

## Disturbing Incident at al-Arakib – An Analysis (8-3-10)

### I. The Bedouin Village of al-Arakib

On July 26, 2010 Israeli police armed with tear gas, a water canon, and two helicopters forced the 200 Bedouin residents of the southern Israeli village of al-Arakib out of their homes. Most of the furniture was then removed from the 45 buildings of the village and bulldozers used to flattened the buildings. It is to be noted that the victims of this act are not residents of the Occupied Territories. They are non-Jewish citizens of the state of Israel.

The news of these home demolitions made it to CNN in a short report entitled [Bedouins Evicted from Village in Southern Israel](#). The Bedouin families explained that this was ancestral land on which they had lived for generations going back to the days of the Ottoman Empire. They even have their original land deeds. Israeli government officials explained that they did not care because they chose not to recognize the Bedouin claim. Why not? Well, all the land of Israel is reserved for the Jewish people and these folks are not Jewish. As far as police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld was concerned, that meant they were living there “illegally.” The government expects the Bedouin to move to “reservations” that have been set aside for them.

This sort of thing happens all the time in “the only democracy in the Middle East.” According to the [Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions](#) over 24,000 Palestinian homes have been torn down or blown up in the Occupied Territories alone. The vast majority of similarly destroyed homes in Israel proper are also those of Palestinians, making Israel’s law of eminent domain a racist weapon. In the case of al-Arakib, the Israeli government says it will be turning the village land into part of a new “Jewish National Fund forest.” But there is every indication that the area will eventually be opened to Jewish settlement, with preference given to “young couples in the army.” Sometimes the Bedouin serve in the IDF, but they won’t qualify for this future perk.

So far this is a story that can be replicated thousands of times and thus just another day in the life of Israel’s segregated non-Jews. So why draw attention to the quite ordinary fate of the 200 people from al-Arakib? The answer to this question comes from the following line in the CNN report, “*the Israeli forces arrived in the village accompanied by busloads of civilians who cheered as the dwellings were demolished.*” This makes the whole incident a ‘sit up and take notice’ kind of event.

### II. Israel’s Teen Age Police Volunteers

This sentence in the CNN report caught the eye of members of Ta'ayush, a small movement within Israel that organizes joint Palestinian-Jewish resistance to the Israeli occupation. They wanted to identify who the "cheering civilians" might be and so sent a delegation to al-Arakib soon after the demolitions took place. There they interviewed the village leaders and others, all of whom are now camped out in tents at the site of their demolished homes. [The report of what they learned](#), accompanied by pictures, is now posted on the web. Here is some of what it says:

1. The cheering civilians were all Israeli Jewish high school students who had volunteered as "police civilian guards" to take part in this assault.

2. These teenagers did more than cheer. "Prior to the demolitions, the student volunteers were sent into the villagers' homes to extract their furniture and belongings." In the process they vandalized the sites, "smashing windows and mirrors...and defacing family photographs." With the furniture piled up outside, the students "lounged around" on it while waiting for the bulldozers. This was done "in plain sight of the owners."

3. While the bulldozers were doing their work, the teens "celebrated."

### III. What Does it All Mean?

The incorporation of Israeli youth into the racist and destructive pattern of behavior exhibited in this incident is almost inevitable. *You simply cannot raise up generation after generation within an environment of officially sanctioned racism and not get many of the young seeking confirmation of their place in the community through unjust socio-political actions.* We can expect to hear more about this sort of officially organized youth thuggery in Israel. It is a logical tactic for the state to use, particularly at a time when the country is becoming increasingly criticized and isolated.

Nor is this sort of thing historically unique. Reading about this incident one can see intimations of the youth organizations of Fascist Italy and Spain, Nazi Germany, and Communist China during the Cultural Revolution. More explicitly though, one can see in this two more immediate precedents. The first is Vladimir Jabotinsky's youth movement Betar. Up until his death in 1940 Jobotinsky was the leader of the Zionist Revisionists, the most militant, and often most terror prone, of pre-1948 Zionists. Likud and its kin are successors of the Revisionist movement. As part of this history, Betar was founded in 1923 in order to "educate its members with a military and nationalistic spirit." The teens at al-Arakib are a good match. The second precedent, and one noted in the Ta'ayush report, are the youth involved in the violent Israeli settler movement.

The Ta'ayush investigators observed that the behavior of the teenage volunteers at al-Arakib was “strikingly reminiscent of the behavior of settler youth in Hebron who pelt Palestinian shopkeepers in the old city with eggs, rocks and human waste. If there is a distinction between the two cases, it is that the Hebron settlers act as vigilantes while the teenagers of the Israeli civilian guard vandalize Arab property as agents of the state.”

I will end this analysis on a personal note. I grew up in a liberal and secular Jewish American household that adhered to the values of equity and justice in their idealized American forms. At the time we all thought that these were perfectly compatible with Jewish teachings. Following from those values, as a teenager I involved myself in the civil rights movement and the resistance against war in Viet Nam. It seemed not only the right thing, but also the natural thing to do. On rare occasion some of my adult relatives used negative Yiddish terms to refer to African-Americans, but that was the closest I ever came to experiencing illiberal sentiments among Jews. Then in 1972, as part of a wider visit to the Middle East, I spent ten days in Israel. It was a real culture shock mainly because for the first time I met openly racist Jews, many of them Americans of my own age.

The shock of those ten days has worn off long ago. But it was replaced by a lasting conviction that Zionism is bad for the Jews in exact proportion to its negative impact on the Palestinians. As the Zionists ethnically cleanse and otherwise destroy Palestinians and their society, they destroy Judaism and mutate themselves, and all others who support them, into barbarians. That includes those teenagers at al-Arakib. It is a matter of ends equaling means and so cannot be otherwise. That is why all Jews would do well to heed the words of Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), an emancipated American slave and fighter for African American dignity, “You can't hold a man down without staying down with him.”