

5. Hermeneutic Chicanery

A contribution to the debate on migration and memory in Germany

In memoriam Ahmed Badawi

West German Remembrance

West Germany – and later reunified Germany¹ – has liked to see itself as a role model for dealing with the experience of dictatorship and mass murder. Decades of widely ranging governmental and non-governmental remembrance projects have brought many at home and abroad to see Germany as a “model student” of socially effective ways of dealing with genocide, persecution, and racist murder. The renowned US anthropologist Susan Slyomovics, herself the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and the author of *How to Accept German Reparations*, has called German remembrance policies the gold standard.² German organizations are often invited to advise wherever there are efforts to learn from past crimes and to transition from dictatorship to democracy. The Goethe-Institut and the German political foundations (with the exception of the AfD-affiliated Desiderius Erasmus Foundation, founded in 2017) have had a major share in conveying the German experience. In 2013, the Goethe-Institut devoted an issue of its arts magazine, *Art & Thought*, to dealing with the past, opening with an editorial that states: “Germans have acquired a reputation as both experts and model students in the discipline of coming to terms with the past.” (*Art & Thought* 2013: 1).

1 For research on the connection between racism, anti-Semitism, and colonial crimes in the GDR from the 1950s onwards, see the lecture by Mario Keßler (ZZF) at the Einstein Forum on October 4, 2021 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KH86kiZFjw&t=6s>).

2 The lecture of Susan Slyomovics at Freie Universität Berlin in 2018 on *The Afterlives of Wiedergutmachung: Algerian Jews and Palestinian Refugees* came under attack by Antideutsche (<https://www.salonkolumnisten.com/eine-moralische-katastrophe/>).

After the German Nazi-era “breach of civilization” (*Zivilisationsbruch*, Dan Diner; Jürgen Habermas), with its industrialized murder of neighbors and fellow citizens, remembrance was afforded a central place from the 1970s onwards as a way of coming to terms with the past to shape the future. The aphorism by Spanish philosopher George Santayana that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”, dating from before World War I, became a mantra in West German “remembrance work” (*Erinnerungsarbeit*, Frigga Haug). By implication, this must mean: Those who *do* remember are *not* condemned to repeat. Therefore, the exemplary forms of remembrance in Germany should be the best test case to verify the dictum “Never again!”: Will German society now be immune to the recurrence of pogroms? Will it be quick next time to recognize the dehumanization of its neighbors? These questions are very much on the minds of many new arrivals and second and third-generation migrants to the country as they watch aggressive right-wing populists march through public institutions attacking Jews and Muslims, and personally experience privately held anti-Semitic and Islamophobic prejudices.

Henryk M. Broder once wrote that the Germans misunderstood Holocaust survivor Hermann Langbein’s outcry, “Never again Auschwitz!” (“Nie wieder Auschwitz!”), to mean, literally: Never again must Jews be exterminated *in Auschwitz*. Broder was alluding that they were incapable of imagining that Auschwitz might reoccur somewhere else or in other manifestations, and that they would, therefore, not be able to implement “Never again!”. (Broder 2012)

If remembering the Holocaust is about not repeating genocide and extermination in the future and possibly worldwide, then other genocides must be compared with the Holocaust and vice versa. Russia’s attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, painfully updated the question of what exactly we Germans have learned from our own history. In many pro-Russian countries, the attack brought out blatant anti-Semitism, including in the figure of the “Nazi Jew” Volodymyr Zelensky. Today, making “Never again” operational is being widely discussed across German society: Did it mean “Never again war,” “Never again appeasement,” “Never again anti-Semitism,” or “Never again dehumanization and extermination of a minority”? Linking Germany’s politics of remembrance to practical norms, such as support for the state of Israel, was important, but what level of abstraction did this involve? Had society come to an understanding about this?

Migration and change

Broad sections of West German society only began to grapple with the perpetrators and victims of National Socialism after 1979, when the US television miniseries *Holo-*

caust was broadcast in Germany to much controversy.³ At that time, I was 12, the child of a German-Egyptian family, and I watched the series and read a variety of related books for young people, such as *When Hitler Stole the Pink Rabbit*, published in German in 1973, *Damals war es Friedrich* (10th edition of 1979), *Ich bin David* (4th edition of 1979), and of course, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (47th edition of 1979). Since the 1980s, most of post-war German society – along with its migrant population – has been grappling with the rise of fascism, the devaluation of human life, and the Shoah in academia, the arts, and politics.

Migrants who settle in Germany can certainly be expected to engage with German history and the Holocaust. Sensitivity to diverse educational backgrounds, appropriately coordinated educational programming, and interest in the history of the immigrants is nevertheless needed, and increasingly available. In the immigrant society, the “perspective on and from history [...] is fractured, narratives are restructured, themes are varied, new ones are added, and old ones dropped, and the kaleidoscope of historical observation becomes more colorful.” (Georgi/Ohliger 2009: 7). In this context, one can well imagine that non-Europeans who see images from a Nazi concentration camp here for the first time will be frightened. This is not a disgrace or an educational gap. They may experience flashbacks that update their own experiences of violence. And they may ask themselves: What historical continuities are there in Germany? How do the NSU, AfD, Nazi marches, and everyday racism fit into this history? Could similar transgressions still be possible today? Indeed, representatives of German politics are also asking themselves these questions. What guarantees do people with a migration background from the Global South and other minorities have that history will not repeat itself? Are they just being overly sensitive as they become aware of the German past?⁴

At the beginning of the new millennium, my friend and colleague Ahmed Badawi, to whom this text is dedicated, said in private that Muslims would become the new “internal enemies” in Germany. I vehemently forbade myself to make such remarks. Today I must admit that, as an agnostic, he sensed a form of anti-Muslim racism early on. The series of murders committed by the so-called *National Socialist Underground* (NSU) against Germans with an immigrant background and a policewoman has yet to be fully solved and saw the victims themselves placed under suspicion for years.

In Hanau in 2020, another perpetrator deliberately gunned down people with a migration background in a shisha bar. The emergency exit, through which many of them could have been saved, was locked. On October 9, 2019, a heavily armed right-wing extremist attempted to break into the synagogue in Halle on Yom Kippur and kill the 51 people gathered there. When he failed to do so, he shot and killed a female

3 For the reactions, see Hammerstein 2019.

4 See also Özyürek 2018.

pedestrian who approached him outside the synagogue about the explosions. He then drove to a Turkish kebab snack bar 500 meters away, threw more explosives, and killed yet another person there. That day on *heute journal*, newscaster Claus Kleber interviewed right-wing extremism researcher Hajo Funke on the two targets – first a synagogue, then a kebab snack bar. Kleber said, “The whole thing seems random and crazy, doesn’t it?”⁵

Watching TV that October 9, 2019, I didn’t find it random at all; to me, it seemed crystal clear and inherently consistent. In response to Pinar Atalay’s (clearly more qualified) question in the ARD *Tagesthemen* shortly thereafter, as to whether the perpetrator, after his failure at the synagogue, had chosen the Turkish snack bar at random, the terrorism expert in the studio, Georg Mascolo, replied: yes, he was probably, like many terrorists, “nothing more than a common murderer” who “simply sought out other victims at random and murdered them.”⁶ These experts completely ignored the ideological superstructure that has interlocked hostility toward Jews and Muslims for almost 20 years. Wolfgang Benz summarized the research findings in the 2008 *Yearbook for Research on Anti-Semitism* as follows: “[T]he phenomenon of Islamophobia [is] interesting because it is widely argued with stereotypes that are familiar from research on anti-Semitism, such as the claim that the Jewish or Islamic religions are viciously inhumane and require their adherents to behave immorally toward those of other faiths” (Benz 2008: 10). But findings about the ideological proximity of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic acts are still being ignored. Yet the German ear, trained from decades of memory work, would have to prick up at the sweeping stigmatization of a religion, its practitioners, and practices, as well as the insinuation that they are hiding their true faith, would it not? Especially since this stigmatization includes all those who are linguistically, religiously, and politically completely assimilated in Germany (but possibly still have a Muslim-sounding name). There are more and more people in Germany who are not ashamed to claim that “Islam” is a “violent” and/or “hate” religion. A Judeo-Christian tradition is invoked that deliberately leaves out the third Abrahamic religion. “This is a remarkable process,” Heribert Prantl wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2010, “because the common ground now invoked was the common ground of perpetrators and victims for centuries.”⁷

In this climate, the solidarity of the *Central Council of Jews in Germany* for victims of Islamophobic and Arabophobic attacks and racism was, in my view, of no small significance. While in 2009 the German media initially ignored the racially moti-

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3eprV2IVCU>, min. 7:40-7:43.

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRMX_85lf88, min. 8:44-8:55.

7 Cf. the *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 17, edited by Wolfgang Benz since 2008, as well as the *Jahrbuch für Islamophobieforschung*, published since 2010.

vated murder⁸ of Egyptian pharmacist Marwa el-Sherbini in a Dresden courtroom – she was a witness in an appeal proceeding –, Stephan Kramer, then the Secretary General of the *Central Council of Jews*, visited Dresden in a gesture of mourning and consternation. “The act went largely unnoted in Germany. Although the case was the first to be clearly Islamophobic motivated – the NSU series of murders only became known two years later through the self-disclosure of three perpetrators of the far-right network – there was little coverage, with very few statements by German officials,” the *Tagesspiegel* reported in its commemoration ten years later.⁹ The city of Dresden also long struggled with official remembrance. Just a few days after the murder, Stephan Kramer wrote:

“In view of this situation, a clarifying word is needed. I did not travel to Dresden because, as a Jew, I belong to a minority. I made the trip because, as a Jew, I know that anyone who attacks a person because of their racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation, is attacking, not only the minority, but democratic society as a whole. Therefore, the relevant question is not why a representative of the Jewish community should have expressed grief and solidarity with Elwi Ali Okaz, but why there was not a massive stream of visitors and solidarity speeches from members of the German majority. [...] It seems that German society has not recognized the significance of the attack in Dresden. They have not realized that the murder of Marwa al-Sherbini is quite obviously the result of near unfettered hate propaganda against Muslims that ranges from the extremist fringes of society to its very core.” (Kramer 2009)

Never was I more grateful for a show of solidarity, which I felt even then required civil courage. These words laid the foundation for how I can envision a practical “Never again!”. Jewish solidarity in Germany is what touches me particularly, gives me courage, and plays a key role in the various threatening future scenarios I sometimes picture. I know that other friends with a migratory background go through similar threat scenarios in their mind as well. Back in my school days I remember hearing taunts of “Hegasy – gas her.” (Hegasy – Vergas sie.) Only a fool would not extrapolate about future developments, having the historical background and personal experience, and given new-old right-wing extremism. I don’t obsess over it, but a correlating state of mind has made itself felt in my life in important decision-making situations, putting me on guard.

8 It must not be forgotten that a police officer deliberately shot the husband, rather than the assassin, in the leg, critically injuring him as he ran to help his wife. El-Sherbini was three months pregnant. She died in the courtroom in front of her son.

9 See Dernbach 2019.

National Socialism without a history

The debate on the “(dis)continuity of colonialism and National Socialism” (Geck/Rühling) has been ongoing for 15 years,¹⁰ though it only entered German *feuilletons* in 2020. The so-called *Historikerstreit 2.0.* is surprisingly loud and impertinent. The enormous number of interventions and facets can be garnered from Serdar Günes’ blog, compiling some 200 contributions to the topic.¹¹ Australian genocide researcher A. Dirk Moses calls the current dispute one among journalists – rather than historians – in an attempt to point out a crisis in the freedom of expression. The problem, however, is that the journalists, and not the academics under attack, are Germany’s opinion leaders. In placing the Holocaust in a historical context, scholars such as Michael Rothberg, Jürgen Zimmerer, Dirk Moses, and others now stand accused of Holocaust relativization and trivialization. This alone deserves closer examination.

Why should referring to colonial history and the experiments on humans in the colonies cast the singularity of the Holocaust into doubt? Turn it around and the shoe fits: The brutality, the brutalization, the dehumanization of people in the European-occupied territories was a step (but not the only one – Klaus Theweleit is worth reading on this) towards the dehumanization of German Jews and Jews throughout Europe. There is nothing wrong about including one’s own colonial history in answering how the breach of civilization could have occurred in the 20th century. And perhaps it is, in fact, impossible to answer at all, as Maxim Biller has pitched into the debate.¹²

Historian Jürgen Zimmerer observes:

“that there was a genocide before the genocide and a racial state before the racial state. Germany’s history of violence, therefore, began long before 1933. Such a realization anchors essential features of the Third Reich – i.e., racism, anti-Semitism, genocidal politics – in the history of the Kaiser Reich.” (Interview with Jürgen Zimmerer 2021: 52)

This research finding, however, clearly does not negate the singularity of the Holocaust (of which I am thoroughly convinced). But it also does not make it impossible to

10 See e.g. Zimmerer 2011b.

11 <https://serdargunes.wordpress.com/2021/06/04/a-debate-german-catechism-holocaust-and-post-colonialism/>

12 “And could it not be that there will never be a final, rational answer to the question of what constitutes the inexplicably inexplicable nature of the Holocaust, which as even such people as Dirk Moses and Jürgen Zimmerer will be forced to accept?” (Biller, *Die neuen Relativierer*, *Die Zeit*, September 1, 2021).

think that the concept of 'sub-human humans' had a history before 1933. Jürgen Zimmerer points to connections in Germany's enthusiasm for the overseas possessions of the *Kaiserreich*, which also found its way into the German literature of the time. Of course, continuities such as these are only one of several explanatory threads, which, incidentally, is also what Zimmerer himself, under attack, says:

"It has been asked again and again whether there was a path from Windhoek to Auschwitz. I think there were many paths. Seen from Windhoek, the Third Reich was by no means the necessary consequence. But to stay in the picture: Of the many roads that fed into the criminal policies of National Socialism, one began in the colonies. And this one was not a remote byway." (2011: 70)

It is therefore a malicious reading that suggests that historians of colonialism and postcolonial theorists interpret the Holocaust simply as one of many colonial acts, or as no more than a continuation of colonialism – this time at home and using other means; spinning National Socialism as an act "committed in Africa" for a change. But this is precisely the interpretation currently being insinuated against researchers – including the works of descendants of Holocaust survivors.

Why are Jewish voices being vilified in the process? For example, the event series "School for Unlearning Zionism," conceived by a group of Jewish-Israeli students at the Weißensee School of Art, including Yehudit Yinhar, was deprived of state funding (vulgo: boycotted). Let me suggest a new interpretive approach: In my view, the purpose is to (consciously or unconsciously) prevent Jewish-Arab-Muslim¹³ solidarity and the alliances described above. For this purpose, a competition between victims is contrived and "envy" conjured up: In his article suggestively entitled "The Holocaust was singular. This is now denied by more than just right-wing radicals", Thomas Schmid writes about Rothberg and Zimmerer:

"In post-colonial circles, there seems to be a kind of great envy of the Jews (and Israel). They are accused of effectively staging themselves as a victim nation. [...] More than slight traces of this conviction can be found in many postcolonial authors, who see in Jews, as it were, inheritance hustlers who have usurped a singular victim status for themselves at the expense of Blacks and other colonized people. No doubt, the post-colonials have built at least close to anti-Semitism." (Schmid 2021a)

Jews as "inheritance hustlers"? Turning allegations of anti-Semitism around could not be more perfidious.

Palestinian literary scholar Edward W. Said, commonly regarded as the founder of postcolonial studies, wrote in the Arabic daily *al-Hayat* back in 1998: "We must ac-

13 In the following, I use the term 'Arab' more often to avoid having to distinguish between practicing and the often-overlooked non-practicing or cultural Muslims from the region.

knowledge the realities of the Holocaust; not as a blank check for Israelis to mistreat us, but as a sign of our humanity, our ability to understand history, our demand for mutual recognition of our sufferings.” This is the birth of postcolonial studies – not competition for the status of victimhood or the idea of “Jews as inheritance creep.”

The parallel with the historians’ dispute of the 1980s is also contrived: A “reaction” (as claimed at the time by Ernst Nolte) is not a “preliminary stage” – it is in fact the exact opposite of a preliminary stage. To spell it out: If I say the Holocaust was (only) a reaction to the Gulag and the crimes of Stalinism, then I am qualifying the Holocaust. If I say that dehumanization by European colonialism laid foundations for the subsequent racial theories and “ancestor passes” of the Third Reich, then I am not qualifying it. Why shouldn’t the Nazi murder machinery and its ideological preparation be placed in its historical context (civilizing mission, physical-anthropological measurements, skin color maps, hierarchization of language families)?

Can intellectuals read?

In the debate outlined here, literary critics who should know better mistakenly equate the method of ‘comparing’ with ‘equating’. In science, comparisons are made to work out both similarities and differences. Comparison can therefore also lead to the result: Nothing is the same. “The specific feature that distinguishes the Holocaust from colonial genocides is this turn against the ‘internal enemy’ who must be killed – and who is not to be primarily exploited like the foreign, colonially subjugated population along with their natural resources,” writes Jürgen Habermas in his response to the debate and the question of whether the Holocaust is comparable to other, colonial genocides or not (Habermas 2021:11).¹⁴ The question common to all genocides, which is also central to prevention, is that of the transformation of average citizens into mass murderers, and here research has found answers.

Are the critics of postcolonial thinking unfamiliar with the comparative method? And even more grim: why do so many of them quote out of context or completely wrong? The journalist and editor of the *Welt* publishing corporation, Thomas Schmid, reduces Jürgen Zimmerer to a quote stating that the murder of the Jews would probably not have been possible “if the ultimate breach of taboo [...] had not occurred earlier”. Schmid goes on to say that Zimmerer leaves nothing to be desired in terms of clarity, “colonialism and the Holocaust do not differ in principle, they are of the same essence” (Schmidt 2021a). But what does Zimmerer say?

“Even the murder of the Jews, which – as mentioned – stands out from other genocides in many ways, would probably not have been possible if the ultimate

14 See also the response by Dirk Moses to Jürgen Habermas in *Berliner Zeitung*, 2021e.

taboo break had not happened earlier: i.e., believing that other ethnic groups can simply be annihilated, and acting upon it. And that took place in colonialism.” (2011a: 69)

Jürgen Zimmerer described the usefulness of comparative genocide research as follows:

“As one cannot simulate specific murder situations in a laboratory, the historical examples play a crucial role. They offer the advantage that it is easier to distinguish the causes and effects, the central facts from the superfluous details and the necessary from the sufficient conditions at a historical distance. Much information that was unknown to the contemporaries is accessible to the historian. The best researched example is doubtless the Holocaust. This is partly due to the high level of scientific interest and partly to the fact that the perpetrating regime in Germany collapsed completely in 1945. As a result, no subsequent regime wanted to cover anything up, so all the archives were largely made accessible” (2011b: 215).

His project (as those of many others) is that of prevention, which only works when indicators are established that allow genocide to be recognized in advance rather than ex post. Why is it necessary to accuse Jürgen Zimmerer of dishonest motives ten years later, when his intention is clearly justified in writings available to the public? It is also about the underlying motives of a debate, as Jürgen Habermas writes in his reply.

Habermas explicitly saw no problem in comparing the “Holocaust with other genocides”:

“But the purpose of the comparison varies by context. The so-called *Historikerstreit* was about whether the comparison of the Holocaust with Stalin’s crimes could exonerate posthumous Germans from their political responsibility or, as Jaspers admonished, “liability” for Nazi mass crimes. For were these not, as Ernst Nolte thought at the time, “only” a reaction to the atrocities of Bolshevism? Under other auspices, today it is not a matter of exoneration from this responsibility, but of a shift in the weights” (2021: 10).

A second example of “intellectual citation skills” involves Austrian philosopher Thomas Macho accusing Dirk Moses of using the term “guilt cult” (*Schuld kult*) in his article *The Catechism of the Germans* (2021a) to refer to German memory politics. It’s a term that Reichsbürger and right-wing radicals like to use, insinuating that public Holocaust remembrance is meant to stigmatize Germans as perpetrators and murderers for generations, from denazification on into the future. When challenged,

Macho apologized to Moses for this insinuation, as Moses in fact did not use this term anywhere.¹⁵

And a third example for misquoting: Maxim Biller also deals with Moses' *Catechism of the Germans*.¹⁶ Biller calls Moses an "Auschwitz blasphemer and genocide watchdog" who "in his choleric *J'accuse* text, directed against the evil Holocaust priests of our day, entertains feverish dreams of 'American, British, and Jewish elites' allegedly driving the contemporary sycophantic German gas chamber cult." (2021b) Let's leave both authors their exaggerations. But, Biller misquotes Moses in a key part of the speech that raises the red flag of anti-Semitism: Moses does not speak of "Jewish elites," but of "American, British, and Israeli elites".¹⁷ A wordsmith such as Biller ought know how to quote. Especially when it comes to a remnant of race theory of National Socialism that equates Jews with Israelis that has been very clearly problematized in Germany at least since Ignaz Bubis. In turn any Arab who says "Jews" when he means "Israelis" will be accused of anti-Semitism.

Biller himself writes how he empathized with the Tutsis in 1994, sensitized by the genocides of the Armenian and Jewish members of his family:

"Why? Because as a Jew, and also a bit as an Armenian, I saw myself intentionally-unintentionally reflected in the Tutsis; because it was all happening in my immediate present day, I suddenly turned into a kind of escapee myself, and that in turn was enough for me to empathize with the dismembered, slain, drowned Tutsis."

This empathy also exists between Jews, Israelis, and Arabs. But wherever such empathy surfaces, it is to be suppressed, and the trope of the envious People of Color (PoC), including the vicious Palestinians, enters the debate. Biller continues, "There was no victimhood rivalry between me and them [the Tutsis], not the kind of Holocaust envy one often witnesses as a Jew from the tightly knit ranks of the sanctimonious PoC faction and their Critical Whiteness allies, but only empathy and hope that they were not all dead and their people might live on like the Jews." Holocaust enviers? Inheritance hustlers? This hermeneutic chicanery confirms many accusations by colleagues that they are being muzzled in this debate. Michael Rothberg would call Maxim Biller's account here of the Tutsi genocide precisely as "multidirectional memory".

15 Hanloser (2021) has found more examples of misquoting, which raises the question – especially against the background of the current debate on misquotation in the political class – whether this is a pattern?

16 Per Leo (2021) suggests that it would be better to speak of "dispositive" in Foucault's sense rather than catechism to move away from the religiously charged terminology that is the focus of criticism of Moses' text.

17 Moses writes about this in a reply: "Addressing such a state need for international legitimacy is not an allusion to the anti-Semitic idea of a Jewry ("elites") supposedly directing world politics, as Friedländer insinuates – but a standard argument in the history of international relations." (July 14, 2021).

“Remembering our colonial history, repressed until recently, is an important extension,” Habermas says today. With immigration to Germany, the political culture must “expand in such a way that members of other cultural ways of life can recognize themselves in it with their heritage and, if necessary, also with their history of suffering” (2021: 11) – a pedagogical appeal that has been around for some time in the teaching of history:

“History and identity have been a defining duo for the self-description and location of German society in framing what is national over the past two centuries. The duo has become a trio: Migration complements historical experience, broadens the historical gaze, and redefines social affiliations. This applies to society as a whole, but especially to young people, whose historical images and consciousness are only beginning to develop their contours.” (Georgi/Ohlinger 2009: 20).

Dirk Moses hoped that Habermas’ intervention would bring more objectivity and reason into the debate. If one follows the argumentation I propose here, this can hardly be expected to happen, because the target of those who accuse Zimmerer and Rothberg of Holocaust relativization is not the research in itself but the Jewish-Arab solidarization of the protagonists. This constellation became evident in the removal of the director of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, Peter Schäfer. Under his direction, the museum had seen itself as a place for multi-directional remembrance.¹⁸ Here, the diversity of racisms and of the degradation of peoples was reflected. The 2018/19 exhibition *Welcome to Jerusalem* had shown the city as a “place desired and longed for by members of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim denominations.” Benjamin Netanyahu intervened with Angela Merkel in connection with this exhibition, saying that the museum should be defunded! That Netanyahu was not concerned with a lack of attention to anti-Semitism in the wider memory culture was apparent from his simultaneous tolerance of blatantly anti-Semitic poster campaigns in Hungary.

There is another way to approach the polemic instigated by Dirk Moses, as demonstrated by historian Jacob Eder in his response to the “Catechism of the Germans” in the Swiss online magazine *Geschichte der Gegenwart* – a model for taking on deliberate misinterpretation.¹⁹ Eder refers to the particularly complex history of the development of German Holocaust remembrance from below (68er movement, media, art) as well as from above (ministerial bureaucracy, government representatives), between national and international objectives, all without insinuating dishonest intentions. He considers “the motives behind his [Dirk Moses]’ arguments comprehensible” and shares “his criticism of the lack of confrontation with racism in this country, the failures to come to terms with the history of

18 Incidentally, the Berlin Center for Research on Anti-Semitism (ZfA) has been struggling with accusations of relativizing anti-Semitism since 2008.

19 See <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/jacob-eders-text/>.

the crimes of colonialism, and Germany's lack of empathy toward the suffering of Palestinian civilians in the Middle East conflict." Eder doubts, however, that something like a "catechism" has been enforced in post-reunification Germany and whether a consensus in fact prevails today? The author rightly concludes that it was precisely "in confronting the Nazi past that the essential political, scientific, and remembrance-cultural foundations and 'instruments' were first created, on the basis of which other histories of suffering and crime are researched, discussed, and debated today" (Eder 2021).

It should not be forgotten that the topic of colonialism was introduced to German discourse over the past ten years primarily in connection with the contested construction of the Humboldt Forum on the site of the former Palace of the Republic. Credit goes to the opponents of the plans for the Humboldt Forum, including the activists, scientists, and artists of *Alexandertechnik*, *Artefakte//anti-humboldt*, and the allied campaign *No Humboldt21!*. The debate about colonial history and restitution was forcefully carried from the margins into the socio-political center and is responsible for colonialism being discussed in Germany today.²⁰

So, Germany has been proud – and rightly so – of its culture of remembrance, hard-won over decades. It is no coincidence that the New Right wants to be rid of it. Today, the Holocaust remembrance community is almost global. This achievement means that non-German voices are a part of the conversation. Jewish interventions such as those of literary scholar Michael Rothberg or philosopher Susan Neiman are central because they stand in for voices of people often assumed to be anti-Semitic based on their historical background (i.e., simply for being born in Muslim-majority societies). Who speaks for whom from which position is of importance in all debates – and that includes those concerning the politics of memory. How are we Germans with an Arab cultural background supposed to intervene here when even renowned personalities in Germany such as Susan Neiman face accusations of anti-Semitism from German authorities?²¹ The harsh "Catechism of the Germans" was not the start of a debate, but a reaction to how Jewish scholars are defamed in Germany. In retrospect, Moses writes,

"In the summer [2021, SH] we witnessed a proverbial death of reason. Slander rather than communicative rationality marked the 'discussion'. This kind of discussion is not new. In 2019, Micha Brumlik characterized the Jewish Museum debate as a 'witch hunt' and 'McCarthyism.'" (Moses 2021e).

20 The arrival of these critical positions in state politics (including critical civil society positions) marks the publication of the Humboldt Forum publication *Das Projekt/The Project*, ed. 2009 by Thomas Flierl and Hermann Parzinger.

21 Thus Susan Neiman at the conference 'Historiker streiten' (historians debate) in Potsdam on October 4, 2021: <https://einsteinforum.de/veranstaltungen/blind-spots-of-genocide-problems-in-dirk-moses-the-problems-of-genocide/>, min. 22ff.

The Israel-Palestine Conflict

This climate causes intellectual honesty to fade. For example, commentators equate the phrase “The Palestinians are victims of the victims of the Holocaust” as heard among Palestinians – though not only from them²² – and the ahistorical apologetics and agitation behind “The Israelis are doing to the Palestinians what the Nazis did to them”. The latter is (of course) incorrect and Israel-related anti-Semitism²³, whereas the former is not anti-Semitic (unless one insinuates that the extent of crimes should be equated). It is therefore dismaying to see that an audit conducted by Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, Ahmed Mansour and Beatrice Mansour to investigate allegations of anti-Semitism against individual employees of *Deutsche Welle’s* Arabic editorial team cites precisely the former (not the latter!) sentence as an example of Israel-related anti-Semitism. After this audit, several editors at *Deutsche Welle* were dismissed or transferred.²⁴ Illustrating the so-called three Ds of antisemitism – double standards, demonization, delegitimization of Israel –, the authors conclude that “the understanding of the Middle East conflict as a prolonged reaction to the Holocaust (e.g., the Palestinians are the victims of the victims)” is among “the attitudes that cross the line of acceptable political positions” (Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger et al 2022: 41). On the ground, people see themselves as victims of persecution, expulsion, and genocide in Europe, for which they are in no way (co)responsible. We should think that sentence with the Palestinians – not against them.

Anyone who defines criticism of Israeli government action as anti-Semitic is, by definition, expanding the circle of those suspected of anti-Semitism – which does not mean that there are no anti-Semitic attitudes among those criticizing Israeli policy. In 2022 Robin Schmahl conveyed to me that young Jewish people in Germany fear and partly already experience in their everyday life how the wrong attribution (*Fremdzuschreibung*) of “all Jews are Israelis and Israelis are colonial settlers”, as well as this supposed relativization of the Shoah in the debates about comparing geno-

22 See, for example, Andrew N. Rubin’s lecture at the Barenboim-Said Academy on June 7, 2022, min. 6:59 and min. 34:00 (Rubin’s Facebook page).

23 For the genesis and my critique of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) use of the “working definition of anti-Semitism,” see my article, Antisemitismus-Debatte: (Post-)migrantische Stimmen zulassen (Anti-Semitism Debate: Allowing (Post-)Migrant Voices) (Hegasy 2020).

24 Two female journalists have since won their labor lawsuits against it, see: <https://rsw.beck.de/aktuell/daily/meldung/detail/arb-g-berlin-kuendigung-einer-redakteur-in-wegen-antisemitischer-aeusserung-unwirksam>.

cides, lead to an actual relativization in society.²⁵ Embedding the Holocaust in European colonialism (which – again – does not go counter to the thesis of a *Zivilisationsbruch*) is thus used among parts of the German public as a vulgar hypothesis, so to speak, to update disposable anti-Semitism in a new guise. It is precisely on this point that those scholars, journalists, and politicians who place Rothberg or Neiman in the corner of relativizing the Holocaust and anti-Semitism should reflect their own attacks critically. While anti-Semitism does like to hide behind criticism of the state of Israel, Susan Neiman, Michael Rothberg, Dirk Moses, or Yehudit Yinhar can hardly be anti-Semites. Obviously, they have a political position in the conflict over Israel and Palestine; they demand empathy with the Palestinian victims, and they resist the successful attempts to delegitimize criticism of Israel's policies as anti-Semitic on principle. In an attempt to close all peaceful channels of communication to resolve the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, these researchers are now being vilified to the maximum. Maxim Biller permits himself the liberty of calling these scholars “Holocaust deniers light” (2021b).

Again, why are descendants of Holocaust survivors misquoted and put in a corner with neo-Nazis? From my point of view, such talk aims to stifle the international solidarity already stifled in the Middle East in the past: These are, on the one hand, bonds of solidarity and empathy between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Arabs that crisscross the Israeli border, and on the other, the historical solidarity of persecuted peoples in the Middle East who, in their distress, believed the assurances of the colonial powers. This solidarity of the persecuted existed – even during the Nazi era, both in Germany and in the region²⁶ – and it exists again, for example, in the ‘Days of Jewish-Muslim Guiding Culture’ curated by Max Czollek in 2020, featuring 40 separate events in German-speaking countries. After that event, Maxim Biller, the central protagonist in the *Historikerstreit 2.0*, denied that the curator was Jewish. I only point to the chronology here: Czollek’s Jewishness was not under review beforehand.

People with a migrant background are reading along, but hardly speak out in this debate, although they certainly do not represent a small group, and might have both as their biographical basis – a German history with references to National Socialism and a migrant history. The German-Egyptian journalist Karim El-Gawhary once hung the photos of his two grandfathers in his office: wearing a Fez as headgear on one photo, and in the uniform of the Wehrmacht on the other. This simultaneity

25 Personal exchange with Robin Schmahl in June 2022. At the same time, one can see how the equation Arabs = Muslims = anti-Semites is gaining ever wider acceptance in German society, both im- and explicitly.

26 See, for example, the work of Ronen Steinke, David Motadel, Mikhal Dekel, Robert Satloff, Marc Baer, and Gerhard Höpp.

may well signify a kind of double implication that is neither mutually exclusive nor in conflict with each other but constitutes a German reality.²⁷

After the controversial BDS resolution of the German Bundestag, which initiated a climate of ongoing suspicions of anti-Semitism, I wrote in 2020 – that is, before the case of Nemi el-Hassan broke –

“[w]hat should we Germans with an Arab or Islamic cultural background do [...] without being placed under the devastating general suspicion of being anti-Semitic? [...] Colleagues from the Arab world have confirmed this fear to me in conversations. They fear being targeted and, above all: being intentionally misunderstood and discredited.”

One year later, Nemi el-Hassan, a TV journalist from Bad Saarow with Palestinian parents, who liked posts on the Instagram page of the *Jewish Voice for Peace* (one of the largest Jewish peace organizations in the U.S.), was suspended by WDR from the prospective moderation of the well-known science magazine *Quarks* because of these likes.²⁸

Stop for a moment and think about this: Likes by a Palestinian woman for the *Jewish Voice for Peace* (JVP), an organization founded in 1996 to find a peaceful solution for Israelis and Palestinians, put an end to her career and portray her as an alleged anti-Semite – even though former Israeli ambassador to Germany Avi Primor, together with Israeli historian Moshe Zimmermann, went on to defend Nemi el-Hassan against this campaign in a letter to the WDR Broadcasting Council. Again, it was Israeli-Palestinian solidarity ties that were being targeted – even at the cost of deriding critical Jewish voices as anti-Semitic.

To summarize, four fronts meet in the debate highlighted here that were not necessarily originally linked, either in terms of personnel or matter:

- 1) Debates on memory politics, whose central figures cannot or do not want to distinguish between the idea that “Hitler and the Nazis are just a ‘speck of bird poop’ in over 1,000 years of successful German history” (Alexander Gauland 2018 at the national congress of the AfD’s junior organization, Junge Alternative). Add to this the idea that causes leading to the Holocaust can also be found, among other things, in Germany’s non-European history of violence in the 19th and 20th centuries (through the study of colonial history and cultural memory). Those who turn research on the history of violence into a “longing for a better, more acceptable, even ‘normal’ national history”, a sentiment deemed “apparently not only widespread on the right-wing fringe of German society” (viz. Andreas Wirsching 2022), are intentionally misinterpreting their colleagues.

27 Thank you to Regina Sarreiter for her comment.

28 Cf. Huber 2021.

- 2) An increasing Islamophobia, already anticipated with the end of the Cold War and growing exponentially since the attacks of al-Qaeda in the USA in 2001, because no distinction is made between Islamic terrorist groups, who have Muslim as well as non-Muslim victims, and the majority faith of Islam. Whether “Islam” is a “religion of violence” or not is a question that, unfortunately, even the occasional bourgeois evening round is now pondering.
- 3) The rise of the AfD and its new-right cultural milieu, in which anti-Semitic, but outwardly emphatically pro-Israel motives are mixed with Islamophobic motives (viz., that they are the true opponents of Israel, not oneself).
- 4) The growing notion that one can point a finger at Palestinians and Arabs as the alleged “real anti-Semites” to exonerate and dismiss Germans from their own history and thus – in an act of ostensible solidarity with the state of Israel – to silence “the Other”.

Regarding Israel, this leaves only the *status quo*, i.e., the occupation of the West Bank and the closure of the Gaza Strip. Jewish-Arab connections are attacked for alternative thinking; compassion is prevented, and opposition to current Israeli policy is discredited. Solidarity with Israel means working for a peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. To advocate for a peaceful solution, means to look at and speak out about the suffering on both sides. We *Mischlinge* will not be denied our solidarity with Israel.

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