

demonstrate their relevance for all.¹⁵ This year my department of Sociology was cut despite being one of the most popular majors on campus. I am not sure whether this was because of its content, but behind a curtain of fiscal responsibility, cutting entire departments is an easy way for trustees to legally get rid of tenured professors who teach subjects that they now believe are liberal indoctrination.

Will German academia surrender without condition? – Mathias Delori

Introduction

German Chancellor Scholz was the first head of government to travel to Israel, ten days after the massacre of October 7th, 2023, in order to publicly assure Prime minister Netanyahu of his country's full support. During the same month, German weapons deliveries to Israel increased significantly.¹⁶ This unconditional support took place whilst Israeli officials had already made clear how they intended to respond to the attack. As early as October 9th and 10th, Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant had declared that Israel is "fighting human animals" and that the Israeli military organization should act "accordingly", namely by retaliating "without restraint" and cutting off all vital resources to the population of Gaza.¹⁷ The unconditional support of Germany to Israel did not stop when the debate on the genocidal character of the Israeli war intensified. In January 2024, the German government intervened in favor of Israel when South Africa accused it before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of violating the convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948. The German diplomatic and military support of Israel only decreased progressively in 2024 after the ICJ found that there is a plausible risk of a genocide in Gaza on January 26, 2024, after Nicaragua filed a

15 Young, Jeremy, Jonathan Friedman, and Kasey Meehan. *America's Censored Classrooms: Lawmakers Shift Strategies as Resistance Rises*. PEN America report, 2023.

16 German weapon delivery to Israel increased tenfold in 2023 compared to 2022. 84% of the 2023 export licenses were authorized between October 7 and November 2, 2023. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/israel-deutschland-ruestungsexporte-100.html> (consulted on October 10, 2024).

17 This declaration can be found on page 60 of the application of South Africa's proceedings against the State of Israel of December 29, 2023. <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf> (consulted on October 10, 2024).

proceeding about Germany's complicity in genocide on March 1st, 2024,¹⁸ and after the ICJ published an advisory opinion on July 19, 2024 on the occupation of the Palestinian territories, stating that it is unlawful and that the Israeli policy violates the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, including its article 3 concerning apartheid. During the year 2024, German weapon deliveries decreased significantly¹⁹ and German officials, in particular foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, underlined that "there are also rules for the right to self-defense, and international humanitarian law also applies to the fight against terrorists".²⁰ Throughout this period, German officials justified this unconditional support progressively matched by humanitarian concerns by echoing former Chancellor Angela Merkel's speech before the Knesset in 2008: Germany has a "historical responsibility" towards Israel and Israel's security is part of Germany's *Staatsräson* (raison d'Etat).

I was working at the Centre Marc Bloch, a French-German research center based in Berlin during this period. My colleagues Sonia Combe, Alexandra Oeser and I were puzzled at the German government's stance on Israel/Palestine. As early as 1946, Karl Jaspers had reflected on the notion of guilt after the Holocaust.²¹ He had argued that the notion of criminal guilt could only apply to individuals but that German people – whether they had been criminals/nazis or not -, were responsible in some way of the crimes perpetrated by the German state. Jaspers perceived this responsibility as an opportunity. By reflecting on their responsibility as German citizens (political guilt) and human beings (moral and theological guilt), they would pave the way to the emergence of a new Germany which would show vigilance vis-à-vis racism, in particular antisemitism, and state violence. This universalistic approach to the notion of historical responsibility had been further developed by the Frankfurt school in sociology and philosophy, in particular Theodor Adorno,²² and, more recently, by Paul Ricoeur who argued that a healthy relation to the past should take the

18 On April 30, 2024, the ICJ ruled against Nicaragua's request to take provisional measures against Germany, but the court also declined Germany's request to drop the case. <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/193> (consulted on October 14, 2024).

19 <https://www.reuters.com/world/germany-has-stopped-approving-war-weapons-exports-israel-source-says-2024-09-18/> (consulted on October 15, 2024).

20 <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/baerbock-gazastreifen-israel-hamas-1.6339143> (consulted on October 15, 2024).

21 Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, Heidelberg, Lambert Schneider Verlag, 1946.

22 Theodor Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?", in: Theodor Adorno (dir), *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 10.2*, Frankfurt a.M., 1977 (1959), pp. 555–572, Theodor Adorno, *Erziehung nach Auschwitz. Version en ligne sur*: <https://www.staff.uni-giessen.de/~g31130/PDF/polphil/ErziehungAuschwitzOffBrief.pdf> (consulté le 24/5/2018), Frankfurt., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971 (1966).

form of a *travail de mémoire* (memory work).²³ Ricoeur conceived of the latter as the opposite of *devoir de mémoire* (memory duty). The difference between *travail* and *devoir de mémoire* is what separates critique and sacralization, deconstruction and essentialization, dialogue and monologue ... Although they stem from different theoretical traditions, neither Jaspers nor Adorno nor Ricoeur conceived of historical responsibility in terms of *raison d'Etat*. They argue, on the contrary, in favor of a universalistic approach and a democratic debate on the lessons to be drawn from history. We decided, therefore, to organize a conference in the Spring of 2024 at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin on the German support of Israel after October 7th and its puzzling justification.²⁴

We took some practical measures when organizing this conference: we did not communicate about it in advance; we asked participants to send us a list of trustworthy guests, and we made sure that no others could access the conference. We felt that we had to do so because dozens of public events touching the question of Israel/Palestine had been cancelled during the years and months preceding our conference.²⁵ These attacks against freedom of expression and academic freedom²⁶ had taken an extreme form one month before our conference, in April 2024, during the organization of the Palestine congress. Two conferenciers – physician Ghassan Abu Sita, the rector of the university of Glasgow, and economist Yanis Varoufakis – were denied entry in Germany. The German police also shut down the whole congress when they understood that they might intervene online. Some people we planned to invite to the conference had also been victims of such attacks. Moshe Zuckermann, the author of a seminal book on our topic,²⁷ had just been called “antisemitic”

23 Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Seuil, 2000.

24 <https://cmb.hu-berlin.de/kalender/termin/responsabilite-historique-et-staatsraeson> (consulted on October 14, 2024).

25 The collective “Archive of silence” keeps a record of the cancellation of events and disinvitation in the German academic and artistic fields. <https://bricup.org.uk/article/german-academics-publish-archive-of-silence-listing-instances-of-censorship-on-palestine/> (consulted on October 10, 2024).

26 Freedom of expression is the human right to say or write what one thinks. Academic freedom encompasses the rights of researchers, teachers and students as member of the academic community. Both are protected and limited by law and ethical norms. There are several concepts or “versions” of freedom of expression and academic freedom. Stanley Fish, *Versions of Academic Freedom. From Professionalism to Revolution*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2014.

27 Moshe Zuckermann, *Der allgegenwärtige Antisemit oder die Angst der Deutschen vor der Vergangenheit*, Frankfurt am Main, Westend, 2018.

by the German authorities.²⁸ Zuckermann, whose parents were Holocaust survivors, is not the only Jewish academic who has been called antisemitic for criticizing Israel. As we shall see later, Emily Dische-Becker of Diaspora Alliance, an international NGO which challenges the instrumentalization of antisemitism and Holocaust memory, has calculated that 30% of the artists and academics who have been cancelled in 2023 for alleged antisemitism are Jewish.²⁹

This article investigates how it has become possible, in the country of Jaspers and Adorno, to use the memory of the Holocaust to justify the support of a far-right government that is massacring civilians.³⁰ It also investigates how it has become possible, in the country of Alexander von Humboldt, to cancel critical academics and call them “antisemitic”, even when they are Jewish, for criticizing a state’s policy. My own expertise straddles the fields of sociology and philosophy of memory,³¹ reconciliation,³² othering,³³ and liberal violence.³⁴ However, I have neither worked on the relations between Germany and Israel/Palestine per se nor on (anti-)antisemitism. Therefore, this article also draws on the work of specialists like Sonia Combe, Emily Dische-Becker, Teresa Koloma-Beck, Daniel Marwecki, Dirk Moses, Susan Neiman, Alexandra Oeser, Esra Özyürek, Nahed Samour and Aurélia Kalisky. I am particularly grateful to Aurélia for the time she dedicated to our conversations. I also thank all those colleagues who have been victims of the recent developments and have accepted to testify anonymously.³⁵

28 <https://www.lebenshaus-alb.de/magazin/015060.html> (consulted on October 5, 2024).

29 <https://thedigradio.com/podcast/the-german-question-w-emily-dische-becker/> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

30 On the democratic challenges posed by the massacre of October 7th and its consequences in Germany, see: <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/sprechen-in-zeiten-des-gaza-kriegs-100.html> (consulted on October 14, 2024).

31 Mathias Delori, *La réconciliation franco-allemande. Les oublis de la mémoire*, Les cahiers d’histoire. Numéro spécial. N°100. Dossier coordonné par Mathias Delori, 2007.

32 Mathias Delori, “Amity Symbolism as a Resource for Conflict Resolution. The Case of Franco-German Relations”, in: Martin Chung et Annika Frieberg (dir), *Reconciling with the Past. Resources and Obstacles in a Global Perspective*, Routledge, 2017, pp. 29–53.

33 Mathias Delori et Vron Ware, “The faces of enmity in international relations. Special issue coordinated by Mathias Delori and Vron Ware”, *Critical Military Studies*, 5–4, 2019.

34 Mathias Delori, *Ce que vaut une vie. Théorie de la violence libérale*, Paris, Editions Amsterdam, 2021, Mathias Delori, “Humanitarian violence. How French airmen kill or let die in order to make live”, *Critical Military Studies*, 5/4, 2019, pp. 322–340.

35 I also thank Laurent Bonnefoy and the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

How German Memory Culture Went “Haywire”

Germany used to be praised for the way it dealt with the darkest pages of its history. In *Learning from the Germans*, Susan Neiman argues that West-Germany’s failure to denazify did not impede the development of a memory culture based on the recognition of past crimes, the prohibition of the glorification of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and the memorialization of the victims.³⁶ This *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* (work on the past) would have contributed to fashion a political culture which encourages vigilance towards racism, in particular antisemitism, and state violence. Neiman’s general argument is that the US society could learn from this example to come to terms with its racist past and present.

This positive assessment of the German *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* has been criticized by specialists who have observed that it mainly focuses on the official memory discourses and policies and does not do justice, by doing so, to the complexity of memory dynamics in East, West and unified Germanies.³⁷ Besides, the official discourses which acknowledge responsibility for the crimes perpetrated by nazi Germany are often closer to what Ricoeur calls *devoir de mémoire* than *travail de mémoire*. It is the case, in particular, when they claim that the Holocaust is not only singular – like all historical events – but also incomparable.³⁸ Another problem is the epistemic erasure of the *Nakba*³⁹ or, when it is thematized, its framing as an event Germany bears no responsibility for.⁴⁰ It also translates into a diplomatic and military support of Israel which amounts to an (in)security policy in Bigo and Tsoukala’s sense.⁴¹ It generates more security (or a feeling thereof)

36 Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*, London, Penguin, 2020.

37 Alexandra Oeser, “History”, in: Felicitas Macgilchrist et Rosalie Metro (dir), *Trickbox of Memory: Essays on Power and Disorderly Pasts*, Punctumbooks, 2020.

38 A. Dirk Moses, “The Holocaust and Genocide”, in: Dan Stone (dir), *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, London, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2004, pp. 533–555, Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, 2009; Kalisky A., “D’un génocide à l’autre. Des références à la Shoah dans les approches scientifiques du génocide des Tutsi”, *Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah*, 181(2), 2004, pp. 411–438.

39 This erasure culminates when the police ban commemorations of the *Nakba*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/20/berlin-bans-nakba-day-demonstrations> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

40 Sarah El Bulbeisi, *Tabu, Trauma und Identität. Subjektkonstruktionen von PalästinenserInnen in Deutschland und der Schweiz, 1960–2015* Bielefeld, 2020, 2020, Hannah Tzuberi et Nahed Samour, “The German State and the Creation of Un/Desired Communities”, *Condensing Modernities*, February 22, 2022.

41 Didier Bigo et Tsoukala Anastassia, *Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes: The (In)security Games*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2006.

to some, in this case those who support Israeli occupation and militarism, but produces more insecurity (or a feeling thereof) to others: the victims of Israeli occupation and militarism (and their supporters).⁴²

Whether Neiman was right or wrong to praise the German *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*, there is little doubt that it has gone “haywire” – as Neiman recently acknowledged⁴³ – during the last few years. So have the “anti-antisemitism complex”,⁴⁴ i.e. the policies and discourses which officially aim at fighting antisemitism. Before the framing of the security of Israel as German *Staatsräson*, anti-antisemitism mainly drew upon what specialists call a “human security concept”.⁴⁵ It aimed mainly at protecting the *human* victims of antisemitism, namely Jewish people, irrespective of their opinions regarding the state of Israel. This translated into a vigilance vis-à-vis all forms of antisemitic acts with a particular focus on the most frequent and violent ones, namely those perpetrated by neo-nazis. Although the trend is not new,⁴⁶ the framing of the security of Israel as German *Staatsräson* transformed anti-antisemitism by introducing a state-centered security concept. The project of protecting humans (Jews) has not fully disappeared, but it is now largely dependent on their attitude towards Israel. The statistic which I mentioned in the introduction regarding the percentage of Jewish academics and artists who have been cancelled for alleged antisemitism is, in this regard, a case in point. The shift from a humane to a state-centered conception of antisemitism is also perceivable when members of the political elite show more attention for the security of Israel than that of German Jews: “For example, Christian Lindner, Germany’s current finance minister, who is the head of the neoliberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), which has championed the anti-BDS cause on the grounds that it is antisemitic, recently attempted to cut pensions to Holocaust survivors.”⁴⁷

42 Daniel Marwecki, *Germany and Israel: Whitewashing and Statebuilding*, London, Hurst, 2020.

43 Susan Neiman, “Historical Reckoning Gone Haywire”, *New York Review of Books*, October 19, 2023.

44 Lorenzo Veracini, “Germany’s anti-antisemitic complex and the question of settler colonialism”, *Settler Colonial Studies*, pp. 1–18.

45 Keith Krause et Michael C Williams, “Preface: Towards Critical Security Studies”, in: Keith Krause et Michael C Williams (dir), *Critical Security Studies*, London, UCL Press, 1997, pp. vii–xxiii.

46 Mosche Zuckermann, *‘Antisemit!’. Ein Vorwurf als Herrschaftsinstrument*, Promedia Verlag, 2010.

47 Emily Dische-Becker, George Prochnik et Eyal Weizman, “Once Again, Germany Defines Who Is a Jew | Part 1 (July 20, 2022)”, *Granta*. <https://granta.com/once-again-germany-defines-who-is-a-jew-part-i/>, 2022. On Lindner’s attempt to reduce these pensions, see: <https://www.zeit.de/2022/45/zahlungen-holocaust-ueberlebende-christian-lindner> (consulted on October 6, 2024).

This trend intensified in 2017 when Germany adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). IHRA defines antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities”. Although the definition also highlights that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic”, it goes along with a series of examples which have fueled the conflation of the critique of Israel with antisemitism.⁴⁸ Neve Gordon goes as far as claiming that the IHRA definition has become “a counterinsurgency tool developed to shield Israel from resistance to its oppressive form of racial governance, its ongoing denial of Palestinian liberation, and, following its recent war on Gaza, from accusations of genocidal violence”.⁴⁹ Not all specialists share this radical critique, but more than 100 civil society groups have highlighted that “the IHRA definition has often been used to wrongly label criticism of Israel as antisemitic, and thus chill and sometimes suppress, non-violent protest”.⁵⁰

At the same time, Germany established antisemitism commissioners – i.e. civil servants in charge of fighting antisemitism – in most German institutions (the federal state, the federated states, the police, etc.). Under the leadership of federal antisemitism commissioner Felix Klein, most antisemitism commissioners interpret antisemitism in a way which resonates with the notion of *Staatsräson* and has little to do with the fight against actual antisemitism. As Emily Dische-Becker puts it, “it is apparently not within the mandate of Felix Klein, Germany’s Federal Antisemitism Commissioner, that there are German police officers sending each other Heil Hitler text messages every morning as a greeting. Rather than addressing the things that are actually a threat to the life and limb of all racialized minorities in Germany, the commissioner prioritizes policing anti-Zionism among artists.”⁵¹

Some antisemitism commissioners try to swim against the tide. Uffa Jensen, the antisemitism commissioner of the *Technische Universität* in Berlin, is a good example. Jensen is a renowned specialist of antisemitism.

48 <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism> (consulted on October 5, 2024).

49 Neve Gordon, “Antisemitism and Zionism: The Internal Operations of the IHRA Definition”, *Middle East Critique*, 33, 2024, pp. 345–360.

50 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/04/human-rights-and-other-civil-society-groups-urge-united-nations-respect-human> (consulted on October 5, 2024).

51 Emily Dische-Becker, George Prochnik et Eyal Weizman, “Once Again, Germany Defines Who Is a Jew | Part 1 (July 20, 2022)”, op. cit.

His work has contributed to shed some light on the under-scrutinized far-right antisemitism.⁵² Jensen also co-signed the Jerusalem declaration on antisemitism which offers an alternative to the IHRA definition and proposes that “antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)”.⁵³ However, Jensen and the partisans of the Jerusalem declaration operate in a difficult institutional environment. Besides the fact that Germany adopted the IHRA definition (see above), the German Parliament voted in 2019 a resolution which calls “antisemitic” the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel. Although the resolution is not legally binding, it has had legal and political effects. Dozens of associations whose members (sometimes only one) have expressed sympathy for BDS have lost their public funding because some civil servants have thought, sometimes in good faith, that the resolution is binding. This has tremendous deterring effects because Germany is one of the countries where civil society is most dependent on public funding.

The transformation described above conflicts with freedom of expression, especially in a society which is becoming, *de facto*, multicultural. This fashions a juridical insecurity which has intensified since October 7, 2023. People who live in Germany cannot know for sure what is legally considered as antisemitic, what is not, and more generally speaking what they are allowed to say regarding Israel/Palestine. In October 2023, whilst Israel was carrying out a mass bombing of Gaza and implementing its full blockade, Iris Hefets was arrested for wearing a sign stating: “As a Jew and Israeli, stop the genocide in Gaza”. She was arrested again and again, for the same reason, during the following six months, including after the ICJ found that there is a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza. Until the charges were dropped in April 2024, citizens and residents in Germany could not know whether their freedom of expression allowed them to refer to the Israeli war in Gaza as “genocidal”.

The transformation of anti-antisemitism has gone along with a reframing of German philosemitism, the set of attitudes consisting in showing admiration or love for Jews.⁵⁴ Whether it has ever had positive dimensions or not, German philosemitism is problematic when it reduces Jews to their status of victims of the Holocaust and when the positive feeling towards them turns into identification. One is only a step away, then, to frame all German

52 Jamie Allinson, “The Necropolitics of Drone”, *International Political Sociology*, 9, 2015, pp. 113–127.

53 <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org> (consulted on October 6th 2024).

54 On German philosemitism, see the seminal work of Frank Stern: Frank Stern, “Philosemitism – The whitewashing of the yellow badge in West-Germany”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 4, 1989, pp. 463–477.

people as victims. Chancellor Scholz coined a soft version of this identity construct when stating that “who attacks Jews in Germany is attacking us all”.⁵⁵ A more radical version externalizes antisemitism and transfers guilt to racialized minorities. Arabs and Muslims are framed, in a good Orientalist fashion,⁵⁶ as the antisemitic Others which threaten the anti-antisemitic or post-antisemitic German national identity. Esra Özyürek has described how this identity construct operates when young Arabs/Muslims who visit former nazi concentration camps express sympathy with the Jewish victims of nazi Germany.⁵⁷ They are told that they should not identify with the victims, only with the perpetrators, and thus even though their family history often makes this identification quite abstract.

The state-centric turn of anti-antisemitism and philosemitism draws upon an image of Israel which leaves outside the frame – to use Butler’s photographic metaphor⁵⁸ – the violence it perpetrates against the Palestinians. The illiberal notion of *Staatsräson* is useful in this context. As Hans Kundnani observed, it helps “to take German policy towards Israel out of the space of democratic contestation and make a commitment to Israeli security ‘an unquestionable, no-alternative principle,’ as historian Jürgen Zimmerer has put it”.⁵⁹ The notion and its associated security practices also help silencing those who could bear witness of it. This implies artists and academics, as we shall see in the next section, but first and foremost Palestinians. Despite their important presence in Germany and in Berlin,⁶⁰ Palestinians are framed as objects of public discourse⁶¹ or, to use Spivak’s terminology, as subalterns.⁶² The world could witness the weight of this power/knowledge nexus during the 74th Berlinale in February 2024 when the jury gave an award to the documentary film *No Other Land*. Two of the film makers – Yuval Abraham, an Israeli, and Basil al-Adra, a Palestinian – together, which called for the liberation of all hostages,

55 <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/scholz-antisemitismus-deutschland-100.html> (consulted on October 14, 2024).

56 Edward W Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Book, 1978.

57 Esra Özyürek, “Muslim Minorities as Germany’s Past Future: Islam Critics, Holocaust Memory, and Immigrant Integration”, *Memory Studies*, 15(1), 2019.

58 Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?*, London, Brooklyn, Verso, 2010.

59 Hans Kundnani, “The failure of Germany’s memory culture”, *Project Muse. University of Pennsylvania Press*, 71–2, 2024, pp. 66–73, p. 72.

60 Hanan Badr et Nahed Samour, *Arab Berlin. Dynamics of Transformation*, Transcripts, 2023.

61 Hanan Toukan, “Refusing Epistemic Violence: Guernica-Gaza and the ‘German Context’” (<https://www.afterall.org/articles/refusing-epistemic-violence-guernica-gaza-and-the-german-context/#footnote-reference-6-1-0470>), *Afterall*, 57, 2024.

62 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in: Nelson Cary et Larry Crossberg (dir), *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–316.

denounced the blockade of Gaza and the apartheid in the West-bank, called for a cease-fire and asked Germany to stop weapon deliveries to Israel. The audience, including the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media Claudia Roth, applauded. Roth was heavily criticized for having given the impression that she agreed with this criticism of Israel. A few days later, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media tried to escape the controversy by explaining that she had only applauded Yuval Abraham, not his Palestinian friend Basil al-Adra, and thus even though they had given the speech together.⁶³

German Universities between *Staatsräson* and Resistance

In February 2024, the Max Planck Society (MPS) terminated its collaboration with anthropologist Ghassan Hage after the newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* accused him of “hatred of Israel”. Hage had been active on the social media since October 7 and criticized Israel for, among other things, implementing an “apartheid” and a “genocide”. He did not only do so as a citizen entitled to freedom of expression but, also, as a scholar. Hage is, indeed, an internationally renowned specialist of racism and multiculturalism.⁶⁴ The MPS considered that Hage’s posts on the social media expressed “views that are incompatible with the core values of the Max Planck Society”.⁶⁵ In December 2023, MPS’ chief Patrick Cramer had indeed declared that accusing Israel of “apartheid, neo-colonialism or even genocide” goes beyond the scope of what the MPS can tolerate.⁶⁶ Whatever one thinks of Hage’s post⁶⁷ and his response,⁶⁸ this episode says a lot about the provincialization of some segments of the German academic field. Specialists within the field of Middle-East studies and genocide studies have not waited the ICJ order and opinion of the year 2024 to discuss whether Israel perpetrates “apartheid” in the Westbank and a “genocide” in Gaza. Not all scholars agree that

63 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/27/german-minister-says-she-was-only-applauding-israeli-filmmaker-at-berlinale> (consulted on October 14, 2024).

64 He is the author of many books on the topic. The last one is: Ghassan Hage, *The Racial Politics of Australian Multiculturalism: White Nation, Against Paranoid Nationalism & Later Writings*. Sydney: Sweatshop, 2023.

65 <https://www.mpg.de/21510445/statement-ghassan-hage> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

66 <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/chef-der-max-planck-gesellschaft-uber-israel-wissenschaft-kann-selbst-in-aussichtslosen-situationen-brucken-bauen-10893949.html> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

67 <https://magazin.zenith.me/de/gesellschaft/forschung-deutschland-und-der-gaza-krieg> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

68 <https://arena.org.au/statement-regarding-my-sacking/> (consulted on October 10, 2024).

Israel perpetrates apartheid and genocide, but it is being debated in academic events and in the mainstream media.⁶⁹ This provincialization further emerges from the international outrage prompted by the MPS' decision. Thousands of academics, including 50 Israeli-Jewish scholars, have expressed solidarity with Hage. So did, among other institutions, the Australian Anthropology Society, the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, the European Association of Social Anthropologists and the American Anthropological Association.⁷⁰

The attack against Hage illustrates a broader trend. The German academic field is becoming what Bourdieu calls a *champ hétéronome* (an *heteronome field*). The nomos of academic freedom is being challenged by a norm produced elsewhere: German *Staatsräson*.⁷¹ This trend is also perceivable in the disinvitations of critical thinkers from conferences or visiting scholarships. As pointed out in the introduction, Emily Dische-Becker has calculated that 30% of those who have been disinvited in 2023 for alleged antisemitism are Jewish.⁷² Knowing that the percentage of Jewish people in Germany is less than 1%, one can reasonably infer that Jewish scholars are disproportionately targeted by anti-antisemitism. A generous interpretation of the over-representations of Jews among the victims of Israel-centered anti-antisemitism puts forward that Jews tend to speak up more because they are less afraid of being called antisemitic.⁷³ Yet this statistic also fuels Elad Lapidot's analysis regarding the common epistemic basis of antisemitism and anti-antisemitism.⁷⁴ Lapidot argues that this common epistemic basis is noticeable in philosophical thought. After the Holocaust, several philosophers criticized antisemitism, but they often did so by arguing, like Sartre, that antisemites invented Jews and Judaism or, to put it differently, that antisemitism impeded assimilation.⁷⁵

69 Bartov Omer, "What I Believe as a Historian of Genocide", New York Times, November 10, 2023.

70 <https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/management/max-planck-gesellschaft-trennt-sich-von-ghassan-hage-6228> (consulted on October 9, 2024).

71 Following Bourdieu, I call "nomos" the cognitive and normative matrixes which a social agents take for granted within a given social field. Bourdieu applied this notion to the academic field in: Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1984.

72 <https://thedigradio.com/podcast/the-german-question-w-emily-dische-becker/> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

73 Following the example of Moshe Zuckermann, some Jews do make fun of those accusations of antisemitism coming from German secular institutions: "I can boast of having been officially classified as an anti-Semite by the German government". <https://overtone-magazin.de/top-story/ich-darf-mich-ruehmen-von-der-bundesregierung-offiziell-als-antisemit-eingestuft-warden-zu-sein/> (consulted on October 3, 2024).

74 Elad Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question. A Critique of Anti-Anti-Semitism*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2020.

75 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, Paris, Paul Morihien, 1946.

Thus, anti-antisemites are guided by good intentions, but they act like antisemites when they fail to recognize Jews as agents of their own identity. This happens, in Germany, when agents of anti-antisemitism deny anti-Zionist and Buberian⁷⁶ Zionist Jews the right to criticize Israel and, even more, when they call them “antisemitic”.

Emily Dische-Becker has also calculated that 90% of the victims of anti-antisemitism in the academic and artistic fields are racialized (she argues that Jewish people are racialized in Germany). Crude racism is not the only explanation. Israel-centered anti-antisemitism often goes hand in hand with a paradigmatic opposition against postcolonial theory and, more generally, all approaches which do not take a white/Northern gaze. The cancelling of Achille Mbembe in 2020 is a famous example.⁷⁷ Mbembe, an internationally renowned specialist of postcolonial theory, was invited to give a talk at the *Ruhrtriennale* cultural festival. Yet federal antisemitism commissioner Felix Klein and a regional politician named Lorenz Deutsch accused him of being antisemitic for, among other things, having called Israel an apartheid state. As it happened with Hage, the decision to cancel Mbembe caused international outrage,⁷⁸ but this episode was only the tip of the Iceberg. As Gert Krell recently observed, “almost every day, German papers pour vehement criticism over anything looking like post-colonial theory”.⁷⁹ Within academia, some attacks against non-Eurocentric approaches are carried out by a group named *Netzwerk Wissenschaftsfreiheit* (“network scientific freedom”). It is made of more than 700 conservative and far-right⁸⁰ academics who repeat, out of ignorance or bad faith, that postcolonial theory (and other critical approaches like the gender studies) is not scientific and that it leaves no space for their own “apolitical” research agenda. Joël Glasman has showed that the attacks perpetrated by this network against critical thinkers have increased since October 7, 2023. Since then, critical academics are also accused of supporting terrorism.⁸¹

76 On the interest of Martin Buber’s thought in the current context, see: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wissen/geist-soziales/martin-buber-zu-den-antisemitischen-massakern-von-1929-19309954.html> (consulted on October 14, 2024).

77 Collective, “Palestine Between German Memory Politics and (De-)Colonial Thought”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 23, 2021, pp. 374–382.

78 Natan Sznaider, “The Summer of Discontent: Achille Mbembe in Germany” *ibid.*, pp. 412–419.

79 Gert Krell, “Germany, Israel’s Security, and the Fight against Anti-Semitism: Shadows from the Past and Current Tensions”, *Analyse & Kritik*, 46–1, 2024, pp. 141–164.

80 <https://table.media/research/standpunkt/die-aktivitaeten-des-netzwerks-wissenschaftsfreiheit-sollten-uns-mit-tiefster-sorge-erfuellen/> (consulted on October 14, 2024).

81 <https://aoc.media/opinion/2024/02/26/terreur-postcoloniale-en-allemagne-la-fabrique-dune-panique-morale/> (consulted on October 14, 2023).

These attacks against academic freedom and critical thinking also impact pedagogical projects. A dozen of Jewish Israeli artists and scholars from the *Weissensee Kunsthochschule*, an art college in Berlin, started a program in 2020 called “The School for Unlearning Zionism”. Although it was mainly thought as an “internal Jewish-Israeli self-negotiation with the Zionist story”, the organizers planned to invite external speakers such as Ilan Pappé, Marwa Fatafta and Salem Barahmeh. The Israeli embassy called the event “a delegitimization of Israel” and “antisemitic”. The *Weissensee Kunsthochschule* ended up cancelling the funding and justified this decision by observing that four speakers (all Jewish and Israelis) were BDS supporters.⁸²

The massacre of October 7, 2023 provoked understandable emotion among Jewish students and scholars in Germany. It was important to assure them, as many academic institutions did, that “universities must be places where Jews can feel safe without ifs and buts”.⁸³ However, some universities did so in ways echoing the federal government’s discourse on *Staatsräson*. Consider, for example, the following press release of the Humboldt Universität:

“Humboldt University condemns the terrorist attack on Israel last weekend”. We are deeply shocked by the extent of the violence. Our thoughts are with the many Israeli students and scholars at HU, who have been fearing for the lives of their relatives and friends ever since. Our thoughts are with the relatives of the six partner institutions of the HU in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Rehovot and Be’er Scheva. We are in contact with the HU students who are spending a semester abroad in Israel.⁸⁴

At the time of this press release, on October 23, 2023, the publicly documented massacre of Palestinians, including scholars and students,⁸⁵ had already started. The fact that the HU found no words for the Palestinian students killed by the Israeli war in Gaza illustrates a mechanism which Judith Butler calls the “differential distribution of public grieving”.⁸⁶ Butler coined this notion after September 11, 2001, when the US mainstream press published necrologies of all the victims of the terrorist attack whilst finding only two words for the civilian

82 <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2020-12-10/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/in-germany-a-witch-hunt-rages-against-israel-critics-many-have-had-enough/0000017f-db0d-df0f-a17f-df4fa21b0000>.

83 Press release of the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* of November 15, 2023. <https://www.hrk.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/pressemitteilung/meldung/hrk-fordert-entschiedenes-eintreten-gegen-antisemitismus-an-hochschulen-5016/> (consulted on October 9, 2024).

84 <https://www.hu-berlin.de/de/pr/nachrichten/oktober-2023/nr-231012-1> (consulted on October 5, 2024).

85 <https://pomeps.org/the-hidden-war-on-higher-education-unmasking-the-educide-in-gaza> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

86 Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

victims of the US counter-terrorist war in Afghanistan: “collateral damages” and “human shields”. Butler went on arguing that this differential distribution of public grieving is not only a speech act which contributes to fashioning a racist world view where human lives have different values. It is also a “frame of war”, i.e. a series of semiotic element which legitimizes war violence: “We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not”.⁸⁷ The differential distribution of public grieving fuels the war machine by normalizing the idea that it is acceptable to kill some people – the “collateral damages” and “human shields” – so that some others can live: those whose names, faces and history are made public. Berliners were privy of an illustration of the incorporation of public grieving into a security apparatus when the police rightfully protected the candles and photos of the Israeli victims of October 7 but destroyed those honoring the Palestinian victims of the Israeli war.⁸⁸

This differential distribution of public grieving also impacts minorities in Germany. As Emily Dische-Becker puts it: “part of what is frustrating about the situation in Germany today is the fracture resulting from October 7th – the incompatible subjectivity of the people grieving two different violent events”.⁸⁹ Eyal Weizman goes a step further, arguing that this impossibility to grieve beyond community bounds fuels racism: “At a time when Jews feel vulnerable and often alone, the Germans, at many levels of society, could stand by their side. But by making Jewish people the stated reason for the repression of Muslim migrants in Germany they make us more vulnerable, not safer. German intervention amplifies both antisemitism and Islamophobia, with mounting hate crimes against both Jews and Muslims the direct consequence. In Germany as elsewhere, the safety of Jews and Palestinians is interdependent.”⁹⁰

In their defense, German university managers have to deal with a supervising institution which has a particular idea of the balance between the norms of German *Staatsräson* and academic freedom. On December 14, 2023, a group of students occupied a lecture hall of the Free University in Berlin to protest against what they perceived as a one-sided pro-Israeli position of

87 Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?*, op. cit, p. 38.

88 <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2023/10/23/germany-bans-public-grieving-and-solidarity-with-palestine/> (consulted on October 4, 2024).

89 Emily Dische-Becker, George Prochnik et Eyal Weizman, “Once Again, Germany Defines Who Is a Jew | Part II (November 1, 2023)”, *Granta*. <https://granta.com/once-again-germany-defines-who-is-a-jew-part-ii>, 2022.

90 Emily Dische-Becker, George Prochnik et Eyal Weizman, “Once Again, Germany Defines Who Is a Jew | Part II (November 1, 2023)”, op. cit.

their institution.⁹¹ After their eviction by about 100 police officers, more than 100 Berlin lecturers signed a public letter stating that “regardless of whether we agree with the specific demands of the protest camp, we stand up for our students and defend their right to peaceful protest”. Internal e-mails from the Federal Minister of Education and Research were leaked to the ARD news program “Panorama” and published on June 11, 2024. These e-mails show that minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger or a high-ranking official from the ministry wanted to check whether the protest letter could constitute a criminal case and whether the lecturers’ funding could be cut. As we shall see in the conclusion, the idea of cutting funds to critical academics has not been abandoned.

I have thought a lot about Derrida during this turbulent period. In *The university without condition*,⁹² Derrida points out that universities would not survive if their sponsors – the Prince in the old days, the state and private foundations nowadays – would stop funding them. Derrida argues that this extreme vulnerability vis-à-vis exogenous powers implies a clear roadmap. Since universities are always at the edge of surrendering “without condition”, academics have not only an ethical duty,⁹³ but also a strategic one, to resist those powers. And since they have no police forces or militias of their own, they should do so with the only weapon at their disposal: critique.

Derrida understands critique in a way that is rooted in the word’s etymological root: *krinein*, which means separating and judging. Scholars are critical when they deconstruct their object of investigation and describe its components meticulously. This descriptive moment of the critical gesture leads to an epistemological one: scholars understand that they can neither observe nor describe the whole phenomenon. They learn, to freely paraphrase Saussure, that the perspective fashions the object of investigation.⁹⁴ Since all perspectives carry value judgements, scholars are left with two main options. The first consists in producing some knowledge that reproduces power structures. The second option, which Derrida advocates, follows Achille Mbembe’s view that scholarship should aim at describing the world, but also “changing” it.⁹⁵

91 https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/presse/informationen/fup/2023/fup_23_300-stellungnahme-aktion-hoersaal/index.html.

92 Jacques Derrida, “The university without condition”, *Without Alibi*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 202–237.

93 On the ethical and historical importance of critique in the present context, see: Didier Fassin, *Une étrange défaite. Sur le consentement à l’écrasement de Gaza*, Paris, La Découverte, 2024.

94 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris, Bally et Sechehaye, 1971.

95 Achille Mbembe, “Qu’est-ce que la pensée post-coloniale? Entretien avec Achille Mbembe”, *Esprit*, Décembre, 2006, pp. 117–133, p. 120.

Many academics based in Germany who work on antisemitism, *Staatsräson*, Israel/Palestine and related topics have followed Derrida's proposal. Instead of surrendering without condition, they have continued to produce critical scholarship. Many have not remained in their ivory tower. They have signed open letters supporting their cancelled colleagues, organized press conferences to re-state the basic principles of academic freedom, joined sit-ins organized by students and denounced the conflation of antisemitism with the critique of Israel. It is impossible to do justice and account for the diversity of all those acts of resistance, but one can lay out a trend: those critical scholars have often acted collectively. Some have joined existing international networks like Diaspora Alliance and Jewish Voice for Peace. New collectives have emerged like that of "Palestinian and Jewish academics" where Palestinian and Jewish scholars speak up together. Some scholars also built and expanded networks in closed online fora as well as in person meetings. Some of these initiatives are aiming for institutionalization.

The structuring of this academic movement of resistance has followed the temporality of the attacks against academic freedom. Important stages were the smear campaign against Achille Mbembe, the accusations of antisemitism against the art exhibition *Dokumenta* in 2022 and the repression of the student protests of the years 2023–2024. This strategy of collective resistance helped counterbalancing the individualized accusations of antisemitism and facilitated the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse which has sometimes found some space in the medias.

Like the German human rights movements in general, those critical thinkers have been empowered by the ICJ order of January 26, 2024 regarding the question of genocide and the opinion of July 19, 2024 which re-stated the unlawfulness of the Israeli occupation and the violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, including its article 3 concerning apartheid. Before those ICJ order/opinion, anyone who would use the words "genocide" and "apartheid" in relation to the Israeli policy towards the Palestinians was automatically called antisemitic. Although the ICJ statements have not put an end to these accusations, human rights organizations, artists and critical academics have started to point out that these accusations amount to calling the ICJ antisemitic. The press release of the United Nations experts of April 2024 denouncing the "scholasticide" in Gaza has had a similar empowering effect. The experts pointed out that 80% of schools and universities had been destroyed in Gaza and that 5 479 students, 261 teachers and 95 university professors had been killed.⁹⁶ Six months later,

96 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza> (consulted on October 10, 2024).

when commemorating the massacre of October 7, 2023, the Humboldt University published a statement which contrasts with that of October 26, 2023 (see above):

“One year ago today”, on 7 October 2023, the terrorist organization Hamas attacked Israel in a cruel and inhumane manner. Hostages are still being held by Hamas today. The attack triggered a war that has since claimed many more victims every day and has caused great suffering. We commemorate the victims and see with great concern the expansion of the conflict. We stand together in the hope and confidence that the spiral of violence will be stopped and a path to lasting peace can be found.⁹⁷

Like all texts (including this article) this statement should be critiqued and possibly criticized, but it paves the way to a common grieving of both Israeli and Palestinian victims.

Conclusion

During the summer of 2024, the main German political parties (SPD, Bündnis90/Die Grünen, FDP and CDU/CSU) drafted a resolution entitled “Never again is now: Protecting, preserving and strengthening Jewish life in Germany”. 150 Jewish artists, academics and intellectuals published an open letter explaining why this text “claims to protect Jewish life in Germany [but] promises instead to endanger it”.⁹⁸ One of their arguments is that the text conflates Israel and Judaism and, by doing so, fuels the antisemitic view that Jews are responsible for the crimes of Israel. Besides this problem, the text proposes to make the positions and fundings of academics dependent on their attitude towards antisemitism as defined by IHRA. This is very intimidating because the neoliberal reforms of the last two decades have severely undermined the autonomy of academics. About 90% of courses are given, in Germany, by *Dozenten* and untenured lecturers, i.e. people whose position in academia has to be regularly renewed. This shows that German academia is at the crossroad described by Derrida in *The university without condition*.⁹⁹ Some academics resist¹⁰⁰ but others seem to be willing to surrender without condition.

97 <https://www.hu-berlin.de/en/press-portal/nachrichten-en/october-2024/nr-24108> (consulted on October 20, 2024).

98 <https://www.dw.com/en/when-germany-targets-jewish-artists-as-antisemitic/a-70180570> (consulted on October 8, 2024).

99 Jacques Derrida, “The university without condition”, op. cit.

100 <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2024-08/resolution-zum-schutz-juedischen-lebens-bundestag-kultur-reaktion> (consulted on October 14, 2024).