

PROLOGUE

We were sitting at a table at Café Atlantic on Bergmannstraße in one of Berlin's trendiest neighborhoods, Kreuzberg, known not so long ago for its large Turkish community but in recent years also as one of the areas in town that have attracted concentrations of Palestinians and Israelis. It was 9:00 PM, and we were both famished. We had just completed another day of interviews, running from one place to the next and barely finding the time to talk to each other and digest the reflections of the Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians we were interviewing.

We were also full of anticipation. We were going to meet Yael Ronen, the Jewish Israeli theater director who had moved to Berlin some five years earlier from Israel. We were familiar with her plays featuring German, Israeli, and Palestinian actors on the stage of the Maxim Gorki Theater, speaking alternately in German, English, Hebrew, and Arabic. The actors were at once following their inner voices and bringing their real lives into dialogue with the stories Ronen framed. We had been stunned to learn that the issues we had been exploring for nearly two years were dealt with in such a vibrant, creative, colorful, and daring fashion onstage, in all visibility, in the middle of Berlin.

Once we came up with the idea to investigate Berlin's large Israeli and Palestinian communities and their relationship to German society and politics, we began to follow Israeli, Arab, English, and German media coverage closely in relation to the issues we planned to explore. We scanned and read all of the scholarship we could lay our hands on. This was meant to prepare us for our field study, including interviews and meetings with Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians living in Berlin.

We had long admired Ronen's work, particularly her play *The Situation* (figure P.1). We also knew about her ex-husband, Yousef Sweid, a Palestinian dancer and actor with whom she was still involved as a friend, colleague, and co-parent to their ten-year-old son. Ronen and Sweid work closely at the Maxim Gorki Theater.

A week earlier, when we had met with the renowned German journalist Carolin Emcke to chat about common interests and experiences, particularly as they relate to Emcke's work covering stories across the Middle East, she said that we had to get to know Ronen and immediately put us in contact. This en-

counter turned out to be pivotal for our understanding of why the topic that had caught our attention was so sensitive. The German and Israeli and, to some extent, international press has been swamped with stories about the post-2011 migration of young Israelis to Berlin. Numerous scholarly articles and several books have been written about the phenomenon, and several more are on the way. Yet Berlin's Palestinian community, which is twice as large, is barely mentioned; nor has this population attracted much attention.

When Ronen arrived on her bicycle, we were struck by her beauty and style, a combination of Israeli straightforwardness and Berlin cosmopolitanism. In the German theater world she is known as “eine Art Generalsekretärin für Weltkonflikte” (a sort of a general-secretary for world conflicts), tackling the most complicated sociopolitical issues and turning them into sensible humor.¹ She was telling us about the play that started her international career and reputation: *Third Generation*, which takes on the issues of inherited guilt and present conflicts and the complex relationships (or Gordian Knot) among Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians that define these three national groups.²

When the play was first to be performed at Tel Aviv's Habima National Theater, the Israeli government tried to shut it down. Ronen said that she had been threatened with public accusations of anti-Semitism if she proceeded with performances of *Third Generation* there and across Europe. When we asked her why the authorities considered the play such a threat, she told us that the idea of a “triangle” that connects Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians challenges those who do not want Palestinians to be rendered legible as victims of the historical circumstances that have led Germany to support Israel since the Holocaust. Ronen persisted with the play, and it catapulted her career. She gave us permission to share these parts of her story in our work. This affirmed to us the importance of properly theorizing and analyzing the notion of the triangle in this context through an anthropological lens.

Our research focuses on issues that resonate with broader controversies in Europe, the Middle East, the United States, and around the world. Our study centers questions of memory, trauma, narrations of the Holocaust, experiences of the Nakba, trajectories in pursuit of reconciliation, pathways of migration, policies toward refugees, integration of religious and ethnic minorities, Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, European politics, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Countless scholars, civil society practitioners, and social movement leaders continue to grapple with considerations of how Israel/Palestine maps onto global contexts; how



Figure P.1 Yael Ronen's play *The Situation*, performed at Berlin's Maxim Gorki Theater (stage set by Tal Shacham; costume design, Amit Epstein; music, Yaniv Fridel and Ofer Shabi; and dramaturge, Irina Szodruć). It features, among others, Israeli, Palestinian, and German actors. From left to right: Orit Nahmias, Maryam Abu Khaled, Yousef Sweid, Ayhan Majid Agha, Karim Daoud, and Dimitrij Schaad. Photograph by Ute Langkafel.

European countries handle their Muslim communities; how we define the relationship between Zionism and anti-Semitism; and how liberal democracies must contend with freedom of speech in the context of growing populist and supremacist groups within their borders. We investigate each of these themes and offer insights that intersect with and diverge from so many other global conversations in productive ways.

Theoretically, we ground this work in the conceptual framework delineated by Michael Rothberg in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Rothberg writes against what he terms “competitive memory,” in which we fear that our recognition of another’s trauma will dilute attention to our own. Instead, he calls for multidirectional memory, in which recognition of one another’s traumas can inform and enrich the robustness of public discourse on our own memory and struggle. Rothberg reminds us that “the other’s history and memory can serve as a source of renewal and reconfiguration for the self—granted one is willing to give up exclusive claims to ultimate victimization and ownership over suffering.”³ While the focus of *Multidirectional Memory* is to bring together Holocaust studies and

studies of colonialism, slavery, and racism, Rothberg identifies the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as “the other dominant political site of multidirectional memory.”⁴ Our book, in examining Israel/Palestine in relation to Germany, can be read as a response to Rothberg’s compelling and persuasive call for “an ethical vision based on commitment to uncovering historical relatedness and working through the partial overlaps and conflicting claims that constitute the memory and terrain of politics.”⁵