

The Abuse of the “Antisemitism” Accusation in Germany

July 31, 2024



Introductory Note by Interviewer, Ban Ge

I often encountered Udi Raz in various Palestinian scenes in Berlin. She always wore a kippah with a watermelon pattern, which made her stand out among the numerous keffiyehs and became her distinctive mark. The watermelon pattern symbolizes Palestine because the four colors of “red, green, white, and black” happen to be the colors of the Palestinian flag. After the West Bank and Gaza were occupied by Israel, the Palestinian flag became taboo there, and people began using the watermelon pattern to represent the flag. Today, the comprehensive suppression of voices supporting Palestine in the Western world has revitalized this symbol as an expression of resistance to censorship.

Udi is a transgender woman and her preferred pronoun is “she.” She is a member of Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East, a German-based Jewish pro-Palestinian network. She is also one of the organizers of the Palestine Congress, originally scheduled to start in Berlin on April 12, 2024. The Palestine Congress, initiated by supporters of the Palestinian solidarity movement from around the world, was expected to last three days, with discussions about a Gaza ceasefire, Israeli violations of international law, and Germany’s complicity in the massacre. However, on the opening day, the police cut off the electricity in the conference hall and raided the hall soon after. Major mainstream media in Germany had launched a smear campaign even before the opening of the congress. Mayor Kai Wegner commented on the Palestine Congress on Twitter, saying, “Berlin does not tolerate antisemitism, hatred, and incitement against Jews.”

Among those arrested at the congress were two Jews, including Udi. The video of her arrest was highly symbolic. Wearing a kippah, she was escorted downstairs by the police, shouting “Free Palestine” to the public. A woman behind her yelled at the police, “You are arresting a Jewish person!”

Since October 7, 2023, Jews in Germany have been “canceled” on charges of “antisemitism” far exceeding their proportion in the population. Today, the abuse of the term “antisemitism” has completely robbed it of its meaning. Anyone who supports Palestine or condemns the Israeli regime

may be accused of “antisemitism,” while real antisemitism is shielded.

On the other hand, the history of the Jewish Holocaust has gradually become a taboo among groups supporting Palestine. This trauma has been continuously invoked by mainstream politics, becoming an oppressive tool and even legitimizing another massacre. Arabs, who have suffered greatly, sneer at it. Progressive Jewish groups are at a loss as to how to address their hijacked collective trauma.

Two days after the closure of the Palestine Congress on April 14, I saw Udi at another resistance movement taking place during the same period—an occupation movement called “Occupy against Occupation” in front of the Bundestag or German parliament. This occupy movement lasted for more than three weeks and was violently evicted on April 26, 2024.

In this context, I interviewed Udi Raz on April 17, 2024.

Jews Are the Biggest Victims of “Antisemitism” Accusations in Germany

Ban Ge: *Can you introduce a bit about yourself and your organization, Jewish Voice for Just Peace?*

Udi Raz: I came from Israel, which some refer to as Palestine. I personally don’t mind how you name it, what matters is the power dynamics that characterize the living realities of those who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. To me it really doesn’t matter if you call it Israel or Palestine.

I am a board member of the organization Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East [I will use “Jewish Voice” to refer to the organization], which was established in 2003 in Germany, symbolically in November, as commemoration of Crystal Night, also known as Kristallnacht, the night of the Broken Glass, when the Nazis raided Jewish institutions in 1938.

Jewish Voice was created by a group of Jews based in Germany, as they understood that in the German media, reporting about the reality of those who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is very one-sided. Not only because only Jews are able to speak to claim what reality is, but also because those Jews are Zionists. Very rarely do anti-Zionist Jews have the opportunity to speak up.

Those individuals who created “Jewish Voice” decided to use the privilege that is given to us—ironically by a racial supremacist structure—in order to bring in voices that are even more marginalized than those of our own, specifically Palestinian voices.

Ban Ge: *Many Jews have been accused of antisemitism in Germany in recent years, especially after October 7, 2023. Can you share with us your work experience at the Jewish Museum and how you lost your job? The Jewish Museum, along with other Holocaust monuments which can be seen everywhere, constitute the landscape of memory politics in Germany. As a Jew living in Germany, how do you see the landscape of Holocaust memory?*

Udi Raz: The Jewish Museum is a huge project. You can spend more than a full day visiting it. For this reason, the Education Department of the museum created guided tours within it that specify certain topics that the Jewish Museum touches upon. One of those topics is Jews in Germany after 1945. This is the topic that I was specializing in when I worked for the Jewish Museum. I worked as a freelancer and the Jewish Museum would book me whenever a group wished to visit to deal with this topic. As a Jewish individual who grew up in Israel and came to Germany, I would usually also explain the reason why I decided to come here. I would explain that the place where I came from has experienced a civil war that is an outcome of a system that is based on injustice. I would give one example referring to the West Bank, where I would make the point that Jews who live in the West

Bank are considered citizens of the State of Israel. Accordingly, they are allowed to decide who sits in the Israeli parliament. However, the Palestinian population who live in the exact same geographical area, are not citizens of Israel. Therefore, they are not allowed to decide who sits in the Israeli parliament, or who occupies them. Then I would refer specifically to a report that was published two or three years ago by Amnesty International, which came to the conclusion that this living reality is one of the many manifestations of a broader phenomenon better described as an *apartheid* system.

For the Education Department of the Jewish Museum, the fact that I used the term *apartheid* was too much. They did not care about the fact that I was talking about a given living reality. They were saying: "Yeah, you can talk about the living realities, but just don't use the term apartheid." I find that quite revealing, considering the fact that all human rights organizations who studied the same phenomenon came to the conclusion that Israel practices apartheid.

There was a big article about me in the *Bild* where they accused me of being an "Israel hater." In fact, I was socialized in a Zionist Israeli habitus. My grandparents on my mother's side migrated from Argentina to Palestine, and the parents of my father migrated from Lithuania. My grandmother survived the Holocaust under German rule in Lithuania, and my grandfather was able to flee in the last seconds to cross the border to the Soviet side where he fought for the Red Army against the Nazis. And then my grandparents found each other again after the war. But the entire family of my grandparents were murdered during the Holocaust by the atrocities of Aryan Supremacists, namely Nazis. To call me an "Israel hater" completely neglects my own living experience and my own heritage and the fact that my family still live there.

In my opinion, the Holocaust monuments in Germany are another proof that Germany celebrates, first and foremost, Jews who are dead. These dead Jews are the most utilized subject in the public sphere in Germany nowadays, in order to create an idea of Germany as not Nazi Germany anymore. Jews who do speak up rarely have the opportunity to share from our own experiences unless we are willing to engage in the discourse of anti-Muslim racism.

Why the Term "Aryan" Is Still Relevant

Ban Ge: *Then how do you see the phenomenon of "German Guilt"?*

Udi Raz: I don't think there is something inherently wrong with trying to come to terms with atrocities that have been committed in the past. But what I find really worrying is that those who are now in power in Germany come to terms with their genocide in the past by promoting and arming another genocide, this time against the Palestinian people.

Ban Ge: *You keep using the term "Aryans." Why do you think the term Aryan is still relevant today?*

Udi Raz: It's a category that has disappeared with the collapse of Nazi Germany. But on the other hand, the term *antisemitism* has survived until today.

My claim as a Jewish individual is that if we want to talk about antisemitism, we also need to talk about Aryan supremacy because the discourse that allows us to talk about the Nazi logic only when referring to the treatment of Jews is something that I want to call into question. Whenever Aryans accuse me of antisemitism, I remind them of the difference between me, as a Jew, and them, as Aryans. And I point out that it is a mistake to apply the antisemitism accusation to Jews, but never to Aryans.

I was struggling for the longest time to conceptualize the difference between me and Aryans. I was

told they are white Germans. Then the question is, wait, are Jews of European origin white? If I go down the street without a kippah, I pass as white, right? There is no external characteristic that would make me appear as a Jewish individual. Then again, it's the category of national context and not of racial difference. That's why for me it's very important to recall the difference between Aryans and Jews. The question is why in Germany some white people have more access to privileges than other white people who are Jews. Some people use this term *Bio-Deutsch* to refer to what I call Aryans, but for me, this *Bio-Deutsch* implies that there are Germans that are more "German" than other Germans, right? And I want to avoid that.

If the term "Aryan" is not relevant, then why are Aryans still those who are in power? If it's not relevant, how come Jews are still structurally made "other"? If it's not relevant, how come Muslims have been made a problem with the concept of Germanness? To me, the question that must be asked again and again is when there is still a very hegemonic social group in today's Germany, why does Germany claim to be de-Nazified? The point that I want to make is that if a country is designed for only one specific group to feel at home, then this group must be named.

I think it's also quite telling when it comes to the question of the representation of Jews in political decision-making in Germany, because when we look nowadays at how many self-identifying Jews are sitting in the German parliament, the answer is zero. It's important for me to underline this because we are being excluded. We don't have direct representation within the parliament of Germany as Jews. Second, since 2018 there is a new office that is called the "Commissioner for Jewish life in Germany and the fight against antisemitism." And you find this position, this office on the federal level, on the state level, on the municipal level, and also in the executive bodies of the German state, for example, within the police and the military. More often than not, those who control this office are non-Jews. They self-identify as Christians, as Protestants, Catholic, evangelists.... And those are the people who make decisions for us on whether we are antisemitic or not. They point to us and tell us that we are antisemitic for saying that democracy should be applied to everyone who lives between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. They call us antisemites for speaking about human rights and saying that Palestinians should also enjoy human rights. They call us antisemites when we speak about international law and say that international law should be applied to everyone, including the Palestinians. They call us antisemites when we call for a ceasefire.

And let's talk about the Central Council of Jews in Germany, an institution that is actually recognized by the German government. If you go to their website, you'll see that they claim to speak for all Jews who live in Germany, claiming they are an umbrella organization of all Jewish communities in Germany. But they mean all Jewish communities in Germany that are organized around synagogues. So the Central Council of Jews in Germany does not represent all Jews, but only those Jews who understand their Jewishness as a religious identity. Secular Jews like me, for example, are completely ignored and excluded from the discourse around Jewishness in today's Germany. Quite ironically, this happens in a state that claims to be a secular state. Jewish Voice is the largest secular Jewish organization nowadays in Germany. We are accused of being dangerous for Jewishness itself, for the German nation, for humanity even. And it's quite telling that we are marked by Aryans as a problem for Germany and for Jews.

So we are talking about the representation of Jews in the Parliament, the representation of Jews in offices that are to actually generate knowledge about Jews. We are talking about who has power to decide for Jews who we are, how we should feel, how we should think, and determine who are our enemies and who are our friends.

Confronting Antisemitism and Islamophobia

Ban Ge: *Germany has also been using memory politics, making Jews and Arabs enemies, for*

example, assuming antisemitism is merely an Arab sentiment.

Udi Raz: The media often says that Arabs play a central role in the antisemitism that is being brought back to Germany. This narrative completely neglects the fact that most of the antisemites in Germany are actually Aryans. To my knowledge, more than 90 percent of the antisemitism cases that have been registered in recent years have been committed by the far right in Germany. Also, a big population of Jews in Palestine are ethnically Arabs. The term “Semite” is a category that actually gives so much empowerment, and this is why I want to celebrate it. Arabs by definition are also Semites. I am a Semite. I have much more in common with my Palestinian sisters and brothers than I have in common with Aryans in general.

In recent years, people like me, the anti-Zionist Jews, are being marked by Aryans as antisemites. In my opinion, such an accusation is another proof that those who are in power in Germany are not interested in the protection of Jews as such, but only interested in the protection of those Jews who are also willing to reproduce anti-Muslim racism. And if we think about the anti-Muslim racism that is inherent in the nation-building process of Germany in the last few decades, we can see this phenomenon repeats again and again with different subjects.

We should keep in mind that the Nazis wanted to purify the German nation from the Jews. And indeed, they were very successful in doing so, because from a population of about half a million Jews living in Germany before the Second World War, less than 1 percent of this population actually survived the Holocaust and stayed in Germany or returned to Germany. Most of the Jewish population that used to live in Germany before the Nazis took over Germany either were systematically murdered by the Nazis or decided to leave Germany. So it’s quite ridiculous now that Germany claims to come to terms with their genocidal past, not only by promoting another genocide against Muslims, against Palestinians specifically (with arms to Israel and by silencing Israel’s critics), but also by explaining again why Germany should remain pure from non-Aryans, namely, from the Muslim population.

I think Germany has never been de-Nazified. It is not necessarily that all Aryans who live in Germany also believe in Aryan supremacy. But I think most of the Aryans who live in Germany are simply not aware of how severe the situation is for non-Aryans. Because for them, our claims for basic human rights are simply matters for discussion instead of essential values.

Ban Ge: *Some more practical disagreements divide Palestinian movements, such as the “one-state solution” or “two-state solution” question. How do you see these issues?*

Udi Raz: So the main question of whether there’s to be a one-state solution or two-state solution, to my understanding, indicates to what extent some people are willing to neutralize the idea that a nation should be organized around one ethnicity. We always must ask why it is necessary to use categories of division rather than categories of inclusion. To my understanding, the one secular state solution is the queer answer to the ongoing imbalance and injustice that characterizes the living realities of people between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. So I personally oppose any other idea but a one secular state solution. Furthermore, I am in favor of getting rid of nationalism or nationalist categories in general. I think the Middle East is one of many examples of why nation-states are inventions that do not uphold the living realities of the actual people who live in the geographical area that is divided into nations, whatever this should mean.

“My Queerness Opened the Door to See the Solidarity with Palestine”

Ban Ge: *Can you share your growing-up experience in Israel? What made you an anti-Zionist Jew?*

Udi Raz: I grew up in Haifa, and Haifa is known as a city where Jews and Palestinians live together. So it was never a surprise for me that the place where I'm living has more than one name. Maybe Jews would refer to this area as Israel, while the Palestinian population would refer to this area as Palestine. As I grew up, I also learned that I'm queer. Growing up in a heteronormative context, you don't have a safe space unless you create it for yourself. So in 2007, together with other queers who live in Haifa and other teenagers, we decided to create our own safe space where we would meet once a week. We would just sit together and talk and laugh and cry—whatever teenagers do when they come to terms with their otherness and try to take care of each other. Creating such a safe space was also an invitation for non-Jewish queers to join in. It was never a question of whether one was Jewish or not; the space was intentionally defined for queer individuals. So in the city where not only Jews live, but also Palestinians, it's not a surprise that Palestinians too joined this safe space. It was the first time in my life that I heard, from the perspective of Palestinians, what it was like to live in a state, in the state of Israel, in the Jewish state as a Palestinian individual.

I learned for the first time in my life that they are subjected to a reality completely different from mine as a Jewish person. Furthermore, I met other Jews who came from the Arab Muslim world or whose family had migrated to Palestine from the Arab Muslim world. I learned so much about the social structure of Haifa through my queerness. It was a door that opened access to understanding the complexities of the living realities that was shaping the lives of queers.

I was forced to serve in the military, which I perceived as something that was not negotiable. It's something that I'm really ashamed of. Nevertheless, I was trained to be a pilot at first. As a child, it was always a dream of mine to become a pilot. So in a way, I was focusing more on this experience of being a pilot than on the fact that I was also a soldier. But after a year of training, I decided to end my training as a pilot because it was so demanding. You can at any point say that you don't want to continue the training and then you are basically out of the training. I was next sent to serve in the headquarters of the Air Force in Tel Aviv. I was trained to escort Air Force missions from the ground. Some of those missions involved killing people. I remember very clearly that after such missions, the officers were catered with cakes and nice food to celebrate their success. So it was a very surreal experience for me to be there. I felt very uncomfortable, and I said that I was not going to continue in this position. Again, I ended my officer training.

Back then, I was still trying to make sense out of the reality unfolding in front of me. Shortly after I left the military, I traveled a lot to the West Bank, specifically to a village that is on the border, so to say, between "Palestine 1948" and "Palestine 1967," where the Israeli regime had built a wall, basically cutting the village population from the field that they had worked on for generations. And this became a symbolic place for the struggle against the separation wall. This was one of the first times that I actually understood how severe the situation is for Palestinians who cannot work on the land on which they live. They cannot have food. They cannot have resources. They are cut off from the main resources they had in order to sustain a community.

It took me years to finally self-identify, to fully embrace the self-identification as an anti-Zionist Jew, because I had grown up in a Zionist habitus that neutralized this idea.

I moved to Berlin in 2012, at a time when Berlin had become a city that celebrated diversity and pluralism, a hotspot for leftists from around the world, and also a queer haven. When I arrived in Berlin, for the first time in my life I met Muslim people as equal to me, specifically Arabs, Palestinians. Not only that we were equal, but we all were sharing this experience of being a minoritized group in Germany.

I found much more in common with other minoritized groups here in Germany as a Jewish person than with Aryans. Thus, my encounter with individuals from other minority groups helped me to

learn or explore the different characteristics, or the different manifestations of the phenomenon that makes us minoritized groups, vis-à-vis Aryans.