



RESEARCH IS NOT ALLOWED: THE CASE OF PATRIK BAAB

Posted on April 1, 2023 by Julian Hett



In the summer of 2022, I was a student in the seminar given by journalist and guest lecturer Patrik Baab at my university, Christian-Albrechts-Universität (CAU) in Kiel, Germany. We studied examples of investigative journalism in the seminar, through which Mr. Baab guided us in understanding the rules of the craft of journalism. One example that I studied was the scandal of star-reporter Claas Relotius from the German magazine *Der Spiegel* who faked up to 40 reports. The investigative work by Relotius' colleague, Juan Moreno, revealed the scandal, while also serving as an example of proper research and fact-checking. Also, this showed to us students, what it means to put oneself into dangerous waters. Because researching a colleague was not well regarded by *Der Spiegel*, Moreno got threatened by his chiefs, that if he continued the research, he could be fired.

A similar thing happened to Patrik Baab. In autumn of 2022, he made another of his many trips to East-Ukraine to research the war on the ground, for his upcoming book. According to Mr. Baab, German media didn't report meticulously and elaborately enough, so he wanted to get his own understanding of the war. He happened to arrive at the time of the election, by the Russian government, in the contested territories Luhansk and Mariupol, and wanted to report on the opinions of citizens who went to the election. Then, something unexpected happened to him. Surrounded by the local conflict, he had got a call from Germany. In it, he was told that his presence during the elections had somehow legitimized the Russian election. By way of an article in the German online magazine T-Online, this explanation became "settled truth" for the German press, that Mr. Baab was researching in East Ukraine and that he was supposedly an official observer of the election in Luhansk and Mariupol. The German university CAU revoked his teaching assignment, a mere twenty-four hours after the publication of the article in T-Online. [Read more [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)]

Double Standards and Reputation

In German there is a saying: "*Wasser predigen und Wein saufen*," which means "preaching [the merits of] water while guzzling wine." This perfectly describes the double standards of CAU. Mr. Baab's teaching content in summer 2022 gave us students a clearer understanding on how to research and how to check facts properly. But more importantly, he taught us what the main tasks of journalism are and how important proper research is for our democracy, since journalism is the Fourth Estate. This is vital, especially for research into areas that we only occasionally accept as plausible, just as this war when given a deeper look reveals errors, and at times entanglements.

But what CAU has shown us with the revocation of Mr. Baab's teaching assignment is that they neither research nor check facts and sources—although their students are taught this at their university. The article from T-Online was corrected immediately after Mr. Baab complained about their wrong claims. CAU could also have checked these claims easily, said Mr. Baab. But rather, they reacted emotionally, because the university won't endanger its reputation. This is because every university is seeking a good reputation and won't lose it by any means. A good reputation gives research funds, which the universities nowadays are dependent on. The story of CAU is full of such reputation-defending actions. [\[Read more here\]](#)

I was shocked to hear that Mr. Baab's teaching assignment got revoked for the winter semester of 2022. But neither was this surprising to me. Over the past three years, critic of Covid, climate change and other "sensitive" topics in Germany are getting canceled. Now and again, one saw acknowledged scientists and academics criticize the political course—but shortly afterwards, they experienced shit-storm campaigns not only in social media, but above all in the German press, with the debate-disqualifying term "conspiracy theorist." At the end of 2020, for example, Professor Sucharit Bhakdi, together with his wife and lecturer at CAU Karina Reis, had published their book, *Corona Fehlalarm!?* In it, they criticized the German Covid measures and explained why they think so on a scientific basis. Professor Bhakti was also a guest lecturer at CAU. After publishing their book, CAU reacted with a very concise statement which said that the book contains wrong claims, therefore the university distances itself from these claims—which also meant the revocation of Bhakdi's teaching assignment.

Two and a half years later, the claims that were postulated in the book were right. The question is: Did those responsible at the CAU act against their better judgment in order to preserve their reputation? Because eventually, Bhakdi's claims are based on biology and medicine. As in Mr. Baab's case, it's again what students learn in the university, while the University itself throws all this knowledge over board.

Student Opinions

Regarding the revocation of Mr. Baab's teaching assignment, it is hard to get a read of the opinions of the students at CAU. Very few students have actually heard about it. This makes sense, because it gives the impression that CAU would love to delete everything that is related to Mr. Baab. On my demand, students that were participants in Mr. Baab's seminar in the summer of 2022 like myself, showed mixed opinions. Most of the students didn't respond. One wrote to me, that he fully understands the action of CAU and that he completely shares the opinion with CAU that Mr. Baab

supports Vladimir Putin.

Then there was another response which tried to understand both CAU and Mr. Baab. On the one hand, the student said that understands why CAU reacted in the way that it did, because it was being emotional. For him, being associated with the aggressor (Russia) is not what CAU would want or need. But in the end, there's also no way to end war, other than to negotiate with the aggressor. On the other hand, Mr. Baab's research in the East-Ukraine can't be seen as wrong behavior, because he's a journalist and so he's supposed to do this kind of research. On a human basis, he also assessed Mr. Baab as a person, who doesn't want to support Russia and who knows what he's doing.

Another response was fully on Mr. Baab's side and argued that Mr. Baab did nothing wrong. He just did, what he is supposed to do as a journalist. That is what he taught us in the seminar. According to Mr. Baab's research, it is also not evident that he supports the Russian side. The whole case should be seen as doubtful, because the statement of CAU is too short to justify their decision. If CAU had good reasons for their action, they could have stated them, in order to get any doubts out of the way. What has ended up happening is that the university doesn't tolerate proper journalism.

Another picture was drawn in the student paper, *Der Albrecht*. Two authors who were also participants in Mr. Baab's seminar in the summer of 2022, wrote an article about Mr. Baab's trip in the East Ukraine and his accompaniment by the Russian-German Blogger, Sergey Filbert. What the two student authors express in their article is, "*Kontaktschuld*," or "contact-guilt," that is, "guilt by association." So, the student article questioned why Mr. Baab was accompanied by the controversial blogger Filbert. But the fact that CAU terminated Mr. Baab's contract because of this Kontaktschuld wasn't even questioned. More than that, the article expresses that the authors support the canceling of investigative journalism.

A few students at the Campus of CAU also had mixed opinions. I informed them about what had happened to Mr. Baab and I described the accusations leveled against him. To make things as neutral as possible, I explained what CAU might have thought, when they revoked Mr. Baab's teaching assignment. Some people said that they found such a thing happening very odd, and they wouldn't want to say anything about it. The fact that Mr. Baab's research in East Ukraine was sufficient to revoke his contract left most people I asked in confusion. But another student told me that she is ashamed about it, what CAU had done. She said that it was better not to continue studying at this university.

The Initiative for Patrik Baab

My fellow students and I founded in January 2022 a student group called "Dialog Grundrechte und Gesundheitsschutz" ("Dialogue for Basic Rights and Occupational Protection"). We seek to encourage a debate culture. Instead of debating about gender reforms, we want to tackle bigger topics, such as Covid, War and Democracy. Also, we connected with the student movement called, Studenten stehen auf (Students Stand Up). So, we are in good contact with the universities throughout Germany. Our student group and the student movement has stood up for Mr. Baab.

Next, we wrote a statement, where we submitted our opinion about the revocation of Mr. Baab's contract and we also made demands. Therefore, we got in contact with Mr. Baab and allowed him to present his point of view. Then, we wanted to publish our statement via round-mail to reach every student and employee at CAU. As a student group, we are allowed to send two mails via round mail in one year. But the committee at our university declined our demand. They explained that our content didn't correspond with the guidelines and that such messages should not be used to kick off debates.

University policy is an important pier of democratic culture in universities. Debates are the momentum to get democratic involvement. Why should a student group use this e-Mail distributor, when it is not allowed to kick off debates? It seems rather that the university loves to avoid a debate like this one. Obviously, CAU wished to delete the chapter about Mr. Baab.

Here's our statement:

Dear Students and Staff at CAU,

It is with regret that we have learned of the dismissal of journalist and lecturer Patrik Baab. Mr Baab was a guest lecturer at CAU and offered the seminar *"Recherchieren—ein journalistischer Handwerkskasten zur Kritik der herrschenden Meinung"* [Research—a journalistic toolbox for critiquing prevailing opinion], which he first offered in the summer semester of 2022 and which was to continue in the following winter semester.

Because of his visit to Luhansk and Mariupol, Mr. Baab was accused of legitimizing the elections, which should indeed be viewed critically. The CAU's accusations are based on a T-Online article, which has since been revised for containing allegedly false facts. The original article alleged that Mr Baab was an official election observer. However, the CAU still stands by its original position. Here is the CAU's statement:

"Patrick Baabs Auftreten als 'Beobachter' der völkerrechtswidrigen Scheinreferenden in den russisch besetzten Gebieten der Ukraine verleiht dem russischen Vorgehen den Anschein von Legitimität. Die CAU distanziert sich ausdrücklich von Herrn Baabs Reise und ihren Implikationen und wird keine Lehrveranstaltungen anbieten, die von Herrn Baab unterrichtet werden. Der Lehrauftrag wird gekündigt."

[Patrick Baab's appearance as an "observer" of the sham referendums in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, which violate international law, gives the Russian actions the appearance of legitimacy. CAU expressly distances itself from Mr. Baab's trip and its implications and will not offer any courses taught by Mr. Baab. The teaching assignment is terminated.]

The use of the term "observer" still leaves room for interpretation that Mr. Baab was an official observer. According to publicly available information, Mr. Baab first visited Western Ukraine and then went to Eastern Ukraine as an independent researcher. His aim was to hear the opinions of local residents and report on the situation first hand. The journalist's activities in Luhansk and Mariupol should be seen as unbiased reporting and not as one-sided support for Russia.

Furthermore, it is a principle of journalism to be present at the action, rather than researching from a distance.

Mr. Baab's teaching post at CAU was then hastily terminated in an urgent procedure, without giving him the opportunity to defend himself. With this action, CAU wanted to protect its reputation.

Regrettably, this action disregarded the democratic right to defend oneself from statements of fact. The university is supposed to be a place of freedom of science, freedom of speech and freedom of education and should therefore support investigative journalism. Terminating Mr. Baab's contract conflicts with these principles.

We, the university group *"Dialog Grundrechte und Gesundheitsschutz,"* condemn the hasty action of CAU and demand the immediate withdrawal of CAU's statement of September 27, 2022, and the resumption of Mr. Baab's teaching post.

An anonymous group that was motivated by our protest, hung up a banner, with the inscription "Solidarität mit Patrik Baab" (Solidarity with Patrik Baab), on a bridge at the most transited street at CAU. Thereupon, [a video was made](#) about the action, which went viral on social media.

The next step of our student group is to spread our statement in printed form to the students of CAU. Aside from that, on April 11th our student group will host a lecture from Mr. Baab, where he recount in front of a large audience what has happened to him so far. We are hopeful and optimistic, that Mr. Baab's "case" will get the attention that is necessarily needed for him and that our university regrets the decision they made.

Julian Hett is a student student in philosophy and sociology at the Kiel University CAU. He is one the founders and first chairman of the student group "Dialog Grundrechte und Gesundheitsschutz."

[Featured](#): *Le Silence [The Silence]*, by Lucien Levy-Dhurmer; painted in 1895.

