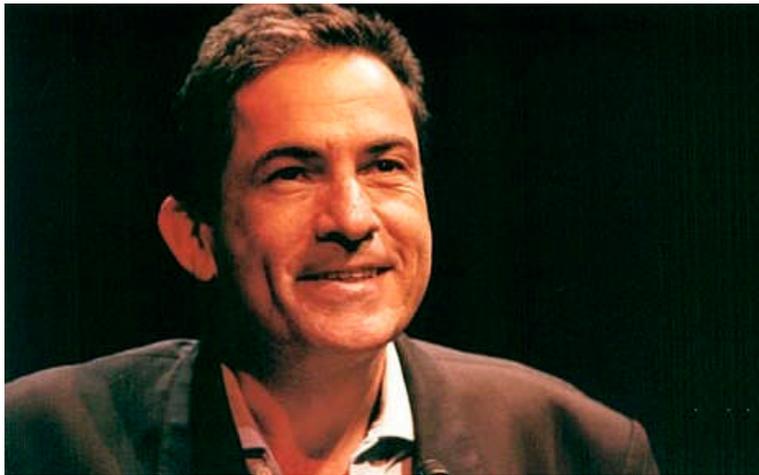




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POLITICS

Israel's primo journo

GIDEON LEVY TALKS MIDEAST PEACE IN TORONTO
BY ELLIE KIRZNER

My fingers know the well-worn path that scrolls to [Gideon Levy's](#) name on the site of the Israeli daily Haaretz. But my digits aren't the only ones making this journey — for mideast activists following news from Gaza or the West Bank, Levy's the primo journo.

But Wednesday, the award-winning columnist and author of *The Punishment of Gaza* wasn't ducking IDF bullets, he was in front of an audience of 500 at U of T's Medical Sciences Building at a meeting hosted by Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East.

Levy, son of Holocaust parents and a one-time aide to current president



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Shimon Peres, has been knocking out columns for 20 years from the Occupied Territories, describing the horrendous details of Palestinian life under the thumb of the IDF. The stories (with oodles of national guilt on the side), are often sadly exclusive, he laments, mostly because other media aren't interested in such narratives.

"I try to tell Israelis stories they don't want to hear" he says. "Israelis," are in a coma."

(To put the influential [Haaretz](#) in perspective, it's circulation is less than 100,000.)

A sardonic man who still manages playfulness, Levy devotes much time to a decode of the Israeli psyche — something which, at first hearing, might sound a trifle gauche. There are Israelis in the audience, after all, and heaven knows, many of us have Israelis in our own families.

But this isn't a traipse through messy national character talk; it's political mindset he's really interested in. "There was never an occupation in history in which the occupier felt so good about himself," he says. "There was never an occupation where the occupiers presented themselves as victims."

He quotes Golda Meir: "we will never forgive the Arabs for forcing us to kill their children."

Levy's despair is palpable and his tone quite different from touring Israeli activists who regale listeners with upbeat tales of resistance at the Wall and protest against home demolitions. This is one pessimistic journalist.

"I'm afraid to say, I can't see change coming from within the society — why should Israelis bother? Life is good." The occupation is 42 years old, he points out; Israel's only existed 19 years without it. It's systemic now, he says, a terrible part of taken for granted reality.

"The world knows more about the occupation than any average Israeli." Many have never actually met Palestinians and many of the latter have never met an Israeli who isn't armed. he says.

Are there any hopes for a peace breakthrough? It used to be said 25 years ago, he says, that if 300 officers refused to fight, the occupation would end. Well, there are 300 now, but "the dramatic effect didn't happen. It all goes through the filter of the Israeli media. We have built ourselves an imaginary world."

As to his own influence, Levy ruefully explains that: "such a meeting as this would never take place in Jerusalem...I can only tell you how deeply moved I am by an evening like this."

I actually believe he is.

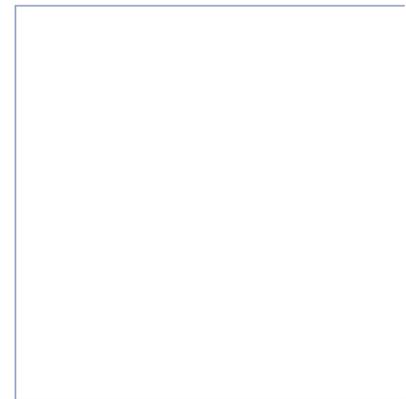
MORE LEVYISMS:

ON THE CURRENT ROUND OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

"STATE negotiations with the representatives of one half of the Palestinian



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we are negotiating with the representative or one half of the Palestinian people. Hamas is excluded — the only time in history where the occupied actor is being boycotted... If there is no recognition of the need to end the occupation, there's nothing to negotiate.”

ON HAMAS

“Hamas is not my cup of tea... but there are reasonable people in Hamas. It's a fatal mistake pushing them into a corner. I don't know if we can make peace with them, but we have to try.”

ON PEACE WITH IRAN

“[The problem with Iran] should be the main incentive to make an agreement with Syria and the Palestinians...The president of Syria begged for peace but Israel ignored it and he's an ally of Iran. I can't imagine this rationale. I don't underestimate the danger of Iran, but you have to do what can be done.”

ON BOYCOTTING ISRAEL

“Boycott is a legitimate weapon. Israel is using it with Hamas. I boycott products of the Occupied Territories... I don't boycott Israel — I live in Israel. I don't call on people to boycott what I don't. Boycott might be effective. I wish it would but I'm not sure [it will be]... It might [also] push Israelis into a more nationalistic corner. They will think the whole world is anti-semitic. ... I leave it open to you to decide.”

ON JEWS AS CHOSEN PEOPLE

“This started in the bible and it should have ended in the bible. I would prohibit the bible to anyone under 18.”



Sep 25, 2010 at 07:40 AM

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