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Title: **“The German Left and Israel”**

Panel: Israel Studies

Within society and in public discourse, antisemitism is still perceived as emanating predominantly from the political Right. However, reactions to the Six-Day War in 1967 demonstrated the falsity of this assumption. Anti-Zionist attitudes spread in German public discourse, notably among the New Left.

Although the Left attempted to distance itself from antisemitism, it nevertheless justified the reproduction of traditional antisemitic stereotypes (e.g. THE GREEDY JEWISH CAPITALIST) and the use of antisemitic metaphors (e.g. *plague of locusts*) through the following two demonizing maneuvers:

One, Israel has been associated from the late 1960s with ideologies the Left clearly rejects: colonialism and imperialism, oppression, militarism, and chauvinism. The Left has always positioned itself on the side of the weak fighting the mighty. In the context of the Mideast conflict, this meant showing solidarity with the Palestinian side. Based on such a perspective, Israel has been continuously blamed as the cruel and mighty oppressor.

Leftists saw in Israel the bridgehead for the United States into the Arab world, and partly interpreted American support as the expression of the alleged Jewish global power.

Two, parts of the German Left declared Israelis as the “new Nazis” and compared the Mideast Conflict to the Holocaust. Through such demonizing analogies, German atrocities became trivialized and identification with the German in-group could take place.

When claiming that the Mideast conflict resembled Nazi atrocities, Germans emphasized their sensitivity regarding their own history and could therefore feel morally superior.

This led to the birth of “honorable antisemitism” (Jean Améry 2005), wrapped in anti-Zionist reproaches.

The way in which such distorted perspectives on Israel and the Mideast conflict are uttered depends to a large extent on the motives and the background of the speaker.

Whilst the extreme Left depicts Israel and Jews as colonialists and imperialists, the educated Left sees itself as advocates for human rights and eloquently advises the secularization of Israel and the abandonment of Zionism. Both groups however charge Israel with a backward and immoral behavior and the status of a pariah.

Its “rhetorical flexibility” (Martin Kloke) makes this form of hatred towards Israel so attractive to mainstream society. Speakers distance themselves from conventional forms of antisemitism, emphasizing – based on their ideological position – that it is impossible for them to hold prejudice against Jews. Antisemitism in this form is presented as legitimate criticism of Israel while at the same time the taboo of criticizing the Jewish state (another antisemitic stereotype) is emphasized. Left Israel-related Antisemitism can then be embraced by mainstream society; and its social acceptability makes it much more dangerous than the limited appeal of traditional forms of Jew-hatred.