

In memoriam

Hans Joachim Meyer, born in 1924, died on 23 August 2014. The simplistic label 'anti-Zionist' does not do justice to Hajo Meyer's convictions.

Hajo's temperament, combined with his upbringing and personal experience, instilled in him a deep revulsion of any tendency to exclude or belittle other human beings. As he saw it, Zionism had long since ceased to be a liberation movement for Jews, developing instead into an ideology that justifies oppression and exclusion, and that has created ever more extreme ways of practicing them in the Middle East, in its dealings with the Palestinians.

He therefore regarded Zionism as the utmost betrayal of the Judaism that had been passed down to him: a nineteenth-century, enlightened, humanist and inclusive approach to human beings and the world. The State of Israel being the primary custodian, exponent and executor of present-day Zionism, Hajo Meyer did not feel kindly disposed towards it, to put it mildly. He took little interest in – and had even less patience with – the tragic side of Zionism: the almost inevitable, success-bred perversion of a movement that originated from a desire for liberation, but whose very success twisted it into the opposite, in its approach to others. To Hajo Meyer, the injunction in the Book of Exodus was absolute: "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Hajo Meyer regarded the politics of the State of Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians as a daily violation of this commandment. This violation roused him to a towering rage, of near-Biblical proportions, for all his diminutive height – he referred to himself as "Hajo with the little legs," in self-mockery but also in gratitude, since he believed that his small size had helped him adhere to the primary rule of survival in the *Appellplatz* and in Auschwitz, which was never, ever to attract attention.

He died on Friday night, this remarkable man, a week after a large party held to celebrate his 90th birthday, where he and his wife Chris entertained their guests with a piece by Sibelius on violins he had built himself; and contrary to the intentions of his would-be executioners, he slipped away peacefully in his sleep. He died on the day on which the *New York Times* published a large advertisement: "Survivors and Descendants of Survivors of Nazi Genocide Condemn the Massacre of Palestinians in Gaza." At the top of the long list of signatories was that of Hajo Meyer.

A survivor has died. A combative spirit, an uncompromising but non-violent warrior, one of the Righteous among the Nations.

Jaap Hamburger, chair, Een Ander Joods Geluid ("A Different Jewish Voice").