

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 (published in *conflict & communication online*, Vol. 15, No. 1, April 2016)

The question of whether and when criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic has lost none of its relevance, as was shown recently in Berlin and Vienna. Early in March, events were held in both cities in the frame of the international “Israeli Apartheid Week,” and in both cities angry protests erupted. The events were labeled anti-Semitic, and in both cities attempts were made to block them using this objection. While the protests failed in Berlin [1], in Vienna they caused the facilities promised to the organizer, BDS Austria [2], to be withdrawn [3]. The international BDS campaign understands itself as a human rights movement, but opponents have often accused it of anti-Semitism. This study by Wilhelm Kempf is located in the center of this field of opposing forces. In a time when not only are human rights increasingly being violated in Palestine and Israel, but racism is also rising in Europe, the book “Israelkritik zwischen Antisemitismus und Menschenrechtsidee. Eine Spurensuche“ [Criticism of Israel between anti-Semitism and human rights considerations. A search for clues] touches a currently sensitive spot.

At this point, it seems unnecessary to say much about the author, Wilhelm Kempf, not least of all because he has served as editor and publisher of the journal *conflict & communication online* since its founding in 2002 and regularly publishes in it. The Professor Emeritus for psychological methodology and peace research at the University of Konstanz, Germany does research and has published for many years on peace and conflict. Among other things, together with Johann Galtung he laid the theoretical cornerstone for the concept of peace journalism. The here reviewed study was made between 2009 and 2012 in the context of a project supported by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) on the topic of “Criticizing Israel, coming to terms with German history and differentiating aspects of modern anti-Semitism,” which was carried out by the Peace Research Group at the University of Konstanz. For the book, Rolf Verleger, a knowledgeable advisor, also participated in the study. Verleger, likewise a psychologist and professor for neurophysiology at the University of Lübeck, has been a member of the Directorate of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, and since 2006 has been one of the best known Jewish voices critical of Israel. As Verleger correctly comments in the foreword, a study such the one undertaken by Kempf and his research team was “urgently needed,” namely one that attempts “to discover the worldviews in which critical attitudes toward Israel are embedded.” (p. 10)

Instead of doing what other studies have done, merely investigating the embedding of criticism of

Israel in an anti-Semitic worldview, Kempf's study simultaneously examines an additional issue, namely human-rights motivated criticism of Israeli policy. For, as Kempf correctly explains: "[I]f one wants to reach robust findings on the relationship between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism, one should not stigmatize all criticism of Israel from the start as anti-Semitic, but rather: [...] One must besides anti-Semitic, Israel-hostile and Palestinian-hostile resentments also view orientations like pacifism, human rights engagement and/or moral disengagement as possible reasons for the positions people take on the conflict" (p. 26). Precisely this was done using a representative quantitative survey of nearly 1000 Germans in summer 2010, whose answers were analyzed in terms of the patterns into which they combine. In all, the study identified four "varieties of support vs. critique" (p. 79) in the German population:

1. Supporters of Israeli policy (in all 26%): While a small share of this group (6% of all persons surveyed) can be classed as "moderate supporters", the majority of "radical supporters" (20% of all persons surveyed) interpreted Israeli policy in the conflict in a "pro-Israeli War Frame" [4] which did not condemn the use of force, and justified itself with rejection of anti-Semitic attitudes and a simultaneous tendency to resentment against Palestinians (p. 80).

2. Latent anti-Semitic avoidance of Israel-critique (in all 11%): Interesting about this group is that it is made up of those Germans who, while they take no specific position on the conflict, nevertheless tend more to sympathize with the Israeli perspective and at the same time tend toward various anti-Zionistic, Israel-hostile and also quite anti-Semitic conceptions (p. 81).

3. Anti-Semitic criticism of Israel (in all 26%): Representatives of this group are characterized by a low level of knowledge of the conflict and a strong to very strong approval of not only anti-Semitic, anti-Zionistic and Israel-hostile, but also Palestinian-hostile prejudices, that is, stated simply they are more open to all sorts of racism (p. 81f.).

4. Human-rights oriented criticism of Israel (in all 36%): Here is one of the study's probably most remarkable findings: The people who make up this group proved to be not only among those best informed about the conflict, but also above all almost completely free of anti-Semitic, and as well other, namely Palestinian- and Islam-hostile prejudices (p. 81f.).

Furthermore, some readers could also be surprised to learn that certain varieties of anti-Semitism and a tendency to generalizing criticism of Israel are more widespread among West Germans than among East Germans (p. 144f.).

Briefly stated, the well thought-out research design of the study has produced differentiated results. Especially facilitating the gain in knowledge is that the questionnaire included the factor

“knowledge of the conflict.” All too often in Germany and Austria a discussion of the backgrounds and intentions of criticism of Israel is conducted without a suitable evaluation of the historical and current facts of the conflict or respectively knowledge of them on the part of critics. Unfortunately the knowledge-test contains not even one question or statement on the topic of Zionism. This would, however, have been necessary for a better comprehension of anti-Zionist attitudes. To be sure, the study gives empirical evidence that, “Anti-Zionism cannot be equated with anti-Semitism” (p. 156). Since it does not examine what the surveyed person understands Zionism to mean, the study does not deal with the in any case already very loaded concept and the associations attached to it in a completely accurate manner. That Kempf’s study neglects this is all the more regrettable, because it otherwise consistently succeeds by means of comprehensive contextualizations in avoiding oversimplified inferences. In conclusion, it is to be positively emphasized that anti-Semitic attitudes are balanced with Palestinian- and Islam-hostile attitudes that are especially relevant for the Israel-Palestine Conflict. Anti-Semitism is thereby not isolated in Kempf’s study, but rather embedded in the broader context of racist mechanisms.

It is a great service of the author that, despite its dense and complex statistical content, the work is very readable. This is surely also due to the fact that the book is divided in two parts, and the details of the analysis and comprehensive tables, which are less understandable to readers unfamiliar with quantitative methods, are placed in the second part of the book. Kempf’s study makes a well-researched and methodically precise contribution to the topical complex of anti-Semitism and critique of Israel. Furthermore, the innovative approach leads to important, nuanced new knowledge. This could be supplemented by qualitative research or respectively expanded and deepened. Thus in her dissertation, Anna-Esther Younes, e.g., recently studied, using an extensive, largely ethnographic analysis, the function that German anti-Semitism discourse serves in the context of colonialism, increasing anti-Muslim racism and intensifying European and national-state security discourses. She thereby comes to the conclusion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict functions not only individually, but also collectively as an identity-giving projection surface for white Germans, and to be sure in a double sense: on one side, to declare through support for Israel the overcoming of one’s own anti-Semitism; and on the other side, to continue to racially stereotype the old racially defined “Jewish other” by means of a shortcut through the “Muslim other” [5]. This could, for example, be drawn on as an explanation for why in Kempf’s study anti-Semitic and also Israel-hostile prejudices are found even in the Israel-supporter group (p. 80). The reviewed book identifies this fact but cannot explain it. At any rate, it is to be hoped that the results of the study by Kempf and Verleger will be taken note of by not only the scientific world, but also political

decision-makers, journalists, and not least also those active in (above all anti-racist) educational work.

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Notes

[1] Cf. <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur/aktivisten-wollten-filmvorfuehrung-im-moviemento-kino-verhindern-23677950> [last downloaded on 19/03/2016]. That there is no longer a dialogue, as maintained at the end of the article, is only partly correct. On the side of the movie theater a discussion round was organized in view of the attempt to prevent the film showing, on the topic of the “Anti-Semitism Debate in Germany,” in which the filmmaker also participated. Cf. <http://www.moviemento.de/presse/pm09-03-deutsch.pdf> [last downloaded on 19/03/2016].

[2] The local group of the international Movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel.

[3] Cf. <http://wien.orf.at/news/stories/2761657/> [last downloaded on 19/03/2016]. The Film showing was completely cancelled, but the lecture by Ofer Neiman was, however, held on the planned day at a different location.

[4] In order to determine the conflict understanding of the surveyed persons, a distinction was made between “War Frame” and “Peace Frame.” Both are found not only with a pro-Israeli, but also a pro-Palestinian attitude. The so-called “War Frame” implies an uncompromising and one-sided partisanship for the one or the other side. Within the “Peace Frame,” to the contrary, despite possible partisanship for the Israeli or Palestinian side, the opponent’s perspective is also taken into consideration. Central is balance. Not least of all, therefore, a “neutral” understanding of the conflict is possible in a Peace Frame, i.e., without one-sided partisanship for one of the conflict parties, while this is not possible in a War Frame (p. 61f.).

[5] Cf. Younes, Anna-Esther, *Race, Colonialism and the Figure of the Jew in a New Germany*, Dissertation, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva 2015.

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