Strategic Alliances and Rhetorical Pivots: The Dangers of Germany's Contemporary Approach to Jewish History

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Abstract

This article examines how two central tenets of German political life—a longstanding alliance with Israel and a firmly implanted culture of historical remembrance—have in recent years been manipulated by the state and by far-right nationalists to meet foreign policy goals at the expense of democratic freedoms. This shift is characterized by state censorship of academics and artists who seek to portray Jewish life as pluralistic and politically diverse. It is marked by extremist discourse that pits Christians and Jews as part of a culture war with Muslims. It is not solely a political or partisan problem, but has taken hold in the cultural and educational sectors, endangering the careers of educators, museum professionals, and creatives. It has even captivated a small minority of German Jews, who are fortified by the caustic rhetoric of anti-Islam politicians. Jewish history is at the heart of this conversation.

The politicization of antisemitism is an increasingly global phenomenon. From Europe to the U.S., right-wing politicians are using Israel and Jewish voters as political tools to prop up foreign policy projects and win domestic culture wars. While the security of Israel and the future of the Jewish people matter deeply to voters across the political spectrum in Germany, we must be attentive to the ways in which far-right parties and complicit governments are co-opting these fears to drive forward illiberal agendas. With an eye toward the future, this paper imparts the risks of promoting ethnonationalism and censorship as a solution to the problems facing Jewish populations.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the war in Gaza in 2023, Germany has reinvigorated its commitment to its Jewish constituents and to the Jewish homeland. Following World War II and the atrocities of the Holocaust, Germany developed the "Staatsräson," now a cornerstone of German foreign policy, which identifies Israel's security as a critical fixture of German statehood.[1] This post-war policy

has continued to color the nation's foreign and domestic policy doctrines, such that Israeli national interests are often elided with Jewish interests writ-large. This resulting dynamic is one in which the state views critics of Israel as de facto antisemites, which warrants interrogation.[2] Since the horrific attacks on Israel in October, the German government, led by center-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz, has developed a domestic strategy to combat antisemitism that, in practice, seems to erode democratic discourse more than fortify it. The state has chosen to privilege affirmations of support for Israel over democratic discourse about Jewish history and the future of the Jewish people. While this may appear to be a rational calculation given the legacy of the Holocaust and the contemporary resonance of the "Staatsräson," it's worth asking who the state is actually targeting with this campaign and who they are purporting to protect.

Though politically and ideologically distinct from the ruling party, Germany's far-right party, the Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD), also maintains a conflicted relationship with Jewish history and Israel. The party has come under fire for antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial in the past decade, and has been labeled by the president of the World Jewish Congress as a "disgraceful reactionary movement."[3] Former AfD co-leader Alexander Gauland made national headlines with the comment that the Holocaust was but a "speck of bird poop" in an otherwise glorious millennium of German history.[4] Another AfD politician, Björn Höcke, criticized Berlin's Holocaust Memorial, lamenting that Germans are "the only people in the world to plant a monument of shame in the heart of its capital."[5] Recently, though, the party has changed its tune, with public statements about Jews and Jewish history that mirror the views of far more moderate sects of the German political sphere. The enduring centrality of the Staatsräson in German politics has made it such that radicalism in Germany is expressed principally through one's perspective on Jewish security and the State of Israel. The AfD's rapprochement with Israel benefits the party by quieting claims of antisemitism against them. Positive references to Israel thus align the AfD with the Staatsräson and Germany's governing coalition, enabling the party to move beyond the extremist fringes and into the mainstream.

Following Hamas' attack on Israel last fall, Germany's cultural sector—public intellectuals, museum educators and artists—has been disproportionately vilified by claims of antisemitism, while the true culprit—Germany's far-right—has largely escaped criticism. In the past sixteen months, museums have been encouraged to modify or eliminate programming that could be seen as sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.[6] At the Frankfurt Book Fair this past year, organizers canceled the award ceremony for the book "Minor Detail" by Palestinian author Adania Shibli, citing "the war in Israel.'[7] Although the novel is set in 1949, the cancellation of the prize speaks to a desire within German cultural institutions to narrow Jewish history and identity such that all critiques of Israel, even historic or semi-fictitious, are off limits.

The AfD similarly subscribes to a rigid conception of the German-Israeli alliance, and of the German Jewish identity writ-large. The party seeks to

control the narrative on Jewish history from the top down, co-opting Jewish voices and casting the Holocaust as a historical anomaly disconnected from German ethnonationalist politics, while patching over their past mistakes with spirited overtures toward Israel. However, this strategic distortion of Jewish history is not limited to Germany's far right. The governing Social Democratic Party (SPD), who have steered Germany's response to the Israel-Hamas war, have increasingly relied on the censorship of artists and academics in order to squash discourse that is critical of Israel. Albeit in different ways, the AfD and the SDP both seek to narrow the state's conception of Jewish history for reasons of political expediency. Recognizing the pluralism of Jewish life and the depth of Jewish history threatens both parties, the AfD hopes that by reifying the Staatsräson they can gain widespread approval on the domestic political stage. For the SDP, maintaining Germany's alliance with Israel reinforces status quo foreign policy goals that stretch back to the mid-20th century. The AfD mimics the SDP and more moderate governing parties' kinship with Israel. This maneuver enables them to hide behind a politically expedient platform, utilizing the centrality of Israeli security to German political discourse to reach the minimum bar for entry into the mainstream, while allowing their more transgressive and discriminatory policy goals to go unnoticed.

The AfD: Rewriting History, Building Coalitions

The AfD was established in 2013 by German conservatives Alexander Gauland and Bernd Lucke, who strongly opposed the multilateral economic policy promoted by Angela Merkel and sought to redirect the economy toward protectionism. Gauland and Lucke protested the government's response to the Eurozone financial crisis of 2009, when Germany bailed out many poorer European countries that had defaulted on their debt.[8] Although the AfD was formed primarily to promote German economic sovereignty, in subsequent years the party has gained traction with its emphatic anti-immigration platform. With each year since its founding, the AfD has gathered a larger vote share in the Bundestag (one house of Germany's parliament), from less than 5 percent of the vote in 2013 to over 10 percent of the vote in the 2021, and a staggering 20.8 percent in February of 2025.[9][10] This upward trend is representative of the AfD's increasing mainstream appeal among Germans of various demographics. Curiously, even German Jews have as of late been courted by the AfD with tailored messaging that pays lip service to the core tenets of Zionism. However, the party's campaign has made little progress in attracting the Jewish voting bloc, which has historically backed moderate and left-wing parties. While the AfD has strived to appeal to Jewish voters, a closer look at its wider political strategy is telling of the party's true intent.[11] The party's attempts to claim themselves as defenders of Jewish life in Germany are perhaps best exemplified by the formation of *Juden in der AfD* (Jews in the AfD) in 2018.

In a 2018 NPR interview, *Juden in der AfD* member Wolfgang Fuhl spoke candidly about his support for the AfD. Responding to claims that his support

for the AfD was unjustifiable given his Jewish identity, he asserted, "Believe me, I'm not being exploited by anybody . . . I'm a conservative person and I'd like to continue to live in Germany. We're roughly 140,000 Jews in this country; it would only take a week for us all to leave. And we'd be leaving not because of the AfD or the right-wing extremists, but because of Islamic anti-semitism."[12] Fuhl comments on a fundamental incompatibility between "Islamic antisemitism" and Jewish life in Germany. Whereas "right-wing extremis[m]" can coexist with Judaism, Fuhl explains, he asserts that it is Islamic hostility that could spell the end of Jewish habitation in Germany. This statement lays bare that Fuhl's admiration of the AfD rests on its aggressive promotion of Zionism and ethnonationalism, not on some more fundamental appreciation of Jewish history and culture.

The AfD's unrevoked antisemitic statements further suggest that their courting of Jews is insincere. The AfD has rehabilitated a number of terms highly associated with Hitler and Nazism, most notably *volksgemeinschaft* ("ethnonational community") and *völkisch* ("folkish" but with ethnonationalist connotations).[13] Moreover, the AfD of Saxony-Anhalt wished their Facebook audience a merry Christmas in 2015 with a post encouraging them to think about "shared values" and their "responsibility for the *Volksgemeinschaft*."[14] Responding to backlash, the local head of the AfD described the term as "entirely unproblematic" and "highly positive."[15] However, the concept of *volksgemeinschaft* was denounced in 2017 by Germany's Federal Constitutional court, which stated that the term and its use "violates the human dignity of all those who do not belong to the ethnic *volksgemeinschaft*, and is incompatible with the constitution's principle of democracy."[16] The reclamation of the *volksgemeinschaft* and associated terminology speaks to a dramatic historical irony: Jews, who were once expelled from the *volksgemeinschaft,* have now been strategically incorporated within the ethnonational community and are being wedged between the German nationalists and their new enemy, Islam. We should see this tactic as evidence that the AfD is neither afraid nor ashamed to use the Nazi's handbook for policy advice.[17]

Altogether, the AfD's courting of German Jews can be understood as an electoral strategy to exit the fringe and become more politically competitive. This strategy does not signal an ideological shift whereby the AfD and its members no longer hold antisemitic stances. Instead, the AfD's strategy to pander to Jews in order to make itself more politically palatable is just that: a strategy. Right-wing candidates appealing to Jewish populations is not unique to Germany, but the German case exposes the uniquely insidious ways the AfD has repositioned itself relative to Germany's history of antisemitism. For much of the 20th century, antisemitism was an essential part of the intellectual framework of white supremacist movements around the world.[18] However, in the 21st century, blatant antisemitism no longer holds positive political weight; in Germany, it is particularly politically inexpedient.[19] Jews, Judaism, and Israel, however, are being increasingly employed as political tools by right-wing parties to gain leverage on other issues such as immigration and foreign policy.

In the decades following the fall of the Nazi regime, Germany began to positively identify with Jewish people and with Israel in a few key stages. In the era of Allied-occupied Germany, the four occupation zones underwent a uneven process of de-Nazification, whereby the occupying powers took different bureaucratic approaches to dismantling Nazi power and influence.[20] When Germany split into East and West in 1949, West Germany rehabilitated itself on the international stage by allying with the United States and with Israel, to which it paid reparations beginning in 1952.[21] East Germany, mainly controlled by the Soviet Union, is acknowledged by scholars as having underwent a much less comprehensive process of de-Nazificiation due to power struggles between the provincial government and the local population.[22] The West German alliance system of the mid-20th century persists in part today; Germany continues to maintain a special relationship with Israel, which relies on it primarily for military aid. For Germany, helping to defend Israel against outside hostilities is understood as a historical responsibility.[23] Germany's unique relationship with Israel, its Staatsräson, does not preclude German politicians from antisemitism, but it does help to explain why AfD members' positive references to Israel coherently fit with their nationalist agenda. Understanding that to be pro-Germany is to be pro-Israel, AfD party members seek to harness the rhetorical weight of Judaism, at the expense of a new national enemy, in this case, Muslims.

In order to claim Jews as a strategic ally, the AfD has relied on a de-racialized vision of Judaism and a highly racialized vision of Islam. As previously mentioned, the AfD has determined that German Jews now belong to the *volksgemeinschaft* alongside German Christians. Their inclusion is predicated on the minimization of Jewish ethnic difference, which was, less than a century ago, the motivating factor behind the Nazi extermination of Jews in Europe. At present, the AfD frames Muslim culture, from clothing and religious practices to food rules, as fundamentally incompatible with European life, and advocates for their removal from the body politic.[24] If Judaism is understood as a religion on a similar cultural plane to Christianity, and Islam is associated with racial difference and cultural foreignness, then the AfD can effectively push for ethnic segregation and redistribution. This approach would be similar to the Nazi deportation, ghettoization, and subsequent extermination of Jewish communities.

Since the refugee crisis of 2015, the AfD has redirected its focus from promoting fiscal sovereignty to building an identity based on anti-immigration rhetoric.[22] Between 2010 and 2016, 3.7 million Muslims arrived in Europe, the majority of whom were fleeing from violent conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. For its part, Germany received roughly 1.3 million refugees from Muslim countries in these years, more than any other Western European destination besides the United Kingdom.[25] This influx of Muslim refugees to Germany resulted in an abrupt shift in policy priorities for the AfD and its adherents. A 2016 survey showed that 81% of AfD supporters strongly backed the idea of a cap on refugee acceptances.[26] In its 2016 manifesto, the AfD also

demanded a ban on burqas, Muslim head and face coverings, and minarets, the towers of mosques from which calls to prayer are projected.[27] Before long, the AfD's anti-immigrant sentiment found popular support. In the 2017 federal elections, the AfD won a historic 12.6% of the national vote and gained 92 seats in the Bundestag. The AfD fanned the flames of Islamophobia with new slogans such as "Der Islam gehört nicht zu Deutschland," (Islam does not belong in Germany) and "Burke? Ich steh' mehr auf Burgunder!" (Burka? I prefer Burgundy wine!).[28]

These slogans are consistent with the AfD's racializing of Muslims, emphasizing the racial and cultural difference of Muslims in order to depict Islam as incompatible with German identity. Björn Höcke, leader of the extremist Der Flügel faction of the AfD, explains that the threat of refugee settlement for Germans is "the death of their race."[29] By inviting refugees to seek citizenship in Germany, he claims, Germany faces "Africanization, orientalization and Islamization."[30] These statements reveal the racial undertones of the AfD's complaint against immigration and Islam, which is again reminiscent of Hitler's racialized and caustic rhetoric toward Jews. Höcke appeals to a nativist camp that fears the integration of racial minorities (i.e., Arabs) into Germany.

The AfD and its supporters thus subscribe to an ethno-nationalist vision of state formation, whereby multiculturalism is a threat to national identity. This foundational viewpoint differs from extremist nationalist parties of Germany's past only in its vision of a solution. The AfD vehemently denies claims that it is a racist organization, and sees minorities returning to their home countries, their version of "social redistribution," as a solution they believe would serve both immigrant communities and German-born citizens.[31] This raises many questions: If the AfD claimed the chancellorship in Germany, how would Muslim relocation be enforced? How would the AfD go about physically redefining the *volksgemeinschaft*? It is imperative that we view the AfD's policy proposals not as empty words, but as genuine calls to action in order to create a state in which ethnic persecution en masse can emerge from its century old grave.

The refugee crisis and influx of hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees since 2010 has cemented the AfD's ethnonationalist vision by providing a perceived enemy to the ethnic order. A study of political rhetoric found that in 2017, 10% of all AfD rhetoric—spoken, written, or posted digitally—consisted of anti-Muslim statements.[32] At times, this rhetoric explicitly referenced the perceived clash between Muslim and Judeo-Christian religious practices. The AfD's 2017 manifesto at one point read, "the minaret and muezzin call contradict the tolerant coexistence of religions that the Christian churches, Jewish communities and other religious communities practice in modern times."[33] By showing favor to the "tolerant" Jews and condemning Muslims, the AfD has sought to distance itself from Nazism and recruit voters who are driven by anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant sentiments. The AfD's 2021 platform shared similar concerns over protecting Jewish people from Muslims, as this statement makes clear: "Jewish life in Germany is not only threatened by right-wing extremists, but also increasingly by anti-Jewish and anti-Israel Muslims."[34]

The constructed incongruity between Jews and Muslims is further marked by the AfD's assertion that Christianity and Judaism share a culture and historical legacy. Uli Henkel, an AfD representative from Bavaria stated in a 2019 interview that, "We also have Jews in the AfD. They are all people, yes, they are Jews, but they are Jews like I am a Christian and not much more." Henkel's statement, though convoluted, makes it clear that part of the AfD's co-opting of Judaism rests on the understanding that Jews are not meaningfully different from Christians in a cultural sense. This comparison dangerously disregards Jewish people' unique historical legacy in Germany, in what could be argued is a purposeful attempt to rewrite history. It also seeks to flatten sectarian differences between Christianity and Judaism, as well as within Judaism itself. With this warped vision of Jewish history, the AfD is able to frame German Jews as a societal monolith, which suits their nativist agenda. Broadly, it suits the AfD to view all stakeholder groups as distinctly homogeneous.[35] If Jews and Muslims are both monoliths, one righteous and ethnically incorporated, the other dangerous and foreign, the AfD can then pit the two against each other as opposing blocs.

Historical Memory and Contemporary Discourse in the Cultural Arena

The flattening of Jewish identity and history has also played out in the cultural sector. Museums, particularly museums of German history or Holocaust memorialization, contribute to the production and reproduction of the modern German identity. Interrogating the country's role in the world and its fraught historical relationship with the Jewish people can bolster German historical memory, guiding future societal shifts while documenting the past. However, in a country that sees its raison d'etre as linked to the redress of historical wrongs toward Jewish people, projects of historical interrogation are rarely seen to completion. Though more well-intentioned than the AfD's ahistoricism, the state funds exhibitions that narrativize troubling parts of German-Jewish history, particularly the Holocaust, into historical accidents rather than products of the ethnonationalist politics that thrived in Germany in the late 19th through 20th centuries. The AfD similarly attempts to minimize the history of the Holocaust, because by doing so, they mask the fact that their campaign against Islam is being performed on a similar ideological basis to Hitler's scapegoating of the Jews.[36] The Berlin History Museum, a state funded institution, is an apt site to examine how the state transcribes Jewish history for a national audience and silos Jewish identity and pluralism in the process.

The exhibition "Roads Not Taken. Or: Things Could Have Gone Differently," which opened at Berlin's Deutsches Historisches Museum this summer, examines the tension between reality and possibility in fourteen pivotal moments in German history. The exhibition, which works backwards in time—from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the 1848 revolution that failed

to democratize the German-speaking states—presents alternative historical trajectories which are brought to life with artifacts and analyses that seek to prove their plausibility. In doing so, "Roads Not Taken" looks to reject historical determinism and a rigid view of German history as inevitable. Dan Diner, a German-Israeli scholar of modern history, is the intellectual engineer behind "Roads Not Taken." In his speech at the opening of the exhibition in December 2022 he remarked, "this exhibition aims to break with the teleological perception in that it not only focuses on the contingency, but also takes account of the events, happenings and tendencies that did *not* actually happen. To do this, it is necessary to jolt the predefined view that is fixed in the historical memory, to alienate it, as it were."[37]

The process of "alienat[ing]" viewers' preconceptions of German history is achieved, in part, through the reverse chronological ordering of historical information. This temporal reversal is designed to shake loose visitors' mechanical understanding of German history, perhaps originally committed to memory in a primary school setting, and further reinforced by cultural institutions, memorials, and state-driven memory culture. The central "what if" question is animated by black and white stations that explain history as it happened, juxtaposed with colorful panels onto which historical possibilities are mapped.

The 1944 exhibition room is significant because it asks what would have happened had the 1944 attempt on Hitler's life been successful. This is the only room in the exhibition that does not explore historical possibility; instead of colorful panels, the room is black and white in its entirety. The first wall explains history as it happened: officer Claus von Stauffenberg placed a bomb in Hitler's meeting room on July 20, and Hitler miraculously survived the attack while much of the room was turned to rubble.[38] The adjacent wall, which in all other exhibition rooms is illuminated with creative historical reinterpretation, is painted with two words, "Zu Spät (Too Late)." No images or illustrations accompany the statement.

Where Diner could have explored a potentially altered timeline of the war, the political future of Germany under new leadership, or the geopolitical reverberations from Hitler's death, the analysis of the historical moment focuses exclusively on the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Diner suggests that if Hitler were assassinated in 1944, it would have made a marginal difference to European Jews who by that point had been slaughtered by the millions in Nazi concentration camps and ghettos. While it has been statistically proven that the majority of Jews killed in the Holocaust died between 1941 and 1944, Diner's analysis of the 1944 assassination attempt still rings hollow for certain reasons.[39]

First, Diner does not engage in the same rigorous historical interrogation for the 1944 room as he does in the others. He simply does not provide "roads not taken," or alternative pathways for 1944, which contradicts the thesis and title of the project. Further, by declaring "too late," Diner siloes Jewish history from German history, military history, and geopolitics. From one perspective,

Diner appropriately represents the tragedy of the Holocaust by removing it from the broader analytical framework. From this standpoint, it is a singular event in German history and should be treated as such. From another perspective, Diner doesn't respect the history of the Holocaust because he purposefully forgoes grappling with the topic on an intellectual level. The latter view appropriately acknowledges how a closed door for intellectual debate about Jewish history and identity is a dangerous path for Germany to tread. It is this view that guides the following critique of Diner's exhibition.

By treating Jewish history as static and uncontestable, Diner contributes to the mental and intellectual rigidity with which the German state promotes remembrance and historical teaching. There are numerous examples to show that the German state looks unfavorably on reinterpretations of Jewish history and will intervene to ensure that museums stay within the predetermined acceptable bounds of historical inquiry. Cultural institutions that center on German history are funded and steered by the federal government, which means that state-directed efforts to halt programming on German-Jewish history have the potential to seal off democratic discourse on Jewish life entirely.[40] Further, given how the AfD in recent years has used Jewish history as a political tool, it is crucial that museums remain the promoters of curiosity and the authors of historical analysis. Museums cannot forgo historical interpretation and allow far-right politicians to fill this gap and control historical narratives. If scholars cannot intervene in German memory culture, nor suggest that Germans consider the Holocaust in relation to a larger and more complex history of authoritarian politics and ethnic violence, the production of knowledge about Jewish history is effectively halted, and the state is to blame.

It is not a stretch to view Deutsches Historisches Museum's "Roads Not Taken" exhibition as participating in what is a state-led, purposefully narrow conversation on Jewish identity in Germany. What an exhibition such as "Roads Not Taken" should do is loosen interpretation of German history through creative curation, so as to emancipate viewers from their preconceived notions, and stimulate a fuller and more honest discourse around the German past and present. The way in which Diner's exhibit specifically failed to engage with the broader history of the Holocaust is representative of the limited conversation surrounding Jewish life in Germany. The treatment of Jewish history as unexaminable or unfit for rigorous inquiry, however well-intentioned, is a weak point of the exhibition and a danger of state-led dialogue on Jewish identity. Further, if histories of state violence are not examined on an intellectual level, contemporary violence and scapegoating are more likely to go unresisted. The AfD is an example of this, capitalizing on the lack of rigorous discourse in order to villainize Muslims in Germany.

Museums such as the Deutsches Historisches Museum are part of the broader conversation on antisemitism that Germans have been grappling with for decades, albeit with renewed vigor since the Hamas-led attacks on Israel on October 7. Although many scandals in the cultural sector have centered on

the historical treatment of the Holocaust, state-funded cultural institutions appear willing to privilege Zionist interpretations of Jewish history even at its earliest moments. In 2018, an exhibition entitled "Welcome to Jerusalem" at the Berlin Jewish Museum generated criticism from high ranking Israeli politicians. The exhibition aimed to illustrate the city's role as a site of religious importance and tension among Christians, Jews, and Muslims over time. Acknowledging the contentious nature of the subject, the Museum's Director Peter Schäfer noted at the exhibit's opening that it "does not aim to offer solutions" but rather was designed to "generate an understanding of Jerusalem's special situation and help visitors to form their own opinions."[41] Shortly after the opening, an unsigned letter surfaced entitled "German Funding of Organizations Intervening in Israeli Domestic Affairs or Promoting Anti-Israel Activity," which was first reported by the German left-wing daily newspaper Die Tageszeitung.[42] The letter directly addressed the exhibit and condemned its supposed sympathy for the Palestinian cause. The Israeli government did not own up to writing it, but they publicly agreed with its contents. Emmanuel Nahshon, a spokesman for Israel's foreign ministry, responded to the exhibit, stating that the Jewish Museum should not have "take[n] sides" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[43] In Germany, an exhibit that aimed to stimulate constructive debate was not shielded by constitutional norms of unrestricted speech and pedagogy. Instead, museum employees were left unprotected to face a slew of backlash from a foreign government.

This suppressive action has only intensified since the war in Gaza began in 2023. In November of 2023, the Museum Folkwang in Essen, Germany closed a portion of a planned exhibition because one of the curators, Anaïs Duplan, had engaged with Pro-Palestine content on social media. The Museum statement on the curators release read: "This decision was made neither for artistic-curatorial reasons nor because of the exhibition's theme, but solely because the curator personally takes sides with the BDS campaign, which questions Israel's right to exist."[44] The Museum took a curator's personal convictions, as gleaned from likes on social media, as substantial evidence to omit Duplan's work from the upcoming exhibition. In a startling episode in January, the Berlin Senate for Culture initially endorsed, then subsequently removed, a clause that tied public funding for artistic projects to organizations' written recognition of Israel's right to exist. The intervention of Israeli officials in the matters of German public education and the influence of German foreign policy on museum programming presents pedagogical as well as political problems.[45] The German state has a genuine commitment to counteract antisemitism, but it has become clear, particularly since the Hamas attacks on Israel in October, that attempts to protect Jews in Germany have coincided with an attack on political and intellectual discourse and an increasing tolerance of the AfD, which pays mere lip service to the Staatsräson.

Conclusion

How is it that one of Germany's main political parties engages in Holocaust denial while intellectuals are thwarted in their attempts at historical reinterpretation? Germany's far-right actors and politically moderate cultural institutions have jointly contributed to a statewide myopia about the pluralism of Jewish life and the complexity of Jewish history. To best represent and promote the understanding of Jewish history in Germany, the state must allow cultural institutions to solicit the intellect of a diverse array of artists and academics. A forced halt on historical inquiry, as it relates to Jewish history, harms Jews and other religious minorities because it allows the state to designate in and out groups without being questioned by the broader public. This is what happened in Hitler's Germany, and it can happen again if the AfD's acquiescence to Israel at the expense of Muslims is not understood as what it is: ethnonationalism in the guise of protecting Germany's Jewish minority. By taking an uncompromising stance on Israeli politics, quashing democratic discourse on Jewish history, caving to the AfD, and policing the pedagogy of cultural institutions, the government is jeopardizing its relationship to its Jewish population and spelling its own democratic decline.

Notes

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