

## Jewish Political Studies Review

States. It provides the reader with a description of a new development within the rich history of the Israel advocacy world.

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Ferhat Mehenni, *Le siècle identitaire; la fin des Etats post-coloniaux* (The Century of Identities: The End of Post-Colonial States), Paris: Editions Michalon, 2010, 190 pp., French.

*Reviewed by Michelle Mazel*

Ferhat Mehenni is far from being a household name, though he is the head of the—admittedly self-proclaimed—provisory government of Kabilya, a vast region in the North-Eastern part of Algeria. The Kabyles who belong to the larger Berber ethnic group are indigenous to North Africa; they have their own language and traditions, though they were Islamized in the first wave of Islamic conquest. They remained largely autonomous in the Ottoman Empire but became part of Algeria under French domination. They were at the forefront of that country's violent fight for independence from the French. Algeria became independent fifty years ago and, ever since, the Kabyles, who make up a third to forty percent of the population of Algeria, have been clamoring for self-government.

Born in 1951, Ferhat Mehenni studied political science at the Algiers university while pursuing a singing career; in 1973 he won the first prize at the modern music festival of Algiers but soon turned his talent to protest songs directed against the government and the Muslim establishment (though he himself is a Muslim). This led to repeated periods of imprisonment—he was arrested 13 times—and eventually to his departure in exile. It is from Paris that in June 2010 he founded the Provisional Government for the Autonomy of Kabilya, of which he is the president.

In this relatively short essay, Mehenni is trying to place his people's fight in the larger context of colonization and decolonization as well as what he sees as the failure of international institutions. "By analyzing the obstacles to be found on the path to freedom of the Kabyle people, he writes, I became aware of the fact that the situation of Kabilya, however singular it may appear to the uninitiated, is far from being an exception."<sup>1</sup> While his thinking on historical processes is original and articulate, his attempts at drawing from the universal to the specific condition of his people can be disconcerting for the reader who does not know Kabilya well enough to follow his logic. Yet some of his observations are extremely interesting.

Decolonization missed the point, he states, and in fact permitted the continuing existence of artificial entities created in colonial times: “The fundamental detail which is forgotten or that one does not want to see is the fact that following that during the fifties and the sixties following their achievement independence, [new states were not created but rather new regimes asserted their authority within the existing colonial boundaries]. It is not because the presidency of the republic is henceforth vested in an authentic native son instead of a European colon that the nature of the institutions finds itself changed.”<sup>2</sup> What he meant is that the new states born after the fight for independence retained the borders of the colonial state that preceded them; borders that had been drawn as a result of wars of conquest and of conflicts between the colonial powers themselves, with no consideration for ethnic, linguistic and historical boundaries. “In the beginning, he writes,<sup>3</sup> there is the act of colonization, the violation of identities and peoples through the definition of new borders.” Paradoxically accession to independence only made things worse, the international principle of the intangibility of borders branding a natural aspiration to freedom as so-called “separatism”<sup>4</sup>

Hence for Mehenni, a country created by a colonial act—be it the last act of the colonial power granting independence to a former colony - is simply illegal, since “it is not the emanation of the will of its people (or peoples) but that of a foreign authority which believes it can do it because it is stronger.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, most of these old/new states are not viable since the different peoples included in these states are engaged in a merciless fight for domination. “The will to live together which should be at the basis of every contract of national unity, between different peoples constituting a single state, is conditioned by treating all equally, by mutual recognition and respect....Between peoples, forced unions will sooner or later lead to divorces which are often bloody.”<sup>6</sup> Witness the countless feuds and civil wars—from Rwanda to Darfur and even to Cote d’Ivoire and Kenya, tearing apart former colonial countries. According to Mehenni, it is, among other things, to avoid such an issue in Algeria that a movement to promote an autonomous solution for Kabylia was launched.

But there is another aspect to the problem, he says. These new but flawed states—whether they are democracies or dictatorships - are not ready to grant autonomy—let alone independence - to the ethnic or national minorities living within their borders. And because they are now members of the international community and of all international institutions, they can often thwart the efforts of these minorities to obtain recognition; furthermore European countries, battling with their own problems and fiercely opposing the emergence of what it calls “*communautarianisme*” do not see that what is happening in their former colonies. Worse, because even today major powers need the votes of these countries at the UN and other international bodies, they refrain from antagonizing them by supporting the legitimate aspirations of national minorities.

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It must be stressed that this book was published in 2010. Since then, South Sudan achieved its independence, which would certainly be considered a positive event by the author. At the same time, the popular explosion that brought down a number of dictatorships in the Arab world appears about to instate in their stead Islamic regimes that are unlikely to be more open to the needs of their ethnic and religious minorities.

Nonetheless, Ferhat Mehenni is doggedly keeping up the fight while his songs still bring hope to his people....

### NOTES

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2. P. 31.
3. P. 72.
4. P. 86.
5. P. 73.
6. P. 90.

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William D. Rubinstein, Michael A. Jolles, and Hilary L. Rubinstein, eds., *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011, 1061 pp.

*Review by Leslie Wagner*

From Arthur Louis Aaron to Szmul Mordekhai Zygielbojm this ambitious volume covers everyone (or almost everyone, more of that later) who was or is anyone in Anglo Jewry. The first and last entrants both died during the Second World War. Aaron, a young British airman from Leeds, was shot down over Turin and piloted his plane with one hand to enable it to land in Allied territory, before succumbing to his wounds. He was awarded the posthumous Victoria Cross. Zygielbojm was born in a Polish shtetl at the end of the Nineteenth Century, escaping in 1939. He became a member of the Polish Government in Exile in London, campaigning tirelessly to publicize the fate of Jews in his Nazi occupied homeland. In May