

Socially Situated Empathy: Muslim Minority Emotions for the Holocaust in Germany

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In the last decade there is a widely shared discomfort about the way Muslim minority Germans engage with the Holocaust. They are accused of not learning the rights lessons from it, not showing empathy towards its Jewish victims, and as a result re-importing anti-Semitism to a country otherwise dealt with it. By focusing on instances in which the emotional reactions of Muslim minority Germans towards the Holocaust – specifically fear and envy – are judged as not empathetic enough and morally wrong, this article explores how idealised empathy assumes a subject position of relative privilege. Returning to 20th century discussions

of empathy in the German language, especially developed by Edmund Husserl, allows us to arrive at a more complex understanding of empathy, which is inclusive of a whole array of emotional expressions. This article expands Husserl's embodied approach to a socially situated one and suggests one can access to the minds of victims of racism, sexism, and other kinds of discrimination because each individual has a standing in a society that ranks people in terms of race, class, and gender based categories. From this perspective expressions that are judged as devoid empathy can be seen as evidence of empathy, and as a matter of fact it's excess.