

Confidential - Not for Public Circulation

RE: The cancellation of Walaa Alqaisiya's lecture at *Spring Curatorial Program 2022: Art Geographies* in Vienna

28 May 2022

Dear contributors to the Spring Curatorial Program 2022,

I am addressing you in my capacity as Programme Director of the [European Legal Support Center \(ELSC\)](https://www.elsc.support), a human rights organisation that provides free legal advice and assistance to associations and individuals advocating for Palestinian rights in mainland Europe and the United Kingdom.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of all scholars, artists and curators contributing to the 2022 edition of the Spring Curatorial Program, the arbitrary cancellation of Walaa Alqaisiya's lecture planned for Monday May 30, 2022 from 5.30pm to 7pm entitled "Queering Aesthetics: Unsettling the Zionist Sensual Regime".

Palestinian scholar Walaa Alqaisiya is a respected Research Fellow sponsored by the European Commission under the Marie Curie Fellowship framework. She is affiliated with three major universities worldwide: Cà Foscari University of Venice (Italy), Columbia University in the City of New York (United States of America) and the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics (United Kingdom). Her research is situated at the intersection of critical, feminist, decolonial, and environmental concerns in the context of Palestine and other indigenous locales.

On the February 18, 2022, Walaa Alqaisiya received an invitation on behalf of the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies to participate in its Spring Curatorial Program 2022: Art Geographies. As you know, the programme is organised by Verein K, the Academy of Fine Arts and Mumok (Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation), and it runs from May 23 to June 1 2022 in Vienna. Given the feminist and decolonial focus of the conference programme, Walaa Alqaisiya accepted the invitation to deliver a lecture on May 30, 2022, based on her upcoming book 'Decolonial Queering in Palestine' (Routledge, 2022). After having her flight booked, on May 26, 2022 she received a phone call from the organiser to inform her that her lecture was cancelled. This followed pressure from individuals and pro-Israel advocacy groups, including the council of Jewish students in Austria and KESHET Austria, groundlessly labelling her work as "antisemitic". Later, she was proposed by one of

the organiser to come and engage students on academic freedom at the same institution that had allowed the cancellation of her lecture. Walaa Alqaisiya still remains uninformed of the complete nature of these accusations and the procedures undertaken to reach such a decision.

The exclusion of Walaa Alqaisiya is a blatant violation of her fundamental right to freedom of expression and academic freedom, enshrined in article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Moreover, this case is illustrative of [Anti-Palestinian racism](#) - a form of anti-Arab racism that aims to silence, exclude, erase, stereotype, defame or dehumanise Palestinians or their narratives, in violation of the right of non-discrimination established by article 14 ECHR.

This is part of a wider trend of silencing Palestinian voices in Europe, whether academics, activists, journalists or artists, as [monitored by our legal center](#). Academic and cultural institutions have a central role in exposing injustices and in contributing to create a fairer society, which is deeply incompatible with participating in the censorship of critical voices. Even more so, in an event focused on decolonial theories. There must be no Palestine exception to academic freedom and freedom of expression.

Therefore, we urge you to:

- a) take a public stance against the arbitrary decision to cancel Walaa Alqaisiya's lecture;
- b) and withdraw your contribution from the Spring Curatorial Program 2022 until Walaa Alqaisiya's lecture is reinstated in the program.

Sincerely yours.

Giovanni Fassina
Programme Director, ELSC
28 May 2022

