



SESSION ABSTRACT

Global Palestine- Research approaches beyond national frames

Rottenschlager, Klaudia (Universität Wien, Wien, AUT); Sayrafi, Imad (Birzeit University, Vienna, AUT)

Contact: rottenschlager.k@gmail.com

New directions in Palestine Studies highlight the importance of transnational research approaches that extend the national as an analytical category and investigate Palestine on a comparative, global scale. Recent commemorations such as 100 years of the Balfour Declaration, 70 years since the UN partition plan of historic Palestine and 50 years of the beginning of the Israeli occupation, made clear that Palestinian refugee communities and those living in exile are still claiming an active part in a national movement that has marginalized them. Since the Nakba, they play an essential role in reaffirming history through memory work beyond national boundaries. However, decades of colonialism, dispossessions, and statelessness have rendered visible the pitfalls of the Palestinian state-building-project within and outside the occupied Palestinian territories. Social anthropologist Ruba Salih suggests to take into consideration multiple perspectives on national frames – moving beyond the national boundaries as a singular unit of analysis – that provide diverse forms of Palestinian struggles for self-determination.

This session asks for anthropological and neighbouring fields contributions that investigate Palestine globally, tracing its history as well as political significance within the broader Arab region. We seek papers that shed light on oral history accounts as a tool of remembrance beyond national frames and the impact of the territorial as well as social fragmentation of Palestinian society due to the ongoing Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. The panel further invites papers that spot the light on comparative settler colonial studies and its possible application in this specific context as well as contributions on national identity formation.

What does this multidimensional perspective mean regarding our methodological and epistemological research approaches? How can we research Palestine intersectionally and avoid Eurocentric and one-dimensional accounts of Palestinian national identity formations? How can the national be traced back to everyday life and struggles against military occupation, statelessness, and expulsion? Which essential role can ethnographic fieldwork play in such circumstances and where are its limits? Last but not least, how can Said's powerful question – Who has the permission to narrate? – be discussed on a global level?

SESSION SCHEDULE

Friday, September 21, 2018 | Slot 6 | Room 2

Randa Wahbe: *Jerusalem as a Settler-Colonial Necropolis*

Imad Sayrafi: *Contextualizing Resistance; Indigenous Narratives and the Progression of an Ongoing Settler Colonialism; The Case of the Palestinian Village of Ni'lin*

Mette Edith Lundsryd: *Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters as Narrators of History: The Case of Palestinian Syrian Women*

Klaudia Rottenschlager: *"I don't envy the younger generation" - Intersectional approaches to Palestinian knowledge production in the context of colonial rule and displacement*

Greg Burris: *Palestine in Black and White: White Settler-Colonialism and the Specter of Transnational Black Power*

SESSION PAPERS

Jerusalem as a Settler-Colonial Necropolis

Wahbe, Randa (Harvard Uni, Cambridge, MA, USA)

Achielle Mbembe defines necropolitics as the “subjugation of life to the power of death” in its ability to “profoundly reconfigure the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror” (Mbembe 2003:39). I apply Mbembe’s concept to the case of Jerusalem, asking: what role do the Palestinian dead hold in the imaginaries of Israeli state boundary-making and settler-colonial expansion? My analysis centers on two phenomena: cemeteries and confiscated bodies.

First, I analyze cemeteries as sacred “spaces of death” (Taussig 1984:94) that hold deep national, religious, and existential meaning for Palestinians. Particularly, I delineate the slow and steady encroachment of the Israeli state on *Bab Al-Rahma* cemetery in the Old City, where the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority have demolished at least six graves to make way for a hiking trail for an Israeli national park. Here, I consider the cosmological warfare inflicted by the Israeli state to make sacred spaces secular in the advancement of the ultimate settler-colonial goal to erase the indigenous, and in this case, Judaize Jerusalem.

Second, I examine Israel’s confiscation of Palestinian bodies, a practice that has been in place since the inception of the state and which resurfaced in 2013 amid increased Palestinian resistance. In this paper, I build on Giorgio Agamben’s theory of *homo sacer* to argue that the settler-colonial power must continuously exclude and exploit both the living and the dead. Using the confiscation of Palestinians in Jerusalem, and their post-mortem treatment and detention, I use Agamben’s theory of “bare life” (mere existence as opposed to citizenship with agency) and extend it into the realm of death to argue that Israel must continue to degrade Palestinians into “bare death,” in which the body is rendered merely a corpse.

This case speaks to Mbembe’s theory and illustrates the ways that it applies to the question of Palestine. Palestinian scholarship often employs both Agamben and Mbembe’s theories to describe state violence against Palestinians. In this paper, I hope to put these theories in relationship to settler-colonialism, as Mbembe limits his theory to occupation and wartime, and Agamben focuses on the state as the exclusive form of sovereignty. Understanding the mechanisms of death and burial in Jerusalem allows for a critical examination of these theories and can shed light on the acts taken to maintain settler-colonial relations, the limits of sovereignty, and the subjugated population’s resistance and resilience in combatting extinction.

Contextualizing Resistance; Indigenous Narratives and the Progression of an Ongoing Settler Colonialism; The Case of the Palestinian Village of Ni’lin

Sayrafi, Imad (Birzeit University, Vienna, AUT)

The paper is part of my doctoral dissertation project entitled “Rural Transformation in Palestine; Change and Everyday Resistance in a Palestinian Village”. The research focuses on the village of Ni’lin in the occupied Palestinian Territories. The village is located at the 1949 armistice line (The Green Line) and is a frontier for Israeli settlement expansion within the West Bank. Since the end of 2003, Israel began constructing the separation wall inside the West Bank; the wall had devastating effects on all aspects of people’s lives. It restricted the economy, confiscated land, isolated farmers from their ancestral lands, and fragmented communities; while settlement construction continued on both sides of the wall. Residents in many villages responded by organizing grassroots movements to resist the wall and settlement expansion- movements that still continue to protest to this day. The research project explores the resistance strategies of the people of Ni’lin towards the everyday colonial violence they face since the beginning of the construction of the wall. This however cannot be understood without historic contextualization of experiencing landscape, land, and political realities since the Nakba – which is the focus of this paper. This is done through exploring narratives of people in Ni’lin that reflect on different time periods and reveal transformations in social and political life. These narratives express different transformations that present the impact of the settler-colonial as an ongoing structure and how it was experienced in different time periods.

Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters as Narrators of History: The Case of Palestinian Syrian Women

Lundsfryd Stendevad, Mette Edith (University of Leicester, School of Media, Communication & Sociology, Copenhagen, DNK)

My doctoral study is an intergenerational women’s oral history project about Palestinian Syrian women who were forced to leave Syria after 2011. I apply and record feminist decolonial strategies (Lugones, 2003). The strategies used include shared authority, co-authorship, use of original language in story telling (Arabic) and a co-creation between the researcher and the participants of the study.

While my focus is on Palestinian Syrian women, there is an emphasis on the discriminative politics that countries such as Denmark and Lebanon has installed to keep refugee families separated. The study follows the experiences of women within the colonial ruins, memories and inherited traumas of colonialism and dictatorship throughout the past 100 years; from the 1917 British Balfour Declaration, through to the 1948 eviction of Palestinians from Palestine, to today’s on-going, settler colonialism in Palestine, the crisis in Syria and fortress Europe.

The study attempts to preserve narrated memories of Palestinian female history in the context of Syria - where documentation of female-led Palestinian lives, resistance and survival is scarce or non-existing. I record everyday responses and resistance(s) to violence, discrimination, sexism, racism and colonialism in the contemporary political climate.

Women have historically resisted their position as stateless, the violence of the Syrian regime, the Ba'ath party, and some of the more extreme Islamist militias that grew as Syria burned (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016; Al-Shami, 2016). Likewise women have often taken leading roles in supporting their communities and building alternatives to the state's totalitarianism (Al-Shami, 2016). Thus, the doctoral endeavor is to document how women experience the historical stateless and rightless position that they are born into in the midst of the war in Syria, and increasingly discriminatory asylum laws in Europe (Irfan, 2017; Lundsfryd, 2017; Orchard, C. & Miller, 2014; UNRWA, 2016).

I have recorded oral histories of Palestinians from Syria in Syria and Lebanon as an activist and researcher since 2011. The stories include men and women's accounts of border crossings and forced separation, and the history of their predecessors who were forced to leave Palestine during 1947-1949. In my presentation I will read aloud some of these stories and speak about how I work with shared authority and inter-subjective interpretation as strategies of decolonising the history of the Palestinian population.

"I don't envy the younger generation" - Intersectional approaches to Palestinian knowledge production in the context of colonial rule and displacement

Rottenschlager, Klaudia (Universität Wien, Wien, AUT)

This paper is part of my dissertation which investigates the higher education cooperation project Rooting Development in the Palestinian Context between the University of Vienna, Birzeit University (WB), Al-Azhar University (Gaza) and two Palestinian community organizations operating in Lebanon and Jordan. One of the aims of the joint initiative is to bring together and encourage discussions between Palestinian fieldworkers and researchers from those geographical locations and bridge the divide between academic knowledge production and community-based knowledge. It further aims at building joint research units that transcended the imposed colonial fragmentation between various segments of Palestinian society.

This paper reflects upon a workshop which will be held at the summer school 2018 of the higher education cooperation project. The workshop will investigate knowledge production on Palestine in revolutionary times, specifically in the 60ies, 70ies, and 80ies in Beirut. Identifying historical legacies of this area, participants of the workshop will discuss how and why current research challenges and topics of investigation have shifted, not just on a historical level but also within different Palestinian communities.

I argue that an intersectional approach towards situated knowledge production that centers Palestinian identities and political struggles allows giving meaning to various actualities and belongings next to and beyond national frames.

In an interview conducted in April 2018, Jamil Hilal – a sociologist at Birzeit University (WB) – reflected upon his experiences as a researcher during revolutionary times in the 70ies in Beirut. The national struggle for the liberation of Palestine set the political framework for his analysis and research which was directed towards understanding and changing the rapid political developments. Asked about current challenges for a young generation of Palestinian researchers, he replied:

"The world has changed we have no longer socialist blogs and national liberation movements. We have a neoliberal, capitalist, heartless, sorted kind of world. It's not the idea of freedom, justice, and democracy which is moving people and those with progressive ideas are in the defensive. I think this is the challenge for anybody, and also Palestinians who are doing research. I think this is what is needed: to give meaning to the forces that are now trying to depress, discriminate and in fact to evict people from the idea of alliance and towards freedom, change, and a more humane world. And that's a difficult task. Now, we face problems of funding research, and of the Palestinian Authority and its negotiations with Israel and its internal structure of the idea of citizenship. It's no longer a liberation movement, and we have not reached a state yet; it's very difficult to say what it is. The authority is very limited of powers and resources and under the control of a settler colonial state which regulated almost every major aspect of life in the WB and in the Gaza Strip through suffocation and siege. I don't envy the younger generation."

Palestine in Black and White: White Settler-Colonialism and the Specter of Transnational Black Power

Burris, Greg (American University of Beirut, Beirut, LBN)

While Israeli bombs were destroying Palestinian lives in the summer of 2014 in Gaza, people in the United States were engaged in two social media campaigns that had gone viral: the Ice Bucket Challenge and the Hands Up, Don't Shoot campaign. While the first sought to raise funds to combat amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS disease), the second, which was sparked by the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, sought to raise awareness about the racism afflicting US cities. Both campaigns eventually went global, even reaching the Middle East, and while some Israelis began taking part in the Ice Bucket Challenge, a number of Palestinians posted pictures of themselves on Facebook and Twitter holding up signs of solidarity with the Black protesters in Ferguson. The utilization of these two campaigns by Israelis and Palestinians represent transnational assertions of political belonging, and if the former used social media to claim a connection to the whitewashed US mainstream, the latter used it to forge ties with protests against institutionalized racism. Both communities were thus constructing global racial imaginaries, and if the Israelis were making a claim to whiteness, the Palestinians were instead making a claim to Blackness. In this paper, I look at the history of Black-Palestinian relations and discuss a number of recent instances in which

links between these two communities have been fashioned through an array of media forms including YouTube videos, Twitter feeds, Facebook posts, spoken word poetry, hip hop music, and television news spectacles. I argue that these links of solidarity should not be considered radical simply because they are Black or Palestinian. Rather, Black-Palestinian imaginaries should be considered radical precisely insofar as they manage to escape the exclusive identitarianisms of the white settler-colonialist projects they contest.