

Report on the Conference on Settler Colonialism in Palestine and the Workshop on the Naqab Bedouin, held at the University of Exeter, 2-4 October 2015

Hosted by the European Centre for Palestine Studies, along with the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's research project "[Gender and Settler Colonialism: Women's Oral Histories in the Naqab](#)", the University of Exeter hosted a pathbreaking scholarly investigation into settler colonialism this past weekend. Drawing together speakers from universities in the United States, Australia, Europe, and the Middle East, the symposia opened important new ground in writing Palestine into the settler colonial paradigm, whilst complicating and enriching the settler colonial field more generally. As such, the conference organisers, along with many speakers, believed it to be a model for the kinds of confident and engaged scholarship which will advance the academic analysis of Palestine and its histories.

The events originated in the work of a group of exceptional postgraduate students at Exeter and were directed -as a collaborative venture between students and staff. As such, they represent a model of knowledge founded on the idea of co-production and reflect the vitality of postgraduate work in Middle East Studies at the institution.

Papers at the conference specifically sought to compare the Palestinian case, in particular that of the Naqab, with other historical instances of settler colonialism, drawing on a wide range of fieldwork, empirical case studies and theoretical speculation. Sessions were organised so as to encourage free and open debates, in which a wide variety of views were expressed, offering opportunities for the public critique of aspects of the settler colonial model and its application in the academy.

As has been publicly discussed, the University came under pressure to cancel or alter the content of the conference, so, as conference organisers, we would like to go on record to thank the management of the University of Exeter for protecting free speech, academic freedom and the integrity of the programme of speakers at this event. As Exeter's honorary graduate Edward Said once asserted, "Nothing in my mind is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position that you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take." Said made this remark in the context of his own work on Palestine – remarking "Personally, I have encountered them in one of the toughest of all contemporary issues, Palestine, where fear of speaking out about one of the greatest injustices in modern history has hobbled, blinkered, muzzled many who know the truth and are in a position to serve it" – and it is our belief that the open discussion of issues such as settler colonialism and the lives of the Naqab Bedouin is vital in the intellectual space of the university.

More detailed reports of the event will be published in due course, along with filmed recordings of keynote lectures, whilst we also expect an important academic collection to emerge from this venture.