

Talk of Expulsion More Ominous than Ever

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Haaretz Op-Ed, May 29th 2001

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Weekend magazines in newspapers that came out following the bloody attack at Netanya's Sharon Mall and the Nablus prison bombing by F-16s carried two articles which deserve mention. The first article, written by Elyakim Haetzni (a Kiryat Arba resident), detailed dangers to which Palestinians will be exposed, should they choose to persist with their current approach. As Haetzni sees it, Israel is liable to reach a point at which it will have no other option but to smite residents of the territories with another Nakba (catastrophe), casting hundreds of thousands of Palestinians out of their homes and native land. The second article, an interview with Miriam Lapid (also a Kiryat Arba resident), divulges a yet more systematic doctrine. After adjusting to the fact that there is no military solution to the dispute, Lapid doesn't speak about the lack of other choices or about necessities. As she sees it, the expulsion of the Palestinian population from the territories is the desirable solution right now. At first glance, the fact that settlers are talking about the mass expulsion of Palestinians hardly comes as a surprise. During the heyday of the Oslo process there was no sign that the messianic right-wing vision of a mass expulsion of Palestinians had receded. The uninterrupted expansion of settlements carried out under the Barak and Netanyahu governments (and with these governments' encouragement) repeatedly made clear that the vision is alive and well, that there is no dearth of players on the stage who are prepared to make it a reality, and that no member of the messianic right relates to the settlements (new or old ones) as bargaining chips.

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On the other hand, the disturbing, ominous statements made by Haetzni and Lapid, comments which stirred little response after their publication, merit special attention. First of all, there is a difference between a vision which, while refusing to die, is articulated behind the scenes, and a public call that allows for, or preaches in the name of, ethnic cleansing. Remarks made by Haetzni and Lapid reflect the dark, dangerous surge of right-wing righteousness

that has convulsed Israeli society ever since Ehud Barak managed to convince himself and the public that it is the Palestinians, and not Israelis, who spurn peaceful accommodation. The rank insensitivity shown by Israel's public in the face of the killings, closures and starvation that their state has imposed on Palestinians, starting from Shimon Peres's first days as Regional Cooperation Minister, has thickened in the current period, when the Nobel Peace prize laureate has moved to the Foreign Ministry, taking the joint reins of power in the ruling triumvirate. This unforgivable insensitivity has become a political and public foundation supporting policies enacted by Ben Eliezer and Sharon, policy directives that send aircraft to bomb Nablus and Gaza, and that smash to smithereens any remaining prospect of dialogue.

Bald perplexity, primal confusion and the glaring lack of a real opposition on the left constitute ideal circumstances for hearing the threatening roars of the messianic right, with its blustering calls for expulsion and Nakba. Surviving Oslo, the settlements have emerged strengthened in the aftermath of the peace process. Following Sharon's election as prime minister, the settlements have moved from the political margins to take a central place on the policy stage. Proud of the historic role which it pretends to have assumed, utterly devoid of any serious spiritual-moral reckoning with the plunder of Palestinian property wrought by the settlements, the messianic right slouches onward. Saturated by hatred, not hindered by moral inhibition, unmindful of the suffering and humiliation they cause Palestinians to endure, the settlers are loath to acknowledge the danger they pose to Israel's chances of achieving normalization. The Oslo process merely strengthened their belief that they must do their utmost to cover the length and breadth of the country. Anybody who's wondering about the contents and parameters of "their utmost" would be well advised to consider the ominous comments by Haetzni and Lapid, which make clear that the settlers' campaign isn't constrained by red lines of any sort.

The messianic drums beat in rhythm with events and processes that are interpreted as signs of the world's advance toward the moment of salvation and redemption. The escalation in the military stand-off with the Palestinians, and the prospects of a general conflagration that would yield another Palestinian catastrophe, are liable to be taken on the far right as just such messianic stirrings. Jingoistic rhetoric about "war" is already afoot: since the final week in April,

most right-wing government ministers have couched their pronouncements in war-talk, castigating those of us who "haven't managed to understand the situation," firing hearts for the worst of all contingencies.

Even if Sharon doesn't want war, the possible prospect of the energy he's unleashing galvanizing and promoting the Nakba envisioned by the extremist right ought to be a cause for real concern for us all.

Should we slip on this slope we'll never rise again - neither morally nor in any other way