

Farewell to Ilan Halevi



Ilan Halevi, a contributor to our journal as well as to La Revue d'Etudes Palestiniennes and JPS, died in Clichy-la-Garenne, on 10 July 2013. He was 69 and still at the height of his productivity. In the tributes given to him in Ramallah, he was often mistakenly referred to as a Yemenite Jew who identified with the Palestinian struggle, and became – in effect – a Palestinian. The assumption was that only a Jew of Arab extraction could identify so closely with the cause of Palestine. Margret Busby, writing in The Independent of 25 July 2013¹ debunks the myth, to unearth the life of a true revolutionary internationalist. This is how she concludes her tribute:

Having begun learning Hebrew in Paris, he perfected it in a kibbutz, and began using the name Halevi. He joined the anti-Zionist group Matzpen, and later he and some friends created their own leftist political entity, Ma'avak, before he was shown the door of the kibbutz, branded an agitator.

Libération, whose correspondent he was in Israel, invited him to Paris in 1975; in 1976 he joined the PLO. In 1981 he wrote his highly regarded book *Question Juive* [A History of the

Ilan Halevi.

Source: Near East News Agency, 1978.

Jews: Ancient and Modern] and co-founded the *Revue d' Études Palestiniennes*. Other books include *Face à la guerre: Lettre de Ramallah* (2003) and *Allers-retours* (2005), a semi-autobiographical novel.

He was appointed Fatah representative to the Socialist International and was a member of the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid and Washington negotiations. After the 1994 Peace Agreements, he lived in Jerusalem then Ramallah, becoming Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 2002 his apartment in Ramallah was destroyed during Operation Rampart; political commitment took its toll on his personal life and health.

Halevi's often-quoted characterization of himself as "100 per cent a Jew, 100 per cent an Arab" was his provocative way of defying rigidly divisive categorization. He latterly wrote a letter to family and close friends in which he recalled with gratitude that Arafat, ever since their meeting in 1979, understood his intellectual position and never classed him as a specialist on the "Jewish Question."

Halevi's was a lifelong fight for his right, every person's right, to be recognised as worthy of respect, simply as another human being. He was one of a kind, the self-made product of a rich mixture of cultures and heritages, which continues in his remarkable family in France, Germany, Africa, the US, the Middle East and the Caribbean.

Ilan Halevi was a true internationalist. Whether in Angola, Mozambique, Algeria, or New York he lived his life to the full, and immersed himself in the daily struggles of his adopted country. He will be dearly missed in Palestine, whose fate preoccupied him for the better part the last four decades of his life.

JQ

Endnote

- 1 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/ilan-halevi-jewish-author-journalist-and-politician-who-rose-to-prominence-in-the-plo-8732579.html>. Accessed 6 October 2013.