

German Music and Cultural Festival Features Antisemitic Academic, But Cancels Over Coronavirus (Part 2)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Achille Mbembe

Before the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of this year's Ruhrtriennale, Stefanie Carp's invitation to Achille Mbembe attracted much horrified comment.

Prior to the cancellation, Asaf Romirowsky, the Executive Director of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME), told the Post that German Jewish NGO Values Initiative "is right to demand that pro-BDS South African academic Achille Mbembe be dis-invited from a cultural festival. Academic like Mbembe mask their antisemitism by saying that they are 'only' anti-Zionist in an attempt to intellectualize their prejudice."

"All of this is extremely concerning, especially his fallacious views equating Israel to Apartheid South Africa, which couldn't be further from the truth," Romirowsky added. "Yet he is part of a large chorus of universities and academic departments that lend their names to propagandists which give their talks an aura of credibility. Instead they should be promoting scholarship and research."

Romirowsky went on to say that "all of this is part of the anti-normalization strategy, which plays out time and again as pro-BDS groups and individuals have exercised, for example, when they veto campus events organized by Jewish and

Israeli organizations, including those that highlight Israeli-Palestinian co-operation. Without communication, and normalization, peace is impossible. And that's precisely their goal."

Elvira Groezinger, Secretary of Board of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East and Deputy-President of the German SPME-Section, told the Post that "Something is rotten in the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia. It does not bother his supporters that Mbembe is known as one of the most biased and one-sided critics of Israel, being in his view a racist 'apartheid state' which according to him is supposed to be isolated in the world, i.e. destroyed. "

"Now the enemies of Israel, like Mbembe, are listed among the guests of the University of Cologne," she added. "There is no excuse for director Carp, to cause political scandals the third year in a row now. It is not acceptable that a festival financed by public taxes can host an antisemitic BDS scholar, counteracting both the anti-BDS resolutions by the State and the Federal Parliament. I therefore join in the criticism of the Antisemitism Commissioners Dr. Felix Klein, Uwe Becker and Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger who call for cancellation of the event."

Groezinger, Becker and Values Initiative have called for the dismissal of Carp, who invited the pro-BDS band Scottish band Young Fathers to perform at the event in 2018. This sparked outrage, and they were disinvited. Carp claimed at the time that she had no idea the band was anti-Israel, though a moment's searching of the Internet would have set her straight. Or more likely, given her astonishing defense of Achille Mbembe – she claims that "linking Achille Mbembe to antisemitism is grotesque and a disgraceful allegation" – she knew all about the band's views, and agreed with them, as one suspects she agrees with, or at least is not in the least disturbed by, the views on Israel expressed by Achille Mbembe,

Ph.D.

Despite the cancellation of the festival because of the coronavirus, those who have called for Carp's dismissal this year should not cease to protest her continued tenure. She remains a defender of the Young Fathers. Achille Mbembe's hatred for Israel is hardly a secret. What more does anyone need to know about Stefanie Carp's judgment?

As for Achille Mbembe, he bears looking into for his comical possibilities. For one example, there is this bit from [an interview with the Great Man](#):

Which of your works should your critics read?

Mbembe: Those who care should read all the work. Because of its fundamentally humanist inspiration and at times deeply spiritual and poetic tone, it will hopefully help them grow in wisdom and generosity. They will not find one single trace of hate or prejudice in my work. Rather, in it they will hear a voice which is open to the world and all who inhabit it, which is sensitive to human suffering and misery, and which assiduously testifies on behalf of the forces of life, hope and reconciliation. This, should I add, is the gift the South African experience has given me. Trying to share it with the world at large and in my own words cannot, in any reasonable account, be conflated with antisemitism.

Of course. How could we have ever thought otherwise?

Then there is this entry in the annals of academic comedy, the Works of the Great Man. I've simply taken three paragraphs from Wikipedia:

Mbembe's main research topics are African history, Postcolonial Studies, and politics and social science. Although he is called a postcolonial theorist, namely due to the title of his first English book, he has thoroughly

rejected this label more recently, because he sees his project as one of both acceptance and transcendence of difference, rather than of return to an original, marginal, non-metropolitan homeland.

His central work, *On the Postcolony*, was translated into English and released by University of California Press in 2001. This work has also been republished in an African edition by Wits University Press, and contains a new preface by Achille Mbembe. In this text Mbembe argues that academic and popular discourse on Africa is caught within a variety of clichés tied to Western fantasies and fears. Following Frantz Fanon and Sigmund Freud, Mbembe holds that this depiction is not a reflection of a real Africa but an unconscious projection tied to guilt, disavowal, and the compulsion to repeat. Like James Ferguson, V.Y. Mudimbe, and others, **Mbembe interprets Africa not as a defined, isolated place but as a fraught relation between itself and the rest of the world which plays out simultaneously on political, psychic, semiotic, and sexual levels.**

Mbembe claims that Michel Foucault's concept of biopower – as an assemblage of disciplinary power and biopolitics – is no longer sufficient to explain these contemporary forms of subjugation. To the insights of Foucault regarding the notions of sovereign power and biopower, Mbembe adds the concept of necropolitics, which goes beyond merely “inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses.” **Discussing the examples of Palestine, Africa, and Kosovo, Mbembe shows how the power of sovereignty now becomes enacted through the creation of zones of death where death becomes the ultimate exercise of domination and the primary form of resistance.**

I'm sure all of those words mean something. And though I haven't been able to figure out just what, that no doubt testifies to my own inadequacy.

So I'm going to read all of his work, as Mbembe himself has suggested his critics should do, so that **they may realize that** "because of its fundamentally humanist inspiration and at times deeply spiritual and poetic tone, it will hopefully help them grow in wisdom and generosity.

I feel better already. And one thing is certain. Achille Mbembe stands very high in Achille Mbembe's opinion. Who are we to disagree?

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