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Dossier 2016/08/26/01/02 Parte seconda

Sulla sparizione di migliaia di bambini ebrei yemeniti e anche askenaziti

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Haaretz20160731 Hundreds of Yemenite children were abducted in state's early years, says Israeli cabinet minister By Ofer Aderet

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.734337>

Disappearances after 1948 were 'not a hallucination,' cabinet minister tasked with reviewing archives on 65-year-old affair tells Channel 2.



Immigrants from Yemen at a transit camp in central Israel, 1950. Credit: Seymour Katcoff, GPO

Contradicting the conclusions of a state panel, Minister Tzachi Hanegbi said on Saturday that hundreds of Yemenite children were taken away from their parents. "They took the children, and gave them away. I don't know where."

Hanegbi, who was interviewed by Channel 2's "Meet the Press," was referring to a 65-year-old affair that returned to the headlines a few months ago. Between 1948 and 1954, between 1,500 and 5,000 children, mainly Yemenite toddlers, were reported missing, with many parents being told their children had died, sparking claims they were taken and given to Ashkenazi couples.

Hanegbi, tasked with reviewing archived material on the affair, said he hoped the disclosures would answer the long-standing questions about the fate of the children. One question left unanswered was whether the establishment was aware of, or even complicit in, the affair. "We may never know," Hanegbi told program host Rina Matzliah.

In 2001, the Kedmi Committee, charged with examining allegations of the children's disappearance, determined that there was no factual basis of organized "abduction" of Yemenite children. That committee, and two others, determined that most had died of illness and a minority had been adopted.

Retired Justice Yaacov Kedmi, the committee's chairman, died in July, aged 85, leaving many questions unanswered, including the fate of a few dozen children.

The committee's conduct and professionalism was questioned by families, legal experts and the media, including Haaretz, which published a series of investigative reports on the affair.

Hanegbi's statements, as the senior official in charge of examining the matter at the behest of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, bolster the struggle of many Yemenite families to know the truth about the missing children. The families believe the children disappeared as the result of a secret, official policy by which they were given to childless Ashkenazi Holocaust survivors.

The story reached the headlines again and came before the Knesset over the past few months due to the activities of organizations that published testimony by families of Yemenite origin who believe the children were taken and the facts covered up.

"The issue of the Yemenite children is an open wound that continues to bleed in many families who do not know what happened to the babies, to children that disappeared, and they are looking for the truth," Netanyahu said last month.

Hanegbi began examining heretofore confidential documents in the State Archives. About 1.5 million pages of documents were collected by the three investigative committees that have discussed the affair since the 1960s. Some will remain sealed for several more decades.

"It's an ocean of material," Hanegbi told Matzliah. "I'm reading testimony of nurses, social workers and people who admitted the children to hospitals and a variety of people, each of whom saw a small piece of the puzzle," he said.

Hanegbi said he was not given access to all the material — adoption records, for example. He explained that only a judge can allow records of this type to be unsealed. He said the government is seeking a solution that would allow him to see such files as part of his investigation.

It was reported earlier this month that as part of his probe, Hanegbi asked the head of the Shin Bet security service and of the Mossad as to their stand on the release of classified documents involving the actions of these two agencies with regard to the disappearance of the children.

Hanegbi said that he would continue to examine the material until October, at which time he would recommend that the government release the material to the public. "My recommendation will be to release the material, to allow any person, at a click on the internet, to reach a site where all the material that has been released can be seen."

He said the material has already begun to be scanned so that as soon as the government decides to make it public it can do so.

Haaretz20160812 Dozens of Ashkenazi babies mysteriously disappeared during Israel's early years By Ofer Aderet

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.736574>

A Haaretz investigation based on the testimony of Holocaust survivors and their families reveals that Ashkenazi children disappeared in a similar manner to the abducted Yemenite children.



The immigration card issued for Ganit Efrat's parents. Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

Ganit Efrat, a lawyer from Petah Tikvah and a former Mossad agent, has been feeling that her heart is "bleeding," as she says, in the past months. The media coverage of the stories of the Yemenite children who disappeared during Israel's first years has resurfaced the pain, sadness and frustration over the disappearance of her big brother Zelig, who she didn't get to know.

Like many of the Yemenite children who disappeared, Zelig was also hospitalized as a baby after falling ill, never to return to his parents. They were also told that he died, but weren't presented with a death certificate or a grave. They were also bluntly silenced, and they too were left with a big question mark looming over their son's fate.

Zelig, however, wasn't born to a family that made aliyah from Yemen or disappeared from a transit camp in Rosh Hayain. His parents were Eastern European Jews who lost all of their family in the Holocaust and were deported by the British to a detention camp in Cyprus, where they were also forced to bid farewell to their baby son, under circumstances that to this day remain unclear. Their family tragedy later disappeared on the margins of the Yemenite children affair.

Now that the affair has again resurfaced, it is important for Efrat that the public know that not only children from Yemen disappeared in the past. "This method started even before the establishment of the state, outside of Israel, with Holocaust survivors," she says.

Recently, Haaretz has received information about dozens of new immigrants from Eastern Europe, many of whom were Holocaust survivors, who were separated from their infant children and do not know what happened to them. It happened both in hospitals in Israel and at the British detention camps in Cyprus before the founding of Israel.

The background of the families involved "shows it was not racism of Ashkenazim against Sephardim, but patronizing and arrogance by veterans against new [immigrants]," says a woman who is still searching for her sister who disappeared just a few days after she was born.

Zelig's father, Moshe Eff, came from the city of Turobin in Poland. His mother, Miriam, was born in Cernowitz, now in Ukraine. The two escaped the Nazis and after the war met at a displaced persons camp in Austria, where they fell in love and married. In 1947 they sailed to Mandatory Palestine aboard the "Hatikvah" boat, but like tens of thousands of other Jews were deported by the British to a detention camp in Cyprus.

A few months later, in June 1947, their eldest son Zelig was born in the camp. His mother was 20 years old and his father 25.

"My parents said he was a healthy and good-looking child who was born weighing four kilos. Everything was fine," Efrat said this week. From here on the story is very similar to those of the immigrants who arrived from Yemen. When Zelig was four months old he fell ill. "He just had a light cold, so my mother took him to the clinic at the camp," Efrat says. The clinic, similar to the other institutions at the Cyprus camp, was run by the Jewish Joint organization together with Jewish Agency emissaries who came from pre-state Israel.

The medical team instructed that she leave her baby overnight for observation, and refused to allow her to stay with him, as she asked. The following morning, when she came with her husband to the clinic, they were told that the son died overnight. When they asked to see his body, they were driven away in disgrace. According to Efrat, her mother told her that "the medical team told them 'go away, you're still young, you'll have more children.' That's how the story ended, but really, this is only where it begins."

In February 1948, her parents were released from the camp and made their way to the port to board the ship that would bring them to Israel. Oddly, "the representatives from Israel, who came to Cyprus, asked them to declare that they are making aliyah with their son – the same baby that only months ago they were told died," Efrat says. "My parents told them: 'But he's dead! We don't want to lie!', but they were convinced that they'll get better terms and a better apartment if they declared that they were arriving with their son."

She keeps at home the Oleh card that the Jewish Agency issued for her parents. Alongside the names of Moshe and Miriam appears the name of their son Zelig, as though he arrived in Israel with them. In Israel, the couple settled down in Jaffa, in a house that belonged to Arabs that escaped it during the War of Independence. In the following years they had three more children. The vanished baby wasn't spoken of at home. "We didn't know anything," says Efrat. "In a 'Holocaust' family you don't speak of such things."

Twenty years ago, she says, the silence was suddenly broken. "My father told me the story. It turns out that the issue was a burning concern for him for years but that it was suppressed." In the same conversation he told her that for years he searched for the doctor and the nurse who took care of his baby son, and finally found the nurse at a retirement home in central Israel. "He said that the nurse confessed to him, that their son was sold for 5,000 dollars to a childless couple, and said that it wasn't the only case," says Efrat.

Her mother died nine years ago. Only in retrospect did Efrat understand an incident that occurred some decades ago when she herself lost a baby right after the birth. "My mother started screaming like a wounded animal. Back then I still didn't know of this whole story, and

I said to her 'Mother, I'm the one who lost a daughter, not you! You need to support me, not me [support] you.' Only years later did I understand that her tears were for herself and not only for me," she says.

Her father, 95, is still alive. "That's the main thing he's still living for. He's waiting for news. He thinks there might still be a miracle," says Etti Ron, Efrat's sister. The sister adds: "He told me that if anyone could find the abducted child – it's only me. I'm convinced from the bottom of my heart that he was sold. I have no doubt about it. My intuition tells me he's still alive, but we have no lead."

Efrat sometimes wonders, "Maybe he's looking for us? Maybe he doesn't even know that he's adopted? It's an enigma, we have no idea. He would be 70 today. Maybe he's no longer alive? And maybe he lives in this building? There are a lot of residents here and I don't know everyone. I'm not going to use anyone, but I want to know what happened there, who did it and why," she concludes.

In the state's commission of inquiry report into the abduction of Yemenite children, published in 2001, cases like the one of the Efrat family appear under a short clause under the title "The disappearance of babies from other communities." According to the report, about a third of the babies that disappeared and whose cases were brought before the commission weren't Yemenite. The majority of them, however, were of Mizrahi origin.

In a table attached to the report, the inquiry commission wrote that 30 cases of children of "European" or "American" origin were among those who disappeared. "The circumstances of the disappearance of the babies of other communities are very similar to the circumstances of the disappearance of the Yemenite immigrants' babies," the report said.

"In general, this is about the disappearance of babies of families that made aliyah in the first years following the state's establishment, and in their cases too, the babies generally disappeared from their parents following hospitalization or soon after birth at maternity homes," the report added.

The report's authors were aware of the sensitivities regarding mentioning children of other origins together with the children born to Yemenite families who then disappeared. "Even though babies from other communities also disappeared under similar circumstances, the phenomenon of disappearance was etched into the consciousness of the Yemenite community as a phenomenon unique to the Yemenite community," the report said. "The disappearance of babies of other communities under similar circumstances naturally tears away at this singularity," it said.

In other words, the state commission of inquiry was concerned that families of Yemenite origin won't view favorably the mention of those abducted from other communities, as that might have weakened their main claim that the establishment – which was mostly Ashkenazi at the time – was responsible for the abduction of Yemenites, among other things for racist motives and as part of a discriminatory and humiliating treatment of Mizrahi immigrants.

There's no clear evidence of the number of Ashkenazi babies who disappeared at the time, but testimonies of families from across the country that reached Haaretz as part of an investigation carried out in recent weeks indicate that the figures reach dozens of cases and maybe even more. Some of them were published in the media in the past as individual stories of mysterious disappearances that weren't categorized as part of a wider phenomenon. Others

were never reported, and only now, when the issue has returned to the public agenda, the families chose to speak out.

"My heart goes out to all the families of the kidnapped children, including the Yemenites, but for us the tragedy is double," says Rachel Potter from Ramat Gan, who lost a brother under similar circumstances. Her parents were Holocaust survivors. Her mother, Chaya-Sarah Sonya Persky came from Volozhin, which today is part of Belarus. Her father, Simcha Potter, was born in Warsaw, Poland. Both her parents lost their families in the Holocaust and met in Poland after World War Two.

Her parents were also deported by the British to a detention camp in Cyprus after trying to reach Israel. They married in Cyprus. In 1948 they arrived in Israel and were sent to a camp for new immigrants in Hadera. In March 1949, their first child, a son named Aharon, was born in Brandeis Hospital in Hadera.

"My mother told me that she breastfed him and he was a good looking and healthy child," says Potter. After giving birth, Chaya-Sarah became ill and remained in the hospital. Later she told her daughter that because she could not get up, her husband went to visit their son in the children's home.

One day, as the mother tells it, she asked her husband to bring their baby son for a test at Hadassah Hospital in Tel Aviv and leave him there. "They took advantage of my mother being bed-ridden to kidnap her son," she says. After three days Simcha was told that their son had died, but he never saw the body or a grave. "He came and told me that they told him the child died, and that's it. We didn't talk about the child ever again. It was over," her mother said much later.

Potter remembers how her mother would tell her: "They stole my [son]." Her mother would cry a lot, she says. "Her eyes were always red, she told me her tears were not water, but blood," said Potter this week — and broke out crying herself. Attempts to locate her lost brother have become the mission of her life, and she has paid a high emotional price because of it.

Along her long journey, she has managed to find various documents; and found a great number of question marks in them: "The birth and death dates and various dates of hospitalization ... so many contradictions," she says — presenting proof of her claims from the documents she found.

"I am angry with the Ashkenazi establishment just like the Yemenites. The anger is directed at those same Ashkenazim who did it to us too," says Rachel. "My father took it to heart and died at a young age from grief," she says crying. "I was daddy's girl. When I was born, he was so afraid that it would happen again that he never left me for a second. I was stuck to his leg all the time. When he died, 33 years ago, I went crazy," she says. Her mother is still alive, but "she never recovered and all her life she suffered and was depressed and embittered."

Needing a grave and gravestone

Far to the south of Ramat Gan, 150 kilometers away in Dimona, lives Rachel Ben Shimol. She keeps a picture of a sleepy baby in her house, her younger brother Zvi. He was born in 1948 in the transit camp in Marseilles, France to his parents Shmuel and Liza Rettig, Polish Jews who managed to escape the Nazis, and then they moved to Israel.

In 1950, Zvi fell ill and was hospitalized in Jaffa. His parents never saw him again. They too were told he had died, and they too never received a death certificate or were shown a grave. "The years passed. My parents never spoke about it and did not mention it," says Ben Shimol. "Every Friday I saw my mother wipe the dust off Zvi's picture, but she never said anything."

Later, when the stories of the missing Yemenite children began to come out, the suspicion began to take hold in her too, and she asked her mother: "Maybe my brother was kidnapped too?" but never received an answer.

When she began to look into the matter herself, she realized that more was hidden than known. At the Interior Ministry she found out that — similar to many of the missing Yemenite children — her brother was listed as having left Israel. "Ceased being a resident," is what the ministry says officially. "It still makes me shudder when I think about it, because after all they told us he had died," she says.

At the burial society her brother is listed as having died and buried in the children's section in the Kiryat Shaul Cemetery in Tel Aviv. "Something here is strange," says Ben Shimol. Over the past few years she has been conducting a legal battle against the government in order to receive a permit to open the grave and conduct a DNA test on the bones inside, in order to know once and for all whether her brother is buried there. "I want for him to have a gravestone and for the affair to be closed," she says.

As a result of similar questions, 15 years ago well-known director David Fisher began a historic and family journey, which he has documented in his film "Love Inventory." The case was of his twin brother and sister who were born in 1952. His parents were both Holocaust survivors, who married after they reached Israel. The twins were born in Assaf Harofeh Hospital in Tzrifin. The girl was born first. Fisher's mother was exhausted and fell asleep after the birth. When she woke up, she was told her daughter was sick, and later she was given the news that she had died. They didn't even have time enough to give her a name. After seven months the boy, Sami, was infected with polio and hospitalized in Pardes Katz Hospital.

"They didn't let my parents enter [the hospital]," Fisher said this week. "My mother said she peeked in through the window in order to see him. They had the feeling the boy was getting better in the hospital, until they realized they were wrong. When he died — assuming he died — no one bothered to inform them."

The parents never saw the graves of their children. "My parents were used to death from their surroundings when they were young. Now, when the twins died, they chose to continue on and not get stuck. They lost their entire families in the Holocaust. They lost another two now, but they chose to continue, to make more," says Fisher.

Decades passed. Before her death, Fisher's mother asked him to solve the riddle. "I didn't succeed," he admits. He was unable to find traces of his lost sister, even though he is convinced she is alive. At the height of his detective campaign, which included intensive searches in archives all over the country, Fisher turned to a retired senior police officer, Dr. Avital Ginaton, who was the head of the police's psychology unit. He asked him to prepare a composite portrait of how his lost sister might look today, after so many years.

The picture was published in the weekend edition of Yedioth Aharonoth 15 years ago, but did not lead to a breakthrough. Ginaton explained at the time in an interview with Yedioth that "the purpose of the composite drawing was to create visual documentation of an eyewitness and not to recreate a week-old person, who no one alive today can remember. There is no real

basis for it, except that it is the nature of siblings to look similar to each other because they are the children of the same parents. But there are siblings who are not alike and we cannot trust the assumption that the lines of similarity that characterize the siblings in a family apply to her too," he said.

Fisher found the grave of his brother Sami in the Kiryat Shaul Cemetery in Tel Aviv, but he and his four siblings, one of them attorney Ronel Fisher, chose not to open the grave and check if their brother really was buried there.

We spoke Yiddish at home

Not everyone who grew up in a family in which one of the children disappeared is willing, or interested, in exposing themselves to the public. A few of the families, whose details are being kept confidential by Haaretz, prefer to let the matter rest. "I am against forcing people out of the closet," says Efrat. "Not everyone can withstand the psychological and emotional burden involved."

This is exactly the case of Ella (a pseudonym, whose real name is being kept confidential by Haaretz). She lives in the center of the country and this week she told Haaretz about two twin girls who disappeared in her family right after they were born. "It was an Ashkenazi family, which spoke Yiddish at home. The mother came from Romania, the father from Belgium. They took both of their babies," says Ella.

It happened in 1954 in the Dajani Hospital in Haifa. "Their mother saw them and heard them crying. They told her they were healthy and everything was fine, and that's it. She never saw them again," said Ella this week.

"After a day or two, a doctor came and said they had died. How did they die? What were they sick with? All these questions weren't answered. 'They died, go home. You will have other children,' they were told." So the mother left the hospital without birth certificates and without death certificates.

The mother of the twins, who is now 90-years-old, is still alive. "She is sure they died, or she has convinced herself they died. I am afraid that if we reveal the names and pictures she will understand they kidnapped her twins and it will kill her," said Ella.

"Throughout all the years she said they died, that is what everyone thought. And then, a year ago, when the entire matter of the Yemenite children arose again, I had the thought that the story was very similar to the other stories I heard, so I started to ask a few questions," says Ella.

"She said they died, that she did not see their grave, but the hospital took care of it. She still believes it, even though she never saw any documents — not a birth certificate and not a death certificate. She remembers they were born healthy and strong, but says then they still didn't know how to take care of babies," she says. "It is clear to me, completely clear, they were kidnapped. I have no doubt whatsoever," concludes Ella.

Orna Klein from Kfar Sava, who was also a Mossad agent in her past, is now collecting information on the missing children from Ashkenazi families.

"When I tell my story to families of Yemenite immigrants, they tell me, 'What, you too, the Ashkenazim, they took babies? No way,'" says Klein.

Even as a girl, so she says, Klein knew that her family's story was "like the story of the Yemenite children." Her parents, Riva and Baruch Sendler, both descendants of Ashkenazi families, were born in South Africa and in 1949 made aliyah to Israel. In 1951 their daughter Ilana was born in the Brandeis Hospital in Hadera. Two days later they were told the baby had died. "My parents, who good little children and disciplined children of 23, thought the establishment was God. When they were told the baby die — then there was no other option," says Klein.

They too never saw their daughter's body or grave. For years her parents were convinced their daughter really had died. Later the doubts began to creep in, which grew as they burrowed into the documents in the archives more and more.

"In my mother's medical file we found that all the information on the period of her pregnancy and giving birth were torn out, while what came before and what came after — [were still there]," she says. "When we asked to look at the files for the maternity hospital, they told us the archive had burned down."

The Ashkenazi background of her parents makes it difficult for Klein to attribute the attitude of the authorities to her parents as motivated by racist-ethnic reasons. In her opinion, "it is not racism of Ashkenazim against Sephardim, but patronizing and arrogance of veterans against the new [immigrants]." The attitude in Israel was as if they were Diaspora, ghetto Jews. They were humiliates because they dressed differently and did not know the language, says Klein. "My parents hated Mapai exactly the way the Yemenites hated it."

She recently published a novel privately titled "June 27, 1951" — the date her lost sister was born. Klein, like the others, is convinced her sister is still alive. Her parents are 89 and live not far from her. "I want to hug the baby," her father tells her once in a while. "Dad, she's not a baby. She is 65-years-old," she answers.

Haaretz20160814 Plot thickens in case of missing Israeli children as dozens of new victims emerge By Ofer Aderet

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.736751>

It was always known that roughly a thousand of Yemenite children disappeared in the 50s, but Haaretz report has revealed Ashkenazi children 'disappeared' as well. Now, in wake of report, new families have come forward.



Hannah and Shmuel London's son was kept in the hospital, next time they came they were told he had died, but no proof was provided. Credit: Courtesy

Some 40 Ashkenazi families contacted Haaretz over the weekend to reveal that their children had disappeared from hospitals in Israel in the 1940s and 1950s — a phenomenon which until recently was thought to have been largely limited to immigrants from Yemen.

The Ashkenazi families were responding to an investigative report in Haaretz on Friday about other Ashkenazi babies who vanished in the early years of the state.

Some of the families who reacted to the article wanted readers to know their full stories, while others wished to make known that they, too, were victims of similar circumstances but preferred not to go public with their experiences. Haaretz documented half of these testimonies.

Among them are Jews who came from Lithuania, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Ukraine, including a number of Holocaust survivors.

All of them told similar stories about their babies who had disappeared from various hospitals in Israel. All were told that their infants had died, but were never shown either a death certificate or a grave.

These 20 cases come in the wake of dozens of other instances documented by Haaretz over the past few weeks. They show that the scope of the phenomenon of disappeared children

born to Ashkenazi families is wider than previously described by the state investigative committee that examined the cases of disappeared Yemenite babies.

That report, released in 2001, included only 30 cases of children from the United States or Europe who were said to have disappeared soon after birth, as opposed to hundreds of cases of children born to Yemenite families.

Some of the cases Haaretz learned about over the weekend involve twins, one of whom vanished after birth. Such is the story of the London family from Lithuania. The mother, Hannah, came to live in Israel in 1933 as a pioneer and a member of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. The father, Shmuel, came to Israel the same year. The two met in Ramat Gan and were married in 1939. On December 17, 1940, their twins, Avraham and Yaakov, were born at Beilinson Hospital in Petah Tikvah.

"Yaakov came back with mother from the hospital. Avraham stayed 'to get stronger.' My mother was told he was born smaller and it was better for him to stay in the hospital," their daughter, who asked that her name not be publicized, said. Later, when the parents went back to the hospital to take Avraham home, they were told that he had died while being fed.

"They never received a document about it," the daughter said. "My mother accepted what they told her, and later told this story as an anecdote, not as something special," she added. "Maybe he really did die, but it's still interesting to find out what happened," she said.

The family's tragedy did not end there. Yaakov, who eventually obtained a Ph.D. in biochemistry, was killed in the Yom Kippur War, leaving a wife and two daughters.

"It's important to know that cases like these happened even before the establishment of the state. It happened to us," she said.

Documentation of a disappearance from a hospital in 1940 is rare. Most of the cases happened in the first years following the establishment of the state. One case, documented by this reporter, involved the disappearance of a baby born in the detention camp in Cyprus in 1947.

Yitzhak Fueurstein also turned to Haaretz over the weekend. He is the son of Holocaust survivors Pirha (Piri), born in Transylvania (a region between Romania and Hungary) and Binyamin, born in Munkatch (then Czechoslovakia, now Ukraine). Fueurstein's parents met in Germany as refugees and came to live in Israel in 1947 after being expelled from the British detention camp on Cyprus.

In 1949 Piri gave birth to twin boys at Rambam Hospital in Haifa. "The birth was normal according to my parents," Fueurstein said. But about a week later, when his mother was released from the hospital, the parents were given a birth certificate on which the two births appeared, but next to one was the word "deceased." They were given no other document or death certificate, Fueurstein said.

"The story hovered around our household all the time, leaving many questions in the air," he added.

Twins Israel and Yosef, the sons of Holocaust survivors Moshe and Regina (Rivka) Raflenski, were born on October 8, 1948 in Hadassah Hospital, which was then in Tel Aviv. At six weeks old Israel he was rushed to the hospital with diarrhea. His parents — who had come to Israel

from Poland — were told to leave their sick son there and go home. When they came to visit him the next day, they were told that he had died.

“His mother called him Israel in the hope of new life in the land of Israel. He never had a funeral, no death certificate was ever presented and of course, he has no grave,” the daughter of Yosef, Israel’s brother, said. She also asked that her name not be used.

Then, one day the family received a draft notice for Israel, which stated that he was a deserter. “All through the years his status in the Interior Ministry was defined as “unknown.” Recently I found out that his status was changed to ‘deceased.’ We are trying, without success, to find out any sliver of information about the lost son,” she added.

“The article in Haaretz on Friday opened up a new wound,” Hannah Gold Levkovich said. Her mother, Shulamit Denishevsky, was born in the town of Ashmyany, near the Lithuanian city of Vilnius. Her father, Yehoshua Gold, was born in the city of Ropczyce, near Krakow in Poland. They met after World War II in a displaced persons camp in Germany, and married.

In 1948, after the state was founded, they came to live in Israel. In the summer of 1949 they had a son at the Dajani (Tzahalon) Hospital in Jaffa. “The birth was normal. The child was big and healthy, but he was taken away immediately,” Levkovich told Haaretz over the weekend. A few hours later they were told their son had died. “They were shown no proof,” Levkovich said.

“All the years my parents claimed the boy was alive, but unfortunately my sister Tova and I did not go along with this terrible thought,” she added. “My parents were Holocaust survivors who had lost everything dear to them in the war and they both suffered, each separately, the hardships of the war. They came to the Promised Land and did not believe such a thing could happen to them.”

Haaretz20160815 As reports of missing Israeli children emerge, the story of my lost brother By Gideon Levy

<http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.736860>

When I read the recent series of Ofer Aderet's reports about the disappearance of children in Israel, I begin to ask myself: Where is Dan? Are you alive?



Gideon Levy with his parents in Tel Aviv, Israel, 1955. Courtesy of Gideon Levy

It was the summer of 1967, not long after the war, that my mother and I went to school for a meeting with the school nurse. It was Ironi Aleph, a well regarded high school at the time, and we were excited. The nurse, clad in a green uniform and head scarf, pulled out the file from the pile on her desk and started perusing it. She asked about childhood diseases and tooth-brushing habits and then, without any warning, the blow landed: "I understand that there was an older brother here," she said. A deathly silence descended on the room. My mother lowered her gaze and I didn't understand anything. It went on for an eternity. Finally my mother said: "Yes, he had a brother and he died."

Later on we went home in silence. In the evening, after Father returned from work, a window was opened — and just as quickly closed. My parents told me that they were sorry that through all these years they hadn't told me that before I was born they had another child. They called him Dan. He was six weeks old when he died, they told me. He died from an illness. They didn't even bring him home from the hospital, apparently the Dajani Hospital in Jaffa, later called Tzahalon, the place where both my younger brother and I were born.

They told me which illness he died from, but now I don't recall which one. Maybe jaundice. What I do remember well was the explanation for the fact that my brother has no grave. My parents told me that Dan was ill and therefore he wasn't circumcised, and because he wasn't circumcised he has no grave. That's what the halakha (Jewish religious law) says, they told my father, who never knew the difference between Passover and Purim. From then on I knew that I had a brother and he has no grave.

An uncircumcised infant has no grave? I asked Rabbi Benny Lau on Sunday. "Absolute nonsense," said the rabbi, "There's no such thing." And a child who is less than a year old? "That's even greater nonsense," said the rabbi. (I know someone whose parents were told that his dead brother had no grave because he was less than a year old when he died).

We never mentioned my dead brother again. I was disturbed by the thought of what would have happened had he not died, and how and when would I have come into the world, if at all, had he lived. But Dan was returned to the family skeleton closet, from which he had been momentarily removed against the family's will, after which the door to that closet was locked for good. They never mentioned him again in our house. As was the case with many other subjects in our parents' generation, they didn't tell and we didn't ask.

Could it be that Dan's fate didn't weigh on them until their dying day? Could it be that they didn't ask themselves why he had no grave? Did they just accept the explanation/lie they were given, with such intolerable ease, without asking any questions? And above all, did they even entertain the thought that Dan is alive and well somewhere in the world?

My parents locked the Dan file with iron chains. After what they, survivors of Europe, had been through in their lives they apparently couldn't deal with those questions. And maybe they always suffered from sleepless nights and were constantly preoccupied by thoughts of Dan, but only didn't tell us, as was usual at the time? Sadly, there's nobody left to ask.

When I read the recent series of reports published in this newspaper by my colleague Ofer Aderet, about the disappearance of other children, I begin to ask myself: Where is Dan? Are you alive, Dan? Please get in touch. You probably aren't called Dan, or maybe you are. Born in the early 1950s, maybe you live on the next street? And maybe in another city? In another country?

Tom, our son who died at the age of one in 1988, is buried in the children's section in the Kiryat Shaul cemetery in Tel Aviv. For years his grave was surrounded by rusty iron poles on the tiny graves of anonymous children. Then, about two years ago, an invisible hand covered this children's section with a concrete floor, and the iron poles were replaced by marble slabs, which were hastily placed on the graves without attaching them to the ground. Names were engraved on those uniform stone slabs, sometimes only last names without any additional information, not a date, not the parents' names. Some are already broken.

Sometimes the thought has entered my mind that my big brother Dan is buried there, next to my little son Tom. Now I'm beginning to doubt that too.

We named our son Dan. He's already 30 years old.

Avidgor Lieberman's mobilization of right-wing MKs for such a contemptible cause – cutting off modest assistance to children in need – sets a new record for the government's dehumanization of the asylum seekers.

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman may be taking his time about liquidating Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh and bringing about the collapse of Hamas in the Gaza Strip – just some of the things he promised to do if he ever got back into the government – but when it comes to other enemies, he's undaunted. These enemies are the children of asylum seekers: Youngsters from infants to six-year-olds, who are held in so-called "child warehouses" in south Tel Aviv – makeshift day care facilities in which 15 children have died over the past five years due to the atrocious conditions.

Lieberman has instructed Chief of General Staff Gadi Eisenkot to cancel the volunteer activities that some soldiers were involved in, consisting mainly of playing with these children in south Tel Aviv's public parks. He was responding to heavy pressure exerted on various MKs and ministers by those who oppose the asylum seekers' presence in south Tel Aviv. The soldiers' activities, which included taking the children out of those suffocating "warehouses" for two to three hours, were described by Lieberman's office as being "activities about which there's a public dispute ... especially when in this case it involves activities with a population that isn't residing here lawfully."

Aside from the fact that this population "that isn't residing here lawfully," as Lieberman's office put it, includes people that cannot be deported because of the non-refoulement principle, which forbids deporting someone to a country where his life or liberty would be at risk, Lieberman's decision reflects an incomprehensible insensitivity. Even if their parents' status is controversial – and it's controversial only because the state is evading a solution – taking this out on helpless children growing up in sub-standard conditions borders on evil.

The reason given by Lieberman is similar to the answer provided by his deputy, Eli Ben-Dahan, who had earlier also asked Eisenkot to stop the initiative. "It's more appropriate that Israel Defense Forces soldiers act according to the concept of 'the poor of your city take precedence,' and help out Holocaust survivors, the needy and the elderly," Lieberman said.

This explanation masks racism as social concern. Soldiers and civilians should be encouraged to volunteer wherever there is a need. The poor of the city include the children of asylum seekers and anyone willing to help them should not be prevented from doing so. One can – and should – encourage volunteer work to help a variety of populations, without (again) inciting against asylum seekers and ostracizing them.

The defense minister's decision, and the mobilization of right-wing MKs for such a contemptible cause – cutting off modest assistance to children in need – sets a new record for the government's dehumanization of the asylum seekers. It's also a new record for racism, abominable morals and cruelty.