Transcript "Decolonising 'Solution-Finding': Futurity, Utopia and Desire" by Lara Fricke

SLIDE 1 (00:00-00:26)

Hi. I am going to present to you a research project that I have been working on. The title of this research project is "Decolonising 'Solution-Finding': Futurity, Utopia, and Desire in Palestine". Within Middle East Studies, Palestine Studies and Politics – among other disciplines - there is a discourse surrounding finding the best solution for Palestine in order to end the oppression, expulsion and killing of Palestinians by the Israeli state and military.

SLIDE 2 (00:27-01:54)

In my research project I argue that this discourse surrounding "solution-finding" reproduces and reinforces colonialism – or more precisely, because I am talking about the Palestinian context – it reproduces and reinforces Israeli settler colonialism. Instead of discussing possible "solutions" for Palestine, we should use decolonial ways of imagining and acting towards a future. These are, for example, futurity and utopia. This research is mainly drawing upon work within Native feminist theories as well as Queer Studies for inspiration of decolonial approaches to the future.

I explain my argument by making two points. The first point I call the "methodological continuation of colonialism" which I see in methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism is the assumption that the nation-state is natural and inevitable and it describes the inability of researchers to see beyond the existence of the nation-state.

The second point is called the "structural continuation of colonialism" which I locate in 'heteropatriarchy'. Here, I could have interchangeably talked about other structures that are a result of and follow colonial logics as well, such as capitalism, ableism, classism, or speciesism. However, as my work is based in Gender Studies for a large part, I decided to explore the structural continuation of heteropatriarchy at this point.

SLIDE 3 (01:55-03:59)

Let me start with the first point: the methodological level. I argue that the very framing of 'solution-finding' is connected to the assumption that Palestine is a 'conflict' that can be solved. The paradigm of settler colonialism shows us that this simplifies Palestine because it ignores the extremely unequal power dynamics of Israel being a settler state and Palestinians being the colonised Indigenous population. Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that for decolonisation, we need to ask the question: whose frameworks are we using? Asking myself this question, I realised that many of the suggested solutions and even the very notion of 'finding a solution'- impose the nation-state paradigm onto Palestine. Hence, the nation-state is an underlying value and framework we use when approaching Palestine. The discourse surrounding solutions seems to be based on the idea that creating a Palestinian nation state will solve all the problems in the region. I explain this assumption by referring to the concept of 'methodological nationalism' – which describes the naturalisation of nation-states as if they are inevitable and the only possible social and political form of organising communities. This is very similar to the strategy being used by settler colonial states, as Lorenzo Veracini has pointed out, because settler states too attempt to appear natural, without beginning and without end. Very prominently, the nation-state paradigm and its automatic application onto non-Western communities has been challenged by Abdullah Ocalan. His concept of 'democratic confederalism' rejects a Kurdish nation-state and offers an alternative form of organising. In the Palestinian context, more and more Palestinian researchers challenge the assumption that a

Palestinian nation state is the solution to the Palestinian struggle. For example, Sophia Azeb writes -quote- "we must refuse to be recognised as Palestinians within the confines and language of such a nation-state…. We make space, not states" – end quote.

SLIDE 4 (04:00-06:05)

The second point supporting my argument is that the focus on finding a solution dismisses the deeply rooted colonial system at play in Palestine. Heteropatriarchy is one structural layer through which colonialism operates – this is what creates the increasing scholarship on the intersections between Gender Studies and Decolonial Studies. Heteropatriarchy describes a system of social domination of cisgender and heterosexual males. The work by Scott Lauria Morgensen shows us that -quote- "colonial rule comes into being by mobilising gendered and sexual power" -end quote-. This means that if Israeli settler colonialism operates through heteropatriarchal structures, the liberation of Palestinians cannot be achieved without dismantling those structures. The focus 'solution' and the 'solution-finding' processes fails to address this. The similarity between colonial naturalisation of nation-states and heteropatriarchy is addressed by Native Feminist theorists, who are challenging methodological nationalism and the "desirability" of nation-states. Andrea Smith argues that heteropatriarchy, just like nation-states, operate within the underlying logic of social hierarchy and domination. The settler colonial state does not only aim at naturalising itself, but also at naturalising and even universalising its heteropatriarchal structures. Smith writes: quote ": "Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nationstate rule their citizens. Consequently, when colonists first came to this land, they saw the necessity of instilling patriarchy in Native communities, because they realized that indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy." – end quote-. Hence, an attempt to liberate Palestinians that does not challenge heteropatriarchy and the nation-state paradigm reproduces colonial logics.

SLIDE 5 (06:06-08:42)

After having established that the liberation of Palestinians is not as simple as just 'finding a solution', but requires decolonisation of the colonial structures at play in Palestine, I would like to look into alternative ways of imagining a future that do not reproduce colonial logics. For this, I look into futurity, utopia and desire. Futurity is best known mainly in the contexts of Queer Futurity, Afro Futurism and Black feminist Futurity.

Futurity describes the imagination of the yet-to-come. In Native feminist theory, futurity is understood as the future of Indigenous peoples based on their own terms, as opposed to being limited and informed by logics of colonialism. For that, we need to imagine what futures are possible outside of the logics of power.

This can seem utopian – BUT utopian visions are important in the making of one's own future. Munoz describes utopia as -quote- "the rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibilities for another world" -end quote-. Utopia in the Palestinian context leads to a rejection of the Israeli settler colonialism and the discourses around Palestinian statehood. Utopia requires to imagine a future in which Palestinians can be liberated – and not let colonial logics or the power dynamics on the ground or globally restrict these imaginations. Munoz calls on us to disidentify with the world until a new one is achieved – and by us, he means not only the actors, but spectators as well. Hence, when we study Palestine, we

have a responsibility to shift our focus away from imposing our own ideas towards Palestinian imaginations of a future. This can look like leaving behind “damage-centred research” and engaging with “desire-centred” research instead, as suggested by Eve Tuck. -quote- “"Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the not yet and, at times, the not anymore. […] Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future” – end quote-. Tuck reminds us that any imagination of the future needs to consider the past as well. A new future is built on the ruins of the past, and therefore cannot be detached from it. Hence, utopia is an imagination of alternative realities that is rooted within historical experiences of violence and oppression.

SLIDE 6 (08:43-09:36)

Cultural productions are very valuable in exploring the intersection of the past and the future – and the imaginations of what a possible future could look like. This does not only include utopian visions, but also dystopian productions that warn us of dynamics in the present by exploring where they could ultimately lead to in the future.

In the Palestinian context, this is done for instance by the book “Palestine +100” which is a collection of stories written by 12 Palestinian writers to imagine what Palestine could look like in the year 2048, a hundred years after the Nakba – taking into consideration the past as well as the present. The futuristic and sci-fi films by Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour also impactfully illustrate the connection between the past, the present and the future, such as in the film “In The Future they Ate from the Finest Porcelain”.

SLIDE 7 (09:37-11:20)

However, imagining a future that isn’t based on methodological nationalism does not have to lead to a rejection of nationalism. Rather, Rita Dhamoon points out that a rejection of the naturalised nation-state paradigm has to lead to an understanding of national liberation movements that does NOT aim at creating a nation-state. There are indigenous understandings of ‘nations’ that are non-hierarchical and non-exploitative but that are based on interrelatedness and responsibility. Their approach to land is different, too: In these frameworks, nation-hood is not about control over territory and ownership of land, but about care and responsibility for land, as pointed out by Andrea Smith. She suggests that this colonial reframing of ‘land not as property’ can inform our understanding of ‘nation’. This means that a decolonial approach to the future of Palestinians should challenge the question of “whose land is this” as it reinforces the settler colonial logic of land ownership.

It is important to note that deliberations about decolonisation and futurity should not give the impression that there is a fixed set for a decolonial future. Rather, it is about creating a space in which each community can consider their own approaches to decolonisation. This means that decolonisation has to be a bottom-up approach. Keeping this in mind, we can look towards other communities in different contexts for inspiration. For example, looking into Rojava in Kurdistan could be very inspiring, especially for the question of how to imagine and work towards a decolonial future beyond the nation-state. This is about looking towards other contexts for inspiration and the potential to learn from each other.

SLIDE 8 (11:21-13:19)

As part of this research project, I reflect on my own previous work and the problems with it. I have found several ways in which I reproduces colonial logics in the past. Firstly, I have approached Palestine as a 'conflict' that can be solved. This is problematic as it ignores the unequal power dynamics between Israelis as the settlers and Palestinians as the Indigenous population. Now, I adopt the paradigm of settler colonialism in my work, which takes into account these power dynamics and the deeply rooted colonial structures such as heteropatriarchy. Secondly, I have assumed that only the creation of a Palestinian nation-state can end the ongoing oppression, evictions and killings of Palestinians. By doing so, I have subconsciously worked on the assumption, that nation-states are natural and inevitable. This reproduces methodological nationalism which is the colonial enactment of universalising Western frameworks and values. Once I have become aware of the problems with this, I concluded that all forms of nationalism are bad as I saw nationalism rooted in the nation-state paradigm. However, thanks to Decolonial Studies I now know that Indigenous understandings of nations exist, and that these are understandings of nations that are not based on oppression and hierarchy.

As a conclusion, I have realised how I have reproduced colonial logics with my previous work. This reflection part is particularly relevant for me, as the aim of my research project is to demonstrate that decolonisation is a journey of unlearning. I call on other researchers to question the underlying values and logics they take for granted, and to critically engage with their own work by asking themselves whether their work might reproduce colonial logics. We are continuous learners and there is no shame in admitting to past mistakes. We should view this as an opportunity to learn and grow – towards decolonisation.

SLIDE 9 (13:20-13:27)

And in conclusion, these are the sources I referred to during the presentation. Thank you for listening.