

# **THE MORAL TRIANGLE**

Germans, Israelis, Palestinians

**SA'ED ATSHAN  
AND  
KATHARINA GALOR**

Duke University Press Durham and London 2020

© 2020 Duke University Press  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞  
Designed by Drew Sisk  
Typeset in Portrait Text Regular, Eurostile LT Std Condensed,  
and Berthold Walbaum Book by Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Names: Atshan, Sa'ed, author. | Galor, Katharina, author. |  
Duke University Press.

Title: The moral triangle : Germans, Israelis, Palestinians /  
Sa'ed Atshan and Katharina Galor.

Other titles: Germans, Israelis, Palestinians

Description: Durham ; London : Duke University Press,  
2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019032724 (print)

ISBN 9781478007852 (Hardcover)

ISBN 9781478008378 (Paperback)

ISBN 9781478012016 (eBook)

Subjects: LCSH: Germans—Germany—Ethnic identity. |  
Palestinian Arabs—Germany—Ethnic identity. | Israelis—  
Germany—Ethnic identity. | Jewish-Arab relations. | Arab-  
Israeli conflict. | Guilt—Political aspects. | Germany—Ethnic  
relations. | Germany—Foreign relations—Israel. | Israel—  
Foreign relations—Germany.

Classification: LCC DD74 .A87 2020 (print) | LCC DD74 (ebook) |  
DDC 305.892/4043—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019032724>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019032725>

Cover art: Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman, *Counter-Ruin*.  
Berlin, 2018. Photo by Nina Berfelde. Courtesy of the artist.





## TRAUMA, HOLOCAUST, NAKBA

### *The Holocaust-Nakba Nexus*

The Holocaust, known in Hebrew as “Shoah” (meaning “calamity”)—a term that also entered German usage in the 1980s by way of a TV series and a film—refers to the Nazi genocide of approximately six million Jews and five million others in the context of the National Socialist regime of World War II, which began in 1933 and ended in 1945.<sup>1</sup> The Holocaust was implemented in several stages, starting with legal restrictions for Jews and other victimized populations, leading from the stripping of citizenship and civil rights to segregation within the country, and finally to removal from German society with mass deportations to concentration and extermination camps. This development was the culmination of a long history of European anti-Semitism, which included the scapegoating of Jews and various pogroms leveled against them. By the end of the war, about two-thirds of Europe’s Jewish communities had perished. The psychological trauma of this genocide continues to affect Jews and other related populations around the world. Survivors of the Holocaust, as well as descendants of victims, including the first and second generations, struggle to heal from the direct and indirect traumas they have experienced or inherited. Even individuals not directly related to families affected by the Holocaust can experience vulnerability to the realities of human brutality, in particular as they relate to continued or resurgent currents of anti-Semitism.

“Nakba” (Arabic for “catastrophe”) is the term that Palestinians associate with the establishment of the State of Israel in historical Palestine in 1948. It marks the beginning of Israel’s dispossession of Palestinians, with 750,000 individuals losing their homes in the context of the 1947–48 Arab-Israeli War. Palestinians mourn the Zionist militias’ massacres in dozens of villages, along with the uprooting of Palestinians from hundreds of villages.<sup>2</sup> This trauma of being uprooted is viewed by Palestinians not as a finite historical event but, rather, as a process of European settler-colonialism that is ongoing. This course of events includes Israel’s conquest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip



in 1967 and Israel's responses to the First and Second Intifadas (1987–91 and 2000–2005), as well as the continued policy of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories, all of which Palestinians consider as part of a single historical continuum. The Nakba has subsequently been front and center in the Palestinian national project, not only in the struggle toward self-determination, but also with particular demands such as the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, who now number in the millions around the world.

Every year since 1948, Israelis have celebrated the War of Independence (Yom Ha'atzmauth) on May 14, and Palestinians commemorate the Nakba on May 15. While the Holocaust and the War of Independence have both played pivotal roles in shaping the Israeli national and political identity, the Nakba has helped to define a shared goal among Palestinians to establish their own national political autonomy.

Despite the fact that these events (World War II, the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the Nakba) are historically linked, exploring the various traumas in relation to one another has remained largely taboo. Countless academic works explore these historical events in depth, but mostly separately. Scholarly and educational attempts to bring the various narratives and associated traumas into dialogue are still marginal and have not entered the public discourse in German, Israeli, or Palestinian societies.<sup>3</sup>

The political establishment of postwar Germany, in particular since the mid-1960s, aligns fundamentally with mainstream Israeli politics. Both countries understand Israel's right to exist, its security, and, therefore, its entitlement to protect itself militarily as the natural result of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> The expression “never again,” a concept directly linked to the genocide, is viewed as a core feature of Israeli identity and has shaped much of the German mainstream collective conscience.<sup>5</sup> Many Palestinians and “left-leaning Israelis” (used in this study for those Israelis who either explicitly identify as such or for those who position themselves in opposition to Israel's right-wing policies) would like to see the “never again” slogan applied to cases in which Israelis are viewed as perpetrators and Palestinians as victims. Although the Palestinian national discourse is not unaware of the historical link between the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is the trauma of the Nakba—the resulting expulsion, the losses of life and property, and, most important, the lack of statehood—that are at the forefront of Palestinian shared identity.<sup>6</sup> While the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993 were largely a response to the Palestinian struggle for statehood, the subsequent failure of the Oslo process and the elusive nature of a Palestinian state in the present has

led to a move away from the state-based model. Few of our Palestinian interlocutors invoked statehood as their purpose; instead, it is a concern with equal civil rights for Palestinians in the context of one democratic state that is now sweeping the rising generation.

While the Nakba portion of the Holocaust-Nakba nexus remains largely undiscussed among Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians in Berlin, knowledge of the Holocaust portion is widely shared among the three groups. Holocaust commemoration in Berlin's public sphere is an obvious and constantly present reality. For instance, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (also known as the Holocaust Memorial or Mahnmahl) and the Stumbling Stones (*Stolpersteine*)—10 cm × 10 cm brass-plated cubes inscribed with the name of a Jewish or other victim of the Nazis—were mentioned spontaneously and specifically by nearly one third of the subjects. More than half of our informants, when asked about the Holocaust, shared that they thought about it nearly daily in Berlin, either in passing or more extensively. This tendency was equally prevalent among Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians.

We, too, felt that one of the more memorable features visible while walking the streets of Berlin—particularly the neighborhoods with the largest Jewish populations during the prewar era, including Charlottenburg and Mitte—are the Stumbling Stones (figure 1.1). They are cemented into the pavement in front of the person's last address prior to their deportation. On a sunny, hot day in June 2018, we coincidentally “stumbled” upon Gunter Demnig, the artist who in 1992 initiated the Stumbling Stones project, which by now has spread to most German cities and counts some seventy thousand cubes across the country and beyond. As we watched him and asked for permission to take photographs, Demnig, with the help of a young assistant, installed four new cubes in the ground. This memorable encounter occurred in one of the many charming and desirable residential streets of the Mitte neighborhood, lined with trees and the occasional café. Shutting out the surrounding noise, we observed a moment of silence to remember these four newly memorialized individuals.

Among our interviewees, Jörg, the son of a former SS officer in his mid-seventies, told us about the leadership role he has taken in his neighborhood, where he and two other volunteers organize the regular polishing of these stones. Another informant we spoke to, Simone, a nurse in her late forties, mentioned placing flowers and candles near some of the plaques every year on November 9, Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass), which now is increasingly referred to as Reichsprogromnacht (Night of the Reich's Pogroms). These are some of the many deeply moving examples that demonstrate how Berliners participate actively in commemorating the country's darkest chapter in his-





Figure 1.1 The German artist Gunter Demnig installing Stumbling Stones in pavement in Mitte. The 10 cm × 10 cm cubes feature the names and birth and death dates of victims of the Nazi era; they are made of concrete covered by a thin brass plate engraved with the commemorative words. (Gunter Demnig)

tory. The present interacts with the past, bringing to mind the Nazi capital where the "Final Solution" was designed and administered and its execution was controlled.

Another shared narrative evenly distributed among the Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians with whom we spoke was the link between the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly the role of the former in catalyzing the establishment of Israel. While some recognized the significance of keeping the past separate from the present and the events of World War II distinct from the tensions and wars in the Middle East, several commented on what they felt was the instrumentalization of the Holocaust to justify current Israeli militarism, in both the official Israeli and German public discourses. Still others reflected that the advent of Zionism in Europe and its push for the establishment of Israel preceded the Holocaust by decades and thus called for a more nuanced understanding when bringing the Holocaust and the Nakba into dialogue. The British Balfour Declaration, pledging to partition Palestine for the Zionist movement, was issued in 1917. "Thus, it would be simplistic to attribute to the Holocaust alone the creation of Israel and the concomitant Israeli-Palestinian conflict," one of our Palestinian informants, Amir, a computer consultant in his late twenties, said. At the same time, almost all of our interlocutors were keenly aware of how Israel derives legitimacy through references to the Holocaust. The most critical voices among our interlocutors came from Israelis and Palestinians. Ofrit, an Israeli Polish musician in her mid-twenties, for instance, told us, "Anti-Semitism preceded the Holocaust, and Jewish victims of European pogroms have long yearned for safety and a home."

In this study, we examine the Holocaust alongside the Nakba analytically, not only because these two events from different regions are historically connected, but also because Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians all overwhelmingly identify a relationship between the Holocaust and Israel's establishment. We are not comparing these two events or suggesting that they are identical or even similar; rather, we outline how the tragedy of the Holocaust helped foster support for Israel, which, in turn, contributed to the traumas that Israelis and Palestinians experienced and continue to face in the present.

Michael Rothberg aptly writes that trauma is a "seemingly ubiquitous modern phenomenon" that "often functions as the object of a competitive struggle, a form of cultural capital that bestows moral privileges." He also reminds us of "the typically spiraling logic of memory production and the tenaciousness of an Israeli military official who, in 2008, 'warned Palestinians to share a language of suffering and retribution.'" Rothberg also points to a 'Shoah' (disaster or Holocaust) if they



continued firing rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel" and a Hamas official who "answered that Palestinians were faced with 'new Nazis.'"<sup>8</sup> Rothberg's attention to rethinking memory, recognition, and representation can help us overcome such an ideological and discursive impasse while bringing Israelis and Palestinians closer to justice. Rothberg adds, "A more heterogeneous understanding of moral action that recognizes the importance of comparison and generalization while resisting too-easy universalization may not produce a global moral code, but it may produce the grounds for new transnational visions of justice and solidarity that do not reproduce the easily manipulated abstract code of 'good and evil.'"<sup>9</sup>

### *Germans and the Holocaust-Nakba Nexus*

For Germany, and Berlin more specifically, the centrality of Holocaust memory is present in official political discourse, as well as in all domains of education, including a solid school curriculum that incorporates guidelines specifically tailored for Germans, and other platforms for knowledge dissemination, such as the media and cultural institutions.<sup>10</sup> This intense intellectual and educational engagement with the Holocaust not only benefits residents of Berlin but attracts millions of visitors and tourists annually.<sup>11</sup> Exhibitions, literary readings, conferences, panel discussions, feature films, and documentaries are among the many formats available to engage with experiences, memories, data, and knowledge regarding the Holocaust. Much attention also has been devoted to educating the Arab and Muslim minorities in Germany about the Holocaust, with increased efforts following the large influx of refugees in 2015.<sup>12</sup>

Monuments, buildings, museums, and plaques throughout the city commemorate events and individuals, victims and resistance heroes—most notable among them, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the memorial to the book burning on Berlin's Bebelplatz, the deportation memorial on the Putlitzbrücke, Track 17 (Gleis 17) at the Berlin-Grunewald railway station, *Leben—Züge in den Tod*, and the Block of Women (*Block der Frauen*) statue, not to mention the countless Stumbling Stones, plaques, and signs on streets, sidewalks, monuments, and buildings throughout the city.

Controversies have been raised regarding the minor space dedicated to other victims of the Holocaust, such as Sinti and Roma and homosexuals.<sup>13</sup> They began to emerge during the planning stages of the Holocaust Memorial and took on various forms of public protest and discussions, in particular fol-

figures to question the mayor of Berlin in 2000 as saying that "the memorial is too big a saying ceremony in 2005, Paul Spiegel, then president of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden), commented that "an incomplete statement."<sup>15</sup> He criticized the fact that the monument is dedicated to other groups persecuted by the Nazis, such as the Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted under Nazism in 2008 and the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism in 2012, the general perception of an unshakable hierarchy of victims remains prevalent and a source of criticism.

In stark contrast to the Holocaust, the Palestinian Nakba, as a historical event, is largely missing from official discourse, public displays, and Berlin's educational forums related to the consequences of World War II. The engagement with this trauma is more personal and sporadic, often marginalized or hidden, and most commonly ignored.

Our ethnographic survey confirmed the centrality of the Holocaust in the individual daily lives of our interlocutors; it was equally salient among Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians. Among our German interviewees there was a marked difference between the older generation who grew up in Germany during the postwar period and the younger population of the second, third, and, now, fourth generations. Most of our subjects in their sixties and older emphasized the significant role that knowledge of the Holocaust and their individual family histories had played in their lives. Several mentioned the 1968 student protests in Germany that challenged authoritarianism and called for critical engagement with the past and present. One of the interlocutors we spoke to, Martina, a retired information scientist in her mid-seventies, told us the gripping story of how as a young adult she had confronted her father about his role during the Nazi era and how, only shortly before he died, she uncovered the full truth. A journalist who had dug up compromising documentation had contacted her ailing father in a retirement home to engage him about his past as a member of the Waffen-SS and thus his direct involvement in, and responsibility for, the persecution of Jews. Panicking, he called Martina, who confronted and questioned him on the phone and asked permission to see the documents and thus gain access to the full truth. Minutes before she reached her father's retirement home to speak to him in person, he had a heart attack and died. Martina's subsequent decision to work at the Jewish Museum and engage more broadly with the intellectual and cultural history of Jews emerged from



the guilt she experienced. The fear that "murderous genes" and behavioral patterns might have been transmitted to her has haunted Martina ever since. She shared with us that she suffers whenever she gets impatient or angry—for instance, in stressful traffic situations or during arguments with her husband. She experiences the outbursts as uncontrollable, "Nazi-like" character traits, which she perceived as inherited from her father and has tried to work through these issues with therapists.

The majority of our young interviewees felt that as Germans they had an obligation to know and not to forget, but they clearly did not feel that they bore personal responsibility for the Nazi past. Although they were mostly conscious of the historical legacy of the Holocaust, their focus was primarily on present issues related to populism and xenophobia rather than past currents of racism. As Mahira, a German woman of Pakistani origin in her fifties—a highly educated and professionally successful mother of two—stated, "We will never forget the Holocaust, but our problems today lie elsewhere, and while we do have the responsibility to learn about the past, we cannot let the past obscure the injustices of the present." More of an outlier was our meeting with a much younger interviewee, Oliver, the manager of a cultural institution in his late twenties. Though initially cheerful and nonchalant while answering our questions, he struggled emotionally when we broached the subject of personal connections to the Holocaust. Oliver told us about his unfruitful questioning of family members and, more directly, of his grandfather. After he uncovered disturbing facts about his grandfather's past and his active role as a Nazi, he severed ties with him, as well as with that side of his family, and decided to not attend his grandfather's recent funeral. Oliver has been dedicated to Jewish studies and, more specifically, to Israel, starting with an extended student exchange program in Jerusalem. He repeatedly travels to Israel and has visited the West Bank a few times. In his present professional pursuits in Berlin he is dedicated to work related to Judaism and Israel. Through his Israeli friends and colleagues, he has also met Palestinians. Oliver acknowledges that his interest in all matters Jewish and Israeli is connected to his personal links to the Holocaust.

For most of the German Jews we interviewed, the Holocaust—whether experienced or remembered through a personal family connection—played a role in their lives, certainly in the context of significant personal and professional choices. Even when married to non-Jews, Germans of Jewish origin or denomination seemed to maintain a historical consciousness of the German-Jewish dialectic. Most of the Germans of Muslim, Arab, or Palestinian background we spoke with acknowledged the significance of Holocaust education

and commemoration to successful integration into German society. In contrast, the majority of Germans we spoke to, including highly educated and informed individuals, were unfamiliar with the term or concept of "Nakba," and only a few were truly familiar with the history and trauma of Palestinians.

Christiane, a German woman in her mid-sixties, stated that, given their history, Jews had the right to defend themselves with all possible means, including the use of violence against Arabs. She stated unabashedly, "The Jews' current suffering is my suffering, and I will not, I cannot, absorb the suffering of Palestinians." This woman was close to retiring after a career as a lawyer at one of Berlin's leading media and entertainment companies. Despite a sense of solidarity with their "Palestinian neighbors and co-religionists," for both Orhan, a professor of Turkish descent at one of Berlin's universities in his early sixties, and Özge, a German Turkish medical student in her late twenties, the Holocaust was an important part of their German identity. As Özge explained, "Though my family was not implicated in this war, taking the Holocaust seriously and feeling the Jewish suffering is much about performing your duties as a German citizen." A German Jew we spoke with, Martin, a psychoanalyst in his early fifties who has always been an active member of the Berlin Jewish community, stated that he had no interest in, or capacity for, acknowledging Palestinian trauma. In a self-reflective voice, he insisted, "I know I should feel bad for them. But I can't. My heart is filled with the trauma of my own people." Among most elderly Germans we interviewed who largely defended the Zionist narrative, one, Rudolf, a film producer in his late seventies, expressed a critical view regarding Israel. He referred to the Holocaust as "Israel's foundation myth," meaning that "the genocide was instrumentalized for nationalistic ends." He was concerned that the Holocaust was being "used" as an "excuse" for continued violence against Palestinians. Rudolf, in his mid-seventies, also felt strongly that the "curtain of denial on Israel's human rights violations was lifted in Germany after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip." His career, too, had created space for active engagement with the German-Israeli relationship during the postwar era: he played a key role in a recent award-winning film about the Eichmann trial.

#### *Israelis and the Holocaust-Nakba Nexus*

Almost none of the Israelis we interviewed had family connections to Berlin or Germany. Some reported that their grandparents, great-grandparents, or other relatives had been deported or had died in the camps. A number of sub-



jects commented that Holocaust commemoration in Berlin was more prevalent than in Israel and that they thought about the Nazi persecution more frequently after they arrived in Germany. Anat, a restaurant owner in her mid-thirties, for example, felt that her increased awareness of the Holocaust in Berlin came not only from "the endless Holocaust memorials all over the city, but also what I think Germans expect of me as a conscientious Jew and committed Israeli." This brought the past more into focus in Germany, in contrast to her former life in Bat Yam, where she grew up. Several interlocutors we spoke to felt that it was easier to transcend Holocaust memory in Israel because of the post-Holocaust reality of living in the State of Israel that emerged in its aftermath. Saul, for instance, an engineer from Beer Sheva in his mid-forties, was committed to teaching his three children about the Holocaust but remembered that, when he was young, "talking about the camps and the Holocaust more generally was considered taboo."

Some Israelis mentioned initial hesitance or negative reactions by parents and relatives in Israel when confronted with the news that they had chosen Berlin as a new home. For many Israelis in Berlin, the association with the past terrors of the Holocaust is often jarring at first, but after a period of time there is a coping and adaptation mechanism so that the Holocaust becomes secondary. Ofira, a professional brand performance manager from Tel Aviv in her thirties, reported that, after some hesitation and slight objections, her parents were convinced that her decision to move to Berlin was the right one when they saw that her new apartment was twice as large as her flat in Tel Aviv for a significantly lower rent. Rachel, an Israeli social worker in her early thirties whose clientele consisted mostly of native Hebrew-speakers, shared with us that the Holocaust usually came up during initial sessions but receded, and most often disappeared, over the course of long-term therapy.

The great majority of Israelis we interviewed felt that Holocaust commemoration in Berlin was necessary and adequate. Some felt that there was too much of it and that it was too "in your face." Several commented that Holocaust commemoration and memorials in Berlin were largely designed for Germans rather than for the victims as a way to publicly and physically document their repentance. Ariel, for instance, a journalist in his late thirties who originally came from Jerusalem, made the cynical suggestion to dub Berlin's central Holocaust Memorial "The Memorial of the Guilt-Ridden Murderers." Einat, a bank employee in her late twenties who had moved to Berlin from Ashkelon, criticized the vast funding and public space dedicated to Holocaust commemoration on the basis that it could be used for better causes. She also commented that the "stones and sculptures were indicative of Germans' im-

munity to experiencing the real pain associated with the suffering of the individuals and families who were tortured or killed but inapt to repair the past crimes." Similarly, Dror, an Israeli science student in his twenties, called the memorials a "failed attempt at reparations (*Wiedergutmachung*)." Yoav, a personal trainer in his early thirties, drew attention to the tourism that surrounds the monuments and the economic benefits Germany now gains from it.

Several Israelis of Mizrahi background (i.e., of Middle Eastern and North African origin) currently living in Berlin shared that they felt excluded from the national Holocaust identity while growing up in Israel. Some reported experiencing a somewhat different form of anti-Semitism that targeted them as "Orientals," a category of discrimination perceived as quite separate from the genocide by which the Jewish communities of European background were marked.<sup>16</sup> Despite the robust Holocaust education in Israeli public schools, many Mizrahis do not connect emotionally with the Holocaust that classmates whose parents or grandparents were implicated directly in the persecution or its related traumas do. Rafi, a doctoral student from Holon in his mid-thirties, for instance, said that one day the students in his class were given an assignment to tell the stories of their grandparents and enliven them with images or objects. He felt resentful that his family had played no part in the Holocaust and ashamed to have nothing more to report on than a "boring Moroccan farmer family routine." Yet the Holocaust continues to touch the lives of Jewish Israelis from all walks of life. The same can be said about the War of Independence. Yet efforts within Israel to commemorate or publicly recognize the Nakba, which has always been marginalized as an event and as a historical narrative, increasingly have been banned or stifled by the Israeli government—hence, solidifying a persistent taboo within Israeli society.

In an article on Holocaust education in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Gideon Greif, a historian of the Holocaust from Israel who lectures before thousands of German students each year, compared Holocaust education in Israel with Holocaust education in Germany. He writes: "German teenagers [including Palestinian Germans] are showing more and more interest in the Holocaust—the opposite of the situation we feared in the past. They are studying Holocaust above and beyond. Their teachers devote a great deal of time to the subject. They go to Auschwitz on study trips and devote more time to the topic than the curriculum demands."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Aya Zarfati, a thirty-two-year-old Israeli woman who lives in Berlin and works as a guide at three Holocaust sites—the Jewish Museum, the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and the House of the Wannsee Conference—commented, "Holocaust studies in Germany are just as thorough as they are in Israel, if not more so."<sup>18</sup>



In contrast to Germans, most Israelis we interviewed were familiar with, and to some extent knowledgeable about, the Nakba. Several left-leaning Israelis critical of the Israeli government made statements about the Nakba's invisibility in the German public discourse and private spheres. A number of them also lamented that, even among the more socially aware and engaged liberal Germans, there was not only striking ignorance with regard to the Nakba, but also a common lack of interest in learning about it. Dror felt that "speaking about the Nakba is perceived as direct criticism of Israel and is thus illegal in Germany." Yonatan, a postdoctoral student in the humanities in his mid-thirties, shared with us his wish to offer a university course on the Nakba. He felt that it would be easier for him, as an Israeli Jew, to introduce a topic that the German academic curriculum has relegated to the margins or even suppressed than for Germans or other nationals employed in the city's universities and various institutes and centers of higher learning.

### *Palestinians and the Holocaust-Nakba Nexus*

Most Palestinians we interviewed were well informed about the Holocaust and the significant role that education and memory holds in both German and Israeli societies. The majority, including one recent refugee from Gaza and one from Syria, felt that the commemoration was adequate and important. Many, however, expressed concern over the gap in knowledge among most Germans and their lack of compassion for Palestinians. Several even took the position that they were indirect victims of the Holocaust and that the Nakba was a direct consequence of World War II, a perspective largely absent from the German public discourse. As Dima, a Palestinian German flight attendant in her mid-thirties, put it, "Their Holocaust is also our Holocaust, but they don't want to acknowledge us." A number of interviewees spoke about fear and censorship when talking openly in Berlin about their forced expulsion from their land. Muhammad, a businessman and father of five in his mid-forties, expressed his wish to explain to Germans that "there are some similarities between Israel's military occupation in Gaza and the West Bank and Germany's military occupation throughout Europe." He felt, though, that making such a comparison could jeopardize his career and, perhaps, his family. Samir, who was born in Lebanon to refugee parents and was in his fifties and the owner of a restaurant that he ran with his four sons, said that "describing the difficulties of our life as refugees or descendants of refugees would insult the Germans." Samir felt very grateful to Germans who had helped him to come to Germany and assisted him in starting a new life here. But he also expressed frustration

that there was no room to talk about the Palestinian trauma and how it was related to his family's forced expulsion from Israel/Palestine. Several of our interviewees iterated that if they deviated from the expected standard discourse on Holocaust suffering and shared their personal associations and experiences, they would not only risk social and professional marginalization but also permanent and irrevocable exclusion.

The Nakba, many of our Palestinian interlocutors said, was a subject they were able to discuss only when among themselves. Fadi, a Palestinian medical student in his twenties who was born and raised in Ramallah, stated, "Why don't Germans understand that what they did to the Jews is similar to what Israelis did to the Palestinians?" He was aware that such a comparison could not be made openly in Berlin and that the overwhelming majority of Germans would take issue with it as historically inaccurate and a form of anti-Semitism. Salma was also Palestinian but was born and raised in Berlin; now in her forties and a mother of three, she works as a janitor at one of Berlin's hospitals. She told us about an exchange she had with a colleague during a lunch break. When Salma tried to explain to her coworker, whom she had considered her only German friend, that her family's suffering was directly linked to the Holocaust, the colleague's response—"Not only do your people steal their land, but now you also want to rob them of the Holocaust"—both shamed her and caused a great deal of anger. Rashid, a successful lawyer in his mid-forties, told us about his parents, who came to Germany as refugees from Lebanon and were both illiterate. Among his eight siblings, only he and his younger brother were allowed to attend preparatory school (*Gymnasium*). Although he has become a public advocate for Holocaust education among Muslim schoolchildren and, more recently, the refugee population, he told us about "the shadow of the Nakba hanging over him, day in day out." He leads a comfortable life, and his friends and colleagues are among Berlin's socioeconomic elite. Yet most of his relatives—apart from his younger brother, who is a physician—live in conditions that maintain the scars of refugee life, despite his efforts to support them financially and emotionally. Rashid said, "If I shared my views about the Nakba openly, or criticized Israel, even with care and nuance, I would be doomed. Sometimes, I wish I could simply leave, go to America or Canada. But I can't just pack and take my forty or fifty relatives along."

Advocating for Holocaust commemoration and education in Germany can shape a person's social and economic integration and success. This is something individuals from all backgrounds and all age groups understand. When in 2012 students from a Berlin Kreuzberg school, including Palestinians, visited Yad Vashem (Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust),



they heard the story of Refik Veseli, a seventeen-year-old Muslim from Albania who rescued a Jewish family during the Holocaust. She was recognized as one of the Righteous among the Nations. The students were greatly moved. After returning to Berlin, they contacted the authorities and asked that the school's name be changed. Their request was granted, and the school is now named after Refik Veseli.<sup>19</sup>

The opposite can be said of advocating for the commemoration of the Nakba in Germany. Not only would doing so prevent social integration, recognition, and success, but even the mere mention of the associated traumas—in particular, for a Palestinian—could have detrimental consequences, beginning with the loss of professional opportunities and, thus, the ability to lead a life of safety and dignity.

---

Germany has made a remarkable effort to grapple with the Holocaust in all spheres of society, defining politics, public discourse, education, and a new German identity. While many Germans and Israelis celebrate the War of Independence and the creation of the State of Israel, the devastating impact that these historical events continue to have on Palestinians is largely ignored in mainstream German public discourse. For Israelis in Berlin, the tangible presence of the Holocaust is familiar, given its similarly prominent position in Israel's educational forums, as well as in its urban landscape and public domain. Most of these Israelis, however, are simultaneously aware of the Nakba and its salience for Palestinian identity and experience. For Palestinians in Berlin, the Holocaust is perceived as a complex and sensitive matter: as defining in terms of their successful integration into German mainstream society, but also as a source of frustration, given the dearth of public acknowledgment of the Nakba. We argue that the German-Israeli-Palestinian moral triangle requires an inclusionary ethos from all three parties that creates room for recognition of the Holocaust and the Nakba.