

Smear Campaigns against Professor Judith Butler

Thanks to Judith Butler!



Smear campaigns against people who do not follow the narrowly defined, politically correct, rhetoric concerning the permanent violations of human rights and Israel's brutal oppression of the Palestinian people are regularly conducted by the right-wing pro-Likud "Israel Lobby" in Germany.

Their newest victim was Judith Butler, Professor in the Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature and the Co-director of the Program of Critical Theory at the University of California, Berkeley. Butler is also active in gender and sexual politics and human rights, anti-war politics, and the Jewish Voice for Peace. She was awarded this year's Adorno prize of the city of Frankfurt. The prize is endowed with 50 000 Euro and is awarded every three years.

Why was Judith Butler slandered? Her "misdemeanors" were that she considers Hamas and Hizbollah as belonging to the global left and because of her support of the BDS-campaign (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions), targeting Israeli goods coming from the occupied Palestinian territories. After the decision to award her the Adorno prize was announced, all hell broke loose. The protesters' procession was led by the secretary general of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Stephan Kramer, followed by Israel's ambassador in Germany and the usual others.

Kramer accused Butler of being an "avowed Israel hater" and an "accomplice" to the BDS initiative, despite Judith Butler's nuanced approach towards BDS. But classifying Hamas and Hizbollah as part of the global left ignores their archaic and fundamentalist worldview, especially towards women. Kramer did not, however, conflate Butler's critique of Israeli government's policy with "anti-Semitism". The controversy surrounding the Adorno prize revealed also the tension between universalistic ethic within Judaism and the nationalistic, self-righteous tendencies of Zionism.

In the controversy that surrounded her, Butler remained steadfast, and she received support inter alia from German intellectuals such as Professor Micha Brumlik from the University of Frankfurt and from Professor Neve Gordon of the Ben-Gurion University in Beer-Sheva. Gordon wrote, "The well-orchestrated witch-hunt initiated by the so-called Scholars for Peace in the Middle East against Judith Butler is a sly attempt – based on half-truths and lies – to silence a staunch critic of Israel's rights-abusive policies in the Occupied Territories."

The smear campaigns by the "Israel Lobby" in Germany occur periodically. Before the current campaign

against Butler, there was one against Nobel laureate in literature Guenter Grass who dared – in his poem “What has to be said” – to suggest that the Israeli government is a bigger threat to world peace than Iran. Although the Central Council of Jews in Germany was also involved in that campaign, most slander was carried out by mainstream German media with the exception of Jakob Augstein’s weekly “der Freitag”.

Two years ago, the famous Israeli human rights lawyer Felicia Langer, who lives in Germany, was severely slandered by the “Israel Lobby” and its infamous extremist supporters, when she received the prestigious “Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany First Class”. Some of the slanderers did not even shrink from attempting to blackmail Germany’s President by threatening to return to him their own medals, should he fail to withdraw the Order of Merit from Ms. Langer.

How Palestinian scholars are treated by German institutions and their representatives is exemplified by the case of the renowned British-Palestinian scholar Dr. Ghada Karmi from the University of Exeter. <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/37/37607/1.html> In February 2012, Ms. Karmi was invited to deliver a speech on Palestine at a Middle East conference at the University of Bremen. At the last minute the invitation was withdrawn, the university suddenly claiming that her views were “not appropriate”. Later it turned out that an Israeli Ph. D. student had protested that the conference and Ms Karmi were “anti-Semitic”. Such unfounded allegations were also leveled against Professor Ilan Pappé, an Israeli Jew, to prevent him from speaking in public in Germany.

But things got even worse for Ms Karmi as she attended a conference on June 8-9, 2012 at the Free University of Berlin, organized by the university’s Research College in cooperation with the German Council on Foreign Relations. Dr. Karmi later commented: “What followed was a depressing display of German sycophancy towards the Israeli participants and a barely disguised discomfort with me, as if they had regretted their boldness in allowing a Palestinian voice to be heard.” She was introduced to the conference by a representative of the German Council on Foreign Relations as a person who according to “some Israelis” is “a Palestinian terrorist”. There was no outcry by the audience and no apology to her followed. Had a representative of the German Council on Foreign Relations dared to introduce an Israeli scholar as a person, who according to “some Palestinians” is “an Israeli terrorist”, his career would have immediately ended.

These smear campaigns reflect the desolate political landscape in Germany.

Ludwig Watzal

First published:

http://www.international.to/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6874:smear-campaigns-against-judith-butler&catid=66:oped&Itemid=151