

ARI RATH PREIS FÜR KRITISCHEN JOURNALISMUS 2021

EHRENPREISTRÄGER GIDEON LEVY, Ha'aretz

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Last time I have been here, it was for a political speech. Tonight, I will be more personal and we will leave politics aside. Everyone knows my views and if not, it is not a big deal.

To be in this house and to get this prize in the name of Ari Rath has a very deep meaning for me. If I had one wish, or two wishes, I would ask God or whoever you believe in, for Bruno Kreisky to step in the room and I will have to honor and above all the possibility to meet him and to tell him a few things and to listen to the things he has to say.

The truth is, I met him once with the delegation of Labor but I was not Gideon Levy then. I was not the same person I am today and I had much less to tell him than I have today. I would have told him, on behalf of Israel, which I do not stand for, on behalf of myself: please forgive us. Forgive all the bad things Israel said about you, forgive all the ugly campaigns Israel held against you. You were a real genuine friend of Israel, much more than those in Washington who think that supplying Israel with more and more weapons is a sign of friendship, and much more than all the EU leaders today who think if they flatter Israel and try to talk to Israel in a nice way, Israel will change. Those who make Israel the ultimate darling of the West, financing Israel, supporting Israel in an unconditioned way. This has never been friendship.

What Bruno did was real friendship because he cared about Israel. He cared about its future and he knew Israel is going on a wrong way, a wrong path. He was courageous enough to say it and he paid a prize for it. Being here today has an emotional meaning for me. I really feel I missed an opportunity.

Maybe I was born too late to meet Bruno, support and salute and listen to him. I see the photos here and I see some of the people I knew in person and all of them are his friends. We miss all of those people. Secondly, obviously Ari Rath. You must know that the Jerusalem Post was not only an English-speaking newspaper in Israel. All the “Jeckes” in Israel in the 70s read the Jerusalem Post. Hebrew was too complicated for them, they could not really read the German newspaper, so they read the Jerusalem Post. I roughly remember the old man selling the newspaper to my father and throwing it to the third floor. He never missed the terrace.

My father and mother read the Jerusalem Post and Ari was the editor in chief. I met Ari many times when I was working with Shimon Peres because they were good friends. And here I want to tell a short episode which is not so important but typical for Ari: Sometimes in the 80s Lufthansa launched a new line from Frankfurt to Washington. At those times, the Israeli press was corrupted enough to get free tickets for editors. We, a group of editors from Israel, were invited to participate in the first flight from Frankfurt to DC. Obviously first class, my only time first class, with cigars and non-stop supply of caviar, which I do not like so much but nobles oblige and I ate more caviar than the rest of my life.

Ari was 30 years older than the oldest of us. In every airport we stopped, there was a blond woman waiting for Ari. None of them knew about the other. We were very young, and let me say very horny, and the picture of Ari having all those women really left us so jealous. Then we arrived in Washington, I do not remember what I did at 3 o'clock in the morning in the corridor but I clearly remember Ari looking for a pack of cigarettes for his partner – whoever it was – at 3 o'clock in the morning. We loved Ari, we really loved him. It is not only about him being a courageous and professional editor and writer, but also a human-being. I really loved that man, even though we did not meet too many times. By the end of the day I remember loving this man and I think his biography is – in the beginning at least – similar to my father's biography. But then also the steps he took in Israel and in Palestine and even the fact that his life ended in the place where it started and still insisted on being buried in Israel next to his brother – and not here next to his mother – makes him really bigger than life. To get a price in his name – in all modesty -.I am sure he would be happy to hear it because he was very emotional as you all know. And in this I feel very similar.

Where I cannot find similarity is with Thomas. The professor shared three things about Thomas and I share none of them. First, I am exactly the opposite of a great expert of technology. I am really a technophobe. Secondly, you wrote so many books and I did not. Thirdly, you have been in so many places. Therefore, I can only tell you that I am really very proud to get the prize together with you. According to what I heard tonight, you stand for the old, good journalism that unfortunately is vanishing and disappearing from the world.

We are very few, very few who care about what we write, very few who are not just cynical reporters, very few who stand for ideology and ideas, for some kind of goals that are more than just getting scoops or likes on twitter or Facebook. This is a very rare phenomenon today. And, I guess in your country – I heard what chancellor Vranitzky said about journalism here – we share the same challenges.

About Israel and politics, I will only say a few sentences. First of all, my second name is pessimism, so let me tell you to not expect too much from the new government, because you will be disappointed. Those who thought – many European leaders included – it was all about Netanyahu and once we get rid of him, Israel will get in a new way, occupation will end within months, Israel will become the most just place on earth, and the IDF will become the most moral army in the world.

I have told Israelis many times: “Why should the IDF be the most moral army in the world? Let’s make it the second most moral army in the world. Let’s say the army of Luxembourg is the most moral one and we are the second most moral army.” And they get so offended: “How dare you? Air forces warn the people before they destroy their houses, look how moral we are, look how moral our pilots are.”

Therefore, my friends I have bad news for you, this is going to continue. The occupation is going to continue, the Jewish supremacy between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean is going to continue because the majority of Jews want it to continue. There is almost no difference among all the Zionist parties in Israel. A part of them is described as left-wing, a part of them is described as right-wing but when it comes to the core issues, Jewish supremacy and the continuation of the occupation and having the so-called Jewish and Democratic State, they all agree, there is no difference whatsoever.

To expect the new government led by a settlers’ radical friend, when the minister of justice is a hardliner who built a concentration camp in the Negev when he was minister of interior to imprison all the asylum seekers in Israel, and when the big hope of the left is nothing else than a moderate right-winger. Believing that this government will bring a change is really being disconnected from reality. And reality means, as long as the international community will not get involved, nothing will change my dear friends.

I am very sorry to say so but do not expect the Israelis to wake up one shiny morning after 53 years of occupation and 100 years of Jewish supremacy in Israel and say: “You know what, it is not so nice, let’s change it”. This will not happen. There is no reason this will happen. The only way this will happen is the way it happened in South Africa. South Africa would have stayed an Apartheid state until this very moment if the international community had not intervened. And when I say intervene, I do not mean condemnations, Israel learned to live with all the condemnations of the EU, nobody cares.

We have here the former Austrian ambassador and he knows that Austria or the EU can condemn Israel and settlements. There were years where Israel took those condemnations very seriously and tried to avoid it, today Israel knows they are hollow and that is the truth, they are hollow. When Russia is invading Crimea, within weeks there are sanctions. But Russia is a tiny, small, weak country – it is not Israel. But when Israel is occupying so much land and so many people for such a long time - nothing. Even the word sanction is not mentioned, nobody speaks about sanctions.

Israel is a special case and my last, but really not least remark must be to you Europeans and you Austrians in particular. Listen, my friends: there is a new strategy run very successfully by Israel in the last few years: anybody who dares to criticize Israel will be labeled as an anti-Semite.

You cannot say a word about Israel without an immediate reaction, no matter if you are a Jew or not, you will be labeled as an anti-Semite. And you know what? It is working! It shut the mouth of Europe. Not only in Germany and Austria, but also in other places. Just look what happened to the Labor Party and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. Look at how you cannot raise your voice anymore. Many journalists have told me that they want to raise their voices against occupation and for equal rights but we cannot do it, not in our country. This is not an Israeli/Palestinian problem anymore; it is becoming a problem for European democracy and freedom of speech. It is as simple as that: it is about the freedom of speech.

The reaction of all those who really stand for justice must be “It is not up to Israel to define who is an anti-Semite and who is not”. There are anti-Semites and they should be fought and there is anti-Semitism and it should be condemned, no doubt about that. But labeling any critique on Israel as antisemitism is a cynical manipulation. Almost all Europeans fell into this trap, leaders, politicians and media, but also ordinary citizens.

A few years ago, Catrin, my partner, and I were invited by the solidarity movement in Berlin, the solidarity movement with the Palestinians. They could not find a venue in Berlin. We had to go 200 km to a Copt monastery in the mountains with an old Egyptian monk gave us his venue. So we could have a seminar about solidarity with the Palestinians while in Berlin nobody would give them a venue for such a weekend, which was totally innocent. It was an intellectual gathering which should be legitimate.

Among other reasons I am here to tell you: "Do not surrender to this manipulation because it is a very cynical one". Thank you so much for coming and thank you for having me, thank you above all for the prize.