

## Politics – August 2011 Social Justice

*Government cannot change the people. People can change government. In Israel, the sooner the better.*

*In the Middle East, optimism is a virtue; realism – a duty.*

*Gilad is still in captivity. Veshavu banim legvulam.*

~Raphael Cohen-Almagor

On August 18, terrorists killed eight Israeli civilians and wounded dozens of others in coordinated attacks on public buses and private cars north of Eilat. The attack was planned in the Gaza Strip by the Popular Resistance Committees and perpetrated by terrorists who crossed from Gaza into Sinai via smuggling tunnels. They then travelled some 200 kilometres to reach an area of the border protected only by a tattered wire fence, about 15 kilometres north of Eilat. Several hours later, yet another gun battle erupted and two more Israelis were injured. Five Egyptian soldiers were also killed in the gunfire. Blaming Israel, Egypt warned that it will recall its ambassador in Israel to Cairo. Relationships between the two countries are tenuous. The following days, at the time of writing, rockets are being fired on Beer Sheva, Ashdod, Ashkelon and other neighbouring towns. One civilian was killed. Others were injured.



Israel retaliated from the air, attacking designated targets in Gaza. Hamas has an interest to warm the borders as September is approaching. I fear yet another major operation/small war in the south.

Israel is so tiny, so vulnerable. In the near future, all cities and towns might be subject to rocket terror. The key to Israel's survival is peace, or at least some form of respectful relationships with its neighbours.

Earlier during the month, fascinating things were taking place in Israel. People want change, and they are doing something about it, for a change. I was never impressed with the figures that the government in general and the ministry of finance in particular aired. Whatever you can show in economic growth, it cannot dust away some troubling facts:

Israel's prices are staggeringly expensive compared to other countries. This is true especially for the most expensive purchases: Houses, cars, electric products;  
 Taxes in Israel are among the highest in the world;  
 The gap between the rich and poor is growing wider all the time;

About a quarter of the population is under the poverty line;  
The middle class struggles to maintain its position, not to fall into the lower classes.

Economy is based on pampering one percent of the population; trusting that this one percent will pull the entire economy up is an anti-social, flawed economy. It is an economy of numbers, not of humans. It is an economy for finance books, not for the people. It is an economy for the rich, and against the common people.

As foreign investments grew, and Euros and dollars came into the country, some sectors enjoyed this boom, mainly building contractors, people who wished to sell their homes, the high tech industry and tourism. Other sectors of the population found that their buying power has eroded as prices went up. Capitalism cares about the strong and the fit, the big fish that eat the small fish. **Solidarity, social responsibility, a sense of community, justice, fairness, equality** – all these values that once-upon-a-time were part and parcel of the Israeli society are all gone, sacrificed and substituted by ruthless individualism.

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**Light Side**

Five LONG years. There is a limit even for gross incompetence. Free Gilad Shalit. The government should invest in his release. It should be one of its top priorities. Veshavu banim legvulam.

Good to see London cabs with a Gilad Shalit photo, raising this issue and calling for his release.

I am saddened to read that the talks with Hamas reached, yet again, a disappointing deadlock. Will Gilad be able to smile again?



Gilad Shalit

I write this Newsletter throughout the month. In early August I wrote: I must say that I truly appreciate this summer's headlines. They are very different from previous summers' headlines. A return, even for a short while, to sanity and some normality.

And then, on August 18, hell erupted, this time from the south.

### **Reflections on the July Newsletter**

Raphy shalom,

The Embassy of Israel is about to run a special screening on August 22nd in the Australian Parliament to all members of parliament.

It is also our intention to bring the principal from the school to address them.

I totally agree with you.

This is a side of Israel that we have to expose, and expose it aggressively.

Yuval

Yuval Rotem  
Ambassador  
Embassy of Israel  
Yarralumla, Australia

Dear Rafi,

Nice to hear from you. I think about you often, and always appreciate your politics newsletters.

I spent a week at Ben Gurion U talking to the neonatologists and others, then went to a pediatrics conference up in Tiberias. I hadn't been back since 2001, and was struck by the changes. There's The Wall, snaking through the Judean hills, of course. And the way Jerusalem has become a city of Black Hats. I also went back and visited the kibbutz where I'd volunteered in '73 - Kibbutz Yifat. I'd worked in the refet. They had a big, new computerized one, now, a joint venture of three kibbutzim. The one where I had worked was still there, but a crumbling ruin. But I was surprised that there were no longer volunteers -

instead, they hire Thai workers. I probably shouldn't have been surprised. I'd read over the years of all the changes going on in the kibbutzim, but the one where my daughter stayed in 2001-2 was much more like the one I remembered than the ones I saw now.

Another thing that struck me - as we drove from Hadera to Afula, was the growth and development of all the Arab towns along that road. Rampant, uncontrolled building, and every little village had a mosque. That's a story that doesn't get told much - the story of the Arab citizens of Israel.

And, in Beersheva, now, 60% of the births at Soroka are to Bedouins. Israel is so much more complicated a place than one would know from the news.

Just a few striking impressions from a visit that was full of different impressions and, of course, meetings with wonderful people. Do you think about moving back?

Hope you and your family are well.

John  
John D. Lantos M.D.

### **Demonstrations in Israel**

Israelis are known to be flexible. You have to in order to survive and keep your sanity in such a troubled environment. The only place I know that comes close to the Israeli pressure cooker is New York. Israelis take many hits, from the outside as well as from its own government, complain and move on. Israelis are known to be flexible. I have been saying:

Al tehye ragish (don't be sensitive)  
Ha'am haze adish (People are apathetic)  
Ha'am haze gamish (People are flexible)  
Kmo chara al hakvish (as shit on the road).

This has been the case up until now. Possibly due to the Arab Spring, when people realized that via social networking sites it is possible to mobilize thousands of people, some Israelis decided to imitate what they saw around them. Dissenting voices flooded Facebook, Twitter and local social networking sites. People decided to take action.

Physicians are protesting all over the country. They are working under inhuman conditions: If they wish to make a decent living, they need to work long shifts. They spend much more time in the hospitals' corridors than with their families. They want better wages and conditions -- spreading the sense of crisis among a middle class that bears Israel's heavy tax burden and sustains its conscript military.

The physicians are led by Leonid Edelman, a person I have known and appreciate for many years. To press the agenda, Leonid opened a hunger strike. Every day there were photos of him on the news. On the eighth day of the hunger strike, I rang him. I could not stand seeing him in such a condition. He was deteriorating as days passed. I pleaded with him: Leonid, at the end of the day it will be about you. Only you will pay the price. Your body might reach a point of total collapse. The politicians are heartless. They do not care. You are a dear person. We need you.



Whether because of my plea or other reasons, the following day I was relieved to hear that Leonid stopped his hunger strike.

Tel Aviv nowadays is very different. It is a Tel Aviv I have never seen. Tents are everywhere. The major avenues became populated with people who protest against the cost of living, cost of housing. Home prices have jumped about 50 percent since 2008. Even a small flat in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem costs a small fortune. Jews who live outside Israel have inflated the cost of housing by buying up apartments for investment or summer/holiday homes, and young (also not-so-young) families simply cannot afford an apartment. In protest, dozens of young people went to the parks and the avenues and spent their time discussing, deliberating, singing, creating. The weather in Israel is conducive to such protests.



A few weeks ago public protest against the cost of white cheese (Cottage) brought down the price of that cheese. High prices of basic goods have become headline news. Early in the year, protests forced Prime Minister Netanyahu to cancel a planned tax hike on petrol. Will

this new protest gather enough momentum to pressure the government to do something so as to provide affordable housing?

"The people of Israel took to the streets because of the housing problem, but they will stay because of the rest. And they will stay until the prime minister and the government of Israel present a serious, revolutionary plan that will solve in depth and immediately the social crisis the majority of the nation is suffering," said activist leader Daphni Leef. "We all feel that this is a crisis of the middle class," President Shimon Peres told reporters.

What do politicians do in such circumstances? Yep, you are right. Establish a committee. Netanyahu established a committee to recommend changes. Israeli economy is his creation. He guides it. He directs it. He decides on its priorities. He is the one who believes in pampering the elite, providing them with tax breaks, giving them incentives, sponsoring their investments, providing them with business opportunities so, he believes, they pull the entire Israeli economy up. The unemployment rates are low. But, on the other hand, far more people are employed by contractors for a short term period, with no social privileges; a form of modern slavery.

Netanyahu creates an economy of numbers, not for people. And now he is establishing a committee to tell him to change his ways. Brilliant. Bravo. The people in the tents are ecstatic.



A recent poll published in the *Haaretz* newspaper found 32 percent of Israelis were satisfied with Netanyahu's performance while 54 percent were not, a reversal of survey figures from May. Then, when Netanyahu received standing ovations at the U.S. Congress as he outlined tough terms for Middle East peace, 51 percent of Israelis supported him and 31 percent of respondents said they opposed his policies.

Source: <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/07/26/idINIndia-58457820110726>

For further information (in Hebrew), see <http://www.acri.org.il/camp/makara/>

### **August 6 Demonstration**

On August 6, 2011, a major demonstration took place in Tel Aviv under the heading of Social Justice. The Rabin Square is under construction so the organizers, in their infinite wisdom, held it on Kaplan Street, in front of the Prime Minister's Office. The problem is that Kaplan is just a street, not even a major street. There was no place for people to gather. About 300,000 people came to protest against government policies that impoverishes them. Most of them did not see the stage, as they could not come close. I was there. People came and went as they only heard the voices, but did not see the speakers. Hayarkon Park was far more suitable for such a large demonstration.



Young and old, people from all walks of life, of all political beliefs, came to protest. This was one of the largest demonstrations in the history of young Israel and the largest social demonstration. The other such demonstrations addressed security concerns and The Conflict (referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). It was heart-warming to see so many people united by a sense of social community and justice.

Wishing to bring together all people, the organizers try to stay away from politics, disassociating themselves from any political party. But of course, everything is political, and without the support of a major political party, things won't move forward. I have been active in Israeli politics for many years. Politics is very centralized. It is hard to stay away from politics. The naiveté is charming but not very practical. Netanyahu is an experienced politician. Before all hell erupted in the south, he knew that in September parents send their children to school. Half of the protesters will go home. Then the weather becomes colder and staying in the tents will become increasingly uncomfortable. And the Palestinian will press for statehood and attention will be drawn to The Conflict. Meaning that Netanyahu had at most five to six weeks to withstand the pressure. This is why he established the committee.

On August 18, things changed dramatically. Security and defence unite all people. These issues enjoy precedence over all other concerns. Social justice can wait until Israel restores relative tranquility along its borders.

### **Constitution for Israel**

Apparently this issue is stuck. The religious parties refuse to accept a full-fledged, written constitution as they believe such a document is already in existence: The Bible. All the good efforts of good people are sternly blocked and Israel will continue to rely on the Supreme Court to protect civil and human rights. Two Basic Laws are very important: **Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty** passed on March 17, 1992 and **Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation** passed on March 9, 1994. However, no law, for instance, protects freedom of expression. Freedom of religion and freedom from religion are still open questions as Orthodox Judaism holds immense influence on the lives of Jews. Israel should have a written constitution but it seems not to be in the cards in the near future.

### **Changing the Electoral System**

There are resumed attempts to change the electoral system from proportional to mixed: Part of the Knesset will be elected by proportional representation, and part of it by district representation: Splitting the country into regions and electing regional representatives. Previous attempts to change the electoral system had failed miserably. Former Labour Minister Gad Yaacobi invested many efforts to bring such change but was blocked by the small parties that fear losing their power and place in the Knesset. The religious parties will agree only if they become convinced that such a change might increase their power. They will never consent if the result might be a reduction of their number in the Israeli parliament.

### **Rabin Square**

Every visit to Israel includes strolling the Israel Kings Square, which became Rabin Square after the Prime Minister's assassination on November 4, 1995 – the fateful day that changed Israeli history for the worse.



### **Rachel and Berl Katznelson**

My friends Mira and Yizhar took me on a tour of the Galilee. It is a beautiful part of Israel. We stopped at the Kinneret cemetery, where some of the great people of Israel are buried, including my favorite poet Rachel; another notable poet Naomi Shemer; the notable philosopher and socialist Moshe Hess, and my personal socialist hero Berl Katznelson. I lived the first twenty two years of my life in Beeri Street, in Tel Aviv, called after Katznelson. When I met my wife, she lived on Katznelson Street in Givatayim. An interesting coincidence, interesting enough to make me read Katznelson's books and find inspiration in them.



On Rachel, please see

[http://www.poetryinternational.org/piw/cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=3155](http://www.poetryinternational.org/piw/cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=3155)

### **Hezbollah: Party of Fraud**

In a recent article, Matthew Levitt analyzes Hezbollah's power in Lebanon and its sources of income, arguing that there is a strong connection between crime and terrorism. In June, Lebanon's new prime minister, Najib Mikati, announced the formation of a government dominated by members and allies of the Shiite terrorist organization Hezbollah. Hezbollah is the most dominant political force in Lebanon six years after the "Cedar Revolution," which placed the group on the defensive and forced its Syrian patrons to leave the country. With control of the Lebanese government, a vast social-service network, an army of soldiers and operatives, and an arsenal of more than 40,000 rockets, Hezbollah is a powerful organization in Lebanon.

Levitt explains that Hezbollah would not have achieved its current stature without the assistance of its creator and chief sponsor, Iran. Since founding Hezbollah in 1982, Iran has armed, funded, and trained the organization, transforming it into a potent terrorist and fighting force. Yet Hezbollah has not relied entirely on Iran to finance its operations. Instead, it has raised funds through criminal activities, including counterfeiting currencies and goods, credit-card fraud, and money laundering. In 2002, for example, Hezbollah operatives in North Carolina were convicted for smuggling cigarettes across state lines and sending a significant portion of their profits -- estimated to be more than \$1.5 million -- back to their commanders in Lebanon.

Hezbollah has long relied on its relationship with Iran and Syria for funding. Since the early 1990s, Hezbollah has operated with a guaranteed annual contribution of at least \$100 million a year from Tehran. Early last decade, Iran doubled that investment to more than \$200 million a year, and its financial support for Hezbollah reached its pinnacle in 2008-9. With revenues from oil prices that had risen as high as \$145 per barrel in late July 2008, Iran

ramped up its funding to defray Hezbollah's soaring costs as it attempted to rebuild following its 2006 war with Israel. Hezbollah required unprecedented assistance to restock its weapons supplies, invest in reconstruction, and buy favor within both the various sectarian communities and Lebanese towns and villages that suffered damage during the war. It was especially desperate for support in advance of Lebanon's June 2009 elections, when the group attempted to compete with its Sunni political rivals, who were funded by Saudi Arabia. As the election neared, Iran allegedly pledged as much as \$600 million to Hezbollah for its political campaign. By 2009, Israeli intelligence estimated that, since the summer of 2006, Iran had provided Hezbollah with more than \$1 billion in direct aid.

This influx of Iranian money led Hezbollah to hire more people and invest in more programs, assuming that Iran's inflated support would persist. Yet just as Hezbollah accustomed itself to a larger budget, Iran became a much less reliable donor. By mid-January 2009, oil prices had fallen to \$36 per barrel and remained under \$60 until May, drastically reducing Iran's oil profits. International sanctions against Iran's nuclear program, meanwhile, became harsher. Combined with crippling subsidies for basic commodities and soaring inflation, these factors severely hampered Iran's economic growth.

These economic pressures forced Tehran to slash its annual budget for Hezbollah by 40 percent in early 2009. Suddenly constrained after years of abundant Iranian funding, Hezbollah turned to its preexisting criminal enterprises to boost its assets. Levitt argues that Hezbollah operatives run one of the largest and most sophisticated global criminal operations in the world. These criminal activities have strengthened Hezbollah and made it more difficult for Western nations to undermine it. Yet they have also exposed Hezbollah to unprecedented risk. Well trained by Iran in the arts of counterintelligence and operational security, Hezbollah prefers to keep its actions out of the public eye. Its crime network, however, has placed the organization under unprecedented scrutiny from law enforcement agencies worldwide, offering a new opening for international action to weaken it like never before.

To begin with, notes Levitt, it is often easier to pursue and apprehend suspects as criminals than as terrorists. Few countries have formally listed Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, but they will target the organization when it engages in criminal plots. The European Union, for example, does not classify Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, but its member states are eager to prevent the group from running criminal enterprises on their territories. Countries around the world share a determination to prevent drugs from being smuggled across their borders, whether by criminals, terrorists, or networks that combine the two.

Although many countries are reluctant to cooperate with the United States on counterterrorism for fear of admitting that terrorists operate on their soil, they are less hesitant to work with the country on criminal law enforcement. Most important, to hold terrorists accountable for their criminal activity, countries do not need to do anything more than enforce their own existing laws. No new legislation, institutional change, or regulatory authority is necessary. And enforcing domestic laws allows countries to avoid the messy politics that counterterrorism activities might imply.

Source: Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah: Party of Fraud", *ForeignAffairs.com* (July 27, 2011), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1685>

## September 2011

1. The Palestinians went first to the USA to promote their cause. Upon understanding that the US will not go out of its way to help them, they plan to go to the UN. The Security Council is not a real option as it seems that the US will veto any position that

is contra the interests of Israel, as understood by the Netanyahu government. Thus the only viable option is for them to appeal to the UN General Assembly, where they are most likely to succeed. The question is whether the Palestinians will reap more than words, whether something on the ground will follow as a result. Mr Netanyahu does what he knows best: Halt, delay, exhaust. Netanyahu is a Tricky (Philip Roth) version of Yitzhak Shamir. Shamir simply said NO. Netanyahu misleads you to believe that he wants peace while in essence he means NO. Even Mr Netanyahu surely understands that peace is not a mere hyperbole, that peace requires compromises and sacrifices.

2. I sincerely hope Al Qaeda does not aim to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. At the same time, I hope security agencies around the globe do their best to avert likely attempts, making absolutely sure that there will not be any repeat of such atrocities.

## Riots in England

Three major components that brought about the riots in England: The Economy; Racism and Internet Social Networking.

**Economy** - Like Netanyahu in Israel, Cameron believes in economy from above, at the expense of the working people. Major cuts are needed to cover the deficit, and these cuts are felt in the lower echelons of the British society. The district in Tottenham is poverty stricken. Unemployment is on the rise. In his zeal for austerity, Cameron has drastically cut government funding for social/community programs. The effect on communities like that of Tottenham is devastating. Without prospects for jobs or career, people become frustrated and alienated. Cameron, like Netanyahu in Israel represents the callous free market economy, which essentially means withdrawing government support for many good causes. His policy is neoliberal of the worst, irresponsible kind, which creates rampant inequality and bank-imposed austerity. Individuality and competitiveness are in vogue. Concepts like justice, social contract, solidarity, social justice are foreign to his mind. There are no relationships or commonality of rich and poor, no common good in Aristotelean terms.

In *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/resource/the-spirit-level>, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett explain that crime, ill-health, imprisonment rates, and mental illness are far more common in unequal societies than ones with better economic distribution and less gap between the richest and the poorest. Decades of individualism, competition and state-encouraged selfishness – combined with a systematic crushing of unions and the ever-increasing criminalisation of dissent, have made Britain one of the most unequal countries in the developed world.

**Racism** – There is a gentleman's agreement between criminals and policemen in Britain: You don't shoot us; we won't shoot you. Rarely are guns pulled out and shots are fired. The incident that sparked the riots should not have taken place. All the bullets fired, including one found in a police car, were from police-issued weapons. There is a feeling that the policeman would not fire his gun if the suspect was a white person. Some blood is cheaper. There is insidious, persistent racism in British society. Mr Cameron unashamedly said that multiculturalism does not work in England. Some people are fed up being the servant, cheap labour of society; and then discriminated against in further, multiple ways.

**Social networking** – yet again, the Internet proved to be a significant mobilizing factor that brings people together and unites them into a sizable force.

Unfortunately, unlike in Israel, the justified grievances did not translate into a social movement. Criminals exploited the uproar and launched vicious, anti-social attacks. Things escalated rapidly as looting spread like fire, with fire. What a shame. A wasted opportunity to demand policy changes.



The scenes are so un-British that I was certain that they will soon cease to exist. The British are far too civilized for legitimizing such anti-social behaviour. The rule of law is important. At the same time, I am hopeful that the next spark will bring people together to protest against government policies and to demand social justice. Mr Cameron will surely persist in his capitalist, Darwin-like agenda that benefits the strong and weakens the weak. He provides plenty of reasons to democratically protest against and demand justified changes. The only change until now is that he postponed his plan to downsize the police.

### **Israel-Britain New High-tech Hub**

In September 2011 the British Embassy in Israel will launch a Hi Tech Hub, tasked with creating a lasting partnership between the UK and Israel. "The UK has recently published a White Paper on Economic Growth", says Ambassador Matthew Gould. "The only country with a specific commitment is Israel - it is now a national objective to promote the high tech partnership between the UK and Israel." During his recent visit to Israel the Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Michael Bear, attended an impressive gathering of Israeli entrepreneurs at the Ambassador's residence in Ramat-Gan.

The Hub's dedicated team will identify and bring innovative Israeli technology and R+D to UK-based companies; define the key sectors where UK/Israel collaboration could be particularly fruitful; match up, and forge partnerships between, UK and Israel based companies; position the UK in Israel as a centre for technological and services innovation; tie Israeli high tech players into UK capital markets; and offer the UK as the base of choice for Israeli high-tech companies in Europe. To find out more contact

[Alicia.zurszpiro@fco.gov.uk](mailto:Alicia.zurszpiro@fco.gov.uk)

I thank Shmuel Ben-Tovim for the information.

### **UN releases essential guide to understanding Human Rights**

How well do we know our rights? What does it mean to have the right to be protected, to protest, to have freedom of association, or the right to talk to international bodies? United Nations Special Rapporteur Margaret Sekaggya has launched an essential guide to the right to defend human rights, aimed at supporting increasing understanding of the UN Declaration on human rights defenders and awareness of the dangers they face.

The 100-page downloadable document maps out the rights provided for in the declaration, analyses what these rights entail, what is needed to ensure their implementation, and addresses the most common restrictions and violations faced by defenders.

The guide is also a comprehensive reference document for journalists covering the situation of human rights defenders in their countries, their regions and the world.

See

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/CommentarytoDeclarationondefendersJuly2011.pdf>

### **Amnesty International launches online TV show for 50th anniversary**

To mark its 50-year anniversary, Amnesty International launched Amnesty TV a biweekly, 15-minute, online show that mixes satire and stunts with documentaries, opinion and news about human rights stories around the world.

The first episode, which aired on 14 July, features Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, talking about Internet freedom in front of a group of school children. There's also a birthday message from Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and a valiant attempt to get ambassadors from Iran, China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. to sign Amnesty's 50th birthday card.



Speaking about the launch, Amnesty's Andy Hackman told the "Observer", "Amnesty International's aim is to connect people and unite them behind a common belief that people coming together can effect real, tangible change. Amnesty TV's combination of entertaining content and inspiring stories will help us engage and mobilise a new generation of supporters."

See <http://tv.amnesty.org.uk/>

Source: [http://www.ifex.org/international/2011/07/20/amnesty\\_tv/](http://www.ifex.org/international/2011/07/20/amnesty_tv/)

### **Aleksey Sokolov, Russian Rights Activist, Freed**

The human rights community is small. We need to support one another. Aleksey Sokolov, the head of the Sverdlovsk-based 'Rights Foundation', was freed on parole. Sokolov campaigned against torture in penitentiaries; he also took part in the investigation of killings and physical abuses in prisons in the city of Kopeisk that took place on May 31, 2008.



Human rights activists consider the fabrication of a criminal court case against Sokolov - he was accused of theft and armed robbery - payback orchestrated by officials for his activism. The initial ruling was based only on the testimony of criminals. Ombudsman for human rights Vladimir Lukin, lawyers Anatoli Kucherina and Henry Resnik, chairman of European Union's Subcommittee for Human Rights Heidi Hautala, as well as Russian and international human rights organizations, all supported Sokolov.

See <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/2120>

In the first interview that Sokolov gave upon returning to Ekatiirenburg from Krasnoyarski Krai, where he was serving his sentence, he said: "I am in seventh heaven because I was finally able to see my family, my daughter and wife."

Source: [http://advancinghumanrights.org/news/russian\\_rights\\_activist\\_freed](http://advancinghumanrights.org/news/russian_rights_activist_freed)

### **World first as Israel court allows egg extraction from deceased woman**

An Israeli court has allowed the parents of a dead 17-year-old woman to remove her eggs for future use. This is the first case of its kind in Israel, possibly the first in the world. Hen Aida Ayish, was critically injured in a car accident a fortnight ago. She was taken to Meir Hospital in Kfar Sava, and a week later doctors declared her brain-dead.

With the consent of Ayish's family her other organs saved the lives of four patients. But the family's second request was denied. Medical personnel said that the family wanted the eggs to be fertilised with the sperm of another dead body. This definitely would have been a world first: a baby whose father and mother both died before she was even conceived. The hospital declined.

Ayish's family did not explain why they sought the egg extraction. The court has only allowed the extraction of the eggs, but their future is undecided. According to guidelines issued by the attorney general in 2003, the use of sperm for a body is only permissible when used to fertilise the widow of the deceased. Parents who seek to use the sperm from a body must gain private permission in court.

The Health Ministry has made clear that "the court's decision has been received independently without hearing the position of the Health Ministry," adding that "the Health Ministry has no knowledge of the details of the situation."

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israel-court-allows-egg-extraction-from-deceased-woman-in-unprecedented-ruling-1.377482>

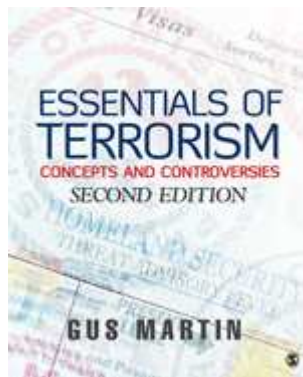
## Wrongful Birth

The government established a committee, headed by Deputy President (ret.) of the Supreme Court Eliyahu Mazza to investigate the delicate issue of wrongful birth and to decide responsibilities of all people concerned (parents, physicians, consultants, insurance, government) and the torts involved. A number of cases came before the Supreme Court and await decision. The committee will submit its recommendations for appropriate legislation and/or judicial guidelines.

Two articles written by sharp minds in my edited book, *Moral Dilemmas in Medicine (Dilemot Be'etica Refuit)* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2002, Hebrew) address this issue. Amos Shapira, the astute legal bioethicist, debates the dilemma with one of Israel's leading philosophers, David Heyd.

## Books Received

**Gus Martin, *Essentials of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, 2011).**



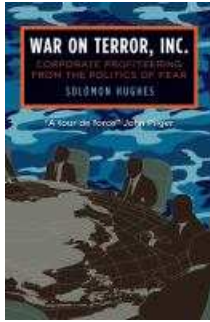
I recommend this book and intend to incorporate it into my courses. It offers an engaging look on modern terrorism, explains basic concepts and provides students with many examples to illustrate trends, developments and scope of modern terror. The illustrations, photos and clear writing make it very accessible to students.

<http://www.sagepub.com/books/Book234535>

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Essentials-Terrorism-Concepts-Controversies-ebook/dp/B004BDNKM2>

I thank Sage for sending me a copy.

**Solomon Hughes, *War on Terror, Inc.* (London: Verso, 2007).**



War has always made people rich: from high-tech weaponry to construction and catering, war is a commercial bonanza. But as Solomon Hughes shows in this wide-ranging chronicle, the many incarnations of the War on Terror have dramatically extended the role of private enterprise, bringing market forces and market thinking to bear on areas of public policy that were once the sole preserve and responsibility of politicians and the state. Hughes demonstrates that the private sector and its army of lobbyists and salesmen are continuously lowering the practical and moral barriers to interventions of every kind, from torture and imprisonment without trial, to blanket surveillance of the civilian population, and to outright war. Meanwhile the state is evermore evasive when it comes to taking responsibility for the practices it authorizes via agreements drawn up under a veil of 'commercial privacy,' and remains as inept as it has ever been at procuring efficiency and value for money from its contracts. Who is behind companies that reap the dividend of the War on Terror? How close are they to political decision-makers? Do they actually deliver what they are contracted to deliver? And at what moral and financial price? Hughes catalogs the appalling record of private contractors doing the dirtiest work, and asks how we can possibly justify delivering into commercial hands those area of public life which, above all others, demand the highest standards of scrupulousness and integrity.

<http://newarrivals.nlb.gov.sg/itemdetail.aspx?bid=12949206>

I thank Verso for sending me a copy.

### **Novel – Hans Fallada: Alone in Berlin**

Otto Hampel and his wife Elisa were deeply disturbed by the death of Elisa's brother during the German assault on France. With their meager means, they decided to oppose the Nazi regime. From September 1940 until their arrest at the end of September 1942, they wrote postcards and more than 200 handwritten leaflets, which they distributed to mailboxes and staircases in Berlin, often near their home in the district of Wedding. The cards and leaflets encouraged people not to donate to National Socialist public collections, to refuse to serve in the war, and to overthrow Hitler. The Hampels drove the Berlin police crazy for two years until they were finally betrayed. On October 20, 1942 the couple was arrested and stood trial before the infamous volk court of the German Reich, presided by the blood-thirsty Roland Freisler (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNi5256dhvM>). As customary in Freisler's loud trials, Otto and Elise Hampel were sentenced to death on January 22, 1943 for "demoralizing the troops" and "preparation for high treason". They were executed in the notorious Berlin-Plötzensee on April 8, 1943.

Hans Fallada lived under the Nazi regime and barely survived it. In 1944 he was forcibly committed to the psychiatric prison in Alt-Strelitz. After the war he received from a friend the Gestapo file on the Hampels and in 24 days he wrote what had become his last novel, "Jeder stirbt für sich allein", basing it on their heroic story. Fallada did not live to see the publication.



In his Introduction, Fallada apologizes to his readers that the book is largely about torture and death. About a third of this book takes place in dark places where you dread to set foot, where death is often better than living. Fallada explains that as the book deals with opponents of the Nazi regime, torture and death were common in those circles. He is not happy to paint such a somber picture but if he were to paint a livelier picture, then he had to lie.

The book is most startling. Fallada was a most talented writer who had the ability to portray people in such a vivid way that you not only see the portrayed characters in your own mind; you can also feel them. You feel their pain, their horror, their misery, their murderous thoughts and deeds (when portraying the Nazi hangmen). It was difficult for me to leave the book. The story provides a genuine picture of the lives of ordinary German citizens in the Nazi capital, people who feared their neighbours and even their own parents and children. Living under the boot of totalitarianism, when even the smallest dissent might bring death, people were fearful even to be seen reading the first lines of the rebellious postcards they found by accident. However, the postcards did have an impact on some people -- those who wished to maintain their decency and character, and those who were frustrated by the rare acts of heroism. Fallada is ingenious in portraying the hardships of life, the small people who dared to rise against the evil Nazi machinery, people who maintained their conscience against all odds, who had to live in constant fear knowing that the slightest mistake will cost them their lives.

### My New Article

“Responsibility of Net Users”, in Mark Fackler and Robert S. Fortner (eds.), *The Handbook of Global Communication and Media Ethics*, Vol. I (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 415-433.

In this paper I develop the concepts of moral responsibility and of social responsibility, adopting them to the Internet realm. I first discuss and explain the concepts and their implications on people and society. Then I address the issue of moral and social responsibilities of agents, or Net users. Next I turn to the issue of readers’ moral and social responsibilities: Responsibility of people who encounter malicious postings on the Internet, some of which might be damaging and harmful. Should they simply read the postings and move on or do something about it?

The paper is available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/rca/docs/articles/net-users-responsibility.pdf>

## Tel Aviv -- voted top world city

The Lonely Planet travel guide ranks Tel Aviv as the third best city in the world. Locals and tourists agree, though some would say it is really No. 1. Lonely Planet calls it "a modern sin city by the sea." With its 300 sunny days a year, there is no "weather-permitting" about an outing in Tel Aviv. And the possibilities are endless. From art to music, beach culture to nightlife, you can find an activity to suit every whim, mood or state of mind in the city that never goes to sleep. Some say the people are the warmest and friendliest in the world, while others say the same about the climate. In the truly diverse, 21st-century Mediterranean hub you can go to the opera or numerous museums; see shows ranging from low comedy to high Shakespeare; take in a concert or dance performance; cycle, jog or walk through ports and parks, down shady boulevards lined with cafes, and through quaint restored alleyways lined with designer boutiques. Or you can rummage through flea markets and vintage shops; explore outdoor fairs; lounge on the beach; check out restored period structures; visit galleries and exhibitions; enjoy the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Bauhaus architecture; sample myriad cuisines, local bars and clubs and quality Israeli wines — it is the New York, London and Paris of the Middle East.



Indeed, Tel Aviv is a wonderful, buzzing city, a city that never stops. It is a very cultural city, with three leading theatres; one opera house; the Israeli Philharmonic; many cinemas that show also quality artistic movies; wonderful music hubs; book stores are everywhere; great basketball and a number of football teams. For me, Tel Aviv is in the top two cities in the world, with Washington DC. A justified vote.

The Tel Aviv promenade is one of the prettiest I have ever seen, among the most beautiful together with the Rio promenade. It stretches from the Tel Aviv old harbour in the north to the old Jaffa port in the south. You can walk on the golden sandy beach, swim in the Mediterranean Sea and enjoy the local delicatessen (don't miss the grilled fish). Some of my friends know this route. I have taken quite a few of them on my VIP personal tour, highlighting the historic places and my very personal special places in the city of my childhood and youth.



This year, an increasing number of Russian tourists mix with the usual French crowd on the Tel Aviv beach, enjoying the sun and the lovely promenade.



See <http://www.world-tour.co.il/2011/05/tel-aviv-voted-top-world-city/>  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyKFoi2gfME&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyKFoi2gfME&feature=player_embedded)

## **Panoramic View of the Kotel (Western Wall)**

[http://www.360tr.net/kudus/aglamaduvar\\_tr/index.html](http://www.360tr.net/kudus/aglamaduvar_tr/index.html)

### **Personal Story 1**

I sat at a small Ramat-Gan coffee house. A large black BMW stopped in front of me. Three young men jumped out. One of them stepped into the coffee-shop, where he was greeted by a fourth man. Three of the men sat at a table next to me. The fourth guy stood three meters away, watching the traffic. He obviously enjoys spending excessive amount of time in the gym. Not the person you would like to meet in a dark alley.

Two people on a motorcycle pass by. One of them takes out a machine gun and starts spraying all the people in the small coffee shop.

The first paragraph is true. The second, luckily, did not take place. However, similar incidents did take place in Israel in the past. Indeed, one of them happened not far from this particular coffee shop. I did not take any chances. I left the scene as soon as I realized that not-so-kosher business meeting was taking place in front of my eyes.

### **Personal Story 2**

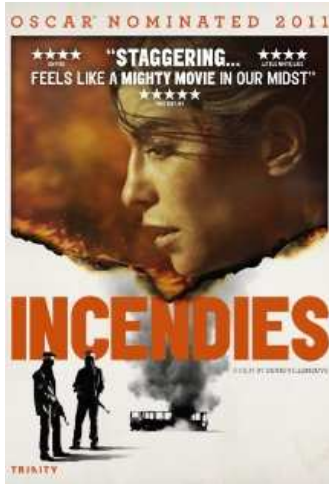
Discussion with my cousin S who became very religious (“chazra be’tshuva”). The subject: Visiting my parents’ graveyard, and whether her mother (my mom’s older sister) should come.

S: You cannot visit the grave whenever you feel like it. Such visits should be made in a timely fashion. You should wait for one year; otherwise this disturbs the spirit of the dead people. They cannot rest in peace. Your mother, who is watching you, is highly troubled by your wish to come to her resting place now (six months after her death). It is not good for her. There are appropriate regulations, commands from God, which no one should bypass. You cannot simply come to the grave whenever you feel like it. It is not appropriate. You are creating havoc.

I was speechless.

I should note that my parents were secular; I am secular, and S’s mother is secular. Small, unimportant details. There is no Live and Let Live when we live. And there is no Live and Let Live after we live/leave.

### **Movie of the Month – Incendies 2010**



A mother dies. Her two children are called to her lawyer, where he reads them her will. The mother instructs her children to find their father, and their brother. This last wish sends the twins, Jeanne and Simon, on a journey to the Middle East in search of their troubled and most tragic roots. They learn about their mother. They learn a chapter in their intimate history. Adapted from Wajdi Mouawad's acclaimed play, *Incendies* tells the powerful and moving tale of two young adults' voyage to the core of deep-rooted hatred, never-ending wars. This journey also teaches them a lesson about forgiveness, courage and love.

Not an easy film; yet it is captivating and touching. 4 stars in Rafi's 1-5 scale.

See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDf-XuYid1A>

## Monthly Poem

### Summer in the South



The Oriole sings in the greening grove  
 As if he were half-way waiting,  
 The rosebuds peep from their hoods of green,  
 Timid, and hesitating.  
 The rain comes down in a torrent sweep  
 And the nights smell warm and pinety,  
 The garden thrives, but the tender shoots  
 Are yellow-green and tiny.  
 Then a flash of sun on a waiting hill,  
 Streams laugh that erst were quiet,  
 The sky smiles down with a dazzling blue  
 And the woods run mad with riot.

## Paul Laurence Dunbar

[More poems from Paul Laurence Dunbar](#)

### Musical Moment

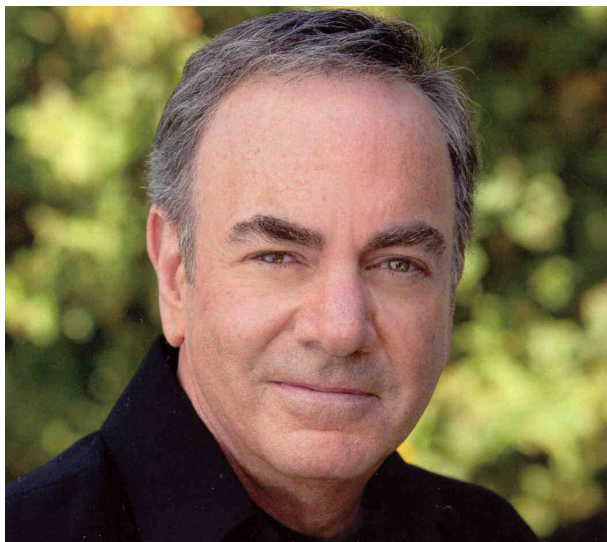
In 2007, when I was a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center, the Center held its annual talent show. One of the highlights was a song, performed by three young female workers of the Center. This was **Gladys Knight & The Pips - Midnight Train To Georgia Live (1976)**. They sang it beautifully, with passion and light-heartedness. I liked the song, but since then the song evokes many good memories. Here it is in the original: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReaRrmPQhkc&feature=related>

Enjoy. It is a true gem.

### Gems of the Month

#### 1. Neil Diamond

I love and appreciate great voices. Last month I was fortunate to see one of my all-time heroes in concert. Neil Diamond is one of the most talented song-writers and musicians who ever walked this planet. In addition to his extraordinary skills in composing some of the greatest songs ever, Mr Diamond has a wonderful, deep and rich voice. Diamond is not just a name. The beauty about this guy is that he is a genius, he knows he is a genius, yet he does not brag about it.



The concert was simply superb. More than two hours of Diamonds. One after the other, most of his greatest hits.

Here is one of them, one of my very favourites,

#### **I Am I Said**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INdp-8P859o>

And another wonderful song, **Play Me:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEbjumu\\_ouU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEbjumu_ouU&feature=related)

## 2. Majorca

My family and I went for vacation to Majorca. We stayed in Puerto Pollenca and visited Pollenca, Alcudia and Puerto Alcudia. Majorca is a lovely island, and the towns offer beaches and old, Roman style neighbourhoods. We had much needed rest.

I love islands, and water, and boats.



Puerto Pollenca beach



Pollenca



Old town of Alcudia



Local castle

### 3. Rivka Zohar

I went to see two great singers: Danny Litany, the best Blues singer in Israel (who should sing more than speak), and Rivka Zohar who sang some of the most beautiful Hebrew songs ever. Zohar retired from singing some twenty years ago, and now decided to resume performing. She still has this strong, enchanting, powerful voice. A true talent that stems from a fragile, bird-like body and soul.



### **Thank you**

Visiting Israel this time was different: First time without my parents. First time without a home. I wish to thank all the wonderful people who welcomed me and made the visit easier for me: Mira and Yizhar Nozik, Gila and Reuven Yagoda, Mira and Ofer Harel, Pupi and Zvi Skladman, Karin and Avi Ohri, Sharon Reiss, Ori Arbel-Ganz, Iris and Ofer Davidi, Ilan Saban, Asa Kasher, Keren Eyal, Noam Lemelshtreich and Betty Basan.

### **Light Side**

Q: Why are Jewish men circumcised?

A: Because Jewish women don't like anything that Isn't 20% off.

A Polish immigrant went to the DMV to apply for a driver's license. First, of course, he had to take an eye sight test. The optician showed him a card with the letters

'C Z W I X N O S T A C Z.'

'Can you read this?' the optician asked.

'Read it?' the Polish guy replied, 'I know the guy.'

Peace and love.

Yours as ever,

Rafi

My last communications are available on <http://almagor.blogspot.com/>  
Earlier posts at my home page: <http://hcc.haifa.ac.il/~rca/>

People wishing to subscribe to this Monthly Newsletter are welcome to e-mail me at r.cohen-almagor@hull.ac.uk  
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