

## **ARI RATH PREIS FÜR KRITISCHEN JOURNALISMUS 2021**

**EHRENPREISTRÄGER GIDEON LEVY, Ha'aretz**

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If you are interested what is going on in Israel and the Palestinian territories, you have to read Gideon Levy's articles in Haaretz. This was one of the useful advices which I got from Ari – long before I decided to move to Tel Aviv to become the Middle East correspondent for Süddeutsche Zeitung.

His column is a must read! Gideon Levy started with this special form of opinion piece after the First intifada in 1988. The title of the column is Twilight Zone – and from my point of view, it is definitely not the right one. I suggest: Spotlight – because he drags the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories into the spotlight. He writes regularly for more than three decades now – and only this makes already a big difference – about the injustice of the occupation, about the consequences for the Palestinians in their daily life.

Gideon Levy does not hesitate to express views, which are unpopular and uncomfortable – not only in Israel. He shows the blind spots and challenges the Israeli ignorance – which exists even on the so-called left side of the political spectrum. Gideon Levy does not want to accept the occupation; he refuses to accept the so-called normalization. Because it is not normal what is going on in the Westbank and in the Gaza Strip and nobody in Israel should get used to it. Gideon Levy is a constant reminder.

He is a Journalist, but also an activist, a problematic mixture from a European perspective. Gideon is also a Fighter – a word, which Ari Rath used regularly to describe his motivation to engage for the peace process until the end of his life. The fight for peace and press freedom is definitely Ari's legacy, a motto, which brings Gideon Levy and Ari Rath together.

For Ari, this was a commitment born from his experience during the Holocaust. Ari had to leave Austria in November 1938; Levy's father Heinz Loewy, was born in the town of Saaz in the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia and fled the Nazis in 1939. After a long and dangerous trip, he finally arrived after months in Palestine. Gideon Levy's mother, Thea, who came from Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, came to Palestine in a rescue operation for children in 1939.

Gideon Levy's grandmother and grandfather were murdered in the Holocaust.

Gideon was born in 1953 and grew up in Tel Aviv. He began his journalistic career at Army Radio in 1974 as a reporter and editor. In 1978, he was appointed aide and spokesperson for Shimon Peres. Levy began working for Haaretz in 1982, first as the newspaper's deputy editor. In 1988, he began his column "The Twilight Zone" following a request from former Knesset member David (Dedi) Zucker, who proposed him to join a trip to see olive trees that had been uprooted in the grove of an elderly Palestinian woman in the West Bank. It was a different view than expected – because after the Six-Day-War in 1967 he learned that the Palestinian territories were the „liberated regions of the homeland“.

He started, gradually and without forethought, 30 years of covering the consequences of the occupation. „Most Israelis didn't want it then and don't want it now. Many Israelis see the very act of covering this topic as a crime. “

He writes sentences like this: "There are months when the blood flows freely, and months were what we covered was felled trees, ruined houses, uprooted residents and suspects held without trial."

In 2010, Levy described Hamas as a fundamentalist organization and held it responsible for the Qassam rockets fired at Israeli cities: "No sovereign state would have tolerated it. Israel had the right to react". "But the first question you have to ask yourselves", he continued, "is why Hamas launched the missiles. Before criticizing Hamas, I would rather criticize my own government, which carries a much bigger responsibility for the occupation and conditions in Gaza“.

During Protective Edge operation in Gaza in 2014, Levy wrote an op-ed harshly critical of air force pilots and drone operators. "How do you sleep at night, pilot? Did you see the pictures of the death and destruction you sowed – on television, and not just in the crosshairs?" He got death threats afterwards.

During the last conflict he wrote on 13th May, that their „true face is exposed to all: All they want is to see blood. Arab blood, as much as possible – blood, the more the better – blood, the main thing is spilled Arab blood. “

On 27th May the title of his opinion piece was "Perhaps Hamas leader Sinwar is a human being, too?"

He describes the ultra-Orthodox as „Neo-fascist Thugs“.

He polarizes with his articles, definitely; and I have to admit – I am not in line with all of his views. However, he forces his readers to reflect.

Levy defines himself as a "patriotic Israeli", and is harshly criticized for his support of boycotting Israel.

Levy's many detractors say that his writing is one-sided, and some even accuse him of supporting terrorism.

Nevertheless: Levy angered members of the left wing after publishing several op-eds praising former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling him an "eloquent and impressive statesman."

In August last year he wrote: „We need to start thinking about it – Naftali Bennett, the next prime minister of Israel “; now he wants to give him a chance with the argument: „Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has nothing to lose.“

In an interview, Gideon Levy expressed his doubts that any newspaper in Israel other than Haaretz would give him the journalistic freedom to publish the kind of pieces he writes.

A few weeks ago, Levy was awarded Israel's top journalism award, the Sokolow Prize.

I am convinced that Ari would be very satisfied with the jury's decision to award the honorary prize to Gideon Levy, a fighter against the occupation and for peace – which is the invisible link between these two courageous journalists.

