

The German city of Frankfurt awards the “Professor of Parody” and hatred of Israel: Judith Butler

By Clemens Heni

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On June 1, 2012, it was announced that Judith Butler will be awarded the Theodor-W.-Adorno-Prize of the city of Frankfurt, Germany, on September 11, 2012. September 11 is the birthday of Adorno, though, today we associate 9/11 with that date, particularly when it comes to scholars like Butler. She is “Maxine Elliot 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.”[\[1\]](#) The prize (50,000 Euro) is named after philosopher Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), a co-founder of Critical Theory in the 1930s, who fled National Socialism in 1934 and was in exile in the United States since 1938 until he returned to Frankfurt. His father was Jewish. The Adorno-Prize is awarded every three years only.[\[2\]](#) While Adorno fled the German boycott of Jews, Butler is known for endorsing the boycott of the Jewish state of Israel.

The core problem is that Israel is not accepted as a Jewish state by many leftist, Islamist, neo-Nazi and other antisemites. It is particularly important to focus on Jewish anti-Zionists because neo-Nazi, leftist and Islamist activists and authors often refer to them and Jewish anti-Zionists give hatred of Israel a kind of kosher stamp.

Many scholars are obsessed with the only diverse society in the Middle East, the only democracy and the only safe haven for Arab and Muslim homosexuals, for example: Israel.

It is important to focus on the Jewish character of Israel. Some anti-Zionists claim that they are not anti-Israel, because they like Israel but reject the *Jewish* character of the state. A bi-national state as envisioned by Martin Buber or Hannah Arendt is still seen as an option by those anti-Zionist activists. The exodus of almost one million Jews from Arab and Muslim countries since 1948 indicates what would happen if Jews no longer comprised the majority in their own country. Everyone can see that scholars like Judith Butler single out Israel and equate Israel with South African apartheid, while they are silent about the really violent and oppressive, antidemocratic countries in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia, Iran (the Iranian threat!), Syria, Turkey, Egypt, among many others.

In 2009 in her book *Frames of War* Judith Butler equates the criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment* with US policies in the *War on Terror*.

“The legal move by which the US claimed that prisoners at Camp Delta were not entitled to protection under the Geneva Conventions is one that institutes the expectation that those prisoners are less than human. They are considered enemies of the state, but they are also not conceptualizable in terms of the civilizational and racial norms by which the human is constituted. In this sense, their status as less than human is not only presupposed by the torture, but reinstated by it. And here we have to see – as Adorno cautioned us – that violence in the name of civilization reveals its own barbarism, even as it ‘justifies’ its own violence by presuming the barbaric subhumanity of the other against whom that violence is waged.” [\[31\]](#)

Adorno and Horkheimer wrote their book in defense of the West and as an attack on Nazi Germany. They applied a *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, while Butler equates the West and America with National Socialism and the Holocaust when she refers to that study. Despite all their shortcomings, Adorno and Horkheimer already focused on antisemitism. They were completely shocked and paralyzed by the Holocaust; they had a specific chapter on antisemitism, along with other chapters on modern rationality, Greek mythos, and modern capitalist and technical society. A close colleague and friend of Adorno and Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) after 1943 – supporting the US in its war against Nazi Germany.

For Butler, the “Professor of [Parody](#)” as philosopher and feminist Martha Nussbaum from the University of Chicago has criticized her, [\[4\]](#) post-9/11-warfare of the US is the same as the war of Nazi Germany against the Jews. In this completely distorted and absurd world of fantasy, jihadists are implicitly portrayed as the Jews of today. In 2011 Butler was published in a volume alongside with Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West. Editors Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen aggressively support Butler’s stand against Harvard President Lawrence Summers and his criticism of the anti-Israel boycott and academic antisemitism. [\[5\]](#) Butler herself [\[6\]](#) attacks Israel [\[7\]](#) and the entire Zionist project, based on Hannah Arendt, [\[8\]](#) Martin Buber and Edward Said and his claim that Palestinians and Jews share a history of displacement. [\[9\]](#) Butler portrays herself as a girl walking in the footsteps of Arendt and Buber:

“I’d like to turn now, briefly, to thinking about Hannah Arendt, Jewish to be sure, but someone whose political views made many people doubt the authenticity of her Jewishness. Indeed, as a result of her salient criticisms of political Zionism and the state of Israel in 1944, ’48, and ’62, her claim to belong to the Jewish people was severely challenged,

*most famously by Gershom Scholem. Scholem quickly embraced a conception of political Zionism, whereas Martin Buber in the teens and twenties actively and publicly defended a spiritual and cultural Zionism that, in his early view, would become 'perverted' if it assumed the form of a political state. By the 1940s, Arendt, Buber, and Nudah Magnes argued in favor of a binational state, proposing a federation in which Jews and Arabs would maintain their respective cultural autonomy; of course, there are other versions of binationalism that do not presume the monolithic cultural integrity of 'two peoples' as Buber did, and I hope to gesture toward that at the end of my remarks. It is worth noting as well that Franz Rosenzweig also elaborated a diasporic opposition to Zionism in his *The Star of Redemption*, in which he argues that Judaism is fundamentally bound up with waiting and wandering but not with the claim of territory."* [\[10\]](#)

Butler prefers a "cultural Zionism" even after the Holocaust, while Buber developed that concept, how bad or mistaken it might have been, between 1910 and 1930, before the Shoah. Buber could also not anticipate genocidal threats from Iran or Arab countries; Butler knows them, but ignores or affirms Iranian, Arab and Muslim Jew-hatred.

It is remarkable (though not astonishing in the case of the German) that Habermas and Taylor join such an outstanding voice like that of Butler, who literally aims at organizations like "AIPAC," [\[11\]](#) and Jewish support for Israel in the US and abroad.

In a very important statement on September 17, 2002, President of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, criticized antisemitism among academics and said:

“I speak with you today not as President of the University but as a concerned member of our community about something that I never thought I would become seriously worried about – the issue of anti-Semitism. I am Jewish, identified but hardly devout. In my lifetime, anti-Semitism has been remote from my experience. My family all left Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. The Holocaust is for me a matter of history, not personal memory. To be sure, there were country clubs where I grew up that had few if any Jewish members, but not ones that included people I knew. My experience in college and graduate school, as a faculty member, as a government official – all involved little notice of my religion.”[\[12\]](#)

He was shocked about the growing antisemitism since 2001 in particular:

“Consider some of the global events of the last year: There have been synagogue burnings, physical assaults on Jews, or the painting of swastikas on Jewish memorials in every country in Europe. Observers in many countries have pointed to the worst outbreak of attacks against the Jews since the Second World War. Candidates who denied the significance of the Holocaust reached the runoff stage of elections for the nation’s highest office in France and Denmark. State-sponsored television stations in many nations of the world spew anti-Zionist propaganda. The United Nations-sponsored World Conference on Racism – while failing to mention human rights abuses in China, Rwanda, or any place in the Arab world – spoke of Israel’s policies prior to recent struggles under the Barak government as constituting ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The NGO declaration at the same conference was even more virulent.”

Summers also noted that “it would have been inconceivable a generation or two ago that Harvard could have a Jewish

President.” There is a long history of antisemitism on American campuses and at the Ivy League in particular, as historian Stephen Norwood has shown.[\[13\]](#)

In a response to Lawrence, who did not mention specific scholars by name, Judith Butler ran riot and wrote a piece in 2003:

“When the president of Harvard University declared that to criticise Israel at this time and to call on universities to divest from Israel are ‘actions that are anti-semitic in their effect, if not their intent’, he introduced a distinction between effective and intentional anti-semitism that is controversial at best. The counter-charge has been that in making his statement, Summers has struck a blow against academic freedom, in effect, if not in intent.”[\[14\]](#)

Criticism of antisemitism is called “a blow against academic freedom” while in fact Judith Butler is against academic freedom, when it comes to criticism of antisemitism. One could argue with Freud that Butler projects her own lust of restricting academic freedom onto others. Butler signed an “Open Letter from American Jews” although it was not anti-Israel enough for her, because it did not call for “the end of Zionism.” Did she ever call for “the end of Saudi-Arabian Wahhabi rule”? Did she ever call for “end the misogynistic policies of the Taliban in Afghanistan”? Did she ever call for the end of airing pro-Holocaust statements on Egypt or Al-Jazeera TV from Qatar? Did she ever call to stop publishing antisemitic cartoons in Arab, state sponsored newspapers, like in Syria, Egypt, or Iraq? Did she ever call to stop the hanging of homosexuals in the Islamic Republic of Iran? Did she ever call on German firms to stop their trade with Islamofascist regimes like in Iran, or did she ever call to stop German trade with Arab dictators like Saddam Hussein, who in March 1988 killed some 5000 Kurdish Iraqis with German lethal gas in the city of Halabja? Did she ever call to halt

the persecution of non-believers and critics of Islam in Muslim countries from Morocco to Indonesia?

In 2006 philosopher Elhanan Yakira initiated a vibrant debate in Israel about post-Zionism, anti-Zionism and antisemitic academics. His study was published in English in 2010 and is a seminal work for scholars, students and the public who want to understand how anti-Israeli propaganda works. For example, he criticizes Judith Butler and her above-quoted article from 2003, where the Californian activist wrote that some “95,000 Palestinians” will be “homeless” thanks to the anti-terror fence. Yakira gives the context:

“In fact, very few, if any, Palestinians have been made ‘homeless’ by the construction of the security barrier, and only a small part of it is actually a wall. It is true that some Arabs have lost part of their land (not their homes). However, Israelis also have lost something: an unknowable number of them have lost the privilege of being killed by infiltrating Palestinian resistance fighters. In areas where the barrier is complete, suicide bombing and other attacks on Israeli civilians – in buses, restaurants, discothèques, and shops – have virtually stopped. Given the fact that Butler’s article was written at the height of the suicide-bombing campaign, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that she is not, after all, immune to the kind of affectivity [Serge] Thion [a close ally of French Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson] exhibits toward Israel and Israelis.”[\[15\]](#)

Judith Butler is a long-time supporter of boycotts of Israel. Before the BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) movement was launched by Palestinians in 2005 she was already singling out the Jewish state. In March 2011 she spoke at the “Israel Apartheid Week” in Toronto.[\[16\]](#) While Blacks in South Africa Apartheid could not vote, for example, Arabs and Muslims can

vote in Israel. The defamation of Israel as apartheid is not just antisemitic because it spreads lies about Jews and throws oil on the Arab, Muslim and Iranian hatred of Jews and Israel. It is also a distortion of South African racism and real apartheid. Germany, though, is a hotbed for anti-Zionist Jews.

There is a committee, consisting of ten members, who decided to award Butler this prize, headed by the mayor of Frankfurt, Petra Roth (from the conservative Christian Democratic Union, CDU). Among those who should best know about antisemitism, one might think, is Axel Honneth, himself professor at Frankfurt University and head of the *Institute for Social Research* in Frankfurt, the very same institution founded by Horkheimer and others and joined by Adorno. Adorno and Horkheimer were lucky and could flee Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust. They witnessed boycotts of Jews and Jewish firms while being in exile, out of reach of the Nazis and Germans. To award a prize to a scholar who is in favor of boycotting Jews and Israelis is a slap in the face of Adorno. Contrary to Butler, Adorno was an intellectual and a scholar who preferred theory and criticism to anti-Jewish activities like Israel Apartheid weeks.

German professor Micha Brumlik gives Butler his Jewish kosher stamp. [\[19\]](#) He is known for doing so for anti-Zionist antisemitism. He is against obvious antisemitism like that of Hamas, but he is in favor of Jewish anti-Zionism. He even equated Butler's pro-Hezbollah and pro-Hamas stand with supposedly or indeed problematic paragraphs from philosopher Adorno about jazz. Therefore criticism of music is the same as hatred of Jews and incitement to genocide from Hamas. I learned that this is mainstream in Germany; after I alerted professor Honneth to Butler's antisemitism he replied that this is rather respectable "criticism of Israel" and he referred to Brumlik's article.

It may not be true and it may not be possible that one of the leading anti-Israel voices of the world, Judith Butler, who wants to destroy the Jewish character of Israel by allowing the return of Palestinian “refugees” from 1948, and who opposes philosophically the Jewish character of Israel with reference to Hannah Arendt and Martin Buber, will be awarded the Adorno Prize of the city of Frankfurt. Butler is among the most aggressive critics of “Campus-Watch,” [\[20\]](#) an institution of the Middle East Forum (MEF), established in 2002. [\[21\]](#) As quoted, in a book of hers in 2009, Butler even equates, like another highly fashionable philosopher of our time, Italian Giorgio Agamben, US policies during the *War on Terror* with Nazi policies and concentration camps. “The other” is the jihadist, seen as victim of America and not as mass murderer. “The other” is the Islamist and he is seen as the Jew of today. More delusion is hardly possible.

Brumlik, though, the German professor of pedagogy, refers to above quoted article of Butler from 2011 (“Is Judaism Zionism”) and likes it very much. American scholar Russell Berman, an expert on Germany, the left, Critical Theory, antisemitism and anti-Western ideology, puts Butler’s ideology in a nutshell – this analysis fits for most liberal and left-wing anti-Zionists, worldwide:

“It is as if for Butler a concern with anti-Semitism anywhere, and, in particular, in the academy were, in her view, incompatible with any criticism of Israel. Yet that absurd presumption is undermined by Butler’s own prose: for she too, despite herself, has to come to grips with anti-Semitism in the academy and not – this would be the easy case – with Nazi flag-wavers or right-wing populists – but in the very core of her chosen political community, the academic anti-Zionist movement.” [\[22\]](#)

The city of Frankfurt has to rethink its decision to award Judith Butler. Antisemitism should not be rewarded in Germany again. Too many anti-Israel scholars and activists already have been honored, tenured, or given prizes. This has to stop and serious research on antisemitism, particularly on anti-Zionist antisemitism and Islamism, has to be supported.

In 2007 Lawrence Summers repeated his criticism of academic and mostly left-wing and liberal antisemitism in an interview he gave to the prestigious Podcast Series "Voices on Antisemitism" of the United States Holocaust Memorial:[\[23\]](#)

"I found it shocking and deeply troubling that a substantial group of faculty members at major universities would propose seriously, and indeed seek to pressure, for universities like Harvard to sell, to divest, any stock, any company that did any business with Israel. It seemed to me that such a boycott that singled out Israel was profoundly misguided. And so I raised the question of whether this action, because of its singling out of Israel, was antisemitic in its effect if not necessarily in its intent."

He has probably Judith Butler's attack on him in mind, when he concludes:

"I think the magnitude of the reaction I got was not something I fully anticipated. I had the reaction that, if people had felt so inhibited from speaking on these issues that they praised my courage, that there must be a larger problem around these issues on university campuses than I had previously supposed. I think it might have been a more difficult decision if I had known just how much attention those remarks would generate, but while it would have been a more difficult decision, I think I would have been even more convinced of the importance of speaking out in the way that I did."

The President of the leading University of the world spoke out against academic antisemitism as early as 2002. In 2012 German academics and politicians still do not understand what anti-Zionism means or they affirm hatred of the Jewish state of Israel. It is not acceptable to call Israel an apartheid state, as Butler does, and it is not acceptable to boycott Israel, as Butler propagates. Adorno told us that antisemitism has to be fought and not to be awarded!

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[1] http://rhetoric.berkeley.edu/people.php?page_id=1056&p=54 (visited June 6, 2012).

[2]

http://www.kulturpreise.de/web/preise_info.php?preisd_id=495 (visited June 6, 2012); "Judith Butler erhält den Theodor-W.-Adorno-Preis," http://www.focus.de/kultur/buecher/literatur-judith-butler-erhaelt-den-theodor-w-adorno-preis_aid_760909.html (visited June 6, 2012); "Theodor-W.-Adorno-Preis an Judith Butler," http://www.hr-online.de/website/rubriken/kultur/index.jsp?rubrik=72824&key=standard_document_44944250 (visited June 6, 2012).

[3] Judith Butler (2009): *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable*, London/New York: Verso, 93.

[4] Martha Nussbaum (1999): *Professor of Parody*, February 22, 1999, *The New Republic*, <http://www.akad.se/Nussbaum.pdf> (visited June 6, 2012). Butler was awarded the “first prize in the annual Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the journal *Philosophy and Literature*”, for example, *ibid.* Nussbaum criticizes that Butler rejects feminist activism towards better laws to protect women, and that Butler stays away from the struggle for more social equality for women, too.

[5] Eduardo Mendieta/Jonathan Vanantwerpen (2011): *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, in: Eduardo Mendieta/Jonathan Vanantwerpen (eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere. With an Afterword by Craig Calhoun*, New York: Columbia University Press. The book is result of an event in New York City on October 22, 2009, *ibid.*, vii.

[6] Judith Butler (2011): *Is Judaism Zionism*, in: Mendieta/Vanantwerpen (eds.), 70–91.

[7] „And, of course, it makes a difference whether one is criticizing the principles of Jewish sovereignty that characterize political Zionism since 1948, or whether one’s criticism is restricted to the occupation as illegal and destructive (and so situates itself in a history that starts with 1967), or whether one is more restrictively criticizing certain military actions in isolation from both Zionism and the occupation, i.e., last year’s assault on Gaza and the war crimes committed there, the growth of settlements, or the policies of the current right-wing regime in Israel,” Butler 2011, 75.

[8] Butler 2011, 77ff.

[9] Butler 2011, 77.

[10] Butler 2011, 77.

[11] Butler 2011, 74.

[12] Lawrence Summers (2002): Address at morning prayers, Memorial Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts, September 17, 2002, http://www.harvard.edu/president/speeches/summers_2002/morningprayers.php (visited June 5, 2012).

[13] Stephen H. Norwood (2009): *The Third Reich in the ivory tower: complicity and conflict on American campuses*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

[14] Judith Butler (2003): No, it's not anti-semitic, *London Review of Books*, August 21, 2003, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n16/judith-butler/no-its-not-anti-semitic> (visited June 5, 2012).

[15] Elhanan Yakira (2010): *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust. Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimation of Israel*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 315.

[16] <http://toronto.nooneisillegal.org/node/572> (visited June 5, 2012).

[17] Micha Brumlik (2012): *Die Philosophin im Brunnen*, June 4, 2012, <http://www.taz.de/Kolumne-Gott-und-die-Welt/!94612/> (visited June 6, 2012). Resentment against Adorno is very widespread in Germany, because he was a son of a Jew and he survived National Socialism. Adorno even came back to Germany, taught Germans about antisemitism and there is resentment against him because Adorno was a critic of right-wing newspapers and their hatred of liberals around 1968, like Axel Springer's BILD daily. Therefore, it is remarkable that a German author equates anti-Zionist Butler with pro-Israel philosopher Adorno, Michael Kreutz (2012): *Versöhnung der Differenzen*, June 3, 2012, <http://www.transatlantic-forum.org/index.php/archives/2012/13541/versoehnung-der-differenzen/> (visited June 8, 2012). Kreutz accuses Adorno of having been a typical German "antiliberal," which isn't but resentment. Adorno was a victim of German

antiliberal German nationalism as early as during the First World War, he wrote about this. Kreutz is a newcomer when it comes to philosophy, history, and research on antisemitism (he studied Oriental Philology). Adorno knew about antisemitism in the US in the 1940s, too. About antisemitism in America and the Ivy League and their pro-Nazi stand see Norwood 2009. Extremely naïve and badly educated authors ignore Western antisemitism completely, they are blinded by their hatred of the left (everyone who is analyzing Western antisemitism, in addition to Islamic or left-wing antisemitism, is considered an evil left-winger or liberal from their point of view).

[\[18\]](#) William Brand (2002): Professors accuse Web site of witch hunt

Campus Watch.org lists critics of U.S. Mideast policy, September 30, 2002, <http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/255> (visited June 6, 2012).

[\[19\]](#) Steven Plaut (2010): Collaborators in the War against the Jews: Judith Butler, March 9, 2010, <http://frontpagemag.com/2010/03/09/collaborators-in-the-war-against-the-jews-judith-butler/> (visited June 6, 2012).

[\[20\]](#) Russell Berman (2008): From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism: Radicalism as Reaction, *Democratiya*, 13, 14–30, 26, http://dissentmagazine.org/democratiya/article_pdfs/d13Berman.pdf (visited June 6, 2012).

[\[21\]](#) Lawrence Summers (2007): Voices on Antisemitism – A Podcast Series, United States Holocaust Memorial, <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/antisemitism/voices/transcript/?content=20070215> (visited June 6, 2012).