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## OPINION

# West Bank residents Israelis too



**MARCY OSTER  
ON ISRAEL**

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KARNEI SHOMRON, Israel – An Associated Press article that first popped up in my Twitter feed last week almost caused me to spit my coffee all over my computer screen.

The writer of the article sounds surprised that people like me, settlers who live in the West Bank, would be allowed to vote in Israeli elections since we do not live on what is considered “sovereign Israeli territory.”

Israel, the article explains, does not allow absentee voting for its citizens living abroad, except for diplomats and emissaries sent by the state. The article expresses amazement that the more than 350,000 Jews living in the West Bank do not fall under the category of Israeli citizens living abroad.

March 17 will be the fifth Israeli election in which I have voted. This is the first time that I can remember my right or ability to vote being questioned.

I pay taxes to Israel. My husband works in Tel Aviv. Two of my children attend school in Kfar Saba. My older daughter lives in the Hebrew University dormitories in Jerusalem. My second-oldest daughter is performing national service in the north of the country. I receive my mail through the Israeli postal service and I have an Israeli zip code. My passport identifies me as Israeli and lists my passport as being issued in Kfar Saba in central Israel. When I get a traffic ticket here it is issued by the Israel Police and I pay my fine to the state. Members of my community do and have in the past served in the Knesset.

No one should question my right to vote in Israel's elections.

But the article and its question seem to have taken on a life of its own. A Google search of its first paragraph shows that it has been republished nearly 9,000 times. And in a sign that the question has taken hold in the minds of decision shapers, New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, who, granted, has no love lost for my community and others like it, invoked the question in a column that appeared three days later.

It was not the first time last week that my fellow West

Bank residents and I came under attack (though you'd think we'd be used to it by now).

An annual Peace Now report released last week blared that there was a 40 percent increase in housing starts in the settlements for 2014. The report mentioned my community by name and even showed an aerial photograph of one of the housing projects, a project I can see from my upstairs window. I think you can even see my house in the aerial photograph.

I thought of the project later in the week, with the release of the state comptroller's report on Israel's housing crisis, which states that: “The government and its ministries have set national housing policy in a deficient manner.”

Isaac Herzog, leader of the Labor party and head of the coalition Zionist Union running in the current national elections, took the opportunity of the release of the report to blame the housing crisis on government spending in the settlements. He said that if the money spent on settlement housing like the new housing project in my neighborhood had been targeted at young couples looking to buy homes then there might not now be an Israeli housing crisis.

But the housing being built here reaches his exact target audience.

The majority of the 96 housing units being built two blocks from my home have been sold to young couples who currently are renting in my community or who are children of residents, the exact people that Herzog believes the money should have been spent on.

These couples just want to raise their children in the same warm and embracing community in which they grew up, instead of Tel Aviv and other major and unaffordable cities that other young couples desire.

There are two other major housing projects in other neighborhoods throughout my municipality, and in those cases the majority of the first-time homebuyers also are young couples returning to their roots.

Many of these young people work in central Israel, pay taxes to the Israeli government and delivered their babies in hospitals in Jerusalem or in central Israel. By buying a home in the West Bank community in which they grew up, they certainly are not planning to give up their right to vote.

**BRETT** from page 3

rooms. The back windows are black, just as they were when Anne was alive to keep the spices in the storeroom protected from light.

The few signs of life left behind stop your heart: The cards with Margot's Latin lessons, the map of Normandy where their dad kept track of the Allied invasion with orange, white and red pins, the faded pencil markings on the wall where Anne's parents noted how fast their girls were growing.

A young girl behind me gasped, “That's what we do.”

A tiny room with dingy beige walls still holds the newspaper and magazine clippings Anne glued to the walls: Queen Elizabeth as a child. Greta Garbo. Ginger Rogers. Sonja Henie. One of Anne's quotes was posted nearby: “I long to ride a bike, dance, whistle, look at the world, feel young and know that I'm free.”

Most of the rooms were empty. The Nazis removed everything from the annex after everyone was taken. Otto Frank wanted it to remain empty to show the void left behind by all those taken.

Near the end of the tour, you see a book with the names of 103,000 Jews deported from Netherlands and killed by Nazis. You know there are millions of stories like Anne's.

Then, there it is, under glass, on a silver pillow. The diary. The red plaid cover takes what's left of your breath away.

Before leaving, I watched a short video of people sharing what the diary means to them. Actress Emma Thompson said, “All her would-haves are our opportunities.” A World War II veteran said, “Now I know why I fought at Normandy.”

Israeli leader Shimon Peres said, “It's not a memory, it's a warning.”

A warning the world must read and heed.

*Regina Brett is the first-place winner of the Louis Rapoport Award for Excellence in Commentary in the 2014 Simon Rockower Awards for Excellence in Jewish Journalism sponsored by the American Jewish Press Association and Best of Show first as best columnist in Ohio in the 2014 Ohio SPJ contest. Connect with her on Facebook at ReginaBrettFans and on Twitter @ReginaBrett.*