

Zionist lobby groups and the German press attempt to censor pro-Palestinian art exhibition

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A coordinated campaign is underway by Zionist lobby groups and the German press to censor and/or close the exhibition “Commune—The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict,” which has been on display in Potsdam since mid-November. The multimedia exhibition by Italian artist Costantino Ciervo attempts to draw attention to the historical, anthropological and linguistic similarities between ordinary Jews and Palestinians against the backdrop of the genocide committed by the Israeli government, which is fully supported by the US, Germany and other leading states in Europe and the Middle East.

According to Evgueni Kutikow, chairman of the Jewish community in Potsdam, and Andreas Büttner, Brandenburg’s antisemitism commissioner, “the exhibition creates problematic equivalences through its basic idea of ‘similarity’ or ‘mirroring’ between Israeli and Palestinian actors.” According to both men, “the exhibition blurs the roles of perpetrator and victim, relativises the terrorist attack of 7 October,” and presents “legitimate Israeli self-defence as part of a supposed mutual extremism.”

In a joint statement to the press, Büttner and Kutikow demanded “that those responsible at the museum draw the necessary conclusions and either fundamentally revise the exhibition or discontinue it.”

The call to ban the exhibition, accompanied by sensationalist headlines such as “Exhibition allegedly trivialises terrorism,” was picked up by many leading German daily newspapers and magazines such as *Stern* and *Die Zeit*.

It should be noted that Andreas Büttner, formerly a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and later the Free Democratic Party (FDP), is currently a member of the Left Party. While Büttner remains in the party, the party executive recently expelled the pro-Palestinian activist Ramsis Kilani.

Even the Israeli embassy has weighed in, publishing a blog post on X accusing Ciervo of legitimising “the terror of those who want to destroy the democratic state of Israel.”

I spoke with Costantino Ciervo about the campaign to censor his exhibition.

Steinberg: Andreas Büttner, Brandenburg’s antisemitism commissioner and representatives of the Jewish community accuse your exhibition of spreading antisemitic propaganda. How do you respond to that?

Ciervo: Of course I reject that. Such an accusation has

consequences. They are demanding that the museum management close the exhibition or remove the depiction of Anne Frank wearing a keffiyeh (Arabic scarf). I am not prepared to accept that.

They argue that the exhibition hurts the feelings of Jewish people. They claim that the images on display equate “perpetrators and victims” and that the terrorist organisation Hamas—which wants to destroy Israel—is supported by these images.

Various newspapers, including national media and the well known weekly magazine *Stern*, have reported on this by reprinting a dpa report and repeating Büttner’s position.

One of the newspapers that published Büttner’s demand for a ban on my exhibition was the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. A few days later, the same newspaper published a report by the Max Planck Institute for Demography in Rostock, which states that more than 100,000 people were killed in the Gaza Strip during the war.

The Rostock report only takes into account deaths caused by direct violence and excludes all deaths caused by collapsing buildings, lack of drinking water, hunger and lack of medical care. This means that the actual number of deaths is much, much higher. The SZ report concludes that “researchers see parallels with historical genocides,” but I am now being attacked by the same newspaper. The hypocrisy of the German media on this issue is boundless.

What all these forces are actually afraid of is the expressiveness of the images on display. They know very well that the images in my exhibition do not contain or promote antisemitism.

Through my visual language, I express the vision that all people are equal—Israeli Jews, Palestinians and Arabs—and that all have the right to live together in peace and with equal civil rights. This idea sketches the vision of a future state that is neither “Palestine” nor “Israel,” but something I call “Paleä-Judea”—overcoming the false two-state formula, overcoming the violence in the form of ethnic cleansing and genocide that, in my opinion, the state of Israel is committing against other population groups.

Steinberg: Your pictures show different generations—women, men, small children as examples of peaceful coexistence between these two population groups. The only picture that shows weapons depicts American soldiers. Why?

Ciervo: In terms of content, my pictures clearly contradict the claim that they are antisemitic.

In a series of hand-painted portraits, I deliberately juxtaposed

different figures—young girls, older girls and women, young boys and older men—not against each other!

These are people who look very similar. I even used figures who look like twins. In doing so, I am making a deeply humanistic statement. Their only difference is their clothing, which refers to their religious or ethnic background. The association I want to evoke is not that of “perpetrators” or “victims,” but that of brotherhood. These are people whose ethnic groups have much more in common than divides them due to their linguistic and historical similarities.

Peaceful coexistence in a confederation based on social equality, thereby overcoming conflict—that is the vision of my exhibition.

I reinforce this vision of brotherhood, commonality and shared humanity with a paradox: behind the figures, I depict the geographical displacement of a population group from 1917 to the present day, especially since the founding of Israel in 1948. The viewer sees how the Palestinian Arab-Islamic population disappears, gradually at first and then rapidly.

With this depiction, I provoke the question: how can it be that people who resemble each other like siblings are being driven out by another group? I have added two more portraits to this six-part series.

I do not show an Israeli soldier controlling a drone for war, nor do I show an attack by Hamas. Instead, I show a soldier from a foreign power—in this case, an American. This does not mean that I am against ordinary Americans. Rather, I emphasise that these conflicts have their origins in the geopolitical interests of imperialist powers.

With these images, I want to evoke the association that the conflict between Israelis and Arab Palestinians is deeply rooted in the United States’ quest for influence in a region rich in oil and other resources.

For over 2,000 years, Arab Palestinians and Jews lived peacefully together in this region. It was the interests of the American superpower that brought violence and chaos—at the expense of the people living there.

Steinberg: Recently, there have been many other cases of political censorship in Germany against artists, intellectuals and politicians who oppose the consensus of the Bundestag parties to unconditionally defend the Israeli government’s mass murders in Gaza.

Ciervo: I am certainly not the first to be censored in this way. There are many cases—and it is not only artists who are affected. Even important figures such as Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur for the Palestinian territories, are being censored. Albanese was even punished directly by the US government for her work. Her bank accounts were frozen, her freedom of travel is restricted and there are many more such cases.

It’s madness. The German government is trying to rid itself of its historical role in the Shoah by unconditionally supporting Israel—even if that means supporting a government of ultra-right-wing Zionists who are committing genocide.

What Germans fail to understand is that unconditional support for Israel and what is happening to the Palestinians is damaging to Jews worldwide. The German government has blocked everything, including at the European level, that could have stopped the

bombing of Gaza and the suffering of the Palestinian people. This provides the real antisemites—those who want to expel or kill Jews—with powerful arguments against Jews.

But that is precisely what I am challenging with my exhibition. It is necessary to distinguish between Zionists and Jews. Racism and antisemitism must of course be combated, but so must ultra-right-wing Zionism.

Steinberg: Germany’s reaction is strongly influenced by its specific interests in the Middle East. Friedrich Merz recently announced that his government would relax restrictions on arms exports to Israel. A few days later, it was announced that Germany had concluded its largest ever arms import deal with Israel.

Ciervo: I agree. Germany and the US are the countries that support Israel most unconditionally. But if we look at the past 30 to 50 years, all European countries had economic interests that determined their policies. The situation has now changed. I come from Italy. Even during the governments of former presidents Giulio Mario Andreotti and Aldo Moro, Italy offered its support to the PLO. At that time, they openly rejected terrorism as a method of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also said they understood why Palestinians resorted to terrorism. Germany, on the other hand, took a position exclusively in favour of the Israeli state at that time and refused to understand the Palestinians. In my view, psychological reasons—the question of Germany’s historical guilt—play a role, but economic interests are certainly also an important factor.

Steinberg: It is important to remember that Auschwitz was not only an extermination camp, but also a labour camp established to increase the profits of German industry.

Ciervo: That’s right. National Socialism arose from economic interests, and the Nazis profited from it. During the Nazi era, capitalism was not blamed for economic decline; instead, the blame was shifted onto the Jews. This created the extremely destructive ideology of National Socialism, because by creating an internal enemy, it was an easy way to control the population. The main idea behind my exhibition is to counteract precisely such attempts at divide and rule.

The concerted campaign to close the exhibition in Potsdam and suppress any criticism of the Israeli government’s ongoing policy of genocide against the Palestinians must be fought. We call on our readers to write letters of support for the exhibition and send them to the museum via email info@fluxusplus.de. Please send copies to the German WSWs editorial board sgp@gleichheit.de.



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