

On Palestine and Israel

Perspektive Selbstverwaltung

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Contents

On the German discourse	3
Historical roots and continuities	4
7/10 and Hamas	5
The genocidal Israeli retaliation	6
Self-criticism and our position	7

For seven long months, we have been watching an intensification of absolutely horrific carnage, death, and destruction in Palestine. The region has turned into a stage on which genocidal rhetoric and practice, the indiscriminate killing of civilians, do not only take place, but also stream live the abyss of human civilization to the whole world. In the meantime a deeply problematic discourse about these events, their historical roots, and even efforts of legitimization around the world unveil itself; in particular in Germany.

For seven long months, we, Perspektive Selbstverwaltung, an anarchist organization in Berlin, have been silent about this. With this statement, we want to end this silence, which many of us have seen as complicity in an unfolding genocide in Gaza. We would like to clarify at the beginning, that the Palestinian and the Israeli societies are, like all societies, heterogeneous, full of internal contradictions and (conflicting) movements with different perspectives, which are important to learn about and take into account, to gain a deeper understanding of the region, its history and the ideologies at work.

This being our organization's first statement on the matter, the aim will not be to provide an in-depth analysis of the matter but a clarification of where we stand. There are many organizations and individuals who have deeper knowledge, experience and analysis on many aspects of this topic than we do.¹

In the following text, we will clarify our positions on the German discourse, the historical roots of the current situation and the conflict, the 7th of October and the ongoing genocidal war in Gaza, additionally we will provide a self-criticism regarding our silence. We welcome constructive criticism and solidarity-based discourse.

On the German discourse

The discourse about the current war in Gaza, antisemitism, and the reactions to it in the German media is reflected in its confusing lack of context and the tendency towards absolute moral imperatives in the repeated (or actually non-existent) disputes within the radical left. This has flared up a smoldering debate that in the past has always managed to break up alliances and divide organizations. On top of this, in the German public sphere, the accusation of antisemitism is constantly being leveled at every critic addressing Israeli policies, at every declaration of solidarity with Palestinians, and every reference to racist and colonial continuities². To name some examples: a team of Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers at the Berlinale^{3,4}; migrant and left-wing activists commemorating victims of fascist violence⁵; international and Jewish organizations⁶; a congress where people wanted to educate themselves and share their thought about the ongoing genocide⁷; two social centers from which two social workers raised their voice against the geno-

¹ To name some: 972 Magazine, Standing Together, Palästina Spricht, Jüdische Stimme für gerechten Frieden in Nahost, Jewish Bund, Azadeh Sobout, Sara Roy, Edward Said, Ella Habiba Shohat, Iris Hefets, Naomi Klein, Judith Butler, Ilan Pappé

² <https://www.972mag.com/germany-israel-palestine-solidarity-repression>

³ <https://www.972mag.com/basel-adra-yuval-abraham-berlinale>

⁴ <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1180355.antisemitismus-eklat-auf-der-berlinale-mit-scheuklappen-um-eigene-achse.html>

⁵ <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1180170.hanau-anschlag-von-hanau-bis-berlin-gedenken-heisst-auch-kaempfen.html>

⁶ <https://www.juedische-stimme.de/berliner-sparkasse-sperret-konto-der-j%C3%BCdischen-stimme>

⁷ <https://www.instagram.com/p/C5rZsmNMwti/>

cide and posted content on their private instagram⁸ (this list is incomplete and getting longer every day).

The usage of these tropes smothers any constructive and honest debate. It undermines any „never again“ and mocks the danger Jews face because of the antisemitism present in society. On the contrary, we believe, that we must not apply „Never again“ and „Resist the beginnings“ to antisemitism as a single case, but to general mechanisms in society. “Never again” means “Never again for anyone”. Of course, there is still deep-seated, often directly violent, antisemitism in German society, and therefore also in the German left, and we must take action against it. But many people in German society are just as easily persuaded to blame other oppressed minorities, to silence them, to disempower them, to deport them and even to justify genocide against them, and this is intolerable. The fact that it is the Holocaust, of all things, that is being misused to justify the mass murder of Palestinians, is as if we are allowing ourselves to be mocked by history, reproducing a racist and colonial continuity.

Another sad example for the double standards of the western discourse is the debate about sexualized violence. Sexualized violence and its weaponization in wars is something we condemn to the utmost degree and want to tackle wherever it occurs. We see sexualized violence as a part of every war on land and this is not discussed nearly as often as it should be. We position ourselves at the absolute opposition to sexualized violence in all its forms. But it is important to be aware of the selective and asymmetric coverage of the topic. And the way it is used in the current discourse serves above all to reinforce racist, orientalist and anti-Muslim narratives.

Historical roots and continuities

One of the first points we would like to point to, is the tendency of the debate in Germany to all too often morally and factually discuss the happenings of the 7th of October, the Hamas attack, and the revenge campaign of the Israeli state as if they happened in a vacuum.

Without going into detail, the events of the last seven months happened within a larger framework which is shaped by Zionism⁹, settler-colonialism, British colonialism and many historical events. To mention just some of them: the expulsion of many European Jews, especially in the aftermath of the holocaust, as well as the expulsion of many middle-eastern Jews from their previous homes and their (oftentimes forced¹⁰) migration to Palestine; the foundation of the Israeli state in 1948 and the following declaration of war by Arab states; the Palestinian Nakba (the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish Palestinians from their homes in 1948); the occupation of the whole of historic Palestine in 1967; the Yom Kippur war in 1973 between Israel and a coalition of Arab states; a series of other wars with neighboring states; on top of this, the imperial powers and their politics also strongly affected the region. Omnipresent since 76 years is the continuous practice of depriving Palestinians of their most basic human rights, the clear

⁸ <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1181673.palaestina-kongress-friedrichshain-kreuzberg-schliesst-queere-maedchentreffs.html>

⁹ Besides Zionism there are also other political Jewish ideologies. Especially Bundism (left-wing) was the most significant Jewish ideology in the first half of the 20th century, while Zionism had very little followers back then. In her Interview with Stichpunkt Magazin, Iris Hefets, a member of Jüdische Stimme, gives more context on the topic (in German): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jmTKFb_1l4

¹⁰ Ella Habiba Shohat: Mizrachim in Israel: Zionismus aus der Sicht seiner jüdischen Opfer. <https://www.rosalux.org.il/artikel/zionismus-mizrachim/>

discrimination which constitutes the crime of Apartheid, as well as the continuous expulsion, violence and Israeli settlement-policies in the West Bank.

As there are numerous reports and analysis about the Israeli System of Apartheid, we rather want to share this, than to summarize it in our own words again. In the Amnesty International extensive 2022 report „Israel’s Apartheid against Palestinians“ they write: *„Israel imposes a system of oppression and domination against Palestinians across all areas under its control: in Israel and the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territory], and against Palestinian refugees, in order to benefit Jewish Israelis. This amounts to apartheid as prohibited in international law.“* The report describes four strategies to do so: *Fragmentation into domains of control, Dispossession of land and property, Segregation and control and Deprivation of economic & social rights.*¹¹¹²¹³ By this we agree on the vast majority of international anticolonial and Palestinian voices and stand by them in the fight against Israel’s Apartheid.

Of course, it has to be said, that evidently, an overwhelming part of the Jewish migration to the region happened in the aftermath of the holocaust and due to the century-long persecution of Jews all over Europe. Although the Nazi-Regime in Germany was defeated, German society and other European societies prevented many Jewish people to stay in or to return to their homes. For many, Israel was a place where they hoped to be safe. In our opinion, these undeniable facts and the indescribable suffering of the Jews in Europe however do not release the Israeli society and state from any humanitarian principles and responsibility, which have clearly been trampled over the last 76 years.

Our position is strong and clear and calls for equal rights and justice for ALL residents in the area – this includes a right to return for all displaced. Therefore, despite global antisemitism and the urgent need to combat it, and despite all the complexities in the historical timeline, in our point of view one thing is perfectly clear: the Palestinian people have been and are oppressed by the state of Israel since it’s foundation and we stand in solidarity with them.

These past 76 years of oppression must not be ignored. Many of today’s population of Gaza, which mainly consists of right-deprived displaced people and their children, have already lived through 3 wars in the past decades and the dehumanization they are facing will not go unanswered forever. It is evident therefore, that there won’t be progress in finding a just and peaceful way for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples without addressing the past 76 years of dehumanization and oppression as well as the right of self-determination of ALL people in this region.

7/10 and Hamas

When Hamas fighters crossed one of the most heavily armed borders of the world on October 7th, 2023 they attacked and killed both army personnel and civilians, in an apparent attempt to cause as much carnage as possible. Sexual violence also was part of this attack according to the recent UN report¹⁴. They also took a large number of hostages back to the Gaza Strip, from which

¹¹ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

¹² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid>

¹³ https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid

¹⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/4/reasonable-grounds-to-believe-hamas-committed-sexual-violence-un>

to this date 100 didn't return. 5,431 people have been injured, and 1,163 have been killed during the attack of October 7th.

For us as anarchist internationalists, it has to be made clear that we reject the suggestions that Hamas, an organization of political islamism, is fighting for the full liberation of Palestinians; we have a truly different understanding of what liberation means. Before October 7th, they have many times proven their patriarchal and brutal authoritarianism. Looking at the facts, Hamas is a prominent force in the resistance against the occupation and oppression by Israel. This however does not make the resistance against the occupation less credible or justified in its entirety. There are many individuals, groups and organizations who resist the occupation, oppression and extermination and they do so in many different ways. Their struggle for liberation is a legitimate cause in and of itself and in every conflict we choose to support those forces that are most in line with our ideals.

Our duty is to firmly stand in solidarity with all civilian victims of war, against systemic and weaponized sexual violence, displacement, and discrimination. That by all means includes the civilian victims from the attack on 7th of October as well as oppressed Palestinians.

The genocidal Israeli retaliation

After the massacre of October 7th, the Israeli retaliation started swiftly and with relentless brutality. We all were able to see live the massive, intentional bombing of civilian infrastructure (houses, hospitals, aid- and food distributions, ambulances, journalists, etc.pp.), and the Israeli leadership made little to no efforts to disguise this. On the contrary, Israeli Defense Minister Gallant announced that the civilian population of Gaza will be starved and cut off from all humanitarian goods, calling them „human animals“. There are numerous more inhumane celebrations of war crimes and genocidal acts by Israeli Politicians. We will not quote them here. In their latest numbers, from 1st of May 2024, the Gaza Health Ministry¹⁵ reports that 34.568 Palestinians (including over 14,000 minors) have been killed, 77.765 injured, and over 7,000 are missing under rubble, totaling about 120,000 casualties since the war began, which is more than 5% of Gaza's 2.3 million population. 75% of the population have been displaced within the strip. On top of this unspeakable horror, an intentional, human-fabricated famine is arising due to Israel's strong limitation of aid/food trucks to enter the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli leadership is currently planning the next attacks on the rest of the Gaza Strip, and even if a ceasefire phase has been negotiated for a while now, if it should come it seems temporary with no definite end in sight to the suffering of the Palestinians.

Human rights violations by the Israeli army, cases of torture¹⁶, neglect and sexualized violence^{17,18} in Israeli prisons continue to pile up. At the same time, attacks in the West Bank¹⁹, Lebanon, and Syria continue to escalate as well as the confrontation with Iran. To us, the Israeli government's military operation is about the military annihilation of the Gaza Strip, whatever

¹⁵ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-208>

¹⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/israel-opt-horrifying-cases-of-torture-and-degrading-treatment-of-palestinian-detainees-amid-spike-in-arbitrary-arrests>

¹⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/02/1146667>

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/22/claims-of-israeli-sexual-assault-of-palestinian-women-are-credible-un-panel-says>

¹⁹ <https://www.972mag.com/pogroms-west-bank-soldiers-settlers/>

the cost, in order to realize an undefined post-war plan of the far-right government and in turn support its own position of power.

There is no justification for the actions of the Israeli state, as it is responsible for the starvation and suffering of the civilian population and tens of thousands of deaths as well as the deaths of its own soldiers and civilians²⁰. If we care about the civilian loss on the attack of the 7th of October, we should also mourn the loss of civilian lives in the aftermath of the Israeli counter-attack; anything less is hypocritical. As much as we call for an end to this hell on earth for the Gazan population, we call for the release of all taken hostages – those held in Gaza and those held in Israeli prisons (at least 3660 are in administrative detention without charge, which is 40% of all Palestinian prisoners²¹). We have to be clear and precise in our demands – for our own humanity, our values and for the affected human beings.

Self-criticism and our position

When starting our organization we avoided finding a clear common position on Palestine and Israel due to the specifics of the German debate mentioned before. As Perspektive Selbstverwaltung (PS) we tried to focus on local politics in Berlin and concluded that finding a common position on Palestine and Israel was not necessary. In the last seven months, with its police violence against (pro-) Palestinian protests in Berlin, the continued and even speeded up approval of the export of military supplies to Israel by the German government, making up 47% of such imports last year^{22,23}, all while being clear what atrocities are committed in Gaza²⁴, the fact that Europe's largest Palestinian diaspora is living in Berlin, increasing Islamophobia and antisemitism within the German society, and the course of the „debates“ in Berlin and Germany all proved us wrong in our previous assumptions. We felt that before a public statement, we first had to find a clear common position in our organization, not only on the new war but also on the assessment of the conflict in general.

These discussions have not been finalized and perhaps never will be. We are aware now, that with our silence as an organization, we didn't do anything to express our compassion and solidarity with the civilian victims in Gaza and other parts of Palestine as well as the civilian victims of the 7th of October. More than that, we did nothing to prevent an unfolding genocide in Gaza. We see ourselves as part of an internationalist movement and stand with those affected by and

²⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-military-opens-probe-into-reports-oct-7-friendly-fire-deaths-2024-02-06/> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-01-06/ty-article/.premium/families-of-israelis-killed-in-beeri-home-hit-by-tank-fire-on-october-7-demand-probe/0000018c-de77-daf6-a5df-df7f22d60000>

²¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/17/palestinian-prisoners-day-how-many-palestinians-are-in-israeli-jails/> / In addition, Israeli Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir suggests using the death penalty for Palestinian detainees labeled „terrorists“ to address prison overcrowding, following government approval for 936 new prison spaces: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240418-ben-gvir-executing-palestinian-detainees-best-way-to-combat-prison-overcrowding/>

²² <https://counter-investigations.org/investigation/german-arms-exports-to-israel-2003-2023>

²³ Germany after the United States Israel's biggest military suppliers, sending 326.5 million euros (\$353.7m) in equipment and weapons in 2023, according to Economy Ministry data.

²⁴ The German Green Party (Die Grüne), being part of the current ruling government, on their website still holds up to be against exporting weapons into warzones and crises areas: „Darüber hinaus lehnen wir Waffenlieferungen in Kriegs- und Krisengebiete ab.“ and is thus defacto facilitating the war.

suffering from wars. We feel that it is crucial to raise our voices with the people who are standing up rejecting and resisting them and we regret not having done so earlier.

Therefore we want to say loud and clear: We stand on the side of all people who are oppressed, disenfranchised, and affected by wars, starvation, weaponized and systemic sexual violence and genocide. It is our humanitarian and socialist-anarchist duty. Everything else would constitute a humanitarian double standard, which we oppose to the utmost level. We stand in solidarity with the movement for the liberation of Palestine from the Israeli occupation and oppression and we stand in solidarity with all voices, who call for a just and fair peace in the Middle East, with equal rights for all. Ceasefire now, end the genocide, end the apartheid!

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