

**Wilhelm Kempf (2015): Israelkritik zwischen Antisemitismus und Menschenrechtsidee. Eine Spurensuche. [Criticism of Israel Between Anti-Semitism and Human Rights Considerations – A Search for Clues] Berlin: verlag irena regener, ISBN 978-3936014-33-4, 280 pp., 39.90 Euro**

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Before reviewing the present text, the reviewer must first confess that for several reasons he is not unbiased in his assessment of Wilhelm Kempf's book: First, for almost 25 years he has been linked in professional friendship with Wilhelm Kempf. Second, the impressive project on which Wilhelm Kempf reports in his highly significant and readable book is based in various parts on preliminary work by the reviewer and his colleagues. And third, the reviewer is a strong supporter of the "Jerusalem Program" of 1951, in which the goals of Zionism were redefined in the sense of strengthening the state of Israel, gathering the diaspora in Eretz Israel and furthering the unity of the Jewish people (see [mercaz.de](http://mercaz.de), "Zionismus"). As a result of this reviewer's commitment, he always suspects veiled anti-Semitism behind the various sorts of so-called "criticism of Israel".

It is almost superfluous to try to introduce Wilhelm Kempf in this journal. For many years, he has been one of Germany's most engaged peace and conflict researchers. Alongside of Johan Galtung, we have above all Wilhelm Kempf to thank that there is an interdisciplinary research program on peace journalism. Wilhelm Kempf was born in Klagenfurt, studied in Vienna, completed his Habilitation in 1977 at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg and then served until 2012 as Professor for Psychological Methodology at the University of Konstanz. Since 2002 he has been the editor of the inter-disciplinary journal "Conflict & Communication online."

At the end of September 2015, Jena Mayor Albrecht Schröter, an engaged fighter against xenophobia and right-wing extremism, commented in a Thuringian local newspaper on the continuing refugee crisis. He blamed refugee problems on "*US policy of hostility to Islam*" and indirectly also on the "*occupying state of Israel.*" Not only did the Chairman of the Jewish Community in Thuringia, Prof. Reinhard Schramm, immediately counter this with his comment that Jena Mayor Schröter was encouraging anti-Semitic attitudes not only among refugees, but also in the German population.

With that we are close to the topic of the present book. How much anti-Semitism is there in critical comments and attitudes toward Israeli policy and the state of Israel? This is the question that concerns the engaged peace and conflict researcher Wilhelm Kempf.

The book begins with a foreword by Rolf Verleger, psychology professor at the University of Lübeck and from 2005 to 2009 member of the Board of Directors of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Direktorium des Zentralrats der Juden in Deutschland). In a harsh 2006 letter, Rolf Verleger criticized the Central Council for its unconditional support of Israeli policy. The “Jüdische Allgemeine” already once called Rolf Verleger the “Critical Jew on Duty” (Jüdische Allgemeine, August 21, 2014). Rolf Verleger pointed out that a study such as the one reported on in the present book was long overdue.

Let us look more closely at a few of the book’s central findings. First, the study on which Wilhelm Kempf reports is based on a project supported by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) and carried out by the “Peace Research Group at the University of Konstanz” between 2009 and 2012. *“In its center, besides media psychological studies of the reception of television documentaries on the Holocaust, as well as on press reportage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its cognitive-emotional processing, there was a broadly conceptualized questionnaire survey, by means of which more precise conclusions on the relationship between anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel were to be reached.”* (p. 103) (On the study see also Wilhelm Kempf, “Antisemitismus und Israelkritik – Mythos und Wirklichkeit eines spannungsreichen Verhältnisses” [Anti-Semitism and Criticism of Israel – Mythos and Reality of a Tense Relationship]; W&F 3-2013, pp. 37-40).

The report that Wilhelm Kempf presents here is based exclusively on the questionnaire survey, whereby in several (also experimental) sub-studies in all 2.677 persons were surveyed. However, he discusses only the findings of the main study, “Anti-Semitism and Criticism of Israel” (ASCI-Survey), with a representative sample of 998 persons from the former West and East German states, as well as 464 active critics of Israel, who were recruited from a variety of different organizations working for peace in the Middle East.

The presentation follows a wise strategy, whereby in two large sections the results of the survey are first presented and interpreted before the background of the scientific-political discourses of the last few years. Wilhelm Kempf does this in that he uses statistics and illustrations very sparingly. This makes it easier to read the still very dense text. In the second part of

the book he then presents detailed documentation of the methodological procedures and results.

The first part of the book, “Antisemitismus und Israelkritik in Deutschland zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts” [Anti-Semitism and Criticism of Israel in Germany at the Start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century], consists of ten chapters. The first chapter introduces the problematic. It deals with anti-Semitism in Germany since 1945 and the starting points of the overall project. One of these starting points, which also marks the central approach Wilhelm Kempf and his colleagues use to deal with the problem area, is the statement, “*One must besides anti-Semitic, Israeli-hostile and Palestinian-hostile resentments as well regard orientations such as pacifism, human rights engagement and/or moral detachment as possible reasons for the way people take positions on the conflict, whether they support Israel’s policy or are critical of it ...*” (p. 26) Conceptually, Kempf relies above all on the definition of anti-Semitism presented by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) as a hostile attitude and/or action toward Jews: which “... *directs hostility against Jews as Jews or against Jews ‘because they are Jews’ or against Jews on the basis of their actual or supposed religious or ‘racial’ background or self-understanding.*” (EUMC 2004, p. 12) For anti-Semitism it is a matter simply of Jews as Jews, and it can – as Kempf shows – appear in various forms: as manifest or classical anti-Semitism, as secondary anti-Semitism in the sense of making “a clean break with the past” or as “perpetrator-victim reversal”), as latent anti-Semitism (in which one avoids speaking publicly about one’s own anti-Semitic prejudices), as anti-Zionism and generalized criticism of Israel or as anti-Semitic criticism of Israel.

It does not surprise this reviewer that Kempf concludes that the results of his study allow us to recognize a shockingly high proneness of the German population to anti-Semitic prejudices (p. 32). Between seven and 25 % agree with classical anti-Semitic statements on drawing a line under the past (such as “*One should finally put an end to talk about our guilt toward the Jews.*”), and this is justified by 44-48% of those surveyed. As well anti-Zionist statements (e.g., “*The Holocaust is a welcome means for the Jews to justify Israeli policy*”) appear, with 26-33% agreement, to be widely accepted. Where, however, Kempf asks (pp. 39ff), is the red line that demarcates anti-Semitic from other forms of criticism of Israel?

In the above named EUMC report precise criteria for this are named: The core components of anti-Zionist anti-Semitism include above all:

- Denial of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination, e.g., through the claim that the existence of the state of Israel is a racist venture.
- The employment of a double standard in demanding behavior from Israel that is not expected and demanded from any other democratic state,
- The employment of symbols and pictures connected with traditional anti-Semitism (e.g. the accusation that Jews murdered Christ or the ritual murder libel) to describe Israel or Israelis,
- Comparisons of current Israeli policy with National Socialist policy.
- The attempt to make all Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Naturally Wilhelm Kempf also knows these criteria, but he doubts, e.g., whether behind a statement such as, “*The way Israelis treat Palestinians is similar to what Nazis did to Jews,*” there are in each case actual anti-Semitic prejudices. (p. 41) The reviewer does not doubt this, but also acknowledges Kempf’s effort to avoid making any blanket and rash judgments.

A crucial argument with which Wilhelm Kempf may also empirically support his doubt could be the framing conceptions of those who take a critical position toward Israeli policy. Kempf speaks in this connection of “frames” or respectively “mental models” and distinguishes war and peace frames. With a frame conception oriented toward securing peace (Peace Frame), there can also be strongly anchored human rights orientations. And thus in regard to the evaluation of Israeli policy, the empirical findings show, among other things, two very different groups of persons (pp. 81ff.): for one thing, human rights oriented critics of Israel, who are generally better informed and display greater emotional proximity to the Israeli conflict (38% of those questioned), and for another, anti-Semitic critics of Israel, who are generally less well informed and have only low emotional proximity to the said conflict (26% of those questioned). Kempf’s conclusion is, among other things: “*We cannot say how these human rights oriented critics of Israel conceive of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because the relevant questions were not asked in the ASCI Survey. It is, however, clear that they are more convinced than all others that the goal of Israeli policy consists in the continued oppression and disenfranchisement of the Palestinians, and that they are less likely than all others to believe that the founding of a Palestinian state can be prevented in the long view – not even if the Palestinian leadership should not succeed in stopping the violence.*” (p. 93)

In the second part of his book, “Spurensuche” [searching for clues], Wilhelm Kempf shows himself to be an outstanding expert on methods. The research design is presented, the methods of scale development are described in great detail, and the results are evaluated and interpreted in an understandable way. Especially the structural analyses using latent-class models are impressive and path-breaking for future research.

To summarize the individual results, we can say: Anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist prejudices can be found above all in the former West German states (that may have changed in the meantime), in the older generation (over 55), among people with low educational levels, among the rural population, among Muslims and in second place among Catholics, as well as among NPD voters (neo-Nazis) and (with the exception of political anti-Zionism) among CDU/CSU voters (conservatives) (p. 151). It is also similar with regard to the expression of Israel-hostile resentments (pp. 168ff.). Among supporters or respectively critics of Israeli policy, four types of behavior can be empirically distinguished: support of Israeli Palestinian policy, latent anti-Semitic avoidance of criticism of Israel, anti-Semitic criticism of Israel, and human rights oriented criticism of Israel, “*which is not marked by anti-Semitic prejudices, but in its most extreme manifestation does tend to believe in a Jewish world conspiracy and wants to draw a bottom line under the past.*” (p. 257)

Actually one could agree with Sigmund Freud, who in a December 2, 1927 letter to Arnold Zweig wrote: “*In the question of anti-Semitism I am not in the mood to search for explanations, I feel a strong inclination to leave myself to my affect and feel myself strengthened in the quite unscientific attitude that people are on the average and in the great majority truly a miserable rabble.*” (Freud 1969, p. 11). Exactly, that is the gist of the matter: Anti-Semites are – psychologically viewed – a miserable rabble whose intellectual poverty can, however, be dangerous, and deadly for Jews. Why do we need to further explain that?

At least for the following reasons we must attempt to explain it: First, “*Anti-Semitism ... is exactly what it claims to be: a deadly threat for the Jews and nothing else*” (Arendt 2001, p. 38; original 1951). Second, anti-Semitic stereotypes and attitude patterns are still deeply anchored in everyday culture. A “Report of the Independent Expert Group on Anti-Semitism” [Bericht des unabhängigen Expertenkreises Antisemitismus] prepared in response to a German Parliamentary resolution, published in November 2011, also pointed out that as before it is completely unexplained: “*To what extent is this sediment of prejudices and resentments*

*expressed in concrete actions (including verbal attacks) in everyday societal interaction, and what consequences does this have for Jews and non-Jews.”* (p. 178) Third, it appears that there is a lack of integrative theoretical and empirical approaches to research on anti-Semitism able to satisfy this need for clarification. This third reason is the explicit starting point of the study Wilhelm Kempf presents in his book.

The study discussed by Wilhelm Kempf in his book demonstrates how concrete empirical anti-Semitism research can function. Some passages of the book do admittedly seem somewhat long-winded; and one does not have to agree with some of the interpretations. But precisely for this reason it is recommended for reading by scientists, journalists and everyone engaged in the struggle against anti-Semitism. And as further reading, the reviewer recommends a book by Lukas Betzler and Manuel Glittenberg, “Antisemitismus im deutschen Mediendiskurs – Eine Analyse des Falls Jakob Augstein” [Anti-Semitism in German Media Discourse – An Analysis of the Case of Jakob Augstein] (Nomos-Verlag), likewise from 2015.

*Wolfgang Frindte*

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