Subcontractors of Guilt. Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany, by Esra Özyürek (Review article)

Janson, Torsten

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Esra Özyürek. *Subcontractors of Guilt. Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023. 249 s.

Teaching classes on racism and xenophobia some twenty-five years ago, I used to present German memory politics as a particularly courageous case of confronting a traumatic past. Not only did it seem to depart from the rising tide of European ethnonationalist assimilationism. I considered it a healthy counterpoint to the oftentimes smug idealisation of secular multiculturalism in Britain, the Netherlands, and Sweden, blind to (or disinterested in?) the racism simmering beneath the surface of official discourse. In light of today's curtailment of debate in Germany on Israel, Holocaust memory, genocidal violence in Gaza, and pro-Palestinian activism, I had evidently missed something important.

Reading Esra Özyürek's *Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory & Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany* has sharpened my sense of what I had overlooked. In a sense, the book was published just in time, a mere six months before 7 October 2023. It provides both an eerie premonition of the breakdown of debate that has ensued and a guide to understanding the drivers and trajectories defining current memory orders and their implications for public debate.

The book presents a unique take on Holocaust memory by regarding it from the perspective of young Germans with a 'Muslim-migrant background'. Grounded in ethnography, it follows young male high-school students and adult educators of Turkish or Arabic descent involved in educational programmes devoted to fostering democratic attitudes and counteracting antisemitism.

After an ambitious introduction, the book consists of five fairly independent chapters and a short conclusion. In the introduction, the author elucidates the background of German post-war memory politics and its roots in American foreign policy and pedagogic-psychological theory: a formerly authoritarian and genocidal state or people can only develop "democratic values" if it accepts and atones for its collective guilt as perpetrators. This also provides the foundation for the economic metaphors guiding Özyürek's analysis of German antisemitism prevention as being based on social-contract and exchange theory.

In the introduction, Özyürek develops the central idea of the book: German postwar nationhood is predicated on the notion that (white) Germans have fully accepted, internalized, and atoned for the guilt of the Holocaust through education and public culture. They have thereby overcome antisemitism. Muslim migrants, however, remain outside this learning curve, according to an antisemitism discourse that settled in response to formative and cataclysmic events such as German unification, 9/11, and the Second Intifada, reaching its apex during the 2015 "refugee crisis". Contrary to Germany, the discourse stipulates, Middle Eastern states and peoples never underwent any self-scrutiny of their pervasive antisemitic attitudes, once imported from Europe.

Hence, "Middle Eastern" German migrants and their offspring are considered a principal source of contemporary antisemitism, particularly in the shape of pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli attitudes – despite the fact, Özyürek imparts, that antisemitic attacks are overwhelmingly perpetrated by right-wing white racists. The official view of German antisemitism has become predicated on an "export-import" theory.

In response to this shift in antisemitism discourse, Muslim youth have become primary targets for German educational programmes against antisemitism. Focusing on Muslim antisemitism offers relief for the German public, argues Özyürek, from the tension between a desire to preserve a German responsibility for commemorating the Holocaust and a desire to feel proud to be German. Furthermore, it provides a means of including "immigrants of three generations into the fold of German identity and yet

keeping them apart […] thus subcontracting part of the guilt onto them […]" while basking in "their continuous investment in fighting against antisemitism in Germany and around the world". (21)

In the ensuing chapters, Özyürek gives an ethnographic account of young Muslim males involved in such educational efforts. Chapter 1 examines programmes in which participants are encouraged to rebel against patriarchal values and embrace Holocaust commemoration as a path to democratic integration. Chapter 2 describes in detail how the gradual "export–import" theory settled, allowing the projection of unresolved national prejudices onto migrant others, who concomitantly remain posited as inferior. Chapter 3, in turn, explores how Muslim participants' emotional responses to Holocaust history are subjected to discipline, revealing the narrow confines of 'correct' empathy. Chapter 4 develops the book's core metaphor: Muslims are enlisted as "subcontractors of guilt", performing repentance for past atrocities they did not commit while being denied recognition of their own experiences of exclusion. Chapter 5, finally, follows the experiences of the Muslim youth before, during, and after their visits to Auschwitz, analysed as a form of moral pilgrimage.

The relatively free-standing character makes each chapter accessible and pleasant to read but also invites a measure of repetition. More problematically, the organisation works against a thorough theoretical engagement with the findings as they evolve across the chapters. While finely chiselled in the introduction, the (sub)contract theory in particular falls short of systematic application or evaluation and hence its analytical value remains unclear and overly schematic.

More convincing is the author's discussion of empathy, inspired by Husserlian ideas: an intersubjective empathetic position is always framed by an individual-biographical horizon. In other words, one can only 'stand in the shoes' of the other as *oneself*. Hence empathy by definition and necessity is contingent and contextual. Yet this is precisely the type of relational empathy that exceptionalist Holocaust discourse stigmatizes as antisemitic.

In elucidating such discursive collisions, the study demonstrates with painful clarity the narrow confines governing the evaluation of Muslim participants' painstaking attempts at internalising Holocaust memory. Any attempt to relate (personal, familial, national) experiences of racism, violence, or discrimination – no matter how reflected, dramatized, or deeply felt – is discarded as a misinformed and foundationally antisemitic relativization of the Holocaust, not to mention any comparison of the Nazi death machine to other genocidal atrocities.

Here Özyürek exposes the oft-observed particularist/universalist paradox of Holocaust memory in sharp analytical light, complementing towering studies such as Young's *The Texture of Memory*, Hirsch's *The Generation of Postmemory*, and Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*. The study is most valuable in its close engagement with the participants, as it captures the labour and pain involved in remembering the darkest moments of human history.

Torsten Janson
Lektor i islamologi, Lunds universitet
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Anna Norrby & Clara Nystrand. *Predika ord som glöder – homiletiska verktyg*. Stockholm: Verbum, 2025. 273 s.

I samband med ett symposium på CTR under våren kunde forskarna som presenterat enas om en sak: Som forskare måste vi fundera över vad det är vi lägger vår tid på. Jag instämmer. Att forska är ett ansvar och ett privilegium. Eftersom jag själv vid denna tid befann mig i en form av övergångsperiod mellan mina akademiska och pastorala studier, på väg in i prästämbetet, slog tanken mig direkt: likadant är det med predikan. Precis som forskaren måste predikanten ständigt funderar över vad det är hen lägger