

Scholar of international relations whose views on radical Islam were shaped by his own Irish heritage

FRED HALLIDAY, who died on April 26 aged 64, was Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, whose expertise on the complexities of the Middle East and the Muslim world reached a substantial public audience.

One of Halliday's principal aims, in numerous books, talks and media interviews, was to debunk the sort of "clash of civilisations" rhetoric which tends to frame the debate about relations between the West and the Muslim world. In *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (1996), he analysed the development of Western anti-Islamic sentiment, demonstrating that the idea of Islam as a monolithic block in opposition to Western values is a "chimera".

He showed the Muslim world to be as diverse in its political, social and religious traditions as the Western Christian one, with trade, military advantage, and inter-ethnic rivalry playing just as important a role as any idea of a unified Islam acting in concert.

After 9/11, Halliday was swift to challenge those who talked of cultural clashes or sought answers to Islamic terrorism in Islamic texts. In an article published in *The Observer* a week after the attacks, he argued that the central causes were to be found in a weakening, if not collapse, of the state in countries like Afghanistan and Yemen, which had created a vacuum in which a culture of violence and religious demagoguery could thrive. The main target of the attacks was not, he argued, American power or Western culture, but the states of the Middle East themselves.

Thus he saw no point in "dialogue" between religions

or civilisations, however well-intentioned, because "as soon as you admit the... legitimacy of cultures and, implicitly, of those usually bearded old men who interpret them, you are caught in a spider's web". Instead, the framework for addressing conflicts between and within states should be based on international law and the principles of the United Nations.

Halliday began his career on the radical Left as a member of the editorial board of the *New Left Review*. But he was always his own man and parted company with the *Review* in the early 1980s, disenchanted with what he saw as its selective approach to human rights and its tendency to justify tyrannies in the name of anti-imperialism.

In the defence of rights which he saw as universal, he tended to favour outside intervention to rid people of oppressors. He saw a Soviet-backed regime as preferable to the Taliban in Afghanistan, and supported western interventions in Kosovo and Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq (though in the last two cases he thought the occupiers ill-prepared for the task).

The anti-interventionist stance of the Left, he felt, ignored the potentially progressive effects of imperialism and the real interests of oppressed peoples: "The key issue is not: Is the US intervening? Nor: What are the US's motives? The key issue is will that intervention plausibly help those people or not?"

In an interview in 2005 Halliday explained that his perspective was deeply influenced by his upbringing in Ireland near the border with Northern Ireland: "If I had to sum up what is for me the bedrock, personal, political experience, it is the



Halliday: railed against ducks' feet, Stetsons and sheep's eyes

Irish question." "Troops out of Ireland", he felt, was as irresponsible a slogan as "Troops out of Afghanistan".

Frederick Halliday was born in Dublin on February 22 1946 to an Irish Catholic mother and an English Methodist-Quaker father. He was educated at the Marist school in Dundalk before going to Ampleforth college in Yorkshire, where he briefly toyed with the idea of becoming a priest. But his Catholicism did not stick (in an article in 2007 he proposed the abolition of the Vatican), and at Queen's College, Oxford, he was converted to the secular religion of Marxism.

He graduated in 1967 with a First in PPE and in 1969 moved to the School of

Oriental and African Studies, where he undertook a master's degree in Middle East politics. The same year he joined the editorial board of the *New Left Review*.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s he marched against the Vietnam War, spent a summer holiday at a student work camp in Cuba, and travelled around with Dhofari separatists fighting a guerrilla war against the British-trained soldiers of Sultan Qaboos of Oman. Two decades later Halliday would concede that Qaboos, who modernised Oman, brought it prosperity and moved it towards democracy, had been a good thing.

At the same time he embarked on a series of studies of a region he

believed to be widely misunderstood: *Arabia without Sultans* (1974); *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (1978), which exposed the instability of the Shah's regime a year before the Islamic revolution, and *Mercenaries in the Persian Gulf: Counter-insurgency in Oman* (1979).

These benefited from his adventurous travels in the region, an ever widening network of acquaintances from Morocco to Afghanistan, and his fluency in Arabic, Farsi, Russian and the major languages of Western Europe. In the 1980s, Halliday began to range more widely with *The Ethiopian Revolution* (1982), co-authored with Maxine Molyneux, who would become his wife in 1979, and *The Making of the Second Cold War* (1983).

After completing a doctorate on nationalist upheaval in Yemen at the London School of Economics, Halliday worked at the institution as Professor of International Relations from 1985 to 2008, when he moved to Spain as a research professor at the Barcelona Institute for International Studies. His output during his time at the LSE alternated specialist studies such as *Arabs in Exile: Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain* (1992) with more general surveys, such as *Rethinking International Relations: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge* (1994), and *Revolution and World Politics* (1999), in which he argued that revolutions have been as important as war in the shaping of the international order.

Within two months of September 2001, he published *Two Hours that Changed the World*, analysing the factors and forces behind the attack, and its likely effect

on foreign policy. Other works include *The Middle East in International Relations* and *100 Myths about the Middle East* (both 2005).

Halliday was an inspiring teacher, loved by his students, not least because he could be entertainingly rude to colleagues whom he felt were guilty of peddling pomposity, repetition and banality – "Starkey's syndrome", as he put it.

As a veteran of academic conferences Halliday's pointed but light-hearted advice to the organisers of such events in an article in 2007 evoked the peripatetic life of the successful academic in the injunction "not to foist oppressive, embarrassing or vexatious local practices on often tired, patient and stressed visitors, such as long boring 'high table' dinners (Oxford, Cambridge), third-rate Indian restaurants (most other UK universities), ducks' feet as main course (Beijing), Stetson hats (Texas), sheep's eyes (Khartoum), fatty sheep's tails (Ulan Bator), mastication sessions of narcotic qat (Sanaa, Aden), hypocritical pretence at avoidance of alcohol (most Arab universities), evening meal at 6pm with no alcohol (East Coast, US), evening meal at 11.30pm with too much alcohol (Barcelona, Madrid, Moscow, Berlin), ponderous, ugly and useless formal presents (Baghdad and many other places), long, vapid and self-regarding introductions by the chair (much of the world), pestering and importuning about own students who have failed to get into the London School of Economics (pretty much everywhere)."

Fred Halliday was elected to the British Academy in 2002. He is survived by his wife Maxine and their son.