

**Between Silence and Repression.
Germany's Culture of Remembrance and
Palestine**

*On Multidirectional Memory and
Germany's Staatsräson*

Die Referent*innen



Ahmad Dakhnous



Dr. Pegah Byroum-Wand

Outline



- 1 Introduction
- 2 **Input:** *German Staatsräson*
- 3 Break
- 4 **Input:** *Multidirectional Memory*
- 5 Q&A and Open Discussion

Why talking about Staatsräson?

- Used on the **highest political level** to reason the German support for Israel (politicians, coalition agreements etc.)
- Central term in Germany's memory culture and yet **vague and undefined**
- Engaging critically with the German support for the Israeli State amid **mass crimes against Palestinians** requires a critical examination of the German Staatsräson

Why talking about Staatsräson?

“It [German Staatsräson] is not only defended outside our borders. Our Staatsräson begins on Berlin's Sonnenallee, in front of the main synagogue in Munich, in schoolyards, in lecture halls, on X and on TikTok. It manifests itself in the protection of Jewish life here in Germany. It manifests itself in empathy – and in the consistent action taken by the judiciary against anti-Semitic crimes” **(Julia Glöckner 2026)**

Input

German Staatsräson – definition and background



The Concept “Staatsräson”

- Staatsräson, Staatsvernunft, raison d'état, Reason of State
- The term comes from the era of absolutism, the pre-democratic era: **self-interest and the survival of the state** take top priority and, under certain circumstances, are placed **above law and ethics**.
- In democracies: the concept of **the rule of law** prevails over the dictates of raison d'état
- Not used at all in the GDR and rarely used in the old Federal Republic (not in relation to Israel)

Staatsräson and Israel

- Essay by former German ambassador to Israel, Rudolf Dressler (2005)

Merkel's speech (2008):

- “Every federal government and every chancellor before me has been committed to Germany's special historical responsibility for Israel's security. This historical responsibility of Germany is part of my country's *raison d'état*.”
- Scholz (2023) and Merz (2025); coalition agreements
- The **impression** is created that this is a **moral and historically informed commitment**.

Daniel Marwecki (2024)

Examines **the German-Israeli relations** and distinguishes between three different phases: **rehabilitation** until 1965, **normalisation** after 1965 and **Staatsräson** after reunification.

However, one thing remained constant throughout all phases:

„Germany has always guided its policy towards Israel by its own national interests“

German national interests and Staatsräson - a brief history (Marwecki 2024)

- In the 1950s and 1960s: **Absolution, rehabilitation** into the Western states community, **distancing** from its own history of violence.
- From 1965 until the end of the Cold War: **Normalisation** of relations with Israel and understanding for the Palestinian national movement → Importance of **oil** and relations with Arab states.
- From the 1990s onwards: Positioning oneself on Israel's side becomes part of a **state-sponsored culture of remembrance and a purified German self-image**, a matter of German raison d'état. Discussions about German policy towards Israel become more **moral and identity-political**. Reunified Germany uses its relations with Israel to present itself to the world as peaceful and democratic, **creating a national identity** in which the confrontation of Nazi crimes and the relationship with Israel are central.



Manifestations of German Staatsräson, criticism and alternatives

Foreign policy expressions of raison d'état (Markus Kaim 2015)

- Commitment to **Israel's regional military superiority** through bilateral arms and intelligence cooperation
- Commitment to **a regional environment that promotes Israel's security**, particularly with regard to good relations between Arab states and Israel and ensuring that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons
- Commitment to Israel in **international organisations**, especially in the UN and at the level of international jurisdiction

Domestic political dimension of Staatsräson

- Merkel's Staatsräson dictum as a framework that reaffirmed “**all existing fundamental decisions of German policy** towards Israel” (Kaim 2015)
 - “The pro-Israel orientation of German policy” is coming under **increasing pressure from within society.**
 - Staatsräson serves as a **legitimising construct** providing “domestic political grounding for German policy on Israel”
 - In other words: Germany's Staatsräson serves domestically to **discursively consolidate** the existing foreign policy course on Israel and **immune it against domestic criticism** – and to **discipline criticism** through numerous domestic policy measures.
-

Domestic political dimension of Staatsräson

“Here too – in the **dispute over the narrative** – German Staatsräson comes into play. [...] Israel does not depend on Germany for military dominance in Gaza or the West Bank [...]. Rather, it is the less experienced German soldiers who learn from the Israeli army, or the Bundeswehr that benefits from Israeli drone technology. But German politicians can provide diplomatic and political backing. This is done, for example, by **adopting a controversial definition of anti-Semitism favoured by Israel, condemning the BDS movement as anti-Semitic, seeking to prevent independent investigations into Israeli human rights violations, banning Palestinian demonstrations in Berlin, and so on.**” (Marwecki 2024)

Domestic expressions of Staatsräson

Increased state repression (concrete and direct)

- Bureaucratic violence (restrictions on access to premises; visa entry bans at the Palestine Congress)
- Cancellation of funding (e.g. for the Berlin cultural centre Oyoun, due to the allocation of space to an anti-Zionist Jewish group; Mädchen-Zentrum)
- Police violence at pro-Palestinian demonstrations / ban on pro-Palestinian demonstrations
- Events, congresses and organisations were banned, protest camps and occupied lecture halls were cleared
- Bans on certain slogans, symbols and languages at demonstrations
- Anti-immigration policies, racist discourse and outsourcing of AS (imported AS)

Domestic expressions of Staatsräson

Defamation and intimidation (vague – indirect forms of repression)

- Artists and academics faced defamation campaigns (Berlinale; FU lecturers).
- Bundestag resolutions: Massive criticism from civil society and human rights groups regarding restrictions on academic freedom, freedom of expression and artistic freedom
- Chilling effects and self-censorship
- Narrowing of academic and public debate
- Instrumentalisation of anti-Semitism (authoritarian anti-anti-Semitism)

Uni Köln lädt bedeutende Philosophin wegen ihrer Haltung zu Israel aus

Gespräch

Palästinensische Autorin Adania Shibli eingeladen

ANTISEMITISMUS BEFÜRCHTET

Weimer begrüßt Böhmermanns Absage des Rapper-Konzerts

Donnepp Media Award entzogen

Wegen Antisemitismus-Vorwürfen: Gewinnerin aus dem Rems-Murr-Kreis wird Auszeichnung aberkannt

Antisemitismusvorwürfe nach Berlinale-Preisverleihung

Stand: 26.02.2024 08:42 Uhr

Pressemitteilung

Hannah-Arendt-Preis an Masha Gessen / Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung zieht sich aus der Veranstaltung zur Preisverleihung zurück

13. Dezember 2023

Staatsräson and Palestine

- Since reunification, the special relationship with Israel has served to forge a national identity and self-image as part of a state-sponsored culture of remembrance.
- Israel thus becomes a central projection space for German self-assurance, historical responsibility and moral purification.
- In this sense, German raison d'état needs a “good” Israeli state so that Germany itself can appear morally rehabilitated.
- **If the political reality in Palestine-Israel is interpreted exclusively through this lens of German coming to terms with the past, the erasure of Palestinian reality becomes a structural necessity.**
- Palestinians thus become particularly inconvenient political subjects for the German national self-image. Their history, present and political demands disrupt the morally structured narrative of German redemption and are therefore systematically marginalised, delegitimised and made invisible.

Dirk A. Moses: Catechism Debate

- Article by Australian historian Dirk A. Moses “The German Catechism” (2021)
- argues that the comparative analysis of the Holocaust with other genocides in history is seen as “heretic”
- Five elements of Catechism according to Moses:

1) **The Holocaust is unique because** it was the unlimited exterminating of the Jews for the sake of extermination itself

2) It was a **civilizational rupture** (Zivilisationsbruch) and the moral foundation of the nation.

3) Germany has a **special responsibility to Jews in Germany, and a special loyalty to Israel** (“Staatsräson”).

4) **Antisemitism is a distinct prejudice**, and was a distinctly German one. It should not be confused with racism.

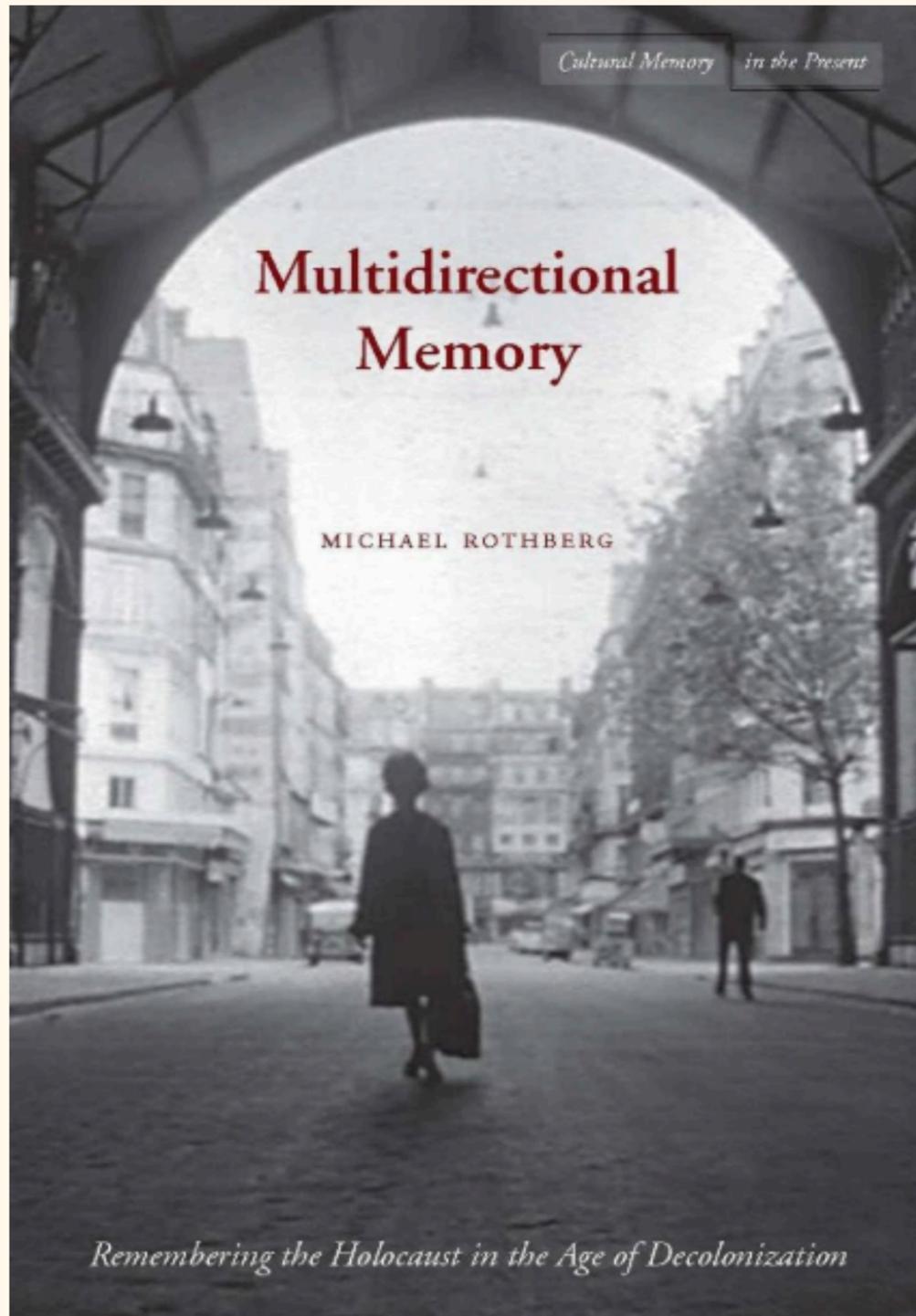
5) **Antizionism is antisemitism.**

Wolfram Weimer: The new memorial site concept (November 12, 2025)

- Replaces the 2008 concept.
- Promotes and develops memorial sites commemorating National Socialism's crimes and SED regime injustices.
- Excludes German colonial crimes, despite Weimer's statement: "Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland trägt eine dauerhafte Verantwortung, die staatlich begangenen Verbrechen des 20. Jahrhunderts aufzuarbeiten und der Opfer zu gedenken."
- SPD, Greens, and Left Party members demanded including colonialism.
- CDU and Central Council of Jews in Germany wanted a separate colonial concept → Hierarchization.
- (Post)migrant commemoration entirely absent.

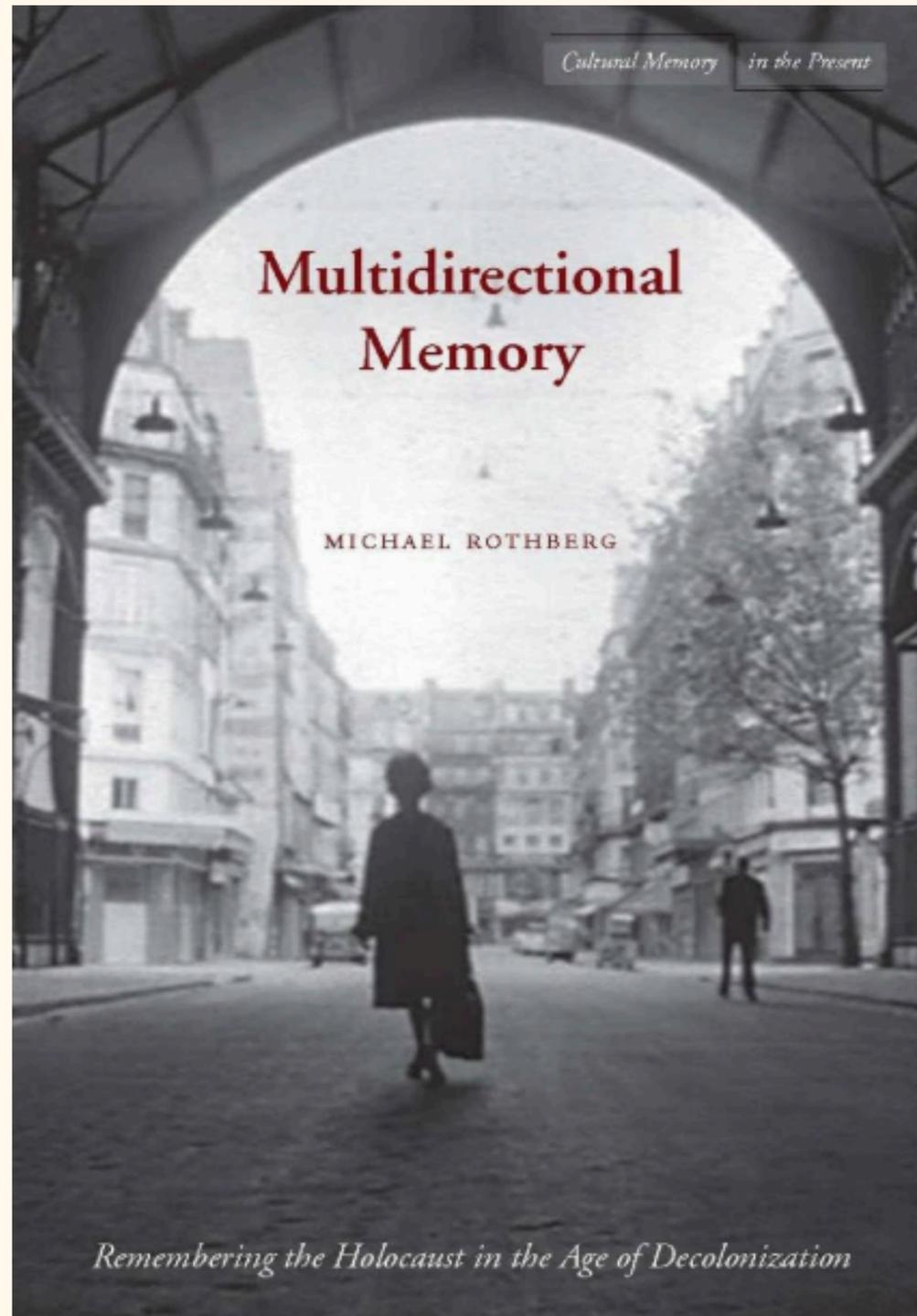
<https://kulturstaatsminister.de/aufarbeiten-und-erinnern/gedenkstaettenkonzeption>

Michael Rothberg: Multidirectional Memory



- Intervention in the German discourse on appropriate commemoration of crimes against humanity
- **German postcolonial debates:** Holocaust memory vs. colonial atrocities (e.g., Herero genocide)
- **Advocates a comparative approach,** rejecting "zero-sum" memory competition (Erinnerungskonkurrenz).
- **memory is not a limited resource:**
- Interconnected remembrance of the Holocaust and other histories of violence (colonialism, slavery, decolonization) reflects reality, versus the singularity paradigm.

Michael Rothberg: Multidirectional Memory



- **limits and productivity of multidirectional lens for a critical analysis:** Hannah Arendt's multidirectional approach to totalitarianism → Eurocentrism; Aimé Césaire → neglected the necessary specificity of Holocaust
- multidirectional memory **exposes gaps and continuities in political violence**
- collective memory as “counterpublic sphere”
- **New solidarity of remembrance and visions of intertwined justice:** decolonization struggles in the 1960s (French-Algerian war) shaped Holocaust remembrance, and vice versa

Masha Gessen: “In the shadow of the Holocaust”

“Here was a country [Germany], or at least a city [Berlin], that was doing what most cultures cannot: looking at its own crimes, its own worst self. But, at some point, the effort began to feel static, glassed in, as though it were an effort not only to remember history but also to insure that only this particular history is remembered—and only in this way.” (Masha Gessen: In the Shadow of the Holocaust, The New Yorker, December 9, 2023)

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-weekend-essay/in-the-shadow-of-the-holocaust>

Masha Gessen: “In the shadow of the Holocaust”

“There [at the Jewish Museum Berlin], an installation by the Israeli artist **Menashe Kadishman, titled “Fallen Leaves,”** consists of more than ten thousand rounds of iron with eyes and mouths cut into them, like casts of children’s drawings of screaming faces. When you walk on the faces, they clank, like shackles, or like the bolt handle of a rifle. Kadishman dedicated the work to victims of the Holocaust and other innocent victims of war and violence. I don’t know what Kadishman, who died in 2015, would have said about the current conflict. [...] **I thought of the thousands of residents of Gaza killed in retaliation for the lives of Jews killed by Hamas. Then I thought that, if I were to state this publicly in Germany, I might get in trouble.**”

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-weekend-essay/in-the-shadow-of-the-holocaust>

Denied: Palestine Commemoration in Germany

Denied commemoration

May 11, 2023 Read time: 8 min



Demonstration to commemorate the Nakba in Berlin May 15, 2021. [Photo: REUTERS/Christian Mang]

Medico International

- shrinking of spaces for critical speech about Israel and Palestine
- banning of Nakba commemoration /vigils/ demonstrations in Berlin (2022/2023)
- poses “threat” to Germany’s self-image
- extension of repressive security measures from Palestine activists to others, e.g. “Letzte Generation“
- Comparison of court rulings: cases of Anti-Semitism at Nakba demonstrations vs. cases of Holocaust relativization and right-wing slogans on Anti-Corona-Protest

<https://www.medico.de/en/denied-commemoration-19089>

Alena Jabarine: “Germany, why are you quiet?”

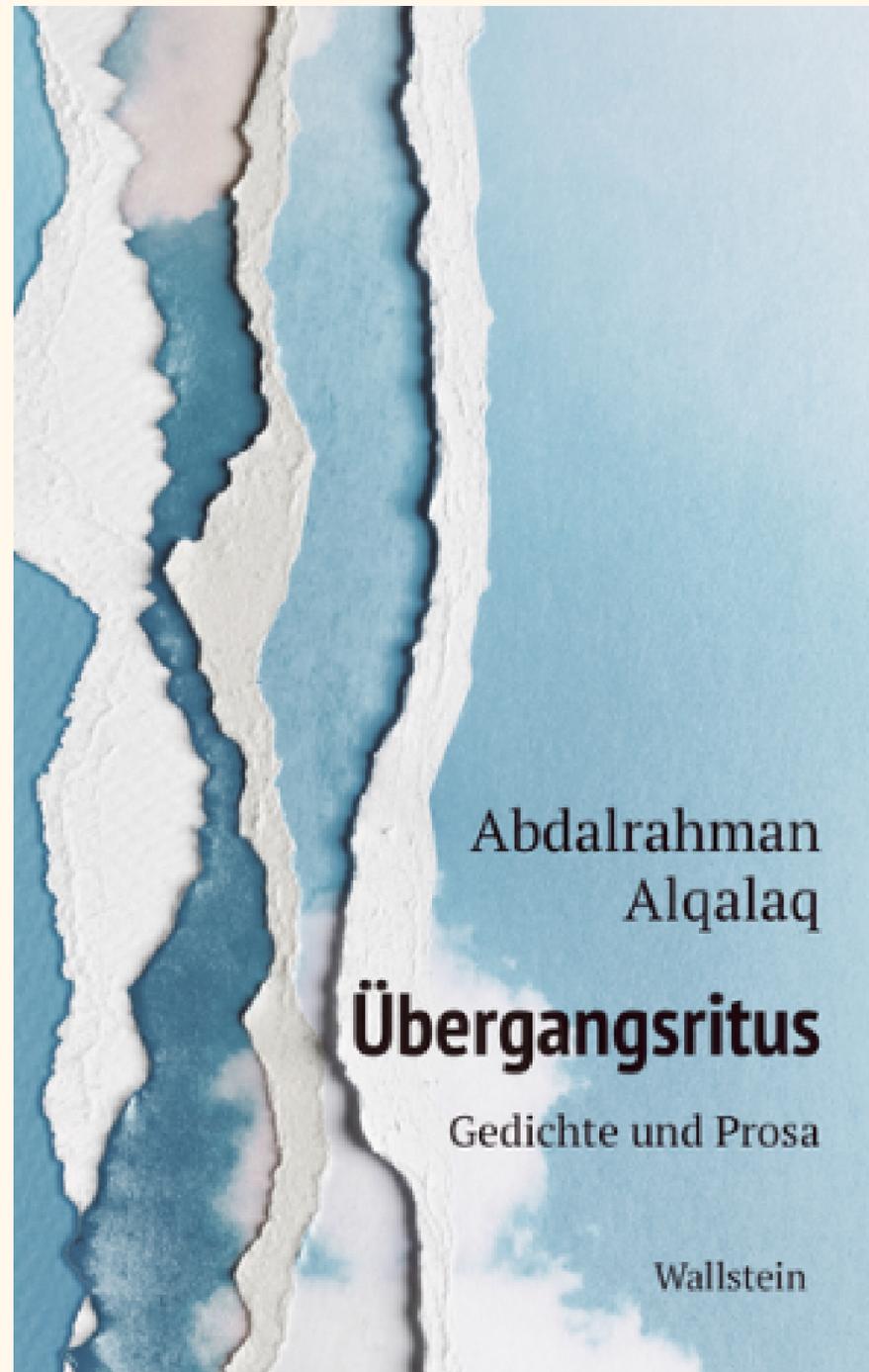
“Fatih [Akin] asked me to say a few words before the film begins. Thank you, Fatih, for your humanity and your courage.

And I ask myself, **why must it require courage? Why is it so hard for me – as a Palestinian, as a German, as a Hamburger – to find the right words in my hometown, in a cinema where I spent many hours of my youth? To speak about a subject that concerns us all.** [...] What would I have done?

When a genocide was taking place – and Germany kept supplying weapons? And boycotted sanctions? When Germany refused to take in injured children, while municipalities and doctors offered their help? Because, it was said by German authorities, their accompanying adults might be dangerous. (Opening Speech, September 29, 2025)

<https://taz.de/Journalistin-ueber-Schweigen-zu-Gaza/!6112725/>

Abdalrahman Alqalaq: Im Land der Anderen



English translation:

In others' land, we labor sadly, fending off the charge
we do nothing at all.

Even as friends are dying, we grieve only as our
integration class permits.

Here, mourning means foreigners stand idle.

*So we scour supermarket shelves for spices, frantic,
while our homeland burns.*

*When sadness fades and we march for Palestine, we
forget: the whites hoard their humanity, sharing it
thinly with the rest.*

We, the long-term displaced, want to apologize for
repeatedly quoting the Human Rights Charter so
brazenly. *We're sorry that our dead make so much
noise online. It wasn't granted to us to learn a
language in which one can die more elegantly.*

Cancellations & Travel Bans

May 10, 2024 12:00AM EDT | News Release

Available in [English](#)

Germany: British-Palestinian Doctor Denied Schengen Entry

Reported Ban Risks Undermining German Commitment to Free Expression, Assembly

Termin abgesagt, Veranstaltung verschoben: We Still Need to Talk

Hin zu einer relationalen Erinnerungskultur

euro-
scene
leipzig

Press release | 15 October 2024

euro-scene Leipzig cancels the guest performance AND HERE I AM by Freedom Theatre / Ahmed Tobasi, Hassan Abdulrazzak, Zoe Lafferty

Following accusations of anti-Semitism against the Freedom Theater, the performances of the production **AND HERE I AM** scheduled for 6 and 7 November will not take place. The debate surrounding the invitation of the artists from Jenin in the West Bank was conducted both locally and in the national media, sometimes leading to contradictory escalations.

Palästina-Aktivist:innen in Berlin

Ausweisung wegen Hass und Hetze?

Vier Aktivist:innen der Berliner Palästina-Bewegung sollen ausgewiesen werden. Das beschäftigt auch das Landesparlament. Vor der Tür gibt es Protest.

7.4.2025 18:15 Uhr

 teilen

Sicherheit jüdischer Studenten gefährdet? Palästina-Funktionärin darf doch nicht an der FU auftreten

Francesca Albanese gilt als Israel-Hasserin. Dennoch sollte die UN-Sonderberichterstatterin an der Freien Universität in Berlin reden. Doch jetzt kommt alles ganz anders.



Elmar Schütze

12.02.2025 · 14.02.2025, 18:15 Uhr



Preis für Journalist*in Masha Gessen

Immer noch ein Eklat mehr

Die feierliche Hannah-Arendt-Preisverleihung an Masha Gessen wurde abgesagt. Gessen verglich Gaza mit den Zwangsghettos der Nazis.

14.12.2023 15:07 Uhr

 teilen

Documentation: Archive of Silence



Archive of Silence

Crowdsourced archive documenting silenced voices in Germany.

About us

Archive of Silence documents the systematic silencing of Palestine solidarity in Germany, especially in arts, culture, and media. Since October 2023, we have recorded over 200 incidents — from bans and cancellations to smear campaigns and censorship. These are not isolated cases but part of a structural pattern of racism and repression, rooted in a longer history of erasing Palestinian identity and solidarity. This archive collects both public cases and anonymous submissions.

<https://archiveofsilence.org/>