

Sara Yael Hirschhorn. *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017. 368 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-97505-7.

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I read *City on a Hilltop* before I was asked to review it. This past summer I was preparing for a trip to Israel and the territories with a group of academics. I wanted to read more about the settlements before the trip, and Sara Yael Hirschhorn's book caught my attention because of the focus on American Jews and the promise that it would be analytical and not polemical. It delivered. And it had an unexpected windfall: we visited the settlement of Efrat, which is one of the three cases in her book. I felt as if I had benefited from an intelligence briefing.

Much like anyone familiar with settlements, I have my preconceived ideas which largely revolve around the belief that the settlements are, in that euphemistic phrasing, an "obstacle to peace." In the introduction, Hirschhorn confesses that she had a much similar attitude before she began her research, with the added personal touch that her family also once considered immigrating to Israel. Additionally, her Zionism differed from that of the American Jewish settlers she studied. Like any researcher, but even more so in her case, she had to become quite self-disciplined to ensure that she kept her opinions to herself. She wanted to write a scholarly study, not a polemic. She wanted to understand these settlers on their own terms and capture their ideological diversity. She wanted the reader to come away with a better understanding

of who these people are. Ultimately, she wanted to write a book that highlighted the tension between the American Jewish liberal values of many of the settlers and the reality of occupation. She succeeded in writing a highly readable, first-rate contribution.

Chapter 1 provides the necessary background to understand the "moment" to the "movement." Her discussion helps set the record straight regarding the numbers, origins, and political opinions of settlers, including the fact that many American Jewish settlers had strong commitments to liberal values, such as equality, the rule of law, and progress, and hoped that their presence would benefit the local population (a familiar dimension of the history of Zionism). The next three chapters provide an in-depth exploration, interwoven with the voices of the settlers, to examine three different settlements that represent some of the diversity of American Jewish settlers. Chapter 2 examines Garin Yamit (better known as Yamit), which was founded in the Sinai in 1972 by liberal American Jews from Cleveland, who hoped to establish a foothold to enact their form of Zionism. The settlement struggled from the very beginning and only began to turn things around at the same moment as the 1979 Camp David Accords and the accompanying decision to dismantle Yamit as part of the peace agreement. The decision by Menachem Be-

gin's government caused a political crisis from pro-settlement Israelis who wanted to demonstrate that there would be considerable costs if other settlements suffered a similar fate.

Chapter 3 examines Efrat on the West Bank, or, as referred to by its residents, "occupied Scarsdale" (p. 98). Born from a marriage between American and Israeli religious figures, Efrat became a hybrid of various ideologies and values, at times a study in contradictions. Plans for the settlement area of Gush Etzion began in the mid-1970s, which subsequently led to the establishment of Efrat. Of all the settlements chronicled in the book, Efrat best exemplifies how American liberal values clashed with the oppressive realities of occupation that denied basic human rights to Palestinians. On my trip to Efrat this summer, the quite dynamic mayor presented a picture of occupation with a human face, tapping into the kinds of liberal sentiments that many foreigners want to hear. From the perspective of the Palestinian residents of the neighboring villages, the perspective is quite different. Chapter 4 examines the settlement of Tekoah, which attempts but has a much more difficult time squaring American liberal values with the reality of turning the occupation into Israeli sovereignty with the prospect of the Palestinians as second-class citizens (at best).

Part of Hirschhorn's goal is to help establish a second-generation scholarship on the settlements that better captures their multiple discourses, constituencies, secular and religious ideologies, and contexts. There are several big takeaways. One, American Jews have imposed their vision of Zionism with an American lens on a land that is inhabited by a large percentage of Palestinians. This continues the theme in which liberal-leaning American Zionists are willfully blind to the reality of the occupation. Two, the examination of liberal American Jewish settlers provides a fascinating slice of the movement that is often overshadowed by their better-known more zealous, religious, authoritarian, and violent religious compatriots.

Three, these settler communities would never have been established without the support of the Israeli government. If I have one criticism it is that Hirschhorn purposefully neglects the settlements that are known for their anti-liberal, hardline views, and willingness to use violence against the local population. My sense is that had she included them, the reader would have a much better appreciation of how American Jews have supplied bodies and considerable political and economic support. It is not just the settlements that are an obstacle to peace, so, too are American Jews.

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