



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

The Epistemic Erasure of Palestine in Austrian Academia

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Abstract: "Where survival is a matter of not being assimilated, positionality is not just central to the issue – it is the issue. In a settler-colonial context, the question of who speaks goes far beyond liberal concerns with equity, dialogue or access to the academy."

Patrick Wolfe- Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology

The Palestinian scholar Abdulla Moaswes defines epistemicide – the destruction of knowledge systems and the knowledge that they generate – as an essential military strategy in perpetuating settler colonialism. In the most recent Israeli war on Gaza, Israel has practiced epistemicide through deliberately erasing universities, educational institutions, UN-funded schools, libraries, and museums. Since January 2024, all universities in Gaza have been partly or completely destroyed, including Al-Azhar University and the Islamic University. While both institutions had or have ongoing academic partnerships with Austrian universities, Austrian academia is either silent about or in support of the increasing attempts to censor events, lecture courses, and colleagues speaking out against what is happening in Gaza and in Palestine.

Denying colonized people the permission to narrate (Said 1984) is not new, on the contrary, it has a long history in the context of European settler-colonial occupation of Palestine and beyond. Yet, today's attacks against Palestinian anthropologists and social scientists of the region at Austrian higher education institutions must be contextualized within the epistemic erasure of the Palestinian question in Europe at large.

This workshop provides needed space to discuss these alarming developments beyond what Patrick Wolfe defined as liberal concerns with equity, dialogue, or access to the academy. Considering the current need for decolonization in academia, we invite participants to explore the (im)possibilities of creating and teaching anthropology that acknowledges and confronts colonial presence/present.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 5 | Room 3

Amira Mittermaier: The Story of a Derailed Hire

Nadia Naser-Najjab/Sabiha Allouche: Decolonising Western Universities

Hanna Al Taher: Space Invaders and the Expulsion of the Revolutionary Subject: Freedom, Liberation, and Notions Liberal Freedom

Kevin Potter: Palestinian Absence and the Specter of Capital

Anat Kraslavsky: Epistemic Erasure of Palestine in German-Speaking Academia: A decolonial Queer-Feminist Perspective on spatial and scientific philosemitism

SESSION PAPERS

The Story of a Derailed Hire

Amira Mittermaier

I will report on a derailed hiring process. I was about to take up a position at the University of Vienna, when a tweet in November 2023 about my support for BDS (Boycott, Divest & Sanctions), led to me being made to withdraw from the hiring process. I will describe what happened, in particular highlighting the opacity and behind-closed-doors nature of the final discussions that upended a highly bureaucratized hiring process that had extended over multiple months. The opacity of the silencing mechanisms currently at play in European and North American universities stands in sharp contrast with the assumed transparency of liberal administrations.

Space Invaders and the Expulsion of the Revolutionary Subject: Freedom, Liberation, and Notions Liberal Freedom

Hanna Al Taher

From the vantage point of anticolonial theory and Magical Marxism this paper travels along and against several threads of thought: First, given their historical entanglements in colonial and imperial rule, including developing and delivering the tools to rule through science colonized populations, can universities, epistemically and practically, be adequate sites for anticolonial struggles and anticolonial theorizing? Second, thinking through traveling theory not just as a translation of concepts and lenses from one context to the other, but as a physical movement, how can we think about ourselves as traveling (anticolonial) bodies, physically moving or being prevented from moving? How does this reality impact our analytical and practical possibilities? And finally, how does the imperial and colonial logic of higher education, exclude Palestinians from the academic landscape? And how is that related to the physical expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine? These questions require us to rethink the existence and position of a revolutionary subject and of the meaning of Freedom and Unfreedom. In this paper, I attempt this re-thinking travelling with the concepts of Space Invaders, queer marxism and Magical Marxism.

Palestinian Absence and the Specter of Capital

Kevin Potter

In his scathing critique of Postcolonial Theory, Vivek Chibber (2013) borrows Karl Marx's concept of "spectrality," indicating the indirect relationship between capital and the shaping of social relations. Rather than the direct subjugation of labor by capital and state power, a much later phase extracts "wealth with much less direct force by redefining social relations through the common currency of value" (Stimson 2021). Although Chibber confines his scorn toward the Subaltern Studies collective, I would like to argue that his perspective clarifies the notable absence of Palestine from postcolonial studies, especially at neoliberal(izing) universities in the Global North. Because of the institutional pressures that require courting grants and achieving prestige within academe, scholars are reluctant to engage with an ongoing and present test case for cultural and critical theory circles - that of Palestinian apartheid. Furthermore, although scholars are happy to cite and teach the works of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, the tendency to defang their political perspectives further indicates a timidity within university settings. In this paper, I would like to argue that the casualization of academic labor, combined with a retreat from radical politics, is symptomatic of what Neil Lazarus described as the "decisive defeat of liberationist ideologies" (2011: 9) as liberal capitalism came to triumph at the End of History. Engaging therefore with a Marxist meta-critique, I would like to argue that the spectrality of capital has led to a certain impotence within literary and cultural studies that has hobbled its radical commitments, leaving the Palestinian struggle to the margins. Combining aspects of personal anecdotes (within Austrian academia), with reference to other reporting throughout the globe, I would like to argue that the disregard for Palestine can be theoretically critiqued using concepts from within and beyond postcolonial studies.

Epistemic Erasure of Palestine in German-Speaking Academia: A decolonial Queer-Feminist Perspective on spatial and scientific philosemitism

Anat Kraslavsky

This paper investigates how academic spaces and knowledge production reinforce state power and silence Palestinian narratives, focusing on gender and sexuality. Key to this analysis are the concepts of spatial and scientific philosemitism, which facilitate the dispossession and marginalization of Palestinians under the guise of preserving Jewish life.

The analysis begins by drawing on the article "Lebensraum, Geopolitics, and Race—Palestine as a Feminist Issue in German-Speaking Academia" by Anna Younes and Hanna Al-Taher. This work explores the mechanisms of silencing in German and German-speaking academia that exclude Palestinians. I adopt the authors' theorization on ruling over space and race 'through science'. Consequently, my analysis highlights cases in Germany and Austria, demonstrating how (transnational) state philosemitism and settler coloniality facilitate the spatial transfer of state policies and ideologies that marginalize Palestinian narratives in German-speaking academia. This supports the ongoing dispossession of Palestinian land and people beyond national borders, disguised as anti-racism and protection of Jewish sovereignty through the 'war on

antisemitism'. I call this spatial philosemitism.

The study further examines the role of scientific philosemitism in academia, particularly through the discourse of 'new anti-Semitism.' This discourse equates Palestinian advocacy with anti-Semitism and bolsters transnational state philosemitic policies, whether in Germany, Austria, or at the EU level, thereby justifying the occupation, apartheid, and genocide of Palestinians. This is done under the pretense of protecting Jewish life, liberal democracy, and 'European' values such as tolerance and gender and sexual equality, while in reality upholding settler sovereignty, border policing, and other geopolitical and bio/necropolitical state interests. Using the work of Karin Stögner as an example, the paper illustrates how academic knowledge on racialized sexuality, through homocolonialism and femonationalism, is utilized to provide the 'science' that justifies state violence.

The presentation concludes with suggestions for counter-epistemology and decolonial queer-feminist possibilities for the future.