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## News In English ,, May 2007

■ May 7, 2007 **Where's the transfer you promised?**

By Sayed Kashua

[Haaretz](#)



I don't like to write about politics. Even though I'm an Arab. I realized long ago that I hardly understand anything about it. Generally speaking, I know that economically, socially, religiously, ethnically and nationally I'm on the side that's screwed, but otherwise everything's fine, so why should I worry about politics?

But this week there was no way to escape it, although I tried. It began one morning when I was sitting in front of the TV and changing the baby's diaper. Kobi Oz and Efrat Reiten promised that MK Otniel Schneller would soon be coming on the show to talk about his initiative to get rid of the Wadi Ara Triangle. I'd read something about it in the paper. Granted, the plan is not so original, but the person who envisioned it was the first one who impressed me as credible, as someone you could count on.

I waited for Otniel, impatiently even, and didn't even change channels when Billy Moscona Lerman was sitting in the studio. Seeing Otniel was really important to me because I was born in the Triangle, my parents are there. They don't bother me - all the plans that they cook up for us. I just wanted to know, bottom line, bureaucracy-wise, what it means. Can I keep on living in Jerusalem or do I have to return to the Triangle for

the transfer? My lease is up this month. Should I renew it or not? Do they send a letter ahead of time? How long ahead of time? And anyway I don't have an address. That's what's most annoying: that they'll dump the Triangle into the territories and I'll miss it because there's no postman in the village.

So I waited for Otniel, who finally made it to the studio. He talked about the state of the country, the state of the party and the Winograd Committee, and then time ran out without him saying a single bad word about the Arabs. Just what were they trying to pull? It's like broadcasting an hour of promos for a revealing interview with Paris Hilton, ads that show her traipsing around in a skimpy bathing suit, and when she finally arrives at the studio she's wearing a head-covering and talking about returning to religion, and to Islam at that.

Where's the transfer you promised? Otniel also protested vehemently: "But I was invited to talk about the plan," he griped. The hosts apologized, time was up, and Otniel didn't budge from his seat until he was promised another interview next week on the topic of getting rid of the Arabs; same time, same studio. All right then, we'll wait. I just hope that in a week it won't be too late.

Two hours after watching Otniel, I was sitting with a script editor and we were wracking our brains, trying to come up with the punch line to this really hilarious scene about this guy whose bladder is bursting - nothing to do with Arabs and Jews, just an infantile comedy - and my phone rang. When I'm working I usually don't pick up, but this was a "confidential number." Those I answer right away. It scares me, the "confidential number": Rumor has it that it's usually the Shin Bet. I answered, so they couldn't say I'd flown the coop.

"Hello," I said in a voice that admitted to all possible guilt, but I soon relaxed. It was just a reporter from The Washington Post. No way was he trying to trick me; I could tell since he spoke Hebrew with an American accent. He called because he heard that I was a writer and he also knew that I wrote for Haaretz. Having put one and one together, he realized - quite rightly - that there was no one better to whom to pose his probing questions. I was seriously excited: The Washington Post. If I come off sounding smart then just like that every door will open to me. Instead of working for practically nothing with a producer from Kfar Adumim, I'll be making millions with Spielberg.

"No, sir," I replied in an intellectual tone. "You're not disturbing me at all."

"I'm calling to hear what you all in the Arab street think about the affair of MK Azmi Bishara."

Now, if it was Hatzofeh or Nekuda or even Haaretz calling, I'd have shot from the hip. "The Arab street is very embittered, very," I'd have said, and as if in elementary school, I'd be sure to come up with sentences that included the vocabulary words "discrimination," "racism," "persecution" and "superiority complex" - and be done with it. But what works just fine with Razi Barkai wouldn't go over quite so well with Spielberg. There, they want excellence, perfection and, above all, real expertise. We're talking American standards here, for God's sake.

I took a deep breath, thought carefully and formulated a position that was positively brimming with insight: "That depends on which street, sir," I said.

"Pardon me?" said the American

. "I'm saying that lately I've discovered that not all Arabs think the same thing. I know it's surprising, but I've noticed that Arabs' views vary from street to street."

"Uh-huh," answered the American.

"So it depends on the street. Let's say that I can tell you about our street. Actually, come to think of it, you can't even call it a street. It doesn't even have a name, let alone asphalt. In any case, on the dirt path where I live people are very embittered over the Azmi Bishara affair, very."

"Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeep," I heard on the other end of the line, then silence. Must be some technical problem, I told myself at first, and waited for the Post to call back.

Nearly a week has gone by, but I haven't given up yet. They'll call again. At The Washington Post they don't just hang up like that in the middle of an interview. That couldn't be America; only Arabs behave that way. Good thing they're getting rid of them.

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