



feral feminisms

Free Palestine!:
Voices of Decolonization

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Palestine and Crip/Queer/Feminist Technoscience: From Automated Occupation to Digital Activism

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Animated by disability justice and queer feminisms, this piece investigates the role of media and technology in the occupation of Palestine, pivoting from pop culture representation to real-world practices by state actors and activists. Engaging with Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch's concept of "crip technoscience" (2019), this piece explores the relationship between technologies and disablement, debilitation, power, occupation, resistance, and community-building. Moving from guns, CCTV cameras, and facial recognition software to Instagram posts, eSIMs, and hashtags, I illuminate both the unqueer/uncrip uses of media and technology by state powers and the queer/crip technoscience of anti-apartheid activists and allies.

From social media posts to bombs, media and technology permeate the historical and contemporary occupation of Palestine. Apartheid is upheld through automatic rifles, digital databases, phone tapping, x-ray scanners, CCTV cameras, propaganda. In fact, the technologic surveillance and control systems in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are so extensive and developed that in 2023 Amnesty International published a report entitled "Automated Apartheid." Starting from the representation of occupation and liberation in the pop culture science fiction series *Star Trek*, this reflection moves to the investigation of real-world technologies of oppression and resistance in Palestine Israel.

In this piece, I want to draw attention to the intersections of technology and violence, debilitation, and disablement in the lives of Palestinians under occupation—both Palestinians in the OPT who have no rights, and Palestinian citizens of Israel who live as second-class citizens—as well as the creative and critical uses of media, pop culture, and technology to protest, resist, gather, and practice collective care. I use both secondary research drawn from experts and critical theorists alongside primary research from my own field work in the West Bank completed in August 2023. Following in the traditions of feminist and disability scholarship that recognize personal experience as a form of knowledge, each movement of this piece will be punctuated by a snapshot of my experiences in Palestine Israel as a disabled/queer/trans white Canadian who is married to a Palestinian citizen of Israel.

Many Palestinians have or will become disabled due to the occupation—from police and military violence, torture, imprisonment, trauma, and lack of access to healthcare, food, shelter, and clean water. As I edit this paper in December 2023, I'm acutely aware of how many Palestinians in Gaza are in the process of becoming disabled due to Israel's relentless bombing campaign and ground invasion, and because Israel has cut off their access to food, water, fuel, and medical supplies. The healthcare system in Gaza has collapsed, and disease is now spreading through the population. Yet this widespread debilitation of Palestinians is not new, nor unique to Gaza. In August 2023, I visited al-Fawwar refugee camp in the West Bank. While there, a man told me that some time back, his young daughter had been injured by a soldier and



an ambulance was called. However, the soldiers stopped the ambulance at the checkpoint that controls entry and exit to/from the camp in order to search the vehicle, deeming it a “security risk.” They made the ambulance wait for more than 30 minutes, and by the time the ambulance finally arrived at the hospital in Hebron/Al-Khalil, his child had died.

Everyone I spoke with had at least one family member who had been killed, arrested and tortured, or maimed, by either IDF soldiers or settlers. Palestinians in al-Fawwar live under constant nighttime raids, and the checkpoint that turns the camp into a prison opens and closes sometimes at random, making everyday life uncertain, unstable, and extremely stressful. Jasbir Puar’s 2016 field work in the West Bank details the ongoing and relentless debilitation caused by the occupation; Puar notes that “treatment without checkpoints” was articulated as a common rallying cry among Palestinian disability activists (2017, 160). The occupation is thus a disability rights issue (Abu Rass and Jerreat-Poole 2023; Puar 2017).

This piece is animated by a desire for queer/crip/feminist technoscience. I engage with technology and media, including the design, production, and use of technology, through the lens of disability justice and queer liberation. Technologies have long been crafted to harm or exclude us; or, they have been crafted through unjust and violent systems that debilitate and harm others. Like other scholars, artists, and activists, I desire a practice, community, and theory of technoscience that unravels the violence of colonial capitalist patriarchal structures, that instead revolves around community, collective care, freedom, climate justice, non-hierarchy, and peace. In “Crip Technoscience Manifesto,” Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch use the term “crip technoscience” to:

describe politicized practices of non-compliant knowing-making: world-building and world-dismantling practices *by* and *with* disabled people and communities that respond to intersectional systems of power, privilege, and oppression by working within and around them (2019, 4–5).

I want to draw attention to the unqueer, uncrip, anti-feminist uses of media and technology by state powers, and the crip technoscience of activists, care workers, and allies who hack, build, design, code, and generate access, community, and survival.

Snapshot #1: Hebron/Al-Khalil

A heat wave rolls across Palestine the day before I arrive. It’s 36 degrees and humid in Al-Khalil. I’m used to the freezing Canadian winters, but I’m new to this kind of heat. My face is bright red and at night my body is so sweaty I’m soaking through the sheets. One of the first words I learn in the Hebron dialect is *mirwaha* (مروحة): fan.¹ I ask my host family if they have a fan, my tongue stumbling over the pronunciation. I need to practice. They do have a fan, so I stand in front of it and let the air cool the sweat that’s pouring down my face. She moves it into the guest room for me. The fan whirs all night, the feeling of the air on my body like a breath. I hear the hum of the refrigerator and the sound of fireworks from a nearby wedding. I fall into a deep, dreamless sleep.



Media and pop culture can shape our understanding of ourselves, our communities, and the world around us; they can curate and cultivate the kinds of ideas we have about our societies and what kinds of futures we believe are possible. This is particularly true of science fiction, which stakes a claim on the trajectory of our relationships, dynamics, and species. While too often Western science fiction turns to space colonialism and intergalactic war, other media craft futures based on justice and liberation. This kind of justice-oriented futurity can be found in *Star Trek*'s Cardassian-Bajoran conflict, first introduced in *The Next Generation* (TNG), the aftermath of which is explored in *Deep Space 9* (DS9).

The resonances between the Cardassia-Bajor conflict and Palestine Israel have been noted by many fans, and one of the creators cited Palestinians as an inspiration for the Bajorans ("Bajoran," n.p.). Like many Palestinians, Bajorans in TNG live in refugee camps; like Palestine, Bajor was occupied and placed under military control, the Bajorans stripped of their basic human(oid) rights. Major Kira in DS9 explicitly identifies as a former "terrorist" and acknowledges the controversial tactics used by Bajor to gain liberation. Anyone following news or politics today knows that not only the militant group Hamas, but Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims more broadly, and even ceasefire activists and anyone calling for peace, are being labeled "terrorists" by centre-right or right-wing governments and media channels.

From this starting point, and the extreme oppression of and discrimination against Bajorans-as-space-Palestinians, *Star Trek* guides the viewer to a future shaped by peace, justice, and liberation. In DS9, the occupation of Bajor has ended. The Bajorans are liberated, free, returned to their land unshackled. Notably, the political discourse of the Federation has shifted; Bajorans are no longer framed as untrustworthy, bloodthirsty terrorists, but valued members and partners; their culture, cultural practices, and religion are respected, and we see them working closely with Benjamin Sisko's crew. Gone are the refugee camps, prisons, torture cells, and detention centres; gone is the anti-Bajoran racism that we first encountered within the Federation. When I watch DS9, when I watch Kira Nerys sipping coffee with Odo or having drinks at Quark's, my heart twinges, because this is the future that I want for all Peoples—the right to mundanity, the privilege of falling in and out of love, the right to move through the world unimpeded and unharmed.

But we're still in the TNG era, marked by refugee camps and torture (Amnesty International 2019; Baroud 2021; B'Tselem 2017; Human Rights Watch 2022). And like Cardassia, Israel has an arsenal of technologies to control and dominate the occupied population. In fact, Israel has one of the most sophisticated surveillance systems in the world. For example, Israel employs facial recognition software to photograph and document Palestinians in the OPT and has created a database, sometimes referred to as the "army's secret 'Facebook for Palestinians,'" to better monitor and control them (Dwoskin 2021, n.p.). Israel also employs numerous surveillance cameras in the West Bank (Amnesty 2023; Siddiqui 2023). Amnesty International mapped the surveillance cameras in East Jerusalem and found "one to two CCTV cameras every five metres" (2023, n.p.). During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, Israeli police tracked their own citizens' phones to ensure they weren't breaking quarantine. It's a common understanding in Israel that phone calls are often tapped, and anything you say, do, think, wear, or don't do, can and will be used against you—especially if you're an Arab. Surveillance is only one of the unqueer/uncrip uses of technology in Israel, which has an impressive and terrifying arsenal ranging from the Iron Dome air defense system to "skunk trucks" that spray "skunk water" at high speeds and volumes and can cause "violent gagging and vomiting ... skin irritation, eye and abdominal pain" (Hawari 2021, n.p.).



Throw in mandatory military service for all Jewish Israeli citizens and the state has created a militarized population of cyborg soldiers financially supported by the current global leader of invasion, theft, and military violence: the United States. I'll never forget standing, in March of 2022, in Charles Clore Park with my partner—built over the Palestinian Manshiya neighborhood of Jaffa—as a group of teenage girls scrolled through Instagram, automatic rifles slung over their shoulders. #NoFilter. Soldiers bring their guns home with them, you know. They have to. They care for them. The gun becomes an extension of the body. The purpose of the gun—and the body of the soldier, which becomes a technology of state control, surveillance, and oppression—is violence. When I'm stopped at a checkpoint outside Hebron/Al-Khalil in the West Bank, a soldier aims his gun at me. The IDF can wave as many rainbow flags as it likes, but the gun will never be a queer technology; it will never generate queer futures, relationships, or communities. The relationship created by the gun is inevitably one defined by power, hierarchy, control, and pain. Occupation, apartheid, colonialism, and imperialism are anathema to queer liberation; and Palestinians should be recognized as our queer and trans kin (Atshan 2020). It's also worth noting that since October 7, 2023, Israel has distributed hundreds of thousands of permits and weapons to Jewish Israeli civilians; now, walking in Jaffa Tel Aviv, you will not only see soldiers wielding rifles, but ordinary people (Parker et al 2023, n.p.).

Snapshot #2: Ben Gurion Airport (built over the Palestinian town Lydda)

I always feel like a cyborg when I'm in an airport. My back hurts from standing and dragging my suitcase, and I wish I had packed my cane. My inorganic bodies—that is, my laptop, tablet, and cellphone—are picked over and studied, and my organic body is scanned for metals. I answer questions and wonder where the guns are. I worry about my spouse, who is brown and has an Arab name. He always ends up with extra cameras and scanners shooting radiation into his body. Sometimes, I do, too—an enemy of the state and a terrorist by associating with Palestinians. More scanners this time, and a separate waiting area. The gender on my passport is wrong, and the nationality is wrong on his. We twitch and twinge and panic our way through security, one little hurt at a time.

Palestinians both within Palestine Israel and in the diaspora have turned to media and technology as forms of resistance, largely through documenting and circulating the atrocities and human rights violations they suffer under occupation. In May 2021, protests in Jerusalem/Al-Quds sparked around the forced evictions of Palestinians. In response, state police stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Palestinians used tweeting and livestreaming to share information about settler mobs hunting Palestinian citizens of Israel in mixed cities, and to follow news of rockets fired from Gaza, which, while unlikely to hit a target (due to the Iron Dome), and by no means equivalent to the harm and violence committed by the Israeli army, do still pose a risk for Palestinian citizens of Israel and their Jewish Israeli friends and allies. My partner was able to follow livestreams on Twitter and relay the information to his parents, who were locked in their apartment, hiding from anti-Arab mobs. Since October 2023, despite rampant misinformation and propaganda from Western media outlets and governments, Palestinian reporters have been able to document and share real-time footage of the siege in



Gaza, which has led Israel to be formally charged with genocide at the International Court of Justice in 2024.

#SaveAlAqsa #GazaUnderAttack #FreePalestine #IsraeliCrimes. While state media—as well as North American media, given the long and continuing collusion and friendship between settler colonial states like Canada, the USA, and Israel—continue to silence, erase, and censor Palestinian struggles, identities, lives, and deaths, social media has become a place to voice resistance and share the reality of the occupation. Deaths are recorded, mourned, and honored on Instagram and Twitter. In March 2022, when Palestinian-American supermodel Gigi Hadid posted on Instagram that she was donating money to both Ukraine and Palestine, *Vogue* only mentioned Ukraine in their coverage of her post (Mounir 2022). Activists flocked to social media to complain, critique, and call out the erasure. Ultimately, *Vogue* edited the caption to include the original reference to Palestine (Ayoubi 2022). The BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) movement has long used social media, email, websites, and digital petitions to successfully organize rallies, lobby politicians, share information, and to demand accountability and accurate reporting by the press.

Moving into the creative arts, the Palestinian hip-hop group DAM—among other Palestinian musicians—uses music and the audiovisual medium of music videos to talk about the occupation. Palestinians and allies write poetry and novels, create art, films, documentaries, TV shows, digital music, video games, blogs, and images. In the fall of 2023, I created a list of Palestinian digital media and performance resources for instructors in my department, and I'll list a few here for interested readers:

- Video game: *Liyla and the Shadows of War*, <https://liyla.org/> (free to play on Windows and Android)
- YouTube video: “Exploring Palestine’s Game Development Scene,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K4VKojcBkA>
- “EVE: A Poetry-Performance Event,” Fargo Tbakhi and George Abraham, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOPjk8wUqx4>
- Short film: *The Present*, directed by Farah Nabulsi (Netflix)
- Short film: *The Teacher*, directed by Farah Nabulsi, <https://tiff.net/events/the-teacher>
- Documentary: *Jenin, Jenin*, by Mohammed Bakri, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/tamara-nassar/israel-censored-film-watch-it-here>
- Documentary: *5 Broken Cameras*, by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi (Amazon, Apple TV, online)
- Video: Palestinian Performing Arts Network (PPAN), interviews with theatre folks in the West Bank: <http://www.ppan.ps/sections/view/8/en>

These creators work with and through digital media and popular culture to connect, educate, communicate, critique, and engage in activism.

Snapshot #3: Haifa

We heard that all the queer Palestinians were moving to Haifa and adopting dogs, so we drove the two hours from Jaffa to the coastal city on a mountain. We sat at a cafe surrounded by young Palestinians—many of whom looked queer, and did, in



fact, have dogs. The cafe was covered in Pride stickers, and the street was marked with antifa graffiti. We wanted to stay longer. We dreamed of a future where all queer Palestinians are free.

I'm not Palestinian, but I have family in Palestine Israel. I've seen the wall around the West Bank. I've seen Palestinians from the OPT (identifiable by their different license plates) pulled over by soldiers who wield guns without repercussions. I've spoken with former IDF members. I've seen the Bedouin shantytowns in the West Bank that are constantly under threat by new (and illegal, according to international law) Jewish Israeli settlements. I've passed through the checkpoints in Hebron and been interrogated by the IDF. So many North Americans talk about Palestine Israel as this confusing, impossible to understand, incredibly complex struggle; while on the ground, the occupation is incredibly simple and highly visible. There is no war. There is only oppression, occupation, and a system that has been identified by numerous human rights organizations (including B'Tselem, an Israeli organization) as apartheid. The butchering of Palestine may not be a convenient fact for many North Americans, but it is a fact, and no amount of government propaganda or anti free speech legislation will alter that truth.

While Palestinian liberation will look slightly different from *Star Trek's* Bajor, requiring different ethnic groups to live together peacefully in the region, *Star Trek* nonetheless offers us an allegorical Free Palestine in space, reminding us that empires fall, that apartheid regimes are dismantled, and that freedom, even in the increasingly gritty and dark universe of *DS9*, is possible. Despite the rampant misinformation being churned out by North American mainstream media, reporters in Gaza like Motaz and Bisan are using Instagram and eSIMs to document the reality on the ground and to combat Western imperial propaganda. Around the globe, creators, designers, and activists are using social media, art, film, music, and performance to challenge the status quo of oppression, erasure, and censorship. These are practices of queer/crip/feminist technoscience, animated by care, community-building, anti-militarism, and anti-apartheid activism.

I want to end this piece with a call to all feminist, queer, disability, media, communication, and technoscience scholars: Palestine is not a footnote. It is not an appendix, an addendum, or an afterthought. The occupation of Palestine—from the Nakba in 1948 to the genocide that is happening right now in 2024—is central to your work, your theory, your practice, and your syllabus. Questions of justice, technology, disability, environmentalism, communication, gender equity, power, and meaning are deeply tied to the bulldozing of olive trees and the bombing of schools.

We are not free until all of us are free.

Acknowledgments

This article is dedicated to my host family in Al-Khalil, and to the kids at the daycare who high-fived me every morning.



Notes

1. I initially wrote “Palestinian dialect,” but my partner pointed out that he and his family, who are from Tayibe in the Triangle region, would say *hawaayeh* (هواية), and I want to acknowledge the regional language differences within Palestine.

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