

13. Dezember 2023

Hannah-Arendt-Preis an Masha Gessen / Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung zieht sich aus der Veranstaltung zur Preisverleihung zurück

Die Heinrich-Böll-Stiftungen (Bundessstiftung und Landesstiftung Bremen) ziehen sich aus der für Freitag, den 15. Dezember, in Bremen geplanten Veranstaltung zur Verleihung des Hannah-Arendt-Preises an Masha Gessen im Einvernehmen mit dem Bremer Senat zurück.

Masha Gessen hat in einem Essay für den New Yorker am 9. Dezember u.a. Gaza mit den jüdischen Ghettos im besetzten Europa verglichen.

Zitat: "But as in the Jewish ghettos of Occupied Europe, there are no prison guards - Gaza is policed not by the occupiers but by a local force. Presumably, the more fitting term "ghetto" would have drawn fire for comparing the predicament of besieged Gazans to that of ghettoized Jews. It also would have given us the language to describe what is happening in Gaza now. The ghetto is being liquidated." // „Doch wie in den jüdischen Ghettos des besetzten Europas gibt es keine Gefängniswärter – Gaza wird nicht von den Besatzern, sondern von einer lokalen Polizeieinheit überwacht. Vermutlich hätte der treffendere Begriff „Ghetto“ Kritik hervorgerufen, da er die Lage der belagerten Gaza-Bewohner mit der der ghettoisierten Juden verglichen hätte. Er hätte uns auch die Worte gegeben, um zu beschreiben, was jetzt in Gaza geschieht. Das Ghetto wird liquidiert.“

Sie impliziert, dass Israel das Ziel hat, Gaza wie ein Nazi-Ghetto zu liquidieren. Diese Aussage ist kein Angebot zur offenen Diskussion, sie hilft nicht, den Konflikt im Nahen Osten zu verstehen. Diese Aussage ist für uns nicht akzeptabel und wir weisen sie zurück.

Zum Hintergrund:

Im August 2023 hat die unabhängige Jury des Hannah-Arendt-Preises die russisch-amerikanische Journalist*in und Schriftsteller*in Masha Gessen zur Preisträger*in auserkoren. In der Begründung hieß es: „Seit Jahren beschreibt die*der russisch-amerikanische Journalist*in und Schriftsteller*in politische Strömungen und Konflikte in der amerikanischen und russischen Gesellschaft. Als Analytiker*in des Niedergangs und der Hoffnung berichtet Gessen über Machtspiele und totalitäre Tendenzen ebenso wie über zivilen Ungehorsam und die Liebe zur Freiheit. Masha Gessen schreibt über den mühsamen Alltag, über kulturelle Konflikte und den Kampf um demokratische Selbstbestimmung

Hannah-Arendt-Preis Böll-Stiftung zieht sich aus Preisvergabe an Masha Gessen zurück Masha Gessen soll den Hannah-Arendt-Preis bekommen. Mehrere Institutionen wenden sich gegen die Vergabe. Gessen hatte die Lage in Gaza mit jüdischen Gettos verglichen. Aktualisiert am 13. Dezember 2023, 17:36 Uhr Quelle: DIE ZEIT, isd , dip , kg Masha Gessen schrieb ein Essay für den "New Yorker", in dem sie einen umstrittenen Vergleich zog. © Jens Schlueter/Getty Images Die Grünen-nahe Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung zieht sich "im Einvernehmen mit dem Bremer Senat" aus der Verleihung des Hannah-Arendt-Preises für politisches Denken an die US-Publizistin Masha Gessen zurück. Dies teilte die Stiftung mit, die diesen Preis zusammen mit dem Senat der Freien Hansestadt Bremen verleiht. Die Preisverleihung sollte ursprünglich am kommenden Freitag in Bremen stattfinden. Nach Informationen von ZEIT ONLINE soll der Preis nun in einem anderen Rahmen am Samstag überreicht werden. 17.02.2026 15:05 Hannah-Arendt-Preis: Böll-Stiftung zieht sich aus Preisvergabe an Masha Gessen zurück |

DIE ZEIT <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2023-12/deutsch-israelische-gesellschaft-masha-gessen-kritik-hannah-arendt-preis> 1/3 Masha Gessen Mehr zum Thema Masha Gessen • Das Wichtigste aus Z+ "Wir erleben einen neuen McCarthyismus" [<https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2023-12/masha-gessen-antisemitismus-israel-zionismus>] An diesem Mittwoch hatte die Bremer Niederlassung der Deutsch-Israelischen Gesellschaft (DIG) Äußerungen von Gessen zur Lage im Gazastreifen heftig kritisiert und gefordert, die geplante Preisverleihung auszusetzen. Eine Ehrung Gessens "würde dem notwendigen entschlossenen Auftreten gegen den wachsenden Antisemitismus entgegenstehen", heißt es in einem offenen Brief [https://www.dig-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Open_Letter_Masha_Gessen_2023.pdf] der Bremer DIG. Auslöser der DIG-Kritik und nun des Rückzugs der Böll-Stiftung ist ein Essay von Gessen im New Yorker [<https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-weekend-essay/in-the-shadow-of-the-holocaust>] vom 9. Dezember, in dem es unter anderem um die deutsche Israel-Politik geht. Gessen setzt sich darin kritisch mit der deutschen Erinnerungspolitik auseinander, darunter mit der umstrittenen BDS-Resolution des Bundestags [<https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-05/israel-boycott-bds-bundestag-foerderung-entzug>], die die Israel-Boycott-Bewegung Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions als antisemitisch verurteilt. Zur Lage im Gazastreifen schreibt Gessen: "Seit 17 Jahren ist Gaza ein übermäßig besiedeltes, verarmtes, eingemauertes Lager, das auch nur für kurze Zeit zu verlassen nur ein kleiner Teil der Bevölkerung das Recht hat – in anderen Worten, ein Getto." Gaza sei "nicht wie ein jüdisches Getto in Venedig oder wie ein innerhalb einer Stadt gelegenes Getto in Amerika, sondern wie ein jüdisches Getto in einem von Nazi-Deutschland besetzten

osteuropäischen Land". "Tiefsitzendes negatives Vorurteil gegenüber dem jüdischen Staat" Die DIG wirft Gessen vor, mit solchen Äußerungen "in deutlichem Gegensatz zum Denken Hannah Arendts" zu stehen. "Es ist uns unbegreiflich, wie ein/e so erfahrene/r Wissenschaftler:in wie Masha Gessen, die sich so große Verdienste um die kritische Analyse des russischen Imperialismus erworben hat, ernsthaft Gaza mit den Vernichtungs-Ghettos der Nazis gleichsetzen kann", heißt es in dem offenen Brief. Aus Sicht der DIG gibt es dafür nur eine Erklärung: "Ein tiefsitzendes und grundsätzliches negatives Vorurteil gegenüber dem jüdischen Staat."

17.02.2026 15:05 Hannah-Arendt-Preis: Böll-Stiftung zieht sich aus Preisvergabe an Masha Gessen zurück | DIE ZEIT <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2023-12/deutsch-israelische-gesellschaft-masha-gessen-kritik-hannah-arendt-preis> 2/3 Gessen stehe es frei, solche Auffassungen zu vertreten, heißt es weiter. "Aber Masha Gessen sollte mit ihren Ansichten nicht mit einem Preis geehrt werden, mit dem der jüdischen Philosophin Hannah Arendt gedacht werden soll." Bereits am Montag hatten zwei Gründungsmitglieder des Vereins HannahArendt-Preis für politisches Denken e.V. in einem Brief an dessen Mitglieder und die Preisstifter gefordert, die geplante Preisverleihung am 15. Dezember abzusagen. Auch sie beziehen sich in ihrem Brief, der ZEIT ONLINE vorliegt, auf den Essay von Gessen im New Yorker. Lothar Probst und Helga Trüpel schreiben, Masha Gessen habe sich "mit Äußerungen zum Nahost-Konflikt in einer Art und Weise disqualifiziert, die alle an der Preisverleihung Beteiligten, vor allem aber die deutsch-jüdische Denkerin Hannah Arendt, diskreditieren würde". In der ursprünglichen Begründung für die Preisvergabe heißt es, Gessen berichte als "Analytiker*in des Niedergangs und der Hoffnung" über "Machtspiele und totalitäre Tendenzen ebenso wie über zivilen Ungehorsam und die Liebe zur Freiheit" – in einer Zeit, die "von der autokratischen Erosion in den USA, von einem kriegsbereiten Totalitarismus in Russland und von gravierenden Konflikten zwischen den großen Mächten geprägt ist". Gessens Texte öffneten "neue Sichtweisen, die helfen, eine Welt im beschleunigten Wandel zu verstehen". Gessen wurde als Kind einer jüdischen Familie in Moskau geboren und lebt seit den Achtzigerjahren in den USA. Gessen bezeichnet sich als non-binäre Person.

December 13th, 2023

Hannah Arendt Prize awarded to Masha Gessen / Heinrich Böll Foundation withdraws from the award ceremony

The Heinrich Böll Foundations (Federal Foundation and Bremen State Foundation) are withdrawing from the event scheduled for Friday, 15 December, in Bremen to present the Hannah Arendt Prize to Masha Gessen, in agreement with the Bremen Senate.

In an essay for The New Yorker on 9 December, Masha Gessen compared, amongst other things, Gaza to the Jewish ghettos in occupied Europe.

Quote: "But as in the Jewish ghettos of Occupied Europe, there are no prison guards – Gaza is policed not by the occupiers but by a local force. Presumably, the more fitting term 'ghetto' would have drawn fire for comparing the predicament of besieged Gazans to that of ghettoised Jews. It also would have given us the language to describe what is happening in Gaza now. The ghetto is being liquidated."

She implies that Israel's aim is to liquidate Gaza like a Nazi ghetto. This statement is not an invitation to open discussion; it does not help us to understand the conflict in the Middle East. We find this statement unacceptable and reject it.

Background:

In August 2023, the independent jury of the Hannah Arendt Prize selected the Russian-American journalist and writer Masha Gessen as the winner. The jury's statement read: "For years, the Russian-American journalist and writer has been describing political currents and conflicts in American and Russian society. As an analyst of decline and hope, Gessen reports on power games and totalitarian tendencies as well as on civil disobedience and the love of freedom. Masha Gessen writes about the arduous daily grind, cultural conflicts and the struggle for democratic self-determination

Hannah Arendt Prize: Böll Foundation withdraws from awarding prize to Masha Gessen Masha Gessen is to receive the Hannah Arendt Prize. Several

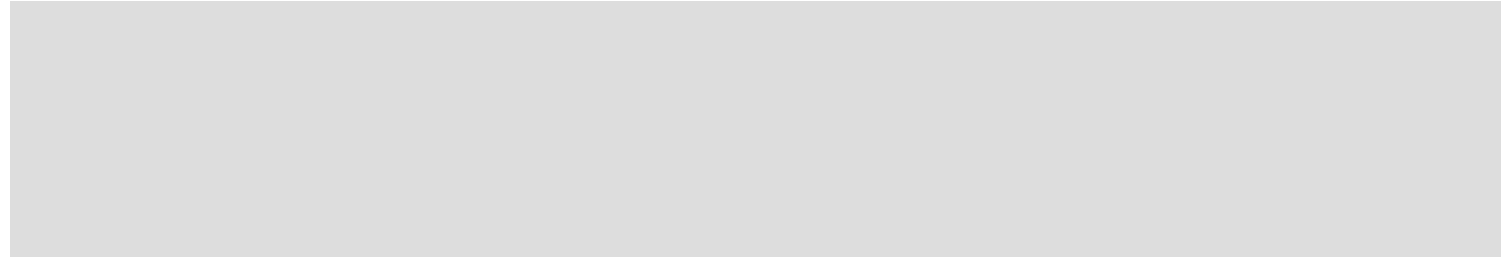
institutions are opposing the award. Gessen had compared the situation in Gaza to Jewish ghettos. Updated on 13 December 2023, 17:36 Source: DIE ZEIT, isd , dip , kg Masha Gessen wrote an essay for *The New Yorker* in which she drew a controversial comparison. © Jens Schlueter/Getty Images

The Heinrich Böll Foundation, which has close ties to the Green Party, is withdrawing “in agreement with the Bremen Senate” from the awarding of the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought to the US writer Masha Gessen. This was announced by the foundation, which awards the prize in conjunction with the Senate of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen. The award ceremony was originally scheduled to take place this coming Friday in Bremen. According to information from ZEIT ONLINE, the prize is now to be presented in a different setting on Saturday. On Wednesday, the Bremen branch of the German-Israeli Society (DIG) strongly criticised Gessen’s comments on the situation in the Gaza Strip and called for the planned award ceremony to be suspended. Honouring Gessen “would run counter to the necessary resolute stance against growing anti-Semitism”, states an open letter from the Bremen DIG. The trigger for the DIG’s criticism – and now the Böll Foundation’s withdrawal – is an essay by Gessen in The New Yorker dated 9 December, which deals, among other things, with German policy towards Israel. In it, Gessen takes a critical look at German remembrance policy, including the Bundestag’s controversial BDS resolution, which condemns the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement as anti-Semitic. On the situation in the Gaza Strip, Gessen writes: “For 17 years, Gaza has been an overpopulated, impoverished, walled-in camp that only a small proportion of the population has the right to leave, even for a short time – in other words, a ghetto.” Gaza is “not like a Jewish ghetto in Venice or a ghetto located within a city in America, but like a Jewish ghetto in an Eastern European country occupied by Nazi Germany”. “Deep-seated negative prejudice against the Jewish state” The DIG accuses Gessen of standing “in stark contrast to the thinking of Hannah Arendt” with such statements. “It is incomprehensible to us how such an experienced scholar as Masha Gessen, who has rendered such great services to the critical analysis of Russian imperialism, can seriously equate Gaza with the Nazi extermination ghettos,” the open letter states. From the DIG’s perspective, there is only one explanation for this: “A deep-seated and fundamental negative prejudice against the Jewish state.” 17 February 2026 15:05

Hannah Arendt Prize: Böll Foundation withdraws from awarding prize to Masha Gessen | DIE ZEIT <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2023-12/deutsch-israelische-gesellschaft-masha-gessen-kritik-hannah-arendt-preis> 2/3

Gessen is free to hold such views, the letter continues. “But Masha Gessen should not be honoured for her views with a prize intended to commemorate the Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt.” As early as Monday, two founding members of the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought Association had called in a letter to its members and the prize sponsors for the planned award ceremony on 15 December to be cancelled. In their letter, which is

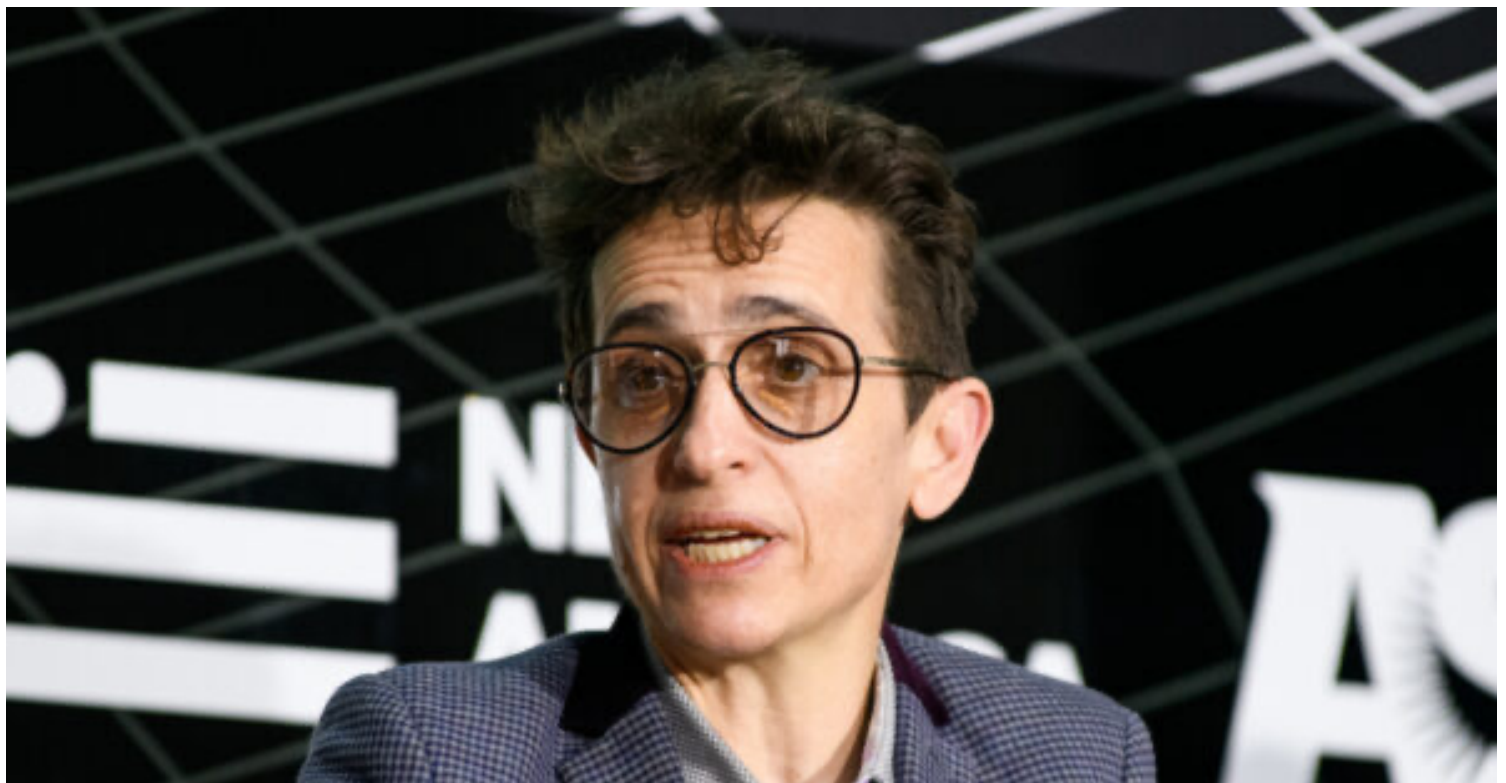
available to ZEIT ONLINE, they too refer to Gessen's essay in The New Yorker. Lothar Probst and Helga Trüpel write that Masha Gessen has "disqualified herself with remarks on the Middle East conflict in a manner that would discredit everyone involved in the award ceremony, but above all the German-Jewish thinker Hannah Arendt". The original justification for the award states that Gessen, as an "analyst of decline and hope", reports on "power games and totalitarian tendencies as well as civil disobedience and the love of freedom" – at a time "marked by autocratic erosion in the US, war-ready totalitarianism in Russia and grave conflicts between the major powers". Gessen's writings open up "new perspectives that help us understand a world in rapid flux". Gessen was born in Moscow to a Jewish family and has lived in the US since the 1980s. Gessen identifies as a non-binary person.



DECEMBER 15, 2023

Gessen's Cancellation Can't Go Unchallenged

ARI PAUL



Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen has built an impressive career in US journalism by being a constant thorn in the side of the Russian state. That journalistic campaign entered a new chapter in November when the Russian government issued a warrant for their arrest

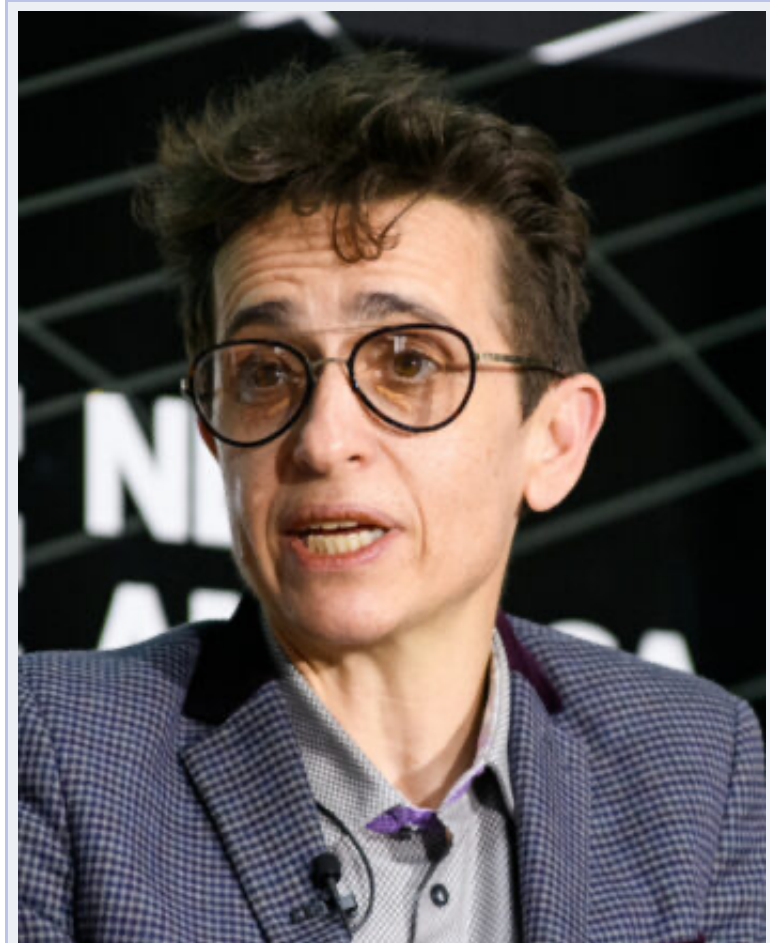
(**Washington Post**, 11/27/23; **AP**, 12/8/23; **RFE/RL**, 12/8/23; Newmark School of Journalism, 12/11/23).

Gessen, a staff writer at the **New Yorker**, gave an interview in which they spoke about well-documented Russian war crimes in the Ukrainian city of Bucha (OHCHR, 12/7/22). The Russian government, forever clamping down on negative press of its military invasion of Ukraine, symbolically declared them an outlaw. (Gessen lives in the United States.)

Gessen has been an annoyance for the Russian government for some time; their book, *The Man Without a Face*, portrays Russian President Vladimir Putin not as a cunning political genius, but as a simpleton whose ego ruined the country (**Washington Post**, 4/7/12; **Foreign Affairs**, 5/1/12). Gessen, who is nonbinary, left Russia a decade ago after covering the country's hostility toward LGBTQ people led them to fear for their own safety (**Business Insider**, 8/23/13).

In the post-2016 shock of Donald Trump's presidential election, a great deal of US media fell into a trance of believing that Trump's success could only be explained by **Russian electoral sabotage**. Gessen, refreshingly, took a different approach. Rather than blame one regime for the electoral outcome, they rightfully put Trump in the context of a global movement of authoritarian backlash toward liberalism. Their pieces linking Trump's success to the rise of authoritarianism in Russia and Hungary remain essential reading (**New York Review of Books**, 11/10/16; **New Yorker**, 3/2/21).

Critical reporting on Putin and Trump is highly valued, and not controversial, in US media. Putin is an authoritarian, yes, but one not backed by the United States, and is viewed as an enemy. Trump, for most liberal publications, is an abhorrent aberration in an otherwise

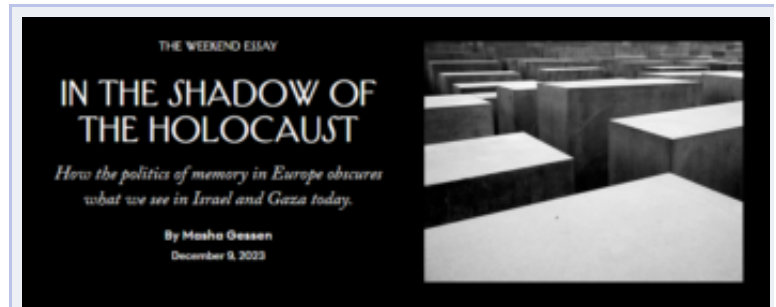


Masha Gessen (Photo: Clarissa Villondo)

flawed but democratic political system.

'The ghetto is being liquidated'

But when Gessen turned their lens to Israel, they fell victim to pro-Israel censorship. Their recent essay (**New Yorker**, 12/9/23) on Holocaust remembrance culture in Germany was a self-fulfilling prophecy: As a result of Gessen's observation that the language that most accurately describes what is happening in Gaza—"the ghetto is being liquidated"—comes from the Jewish experience during World War II, the Green Party-affiliated Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBS), which was planning to award Gessen its Hannah Arendt Prize, canceled the event.



*Masha Gessen (**New Yorker**, 12/9/23): "From the earliest days of Israel's founding, the comparison of displaced Palestinians to displaced Jews has presented itself, only to be swatted away."*

The **Guardian** (12/14/23) explained:

The HBS said it objected to and rejected a comparison made by Gessen in a 9 December [essay](#) in the **New Yorker** between Gaza and the Jewish ghettos in Europe.

In the essay, Gessen, who uses they, criticized Germany's unequivocal support of Israel, drawing attention to the Bundestag's 2019 resolution condemning the Israel boycott movement BDS as antisemitic and quoting a Jewish critic of Germany's politics of Holocaust remembrance as saying memory culture had "gone haywire."

In the paragraph the HBS draws attention to, Gessen wrote that "ghetto" would be "the more appropriate term" to describe Gaza, but the word "would have drawn fire for comparing the predicament of besieged Gazans to that of ghettoized Jews. It also would have given us the language to describe what is happening in Gaza now. The ghetto is being liquidated."

The foundation said Gessen was implying that Israel aimed to

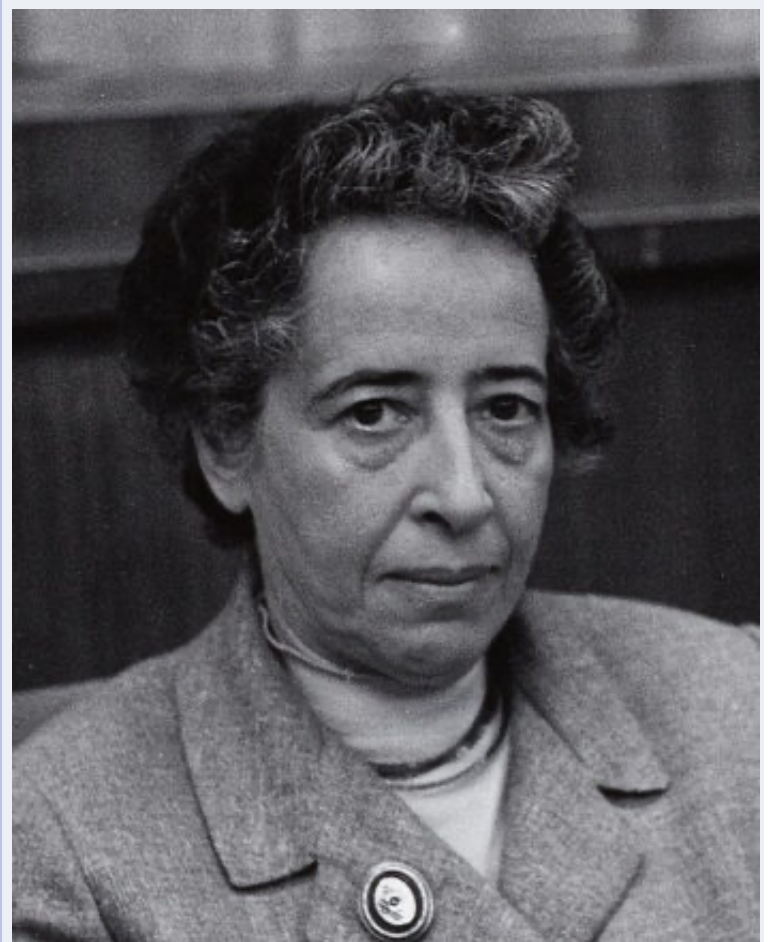
"liquidate Gaza like a Nazi ghetto," adding that "this statement is unacceptable to us and we reject it."

Chilling censorship regime

Germany's political culture of strong support for Israel, deeply tied to its guilt over the Nazi genocide of Jews, has led to a deeply chilling and severely anti-Palestinian censorship regime. As I have previously reported for FAIR ([11/5/21](#)), this culture has even taken a grip in US media.

There is a special irony in a prize in the name of German Jewish philosopher and journalist Hannah Arendt, whose work on the rise of German fascism is essential, being withheld from another Jewish journalist for writing about the rise of authoritarianism.

Arendt herself, as Gessen's essay noted, wasn't afraid to link Zionist extremism with the "N word," joining other Jewish intellectuals in 1948 (including Albert Einstein) who protested the visit of Israeli politician Menachem Begin to the United States, denouncing Begin's Herut (Freedom) party as "a political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties" (**Haaretz**, [12/4/14](#)). It seems likely that Hannah Arendt would also be deemed unworthy to receive the Hannah Arendt Prize.



*Hannah Arendt (**New Yorker**, [12/9/23](#)) called Israel's Herut party—a forerunner of Likud—"a political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy, and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties." Such opinions would likely disqualify her for the Hannah Arendt Prize.*

The **Daily Beast** ([12/13/23](#)), **New York Post** ([12/14/23](#)), **Washington Post** ([12/14/23](#)) and **Literary Hub** ([12/13/23](#)) covered the issue. But the absurdity of the situation should be

shouted from the rooftops of every respectable newspaper.

Job-costing solidarity

Gessen, of course, isn't the only media victim of anti-Palestinian censorship since the outbreak of violence began in October. **Reuters** (10/21/23) reported that

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Viet Thanh Nguyen said...a Jewish organization in New York City canceled a reading he was due to give on Friday without explanation, a day after he said he signed an open letter condemning Israel's "indiscriminate violence" against Palestinians in Gaza.

Two writers were forced out of the **New York Times Magazine** because of their protests against Israel's military action in Gaza, as the magazine's editor "Jake Silverstein said the letter violated the outlet's policy on public protest" (**Democracy Now!**, 11/14/23).

After **Artforum** editor David Velasco was fired for posting an open letter expressing solidarity with Palestinians, he told the **New York Times** (10/26/23), "I have no regrets." He added that he was "disappointed that a magazine that has always stood for freedom of speech and the voices of artists has bent to outside pressure."

Jackson Frank, a sports writer for **PhillyVoice.com**, was fired for tweeting "solidarity with Palestine always" (**Guardian**, 10/10/23). Michael Eisen lost his job as editor-in-chief of the academic journal **eLife** after commenting favorably on an **Onion** (10/13/23) article with the headline "Dying Gazans Criticized for Not Using Last Words to Condemn Hamas" (**Science**, 10/23/23).

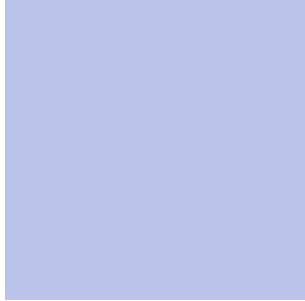
The absurdity of Gessen, a queer Jew, being punished in the name of Hannah Arendt, also a Jew, by a branch of the German political machine for being too open about the nature of global authoritarianism should be a wake up call for how degraded our discourse on Israel/Palestine has become. But it likely won't change minds in most media. At least not yet.

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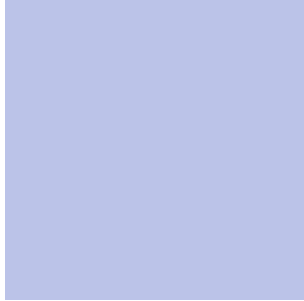
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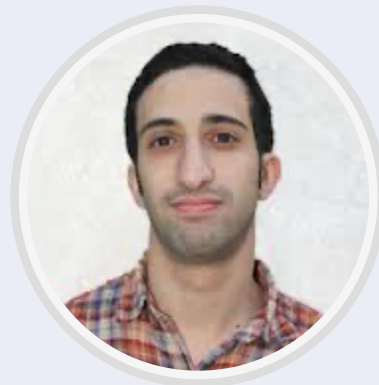


Kevin Kumashiro on Student Debt Cancellation

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Ari Paul

Ari Paul has reported for the **Nation**, the **Guardian**, the **Forward**, the **Brooklyn Rail**, **Vice News**, **In These Times**, **Jacobin** and many other outlets.



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