

The Settlers: Israeli Atrocities Are Not Limited to Gaza



These lines are written as yet another announcement is made about the “continuation of the US-backed Israeli war on Gaza,” and as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calls for “full occupation.” This war has so far claimed the lives of more than sixty thousand Palestinians. Its supporters insist that it is solely a response to the events of October 7.

Yet the BBC documentary *The Settlers* subtly and indirectly challenges that narrative—not least because its events unfold far from Gaza, and because it reveals the entrenched Israeli settler view across all of Palestine: that its people are “not human like us.”

The film’s central theme—the dehumanization of Arabs and Palestinians—emerges as its most important point. Directed by British filmmaker Louis Theroux, *The Settlers* stands as a historical and factual visual record that perhaps could only have been made by someone outside the Arab world.

Theroux travels to the occupied West Bank to speak directly with settlers, seeking to understand life there, and by extension, across all of Palestine. The testimonies he captures are startling for Western audiences, laying bare the mindset of Israeli settlers.

The film focuses on settler expansion in the West Bank—a central region that makes up roughly 21 percent of Palestine. After remaining under Arab control with Gaza following the Nakba and the 1948 defeat, settlements began to grow there after the 1967 war, pushing Palestinians out.

Today, according to the film, more than 700,000 Jewish Israeli settlers live in the West Bank. Theroux interviews settlers from across the globe—Russians, Americans, European Jews—who all insist the land is theirs because “history says so,” and that it does not belong to “camel herders,” their slur for Arabs.

This diverse mix of settlers could not be united without a common narrative to justify their shared presence. The film probes this narrative—not to absolve them, but to understand it before condemning it.

The obvious question arises: Why focus on settlers in the West Bank while thousands of Palestinians are dying daily in nearby Gaza? The answer: because the occupation’s violence is not confined to Gaza. It unfolds in multiple, continuous contexts. The film shows that these assaults happen without any clear provocation—driven instead by a persistent desire to seize all the land by force.

“Camel herders” outside civilization

Zionism’s cornerstone is the removal of Arabs from the category of the fully human. The settlers in the film repeatedly frame Palestinians as “camel herders outside civilization,” implying that getting rid of them—by any means—might even be desirable.

The film’s imagery mirrors stereotypes found in global pop culture. Theroux draws a parallel to a fleeting moment in the Hollywood film *Fantastic Four*, where the camera sweeps across the globe and depicts an Arab country with nothing

more than a camel in the desert—reducing an entire civilization to a symbol of backwardness.

The camel, in this framing, is not a cultural emblem but an emblem of regression. Arabs are presented as folklore outside modernity—Bedouins or armed tribes—never as participants in contemporary life. This lens applies as much to Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, and Morocco as it does to Palestine.

One settler woman—dubbed the “Mother of the Settlers”—states in the film that Palestinians should go to Canada, Turkey, or anywhere else outside “Israel.” She calls for “cleansing” the land of “savage camel herders” for the supposed benefit of all.

This visual and rhetorical framing of Arabs as outside civilization serves to legitimize their displacement, much as America once dehumanized Native Americans as “savages,” embedding that stereotype globally through cinema and policy alike. Such narratives make it easier to ignore or even justify daily massacres that should outrage humanity.

Not far from Gaza

The film opens with an Israeli man showing Theroux a map and asserting that the West Bank belongs to Israel. He labels its Arabs “jihadis.” When Theroux asks whether there are Palestinians who are not jihadists, the man replies, “History says so.”

In another scene, a teenage girl explains her acceptance of violence against Arabs by repeating, “History says this is our land.”

Historian Ilan Pappé notes in *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge* that the absence of any mention of the Palestinian tragedy in Israeli schoolbooks reflects a broader orientalist perspective: Palestinians are portrayed as an insignificant footnote in a promised land awaiting redemption.

This mindset fuels the settler movement’s drive for total dominance. At the forefront is Daniela Weiss, the “Mother of the Settlers,” who has pushed for full West Bank annexation since the aftermath of the 1967 war. She goes further, declaring that all of Palestine—and even lands “from the river to the river,” including Turkey and Saudi Arabia—should be under Israeli control.

Violence without context

The film’s sixty minutes make clear that this is not just about Palestinians—it is about any Arab who might face an enemy that does not see them as human, and who will use any means to expel them.

The Arab silence in the face of what is happening in the West Bank and Gaza is

doubly shameful, for the danger will not stop there.

Although Theroux does not give equal space to Palestinian voices, his footage still documents the daily violence settlers inflict—killing neighbors, seizing more land, all amid Arab and global silence.

One scene shows a Palestinian family harvesting olives on their own land. Soldiers harass them, fully aware they own the land and carry no weapons. Theroux objects—only to be ordered to leave or face arrest.

The film is free of music. It alternates between wide shots of the land and close-ups of faces to expose the repetition of lies, allowing the settlers' own words to condemn them. It begins and ends with the same point: Israel's "historical" claims have no clear origin, but they drive a relentless campaign to make the land comfortable for settlers.

The Settlers underscores a critical point: to frame Gaza's destruction as solely a result of October 7 is to ignore the broader, ongoing campaign of dispossession and killing. Even in the absence of conflict, the drive to eradicate Palestinians continues.

The film serves as evidence that coexistence with mercenary settlers is impossible, and that targeting will persist—with or without October 7.