

In cooperation with the UNC-Chapel Hill, Department of History

Friday, 20 November 2020

2:00–4:00 pm | Online

New NCGS series "CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS":

Postcolonialism, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust: The Achille Mbembe Case in Germany



Roundtable Participants

A. DIRK MOSES | UNC-Chapel-Hill, Department of History

JOSEPH BEN PRESTEL | Free University of Berlin, Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut

PRISCILLA LAYNE | UNC-Chapel Hill, Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

This spring has witnessed heated debate in Germany about the campaign to disinvite Achille Mbembe, the South African-based Cameroonian theorist, as the keynote speaker at a music festival. In late March, some politicians and critics accused Mbembe of relativizing the Holocaust, trading in anti-Israel antisemitism for linking Israel to colonialism and Apartheid, and for supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS). In response, German and foreign academics signed public letters supporting Mbembe, who addressed his critics as well. Many of the contentious issues are familiar, but this time the debate extends beyond the self-referential European Cold War coordinates of the old *Historikerstreit*. For not only does Mbembe introduce a voice from Africa, Germany is also wrestling with its colonial past. Whereas Holocaust memory has been intended to promote political liberalization, now it seems that Holocaust memory, at least as currently mobilized, is wielded against other historical victims of the German state. We ask: what does “relativizing the Holocaust” mean today? How does this debate relate to the global moment of anti-racism and coming to terms with colonial pasts? Why does a postcolonial understanding of Zionism lead to accusations of antisemitism in Germany? In this session, we pose these and other questions raised by the Mbembe debate.

For more information on the debate, see:

- [“German politician urges festival to disinvite BDS academic,”](#) The Jerusalem Post, 13 April 2020.
- [“Why Achille Mbembe was accused of anti-Semitism,”](#) Deutsche Welle, 30 April 2020.
- [“Long Read | The Metamorphosis of Achille Mbembe,”](#) New Frame, 10 June 2020.

Moderator: KAREN HAGEMANN | UNC-Chapel Hill, Department of History

For more information on the NCGS program and the Zoom access go to the NCGS website: <https://ncgsws.web.unc.edu/>

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