



## An Anti-Racist Walk Through Vienna

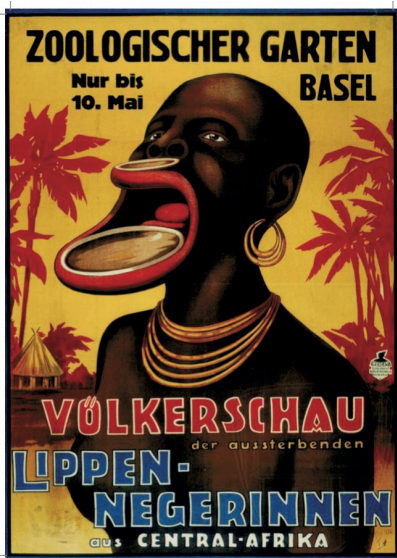
Peter Unterweger, Vienna, March 18, 2018

As part of the annual international Israeli Apartheid Week, BDS Austria conducted an anti-racist tour through the center of Vienna to illustrate how Viennese sights and places celebrate (or conveniently ignore) racism, Zionism, and colonialism.

The tour began at a square that was named after Theodor Herzl in 2004 - the 100th anniversary of his death. Herzl was one of the key figures of the Zionist movement. Born in 1860 to Jewish parents in what is now Budapest and was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As was the case in many assimilated Jewish families, family life was characterized more by German culture than Jewish traditions. After completing his studies in Vienna, Herzl ultimately became a journalist.



Throughout his life, he searched for an answer to the so-called “Jewish question.” At first, he favored the total assimilation of Jews into the dominant culture – going as far as to advocate



renouncing the Jewish faith. However, after witnessing the anti-semitic Dreyfus Affaire as a journalist in Paris, he changed his views. In 1896, Herzl published *Der Judenstaat*, in which he proposed the creation of a Jewish state. He argued that Jews had a nationality, but no state of their own, and that only in a Jewish state, preferably (but not necessarily) in Palestine, could Jews escape anti-Semitism and be free to practice their religion and culture.

Herzl also embraced colonialism. The land for the *Judenstaat* could be acquired, if need be, against the will of the native population, who could also be induced to move. The example of European colonialism was ever-present in his days and such methods, and worse, had already been practiced for centuries. He compared the migration of Jews to their intended homeland with the settlement of North America and the rule of Europeans over South Africa – the attendant ethnic cleansing and genocide

go unmentioned. He actually thought that the natives should be glad to receive the “civilization” of their colonial rulers because it would increase the worth of their lands.

Herzl was also well aware of the benefits of cooperating with existing empires. In *Der Judenstaat* he appealed to them: “If His Majesty the Sultan [of the Ottoman Empire] were to give us Palestine, we could in return undertake to regulate the whole finances of Turkey. We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism. We should as a neutral State remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence.” [emphasis added]

Like many of his peers, he was influenced by Social Darwinism and racial theories that were prevalent at his time. It was not uncommon for “exotic” peoples to be exhibited like animals in a zoo for the amusement of white Europeans. For example, the poster shown above, advertised a “People Show” at the Zoo in Basel, Switzerland. This kind of racialization of “other” peoples also served to legitimize the supposed superiority of the colonial rulers, and contributed to confirming racial prejudices.

The photo at right shows a staged “Somali Village” in Vienna in 1910. Herzl wrote about a similar exhibition there in 1896: “They are just at the beginning of our story; looking at them we can see where we already are, and how much we already know about good and evil.” For Herzl as well as other members of the European elite, the culture of Africans and Arabs was nothing more than “barbarism.”



The devaluing of non-European peoples and cultures continues to this day. Many westerners would be surprised to see a world map that does not have Europe at its center. Labels such as “Near East” betray similar attitudes, while phrases such as “developing countries” or “third world” suggest that such countries are “underdeveloped” as long as they do not measure up to European standards. Last but not least, the scientific and cultural achievements of people of color are often attributed to European influences.

The presentation at Herzl Square insisted that this context and continuity must be recognized and broken. After consulting the audience, the poster of the “People Show” was burned and a declaration read:



“We continue our action today by symbolically renaming this place to draw attention to the glorification of colonialism and racism and to demand a break with this tradition. Europe and Austria must acknowledge their centuries of colonialism and neo-colonial exploitation instead of trivializing this history by presenting it as a “civilizing project,” or, as in the case of the Theodor-Herzl Square, by using it to legitimize ongoing colonialism.

We now rename this place: Hadeel al-Hashlamoun Square. Hadeel was an 18-year old, unarmed student who was shot to death by Israeli soldiers in the occupied city of al-Khalil/Hebron. This square shall bear her name in memory of the thousands of victims of Israel’s occupation and apartheid policies.”

The city tour continued to four more stations. The next was Vienna's famous *Heldenplatz* (Heroes Square) where the parallels between the Habsburgs military campaigns in the Balkans and the siege of Jaffa by Haganah and Irgun militias were drawn. The Zionist forces drove out 95% of the city's inhabitants and enclosed the remaining Palestinians in a barbed wire ringed ghetto.

A bit further on, there was a stop at the Museum of Natural History, which had its origins in the Habsburg's collection of natural objects and at one point exhibited taxidermically prepared humans and also featured a "hall of races" as recently as 1996. This history served as another example of the dehumanization that inevitably precedes the kind of slow genocide that Israel inflicts on Gaza through its wars and continuing decade-long blockade.

The walk then proceeded to the *Mariahilfer Straße* – Vienna's most popular shopping street, which served as a contrast to the ghost town that the historic center of Al-Khalil/ Hebron has become after decades of Israeli occupation and the influx of national-religious settlers. In 1994, in the Ibrahimi Mosque, Baruch Goldstein, a prominent member of the terrorist *Kach* movement, shot 125 praying Muslims to death and wounded 125 more. Hadeel al-Hashlamoun, who was mentioned earlier, was killed by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint in Al-Khalil on September 22, 2015.

The final stop was at the *Square of Human Rights*. There the remarks condemned the hypocrisy of the EU and Austria, who claim human rights as a fundamental value while barring refugees from entering EU territory by means of the FRONTEX agency - effectively condemning many to drowning in the Mediterranean – and supporting neoliberal policies and military interventions around the globe. The demonstrators demanded the revocation of the Nobel Peace Prize the EU received in 2012 for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe, and proceeded to rename the Square to "Square of People Without Rights."



## 7., Platz der Menschen ohne Rechte