

Esther Webman (1947–2020)

Dina Porat

Dina Porat is head of the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and incumbent of the Alfred P. Slaner Chair in Antisemitism and Racism, Tel Aviv University. She is also the chief historian of Yad Vashem. Her most recent book is Vengeance and Recompense are Mine: The Yishuv, the Holocaust and the Abba Kovner Avengers Group, winner of the Babat Prize. Her previous book, The Fall of a Sparrow: The Life and Times of Abba Kovner, received the National Jewish Book Award.

Dr. Esther Webman, a dear friend for decades and an outstanding scholar, passed away suddenly on June 16. Esti—as she was fondly called by her many friends and colleagues—has left behind a void that cannot be filled and we find ourselves in deep mourning.

Esti's research was well known internationally and highly acclaimed. She was one of the foremost scholars on antisemitism and perceptions of the Holocaust in the Arab and Muslim world. Her leadership in this field was evident in her numerous publications, lectures, and papers presented at conferences. She distinguished herself by her original thinking, sharp and critical eye, and deep understanding of the political and social realities in the Arab world at large, whether today or in the recent past. Esti's writing was lucid and well balanced, and she always shied away from exaggeration or extremism.

Born in Cairo, Esti grew up speaking Arabic and French. She had a gift for languages and later in life learned to write impeccable English. After being driven out of Egypt, her family immigrated to Israel. She grew up in Migdal Ha'Emek, a small town in the Galilee, and was educated in an excellent boarding school, where she was always at the top of her class. Esti served as a lieutenant in an elite IDF intelligence unit that later became known as 8200. Upon completing her army service shortly after the Six-Day War, she embarked on a brilliant academic career at Tel Aviv University, receiving the highest praise of her professors.

Esti served as a senior researcher and editor-in-chief of publications at the Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. She was a staff member at the

Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Antisemitism and Racism, and in the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, all three at Tel Aviv University. One of the most noteworthy among her many publications was *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust*, co-authored with Prof. Meir Litvak. That book won the gold medal of the Washington Institute for Middle Eastern Policy in 2010. She also authored the sections on the Arab world for the reports on antisemitism that were published annually by the Stephen Roth Institute and later by the Kantor Center, beginning in 1994. Those texts were exemplary in their accuracy, depth of analysis, and skillful use of a wide variety of sources, and were characterized by their courageous assessments. Her colleagues will never forget her steadfastness in defending her scholarly findings, which she always reached through meticulous research. Esti contributed her scholarship to this journal and other academic publications as well.

Esti insisted that in recent years, if one listened carefully, new voices in the Arab and Muslim world could be heard which deviate from those expressing antipathy toward Jews and the Jewish State, especially among intellectuals and political analysts. These bold individuals point out the damage caused to the reputations of Arabs and Muslims in the West when the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or the idea that Jews use blood for ritual purposes are hailed as absolute truth along with other ludicrous notions about Jews. Esti had high hopes that these moderate voices would pave the way to at least a modest reconciliation between Israel and its neighbors. Those hopes matched her political and social convictions, which always led her to champion the rights of minorities, the weak, and the disadvantaged.

She leaves behind her son, Oded, her daughter, Adi, and her grandson, Adam, who was the apple of her eye.

Her memory will definitely be a blessing.