Palestinian interlocutors, who spoke openly about the huge conflagration that might break out as a reaction to such a demonstrative act by their historical nemesis. In this respect, one may say that Ehud Barak closed the historical circle of blindness that generations of Labor Movement personalities had displayed in regard to the settlements and the settlers, and the plight and aspirations of the Palestinian people, since the first day of colonialist Israeli settlement on Palestinian land.

The Root of Noxious Fruit

The way the very first minuscule settlement was established under the auspices of the Labor Movement, in the Etzion Bloc in September 1967, already embodied both the tragedy and the farce that were typical of the generations of settlement-building and, in the main, the behavior of Israel's governments vis-a-vis the Jewish settlers who rushed into the territory. During the 1948 war, the Etzion Bloc had fallen to the Arab Legion of Transjordan, its fighters killed and its civilians evacuated, in what became a bleeding trauma in the Israeli collective memory. When the children of the Etzion Bloc settlers turned to the bureau of the Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, and demanded that the Bloc be resettled, Eshkol knew that the first go-ahead from his Government would open a Pandora's box of unknowable size. However, he was not strong enough to resist the pressures from outside the government and from within. The first settlers, led (among others) by the young Hanan Porat, the pioneer of settlements, a demobilized soldier who had fought in Jerusalem in June 1967, took action to move onto the land before the approval came through. "We prepared for the possibility of going up to Kefar Etzion without authorization, with the backing of the Greater Israel Movement people and others," Porat said after the fact. "We loaded everything we needed into a truck ... Eshkol asked, 'When do you want to go up?' We answered that we want to hold [prayer] services there on Rosh Hashanah. Eshkol replied, 'Go.' "

Thus, the decision to establish the first settlement in the West Bank was made without principled debate in the Government about an overall settlement policy and the short- and long-term implications of Jewish settlement in the territories. **This is how the immeasurably important precedent was established.** The settlers' modus operandi also solidified at this time: the creation of "facts on the ground" and sophisticated toying with time—rushing ahead on the one hand and patient waiting on the other, until the walls of resistance of Israel's state institutions weakened. Even though many officials, headed by Prime Minister Eshkol, regarded the return to Kefar Etzion not as a precedent but as a nonrecurrent gesture to the Etzion Bloc refugees and the families of the Jewish casualties of 1948, this modest act became the first inaugural step in the massive enterprise of settlement-building.

The resettlement of the Etzion Bloc transformed the idea of returning to destroyed Jewish localities from a fantasy of the few into an act attainable by masses. Once the offspring of Kefar Etzion were allowed to return to the destroyed homes that had been left behind in 1948, the leadership found it difficult to explain to the descendants of the Hebron massacre in 1929 why their fate should be any different.

Indeed, the idea of settling in Hebron began to move ahead less than two weeks after the resettlement of Kefar Eztion. Like the Etzion Bloc settlers, those eager to settle in the heart of Hebron—the most religious and fanatic Muslim city in the territories—were products of Religious Zionism, headed by Rabbi Moshe Levinger. However, without the assistance of senior Government ministers, members of the more extreme activist current in the historical Labor Movement, led by Yigal Alon and Israel Galili, the malignant settlement in the heart of Hebron might never have come into being. Like Sharon later on, Yigal Alon became the self-appointed emissary of the aspiring settlers in the occupied territories. Thus, the members of the Labor Movement group that considered the 1947 partitioning of the country an open wound in need of suturing and, therefore, treated the outcome of the Six-Day War as the righting of a great historical wrong, now assumed personal responsibility within the Government for the fulfillment of this vision. “We mustn’t acquiesce in making Hebron *Judenrein* of our own free will due to a murderous pogrom in August 1929,” Yigal Alon proclaimed in the Knesset.²⁷ Despite strong opposition in the Government, Alon and his colleagues assisted the settlement effort in Hebron in all ways, overt and covert, providing the settlers with information, money, goods, weapons, and most important, a seal of approval from the pioneering Labor Movement.

Yigal Alon did not content himself with allowing and urging Jews to settle in the heart of the Muslim city of Hebron. As he assisted those who invaded Hebron on Passover 1968, Alon proposed to establish military settlements—quasi-agricultural army outposts—two localities in the Gaza Strip, near Nuseirat (subsequently the settlement of Netzarim) and at Kefar Darom, that were like wedges in the heart of the Palestinian population, claiming a horrific price over the years in human lives and physical destruction on both sides. These two settlements, which Sharon recently proclaimed as no less important than Tel Aviv, were evacuated and demolished in August 2005 at Sharon’s command. However, Alon’s historical myopia and irresponsibility preceded Sharon’s. “These settlements [Netzarim and Kefar Darom] are of supreme importance for the political future of the [Gaza] Strip, because they split the Strip south of Gaza City,” Alon stated. The banner of settlement in the occupied territories that Alon hoisted was also part of his struggle against Moshe Dayan for political **primacy** in the Labor Movement. All means were fair in this personal political battle, which the settlers knew how to exploit, as they would in similar internal struggles in subsequent decades—between Rabin and Shimon Peres, between Sharon and prime ministers on the Right, and between ministers on the Right and Prime Minister Sharon in 2004–2005.

The illegal settlement in Hebron, established by deception and with covert assistance from Government ministers, paved the way to recognized and approved settlement activity in this locality. In a process that literally became a model for settlers’ actions and governmental conduct toward them, the settlers gradually received permits to build themselves a synagogue, some small businesses, a small yeshiva, and permanent dwellings, and to carry weapons. Whatever they did not obtain by favor, they took by force. The pattern of hostile, violent relations with local inhabitants and the doubly violent pattern of the Israeli response began to take shape there. Another outgrowth of the settlement in Hebron was the town of “Upper Hebron,” subsequently named Kiryat Arba. This was another initiative of Yigal

²⁷ *Divrei ha-Knesset*, session of March 25, 1970 (Hebrew).

Alon's, part of his grand design to attach not only Greater Jerusalem but also the entire Hebron hills area, Palestinian population and all, to the State of Israel. Alon's envisaged model for Hebron belonged to the type that had been developed within the borders of Israel: the establishment of a Jewish city next to and upland from an Arab one, for the purpose of supervision and control of a civilian population that was perceived as hostile and menacing to the Zionist project. The land on which Kiryat Arba was established was expropriated from its Palestinian owners for "military needs." A military camp was established at the site before the first apartment buildings in civilian Kiryat Arba went up, but it was torn down immediately after the first buildings were tenanted. The spurious claim of "military needs," endorsed by the Israeli Supreme Court until it was forced to reveal its falseness some ten years later, was born in Kiryat Arba and set out from there along its lengthy path.

Kiryat Arba, the first large settlement in the territories, established by a Labor-led Government, did not attract the thousands that had been expected despite its wonderful climate and cheap housing. Instead, it became a bedraggled, slummy little town, crawling with fanatic rabbis and extremist yeshivas.²⁸ Its importance, however, far surpassed its vital statistics. It was the launching pad of the Elon Moreh group that melted into Gush Emunim and was the driving force of massive Jewish settlement in the heart of the Palestinian population of Samaria. It was also the home of Dr. Baruch Goldstein, who set out from there to massacre Muslims as they worshipped in order to halt the withdrawal from the territories. And it was from Goldstein's funeral and the messianic racism of some rabbis of Kiryat Arba who justified the massacre, the religious mentors of Yigal Amir, that the idea of murdering a prime minister in Israel was conceived.

If Yigal Alon was the Labor Party scion who promoted settlement construction in the Hebron hills area, Shimon Peres, Minister of Defense in the first Rabin Government, was the settlers' "good Samaritan," aiding settlement activity in the Samaria region north of Jerusalem and, especially the first settlement in that region, the flagship of Gush Emunim, Ofra. Here too, the Government's weakness, disharmony among its ministers, and, especially, the personal struggle between Rabin and Peres defeated any possibility of frustrating the settlers' settlement operations on the ground. Among other things, to gore Rabin, who was never sympathetic to the settlers and the settlements, Peres helped the settlers in his function as Minister of Defense, providing them with military protection, roads, electricity, and whatever else they needed. It was Peres who was invited to join the settler nobility in celebrating the dedication of Ofra in early 1976 and was given the honor of planting a tree. In the debates over the settlements that tore the Labor Knesset faction apart, Peres defended the settlers and defined them as "good citizens and good settlers." There are laws, he added, that the Government is entitled to circumvent "for reasons that descend to the nation's soul."²⁹ In subsequent books and numerous interviews, Peres tried to repudiate his share in the Jewish settlement venture in Samaria. More than two years after the Rabin Government was ousted, Peres performed a historical reckoning of sorts with Gush Emunim. In this forgotten text, Peres alleged that the Gush Emunim modus operandi was weakening "the stature of the Government, weak to begin with, as the body that runs the State of Israel," harming the army, casting "a dark shadow

²⁸ Dan Margalit, "Volcano in Hebron," *Ha'aretz*, 7 December 1977.

²⁹ Shlomo Nakdimon and Aryeh Tzimuki, "The Protocols of the Brokers of Kadum," *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 30 April 1976.

over Israel's democratic strength," portraying Zionism as "a territorial movement and not a national redemption movement," and making Israel look to the world as the immoderate side in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Peres also wrote that Gush Emunim had failed to liberate Israel from "even one of the elements that, in the aggregate, threaten to create a Palestinian state."³⁰ Indeed, Shimon Peres was one of the last important personalities in the Labor Movement to acknowledge the Palestinians' right to their own state. Only in 1997, after the Oslo accord had become a reality and after Benjamin Netanyahu had trounced him in the elections following the assassination of Rabin, did he come around to this view.

Historical Breakpoint or the Continuation of Zionism

The questions that beg to be asked as we near the end are: (a) How could the State of Israel, a country considered modern and rational, a country accepted as being an enlightened democracy, "the only democracy in the Middle East," stumble onto the malignant path of establishing settlements in occupied territory, in contravention of international conventions that it itself had signed?³¹ (b) How can a society established several years after the end of World War II by force of the destruction of European Jewry by Nazi Germany sink into the bottomless pit of military occupation, control of another people, repression, and perpetration of injustices and crimes against civilians, all derived from the existence of the settlements, and treat the situation with relative acquiescence? (c) How could Israel think it possible to be drawn into a colonial situation in the last third of the twentieth century, the era of post-colonialism, the disintegration of colonial empires, and the colonial states' efforts to cope with the bitter moral and social results of lengthy colonial situations? (d) Did the massive Jewish settlement enterprise in the territories occupied in 1967 mark a breakpoint in the history of Zionism and Israel, or was it a natural continuation of the Jewish Zionist settlement project that had been pursued in parts of the land before statehood was declared in 1948, i.e., does it fall within the ambit of the protracted national, territorial, and demographic struggle that began in the late nineteenth century between the Jewish and Palestinian communities? (e) As a derivative of the previous questions, one should try to ponder the thoughts and visions that motivated the heads of state, the political leadership, and the intellectual and social elites that aided, abetted, and supported the settlement enterprise or held their relative silence as the settlement phenomenon grew and spread until it took over Israel's agenda.

Israel stepped into the historical chain of settling the territories that it had occupied in the war blindly and without a plan, a long-term strategy, or a vision. It toppled into the abyss of occupation from the euphoria of military victory and the conquest of territories that carried the enormous religious, mythological, and emotional baggage of "Land of the Patriarchs" without calculating all possible outcomes of such a historic act. Basically, it was the profound, across-the-board identification of Israeli society with the Jewish neo-pioneers that made the massive Jewish settlement in the territories possible. To argue beyond the religious imperative of settling these sanctified areas of the homeland, and to add political and historical legitimacy to the divine behest, the settlers and their supporters portrayed the

³⁰ Shimon Peres, "Faithful [Emunim] to What?" *Ma'ariv*, 19 October 1979.

³¹ Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." Israel ratified the Geneva Conventions in July 1951, thereby committing itself to them.

settlement enterprise as a direct outgrowth of “classical” Zionism, that of the Labor Movement, which earned control of the territory that eventually became the State of Israel by means of the settlements that it had established and defended. In contrast, the opponents of the settlements, who were very few in the beginning, tend today to regard the settlement project as a wild, messianic mutation of Zionism, a breakpoint in Zionist and Israeli history. This perspective is too facile and convenient because it absolves Israeli society, the Labor Movement, and the Israeli Left at large, along with the the state and its institutions, of responsibility for the settlements and the occupation,.

The settlements of the last thirty-eight years (since 1967), one has to admit, are part and parcel of the Zionist project. They are outgrowths of the Zionist ideals and the mainstream Zionist ethos and concepts of settling the land, driving stakes into the soil, tilling it and loving it, creating facts on the ground—with the added value, in this case, of the divine commandment that guided the settlers. The settlers of recent decades have defined themselves not only as the heirs to the Labor Movement ethos but also the fulfillers of the vision and practices of classical Zionism, which indeed was a movement of settlement, of conquering the land, relocating population, and acting unilaterally in the its area. One should stress, however, that the difference of substance and of principle between the two waves of settlement activity was that the Labor Movement settlers up to 1948 went about their project amidst a struggle for territory between communities, with no recognized political border, sovereign rule, and state or international law. The messianic religious neo-Zionist settlers of the post-1967 years, in contrast, have carried out their project after the establishment of the State of Israel, as citizens of a sovereign state that has an internationally recognized armistice demarcation line (The Green Line) and in contravention of international law and custom. As the daughter of pre-1948 Zionist settlers who lived in a kibbutz since their arrival to Palestine in the 1930s, I would like to believe that with regard to moral considerations and the principled as well as daily attitude toward the local Palestinian inhabitants, the generation of my parents differed totally from the neo-settlers of the post-1967 era. In the case of my parents, just for the sake of proper disclosure, they were members of a political, social movement that for years vehicled the idea of an equal, bi-national Jewish-Arab state in Palestine. This tenet, supported by just a small minority among those who embraced the Zionist movement idea, collapsed with the destruction of European Jewry during World War II.

The strength of the neo-settlers emanated not just from the fact that they were the sociopolitical body that had the most cohesive program in Israeli society after the Six-Day War. The concurrent decline of the historic Labor Movement, the great Zionist settlement movement of the pre-statehood decades, after its steady loss of strength and vitality in the first statehood decades, made the settlers and their leading ideological organization, Gush Emunim, the political force with the most influence on Israel’s agenda and moves during the past thirty years. Thus, a dual historical shift took place. While the mainstream movement of mobilized Jewish nationhood, Labor, became bourgeois and sank into decline, losing its vitality and historical stature, the body that became the most important and influential political and cultural movement in Israel’s history, Gush Emunim, which hoisted the torch of settling the territories and undertook the mission of shaping the country’s borders and profile, grew and gained altitude. The love of the land of the neo-settlers, their patriotism, practical pioneerism, feats of settlement, expansion of borders, and heroic devotion seduced the

old, declining Laborites and defeated those few who were able right from the beginning to foresee the malignancy of the project of violent Jewish settlement in the heart of another people's population. Various schemes, few in number, that addressed the need to separate the communities and establish an independent Palestinian state in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war were shoved off the agenda and forgotten.³² Labor Movement leaders who believed in the Greater Israel idea³³ watched others doing their work for them and spared no effort to promote and assist the Jewish settlement venture in the territories. Thus, by 1977 settlement activity under the auspices of Labor Governments was flourishing in the Jordan Basin, on the Golan Heights, in the Gaza Strip, in the Hebron hills, and in Samaria. Furthermore, deep in the Israeli consciousness and sentiment, the settlers were perceived as the *real* Zionists and Jews, atoners for the sins of the rest of the Jewish population, who with their bodies and souls were fulfilling the neglected vision of Zionism. Here lie the roots of the special relationship, the special connections, and the special status that the settlers were awarded not only by the political Right but also by the Labor Movement—political leaders, elites, institutions, and all.

The vision of the undivided Greater Israel, as stated, was not the exclusive property of Rabbi Kook and his National Religious students, tomorrow's Gush Emunim, or of Israel's revisionist Right; it also attracted large segments of Israeli society. Not only Rabbi Kook wept on the eve of the Six-Day War over the abandoned towns of Hebron and Shechem (Nablus), "defiled by foreigners." Shimon Peres, too, wrote in his fourteen-point plan for the unification of the various Labor Movement parties about the need to resettle Gush Etzion and Hebron,³⁴ and the national *chansonniere*, Naomi Shemer wrote on the eve of the war about the empty town square in Jerusalem, waiting for the Jews to return. Greater Israel was a central plank in the ideology and politics of the political movement of the Hakibbutz Hameuhad organization, headed by one of the Labor founding fathers, Yitzhak Tabenkin. To these people, the conquest of the territories in the 1967 war and Jewish settlement there was the righting of a historical wrong and something for which generations had yearned. On 19 June 1967, Tabenkin's disciple, Yigal Alon, said that "A peace treaty is the weakest guarantee of the future of peace and the future of security ..." If I had to choose between "an undivided land with the entire Arab population or relinquishing the [West] Bank, I would favor the integrity of the land with all the Arabs," said Alon.³⁵ Furthermore, the charter of the Greater Israel Movement was written and formulated by prominent members of the Labor Movement—political leaders, authors and poets, economic and military figures. This document, made public in September 1967, stated that "Eretz Israel is now in the possession of the Jewish people ... We pledge allegiance to the indivisibility of our country ... an indivisibility that no government is entitled to forfeit."³⁶

³² One example, a plan worked up by several senior Mossad officials: David Kimche, Yitzhak Oron, Alouph Hareven, and Dan Bavli—"Proposal for Settlement of the Palestinian Problem," 14 June 1967—was presented to Prime Minister Eshkol but was never debated.

³³ Nearly all founders of the Greater Israel movement and authors of its charter were veterans of the Labor Movement. In this matter, see Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge 2005, p. 190.

³⁴ Labor Party Archives, 15-1965-040-4.

³⁵ Minutes of Government meeting, 19 June 1967, Israel State Archives.

³⁶ "For the Sake of Greater Israel," 12 September 1967, *Davar*, *Ha'aretz*, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, *Ma'ariv*.

Israel's demarcation line, too, as determined in the 1948 war and agreed upon in the 1949 armistice accords—encompassing 78 percent of pre-Israel Palestine—was perceived by many in the political system and Israeli society as a temporary boundary that should eventually be expanded. In fact, the territorial boundary of the Zionist project—the clear, defined, secure border that would separate inside from outside, between what belongs and what does not, and between friend and foe, a crucial element in the concept and imposition of order that was essential element of modernity—has never been sketched out, even though political Zionism defined itself as a modern, secular political movement. Various political groups and players within the Zionist Movement drew the borders that they desired but the Zionist Movement at large, representing the national aspirations of the Jewish people, always refrained from discussing and taking a decision on the issue of the country's borders. Ever since statehood was attained, the Governments of Israel have followed the movement's example. At no stage did the State of Israel define its own borders—the ones that it wanted, was willing to agree to, and would treat as secure—and take action to establish such borders and obtain international recognition for them. The porous, permeable, and unagreed border that demarcates the territorial confines of the Israeli Jewish nation-state, and the territorial obtuseness that all Israeli Governments have displayed, also found expression in the continual breaching of the border, in de facto non-recognition of the border both by the State (e.g., in the reprisal actions of the 1950s, continual Israeli operations across the border or outside Israeli airspace or territorial waters) and by radical groups. By speaking in several voices about the border issue and by allowing various groups to cross into and create facts in territories across the border, Israel during its period of political sovereignty has continued the vagueness and duplicity in word and deed that had typified the Jewish community during its struggle for sovereignty. In this sense as well as others, the State of Israel has continued to act as a community and not as a political sovereign. Thus, the settlers' violation of the political borders after 1967 not only represented nothing new; it was a continuation of the policies of the Governments up to 1967.³⁷

The upshot of all the foregoing was massive involvement and cooperation on the part of all institutions—Governments, the judiciary, the military and security system, industry, political parties, media, and academia—with the Jewish settlement enterprise in the territories and the military occupation, thereby abetting the intensification of both. From the other side of the divide, human-rights organizations, a few politicians, university people, fragments of the media, and a handful of intellectuals, writers, and lawyers have spent years stressing the basic illegality of the settlements, the unendurable results and moral outrage of the occupation, the ongoing theft of land and abuse of the Palestinians, and the settlers' violence and lawlessness. However, no reckoning has been done. None of those responsible for the settlements and the occupation, the many thousands of people who were involved in building the settlements, defending them, and providing them with legal sanction, all of Israeli society, which was a partner or bystander, have been brought before public scrutiny. To this day, no one has admitted publicly his or her sins of commission and omission.

The harshest example of collaboration with the vast illegal settlement enterprise was provided by the Israeli judiciary at all levels: the courts, headed by the Supreme Court; the Attorney General; the office of the IDF Judge-Advocate General; and State

³⁷ See Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, p. 184.

Attorney's Office. All of them lined up to sanction the unsanctionable and legalize the illegal. Ever since the occupation began, the settlers and the judiciary have been marching arm-in-arm. The courts have lent the occupation and settlement of the territories their stamp of approval. Even though the army has been sovereign in the territories for all these years—tasked with upholding the law that existed in the territories on the eve of the occupation, protecting the inhabitants of these territories, and safeguarding their rights—the changes that have occurred during the thirty-eight years of occupation in the legal and general status of the inhabitants and in their country have been so numerous, and so far-reaching, that their situation in 2005 bears no resemblance to that in 1967. Cloaked by the umbrella of legitimacy that the Israeli judicial system has provided, the territories over the years have carried on under a military occupation regime that has become more and more onerous, amidst sweeping violations of international conventions, most notably the Fourth Geneva Convention. Senior jurists in the civil service and academia have used semantic and legal hair-splitting to sanction the act of settling civilians of an occupying state on territory that it had occupied by declaring the Geneva Convention inapplicable in Israel's case. Thus, Israel has managed to benefit from several worlds that are legally irreconcilable. It has maintained a regime in the territories based on the authority and power of a military commander in an occupied territory, without assuming the restrictions and prohibitions that are incumbent upon an occupying state.

The judicial backing of the army and the settlers has led to protracted and widespread infringement of the basic human rights of the Palestinians who inhabit the areas including the personal freedom, freedom of movement, and the right to property. It has also thwarted any possibility of realizing the collective rights of those who had inhabited the territories on the eve of the entry of the Israeli army, such as the right to self-determination, national coalescence, and the construction of a nation and of a state. The permanent settlement of some quarter-million Jews on Palestinian land and the positioning of the settlers' existential and security needs at the top of the Israeli scale of interests has created a de facto state of apartheid, persecution, and extreme discrimination. Moreover, the extent of protection and legal aid that the State of Israel, with its judicial instances, has given the Palestinian inhabitants against the Jewish settlers' fanaticism and violence and the discriminatory practices of its own authorities, such as the army and the police, has been minimal. By extending the authority of the Israeli High Court of Justice to the occupied territories, ostensibly to provide the Palestinians with legal relief against the Israeli authorities' depredations, the judicial system has forced the Palestinians to recognize it and Israeli rule at large. What is more, when Palestinians have petitioned the Court, they have rarely received the redress to which they were entitled, usually due to "security needs."

The law-enforcement systems have taken a forgiving attitude to settlers' crimes, from the most trivial up to murder, while applying extreme punitive measures against Palestinians. Thus, two separate systems of law exist on the ground, creating blatant discrimination between Jewish settlers and Palestinian inhabitants. "In Judea, Samaria, and Gaza there are two legal systems and two different types of people," Member of Knesset Amnon Rubinstein, a professor of law, said in the Knesset plenum, "Israeli citizens with full rights and non-Israeli non-citizens with non-rights."³⁸ The judicial system's creation of, and cooperation with, this long-term

³⁸ Amnon Rubinstein, *Divrei ha-Knesset*, vol. 98, session of 2 January 1984 (Hebrew), p. 923.

situation are especially outrageous and dispiriting because Israel's judiciary has always been considered the most enlightened, prestigious, and progressive institution of Israeli democracy. The **near-totality** of its failure to create a bulwark against Israeli settlement in the occupied territories is the most profound evidence of the fragility of the very concepts of law and democracy in Israel.

The Day After

Israel's much-acclaimed pullout from Gaza in the summer of 2005 has done nothing to change this grim picture. In the West Bank, the core of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, only four of the 120 settlements that blanket the territory were emptied. In northern Samaria, the evacuated area of the West Bank, Israel has retained—by force of a Government resolution taken in July 2005—“defense responsibility” for the territory surrounding the evicted settlements. Thus, Israel has continued to maintain its military bases in the area, i.e., full military control on the ground. Furthermore, the “illegal” outposts, which by being so defined amount to an attempt to sanction all the other settlements and define them as legal, have not been uprooted even though the Government and Sharon himself have repeatedly promised the American administration that this will be done as part of the preliminary measures toward the “road map.” Now, to reward Sharon for his “good behavior” in Gaza and northern Samaria, the American president has announced the suspension of pressure on Israel to remove these outposts. Thus, the Israeli occupation continues to roar ahead. The pullout from Gaza was merely a “side show.” **Its underlying motives are disputed** and its sequel is vague and dependent on many variables, such as the intentions of the parties involved—Israeli, Palestinian, American, the European Community, and the Arab world—and the measures that they will take. The American President's claim of 14 April 2005, that Israel's withdrawal will facilitate the establishment of “a democratic state in Gaza” and open the door to democracy in the Middle East, also sounds farcical in view of the destruction, poverty, joblessness, lack of sources of income, and total collapse of all systems—health, education, welfare, social services, justice, and security—that Israel left behind in Gaza.³⁹

As stated, however, Gaza is only a small part of the problem. The situation on the West Bank is not much better than that in Gaza, and Israel, under Sharon's stewardship, is not planning further pullbacks there at the present time. While the Government resolution to pull out of Gaza and northern Samaria did promise Israeli assistance for the improvement of Palestinian transport infrastructure in order to allow Palestinian traffic and transport services to function more efficiently, this rhetoric has been meaningless in terms of action on the ground. The Palestinians' difficulties in moving around their country are mounting with each passing day. Palestinian displacement from one place to another has to surmount innumerable unilateral measures that Israel has imposed. Foremost among them is the separation wall, more than 600 kilometers long (of which some 200 kilometers, one-third of the planned length, have already been built), made of concrete slabs more than 8 meters high in some sections and impermeable high-tech fence systems in the rest, established mostly on land expropriated from the Palestinians, amplifying and worsening incessantly the isolation and poverty of the Palestinian villages. Furthermore, this rampart “annexes” between some 11 percent (according to the lowest estimate) to

³⁹ Sara Roy, “Praying with Their Eyes Closed: Reflections on the Disengagement from Gaza,” *Palestinian Studies*, August 2005.

more than 23 percent (according to higher estimates) of the West Bank territory to Israel. Palestinians' movement around the West Bank is also impaired daily by a 400-kilometer network of modern highways and bypass roads meant for the exclusive use of the quarter-million Jewish settlers. These highways and byways cut the Palestinians off from each other, confine them to "reservations," and drive the standard of living in these areas below the endurable minimum. Since Israel has promised to improve the Palestinians' ability to circulate, it should also take account of the construction of some 7,000 new dwellings in and around Jerusalem, which will sever the northern part of the West Bank from the southern part, isolate Eastern Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, and create separations among Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Jericho, Kalkilya, Jenin, Nablus, and the other cities and towns of the West Bank.

The separation and fragmentation that Israel has been creating in the Palestinian territories, in order to sustain the settlements and Israel's military control of the areas, have far-reaching implications for the ability of the Palestinian national community to crystallize as a national unit, establish internal institutions, develop a stable political culture, and generate a leadership that can establish an independent, democratic, and viable state. This is indeed, what Ariel Sharon has in mind, namely, ruling out the possibility of establishing and sustaining a functioning, democratic Palestinian state. Therefore, the Israeli and American demand for the creation of democratic process of Palestinian society as a basic precondition for Israel's entering into permanent-status negotiations is spurious if not immoral. Coupled with the continued Israeli occupation and the ongoing fragmentation of the Palestinian nation, it makes the democratization of Palestinian society virtually inconceivable and assures Israel that it will never have to pass the test of ending the state of occupation.

As for Israeli democracy, another of those self-evident truths that Israel doesn't discuss much, it seemingly emerged victorious after the ordeal of the pullout from Gaza and northern Samaria. The state institutions—the army and the police, especially—did their job well and the settlers, who had been considered the greatest threat to democracy, surrendered and were trounced. Thus, the culmination of the withdrawal from Gaza was experienced as a moment of celebration of democracy. But was it really? I would suggest that the picture is much more complex. The Prime Minister's political moves on the road to the disengagement subjected democratic process to a brutal trampling—a matter about which much has been said and written. More important, however, the way the pullout went ahead rather exposed the fact that Israel has never carried out the internal political revolution that it should have performed in order to transform itself from an ethnic, religious, national, and cultural community into a fully civic, democratic political state. Thus, in fact, the segregationist ethnic nature of Israeli democracy and the Jewish complexion and norms of Israel's democratic institutions came to light during the disengagement, especially in the close encounter between the settlers and the forces acting on behalf of Israeli democracy, i.e., the army and the police. Furthermore, the physical embracing between settlers and soldiers and the embarrassing gooey gestures, such as crying on each other's shoulders, and the exemplary restraint with which commanders and soldiers reacted to some settlers' violent, crude, and ugly behavior, were but another proof of the deep symbiotic relationship that has existed for years between the settlers and the Israeli security forces in the occupied territories. It shows how partial and un-universal Israeli democracy remains, and how the country maintains in fact two armies: a compassionate, intelligent army that coddles Jewish civilians such as

settlers, and a brutal and violent army that deals with Palestinians and their supporters on the Israeli Left. To appreciate the vast distance between these two armies and these types of citizens, one need only contemplate the intolerable daily spectacles of army brutality toward Palestinians and Jewish Israeli civilians who demonstrate against the separation barrier.

Finally, it is worth asking whether the settlers were in fact the defeated party in the drama of the pullout from Gaza and northern Samaria. Yes, some 8,000 of them were forcibly displaced from their homes. Admittedly, it was a harsh experience for them—one that, by the way, recurs routinely in the occupied territories under Israeli society's oblivious nose. The disengagement aside, the settlers' status in Israeli society and their influence over the Israeli agenda have not changed basically. Not yet at least. Their complaints, their reckonings, the mutual accusations within their leadership, should not mislead anybody. The quiet, covert revolution that they are wreaking in Israeli society is continuing and will continue with greater audacity in years to come. The settlers will use their temporary defeat in Gaza as a springboard for even more intensive revolutionary activity. By deliberately volunteering en masse for the army's combat units, the settlers' offspring are transforming the face of the military for generations to come. Their sophisticated and calculated penetration of the media, the judiciary, and other leading systems in Israel will assure them a dominant presence and influence in steering Israel toward its transformation into a fundamentalist halakhic state. This forecast is no fantasy; it is something the settlers talk about and constitutes their working plan for the upcoming years. What the more moderate settlers do not dare to state overtly, Effi Eitam, a former brigadier-general and one of the most extreme settler leaders, wrote in the newspaper *Ma'ariv*: "Eventually we'll become the majority. Jewish demography is at work in this matter You [non-religious Jewish Israelis] will eventually accept the decisions of a different majority even if these decisions are bitter as thistles for you, even if they turn your guts inside-out ... We also have a dispute about the Jewish complexion of the state, the Sabbath, the family, and its education system. All these issues will be decided by democratic majority. Brace yourselves, gentlemen, Jewish demography is on the way."⁴⁰

Many members of the settler community express themselves this way or in similar terms. Here is what one of the leaders of the second generation of the settler leadership, a colonel in the army reserves, formerly deputy commander of the General Staff Commandos—the most select and prestigious unit in the Israeli army—told a leader of the Peace Now movement during the pullout from Gaza: "I don't recognize you and don't know who you are. I haven't seen you establish a settlement or a yeshiva in the past fifty years. You and your buddies on the Left don't matter to me. In another few years you won't exist at all, we'll trample you with our spirit and our gigantic young people, and we'll take the State of Israel with us and add more and more levels of our own to it." In the settlers' language, this means only one thing: the Jewish revolution has only begun.

⁴⁰ Effi Eitam, "It's Your Turn Now," *Ma'ariv*, 31 August 2005.