

SOLIDARITY WITH CANDICE BREITZ

In today's Germany, a worthy and hard-won commitment to fighting antisemitism has gone off the rails. At the same moment that a far-right party, the AfD, is gathering electoral strength, the fight against antisemitism increasingly targets progressive voices who dissent from dominant German understandings of the political situation in Israel/Palestine. With ever greater frequency, the targets of such attacks are Jewish.

Last week, the Saarland Museum canceled an exhibition by the Berlin-based, Jewish South African artist Candice Breitz because of allegedly "controversial statements" about the war in Gaza. Breitz, the museum claimed, has not "clearly positioned herself against the terror of Hamas." This absurd and dangerous claim is refuted by a simple look at Breitz's public statements over the past several weeks, which repeatedly condemn Hamas's October 7 attacks, call for the release of all hostages, and clearly articulate empathy for all civilian victims—Israeli as well as Palestinian. In an October 31, 2023 public letter about the earlier cancellation of our symposium "We Still Need to Talk," Breitz and I "unequivocally" condemn Hamas's attack and "denounce the unspeakable violence and death visited upon more than a thousand Israeli civilians." Breitz has been similarly clear in her statements about Hamas in her social media posts and other public proclamations.

The truth is that the real reason Breitz's exhibition was canceled was not her insufficient condemnation of Hamas. The real reason is that Breitz refuses to stay silent about the thousands of civilians killed in Israeli bombing attacks since October 7 and the conditions of occupation and siege that have been in place for decades. The German mainstream's legitimate focus on Israeli victims has left some unable to see and comprehend the ongoing catastrophe for Palestinians. And yet, as the [New York Times reported on November 25](#), Israeli's bombing of Gaza has claimed more civilian victims in Gaza than in the first year after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and nearly as many as there were in twenty years of US war in Afghanistan. An earlier [October 30 Times report](#) additionally detailed rising violence from the army and settlers in the West Bank, where attacks have more than doubled since October 7.

The real problem is not anything Candice Breitz did or did not say. The real problem is the inability of the dominant German perspective on Israel/Palestine to recognize the common humanity of all the victims and the legitimate demands of ordinary Palestinians for freedom, democracy, and justice. When a supposed commitment to protecting Jews ends up targeting individual Jews and demonizing Palestinians collectively, something has gone terribly wrong. As a Jewish person, I refuse to stand by silently while this happens again and again.

Solidarity with Candice Breitz. Solidarity with everyone struggling for a just peace for all in Israel/Palestine.

Michael Rothberg, 27 November 2023