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How the Mindset in Germany That Led to the Holocaust Now Enables Israel's Genocide in Gaza



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

This week, South Africa is taking Israel to the UN's highest court, charging it with systematic war crimes of genocide, ethnic cleansing and collective punishment. Why does Germany continue to support Israel?

Part of the answer lies with the unforgivable 'guilt' that Germany feels about inflicting the Holocaust on the Jewish people. Another part, though, can be traced to a deep and entrenched racism among the German ruling elites in politics, literature and art. Would the German government, German state and many German intellectuals and artists behave

in the same manner if the victims of the Israeli army were not Palestinian but English or French?

When I asked people in my local English town of Lincoln this question during a small pro-ceasefire demonstration last month, I felt a palpable change in their body language. They hadn't considered these crimes and Germany's support from this perspective.

As we know, the root cause of the Holocaust was the de-humanisation of the Jews. This same process lies behind Germany's strong support for Israel. The only difference is that the Palestinians have replaced the Jews. The Israeli state systematically and officially describes Palestinians in Gaza as 'human animals.' It has declared that there are 'no innocent civilians,' and that all are in effect 'guilty at birth,' guilty by the very fact of 'being born'. Prime minister Netanyahu describes them as 'Amalek' and tells the country that the entire Palestinian population, including their babies, even their animals, should be slaughtered.

The only difference between the terms that the Nazi regime once used and those that the Israeli elites use today is that the labels of 'lesser people,' 'subhuman' and 'human animals' refer not to Jewish people but to Palestinians. By supporting the Israeli regime, Germany endorses such view.

It cannot do so in isolation. This form of dehumanization and treatment of a people as expendable is a colonial discourse that remains deeply embedded in the western political establishment and beyond. We can see it in 'diplomatic lapses' when masks of defending democracy, human dignity and human rights fall off and politicians reveal beliefs that are based on racism and othering.

For example, in the colonial, racist mindset of Ursula von der Leyn, the President of the European Commission, we see that she supported Ukraine after Russia's invasion not because Russia violated international law, but because 'Ukraine is one of us.' In this racist colonial mindset, 'othering' takes priority over international law and human rights. Or consider Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, who said: 'Europe is a garden...most of the rest of the world is jungle...and the jungle could invade the garden. The gardeners should take care of it.'

What lurks behind this semi-visible dichotomy is a contradiction their 'apparent universality' of human rights and their 'actual non-universality,' a view of the world as 'us' vs. 'them'. The idea that the 'garden' of civilization has to be protected from the 'jungle of the uncivilized' is entrenched in an intellectual, cultural and historical mindset that seeks legal and emotional legitimacy from the work of Nazi legal theoreticians such

as Karl Schmit who challenged the universality of 'Human Rights'. We can see how superficial this garden is whenever violence is inflicted outside of this 'garden' and when a member of this 'garden' initiates it. Beneath it is nothing but a savage jungle under this calm and peaceful garden 'a lawless, unbridled desire for power and pleasure wrapped itself in a Freudian mantle of superego any cost to others.'

The very mindset that makes Germany condone crimes against humanity in Gaza is the same that allows Ursula von der Leyn to stand before Israeli tanks giving her blessing for them to destroy Gaza and massacre its people. It is the same mindset that allows Joe Biden to embrace Netanyahu, giving him a green light for genocide and flooding Israel with the weapons to unleash hell on Gazans old and young, men and women, children and babies. **These people from both sides of the Atlantic drink from the same fountain of supremacy, domination and exceptionalism.** As long as the world does not acknowledge this, and as long as it buys the facades of 'democracy', 'human rights' and 'human dignity', crimes against humanity will go unpunished. the savagery that takes place under the thin garb of 'civilization' will continue, with theories of a 'clash of civilisations' by prophets of doom and supremacy providing political and cultural legitimacy for it.

Despite the well-oiled machine of colonial destruction, there are hopes. Real hopes, for two reasons. First, western colonial supremacy is on its last legs. The East is rising and the rest of the world is shedding the last remnants of western capital-colonial legacy, which has inflicted untold suffering on the rest of the people of the planet Earth and endangered life itself. What we see in Palestine is the last colonial struggle against a hegemon. The fierce resistance and unbelievable courage of the people of Gaza, who despite living in hell refuse to be 'ethnically cleansed', tells us that if Israel wants to have any future in the region it should do away with its savage apartheid system and accept the equal human and democratic rights of the Palestinians. Second, the majority of people in the west want a ceasefire. The fact that the young generation in the west, have become aware of the truth of the tragedy of Palestine and sided with the Palestinians isolates politicians in their country. This tells us that it is just a matter of time before western political elites reflect the demand of the popular majority and observe the rights of individuals, societies and nature.

We should not forget that the darkest time is before dawn. With our action, we can bring dawn even closer.

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