



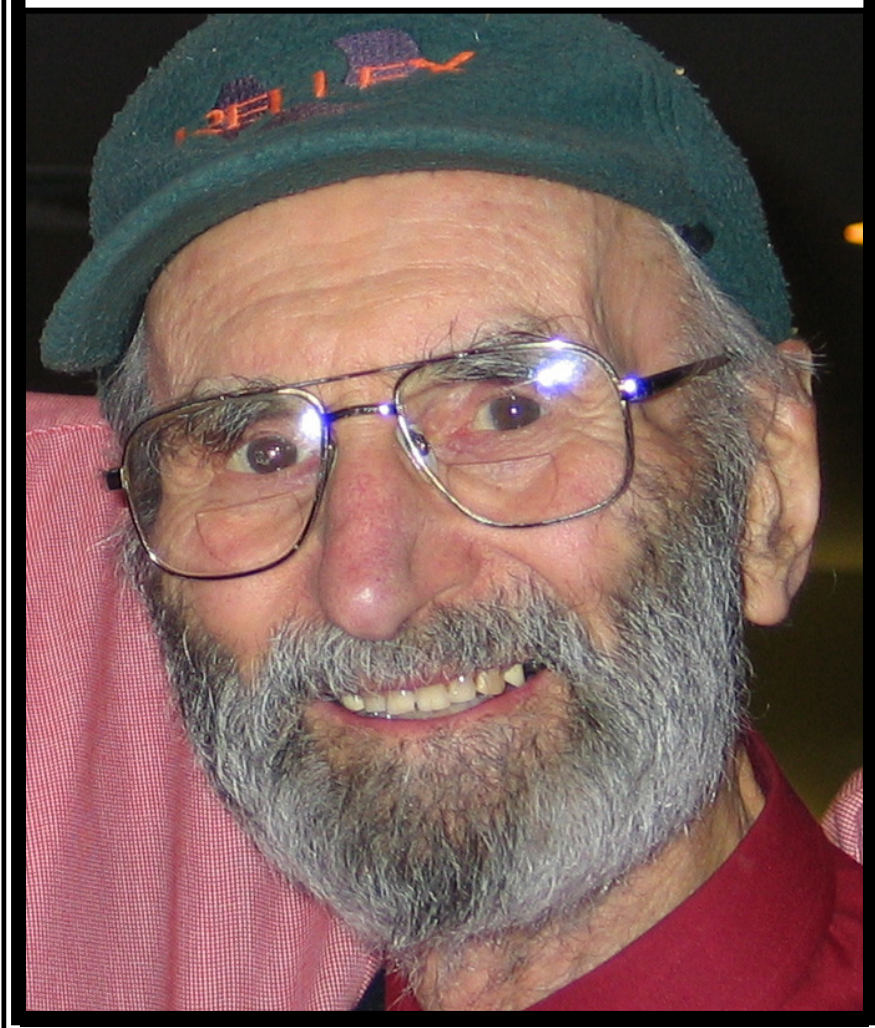
AJDS Newsletter

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June 2010

Norman Rothfield 1912-2010



We will miss you Norman

Norman Rothfield, who passed away on 4 June aged 98, was a very special person. Just how special became obvious within a few hours of the announcement of his death when tributes started flowing in. And what a range it was -- from Palestinian activists to members of the community leadership, everyone felt the need to tell us more about the man we have lost.

Norman was special not only because he was good and generous, well informed and erudite, witty and humorous, not to mention clever and hardworking. These, and others, are all traits that others share. It was not even his amazing physical prowess -- not many people are still able to play tennis at 98. What made him special was the way all these attributes combined to make an exceptional human being.

Norman Rothfield was born on 26 January 1912 in Newcastle-on-Tyne and spent his early years in that city. As all who knew him realised, he was a man of ideas. Politics was a major driving force in his life (even his autobiography, *Many Paths to Peace*, is subtitled *the political memoirs of Norman Rothfield*.) So it is not surprising to find out that he became political at a young age. He discovered socialism at the age of 14 when he read George Bernard Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*. His interest in reading about ideas continued for the next 84 years. Norman never confined his reading to dull and boring tracts, although he read those too. He was interested in many aspects of life. But one that endeared itself to him was

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The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the AJDS. These are expressed in its own statements.

What we stand for:

- Social justice and human rights.
- Opposition to the vilification and mandatory detention of asylum seekers.
- The struggle against racism, antisemitism in particular.
- Non-violent paths to conflict resolution.
- In line with this, the search for a negotiated solution to the Israel/Palestinian conflict.
- Equal rights, including land rights and justice, for Indigenous Australians.

Why we criticise

A statement by Meretz USA

Meretz USA's statement earlier this week on the Gaza flotilla incident generated plenty of strong reaction. We appreciate all your feedback during these trying times.

Most wrote to express appreciation for our nuanced perspective that fell prey neither to the Scylla of "Israel can do no right", nor the Charybdis of "Israel can do no wrong".

There were, however, a few individuals who seemed to feel that we had presented Israel as the sole villain in an incredibly complex situation. That, of course, is far from our belief.

The disquiet voiced by these individuals emanates from their deep and understandable concern that Israel is growing increasingly isolated in the international community. This is a concern that we share. The question, however, is what can be done about this ill-wind.

As opposed to some in the American Jewish community, who clamour for better, slicker PR, or who insist that the cure is wall-to-wall Jewish solidarity with Israel's government, we believe that Israel can start to win hearts and minds by adopting better policy.

The Oslo process of the 1990s, for example, for all its imperfections, was an important demonstration of the world's willingness to embrace an Israel that strives for peace and works together with the international community.

During that time, Israel established or renewed ties with over three dozen countries, including powerhouses such as China and India, and many members of the Arab League. Far from being boycotted, Israel became a focus for international investment, its economy took off, and, on the cultural scene, dozens of performers began stretching their European tours to include Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

In other words, there have always been provocative, anti-Zionist, delegitimising activists, but they don't gain much traction when Israel offers a credible and legitimate vision of peace.

Sadly, delegitimisers of Israel have been able to feast on some of the current Israeli government's gross diplomatic blunders: The televised hazing of Turkey's ambassador; the public embarrassment of America's Vice President during his trip in March; the Mossad's reported use of forged British and Australian passports for a hit squad in Dubai; the Foreign Minister's decision to broadcast his boycott of the President of Brazil.

But the more fundamental problem lies not in these examples of pugnacity and diplomatic insensitivity but in the disappointment created by a Netanyahu government that, from day one, invalidated the results of the Annapolis conference, dissociated from the offers made by Prime Minister Olmert, and vowed to expand settlement construction; and that also insists on continuing an oppressive blockade policy which has clearly outlived its usefulness -- if useful it ever was.

So with the government in Jerusalem showing no appetite for what Ariel Sharon once called "painful concessions", it's sad, but not surprising, that most of the world is no longer giving Israel the benefit of the doubt.

And that's dangerous -- because Israel faces a growing movement eager to mine worldwide frustration over the country's West Bank and Gaza policies in order to stoke opposition to its very existence.

So we don't criticise Israel because we wish to do her harm. We criticise because we know that good PR can never gussy up bad policy. And because wall-to-wall solidarity is only as good as the policy it seeks to defend.

Israel's isolation, after all, is not inevitable or etched in stone. It can be countered by brave Israeli diplomacy that offers necessary, far-reaching compromises while also protecting Israel's most fundamental interests. We believe the American Jewish community has an obligation to say as much because the Israeli people deserve better.

We criticise, in other words, because we care.

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science, particularly evolution. His other main book, *The Trial of God*, was inspired by the way he was won over to rational thought and the scientific method, in particular Darwin's theory of evolution.

Norman never toyed with ideas for ideas' sake. More than anything else he was a doer. Even at school he acted upon his thoughts and ideas, starting a school magazine. If any one of us who collaborated with him were to be asked what was his most distinctive feature, then the answer would have to be his steely determination. His was the combination of the ideas and doing something about them. More than one member of the AJDS leadership over the years has been known to observe that if they received a phone call in which Norman started the conversation by saying: "I think we should do such and such", they knew that whatever followed would probably come to fruition. Norman was never big on ceremony and small talk on the phone; he liked to get straight into the action.

In his late teenage years Norman joined the Socialist League, a ginger group that operated within the British Labour Party. For the next eight decades he remained associated with the movement, transferring his allegiance to the Australian Labor Party after emigrating in 1938. Before leaving the UK, Norman had the distinction of becoming the youngest local councillor in the UK, having been elected for the London Borough of Marylebone in 1934 at the ripe old age of 22. While he was involved with the ALP, even playing a key role in its radio program, he only ran twice for public office: he stood for the Federal seat of Balaclava in 1958; in that campaign he worked closely with Dr Jim Cairns, later Australia's Deputy Prime Minister. (When Cairns died in 2003 the Australian newspaper turned to Norman to write his obituary.) He ran for the seat of Ivanhoe a few years later.

For Norman, Labour politics were forever intertwined with peace politics. His generous contributions have helped many a peace movement campaign but other causes such as Indigenous Australians also benefited from his generosity. A central idea of his life, however, was the concept of a Jewish homeland. He became involved with Zionism while at university and his interest in what later became Israel never waned. Norman com-

bined this with his interest in left-wing politics. He became an executive member of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Antisemitism and later, chairman of the Public Relations Committee of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies. His connections inside the ALP came in handy. He never had to lobby Australia's Foreign Minister, Herbert V Evatt, who chaired the UN discussions on the partition resolution for the simple reason that Evatt had already been won to the cause. But later, after Israel's declaration of independence, Norman's connections and skills were utilised on behalf of the nascent state.

Norman was lucky enough and perceptive enough to make an even a bigger contribution to Israel's cause. He realised long before others that Israel cannot have peace if the Palestinians did not have their own state. He established the journal *Paths to Peace*, which campaigned vigorously for a negotiated settlement to the Middle East conflict, and appeared regularly from 1974 to 1986 as well as on its radio program on 3CR. In 1984 he was a founding member of the Australian Jewish Democratic Society (AJDS), and was active in it almost to his last day. His strong views did not endear himself to those in the community leadership who followed the zigs and zags of their mentors in Israel. Nor were they popular with those on the left who regarded Zionism as a form of racism and conducted a campaign against giving AJDS

airtime on 3CR. His persistence had an impact. I can personally vouch for several of my left wing friends who came to see things his way because of the tenacious, and intelligent way in which Norman presented his arguments. Norman's tenacity was helped by his physical vigour. His sporting activity was legendary, making it all the way to the 7.30 Report. It is also the subject of my favourite anecdote about him. The AJDS committee had



Norman and Evelyn Rothfield

planned a proper occasion to celebrate his 90th birthday. We even lined up Phillip Adams, only to discover that Norman had other plans – He was skiing in Canada, for our own season wasn't enough for him.

Even then Norman had another secret weapon, whom he recognised provided the key to his success -- his wife of 72 years, Evelyn Rothfield, a peace campaigner and writer in her own right who passed away in 2006.

Sol Salbe

A celebration of Norman Rothfield's life

3.00pm, Sunday 4 July, St Kilda Town Hall, Brighton Rd St Kilda

An early RSVP to the family would be appreciated, either by email to normanrothfield@bigpond.com or by phone to messagebank at 9482 5574

The Renate Kamener Oration

Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University



Living ethically in a divided world

Sunday 11 July, 7.15 for 7.30pm

Leo Baeck Centre, 33 Harp Rd East Kew

\$15 admission

Proceeds will go to the establishment of a scholarship for indigenous students at the University of Melbourne
Additional donations welcomed.

Limited parking is available behind the Leo Baeck Centre - otherwise park in side streets (but not on Harp Rd itself)

Please RSVP Tom Wolkenberg email lintom@bigpond.com
or phone 9885 6260 so that we can assess numbers

Australian Jewish Democratic Society

www.ajds.org.au

A growing source of news, current opinion and debate, along with back issues of this *Newsletter* and a host of links and other features.

Use it and stay on top of the issues important to you.

Dismantling some Gaza-Israel myths

Dahlia Scheindlin

Certain perspectives on the flotilla, Gaza and Israel have taken on mythological proportions but have little logical force, and they are an obstacle to moving forward. Here are some myths, dismantled.

1. "There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza #1" (as a reason why the blockade is not so bad). There is some humanitarian crisis in Gaza; Israel lets in limited, insufficient, arbitrarily determined supplies and a thriving tunnel business provides the rest, but eats away at any semblance of a legitimate economy, increases lawlessness and becomes an employer for overqualified Gaza graduates who should be the next generation of leaders. Starvation is only one kind of crisis: being trapped and immobilised, with severely limited goods and options, is another.

2. "There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza #2" (as a reason why the ships didn't need to be let in). The ships needed to be let in because they were a symbolic act of protest against a policy that is deemed an unfair, unlawful and immoral violation of the human rights of the people of Gaza. People have a right to protest both the policy and its results.

3. "The ships were not intended to provide aid, but to cause a provocation." This is an absurd argument and I am not the first to point this out. There is no disagreement. The ships were intended to both provide aid and provoke Israel into exposing the bankruptcy of its Gaza policy (which -- like the flotilla situation itself -- is lose-lose for Israel, as it fails to provide internal security and is damaging internationally). The Exodus too sought to both get the refugees into Palestine, and focus world attention on Britain's post-war Jewish immigration limitations.

4. "The ships were equivalent to Karine A", the shipload of Iranian weapons bound for the Palestinian Authority, which Israel intercepted in 2002. Or, "allowing sea access to Gaza is an umbilical cord to Iran." So far no weapons cache has been reported, except for the light weaponry [from the kitchen – Ed] on the Mavi Marmara used in the confrontation. The WMD fiasco might be a better analogy. The Iran excuse against opening up access to Gaza is false, since eventually Gaza will be opened as part of a political conflict-resolution process, and Iran will still exist.

5. "Israel disengaged from Gaza and all we got were 12,000 lousy Qassam rockets." This is a very prominent, very dangerous myth that is nearly meaningless because it blots out huge chunks of reality. Israeli settlements were dismantled in 2005; the word "disengaged" is inappropriate since Israel has been constantly engaged since then. Reciprocal attacks through to June



Gilad Shalit

2006 escalated during two weeks in mid-June when 18 Palestinians were killed; two weeks later two soldiers were killed and Corporal Gilad Shalit was abducted; Israel re-invaded Gaza with air and ground forces, bombing infrastructure and cutting electricity in an offensive that lasted through November 2006; there was another air and ground incursion in March 2008 in which over 100 Palestinians died. Following the 2007 Hamas takeover, Israel imposed a blockade on movement of people and goods, which has lasted for three of the five years since the settlements were dismantled. Israel controls land and sea crossings except for Rafah (controlled by Egypt). In June 2008 Israel and Hamas agreed on a six-month ceasefire in return for easing the blockade. Hamas claims Israel did not comply, and refused to renew the ceasefire but did renew Qassam attacks. Rocket fire has been ongoing except during the ceasefire and reduced following the January 2009 Cast Lead Operation.

6. "Israel is no longer responsible for Gaza -- the Palestinians are." The flotilla disaster highlights the fact that Israel controls Gaza. See above. Israeli officials now constantly repeat that Israel's "sovereignty" was threatened or violated by the flotilla -- so even Israel admits that what pertains to Gaza pertains to its sovereignty.

7. "Hamas is a group of evil terrorists, sworn to Israel's destruction, cynically abusing their people, stifling human rights and oppressing women." Partly -- maybe even mostly true. But mainly, this is an internal Palestinian issue, neither Israel's moral nor political responsibility. And by now, it is irrelevant as a justification for Israel's Gaza policy and irrelevant for Israel's best interests: getting out.

8. The last is not an Israeli myth but relates to the flotilla: "The people on the ships were peace-seekers." Peace means bringing two sides together. If that's what they were, the activists could have taken aid or letters to abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit too. Further, peace-makers would not have tarnished their mission with what could turn out to be hired thugs. Political provocation is legitimate. But they would have been far more effective if they hadn't added more hypocrisy and cynicism to a region that has enough already.

The events can't be undone but the myths can. Then we can try to salvage some political opportunities from the wreckage. Here are two simple recommendations. Israel should heed the unbearable international pressure and end the Gaza blockade. It has failed everyone -- Palestinians and Israelis alike. Israel must stop dealing with Gaza in isolation from the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and get working on the latter. To true peace-makers: keep your hands clean and your intentions pure, or you risk alienating dissenters who do not agree with what the government is doing in our name.

Dahlia Scheindlin is a public opinion research consultant and freelance writer living in Tel Aviv. Originally published by the *Huffington Post*.



Dahlia Scheindlin

Israel's Gaza policy has strengthened Hamas

Gershon Baskin

Hamas is stronger and richer and Israel is isolated and condemned by the international community.

The recent attempts to break the naval blockade of Gaza are the strongest evidence that the occupation has never ended. When the Sharon government completed the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni planned to announce to the UN General Assembly in September 2005 that Israel no longer occupied Gaza and that the international body is now responsible for the welfare of its people. The Legal Department of the Foreign Ministry informed her that she could not make that claim. From a legal point of view, as long as Israel controls Gaza's territorial waters, its airspace and its external boundaries, it remains legally responsible for Gaza as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In accordance with international law, Israel has the right to stop shipments of goods heading to Gaza. Part III, section 59 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (on occupied



Gaza ruins. The reconstruction of Gaza requires a huge amount of cement and other building material, none of which has been allowed in.

territory) states: "A power granting free passage to consignments on their way to territory occupied by an adverse party to the conflict shall have the right to search the consignments, to regulate their passage according to prescribed times and routes, and to be reasonably satisfied... that these consignments are to be used for the relief of the needy population..."

The provocation of the Free Gaza campaign is not directed at the sea blockade per se, but rather at the economic siege of Gaza. There has been a sea blockade on Gaza pretty much since 1949. The Egyptian military authorities in control of Gaza from 1949 to 1967 did not allow it to develop a sea port. Since the Israeli occupation in 1967 there has not been a port of Gaza, although there were plans to build a deep seaport in Gaza as part of the peace process. An international airport in Gaza was built and operated from 1998 to 2001, when the IAF bombed it during the second Intifada. The Gaza airport was not used for cargo, but there were plans to expand it and to create a mechanism for international monitors to prevent the importation of weapons and explosives.

On 15 November 2005 Israel signed two agreements (with the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, the European Union and the United States) regulating the flow of goods and people in and out of Gaza via Israel and Egypt. The Movement and Access Agreement states its purpose to be "to promote peaceful economic development and improve the humanitarian situation on the ground." The agreement created mechanisms for allowing movement in and out of Gaza and even between the West Bank and Gaza. The Rafah Agreement regulated the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt. After the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, the government of Israel unilaterally cancelled these agreements. In reality the agreements ceased to be in use after the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections of January 2006.

In 1995 one of the senior Palestinian military commanders in Gaza invited me to spend a day with him. In his jeep, with two other military vehicles as escorts, we drove all over Gaza, protected by his Kalashnikov carrying soldiers. After dinner in his home, drinking Arabic coffee, he said to me, "I have something that I would like you to tell Prime Minister [Yitzhak] Rabin. There are at least 35 tunnels under the Philadelphi route smuggling weapons and explosives into Gaza." I asked him why he didn't use his forces to shut them down.

He told me that his hands were tied, but if Israel did not close them down, it would all eventually explode in our (collective) face. I reported that information to Rabin immediately.

Unilateral breach

Since the unilateral Israeli decision to fully breach the Movement and Access Agreement and the Agreement on Rafah and impose a full economic siege on Gaza, more than 1000 tunnels have been operating. The direct result has been the empowering of Hamas and the filling of its coffers. Through the control of the underground economy, Hamas has remained in full control over the territory. About 90 per cent of the factories in Gaza are closed and unemployment is about 70 per cent. Factory owners cannot get their raw materials in or their finished products out.

Israel does allow "humanitarian goods" into Gaza via various crossings. There is no hunger there; Israel is very careful about not creating a humanitarian crisis. How is that done? The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has set 1800 calories per person per day as the minimum amount of food necessary to prevent hunger. On that basis, the IDF has calculated how much food must enter Gaza every day based on the size of the population so that Israel fulfils its legal responsibilities as the occupier under the Geneva Conventions. In addition, Israel allows fresh foodstuffs to enter based on the surpluses that exist as a result of the strong agriculture lobby in Israel – Gaza is a significant market for Israeli agricultural products.

So rest assured, Palestinians in Gaza are getting enough calories. But there are serious problems of malnutrition,

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Gershon Baskin

Melbourne community cajoled to defend Israel, again

Les Rosenblatt

Some 300-350 people attended an information session on the Gaza flotilla organised by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) and the Zionist Council of Victoria (ZCV). It was a case of preaching to an unrepresentative number of people who were already converted. There were no familiar faces, and I've lived among Melbourne's Jewish community for more than 60 years.

Sam Tatarka, PR Chairperson for the ZCV, got things going by reminding us of the Goldstone Report and media coverage of the Cast Lead offensive in Gaza in 2008/9 as examples of "obscene" reporting with which Israel and its supporters had now, once again, to contend. Zionist Federation of Australia President Phillip Chester showed us the video clip of Israeli military personnel being assaulted as they attempted to board the Mavi Marmara flotilla vessel where the killing of the activists occurred. It was the familiar clip with the yellow circles and captions explaining what was happening from the standpoint of the Israeli military. Chester then told us that Gazans were not really interested in rebuilding Gaza and had rejected offers of assistance from prestigious and credible financial sources such as James Wolfensohn. A blockade was necessary to counter the threat from Hamas. Israel had perhaps erred in trying to avoid accusations of excessive force by using only lightly armed interceptors to halt the flotilla. It was worrying that Turkey had been lost as an important ally and, just perhaps, the Israeli Foreign Minister had been a bit insensitive in remarks he made about Turkey. But the Jewish community needed to show its vigilance and unity in defending Israel against all its detractors and needed to make its voice heard as widely and as frequently as possible on all media platforms, including Facebook, talk-back radio, emails and perhaps, rallies in the streets, provided that there was a high probability of the intended message getting undistorted to the Australian public.

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mainly as a result of a lack of protein in their diets – the main source of protein was fish, but because of the coastal blockade and Israeli fears of smuggling weapons via the sea, fishermen are not allowed to go out to where the fish can be found. There are also serious health problems as a result of the water, which is not fit for human consumption.

Because of the tunnel-based economy there are no real shortages in Gaza, but with some 70 per cent unemployment, people do not have the money to purchase those goods. The only group not hurt by the siege is Hamas and its supporters.

There is a new class of nouveau riche, the Hamas operatives who control the tunnels. Hamas even created a Ministry for Tunnel Affairs where it collects taxes from the tunnels and even leases them by the hour, day or week.

Israel's policy has empowered Hamas and has weakened the working class. Somehow, its brilliant generals and military analysts actually believe this policy will weaken public support for Hamas and they credit the significant decline in support for the group to the siege policy. This is far from the truth, but the desire and the need to justify a

And then began a vocal upsurge of revulsion and venom towards the *Age* and Fairfax coverage, particularly, but not only, that of Paul McGeough. No *Age* journalist who had a Palestinian spouse was credible. Speakers on the panel and from the floor repeatedly denounced the *Age* for misinformation, bias, fabrication, lies and almost every journalistic calumny imaginable. Searle revealed that there'd been a concerted campaign to put pressure on the *Age* (but hadn't had his calls returned) and the audience were exhorted to cancel their subscriptions, and desist from advertising in the paper. It was even suggested that the *Age* might be guilty of infringing the human rights of the community through indirectly weakening its security.

We were lectured on how to deflect arguments away from questioning Israeli behaviour in favour of always focusing on aggression directed at Israelis and the need for Israeli self-defence and security. An ex-Israeli military man explained that it was necessary to stop instant coffee and coriander going into Gaza as these had strong aromas and could deflect sensitivity towards less aromatic but more dangerous items. He instanced a rocket propelled grenade he'd once found in a Palestinian ambulance.

It was dispiriting to hear the fear, anger, insecurity, defensiveness, and denial of these "community leaders" and being hectoring by them on how to apply community media and public pressure in fiercely unreserved support of Israel. Never a murmur of questioning the wisdom of Israel alienating its allies whilst enforcing a strategically ineffective and tactically destructive "blockade" nor of acknowledging its dreadful humanitarian and legal consequences. It was all about withstanding the current media siege while attempting to shoot the messenger.



Les Rosenblatt

policy which is so blatantly and morally wrong must have blinded their ability to see what is really happening and what the siege policy has turned us into.

What Israel should be doing is demanding that the movement and access and the Rafah agreements go back to full implementation. That would mean a return of Palestinian Authority troops and officials loyal to Mahmoud Abbas to the crossings and the return of the European monitoring force supervising the crossings, with Israeli agreement and real-time closed-circuit Israeli oversight. Israel can keep the sea blockade on until there is a peace arrangement, but with the land crossings reopened, life in Gaza will be normalised, the working people will go back to work and Hamas will lose more public support.

The economic siege was meant to weaken Hamas and to apply pressure on it to release Gilad Shalit. The policy has accomplished neither. Instead, Hamas is stronger and richer and Israel is isolated and condemned by the international community.

Gershon Baskin is co-CEO of the Israel/Palestine Centre for Research and Information (www.ipcri.org) and an elected member of the leadership of the Green Movement political party.

Farewell Petro Georgiou

Nearly three years ago we published Kim Beazley's and Carmen Lawrence's valedictory speeches. We were not endorsing their political party, but felt they had an important message to deliver. While we suspect that the preferences of the vast majority of our members ended up with the Australian Labor Party, we recognise that there are good people on the other side of politics as well. In recent years there has been none better than Petro Georgiou, whose stance on asylum seekers puts many members of the government to shame. We publish excerpts from his valedictory speech.

In recent months, there has been an efflorescence within the party of the right to dissent – dissent over climate change and alcopops come to mind. I may differ with my colleagues on their position, but I unequivocally endorse their right to dissent. Hopefully, we will never again hear a member of the Federal Parliamentary Liberal Party brand colleagues “political terrorists” because they took a stand on principle.

It is my conviction that public policy is served when Members of Parliament feel able to speak publicly about deeply felt concerns, even when their views do not conform with those of the majority of their colleagues. I believe that the public good was promoted by the attempt by myself and others to have the Commonwealth intervene to override the Northern Territory laws which jailed children for minor infractions such as stealing a bottle of spring water, laws which fell particularly harshly on indigenous children. We did not succeed in getting the laws overridden. We did achieve the establishment of diversionary programs which effectively displaced jail.

I believe that Australia benefited from the reforms that flowed from the attempt of a number of us to introduce Private Members' bills reforming the treatment of asylum seekers. Children and families were taken out from behind razor wire. The Ombudsman was made responsible for publicly reporting on people being detained for prolonged periods. Thousands of people on temporary protection visas were given permanent protection. I believe that the resistance to draconian aspects of the anti-terrorist laws, and the introduction of a Private Member's Bill to establish an independent reviewer of the terrorist laws, which was in essence taken up by the Labor government after much reluctance, served liberal principles well.

Parliamentary reforms

I do not pretend that these efforts had anything like total success. The Northern Territory laws were not struck down. The policy of mandatory detention was not abolished by either the Howard or the Rudd governments. What did happen, however, was that the compromises achieved made a significant difference to the lives of thousands of vulnerable men, women and children.

Mr Speaker, for much of my life I believed in the inevitability of progress. The reality has been that many of the things that I believed were embedded parts of our polity – multiculturalism, inclusive Australian citizenship, the protections of civil rights – have been rolled back.

Also rolled back has been a more decent treatment of asylum seekers. Until a few months ago I believed that the reforms made by the Howard and the Rudd Govern-

ment meant that we had irreversibly turned the corner.

I wrote that we were closing a dark chapter in our history. This chapter had seen men, women and children seeking refuge in our country incarcerated; innocent people imprisoned for periods longer than convicted rapists, robbers and kidnappers. Escapees from persecution were demonised. Detention centres traumatised not just detainees but their guards. That chapter has been reopened.

Regression has become the order of the day. With an increase in boat arrivals, asylum seekers are being subjected to increasingly virulent attacks. The Labor Government has frozen the processing of Afghani and Sri Lankan asylum seekers, and is reopening the Curtin detention centre, historically the most notorious detention centre, a place of despair and self harm.

Opposition policies would turn back boats, process asylum seekers in undisclosed third countries, and restore the destructive temporary protection visas. These policies are cruel. They do not have my support.

Regression

This regression does not reflect credit on either side of federal politics. Vulnerable people are again being made into a football to be kicked around in the interests of partisan politics. This is despite the facts and the best values of our society.

The fact is, Australia's punitive approach did not deter people seeking to come to Australia. Mandatory detention, charging asylum seekers for the cost of their detention, the introduction of temporary protection visas and the Pacific Solution did not deter.

After mandatory detention was introduced, boat arrivals increased. After temporary protection visas were introduced, boat arrivals increased. Most of the people subjected to the Pacific Solution were found to be refugees and resettled in Australia and New Zealand. We have not lost control of our borders. People smugglers do not determine who comes into Australia and who doesn't.

We can support orderly processes; we can warn people against people smugglers and risking their lives on unseaworthy boats. We have to realise, however, that escaping from persecution is not an orderly process. Desperate people do take desperate measures. Beyond the arguments about deterrence and what causes what, however, is a deeper issue.

It goes to our obligations. I believe we have a fundamental obligation as a nation. That obligation is to not further harm those who bring themselves into our orbit of responsibility seeking safe haven.

We should not, as Australians, compound the persecution of genuine refugees, delaying their processing, locking them up in unnamed third countries or keeping them in permanent insecurity on temporary protection visas.

I once said to journalist Michael Gordon that “in life there are many things that you'd like to walk past and not no-



Petro Georgiou

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Why the flotilla attack proves me right about Israel/Palestine

Wayne Myers

There can be no doubt that Israel's botched attack on the humanitarian activist flotilla marks a significant turning point in the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Yet commentators from both sides, as well as those trying to take a more balanced view, have all missed the most important point. What the attack shows, plain as day, is that my own opinions on the issue are the only correct ones, and everyone else is painfully wrong. The failure of everyone else to see how right I am can lead only to tragic consequences.

First, a little historical background. The side of the conflict that I support comprises nothing but honourable and courageous men and women. They are motivated by nothing more than a desire to defend their own families and rich culture. Their cause is right and these people are completely justified in every action, no matter what they do. By contrast, the other side is composed entirely of amoral murderous thugs who will stop at nothing to achieve their ends. Far from achieving a just settlement and a lasting peace, these thugs are only interested in perpetuating the cycle of violence and brutality.

I will admit that there are some innocent casualties on the other side of the conflict, and this is to be regretted, but let us look more closely. Just how innocent are they? It is clear that these people are giving succour to what is nothing more than terrorism, plain and simple. Their losses frankly pale into insignificance when compared to the tragedy of the truly innocent lives that are blighted daily on the side that I support. These are just ordinary people trying to go about their daily business in the face of increasingly vicious and brutal violence.

That violence must stop and it must stop now. Of course, until it does, it is hard to see how the side that I support can be blamed for responding to violence with violence. Everyone has the right to defend themselves.

This is the context in which the flotilla attack must be understood.

It should by now be blatantly obvious that every account of the attack given by the other side of the conflict is nothing

but a pack of lies designed to pull the wool over the eyes of the international community. This will not work. The facts of the matter are plain – yet again it is those on my side of the conflict that have been brutally wronged. It is hard to understand how anyone cannot see this. The voices of those who support the other side of the conflict would be tiresome were they not so dangerous. The result is business as usual, as a cowardly British government and utterly ineffectual UN capitulate to those voices in an entirely predictable way. This is nothing more than a recipe for more violence and bloodshed.



What you see in this image is very much dependent on your take of what happened on 31 May.

The biased reporting from the BBC should come as a surprise to no-one. Time and again they give those on the other side of the conflict an easy ride. At the same time they twist the words of those speaking for my side in order to make them look ridiculous, belittling the importance of our just cause. This is an insult -- the facts of the situation are clear and easily found on Google. Yet the BBC seems to ignore facts, preferring instead to act as if they are actually part of

the other side's own propaganda machine. Is this what we pay our licence fee for?

The newspapers are no better. Only yesterday the *Guardian* printed an editorial article in the Comment Is Free section of its website which made me more angry than anything I have read on this subject in weeks. Unbelievable though it may seem, this article was actually trying to defend the indefensible. The piece made it seem as if the side of the conflict which I do not support had some kind of justification for its actions. There may be merit in this kind of thing as an abstract thought experiment, but not at a time like this when lives are at stake. It is sad to find such sheer moral bankruptcy from a paper with a once proud tradition.

There is a sense of urgency here. I call upon everyone who supports the other side of the conflict to stop doing so immediately and to realise that actually it is my side of the conflict who are in the right and who have always been in the right. Only in this way can peace finally be achieved in the Middle East.

Blogger Wayne Myers is a writer and musician.

(Continued from page 8)

...tice. Lots. But sometimes you do notice and when you notice, you have to do something". Well I have noticed some things, and I have tried not to walk past.

Progress is not inevitable, it requires commitment. There are setbacks and regression but I leave this place still

optimistic that Australians will seek and find in their representatives declarations and deeds that elevate hope above fear, tolerance above prejudice and that they may be proud of laws made by Parliamentarians and the contribution they make to help build a fair, decent and civil society for quickly coming generations. We here each bear a responsibility for our nation's calling and our nation's standing.

James Galbraith: The danger posed by the deficit “is zero”

James Galbraith is an economist and the Lloyd M. Bentsen Jr chair in government and business relations at the University of Texas at Austin. He's also a sceptic of the prevailing concern over America's long-term deficit. With many people now comparing the US's fiscal condition to Greece, the Washington Post's Ezra Klein spoke with Galbraith to get the other side of the argument. Virtually, what he said is applicable to one degree or another to Australia. This is an edited transcript of the conversation.

EK: You think the danger posed by the long-term deficit is overstated by most economists and economic commentators.

JG: No, I think the danger is zero. It's not overstated. It's completely misstated.

EK: Why?

JG: What is the nature of the danger? The only possible answer is that this larger deficit would cause a rise in the interest rate. Well, if the markets thought that was a serious risk, the rate on 20-year treasury bonds wouldn't be 4 percent and change now. If the markets thought that the interest rate would be forced up by funding difficulties 10 years from now, it would show up in the 20-year rate. That rate has actually been coming down in the wake of the European crisis.

So there are two possibilities here. One is the theory is wrong. The other is that the market isn't rational. And if the market isn't rational, there's no point in designing policy to accommodate the markets because you can't accommodate an irrational entity.

EK: Then why are the bulk of your colleagues so worried about this?

JG: Let's push a bit deeper on the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) forecasts. They publish a baseline set of projections. One of those projections holds the economy will return to a normal high-employment level with low inflation

over the next 10 years. If true, that would be wonderful news. Go down a few lines and they also have the short-term interest rate going up to 5 percent. It's that short-term interest rate combined with that low inflation rate that allows them to generate, quite mechanically, these enormous future deficit forecasts. And those forecasts are driven partially by the assumption that health-care costs will rise forever at a faster rate than everything else, and by interest payments on the debt will hit 20 or 25 per cent of GDP.

At this point, the whole thing is completely incoherent. You cannot write cheques to 20 per cent to anybody without that money entering the economy and increasing employment and inflation. And if it does that, then debt-to-

GDP has to be lower, because inflation figures into how much debt we have. These numbers need to come together in a coherent story, and the CBO's forecast does not give us a coherent story. So everything that is said that is based on the CBO's baseline is, strictly speaking, nonsense.

EK: But couldn't there be a space between the CBO being totally correct and the debt not being a problem? It seems certain, for instance, that health-care costs will continue to rise faster than other sectors of the economy.

JG: No, it's not reasonable. Share of health-care cost would rise as part of total GDP and the inflation would rise to be nearer to what the rate of health-care inflation is. And if health care does get that expensive, and we're paying 30 percent of GDP while everyone else is paying 12 percent, we could buy Paris and all the doctors and just move our elderly there.

EK: But putting inflation aside, the gap between spending and revenues won't have other ill effects?



James Galbraith

JG: Is there any terrible consequence because we haven't prefunded the defence budget? No. There's only one budget and one borrowing authority and all that matters is what that authority pays. Say I'm the federal government and I wish to pay you, Ezra Klein, a billion dollars to build an aircraft carrier. I put money in your bank account for that. Did the Federal Reserve look into that? Did the IRS sign off on it? Government does not need money to spend just as a bowling alley does not



Striking Greek workers demonstrate — a harbinger of similar such actions in the US (and Australia)?

run out of points.

What people worry about is that the federal government won't be able to sell bonds. But there can never be a problem for the federal government selling bonds. It goes the other way. The government's spending creates the bank's demand for bonds, because they want a higher return on the money that the government is putting into the economy. My father said this process is so simple that the mind recoils from it.

EK: What are the policy implications of this view?

JG: It says that we should be focusing on real problems and not fake ones. We have serious problems. Unem-

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Sharp increase in Darfur violence

Alex de Waal

May 2010 saw the largest number of recorded violent fatalities in Darfur since the arrival of the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation (UNAMID) in January 2008. According to the figures compiled by the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC), there were 491 confirmed fatalities and 108 unconfirmed but very probable fatalities during the month, about five times higher than the average for the last year.

The reason for the increase in violence is fighting between the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Armed Forces, which accounts for 440 deaths. At the time of the ceasefire agreement signed in N'djamena in



UNAMID peacekeepers

February (and subsequently in Doha), JEM was required to relocate inside Darfur and joint Sudanese and Chadian forces began patrolling the border. A large and well-equipped JEM force established itself at Jebel Moon. The ceasefire lasted two months, and after it collapsed, with no additional progress in the Doha talks, the fighting rapidly resumed, alongside efforts by the government of Sudan to prevent Khalil Ibrahim from returning to the field. Unwilling to fight defensively, JEM preferred to go on the offensive. It was forced out of Jebel Moon and instead dispersed across Darfur and into parts of Kordofan, taking the war to these areas. The largest number of clashes has been in south-east Darfur but JEM has also been active in the vicinity of al Fashir.

Reports indicate that JEM has made alliances, possibly tactical and operational, with the Sudan Liberation Army in Jebel Marra and with disgruntled Arab groups.

JEM forces have also been responsible for an upsurge in carjacking, among them UNAMID supply trucks carrying fuel and other provisions. Cut off from its Chadian supply base, JEM is now resupplying itself from whatever resources it can find in Darfur and Kordofan, and UNAMID supplies are an attractive target.

Even without this, May would have been an above-average month for lethal violence, because of an increase in inter-tribal fighting in West Darfur, which caused 119 fatalities (monthly total for inter-tribal fighting: 126). The previous two months have actually seen even higher levels of inter-tribal violence, including fighting in the Kass-Jebel Marra area between the Missiriya and Nuwaiba Arab tribes.

The inter-tribal fighting in the last three months has been almost entirely a single conflict to the south and west of Jebel Marra between Misiriya and Nuwaiba Rizeigat. Unusually, south Darfur has been quiet. As with most of these conflicts, there are several layers, including land and local administration, but the spark for the conflict seems to have been quite accidental, following on from an incident in which a *dija* payment [blood money compensation in lieu of retaliation] was received, and the group that had received it entered the marketplace firing in the air in celebration, causing all-round mobilization and a firefight, after which the violence escalated.

Alex de Waal is a scholar and author specialising in Sudan.



Alex de Waal

(Continued from page 10)

ployment is at 10 per cent. If we got busy and worked out things for the unemployed to do, we'd be much better off. And we can certainly afford it. We have an impending energy crisis and a climate crisis. We could spend a generation fixing those problems in a way that would rebuild our country, too. On the tax side, what you want to do is reverse the burden on working people.

Since the beginning of the crisis, I've supported a payroll tax holiday so everyone gets an increase in their after-tax earnings so they can pay down their mortgages, which would be a good thing. You also want to encourage rich people to recycle their money, which is why I support the estate tax, which has accounted for an enormous number of our great universities and nonprofits and philanthropic organisations. That's one difference between us and Europe.

EK: That does it for my questions, I think.

JG: I have one more answer, though! Since the 1790s, how often has the federal government not run a deficit? Six short periods, all leading to recession. Why? Because the government needs to run a deficit, it's the only way to inject financial resources into the economy. If

you're not running a deficit, it's draining the pockets of the private sector. I was at a meeting in Cambridge last month where the managing director of the IMF said he was against deficits but in favour of saving, but they're exactly the same thing! A government deficit means more money in private pockets.

The way people suggest they can cut spending without cutting activity is completely fallacious. This is appalling in Europe right now. The Greeks are being asked to cut 10 per cent from spending in a few years. And the assumption is that this won't affect GDP. But of course it will! It will cut at least 10 per cent! And so they won't have the tax collections to fund the new lower level of spending. Spain was forced to make the same announcement yesterday. So the Eurozone is going down the tubes.

On the other hand, look at Japan. They've had enormous deficits ever since the crash in 1988. What's been the interest rate on government bonds ever since? It's zero! They've had no problem funding themselves. The best asset to own in Japan is cash, because the price level is falling. It gets you 4 per cent return. The idea that funding difficulties are driven by deficits is an argument backed by a very powerful metaphor, but not much in the way of fact, theory or current experience.

Helen Thomas, hypocrisy here and there

Cecilie Surasky

It's impossible to defend Grande Dame of White House journalists Helen Thomas' recent off the cuff statement that Israeli Jews should go back to Germany...or Poland. (She said Israel should get out of Palestine, but it wasn't clear if she meant the Occupied Territories, which Israelis should get out of, or Israel behind the Green Line.) It was deeply offensive and wrong.

One of this country's most important and courageous journalists said something terribly wrong, was massively criticised, apologised for it, and was forced into retirement. Exactly the way it should be, right? Wrong.

It's hard to even chart out the hypocrisy of the whole affair. What happened in 2002 when US House Republican Majority Leader Dick Armey called for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians on MSNBC's *Hardball*? An outraged response? Nary a peep. That same year Senator James Inhofe also called for Israel to permanently retain all of the Occupied Territories, "Because God said so." Did he quit? No. And what to make of the fact that Obama's White House summoned infinitely more moral outrage for Thomas' terrible but certainly not lethal remarks, than for the death of nine people on the Mavi Marmara, including a 19-year-old US citizen shot in the head. (One prompted "deep regret", the other was "reprehensible". Guess which was which.)

There's also the glass house in which Rabbi Nessenoff lives: he's the one who recorded the Thomas gotcha video and who, it seems, has offered the world his own offensive imitation of a Mexican priest, and believes that Palestinians all belong back home...in Jordan.

Taking a short trip over to Israel we discover that the Israeli military recently created an order that, according to many human rights groups and *Haaretz*, "will enable mass deportation from West Bank." Who had to retire because of that? Maybe because it wasn't an off the cuff remark to suggest ethnic cleansing, but an actual military order to allow it, its authors escaped opprobrium. Wacky!

Just this week, Likud party MK, Miri Regev shouted at Hanin Zoabi, an Arab member of the Knesset from Nazareth who went on the Gaza flotilla, "Get back to Gaza, you traitor!" Sounds familiar, as though Thomas herself could have said it. Outrage meter? Zero. Then again, Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishai wants Zoabi stripped of her Israeli citizenship, so telling her to go back to a place she is not from actually seems pretty mild by those standards.

Blogger Moshe Yaroni, who abhors what Thomas said, compares her treatment to Israel's response to the *Jerusalem Post*'s Caroline Glick who is surely responsible for what will go down as one of the most morally heinous pieces of agitprop in modern history.

In Israel, the premier woman journalist in the country went a hell of a lot farther, in a premeditated, rather than an impetuous fashion. And there is hardly a peep in response in her home country. Caroline Glick is well-known to readers of right-wing email lists, and of course, of the *Jerusalem Post*, where she is the deputy managing editor and a regular columnist. She is also a fellow at the extremist neoconservative Centre for Security Policy in Washington.

Glick herself is an extremist, and even those who agree with her (and who would, of course, not refer to her as an extremist) would have to agree that she situates herself well to the right of the current Israeli government. And that's all well and good; she's an op-ed writer, and she is certainly entitled to her opinions.

But at her web site, Latma, Glick has raised her vitriol to a whole new level. In a video overflowing with racism, a group of Israelis satirise the Israeli attack on the Gaza flotilla. You can see it for yourself on YouTube (just type "we conned the world"), if you can make it through the whole thing.

In a most contemptible fashion, almost every trope of bigotry is on display in the video, which features the contention that the massive suffering in Gaza is all an elaborate fabrication.

This level of cruelty is truly astonishing. Even if one contends that the Gaza blockade is a necessary security measure (see my earlier article for why it has the opposite effect), it is appalling to see fellow Jews laughing about it. And don't we know all too well the offence in denying such things?

The punchline, of course, is that because of her truly abominable and utterly vile video, Caroline Glick is being hailed as a Hasbara hero in Israel -- while one of our few truly great journalists has ended an otherwise remarkable career. Yaroni continues:

No, the real concern, the real question is where is the Israeli outrage? We wouldn't expect it from the government, of course. In fact, the Government Press Office emailed the video to journalists and later apologised, saying it had been done in error. That is unlikely to say the least. Mark Regev, the Prime Minister's Office spokesman, said: "I called my kids in to watch it because I thought it was funny. It is what Israelis feel. But the government has nothing to do with it."

The courageous blog, Coteret, run by Didi Remez, blasts the video and all it represents. But in the mainstream Israeli media and commentary, there is nothing. This blatantly hateful and racist video is perfectly acceptable in Israel.

Glick, on her blog, magnifies her hypocrisy by spending a great many words blasting Thomas for her offensive remarks.

GRITtv's Laura Flanders may be onto something when she says:

Thomas's crime wasn't just antisemitism — it was antisemitism in defence of Palestine. That's the true source of the outrage. The outrage that Obama and Biden and most other US officials, to say nothing of the majority of the press corps, can't seem to find for others.

I'm not sure. Had Helen Thomas made a similar remark about African Americans, for example, it's possible the same fate would have befallen her. If only I could feel confident that all those power-brokers cared as much about my Arab and Muslim friends as they seem to care about me...as a Jew of course.

The US Jewish Voice for Peace's Cecilie Surasky runs the *Muzzle Watch* blog.

LimmudOz meets appetite for diversity

Sol Salbe

Like Melbourne's weather, LimmudOz provides a great deal of variety. If you don't like something, just step in next door or wait a short while for the next session. With 12 simultaneous events at any given time, the choice was mind boggling. Sunday's nine sessions alone provided enough unique permutations for almost every man, woman and child on the planet!

A great variety of the bland would not be something to celebrate but instead, a lot of tasty fare was on offer on subjects ranging from politics to Jewish history, and from climate change to feminism, with luscious delicacies on Israelis in Australia, the "Jew media" and the Jewish community survey. There were, however, a few flies in the ointment. In this writer's view not enough thought had gone into the programming of sessions. Program clashes are inevitable but it does not make much sense scheduling Mark Baker in conversation with a Muslim scholar at the same time as a panel discussion on interfaith dialogue, or the same Baker again to speak with Palestinian activists at the same time as a panel on the language wars of the Diaspora looking at words like Zionism. A humble, but hopefully positive, suggestion: once the preliminary program has been scheduled, ask one or more people outside the organising circle to look for such clashes in the same way as



Samah Sabawi

one gets a second pair of eyes to do the proof-reading.

Another observation. In a fascinating session, Professor Andrew Markus pointed to the skewed age distribution of the Jewish community where the number of young people is comparatively low. Just as well he didn't have to make a similar analysis of the weekend's gathering, for the theme here was baby-boomers rule. There were just not enough younger faces around.

Granted that younger people prefer to get their information on line, it would still be a good idea to organise a brainstorming session of how we could entice members of generations X and Y to future sessions. Discount prices? An under 30 subcommittee to help pick suitable sessions? I don't know, but let's start thinking about it.

A LimmudOz rule of thumb: Do pick a few items outside the square. Get out of your comfort zone. The sessions into which you wander by accident will often turn out to be some of the best you attend. For me this year it was Raymond Scheindlin's talk on Saadia Gaon and the Judeo-Arabic Golden Age. I have to confess my ignorance: to me, Saadia Gaon was a Jerusalem street. I wandered into the session because a chance conversation on the Internet required delivering a message to pass on to the speaker. But Prof Scheindlin opened a whole new world for his audience. For starters it is

wrong to think of the Golden Age as being confined to Spain. Saadia's achievements, including a translation of the Bible into Arabic, actually took place in Baghdad. There Saadia collaborated with Muslim and Christian scholars discussing philosophy, language, mathematics and logic. One of the rules of the group was that no one was allowed to prove anything by quoting from their own scripture. A logical proof was necessary. An absolutely fascinating session.

Scheindlin was one of 13 international speakers. It may have been the largest number ever, but their selection left something to be desired. There is no useful purpose in belabouring the point but three people belonging to the problem-is-Islam school were not balanced by people who see the conflict differently. Maybe not Gideon Levy, who had spoken at the London Limmud, but a representation from across the political spectrum would be a good idea.



Andrew Markus

But if the organisers' choice of guests was one-sided, LimmudOz attendees have shown that at least in terms of politics, our views line up along a continuum. That point was brought to the forefront by Vivienne Porzolt in a session on critical Jews. She asked the audience to stand and distribute themselves from the modest "pro-Israel" to the most "anti-Israel". Well, nobody wanted to describe themselves as anti-Israel so that corner remained conspicuously empty, but about half the audience distributed themselves along a line while the other half chose to remain in the centre. It was a theme that one encountered throughout the festival of learning. No more can the Jewish community be described as "speaking with one voice". Perhaps it is the logical flow-on from the multitude of blogs, websites and Facebook pages that have sprung out since my last attendance. The good news is that we may not have to say "let a hundred flowers bloom" because everyone can see and smell them. I am told that when Tzipi Hotovely finished her address telling Diaspora Jews that they should volunteer to assist Israel by taking up Hasbara, it was someone whose political views were a long way from those of the AJDS who challenged her to tell us what Israel should do for Diaspora Jewry. Again it was other people who complained in the next session about Efraim Inbar referring to the Palestinians as "barbarians". Quite a large audience gave a fair hearing to Samah Sabawi and Maher Mughrabi, putting two distinct Palestinian points of view. Moderator Mark Baker, using a very light touch, managed to guide the two through some of the most difficult issues with which Israelis and Palestinians would ever have to deal. Only an occasional murmur of disagreement was heard. The panel on the "Jew media" saw a whole range of diverse views on the key issue of the Age's coverage of the Middle East.

LimmudOz reflected the community's appetite for diversity.

Hirsi Ali's *Nomad*

Shakira Hussein

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is, to say the very least, no stranger to controversy. Her memoir, *Infidel*, chronicles her upbringing in Somalia, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and Kenya and her migration to The Netherlands, where she studied political science and entered public life as an outspoken critic of Islam.

Outrage over her film *Submission* culminated in the murder of her collaborator, Theo van Gogh, by a Muslim youth who left a death threat addressed to her impaled on his victim's corpse. She resigned as a conservative member of the Dutch parliament after a television documentary pointed out that she had not fled directly from war-torn Somalia, as she had claimed in her asylum application, but from Kenya, where she had lived for many years.

She countered that she had indeed been fleeing: not from a war zone, but from her family's determination to force her into marriage. She was briefly threatened with the loss of her Dutch citizenship, then departed for the US, where she joined the American Enterprise Institute.

In *Nomad*, Hirsi Ali brings her story up to date and expands her reflections on religion and politics. While the "clash" (as she sees it) between Islam and the Enlightenment remains her focus, her discussion ranges across issues such as multiculturalism, feminism, tribalism, modernity, welfare, education and racism.

In *Nomad*, Hirsi Ali again uses her family as a starting point, replying to readers who had asked whether the experiences she had used as the basis for her critique of

Islam in *Infidel* were representative of Muslim families in general. She writes that reconnecting with her family underlined her belief that her family's dysfunction was indeed "typical". Moreover, "the dysfunctional Muslim family constitutes a threat to the very fabric of Western life".

Family relations

Infidel describes Hirsi Ali's experience of her immediate family. In *Nomad*, she also relates the lives of her much younger half-sister and cousins, known to her only through phone calls and second or third-hand family gossip. She fills in the blanks by imagining what they "must have" thought. Based on a single childhood meeting and a series of phone calls, she deduces that her half-sister's failure to take advantage of educational opportunities available to her in Britain is due to her fear of breaking free of her role as a good Muslim woman.

Hirsi Ali's cousin tells her the story of another female relative, who had failed to inform her caring Irish boyfriend that she had tested positive for HIV. Hirsi Ali deduces that

the young woman's sexually repressive religious values put her in denial of her engagement in premarital sex (though she had been sufficiently alert to take the test).

Hirsi Ali has telepathic insight into the boyfriend as well: "She's a Muslim girl, she wears a headscarf, she condemns any sort of sexual activity before marriage, so she must be a virgin." His naivety intersects with his girlfriend's Islamic sexual repression, with tragic results: the couple fail to practice safe sex, and he too becomes infected.

Infidel contains harsh judgments of members of Hirsi Ali's family, but it focuses on her older relatives, whose rank in the family hierarchy gave them authority over her. Her



Shakira Hussein

readiness to make rulings on the lives of younger relatives with whom she has had little direct contact seems less well founded, and leaves an unpleasant taste.

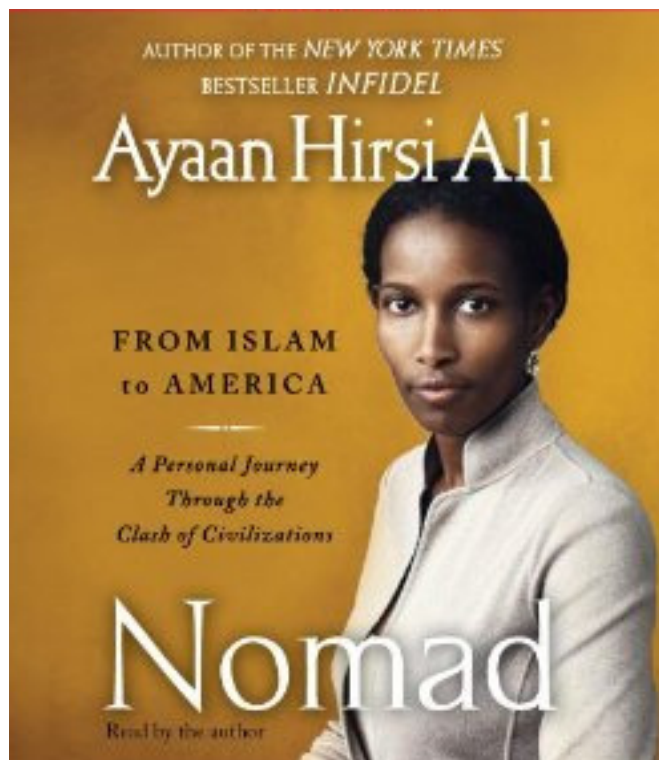
Osama's Islam?

She identifies Osama bin Laden as the force who propelled her into declaring herself an infidel. After 9/11, she found al-Qaida's murder of innocents was consistent with Koran. On this issue, bin Laden the jihadist and Hirsi Ali the infidel are in agreement: there is only one Islam, bin Laden's Islam, and Muslims who reject this are either disingenuous or deluded. For Hirsi Ali, there is no clear boundary separating Muslim extremists from moderates. The agents of radicalisation need only awaken the mind-

set that is inculcated in "almost all" Muslims from early childhood. This is both empirically untrue and strategically dangerous. Hirsi Ali asserts her belief that "Muslim minds can be opened", if only because the demands of religious observance can become so time-consuming. However, an open mind must first accept that the Islam of Osama bin Laden is the one true Islam, and then search for an alternative belief system. This approach renders Muslims who reject bin Laden part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. And Western attempts to build bridges with such Muslims are dangerously naive.

Hirsi Ali identifies the feminist movement and Christian churches as two forces that could do more to combat the "common enemy" of Islamism. Feminists, she asserts, have begun to "define white men as the ultimate and only oppressors". She calls on Western feminists to band together to liberate their Muslim sisters, but damsels in distress do not generally welcome a rescue that proclaims

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the superiority of the rescuers' culture or religion. Since Hirsi Ali believes that feminism and Islam are inherently incompatible, she dismisses Muslim and Western feminists who work together as an irrelevant distraction.

Despite her frequently stated atheism, Hirsi Ali also believes that the Christian churches have an important role to play in the battle against Islam. She regards both fundamentalist Christians and Christians who would "appease Islam" (by participating in interfaith dialogue) as "a liability to Western civilisation", unlike Christians who stand firm against Islam while sharing the message of a tolerant and loving God.

Christianity as a counter-measure?

Nomad must be the only book ever to carry an endorsement from Richard Dawkins on the cover and a call within its pages for the Vatican to more actively evangelise.

Hirsi Ali explains this strange juxtaposition by saying there are many Muslims who instinctively recoil from the violence of bin Laden, but are not yet ready to face the idea of a world without God. Christians should show that their religion offers a preferable (if equally delusional) placebo.

Hirsi Ali makes clear that her call for assimilation into Western civilisation is not confined to Muslims. Australian readers will recognise many parallels with the rhetoric surrounding the federal intervention into indigenous communities and indeed, Hirsi Ali lists "Aboriginals" alongside Afghans, Somalis, Arabs, and Native Americans as "non-Western groups [who] have to make the transition to modernity".

Her discussion of race in America is also likely to raise hackles: for example, her proclamation that "all black people" should read *The Bell Curve*, which argues that socioeconomic disparity in the US can be explained by genetic differences in intelligence.

Just as most Muslims will reject Hirsi Ali's portrayal of their religious community, many non-Muslims will take issue with her portrayal of the Enlightenment -- not to mention multiculturalism, feminism, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Hirsi Ali's journey is not through the clash of civilisations: she is experiencing the clash within civilisations, Islamic and Western.

Dr Shakira Hussein is a frequent contributor to the Australian media including Crikey.com.au and the Australian.

AJDS statement on Gaza flotilla

The following statement was issued on 1 June by the AJDS Executive.

The terrible and deplorable deaths and injuries that occurred on board the Turkish flagged ship, the Mavi Marmara, one of a convoy of ships attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, are not only heartbreaking for the immediate families of the nine people killed and the many injured, but a tragedy for all people who yearn for a resolution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

The Israeli government claims that the non-violent intent of the activists in the convoy was a lie, that the convoy organisers have links to terrorist organisations including Al-Qaeda and that weapons were prepared in advance for use against the Israeli navy when they boarded the ship.

We know that many of the activists on board the convoy are stridently anti-Israel and we disagree with many of the political views of the Free Gaza movement that organised the convoy, but we have no problem with the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, even with awareness of the additional political agenda behind the convoy.

Support for Israel does not mean support for the policies of its government and we have been vocal in opposing the Israeli blockade of Gaza.

From the news reports of the event, it appears that Israel felt entitled to drop armed soldiers onto the ships in international waters to prevent them from reaching Gaza, and the civilians on board, far from feeling either fear or anger, were supposed to understand the peaceful intent of the armed forces that confronted them. Perhaps the soldiers expected no resistance, but when armed soldiers are engaged in a military exercise against enraged civilians the outcome is predictable. It takes very few people to resist with nothing more than their bodies, metal bars or sling shots for the outcome to be lethal.

Even if some of the protesters were spoiling for a fight, for an act of disobedience to be met with such violence, injury and death completely cuts across our fundamental attitudes to political opposition.

If the price Israel had to pay for avoiding the tragic outcome of this confrontation was the loss of a propaganda skirmish, then it was a price we could all live with and emphasis needs to be on the word "live".

How can we feel outrage against barbarous acts of terrorism that rob innocent people of their lives, travelling on Israeli buses or eating in restaurants, and not feel similar outrage at this event?

How can Israel detain foreign journalists (including Australians) and others who had no role in the confrontation and claim to be a democracy?

Unless the Israeli government can convincingly back up its claims that the Gaza aid convoy was not a project for delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza, but in reality a front for violent action, it invites the condemnation of everyone who supports negotiated conflict resolution and reinforces the view that Israel's professed support for human rights is a sham.

If the anger we feel for what has occurred is clear from our words and the words of many other people, then that anger needs to be understood by Israel. What needs to occur now is for Israel to conduct a full, open and comprehensive enquiry into this fatal exercise.

Refugees are welcome rally

Sunday 20 June

Gather at 12 noon at the State Library for 12.15 march to Melbourne Museum and then to the EMERGE Festival at Fitzroy Town Hall.

This event has been endorsed by the AJDS.

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