



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

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Karola Kraus
General Director
Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation (Mumok)

By email: karola.kraus@mumok.at

Mag. Dr. Johan F. Hartle
Rector
Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

By email: rektor@akbild.ac.at

27 May 2022

Dear Karola Kraus,

Dear Mag. Dr. Hartle,

I write on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our serious and urgent concern regarding the cancellation of a talk by Dr Walaa Alqaisiya scheduled for May 30 at the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies as part of its Spring Curatorial Program 2022, *Art Geographies*, organized by Verein K, by the Academy of Fine Arts, and by Mumok (Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation).

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. BRISMES is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and as part of its remit to advance the knowledge and study of the region both in the UK and globally.

Dr Walaa Alqaisiya is an internationally respected scholar. She is a Marie Curie Research Fellow at Cà Foscari University of Venice (Italy) whose research is funded by the European Commission, and a Fellow at Columbia University (USA) and the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics (UK). Dr Alqaisiya's research focuses on critical, feminist, decolonial, and environmental concerns in indigenous locales, including Palestine. Each institution to which Dr Alqaisiya is affiliated has stringent positions on antisemitism, as does the European Commission itself, which funds Dr Alqaisiya's research.

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She was invited by the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies to take part in its Spring Curatorial Program 2022, running from May 23 to June 1, 2022, in Vienna. Indeed, the [conference programme](#) presents itself as having a feminist and decolonial focus, as does the theme of the lecture she proposed based on her forthcoming book *Decolonial Queering in Palestine* (Routledge, 2022).

However, after the topic of the talk was agreed and after arrangements for flight and accommodation were made, on May 26, 2022, Dr Alqaisiya was notified by phone by the organisers that her lecture was cancelled and that this was the result of pressure received from groups including the Council of Jewish Students in Austria and KESHET Austria. These organisations appear to have lodged with organisers accusations of antisemitism against Dr Alqaisiya. We note that at the time of writing Dr Alqaisiya has not yet been informed of the grounds upon which these accusations were made, nor which of the participant organising bodies took the decision to rescind her invitation, nor was she afforded the opportunity to rebut such serious accusations.

Organisers then proposed that Dr Alqaisiya hold a session with students on academic freedom at the very institution that had cancelled her lecture – a position which is at the very least incongruous given their acceptance of the accusation of antisemitism made against her.

The actions of her host institution and the accusations themselves are also particularly egregious since they not only appear to target scholarship on Palestine as such, but also accuse Dr Alqaisiya of a terrible hate crime without anything resembling 'due process', stigmatising a Palestinian academic who is also particularly vulnerable as an early-career scholar and woman of colour. In preventing her from speaking about her research and tarnishing her reputation they undermine both her academic freedom and her freedom of expression, while also tarnishing her reputation and potentially harming her career.

BRISMES is also deeply concerned that such accusations of antisemitism against Palestinian academics and more generally against researchers – of any faith or nationality – are being used to intimidate and silence academics simply because they dissent from the positions of the Israeli government. In so doing, such accusations undermine academic freedom and freedom of expression on the question of Palestine and Israel, sending a chilling message to all other scholars who work on these issues. Moreover, they also undermine the credibility of legitimate accusations of antisemitism at a time when this is indeed a serious concern, particularly among Europe's far right organisations, including those in Austria itself.



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We call upon the organisers to inform Dr Alqaisiya *in writing* of the exact accusations levelled against her, including the specific grounds upon which those accusations have been made, and precisely which body or bodies took the decision to cancel her lecture. Dr Alqaisiya should also be informed of both the regulations and processes governing the decision taken by organisers, and the grounds for appeal and redress available to her.

We call upon the organisers to rescind this decision and issue a full apology to Dr Alqaisiya in view of the grave and unsubstantiated nature of the accusations against her and in view of the damage to her personal and professional reputation.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Neve Gordon

Vice President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

CC.

Walaa Alqaisiya, Cà Foscari University of Venice (Italy)

Jelena Petrovic, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna