

No, Post-Nazi Germany Isn't a Model of Atoning for the Past

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German public debate is often marked by self-congratulation at “coming to terms” with the country’s past. Yet comparisons between antisemitism and other racisms are increasingly being demonized — and it’s stifling discussion of Germany’s colonial crimes.

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A new “historians’ dispute” (*Historikerstreit*) about the Holocaust is currently shaking Germany. The first took place over thirty-five years ago, during the Cold War, when the country was still divided and many players had firsthand experience of Nazism and World War II. Against the neoconservative historian Ernst Nolte, who deplored Germany’s imprisonment within “a past that will not pass,” the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas affirmed memory of the Holocaust as a pillar of German historical consciousness.

Undeniably, Nolte’s apologetic interpretation of Auschwitz as a simple “copy” of the Gulag — the Bolshevik crimes being the “logical and factual *prius*” of modern totalitarianism, and the Nazi ones the reaction of a threatened country — could fulfill a political function during the Cold War. In the twenty-first century, however, it has become useless, even for neoconservatives. Germany belongs to the West no longer as a geopolitical outpost in a bipolar world, but rather as one of its key actors, including as the motor of the European Union.

Created as the result of a long, twisted, and tormented process of “working through the past,” the Holocaust Memorial today at the heart of Berlin is doubtless an impressive material testimony to the integration of Nazism into German historical self-representation. Nonetheless, it also fulfills other purposes. Thanks to this successful “coming to terms with the past” (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), Germany is finally equipped to assume the leadership of the EU ; for even beyond its economic hegemony, it has its cards in order also from the human rights viewpoint. Holocaust memory is no longer, as it perhaps was in Nolte’s days, the permanent and impossible work of mourning of a country facing its troubled past. Today it has become the sign of a new political normativity : market society, liberal democracy, and (selective) defense of human rights.

The new *Historikerstreit* puts this new cultural and political landscape into question. In a global age, this second “historians’ dispute” transcends German borders. Its initiator, Dirk Moses, is an Australian scholar who has obtained an international reputation in German and postcolonial studies, notably by investigating the history and theory of genocide. This University of North Carolina

professor has prestigious academic standing in the United States, and his positions cannot be ignored, as usually happens with scholars from the Global South.

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He does not hesitate to speak of a new "German catechism" grounded on the idea of the Holocaust's "uniqueness," a sacred dogma defended by stigmatizing its comparison with colonial genocides as an insidious form of antisemitism (and thus trivializing colonial genocides as "ordinary," second-class genocides). Ironically, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* — the daily that in the 1980s defended Nolte's positions — has become one of the most tenacious disparagers of Moses and his defenders, depicted as "revisionist" deniers of the singularity of the Holocaust.

The time for guilt is over ; mourning has been replaced by the obsessive hunt for antisemitic conspiracies. The fatwas of this new German conformism have struck against a long list of figures, from philosophers such as Judith Butler and Achille Mbembe (a South Africa-based scholar who dared to compare Gaza and the Palestinian West Bank to apartheid), to historians such as Michael Rothberg and Jürgen Zimmerer. They do not even spare heads of major public institutions, like the former director of the Jewish Museum of Berlin, compelled to resign for inviting personalities who did not unquestioningly support Israel. Once again, the heart of the debate is historical comparison and its political uses.

On Historical Comparisons

Comparison is a customary practice for historians. But scholars do not compare ideas, events, and experiences to establish homologies ; rather, they detect similarities and analogies, which ultimately help us to recognize historical peculiarities. Like wars and revolutions, genocides both repeat and innovate, merging predictable tendencies with unexpected accomplishments. Every genocide possesses its "uniqueness" that the work of comparison helps to detect. In short, comparison is a necessary epistemological dimension of historical research ; its aim is critical understanding.

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Historical comparison, however, is not a "neutral" and innocent intellectual procedure, insofar as it participates in building collective memories. Saying that Auschwitz was a "copy" of the Gulag (except for the "technical" procedure of gassing, Nolte pointed out) obviously suggests that the "bad guys" of the story were the Bolsheviks ; the Nazis, on this telling, become simple epigones : they

were corrupted by the original and true inventors of totalitarian evil.

Italians like the idea of the “uniqueness” of the Nazi crimes : this means that fascism was not so bad, and Italy clearly prefers to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust than those of its own genocide in Ethiopia. For the Ukrainians and the Tutsis, comparing the Holodomor to Auschwitz and speaking of a “tropical Nazism” does not mean diminishing the Holocaust, but giving recognition to their own victims. Those exhuming the corpses of the Spanish Republicans today speak of a Francoite Holocaust, whereas neoconservatives and “revisionist” scholars prefer to depict the Republic as a “Trojan horse” of Bolshevism and Franco as a patriot who, while despising democracy, ultimately saved Spain from totalitarianism.

The definition of the nineteenth-century French conquest of Algeria is the object of permanent conflict between the two countries. In 2005, the French Parliament promulgated two laws recognizing the genocide of the Armenians perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire during World War I, and the “beneficial effects” (*bienfaits*) of French colonization in Africa, Asia, and the Antilles. Even the most naïve observer could not deny the political dimension of memory policies, which might either burden historical consciousness or relieve wounded communities : states are accountable for their own past. To take two well-known examples, Willy Brandt’s kneeling in front of the Warsaw Ghetto memorial and Jacques Chirac’s admission of France’s guilt in the Jews’ fate during World War II powerfully helped establish a new political responsibility in representing the past.

Very often, comparison reveals historical entanglements. This is valid for synchronic events : Stalin’s crimes do not justify or trivialize Hitler’s crimes, and vice versa, but undoubtedly Stalinism and Nazism deeply interacted and influenced each other, by creating a spiral of radicalization that resulted in the apocalyptic clash of World War II. A similar entanglement — even if not synchronic — binds Nazi violence with the history of European and German colonialism. Holocaust studies usually ignored this genealogical link : colonialism is virtually nonexistent in the works on Nazism by prominent historians such as George L. Mosse, Raul Hilberg, Hans Mommsen, Martin Broszat, or Saul Friedländer, or even those of a subsequent generation embodied by distinguished scholars like Götz Aly, Omer Bartov, Christian Gerlach, and Peter Longerich. For most of them, colonialism is an ephemeral “metaphor” (Friedländer) which appeared very shortly in 1940, before the Holocaust, when, after France’s capitulation, the Nazis briefly discussed the plan of deporting the European Jews to Madagascar.

Yet, the entanglement between Nazism and colonialism has been studied by several contemporary historians, from Arno J. Mayer to Mark Mazower, who stressed the imperial dimension of Nazi politics. This was earlier suggested by various scholars. Writing in 1942, Karl Korsch observed that Hitler’s Germany had “extended to ‘civilized’ European peoples the methods hitherto reserved for the ‘natives’ or ‘savages’ living outside so-called civilization.” In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Hannah Arendt grasped a premise for Nazism in the “administrative massacres” devised by the British rulers of Africa and India. Once this fateful link between state violence and managerial rationality was established in the colonial world, Arendt pointed out, “the stage seemed to be set for all possible horrors.”

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During the war, Franz Neumann, a German-Jewish political scientist exiled in the United States, and Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish law scholar who forged the concept of genocide, stressed the affinities between modern antisemitism and colonial racism. Colonial racism, they emphasized, had been an inspiration for Wilhelm Marr, the essayist who coined “antisemitism” in the late 1870s. Several historians have stressed Hitler’s admiration for the British Empire, and more recently Harvard law scholar James Q. Whitman carefully studied the influence of American racism on Nazi ideology and politics.

The Jim Crow laws in the postbellum South inspired the Nuremberg laws of 1935 in defining race and citizenship ; in distinguishing between “pure race” citizens (white, Aryans), racially inferior groups (blacks), and “mongrels” (*Mischlinge*) ; and in prohibiting and punishing sex relations between racially different individuals. The Nazis deplored that the Jim Crow laws were not extended to the Jews, but this did not diminish their admiration for the United States, whose hostility toward Nazi Germany they attributed to Jewish elites’ harmful influence on Roosevelt’s administration. They prized the flexible American juridical system, which was able to merge two contradictory tendencies : a white supremacist order and an egalitarian transformative order ; the “realism” of segregationist laws and the “formalism” of constitutional equality. For the Nazis, this meant that racial hierarchies had to be combined with “equality” within the German *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Colonial Roots

Nazi violence is incomprehensible without the material and cultural legacy of colonialism. Nineteenth-century colonial wars were conceived as wars of conquest and extermination, carried out not against states but against populations themselves. Nazism folded the biopolitics of colonialism, which used starvation as a tool of control on the submitted populations (notably in India, as stressed by Mike Davis in *Late Victorian Holocausts*). Even a superficial analysis of the Nazi lexicon reveals its colonial filiation : “living space” (*Lebensraum*), “declining” and “dying” peoples (*untergehender, sterbender Völker*), “sub-humanity” (*Untermenschentum*), “master race” (*Herren Rasse*), and finally “annihilation” (*Vernichtung*). These were the words of German colonialism.

As Mayer suggests in *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken ?* (1988), the Nazi worldview was syncretic and focused on three intertwined objectives : anti-communism, colonialism, and antisemitism. The first was ideological and philosophical : Marxism, the most radical form of Enlightenment, must be destroyed. The second was geopolitical : the conquest of German “living space” was a variant of Pan-Germanism inherited from *völkisch* nationalism. Hitler located the German *lebensraum* in Eastern Europe, a Slavonic world organized as a communist state. The third was cultural : annihilating the Jews as the internal enemy of Germanness and the “brain” of the USSR.

During the war, these three dimensions of Nazism merged resulting in a unique process : the destruction of the USSR, the colonization of Central and Eastern Europe, and the extermination of the Jews became inseparable aims. For Nazi ideology, the USSR brought together two forms of otherness that had shaped Western history for two centuries : the Jew and the colonial subject. Hitler’s politics synthesized these cultural, geopolitical, and ideological dichotomies : Germans versus Jews ; Europe versus “Asia” (Russia) ; and Nazism versus Bolshevism.

In conceiving and implementing this policy of conquest and extermination, the Nazis not only looked to British and European colonialism as edifying paradigms, but also to German history. In 1904, the

repression of the Herero rebellion in Namibia, then a German colony, resulted in genocide. General Lothar von Trotha emitted an annihilation order and German propaganda presented this extermination campaign as a race war. After World War I, Germany lost its colonies and transferred its expansionist ambitions from *Mittelafrika* to *Mitteleuropa*. Several Nazi leaders came from this African experience.

According to historian Timothy Snyder, the Holocaust became a kind of ersatz for Nazi Germany's failed colonial ambitions. In summer 1941, the Nazis had "four utopias : a lightning victory that would destroy the Soviet Union in weeks ; a Hunger Plan that would starve thirty million people in months ; a Final Solution that would eliminate European Jews after the war ; and a *Generalplan Ost* that would make of the western Soviet Union a German colony. Six months after Operation Barbarossa was launched, Hitler had reformulated the war aims such that the physical extermination of the Jews became the priority." Their deportation outside of Europe being impossible, the Jews had to be annihilated.

Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon were not historians, but their view of the Nazi crimes as a "backlash" (*choc en retour*) was a useful and justified warning in a time of collective amnesia. For Césaire, Nazism "applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa." According to Frantz Fanon, who wrote *The Wretched of Earth* (1961) during the Algerian War, fascism could not be dissociated from colonialism : "What is fascism if not colonialism when rooted in a traditionally colonialist country ?" Their approach, which runs the risk of crudely equating the Holocaust with colonialism, is debatable, but it nevertheless harbors a fruitful intuition. Their admonition, however, was regrettably ignored by most historians, who did not grasp the crucial genealogical link between Nazi crimes and Europe's imperial past.

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While these features of the Holocaust prove its *genealogical link* with imperialism and colonialism, they do not establish any *equivalence*. Mass violence is not a monolithic category in which experiences in different continents at different times are identical. If the Holocaust undoubtedly possessed a colonial dimension, this does not explain the deportation to Auschwitz of the French, Italian, Belgian, Dutch, Hungarian, or Greek Jews. Their systematic killing was not instrumental in conquering *lebensraum* : it was related to the peculiar history of *völkisch* ideology and antisemitism.

Does this mean that the Holocaust, unlike other genocides, was an "ontological" extermination, in George Steiner's ? All genocides are "ontological," even if the conquest of a continent cannot be planned as the destruction of a minority. Otherwise, one should conclude that the Spanish colonization of America was a minor genocide because the *conquistadores* did not exterminate the entire population. The Jews annihilated by the Nazis — it is painful to repeat such a truism — deserve neither more nor less compassion and recollection than the Armenians destroyed in the Ottoman Empire on the brink of collapse, the Soviet citizens who died in the Gulags, the Ukrainian peasants extinguished in the Holodomor, the Congolese killed in Leopold II's rubber plantations, the Algerians burned in their villages by French armies, the Ethiopians gassed by Italian planes, the *desaparecidos* of the Argentinian and Chilean military dictatorships, and so on in an interminable list

of modern atrocities.

Mass violence is a collection of related, similar, comparable, but also singular events. This implies no hierarchy of victimhood but remains relevant to critical understanding. All genocides are “caesurae of civilization” (*Zivilisationsbruch*), even if they might result from the destructive potentialities of civilization itself, from very different historical circumstances, and if their perception and legacy cannot be the same everywhere.

There is an *absolute* uniqueness of genocides — the Holocaust among them — which is embodied by their victims. No effort of empathy or insight can completely grasp their suffering. Historians should respect the singularity of this untransmissible lived experience, but they cannot endorse it. This uniqueness is subjective and historical understanding consists in contextualizing and transcending it, including through its comparison with other forms of violence, instead of sacralizing it.

Survivors’ memory — this is what Primo Levi meant in speaking about the nonexistence of an “integral witness” — is but a fragment of an event with a variety of forms and causes. The Holocaust had at least four major phenomenological dimensions : ghettos, mass shootings, extermination camps, and the death marches in late 1944 to early 1945. Individual recollections cannot embrace such a complexity ; history is made of *relative* — neither absolute nor incomparable — singularities.

To return to Moses and the new *Historikestreit* : he maintains that the key to understanding genocide lies in modern states’ obsession with “permanent security,” a new concept that contests the usual primacy of ethnic and racial criteria, and finally does not distinguish between the Holocaust and colonial genocides. The historiographical debate this concept provoked is obviously legitimate. Equally legitimate is Moses’s reassessment of the genealogy of the notion of genocide, considering the (recently discovered) Zionist past of Raphael Lemkin, its inventor.

This concept, he argues, did not result from a cumulative process of research and knowledge on the history of mass violence. It was rather a product of the “contingency” of World War II : a useful tool for a judicial culture accustomed to evaluating crimes against nations (i.e. communities recognized by international law) to acknowledge the extermination of the Jews. Whatever its origins, this concept informed decades of scholarship and historical research. Moreover, Moses is not the first scholar to raise doubts about the pertinence of such a juridical category for historical analysis, when its purpose is not to contextualize and explain but to define guilt and innocence, perpetrators and victims.

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This debate is itself political as well as purely historiographical. The concept of the Holocaust’s “uniqueness” is brandished like a slogan by scholars as different as Götz Aly, who wrote several works to prove the economic rationality of the extermination of the Jews, and Yehuda Bauer, according to whom the Holocaust differs from any other genocide in history precisely because of its lack of economic motives.

Behind their historical arguments, however, memory is at stake : the “uniqueness” thesis brings

together a generation of German scholars who several decades ago tried to “come to terms with the past,” with Zionist intellectuals who have long defended a Judeo-centric view of history. A similar Judeo-centric approach inspires Omer Bartov, who equalizes Nolte and Moses as representatives of symmetrical forms of historical “revisionism” : the first by exculpating the Germans as victims of Bolshevism, the second by recognizing the status of victims to colonized peoples alongside the Jews. Both would put into question the exclusive status of Jewish victimhood.

In some respects, this definition of “uniqueness” — hierarchizing victims — has become the official stance of the German state. By negotiating apologies with Namibia, without considering reparations for that country’s Nama and Herero minorities, Germany trivializes its colonial past (and the victims thereof) as a domain of *raison d’état*, not of collective memory. The Holocaust is “unique” and deserves to be expiated ; the extermination of the Herero and Nama is an “ordinary” colonial genocide for which apologies and a single all-inclusive compensation are enough.

Anti-Colonial Memory

For almost three decades after 1945, a time in which governments did not create Holocaust museums and memorials, in which both survivors and their persecutors were still numerous and active, efforts to remember the extermination of the European Jews did not emphasize its “uniqueness.” The Holocaust was almost indistinguishable from the remembrance of the Resistance, and it powerfully fueled anti-colonialism. Historical knowledge of the Holocaust was still incomplete and approximative — historians did not yet distinguish between concentration and extermination camps — but its legacy and political meaning were obvious, particularly for the Left.

In France, during the Algerian War, many former partisans — many Jews among them — considered their support of the National Liberation Front (FLN) continuous with their previous anti-fascist commitments. They certainly would not object to Césaire’s and Fanon’s assimilation of Nazism to colonialism. Jakob Moneta — a German Jew who had experienced the pogroms in Poland as a child, at the end of World War I, and had survived the Holocaust by emigrating to Palestine — played a significant role, benefiting from his diplomatic immunity as a civil servant of the German embassy in Paris, in bringing material and financial support to the FLN.

The continuity between anti-fascism, the struggle against antisemitism, and anti-colonialism, was equally evident for Wolfgang Abendroth, Günther Anders, Lelio Basso, Simone de Beauvoir, Isaac Deutscher, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ralph Schoenman, Gisèle Halimi, and other intellectuals who participated in the Russell Tribunal against the Vietnam War.

After the My Lai massacre, Anders, a German Jew, recommended holding a session of the tribunal in Auschwitz, precisely to emphasize the continuity between the Nazi crimes and the US crimes in Vietnam, both ascribed to imperialism. In 1967, Jean Améry (Hans Mayer), an Auschwitz survivor, gathered several texts devoted to the Holocaust in *At the Mind’s Limits*, a chapter of which focuses on torture. Before being deported as a Jew, Améry had been tortured as a Resistance fighter in Belgium. After spending one year beside the gas chambers of Auschwitz, he described torture not as an “accidental quality of the Third Reich” but rather as its “essence.” According to Améry, torture was “the apotheosis of National Socialism” : “It was precisely in torture that the Third Reich materialized in all the density of its being.”

How to explain this paradoxical assessment by an Auschwitz survivor ? Torture has been universally used by all kinds of political regimes, from military dictatorships to democracies (think of Abu Ghraib), whereas the Holocaust was genocide. Améry’s text is usually interpreted as a timeless meditation on violence, but it should be set within the French debate on torture during the Algerian

War, prompted by Henri Alleg's 1958 work *La Question*. Améry revisited the Holocaust through the prism of colonialism. The historical hermeneutic displayed in his text is debatable, but his political goal was perfectly clear. Améry sought not to erect a monument to the memory of the survivors, but to activate its critical force.

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It was clear to Améry that bearing witness to the Holocaust meant struggling against oppression in the present, not surrounding a lived trauma with a mystical aura of sacredness. He was not naïve. He felt that the German New Left's tendency to speak of fascism rather than of Nazism (in a time in which so many former Nazis were not only still alive but significantly embedded in the West German state) was suspicious, as well as its insistence on speaking of anti-Zionism while ignoring antisemitism.

For the German New Left, the Holocaust was more removed than assimilated or transcended. Améry wrote an article for *konkret*, the New Left's most important cultural magazine, to point out these ambiguities. When the Holocaust took center stage in the 1980s, first with a rather mediocre American television series, *Holocaust*, then with the *Historikerstreit*, the New Left was completely marginalized and many leading figures abandoned it. What Moses calls the "German catechism," with its obsession with uniqueness, its mistrust of comparison, its extreme Zionism, and its proclivity to consider postcolonial studies as a form of antisemitism, could be viewed as a kind of backlash : this hyperbolic focus on the Holocaust "uniqueness" is the symmetrical reversal and the belated compensation for a long repression, now viewed as a guilty silence.

Civil Religion

In some respects, what Moses calls the "German catechism" is the perverted form of a *civil religion*. The Holocaust as "civil religion" incontestably possesses its virtues, sacralizing such values as democracy, freedom, pluralism, tolerance, and respect for racial, ethnic, or sexual otherness through ritualized commemorations. The "German catechism," however, sacralizes both Jewish victimhood and German guilt by separating them from the history of nationalism, racism, fascism, and colonialism. Instead of treating the Holocaust as a warning against the current forms of racism and xenophobia, it celebrates the indestructible alliance between Germany and Israel.

In times of growing Islamophobia and xenophobic rejection of immigrants and refugees, this sectarian and shortsighted remembrance can easily become a comfortable alibi for post-fascism. From Matteo Salvini to Marine Le Pen, from Éric Zemmour to Viktor Orbán, all European right-wing populist leaders show off their excellent relationships with Israel to prove their irreproachability in matter of human rights. A couple of years ago, Salvini organized, in the same week, an anti-immigrant raid in the Roman suburbs and, at the Italian Senate, a Holocaust symposium with the participation of the Israeli ambassador. In Germany, Moses emphasizes, the "catechism" federates a large political spectrum going from the *Antideutsche* (a pathologically hyper-Zionist radical left) to the post-fascist Alternative für Deutschland, from the most intransigent detractors of German guilt

to the nostalgic epigones of German nationalism.

Most contemporary neoconservatives have abandoned antisemitism. Considering the Jews as strangers to Europe — they say — was the fatal mistake of their ancestors, the adherents of *völkisch* nationalism. Germany has clarified this inexcusable misunderstanding and repented for its crimes by giving home to the Jews, finally recognized as a constitutive part of Western civilization. Now they have been accepted and Europe must protect itself against its true enemies : Islam and Islamic terrorism. Immigrants and refugees, unlike Jews, embody a culture, a religion, and a way of life which are basically incompatible with the West (and Jewish-Christian civilization) ; they are a privileged vector of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

Neoconservative philosemitism and support of Israel goes together with Islamophobia, often displayed under the flag of human rights (the defense of Western values against Islamic obscurantism). The common feature of all these neoconservative and post-fascist currents that abandoned antisemitism is their hate for immigrants and their rejection of Islam. Defenders of the dogma of the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust, as per official German state policy, don’t care about this.

In some respects, the “German catechism” displays the ambiguities of the vigorous memorial battle which Habermas fought at the time of the first *Historikerstreit*. Defending the idea of a post-national German identity — Hitler having irremediably discredited the entire tradition of German nationalism — Habermas stressed the redemptive character of the Holocaust memory : it is only “after and through (*nach und durch*) Auschwitz,” he wrote, that Germany had finally “joined the West.”

This had implications beyond the affirmation of a “constitutional patriotism” clearly rooted in the Western-liberal tradition. First, it claimed guilt loudly and clearly as no German voice had previously done (except for Karl Jaspers, quickly isolated and silenced in 1946). Moreover, it completely blurred the genealogical link between the Holocaust and colonialism. In this way, the Holocaust became a pathological deviation from a linear Western path ; certainly not, as colonialism, a product of Western civilization itself. Thirty-five years after the *Historikerstreit*, the German state has replaced Nazi “redemptive” antisemitism (*Friedländer*) with a sort of “redemptive” philosemitism which means not the struggle against racism, but Israeli security inscribed into law.

In 2015, at the height of the refugee crisis, Angela Merkel solemnly declared that, given its past, Germany could not escape the moral duty to receive them. Now, a new wave of German nationalism looks at non-European refugees and immigrants (often opposed to Ukrainian refugees) as barbarians. In many ways, Moses is right to emphasize that Germany is still haunted by its “Jewish Question.” In the nineteenth century, antisemitism was a “cultural code” in the Kaiserreich’s nation-building process. Lacking positive myths — Reformation resulted in religious wars and liberalism failed in 1848 — Germany *negatively* forged its self-representation through antisemitism : being German meant, above all, not being Jewish ; Germanness was the antithesis of Jewishness. Today, philosemitism has become the “cultural code” of a reunified, post-national Germany, considering Jews as special friends and defending Israel as a moral duty. Either stigmatized (in the past) or sacralized (now), the Jews remain a symbolic marker through which a national community tries to define itself, its virtues, and its identity.

Should German citizens of Palestinian descent consider Israel’s security as their own political and moral duty ?

Despite the ambiguities mentioned above, Habermas's combat during the *Historikerstreit* obviously had fruitful consequences. His battle to make the Holocaust a pillar of German historical consciousness resulted, a decade and a half later, in a new nationality law that establishes the *jus soli* beside the *jus sanguinis*. Being a German citizen no longer means belonging to an ethnic group of *Stammgenosse* ("blood brothers"), but rather being a member of a political community, sharing duties and rights despite one's ethnic origins. This was a posthumous recognition for millions of German Jews who, for decades, had been seen as strangers in their own country.

Today, Germany has become a multiethnic, multi-confessional, and multicultural nation, with a significant number of young citizens of postcolonial descent. During the World Cup, millions of Germans proudly identify with football players bearing Polish, Turkish, African, or Latino last names. This is the sign of a huge and positive cultural change. Certainly, German citizens with postcolonial origins should not ignore that the Holocaust belongs to the history of their country, but they also embody other memories that legitimately claim recognition. Colonialism is a constitutive part of European and German history as much as antisemitism ; their memory should be part of German collective memory, not merely the memory of its minorities. This truism, however, is simply incompatible with the dogma of the Holocaust uniqueness and the defense of Israel. Should German citizens of Palestinian descent consider Israel's security as their own political and moral duty ?

Dirk Moses observes that, according to several inquiries, many nonwhite German school pupils who visited Auschwitz did not feel guilty for the German deeds but rather spontaneously identified with the Jews. A significant part of German society cannot recognize itself in a civil religion of remembering that rejects postcolonial identities as antisemitic. A multicultural society should preserve its diversity, as the realm of a "multidirectional memory" (Michael Rothberg), in which the remembrance of the Holocaust and that of colonialism could not only coexist but also reinforce democracy and pluralism.

In the age of globalization, historical consciousness and a pedagogy of pluralism and democracy cannot be grounded exclusively on the memory of the Holocaust, however important it is and however essential it has been in allowing Germany and Europe to "work through the past." Unfortunately, "catechists" are not inclined to dialogue ; they are just the opposite of the noble tradition of Jewish universalism, which found so many great representatives in Germany.

ENZO TRAVERSO

P.-S.

- Jacobin. 06.06.2022 :
<https://jacobin.com/2022/06/post-nazi-germany-colonialism-holocaust-israel-atonement>