



BRILL

PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGIST 7 (2025) 305–321

PUBLIC
ANTHROPOLOGIST
brill.com/puan

Speaking against Erasure: The Denial of Israeli Atrocities in Germany

Susann Kassem | ORCID: 0000-0001-6196-977X

Research Associate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,

University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

susann.kassem@ames.ox.ac.uk

Received 10 September 2024 | Accepted 11 April 2025 |

Published online XXXX

Abstract

This article critically examines the portrayal of Arabs, particularly Palestinians, in German media and public discourse. It highlights the complicity of German media and the failure of Middle East studies in Germany to take a critical position amidst Israel's genocide in Gaza. It discusses how Germany's pro-Israeli policies and public positioning lead to the direct exclusion of Arabs and their histories and experiences from society. The article reflects on my own experience as an Arab-German, having grown up as a refugee from Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. It discusses the "toleration" (*Duldung*) status imposed on many Palestinians and Lebanese who arrived in Germany in the 1980s, exacerbating their marginalization. It addresses how Germany's criminalization of protests and support for Israel's crimes deepens Arab alienation. It furthermore reflects on my role as scholar working on the Middle East and the moral obligation to speak out despite the lack of institutional support.

Keywords

Arabs in Germany – Arab-Israeli conflict – *Duldung* – toleration – Palestine – Lebanon – German Middle East studies

Pro-Palestinian Voices and the Failure of German Middle East Scholarship

In July 2023, Muriel Asseburg, Senior Fellow in the Middle East and Africa division at the renowned German Institute for International and Security Affairs (*Stiftung für Wissenschaft und Politik*) gave an interview for the podcast *Jung & Naiv*. In this interview, Asseburg discusses questions of apartheid in Israel, BDS,¹ and the legitimacy of certain forms of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation.² Asseburg's interview sparked a debate in Germany, with the Israeli embassy accusing her of antisemitism. Lea Frehse, Middle East correspondent for *die Zeit*, describes the defamation campaign against Asseburg and the intimidations of pro-Palestinian voices when debating the Arab-Israeli conflict as "A tone meant to intimidate" (*"Ein Ton, der einschüchtern soll"*). A tone that is largely set by the Israeli embassy which is trying to control any debate about the Arab-Israeli conflict in Germany.³ In her article for *die Zeit* in July 2023, Frehse observes that "an objective, empathetic debate about the Middle East conflict is hardly possible anymore."⁴ Asseburg "luckily, also received significant official and public backing," writes academic Benjamin Schütze more recently.⁵ Schütze's essay thematizes the failure of German Middle East studies to take a critical stand in the current genocidal war on Gaza. "Whether [Asseburg] would have received such support after October 7 [2023] is troublingly unclear," Schütze notes, emphasizing both the failure of German Middle East scholars speaking out amidst the ongoing genocide and the prevalence of censorship and intimidation surrounding Middle East discourse in Germany.⁶ Schütze points to several "red lines" that have emerged when discussing the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the use of established academic terms like "genocide," "Nakba," "settler colonialism," and

1 Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality. <https://www.bdsmovement.net/>

2 Jung, T. (2023). Interview mit Nahost-Expertin Muriel Asseburg. *Jung & Naiv*, June 27. Accessed March 15, 2023, <https://forum.jungundnaiv.de/index.php?thread/604-647-nahost-expertin-muriel-asseburg/>

3 Frehse, L. (2023). Es geht nicht um die Sache. *Zeit Online*, July 8. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2023-07/nahost-debatte-israel-muriel-asseburg/komplettansicht>.

4 Frehse, L. (2023). Es geht nicht um die Sache.

5 Schuetze, B. (2024). Supporting Plausible Acts of Genocide: Red Lines and the Failure of German Middle Eastern Studies. *Project on Middle East Political Science*, April. Accessed August 8, 2024, https://pomeps.org/supporting-plausible-acts-of-genocide-red-lines-and-the-failure-of-german-middle-eastern-studies?fbclid=IwZXhobgNhZW0CMTEAAR3HN2a0fol7IFLQoNOoZMUEMby29WmlV-_EdkZ9rxrsSJys4rGrvQ3OEX4_aem_ZmFrZWwRbW15MTZieXRlcw.

6 Schuetze, Benjamin (2024). Supporting Plausible Acts of Genocide.

“apartheid”; drawing parallels between Israeli violence and Nazi war crimes; affirming Palestinian’s right to resist occupation; supporting BDS; as well as contextualizing the October 7 attacks historically.⁷ He emphasizes the need for Middle East scholarship in Germany to engage these red lines, which it has failed to do thus far. German media and authorities are increasingly silencing Arab voices who speak out against the injustices they have experienced. Pro-Palestinian gatherings and spaces are heavily policed, restricted, and, in some cases, criminalized—including for actions as simple as displaying a Palestinian flag. This article reflects on how I have experienced Israel’s most recent war on Gaza and Lebanon as a Lebanese-German academic. It discusses growing up in Germany as a refugee from Israeli occupation of Lebanon, where publicly articulating Israel’s role as settler colonial aggressor is a taboo and often labeled as antisemitic. It further addresses the moral responsibility of Middle East scholars to speak out despite these challenges.

The Arab Portrayed in German Media

In Germany, Middle East scholarship is subject to surveillance and intimidation, while Palestinian and other Arab voices are only rarely—and often tokenistically—allowed to speak about Palestine. Such opportunities often only exist in specific preset frameworks. In February 2024, four months into the war on Gaza, *die Zeit* printed a group interview entitled “Among us Palestinians.”⁸ The questions posed, the selection of interviewees, and their statements chosen for publication fit precisely in the prescribed framework that Germans have built for Arab voices in Germany. In the interview, Israel was never directly accountable for any of their actions—whether before or after October 7—while culpability is repeatedly put on Palestinians, whether in Palestine or Germany. Notably, this interview took place after months of relentless Israeli bombing causing unprecedented Palestinian casualties, and after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued its provisional measures in January 2024 acknowledging that Israel’s war on Gaza plausibly amounts to genocide.⁹

7 Schuetze, Benjamin (2024). Supporting Plausible Acts of Genocide.

8 Lau, M. and Wahba, A. (2024). Unter uns Palästinensern. *Zeit Magazin*, February 27. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/2024/09/palaestinsener-deutschland-amas-nahostkonflikt>.

9 International Court of Justice, Order on the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel) Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures (International Court of Justice January 26, 2024).

Some typical incorrect assumptions about the Zionist colonization of Palestine are revealed in the interviewer's questions, which show, at best, a Eurocentric perspective, and at worst, a plain racism. The questions imply that Islam is an antisemitic religion and portray Arabs as inherently antisemitic. They present Arabs as being oblivious to the history of the Nazi Holocaust while remaining blissfully ignorant of the history of European colonialism, particularly in the Middle East. When it does mention the history of the region, namely when it thematizes the Palestinian refugees that came to Germany during the Lebanese civil war, the article ignores the main reason, namely Israeli settler colonial policies that first expelled them from their homeland and then denied them their right of return. Instead, the war is portrayed as internal sectarian civil war, which included Palestinian factions, without discussing the extensive role Israel played in fostering and sustaining it.¹⁰

The article presents Israelis and Palestinians as equal parties to a conflict with no mention of Israel's enforcement of a decades-long illegal occupation.¹¹ It further depicts the conflict as cultural, not political, giving the impression that if only Palestinians and Israelis got to know each other better, there would be a peaceful resolution. There is no mention of Israeli practices placing Palestinians under illegal occupation and apartheid rule, whether in Gaza, the West Bank, or inside Israel. There is no criticism whatsoever of the ongoing Israeli genocidal war in Gaza. This licenses Israel's actions as a legitimate response to the Hamas-led attacks of October 7. On the other hand, October 7 is invoked constantly. Furthermore, there is no discussion about the situation before or after October 7 or any other provision of historical context to the current war. Again, this contributes to the idea that the Palestinians alone are to blame for the war and their situation while freeing Israelis from any culpability. Israel is portrayed as a liberal democratic society in opposition to Arabs with undemocratic values, concealing the widespread popularity of ethnonationalist and illiberal Israeli policies that explicitly endorse Jewish supremacy and deny Palestinian self-determination and statehood. The article

10 See, for instance, Mundhir Maḥmūd Jābir (1999). *Al-Sharīṭ, al-Lubnānī al-Muḥṭall: Maslālik al-Iḥṭilāl, Masārāt al-Muwājahah, Masā'ir al-Ahālī*. Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīniyya; Walid K. (1979). *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*. Center for International Affairs; Soha B. (2003). *Resistance: My Life for Lebanon*, trans. Gabriel Levine. Soft Skull Press; Fawwaz T. (2007). *A History of Modern Lebanon*. Pluto; Beate H. (1988). *The Emergence of the South Lebanon Security Belt: Major Saad Haddad and the Ties with Israel, 1975–1978*. Praeger.

11 For a concise catalogue, refer to the International Court of Justice, Advisory Opinion, Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem (July 19, 2024).

also presents Hamas simply as a terrorist party whose primary aim is to destroy Israel, without proper sourcing of such statements, while completely ignoring the legality of military resistance to illegal occupation. The questions are framed with the expectation that the interviewed participants will distance themselves from certain Palestinian positions. For example, they ask one of the interviewees, the comedian Abdel Kader Chahin, to clarify a statement that he gave in a previous public interview, in which he said that after the October 7 attacks his father was sitting in front of the TV and said, "I think next week I will drink my coffee in Jaffa." The expectation is for the interviewees to immediately distance themselves from such positions and the experiences of their parents' and their generation to be taken seriously. The parents are portrayed as somewhat ignorant and naïve because they dream of enacting their right to return home someday. This line of questioning proceeds with no awareness of the ways such sentiments are further conditioned by their constant feelings of exclusion from German society, which I will discuss below in greater detail.

To add insult to injury, the mere fact that *die Zeit* devoted this article to Palestinians, however malicious their portrayal, was enough for a former member of the Bundestag for the Green Party, Volker Beck, to swap the photo of a Palestinian woman in the newspaper with a portrait of Hitler, making antisemitic accusations about the intentions of *die Zeit* and the protagonists of their story. The article is by no means the exception in writing about Palestinians or the Arab-Israeli war in Germany. There are only a handful of German journalists that are writing more complete accounts, based on proper research in Palestine/Israel. German media often reproduce Israeli accounts as unquestioned facts, at times directly from Israeli military sources, instead of handling them critically as coming from one party to the conflict.¹²

Instead of this problematic position Palestinians and Arabs are held in the German media and public discourse, the following topics that came up in this interview were insufficiently contextualized: Why did the parents of these Palestinians have to flee first Palestine and then Lebanon? Why did they not mention the Israeli occupation of much of Lebanon, and the repeated massacres Israel and its allies committed against Lebanese and Palestinians before, during, and after the Lebanese civil war? Why were Israel's illegal occupations in the past and present not mentioned? Answering these questions would require addressing the actual political causes of this war, such

12 For a good thematization of the unequal correspondence see: Goldmann, F. (2025). Die tendenziöse Sprache der Tagesschau: Israelische Gewalt im Nahost-Konflikt wird eingebettet, palästinensische emotionalisiert. *nd Journalismus von Links*, March 13.

as Israel's occupation, illegal settler policies, and apartheid rule, instead of merely representing it as a "cultural" problem, in which "one" is misinformed about and scared to talk to the "other."

What is Missing: My History and the Current War

I was born in a small border village in southern Lebanon during the decades of Israeli occupation. My family and I fled to Germany, where I grew up as a refugee from this Israeli occupation. Yet, this combination seems to be an oxymoron in the consciousness of many Germans. Germany's history of antisemitic discrimination, culminating in the Holocaust, are cited as primary reasons for the necessity of creating Israel as a Jewish state. At the same time, it was this very idea of a Jewish settler colony outside Europe that led to the displacement of my family like so many others. In Germany, immigrants are often told to be grateful to the German state for accepting them. There is an imperialist arrogance in this rhetoric's certainty that immigrants are of course better off in Germany than in their home countries they escaped from. There is no contextualization of the circumstances in which people left and where and what German policy's role had been in the country of the refugee. In the case of Palestinians and Lebanese living in Germany, it is crucial to reflect on the role Israel played in their displacement. As a staunch supporter of Israel, materially and politically, Germany carries a considerable share of responsibility for Israel's actions.

"Tolerated" Status in Germany

Many Palestinians and Lebanese refugees, such as some of the families mentioned in the *Zeit* article, who fled to Germany amidst the international civil war in Lebanon from the 80s onwards received *Duldung* (lit. "toleration") status.¹³ This is not a resident status; it is merely a temporary suspension of deportation. The *Duldung* status did not grant refugees either the right to work

13 In the he earlier phases (1965–1980) *Duldung* status applied to rejected asylum seekers as well as asylum seekers awaiting a decision regarding their status, and stateless persons. From the 1990s onwards the category of *Geduldete* extended towards specific nationalities and minorities (such as Lebanese, Palestinians, Yazidis and Kurds from Turkey, Iraq and Syria). For more details read: Schütze, T. (2022). The (Non-)Status of "Duldung": Non-Deportability in Germany and the Politics of Limitless Temporariness. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 36(3): 409–429.

or travel, which explicitly restricted their integration into Germany. Many of that first immigrant generation lived in constant fear of being deported at any moment, reinforcing the feeling that their lives in Germany were only temporary. And yet the *Zeit* article's discussion of the interviewees' parents and their dreams to return home to Palestine, such defining details are not paid enough sensitivity. Even when one of the interviewees directly brings up these specific circumstances that prevailed when their parents and some of their siblings arrived in Germany, the interviewers do not pursue this topic at all. The interview reads more as if the dreams of that first immigrant generation to go home are ridiculed and derided as an extremist view. The prevalent idea is that to be integrated into German society, one must give up on the idea of longing for and belonging elsewhere. For Palestinians, this is particularly intense, as they are simultaneously required to celebrate their dispossession by Israel as a fitting atonement for Germany's genocidal history. At the same time, years of deprivation of basic immigrant statuses inevitably lead to their exclusion in Germany. As "*Geduldete(r)*," people with tolerated status, one was unable to pursue any work, this even included receiving an education under Germany's dual vocational training system (*Ausbildung*). This permanently relegated this entire population to dependency on state welfare, which subsequently made them an obvious target for anti-migrant white nationalists. During the interview, one of the participants explained that his elder sibling wasn't allowed to finish their vocational training while growing up due to the restrictions of this status. Furthermore, their tolerated status was only recognized in Germany. This meant that one could not travel abroad, not even to neighboring EU countries, as they would lose this status and would not be allowed to reenter. This way, many were unable to visit home and relatives, sometimes over decades. This legal standing is very different to statuses more recent Syrian and Ukrainian refugees were granted in Germany. These refugees faced fewer restrictions, enabling them to travel, seek employment, and access education and social welfare services freely upon arrival. Some of the parents and family members of the interview participants do not have German citizenship even decades after having lived in Germany. This is another topic the interviewers fail to problematize even though the participants mention it. Ironically, it is the unemployed status of *Geduldete* that to this day continues to exclude them from obtaining a more permanent resident status and citizenship rights. Moreover, and independent of one's immigration status in Germany, it is natural for people to long for a prior home, and especially for those who were forcibly expelled. The right to return to one's country of origin is a principle in international law. The "*Geduldete's*" exclusion from an immigration status and access to full rights intensifies this attachment and ensures the impossibility

of building a stable life. Israel's racist and discriminatory policies towards Palestinians are the direct reasons for their expulsion, while its past and present wars beyond its borders have contributed to the displacement of many southern Lebanese. And yet, it is these vulnerable populations who continue to be the focus of scrutiny and repression in Germany.

The Misrepresentation and Complicity of German Media

It is as if German media represents a parallel reality, that fits within the discourse on Palestine and Arabs in Germany. German media coverage of the war on and situation in Gaza has largely been reported from an Israeli, often even Israeli military, point of view, sometimes even without recognition as such.¹⁴ Media is thus written from the perspective of the perpetrators of a genocide. The situation in Gaza and Lebanon has been grossly underreported. The media centralizes the narrative around the October 7 Hamas' attack on Israel and grossly underreports on Israel's countless massacres and violations of international law in the years prior to the attack as well as in the more than 550 days thereafter. For example, the South African case in the ICJ accusing Israel of failing to prevent genocide was mostly ignored by German media. Like major US and UK media outlets, German television broadcast the Israeli presentation of its opening defense on the second day of the hearings, while completely ignoring the South African brief on the first day. More recently, the ICJ declaration on illegality of Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory was often falsely reported to only concern Israel's illegal settlements.¹⁵

Israel's war on Lebanon has not been given much media attention either, especially because the German media landscape is predominantly occupied with portraying Israel as a victim. Since beginning of this war between Israel and Lebanon on October 8, 2023, and up to the ceasefire that was agreed on November 27, 2024, there have been almost daily exchanges of fire. Even though Hizballah initially vowed it's an eye for an eye for every attack Israel conducts on Lebanon, Israel's attacks on Lebanon were many times greater in numbers and levels of destruction.¹⁶ Israeli attacks have killed over 4,000

14 See Goldmann, F. (2025). Die tendenziöse Sprache der Tagesschau.

15 See for example: Unknown. (2024). Höchstes Uno-Gericht erklärt Israels Siedlungspolitik für illegal. *Spiegel Ausland*, July 17. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/israel-hoehstes-uno-gericht-erklaert-siedlungspolitik-fuer-illegal-a-c4559fec-d07b-4380-8f04-609b443a96a4>.

16 For example, Israel, as of June 21, 2024, conducted 83% of the cross-border attacks since October 8. Israel conducted 6,141 attacks on Lebanon and Hezbollah and others have

people in Lebanon to date, in a tally that continues to mount. Many were killed in the most intense phase of confrontations that saw Israeli attacks on the entire country in September and October 2024. It was during this time that Israel assassinated Hizballah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and his successor Hashem Safieddine, among many others. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), over 16,600 were injured in Lebanon in this war, some with life-altering injuries.¹⁷ It displaced 1.3 million people. The residents of the south Lebanese border area were affected the most, as they were displaced from the beginning of the confrontations and continue to be displaced, as much of their villages have since been destroyed. There has been a very significant infrastructure damage throughout the country, but mainly concentrated in south Lebanon, the Beqaa, and other areas of Lebanon predominantly inhabited by Shi'a, including the capital, Beirut. Israel has demolished thousands of houses and vast stretches of agricultural land in south Lebanon.¹⁸ Despite the ceasefire agreement of November 27, 2024, Israel continues to pursue targeted killings, and as of March 12, has struck at least 30 targets throughout the country since it came into place.¹⁹

While German media largely chooses to ignore the widespread devastation and Israeli aggression in Lebanon, videos circulated within the Lebanese diaspora in Germany during the war, revealing the extensive destruction—particularly in the southern border region. The villages bare little comparison to what we once knew. Whether inside or outside Lebanon, these few videos often serve as the only source residents of the villages have, to check whether their houses are intact or whether they have been destroyed. At the beginning of the confrontations, most people were only able return to their villages during funerals, hoping Israel will refrain from attacking them. This was the

executed 1,258 attacks on Israel from Lebanon. See Hussein, M. (2024). Mapping 7,400 cross-border attacks between Israel and Lebanon. *Al Jazeera*, June 27. Accessed August 4, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/27/mapping-7400-cross-border-attacks-between-israel-and-lebanon>.

17 OCHA. (2025). Middle East and North Africa. Lebanon. Accessed March 15, 2025, <https://www.unocha.org/lebanon>.

18 Unknown. (2024). Gantz's Claim of Taking Apart Hezbollah's Power in Days Discredited. *Al Mayadeen English*, June 27. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/gantz-s-claim-of-taking-apart-hezbollah-s-power-in-days-disc>.

19 Ali Harisi, M. and Helm, T. (2025). Israel's Free Hand and the Fallout of a "Secret Agreement" Lebanon Acknowledged but Never Signed. *The National*, March 12. Accessed March 15, 2025, https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2025/03/12/israels-free-hand-and-the-fallout-of-a-secret-agreement-lebanon-acknowledged-but-never-signed/?utm_campaign=linkinbio&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=later-linkinbio.

only way for people to check on their houses and then only from a distance, while passing with the funeral convoy. In the last and more intensive phase of the war and after Israel invaded south Lebanon and occupied several villages, no one was able to return to their village, not even the dead to be buried. Many were forced to be buried outside their villages, often in temporary graves until they could be moved after Israel's withdrawal.

German media bias towards Israel is not a new phenomenon but has existed throughout the past decades. This bias also actively disregards non-Zionist, anti-Zionist, and progressive Jewish voices in Germany. Jon Peaceman, a blogger and progressive Jewish anti-Zionist that grew up in Israel and lives in Germany, characterized German unconditional military and diplomatic support for Israel as an attempt to absolve itself of historical guilt. "The Jews, collective noun, their collective being finally rendered understandable and even desirable as an affirmation of long-cherished German beliefs in concepts like the nation state, militarism, facile moral dichotomies and so on."²⁰

For me, growing up in Germany was like living in two parallel societies. It was especially during the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, at the age of 20, that I realized the extent of the misinformation about the Middle East in Germany. The German news I read did not at all convey what I witnessed and heard from affected family members and in Arabic news coverage. When I then moved to Lebanon in 2008, and during the time I spent there since, I realized that much of the Israeli aggression in the region is not covered in German media. This is not an isolated feeling, as the few journalists in Germany who have been providing a more complete picture of the situation on the ground share this observation.²¹ Of course, much of this bias also applies to the media landscape across the Global North. Yet, in Germany, the sheer amount of misinformation about the situation is exacerbated.²² The discourse about Israel in Germany

20 Peaceman, J. (2024). "For some German Jews, Jews residing in Germany and Even Jewish and Non-Jewish Observers From Afar," Instagram photo, April 8. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C5g1oSHtbx8/?igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==>.

21 For this, see discussion between Alena Jabarine, Hanno Hauenstein and Emran Feroz: Jabarine, A. (2024). Gaza Talks #2: Medien: Alena Jabarine im Gespräch mit Hanno Hauenstein und Emran Feroz. *Berliner Ensemble*, June 27. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.berliner-ensemble.de/magazin/gaza-talks-2-medien>.

22 For a rare and candid commentary on the Germany's foreign policy in the Middle East, see: Al-Taher, H. and Schuetze, B. (2025). Verlogen und verloren: Die Verurteilungen von Trumps Gaza-Plänen aus Deutschland sind scheinheilig. Denn die hiesige Politik unterstützt Israels Vorgehen. *Taz*, March 17. Accessed, March 17, 2025, <https://taz.de/Deutsche-Nahostpolitik/!6071887/>.

does not acknowledge Arab and Israeli suffering equally. This makes my relationship to Germany and being German very difficult as I don't find my identity and background are accepted.

The Destruction of Our Villages: The Annihilation of Our History

My village is one of the villages that Israel has largely erased in the current war. My family and fellow villagers have been displaced and deprived of access to their village, homes, places of work, and schools since October 8, 2023, the beginning of this war. Many of them have no longer a home to go back to. Some have become depended on us, family members abroad, and other family members. Many displaced live with extended family members in different parts of the country. Some live in sparsely furnished rented apartments that are not set up for long-term stay. Some are repeatedly displaced and must constantly move between properties and/or different family members due to changing patterns of Israeli attack. It is very painful for me to watch four generations of family members that used to happily live in their houses in their village and provide for themselves rendered dependent on others. This is not the first war or displacement between Israel and Lebanon that my family has lived through, but it has been the most destructive yet for my village. As early as 1948, its residents were displaced for the duration of nearly a year and much of the village was destroyed. But the scale of destruction in the border regions in this war is unprecedented.

Every generation is affected differently. My grandparent's generation has been forced to spend what for some has been the last phase of their lives outside of their homes and comfort zones. The elderly have suffered injuries because of not being used to their environment. Many apartments they escaped to are less than fully accessible, further restricting their mobility. My parent's generation lost everything they worked for and toward: their properties, agricultural land, olive groves, and other means of subsistence, such as livestock, and especially security for their children and their future. For the younger generation, especially those born around the time of the 2006 war, it is the first major war they consciously experienced. Many children and their families have been displaced multiple times, traumatized, and distressed because of the random attacks and as they have friends and family members who were killed or injured. Their insecurity is also exacerbated by the fact that the younger generations, children and young adults, were unable to attend school and universities, some for over a year, and continue having to switch schools depending on their residence.

Israel's withdrawal from my and other border villages at the end of February 2025 coincided with my revisions of this paper. As a direct result, I have not been able to do the revisions on time or do any other work that requires much concentration. The state of destruction that the Israeli army left my village, our house, and houses of family members, friends, and neighbors in, is deeply affecting me. I feel in a constant state of pain and loss that requires time to heal. I am finding this period as difficult as the period of active war. It has become an increasingly apparent reality that my family, community, and I will not be able to return home for an indefinite period of time. Israel intentionally destroyed any trace of our village's physical, social, historical, and cultural existence. Its historic mosque and the old village center were wiped out. Vast areas of nature have been burnt, and trees and olive groves uprooted. The village infrastructure has been destroyed: electricity (both the government as well as private diesel generator, *ishtirak*, lines, solar panels); water, including pipes and storage tanks; internet and phone lines; three schools; cemeteries; civil defense units; streets; two *hussaynias* and other places of worship; private shops and gas stations; as well as small factories and farms. I received photos and videos that show the old village center where nothing is left but mountains of rubble. The houses of several of my aunts, uncles, and paternal grandparents have been completely flattened. It will be difficult to rebuild the infrastructure throughout the southern border villages. Israel destroyed key infrastructure much of which was built in the two decades following Israel's occupation. For example, the Wazzani waterpower pumping station was directly targeted and destroyed in February 2024, very early on in this war. It was built shortly after the liberation of south Lebanon in 2002. It is of vital importance to the villages in southeastern Lebanon that have no access to water resources otherwise. It took years to connect the pipes to the villages and houses throughout the south. When I was in Lebanon in September 2023, some houses in my village were still connecting the pipes to access this water.

My parents had just finished renovating and setting up their house in the south and planned to spend their retirement in Lebanon. As I was revising this paper, we received photos from our house from relatives checking on the property. Israeli soldiers apparently had stayed in it during the war and rendered it uninhabitable. It was looted, severely vandalized, and damaged. Israeli soldiers wrote insults and threatening messages on the walls in Hebrew as well as in English. All the closets were emptied out, and their contents either dumped and spread throughout the house or gone missing. Much of the house was destroyed by hand: doors taken out, wardrobes thrown to the ground, gates, windows and doors broken, walls damaged or knocked out. All electronic items were destroyed. The kitchen was utterly destroyed and only

part of its walls are left standing. Its contents were blown or thrown out into the garden.

At the time of writing, it is not clear whether it will be possible for the border villages to be rebuilt, whether there will be any funding or support to do so, and or if people will be able to return. As of early March 2024, Israel has violated the ceasefire that was implemented between Lebanon and Israel on November 27, 2024 over 1,000 times and has killed already 84 Lebanese and injured over 280 others since then.²³ Considering the daily Israeli violations, surveillance, and frequent attacks, I am having a hard time imagining that I will be able to return anytime soon and experience the safety I have known in my village since liberation from Israel's occupation in 2000. The village I have known and that has been such a big part of my life is lost, a fact that is hard to comprehend. It leaves a big hole in my life, in our lives.

Feelings of Alienation (“Gefühle der Entfremdung”)²⁴

Eerie silence, palpable awkwardness. It only took Palestinian-Lebanese-American historian Ussama Makdisi a year or two during fellowships in Germany to recognize and ponder the awkward reactions many Germans have when the question of Palestine comes up. He emphasizes the difficulties Palestinians and anti-Zionists Jews face when talking about Palestine in Germany.²⁵ In 2022, I translated an article Makdisi wrote about his time in Germany addressing how it excludes Palestine and Palestinians from its memory politics. In it he questions whether Germany can truly repent for its past while making Palestine and Palestinians pay the price for it. I sent my translation to German academic and other online magazines and newspapers to publish it, and all declined. I have always felt addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict is very difficult, but this silence has never been so blatant as it became during this war. Even amongst German friends of mine that consider themselves to be pro-Palestinian, in the rare occasions that I dare to talk about the topic, the blame is always put on the Arabs, on Hamas, on Hizballah, on their rockets, the list goes on and usually revolves around the one-sided media

23 MEE Staff. (2025). Israeli settlers storm purported rabbi's shrine in Lebanon. *Middle East Eye*, March 7. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-settlers-storm-purported-rabbis-shrine-lebanon>.

24 Al Bulbeisi, S. (2024). Palästinenser erzählen mir, man ignoriere ihr Leid.

25 Ussama Makdisi. (2021). Atonement at the Expense of Another. *The New Fascism Syllabus*, June 12. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/atonement-at-the-expense-of-another/>.

discourse I discussed earlier that exists of Palestinians in the public. Whether now or during the 2006 war, the Arab-Israeli conflict is an uncomfortable topic that people do not like to talk about, especially when affected Arabs are part of the conversation. There is a submerged racism towards Arabs, which is reinforced by the public debate and media portrayal. Increasingly this racism is out in the open. We Arabs are not allowed to suffer. We are not allowed to speak about our pain. The war and all Israeli actions, no matter how illegal or genocidal, are our fault. As during previous wars, I limited sharing news about the war, my family, and my village with friends because they just don't react to my posts, whether in person, on WhatsApp groups, or on social media.

"The familiar has never seemed as uncanny to Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland as it does now," writes Palestinian-Swiss scholar Sarah Bulbeisi about the position of Palestinians amidst Israel's most recent war on Gaza.²⁶ Bulbeisi's research discusses trauma among Palestinian immigrants in Germany and Switzerland. In her work she underlines how this exclusion of society traumatizes Palestinians and how it compounds their experienced trauma, as they are not able to heal or come to terms with the past. During the recent war on Gaza, she writes that some of her research participants did not have the strength to leave the house anymore. "As if the public considers Palestinian suffering to be grossly exaggerated, as if the public would punish them for the Hamas attack with the lack of empathy."²⁷ I find this description of punishment relevant based on my interactions with Germans about the war. Bulbeisi's participants describe a withdrawal from society to avoid the burden of having to constantly prove Palestinian humanity. "It was too painful and shameful to almost have to convince acquaintances, and even friends, that Palestinians also suffer from violence, systematically and for decades."²⁸

26 Al Bulbeisi, S. (2024). Palästinenser erzählen mir, man ignoriere ihr Leid. Translated by author from German original: "So unheimlich wie jetzt erschien Palästinensern in Deutschland und der Schweiz das Vertraute aber noch nie."

27 Al Bulbeisi, S. (2024). Palästinenser erzählen mir, man ignoriere ihr Leid. Translated by author from German original: "Als ob die Öffentlichkeit palästinensisches Leiden für masslos übertrieben halte, als ob sie sie für den Angriff der Hamas mit Empathielosigkeit bestrafen würde."

28 Al Bulbeisi, S. (2024). Palästinenser erzählen mir, man ignoriere ihr Leid. Translated by author from German original: "Zu schmerzhaft und beschämend sei es gewesen, Bekannte, aber auch Freunde fast davon überzeugen zu müssen, dass auch Palästinenser Gewalt erlitten, und dies systematisch und seit Jahrzehnten."

My Role and Position as a Scholar

Wars in Lebanon, in the past and present have always put me in a paralyzed state. A state where one is preoccupied with the safety of their loved ones and unable to do anything besides being glued to minute to minute news updates. The time I was not reading or watching the news, I was talking to family members, arranged housing for displaced family members, collected and delivered money and help for them. And as much as I wanted this war to end every day, it lasted longer than wars that I have lived through in the past. Life of course never returned to any kind of normalcy since then, but I have found strength in keeping a diary to regularly write down the atrocities that family members and friends had to witness in Lebanon. It helps me stay sane to document the crimes that were committed against me and my community, that I am not able to write about publicly yet. I also wrote a few policy-oriented articles, hoping to be able to direct some attention and aid to displaced in Lebanon whose pain I followed daily. My experience in academia during this war was like having a baby during the Covid-19 pandemic. Academics without children or caring responsibilities continued their work while others were more burdened, without receiving substantial institutional support. Looking forward, I think as academics we can do more to be aware of these burdens and create more inclusive spaces.

Conclusion

Over a year into Israel's genocide on Gaza, the state of German media has not changed much. Besides the few voices, consisting of independent journalists such as Hanno Hauenstein, Fabian Goldmann, Alena Jabarine, Elias Feroz, and Pauline Jäckels, there are very few journalists that have delivered credible investigations into the war rather than simply rehearse official Israeli state narratives.²⁹

29 See for example following articles: Jäckels, P. (2024). Hörst auf, den Tod unserer Kinder zu instrumentalisieren. *Nd Journalismus von Links*, August 1. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1184186.krieg-in-nahost-hoert-auf-den-tod-unserer-kinder-zu-instrumentalisieren.html>; Hauenstein, H. (2024). German Media Giant Axel Springer Makes Money of Israel's Illegal Settlements. *The Intercept*, February 5. Accessed August 8, 2024, <https://theintercept.com/2024/02/05/axel-springer-israel-settlement-profit/>; Feroz, E. (2024). Amos Goldberg: Genau so sieht Völkermord aus. *Jacobin*, July 10. Accessed July 21 2024, <https://www.jacobin.de/artikel/israel-voelkermord-genozid-palaestina>.

In early July 2024, the entire editorial board of the state-funded German online magazine *Qantara*, publicly resigned from their posts in protest of German state-imposed structural changes on the e-zine. In their statement of resignation, the staff made clear the new directives made them unable to provide “independent critical journalism” free from interference from the foreign ministry.³⁰ German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock revealed in an interview that the government did not agree with some of the content that was shared on *Qantara*, characterized by her as “antisemitic,” and the government sought to control it.³¹ The restructuring is politically motivated. The government seems to be interested in controlling and changing *Qantara*’s previous positioning sympathetic to Palestinian rights.

Where is this all leading amidst Israel’s ongoing genocide and regional aggression? German government actions are increasingly contracting the boundaries of acceptable positions on Palestine, as well as the places in which pro-Palestinian positions can be heard. While open support for genocidal colonial Zionism is welcomed, German state and dominant society represses support for Palestinian rights. Indeed, as I was revising this paper, the new German government elected in February 2025 wants to investigate whether it is permissible to strip German citizenship from naturalized citizens. The center-right CDU/CSU and center-left SPD agreed to “constitutionally examine whether [they] can revoke German citizenship from supporters of terrorism, anti-Semites and extremists who call for the abolition of the free and democratic basic order if they hold another nationality.”³² How they will decide who can be targeted by this or not and how they will define supporters of terrorism and antisemitism is unclear. But recent developments in the US, where green card holders, such as Mahmoud Khalil, have been abducted by ICE for his pro-Palestine activism sets a dark example of who is meant by this.

Yet generations of Arab-Germans exist, and we are part of this country if you like it or not. Being an academic working on the Middle East and being of a minority background, as an Arab-German from south Lebanon, I also feel the importance of having our voices included. Israel’s present war is unlike

30 Qantara was founded in 2001 with the idea to enhance German relations with the Middle East. Jackson, J. (2024). Exclusive: German Government Post-Gaza Restructure of Renowned Middle East-focused Qantara.de Prompts Editors’ Resignation. *The New Arab*, July 4. Accessed, August 6, 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/news/exclusive-qantarade-editors-resign-after-post-gaza-restructure>.

31 Jackson, J. (2024). Exclusive: German government post-Gaza restructure.

32 Unknown. (2025). Sondierungspapier im Wortlaut: Das haben Union und SPD vor. *Berliner Morgenpost*, March 9. Accessed March 15, 2025, <https://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article408508198/sonderungspapier-von-cdu-csu-und-spd-im-wortlaut-das-steht-drin.html>.

wars we have experienced before in scale, destruction, and killing. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to become an academic and make it my profession to learn and educate others about our history. I lived, studied, and researched in Lebanon over many years, and speaking about what I and others from the southern border villages have experienced over the past decades is crucial. What I can do is limited, of course, but I hope that cumulatively we can contribute to creating more awareness and ultimately, policy change. It is difficult, and there is insufficient institutional support, but the reason why I chose to be an academic is to write about this history and I continue to feel the need to present this marginalized point of view. After I have witnessed many others, especially family members, lose all their tangible and intangible possessions, what do I really have to lose?