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Didier Bigo, Akos Kopper, Emma Mc Cluskey, Elspeth Guild, Nicholas de Genova, Arnaud Kurze, Anna Leander, Catherine Goetze, Mark Maguire, Anastassia Tsoukala

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# Biographical Reflections On Academic Freedom—Part One

*PARISS* Collective<sup>1</sup>  
*parisseditorial@gmail.com*

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## Abstract

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we all became used to people wearing masks and covering their faces to protect society. By now these masks are off and we can clearly see everyone's faces; we can read their lips and can understand their expressions and gestures. Words, however, are not coming freely from these mouths. The war on Gaza is just the last example of how questions of how to talk and what can be said permeate the academic community, undermining the essence of being a researcher, teacher and scholar. We, the editors of *PARISS* felt that we should not remain silent on this topic, which affects all of us, albeit in rather different ways. Therefore, we decided to write a collective article in which we could combine voices of various experiences, creating a patchwork of insights on how dilemmas of academic freedom appear in different guises in our experiences.

## Keywords

Academic freedom – collective – Israel – Gaza

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- <sup>1</sup> This is a collective article, published under the name 'PARISS collective', consisting of (Corresponding author) Didier Bigo, Akos Kopper, Emma Mc Cluskey, Elspeth Guild, Nicholas De Genova, Arnaud Kurze, Anna Leander, Catherine Goetze, Mark Maguire and Anastassia Tsoukala. Each author, however, is responsible for their own contribution, and names of respective authors are listed next to the title of each intervention. The order of contributions (and order of authors who constitute *PARISS* Collective) has been chosen randomly.

## Prelude

As we began to write this piece and solicit interventions at the start of 2024, it felt as though issues of academic freedom had never been so pertinent. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we all became used to people wearing masks and covering their faces to protect society. By now these masks are off and we can clearly see everyone's faces; we can read their lips and can understand their expressions and gestures. Words, however, are not coming freely from these mouths. The war on Gaza is just the last example of how questions of how to talk and what can be said permeate the academic community, undermining the essence of being a researcher, teacher and scholar. We, the editors of *PARISS* felt that we should not remain silent on this topic, which affects all of us, albeit in rather different ways. Therefore, we decided to write a collective article in which we could combine voices of various experiences, believing that these various experiences would create a patchwork or collage of insights on how dilemmas of academic freedom appear in different guises in our experiences, depending on our situatedness.

This led to a piece where each part is written by (an) author(s) responsible for their specific contribution to the conversation. The collective represents a shared authorship only to the extent that contributors of each part share the belief in the significance of assembling these reflections. The way this work is organized reflects this, with parts arranged in random order. There is no greater significance to be attributed to any one part or another. Rather, these are parallel recollections and reflections against the backdrop of a shared zeitgeist reminding us about our similar concerns and difficulties. Yet, at the same time, local milieus make these latter considerably differ.

### **Exploring freedom of expression, academic freedom and academic responsibility: How to talk, what to say?—Didier Bigo, Akos Kopper and Emma Mc Cluskey**

It is difficult to know where to begin in broaching the subject of freedom of expression, academic freedom and academic responsibility in contemporary contexts. Even entertaining the question can feel both self-indulgent and profoundly insignificant in the context of such immense human suffering, especially when one does not consider themselves an 'expert' on what is euphemistically called the 'question' of Palestine. Even the English language itself seems so insufficient, described as a 'prison' by Nabil Echchaibi, cultural studies scholar and journalist from Morocco; reduced to a sterile

and impoverished idiom loaded with suspicion towards Arabs.<sup>2</sup> As numerous colleagues have pointed out however, whilst there is certainly an impetus for academics to remain silent, this exists simultaneously with the directive to publicly take 'sides'. How are these paradoxical and often absurd demands playing out? Social media quickly became awash with stories of censorship and self-censorship within the academy; students interrupting talks, invitations being cancelled and posters being ripped down. Now, when we are ready to submit the piece to production in the spring, mainstream media outlets in the USA and parts of Europe are leading with stories of police entering universities to clear out students' pro-Palestine encampments, protesters being publicly named and blacklisted, and university leaders being summoned by politicians to ensure that campuses were free from 'hate speech'.

And yet, even within the three specific embedded contexts of the editors-in-chief in France, Germany and the UK, we seemed to get the impression that we were 'watching different channels'. Language, trajectory, institutional culture, discipline, seniority and gender all play out in ways that mean there is no *single* story. Though we all intuitively get the impression that the space for 'acceptable' talk is shrinking and norms of sayability are becoming much more strictly demarcated and choreographed, what exactly do we mean by this? How can we effectively politically intervene in such a context? What are the origins of this silencing?

The resurgence of the work of Edward Said, and his 'discovery' by so-called Gen Z across social media- has been perhaps the only break in today's dark clouds. This is particularly so in relation to today's political climate of the 'culture wars-ification' of so many questions around rights and freedoms, moves to more cultural essentialism and fetishization.<sup>3</sup> Said's commitment to forgo presentism and exceptionalist thinking and to always see things in relation- is a timely prompt to international social scientists. Not only is the scholar's pronouncement that "I have no power so I have to resort to the tools of education, to writing and speaking"<sup>4</sup> a reminder of the responsibility of the academic, the fact that so many are reading this anew, some twenty years after Said's death- is also a reminder that these issues we speak of are hardly new.

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- 2 Echchaibi, Nabil "Narrating Gaza: Pain in Arabic, information in English", *Al-Jazeera*, 5th December 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/5/narrating-gaza-pain-in-arabic-information-in-english>
  - 3 Dematteo, Lynda, and Mariella Pandolfi. "Anthropology from Dissonance to Ambiguity: Breaking the Deadlock." *Political Anthropological Research on International Social Sciences (PARISS)* 1, no. 1 (2020): 39–60.
  - 4 Said, Edward W. "Memory, inequality, and power: Palestine and the universality of human rights." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 24 (2004): 15–36.

Academic freedom has frequently seen to be in danger when a political power wants to transform research, or indeed teaching, into a political opposition with an opinion considered as 'subversive', or as a 'traitor', coming from someone who was known as a supporter of a cause. Though qualitatively different from the types of censorship we are experiencing in liberal democracies, the detention of anthropologist Fariba Adelkhah, amongst other scholars, by the Iranian regime, is a reminder that the collapse of the categories of academic/political opponent extends far beyond today's US-centric 'culture wars' fights. Adelkhah's relentless struggle to retain the status of academic and refusal to be reduced to a tool of propaganda- is but one example which sets questions of freedom and responsibility in a broader setting. Whilst we are not suggesting that censorship, self-censorship and requirements to speak a certain way are the same as being imprisoned, questions about where the borderline between liberal and illiberal regimes sits regarding academic freedom are nonetheless brought to the fore in unsettling ways. How then to begin to try to objectify these sets of relations in which we are all embedded?

*Academic Freedom as Rigour: Against 'Camps' and Towards Reflexive Encounters*

A first step to think through these questions is to clarify what exactly it is we mean by academic freedom. How is this different to freedom of expression, or indeed of opinion? In the current climate, we see all of these concepts muddled together and used interchangeably, often to delegitimise the positions of another.

Freedom of expression is the right to say what you (as a citizen, as part of the people) think. This is linked to an opinion based on intimate feelings and reasoning and can be constructed by beliefs and emotions as well as education and knowledge. A long list of criteria affecting the positions and trajectories of a specific person may serve to justify an opinion, be they social class, gender, localisation, or family traditions. Political science has tried to classify the aggregation of opinions through opinion polls, but none (even together) can reach the intimacy of the 'free will' producing the opinion. The notion of habitus as a grammar generating the position takings and analysing the relations of structural proximity and the strategies of (little) distinction give some indications but cannot predict the result of the formation of an opinion.

In 'The Plural Actor', Bernard Lahire so shrewdly criticises the danger of reducing human beings to a singular unit of behaviour and thought.<sup>5</sup> Using the concept of 'patrimony of dispositions' to refuse both the unicity of a mentality

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<sup>5</sup> Lahire, Bernard. *The plural actor*. Polity, Cambridge, 2011.

of both groups and individual actors, Lahire provides tools to explore what is in fact a permanent flow of contradictory thoughts, even within the conscience of one individual themselves. To address one opinion to one person timelessly, and even more so to a group- is in fact the opposite of understanding freedom of opinion. Instead, this operates as a mechanism based on accusation, suspicion and scapegoating, rendered irresponsible by time when opinions inevitably shift with the wind and the waves. In today's frenetic social-media context, in which hangmen are searching for victims to fuel ever increasing polarizations, attempts to cancel 'adverse' opinions means the path towards despotism and colonial war has already begun. In fixing, fetishizing, and closing down, we deprive ourselves of possibilities to hear, to self-educate, and to transform and evolve. We destroy the conditions for the constant flow of realities that undermines every claim to absolute knowledge. This is why defending freedom of opinion is crucial. Opinions may be reasonable or not, nonetheless, and within certain legal limits, they have the right to be expressed.

Very often the production of (political) opinion does not happen at random, in a void. They are part of a situation, a context in which people feel obliged to choose a 'camp' and the reduction of complexity leads to binary boundaries (for or against). Opinions are not kept intimate, they are publicly expressed as much against something or someone than in favour of something or someone. They are 'ideological' and are often based on the strength of collective affiliations but also on the feeling that they may be right even if belonging to a minority or even one person.

Freedom of individual opinion and freedom of collective opinion by a minority is not exactly the same. The collective opinion is not just an aggregation of individual opinions that join freely, the process of mobilisation dynamics transformed an opinion into a politicisation of opinion in order to convert others to share the same opinion, or even to cancel the opinion of the others in public spaces. Propaganda in the name of freedom of opinion is transforming freedom into a conflictual framing, under the cover of anonymity of the net, social network platforms gathering around so-called influencers, whereby Elon Musk is held up as some sort of champion.

Academic freedom is for us, partly different. Academic freedom may be based on non-academic freedom of opinion. Everyone has a right to have thought and to express them (in a democratic society) but an opinion of an academic claiming knowledge as an expert, assuming that their own stance is superior, is at risk of acting *against* freedom of opinion. 'Academic' freedom is therefore first and foremost based on the right to dissent with a 'camp' and to *distantiate* from a form of identity or belonging. This can be firstly criticising the camp to which one belongs, to show its own limitations and blindness.

Secondly, it can take the form of analysing the relations between different opinions in order to objectivise them, to understand how ‘reasonable’ they are, their origins, their attractiveness and their social conditions of possibility. This means that academic freedom must emancipate itself from opinions by having a certain rigor, specific methods, logics in the reasoning, and to be ready to accept criticism about this logic. Academic freedom therefore sometimes finds itself at odds with the immediacy of freedom of opinion. It takes the ‘time to reflect’ and is constructed as a reflexive move against the primary opinions of the self.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that it is a scientific method that has a superior truth or that it become neutral, but that its politics is not directly ideological.

The framing of a question through academic freedom is based on an understanding of a situation, and the description of this situation through an academic discipline or language, the language of history, of law, of psychology, of sociology, of politics (political theory, political science, geopolitics). This implies rules, this implies debates where the use of violence as the last sovereign word is refused. The more powerful is not always right, and their narrative is not the truth.

### *The Conditions of the ‘Homo Academicus’: Collecting Heterogenous Stories and Lived Experiences*

Clearly, the events that triggered this initiative are in a sense just like the last drop in the ocean after academia’s shift in a much more corporate direction in recent decades. With issues of social responsibility and social contribution simultaneously fetishized and trivialized, the sector has seen funding dwindling, the rise of managerialism as an organising principle, and the transformation of pedagogy.

In our first issue of *PARISS*, we asked how it was possible that academic freedom, which works as the condition of pedagogy, has been transformed into the will to serve, to become the best in an arbitrary ranking process, where the academic becomes an employee, a sales-person of an institution of higher learning, employed to sell diplomas? How has the classroom, traditionally seen as a space for plural engagement, obliging students to at times bear discomfort, contradiction and complexity- now come to be accepted as a much more fixed and rigid place, allowing for ever more little room to move? With such inconsistent and hollow logics, it is no surprise that the term ‘correctness’ is

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6 Lefort, Claude. “Réflexion: Le religieux dans le politique” in Collectif [Authors], *Le Temps de la réflexion* Paris: Gallimard, 1981; Castoriadis, Cornelius. *Figures of the Thinkable*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2007.

so superficial and taking so many interpretations, making it hard to refer to an expected code of conduct of the *Homo Academicus*.

Though we are all feeling the limits of academic freedom being reconfigured, it is clear that this is not taking place within one 'space' per se. We have very different experiences and live in not one academic community, but in overlapping layers of 'conditionalities' that enable/constrain, but also require academics to speak. This is why this call for interventions is so important. We wish to collect stories from our colleagues precisely on how they have experienced the reconfiguration of limits around their own academic freedom. If we, the editors-in-chief, had such diverse experiences and sometimes felt as though we were talking past each other, this only reiterates the necessity of providing a space to share as many experiences and stories as possible. Every story, however seemingly insignificant, is important in this regard.

A richness of lived experiences brought together, and in dialogue with one another is perhaps a first step to situate this multiplicity of conditionalities in relation to each other. Shining a light into various aspects of the issue, in all its richness and complexity- is a move towards academic freedom in the way that we have understood it; as both situated and relational, allowing for engagement which is complex, radically heterogenous and perhaps uncomfortable. We think of this article as a brainstorming exercise; a first step in what we hope will be an ongoing conversation.

### *An Open End—Till next time*

We have therefore fashioned this article as 'part one' of an ongoing conversation. The seven interventions published below are not representative of all the aspects emanating around academic freedom in the past few months. Indeed, the time between soliciting interventions and publishing the forum has seen questions around academic freedom catapulted into public consciousness in ways that have not been seen since the early days of the War on Terror. This article is simply a first attempt to gather a plurality of stories, and place them together in ways which reveal disjuncture, paradoxes and blind spots, instead of one unitary narrative. Just because certain places, events or dynamics are not touched upon in any of the interventions below, it does not mean that we do not consider them important. Indeed, in part two of the conversation, which will be published in 5.2, we will expand our discussions to include many more biographical reflections from colleagues outside of European and US universities, and stories of the shifting spaces around academic freedom that we could not even have begun to think of when we sent around the initial call. The doors to this running theme remain firmly open, and we warmly welcome submissions from colleagues who have something to say about freedom of



expression, academic freedom and academic responsibility in the current context, in all its manifestations. Though, in the tradition of PARISS collective articles, the order of contributions has been decided randomly, with the rolling of a die, so as not to claim preference for a particular narrative, context, or style, we invite the reader to read these stories together, hopefully appreciating the tensions and ambiguities inherent in doing so.

### **Academic Freedom? The Language of Law and the Untenability of Silence— Elspeth Guild**

What does academic freedom mean for me? First and foremost, as someone who has moved from private practice to the academic world (without ever abandoning one or the other), academic freedom has meant the opportunity to theorise the mass of information and data acquired on a daily basis while trying to resolve the problem of people who find themselves face-to-face with a hostile state administration. When one is at the rock face, five interviews with clients in terrible need of legal assistance lined up for the day, the hours of follow up work to do under great pressure with people's lives in the balance if one does not put in the extra effort, academic freedom seems like a dream. Beyond the discussion of attempts by multiple actors to silence the voices of academics, for me the starting place is having the space and time to think and to formulate the meaning of the daily David and Goliath battle to protect individuals from the risk of expulsion to a place where there is a real risk of persecution and/or torture/arbitrary disappearance.

The heroism and cowardice of the daily: at the rock face it is a matter of what one can and cannot manage for someone else, what an extra hour might have made the difference, what herculean struggle lost was one's fault. The question is one of how to understand the conditions of possibility under which people (like me) work subject to the shocking arbitrary of administrative decision making. The opportunity which academia provided to analyse this was an extraordinary privilege for me, a chance to step out of the daily work of private practice. Thereafter, the petty fiefdoms of administrators and colleagues in the academic world seemed like a piece of cake. However, times of profound change to the underlying doxas regarding conditions of possibility of legality have perturbed my academic career. The 2001 declaration by a president of the USA of a War on Terror set in motion an extraordinary challenge to an international legal doxa regarding the prohibition on torture.

Out of my rather restricted world on migration and asylum, I found myself catapulted into what was presented as a geopolitical struggle about the legitimacy of the use of violence against individuals by state authorities (and their agents). The post 2001 attempts to transform some people into

no longer human monsters thus not entitled to international human rights and therefore the legitimate objects of torture constituted a challenge to my understanding of law (and I was by no means alone). The shadow world of the US extraordinary rendition program where individuals were kidnapped anywhere in the world and sent to black sites for torture on the basis that they were terrorists constituted a challenge of extraordinary proportions for me personally and my jurist colleagues where the sanctity of the prohibition on torture was embedded in the international community in the form of the UN and its human rights acquis. For refugees, the prohibition of torture is one of the bases for their protection from *refoulement* (return to a country where they would be at serious risk of persecution or torture). The War on Terrorism claim that torture was justified against suspected terrorists constituted the thin edge of the wedge which if successful would eliminate the right to international protection. One country of origin's dissident is transformed into a traitor when he or she escapes the country and seeks asylum elsewhere. The dissident's claim to fear torture if returned to the country of origin is balanced against the destination state authorities' disbelief regarding the reasonableness of the fear and the genuineness of the threat. If the state planning torture is a good democratic ally, like the USA, can law be deployed successfully to allow the individual's escape?

Law is an old and rusty tool of governance and, many would say, oppression. But at the end of the 20th century, after the horrors of WWII, its form as including international standards regarding the treatment of persons below which state action can never fall provides new ways of thinking about torture and escape. The resilience of international human rights law, upheld by international and regional legal regimes across the world, has slowly but surely proven its worth as a counterbalance to the Schmittian claims regarding exceptionalism. A key turning point was a decision by the UN Committee against Torture (*Agiza*) in June 2003 that Sweden had violated the human rights of a victim of the CIA's extraordinary rendition program through complicity with the USA in handing over the victim to what it should have known would result in torture. This began the formal opening of space to discuss the acts of torture carried out by the authorities of the USA. Slowly but surely, judicial instance after judicial instance found that the extraordinary rendition program had resulted in profound human rights abuses the victims of which were entitled to compensation. Compensation, of course, is a weak and inadequate solution for those whose lives have been blighted by a State's illegal exercise of torture. But the judicial condemnation of a state for carrying out or sanctioning torture has turned out to be a very potent tool in transforming the lives of individuals.

The role of academics in calling out the egregious wrongs of acts carried out in the name of the War on Terrorism has been salutary. The dedication and selflessness of groups of academics and practitioners working together to amass the evidence needed to persuade judicial instances of the reality of torture was impressive. Among the surprising aspects was the willingness of some academic funding bodies to approve proposals which were evidently unwelcome to some political authorities within the state, approvals based on the need for academic freedom. The knowledge constituted as result has been fundamental to the establishment of the wrongs committed. Among the most impressive British examples was the Rendition Project, funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).<sup>7</sup>

The ability of the international community expressed within the UN in 2003 onwards to uphold human rights principles set out in binding human rights instruments and to resist pressure to cede to nativist pressure to compromise these standards was emblematic at the time. The role of the academic community (in part though not whole) in creating the necessary knowledge to evidence violations of international standards was critical. Without knowledge, the judicial systems cannot do their job (though this is not to deny the evidence that even with knowledge not all judicial instances in fact do their job correctly).

In the 2023/24 context, the Israeli attacks on Gaza following the Hamas attacks in Israel have provided a new venue for questioning the adequacy and resilience of academic freedom. From the Hamas killing and hostage-taking which took place on one day, the Israeli military and political response has been immediate, devastating and long lasting. The initial virtually unconditional support by Global West powers for the Israeli offensive set the tone for the academic response as well. The reaction within the academic community has been very diverse but throughout the Autumn of 2023 there has been a privileging of voices justifying the intensity of the Israeli attacks and a demonisation of those concerned about the proportionality of it. The allegation of anti-semitism, in particular, to silence critics of the massacres of a civilian population has been most notable during this period. This position changed somewhat after the International Court of Justice's preliminary ruling in the case of *South Africa v Israel* on the Genocide Convention (26 January 2024). The ICJ's Order finding that Israel must take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts contrary to the Genocide Convention changed the framework. It immediately opened the way to discuss the Gaza situation in the context of law and that of possible Israeli contraventions of the

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7 See Sam Raphael, Crofton Black, and Ruth Blakeley, "CIA torture unredacted." (2019).

Genocide Convention. The jurists were entitled to speak about the application of the Genocide Convention and duty on all states to stop the killing. While the order was followed on the same day by a series of Israeli government allegations against the UN Gaza aid agency UNWRA, resulting in a number of countries withdrawing financial support for UNWRA, many of those states are now reinstating that support. The silencing of academic debate about killing in Gaza has become untenable in a much shorter period of time than that of action taken in the context of the War on Terror. It has also been placed in a framework on international law much more quickly and with spectacular results. For me, the Gaza crisis is no longer a subject to be addressed at one's peril. It is central to international rule of law and human rights.

The difference between the War on Terror and the Gaza massacres in the area of law has been primarily a temporal one. In the former case, the CIA took great efforts to cloak in secrecy their activities as the 2014 US Senate report revealed. The Israeli authorities have been unable to prevent the reporting of the massacres in Gaza (notwithstanding Reporters without Borders announcement that more than 103 journalists have been killed so far in recent Gaza bombardments). The capacity of Israel to sustain comprehensive international support for its Gaza offensive has been shaken by the findings of the ICJ and the consequence of those findings regarding the legitimacy of (mainly Global North states') continued material support which has continued to make possible the massacres.

### **Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and the Vocation of the Intellectual— Nicholas De Genova**

The measure of the “freedom” of free speech is the extent to which the substance of such speech, or the manner of its expression, can go unimpeded and unpunished by constituted authorities (above all, those of the state, but also those of private institutions in the position to exercise their power over those whose speech may offend). Inevitably, the risk to speech of censorship, silencing, punishment, or repression is presented primarily, if not exclusively, for such speech that is perceived to be at odds with, or a threat to, the dominant opinions and ideologies upheld and defended by the authorities. Under more authoritarian regimes, the measure of that freedom of speech is considerably more restricted, if not utterly suppressed. Under those regimes that fashion themselves as liberal and democratic, the measure of that freedom is constantly put to the test as authorities exercise greater or lesser degrees of constraint in the deployment of their power to penalize speech that is deemed to be controversial, or scandalous, or indeed, so threatening as to be intolerable. As with any other putative “right” or “liberty,” nonetheless, the right to free speech

simply does not exist unless we dare to take it, unless we dare to exercise that freedom, regardless of the risks.

The opposite of free speech is speech that could never be deemed to be scandalous because it merely recapitulates the dominant common sense, speech that could never be judged intolerable because it reiterates the dominant ideology, speech that is perfectly aligned with power and exalts the legitimacy of authorities. In our modern world, where the premier and paramount power is generally understood to be the public and secular power of the state, the opposite of free speech is state speech. To produce the sort of servile and sycophantic speech that merely emulates or aggrandizes the discourse of the authorities is not free speech, because it takes no risks whatsoever.

Academic freedom is that more specialized variant of free speech and expression reserved for scholars and researchers associated with an academic institution. It encompasses both a) the freedom to pursue research and publish research findings in a manner that is independent and uninhibited by ossified opinions and dominant ideologies, which refers to the protections necessary for the free pursuit of critical inquiry and science by academic specialist practitioners of their respective areas of expertise, and b) more generally, the far broader free speech of academic intellectuals to intervene in any and all public debates around questions that are *not* confined to their specific scholarly or research specializations. The former, more narrow conception of academic freedom is absolutely necessary and integral for the progress of free debate and dispute among specialists, and is therefore foundational to the integrity of the very concept of the university. The latter, broader conception of academic freedom is more seemingly equivocal and contentious, because it inherently refers to the presumptive right to free speech of academics as “citizens”—which is to say, as citizens like any other citizens (or more precisely, as public persons ostensibly endowed with rights like any others)—beyond their narrow academic specializations and their esoteric expertise, but with the important difference that their public status as university-affiliated intellectuals may often lend their perspectives and judgments greater prestige and consequence. When a specialist in linguistics, such as Noam Chomsky, intervenes into public debates about U.S. foreign policy, for example, he is exercising his presumptive right to free speech as a “citizen,” as a public person, but it is more precisely his academic freedom that ought to protect the security of his position within the university in spite of whatever offense his speech may give to the authorities. Sadly, as we know too well, there have been many academics, including

myself,<sup>8</sup> whose free speech around the urgent political disputes of the day gave offense and were deemed to be inconvenient to the authorities who managed the universities where we were employed: our ostensible academic freedom was disregarded and we suffered punitive repercussions for daring to profess what we understood to be the truth.

This, after all, is the meaning of being a professor: a professor is one who has a duty to *profess* the truth as she understands it. However vital to the pursuit of knowledge, it is a rather parochial matter to profess the truth of one's research findings, no matter how controversial they may be in the esoteric arena of expert evaluation, where rigorous scholarly protocols of demonstration and argument are subject to peer review, and a shared commitment to ascertaining the truth is presumed to prevail and in any case can be put to the test. It is a matter of rather more profound societal impact, however, to profess what one understands to be the truth about the most urgent political and social questions of the day, according to the rigors of one's trained analytical skills and powers of critical reasoning. This indeed has always been the vocation of the intellectual: to sincerely and courageously profess the truth with candor, out of a sense of duty, despite the risks of offending those with greater power because the profession of such a truth "has the function of *criticism*".<sup>9</sup> This vocation should not be diminished or degraded for professional academic intellectuals in our contemporary context of hyper-specialization. The preposterous expectation that academic freedom should not protect the controversial speech or opinions of scholars who speak freely on topics beyond the immediate purview of their academic specializations is a devious but commonplace tactic for censoring, silencing, or penalizing those of us who challenge or offend the conceits of the authorities and the dominant common sense. Why, indeed, should academic freedom be understood to confine academics to speaking freely only with regard to our narrow specialized scholarly expertise? Why, indeed, should academics have a lesser right to free speech than any other "citizen"? And why, then, should an academic's wherewithal to speak freely on topics of broad public interest be subject to extraordinary punitive repercussions, above and beyond what any other ordinary "citizen" would customarily suffer, including the termination of her employment by a university? Repudiating

8 See De Genova, Nicholas, "Within and Against the Imperial University: Reflections on Crossing the Line" in Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, eds. *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, 301–328, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014; available at: <https://www.nicholasdegenova.com/free-speech-academic-freedom>

9 Foucault, Michel, *Fearless Speech*. Edited by Joseph Pearson. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001: 17 (emphasis in original)

these pernicious confusions around the free speech of academics is the more robust and utterly necessary interpretation of academic freedom.

Yet, we live in dangerous times. As we are witness to the shocking and repugnant truth of the outrageous genocidal atrocities perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people in Gaza, we are also subjected to the outlandish explicit demand for our complicity with the cynical rationalization of the slaughter, accompanied always by the still more insidious implicit compromise that would extort our silence. One of the treacherous seductions of our relatively privileged positions as academics is that our material comforts, comparatively meager though they may be in fact, can nonetheless induce complacency and complicity. This is particularly so when we are menaced by cultures of (self-)censorship and campaigns of intimidation designed to make us fearful that we may be punished—with damage to our professional reputations, loss of career opportunities, denial of promotion, deprivation of employment, even long-term ostracism. Of course, academics are not alone in confronting these pervasive pressures to either acquiesce or remain quiescent. In the abject absence of a more properly public sphere of testimony and debate among fellow “citizens,” any sort of professional with an even modest public platform, audience, or social media following—from film stars to artists to schoolteachers to librarians to fashion models—easily and increasingly are subjected to the demand to curtail their free speech at the risk of professional ostracism. Silence or acquiescence is always a choice—indeed, always the easier and more comfortable choice, offering the path of least resistance—just as the vocation of truth-telling and its incumbent perils similarly require us to repeatedly act, both out of the obligation to discern the truth and the freedom to fearlessly profess it.

### **Academic Freedom, Memory Politics and Dealing with the Present—Arnaud Kurze**

Germany is a compelling case in which the frontline battles of these questions have stirred up public debates in recent years. Max Weber, early 20th century scholar of German politics, already called for the separation of the objective researcher and the expert who expresses political viewpoints freely as a pundit.<sup>10</sup> While article 5 of the German basic law protects academic freedom, it also constrains the scientific community to abide by the constitution. In large part due to the country's dark chapter of the Holocaust, the question

10 Weber, Max. “Die ‘Objektivität’ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis.” In Johannes Winckelmann (ed.). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen, 1988. See also, *Schriften zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Reclam, Stuttgart 1991.

of antisemitism constitutes a resurging focal point in contemporary public debates in German society, advancing insights in terms of larger questions faced in the context of academic knowledge production and dissemination. However, the main objective here does not lie in providing a chronological account of contemporary issues in this context, nor delving head to toe into the tempestuously debated conflict in Gaza. This concise reflection on the case of Germany does not get into the weeds regarding growing populism and the rise of the right-wing political party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), either. Instead, the goal consists of sketching a relatively recent incident in national German politics, offering readers with empirical food for thought to ponder power dynamics, politics, and the role of academic thought in an environment of perpetually evolving responsibility of dealing with past wrongdoings in society.

In 2015 and 2016 the German state, under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel, welcomed over 1.2 million refugees mostly from Syria, for which she received an award by the UN refugee agency in October 2022.<sup>11</sup> The decision of opening national borders to asylum seekers from the Middle East, many of them of Muslim faith, turned out to be a delicate issue on many fronts. The one of interest for our purposes was sparked by public debates on antisemitic behavior and discourse among the newly admitted refugee population, leading to calls by Abraham Lehrer, vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, to integrate antisemitism lessons for Muslim migrants in national education curricula.<sup>12</sup> Although these trends occurred against the backdrop of the quickly rising and spreading right-wing and populist party AfD, the origins of this problem were rooted much deeper. To be sure, they lay in a lack of addressing a long-established and anachronistic practice of dealing with the past—or *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as Germans call it—vis-à-vis a myopic perception and apprehension of sociocultural, political and economic integration of migrants, particularly those of Muslim faith.

Reminiscent of the tardive coming to terms of Germans recognizing and embracing the reality of a migrant culture in society—notably sparked by debates in the 1990s based on the principle of a guiding or leading culture (*Leitkultur* in German)—today, the country is at another critical juncture of

11 Keaten, Jamey. “Merkel Wins UN Refugee Agency Award over Welcome of Syrians.” *AP News*, October 4, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/geneva-germany-migration-united-nations-74cb893889479afe6a98718c1d22c515>.

12 BBC News. “German Jews Propose Anti-Semitism Lessons for Muslim Migrants.” *BBC*. November 5, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46095808>.



self-awareness and other turning points are likely to pose challenges in the future. A quarter century ago, while polarized exchanges across the political spectrum drew deeper fault lines between the left and right,<sup>13</sup> vitriol-like deliberations and public discussions also led to growing collective consciousness of German people about immigration, compelling them to acknowledge and identify as an immigrant nation. A first in modern German history. In fact, post-1945 Germany could not keep up with the demand to rebuild its infrastructure, housing and industry, requiring additional labor, which the government drew from migrant workers, notably from Turkey and Italy, so-called guest workers with a temporary status.<sup>14</sup> In the decades to follow this temporary workforce became part of the socioeconomic and cultural landscape, lacking, however, any political and institutional recognition by the state and society.

This historical reluctance to confront an uncomfortable reality may strike one as paradoxical, notably because of Germany's highly regarded track-record by other countries, which perceive of German society as a model in addressing past wrongdoings, including key historical examples, such as the Holocaust or crimes perpetrated by the so-called Stasi (Staatssicherheit) in East Germany during the Cold War—when country was divided into a Western, democratic state and an autocratic Soviet satellite country, a police state with security forces silencing any citizens opposed to the regime. These observations have not gone unnoticed, inciting some to consider how to integrate challenging public debates. Max Czollek, for instance, has put forward a roadmap to grapple with the issue, calling for a proactive dealing with the present or *Gegenwartsbewältigung*, which, contrary to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, does not aspire for normality or catharsis, but rather, for the awareness that both we, ourselves, and our society require ongoing attention and care.”<sup>15</sup>

Today, the role of historical memory and belonging are key in this context, further accentuated by the recent impasse of German elites and notably the state in their response to the conflict in Gaza. And this is where Germans find themselves at a crossroads. Old ideologies and perceptions about identity and the politics associated with it ought not to be insurmountable bastions of inertia, but instead, ought to be transformed into arenas of deliberative

13 Jessen, Jens. “Leitkultur.” ZEIT ONLINE, October 26, 2000. <https://www.zeit.de/2000/44/Leitkultur>.

14 See for instance, Hunn, Karin. “Nächstes Jahr kehren wir zurück--”: die Geschichte der türkischen “Gastarbeiter” in der Bundesrepublik. Wallstein Verlag, 2005 and Herbert, Ulrich. Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland: Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge. C.H. Beck, 2001.

15 Czollek, Max, and Jon Cho-Polizzi. “Gegenwartsbewältigung [Overcoming the Present].” *Transition Metal Chemistry* 12, no. 2 (2020), p. 150.

processes characteristic of healthy, mature democratic societies. While populist forces and electoral politics have widened the institutional cracks in Germany's democratic foundations, we must learn to discern and embrace the ambiguities pluralistic exchanges catalyze among our communities and the nation as a whole. Academia, with its *homo academicus*, are the foundation of a holistic society, based on methodological rigor, independent thought, and a production of knowledge that is based on reason and an essential intellectual curiosity to understand the intricate dynamics within our societies.

### **Paradoxes of Academic Freedom: Science, Solidarity, Stability—Anna Leander**

Recently, an open letter<sup>16</sup> In Defense of Academic Freedom in Switzerland circulated among academics. The letter expressed concern with an 'increasingly anti-intellectual climate' and 'intensified attacks ... on the social sciences and humanities'. As the letter mentions, two institutions are currently undergoing 'administrative investigation'. The issues under investigation are public statements their faculty in the wake of the 7 October 2023 events. As the letter does not mention, at the same time, gender studies is a target of repeated public attacks and strategic reprioritizations with implications for funding and more precisely resulting in the defunding of research in the field. The open letter concludes on a range of pleas calling all concerned and involved to accept their responsibility and take action to counter the erosion of 'academic freedom' in the Swiss context. At the time of writing, this letter has close to 600 signatories. This is an achievement. As the campaign for gathering signatures started, few were ready to sign and even fewer to have their name listed among the first ten. The first public version of the letter started with some twenty anonymous signatories. The signatories now appear in alphabetical order. However, 142 of the signatories still prefer to sign as 'anonymous' followed by their title and institutional affiliation.

#### Self-Inflected Self-Censorship

The difficult beginning of the Swiss open letter calls attention the discomfort surrounding the line separating acceptable and unacceptable public interventions in Switzerland runs. At the core of the unease is the 'framing of critical scholarship in the social sciences and humanities as "ideological" and "unscientific"' as the open letter puts it. In Switzerland and beyond scholars stand accused of abusing their scholarly authority by making 'political'

16 <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1icRPqMcU6YK-7WCFGu8QK5HvW4uBQgKvHByIyqfZo8Y/edit?usp=sharing>.

statements about Gaza, gender, race, colonialism and beyond. They are guilty of contaminating the pure scientific world with corroding dirty politics. Even if its precise articulation varies, such allegations have infused the atmospheres across contexts restricting what academics feel free to say in public and what kind of research they feel free to pursue. Many if not all scholars negotiate the politics of their own research carefully calibrating their public statements and adopting their research approaches to accommodate the exigencies of science in their context. Of ten scholars well informed about a sensitive topic, none agreed to appear on the main evening news. Commenting on the total exclusion of a sensitive, but crucial, issue from a parliamentary investigation, the scholar in charge answered ‘only critical scholars focus on that’. My world is full of stories such as these implying self-censorship and distorted research agendas. So, I would assume, are yours. Here my intention is not to provide endless examples. Rather, I want to focus on the effective role the accusation of politicizing plays in generating them and more specifically on the many subtle ways in which we, as scholars, are reinforcing and contributing to this effectiveness.

The effectiveness of curtailing academic freedom by ‘framing of critical scholarship in the social sciences and humanities as “ideological” and “unscientific”’ is indeed nothing short of amazing to me. One would think that after decades, no centuries, of critical scholarship attuned to the politics of categories and knowledge, we would be less vulnerable to accusations of politicization. To see the general point we do not need to resort to our contemporaries such as Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway or Isabelle Stengers.<sup>17</sup> Aristotle or Ibn Khaldun will do just fine. So why is it that we cannot simply say: ‘yes, all kinds of knowledge are “ideological”’? Why do we not underscore that it would be “unscientific” to ignore this. Equally, how is it possible that we find it so difficult to affirm that when research is rigorous and relevant, it obviously has political implications? One might think that in a context where ‘impact’ is a major concern of funders (and so of everyone), making this politics explicit would not only be valued but rather be a scientific social responsibility. None of this is happening. Rather, despite the many powerful reasons critical scholars have given for seriously questioning the idea that science and ideology are opposite poles and instead making the probing their connections core to any scientific and scholarly endeavor, we collectively keep recoiling in

17 Braidotti, Rosi. “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (2019): 31–61; Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016; Stengers, Isabelle. “Putting Problematization to the Test of Our Present.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, no. 2 (2021): 71–92.

the face of the accusation that our knowledge is political. More strongly, we often contribute to recursively inscribe the idea that science can and should (somehow) be apolitical and non-ideological. Repeating myself: I am amazed. I have no explanation to propose of why this is so. A brief excursion into my real scholarly world can provide some sketchy examples of the paradoxical, self-defeating, processes I have in mind.

#### Scientific: I am Rigorous

In a recent conversation about Gaza, a colleague specializing in the region told me that ‘Anyone reasonable will stay as far away from it as they can’. For my part, I expressed my gratitude to Ezzedine Fishere and Judith Butler but also acknowledged the price of engagement for both and others like them.<sup>18</sup> In not-so-subtle ways, we were both responding to the pressures on scientists engaging in politics with arguments resting the scientific rigor. I was referencing the two uncontestably rigorous academic authorities implicitly underlining that rigor and public statements can indeed be compatible. My colleague was contrasting the deeply adversarial atmospheres surrounding Gaza that with the rigorous ones of scientific debate. While saying opposite things about academics engaging with Gaza, we were doing both accepting and re-inscribing the contrast between scientific rigor and politics. Such re-inscriptions matter. While they secured my colleague and myself against the accusation of politicizing by drawing up a defensive wall around our scientific rigor, they suggested that other engagements with Gaza might be less rigorous. They might be politicizing either because they do not belong in the category of ‘anyone reasonable’ that stays away or because they lack the rigor of an Ezzedine Fishere and or a Judith Butler. We were both implicitly elevating ‘rigor’ to a core criterion for justifying academic interventions regarding Gaza. By the same token we were also subjecting it to fundamental suspicion. We were turning ‘rigor’ into a receding horizon, that could potentially be moved ever further out. Living up to the shifting demands may be exacting enough to kill research, leaving it in a state of ‘rigor mortis’ to speak with Barbara Czarniawska or Michel Serres.<sup>19</sup> It certainly deepens its vulnerability to

18 See e.g. Ezzedine Choukri Fishere, on X-Twitter or YouTube and Judit Butler, “The West knows nothing about the Palestinian struggle | Judith Butler on Israel Palestine” available at <https://youtu.be/8AulovWIFtQ>.

19 Respectively in Czarniawska, Barbara. “Reflexivity Versus Rigor.” *Management Learning* 47, no. 5 (2016): 615–19 and Serres, Michel, and Bruno Latour. “Fourth Conversation: The End of Criticism.” In *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, edited by Michel Serres and Bruno Latour. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008.

accusations of insufficient rigor and so reproduces or perhaps even increases their amazing effectiveness.

### Solidarity: I am Radical

At the latest Swiss Political Science Association annual conference, a colleague who has been very active in our 'international political sociology working group', participated in our opening session and then disappeared for most of the conference to reappear in our closing event sessions. My assumption had been that they were busy. It turned out they felt out of place. They were doing more 'mainstream' and 'professionally oriented' work. The paper was a better fit for another section but they were still feeling attached to our microscopic IPS working group. While fully grasping the unease of presenting something out of line with the work in the group, the brief exchange left me uneasy. Was our little group now putting scholars, including my colleague in situation where they had to ask 'mirror, mirror on the wall who is the most radical of us all?' and then leave unless the mirror answered: 'you are'? Or, was this perhaps a radical scholar's difficulty of accepting and adjusting to their shifting ambitions and aspirations? Either way, the banal conversations was a reminder of the difficulties of cultivating community and solidarity in academic contexts and in the radical ones especially. The divisions within and the (self-)accusations of insufficient radicality, or radicality of the wrong kind practiced in the wrong way, academically and/or politically, opens breaches in the scholarly solidarity. Some scholars are not serious enough. They are not doing work of the kind that deserves respectful consideration. They are gratuitously politicizing. Instead of consolidating alliances and solidarities, assertions of radicality may erode or sap them as they exclude, expel or ostracize those who fail to live up to moving expectation. My colleague avoiding the IPS working group was a painful reminder of these dynamics and my role in them. It underlined how difficult it is to suspend differences and how easy it is to deepen divisions. Instead of countering the claim that some scholarship is political in the wrong way, we nurture it and provide water for the mill of those making it. More could and should certainly be made of the 'analytical and inventive powers of feminism' and specifically 'its incredible gift and its demand: the entwined capacity to think and act' that Braidotti and Fuller rightly laude.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Braidotti, Rosi, and Matthew Fuller. "The Posthumanities in an Era of Unexpected Consequences." *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (2019): 3–29.

### Stability: I am Realistic

In a public lecture, a scholar invited by my university explained to a packed lecture hall that we critical scholars, among whom she clearly counted herself, now needed to become more realistic. These were politically hard times. We had to engage with ‘fundamental issues’. She meant political economy and finance in particular as well as war and peace. Her explicit thrust was that in the face of the current challenges, a return to conventional issues and approaches was called for. While obviously important, the prioritizing of issues and approaches for reasons of realism was uncomfortable in the context as well as generally. It was an unforgiving condemnation of the work of most of the audience and the scholar herself. In the name of realism, their contributions were swept off the table. Besides finding such rejection unfounded and problematic because more not less critical is called for when politics is hard, the consequences of affirming the superiority of more conventional and conservative research traditions disturbed me. The speaker was reinstating tradition and in fact solidifying it. She was distinguishing a prudent and wise, strategically savvy and institutionally solid social science, from an uncertain, critical and problematic one. With reference to current conjuncture, she was dismissing this inferior kind of knowledge, abandoning it and urging her audience to do the same. She was undoing the achievements of critical scholarship while stabilizing, not say petrifying the *status quo* in our context. At its core the speech and its implications were uncomfortable because it is so vividly brought out the conservatism of a strategy that I—and probably most of us—often (feel we have to) follow in our own contexts. To pass projects, prove points, and to protect our academic institutions, we often ‘realistically’ work with and pander to the most conservative assumptions of our fields. We re-produce and enshrine them. A perverse tactically and strategically motivated self-censoring downplays intellectual insights and undermines hard won institutional achievements.

Returning to the open letter In Defense of Academic Freedom in Switzerland that opened this letter. The stories I have just talked about my personal experience in my academic life underscore the paradoxical ways in which strategies informed by values most scholars cherish and that, in principle, ought to bolster ‘academic freedom’ instead undermine it. Valuing science, to solidarity and to the institutional stability of academia ought to be the foundation of academic freedom. This includes the academic freedom to publicly debate Gaza, defend gender studies and more generally shield scholarly knowledge from the efforts by states and—more centrally in the current context—markets to steer and manipulate it. Yet, when these values are associated with strategies emphasizing rigor, radicality and realism, they

often have the opposite effects. This is particularly disturbing as rigor, radicality and realism are important and often necessary. So, what to do about this? As with all real dilemmas, there is no easy answer. No pure place to act from. There is only 'dirty politics' (to speak with Kimberly Hutchings<sup>21</sup>). This said, threading more carefully, acknowledging the frictions around the boundaries of our engagement with the politics of knowledge and acknowledging the performative implications of our values and strategies is essential. It helps us acknowledge our response-abilities in the 'increasingly anti-intellectual climate' and 'intensified attacks ... on the social sciences and humanities' that motivated the Swiss open letter.

### Mittendrin—Catherine Goetze

A short note on myself: I am a natural product of French-German cooperation, grew up in Germany and the US and spent most of my youth and schooling in a small university town in south-west Germany. I have no personal connections to either Israel or Palestine although I have personal connections to people who have. I don't live in Germany (nor France) anymore for 20 years and my children speak German as foreign language. I absolutely, totally do not intend to defend the state policies of either the Federal Government or of any Land; but I do intend to make it clear that Germany's (and Europe's for that matter) history transcends the simplicity of many narratives that locate the roots of Israel's politics in German support.

20.10.2023

Israel' response will be horrifying. All the ingredients of a genocide are there: the victimization; a government with a fascist view of state possession; a thoroughly militarized society; fear; loneliness; anger. Even in the most 'peaceful' of times, Israel has given a sh\*\* about the laws of war, why would they care *now*? What were those Hamas leaders thinking? That they could throw Israelis into the sea? That Israel's brutality would give them the moral high ground from which they would have better chances of negotiation? At the price of thousands and thousands of dead Palestinians? At the price of total destruction of Gaza and its ethnic cleansing because nothing else is what on the mind of that fascist Israeli government? And what are *they* thinking? What peace, what kind of state can be built on such horror? Which democracy can survive so much brutality?

21 Hutchings, Kimberly. "Pacifism Is Dirty: Towards an Ethico-Political Defence." *Critical Studies on Security* 6, no. 2 (2018): 176–92.

Protesters in Germany chant 'Free Palestine from German guilt'. Another version of 'Israel is your (Germany's) fault'.

I heard it the first time in Ramallah in 1992 where an interlocutor explained that if Germany's government would not have been tricked into losing the first world war, the Ottoman empire would have not broken up, Palestine would not have become a mandate and Jews would have remained the minority group they had been under the Ottomans. It was very strange to hear the most Nazi of all conspiracy theories, the dagger stab legend, being told by a Palestinian.

Then in 1997 I heard another version of Germany's guilt from a Palestinian student: "Anyway, all this (Israel-Palestine) is your fault. You didn't kill them all!". The occasion was the public reading of Daniel Goldhagen's book 'Hitler's willing executioners'<sup>22</sup> which argues that the grounds for the Holocaust were the wide social spread of antisemitism in Germany so that it could be mobilized by the Nazis as nationalist catalyst.

Two years ago, a Saudi student wrote in her essay: "During the mandate, Western countries decided to migrate all Jews to Palestine." When I answer that the creation of Israel was not the purpose of killing 6 million Jews, I feel her hesitation to contradict but as she never did, I didn't find out what her objection was.

5.11.2023

Someone posts on Bluesky: "Those young German men and women who every once in a while—on the occasion of all the Diary of Anne Frank hubbub and of the Eichmann trial—treat us to hysterical outbreaks of guilt feelings are not staggering under the burden of the past, their fathers' guilt; rather, they are trying to escape from the pressure of very present and actual problems into a cheap sentimentality."<sup>23</sup>

I recognize it immediately as Arendt's comment, thrown into brackets in her chapter on Eichmann's capital punishment, that had confused me since we read it in high school in 1988. It was the time when the first intifada had broken out and when we were also studying the rise of Nazism and the Third Reich. One full term, five hours per week. Many, many discussions, of guilt and responsibility, of *Wiedergutmachung*, Europe, Israel, Palestinians, war and rights ... what did it mean to us, the second-third generation after the war?

22 Goldhagen, Daniel (1996). *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Rowman & Littlefield.

23 Arendt, Hannah (2006, 15th edition). *Eichmann in Jerusalem. Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen*. München: Piper, p. 370. The English translation here is stolen from the internet somewhere. There are so many translations and editions of this book that I prefer to cite the one I actually use, the German one.



Did this responsibility mean to criticize Israel for occupying land and for responding with real bullets to rock slinging kids? Or did this responsibility mean to respect Israel's sovereign decision over its own security? Did the defense of human rights and justice mean to defend Palestinian struggles for deciding their own fate? Or did it mean to condemn Palestinians for their terrorism, for their machos' culture of violence, and their open antisemitism?

Already as a high school student And/ Both was an extremely thin line to walk.

But what I was wondering then and today is who Arendt is thinking of when talking about sentimental young Germans in the 1960s?

From my leftie-humanist, grammar school 1980s point of view I mainly saw protest: RAF terrorists who had been radicalised by the prospect of Nazism rising in Germany and eminent figures of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s like Beate Klarsfeld who slapped in public the former Nazi and now German President Kiesinger; Daniel Cohn-Bendit who became an icon of the Paris 1968 protests and later co-founder of the Green Party; Rudi Dutschke, leader of the extra-parliamentarian opposition (Außerparlamentarische Opposition) and who was shot at by a fascist in 1968; and so many others. All of them arguing, pleading and, for some, violently fighting against those hypocrites like the first chancellor of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer whose main motivation for the FRG's politics of reconciliation was his hysterical fear of 'the Soviets' and his unrepentant antisemitism: "*The power of the Jews must not be underestimated even today (after the Holocaust) and particularly in America. This is why I have deliberately and consciously put all my efforts into the reconciliation of the German with the Jewish people (Israel) (because we need the US support against the s v)*", the then retired chancellor told an interviewer in 1965.

Indignation and outrage over the hypocrisy and insufficiency of such hateful and self-serving motives are also a constant theme of Germany's literature and art. Heinrich Böll's novels, Hans Magnus Enzensberger's poetry, the works of the psychoanalysts Margaret and Alexander Mitscherlich in the early times to the critical assessments of today's Max Czollek, the brilliant literature of Eva Menasse, the deeply depressing reflective autobiography of Anne Rabe are all inscribed in this vein of reflective and critical engagement with the manifold ways (West) Germany's conservatives and far right have tried to subvert, appropriate or silence honest discourses of remembrance, reflection and reconciliation.

5.12.2023

German newspapers are all over Eva Menasse. I loved her novel 'Dunkelblum' about the secret and murderous Nazi past of an Austrian village. A kind of village I know from my youth in South West Germany where bakeries sell pastries named 'jewish fart' (Judenpfürzle), 'nigger kiss' (Negerkuss) or 'maur's head' (Mohrenkopf), where a mix of Coca-Cola and red wine is called 'Arab' and hot chocolate with rum 'Lumumba'. Where 'Neger' is a common term for minions and 'Judensau' (Jewish pig) or 'Schwuchtel'sau' (fagot pig) are, in some circles, perfectly acceptable insults. Where anyone who cannot prove at least 200 years of settlement *here*, remains an outsider. And where outsiders are not welcome.

Eva Menasse is under attack as speaker of the board of PEN Berlin. She is Jewish, co-author of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>) and she refuses declarations of blind solidarity with Israel, even in the light of the horrors of 7/10. The publisher Ernst Piper<sup>24</sup> has withdrawn his membership from PEN Berlin in protest. A German man publicly lectures a Jewish woman on the right attitude towards Israel.

12.1.2024

The way the conservatives and the far right in Germany are jumping on the bandwagon of 'fighting antisemitism' is hysterical and disgusting. In December 2023, the Land of Saxony-Anhalt which since unification times suffers from massive problems with neo-Nazis terrorizing entire villages has announced that it will require applicants to citizenship to sign a declaration that they accept the existence of Israel. Obviously, the aim is not to expatriate those Neo-Nazis who revel in concentration camp jokes but to display symbolic anti-migration politics. The proposal is likely to go nowhere as it is deemed anti-constitutional and the left-wing oppositional party Die Linke has announced to fight it.

In early January in Berlin, the conservative party's Senator for Culture Joe Chialo (naturalized son of Nigerian immigrants) wants to introduce a conditional clause to all funding for cultural projects that requires applicants to declare their commitment to fight antisemitism. The reaction of Berlin's multi-national cultural scene is immediate: open letters with thousands of

24 The one whose publishing house has published most of Hannah Arendt's work, see footnote above.

signatories, loud objection by the Berlin Academy of the Arts and Sciences and country-wide protests. Later that same month, Chialo announces to abandon these plans.

Concerned about what I can do from my antipodean situation in Australia, I decide to look at Strike Germany, the manifesto that calls on academics and artists not to 'give their labour' to academic or cultural events in Germany. I sympathize a lot with the impulse. The political-bureaucratic drive to enforce what the author Max Czollek has called 'reconciliation theatre'<sup>25</sup> by incorporating clauses 'against antisemitic content' is dangerously undemocratic and echoes the most ugly fascist traditions of censorship.

And there I see it again, the 'Free Palestine from German guilt' trope: "German post-reunification "remembrance culture" (Erinnerungskultur)—the state campaign to address Germany's genocide of the Jews—acts as a repressive dogma, reinvigorating the oppression that real "rememberance" (sic) should work against." Who are these people who want to give me, for instance, a lesson in 'real' remembrance? There are no responsible signatories of the call. Apparently, it is not foreseen that someone asks questions.

23.1.2024

I have Covid. Locked away in my bedroom I search the internet for information on my great-grandfather. I come across a recent article by a local historian that confirms what I always had puzzled together from the bits and pieces that my father had let go.<sup>26</sup> In the family story, he was a strict but just, totally unpolitical teacher of Latin and Greek who all his life had been passionate about public libraries. This is why he had become Director of the German people libraries system in 1937. Out of a passion to educate the people. He wasn't a Nazi, the family story said.

In reality, however, he quickly had become a member of the Nazi party and the Motor ss in April 1933. The article contains reproductions of his membership card and his denazification application. Also a photo that at first sight makes me think 'What a f\*\*king fascist face!'. He had been one of the three organizers of the 1933 book burnings in Hannover. In 1937, he became the national officer for public libraries, responsible for 'cleansing' what the common German

25 Czollek, Max (2023). *Versöhnungstheater*. Berlin: Hanser.

26 Rabiuss, Ragnhild (2017). Fritz Heiligenstaedt, ein begeisterter Förderer der Volksbüchereien und überzeugter Propagandist des NS-Volksbüchereiwesens. In Kuttner, Sven and Peter Vodosek (eds), *Volksbibliothekare im Nationalsozialismus, Handlungsspielräume, Kontinuitäten, Deutungsmuster*. Wolfenbüttler Schriften zur Geschichte des Buchwesens Bd. 50.

man should read. He had a special distaste of 'asphalt literature', i.e. authors who wrote from the standpoint of metropolitan-cosmopolitan culture like Bertold Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Carl von Ossietzky, Kurt Tucholsky or Leon Feuchtwanger. In 1944, still, he is exhorting librarians to keep libraries 'clean' from nasty 'Jewish influences that corrupt Germany's glorious war efforts'.

Anger, sadness, disgust ... at him, my father, my grandfather, their silence but also their complicity. They had not only closed their eyes on the ugliness of his doings but, on the contrary, expressed admiration for his 'stealth', his 'career' and 'achievements'. Certainly not those Germans who Arendt thought to be careerist to *escape* guilt. Rather those who, indeed, thought that all this was accidental, a 'Betriebsunfall', an operating accident of Germany's otherwise 'humanist' culture of philosophy, music and literature. As a self-conscious Bildungsbürger,<sup>27</sup> it had been my great-grandfather's calling to 'educate' the German people. Surely, he could not be made responsible for the Holocaust as it was not him, after all, who had been deciding over the curriculum by which to 'educate'. The pattern. It was not me ...

While reading the article, I think back to 2015–16 when I was working at the University of Sussex. There was much discussion whether the department should join BDS by boycotting academic contacts with Israeli institutions and scholars. I didn't know all that I know today about my book burning great-grandfather although I suspected that he was much more involved than just by his passion for public libraries. I told colleagues that, as a German, I could not support a boycott of research, thinking, academic freedom, writing and dialogue in general; and specifically not of Jewish colleagues or such whose country's politics I do not agree with in particular. Some understood; some did not. Some responded with silence and distance. Others argued that I was wrong, that BDS was the right lesson to draw, that Israel is doing to the Palestinians what the Nazis did to Jews, that anyway it was all the West's fault (which of course includes Germany), that critique of Israel was not antisemitism, that the accusation of antisemitism was a tool in the hands of Islamophobes ... I did not have the stamina and courage to face the long discussion it would need to explain why I thought that these were politically wrong arguments, and that they actually *are* antisemitic.

Mainly I chickened out because it was clear that this was a vain discussion. People had decided that they needed to be on one side in this conflict. And that

27 In Germany, it is common to distinguish the educated elites, *Bildungsbürgertum*, from the capitalist bourgeoisie, *Wirtschaftsbürgertum*, since their social status and privilege originates in their educational and cultural dominance not in their wealth or economic role. This distinction is a sociological but also a self-assumed one.

was then the good side by the simple fact that they were on it. And/both sides have an interest to silence and/both views of the conflict and its associated histories. I had hoped that someone, anyone supporting BDS would, at some point, say 'Yes, it's true there is some genuine antisemitism in the movement and that's bad.' But that never happened.

20.2.2024

It's hot in Australia today. I watch a fly bouncing off the window, angrily buzzing to the next and bouncing off again. Then the buzzes become desperate. Then less. Tired the fly sits on wall, making a last unmotivated effort to get through the glass to the other side. Without success. I open the newspaper to the rising toll of this madness.

### **Ireland Unfree**—Mark Maguire

Freedom of expression, academic freedom, and intellectual responsibility are rarely discussed in the same breath. However, they have recently collided in ways that threaten Irish university life. In 2023 and early 2024, the government of Ireland spent considerable effort trying to push deeply unpopular legislation on “hate speech” through parliament, while academics are demanding institutional support for their activism, and responsibility is vanishing in the fog of a culture war. Here, I discuss the currents, historical and political, roiling academic life in a post-colony, and some of the tensions surfacing.

Academic freedom in the Republic of Ireland is expressed in the *Universities Act* of 1997 as the right to “test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas and to state controversial or unpopular opinions” in or outside the university without fear of penalization. This robust formulation passed into law during the *mise-en-scène* of a new, progressive, and global-facing republic, just as sectarian hostilities in Northern Ireland formally ceased, and the curtain fell on the censorious influence of the Catholic Church. The legislators ventriloquized the zeitgeist by aiming to protect universities from authoritarian moralizers in search of an institutional home. However, to paraphrase Edgar Allen Poe, the disease is now inside the walls.

During the past quarter of a century, the span of my academic career, I have noted the moments during which academic freedom has surfaced in national conversations. It has mainly been when political voices demanded investment in business-oriented or employment-ready degrees over the (“uneconomic”) humanities and social sciences or when cost-cutting civil servants sought to slash through the protection of employment tenure. However, the conflict between Israel and Palestine has regularly spotlighted academic freedom.

Indeed, the Irish Federation of University Teachers, which represents most academics, has been dragged both for expressing solidarity with Palestine and rejecting calls to boycott Israel. Moreover, in the wake of the horror of October 7th, and the subsequent invasion of Gaza, university vice presidents sent messages urging academics to restrain themselves from denouncing disinterested colleagues. Why does Israel and Palestine loom so large in Ireland? After all, borrowing from Elizabeth Bowen, it is just an island moored loosely off northern Europe.

Many Irish republicans situate their “struggle” alongside international civil rights campaigns and post-colonial liberation movements. This is not a theoretical gesture: During the 1970s, the IRA maintained close ties with ETA, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, and especially with the PLO, with whom they regularly traded arms and expertise. Little wonder, then, that Belfast has regularly been festooned with pro-Palestine murals. In this context, at least viewed from the perspective of the Republic of Ireland, one would assume that, given the island’s small size, the relationship between political radicals and activist academics would either be uncomfortably close or happily distant. However, across the humanities and social sciences, academics have formulated decolonization theories without feeling the urge to practice them and self-identify as the “resistance” without coarsening their hands in the marketplace of ideas.

It is notable that the ghost of Edward Said still hovers over Ireland. Said’s essay “Yeats and Decolonisation” marked a critical moment in his career and it influenced the Irish intellectual scene greatly. However, academics generally preferred to bracket his political commitments and his views on the university in society. There is no discussion today of Said’s objection to the Irish peace process, and few even know that he echoed Max Weber by cautioning against those who would turn the lectern into a political bully pulpit for “a new ascendancy [that would] prescribe and anathematize”.<sup>28</sup> Said’s ghost warns us that many academics wish to wave a sword without wielding it, but even soulless symbolic gestures bring dangers.

In the immediate aftermath of October 7th, *Irish Times* journalists set the cultural tone, describing the horrors that unfolded and the IDF’s response in purely military and geopolitical terms. Immediately, academics saturated the public sphere with “context” statements, mainly Middle Eastern history washed through a colourless, odourless fluid of post-colonial theory. Consensus

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28 Cited in Daniel, Gordon “The Politics of the Classroom Are Not the Politics of the World: An Unpublished Speech by Edward W. Said,” *Philosophy and Literature* 44(2): 380–394, 2020, 385.

loves simplicity. Hundreds of academics signed a public letter demanding a boycott of Israeli higher education. A few signed a counter-letter opposing the politicization of universities. However, despite Ireland's trade links with Israel, including millions of unethical euros in purchases from arms producers, there is no opposition position. Instead, we have academics demanding their universities reflect their moral values, with a minority worrying that society now sees the lectern as a pulpit for moralizing disguised as critical thinking. After all, the public demand for business-oriented or employment-ready degrees has already brought a precipitous decline in arts and humanities enrolments, and the cost-cutting civil servants are scratching at the door.

At first glance, campus conflict over academic freedom seems unrelated to the rising censoriousness in society, but this is certainly not so in Ireland. Many of the academics who are calling for boycotts and denouncing colleagues for remaining outside the arena are the ones who crafted and supported Ireland's forthcoming incitement to violence, hatred, and hate offenses legislation. Strangely, the fact that international intellectuals who have expressed solidarity with Palestine have been accused of hate speech has not dampened the academic enthusiasm for censorship. The public is overwhelmingly against the new law in Ireland, but the political class, unelected NGO representatives, and academics are offering full-throated support. The exemption enjoyed by those sectors under the proposed legislation may explain their reaction. Academic freedom will soon no longer be a right but rather a privilege.

Today, as bombs fall on Gaza, the new ascendancy is portraying Ireland as the "island of solidarity" while using legislation to convert rights and responsibilities into privileges to be enjoyed by the elect few. Said's warning that they will "prescribe and anathematize" knowledge seems prophetic. He was inspired by and fearful of the darkness WB Yeats detected in people who presented as saviours but whose values were pretence:

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

### **Israel-Palestinian conflict and academic freedom in Greece—Anastassia Tsoukala**

Contrary to what has been observed in many liberal democracies, the present Israel-Palestinian conflict has not entailed any restrictions on academic freedom in Greece. Pro-Palestinian protests have, on occasion, been repressed unprovokedly but scholars are free to express their point of view, in academia

as well as in both mainstream and social media, though the Greek government has clearly supported Israel from the very beginning of the conflict.

This freedom of expression does not stem from a robust state of academic freedom. In the latest edition of the Academic Freedom Index<sup>29</sup> the country ranks 67th out of 179 countries; in the 2023 edition it ranked 81st, and in the 2022 one it ranked 74th.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, deep concerns of both Greek leftwing politicians and civil society over the wavering state of the rule of law were recently shared by the European Parliament.<sup>31</sup> The preservation of academic freedom with regard to the Israel-Palestinian conflict therefore calls for an explanation that is arguably dissociated from civil liberties-related issues, to be grounded in both domestic and international interests at stake.

At the domestic level, the longstanding vulnerability of the post-war small Greek-Jewish community,<sup>32</sup> due to deeply-rooted antisemitism,<sup>33</sup> is presently heightened in front of the combined effect of the impressive re-emergence of the far-right in the central political arena<sup>34</sup> and the traditional Pro-Palestinian position of leftwing and far-left parties and groups. Given this explosive mixture of limited political support and broadly diffused social hatred, it is plausible to assume that any government attempt to foster its unpopular pro-Israel stance

29 “Academic Freedom Index 2024” Academic Freedom Index, [https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic\\_Freedom\\_Index\\_Update\\_2024.pdf](https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update_2024.pdf), accessed March 30, 2024.

30 “Academic Freedom Index 2022” Academic Freedom Index, <https://www.pol.phil.fau.de/files/2022/03/afi-update-2022.pdf>, accessed March 30, 2024 and “Academic Freedom Index 2023” Academic Freedom Index, [https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic\\_Freedom\\_Index\\_Update.pdf](https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update.pdf), accessed March 30, 2024

31 European Parliament, “Resolution on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece”, February 7 2024, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0069\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0069_EN.html), accessed March 19, 2024

32 Core Jewish population is estimated at 4,100 persons, i.e. 0,38 per 1,000 in the population (Institute for Jewish Policy Research, <https://www.jpr.org.uk/countries/how-many-jews-in-greece>).

33 Apostolou, Andrew. “The crudest hatred: antisemitism and apologia for terrorism in contemporary Greece.” *AXT/Antisemitism and Xenophobia Today* (2005). London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research <https://www.cohen.gr/newEn/apostolou.pdf>, accessed March 28, 2024

34 In the 2023 general elections, three far-right parties won 12,8% of the national vote. See Patrick Smith “Far-right victories in Greece highlight trend across Europe”, *NBC News*, June 27th 2023 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/election-greece-right-wing-spartans-trend-europe-italy-lepen-vox-rcna91094>, accessed March 26, 2024



by restricting academic freedom would have jeopardized the very safety of the Greek-Jewish community.

In this anti-Israeli context, infringement of academic freedom might also be harmful to the ever-growing bilateral strategic partnership that covers many different fields, ranging from defense and energy to tourism, trade and technology.<sup>35</sup> Widespread anti-Israeli feelings are somewhat contained by the fact that bilateral close relations are limited to core state issues and financial affairs. Enlargement of these fields at the expense of civil society, which is nowadays hypersensitive to civil liberties endangered by the overall enfeebled rule of law, would probably stir up both antisemitic and critical leftwing reactions that in turn could produce, even in short-term, undesirable effects on the growth of the bilateral partnership.

These factors interact with the collective memory of the troubled political history of the country, marked by an array of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. Since its coming to power, in 2019, the present government has been heavily criticized for its increasingly authoritarian mode of governance.<sup>36</sup> Immediate restrictions on academic freedom would have revived memories of dictatorial censorship likely to impact on the results of the second round of the regional and municipal elections, held on October 15, 2023, and posterior ones would be harmful to government legitimacy under constant attack for the overall decline of the rule of law.

Nonetheless, however important these domestic interests at stake may be, they would not have prevailed if they were subordinated to major international ones. As will be explained below, this was not the case despite Greece being clearly under the US sphere of influence. Actually, in geopolitical terms, Greece is undoubtedly an important player in the Eastern Mediterranean but remains less powerful than Turkey in that it can neither control nor profit eventually

35 Nedos, Vassilis “Greek-Israeli strategic partnership is ‘rock-solid’”, *I Kathimerini*, July 9 2023, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/interviews/1215021/greek-israeli-strategic-partnership-is-rock-solid>, accessed March 28, 2024.

36 Tsoukala, Anastassia. “Government multiform authoritarianism” (in Greek), *3Point Magazine*, March 21 2021, <https://3pointmagazine.gr/o-polymorfos-aytarchismos>, accessed March 30, 2024; Rafenberg, Marina, “Greek PM Mitsotakis seeks second term playing on a ‘me or chaos’ strategy”, *Le Monde*, May 21 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/21/greek-pm-mitsotakis-seeks-second-term-playing-on-a-me-or-chaos-strategy\\_6027458\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/21/greek-pm-mitsotakis-seeks-second-term-playing-on-a-me-or-chaos-strategy_6027458_4.html), accessed March 30, 2024

from many different, and often conflictual, regional interests.<sup>37</sup> In the Balkans, the expected regional stabilization following the signing of the 2018 Prespa Agreement has not been achieved for the Greek foreign policy from 2019 on has either decelerated the improvement of neighboring relations or fueled conflictual ones,<sup>38</sup> thus preventing the country from guiding public opinion beyond its borders. For what matters here then, opinions expressed by Greek scholars have very limited, if any, international impact.

Low international influence is further limited by the marginal position held by the Greek language at the international level. Academic opinions expressed in Greek would only matter if they were broadcasted by foreign mass media in English. A highly improbable hypothesis as this would annihilate the restrictions on academic freedom imposed in the countries concerned. Greece's international weakness in geopolitical and linguistic terms therefore leaves intact the importance of the domestic interests at stake, thus allowing Greek scholars to publicly criticise Israel's war on Gaza.

This leads to the rather ironic conclusion that the protection of civil liberties seems to be divorced from the robustness of the rule of law in a given country. Academic freedom has been infringed in countries with long parliamentary traditions and protected in a country suffering from a sharp decline in civil rights and liberties. This apparent paradox is arguably explained by the fact that freedom-restricting countries are at the same time predominant geopolitical players and powerful influencers in linguistic terms. Opinions expressed by their scholars had to be hushed because they were likely to influence both domestic and international public opinion and, hence, put pressure on respective political decisions that play a crucial role in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Domestic factors, such as the volume and the political, financial, and social power of respective Jewish communities, are certainly important in both electoral terms and power-relations but arguably come second to geopolitical and geo-economic interests at stake.

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- 37 Tsardanidis, Charalambos. "Greece's Changing role in the Eastern Mediterranean." *The new geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral partnerships and regional security*, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, and Peace Research Institute Oslo, Report No 3 (2019): 73–93.
- Mallinson, William, Pavel Kanevskiy, and Aris Petasis. "Then is now, but the colours are new: Greece, Cyprus and the evolving power game between the West, Russia and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 22, no. 3 (2020): 306–332.
- 38 Alice Taylor and Sarantis Michalopoulos. "Greece pressures Albania to show "way out" of bilateral crisis" *Euractiv*, November 14 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/greece-pressures-albania-to-show-way-out-of-bilateral-crisis>, accessed March 29, 2024.