

Haaretz | Opinion

Opinion | Israelis Shouldn't Cry Over a Violent Settler's Death

Thursday 31 October 2024, by [LEVY Gideon](#) (Date first published: 31 October 2024).

*Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich in the Knesset wearing two pins: one engraved with the map of Israel, including the West Bank, and a yellow hostage pin, on September 9th, 2024*Credit: Oren Ben Hakoon

When Bezalel Smotrich cries, one can only respond with a bitter laugh. When Uriah Ben-Natan weeps on the grave of his brother Shuvael and eulogizes him, we must call the police to arrest him. When a brutal war continues with no end in sight on account of Smotrich, Ben-Natan and their ilk, we need not share in their sorrow.

When mourning is [turned into repugnant incitement](#) to commit additional war crimes, this cannot be sidelined, even when the source is a man who has just lost his brother. Political correctness must stop here, along with the precept that "a person cannot be held responsible for what he says when in distress." Their sorrow is not my sorrow: their sorrow is not the sorrow of all Israelis.

[Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich](#) burst into tears this week during a Knesset caucus of his Religious Zionism party over the "wise, the righteous Torah scholars, who have fallen in defense of the state." One who has been pushing to continue the war and even its escalation, and prevented its end by wielding his coalition's extortion power, does not deserve to share another's grief.

More than anything, Smotrich is lamenting the price the religious Zionist community has paid in blood in the war, "a price disproportionate to its share of the population." However, one should not ignore this group's role in the horrors of the war and its criminal continuation.

*Israeli Army operations in Gaza, October 2024.*Credit: IDF Spokesperson's Unit

This is a war of Smotrich's constituency. It is the first war of the extreme right. Never has Israel prosecuted a war in which [the Kahanist right](#) had such a profound influence.

A firm majority of Israelis support it. The fighting is not being directed by hilltop youth, the West Bank's radicalized young Jewish settlers. Most of the [war crimes that have been perpetuated](#) have been committed by officers, pilots and soldiers of the Zionist left and the political center. Moreover, it is also true that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu carries most of the responsibility and blame for the war.

But Israel has never fought a war in which the settlers and their supporters had such a [decisive influence on its course](#). Therefore, when one of their leaders cries, he cannot arouse any sympathy or compassion from the war's opponents. Because of Smotrich and his ilk there are now millions of people endlessly crying, from Beirut to Rafah, including in Israel. Because of them, Israel has become a pariah state in which any compassion and humanity toward the Other is not only alien but considered treason.

An Israeli army soldier stands by while Israeli settlers walk during a guided tour of the old market in the Palestinian part of the old city of Hebron in the West Bank on October 22, 2024 during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. Credit: AFP/Hazem Bader

Smotrich wept for the dead of his electoral base (while mentioning the others). It was through his patronage, support, encouragement and [funding that the Shuvaels](#) flourished. The soldier Shuvael Ben-Natan was killed last week in Lebanon. He lived in the West Bank settlement of Rehelim. His funeral at Mount Herzl, which thousands attended, turned into a display of incitement and verbal violence unlike anything ever seen in Israel. Under the guise of mourning and bereavement, the masks were removed. At Mount Herzl, the cat was let out of the bag, and it was violent, criminal, racist, pogromist, neo-Nazi. The Smotriches encouraged him.

He was known as “Shuvi the *Madlik*” (with *madlik* translating both to ‘igniting’ in Hebrew, as well as a colloquial term for ‘great’), for his habit of torching Palestinian homes “for fun.” Friends spoke of him at his funeral with fondness and admiration. A year ago he was arrested on suspicion of killing a Palestinian peasant who was innocently harvesting his own olives. Ben-Natan was quickly released, this too in the spirit of the Smotrich era.

Bilal Salah, who was shot to death by a settler, allegedly Shuvael “Shuvi the Madlik” Ben-Natan, near Nablus last year.

This is how his brother Uriah eulogized him: “You went into Gaza to take revenge, as much as possible – women, children, everyone you saw, as much as possible, that’s what you wanted... We thought we would slaughter the enemy, slaughter them all, drive them out of the country here... All the people of Israel should be able to avenge you. Bloody revenge: not the revenge of burning houses, nor the revenge of burning trees, nor the revenge of burning vehicles, [but the revenge](#) of your servants’ spilled blood.”

For one powerful moment, the true nature of Israel’s violent settlers was fully revealed. Under the cover of the war, they are not only rampaging in Gaza but also in the West Bank, on an unprecedented scale that they have never rampaged before, courtesy of Smotrich.

It is pointless to imagine what would have happened if a bereaved Palestinian used similar words at his own brother’s grave. Pointless because [the body of a Palestinian terrorist](#), unlike a Jewish terrorist, would not be returned to his family.

Gideon Levy

P.S.

• Haaretz. Oct 31, 2024 12:21 am IST:
<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-10-31/ty-article-opinion/premium/israelis-shouldnt-cry-over-a-violent-settlers-death/00000192-de92-dd31-a9be-df9b5a5d0000>

• *Gideon Levy's article in the Haaretz:*
<https://www.haaretz.com/ty-WRITER/0000017f-da24-d249-ab7f-fbe4caac0000>