

# The Catechism Debate

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In the summer of 2021, scholars of 20th century Germany, Black Studies, critical theory, and the history of empire weighed in with reactions to a piece by genocide historian A. Dirk Moses in the online journal *Geschichte der Gegenwart* (*The History of Today*) on the memory politics of the Federal Republic of Germany. The result was the *New Fascism Syllabus*-hosted “Catechism Debate.”

<b>“The German Catechism”</b> .....	1
A. Dirk Moses   <i>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</i>	
<b>“Priests, Catechisms and Heretics: Some Thoughts on Dirk Moses’ Remarks”</b> .....	8
Neil Gregor   <i>University of Southampton</i>	
<b>“On the ‘German Catechism’”</b> .....	12
Matt Fitzpatrick   <i>Flinders University</i>	
<b>“‘Sieferle von links’: A Fair Criticism?”</b> .....	15
Helmut Walser Smith   <i>Vanderbilt University</i>	
<b>“Does Holocaust Memory Still Matter?”</b> .....	18
Udi Greenberg   <i>Dartmouth College</i>	
<b>“In Absentia of Black Study”</b> .....	22
Zoe Samudzi   <i>University of California, San Francisco</i>	
<b>“Confessions of an Ex-Believer”</b> .....	25
Frank Biess   <i>University of California, San Diego</i>	
<b>“On the Misleading Framing of Plausible Insights”</b> .....	29
Paula Villa Braslavsky   <i>Ludwig Maximilian University Munich</i>	
<b>“A Plea for More Balance”</b> .....	31
Bill Niven   <i>Nottingham Trent University</i>	
<b>“Polemics and Provocations”</b> .....	35
Johannes von Moltke   <i>University of Michigan</i>	

<b>“A Commitment to Holocaust Remembrance Does Not Justify Denial of Equal Rights”</b> .....	40
Alon Confino   <i>University of Massachusetts, Amherst</i>	
<b>“The Wrath of Moses, or The Shadow Side of German Memory Culture”</b> .....	44
Andrew Port   <i>Wayne State University</i>	
<b>“Queer Memory and Black Germans”</b> .....	49
Tiffany Florvil   <i>University of New Mexico</i>	
<b>“Stones Can Talk Back: <i>Vergangenheitsbewältigung</i> Revisited”</b> .....	53
Mirjam Brusius	
<b>“Inaccuracies and Absences”</b> .....	60
Joachim Häberlen   <i>University of Warwick</i>	
<b>“Apocryphal Queers and Gay Orthodoxy”</b> .....	64
Sébastien Tremblay   <i>Freie Universität Berlin</i>	
<b>“Border Exceptionalism”</b> .....	67
Christiane Wilke   <i>Carleton University</i>	
<b>“Refusing the Extended Hand”</b> .....	71
Fabian Wolff	
<b>“Atonement at the Expense of Another”</b> .....	75
Ussama Makdisi   <i>Rice University</i>	
<b>“The Philosophers Have Only Interpreted the World...”</b> .....	79
Kate Davison   <i>Goldsmiths, University of London</i>	
<b>“Dialectic of <i>Vergangenheitsbewältigung</i>”</b> .....	85
A. Dirk Moses   <i>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</i>	
<b>“Ends and Beginnings”</b> .....	96
Jennifer Evans   <i>Carleton University</i>	

# The German Catechism

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The heated German debate about Achille Mbembe's alleged antisemitism, Michael Rothberg's book, *Multidirectional Memory*, and Jürgen Zimmerer's *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz?* linking German colonialism to the Nazi war of annihilation, has foreign observers like me scratching our heads. After all, we have been raising these issues for twenty years. Rothberg and Zimmerer attended a conference I organized in Sydney on "Genocide and Colonialism" in 2003, and Zimmerer published one of many articles on colonialism and the Holocaust in a book I edited the next year. By the end of the decade, many scholars had come to accept that the NS regime and the Holocaust could also be understood in imperial-colonial terms.

So what is new here? Certainly not the counter arguments, which were raised at the time by German and other historians, like Birthe Kundrus, Robert Gerwarth and Stefan Malinowski. This debate deprovincialized Holocaust historiography and forced all participants to sharpen their thinking. The situation is different now. The vehemence of the reaction to Rothberg and Zimmerer's article in *Die Zeit*, "Enttabuisiert den Vergleich!" indicated by the denunciation, sarcasm, and indignation are reminiscent of heresy trials. Outrage replaces sobriety, perhaps exacerbated in social media's capacity to channel and publicize political emotions. We are witnessing, I believe, nothing less than a public exorcism performed by the self-appointed high priests of the *Katechismus der Deutschen*. This catechism has five elements:

## The Catechism

1. The Holocaust is unique because it was the unlimited *Vernichtung der Juden um der Vernichtung willen* (exterminating the Jews for the sake of extermination itself) distinguished from the limited and pragmatic aims of other genocides. It is the first time in history that a state had set out to destroy a people solely on ideological grounds.
2. It was thus a *Zivilisationsbruch* (civilizational rupture) and the moral foundation of the nation.
3. Germany has a special responsibility to Jews in Germany, and a special loyalty to Israel: "*Die Sicherheit Israels ist Teil der Staatsräson unseres Landes*" (Israel's security is part of Germany's reason of state).
4. Antisemitism is a distinct prejudice—and was a distinctly German one. It should not be confused with racism.
5. Antizionism is antisemitism.

This catechism replaced a previous one about 2000. The older German catechism was committed to norms of national honor and tradition, and regarded the Holocaust as a historical accident committed by a small group of fanatics, which *Nestbeschmutzer* (soilers of the nest) instrumentalized to dishonor the nation.

Many German families witnessed the scene of generational confrontations during the 1960s and 1970s between this older sense of Germanness and a new one borne by the younger 68er generation. That did not yet mean the 68ers believed in the Holocaust's uniqueness: in their anti-imperialism, many compared the US-led war in Vietnam to Nazi Germany ("USA-SA-SS"). By the 1980s, however, the understanding of the Holocaust as historically special had broken through in the West, and now many leftist and liberal

Germans began to understand that being a “good” post-Holocaust subject meant incorporating this belief into their self-understanding and international image.

**Alan Moore, Blind Man in Bergen-Belsen, 1947**



The new catechism did yet not triumph in the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s as commonly supposed. It was one episode among others—debates about multiculturalism, Goldhagen’s controversial book, the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* (Wehrmacht exhibition) and the Holocaust memorial in Berlin—in which conservatives, led by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, fought a rear-guard action in defence of the old one. But, eventually, they too came to understand that the country’s geopolitical legitimacy depended on accepting the new catechism thrashed out with American, British, and Israeli elites.

Its five elements have become articles of faith in Germany over the past generation, internalized by tens of millions as the path to national redemption from its sinful past. In short, the catechism implies a redemptive story in which the sacrifice of Jews in the Holocaust by Nazis is the premise for the Federal Republic’s legitimacy. That is why the Holocaust is more than an important historical event. It is a sacred trauma that cannot be contaminated by profane ones—meaning non-Jewish victims and other genocides—

that would vitiate its sacrificial function. The historian Dan Diner even takes the Holocaust, as civilizational rupture, as substituting the place occupied by God before the Enlightenment. The evidence lies in how the universal significance of the suffering of Jews in this genocide becomes the basis of a new world; but that, according to Diner, remains closed to those who through their “sacred temporal blockage” (he refers to Arabs) remain caught in the past *before* the “sacrifice.” Nazi morality must be negated: instead of “redemptive antisemitism” (Saul Friedländer)—“redemptive philosemitism.”

### A Redemption Narrative

A central role in this Christologically-informed redemptive narrative is also discernible in the “Wiederaufstehung” of the victims. Since unification of the two German states and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the German state has undertaken various measures to “reforest” Germany with Jews. So the discourse about migration of Jews from the former Soviet Union is accompanied by the redemptive narrative in which the Jewish migrants were blended with Holocaust victims to restore the “German-Jewish symbiosis.” Having undergone the most thorough working through of history in history, Germany can once again stand proud among the nations as the beacon of civilization, vouched by approving pats on the head from Israeli and American elites.

Keeping the faith requires constant vigilance. Led by a government official with the imposing title of *Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für jüdisches Leben in Deutschland und den Kampf gegen Antisemitismus* (Federal Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and in the Fight against Antisemitism) the priests are forever on the lookout for the heresy of antisemitism and signs of the old catechism, like recurring *Schlussstrichdebatten* (debates about drawing a line under the past). Indeed, having symbolically expunged Nazis from the nation-in-redemption in serial scandals about the Nazi past since the 1960s, the compulsion continues long after they have gone. Now the priests detect new Nazis—like Palestinians and their non-Zionist Israeli friends in Germany and beyond who are experimenting in non-nationalist modes of coexistence. Its most portentous manifestation is the BDS-Beschluss des Deutschen Bundestages (2019) that condemns the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement because—somewhat provincially—it reminded the parliamentarians “of the worst phase in German history.” The resolution and its broad support indicate a consensus that extends from the Antideutschen sect to the AfD. Any alternative paths that Palestinians might pursue to resist the colonization of their land did not appear to concern these politicians because they don’t feel they need Palestinian approval for an ethically upright self-image and their international reputations.

The moral hubris leads to the remarkable situation of gentile Germans lecturing American and Israeli Jews with accusing finger about the correct forms of remembrance and loyalty to Israel. Not that this has prevented them from maintaining discipline, even forcing some conformity from the AfD which, in trying to revive the old catechism, understands the public image necessary to avoid public banishment. Besides, it admires Israel as an anti-Islamic state that tightly regulates migration. So fearful are people in Germany that a contributor to a forum on the Mbembe debate that I published in the *Journal of Genocide Research* insisted that their identity be protected.

But priestly success has provoked a reaction. The purging of heretics has led the liberals who run German cultural institutions to worry that “*die Gedanken*” (thoughts) are not so free after all, and that they might be next. So, in December 2020, they issued the *Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit*, a statement about freedom of expression and the right to criticize Israeli policy. Even if many of them oppose BDS,

they don't think doing so should entail unemployment and exclusion from public life. For the same reasons, some of them also supported the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism to counter the chilling effects of the IHRA definition of antisemitism pushed by the Israeli government.

### The Other Perspective of Migrants

The German population is also increasingly harder to discipline because of demographic and generational change. Needless to say, migrants to Germany bring their own experiences and perspectives about history and politics that are not going to indulge the self-congratulatory stories Westerners like to tell themselves about spreading civilization over the centuries. For many of them, the article of faith about the Nazi *Zivilisationsbruch* (civilizational rupture) rings hollow, even if they recognize the Holocaust's undeniably distinctive features. Weren't vast parts of the globe conquered by Europeans and Americans, and millions killed, in the name of Western civilization, including by German colonial authorities?

For increasing numbers of younger Germans, the catechism does not reflect their lifeworld—despite the best efforts of schoolteachers. Like their cohort in the US and elsewhere who marched for Black Lives Matter, many understand that racism against migrants—not just antisemitism—is a general problem. They also observe that Israelis keep electing rightwing governments that entrench the settlement project, thereby ending the illusion of the two-state solution that allows Germans (and Americans) to believe they can reconcile their Zionism with justice for Palestinians. Joining them in Berlin are thousands of young Israelis and Palestinians escaping the nightmare enveloping their homeland. What is more, the democratic anarchy of the internet means the priestly censors cannot control the conversation like in the 1980s and 1990s. Social media enables subaltern public spheres even if speaking back to power remains limited by the cross-party consensus about the catechism.

At the same time, in this age of globalization since the 1990s, German academics joined colleagues abroad in devoting more attention to imperial history and colonial literature because they are not only interested in the thoughts and deeds of white people. “Postcolonial Studies” is too complex an interdisciplinary field to adequately summarize, but one central point is to understand the metropole and colony as a single unit in which flows of information, people, and culture takes place. Another point is to register how politics was understood in imperial categories until quite recently: in terms of racial hierarchies and historical analogies: imitating Rome, for instance.

Many historians thus regard the insistence that the Holocaust has nothing to do with imperial history as perverse as insisting that antisemitism is utterly distinct from racism. As Claudia Bruns has shown, “Blackness” and “Jewishness” overlapped in the Enlightenment debates about Jewish emancipation in which “colonial” solutions to the “Jewish Question” were proposed, and Wilhelm Marr, the notorious inventor of the term “*Antisemitismus*,” was inspired by the rigid racial hierarchies he observed in his travels in the Americas in the 1850s. Decades later, as Christian S. Davis among others have written, German rule over Africans provided the *Alldeutscher Verband* with the model of racial subjugation, segregation, and oppression. For instance, in the 1890s, these antisemites demanded that Jews be placed under a special alien law at the same time as they advocated that Africans be subject to a separate “native law.” The understanding of the Jewish presence in Germany occurred in the context of a race-conscious worldview in which conquest and colonization of foreign peoples, hierarchies of civilization, progress and decline, survival, and extinction were central elements.

### Victims of a Massacre of Suspected Mau Mau Insurgents in Kenya, Early 1950s



#### Nothing Is “Pure”

In view of these kinds of connections, the language of “relativization” makes no sense. It is theological rather than scholarly. When Michael Rothberg places the Holocaust into relationship with other historical traumas, he does so by showing how this has been a global practice since the Holocaust. Memory is unavoidably constituted by recursive processes of inclusion and exclusion, analogizing and distinguishing. Nothing is “pure.” The Holocaust is part of many histories: of antisemitism, of mass enslavement, of colonial counterinsurgency, or population expulsions, among others.

Combining activism from below and scholarship from above, the *Zeitgeist* has forced a reckoning with colonial legacies in Western countries. How did those objects make their way into museums? Why are those streets named after colonial “heroes” and why do statues of them dot the urban landscape? How did institutions, indeed entire economies, benefit from, and even depend on, the systematic enslavement of Africans? What were European powers doing in Africa and other parts of the world anyway, and should reparations be paid to the descendants of peoples subject to their genocidal campaigns and hyper-exploitation? For Tobias Rapp in *Der Spiegel*, simply asking this question threatens the fundamentals of western civilization.

These developments have provoked the familiar reaction we observe today, which elsewhere I have called “Anxieties in Holocaust and Genocide Studies”: panic that the iconic status of the Holocaust will be diminished as “just another” genocide in history, the sacred sullied by the profane. Some, like Thomas Schmid in *Die Zeit*, even worry about the “general suspicion of the white man.” For the ageing 68er generation, the influence of Postcolonial Studies is tantamount to the barbarian conquest of Rome. A debate about these issues is timely, but the high priests want to conduct it like an inquisition, denouncing heresy and ritually incanting the catechism as a substitute for argumentation.

The fact is that German elites do in fact use the Holocaust to blend out other historical crimes. Consider Claudius Seidl who asked in the FAZ if “War der Holocaust eine koloniale Tat?” (“Was the Holocaust a Colonial Act?”) and in answering in the negative insisted that Germans have a special obligation to Jews because of the Holocaust. He neglected to mention such obligations to Namibians. When they demand reparations, the German envoy Ruprecht Polenz denied them because the Holocaust, he declared, is “incomparable.” Meanwhile, Schmid likewise declared that “Der Holocaust war kein Kolonialverbrechen” (“The Holocaust was not colonial crime”) and that the “‘Global South’ owes an explanation for how it stands for a better development” than the West. No wonder these descendants of victims of the German state, whose capacities for development were smashed by genocidal colonial warfare, experience German memory culture as racist: it posits a hierarchy of suffering, degrees of humanity, and an embarrassing lack of critical self-awareness.

The priests justify this hierarchy by pointing to the apparent empirical uniqueness of the Holocaust: only Jews were killed for the sake of killing, out of hatred alone, while all other victims of genocide were killed for pragmatic reasons. While Nazis may have seen Slavs in colonial terms, they saw Jews through an antisemitic lens, leading to their limitless campaign, unique in history. What is more, so the argument continues, if colonialism was such an important factor, why didn’t France and Britain, with their far larger empires, commit a Holocaust?

### **The Colonialism of the National Socialists**

As I argue in my new book, *The Problems of Genocide*, these familiar objections are based on a faulty reading of history. They ignore the fact that the Nazi empire was a compensatory undertaking to ensure the German people were forever invulnerable to the starvation they suffered in the Allied blockade during the First World War. This meant the utopian ambition of autarchic territorial control over resources and the elimination of inner security threats. Many Germans blamed Jews and the Left for defeat in 1918, and ever since the Nazis regarded Jews as an enemy people who imperilled the projected empire because of their perceived affiliation with the international ideologies of liberalism and communism.

This may appear as unprecedented to the priests, but historians know that eliminating entire groups in paranoid and vengeful security campaigns against “hereditary enemies” is a common pattern in world history. Hitler and other leading Nazis studied these patterns in ancient and modern empires in crafting a ruthlessly modern version to house a reborn German people after the degradation of military defeat.

Like Rome and the ancient Germans, the new German Reich would save also European civilization from “Asiatic barbarism”: from the “threatening storm of the inner-Asian East, this eternal, latent danger for Europe.” This was indeed a historical German mission, Hitler continued in November 1944: “For centuries, the old Reich, alone and with allied forces, had to mount its struggle against the Mongols and later the Turks to protect Europe from a fate that in its outcome would look exactly like Bolshevisization today.” Orientalism was intrinsic to an enduring tradition of German Occidentalism.

Those who fled the Nazis, including Jewish émigré scholars, appreciated these connections very well. Over a decade before Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon wrote about the subject, they understood that the Nazis were importing into Europe the style of rule that Europeans had employed in governing their empires. Not for nothing did Raphael Lemkin, who coined the genocide concept in 1944, define it in

terms of colonization—replacing populations with settlers—and Franz Neumann, in his *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (1942) called Nazism a “racial imperialism” that sought to integrate the population by promising it the spoils of “world conquest,” meaning “reducing the vanquished states and their satellites to the level of colonial peoples.”

### **It’s Time for Inclusive Thinking**

The new German catechism takes historical justice to consist in a transaction between identifiable and stable *Völker*: instead of murdering Jews, Germans should be nice and welcoming. This philosemitism continues to view Jews in Germany as guests, not fully German, and the Jewish community as representing a foreign state, Israel. While this connection is cherished by the German political class, it asks Muslim migrants not to identify with Muslims abroad lest that foster Jihad. Redeeming the *Zivilisationsbruch* has empowered it to proclaim a new civilizing mission that sees the problem of migrants’ “imported antisemitism” as solvable with Holocaust education rather than identifying racism of all kinds with the conflation of the German Volk and political citizenship. One wonders how these migrants regard Germany’s sense of historical justice if it means defending a military dictatorship over Palestinians for over half a century.

To be sure, the catechism served an important function in denazifying the country. It is good that a Holocaust memorial exists in Berlin. But the country has changed. Not only has the catechism outlived its usefulness; it imperils the very freedom that Germans ostensibly prize. In its *völkisch* assumptions and fetishization of European civilization vs the Asiatic barbarians, the catechism is riddled with contradictions revealed by new German and non-German voices. The time has come to set it aside and renegotiate the demands of historical justice in a way that respects all victims of the German state and Germans of all kinds.

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# Priests, Catechisms and Heretics: Some Thoughts on Dirk Moses' Remarks

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In this piece I seek to acknowledge the stimulus of Dirk Moses' intervention, recognising that his argument sits within a palpable move across our discipline(s) to place the Holocaust within the wider European history of extreme violence, colonial and otherwise. My initial purpose in writing was to seek to acknowledge the presence of a terrain for further discussion, whilst lowering the levels of polemical intensity that characterised Moses' own piece. The polemics of the latter seemed unlikely to me to foster the kinds of conversation around this topic that I should also like to see develop. I seek, finally, to draw initial attention to the dynamics of (mainly West) German memory culture since the 1960s, suggesting that what Moses describes as an ossified 'catechism' reflects the workings of a complex set of social movements over time—the evolution of this should be recognised and understood as a set of historically contingent processes too.

In a spirited, provocative essay for the highly respected Zurich-based History and Current Affairs web publication *Geschichte der Gegenwart* Dirk Moses takes to task the 'high priests' of Germany's memory culture for their defence of a view of the National Socialist past, its place in German and European history, and its proper place in the historical consciousness of the Federal Republic, that he regards as outdated. For Moses, the claims that 1. The Holocaust was unique on the grounds of the specific role that ideology played in it 2. it represented a *Zivilisationsbruch* (a 'civilisational rupture', or a 'rupture with civilisation', according to taste) 3. Germany has a special responsibility both to Jews in Germany and to the state of Israel as a result. 4. Antisemitism is a peculiar kind of prejudice, a distinctly German one, and is different to other racisms. 5. Anti-Zionism is antisemitism amount, collectively, to a 'catechism'. Together they form a doctrinal set of beliefs, foundational and incontrovertible truths designed—since this is what a catechism is—to be impressed upon the young i.e. the next generation of citizens of the Federal Republic, so that they may gain a firm, unshakeable grasp of what it means to be German in a world after Auschwitz, and of the obligations that entails. That such views have to be internalised equally both by fourth or fifth generation direct descendants of the perpetrator generation and by new citizens hailing from Syria or Afghanistan is what gives it its character as a civic religion and its key function in determining how German democratic subjectivity is to be inhabited by all, regardless of their other differences.

Moses' central claim is that the endless repetition of this catechism by its 'high priests' flies in the face of the new truths carried by a growing body of scholarship that renders such claims unsustainable, and that it has reached a point where it functions as a barrier, rather than a stimulus, to fostering the critical thought upon which both the vitality of democracy and a culture of respect for human rights in the present depend. Moreover, changing facts on the ground—the emergence of new demographics, positioned differently in relation to Europe's colonial pasts compared to the positions occupied (structurally, if not necessarily always intellectually) by its historical white majority—are now providing a powerful catalyst for an overdue renegotiation of how a (hitherto unproblematic) German and European 'we' imagine the moral burdens and pedagogical obligations bequeathed by 'our' many colonialist and genocidal pasts. Acknowledging as white Europeans now must (and should wish to do) that the unproblematised 'we' of the European imagination is now a far more complex, heterogenous

‘we’ whose diverse histories contain a wide variety of experiences of colonialism, violence and genocide enacted by Germans and other Europeans alike demands rethinking the underlying ethics of our relationship both to History and to human rights crises in the present. The catechism, according to Moses, stands in the way of this—the polemical tone of the piece makes clear that it ought urgently to be abandoned.

I sympathise with much of Moses’ perspective on the history, and with much of his ethical thrust too. I have argued for similar elsewhere, if slightly more *en passant*. For a long time, the history of National Socialism has made much greater sense to me when understood as European history as well as German history, and I have always thought it important to locate it within wider histories of European colonialism and racial science, to read its ideological drives within the contexts of more generic nationalism, militarism and anti-democratic thought, and to see it as having been incubated by powerful tendencies in not just German, but European histories from the nineteenth century onwards. The idea that National Socialism represented a moment of rupture with European civilisation has always seemed to me to rest on a set of rather dubious conceits about what European history prior to 1933 consisted of – far from representing a break with that history, it has always seemed to me to represent a powerful distillation of some of its most unpleasant traditions. (If the endless footnotes of the 2015 scholarly edition of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* taught us anything, then surely it was that). The fact that many of us work in institutions that helped to incubate those very ideas makes it all the more important to acknowledge it.

This is not, moreover, a question of juxtaposing a general burden owned by ‘us’ as Europeans—one anchored in our shared inheritance of a certain fundus of ugly ideas—with a more particular burden for those second, third, fourth generation descendants of the German perpetrators whom I mentioned earlier, understandable as that line of reasoning might in some ways be at first sight. The huge amount of work on the subject of collaboration in the Holocaust from France to the Ukraine tells us that this is not a question of juxtaposing European thoughts with German actions. From the French Milice to Ukrainian auxiliaries, collaborators acted out the antisemitic impulses that animated German perpetrators with the same complex, varied but recognisable mix of commitment, enthusiasm, routine and situational exigency that scholars have explored over the last three decades or so in the case of Germany itself.

The question ‘why Germany?’ is not explained away by any of this, still less is it answered. To ground an account of the Holocaust in the contexts advocated by Moses is not to obviate the need to think about the stresses of an unstable, dynamically changing, authoritarian society bursting with disruptive democratic energies; about the profound, deep, multi-dimensional crises engendered by the First World War and its aftermaths; about the sense many Germans made of these crises and their impact upon Germany; or about the ways in which those cultural and ideological responses – which drew upon those wider inheritances mentioned above—shaped the choices Germans (or enough of them) made in 1933, 1939 or 1941. Neither does Moses claim that to be so. His insistence that the antisemitic animus governing National Socialism makes more sense when read against wider histories of persecuting imagined ‘security threats’ and acting to destroy them than it does if described simply as yet another expression of the ‘longest hatred’ seems to me a point worth thinking about, though I see little need to adjudicate that as a zero-sum game.

More generally, however, I remain uncertain of the answer to that question, and the sense that the frames inside of which we need to think to answer it are shifting quite profoundly at the moment makes me less

certain than I have been for some time. That uncertainty has been compounded by some systematic reading of modern French history over the last year or so, and by shifting the emphasis of much of my reading and teaching into comparative work (for example on the history of the European far Right). The most cursory of perusals of the work undertaken by colleagues specialising in French history to recuperate the history of French fascism, as well as indigenous forms of French nativism and authoritarianism, leaves one feeling that while France didn't produce its own Hitler it might well have done so (and as one friend in that field often reminds me, it didn't produce one—it produced several). If one widens the frame more widely, and considers the resurgence of the far Right across Europe in the last ten to twenty years, it is similarly striking how little headway one makes in defining a generic core to often disparate movements without reaching for a common archaeology in late 19th century European colonialism.

If Moses' broad argument about Europe as a set of contexts is well-taken, then so is his observation of a certain defensiveness, and of the neuralgic points which one presses at one's peril, if one argues on this basis before a German public. I too have experienced the frustration of participating in public panel discussions in Germany, of arguing for the need to contextualise the history of National Socialism within a wider set of European histories of violence, and been met with the response that I am rearticulating the views of Ernst Nolte, or giving succour to 1980s-style conservative revisionism—as if the only people who could possibly want to think about National Socialism within those wider contexts must be that way inclined. My personal low point occurred a few years back when a senior German professor and established public voice—one of those I imagine Moses to have in mind when he refers to 'high priests'—responded to my suggestion on a public podium that we need to develop those more cosmopolitan memory cultures by taking the microphone and growling 'Quatsch' ('rubbish') into it.

Where I part company with Moses, however, is in the somewhat disrespectful tone vis-a-vis the authenticity of the political and emotional commitments of those whom he criticises. One of the weaknesses of the piece is that it is not entirely clear where, structurally, the problem seems to lie—Moses' 'high priests' are described, variously, as '68ers' and/or 'elites', both of which terms mask as much as they reveal, and in a manner that rides roughshod over the range of opinions among those for whom '68er' or 'elite' might figure as serviceable shorthand. But if we assume that Moses has in his sights the broad generation or two of scholars, memory workers and community activists who worked from the 1960s to the turn of the century to place awareness and acceptance of the crimes of the National Socialist era at the centre of the political culture of the Federal Republic, then we ought surely to feel some discomfort at the manner in which their efforts are described here. To characterise this broad section of opinion as simply fighting a reactionary, rear-guard action against the incontrovertible new truth, using the methods of censorship to repress 'heresy', seems to me to traduce both the achievements and the motivations of the people at stake here in a way that is not calculated to foster the conversation we need.

It is easy to forget the massive effort the project of establishing that knowledge took in the old *Bundesrepublik* and after 1990, and to underestimate the very powerful structural hostility which that shared project encountered. The desperately hierarchical, patrician, paternalist, clientelist character of German academia, and not least the co-determining say of the Ministry in making senior appointments—meant that the career stakes in pursuing certain projects were high. As late as the 1990s, pursuing work on the role of institutions such as universities in the National Socialist era was not just an indulgence of the age-old scholarly oedipal impulse—to do this meant challenging and accusing one's own immediate

(and powerful) academic elders for their own roles as intellectual outriders for murder. To write about lawyers, judges, doctors, policemen or teachers in the Nazi era was to write about one's own parents, aunts or uncles: the political, ethical and emotional stakes, and the potential personal costs, were high. If one looks more widely, at the range of civil society actors that emerged out of the History Workshop grassroots movements of the 1970s and 1980s the point becomes yet clearer: engaging the history in which parents and grandparents had been complicit was an act often associated with much pain. What Moses describes—pushing the religion analogy, as is often the temptation, that bit too far—with unmistakable sarcasm as ‘sacred trauma’ was something felt bitterly and forcefully by members of a generation who grew up with a very profound sense of personal encumbrance. It was that encumbrance that was channelled in the pursuit of struggles for funding, or space, or institutional support to unfold various memory projects, again against often massive resistance from political forces answering to constituencies that simply did not want to hear.

The political commitments of this generation of activists are open, of course, to interrogation with the methods of the history of emotions, and the place such commitments occupied in the democratic subjectivities of Germans in the 1980s and 1990s has started to produce much thoughtful scholarship. It is interesting, indeed, to reflect about the socialisation of that generation of senior academics, museum curators and administrators that now presides over the important institutions of memory work. But while the desire to make some kind of restitution, however inadequate, on the part of this generation may be available for analysis with the tools of psychoanalysis, it strikes me as just too cynical to describe their work in such polemical terms as the pursuit of ‘national redemption.’ My impression has always been that such individuals are motivated by a variety of commitments that one could subsume, broadly, under the headings of democratic activism and the strengthening of civil society, and that such efforts should command respect. While such projects often have their limitations, and can be criticised for what they may not do, we have no need to traduce the efforts of those who, after all, were responsible for drawing to our attention the things about which we also try to think critically today.

The ‘high priests’ are heading into retirement, and it is hardly surprising that they feel a need to protect what they have achieved, not least given the resurgence of forms of far Right thought in the contemporary world. If we are going to engage those who see the historical past, its legacies and implications slightly differently to us in a meaningful conversation we will have to find a slightly different tone.

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# On the ‘German Catechism’

Matt Fitzpatrick

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From the vantage point of Australia, and cognizant of that nation’s own struggle to come to terms with its violent settler colonial past, Matt Fitzpatrick defends the comparative (and contrastive) approach to German histories of violence and genocide, arguing that our understanding of the Holocaust is greatly enriched by analyzing it alongside other extremely violent societies. He reaffirms the importance of postcolonial approaches to German history and suggests that linking criticism of the dispossession of the Palestinians with antisemitism is a deliberate conflation of two different things. The contribution concludes by asserting that many longstanding political and historiographical assumptions need to be re-examined in light of the experiences and testimony of colonized peoples, who have clearly articulated how framing the violence of the German and European past without reference to colonial atrocities distorts that history.

Dirk Moses’ provocative intervention into the historical dimensions of German political culture may take its title from Kleist, but its substance arguably deals with more Schmittian themes, laying bare what he sees as a new German political theology, one in which the friend / foe distinction orders public discourse and debate. As a short polemic aimed at a broader public, the tone is sharp—at times caustic—and it necessarily simplifies some complex ground in the interests of brevity. It also probably overstates the extent to which the hold of this ‘catechism’ is a monolithic feature of German public culture, where lively debate is still possible and still taken seriously. Nonetheless, these matters of tone and form do not alter the fact that Moses’ intervention is overwhelmingly for the good.

Given limited time and space I want to demonstrate this by addressing three central aspects of the piece: namely the status of the Holocaust as a historical event, its relationship to the colonial past and the subsequent meaning of the Holocaust in German public life, with particular reference to the question of Palestine and Germany’s unstinting support for Israel.

As I wrote in an article in 2008, Jürgen Habermas’ *Historikerstreit*-era prohibition on comparing the Holocaust to other events has been a problematic legacy for historians. Tactically, this prohibition proved to be an immensely useful bulwark against the brown-tinged revisionism of Ernst Nolte, but it was an ahistorical understanding that lifted an event out of history when it, like all events, was necessarily intertwined with broader histories. The genocidal violence of the Holocaust cries out for historical explanation, and part of the process of explanation is comparison and assessing its relationship with other events. As Moses points out, this has long been understood by historians, which is why there has been no serious work recently that supports the earlier notion that the Holocaust was ‘uniquely unique’ or that antisemitism, including violent antisemitism, was *sui generis* or the sole preserve of Germans. That the incomparability of the Holocaust has become a pillar of German public culture seems to be a historically contingent by-product of the laudable and extremely important work of honouring the memory of the victims of Nazi violence and ensuring that the violence of the far right is not unleashed once again on those deemed to be inferior or a threat. But for non-Germans such as myself, the German insistence on controlling the terms of debate regarding genocide and how it might be studied has had a deleterious effect on efforts to understand the history of other extremely violent societies.

There is no historical reason why colonial violence, particularly colonial genocides, should not be

discussed alongside the Holocaust, just as there is no reason why the Holocaust cannot still be studied from the perspective of its relationship with long and short-term developments in Germany itself. Personally, I consider examining, testing and debating the relationship between the Holocaust and other manifestations of racial exclusion, colonial violence and genocide to be important historical work. I share Moses' incredulity at the way in which Achille Mbembe was lambasted in the German press, and how Jürgen Zimmerer's work was seen as somehow beyond the realm of acceptable discourse by some commentators (although it would be hard to maintain that Jürgen Zimmerer, one of the most ubiquitous commentators on German colonialism in the German media, has been 'exorcised' from public debate). Both scholars have in their own ways opened up important new ways of seeing the past. One of these new ways of seeing entails accepting the viewpoint of the colonised who, as Moses put it, know too well why 'the article of faith about the Nazis' *Zivilisationsbruch* rings hollow' given the devastating effects that European civilisation had on their societies.

As it happens, I do not share Zimmerer's or Moses' sense that there are strong structural continuities between Windhoek and Auschwitz. In my work I have frequently tried to point out that while the comparative approach is fruitful, so too is the contrastive. I continue to hold that the genocide in German Southwest Africa sits best within the logic that drove (for example) Britain's annihilatory warfare in the Sudan, as witnessed at Omdurman, and the violent impulses of other settler colonies such as Australia. That Nazi genocide unfolded during an imperialist war does not mean that all imperialist wars (German or otherwise) or genocides (German or otherwise) can be seen as a coherent whole or structurally linked. To do so risks flattening what is deeply complicated terrain.

This is perhaps my sole difference with Moses. But this is not a matter of doctrine, rather a difference of interpretation drawn from the same method—comparative history. And these differences certainly do not stop me from sharing Moses' unease regarding the 'German catechism'.

Crucially, three of the five points of the 'catechism' deal with the consequences that withholding the Holocaust from comparison has had on German public and political culture and in particular on Germany's support for Israel and its actions in all circumstances. Here it pays to tread carefully. Quite deliberately, it has been a long time since I've discussed the question of Palestine, although careful readers will know that I have always counted Israel among settler colonial states. My reticence has not been a question of timidity. Instead, it came from a deep-seated uneasiness about the fact that I live, as Moses did for a long time, in a place that is far from having its own settler colonial house in order. I write this short piece, for example, on Australia's National Sorry Day, where we remember the Stolen Generations of Indigenous Australians, at a time when Indigenous calls for white Australians to face up to their annihilatory history remain all but ignored in political debate and where the gracious and extremely generous offer of *Makarrata*—the coming together of two sides after a struggle—that stemmed from the joint-Indigenous nations' Uluru Statement from the Heart has been rebuffed by a bipartisan refusal to stare the uglier facts of colonial history in the face. Accusing Israelis of settler colonial violence while living happily on unceded Kurna country in Australia seemed at best problematic and at worst hypocritical.

The recent violence against Palestinians and the German political and media response to it, however, means that confronting Moses' charges regarding German political culture is sadly both timely and necessary. I can only applaud the way in which Moses has shown how the responsibility to honour and protect the public memory of the Holocaust has become a rationale for defending the violence and

dispossession now occurring in Israel. That the Holocaust seems to be understood by the German state and media as a reason why the systematic and violent dispossession of Palestinians might be ignored or rationalised strikes me as shocking. So too I agree that linking antizionism and antisemitism is a deliberate political tactic designed to conflate two very different things. More speculatively, I also think that the Germans discussed by Moses will in all likelihood find themselves on the wrong side of history. With the one-state solution increasingly the only real solution beckoning as Palestinian territory shrinks house by house and hill by hill, Germany's rigid adherence to supporting any and all actions by Israel against the Palestinians is either anachronistic or inadvertently accelerationist.

To conclude, if intellectual and cultural decolonisation means anything, it surely means testing longstanding political assumptions against new understandings garnered from listening to those whose experience of history differs from that of the metropole. German history necessarily intersects with the histories of other peoples, many of whom remember only too well the experience and costs of European imperialism. I cannot speak on their behalf, but it might be with some justification that colonised peoples remain sceptical of German claims to be serving historical justice by excluding the Holocaust from a broader history, refusing to take seriously the genocidal legacy of colonialism or excusing Israel from the need to treat Palestinians justly. Instead, they might well see in this yet another means for the continued suppression of their own historical experiences.

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# “*Sieferle von links*”: A Fair Criticism?

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Unfortunately, in one crucial aspect, yes.

The problem lies in the reified religious language of Dirk Moses’s polemic, concentrated in his evocation of Heinrich von Kleist’s ultra-nationalist “Catechism of the Germans” of 1809.

According to Moses’ updated version, published May 23rd in the online journal *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, it is an article of faith in the Federal Republic that the (1) the Holocaust is unique, (2) constituted a civilizational rupture, and (3) implies “a special responsibility to Jews in Germany, and a special loyalty to Israel.” Moreover, (4) “antisemitism is a distinct prejudice—and was a distinctly German one” that “should not be confused with racism.” And finally (5), anti-Zionism is antisemitism.

As Patrick Bahners, the sharp-minded *FAZ Feuilleton* editor who levelled the “*Sieferle von links*” charge no doubt knew, Rolf Peter Sieferle, once a talented, wide-ranging, iconoclastic historian, had made similarly religiously-inflected arguments in his *Finis Germania* (2017), published posthumously after his suicide in 2016. Hitherto the declension narratives of the new nationalism had focused on ethno-demography, as was the case with Robert Hepp: *Die Endlösung der Deutschen Frage (The Final Solution of the German Question)*, 1988) and Thilo Sarrazin: *Deutschland schafft sich ab (Germany Abolishes Itself)*, 2010). But Sieferle’s short book was different. *Finis Germania* proffered a bleak vision of decline centered on how Germany had faced its past, describing the Federal Republic’s memory work in terms of religious eschatology, the theology of last things.

Auschwitz (which he famously put in quotation marks) had become “the last myth of a thoroughly rationalized word,” Sieferle declared. He defined myth as a truth beyond discussion. And like Moses, Sieferle began with the supposed ontological singularity, the alleged public-sphere commandment number one of Auschwitz, namely: You may not compare your atrocity with other atrocities. Like Moses, Sieferle did not stop there. Pushing his religiously-inflected analysis of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* further, he argued that as the Jews are the “chosen people,” the singularity of Auschwitz brings with it a concomitant singularity in guilt. Like the mark of Cain, this singularity will stay with the German people forever. The Jews as elect, the Germans as damned. According to Sieferle, this was the most compelling myth of our times. It condemned the Germans to perpetual penance, and it meant that other histories, other discussions, other possibilities, were forever shut down.

Some parts of Dirk Moses’s analysis seem drawn directly from Sieferle. The catechism, Moses tells us, lays out articles of faith “on a path to national redemption” via a “redemptive story in which the sacrifice of Jews in the Holocaust by Nazis is the premise for the Federal Republic’s legitimacy.” The Holocaust, he underscores, is “a sacred trauma that cannot be contaminated by profane ones,” and counts non-Jewish victims and other genocides as belonging to the impure that would “vitiate its sacrificial function.” Other parts seem drawn from religious sociology, as when Moses writes of priestly censors, priests conducting inquisitions, and priests forever on the lookout for anti-Semitism.

So, what is the problem? It is not, for me, that *les extrêmes se touchent*, if indeed they do. It is not that I



cannot recognize the truth of some of the so-called articles of faith of the catechism with respect to my own German experience over the years (as is the case with article four, antisemitism as a distinctly German prejudice, not to be confused with racism). And it is not even that some of those articles are too much in the realm of pure politics for me to want to mix them up with honest attempts at historical memory (as is the case with article 5, anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism). Rather, for me, the central problem is the mystification that the religious analogy brings to the understanding of how Germany faced its past.

To narrate Germany's turn to its past as an expectation of national salvation, as did both Sieferle and Moses, dramatically foreshortens two aspects of that turn: how it happened on the ground, and the complexity of the historical landscape. It also makes national memory into a

kind of religious war, which it is not.

When we turn to how *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) actually happened, and widen our analytical aperture, we see that this was not a movement of high-minded clerics but a social movement that encompassed a great many ordinary people and unsung heroes. Already in the 1980s, certainly in the 1990s, the effort to face the past honestly had become an immensely popular, widespread, sociologically deep, politically eclectic movement. Not secular priests but local archivists, school teachers, retired people, young people, on the left and on the right, were its *Macher* (makers) So too were Jews. Often in cooperation with non-Jewish Germans, often from outside of Germany, Jews participated in this project more than many people realize. Moreover, this movement was both transnational and local. It was transnational because of the many actors, from the U.S. Great Britain, France, Israel, Canada, and elsewhere, who were involved (indeed this forum is a testament to that ongoing involvement). And it was local because of the seemingly immense amount of commemorative work that went into it.

Consider only one dimension of this localness. More than 1300 synagogues were desecrated or destroyed during the November Pogrom. Close to a thousand now have commemorative plaques. This involved hundreds of local conflicts, city and town-council discussions, restoration club meetings, letters to survivors (many cities and towns organized *Besucherwochen*), and yes, a lot of people reading and indeed writing history. Tens if not hundreds of thousands of people, from all walks of life, participated in this movement. Dirk Moses's late dating—by the way—begins with the movement's success and misses the years, sometimes even decades, of preparatory work that went into achieving limited victories, as thousands and thousands of people, in one town after the next, fought for a more honest historical understanding of what happened in their own home town.

The emphasis on the expectation of national salvation also flattens the historical field. For at least three decades, it has been the case that historians do, actually, compare dictatorships and genocides, and Dirk Moses has been an important part of this story. There are even journals, like *The Journal of Genocide Research*, devoted to the comparison, and handbooks, one edited by Moses himself, that demonstrate the great differentiations and increasing sophistication of the field. Moreover, for at least three decades, there has been a discussion about the relation of genocide of the Nama and Herrero with the Holocaust, though its outcome is not as much a matter of consensus as Dirk Moses implies (especially in the German translation). On the contrary. Two of the most trenchant recent interpretations, Peter Hayes' *Why: Explaining the Holocaust*, and Christian Gerlach's *The Extermination of the European Jews*, do not even mention the direct link. And it is, indeed, the direct link that is in question: not whether racism and colonial violence belongs to the background factors of the Holocaust.

Likewise, major advances in the study of the Holocaust in the last two decades no longer admit of a kind of national salvation argument. Historians no longer see the perpetrators as just German. Even as the orders came from the Nazi SS, the killers also comprised Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and others. Often, they were local fascists. In almost all cases, they did not kill because they were forced to, but rather out of hatred and avarice. The same holds true for the people who occupied the houses of Jews and without remorse stole the belongings of their neighbors. Throughout Europe, the Nazis plundered most of what the Jews possessed, but others took the rest. Seeing genocide at this level of micro detail, town by town throughout Europe, and especially in Eastern Europe, means re-envisioning the genocide as it actually happened—*wie es eigentlich gewesen*, to cite Leopold von Ranke, insofar as that is humanly possible. All of this makes the study of the Holocaust hardly a German-centered undertaking anymore. One need only think of major pathbreaking works of recent years—from Jan Gross's *Neighbours* (2002), to Omar Bartov's *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (2018), or Wendy Lower's recent *The Ravine* (2021), to realize that many of the most important works no longer centre on German actors alone.

Two decades ago, the works of the late German-English author and critic W.G. Sebald spurred a discussion of how see historical tragedy more precisely. In a series of lectures on aerial bombing and literature, he argued something had kept German authors from treating the devastation of German cities with an acute eye for the ruin it wrought. If scholars have since shown that Sebald exaggerated his case, it nevertheless remains that he pointed to a general tendency to avert one's eyes to the complexities, beyond sin and redemption, of wartime destruction. That looking "has something to do with truth," as Sebald said in one of his poems. And that experience of truth, in post-Holocaust Germany, has something to do with the openness of the German public sphere. National memory is not a zero-sum game. As I write these lines, *Al Jazeera* reports that the Federal Republic will recognize the the genocide against the Herero and Nama as a genocide (*Völkermord*), and fund 1.3 billion in infrastructure, healthcare and training projects in Namibia over the next 30 years. People who worked for Germany's turn to its past, centered, as that turn was, on the Holocaust, are, nearly to a person, applauding.

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# Does Holocaust Memory Still Matter?

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Holocaust commemoration is both a scholarly and political endeavor. In this post, Udi Greenberg assesses the values and limits of Dirk Moses' interventions in both spheres. First, he discusses Moses' historical research and the effort to situate the Nazi genocide in the broader framework of colonial violence. He claims that while this approach is highly fruitful (especially in its focus on the racialization of space), it does not fully explain some of the Third Reich's most radical policies. Second, Greenberg explores Moses' critique of current German focus on Holocaust memory, and especially Moses' belief that it prevents Germans from confronting the legacies of their country's colonial violence, both at home (in relations to immigrants communities) and abroad (in their unilateral support of Israel). He argues that Moses is correct to call out these political injustices, but wonders whether memorialization is truly important for their constitutions; after all, similar social and diplomatic dynamics are in works also in countries like Britain or France, where Holocaust memory is not as central.

In the heart of Vienna, a stone's throw from university's main compound, stands a statue of an antisemite. It celebrates Karl Lueger, the charismatic mayor of Vienna (1897-1910), whose career was built on relentless anti-Jewish rhetoric and who, among other things, helped inspire a young Adolf Hitler. Despite this ugly legacy, and even as it became a meeting point for far-right activists, Vienna is deeply dedicated to this monument. When protesters (inspired by anti-racist demonstrations in the US and elsewhere) recently covered it with graffiti, city workers rushed to clean it. This commitment is of course designed to make some feel uncomfortable. Either through malice or indifference, it signals to non-Christians that their presence in the city is precarious. It may be an exaggeration to attribute so much meaning to a statue, but this at least was my own experience when I was a student in Vienna. I am a Jewish grandchild of holocaust survivors, and every time I passed by Lueger's imposing figure I felt like someone was saying: *It's fine for you to visit, but this space is not for you.*

On the face of it, Berlin seems like the opposite of Vienna. From the enormous memorials to the holocaust in the city's center to the Jewish Museum in Kreuzberg, the city overflows with reminders of antisemitism's violence and of a centuries-old Jewish community. As many commentators note, what is so striking about Berlin's—and Germany's—approach to the politics of memory is its resistance to self-glorification. Instead of demarcating the communities' borders, as the Lueger monument does, German historical monuments seek to make the native population uncomfortable. Nothing illustrates this more than the famous “Stumbling Stones” project, which inscribed the names of the Third Reich's victims on the sidewalks near their houses. Its purpose is to impose a daily encounter with loss, to remind inhabitants of those neighborhoods that they live on stolen property. The intended message seems: *be: This space does not belong to anyone in particular, but to everyone.*

Commentators have showered endless praise on Germany's memory politics, but in his provocative essay, Dirk Moses offers a far less dewy-eyed assessment. The country's intense focus on holocaust memorialization may comfort people like me, he claims, but it does so at the expense of others, especially the people of Africa and the Middle East. Unlike Jews, members of these groups do not enjoy any recognition of their collective historical suffering. There is no museum to the Berlin Conference (1884/5), where European powers (with German coordination) radically expanded the reach of their brutal imperialism in Africa. There are also no “Stepping Stones” to remind Germans of the African lives lost to German troops' genocidal violence in Namibia (1904). For Moses, this is not an omission but an

active repression. German elites have fixated on holocaust repentance precisely so they could avoid confronting the country's long history of violence and exclusion that has targeted multiple groups. It is therefore time for them to acknowledge that the holocaust was not unique, but part of a broad set of atrocities in which Germany was implicated. It was one version of settler colonial racism that has destroyed communities the world over.

Situating the holocaust in the broader history of modern colonialism is not a new endeavor, and as Moses notes, historians have been doing so for over a decade. Moses' goal is not just scholarly but also political: in his mind, Germany's memory politics have dire consequences in our own world. In his telling, the focus on Nazi crimes may once have had its political benefits (in fighting jingoism or in solidifying a commitment to democracy) but this is no longer the case. Now it mostly serves to deflect the plight of Germany's new minorities, mostly immigrants and their descendants from the Middle East and Africa, whose status as second-rate subjects is tolerated because they are not Jewish. Even more egregiously, the Holocaust's meaning as a unique and unparalleled crime helps feed Germany's unilateral support for Israel, even as its government systematically forces Palestinians off their lands and bombs their homes into oblivion. In a dark irony, Moses concludes, holocaust memory helps reproduce the forces it seeks to tame, giving cover to racism and violence.

Scholarship and politics are so deeply intertwined in Moses' essay that it may feel forced for me to address them separately. But his interventions in history and political discourse are not identical, and thus generate different sets of questions. When it comes to scholarship, like most historians, I admire and appreciate the quest by Moses and others to expand our understanding of Nazism's violence. Thanks to their efforts, few scholars would now doubt that the Nazis drew *some* of their ideas, especially their conflation of space with race, from other colonial projects. In this regard, Moses has built on—and very much enriched—a scholarly tradition that highlight the features the Third Reich shared with other regimes, whether the Soviet Union's state terror (Timothy Snyder) or the United States' modernization efforts (Wolfgang Schivelbusch). Like them, he has contributed to our understanding of Nazism less as a uniquely German pathology and more as an extreme manifestation of broad trends.

As was the case with those earlier comparisons, however, one can wonder if Moses' focus on imperialism and settler colonialism is at times too broad to clarify Nazism's distinct characteristics. An army of scholars has shown in the last few decades that modern colonialism included countless techniques of rules, utilization of technology, and legitimizing ideologies. Colonial authorities and settler communities employed a diverse repertoire of actions when dealing with colonial subjects, from building schools and hospitals (in an effort to “uplift”) to murdering them in camps. The question therefore is whether situating the Nazis in this framework explains why and how they chose their particular assortment of colonial actions. Why, for example, did they eschew the language of a civilizing mission, which was common among some imperialists (including some earlier German colonialists in Eastern Europe)? Why did they not only emulate other countries' colonial violence (say Belgium's brutality in the Congo) but also radically expand on it by establishing industrial death centers? Answering these questions requires focusing on the particulars, like anti-Communism's central role in the Nazi imagination (which it shared with regimes that were not colonial) or the trauma of WWI's mechanized killing. Settler colonialism provides a crucial pretext for their visions but does not fully explain them.

Both the value and limits of Moses' intervention can perhaps be illuminated by comparing it to the depiction of Nazism as a version of “biopolitics.” In lectures delivered in the 1970s, Michel Foucault

famously claimed that Nazism was but a version of a new European approach to the human body. All modern European regimes, he claimed, whether democratic, fascist, or socialist, developed a fixation with health and reproduction, and unleashed campaigns to control and regulate them (in a brief comment, which has not gotten as much attention as it deserves, he also claimed that colonialism was an important pretext to this modern racism). In the years since, several historians have echoed Foucault by noting that the Third Reich's dystopian efforts to control reproduction through mass sterilization of "undesirables" (prostitutes, gay people, alcoholics, and others) was indeed part of a broader trend that cut across political structures. Similar horrific campaigns also unfolded in Sweden the United States, postwar Japan, postcolonial India, and communist China. Despite its obvious insights, this contextualization also has clear limits. It does not explain why the Nazis expanded sterilization to an unparalleled scale, nor why they ultimately deviated from existing models by moving from sterilization to mass killing. Providing context, in short, is certainly illuminating, but leaves some of the hardest questions unanswered.

I similarly have both admiration and some reservations for Moses' claims about history's place in contemporary affairs. As a former Israeli, I know well what Moses describes as "the nightmare" of the region's ethnic violence. I share his damning views of Israel's brutality against Palestinians as well as his allergy to the holocaust's instrumentalization to justify it. Indeed, like him, I find the blind support of some German elites for Israel scandalous. The 2019 Bundestag resolution that criminalized the BDS movement, equated it with Nazism, and passed over vocal opposition from countless Jewish organizations and individuals, is only the most recent example of the tragic consequences of this approach. Some critics thought that Moses was too polemical when he called German holocaust remembrance "catechism," and I agree that it risks dismissing some people's serious and at time brave efforts to confront their society's crimes. It also risks conflating different forces and motives behind memory politics (some were initiated by state authorities, others by volunteers and artists). Moses is right, though, to question whether the German approach to the Middle East is too rigid, and to call for its radical rethinking.

The question however is whether holocaust memory is actually so central to these dynamics. It is certainly part of the story, but are the countless monuments, museums, and school plans responsible for it? Most people in the United States, for example, do not seem particularly riddled with guilt over the holocaust or the U.S. government's refusal to provide Jewish refugees shelter in the 1930s. Yet support for Israel is just as intense and bipartisan in the United States as in Germany: dozens of states have passed anti-BDS bills, and the U.S. Congress considered similar legislation in 2018. Similar support for Israel flows from other commentators who cling to simplistic narratives of national innocence, like Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Czech President Miloš Zeman. The reasons for this intense investment in Israel and hostility to Palestinians are complex, and combine geopolitics, business, history, and other factors. They also, of course, vary from one setting to another. But the fact that pro-Israel sentiments flourish in so many places can lead one to wonder if they have as much to do as it seems with holocaust memory.

The same question can be asked regarding Moses' claim about Germany's relationships with its growing black and brown communities. Is the centrality of holocaust memory, at the expense of colonial violence in other parts of the world, a crucial factor in their marginalization? Germany is not unique in facing a recent wave of calls to recognize its ugly imperial history, which have often come from the descendants of colonialism's victims. Similar calls have appeared in Britain and France. Neither are the

uncomfortable feelings that such demands sometimes generate unusual. In both Britain and France, an apologetics industry has emerged, insisting that colonialism should also be remembered for its “positive” legacies. Moses is right that the holocaust’s uniqueness is sometimes utilized as a rhetorical tool to avoid other historical wrongs. But it is unclear if it is the cause of this evasion, or merely a symptom.

Moses, in short, is right to call for more reckoning with the legacies of European colonialism, but I am not sure that the fastest path there goes through the critique of holocaust memorialization. Even if one believes that the Nazi genocide was unique, it does not preclude one’s hope that Europeans would build museums, monuments, and schools plans that highlight the history of colonial violence. As Helmut Walser Smith noted here a few days ago, Germany just announced this week its plans to pay reparations to Namibia. It was an act that did not require denouncing the holocaust’s distinct role in Germany’s formal national narrative. If anything, holocaust monuments could provide one of the models for new memory culture. For if such culture ever emerge, it will likely follow the “Stumbling Stones” project: not by initiative of state authorities, but by the works of local and independent activists.

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# In Absentia of Black Study

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Last week, the German government offered a recognition of its early 20th century genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people in what was then German South West Africa. After a rejected compensation offer of €10 million in 2020, Germany announced it would describe its race war practices against the indigenous peoples of Namibia as a genocide and would pay €1.1 billion “to existing aid programs over 30 years.” This comes out to about the same amount of annual development funding that Germany has given Namibia since its independence in 1990, including infrastructural projects and €50 million “towards setting up a foundation for reconciliation between the two states.” The deal was born out of bilateral negotiations between the German and Namibian governments. Notably, multiple traditional leaders and representatives of the affected communities have rejected this deal, including Ovaherero Paramount Chief Vekuii Rukoro who described it as “an insult,” a fair assessment of the crafty discursive transformation of ongoing disbursements of development aid into grand conciliatory gesture.

This alleged deal, which has been celebrated by many Germans as a political and moral success, has arrived in the midst of a potentially paradigm-shifting debate about German statecraft. On one side rests the insistence on a genocide exceptionalism, a singularity of Germany’s genocide of Jews; and on the other, there exists various articulations of a historical relationship between the genocidal violence of German imperialism and atrocities committed in Europe during World War II. There is a strange sentimentalism attached to insistences on genocide uniqueness: there has been some deliberate imputation of rhetorical red herrings and unmade intellectual claims (for example, the idea that structural relationality or continuity is synonymous with causation) that betrays disciplinary and epistemic shortcomings and investments alike.

In “The German Catechism,” Dirk Moses laid out the five-part foundation of the German state’s post-war political theology. First, is the claim that the Nazis’ genocide was unique and exceptional because it was the *Vernichtung der Juden um der Vernichtung willen*, ie. the extermination of Jews for the sake of extermination itself. That ideological targeting denoted, secondly, a *Zivilisationsbruch*, or civilizational rupture (per Dan Diner). Per the mythos, Germany broke from the practice of just, regulated European warfare and was subsequently punished by the Nuremberg trial, which attempted to serve as a juridical righting of Nazi wrongs and, for the first time, brought the then-infant concept of genocide into the fold of international criminal law. Thus, Germany has thirdly, a particular responsibility to Jews in Germany and to the state of Israel birthed from this attempted extermination and racism towards Jews (i.e. antisemitism) that is, fourthly, a distinctly German racialized prejudice distinct from other forms of racism. Finally, and fifthly, any oppositions to the self-determining politics of the state of Israel constitute antisemitism; to this end Germany is an emphatic adopter and enforcer of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association’s definition of antisemitism.

To understand the political character, national ethos, and development path that eventually yielded the brutalities of Nazism’s genocidal violence, I feel compelled to begin with Germany’s first materialization of *Lebensraum*. The first iteration of this settler colonial “living space” coupled territorial expansion with a biologization of Germanness as superior whiteness contra, here, to the barbarism of uncivilized Africans who held no legible claim to this *German* land. In understanding *Lebensraum* as a land-based

definition of German self and racialized other, one can deploy Michelle Wright's notion of blackness as not simply a thing being defined, but also in the "when and where it is being imagined, defined, and performed and in what locations."

Germany began its colonization of Berlin Conference-obtained South West Africa in 1884. In classic settler form, the arrival of Germans and competition over land quickly necessitated the elimination of native peoples. The 1904-08 Herero Wars saw the devastating extermination of 80% of Ovaherero people and nearly half of the Nama. Examining the scientific afterlife of this genocide via anti-blackness and its relationalities with other racializing frames and practices helps us better understand the prevailing imperial frame within which Wilhelmene and Nazi racecraft was enacted via *Lebensraum*. In looking at the work of influential anthropologist Eugen Fischer, for example, his study of the mixed-race communities in Rehoboth came to influence Germany's anti-miscegenation policy: from the 1908 and 1912 criminalizations of mixed race marriages in the German colonies and metropole, respectively, to the *jus sanguinis*-based 1913 Nationality Law, to his influence on Adolf Hitler and the creation of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws. The transmutation of racial frames from South West Africa to the lands and populations of Eastern Prussia permits a tracking of the trajectory of Germanness' calcification as whiteness: German citizenship's preclusion of blackness and Jewishness and other impurities necessitated racial hygiene science, enforced segregations, and then, necessarily, genocide. Writing on antisemitism in the French empire, Dorian Bell refers to the "tendency of racializing logics to change scales in an effort to resolve contradictions internal to the logics themselves" as *racial scalarity*. *Racial scalarity* can duly be understood as the ways that "it was as possible for race to produce space as for space to mediate race." Racialization occurs across scales and across space and time, and where "racialization processes are mutually constitutive of one another" per Claire Jean Kim's racial triangulation theory, the relationship between genocidal German racializations becomes increasingly clear.

Studying blackness, engaging in Black study, has privileged an embrace of what Wright describes as *Epiphenomenal time*, a "'now,' through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted" through a rejection of "direct, or linear, causality" (as well as cheap political analogy). There needn't be a claim of causality for a meaningful acknowledgement that Germany's colonial ambition folded itself into post-World War I politics in the metropole, that the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people brought mass extermination into the arsenal of biopolitical possibility, or that Nazi *Lebensraum* had markedly settler colonial characteristics.

The focus on blackness, for me, offers a constant reminder that these historiographic debates have very real stakes. More pressing than contestations about whether the German path from Windhoek to Auschwitz was a direct, indirect, or non-existent one is the inconsistency with which experiences of genocide are regarded. Despite colonialism acting as the foundation for Raphael Lemkin's coining of the term—he was influenced significantly by the Ottoman Turkish genocide of the empire's Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek populations, as well as Spanish colonization in the Americas—there is stunningly little space for indictments of European colonial genocides and the possibility of retroactive redress. Because as we debate whether or not Nazi genocide is exceptional or historically connected, the victims of Germany's prior genocide are being presented an insulting and undignified bare minimum: survivor communities are expected to accept this rhetorical recognition (an admission of guilty rather than an apology) without meaningful compensation despite their long-held maxim that there actually cannot be recognition without reparations. Germany's recognition *cannot* possibly be celebrated as the first step on

the long road to reconciliation in no small part because Ovaherero and Nama communities continue to suffer the spiritual, cultural, and metaphysical wound of their murdered ancestors still being incarcerated in German (and other) archives and museum institutions despite previous state repatriation ceremonies.

The glaring absence in this debate around continuity is that of Black study and of Black people themselves: the shocking deprioritization and disinterest in both living and dead Black people, the abstracted treatments of African/Black people as subjects of historical contemplation when there are communities enduring continuations of colonial dispossession and still demanding recompense for their suffering. What is the function of depoliticizing attempted extermination as simply an “ideological” matter as though there are not, per the violent dictates of the Westphalian system, clear and distinct political motivations for othering, demonizing, and attempting to exterminate entire peoples? What if this story were to begin with indigenous Namibians rejecting the deal rather than that critical rejection being relegated to an end-of-story afterthought in western news coverage? What if African materialities comprised a major core of the debate rather than simply our interpretations of the violence of their oppressors? What if the Ovaherero and Nama were entrusted as suitably reliable narrators such that we held their worldviews, historical interpretations, ongoing traumas, and calls of reparations as *our* defining truths?

Events are certainly unique but rarely exceptional. Understanding deep interconnectedness of historical event and process rather than solely linear progression can only strengthen our understandings of historical events and the potential for solidarity born out of that *true* recognition. A sustained engagement with Black study can help to facilitate this.

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# Confessions of an Ex-Believer

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Based on a general agreement with Dirk Moses' intervention, this contribution seeks to assess the significance of Holocaust memory for West German subjectivities in the 1980s. It argues that Holocaust memory and the singularity thesis need to be seen in the context of nationalist-conservative historical revisionism during the Kohl-era. The progressive function of Holocaust memory manifested itself in many local commemorative initiatives, which, at least occasionally, were quite willing to link the memory of the persecution of the Jews to racist exclusions in the West German present. By the early 2000s, however, Holocaust memory became increasingly ossified and ritualized and lost some of its earlier progressive meanings. How and why this shift occurred is still not fully understood. But it also meant that it became increasingly difficult to locate the Holocaust within a broader history of racism and state-sponsored violence. In fact, the increasingly rigid emphasis on the uniqueness of the Holocaust rendered this memory less pertinent, perhaps even objectively unhelpful, for anti-racist struggles in the present. As such, this contribution sees Dirk Moses' intervention as a plea for a different, progressive and multidirectional Holocaust memory and not as a critique of German commemorative culture per se (as right-wing observers falsely claimed).

I read Dirk Moses' provocative piece with a series of mixed emotions: widespread agreement and internal nodding regarding the general substance, if perhaps not the tone, of the argument, yet also a sense of unease and a kind of *Betroffenheit* (being personally affected). Let me try to explain both reactions. I'll start with the latter. My unease, I think, results from the fact that I used to believe in what he calls the "catechism of the Germans." In fact, this catechism was central to my political socialization in the 1980s and 1990s and probably constitutes one, if not the most important reason, for the fact that I am now fortunate enough to earn my living by thinking, writing, and teaching about German history. Moses' text clearly recognizes the significance of this "catechism" for West German subjectivities since the 1980s. But I think his essay does not sufficiently acknowledge both the reasons for this emotional investment as well as its broader significance.

As Moses states correctly, a belief in the singularity of the Holocaust—and a strong partisanship with Habermas and his left-liberal allies among the historical profession in the *Historikerstreit*—was absolutely central to Germans coming of age in the 1980s with broadly left-wing sympathies. Perhaps it simply resided in a naïve desire to be a "good German", as Moses asserts. But I would like to think that there were also some more important and profound motivations for this attitude. The most important one was to push back against a sustained and quite explicit conservative attempt to roll back whatever critical memory of the Nazi past had emerged and to recreate a positive national identity supposedly unburdened by the Nazi past. It's easy to underestimate the sense of anxiety and outrage that this project invoked since an emerging critical memory of the Nazi past seemed so closely intertwined with West German democracy per se. It also should give pause to those who prematurely declare postwar Germany as some kind of "post-national" society. Some of this commemorative and historical revisionism was blatant nationalism, which had never completely disappeared and had fueled a conservative desire for a "final stroke" since the 1950s. Ironically, these attitudes were articulated precisely on the pages of those venues, especially the FAZ, that are now at the forefront of the defense of the singularity thesis!

The emotional and political commitment to Holocaust memory, however, was not really matched by any sort of deeper expertise in the subject. It's also important to remember how late the study of the Holocaust arrived in the German historical profession. Throughout my academic studies in the late 1980s

and early 1990s, I do not recall ever having seen a course offered on the history of Holocaust. In my *Gymnasium*, committed and progressive teachers taught about the rise of the Nazis and the destruction of Weimar democracy. But not about the Holocaust. At the time, Holocaust memory was anchored more strongly among non-professional historians, many of whom started local initiatives to research the history of their local Jewish communities. Some of the effects of these activities are visible to this day in local commemorative sites or, for example, in the wonderful exhibition on “We Were Neighbors” in the Schöneberg City Hall (<http://www.wirwarennachbarn.de/index.php/denkmal-bayerisches-viertel.html>). But for most of us, Holocaust memory did remain a rather abstract entity, more of an emotional commitment or a set of belief that was not really grounded either in a deep familiarity with Holocaust history or, for that matter, in any meaningful encounter with actual living Jewish people in Germany. I became aware of this fact only when I noticed how much I had to struggle in reconciling my belief in the singularity of the Holocaust (and therefore my membership in a unique perpetrator collective) with interacting with exceedingly generous and friendly Jewish professors at my first American host university. I will not dwell on my awkward contortions in these encounters. Suffice to say that “redemptive philosemitism”, as Moses calls it, was quite difficult to put into practice, at least for me.

It is also important to remember and, in my view, not sufficiently acknowledged in Moses’ text, that Holocaust memory was an unabashedly progressive project at the time. The peace movement of the 1980s, by far the largest protest movement in the history of the Federal Republic, projected Holocaust memory into the future with its apocalyptic imagination of a “nuclear Holocaust.” There were also considerable efforts to link Holocaust memory to contemporary forms of exclusion and racism. One of my favorite songs at the time was “Kristalnaach” by the Cologne band BAP. The lyrics propagated a distinctly universal Holocaust memory and went as following (in translation from the original Kölsch): *Da, wo Darwin für alles herhält, Ob man Menschen vertreibt oder quält, Da, wo hinter Macht Geld ist, Wo Starksein die Welt ist, Vom Kuschen und Strammstehen entsteht, Wo man Hymnen auf dem Kamm sogar bläst, In barbarischer Gier nach Profit “Hosianna“ und „Kreuzigt ihn“ ruft, Wenn man nur einen Vorteil drin sieht, Ist täglich Kristallnacht. Nur noch Kristallnacht.* (If you don’t know it, here it is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK5O1rL0NwE>). To be sure, there was of course no “daily Kristallnacht” in Germany at the time. But the examples demonstrate that, at least in popular culture, Holocaust memory entailed a critical edge with respect to the West German present.

Progressive Holocaust memory also enabled a critique of anti-foreigner racism (though mostly and euphemistically labeled “xenophobia” at the time). In the asylum debates of the 1980s and 1990s, the attack on foreigners was routinely combined with a critique of Holocaust memory whereas a defense of more welcoming attitudes toward asylum seekers was linked to a critical understanding of the German past, i.e. Holocaust memory. Some commemorative activities made this link public as well. The inauguration of the impressive memorial by Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock in the Bavarian quarter in Berlin Schöneberg in June 1993 explicitly invoked the neo-Nazi arson attack in Solingen one week earlier that killed five and injured 14 people with Turkish background. As these example demonstrates, the provincialism and singularity of Holocaust memory, its separation from other and more contemporary forms of racism, was not there from the beginning but constitutes itself a historical product that requires analysis and explanation.

While the catechism of Holocaust memory was therefore central to my political socialization and political identity formation, I have ceased to believe in it and have come to recognize its deficits. This is why I now essentially agree with the basic thrust of Moses’ argument. This gradual disbelieving (not

really a conversion since I don't think it has been replaced by a similarly strong set of beliefs) constituted another painful process. It would exceed the available space to mark all its stages, but I want to highlight some of what I think are the most important markers.

Perhaps the most important one is a gradual recognition of the long and largely unacknowledged history of racism in postwar West Germany. The 1980s are crucial in this respect as well. This was the decade when a group of conservative academics could propagate unabashedly folkish theories in the Heidelberg declaration (published in the FAZ!) and warn against the "over-foreignisation" (*Überfremdung*) of the German *Volk*. West German policy toward foreigners already during the social-liberal coalition but then especially during the Kohl government aggressively promoted the return of foreigners to their alleged homeland, thus pursuing, according to Philipp Ther, a policy of "de-integration." Despite the isolated efforts mentioned above, Holocaust memory became increasingly isolated from these forms of official and popular racism. We still don't know how and why this decoupling of an emerging Holocaust memory, on the one hand, and racism toward ethnic minorities, on the other occurred. But I am inclined to agree with Rita Chin, Michael Meng and others, who have emphasized the limiting and, at times, exclusionary nature of Holocaust memory. Holocaust memory, especially in its singularist version, called on the former members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) to confront a difficult past. In so doing, it tended to exclude non-ethnic and non-white Germans who made up an increasing part of West German society. Racism too, was increasingly limited to Nazi biological antisemitism, everything else became euphemistically labeled "xenophobia" or "hostility toward foreigners." The 1980s were also the period when other minorities like Afro-Germans began to organize and form a distinct identity. They too did not seem to find Holocaust memory useful in developing a language to address the daily racism they were encountering. If I am honest, I must confess that the abstract nature of the catechism also did not enable me to really see the link between Holocaust memory and the situation of Turkish guest workers and other immigrants in Germany at that time. In retrospect, I would see this indifference toward popular racism as one of the blind spots in my political socialization (the other one was a similar indifference toward the situation and the experience of Germans east of the Iron Curtain). I am not sure if it was actually caused by Holocaust memory, i.e. whether a fixation on the suffering of Jew in the past came at the expense of an indifference toward ethnic minorities in the present. But my white privilege (yes, it existed in Germany as well!) certainly enabled me to keep the two things rather separate.

A growing familiarity with what might be called post-colonial sensibilities also helped me in (hopefully) transcending a narrowly German-centered perspective. Teaching twentieth century World History in multicultural California for now almost two decades definitely cures one from the ultimately Eurocentric assumption that any national history can claim a particular singularity (that is beyond the truism that, in some way, every history is singular). So I completely agree with Moses in highlighting the intellectual benefits of the longstanding debate about the link between colonialism and the Holocaust. The challenge is to show how what Charles Maier called "the two narratives of moral atrocity in the 20th century"—imperialism and genocide—were, in fact, always interrelated. What is truly "singular" here is the German reaction to a debate that has been firmly established in international scholarship for decades now. The English version of Michael Rothberg's book has been on the reading list for my doctoral students since it appeared in 2009, courses on "Comparative Genocide" that examine the similarities *and* differences of genocides are routinely part of course offering in US History Department, and the recognition that figures like W. E. B. Du Bois or James Baldwin thought about the oppression of African Americans in the United States in relationship to the Holocaust strikes me as intellectually tantalizing. While it is perfectly possible to arrive at a variety of different positions regarding the historical

relationship between the history of colonialism and the Holocaust, the rejection of this entire debate as somehow illegitimate, revisionist or even antisemitic is simply absurd and, indeed, singularly provincial.

The force of the argument and the passion that the debate ignites shows that there is more at stake here than merely competing historiographical positions. And this gets me to the last point why I have stopped believing in the catechism. For it is plainly obvious that Holocaust memory, at least in certain contexts, has lost some of its progressive impetus that it still entailed in the 1980s and 1990s. Some of it has simply to do with a changed political context: the rise of Islamophobia as a dominant form of racism in the West after 9/11; the increasing rightward shift in Israeli politics and the gradual abandonment of the peace process; the rise of a global right-wing ethno-nationalism. Perhaps the vestiges of my former belief in the catechism still lead me to think that perhaps Germans and the German government do not necessarily have to be at the forefront in articulating the harshest critiques of Israel. At the same time, I also do not think that the German parliament should declare complicated positions such as the BDS as “antisemitic” and hence essentially exclude them from public discourse. In general, the current tendency to label positions as somehow “antisemitic” that are identical or even more moderate than similar liberal or left-wing critiques of Israeli government policies formulated from within the Jewish discourse inside and outside Israel is just silly. For my part, I want to have nothing to do with (or contribute to) a right-wing Holocaust memory that is eventually used as a justification for acts of violence, oppression, and racist exclusion. At the same time, I find the invocation of Holocaust memory both legitimate and necessary in criticizing and rejecting misguided attempts to express opposition to Israeli policy by attacking synagogues or even individual Jewish people. If this makes me end up “between all chairs,” so be it!

Memory, as we know after studying it for several decades, always responds to the concerns of the present. The current debate therefore is also about the function of Holocaust memory in the early 21st century. My own sense is that a universalist and open Holocaust memory that does not shy away from new meanings in changing contexts will ultimately be more productive than a closed, singular and provincial memory. The current global movement for racial justice actually strikes me as a real opportunity for renewed research on and teaching of the Holocaust, albeit in multidirectional ways. The history of the Holocaust is not just part of German or Jewish history but an integral part of European and global history in the modern period. In one of the formative History books of my younger self as a believer, *Inside Nazi Germany*, the great historian Detlev Peukert ends his reflection on National Socialism as a “pathology of modernity” with the following statement about the enduring lessons of the Nazi period. “The values we should assert in response to this experience are easily stated but hard to practice: reverence for life, pleasure in diversity and contrariety, respect for what is alien, tolerance for what is unpalatable, skepticism about the feasibility and desirability of chiliastic schemes for a new order, openness toward others and willingness to learn even from those who call into question one’s own principles of social virtue.” This is something I can still believe in.

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# On the Misleading Framing of Plausible Insights

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This paper was written from the experience of a migrant Jewish German citizen, a sociologist living and working in Germany, an academic and intellectual of sorts. As such, I find Moses' piece ambiguous and strangely contradictory. I argue that by framing historical dynamics as 'catechism', Moses systematically invisibilizes the nuances and complexities of politics, the public sphere, and the educational sector; the tensions, struggles, the intense debates, and the inner contradictions within social groups and movements.

Dirk Moses published an important, interesting and timely piece on what he describes as the "catechism" of German Holocaust remembrance. The piece has sparked an intensive and productive, while nuanced and friendly debate. This in itself is a merit and, at least to those of us living in Germany, delightfully refreshing, especially in the light of what Moses lays his finger on, the 'heated' and somewhat sectarian debate regarding the nexus of the Holocaust and (other?) genocidal realizations of systemic racism and/or racist colonialism. For Moses, all past, recent, and ongoing political debate on this issue is to be understood in somewhat religious terms. The "German Catechism," as he puts it, consists of five 'sacred' elements, and any discussion of or any reference to the indeed tricky topic is, in Germany, to be understood as religious of sorts. Moses refers to the several dimensions of how Germany discusses, teaches, legislates, remembers, questions, negotiates ... does, well, anything in this regard as religious: "heresy trails", "priests", "sect", "keeping the faith", "priestly censors", "inquisition", "purging of heretics" etc.

As a migrant Jewish German citizen, a sociologist living and working in Germany, an academic and intellectual of sorts, I find Moses's piece ambiguous and strangely contradictory. Perhaps even dubious. I, too, "scratch my head," to use his words. While I agree with many observations and some of his arguments, I find the 'religious' framing highly misleading, and one that even undermines the actual argument of the piece. What I do agree with is Moses's observation of the intensity, ferocity, and often reductive fundamentalism of many German debates regarding the Shoah, the Nazi period, and how to deal with it in schools, politics, law. I, too, am frustrated, bewildered and taken aback by what I'd call a '*Willen zur Unbedingtheit*' of many public voices; a willful ignorance of nuance, the conscious inability or reluctance to acknowledge complexity, connections, contradictions, the weird taking pride in strong absolute judgements where actually careful nuancing would be necessary. But, is this specific to Germany? Is it specific to the Holocaust issue, or to the *(Un)Möglichkeit of Vergleich*? Is it specific to a specific version of memory and memory-making? No, it's not. I would argue that any political ideology, any reductionist version of actually complex political dynamics, especially those which include such heavy ethical questions (and which wouldn't?) might be described, if you wanted, as 'catechism'. The term usually used in political and/or academic commentary is 'orthodoxy'. But, does this framing make any sense? Does it help us to better understand history or the present? I don't think so. While Moses mentions all sorts of debates and re-formulations of how Germany comes to terms—or not so much—with its genocidal past, the catechism/heresy/sect framing obscures and ridicules precisely the debates and negotiations that have been, and are on going, in Germany. Instead of acknowledging these debates as part of a complex and complicated, still to be fully understood political history of post-war Germany, its divided past btw completely skipped by Moses, the framing he offers is itself reductionist. It systematically invisibilizes the nuances and complexities of politics, the public sphere, and the

educational sector including the tensions, struggles, the intense debates and the inner contradictions within social groups and movements. Moses's rhetoric sounds even conspiratorial at times, evoking a country governed by a uniform elite, "disciplining" its citizens through educational programs into a philosemitism. This obviously contradicts not only many empirical dynamics found in the GDR and FRG, but it is also clearly incongruent with the many debates and struggles Moses himself narrates.

It bears mentioning that the catechism-framing also has resonance with the defamatory rhetoric against liberals, lefts, feminist, gender studies, queer theory, LGBTQI\* we've seen over years. When, in 1991 Judith Butler appeared in academia, German feuilletons used the sect/catechism trope to ridicule her work and those engaging with it. The contemporary illiberal regimes in Brazil, Poland or Hungary, much like the neo-authoritarian movements in the far-right spectrum all over Europe, East and West, often describe 'gender' and queer perspectives as 'death cults', quasi-religious, creationist or other forms of sectarian idolatry. Casts, elites, priests, manipulation, catechism. 'priestly censors'—this is the language of those who are actually threatening pluralism and progressive politics. In other words: To frame complex political issues through the religious/sectarian frame is a rather reducing, perhaps even authoritarian move. So, why use this catechism-framing at all?

I can only assume it might relate to the actually head-scratching, bewildering '*Unbedingtheit*' that marks the intensity of debates in Germany regarding the Nazi past. It might be worthwhile to take a closer, open look at the political affects generated in Germany, especially among '*Menschen mit Nazihintergrund*' (Hilal & Varatharajah 2021). Why not instead draw on the rich strands of historical analysis on affect (e.g. Frevert), embodiment (e.g. Theweleit), authoritarian personality (e.g. Adorno & Horkheimer) to understand what Götz Aly has criticized as the widespread reluctance of the German population—East and West—to 'identify' with the perpetrators (Aly 2018; <https://www.geschwister-scholl-preis.de/preistraegerinnen/2018/>), finding accessible comfort and, yes, perhaps redemption in the identification with the victims or with the heroic few *Widerstandskämpfer\_innen*.

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# A Plea for More Balance

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Dirk Moses' recent blog post "The Catechism of the Germans" has triggered a vehement discussion about Germany's culture of memory. While acknowledging the arguments made by Moses, in my response I take issue with a number of them. I argue that while the Holocaust still takes centre stage in German memory, the last ten years particularly have seen a move towards precisely the more inclusive approach Moses misses. As examples I cite the integration into Germany's memory landscape of the crimes of socialism, and of the controversial history of the flight and expulsion of Germans from eastern Europe at the end of World War Two. As far as Israel is concerned, I point out that the German government is not always only supportive. While the anti-BDS resolution, problematically, could prohibit quite legitimate criticism of Israel, it is motivated by an equally legitimate concern at the antisemitic programme underlying the aims of the BDS. I express surprise that Moses and others do not balance criticism of Israel or support for the Palestinian refugees with concern at the actions of Hamas or empathy for the 850,000 Jews driven out of Arab and African countries. In short—we need more balance.

Anyone who has read Dirk Moses' recent article "The Catechism of the Germans" can hardly not be impressed by the power of the writing and the strength of the arguments. There is a moral passion too in his prose which commands respect. Many of his points are well made, and he leaves us with much to think about. Yet I have to disagree with these points. That Holocaust memory has become a kind of ersatz religion, not least because of the uniqueness argument—the "more" unique the crime, the greater the need for penance, but also the greater the redemption—is a criticism that has been levelled before. It is an interesting interpretation, but seems to me to impose a kind of theodicy on German memory: if any sense can be made of the Holocaust, then it is through German penance, and the salvation that offers. This seems to offer little room for a much more secular and less self-indulgent understanding of a key motive which informed Germany's facing of its past: namely the wish for a more democratic political consciousness arising from a deeper awareness of National Socialist crime. Of course, if German Holocaust memory has become the stomping ground for high priests bent on identifying heretics, then this makes those who find fault with that memory into martyrs. One wonders whether the religious vocabulary used by Moses reflects more his own perception of the status of critics of the supposed German memory regime rather than that "regime" itself.

Recent criticism of German memory of the past as having ossified to the extent of becoming exclusive in its focus on the Holocaust is not without some foundation, but more notice should surely be taken of the way in which this memory has opened out over the last ten to twenty years. Debates around colonialism in the last year or so have often been framed in terms of a second Historians' Dispute, recalling the debate in the 1980s around the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the crimes of Stalinism. Yet this is to simply omit all the intervening debates around the Nazi past, not least the long-running discussion around whether or not German victimhood during and after the war had been "taboo", or the equally protracted debate around how to set memory of the GDR in relation to memory of Nazism and the Holocaust. With regard to the latter, some consensus has developed around the so-called "Faulenbach formula", according to which Nazi crimes should not be relativised when dealing with the crimes of Stalinism, nor should Stalinist crimes be trivialised through reference to Nazi crimes. The debate around German victimhood has subsided somewhat in recent years, but the fact that the Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation will now finally open this year in Berlin may indicate that

Germany can find a way to remember its own suffering, and the crimes committed against it, without losing sight of the responsibility for remembering the Holocaust. While the Historians' Debate seemed to result in the victory of a left-liberal consensus on the central place of Auschwitz in German memory, these more recent debates are not about one way of remembering ousting or triumphing over another, but about negotiating a space for memories to coexist.

As I see it, the current debate over colonialism fits into this pattern. At present, it may seem that a kind of extreme particularism (the Holocaust cannot be connected to colonialism) is pitted against an equally radical inclusivism (the Holocaust cannot be understood without colonialism). These tensions need to be negotiated so that memory of the Holocaust and of colonialism can sit side by side. This may, though, take some time. It helps neither to dismiss out of hand the links between the Holocaust and colonialism, nor to shoehorn the Holocaust into a history of colonialism. It does not help to deny links between antisemitism and the wider history of racism, but nor does it help to absorb the history of antisemitism into the history of racism so that the particularities of antisemitism are lost from view. Those who loudly deny links are indeed, no doubt, setting out to defend the trope of Holocaust uniqueness—one of the “catechisms”—but those who insist loudly that the Holocaust really cannot be grasped without situating it within the history of colonialism may be responding in part at least to their own anger at what they see as the dominance of Holocaust memory.

Especially during the Mbembe debate, the image projected of Israel as a modern colonialist settler or even apartheid state—almost the contemporary exemplar—caused some concern to Felix Klein, the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Anti-Semitism (since this office was created in 2018). It caused him concern because he believed it to be wrong, and antisemitic. But one can well imagine, too, that it would be hard to justify keeping a focus on Jewish victimhood at the heart of national memory if the idea takes root that the Israeli state today is behaving in ways which can only be understood in the context of precisely those wider historical traditions that informed colonialism, apartheid and even some aspects of Nazism. Of course right-wing Israeli politicians should not be conflated with Israelis as a whole, or Jews as a whole. Sadly, however, that is precisely what antisemites like to do. If the German government were to feel that what was happening in the West Bank is indeed apartheid, and say so, it would not take long for antisemites to exploit this (along the lines of the “victim people” have become the “perpetrator people”). I agree with recent calls for Germany to acknowledge responsibility for the Palestinians and actively support the two-state solution from a Palestinian, not just an Israeli point of view. I agree too that the Nakba should have a place in German memory alongside the Holocaust. A greater openness to sensitive contemporary political and historical issues is needed. But at the same time, the critics of Israel's history and politics need a similar openness. How many remember the migration of some 850,000 Jews from Arab lands since 1945? True, reasons for this migration were many, but there can be no denying a significant role was played by pogroms, antisemitism and expulsion. When we condemn, as we should, Israel's erasure of Palestinian villages and cultural sites, we might at least spare a thought for the erasure of Jewish heritage in Arab lands. I agree totally with Moses that the Israeli government's politics of settlement and annexation is more than seriously undermining prospects of the two-state solution, but there are certainly those who would argue that Hamas is not exactly supporting these prospects either. Opposition to the very existence of Israel is not uncommon among Palestinian politicians or Arab politicians more generally. Should we not at least mention this? I am formulating this very carefully. It could be formulated more robustly.

I don't really want to get into the debate around the BDS, but again, I think it would be helpful if the "warring parties" tried to see things from each other's perspectives. The German parliament passed a resolution against the BDS in 2019 (the AfD actually abstained during the vote, contrary to what Moses implies, though of course their reasons for abstention were that the resolution did not go far enough). Some regional parliaments have done the same. That not providing a platform through public funding for anyone who has supported the BDS, or might have done, is tantamount to censorship, is true. It severely inhibits criticism of Israel, as lots of people critical of Israel's politics support the BDS or have sympathised with their measures, however they might feel about the BDS itself. Roundly dismissing the BDS as antisemitic, as German parliament did, simply overlooks the wide variety of motives for the support it enjoys. Yet can one not at least have some understanding for Germany's concerns? The three main demands of the BDS are: end the occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands; create true equality for Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel; and recognise the right of return of Palestinian refugees. These all sound absolutely reasonable, until you start to ask what the BDS means by "all Arab lands", and reflect on the demographic consequences of the return of the Palestinian refugees and their families to Israel (and this is what Palestinian negotiators have wanted for years—i.e. the refugees should not simply be resettled in any future Palestinian state). I do find it slightly ironic that many on the left in Germany are so sympathetic to the idea of Palestinian return, when not long ago they would have roundly dismissed any such right of return in the case of Germans wanting to return to former German lands in central-eastern Europe. The historical contexts are very different, of course, but still...

Incidentally—in projecting the image I just have of a German government reluctant to criticise Israel or even allow criticism of Israel, I may be allowing myself to be influenced a little too much by those who keep complaining this is the case. Unquestionably, defending Israel is part of German "Staatsräson"—the BDS resolution of May 2019 states this in all clarity. That this leads to alarming one-sidedness is true. In an interview of late May 2021, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas lamented the effect of Hamas rockets on Israel, but had nothing to say about the effect of Israel's pummeling of Gaza. But it is also true that Germany has generally supported the UN resolutions criticising Israel—of which there were 17 in 2020. By contrast, only six were passed against other countries. In March 2021, Germany supported a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council which described Israel as an occupying power and made it responsible for the critical situation in the West Bank and Gaza. It also called for an end to discrimination against Palestinians. I am also not sure this image of the German press as uncritically supportive of Israel is true either. For sure, it would be true of the *BILD-Zeitung* and *Die Welt*. But it is worth noting that ARD and ZDF have been the subject of complaints that their reports on the current crisis in the Middle East and on pro-Palestinian protests in Germany carried an anti-Israeli bias. Often German newspapers seek to remain neutral. Many reports I have read do that. One might argue this is what newspapers are supposed to do.

Overall, I do not feel that Holocaust memory is "blocking" memory of other pasts. In the case of the Herero and Nama, it certainly seemed like that when Ruprecht Polenz, the German government's representative in the negotiations towards the conciliation agreement, flatly dismissed comparisons between the Herero and Nama genocide and the Holocaust. There was a disturbing arrogance about that dismissal, though of course it was pragmatic: paying reparations on account of the Holocaust has created a precedent, which you can only try to circumnavigate by denying it was a precedent. Yet over and again the Holocaust, and German reparations agreements, have been a reference point for Herero and Nama groups. In other words, the fact that Germany has acknowledged its responsibility towards Jewish victims creates an expectation. It is not one Germany will be able to evade, in the end. In addition to

berating Germany for not following up on this precedent, we would do well to berate Britain, for instance, for not creating any kind of precedent whatsoever.

Other atrocities are not forgotten in Germany. Even a cursory glance at memorialisation in the last twenty years shows a commitment to remembering the Nazi genocide against the Sinti and Roma, as well as the victims of the euthanasia programm and the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. In October 2020, the Federal Government agreed on the construction of a memorial to Polish victims of Nazism, as well as a documentation centre to the victims of the German war of annihilation and Nazi occupation. Soviet victims remain a blind spot, though it was suggested that Polish and Soviet victims be jointly commemorated—a suggestion that would not have gone down well in Warsaw or Moscow, given the current history wars between Russia and Poland. This wider contextualisation of the Holocaust within Nazi criminality as whole is complemented by memorialisation of the criminal history of the GDR border regime and its repressive politics more generally. I pointed to the fact that the flight and expulsion of Germans will soon be centrally remembered in Berlin – in a broader European and transnational historical context, and also in relation to Germany’s population politics during World War Two. The recent debates around the question of guilt for World War One which raged in 2014 and 2018, while certainly prompting some euphoria on the part of those who finally saw Germany being let off the hook, led to wide reflection in the media on the relationship between Nazism, the First World War and post-World War One Germany. I don’t see Holocaust memory closing discussion down for fear of admitting points of comparison or historical context.

If colonialism has taken so long to establish itself in German memory, then not because of Holocaust memory, but because Europe generally has taken so long to face its white-supremacist racist past and present. There have been grassroots endeavours in Germany to change colonialist street names for some time, sometimes with success—consciousness has been developing. The current upsurge of interest in colonialist crime, however, can be put down firstly to the Mbembe debate, and secondly, ironically, to Germany’s recent attempts to resuscitate memory of Prussian heritage, which, rather than helping to engender some pride in pre-Nazi German history, backfired when the degree to which that heritage was steeped in colonial exploitation became public knowledge. Just as significant as a causal factor is the broad transnational sweep of anger at racism and its historical traces which has engulfed the USA, Britain and other. It is to be hoped this interest will intensify, and that Berlin will see a major documentation centre and memorial to German colonial crimes. The EU must take steps to ensure the memorialisation of slavery and colonialism is Europe-wide.

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# Polemics and Provocations

Johannes von Moltke

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This contribution attempts to steer the debate back to its origins in the German *Feuilleton*, where responses to the Mbembe Affair and to the publication of Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* in German translation first manifested some of the dogmatic positioning that Dirk Moses called out in his "German Catechism". Noting that these debates extend well beyond the circles of professional historians, von Moltke argues that, in addition to policing the parameters for Holocaust memory in Germany, the "Catechism" unites liberal *Feuilleton* critics with positions on the identitarian new right, with which they share a rigid, anti-American aversion to postcolonial studies and progressive identity politics.

Dirk Moses's short piece for *Geschichte der Gegenwart* has hit a nerve, to be sure, as polemics will. Hard to imagine that a rewriting of Kleist, replete with a five-point program for a "public exorcism," wasn't meant as a provocation in the first place, flirting with the very "moral hubris" of which Moses accuses the Federal Republic's official memory culture. Leaning hard on the language of religion and heresy, he invests his new "German Catechism" with the power of clerical dogma promulgated by the "high priests" of redemptive philosemitism. With the help of their "priestly censors," these guardians of incomparability keep the German population in the fold by protecting the "sacred trauma" of the Holocaust from contamination by other memories.

This all sounds downright dystopian and a bit over the top, leading the historian Volker Weiß to see in Moses's text nothing but a "resentment-laden mess" lacking full knowledge of the relevant debates. If this claim misses the mark in light of Moses' published record, Patrick Bahners' quip that Moses was "Sieferle von links" at first glance hit somewhat closer to home—though as I'll explain, the quick analogy also distracts from key aspects of the debate. Elsewhere on this blog, Helmut Walser Smith has detailed the implications of the manifest echoes between Moses' religious rhetoric and the reactionary critique of the "Auschwitz-Myth" (Sieferle's term and quotation marks)—to which one could also add Martin Walser's similarly infamous reference to Auschwitz as a "moral cudgel." Regardless of the divergent politics underlying them, these resonances risk moving Moses into an unpalatable proximity with the intellectual discourse of the German far right, which gleefully seized on Bahners's Sieferle tweet to score points on its own blog. Which is how we end up with a text by the leader of the Austrian Identitarian movement writing in the right-wing *Sezession* about a piece published by a US-based Australian historian of Germany in the Swiss online journal *Geschichte der Gegenwart*. I'll return to this curious constellation below, but first want to take stock – not just of current state of the debate but also of a few aspects that seem to have fallen by the wayside. Recovering them from the fracas will be important for locating the political fault lines in this iteration of *finis germania*, if that's what it is.

Moses' "Catechism" text has also had its share of well- or better-meaning critics, most of them now assembled in this forum. Appreciative of some of his stated intentions, they plead for more balance and all seem to call for degrees of moderation (but how do you conduct a moderate polemics?) and greater differentiation. Historians all – until the recent contributions by the sociologists Zoé Samudzi and Paula Villa Braslavsky, that is –, they seek to steer Moses back into the disciplinary fold by asking him to consider more carefully the *history* of German memory. Neil Gregor, Matt Fitzpatrick, Helmut Walser Smith, Udi Greenberg, Bill Niven, and, in a more personal vein, Frank Biess would remind Moses of the

hard-fought gains of individuals and social movements; the work of the *Geschichtswerkstätten* and the long march through the institutions; the varieties of democratic activism and the strengthening of civil society that ensued; and indeed the work of academic historians, who have long attended to questions of comparison and complex causation even as they have continued to debate, uphold, and nuance our understanding of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Others have suggested that Moses overestimates the impact of the “civic religion” he outlines. As Greenberg suggests and as Samudzi’s contribution also implies, Holocaust memorialization may not be the most important obstacle to facing the history of colonialism, combatting racism, and building a more inclusive society in Germany. And Bill Niven points out that the memorialization of other groups may not be quite as proscribed (let alone censored) as Moses suggests.

These critiques and historical vantage points are as welcome as the debate itself – so long as we recall also some of its more proximate causes. After all, Moses’ intervention was penned explicitly in response to the Mbembe affair last year and to the vitriol unleashed earlier this year in the *Feuilletons* upon the publication of Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory* in German. As became clear in those debates – a “historians’ debate 2.0” now rewired to new political polarities – history, and indeed scholarship, at times took a distant second place to opinionating, to political posturing, but also to memory as a public act that always takes place in the present. This is not to suggest that the kinds of historical correctives advocated in this forum aren’t in order and indeed crucial in various ways. But it is to remind ourselves that, in Rothberg’s case at least, the terms of the debate are set by (scholarship on) literature and memory, for starters. To be sure, this fact was all too often obscured in the responses – Rothberg had to remind his critics time and again that he is a comparatist by training, not a historian (nor was Habermas, for that matter). And he has had to defend himself more than once, bizarrely, for doing the work of a humanist: for asking and answering questions as they arise in literature, painting, and film, where they often find their richest articulations. From the literary analyses that make up Rothberg’s book, multidirectional memory emerged as much as a theoretical paradigm as an empirical finding in the annals of postwar cultural production.

Most of Rothberg’s German critics refused to accept the premise, let alone follow Rothberg’s argumentation, though for good measure they happily threw historian Jürgen Zimmerer under the bus along with *Multidirectional Memory*. Some demonstrably failed to read books carefully or to the end, others cited out of context and in bad faith, others again just reworked their colleagues’ misquotations into mash-ups of their own. Thomas Schmid was a particularly egregious, serial offender. Writing first for *Die Welt*, he lashed out against Rothberg as an “intellectual authoritarian” and “the current Guru of a cultural milieu supported by NGOs and left-liberals,” a notion that Schmid might as well have cribbed from the far right’s talk of a “links-grün versifftes Milieu.” Drawing on experiences made only “on paper, in paintings, and on film reels,” Schmid claimed, the contributions of *Multidirectional Memory* amounted to little than “social work platitudes.” Not content to leave it at that, he repeated and amplified his claims in a response to an article by Zimmerer and Rothberg in *Die Zeit*. Though it was difficult to recognize the latter’s claims in Schmid’s rendering, which accused these two Holocaust scholars of seeing in the Shoa “merely a special case of colonialism.” Both have argued explicitly against such a conflation. In advancing their comparative frameworks, Rothberg and Zimmerer were playing with fire, Schmid suggested, feeding the “resentment for overdoing the Holocaust” – or belittling it, as the case may be: “At universities in the USA” (one wants to know: which?) “it can happen that minority rights activists dismiss the Holocaust as mere ‘white on white’ crime.”

Schmid's contributions as well as some of his misattributions were subsequently aped on the other side of the *Feuilleton* spectrum by Tania Martini. Writing for the *taz*, she, too, lamented the nefarious effects of postcolonial studies, that noxious academic import from "universities in the USA." Curiously and counter-intuitively, Martini first aligned Rothberg with this import and then accused postcolonialism of engaging in competition over victimhood – in other words: of precisely the kind of competitive memory politics against which Rothberg first wrote *Multidirectional Memory* over a decade ago. And in passing Martini, too, discredits the work of literary scholars who "disregard historical specifics and pay more attention to narratives than real history or political processes." Other critiques – by Claudius Seidl in the *FAZ* and Tobias Rapp in *Der Spiegel* – were somewhat more nuanced, though the former, too, misquotes Zimmerer and misreads *Multidirectional Memory* entirely when he concludes with a hint of satisfaction that "the American Rothberg" will not "unburden us of our German responsibility."

If I have picked out only some of the more egregious examples as a reminder of how the German *Feuilleton* across the political spectrum hyperventilated in response to Rothberg's book, it is to underscore Moses' point. Whatever his exaggerations, they become legible as a response to the overblown rhetoric of a debate that does seem driven by some shared doxa, collective catechism apparently in need of defending. I am less certain that this catechism is captured precisely by the five points Moses lists. Rather, I think it also involves a few other articles of faith that underpin the reactions to Mbembe, Rothberg, and Zimmerer. Reassessing the controversy, one might begin to ask what was truly at stake in the furor of the *Feuilleton*.

For the critiques certainly went beyond the reassertion of the singularity of the Holocaust that seems to have become the focus of the debate, but which neither Rothberg nor Zimmerer ever really disputed. And so, underneath the not-so-genteel veneer we find other common causes for handwringing: postcolonial studies, identity politics, academic standards – unwelcome imports from across the Atlantic, all of them. This is not the place to unpack the defensive reaction that these terms occasion in current debates (including those launched in the past few months by Wolfgang Thierse and Horst Bredekamp). But this complex is surely what Moses has in mind when he notes that "for the ageing 68er generation, the influence of Postcolonial Studies is tantamount to the barbarian conquest of Rome." The responses range from nostalgia to political reaction. One need only reread the opening lines of Schmid's nasty review – where in a mix of mockery and ironic self-deprecation, he nostalgically recalls the ubiquity of the "Sarotti-Mohr" – to realize how much the reaction is driven by a desire to return to a *status quo ante* of the "young Federal Republic" in which Schmid apparently grew up. Though he goes on to admit that colonialism remains a blind spot in the landscape of German memory, the dogwhistle has been sounded as loudly as if he had opened with some lines about changing demographics in light of increased migration.

Which brings us back to *Sezession*, where Martin Sellner picked up on Patrick Bahners' "left-wing Sieferle" tweet. In his piece, entitled "Postcolonial Attack on the 'Auschwitz-Myth,'" Sellner seizes on Moses's religious imagery to outline the "right" way to overcome the *Schuldskult* inculcated by the new catechism. *Sezession*, it should perhaps be noted, is but one tentacle of the "metapolitical" project that has been operating for the better part of 20 years out of the small village of Schnellroda, home to the poster couple of far right think tanks, Götz Kubitschek and Ellen Kositzka. Besides the journal-cum-blog, the operation includes a publishing house (Antaios), a YouTube channel, podcasts and biannual "academies" organized by a think tank, the Institut für Staatspolitik, which remains under surveillance by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Nonetheless, Kubitschek, Kositzka, Sellner

and company have continuously sought to expand their discursive footprint, espousing what some have called a “Gramscianism of the Right” (pace Antonio Gramsci), even promulgating their own “conservative catechism” in the pages of *Sezession*. In this context, the constellation of authors, arguments, and publishing venues I briefly sketched out above would prove irresistible to someone like Sellner. And so we find ourselves at the interface of progressive and reactionary debates, in that strange space of the Venn diagram where the readership of *Geschichte der Gegenwart* overlaps with that of *Sezession*.

Sellner applauds Moses’ “sharp analysis,” since he and his ilk share its “clearly formulated thesis” about the centrality of Holocaust memory to the moral foundations of the Federal Republic.

**Sezession** Konzept Autoren • Kategorien • #101 Abo Archiv

25. Mai 2021

## Postkoloniale Angriffe auf den „Auschwitz-Mythos“

Martin Sellner / 95 Kommentare

Die Scholastiker der deutschen Schuldreligion schlagen Alarm. Ihr „Universalismus der Schuld“ ist Thema identitätspolitischer Debatten.



Martin Sellner ist Kopf der österreichischen Identitären Bewegung.

Sez  

„Sieferle von links“, urteilt etwa Patrick Bahners über einen jüngst von A. Dirk Moses veröffentlichten Beitrag über den „Katechismus der Deutschen“. Tatsächlich erleben wir im Kampf zwischen dem deutschen postnazistischen Schuldstolz und der postmodernen Identitätspolitik einen interessanten theologischen Konflikt der Neuzeit.

Der Text von Moses ist absolut lesenswert. Seine klare formulierte These muß in den Ohren des bundesrepublikanischen *juste milieu* wie Blasphemie klingen: „Die Erinnerung an den Holocaust als Zivilisationsbruch ist für viele das moralische Fundament der Bundesrepublik. Diesen mit anderen Genoziden zu vergleichen, gilt ihnen daher als eine Häresie, als Abfall vom rechten Glauben. Es ist an der Zeit, diesen Katechismus aufzugeben.“

  

Similarly, Sellner quotes approvingly from Rothberg’s and Zimmerer’s article in *Die Zeit*, where they called for an end to the taboos on comparison and critiqued the provincialism and “ritualized postulates” of German memory culture. He also devotes considerable space, several Sieferle-quotations and one quote from Adorno to further shoring up the religious character of the German “guilt narrative,” happily adopting Moses’s reference to a “sacred trauma.”

However, especially in view of the analogy that Moses admittedly furnished by his choice of imagery, it is worth noting that the parallels end right there. For where Moses critiques the catechism in the name of

greater differentiation, where Rothberg and Zimmerer call for more multidirectionality and comparison, the far-right advocates for its outright abolition as the only way to free the Germans from the burden of guilt. To them, the problem lies, neither in the singularity thesis nor in the ritualization of Holocaust memory per se, but in their “psychological and political effects on the German *Volk*.” The purpose of critique, consequently, is not inclusiveness, recognition, or solidarity across multiple identity groups but ethnonationalist retrenchment. Agreeing at first blush with the thesis of a catechism that rules Germans lives, Sellner winds his way to conclusions diametrically opposed to both the letter and the spirit of Moses’s intervention. If for the former the catechism demands to be countered by “inclusive thinking,” the latter sees it only in terms of its “inescapable consequences”: “the exchange of the population through replacement migration as well as the routine, targeted traumatization of indigenous youth.” By which he presumably means “bio-Germans.” Moses, Rothberg, and Zimmerer want a *different* culture of memory; Sieferle and Sellner want none.

What they do want, however, is what Rothberg’s and Zimmerer’s critics ultimately called for: less multiculturalism, no postcolonial studies, and leave us alone with your identity politics, thank you (we have our own). In Sellner’s barely veiled *völkisch* language, these tendencies go hand in hand with the universalizing guilt narrative in dooming the people (he calls this “ethnomasochism”). By contrast, he seeks to work out an “identitarian approach to anti-Semitism, Holocaust, Shoa, and Colonialism.” While Moses may have provided him with some terminology for this, Sellner’s ideological alignment is ultimately, if counter-intuitively, with the very “priests” Moses had called out for their gatekeeping.

As Fabian Wolff noted in his long, searching essay for *Die Zeit*, the pattern is not new, even if some of the terms are. “*Diese weiße Mehrheitsgesellschaft ist nämlich schon seit Jahren damit beschäftigt, rechtes, ja völkisches Gedankengut in die Mitte zu holen, auf links zu zeigen, um über rechts zu schweigen, und sich lieber von Schnellroda-Chic anfixen zu lassen, statt ihn zu bekämpfen.*” To Dirk Moses’ credit, he pointed squarely at that center, laying bare the degree to which Schnellroda chic already colors some corners of the *Feuilleton*, and forcing us to ask when self-styled liberal critique shades into the *völkisch-identitarian* dribble peddled in *Sezession*.

This article was originally published on the *New Fascism Syllabus*’ weblog series, “The Catechism Debate.” For the full list of hyperlink citations, please consult the original online version at: <https://newfascismsyllabus.com/category/opinions/the-catechism-debate/>.

# A Commitment to Holocaust Remembrance Does Not Justify Denial of Equal Rights

Alon Confino

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Dirk Moses has written a much needed and thoughtful text on the German use and abuse of Holocaust remembrance. “The German catechism,” as Moses dubbed it, has been carried by “self appointed high priests” who have maintained among other things the uniqueness of the Holocaust, antisemitism as a distinct prejudice different from other forms of racism, and anti-Zionism as antisemitism. An excellent discussion ensued from critics who added on complexity and nuance to Moses’ argument. *I would like to draw our attention to the following topic that emerges from Moses’s text, namely the relation of current German memory to the Holocaust, antisemitism, Israel, and Palestine.*

One context within which to understand Moses’ text is the debate about antisemitism. The reason this debate has become heated in the last decade or so is not so much because cases of antisemitism have spiked but because the issue of Israel and Palestine has become inextricably entangled with the issue of antisemitism itself. We talk so much about antisemitism because we deeply disagree on how to define it: how to distinguish between antisemitic speech and legitimate critique of Israel, however harsh and painful it may be for some. Pithily put, our challenge is how to juggle the tension between keeping the specific memory of the Holocaust alive and fighting antisemitism where it surfaces while maintaining the universal value that emerged from the Holocaust: that equal rights and guarantees of life free of discrimination are fundamental to all human beings—rights that are being denied to Palestinians by Israel today.

Keeping these relations in tension but without breaking is what divides Germans, Jews, and many others because it is an impossible task: no argument can justify denying a group of people equal rights—particularly not Holocaust memory. The value of Moses’ intervention in this intellectual and political moment of scholarly and public debate on antisemitism in Germany, Europe, the United States, Israel, Palestine, and beyond lies in pointing out how in Germany Holocaust memory, which we aspire to associate with values such as humanity, justice, and rights, has turned into a legitimizing shield and a justification for the discrimination of Palestinians by Israeli Jews. This, to my mind, is the most urgent and important problem of Germany’s coming to terms with the past *these days*.

Germany’s history of coming to terms with its past has moved, very broadly sketched, from one of rejection to owning its crimes in the three decades after 1945 to an impressive social, cultural and political movement from the 1970s onward that acknowledged and internalized Nazi crimes, as Helmut Walser Smith pointed out in his contribution here. It has become a model for how to own a violent national past. But in the last twenty years or so there has been in Germany another memory development related to antisemitism, which Moses identified, that sanctified the status of Israel as immune to historical and evidenced-based arguments and blind to the experience of Palestinians under occupation. It is not wrong to identify this memory trend in terms taken from the language of the sacred and the profane—because this is how its believers represent themselves.

I understand where this German sentiment comes from, namely the wish to atone for the Holocaust. It reflects on some level a German *feeling*—and feeling is the right word here—that Germans cannot quite

trust their views on Jews and therefore it is better to err on the side of total support of Israel. But this view ignores the diversity of opinions among Jews on the issue of Israel and Palestine. There is hardly a consensus on this. Many Jews in Israel and beyond oppose the Israeli policies of discrimination towards the Palestinians. Why does the German official and media viewpoint not represent or adopt this view?

This official and media approach in Germany is based on the axiom that a lesson of the Holocaust is that Jews and Israel (or more accurately, Israeli Jews) are always right. Treating any human group to be beyond moral reproach and historical accountability is a form of worship wise people should avoid. Learning from the Holocaust that all human beings deserve a life of dignity and rights apart from those who are denied those rights by Israeli Jews—this is a moral travesty. I am an Israeli Jew who lives in America. I am as wary of philosemites who think that Israel can do no wrong as I am of antisemites who think that Jews are eternally to be blamed. Beware of those who sanctify or dehumanize you. I prefer Israeli Jews to be treated as human beings who, as all human beings, should be judged by, and accountable to, their actions that necessarily commingle good and not-so-good deeds.

Those who share this restrictive view of Holocaust memory, Israel, and antisemitism have in effect suffocated any serious debate in Germany on these issues. They reflexively view Jewish Israelis as victims and hermetically silence Palestinian voices in Germany. This view is blind to the fact that between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean there are two national groups of roughly 6.8 million Jews and 6.8 million Palestinians—one group has all the rights and it denies in various ways the rights of the other (this includes systemic racism toward Palestinian citizens of Israel, occupation in the West Bank, and siege on the Gaza Strip, creating what amounts to a huge prison). More broadly, Holocaust memory in Germany continues today, to follow Frank Biess's exceptionally insightful contribution to this debate, as a pattern of excluding non-Jews, non-ethnic, and non-white Germans, who make up an increasing part of German society, from the conversation.

If there is a lesson from the Holocaust it should be that all human beings deserve equal rights and a life of dignity. Insisting on Palestinian equal rights (under whatever political arrangement) cannot be deemed antisemitic. Understanding the situation in Israel and Palestine via terms such as Apartheid and settler colonialism, the non-violent social movement BDS, and Palestinian voices of their experience and politics can be debated and opposed but they are not antisemitic. Bill Niven in his contribution criticized Moses for a lack of a balanced approach on some of these issues. This is always a wise advice. But I should point out that the issue is not one of balance but of admitting in Germany that these topics form a legitimate part of the conversation to begin with, and that, at the end of the day, being balanced—or arguing for complexity—should not be used as an argument to hide the violent reality of occupied and occupier. The Israeli human rights group B'tselem published recently a detailed report *A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid*, followed by a similar report of Human Rights Watch *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*. These expert opinions should be discussed and debated, not designated as heretic documents sent to the bonfire. Burning books, metaphorically, is not the answer; facing history is.

Germans who uphold this view have the brazen nerve to blame Jews, Israelis, and others who disagree with them as antisemites. They share a knee-jerk reaction to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism. We ought to separate out the fight against antisemitism from the arguments over Zionism and anti-Zionism and over Israeli policies. Antisemitism, which is a form of racism or discrimination, is never acceptable. Zionism, similar to any form of nationalism, is always debatable. The right principle is to support equal

rights to all the inhabitants living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. How these inhabitants decide to apportion politically these rights—in one state, two states, confederation, or any other political arrangements—is for them to decide. A broad historical perspective is useful here. Jews have been divided over the issue of Jewish self-determination for a long time. Are we to consider as a legacy of the Holocaust Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, and Judah Magnes antisemites because they envisioned a Jewish homeland not as an exclusive Jewish state but as a binational one?

These restrictive German views on antisemitism, Israel, and Palestine have influenced government policy on the federal and local levels. The German government supports the 2016 IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) document on antisemitism that regardless of its framers' original intentions has since become a weapon to silence criticism of Israel. The Bundestag passed a resolution describing the BDS movement as antisemitic. A uniformity of voice is demanded. A German colleague wrote me a few weeks ago during the recent violence in Israel and Gaza that “This is a new stage in the history of our democracy; the media all speak with one voice, but they don't seem to do this under strong constraints from above, but because when it comes to fighting antisemitism in Germany, everyone wants to surpass and outdo the other.”

There has been pushback. In December 2020, German cultural institutions issued the *Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit* for freedom of opinion in the arts and sciences, including those who may support a boycott of Israel. The Jerusalem Declaration of Antisemitism published in March 2021, I was among its framers, provided guidelines to distinguish between antisemitic speech and legitimate critique of Israel. Its more than 300 signatories, distinguished names in the fields of Holocaust, Nazi, antisemitism, Jewish, and Israel studies, share a commitment to fighting antisemitism, protecting freedom of expression, and calling for equal rights for all the inhabitants of the Holy Land. Some reactions to this initiative in Germany were beyond the pale, targeting particularly German colleagues. Frankfurt Mayor Uwe Becker, who is the head of the Deutsch-Israelische Gesellschaft and the antisemitism czar for the state of Hessen, recently published a piece in which he blamed the JDA signatories for supporting Israel's destruction. We are in the realm of violent phantasies. One is uncomfortably reminded of erstwhile antisemitic phantasies; in this case here again the Jews, this time those on the left, are almighty and responsible for evil.

We need a different German memory of the Holocaust, antisemitism, Israel, and Palestine—for Germans, Jews, and Palestinians. Germany announced several days ago that it acknowledges the genocide it committed in Namibia in the early 1900s and plans to pay reparation. This places one of Moses' elements of catechism—on the uniqueness of the Holocaust—in a different light. As Udi Greenberg noted in his contribution the acknowledgment of the genocide in Namibia did not require backtracking on German views of the Holocaust's special role in making German national identity. Germans should bring this sort of historical and moral sophistication to the topic at hand. The Holocaust has entrusted Germans with an abiding moral obligation to remember it and fight antisemitism. At the same time, the history of antisemitism has become more, not less, complicated with the foundation of the State of Israel. The condition of diasporic Jewish communities as a minority in their given states is not identical to the existence of Jews as a sovereign majority in the State of Israel. Jews are attacked by antisemites as a minority in states around the world, while Israel has inflicted injustices on the Palestinians in the past and in the present. Jews can be both victims and victimizers. This complexity should be acknowledged.

Germans should search for a way to fight antisemitism and cherish the memory of the Holocaust as well

as acknowledge criticism of Israel for denying equal rights to Palestinians as a legitimate part of the conversation. This acknowledgment does not signal an agreement with these critical views. It is a first step toward a serious public discussion on how to find the right words to juggle a commitment to Holocaust remembrance and criticism of Israel for denying equal rights to the Palestinians. This is a delicate, difficult challenge but not impossible if the moral, historical, and civil courage is there. If there is a lesson to draw from the Holocaust, then this seems a worthy one.

The line between scholarly pursuit and political engagement in this debate is often blurred, much as it has been blurred in the *Historikerstreit* in the mid-1980s about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the Third Reich. Scholars of Germany should raise their voice; government officials and media persons should listen to scholars and to the work of local activists. A reservoir of such local, popular goodwill from below is described in the book of Sa'ed Atshan and Katharine Galor, *The Moral Triangle: Germans, Israelis, Palestinians* (Duke University Press, 2020). They portray this conflicted terrain in Berlin and seek spaces of activism and solidarity among Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians that can help create mutual recognition and restorative justice.

In scholarship, the fields of Holocaust, Israel, and Palestine studies have moved in the direction of integrative history. A first port of call is the pathbreaking co-edited book of Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History* (Columbia University Press, 2018), which was the subject of scholars' forums in the *Journal of Genocide Research* and *Central European History*. Debates over the topic are fruitful and continue. My view is that the question is not whether to explore the two events in tandem, but how to do so insightfully. The two events are completely different in their magnitude and historical character; the point is not to compare but to outline their meaningful relations in history and memory, not least because contemporaries then and later viewed them as related in different ways. Important scholarship has pulled together various strands of the relations among Europe, Germany, Israel, and Palestine, beyond binary and moralizing understanding, such as the recent book edited by Bashir Bashir and Leila Farsakh, *The Arab and the Jewish Questions: Geographies of Engagement in Palestine and Beyond* (Columbia University Press, 2020).

Official German memory of the Holocaust, antisemitism, Israel, and Palestine as it appears today is on the road to nowhere. It lacks in humanity for victims, regardless of who they are. There can be no justification in our world for denying equal rights to a given group of people. To justify implicitly or explicitly the denial of these rights via Holocaust memory is a screeching dissonance.

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# The Wrath of Moses, or the Shadow Side of German Memory Culture

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In this contribution, Andrew I. Port explores both the reasons for the heated backlash against Dirk Moses's essay, as well as the rationale underlying the often emotional attachment to seemingly irrational "hierarchies of suffering." Like other fraught debates about the Holocaust and the Middle East, Port argues, the present discussion is largely about subtexts, imputed motives, and unspoken fears about undesirable consequences. Moses's needlessly polemical tone, along with a raft of vague formulations, inexact characterizations, dubious claims, and debatable suppositions, cause offense, create confusion, and seriously undermine what is otherwise an eminently reasonable set of arguments worthy of sober consideration.

The poor Germans: damned if they don't, damned if they do. Long criticized for supposedly "repressing" disagreeable memories of the Third Reich, Germans eventually became "world masters" of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—of mastering a difficult past. When the process began, and when Germans finally earned that distinction, are matters of debate and interpretation. Still, most foreign observers rightfully laud that transformation. Susan Neiman has even made the case just recently that Americans can "learn from the Germans" when it comes to dealing with their own racist past. But now Dirk Moses comes along and throws shade on that seemingly rosy development. There is, he tells us, a dark side to German memory culture. A distinct "reading" of the Holocaust not only immures German "elites" to the suffering of other groups, but even makes them antipathetic toward those groups—as well as toward anyone who questions their "accepted truths," above all concerning the uniqueness of the Holocaust. This is a German variant of "cancel culture," but in the Federal Republic, it would seem that those who are being "cancelled" are the ones who usually do the cancelling (at least in the "English-language" online realm).

The thrust of Moses's arguments seems eminently reasonable, if my brief recapitulation is accurate. Who could disagree, for instance, that the horrors of European colonialism provide important context for understanding Nazi atrocities? Hannah Arendt already made that point in the early 1950s in her work on totalitarianism. Why, then, the heated reaction to this timely provocation? There are, I believe, three main reasons: the polemical tone of the piece, its barely concealed political subtext, and, last but not least, the bold attribution of motive—and an iron grip on public discourse—to a specific group of vaguely defined German "elites."

The early contributors to this forum have already commented on the tone of the essay, calling it "sharp" and "caustic" (Fitzpatrick), "disrespectful" and "cynical" (Gregor). Those who have worked so hard to bring the topic of the Holocaust to the forefront of public discussion in Germany deserve greater respect, Neil Gregor forcefully argues. Agreed, though we should not forget that these are individuals who have been more than adept at dishing it out themselves when lambasting those with whom they disagree. In any event, the reactions thus far remind me of the angry responses to Norman Finkelstein's past provocations—though the more positive reactions in this forum to Moses's piece suggest just how "hoffähig" (acceptable) certain claims, previously considered anathema, have become over the past two and a half decades. (So much, perhaps, for the dictatorial nature of the "new catechism"...) )

It is probably no coincidence that, in both cases, the provocateurs offer critical analyses of Holocaust memory informed—sometimes more (Finkelstein), sometimes less (Moses) unambiguously—by their sympathies in the ongoing Middle East conflict. In an ideal world, polemics and politics should not matter if the general substance of one’s arguments is sound. But we do not live in an ideal world and, as a result, weighty points worth debating get lost in the shuffle when they are presented as diatribes. Honey may attract more flies than vinegar, but arch interventions tend to attract more (momentary) attention, alas, than sober reflection, careful language, and nuance. The current controversy is a case in point. Moses is right to lament it when “outrage replaces sobriety.” But I can’t help thinking: *Et tu, quoque?*

All of this reinforces an impression I first had in graduate school when reading the exchange between Saul Friedländer and Martin Broszat about the “historicization” of the Third Reich, namely, that such discussions generally have little to do with historical “facts” and interpretations. They are more about subtexts, imputed motivations, and fears about undesirable consequences. And that, in turn, leads to arguments that normally careful, rational thinkers would not make in other, less fraught contexts. After all, what human event can really be considered to be “outside history,” as Friedländer seriously suggested about the Holocaust?

The point has been made that most “serious” scholars now tend to eschew “uniqueness” claims about the Holocaust. That the German “high priests” imprecisely identified by Moses are not *au courant* with the latest historiography (especially the English-language literature) is not surprising. But what if we—and they—were all to agree that the Holocaust was not “unique,” that it was not *the* worst crime in human history (the two claims seem to go hand-in-hand)? Would that somehow diminish the horror and significance of the Holocaust? Does placing the Final Solution in the context of European colonialism do that? Hardly. But there seems to be an unspoken fear that this not only would do so, but, even worse, that that is the malevolent intent of those who make such claims, and that this will have dangerous consequences down the road. Therein lies the rationale for the vehement attachment to irrational “hierarchies of suffering.”

I can certainly appreciate such apprehensions. Since the personal *is* often political, let me lay my cards out on the table, as Frank Biess has done so impressively—and as I wish more of us would do in these debates. As a young boy attending Sunday School at my local synagogue in Brooklyn in the 1970s, I learned that the only thing standing between us Jews and another Holocaust was the State of Israel. A decade earlier, the Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban had famously invoked the image of “Auschwitz borders” in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. That the Holocaust enjoined us to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Jewish state, come what may, became an accepted truth—a religious dogma of sorts, to stick with Moses’s religious terminology—for many, if not most, in my milieu. Jews, we swore, would never again go like lambs to the slaughter, a conviction that often led to a knee-jerk defense of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. In (yet another) discussion of Middle East politics during my final year at college, a fellow student informed me that the “best thing” that had ever happened to the Jews was the Holocaust because of the way they used it to justify their treatment of the Palestinians. The comment struck me as outrageous at the time, and I still find the language off-putting and extremely tasteless, to say the least. Some would label it antisemitic. But it was the first time I was exposed to such arguments, and it initiated a difficult process of self-reflection and soul-searching on my part, one that continues today.

What, if anything, does this have to do with German memory and the “high priests” who have brought down upon themselves the wrath of Moses? It behooves us, I think, to reflect on *their* motivations—despite the perils of such an undertaking, especially when conjecture about presumed motives overshadows actual arguments. Moses suggests that, for German elites, the “sacrosanct” treatment of the Holocaust is a matter of “national redemption.” Perhaps, but it is difficult to say, not least because he never really tells us who “they” are precisely, apart from some vague formulations (“many leftist and liberal Germans”) and a couple of stray examples. And therein lies a major source of confusion in his essay and some of the responses I have read thus far. Moses’s target seems to be some (vague) group of talking heads and public intellectuals who, to his mind, determine the limits of acceptable discourse in the Federal Republic, at least when it comes to memory of the Holocaust. Moses seems to be aiming, in the main, at the “sixty-eighters” and their progeny—more specifically, at those who have recently condemned authors such as Achille Mbembe and Jürgen Zimmerer. Johannes von Moltke’s contribution makes all of this much clearer.

The suggestion that this is, for them, all about “national redemption” and the (selfish?) instrumentalization of the Holocaust to that end strikes me as a woefully inexact characterization. It may hold true for some of the so-called high priests, whoever they may be...—just as accusations of antisemitism may hold true for *some* critics of Israel and Zionism. But surely, other motivations are at play. To state the most obvious one: a laudable desire to prevent a resurgence of beliefs and behavior that resulted in unspeakable atrocities in the past. That is why, I think, the “high priests” find themselves in a particular pickle at the moment. Most are no doubt sympathetic to the plight of the most recent immigrants from the Middle East, but they are understandably put off by attitudes and actions inimical to Israel, which they often construe, rightly or wrongly, as blatantly antisemitic. This is not only offensive to them, in light of Germany’s history, but also worrisome—not least, I imagine, because of fears about the potentially undesirable effects this may have one day on homegrown *German* discourse and behavior.

That brings me back to my earlier point. This debate and similar ones are primarily about subtexts and fears about (intended or unintended) consequences. One colleague has written to me that the far right is “full of praise” for Moses’s arguments. I heard similar claims about Finkelstein’s interventions years ago. That is highly regrettable, of course. But it does not *in itself* undermine the validity of their arguments. Then again, there is no need: Moses offers enough ammunition for that himself, at least when it comes to some of his claims. For one, his sensible comments about the “democratic anarchy” of the internet and his allusion to a recent German initiative calling for “freedom of expression and the right to criticize Israeli policy”—reminiscent of the “Letter on Justice and Open Debate” published this past summer in *Harper’s* and signed by more than 150 American scholars and public intellectuals—undermine his own arguments about the hold of the “high priests” on German discourse. (Then again, the fact that the signatories felt the need to launch such an “initiative” speaks volumes.) Matt Fitzpatrick writes in his contribution to this forum that the German public sphere is not “monolithic” and “lively debate is still possible...” I agree, and Moses acknowledges as much when he submits that the “priestly censors cannot control the conversation like [they did] in the 1980s and 1990s.” (I’m not sure they did back then, either.) So why is his intervention necessary, if not to preach to a choir that already exists? If his intent is to persuade the “high priests,” whoever they may be, he should have taken a much different tack.

There are other aspects of the essay I find troubling. For one, I’m not sure that the “catechism” is as widespread among *nonacademic* elites and opinion-makers in the Federal Republic as Moses suggests.

The idea that antisemitism is a “distinctly German” prejudice (the fourth “element” of the catechism) is not a talking point I’m familiar with—at least not since Daniel J. Goldhagen made the argument a quarter century ago and met with a great deal of criticism *in Germany* because of it. Careless phrasing does not help Moses’s case either. Take the second “element” of the catechism, which suggests that the very nature of the Holocaust made it a “civilizational rupture” and thus the “moral foundation of the nation.” Surely, he means (less offensively) that, in the eyes of the “high priests,” the *reaction* to the Holocaust decades after the end of World War II was the “moral foundation” of the Federal Republic—a debatable supposition. I would argue that the “moral foundation” came much earlier, when Germans on both sides of the Iron Curtain set about the institutional task of creating states that would, at least in theory, never again represent a threat to their neighbors or their own citizens. Coping with the past must not be limited to or equated with a reckoning with the Holocaust.

But that is perhaps beside the point. The issue at hand is not whether the individual elements of the “catechism” are “true” or how accurately Moses describes them. (To stick with the religious motif, I would have chosen a different one that is certainly widespread across most segments of mainstream German society: “Thou shalt not relativize the Holocaust.”) What *is* important is their effect on public discourse in Germany and elsewhere. And this is where I find myself largely agreeing with the thrust of the essay, even if I can think of worse things than “redemptive philosemitism,” especially in a place like Germany. As admirable as German efforts have been to “come to terms” with a difficult past, it is highly regrettable if, as a result, it leads certain opinion-makers to downplay, “blend out,” or even defend other instances of mass suffering and brutality. Rita Chin has similarly suggested elsewhere, if I read her work correctly, that the preoccupation with earlier atrocities against the Jews has made Germans less sensitive, as a rule, to issues of race and everyday racism against *other* groups living in today’s Germany.

These are important points worthy of serious reflection, though I am not sure they are entirely accurate. Even if we leave aside the (admittedly extreme) example of the German hijackers involved in the 1976 hijacking of the Air France flight to Entebbe, it is simply disingenuous to suggest that German leftists are, as a rule, insensitive to the plight of Palestinians and other downtrodden groups. While researching my forthcoming book on German reactions to genocides in other lands since the Holocaust, I have been struck repeatedly by the outpouring of humanitarian assistance provided by Germans from all walks of life and from across the entire political spectrum. Their motivations vary, but the burden of the Nazi past, especially the Holocaust, has often played a role. This holds true for those who participate in candlelight vigils following xenophobic attacks against non-Jews, to those who take in or otherwise provide assistance to foreigners from the so-called developing world. Let us not forget that the Federal Republic welcomed more Muslim refugees from Bosnia in the early 1990s than all the other members of the European Union put together. It is sadly true that the xenophobic far-right has enjoyed a political resurgence of late. But let us also not forget that this came in the wake of Angela Merkel’s laudable decision to welcome more than a million refugees from Africa and the Middle East.

That said, I am stunned again and again by the subtle (and not so subtle) racist—and sexist—comments made *en passant* by Germans who would never dream of making such statements about Jews (at least in public). In 2007, former West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt asked me during a private conversation if I thought that the United States would remain a major power if demographic trends continued and non-whites one day became a majority... The point is that things are “complicated,” as they always are, and if Dirk Moses had been more circumspect about making blanket assertions, if he had given more credit where credit is due, the ire aroused by his essay might have been less fierce. He

would surely agree that it is entirely understandable that many Germans feel uncomfortable criticizing Israel. To my mind, it is also extremely admirable, in light of their country's history—just as it is admirable that someone like Norman Finkelstein, the son of Holocaust survivors, expresses solidarity with the Palestinians. Then again, my sympathies have always lain with those who champion the side of the Other.

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# Queer Memory and Black Germans

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In “The German Catechism,” Dirk Moses offers an interesting intervention by challenging the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness as well as current debates about the Holocaust and its connection to German colonialism, especially the Namibian genocide (1904-08). He also addresses the stifled debates surrounding antisemitism, Israel, and Palestine. In making his argument, Moses uses five points to explore Germans’ abilities to come to terms with their genocidal past and how that past has shaped subsequent postwar efforts at state (re)building, national identity, belonging, and restitution. Postcolonial scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire have long acknowledged the interconnections among colonialism, antisemitism, racism, and the Holocaust. Moses even references the latter two theorists in his piece. I applaud some of his intellectual provocations as well as the other contributors in this exciting forum (i.e. Frank Biess, Alon Confino, Bill Niven, Zoe Samudzi, Helmut Walser Smith, Johannes von Moltke, etc.). Together, they not only force us to grapple with these histories and our own positionalities, but they affirm how subjective (and not value-free) the production and dissemination of knowledge really is.

As much as I welcome debate, I am left pondering what is exactly new about Moses’s claims given that Black (queer) women in Germany examined the Holocaust and memory politics since the 1980s often outside of academic institutions and mainstream debates; sadly, a dynamic that is still common today. There were (and remain) racialized communities in Germany who used the Holocaust as a point of reference for opening up public dialogues about discrimination and systemic racism. They did so in their community and in their own publications, constructing a new public sphere. This was not taken up in the mainstream; it still isn’t today. Where are the voices of those individuals in these German debates past and present? This is also striking considering that those same communities demonstrated in their cultural and political work how “Memories are not owned by groups—nor are groups owned by memories. Rather, the borders of memory and identity are jagged”—a point stressed in Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), which is encountering criticism in today’s Germany, but which has propelled analysis of the complex, overlapping layers of memory at play in the postwar years. If *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* is such a fundamental feature of postwar German society, where are the perspectives from Black German, Turkish German, and Romani communities? Why don’t we know them and why aren’t they shaping the debate? The latter group was not officially recognized as victims of the Third Reich until 1982. It is the first group I will focus on in further detail below.

As a scholar of Black German and Black Europe, I decenter whiteness by showing how these racialized communities opened up new ways of being, knowing, and thinking about some of the fundamental issues we hold important today. It is here where Black Germans and other Black diasporic individuals gave (and still give) us examples of a queer memory—queer as in layered and multifaceted—that was inherently multidirectional. As the literature scholar Fatima El-Tayeb wrote in *European Others* (2011), Black Germans created a “[queer] memory discourse that is not built on linear notions of roots or authentic origins, but on the grounding of a community embracing its ‘inauthentic,’ fractured nature rather than resolving it through a projected, unambiguous past” (43-44). They shared counter-memories that challenged the hegemonic politics of mainstream German history and rejected German national memory formations as organic, natural, and homogeneous. In addition, their approach did not advocate

for a competition or a type of “Oppression Olympics,” where one group is afforded a gold medal in oppression and the other group a bronze. Their approach rejected linearity and simplistic understandings of the past. Black Germans knew that power was exercised through the production of national narratives and the construction of multiple silences and that subalterns’ memories were always subjected to assumptions, memories, and generalizations by the majority. (For more on how power operates in processes of remembering the past and producing histories in the present, one might look to Michel Rolph-Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past* (1995/2015), Gayatri Spivak’s *In Other Words* (1987), and Joan Wallach Scott’s *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988/2018).

Centering their pasts and excavating their overlooked narratives, Black Germans catalyzed their movement through the establishment of two Black German grassroots organizations: the Initiative of Black People (*Initiative Schwarze Deutsche*, ISD) and Afro-German women (*Afrodeutsche Frauen*, ADEFRA). ISD is now called the Initiative of Black People in Germany, and ADEFRA is now called the Black Women in Germany. In local ISD and ADEFRA chapters, members led pronounced efforts of meaning making by organizing events and producing numerous cultural works. They explored their intersecting histories (of colonialism, migration, and integration) and interrogated German practices of othering and non-belonging across what Michelle M. Wright calls *spacetimes*, sometimes in but also beyond Germany; Wright linked time to space beyond linear framings. In this way, the past remained an integral part of their work.

In my monograph *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* (2020), I refer to Black Germans as quotidian intellectuals who knew that how we conceive of the past shapes the present and the future. Quotidian intellectuals such as May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, Helga Emde, and Ricky Reiser, created a new Black public sphere that facilitated discussions about the power of coloniality, the persistence of racism, and Black Germans’ historical erasure. In doing so, they emphasized the nature of discrimination and race in everyday Germany and made it critical to their activism and outreach.

“Memory’s anachronistic quality,” as Rothberg wrote, “its bringing together of now and then, here and there—is actually the source of powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones” (5). Indeed, this “powerful creativity” enabled Black Germans like Ayim to use Holocaust memories to address parallel violent practices of power and exclusion in postwar Germany; she did not diminish the significance of the Holocaust, colonialism, or decolonization in her work. I use Ayim, who was one of the most prominent Black German activists and writers before her untimely death in 1996, to demonstrate that she saw her, other Black Germans’, and Germans’ of Color conditions as connected to the German (Nazi) past, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall or the post-Wende period. It was a historical moment that saw the reunification of both Germanies and the reemergence of an ethno-nationalism that targeted foreign immigrants and non-white Germans alike. But as we’ll see, she realized that structures of racism did not dissipate after 1945, 1961, or 1989 but remained core features of German society in the present day.

Ayim addresses this point in “deutschland in herbst”/“autumn in Germany,” which was published in her 1996 poetry volume *blues in schwarz weiss* (82-83), where she takes up the continuation of Nazi violence and ideology in the present. Her vision of a united Germany was far from positive or hopeful. It was a vision of Germany that symbolized its sustained history of exclusion and racial persecution. She references “the shattered windowpanes” during Kristallnacht in 1938/39 and notes how this violence

certainly repeated itself with the right-wing murder of the Angolan contract worker Antonio Amadeu Kiowa in 1990. Kiowa became one of the first victims of racial violence in reunified Germany. His death signaled a rise in xenophobic attacks across Germany, where the cost for German homogeneity was deadly. I also briefly discuss this moment in my book. But here, silences in both 1938 and 1990 around structural racism affirmed the complicity of mainstream white, non-Jewish Germans, and it signaled white, non-Jewish Germans' inability to speak out or even acknowledge these discriminatory acts as deeply entrenched in historical and contemporary practices. Ayim also stresses the lateral connections that racialized and sexualized minorities faced in Germany when noting that the "human bones/of jews and blacks/of the weak and the sick/of the Sinti and Roma and/poles of lesbians and gays of and of/" were again subjected to discrimination, and they were positioned as non-human and not belonging in the German nation. This poem represents a queer approach to memory that did not narrate in a single voice but reaches out in new directions thematically, theoretically, methodologically, and historically. Ayim's queer approach was also cognizant of the significance of gender, sexuality, and race in grappling with Germany's past. Her poem as well as others, such as "blues in schwarz weiss," account for the complexity and mutability of memory in shaping histories, identities, and discourses. It is this attentiveness to intersecting identities and histories that reinforces the importance of queer, multidirectional memory.

As a mentor to both Ayim and other Black German women, Caribbean American poet and activist Audre Lorde, who taught at the Free University of Berlin in 1984, also used the Holocaust and her experiences to link antisemitism and racism in Germany and the United States. Again, her poems such as "This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps" (1984), "East Berlin (1989)," and "Berlin is hard on Colored Girls" (1984) recognized the persecution of others in an increasingly hostile racist climate in Germany. Lorde was disturbed by the limited engagements that white Germans had with their Nazi past and discussed how that past shaped their treatment of non-white Germans, immigrants, and refugees in the present. She also confronted white West German feminists' reticence to integrate more intersectional politics and to pursue racial solidarity in their movement. Her poetry and public readings, much like Ayim's, offer another example of queer memory that takes up the Holocaust as well as other examples of racial persecution to understand the larger intimate connections that racialized communities experience in oppressive German systems.

Both women illustrate the importance of examining how Black diasporic minorities remained attentive to the significant power of the Holocaust for calling out German marginalization and systemic racism. Ayim's and Lorde's solidarity with oppressed people in and beyond Germany complicated notions of belonging and identity. What remains striking to me about them was their ability to push against the boundaries of tradition, authenticity, and cisheteronormativity (cis referring to a heteronormativity based on the presumed confluence of born sex and gender presentation). In doing so, they showed how German memory was queer, multidirectional, and radical, which allowed them to chart new directions for memory politics and, of course, for themselves.

Ultimately, Dirk Moses's interventions reveal the need for more intersectional approaches in German Studies that account for the multidirectional nature of memory and identity. Scholars from the Global North, in particular, must recognize how complicated different temporalities and geographies of memory functioned in the postwar period. This is why an approach that is attentive to intersectionality must also engage with Black diasporic subjects in the past and present in these larger debates. Doing so does not drain the Holocaust of its meaning; instead it underscores its power for diverse people in search of

restitution and reparative justice.

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# Stones Can Talk Back: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* Revisited

Mirjam Brusius

Memory formations require a radical rethinking. This response to Dirk Moses' essay will take up two points. First, the missed opportunity of the catechism to keep up with social realities that ethnic minorities in post-war (west) Germany were facing, and its lack of visions for moving forward. Secondly, the necessity to complicate national pasts, which were entangled histories. For a more inclusive history to be successful, however, it also matters who is granted access to write it. Does Germany defy the logic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* if both history itself, and those who write it, refuse to embrace approaches that reflect the country's multiculturalism, perpetuating a discriminatory mechanism instead?

The German Catechism, as laid out in Dirk Moses' essay, was not always as binding as it now seems. Not long ago, in 2017, Benjamin Netanyahu cancelled talks with Sigmar Gabriel, then German foreign secretary, after insisting to meet Israeli human rights groups, including B'Tselem. Today, this seems remote and unconceivable. In light of the contested Bundestag resolution, Germany would probably designate B'Tselem's recent 'Apartheid report', as Alon Confino painfully observed on this blog, as a "heretic document sent to the bonfire." The "desperate" Germans (as German-Palestinian Sami Khatib put it recently) had not even covered the report. A disillusioned Jewish friend laid bare the irony: if Jews can be victimizers, it turns them into normal human beings. Seeing Germans criticize Israel would finally make him feel alive, unlike their suffocating philosemitism.

If this blog series were a support group for former members of an extremist religious community, and you would ask me when I started thinking of stepping away I would say: precisely when I recognized these ironies. History and Germanness are both complicated, and not remotely compatible with a political religion. Yet anxiety about pushing against my own professional instinct as I write this piece means that I must have somehow internalized the catechism in my DNA.

In a recent video for the cathartic project *Menschen mit Nazihintergrund*, I laid out these complications in their historical entanglements. It was liberating. Informed by the many worlds in which I have lived, the monolithic categories fixed in postwar Germany will not get me very far. The white Germany that is often assumed never existed. Forced and unforced migration means the norm has long shifted: we are already and formidably multicultural, multilingual, multireligious, and many of us ethnically mixed. It is just that we were wrongly presented a version of history that seems clear-cut where it really is not. That is why we need an inclusive narrative fitting also those who are forcefully and yet tranquilly demanding it, most recently Maryam Aras in her sagacious essay on the forgotten contributions of immigrants to the 1968 civil uprisings. How else can we, rather than retreat into irrelevance, understand Germany's place in this world today: its exploitative relations with the Middle East, the lack of healing in former African colonies, as well as the ways in which discrimination is still perpetuated inside the country today.

The grand missed opportunity of the catechism is that it has not kept up with social realities, and lacks visions for moving forward. Take No. 4: "Antisemitism is a distinct prejudice—and was a distinctly German one. It should not be confused with racism." No. We need to understand what exactly the historical differences and similarities are and unlearn respective biases to forge the necessary solidarities

against structures of dehumanization. Or No. 3: “Germany has a special responsibility to Jews in Germany, and a special loyalty to Israel.” *Therefore*, our responsibility extends to discriminatory practices in this region that were sparked as a result of this loyalty, an acknowledgment of the wrongdoings of European imperialism, and a commitment to make space for the heterogenous views of Jews in Germany, and beyond.

Rather than fighting against structures of dehumanization, however, the self-centred catechism came to deflect and delegitimize the plight of Germany’s Black and Middle Eastern inhabitants, which it wrongly assumes cannot *also* be Jewish. If anything about West German *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* left me flabbergasted, it is this blindness: that lighting candles for racist murders of inhabitants of refugee homes (East and West), and the ritualized commemoration of *Kristallnacht* never went hand in hand with an anti-bullying scheme against ethnic minority schoolchildren, which could have prevented these ongoing murders. It also failed to present Jews as living humans, often also migrants, who may or may not have shown an interest in a visit to the local synagogue, Israel, or Holocaust commemoration. Fast forward a quarter of a century and the prevailing idea cited by Moses that “instead of murdering Jews, Germans should be nice and welcoming” seemed to apply to Jews but not to others. Having grown up with the idea that being mortally attacked by Molotov cocktails was normal,\* I perceived the reactions to the arrival of refugees in 2015 as a bizarre *Übersprungshandlung* (act of displacement). White Germans awkwardly hugging brown people whom they had never met, at railway stations, nappies and wet wipes squeezed under their arms: this was part of an important political act. But it also looked like a hysterical attempt at absolution.

I was not surprised when the mood quickly changed as soon as it became clear that ‘assimilation’ was not necessarily the norm to which all immigrants aspired. The catechism was part of this assimilation process, but since it gave cover to racism and islamophobia, it was also a deadly trap. Perhaps earlier generations of immigrants should have resisted the idea that it was the only means of survival, given that the place many thought to be their home responded with barriers and violence anyway: the now fatefully inseparable names of Hanau and Halle will always be fresh in our minds. It further strengthened intersectional alliances between various discriminated groups, which as Tiffany Florvil showed, have a long history.

Carnival celebrations went ahead after the massacre in Hanau, while a vigil to mourn the deaths could not. Antisemites were still allowed to march in the streets. Some can even stand for election. Taking stock of these asymmetries, to say nothing of the endless secretiveness around the NSU murders, the surreal Mbembe debate, or the fact that being left-wing and Jewish means feeling unprotected by a state that claims to do the reverse: might Germany be reaching a grotesque low point in its history? If antisemitism and racism have no space (‘keinen Platz’) in Germany, why do they still claim so much room? Who will set the future terms of historical memory in a country where for large multiethnic sectors of the society, denazification simply never happened?

\* *Racist attacks still rarely make national headlines as such. Only this week, a quarter of a century later, the media fully acknowledged an 1996 incident in the author’s home town as racism. The murderer has never been found.*

**Brandstiftung in Karlsruhe: 1996 starben drei Menschen — der Täter wurde nie gefunden**

Brandanschlag: Bei einem vorsätzlich gelegten Brand in einem Mehrfamilienhaus in der Karlsruher Markgrafenstraße starben im Oktober 1996 drei Menschen. Sie stammten aus der Türkei. Foto: Rolf Donecker

**History Is Complicated**

The history of perpetrators, liberators and victims taught in Germany became a pedagogical morality play in which the *dramatis personae* were reified while others were excluded altogether. Yet history, as Moses argues, does not work with clear-cut categories, then and now. It is messy and entangled. Jews in Germany today, for example, might feel more like liberators than victims if their former compatriots fought for the Russians. Black people became forgotten victims of Nazi race science while also fighting for allied troops; some of them might have been Muslim, or Jews. Some Muslims might have been hiding Jews; while others fought for the Nazis who in turn viewed them as a mere “means to an end”. Many people in German society today cannot be put into single categories like perpetrators, liberators and victims, let alone into those based on gender, religion or ‘race’. Race science in itself, which also fueled specific forms of antisemitism, relied on pure categories that never existed—that is precisely what is wrong with race—always coalescing with social projections based on constructed prejudice. We run the danger of perpetuating these categories so long as we omit intersectional approaches that complicate histories, enabling us to eventually *undo* race. What is a German nowadays anyway?

Just as research showed how antisemitism and anti-Blackness are deeply entangled, it is impossible to move forward without taking into account how colonialism in Africa, and the prehistory to the Holocaust also overlap in myriad ways with German imperialism in the Ottoman Empire and its aftermath—to this

day. Moses' point how orientalism was intrinsic in German occidentalism has huge potential for German debate. Recent research discusses citizens of the Turkish Republic who lived in Germany during the Third Reich and during *Kristallnacht* feared being mistaken for Jews. While some of them might have been, others might have identified with different or mixed ethnicities. Many will have looked alike. Earlier this year, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published a piece by Esra Öyzürek on Muslim pupils who reacted with empathy during visits to concentration camps, fearing they might be next. Not fitting the national narrative, this was another piece ignored in German media. That Israel takes the lead for Germany was curiously unthinkable.

As a historian who approaches the Holocaust from distant vantage points around 1900, as Zoé Samudzi noted in this series, I am baffled by the resistance to any form of obvious continuity—*Lebensraum*, race science, or colonial collecting—and broader context. I've been rebuked for using the word 'genocide' in reference to Germany's targeted slaughter in Namibia, even days before the Bundesregierung's official announcement to call it just that. I've been rebuked for explaining how the idea of camps and race science were joint European inventions. Even in today's jingoistic Tory Britain, a major institution like the Imperial War Museum in its Holocaust exhibition names Francis Galton as the leading scientist who perpetuated racial ideology across Europe. If Germany wants to 'own' its racist history, why are its museums and universities largely silent on their own contribution to the invention of race science at the height of German colonialism, naming museums after antisemites instead?

I suppose it was easier in some way when the Holocaust seemingly grew out of nowhere—and then magically disappeared. Yet the current pushback against a different narrative not only dislodges the Holocaust from actual history, it also dislodges it from the research of professional historians, which is why *Historikerstreit 2.0* is indeed the entirely wrong term. It is not about relativizing the Holocaust, or its singularity. Rather, it is about finding more nuance, complicating what we believe we know, and looking for the ways in which other groups of people have used these histories to give force to their own struggles. Michael Rothberg, not an historian, presented these same ideas to acclaim ten years ago; the argument in his book that memory is not a zero-sum game has since been applied to move the field forward in important ways. This is peer-reviewed scholarship. Why is it being impugned and ignored?

It is necessary to complicate national pasts not just because of the entangled histories of suffering, resistance and indeed liberation that Jews, Muslims, and Black people share with one other. But also, because there are more atrocities for which Germany shares a responsibility. Add to this not only an egregious colonial genocide, but also the long road to adequately commemorating Sinti and Roma, Soviet and Polish, homosexual and euthanasia program victims during the Holocaust. Yet could the additional monuments that will no doubt be built, this time please come with equity and equality for those still affected by the lingering racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia whose origins, like antisemitism, do not come from away but are still at work chez nous? Stones and monuments have almost become a burdensome symbol for a political standstill. But many have had enough of being cemented into some netherworld, filled with rituals of fealty and ostracism, rather than being allowed to walk among the living with their own minds, opinions, interventions, thoughts.

### **Our Histories Included**

To some Germans on the right, today's problems are precisely those living Jews, immigrants and their children who are now demanding agency in constructing a new historical narrative: a volunteer 'refugee

guide' in a museum who wants to be the new multilingual curator of a more inclusive national display, and actually gets credited and paid for her work. A role-model Muslim history teacher, her hijab suddenly considered illegal. Wasn't it just fine when her mother wore it as she cleaned the toilets in the same school? Germany could have drawn on the skills of a multilingual population for decades. Yet rather than recruit students in Berlin Neukölln for subjects like history and political science to produce bilingual cultural diplomats, or archaeologists and art historians who can actually communicate with Middle Eastern collaborators and communities in Africa during excavations or those exigent repatriation negotiations, these strengths are considered a hindrance, rather than the incredible asset they actually are. There is no German equivalent of London's SOAS. Meanwhile, German Black Studies has a scandalous history of exclusion. Germany also *still* lacks a 'decolonize the curriculum' debate while German studies abroad is actively being decolonized, as are other disciplines. This is perhaps unsurprising given that some German media claim in all seriousness that postcolonial studies is more threatening than the AfD. I still laugh.

Histories are never neutral. They are always informed by those who write them. For a more inclusive version to be successful it also matters who is granted authority. "If our colleagues are the Nachwuchs of the Nazis", Wendy Shaw, an international renowned expert in Islamic Art has argued, it was not because of their "birth as Germans, but because many had not rethought the nature of authority and exclusion and replaced the white-patriarchal hierarchy at the heart of universities with a working system of diversity and inclusion". Last year, when 'Black Lives Matter statements' filled websites of predominantly white history departments in the US and the UK, it did not escape the attention of colleagues abroad that historians in Germany chose not to speak out. One tweet read: 'Even my swimming club speaks out in favour of #BLM—but German historians don't.' I channelled this observation into a blog piece on race, history, and academia. Part two suggested how to move forward, including collecting data on ethnic minorities in history programs. It is ironic that the means that could help fight discrimination today is contested in Germany because it was also such data that once facilitated the persecution of Jews. Should it not trouble us deeply that some people fear such data might still fall into the wrong hands? And yet, in order for claims of discrimination to be made, we are asked for evidence.

Meanwhile, German academia refuses to recognize that it is excluding large parts of society in its workforce. In the UK, a report based on data collected by the Royal Historical Society highlighted considerable racial and ethnic inequalities in the field of History, concluding 'with tailored advice and guidance' for change. Similar numbers could be found across Germany. Those who try to diversify their departments report fierce opposition to their proposal that posts be advertised in a way that would encourage diverse candidates to apply. Shaw's professorship will now end: one would have thought, her extraordinary scholarly achievements and acclaimed expertise in Islam notwithstanding, that her Muslim-Turkish *and* American-Jewish background would also make her indispensable in a city like Berlin.

If anything was more daunting than the deafening silence of German academia and museums during the Black Lives Matter protests, it has been the deafening silence since. Confronting it feels like pushing a stone—a monument, perhaps?—up a steep *Trümmerberg*. As someone on a temporary contract, I acknowledge the anxiety of colleagues in an academic system that grants access to tenured positions only to a select few. It largely relies on self-recruiting and patronage (the fact that many people of colour and those without traditional 'habitus' never had patrons anyway is our *Alleinstellungsmerkmal*). Some expressed concern that criticizing the system or investing time in something not directly related to one's

own career goals could harm them in their prospects. Yet what does it reveal about a country—where collective duty says ‘never again’ while antisemitism and racism keep returning ‘again’ and ‘again’—and that being anti-racist is considered alternatively a risk or waste of time?

There is something deeply unsettling about the fact that Black German history, for instance, is mostly written by competent Black scholars who have no choice but to work freelance or abroad. They become targets of yet more racist abuse if they point out that the only Black staff in most German universities are, again, the cleaning staff. Are ‘we’ really ok with this status quo? Can ‘we’ not see how it deeply relates to this debate here? Exclusion and silent compliancy continue not in spite of, but *because* they are part of the country’s past.

It seems pertinent to ask what exactly is happening here at this very moment in time. Is it not also very awkward that we largely rely on former ‘Western allies’—besides Israel—to ‘liberate’ us from one-sided approaches to our history? The fact that Moses’ essay too was published abroad, after a German journal demurred, fearing controversy, proves his point. This is alarming. Inside the country, many are disillusioned with the traditional *Feuilleton* and museums, and opt for spaces outside the fold: in the arts and literary world, theatre, podcasts, on social media, and blogs. On our own, voices from the Global South write the erased stories of places from whence museum objects were violently taken, Palestine included, back into history.

Who do we want to be? While the debate around pluralizing memory culture is framed as a generational issue, I think it is more of an issue of people who ought to listen not sharing the same space. Not only do the high priests to whom Moses refers seem unwilling to retire, but they wrongly assume their histories were not also ideological. Rather than listening, they are now using harmful and distressing rhetoric, insulting living Jews—philosemitism being an insult—and denouncing those affected by the aftermath of colonialism. Many of us have respectfully listened to older generations for decades, admiring and learning from certain arguments, while often silently disagreeing with others. Is it too much to ask for the same?

The question is further how established media and museums, which mediate a changing landscape of historical commemoration to the broader public, will stay relevant unless they engage with new approaches, grounded in international research, or better still, offer actual jobs to those who develop them. Opinion pieces on colonial legacies are still written by white authors rather than the affected. Publications on looted objects mainly continue to follow the white saviour complex. What if communities might not want all of their objects back, just because Europeans have decided they are now done with them? Who sets the terms for their return?

In the UK, our network of museum workers of colour holds cultural institutions to account. Last week the panel *Black Lives Still Matter* asked what museums have achieved since 2020. Repatriation efforts aside, how is it that German institutions assume they can just stay out of such conversations—in a week that drew fierce criticism about the insulting reparations offered to Namibia for the genocide? The Humboldt Forum would have been the country’s unique chance to revisit neglected parts of its history, and to diversify its workforce. Instead, four days after the killing of George Floyd, a cross, a symbol of white Christian supremacy, was fastened on top of its edifice. Now Jewish, Muslim and Black staff members, if hired at all, will have to work under its roof—at the same time as racist statues elsewhere in Europe are being toppled. A week later, Black Lives Matter protesters fought for justice down the road,

some of them descendants of forced adherents to Christianity in the colonies, converted in the name of that very cross. Can a situation get more perfidious than that?

All this deserves satire. For this reason, I appreciated the sarcasm of Moses' piece. Its un-German humour seems to have been disliked by or lost on some readers. To see Moses, a scholar who actually listens to marginalized voices, discussed side by side with a populist and right-wing author rather than generously engaged with over his key points of concern about more inclusive histories, shows just how utterly removed some have become from the concerns of the younger, multicultural population. But where some fear losing power (and *Deutungshoheit*), many others fear losing their lives. In her essay on the silencing of Jews in Germany, Shaw writes: "I do believe in analysing and undermining the systems that perpetuate violence so as to build new systems that avoid repeating the horrors of the past. German and non-German alike, our collective sin is not a failure to recognize the past, but our incompetence in preventing its repetition." Memory formations require a radical rethinking. *Vergangenheit* (the past) has not been not *bewältigt* ('come to terms with'), not in the slightest. If a large proportion of German society fears they are next, it is time to acknowledge that this simply hasn't worked.

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# Inaccuracies and Absences

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Joachim Häberlen is scratching his head, wondering about the perception of German media and politics by some colleagues.

## I: Scratching My Head

Reading the debate about Moses's essay makes me wonder if the place where I spend much time, Germany, is the same place Moses and some of his respondents write about. It seems like a space of uniformity, without dissent, except for the anarchy of social media. This seems far removed from the reality I'm living in. I'm struck to read that the "official and media approach in Germany is based on the axiom that a lesson of the Holocaust is that Jews and Israel (or more accurately, Israeli Jews) are always right" (Alon Confino); or about "Germany's rigid adherence to supporting any and all actions by Israel against the Palestinians" (Matt Fitzpatrick). This is simply inaccurate. At best, it displays a stunning lack of knowledge about actual controversies in German media.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, certainly not known to be a paper with leftist sympathies, reported for example about the "clashes" within Israel. The article quotes the mayor of Lod comparing riots by young Arab men with Kristallnacht, and blaming them for destroying seventy years of peaceful coexistence. The *FAZ* reporter notes: "He had few words for the other side's actions. After the nights of unrest in Israel, law enforcement agencies across the country have charged 116 suspected rioters. None of them are Jewish." Does this sound like "what Israeli Jews are doing is always right"? We might also look at the *ZEIT*, which published an article before the escalation of violence in Gaza: "Provocations instead of a sense of proportion: The situation in Jerusalem has escalated. Once again, the Israeli authorities and security forces have made decisions without giving sufficient consideration to the consequences." The list could go on and on.

Or with regards to the supposed silencing of Palestinian voices in Germany: *Ze.tt*, the *ZEIT*'s online magazine for young readers, published a long interview with Palestinian Simin Jawabreh in addition to long articles about how it feels to live as a young Jew in Germany right now. Leftist *Jungle World*, surely more on the side of Israel, has published a letter by a young Palestinian fleeing from Hamas. More generally, one of the most powerful comments on German Holocaust memory, and on the relationship between German identity and the Holocaust, comes from Navid Kermani, a "non-white, non-Jewish, non-ethnic German" (Confino). Or consider Deniz Yücel, another non-white, non-Jewish, non-ethnic German, actually vocally condemning pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the *Welt*. Once again, there are many more examples one might cite.

The same goes with regards to Germany's alleged "rigid adherence to supporting any and all actions by Israel against the Palestinians": Yes, German politicians across the political spectrum declare that Israel's security is part of German *Staatsräson*, that Israel has a right to defend itself, and that Israel's right to exist is without question. Germany isn't neutral. But Germany has also, by itself and through the EU, repeatedly criticized Israeli settlement policies. It has announced that it would consider an annexation of the occupied territories a breach of international law and condemned the expulsion of Palestinians from

their homes based on Israeli court rulings (a clear reference to Sheikh Jarrah). Of course, one might wish German politicians (or the EU more generally) to be more in line with what Israeli human rights organizations advocate, that German officials condemn more strongly human rights violations. But claiming that Germany is “supporting any and all actions by Israel against the Palestinians” is plain and simply wrong. Factual accuracy as a basis for political and scholarly claims about current German politics and media is a must.

All too often in this debate, it feels as if German media and politicians are accused of one-sidedness because they aren't supporting a particular position. The same is true, by the way, for the other side in the debate. The *Jüdische Allgemeine* (published by the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland), for example, wrote about the recent Bundestag debate on Israel / Palestine: “Almost like a prayer wheel, many MPs repeated their commitment to Israel, its right to exist and its right to self-defense. But most of them linked the whole thing with criticism of the Israeli settlement policy and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.”

This brings me to the controversial BDS movement, and the equally controversial Bundestag resolution. Far from this resolution being unanimously supported in German media, the FAZ published a damning (and in my view ultimately convincing, even though I have zero sympathy for the BDS movement) legal critique of the resolution by Stephan Detjen; and it also published an equally damning critique of the effects of the resolution by Hanno Loewy, along with critique of BDS itself. This is all controversial, and German mainstream media offers a platform for those controversies. Strange times indeed in which defending the FAZ has become necessary.

Overall, I share Paula Villa Braslavsky's and Andrew Port's sense that Moses (and some of his respondents) are just as restrictive and polemical as the debate they respond to. Much of it is a continuation of polemics from all sides, the latest iteration being Johannes von Moltke's equally polemical contribution, that doesn't offer much that is novel for anyone reading German newspapers on a regular basis. I find those polemics tiring, and as long as it's not about arguments, but about inquisitions, I find it hard to see anything intellectually stimulating here. Amusingly, one of the FAZ articles Moses mentions in fact more or less summarizes the points he makes, albeit to refute them. To me, this indicates how unproductive the debate has become.

## II: Political Socializations

Frank Biess gave us an insight into his political socialization, and Andrew Port called upon us to do the same. So I'll follow their models. My own political socialization in (then reunited West-) Germany happened a decade after Biess's (*die Gnade der späten Geburt, von der Friedensbewegung verschont geblieben zu sein*). It was a time of racist violence, not only in the former East, but also in West Germany. Mölln and Solingen are only the most famous, and most lethal, examples, but violence also happened in places like Mannheim-Schönau. Recalling those years and the various anti-racist struggles, against neo-Nazis as much as against a state deporting refugees, I'm struck to read that young Germans are now, finally, joining the fight against forms of racism other than antisemitism, inspired by the BLM movement, as if that struggle is new. Even though I was impressed by the numbers of teenagers in the streets last summer, it remains to be seen how much of that will last.

But I'm even more struck by claims that memories of the Holocaust and Auschwitz did not help

migrants and their descendants to address racist violence (Tiffany Florvil now made a similar point with regards to Black (queer) women). I vividly recall migrant groups on the left, most importantly Café Morgenland from Frankfurt, but also Köxüz from Hamburg and Berlin. They were famous for harsh polemics against fellow white, German leftists. These migrants clearly regarded the struggle against everyday racist violence in post-unification Germany as intrinsically linked with a struggle against antisemitism. For their critiques of the *deutsche Zustände*, Auschwitz was central, though they had nothing but contempt for the shallow public memory culture. Their furious polemics, attacking racism in the German left as well as antisemitism amongst migrants, are still worth reading today. They never made it to the pages of German *Feuilletons*. Yet, this should not keep us from including these marginal voices in the narratives. I find their absence telling.

### III: Absent Voices

So much of this debate is about the absence of voices, specifically the absence of non-white German voices; indeed, I find their absence in the debate we are having here (at least in the contributions so far—this was written prior to Tiffany Florvil’s contribution) conspicuous. So I want to introduce one such voice, Yassin al-Haj Saleh, a Syrian writer and dissident now living in Berlin. If I look for intellectual inspiration, I turn to him. I’m happy to call him a friend, and I’ve published myself on Al Jumhuriya, which he co-founded. As it happens, he just published a very positive review of Dirk Moses’s recent book, calling for its translation into Arabic (including a reference to Moses’s catechism-text). There is much I agree about with Saleh, even though there are also—of course, as it should be!—disagreements. I recently found myself in agreement with something he wrote, as it turns out, years ago, and with which he now disagrees; I’ll return to this later, because I still find his former position profoundly inspiring.

Let me start with something I share with him: a deep frustration with the West, including the Western left, taking barely any interest in what’s happening in Syria, in its democratic and now clearly defeated revolution, which I found immensely inspiring, or in the genocidal politics of the Assad regime. Shouldn’t we, in the West, if we genuinely believe in democracy, declare at least some solidarity with those struggling for democracy in Syria? Why are we not having a debate, here on the New Fascism Syllabus, about the fascist nature of the Assad regime, with the voices of Syrians who have to say a lot about those matters?

And it’s not only Syrians. What about the voices of Afghans who recently came to Germany? Who took notice of a vigil Afghans in Berlin organized for 86 girls killed in a blast in Kabul just at the same time as violence in Gaza escalated? While I’m writing these lines, my Facebook newsfeed is filled with posts about the genocide of Hazara. Any interest? This indeed strikes me as deeply provincial.

The question is, though, how to explain this silence. Of course, one might wonder if there is some limitation to what people can take an interest in. There’s just too much suffering going on in the world for us to pay constantly attention. For Moses, it seems to be the German Catechism that prevents at least Germans from seeing anything but the Holocaust, that makes them incapable of seeing other atrocities and recognizing other struggles against racism.

But here, I would have to disagree. The problem as I see it is that everything has to be looked at through the lens of the Holocaust, antisemitism, and, yes, the Israel-Palestine . Look at the debate here on the NFS, the German Feuilleton debates it responds to, and indeed Moses’s essay for *Geschichte der*

Gegenwart: what makes it a hot topic, causing outrage, is what Moses writes about the Holocaust, how it is commemorated, and probably most importantly what he says about Israel/Palestine. Everyone feels compelled to comment on this conflict, and how Germany is positioning itself. And to be clear: this goes for all sides of the debate. Moses, who criticizes Germans' fixation on the Holocaust, remains just as fixated. By contrast, neither the Holocaust nor Israel/Palestine came up as a frequent topic in numerous conversations I had with people from Syria and Afghanistan since 2015 (until this May, when it did become important for some, with people having, not surprisingly, diverse views). Can't we actually just listen to what they have to say about their histories, about their political visions, which is so much richer than this constant circling around the question of how singular the Holocaust was or wasn't, how it was related to colonialism, and so on? I doubt that an essay about Assad's genocidal politics, whether that label applies, or about German politics with regards to the situation in Syria, would have sparked a similarly heated debate. How provincial indeed.

(To be fair, drawing on an article by Yassin al-Haj Saleh, Moses's book does seem to present an argument to move beyond this trap, in his view, of looking at everything through a genocide lens, which makes me wonder why the polemics on *Geschichte der Gegenwart* effectively replicated this trap and its limitations, rather than overcoming them: what a missed opportunity! Indeed, I wonder if Moses's argument about security regimes wouldn't equally work, perhaps even be stronger, *without* reference to the Holocaust. It seems that, once again, everything needs to be tied to it.)

Can I then just avoid saying something about Israel and Palestine, the conflict that is on everybody's mind? It's a topic causing absolute enmity, it sometimes seems. There's no option but joining one or the other side. We might agree on almost everything else, but if we disagree about this conflict, nothing else matters. Therefore, I'll limit myself to quoting a comment by Yassin al-Haj Saleh, which I found on Twitter and thought it recent, only to learn from him that it's many years old, and that he now disagrees with his former position. So to be crystal clear, while I don't claim authorship of those words, they should be considered my position alone. Because of that, I only cite the final question in the Tweet: "Is there a policy of partnership other than in death [with regards to Israelis and Palestinians]?" To me, this question expresses a profound, perhaps even utopian hope for reconciliation. I do not want to give up on this.

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# Apocryphal Queers and Gay Orthodoxy

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In this piece I am linking Dirk Moses' German Catechism to the history of social movements in the FRG, underlining German gay liberation's own antisemitic past. I especially identify ways in which the weaponization of the Catechism by cisgendered white gay men enabled them to avoid, silence, and dismiss reflection about race and gender. Moses' framework allows a new analysis of contemporary intersectional politics, but my intervention goes one step further. I am inviting queer activists to revisit their own history and reflect on the genealogy of queer liberation. Doing so, I pinpoint ways in which an appropriation of the Catechism has hindered queer German scholarship.

Dirk Moses' intervention in *Geschichte der Gegenwart* has unleashed a wave of reactions. For those based outside of Germany, even specialists working on German history, the anger and vitriol of some of the responses may have been surprising. For those of us working and based in Germany, however, this was not the case. It is also not astonishing that this criticism came from outside of continental academic circles and that what Moses denounces as a German Catechism has been framed as a misunderstanding of the nuances of postwar German history. As a non-German born specialist trained in Germany, researching the memory of National Socialism from a global perspective, I am not new to these debates. What Moses calls a 'Catechism' challenges the idea that postwar German memory culture, fraught and complex, is by and large a story of success. This has broad significance, precisely because it calls into question a strong sense of pride and accomplishment around indeed what was a remarkable feat, that of coming to terms with an exceedingly violent past, a process that is of course, never truly complete. In my short missive here, I wish to question that success story by way of a brief look at the integration of queer history into German memory culture, and how tensions especially around race but also gender—within the queer community itself—suggest there is still much more work to be done.

Outside or inside of academia, many parts of the German Left rebuff global and transnational perspectives. In a city such as Berlin, this manifests in different forms, from rolling eyes in conferences to the paternalistic dismissal of international scholarship, especially around feminist, queer, and postcolonial theory. I do not agree completely with Moses that this German Catechism is everywhere. Yet it is multi-faceted, and takes many shapes. It is a new kind of commons where the ideas of nationalists and anti-nationalists sometimes mix and meet, from the AfD to the racist bubble of the so-called anti-deutsche "left," a strand of leftist politics that sees antisemitism taking root among progressives in the land of the Shoah, but also ends up reproducing islamophobic talking points found on the right end of the political spectrum.

I want to look at the ways in which this German Catechism is used by social movements in Germany, how victims of the priests themselves have become the inquisitors. As a queer scholar working on queer transatlantic memories of National Socialism, I am especially interested in how cisgendered white gay men like me, men whose gender identity matches their sex at birth, weaponized the Catechism and preached its Gospel to avoid self-reflection on racism.

The homosexual road toward the mainstream was a bumpy one to say the least. From the (re)discovery of the National Socialist persecutions of homosexualities to the decades-long fight for the deletion of the

paragraph of the penal code criminalizing non-heteronormative sexualities between men (§175), gay activists have suffered, were ostracized, and faced dire consequences for speaking out. This (still unfinished) fight was correctly framed as a struggle for human rights. In order to claim these rights, gay men linked their struggle to a past of injury, of victimization. This is not an instrumentalization of the horrors of National Socialism per se. Gay men in the 1970s were well aware that the version of §175 reformed by the National Socialists was only denazified at the end of the 1960s. Although Richard von Weizsäcker famously included gays in the list of victims of the Nazi regime in 1985, formal apologies and restitution came much later, in 2002, the product of tireless work on the part of queer activists. Despite these great strides, however, some gay activists used the long history of repression and resistance as a shield to protect them from engaging with real and ongoing tensions within the community around lesbian feminism, queer theory and anti-racist criticism of queer white supremacy.

In the early years of the postwar German homosexual liberation movement, many activists relativized the Holocaust itself. Debunked during the professionalization of gay and lesbian history in the 1980s, the myth of a hidden ‘Homocaust’ remained pervasive in the community. A mixture of antisemitic resentment toward Jewish victims of the Holocaust for having ‘stolen’ the spotlight on victimhood and a desire for recognition of queer suffering, at one point advocates even suggested that more homosexuals had been murdered than Jewish victims and that being a gay non-Jewish man in a concentration camp was a worse sentence than being a Jewish deportee. The stories of Jewish gay victims rarely came to light in this narrative. While it is true that many former adherents have since denounced this period of gay memory activism, German homosexual liberation and the manufacturing of a gay collective identity were anchored in antisemitic tropes and resentment.

Discussions about antisemitism and relativizing the Holocaust resurfaced again during debates surrounding the creation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Activists at the time, some Jewish and some not, denounced the casting into stone of only one narrative of the horrors of National Socialism while pointing out the singularity of the murder of the European Jewry. Opponents took to the pages of the German feuilleton to express outrage at the idea of commemorating the Holocaust simultaneously with other atrocities committed by the National Socialists. At the time, gay activists expressed solidarity with survivor communities, especially with Romani victims. This changed in 2008. This spirit of solidarity with other victims quickly dissipated as plans gelled for a monument to gay victims across the street in the neighbouring Tiergarten. Mainly at the commemoration and inclusion of lesbian oppression, by anchoring their argument in legal definitions over a rich historiography that showed women experienced persecution too, albeit in different forms. Invited to share the bread and wine of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), gay activists preached the German Catechism to secure the recognition of gay memories of victimization at the expense of others. In the end, feminists were able to and of the monument to reflect a more diverse set of victims of historical and contemporary homophobia, but this was no easy feat. And while the monument is an important part of the German memory field today, the text on its memorial plaque betrays other tensions and blindspots within the queer community especially around race, as it hints that homophobia is not home grown in Germany, but something that comes from away. Indeed, the inscription underlines how: “because of its history, Germany has a special responsibility to actively oppose the violation of gay men’s and lesbians’ human rights. In many parts of the world people continue to be persecuted for their sexuality, homosexual love remains illegal and a kiss can be dangerous.” This focus on liberal queer inclusion as a test of democracy is similar to some North American homonationalist narratives, where Germany is even praised as an example of queer politics for its connection to a redeemed violent past of persecutions.

The queer German Catechism has also been used to silence anti-racist intersectional queer scholarship. Together with their longstanding position on Palestine and feminist interventions in gender theory, which itself has caused controversy in German academic circles, philosopher and activist Judith Butler has borne the brunt of animus within mainstream gay circles. When Butler turned down a Civil Courage Award in Berlin in 2010 citing racism within the queer community, they became persona non grata for a large part of the German Left. Indeed, in declining this prize bestowed yearly by Germany's biggest Pride Event, Shortly thereafter, Butler and any scholar associated with them became the focus of intense political campaigns inside and outside of German academia. It became easy for gay chauvinists to reject critical queer scholarship by offering Butler up as a pagan hierophant to the Catechism. From the pages of the anti-deutsch magazine *Jungle World* to a whole series of books printed by the publisher Querverlag, the term queer itself was turned into an antisemitic epithet. Key concepts in the international literature around Homonationalism and Pink Washing became taboo inside and outside of German academia. Jasbir Puar and others joined the ranks of heretics and pagans for their work on post-colonial queer studies and Islamophobia. This has hindered queer and intersectional methodological investigations of Germany's gay, lesbian, and trans histories, to say nothing of shifting attention away from tangible, lived forms of antisemitism and Islamophobia that countless Jews and Muslims face in today's Germany. In other words, a repetition of and a national focus on the Gospel have blurred the line between denouncing antisemitic practices in the writing of history and the rhetorical use of essentialist tropes to discredit international scholarship.

Weaponizing the German Catechism, gay priests have not only managed to demonize queer and feminist theory, but they also seek to frame anti-racist and postcolonial scholarship as an attack on the *vivre ensemble*. Presenting queer and anti-racist critique as an antisemitic import has allowed cis gay white men in Germany to dismiss these criticisms as irrelevant and sinful. Beyond a critique of gay white supremacy, it also presents studies on intersectionality as some sort of rear guard attack on an anterior period of togetherness beyond categories and identities. Not only did contestation and conflict always exist in the queer community, but the creation of the community itself was based on a perspective of history and memory that wouldn't survive the inquisition nowadays. In other words, weaponizing the German Catechism has allowed cis white gay voices to ignore historic and ongoing tensions within Germany's queer communities. Instead, they claim to protect a memory and a contemporary politics of queer struggle that is universal, but which in actuality is cis, white, and male.

Displacing the blame onto the oppressed by using memory and national virtue is usually something seen on the right end of the spectrum. When members of the antideutscher left meet in a pub in the Berlin borough of Neukölln to discuss a so-called 'Muslim problem,' when international academic discussions on homonationalism are booed, and when Jewish queer voices are silenced by non-Jewish pundits, it is time to reshape our understanding of both antisemitism and racism in the queer community and in queer academia, beyond a sense of unbridled accomplishment and pride. Dirk Moses' intervention is important for our understanding of queer activism in Germany. Framing German memory as a sort of civic religion is provocative yet it pushes us to understand the complex ways in which social movements sometimes use its gospel to avoid reflection on race.

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# Border Exceptionalism

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This essay probes the structure of exceptionalism claims in German memorial culture by focusing on how the Berlin Wall is remembered both in monuments and in judicial engagements with border violence. In these disparate sites of memory, the Berlin Wall's uniqueness is emphasized to the detriment of drawing attention to the broader structures of border violence. The essay considers the effects of this "border exceptionalism," stressing that a more multidirectional memory of borders opens space for solidarity and political engagement across different borders.

What are memories good for? The debate about 'The German Catechism' (Moses) and 'multidirectional memory' (Rothberg) has surfaced many questions about nationalism, whiteness, and the relationship between antisemitism, islamophobia, and anti-Blackness. Which memories become public, and how are the relationships between different memories and the people who hold them narrated? Drawing on previous contributions to this debate, especially by Zoe Samudzi, Tiffany Florvil, and Mirjam Brusius, I want to add another layer and an apparent detour to this conversation. German memory practices not only feature an unwarranted "genocide exceptionalism" (Samudzi), but, I argue, this mode of exceptionalizing histories of violence extends to GDR history as well. Germany specializes in exceptionalisms. The memory of the Berlin Wall, authoritatively imprinted in physical monuments as well as Federal Supreme Court (Bundesgerichtshof, BGH) decisions on the deaths at the border, codify a "border exceptionalism" that treats the violence at the GDR/FRG border as uniquely violent and evil. This framing disallows multidirectional memory practices that would allow all residents of Germany to consider their current and past implication in the violence at the EU borders.

Dirk Moses' 'The German Catechism' powerfully speaks to the exclusion of racialized migrants and minorities from German memory culture. Muslims in particular are often projected as harbingers of antisemitism. Yet, as Fabian Wolff also points out, Moses' incisive contribution skirts the question of how East German voices and memory practices fit in this debate. Moses writes: "many German families witnessed the scene of generational confrontations during the 1960s and 1970s," and states ambiguously that during the 1980s, "the understanding of the Holocaust as historically special had broken through in the West." Where is East Germany in this picture? For most of my family, the defining event of 1968 was the Soviet Union's crushing of the Prague Spring followed by increased repression at home, not the student movement of the transnational West. As Tiffany Florvil has already suggested, we all stand to benefit from recovering different strands of memories—Black German, migrant German, but also East German—that allow for solidarities across different experiences. Migrants to Germany as well as East Germans come to the table with different family histories. Yet we are expected to not only learn about the history of (West) Germany, but also to master the appropriate emotions to be felt about important events. As Sara Ahmed has written, the boundaries of nations are constituted through shared emotions, what scholars call affects. Belonging requires the mastery of expected affects or, failing that, inconspicuous silence.

In the mid-2010s, I was invited to be part of a Canadian delegation discussing possible collaborations with a research institute in Berlin. After a long day of workshops and presentations, our hosts had planned one touristic activity before dinner at a nice restaurant. They guided our visit of the Berlin Wall

Memorial in Bernauer Strasse. I was familiar with the memorial: on my sabbatical, I had visited it while researching the prosecutions of border guards and their superiors. The memorial included a wall with the names and photographs of the people who had been shot along the Berlin Wall. Some of these names were familiar: the deaths of these young men had been investigated, prosecuted, and adjudicated in the court judgments I had pored over. Yet as I looked at this wall of victims, seeing 138 names (the current tally is 140), my thoughts wandered to the TV footage of the perilous journeys of migrants from Africa and the Middle East to European shores. “138 deaths is like a bad week in the Mediterranean,” I said, probably too loudly. There was no verbal response, only an icy glare. My affective reaction to the memorial to a border that had divided my family was judged to be out of place.

East German critiques of West German memory and legal practices are frequently rendered suspect as “*Ostalgie*” (nostalgia for the old East) or evidence of insufficient familiarity with West German ways. In preparing to write this essay, I went back to the Supreme Court decisions on the border deaths that I have researched, trying to connect my unease at the memorial with my unease about the legal judgments. Law isn’t a neutral site of adjudication. Law is memory. It is a practice of making certain pasts relevant and visible, of passing judgment on them, and on filing these judgments away for future study and citation. Under its technical and disciplined surface, German law is replete with ghosts: when former East German judges were on trial for “bending the law” (*Rechtsbeugung*) in the 1990s, their judges saw specters of the Nazi judges who had never been held accountable.

According to the Berlin Wall memorial, at least 140 people were killed at the Berlin Wall between 1961 and 1989. This number includes East German border guards. In 2015 alone, at least 2,078 migrants died in the Mediterranean in an effort to reach European shores to claim asylum. Numbers can become dehumanizing abstractions, but they can also become tools for grasping the enormity of the situation and for thinking across contexts.

It would be misleading to see the drowning deaths in the Mediterranean as accidental or unintentional: the EU penalizes ferries and airlines for bringing persons without entry permit into the EU, and Greece has prosecuted fishermen as well as NGO workers helping migrants to arrive safely. More recently, Italian authorities have detained the captain of a vessel that brought rescued migrants to an Italian port. In addition to using law as barbed wire, the EU weaponizes the sea itself: the merciless sun, the high waves, the salty waters, and the vast expanse of water that swallows boats, bodies, and dreams. Law has turned the sea into a Wall and criminalizes those who try to tear it down.

The Berlin Wall has become not only the symbol for the GDR “*Unrechtsstaat*,” but it has also been exceptionalized as a border regime. The West German State had never fully accepted the sovereignty of East Germany. In the trials of border guards for the killing of border crossers, the border was described as the “*innerdeutsche Grenze*” (intra-German border). Legal judgments not only decide on questions of law, they also mirror and enshrine social judgments on values and principles. In a 1993 judgment, the Federal Supreme Court described that the two border shooting victims wanted “to leave the GDR via the administrative boundary [*Bezirksgrenze*] between Treptow and Neukölln.” The desire to cross the border was rendered natural not only by downplaying the status of the Wall, but also by rendering all Germans collective victims of the border regime: “Germans from the GDR had particular reasons for wanting to cross the border to West Berlin and West Germany: they were connected to the people on the other side of the border as members of the same nation” and had “familial and other personal relationships.” In 1992 and 1993, the Federal Supreme Court saw this specific border as an obstacle to the values of

national and familial unity. During the same years, the German parliament negotiated and passed the “asylum compromise” that significantly restricted the rights of asylum seekers. In this logic, the Berlin Wall was wrong because it impeded the movement of Germans on German lands. The right to cross borders was turned into a privilege attached to whiteness and nationality.

The understanding of the Berlin Wall as an exceptional border is not only a product of law, but also of official and private commemorative practices largely driven by West Germans. Starting in 1971, an association of West Berlin citizens started to put up white crosses commemorating the people who have been killed trying to cross the Wall. This memorial project has taken different shapes throughout its history. In its current iteration, the crosses are installed at a location along the former border and within sight of the Bundestag building. Six crosses bear the names and dates of death of selected victims, and the seventh cross is dedicated to the “unknown” victims. In 2014, the Center for Political Beauty, a Berlin-based performance art collective emphasizing “moral beauty, political poetry, and human magnanimity” moved these crosses to sites along the EU external border. In the artists’ words: “The art installation of »white crosses« collectively left the city’s government quarters to escape the commemoration festivities for the fall of the Berlin wall’s 25th anniversary. In an act of solidarity, the victims fled to their brothers and sisters across the European Union’s external borders, more precisely, to the future victims of the wall. Since the fall of the iron curtain, the EU’s border has taken 30,000 lives.” The collective planned this unauthorized memorial mobility as a critique of “the self-involved German tradition of commemorating.” In photos accompanying the project, African migrants in legal limbo in Morocco are seen posing with the crosses that are commemorating East German border crossers. The photos are uncomfortable at many levels: they juxtapose the commemorated deaths of East Germans with the devalued lives of Africans about to embark on a perilous journey, posing questions about the differential grievability of lives lost at different borders.

The representatives of the political elites who had planned to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Berlin Wall only to find a gap where the crosses would have been condemned these actions as “lacking piety” and “theft.” The Center clarified that they never intended to keep the crosses; they merely took them on a journey to the new borders at which people are killed. The activists practiced a form of “multidirectional memory” (Rothberg) that tries to bring different injustices in relationship and conversation with one another. They state that their “fundamental conviction is that the legacy of the Holocaust is rendered void by political apathy, the rejection of refugees, and cowardice.” Their goal is to use the dominant ethical sensibility towards the Berlin Wall as a resource for denouncing EU actions and inactions in the Mediterranean.

If we look back at the Federal Supreme Court’s 1993 decision on criminal responsibility for the death of Chris Gueffroy, one of the victims named in the white crosses, we can see that the Court carefully separated Gueffroy’s attempted migration and death from the suffering at other borders. The Court described the building of the Berlin Wall as a “desperate situation” for citizens of East and West Germany because it tore families and the nation apart. Under these specific circumstances, the Court added, “unpaid aid to escape was widely understood by people on both side of the border as a humanitarian duty.” The Berlin Wall stood accused not as a border, but as a symbol of a state that was understood to illegitimately divide a nation. Aiding migrants was a patriotic act in divided Berlin, but the “humanitarian duty” was based on shared nationality and not shared humanity.

In a second “operation,” the Center for Political Beauty highlighted the deaths at the border in a more

visceral way. Reminding the public that the EU borders “are the world’s deadliest” and the victims “are buried in masses in the hinterland of Southern European states,” the Center, in its own words: “took these dead immigrants from the EU’s external borders right to the heart of Europe’s mechanism of defense: to the German capital.” The Center claims: “Together with the victims’ relatives, we opened inhumane graves, identified and exhumed the bodies and brought them to Germany.” It is not clear if the coffins that were ceremoniously buried in Berlin contained the bodies of border victims. The Center encouraged Germans to create “graves” in cities all over the countries, viscerally reminding citizens of the deadly consequences of EU policies. This “operation” was not uncontroversial in its focus on dead migrants without the inclusion of migrants within Germany and in its use of German Christian burial iconographies. Yet in bringing reminders of the deaths to Germany and bridging the spatial divide between the centers of political powers and the sites of death, the project raised important questions about the locus of responsibility. In his recent book, Michael Rothberg proposes the concept of the “implicated subject” as a position “aligned with power and privilege” without being direct “agents of harm” (1). Implicated subjects are produced in “interlocking systems of oppression” that leave very few people truly uninvolved in injustices (202). The point of this concept is to call for a responsibility beyond “legalistic guilt.” This focus on judgment beyond law is all the more important once we recognize that law is capable of justifying and legitimating grievous harms.

Thinking through different sites of border violence in juxtaposition and comparison, we can realize that many of us have found ourselves on different sides of a range of borders. This can be a basis for building solidarity and recognizing different forms of implication in border violence without denying differences. These conversations across current and former borders can also help us remember that it takes two to border. West Germany was implicated in the East German border regime by offering immediate citizenship to East Germans and by trading East German political prisoners for oranges (sometimes without the prisoners’ consent). Post-unification Germany is also implicated on both sides of the border crisis in the Mediterranean: many migrants have fled countries that have suffered under European colonialism, IMF/World Bank structural adjustment policies, and (in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan) decades of armed conflict driven by Western imperialism. The claim to border exceptionalism shares a defining feature with claims of genocide exceptionalism: the “shocking deprioritization of and disinterest in both living and dead Black people” (Samudzi).

Law and public memorials are important sites of designating injustices, victims, and perpetrators. Yet, as this reading of the Berlin Wall judgments alongside the criminalization of rescue in the Mediterranean border shows, these sites can easily be used to exceptionalize specific episodes and numb us to our implication in others. Solidarity requires that we develop a vocabulary for understanding different sites of oppression in their connectedness and that we start assuming responsibilities for one another beyond the law.

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# Refusing the Extended Hand

Fabian Wolff

In German memory culture, conviction doesn't merely trump substance, it can actively fight it. The adherents of the catechism obscure radical traditions from the past—and the reasons they often failed—and today. All the more reason to revive them, without repeating mistakes: the stakes couldn't be higher.

Allow me some genuine modesty: I come to you not as an historian but just as an unspecified writer—albeit one obsessed with history, and History. A historian by temperament, I'd like to think. So I'm not able to share something as incisive and substantial as the contributions by Zoé Samudzi, Mirjam Brusius, Sébastien Tremblay and Tiffany N. Florvil, for example. What I can offer are some autobiographical and anecdotal musings by someone who knows the “German Catechism” that Dirk Moses outlines inside and out and who has struggled with it through various identity markers, personal and familial: Jew, Communist, German.

The catechism Moses describes is of course a \*West\* German one. East Germany had its own doctrine—one that synthesized the perspective of both (some) survivors and (some) conquerors. The central figure was the liberated Buchenwald inmate—maybe Jewish, maybe not, but definitely antifascist, definitely a Communist, definitely a fighter. His (pretty much always his) solemn oath to socialist values was nationally universal, collective, certainly not tribalistic, and thus a useful story to be told to and adopted by East Germans who had sworn oaths of a different sort just a few years earlier.

Still, as late as the 1980's the Party officials who imprinted (another word for “enforced”) that oath onto the collective did in fact have moral legitimacy to understand themselves to have been, in the Antifascist struggle at least, on the right side, be it as veterans of the Spanish Civil War, resistance fighters in Germany and France or (and this is where it gets quite grey zone-y) as organizers of those struggles in their calamitous Soviet exile. Some, (or many, depending on who you ask) were Jews, and thus also knew about “*rassistische Verfolgung*”—racial persecution—in the parlance of the East German honorary pension system.

It's that doctrine that I grew up with, maybe even was raised in, augmented by attempts at personal de-Stalinization. It for the most part accurately reflected my family's histories. The part of Berlin I grew up in in the 1990s was filled with spectres and ghosts and History; as a young boy I shook the hands of people who had been peripherally involved with the Red Orchestra. When I turned 18 I had never met a Jew who also wasn't a Communist, in fact those two things seemed all but identical to me.

But I was surrounded by West Germany. While the new openness was appreciated, even gratefully, Germany remained the *Feindesland*, the land of the enemy, to slightly misapprehend Fritz Bauer's phrase—the land of old and new Nazis, a straight line from Luther to Hitler and beyond. The \*East\* Germany I heard about in anecdotes was antifascist, *solidarisch*, cosmopolitan and antiracist, through encounters with Angela Davis and visitors from Angola, Korea, Libya, and not just as exploited workers either.

Identifying with those values came naturally; Germany itself held no interest for me. It was only after spending real time with people who genuinely weren't German and trying to explain to them anything

from 1848 to the RAF that it dawned on me that German history was in fact \*interesting\*, and also something I had an emotional and intellectual connection to. I learned my German history not from Winkler and Wehler but from the Sterns, Fritz and Selma, Peter Gay, George Mosse, Sander Gilman.

The fact that those historians were all Jewish was comforting, reassuring—I wouldn't have to be afraid of suddenly stumbling into, I dunno, a comparison of Anne Frank and Ulrike Meinhof, or of the Jewish industrialist and the Nazi camp commandant, the way that could happen with even the most insightful German self-interrogators like Fassbinder.

Those historians' visions of Germany had something to offer, something alive, dare I say something warm. Something not as robotic and sterilely evil as the leftist quasi-antideutsche self-hatred. "*Aber hier leben? Nein danke*" (But living here? No thank you) went a popular slogan of those years, uttered by people who, I had already realized, actually didn't know anything other than Germany and Germanness, whose senses of self were inseparably tied to it.

Still, something connected me to those Germans, or so I thought. One, they were showing an intense desire to understand the Holocaust, a desire that at times even came close to understanding. Two, their rhetorical anti-Germanness was appealing. After all I spent most of my days trying to escape the fact that I was in fact living here. So what if they were goyim, so what if they talked a little too much about Israel for my liking.

I don't know when the rupture occurred but I think it was reading a piece in *taz* that accused Timothy Snyder of trivializing the Holocaust, through contextualizing it. His book *Bloodlands* is obviously not just controversial but debatable, maybe a bit too neat in its geographical focus and narrative shaping (I say not just as an Ehrenburg apologist). But Snyder's sense of empathy and suffering in his books *Bloodlands* and *Black Earth* are real, palpable. At no point did I think that Snyder was *gleichstellend* (equating) or *relativierend* (relativizing). But that was just what the *taz* writer accused him of: Snyder's big transgression was questioning the Holocaust's singularity.

The uneasiness of the *taz* writer (who is Jewish, which I think complicates matters only a tiny bit) was also real, maybe even understandable. He tried to counter Snyder's work with Lanzmann's distinctly metaphysical conception of the Holocaust, which is one that denies the validity of all metaphysics. Which is all good and well, I thought, but not really the point of historical scholarship?

It was around this time that I stopped caring about the question of "singularity". It's not that I disagree with that position, I just don't think it matters all that much. It doesn't—or shouldn't—matter in making a case for the safety of Jews, for fighting Fascism, for remembering the dead and their lives and worlds.

Germany's insistence on numbers—one number, really, six million—increasingly struck me as inhumane. I grew sick of the rote phrases of German memory culture (*Erinnerungskultur*). Take "industrial destruction" (*industrielle Vernichtung*), for example. It's not just the coldness, nor the inaccuracy, the way it erases victims of more chaotic shooting actions and disease in ghettos. I'm not feeling polemical enough to claim that there's a secret kind of pride behind it, but I do know this: it's a maximalist statement that is constantly seeking to affirm its own maximalism.

I started to do little experiments. How much did the Germans around me actually know—especially

those who always talked about how deeply “*angefasst*”, touched, they were when they had toured a camp memorial site in high school or read one of the countless (and nameless) books about “this unimaginable horror”. They knew about Nazis, to be sure, but not about the lives of Jews in Lyon, Brody, Thessaloniki, Czernowitz who were murdered. In fact most of the six million Jews magically became German in their mind: the sort of educated and friendly, even patriotic, Jewish neighbour they so longed for. I started to avoid most Germans whenever I could, finding home and belonging in a sphere of Germany’s undesirables.

A few weeks ago I wrote an essay about the limits of what Jews can say in Germany, about their own history, about Israel. Those limits are asserted not just through admonishment and hostility—Germans denouncing antizionist Jews as antisemitic and self-hating and the like—but also through paternalistic concern. Sure, it’s fine for Jews in Israel and the US to think and say certain things, the refrain goes, but not in Germany, not with its history, not among Germans.

I’m not unsympathetic to that concern, especially when it comes from other Jews who were raised on some variation of “not in front of the gentiles”. I’m less convinced that the people who make that argument really do think that it’s “fine”—it seems to me that they are also troubled by a critique of Israel when it comes from, for example, American Jews in the US. It’s just easier for them to ignore there. This, if you permit me this bit of jargon, locational epistemology, is of course absurd and goes against everything being Jewish as part of a collective stands for. Even the people who indulge in it should recognize that but often don’t. I still remember the hand-wringing admission of a firm believer in the IHRA definition on Twitter that it’s okay for a Jew in New York to call for a boycott of Israel, but if that Jew gets on a plane and does the same in Berlin it’d be antisemitic. (The joke, if you want to call it that, is that according to the IHRA definition it’d in fact be antisemitic anywhere.)

I had little use for the German branch of “Antisemitism research and combating” (*Antisemitismusforschung und -bekämpfung*) that’s based on the IHRA definition and some unseemly brew of Critical Theory, pseudo-leftist self-loathing and parochial whiteness before; I have even less use for it now. Just as I don’t know how you can separate the discourse around fighting antisemitism from the perspectives and needs of actual Jews—all Jews—I don’t quite understand how at times frantic concern for antisemitic undertones of Israel debates can be divorced from the realities of the region.

But that is apparently what is happening. People—in this case Jews and Germans in Germany—who usually greet every instance of antizionism with a level of alarm as if the unspeakable is once again around the corner suddenly got real quiet precisely at the moment when it became very hard to make any kind of moral case for the IDF’s actions. They only raised their voices again when there were clear examples of antisemitism in Germany to denounce. The reason to me is clear: they don’t actually care what is happening in Israel and Palestine, which would be perfectly okay if they weren’t constantly policing how others, most of all Palestinians and Israelis, are speaking about a conflict that’s directly impacting their lives.

This policing—as policing is liable to do—does not make life safer for Jews, on the contrary. It stands in the way of mutual understanding and constantly threatens the seeds of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue that could blossom in Germany, that unlikeliest of exiles for both parties.

It also threatens antiracist struggles. We are in some ways in the first stages of a genuine racial

reckoning, ushered in by BIPOC activists, writers and academics and some white allies, who are themselves standing on the shoulders of generations of thinkers who were silenced, marginalized and persecuted by Germany. Against all odds there's a growing awareness of German colonial crimes and genocide, and of structural racism. But something very ominous and potentially lethal is taking shape in German culture: a whiteness backlash. The alleged "structural antisemitism" of intersectional thought and BlackLivesMatter, to name just two right-wing scares, are decried not just in conservative rags but self-declared Leftist publications in Germany.

This wounded whiteness now wants to use, abuse, the memory of the Holocaust to defend itself.

Honest, even noble attempts to deepen our understanding of the Holocaust, through contextualizing it in the history of colonialism or anti-Blackness for example, are greeted in Germany with hostility and hypocrisy. That scares and sickens me, both as a Jew who wants to fight racism, and as a Jew intent on understanding and remembering the Holocaust. In the end this country's memory culture is designed to just serve the country, not memory or culture. There's a Celan quote I sometimes think of, about the German's "reversal" in their attitude towards the Jew: only they who "with their very own pain have been with the hook-nosed and tattling and crooked dead of Auschwitz and Treblinka and other places will meet the eye and its almond".

The Germans, on the whole, have thoroughly refused to accept that challenge, or invitation. It was never truly about the Jews, never truly about the victims. I'd like to rescue the term "antideutsch" because it strikes me as a worthwhile endeavour. I really don't trust German self-satisfaction, not the extended hand, not the pointed finger. All the rote phrases, the harping on the industrial nature of the killing, the numbers, but also the stereotyped, distorted image of the victims, the Germanification of European Jews: I have come to believe that these are ploys that Germans, well-meaning and not so well-meaning, use to trick themselves into caring.

Where does that leave those who truly care about the pain and the suffering, who want to be there with the dead, who want to fight for justice, and who also recognize the nature of Celan's "other places"? Not in a great spot, admittedly. Embattled, surrounded, *im Feindesland* once again. As a Jew in Germany I pledge not to give up, and as a Jew in Germany I plead: please don't give up. These Germans are desperate. The contradictions are becoming too grand to ignore, the chasm between their stated ideals and the reality of their intellectual engagement too wide. Stating basic truths and facts over and over again is a thankless task, and in many ways a distraction from real historical scholarship, but it's necessary, lest Germans truly relapse into barbarism again.

And if all of this makes me sound like a reeducation officer stationed in postwar Germany then so be it. I mean: nice work if you can get it.

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# Atonement at the Expense of Another

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What does it mean to atone for a crime against humanity? And how can a nation meaningfully repent for its past if it makes another nation pay the price for this repentance? These two questions go to the heart of Germany's grappling with its genocidal past. Germany's elaborate moral calculus of historical reflection has tied the expiation of its sin to the formation and security of Israel as a Jewish state. Yet Germany and Germans have consistently overlooked the obvious fact that a Jewish state in Palestine has come at the expense of the non-Jewish Palestinian natives of that land. Palestine and the Palestinians have been the sacrificial offerings for a rebirth of postwar philoZionist liberal Western morality; in fact, they are the embodiment of the immorality of this morality.

What does it mean to atone for a crime against humanity? And how can a nation meaningfully repent for its past if it makes another nation pay the price for this repentance? These two questions go to the heart of Germany's grappling with its genocidal past. Historian Dirk Moses' provocative essay distills what he describes as a new "German Catechism" on the Holocaust. Moses delineates the main points of this catechism, which include the idea that Germany has a special loyalty to the state of Israel. Because of this loyalty, the catechism equates antizionism with antisemitism, which itself is considered a unique form of prejudice distinct from racism.

The descendants of the perpetrators of the Holocaust have expiated the sins of their ancestors by declaring a moral and material commitment to a foreign state that, in turn, claims to represent the Jewish people. In 1952, West Germany committed itself to paying reparations to Israel, which a year later commenced building its famous World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Yad Vashem. Less well-known is the fact that this Israeli museum and memorial complex is situated across the valley from the now erased village of Deir Yassin, where an infamous massacre of Palestinian villagers occurred in April 1948. What is the relationship between this unacknowledged proximity and the unacknowledged foundation of postwar German repentance? Israel, after all, was established at the expense of another people, the indigenous Palestinian population, whom it actively victimizes to this day: comprehensively, systematically, cruelly, and above all, with Western-enabled impunity.

I remain horrified by the monstrosity of the Holocaust. Having walked across the stumbling stones—the Stolpersteine—of Berlin and visited many memorials in the rebuilt capital of the former Nazi empire to mark the various locations where German Jews were deported to their deaths, I am repeatedly shocked by the extent and nature of that genocide. I also appreciate the seriousness, scale and ubiquity of the critical architecture of the commemoration of war in Berlin, even if I understand that this is as much a function of crushing wartime German defeat as it is a genuine, difficult, and dynamic German coming to terms with the past.

The dominant representation of Nazi horror is consistently, and from an American standpoint conveniently, insulated from a broader, general, and globalized Western colonial system of terror that enveloped hundreds of millions of "inferior" or "lesser" or "uncivilized" peoples. There is, after all, a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (and similar museums in many other U.S. cities), but no similar national museum dedicated to recalling the genocide of Native peoples in America. Although Germany's public repentance of its Nazi past has inspired debate in the United States

about its own racist history, there is still no national museum devoted to remembering the systematic calculated brutality and horror of the enslavement of Africans and their descendants for centuries, or the nuclear massacres of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One attempt by the Smithsonian Museum to acknowledge the premeditated and unprecedented U.S. annihilation of tens of thousands of children, women, and men in a single moment in August 1945 Hiroshima prompted a ferocious backlash. Some horrors can be safely denounced, while others continue to be rationalized, justified, or ignored.

And like others from worlds disfigured by Western colonialism, I have been struck by how Germany refused until very recently to address its own colonial past. Before the Holocaust, German colonialists committed the genocide of the Herrero and Nama peoples in German Southwest Africa. I still recall how an administrator at the prestigious Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin—a very nice man and brilliant scholar—once looked at me quizzically during a talk I gave on colonialism. Germany, he gently admonished me, had no colonial past. His perspective reflected not outright cynicism, but rather the conventional Eurocentric liberalism of his day. His view, in any case, is now outdated. Moses' account insists that the new catechism is able to acknowledge other genocides while still maintaining that the Holocaust is, in fact, not morally comparable to any other act of mass murder. It is the Holocaust; the rest are specific lower-case genocides.

But Palestine is not southwest Africa. Palestine is not ignored just because it is non-Western. It is actively denied and repressed in a manner different from the manner in which anti-blackness and German colonial rule are elided. Palestine is utterly essential and paradoxically invisible in Germany's elaborate moral calculus of historical reflection. Because Germany has tied the expiation of its sin to Israel's formation and security as a *Jewish* state, it consistently overlooks the obvious fact that a Jewish state in Palestine has come at the expense of the non-Jewish Palestinian natives of that land. As a settler-colonial state, Israel has been built, and continues to be built deliberately, road by road, and settlement after settlement, on the ruins of Palestinian Arab society and history. Palestine and the Palestinians have been the sacrificial offerings for a rebirth of postwar philoZionist liberal Western morality; in fact, they are the embodiment of the immorality of this morality.

The central question needs to be restated thus: what kind of morality is it that comes at another people's *ongoing* expense? If Israel as a Jewish state is indeed part of postwar Germany's *Staatsräson* as Moses reminds us (and even part of its *raison d'être* as Angela Merkel suggested in 2008 by insisting that Germany has a "special historical responsibility for Israel's security" and that this responsibility "is part of why my country exists"), does that not mean that Palestinian suffering as permanent second-class non-Jewish citizens in a Jewish state is also part of a penitent Germany's *Staatsräson*? Does Germany's avowed commitment to Israel as a Jewish state mean that the oppression of Palestinians under apartheid rule that exists to maintain Jewish supremacy over non-Jews across historic Palestine is also part of Germany's *Staatsräson*? And is the inability of Palestinian exiles and refugees to exercise their legal and legitimate right to return to their homes and lands also part of Germany's *Staatsräson*?

To then be told with "moral hubris" (as Moses describes it) that to oppose this colonial Zionism makes one an anti-Semite adds insult to injury: it returns us to where this fateful moral triangle began and to the idea that some peoples, some histories, and the humanity of some, count, and others do not—at least not as much. We are back, then, not only to an insidious hierarchy of suffering, but also to an even more insidious hierarchy of humanity with all that is attendant on it. This hierarchy contributes to the eerie silence that surrounds the question of Palestine in Germany, and to a palpable awkwardness in the room

when unfettered Palestinians and other Arabs, as well as progressive anti-Zionist Jews, talk about Palestine in Germany or the West—when they are allowed to speak at all that is. Palestinian humanity and history haunt a profoundly Eurocentric philosemitism that grapples with European Nazi evil and its European Jewish victims. Palestine and Palestinians cannot enter this world except as docile mutes who submissively abide by its rules or as antisemitic fanatics if they don't. They are, in effect, specters who intrude intermittently in a moral universe that has no place for them, only to be exorcized through the now ritualized philo-Zionism.

The problem of this sanctimonious morality and myopia, in fairness, began long before the Holocaust and is not just Germany's. Zionism as a political movement emerged in nineteenth-century Europe to answer a European "Jewish Question." Racial antisemitism was a European nationalist disease that emerged during the high era of Western colonialism and racism. Zionism's leaders were all from Central or Eastern Europe—not one emerged from the ancient Jewish communities of the Ottoman, Arab, or Islamic worlds. These leaders proposed Zionism, or a Jewish nationalism in a separate Jewish state outside of Europe, as the only solution to the scourge of European antisemitism. They settled on Palestine as the location of this national home because of its important connection to Jewish faith and history.

But European Zionists could imagine implementing their nationalist ideology in a non-European land precisely because they belonged to a European world that, by the late nineteenth century, had displaced, removed, annihilated, or, paradoxically, claimed to civilize, tutor, and uplift native peoples around the world. Western colonizers approached these people "without history" as anthropologist Eric Wolff once put it, and sought to either "elevate" them into meaningful history or permanently remove them from it. It is not a coincidence that the fantasy to transform Palestine into a nationalist Jewish state and to see it as a "land without a people for a people without a land" coincided with European depravities in colonized Africa, and specifically with the German annihilation of black peoples in colonized southwest Africa, the U.S. extermination of Native peoples, and the institutionalization of racial segregation in the U.S. South. Theodor Herzl wrote in 1896 that "We should there [in Palestine] form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism."

Colonial Zionism set out to build an exclusive ethnoreligious state in a multireligious land. When the Palestinian Arab natives protested that a Jewish state would inevitably come at their expense, they were dismissed, deported, and violently pacified by British colonial forces. After 1917, Britain put into place the military, political, and legal structures to realize Zionist political ambitions in Palestine, pretending all the while that the drive to create a Jewish state could somehow be reconciled with the "civil and religious" rights of the majority population. For the European Zionist colonizers and for their British imperial protectors, democracy was out of the question in Palestine. The Palestinian Arabs were both the native and majority population, and the Europeans knew this. The Russian-born Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann confessed in 1918 to Arthur Balfour that the "brutal numbers operate against us."

The British Peel Commission of 1937 first suggested partition of Mandate Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. The commission recognized that any partition plan would be grotesquely unfair to the Arab majority, since Arabs owned most of the land and constituted the overwhelming majority of the population, and it was Arab lands and homes that were to be turned over to create a Jewish state. After having been reassured for two decades that their civil and religious rights would be protected, Palestinians were to be coerced into making way for a Jewish state. This state would be populated

primarily by European Jews, many of whom had arrived after the rise of Nazism, at a time when neither the United States nor Britain were willing to open their own sovereign doors to the mass of desperate Jewish refugees.

In their conclusion to their report recommending partition, the Peel Commission explained its rationale for this manifest injustice against Palestinians. It stated that “Considering what the possibility of finding a refuge in Palestine means to many thousands of suffering Jews, we cannot believe that the ‘distress’ occasioned by Partition, great as it would be, is more than Arab generosity can bear. And in this, as in so much else connected with Palestine, it is not only the peoples of that country that have to be considered. The Jewish problem is not the least of the many problems which are disturbing international relations at this critical time and obstructing the path to peace and prosperity. If the Arabs, at some sacrifice, could help to solve that problem, they would earn the gratitude, not of the Jews alone, but of all the Western World.”

This extraordinary reasoning predates Kristallnacht and the Holocaust. Yet it also anticipates the post-Holocaust “German catechism” that Dirk Moses explores. Like the authors of the new German catechism, the colonialists of the Peel Commission invoked the moral imperative of the suffering of Jews to justify the oppression of colonized non-Jews *outside of Europe*, women and men who were neither the authors of Jewish suffering nor responsible for the Western world’s “Jewish problem.” But unlike the authors of the new German catechism, they at least acknowledged that Arabs were going to suffer to expiate the sins of the Western world. To this insidious colonial logic of morality, as well as to that of the postcolonial new German catechism, the best answer has already been given. In 1938, George Antonius concluded his ode to Arab history and humanity with the following words:

The treatment meted out to the Jews in Germany and other European countries is a disgrace to its authors and to modern civilisation; but posterity will not exonerate any country that fails to bear its proper share of the sacrifices needed to alleviate Jewish suffering and distress. To place the brunt of the burden upon Arab Palestine is a miserable evasion of the duty that lies upon the whole of the civilised world. It is also morally outrageous. No code of morals can justify the persecution of one people in an attempt to relieve the persecution of another.

His words ring as true today as they did nearly a century ago. They might yet form the basis of a new secular catechism of repentance tied to accountability, one that is fully denationalized and truly universalized—and one that values and relates the equal humanity, history, and dignity of all the oppressed, everywhere.

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# The Philosophers Have Only Interpreted the World...

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Chiselled into the marble wall of Humboldt University's grand main building in Berlin is the famous quote (often ill-used, not least by the SED regime) from Karl Marx: 'Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.'

In this eleventh and final of his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx wasn't dismissing philosophy per se, nor indeed philosophers like himself, as bourgeois. Rather, he was making a point about praxis, the integration of theory and practice. This pithy, dot-point summary, which was the starting point of a broader critique laid out by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* taking aim at poor materialist critiques of religion and theology, could be crudely précised as 'context! context! context!'

These days part of the university's former East German heritage, the quote's original installation was less public memorial and more ideological caveat. Nevertheless, there seems to be a lesson here for the present debate. I have often found my mind wandering to the *Theses* not only in relation to this set of responses to Dirk Moses' piece on the German Catechism, but a wider set of intellectual, political and public discussions currently underway over questions of historical and continued imperialist and genocidal violence, and their implications for geopolitics but also domestic security and everyday life.

The first time I ever attended a political panel about the 'Palestine question' in Germany was in 2007 in the main building of Humboldt University, up the marble staircase past Marx's 11th thesis. In the discussion time, many of the contributions seemed to implicitly support a two-state solution. When my turn came, I argued that the two-state solution often worked like a corridor pass for those who couldn't bear confronting the logic of Zionism and the question of a Palestinian right of return. This seemed fairly uncontroversial to me in the context of a left-wing activist conference, coming as I did from the Australian Marxist left and having cut my political teeth on the issue of settler colonialism, land and genocide in that context. But some audience members stared as though I had descended from Mars. My German was admittedly intermediate, but I felt like something more was being lost in translation. I later wrote about this sense of deep cognitive political dissonance, which I know has been shared by many other activist immigrants to Germany.

German public discourse over Palestine has long been an object lesson in 'cancellation', even before that concept was a thing. Occasionally we see a thaw, only to see things quickly refrozen. The illustrious line of cancelled critics of Israel includes not just Norman Finkelstein but Jewish American philosopher Judith Butler, Jewish Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, and the elected Palestinian member of Israel's Knesset, Haneen Zoabi. German scholars too, such as Helga Baumgarten, have been smeared as Hamas apologists. The high-profile Mbembe affair, as others before me here have pointed out, is only the latest, but the very fact that it attracted such immense public attention and had such huge ripple effects is, in my view, a sign of a more significant thaw, deep in the permafrost of the 'German Catechism'. The seemingly pre-scripted intellectual pearl-clutching in response to Moses' frankly mild scholarly provocation, not to mention those by Michael Rothberg and Jürgen Zimmerer, strikes me as dreary rather than chilling, at times bordering on an intellectual storm in a Meißner teacup, threatening to spill little

more than weak black tea over the latest Feuilleton broadsheet.

Often the debate lacks connection to actual, practical political struggles that are playing out not only in the salons but on the streets, in local parliaments, public treasuries, community services, cultural clubs, theatres and even private social networks. If these intellectuals are merely interpreting the world in various ways, fretting over whether the religious overtones of the term ‘Catechism’ are historically, philosophically or symbolically justified, then who is changing it? As Zoe Samudzi challenged—echoed by Tiffany Florvil and others—what is really at stake here? And for whom?

This is why, when a photograph of one of the intellectual giants of post-colonial and anti-imperial critique in the twentieth century throwing a rock at an Israeli guardhouse in Southern Lebanon in the summer of 2000 was virally shared on social media during May 2021, I began once again to ponder the question: ‘What do German intellectuals do with Edward Said?’

For I have noticed that there are two parallel and seemingly disconnected critical discussions taking place over how, in Germany, the memory and erasure respectively of the Holocaust and colonial crimes are weaponised in the service of present-day political objectives concerning Palestine, racism and fascism. One is among academic historians and political scientists who, with some notable exceptions, research German politics and history at universities *outside* Germany, some of whom have a semi-high public profile, but most of whom still struggle to get their opinions published in mainstream papers. The other is among activists in the revolutionary and socialist left and the anti-racism movement inside Germany, including minority ethnic networks, communities, political organisations and human rights campaign groups, with one or two semi-semi-high profile politicians from marginal political parties. Arguably there is a third arena in the German bourgeois cultural and research sectors, including peak representative bodies of religious communities and establishment political figures with relevant offices and titles.

I mostly only care about the first two, but aside from having in common that they are in different ways marginal to the German mainstream, it seems to me that they don’t speak to each other at all. There have been some recent exceptional crossovers, such as the ‘This is Germany’ Instagram video initiative and Fabian Wolff’s magnificent recent essay in *Die Zeit*, which was shared and read widely in activist networks. But as far as I can see, not enough of the scholars participating in the debates (even this one on New Fascism Syllabus) are in touch with, or even aware of the grassroots activist interventions within Germany. I don’t just mean the historical activist scholars that Florvil describes in her excellent piece, but those in the here and now, too.

What of important contributions by activist scholars such as Ármin Langer, co-founder of the important Salaam-Shalom initiative in Berlin in 2013, whose excellent 2016 book *Ein Jude in Neukölln: Mein Weg zum Miteinander der Religionen (A Jew in Neukölln: My Path to Coexistence of the Religions)* presented a forceful rejection—based on personal activist experience—of the weaponization of antisemitism in the service of Islamophobia? A Hungarian international student at the Abraham Geiger Rabbinical College in Potsdam, Langer was expelled after publicly criticising the leader of the German Central Council of Jews, Josef Schuster, for advocating a cap on (Muslim) refugees. Schuster and other high-ranking Jewish community spokespeople such as Daniel Alter, who warned that the Berlin district of Neukölln was ‘unsafe for Jews’ due to the high number of Muslims, were ‘sounding the same horn as Sarrazin, Buschkowsky and the AfD’, according to Langer.

Salaam-Shalom, by contrast, sought to demonstrate how Jews and Muslims could work together to fight racism. Another participant in Salaam-Shalom was activist scholar Yossi Bartal. A queer Jewish, former Israeli investigative journalist who publishes regularly in newspapers such as the TAZ, Bartal is an active public intellectual with strong links to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Now also a member of the Left Party (Die Linke), Bartal was once spectacularly refused entry to the beloved leftist techno club about:blank because he was wearing a keffiyeh. It is through such voices that we learn, for example, that a multicultural festival with the name ‘Open Neukölln’ had banned Jewish and Palestinian locals from participating. Or that a critical culture festival in Freiburg with the name ‘Dear White People...’ had cancelled a workshop on anti-Palestinian racism following pressure from funding bodies.

Together with queer artist, sex worker activist and former Israeli Liad Kantorowicz-Hussein, Bartal has held important public political interventions on what Rutgers professor Jasbir Puar has labelled as ‘homonationalism’ and pinkwashing in relation to Israel’s queer politics, with one meeting at the Berlin club and café Südblock in Kreuzberg even attracting the attendance of representatives from the Israeli Embassy. Both have been active members of the Queers Against Pinkwashing group which has been subject to repeated (even physical) attacks by pro-Zionist anti-Germans in the left and gay scenes.

This is to say nothing of the interventions by the Palestinian communities themselves. Bizarrely, the corona crisis has opened up new opportunities for circumventing ‘cancellation’ on German soil by making global conversations more accessible to activists on the ground here. Although previous in-person visits to Germany have faced threats of cancellation and harassment, Palestinian Knesset member Haneen Zoabi spoke virtually on a recent panel on ‘Discussing Palestine in Germany’ organised by the Left Internationals group (a group of non-German leftists in Germany) together with Member of the German parliament Christine Buchholz and Director of the Einstein Forum in Potsdam and member of the Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit Susan Neiman. This was just one recent example of activist intellectuals and activist politicians coming together to discuss both theory and practice in context; many scholars eschew such forums.

At another virtual meeting on ‘Said’s Palestine’ hosted by the University of California Humanities Research Institute moderated by Judith Butler, four activist scholar panel members teased out the dual shifts of hardening/radicalising rightward Zionism and the increasing visibility and confidence of the global Palestine solidarity movement following a provocative intervention by Columbia scholar Nadia Abu El-Haj, who argued that even liberal Zionists inside Israel are caught up on the ‘trauma of the perpetrator’. They wring their hands in agonised sympathy over the Nakba but are on the whole unwilling to confront or admit the need for fundamental—or indeed, as Marx said in his *Theses on Feuerbach*—revolutionary change. On the question of religious symbolism and memorialisation, another panel member, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian of Hebrew University, made chilling observations about the sacralisation of political violence, on ‘killability’ and ‘livability’, who counts as a human, as a child, etc.: ‘I look out my window in Jerusalem and literally see mobs dancing on the graves of Palestinians’. For this reason, she noted, linking the struggle to Black Lives Matter was important precisely because of its radical politics and radical analysis. ‘Black Lives Matter is Palestinian Lives Matter. George Floyd is part of us.’

The ‘trauma of the perpetrator’ is a notion that can easily apply to the German state and its political bodies (and here I agree with the criticism levelled at Moses for his fuzzy, ill-defined ‘elites’). But this goes for the intellectual establishment too, if they insist on divorcing the question of genocide and its

persisting legacies and present-day forms from political struggle, treating the debate as an academic one. While I, like Marx, do not at all seek to belittle the importance of interpretive debates, I do suspect that at least some of the quibbling over the ‘Catechism’ concept is a useful distraction. Of course, responding to Paula Villa Braslavsky in this discussion, this refusal of nuance is not specific to Germany, but neither is false equivalence. In an Australian live TV panel discussion in late May, Palestinian-Australian activist and novelist Randa Abdel-Fattah was challenged for a response by an audience member whose son’s dog in Israel—unable to fit in the family’s safe room—had suffered trauma from Hamas rockets. And like the directives given to journalists at Deutsche Welle, Australian journalists, too, have been warned with disciplinary action for not complying with specific rules around terminology designed to erase the violence of the occupation. Unsurprisingly, some of the most incisive critiques of the Australian context have come from Indigenous activist scholars who recognise the links, for example, ‘From Gadigal Land to Gaza’.

On El-Haj’s other observation of the dual shift—a hardening of the pro-Israeli position along the lines of ‘well, sure, the IDF has killed 66 children but so be it’ and a simultaneous growth of human rights sentiment in solidarity with Palestine—I put this question to Palestinian activist scholar and journalist Majed Abusalama at a panel discussion on 5 June 2021 around the topic of ‘Palestine: Opportunities and Limits of Discourse’, organised, again, by the Left Internationals group in cooperation with Palästina Spricht (Palestine Speaks) and Jüdische Stimme für gerechten Frieden in Nahost (Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East). Originally titled ‘Cancel Palestine’, this was the workshop cancelled twice by the Open Neukölln festival mentioned above. Having just outlined how his mother had called him from Gaza on 13 May ‘as if she is saying good bye’ he replied with another question: ‘How many of my family members have to die while we wait for yet another shift?’

And what of the 15,000+ people from the Palestinian community in Berlin and their supporters who repeatedly marched in May and June for an end to the bombing? I witnessed the German police response with my own eyes—young men aged between 20-30 wearing keffiyehs were very obviously singled out and escorted away from public gatherings, ostensibly for breaching hygiene restrictions, but not the elderly, white Jewish women standing shoulder to shoulder with them in solidarity. What do the academics, intellectuals, philosophers and historians have to say to the working class, non-scholar Palestinian-Germans who live in my neighbourhood and, though happy to see me, a white person, wearing my Palestinian keffiyeh while out walking my dog, nevertheless note how much more of a risk it is for them to do so. ‘People accuse me of antisemitism if I wear mine around’, said one young man. ‘I have to be careful.’ Some have been slightly confused, asking ‘do you know what this means?’, assuming that I must think along the lines of the Catechism, until they learn that I am not German.

Despite the thaw and all of these new conversations, the fear of cancellation in Germany and beyond remains real for activists-who-are-also-intellectuals. It is no accident that most of the contributors here, the organisers of the Left Internationals group, and the various online virtual forums that have been consumed and watched by people located in Germany have not been Germans. For many, unlike Frank Biess, it’s because they have not yet extracted themselves from the Catechism. For others, it is simply personal terror. One of the brightest and sharpest activist-intellectual minds I know on the topic of Israel-Palestine discourse in Germany recently told me he had ceased posting on social media because he is currently on the job market as a precarious Early Career Researcher. I noted how much I appreciated the social media commentaries of other activist intellectuals such as Ghassan Hage, to which my friend retorted, ‘Ghassan Hage is tenured af [as f@#ck]’.

But even intellectual giants are not safe: the AFP photograph of Edward Said's rock-throwing nearly got him cancelled. Reports of the action quickly went viral in the international press (eg. here and here), sparking an energetic campaign by pro-Israel faculty and organisations to have him dismissed from Columbia University.

While the act itself had been a light-hearted, 'symbolic gesture of joy', the whole affair sent Said into a depression which his daughter later described as 'the beginning of the end of my father's spirit'. 'The assumption was that I was throwing stones at someone', he explained in an interview shortly after it happened, 'But there was nobody there.' Israel had already pulled out of Southern Lebanon.\* It seems additionally poignant that there is some debate over whether the man in the centre of the frequently cropped photo is the philosopher, or rather the other figure to the left of the frame, often only visible as a disembodied leg.

[\* See p. 446 and p. 339 for Said's own reflections.]

My take on Moses' Catechism piece is that it is an excellent, much needed intervention and its polemical tone was well-judged to strike up precisely these and other responses. More of this is a good thing. Could Moses' piece have been published in Germany? Perhaps, though the number of conceivably willing publications (Freitag? Junge Welt? Neues Deutschland?) is always small, and they are inevitably marginal or associated with the 'loony left'. For me, what the piece is missing is the praxis—the connection to political movements, an indication of where the intellectual debate can lead and how it can help us in the political struggle for human rights, for reparations, not just for acknowledging the crimes of the past in order to reify them into a political weapon against today's oppressed, and—for God's sake!—not to perpetuate Catechistic *Sonderweg* approaches to global political problems.

To lay my cards on the table as others in this series have done: I have no personal, ancestral skin in the game. Nor am I a Holocaust scholar, though I am active in memory and museum studies, including a stint as a postdoctoral researcher at the Natural History Museum in Berlin, working on a collaborative project with various Australian Indigenous organisations, curators and museums and the German Foundation for Lost Art, Ethnographic Museum and Botanical Gardens. I am not Jewish or Palestinian or Black, but my Northern Irish Catholic emigrant parentage and my upbringing as a white person in Australia does give me some personal perspective on empire. More importantly than any of that, I come from a political (and intellectual) tradition built up by revolutionary socialists Tony Cliff (born Yigael Glückstein) and Chanie Rosenberg (who passed away this week at the age of 99), who emigrated from Palestine to Britain in 1947, where they founded one of the most important groups of the post-war British left in the spirit of Marx, Luxemburg, Lenin and Gramsci. It is impossible for me to separate the history of imperialism from the geopolitics of today, much less to treat scholarship as though it were a purely intellectual endeavour. I ask myself how memory culture around the Holocaust in Germany can avoid colonial associations—the Balfour declaration was a British manoeuvre, to be sure, but it laid the groundwork for Germany's post-war Israel solution.

So how can progressive intellectuals avoid cutting themselves off from the struggle on the ground? How can we inspire one another to overcome the fear of cancellation and what strategies can we develop to avoid it really happening? How can the become—and remain—activist scholars?

Perhaps Said's excoriation of Sartre, De Beauvoir and Foucault after meeting them in 1979 can serve as

a cautionary reminder:

I guess we need to understand why great old men are liable to succumb either to the wiles of younger ones, or to the grip of an unmodifiable political belief. It's a dispiriting thought, but it's what happened to Sartre. With the exception of Algeria, the justice of the Arab cause simply could not make an impression on him, and whether it was entirely because of Israel or because of a basic lack of sympathy—cultural or perhaps religious—it's impossible for me to say.

Philosophers can always interpret the world in various ways, but they can also be active in changing it.

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# Dialectic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

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The occasion for my article, “The German Catechism,” were the bitter polemics directed against Michael Rothberg and Jürgen Zimmerer’s work in Germany, so I was expecting a similarly petulant response to my intervention. That it would spark such an extensive international debate about German memory and the Holocaust has surprised many, however. The debate is not my invention of course. The tinder was very dry; only a spark was required to ignite the flame.

I had been warned about the tinder. The German journal that accepted “German Catechism” for its June issue decided to delay publication because the editors felt the public was unable to discuss the issues rationally. After reading my piece in the Swiss *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, which published it immediately, a German historian colleague wrote to me thus: “Die Hysterie und Überdrehtheit vieler aktueller historischer ‘Debatten’ in Deutschland ... ist unglaublich. Der Rufmord gehört inzwischen fest dazu ...” (The hysteria and over-the-topness of many current historical ‘debates’ in Germany ... is unbelievable. Character assassination is an integral part of it...) They have been proven correct. Ask the intellectual, Carolin Emcke, who conservative politicians attacked after she made perfectly reasonable links between between conspiracy thinking, including antisemitism, in the past and present.

So, what is that tinder? It is the dialectic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). Until about 2008, it was a civil-society driven process of working through the Nazi past that had served a progressive function. Over time, however, this hardened into a state-sanctioned, state-directed political religion presided over by a priestly class of politicians and journalists who try to enforce the orthodoxy on an increasingly diverse population. What started with authentic sensibilities of guilt, shame, and genuine insight has ossified into a quasi-religious righteousness that now underwrites the “project” of German democracy, German reunification, and a German-led European Union.

The reactionary function of the Catechism is evident in the effort of the state to discipline those groups—above all racialized minorities/Germans of “migration background”—who are advocating for a full reckoning with the past. Michael Rothberg put it well on Facebook in defending my article against America-based detractors ignorant of the situation in Germany today: “There’s been a monumentalization of memory as it has become part of the official self-conception of the state and this has gone along with an increasing rigidity—it has become a dogmatic consensus that no longer has the self-critical dimensions of the earlier moment.” Frank Biess said much the same in his unsparing account of his loss of faith in the Catechism: “Confessions of an Ex-Believer.”

Others exemplified the blindspots caused by fetishizing the Holocaust as a sacred object. For example, one critic wrote that Black and Jewish victims of historical injustice could not be compared because, unlike the Nazis who sought to exterminate Jews everywhere, the US authorities did not scour the world for potential slaves.

None of them addressed my points about the intimidation particularly of racialized minorities in Germany. When they engage in Africa or Palestine advocacy their status as historically oppressed minorities is consistently denied by reference to a category of absolute pure victimhood that is not the

product of history but of the mental acrobatics of the same men of Men of Reason whose righteousness depends on the existence of absolute good and absolute evil that they alone by virtue of their “reason” have the ability to discern. I missed the appreciation for, still less interest in, their daily struggles against the ceaseless aggressions, micro and macro, as Mirjam Brusius bravely shows.

The priests want a “formierte Gesellschaft” (formed society, a notion proposed by conservative West German intellectuals and politicians in the 1960s) and are simultaneously able to deny the very existence of a catechism, simply, because they are not its targets. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* editor Jürgen Kaube, for example, seems not to experience the catechism as a social reality because it cements *his* affects, intuitions, and emotions into an immutable, universal standard, against which *others* are measured, governed, and disciplined.

Instead, while priests excoriated Rothberg and Zimmerer (“academic dwarves,” wrote one non-academic critic), and now Emcke, I was supposedly out of line in the asperity of my censure. Such performative hypocrisy is to be expected from the clerisy, but it was surprising to see so many academics misjudge the situation. The polemic is a calculated intervention with which an author assails an argument that they hold to be wrongheaded or dangerous. Pointed formulations are designed to raise hackles, force public clarification, and highlight the key issues, especially when confronting the status quo. The polemic is a common genre in Great Britain, Ireland, and Australia, though it seemingly makes some delicate US and German scholars squirm at their comfortable desks. In response, these guardians of tone invoke “civility” when they feel their faith is threatened or, perhaps, so they don’t have to admit that at some level their perspective doesn’t make moral sense because their politics in the US are liberal and against racism in general.

Whatever the case, everyone knows that we would not be having this debate had I written a mild-mannered “on the one hand, on the other” article. It was necessary to provoke so the priests would emerge from their confessionals. Having done so, we can put polemic aside and run through the issues one by one.

### **White Supremacy**

The problem is German white supremacy, as Fabian Wolff says plainly. The fact and shape of this debate testifies to this unhappy fact: my advantages as a well-connected, middle-aged, white, tenured university professor enabled the rapid acceptance of my article in two mainstream journals and then its astonishingly quick reception. Yet much of what I say has been argued in different ways by Black, Palestinian, and progressive Jewish Germans in various forums, as Zoe Samudzi and Tiffany Florvil noted in their contributions to the NFS debate. Besides Wolff, such writers are not invited to contribute in the mainstream German press; only priestly sermons were printed. When a German television station asked to interview me for a story about this debate, it became apparent that it had not considered including a non-white voice among the commentators. I suggested they do, saying that it’s unacceptable for public television to have only white cultural elites talk about non-white Germans without them as interlocutors. This is how white supremacy works. Thanks to the indefatigable Jennifer Evans, at least a diversity of voices in English appeared in the NFS.

The Catechism articulates white supremacy by making Germany’s answer to the Nazi past and the Holocaust the political and cultural return to “the West”: because Nazis were barbarians, Germans must

rejoin civilization defined by Western Europe and the US, with Israel as their outpost, “the villa in the jungle” (Ehud Barak). The poisoned fruit of German Romanticism, namely toxic irrational traditions of antisemitism and ethno-nationalism are (ostensibly) rejected while the Enlightenment, which posed the Jewish question through divide and rule of the attributes of European Jewish subjectivity, is valorized. That Kaube’s book, *Hegel’s Welt*, won the Sachbuchpreis of the Humboldt Forum this week against of two shortlisted women of color—in a ceremony held next to the contested colonial collections in the Humboldt Forum of all places—indicates the direction of the World Spirit in Germany.

This narrative choice necessarily entails a positive, or at least uncritical, attitude to Western colonialism in general and German colonialism in particular. They cannot be criminalized, like the years between 1933 and 1945, because European empires engaged in civilizing missions and defeated Nazi Germany. Hence the hubris of the Humboldt Forum and its apologists; the pussy-footing around the restitution of plundered artefacts in German museums; the refusal to pay reparations to, let alone negotiate with Herero and Nama representatives; the denigration of racism as a banal prejudice against people of color while antisemitism is presented as a qualitatively different hatred. (Of course, German museums are not alone in this respect, having obtained artefacts from British ones).

According to the Catechism, practitioners of postcolonial studies and history and non-white people (those with “migration background”) are considered suspect because they threaten this narrative choice by pointing to serial colonial crimes: slavery, genocide, famine, resource exploitation. What is more, for over 70 years, Black, African, African-American and Arab intellectuals have noted links between these colonial modalities of domination and the Nazi empire. So, if “Western civilization” is the answer to the Nazi past, these links must be disavowed or played down. Believers cannot understand a postcolonial critique of the West other than as a recurrence of the Romantic irrationalism (“identity politics”) that led to Auschwitz. The ostensible rejection of German irrationalism tacitly equates it with the time-honored “premodern” irrationality of the colored colonized (who supposedly lacks reason and self-possession). Hence the reiterated sacrifice of the Jews (discussed below) always goes hand in hand with an exorcism of that alleged premodern irrational other, within and without. That is why they call postcolonial studies structurally antisemitic, the epitome of an irrational prejudice. Only a few weeks ago, the Green politician Cem Özdemir stood at an Israel rally at Brandenburger Tor to announce that “peace will come when Arabs love their children more than they hate Israel.” The fact that this racist demonization of Arabs does not cause public outcry should give us pause.

The unease can be attributed, I think, to the fact that the position of Jews changes markedly between narratives. Whereas they are the clear victim of irrational antisemitism in the one narrative, their positionality is more ambiguous in the postcolonial one. As a new article in the journal *Postcolonial Studies* by the Israeli historian Doron Avraham shows (“Reforming Identities: Jews’ Experience of German Colonial Expansion”), German Jews found themselves on both sides of the campaigns about German imperialism before, during, and after the First World War. Apart from the Pan-Germans, who regarded Jews as aliens and insufficiently pro-colonial, colonial associations welcomed middle class German Jews who assumed prominent roles, even while others criticized colonialism’s excesses. Even the critical voices, however, did not question the right of Europeans, including European Jews, to rule over Africans and Pacific Islanders.

Hannah Arendt belongs squarely in this tradition. Often misunderstood as a critic of European empire in the manner of Césaire and Fanon, she in fact approved of European empire building over the centuries,

especially the British and French ones. What she opposed was the seemingly limitless expansion of imperialism, linked to capitalist crisis, since the late nineteenth century, a notion she took from Rosa Luxemburg. Analytically inconsistent with this approach, she identified the main origins of totalitarianism with pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism, in other words, continental empires. Her postwar reservations about decolonization and the US civil rights movement are entirely in keeping with her belief that Jews are white who are settling Palestine as Europeans. In her Orientalism, she is a fitting icon, indeed a veritable saint, in the Catechism.

At the heart of the contemporary catechism, then, also lies a fundamental inability to come to terms with the fact that the Enlightenment, and its concomitant promise to convert Jews into citizens of European nation-states, entailed violence: The “civic improvement” of Jews, promising to turn them into fully human subjects, transformed Judaism into a private, voluntary, and above all apolitical “religion” along the lines of liberal Protestantism. By locating the only recognizable Jewish *political* figure in the state of Israel, the Catechism also continues Europe’s civilizing mission.

### “Relativization” and Historicization

Behind the fear of a “relativization” of the Holocaust and antisemitism—like “equation” (*Gleichsetzen*), an undefined noun that indicates a religious taboo—lies the priestly conviction that whereas the Holocaust was the outcome of irrational antisemitism, the regular genocides punctuating the sorry history of humanity were outcomes of racist, but limited aims. According to Dan Diner’s theory of “civilizational rupture,” the Holocaust is distinct because the Nazis killed Jews against their own material interests, and was thus irrational. By contrast, material interests limited the extent of killing in other genocides, which were to that extent rational. This is a central tenet of the Catechism, actually articulated by Arendt well before Diner, and has been repeated in many commentaries on my article. The function of this distinction is to sacralize the Holocaust as the negation of Western civilization, thereby normalizing another catastrophic violence that precisely enabled that same civilization.

It is a false distinction, I think. The security rationality that drove the Nazis is discernible in all genocides. True, the Nazi belief that Jews were colonizing Germany is remarkable in its paranoia (though Nazi thinkers reasoned about it in a calculated fashion, as we see below), but paranoia about present and future threats is discernible in many varying contexts and periods, as I show in my book, *The Problems of Genocide*. Whenever states pursued the utopian goal of permanent security, they sought to anticipate future threats by dreaming up and enacting final solutions. Of course, the Nazi one differs in important respects from previous solutions because it was perpetrated by a modern and powerful state, and because one of its targets, “the Jews,” were posited by most people as globally dispersed: the genocidal ambition was thus global. The same can’t be said of the Herero in German Southwest Africa. As I wrote eleven years ago in the *Oxford History of Holocaust Studies*:

The Holocaust was not a classical case of “colonial genocide,” that is, of a colonizer destroying the colonized. Nevertheless, the colonial experience was relevant to the fate of the Jews. German Jews were killed as colonizers who had—in the Nazi imagination—dominated Germany and led it to the brink of extinction. Eastern European Jews had to die because they provided the “breeding ground” for those colonists. Simultaneously, Hitler regarded Germans as a colonizing people. His administrators and soldiers were taught to think of eastern Jews in terms of colonial stereotypes: as dirty, lazy, and uncivilized. For that reason, they had no place in greater Germany’s future. Like

many other colonized people, these Jews were murdered or worked to death. Soviet Jews were labeled as security threats to the conquest of the east and therefore murdered pre-emptively. The Holocaust arose out of the union of imperial and colonial impulses. It was born of a frustrated imperial nation struggling against a perceived colonizer, and it fed on the compensatory fantasies of many Germans during the interwar period, fantasies of achieving invulnerability through a new empire, colonies, and the expulsion and later elimination of “enemy peoples.”

It is a commonplace now for historians to observe imperial logics in the Nazi regime’s policies. Consider Christian Gerlach’s *The Extermination of the European Jews* (2016), which argues that:

Leading Nazi politicians and organizers of destruction linked the murder of Jews to the creation of a new order in Germany’s eastern empire. As with the persecution of the Jews, whoever considers the non-Jewish victims of German and Axis violence in their entirety must also take account of imperialism. Some 300,000–350,000 of the 6–8 million non-Jews killed were German; that is, about 95% were foreigners from the German point of view. Of the 6 million Jews slain, about 165,000 were German, meaning 97% were foreign.

Slavery is part of this story as well, as Wolf Gruner showed in his books about the enslavement of Jews: *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zwangsarbeit als ein Element der Verfolgung 1938-1943* (1997), and *Zwangsarbeit und Verfolgung: Österreichische Juden im NS-Staat 1938-45* (2000), in English as *Jewish Forced Labor Under the Nazis* (2006).

In the anxious minds of priests, scholarly historicization like this is tantamount to “relativization” because it contaminates the sacred with the profane by accounting for the Holocaust with the same causal mechanisms as other instances of permanent security. I agree, as noted above, that the Holocaust has distinctive features. But these can be placed on a spectrum of violence and paranoia rather than into a qualitatively different category.

Contingency rather than the metaphysics of inevitability are central to this story, as well. Had the Red Army not repelled the Wehrmacht, the Nazi extermination of European Jewry might have resembled the US Trail of Tears in the murderous deportation and dumping of Jews to perish in the Russian tundra. And today—resuming defeat of the Nazis—we would also be talking about the catastrophic implementation of *Generalplan Ost* with its planned mass starvation of tens of millions of Slavs.

The German state could integrate the Holocaust in its national revival by way of its exceptionalization. The priests worry about the *Gleichsetzung* (equation) of the Holocaust and the Herero-Nama genocide, but what does that mean—equal in stature? If so, for whom? Who can deny that the both genocides were equally traumatic for both victim groups. The whole relativization-paranoia seems premised on a privileging of the perspectives of perpetrators.

This exceptionalization forbids the recruitment of antisemitism and the Holocaust for contemporary application: the constant refrain in Germany is “learning from history” and “never again Auschwitz.” But when Caroline Emcke did so, she was accused of “relativization” by political opponents, doubtless for partisan purposes, as many could see. The point, however, is not the craven opportunism, but that the Catechism’s “never again” is Israel’s interpretation of the phrase, meaning that a political standard has been erected which enables such a persecution mechanism to be triggered. Sébastien Tremblay notes in

his reconstruction of the complex intersectionality in the queer community that even some of its members could weaponize the Catechism to gain acceptance. This can apply to non-white migrants as well. As Alon Confino highlighted in his contribution, the universal values of the Holocaust stop when the right of the Palestinians are concerned. What divides German and others is not only whether the Holocaust is unique but attitudes to Israel and Palestine. Emcke's uncomfortable experience is the Catechism in action—and she is just a prominent, recent example. Witnessing this unseemly scene may perhaps jolt some skeptics into recognizing its pernicious operation.

### **Philosemitism**

Anti-antisemitism is claimed as a central part of the Catechism. And anti-antisemitism has morphed into a philosemitic identification with Israel to the extent that it is effectively part of German political space. I am not the first to note the strangeness of German and Austrian government buildings flying the Israel flag during the recent Gaza war. The Israeli-German director of the Anne Frank Institute, Meron Mendel, is suspicious of this identification, which he thinks indicates “the attempt of certain social groups to right the wrongs of history, and this time to stand on the right side of history.” What they don't realize in doing so, he adds, is that they supported Netanyahu's nationalistic and rightwing policies. He is also suspicious of Germany's much-discussed inclusion of Israel's security in its *Staatsraison*, which he thinks more than anything benefits the German armament industry that supplies Israel with submarines.

In fact, the relationship may now flow in the other direction: we could be witnessing the Israelification of Germany in the demonization of Muslims as the inner enemy, with the consequent police harassment of protestors, in the parliamentary BDS-Resolution, and in what I call the “affective colonization” of migrant Germans by requiring that they accept the Israeli understanding of its war of independence in 1948 (and thus denial of the Nakba), as Felix Klein declared. In other words, for Palestinian refugees in Germany to feel like those Germans whose ancestors perpetrated the Holocaust they must feel Israeli in this respect. Infuriatingly for priests, as the anthropologist Esra Ozyürek shows in her fieldwork on educational visits to German camps by German Muslims, many Muslims identify with the murdered Jews rather than the German perpetrators.

In its current modality, Holocaust memory has become an instrument to govern and exclude “foreigners”/ Muslims/migrants. The anthropologist Anna-Esther Younes finds what she coins a (European) “War on Antisemitism” emerging around the year 2000 jointly with the “Global War on Terror.” The German technique to manage its non-white population whilst pacifying its own experiences of racism is to appropriate “anti-racism” discourses for (preventive) re-/education programs directed towards Muslims, who are already framed as inassimilable.

The disciplining takes place in other ways, as Younes notes elsewhere, “People have been threatened with eviction from Germany, in the case of African and Arab refugees from their antisemitic ‘breeding grounds,’ or when it comes to political speakers and activist with non-European or non-German citizenship. Effectively, there is already a Berufsverbot in Germany for those violating those loosely defined boundaries of German sensibilities.” Too many contributors to this debate have regarded it as a parlor game, and mistake the existence of undeniable pluralism in the German public sphere to deny the existence of the Catechism. Stuck in their ivory towers of whiteness, they miss how the Catechism is weaponized to discipline a diverse population, and how it impacts real people in concrete and painful ways. They celebrated the German “apology” for the Herero and Nama genocide as sweet fruit of their

vaunted *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* before waiting to see what the Herero and Nama people think of it: not much, it turns out. It's a good idea to listen to the victims of the German state, as Matthew Fitzpatrick reminds them.

It is time to ask whether Germany's relationship to Jews has moved beyond the structures of identification that enabled the Holocaust: the positing of "the Semite" as Other in the nineteenth century was contingent upon "the Aryan." Later on, the Nazis sought to exterminate the Semite Jew. Now the denazified German qua Aryan is sorry that his Nazi grandparents treated Semites as a dangerously Asiatic people who (they felt) had tried to colonize them as *Sippenforscher* Heinrich Banniza von Bazan (1904–1950) analyzed in his book, *Das deutsche Blut im deutschen Raum: Sippenkundliche Grundzüge des deutschen Bevölkerungswandels in der Neuzeit* (1937). Jews, he determined, had infiltrated the ruling strata by intermarriage: "It looks like a planned dividing up of all German cultural areas. Four sons enter the four university faculties, another becomes an artist, while the daughter disports herself as the wife of the pastor." This integration did not bode well for Germany, he thought.

Now, by contrast, Semites are welcome in Germany, which, as Hannah Tzuberi puts it, is "reforesting" the country with Jews to compensate for the Holocaust. However *willkommen* they are now, the Semite remains another tribe, re-membered by asserting their dis-memberment from German society. In other words, they are viewed as Jews in Germany (*Juden in Deutschland*), not as German Jews or Jewish Germans. This philo-Semitic stance implies that Germans are of ethno-racial distinction – the Aryan is the twin sibling of the Semite.

Not for nothing do the philosopher Susan Neiman and Younes in the *Journal of Genocide Research* (disclaimer: I am the editor) focus on philosemitism as the problem. Neiman states that she experiences "philosemitism as an extremely creepy form of discrimination," while Younes posits it as a form of racism. The German Catechism has redrawn the racial-historical map as follows: while Nazis did not regard Jews as white, the postwar German political class projected onto Jews their hope for a "post-national" post-racial future, with imaginary Jews as model-citizens (Jürgen Habermas wrote in 1961 that "we are now forced into the historical irony of taking up the Jewish question without the Jews").

Thus, it is no wonder that the philosemitic attitudes witnessed today are justified by invoking the "reforesting" of actual Jews in Germany. Despite shying away from direct ethno-national language, this philosemitism can be well understood as a form of "inverted postnationalism," which recycles white supremacy in the guise of Judeo-Christian particularism. Jews' occasional deviance from white civilization—for example, in practicing circumcision—is tolerated as an exception to the norm, but does not protect all those—i.e., Muslims—whose practices and political claims do not fall under the rubric of "special responsibility." The vulnerability and "protection-worthiness" of non-white, non-Jewish Germans, refugees, and migrants hinges on whether their protection simultaneously includes Jews. Their political claims, if antagonistic to the Catechism, are demonized as "imported antisemitism," while Jews are appreciated as conditionally white. The Western civilizational ideology of white supremacy became Judeo-Christian as the distinctive German-Nazi tradition of antisemitism is projected onto Muslims.

### **Misreadings and Misunderstandings**

There are good reasons to think that my article was misread to avoid confronting these facts. That is a risk of the polemic genre: it can evoke an emotionalized response that leads to willed or unwilling

misunderstandings. For instance, the priests have said my supposed invocation of “*Schuld*kult” has given succor to the far right. Branding people in this way is a typical rhetorical priestly move to excommunicate people who expose the operations of their discursive power: “you argue like Ernst Nolte” or are “*Sieferle von Links*.” It is true that the “identitarian” Martin Sellner praised aspects of my article, but only to reject its conclusions, as Johannes von Moltke reminded people, because Sellner wants more white supremacy while my writings aim to confront it.

It is also important to remember that Nolte and company sought to compare (and relativize) Nazi crimes at a time when the previous priestly class—many of whom still remembered or had participated in the Third Reich—refused to accept much less internalize German responsibility for Auschwitz. Holocaust and Jewish studies, for that matter, had yet to become acceptable or mainstream subjects in German universities—marginalized in much the same way that postcolonial and subaltern studies are today. For those reasons, Habermas and colleagues represented the forces of progress in the Historians’ Dispute 1980s. But the (geo)political and academic context is now quite different, notably in the (unhealthy) centrality that the Holocaust now plays in German academic and public discourse. To pretend that the context and therefore the stakes of the debate has not changed is simply disingenuous. Besides, you can’t let the far right set the agenda in this way. Just because it talks about elites, does not mean we can’t talk about elites. That would be absurd, yet this reasoning is what priests entreat.

Noteworthy for me is the Islamophobic consensus from the far right through the middle of German politics to the bizarre cult of the antideutsche. The latter are part of a new “ethno-national international” stretching from Le Pen via the AfD and Orban to the US Republicans and serial Israeli governments. Its consolidation in Germany includes the same leftist proponents of the Catechism in a veritable “Querfront.” They are at one in opposing BDS and in their love of Israel.

As it happens, I did not invoke “*Schuld*kult.” In my book, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (2007) and article “Stigma and Sacrifice” (2007), which was footnoted in “The German Catechism,” I argue that notions like inherited collective guilt are nonsensical. Instead, I suggested, the more useful concept to understand postwar West German political emotions is “stigma”: the collective identity crippled or damaged by the Holocaust in the eyes of the world.

My theological or religious analysis struck many as strange. They mustn’t have read my book, which I was merely updating. There they would find that the terms in which Germans talk about the past—“inherited sin,” “collective guilt,” “the mark of Cain,” “redemption,” and so forth—indicate the “exhaustion of secular vocabulary.” I argued that we needed to acknowledge the “subterranean biblical themes flowing beneath the surface froth of events” (21), already discernible in Karl Jaspers’, *The Question of German Guilt*. Given the emphatically Christian horizon of Protestant wrestling with the guilt question, the recourse to Biblical themes is hardly surprising.

The intense German identification with Jews with religious overtones has been studied by others, too, of course, like Ulrike Jureit and Christian Schneider in *Gefühlte Opfer: Illusionen der Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (2010). And more recently a colleague has pointed out to me that talk of “high priests” and civil religion was invoked by the journalist Stephan Detjen in his analysis of the Mbembe debate last year.

Germans, I determined, needed to convert the stigma of the perpetrator nation to stigmata by the unstable

combined pursuit of philosemitism and human rights (“*Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar*”). “For the Non-German Germans,” I wrote, “the Berlin memorial thus works as stigmata, the divine sign of grace and of Jesus’s sacrifice, rather than as a stigma, a source of shame.” Germany is thus a “sinful but repentant community” that “needs to keep resacramenting the Jews in regular, national rituals in the same way as Christians regularly celebrate the Eucharist. The memory of the murdered Jews thereby serves as a permanent resource for collective regeneration.”

I ended my book in 2007 on an optimistic note. The Bible taught that the sins of the father are not visited on successive generations in perpetuity, only for three or four generations. “Younger Germans are no longer vulnerable to such attempts to revive German stigma in the service of partisan geopolitics [i.e., supporting the ‘Global War on Terror’]. People living in Germany continue to negotiate their identity dilemmas around the axes of ethnicity and immigration—just like any other country.” I was wrong. The next year, German chancellor Angela Merkel declared Germany’s *Staatsraison* to encompass Israel’s security, thus making the continuing oppression of Palestinians a central German mission, as Ussama Makdisi observes in his contribution to this debate. He explains why “Palestinian” has become a *Schimpfwort* (swear word) in Germany, the victim of the victims bearing the burden of the German collective psychodrama.

As for collective psychology, it must surely be clear that I am operating in the tradition of Norbert Elias’s *The Germans* and the Mitscherliches’ *The Inability to Mourn*. Political theology is also a venerable German intellectual tradition, I thought, but many readers seem to be unaware of this except the Germanist von Moltke.

To be sure, whether my historical reconstruction in “The German Catechism” was a functional analysis or normative manifesto could have been clearer. It is both. I briefly explained how and why it came into being, how and why it was damaging people of color, and how and why cultural and demographic trends would lead to change. The shrillness of the priests can be accounted for, I think, by their realization that time is against them, that their generational achievement in the 1980s and 1990s is being challenged by forces beyond their control.

## Conclusion

It may be time for the baby boomer male priests to relinquish control so that a memory regime can emerge that treats the victims of the German state equally, that accords equal respect to all its citizens, that recognizes that antisemitism and other racisms are a problem running straight through German society and state-institutions, with global and local white supremacist networks posing a long-disavowed threat. If they don’t want German Muslims protesting against Israel, German politicians should just stop identifying Germany with Israel (“an attack against Israel is an attack against Germany”) because Germany just really is not Israel, and because this identification disables political equality for Palestinians and all those who identify with their cause. Udi Greenberg asks “Does the Holocaust Still Matter?” Of course it does. The task is to integrate it into the continuum of German and European imperial history along with the history of racism and antisemitism. It is also about taking seriously the proposition that we need to learn from history, a process that has been blocked by the Catechism. One lesson, taught by Christiane Wilke in her contribution, is that the total number of deaths at the Berlin Wall pale by comparison with migrant deaths at Europe’s borders *each week*, and that these borders and the causes of migration are a result of Western imperialism.

If anything good has come of this current debate, it is the recognition that the Catechism is exhausted. The German newspaper columns and some NFS essays just repeated its timeworn and tiresome articles. The grassroots need to be heard, as Kate Davison rightly declares in her contribution. To repeat: what once had an emancipatory effect has morphed into an institutionalized set of beliefs and rituals that tries to contain cultural pluralism with exclusive civilizationism, now a virulent strain of cancel culture. A true reckoning with the past would confront this white supremacy, which inheres in the systematic denigration of Black and Middle Eastern experiences in German, in Africa, and in Palestine-Israel, as the contributors mentioned here make clear. These are the groups that are now driving *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but the dialectic is frozen by the Catechism. It's time for a German Perestroika.

Unfortunately, there is a long way to go. The #IchBinHanna thread on Twitter shows how younger, particularly female and minority academics depend on the priests for permanent employment. Adherence to the Catechism is expected. Brusius was the only German scholar working in a German institution on a fixed-term post who dared to contribute to the NFS; four other Germans in Germany declined to participate. Why? Is it for fear of priestly censure? Disappointingly, none of the German professors working in the US and UK who contributed to the NFS took up the issue of racism and precarity in German academia, which could have laid bare the continuous silence from senior academics in Germany itself, even if a small number, like Jürgen Zimmerer, publicly challenges the colonial aspects of the Catechism. The two should go hand in hand. What happened to *Zivilcourage*, that apparent lesson of the Nazi past?

Christiane Wilke and Fabian Wolff rightly took me to task for ignoring the GDR experience. Susan Neiman is often quoted in relation to her book, *Learning from the Germans*, about the relative success of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. She has changed her mind on some points. Notwithstanding the post-unification violence against migrants in Eastern Germany, in that book she argues that East Germany's anti-racism and internationalism can inspire Germans today, not the Catechism.

I leave the last word to Zoe Samudzi who on Twitter summed up the thinking of many:

What I appreciate about @JenniferVEvans' curation of posts around @dirkmoses #GermanCatechism provocation is that the memory debate has been wrested out of the hands of white scholars deliberately misdescribing & limiting its scope and expanding into all these different corners. It is not \*simply\* about singularity of recognition because it has never been. Because the debate is essentially about racial citizenship & legitimate victimhood, the debate has always already been about post-colonial Namibia, migrants, Afro-Germans...queer histories, the Potsdam Agreement AND reunification, Roma & Sinti peoples, Jewish belonging, education, denialisms, political indebtedness & the acceptability of Palestinian disenfranchisement. The national memory debate has always been about these things, but The Debate has never voluntarily engaged many of these topics or communities because its white interlocutors have tellingly decided that they do not exist within the purview of German history, memory, or futurity. It's heartening to see and learn from so many brilliant people (whether in this specific iteration of the debate or not) rejecting memory as this carefully managed arena of German nationalism and embracing chaotic and sometimes contradictory interconnection and expansiveness. I'm very grateful for what's come out of this series and the invitation to participate, and I feel more empowered to simply ignore manipulated political premises that do not move us closer to

disentangling ourselves from the intellectual shackles of empire.

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# Ends and Beginnings

Jennifer Evans

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In this final entry on the debate, Jennifer Evans uses storytelling and positionality to make a case for ways in which we can learn from Indigenous methodologies and knowledge formations to think about histories of mass violence and genocide. Evans uses this frame deliberately, along with the examples of two survivors of genocide, as an example of the fruitfulness of parallel frameworks and interdisciplinarity for the way they capture both the enormity and distinctiveness of victim experience.

*All we are are the stories we tell.*

— Leroy Little Bear

It has been a little over three weeks since *Geschichte der Gegenwart* (GdG) published Dirk Moses's catechism polemic and just under two since the *New Fascism Syllabus* (NFS) began running daily blog responses from scholars and writers inside and outside Germany. As those who have followed along here already know, the conversation has gone in vastly different directions. In the German press, however, the focus has been singular, and puzzling. Where these 19 blogs have made the case for nuance, for complexity, and for criticism, for bringing scholarship and expertise to bear on different parts of Moses's claims, the press account has not reflected the various sides to this debate—and there are a great many sides.

As the person behind the posts, I thought I would take this opportunity to weigh in from my vantage about what I hoped this blog series might accomplish as a collective forum and experiment, and where I hope things might go from here.

For the reader who is new to our site, the NFS is a project that came into being in a moment of crisis in the weeks and months following Donald Trump's election in 2016. Started by University of Iowa professor Lisa Heineman and myself and joined by Brian J Griffith—an expert on Italian fascism—it grew into a crowdsourced collection of resources to help journalists and citizens better navigate the news cycle with access to scholarly research and public writing around populism, the authoritarian turn, and historical as well as contemporary fascisms. Its mandate is to promote informed conversation based on the sharing of scholarly expertise in a public venue. But this doesn't explain why the NFS would intervene in a debate around German memory politics today.

The answer to that question is personal as well as professional, as these things often are. And it requires a story.

Today, I am a scholar of German and European history, who writes on the history of sexuality, specifically queer history, and oversees several collaborative big data projects in critical communications studies around how harmful speech becomes normalized as legitimate discourse in social media.

But I was once a curious Canadian student, drawn to West Germany in the late 1980s on a quest to learn more about how a country steeped in history and culture could have perpetrated the tragedy of the

Shoah, together with the targeting of different social and racial minorities, and the mass dislocation of millions of innocent people. For a year, I lived in the Hanseatic city of Bremen, shuffling between four host families, merchants, lawyers, schoolteachers, good, charitable people with their own stories to tell. And it was there that I first learned about how Germans struggled to come to terms with their past.

There was much that I loved about Germany. The empty flagpoles, the disavowal of patriotic rhetoric and symbols, buildings pock-marked with bullet holes—all stark reminders that the past still haunted the present. Unlike at home, in Bremen history was inescapable, etched into the landscape everywhere I looked.

A history of violence was in my midst as well, only I didn't see it yet. I grew up in a working-class family in London Ontario, a city also on the river Thames, made infamous this past week for the Islamophobic killing of a family of four, whose only crime was believing they might venture out for an evening walk. I grew up believing what many Canadians still believe today, that we are a country of polite citizens, with a commitment to liberal democracy and the social contract. We take pride in our policy on multiculturalism, with two official languages and many more spoken in homes across the nation. As American and European friends liked to suggest these last few years as trouble brewed south of the border, we were a success story in a world of increasing ethnic, nationalist, religious, and linguistic strife. That this was occupied and stolen land seems not to have tarnished this image, even after the gruesome discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 Indigenous children this past month, buried on the grounds of a residential school in British Columbia. Our past is with us too. Only given the shock expressed by some of this country's citizens, it is not one that is fully appreciated, still.

When I traveled to Germany in 1987, I believed this same story. I wasn't a proud Canadian by any sense—the language of pride in nation was not yet a thing. What resonated with me most about the Germany I encountered then was this reluctance, fear—maybe even disdain—of patriotism as a public act. I said as much to one of my host parents, that it was perhaps my greatest marvel, only to be surprised at her response: “Why must we Germans constantly atone for our past when you have never even begun?”

Of course, she was absolutely correct. My country was nowhere close to unpacking the continued violence of settler colonialism. Residential schools built to “take the Indian out of the child” would stay in operation until 1996. In any major city, then as now, Indigenous youth loiter on street corners and languish in disproportionate numbers in foster care, while murdered and missing women remain unaccounted for by police services nationwide, neglected but more often than not simply ignored. Absolutely, we had a lot to account for. We still do.

But her words rang in my ears another way. I heard the desperation at having to be held accountable, the self-loathing for being part of unconscionable violence in the first place, and I heard too, just a hint, that the hard work of atoning quite possibly had been done. As we know from these contributions here, in this series, the work of remembering is never over. As Zoe Samudzi, Tiffany Florvil, and Mirjam Brusius showed us, for some groups, it has barely even begun.

I took back with me to Canada the rawness of that conversation. It guided me in my studies those next several years as I learned more about the role of race science, eugenics, and antisemitism in wartime, mechanized killing, and the different way East and West Germans processed these crimes. I became even more curious about what people and communities do in often quiet ways to work through and write their

own stories.

That cross-cultural encounter with Germany's history of perpetration and remembering was existential for me. Suddenly, I saw racial inequality everywhere. It was engraved in historical plaques that wrote out the deep history of Indigenous peoples. It was featured in street names and on government buildings. My own elementary school was named after Sir. Winston Churchill, and our sports teams the British Bulldogs. It was alive and well in my own family, in "innocent" jokes and "funny" asides. To draw on a different book by Michael Rothberg, whose arguments have also surfaced in the debate here, I was implicated in a history of violence and inequality that continues into the present day. It became my professional calling to address this in my writing and work, to widen the scope of historical inquiry to include different voices and experiences of discrimination but also agency, to disrupt what we think we already know with tales of what has yet to be.

In other words, this encounter with what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory occasioned a reckoning with other forms and vectors of violence. It didn't relativize the enormity of the Shoah by thinking about it in tandem with other genocides. It augmented its force and meaning. Just as the Holocaust gave the world a lexicon for how to recognize crimes against humanity, even if some countries, like my own, still eschew the word genocide despite evidence of its applicability, so too did it give me an index with which to gauge my own implication in the course of white supremacy. By recognizing the tenacity of its hold, we sharpen our senses to its work historically as well as today. As Dutch-Surinamese feminist Gloria Wekkers instructs us with examples from another successful democracy, any presumption of our own progressivism is not just a privilege, for some it is deadly. There remains much work to be done.

None of what I say here is really that shocking. It has been the stuff of scholarship for many years. And yet it is only recently that these ideas—of pushing at the limits of what we believe we have achieved, what was so hard fought for but which might look differently when explored from other vantages—has somehow become the stuff of backlash and distrust. Regardless of where we come down on the intricacies of the arguments themselves, on the question of continuities in Jürgen Zimmerer's work and multidirectionality in Michael Rothberg's, we should be worried, as a scholarly community, when peer-reviewed research, knowledge, and expertise is being dismissed, misunderstood, or deliberately maligned.

When I first read Moses's shot across the bow in GdG, I sensed that there was a lot of work that might be done with this piece. Across the Atlantic, Neil Gregor thought so too, and when he sent me the first iteration of his blog entry for my thoughts, we agreed it might be a good jumping off point for a larger discussion and debate. I wanted to use the NFS as a place where colleagues might collectively weigh in, in public-facing writing, in a digital public sphere, with all the emotional and affective affordances—as media scholar Zizi Papacharissi has called them—that go along with social media. Drawing together scholars from across disciplines and generation, from different points in their career trajectory, with different stakes at play, my aim was to tease out the complexities that seemed to be flattened out in mainstream news. And this has borne out.

Unlike in the legacy press, on this site these last weeks—and thanks to the tireless translation efforts of Svenja Goltermann and Philipp Sarasin also in German in GdG—colleagues have shown us the work that scholarship does and can do in providing much-needed critical thinking on this issue of how Germany's memory culture has evolved these last decades. Respondents here have spoken to problems

with Moses's frame (Gregor, Fitzpatrick, Greenberg, Niven, Smith, Braslavsky, Port) and to the emphasis on certain political realities over others (von Moltke, Haeberlen, Wilke). They have shown the ways in which Holocaust memory has been drawn upon to help legitimize other human rights struggles (Florvil, Tremblay, Biess), and when it seems to have failed to humanize Germans to the pain of others (Confino, Samudzi, Brusius, Wolff, Makdisi, Davison).

This has generated much conversation across social media platforms, in Germany as well as in the United Kingdom and North America (some of it heated to be sure). It has allowed a simple website to have some influence, however small, on the tenor of national debate. This might be shocking to consider for some, but for others it offers a tangible opportunity to shape the terms of reference in important and meaningful ways. It is an example of the potent and sometimes anarchic nature of digital connectivity and what media scholar Andrew Hoskins calls connective memory, a rapidly changing media engagement with national pasts that puts our digital networks front and centre. With modest hopes for shaping civic literacy through representation and information equality, it is, or might aspire to be a democratic practice.

But here too these networks are at once personal as well as digital. For me and my work curating this conversation, these two were inseparable, as was the emotional impact of the original piece by Moses and the sentiments it unleashed. We see this sprinkled throughout all of these texts. What we don't see are the countless hours behind the scenes I and others spent, steeped in discussion. I could not have done any of this without the help and input of so many others.

There is so much to think through here. Unlike other debates, the fact that this took place online has meant alongside the written archive, we have generated tons of social data that can likewise add to our thinking. We can map out empirically the reach of certain voices over others, see in the datasets whose perspectives loomed largest, had more of a footprint, and travelled furthest. The data might even shock some of us accustomed as we are to certain voices as authoritative with others vying to be heard. Whose voices are really dominating, and whose are overlooked? In the spirit of Open Access, I've made some of this data available for folks to take a look themselves.

What we can say with some persuasiveness at this point in the thick of things is that while the mainstream media in Germany has been slow to take up the lessons of scholarly interventions like these outside of its physical borders, even as they are penned by internationally trained, multi-lingual experts with feet in many different academic communities, online initiatives like these offer much in the way of collaborative thinking, claims making, and alternative ways into a subject. The Internet is not a passive medium. It challenges conventional structures and undoes more hierarchical and centralized forms of organization and even thinking. In these last few weeks, it has hosted a rich (sometimes frustrating) multi-faceted discussion of Holocaust history and memory activism that takes up the question of continuity and comparison in important new ways.

In these posts, we have pursued a much-needed exchange about how to put the lessons of the Holocaust in conversation with the legacies of colonialism, the Nakba, anti-Black racism, and contemporary human rights struggles. We might pause, after reading these submissions, and ask what it means that what passes for critical discourse outside Germany's borders can lead to charges of obfuscation and worse, antisemitism, within them? Regardless of where we might stand on the pressing political matters facing our world today, surely we can agree that the cynicism towards scholarship and the policing of dissent is

not only counterproductive but a dangerous outgrowth of the challenging times we live in. We can and must expect more.

Here too, social media might play a productive role. As much as it is often maligned, I am struck by the lessons we might take away from participatory media itself, about the power of collegiality and of mutual support, and our common quest for nuance and informed debate. Despite the fact that we may be accused of speaking past one another sometimes, we also find ways to navigate differences in the name of critical *Ausseinandersetzung* to use one of my favourite German words for “pulling or wresting apart” ideas we might not care for or understand. Social media can be a place where we argue with passion and conviction in public and for the public with the tools we have at our disposal. As this debate has shown, too, it can be a site of recalcitrance, but it was always my hope that we would not lose sight of the fact that social media might also foster an ethics of attentiveness (Claudia Breger), of thinking, of working, and reacting together to argument. As it turns out, listening and dialogue can be a radical project.

Of course it isn't perfect—far from it—and it does not replace sober scholarly interventions. But it can be a site of critical intervention, a place where scholars (and activists) meet one another and are shaped too by the act of going there.

I draw to a close this online forum with one final example of the power of diverse pasts for reconciling with troubling presents. It takes the form of friendship, of listening across divides, of telling difficult stories with a sense of urgency and implication in the face of forgetting, with the hope of reconciliation and learning from each other. It is a practice of living and working “in good relation” as Indigenous feminists teach us, of being responsible to ourselves and our communities, to remain committed to finding new ways to address the erasures of mass violence, while generating knowledge, connections, relationships and ideas for how to work collectively and collaboratively towards a better world and life.

Until a few weeks ago, I had hoped to host a very special event in Ottawa during the Lessons and Legacies conference on Holocaust history. It was to be an evening with two survivors, who shared in different ways the trauma of white supremacy and genocide. This conversation was to be between Ted Fontaine, former Sagkeeng chief, pillar of Manitoba's First Nations communities and residential school survivor and Nate Leipziger, born in Chorzów, Poland, interned at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and fellow Canadian. It would have been an opportunity for us to hear how people find strength in their shared stories, mindful of the differences that indelibly marked who these men were as victims of genocide. At some point, through education and advocacy networks, they had learned of each other's experiences of racial inequality and sexual abuse. They met, became fast friends, and opted to share in each other's suffering in public events to reinforce the urgency of thinking capaciously about state sanctioned violence, even on the most personal of levels. For many years and for many reasons, men—to say nothing of women—were not encouraged to speak about these experiences. When they did, rarely were their stories taken up in the historical register. Ted passed away a few weeks ago, but this legacy lingers on, of asking us to grapple with difficult questions, of situating ourselves in the stories we tell, of doing so mindfully as well as critically, to see the interconnected ways in which history envelops us all, makes us uncomfortable, and pushes us to make good on its teachings. Let that be the lesson of critical conversation in difficult times. Let that be the takeaway here too, that we are implicated in each other's struggles and in our responsibility to ourselves and our publics to do better.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for following along, and thank you for participating in this arena.

This article was originally published on the *New Fascism Syllabus*' weblog series, "The Catechism Debate." For the full list of hyperlink citations, please consult the original online version at: <https://newfascismsyllabus.com/category/opinions/the-catechism-debate/>.