

Philosophy in the Military-Intellectual Complex

The Hebrew University is situated on occupied territory, in East Jerusalem, behind the Green Line.¹ Parts of the campus are used for military purposes (as the watch tower, which is at the same time the icon of the Hebrew University). But the Hebrew University and some of its intellectual production is part of the military-intellectual complex for more than these reasons.

In 2007/08 (a year after the Lebanon war and a year before the war in Gaza) I could hardly experience any opposition inside Israel, while targeted and accidental killing in the occupied territories were part of the daily business. In the meantime the official politics has only gotten worse. And the nationalist consensus still seems to be stable.

Increasing the pressure from outside would include the refusal of collaboration with institutions that are part of the current consent. In Israel this statement has been made illegal: Appeals to boycott (even of the settlements) will now have juridical consequences.

The Franz-Rosenzweig Minerva Research Centre that hosted me for a few months is located on the Campus of the Hebrew University. It is dedicated to German Jewish thought.

The construction of this scientific discipline implies its own pitfalls. There have, undoubtedly, been very many German thinkers of Jewish origin especially in the Weimar republic. Their expulsion and liquidation will remain the most painful loss for German intellectual life.

Some of these thinkers might have been religious, some not. And I wonder how to retrospectively construct the shared properties of these German Jewish thinkers. How can they be identified as one group of thinkers? How can we assume that their ideas might have had something structural in common?

One way to justify this argument could be as follows: No matter what relation these thinkers might actually have had to Jewish religion – those who believed in essential identities (like Anti-Semites) would always have stigmatized them as such (this is Adorno's argument in the *Minima Moralia*) because of some arbitrary genealogy. Marx would have said that anti-Semites are, just like upper nobility, defined by their interest in political zoology.

German-Jewish thinkers have shared an anti-Semitic label; the figure of "the Jew" would be name for a stigma. This stigma has, at the same time constituted a Diaspora-culture. Painful as it was, it was very fruitful, too. In some way one could say that we all have to become Jews. The Diasporaic position of the Jew has become a dialectical figure of universalism and emancipation. As the activists of May 68 said: We are all German Jews! And we could add: We are all Palestinians! (And the Palestinian people has indeed been constituted by repression and expulsion just like the Jewish people.)

¹ The Green Line defines the borders of Israel as they were defined before the Six Days War in 1967. It is mostly referred to as the condition for a peaceful two state solution).

It is precisely this concept of "the Jew" that allows Alain Badiou to claim that Israel is one of the countries that doesn't allow for Jews: for cosmopolitical, deterritorializing, critical intellectuals that thwart the idea of the nation: "Nestbeschmutzer", intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, Norman Finkelstein, Ilan Pappé and many others. According to my experience of the year 2007/2008 there is no anti-nationalist left in Israel that would be worth mentioning and if so, it has been criminalized by the most recent developments in Israeli legislation.

The discursive context, however, in which Jewish studies functions nowadays is therefore quite different. It is not so much dedicated to the emancipatory idea of a Diaspora-culture. And the institutional label "Jewish Studies" is not a function of constructing a Jewish people that would be defined as the contingent community of believers either. It is constructed as nation, a substantial *Volk*.

There are enough reasons to be critical of this essentialist assumption of an ethnical (or deeply rooted cultural) Jewish identity. Structurally it is founded on the similar ethnicist assumptions as German nationalism (founded on culture rather than civilization) and Anti-Semitism were. Maybe it is not a coincidence that the (Anti-Islamic) European right (with people like Geert Wilders and Henryk M. Broder) are passionate admirers of the current state of Israel: not only because it functions as a bulwark against Islam but also because it represents the essentialist idea of a nation founded on ethnicity.

Unwillingly I have been part of both the territorial practice and discourse of current Israeli politics. I have been part of the military-intellectual complex and I feel uncomfortable with it.

But while I write this, the biggest waves of social protest that Israel has ever faced are rolling over the country. Several hundred thousand protestors are marching through Tel Aviv to oppose increasing social injustice and the politics of Netanyahu. My hope is with them – even more so if the Palestinian people has reasons to share this hope.