

# MASHA GESSEN ON THE HOLOCAUST, ISRAEL, AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

*The New Yorker staff writer discusses the enforcement of “memory culture” in Germany, and the ongoing battle over the definition of antisemitism.*

**With Tyler Foggatt**

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... **a**st week, the U.S. Congress passed a nonbinding resolution that deemed any expression of anti-Zionism to be a form of antisemitism. This move closely follows the model set by the German government, which has created strict measures to combat antisemitism and a bureaucracy to enforce those measures. Sometimes, Jewish people are found to be in violation. In both Germany and the United States, many politicians championing similar protections are members of the right wing, some of whom are also known white supremacists. Masha Gessen, a *New Yorker* staff writer, recently wrote [an essay about the politics of memory](#) in Europe and the widespread insistence that the Holocaust is a singular event unlike any other. Gessen joins Tyler Foggatt to discuss how the stories we tell about history can prevent us from understanding the conditions that give rise to atrocities. “The thing is, if something is unimaginable, then anything that happens in the present, which is by definition imaginable, is not like it,” Gessen says. “And I think that’s the crazy mental trick that we’ve played on ourselves.”

*Masha Gessen was due to receive the Hannah Arendt Prize on December 15th, but, after the publication of this essay, the Heinrich Böll Foundation chose not to participate in the granting of the award.*