

We had both been speakers at the “Hijacking memory” conference in Berlin last month. We are dismayed to learn that the debate following our statement made during it is turning into personal attacks instead of dealing with the matters we had addressed. We had protested the vicious attack on Israel made in his presentation by Palestinian activist Tareq Baconi, which was not only unjustified, but gratuitous, as it had nothing to do with the subject of the conference. We now learn that Daniel Botmann of the Central Council of Jews in Germany has informed (as per “Tagesspiegel of July 7) the Bundestag Committee for Culture that “Institute directors who provide a stage for those who sympathize with BDS are inappropriate appointments”, mentioning in that context two of the organizers: the Haus der Kulturen der Welt and the Potsdam Einstein Forum.

However, like any other participant, Mr Baconi remains sole responsible for his remarks. For the organizers to bear that responsibility, they would have to read and approve his remarks beforehand. This would amount to unacceptable censorship, and we would not have allowed our presentations to be so treated. Most importantly, however – and contrary to what Mr Botmann maintains - none of the organizers expressed “extremely problematic antisemitic content including relativizing the Shoah”, or sympathy with BDS. Punishing them for the misguided presentation of one participant out of forty, and making that presentation representative of an otherwise successful conference, would be a no lesser outrage than the presentation itself. We wish to protest against such a possibility.

In the interest of full disclosure: one of us (Konstanty Gebert) has been for years a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of one of the criticized organizers, namely the Einstein Forum. Issues regarding Israel often arose in the private and public proceedings of the Forum, yet he never felt it necessary to protest against statements made there. We both have nothing but the highest regard for that institution and its director, Susan Neiman.



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Jan Grabowski



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Konstanty Gebert