

**Disrupting Fixity: Palestine as Central to Decolonial Disability Justice**

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### Abstract

This conversation enacts a decolonial feminist intervention, especially in the realm of knowledge production. More specifically, the conversation is a real-time attempt to “disrupt fixity” by insisting that the fight for the liberation of Palestine is central to decolonial disability futures. The conversation takes up issues of ableism, including how it relates to mental health, “access washing,” settler colonialism, and the decolonial present as well as futures.

*Keywords:* disability, Palestine, settler-colonialism, ableism, Zionism

### **Disrupting Fixity: Palestine as Central to Decolonial Disability Justice**

In responding to the call for papers for this special issue, we challenged ourselves to enact a decolonial feminist intervention, one that is meant to disrupt, in real time, hegemonic structures that otherwise might go unnoticed, or unchecked, especially in the realm of knowledge production. Instead of co-writing an article, then, we decided to be in conversation together. Ahead of our conversation, we generated several questions to guide us, though we did not speak beforehand to allow for non-performative exchange. Some of the questions we thought up were drawn directly from the call, others informed it but written by us. While we chose questions that we thought would guide a generative conversation, we were also committed to letting the conversation unfold organically, an in-vivo enactment of the generativity and fluidity against an “always-already” ableist register that we also discuss. What emerged was an exchange that is both grounded in and critical of our academic traditions and draws on our lived experiences and political commitments. More specifically, we find ourselves discussing ableism, including how it relates to mental health, “access washing,” settler colonialism, and the decolonial present as well as futures.

Importantly, this conversation took place well before October 7, 2023. Rather than deploy colonial time stamps of “before” and “after,” we invite the reader to instead hold space for the violence of settler colonialism that always already saturates any conversation on Palestine, let alone one that takes up decoloniality in disability studies. Through our conversation, then, we invite you to reflect with us on how the structural logic of settler colonialism both predated October 7 and provided the infrastructure through which a

genocide of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip could both unfold in real-time and be actively supported by United States imperialism and its twin settler colonial scaffolding.

### **Why this format?**

L. Jaffee (personal communication, prior to October 7, 2023): I was very grateful that you suggested this format. I was feeling overwhelmed by the overwork of academia and this format felt not only more doable but also more enjoyable. Having to communicate an idea to someone in real time forces the use of more accessible language. You're getting live feedback about what you're saying. Even within disability studies there can be a lot of heavy jargon. People don't talk like that, but it's so engrained in academic writing. I'm not saying there's not a place for neologisms or new terminology, but I appreciate a format that forces us to think more about the words that we're using, what we really mean by them, and how to communicate that effectively in real time.

L. Sheehi: I think also, if we're centering disability justice as an orienting framework for our world and for our political struggles, everything we do has the potential to become a practice of decentering ableism that lodges itself in us as like a normative fixture. So, part of the constant challenge is how can I consistently disrupt these processes, all the time, in every space? We live in an ableist world that insists on fixtures of normative being, which includes psychically cordoned off areas to us, even unconsciously. For example, in academic publishing it is about what counts as a publication or what counts as knowledge production, which reproduces structures of domination and epistemological exclusion as a matter of "common sense" academic practice. But, when our entry point is disability justice, as an integral part of abolitionist thinking and enacting, we need to *disrupt* processes that are

regularized, modes of being and doing and functioning-as-normative-academic. Ableism is structurally going to support a very narrow way of engaging with the world, so for me, this type of format is also disruptive in real time. And allows us to experience in real-time something new emerge.

L. Jaffee: I mean that feels truer to disability studies' origins— obviously disabilities studies is an academic discipline—but it's one that grew out of disabled folks' organizing and activism. So, I think this format is both a way of practicing disability justice, and also, a conversation feels apt given that we came to know each other because student activists were having conversations—and organizing— around disability justice and Palestine.

L. Sheehi: You're also highlighting that relationality. This relational space acts as a bedrock both of organizing but also, again, together vs. alone asking, struggling through, and pushing the question and *act*, "how do we penetrate these systems that feel so immovable?"; not just one off, but on a regular basis not somewhere far off in the future? Let's do this now.

L. Jaffee: I was thinking, too, that everything about traditional academic knowledge production is antithetical to challenging intellectual supremacy and neurotypical norms. So I'm thinking about this format as challenging what counts as legitimate knowledge production, and in terms of the working conditions and inaccessibility of academia, this is a format that feels far more accessible and far more manageable in terms of the productivity expectations of academia, say for getting or keeping a job.

I also want to say something about how I came to this work, or how I'm positioned in relation to it. I was initially drawn to disability studies because I had done a lot of inclusion work with intellectually disabled kids in the U.S. Through the course of my graduate studies and conversations with disabled comrades, I came to understand the ways ableism had shaped my own experiences—as a person with a chronic immune condition—too. I'm also a white Ashkenazi, American Jew and was raised in contexts where Zionism<sup>1</sup> was just in the air; it wasn't something I knew to question. It was really through the immense generosity and patience of Palestinian and other BIPOC educators and mentors in my life that I came to recognize Palestinian liberation as integral to all the political commitments and principles I hold, and Zionism as irreconcilable with my other politics—as a queer, and as someone doing anti-racist and anti-imperialist community organizing work.

L. Sheehi: Thanks for that—I appreciate your invitation to own our entry points, too. I am Lebanese Arab and queer, and a clinical psychologist. Over the years, I have become more involved in the thinking through and active disruption of the eugenicist and colonial “givens” of my field, with a focus on psychoanalysis. The questions for me are necessarily guided by my own experience of living under the settler colonial condition of Zionism, being keenly aware of limitations of space, movement, and the right to fullness and being. This recognition was solidified when I moved to the United States for graduate school post-9/11. The intersection of abolitionist mental health work, revolutionary psychoanalysis, queer of color

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<sup>1</sup> Zionism refers to a Jewish nationalist ideology that from its origin called for the creation of a Jewish state. Today, Zionist ideology justifies and normalizes the existence of Israel as an ethno-state formed and maintained through the colonial occupation of Palestinian land and people.

critique, and disability justice has been a process of coming into that being, and an insistence that there is no separation between the clinic and the street, so to speak. But also, on the question of access and legitimacy, I am really interested in the despecializing of psychoanalytic and psychological knowledge, following Che Guevara or Frantz Fanon's tradition of despecializing medicine. It's this political commitment that allows me to understand why clinicians have a place in the fight for liberation, and especially Palestine.

To come full circle, the knowledge we are producing together is happening *because* we met through a Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) event, the central question of which was, "how do we think about disability justice when we're thinking about issues of displacement? When we're thinking about issues of erasure? When we're thinking about issues of dispossession? Of ability and debility on a spectrum? When we're thinking of settler colonialism?"

### **What does ableism look like within transnational contexts?**

L. Jaffee: I was thinking generally about how disability studies is so much about the physical site of the body and how the body meets the environment, but Western disability studies has very much been focused on the body as an individual body and not a national or collective body. Part of thinking about ableism within transnational contexts is considering how ableism acts on national bodies—occupied, colonized, Indigenous national bodies—as opposed to thinking about the body as a purely atomized individual entity.

And one way this plays out is in how colonial, imperialist, and settler ideologies use ableism to justify the exploitation of labor, to justify genocide, to justify the extraction of resources by

deeming entire populations— national populations, Indigenous populations, occupied populations— either intellectually or physically or psychiatrically inferior in some way (Sins Invalid, 2019). It's always premised on this blueprint of a hierarchy of ability—which then race, nation, gender can be mapped onto.

L. Sheehi: I am also thinking through a psychology register— is intimately intertwined with violence, if we borrow from Frantz Fanon's (1963; 1986) understanding of the logics of oppression. The organizing framework I am using is that ableism is the structure and the logic through which this type of violence is mobilized while settler colonialism creates the conditions of debility, or the conditions through which ableism can even come to be, all of which is enshrined by capitalism and imperialism, similarly to how Ruth Wilson Gilmore<sup>2</sup> teaches us that racism is enshrined by capitalism. I think it's seductive for us to think about ableism as a symptom rather than as a structure that aids settler colonialism, and like you said, that settler colonialism comes to rely on.

Sometimes we think about ableism as an after-effect, but what we're highlighting is that it's not accidental that ableism is a part of the settler-colonial condition. You're saying that settler colonialism has to include ableism because it's a structure that is fundamentally based on hierarchies of being, contingent on who has access and who doesn't. This is not passive, but rather an active erasure of those who come to not be *allowed* access under the rubric of settler colonialism. This is done, according to Patrick Wolfe (2006), through an insistence that the

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<sup>2</sup> See the short film "Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore," found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI>



settler is actually Indigenous, which, of course, makes the Indigenous the settlers; it is a psychic inversion that happens. We see this logic repeated. For example, we build structures that are ableist, and then there is an inversion of blame that dictates that it's folks who are disabled that are blameworthy for not adapting to ableist structures.

L. Jaffee: As you mentioned Ruth Wilson Gilmore's work, I feel like there are parallels to conversations that many have had around race and capitalism in terms of contesting the conceptualization that race is just an accidental outcome of capitalism. Instead, racism is what actually enabled capitalism to develop through the creation of racial divisions necessary for capitalism to operate and be normalized. Likewise, ableism creates divisions along lines of ability—or perceived or presumed ability—that serve capitalism, as a system of production premised on division and hierarchy: bosses and workers, landlords and tenants, colonizer and colonized. By naturalizing the idea that there is a hierarchy of ability—of smartness, of strength, of usefulness—ableism provides ideological infrastructure that all systems of oppression can map onto (Sins Invalid, 2019, Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). So, within transnational contexts, ableism is also playing out on a larger scale than typically conceptualized within Western disability studies. It's not just about the impact of ableism on an individual disabled person, but the way ableism lends credence to imperialist and colonial logics that deem the colonized/occupied less than. As Sins Invalid (2019) has written, "one cannot look at the history of U.S. slavery, the stealing of Indigenous lands, and U.S. imperialism without seeing the way that white supremacy uses ableism to create a lesser/'other' group of people that is deemed less worthy/abled/smart/capable" (p. 18).

L. Sheehi: Racial capitalism is always based on hierarchies of power and that's what creates it.

L. Jaffee: Yes! Lately I've been having a lot of conversations about hope and where we find it. As the brilliant organizer Mariame Kaba famously said, hope is a discipline (Kaba, 2020). I think living in the moment we're in, a lot of folks struggle with a degree of hopelessness or apathy, or assumptions based on the world as it is currently configured. I hear so many assumptions around human nature and the idea that people are just bad and selfish and that violence is inevitable. I think the apathy is not so much indifference but ultimately rooted in or a symptom of hopelessness, being stuck in the belief that things can't change.

I was just thinking about the fact that ableism, anti-Blackness, settler ideologies—all of these ideologies have to be continually reinforced to justify violent practices, to justify extraction, to justify domination, to justify displacement. Because I don't think people are inherently selfish or violent or cruel. Even folks in power, the fact that the ruling class needs to create ideologies to justify harmful behavior or violent social systems suggests to me that people aren't inherently just evil and selfish and trying to better their own situation at the expense of others, right? It's not human nature if the ruling class has to devise ideological systems that normalize state violence, that enable them—as the beneficiaries of the political-economic system—to feel okay about systemic violence and make oppression and control commonsense. These logics are produced, and so just as easily could not be produced.

L. Sheehi: To your point, the immense resistances that come up against *being otherwise*, as Black feminists, and here I am specifically thinking of Gail Lewis (2019), remind us. If selfishness is an intrinsic way of being, a fixed position, other modes of being or the spontaneity with which other forms of being come to exist doesn't add up. We saw this during the beginning stages of COVID. Overnight, everything changes. We go through our lives, thinking that things are just fixtures, ideologically fixed, when really, they've been molded into their fixity over time. Undoing ideological fixedness, that's a practice, that's a skill, to remember that the things that have become fixtures aren't natural. We're back to the practice of disruption! To disrupt the making-of-normativity, it's a good psychological reminder, about alacrity versus fixity.

L. Jaffee: I'm in the field of education, so as you're describing ideological fixedness, I'm thinking about all the attacks on progressive or liberatory curricula within the US education system right now. On Palestine, on critical race theory or whatever gets called CRT by the Right, on teaching issues related to gender and sexuality. This is all part of a very broad and constant effort to maintain dominant ideologies and also quash any imagination. Because there are so many concrete historical examples of the wins that movements have made, and of ways of being and existing that undermine the dominant narrative about what's "fixed."

So, the message is, "this is as good as it gets so don't bother trying to make change." It's part of concealing how social change happens— from movements, from groups of people engaging in collective, direct action. All of the anti-CRT, anti-queer and trans education legislation bent on concealing and erasing non-dominant or subversive histories from textbooks and

from classrooms is about maintaining the myth that human nature is selfish and individualistic, that hierarchies of power are natural, that the world as it exists is inevitable, and that the power structure is fixed and unchangeable.

L. Sheehi: Which is, as you know, is a robust space for ableism to persist. And to persist unchecked. And why part of disruption must include divesting and disidentifying. We—in contradictory and varying degrees—have psychic investments in these systems working as they do. And I think this goes back to the question of transnational ableism. What does ableism look like when we understand it as having a transnational dimension of existence? Based on what we're talking about, there's a logic that repeats itself. Borders of agreed upon nation-states are not disrupting this logic.

**How do the conditions of Israeli settler-colonialism reveal the “the struggles inherent in Western disability studies”?**

L. Jaffee: I think one of the one more obvious examples is Israel's disability rights rhetoric, which is part of Israel's manufactured image as “the only democracy in the Middle East” and as this liberal progressive oasis, based on a very narrow, individualized understanding of identity, or social identity. I was thinking about, for example, Israel signing the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, as well as the framing of Israel's COVID policies, and the haste with which Israeli citizens were vaccinated. The media campaign signifying that this is a progressive nation-state that is making great strides in health access erases and ignores Palestinians living under occupation who were denied access to the vaccine as a result of the Israeli blockade (Asi, 2021).

I've talked about this as *access washing*, which is a term I started using in the early stages of my dissertation work in 2017, and later learned (weeks before my dissertation defense in 2020) that the late disability justice organizer and writer Stacey Milbern had used the term in a 2019 blog post titled, *Notes on Access Washing*, which I didn't know existed.

And I feel like the trained response in academia is like, oh shit, somebody used this and here I thought I was coining a term. But I honestly felt a lot of relief. It felt like ok, this is something other people, and specifically other disabled organizers and writers, are seeing and talking about and finding useful to name. It was reassuring that this was not me trying to make a name for myself with some jargon, but this is actually a phenomenon that other people— a disabled organizer of color who I really respect, in particular— are noticing and think is worth naming.

As a general definition, I think of access washing as naming the ways in which relatively privileged—often white, global Northern, cisgender— disabled groups are made hyper-visible to obscure structural forces that produce disability unevenly among populations, and particularly among the most marginalized disabled folks— Indigenous, Black, global South, trans.

Part of access washing is the hypervisibility of disability— of some disability— to justify practices, programs, and policies that harm or exploit disabled and (non-disabled) oppressed groups. These ideas were very much growing out of being a graduate worker at Syracuse University (SU), which is a private university that has a very prominent disability studies

program and also uses rhetoric around disability and accessibility and disability inclusion as part of its university brand or image.

As one example, in 2016 SU built a “promenade”—a \$6 million dollar promenade— through the middle of campus on what used to be a city road. This was essentially a \$6 million walkway, but it was justified as necessary to make the path ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant (based on the incline of the road) and as making campus more accessible for disabled students. But it had previously been a city road that public buses could drive on so people could actually access the campus using public transportation. What they did— without the city’s approval—was they just shut down the road and turned it into a walking-only path.

L. Sheehi: They privatized it.

L. Jaffee: Exactly. And it was actually covered in stairs. And it’s named after the donor— the Einhorn Family Walkway. The donor, as an aside, is a Zionist and an Israel Bonds Honoree.<sup>3</sup> And this was this really expensive project, a beautification project, part of corporatizing the university. It further enclosed this predominantly white, wealthy university on a hill. And essentially it’s gatekeeping, or further closing it off to the community, to the broader population of Syracuse.

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<sup>3</sup> The Development Corporation for Israel (DCI), better known as Israel Bonds, was created by the State of Israel in 1951 to finance the newly formed state. Since their creation, sales of Israel Bonds have generated over \$50 billion to sustain Israel’s economy and colonial occupation. DCI is headquartered in NYC, and many U.S. state and municipal pension and treasury funds invest in Israel bonds.

L. Sheehi: Drawing out these concrete examples that happen so regularly is so important to animating what we're talking about. They are such a vibrant way to see how the logics of ableism become intimately intertwined with class access, and race, like you're saying. That example packs all of that in it. I think it goes back to your point that people aren't inherently "trying to be bad," but rather, there are ways in which things become lodged in us as fixtures that task certain people with always having to be oriented to the world, to seeing all these textures of possibilities and potential catastrophic outcomes while others never have to think about it or engage it with meaningful intention.

To me, that's the ableism in it. When I say, "Who do we imagine in a space as readily as we disimagine?"—this is an example of that. Because there is a way in which people claim innocence (Sheehi & Sheehi, 2022) or get into this reactionary and defensive response of, "well, we can't do anything right then." That's not it. What I'm saying is that, consciously or unconsciously, in this act, there is a way in which the people who you imagined in this space, the people who you imagined could come to use this new walkway, this new part of campus, falls on fault lines that *already exist in the world* and, in their already-existence, they happen to be raced, classed, gendered, and dis/abled.

The regularity with which this happens in a patterned way tells us it's a structure. The regularized nature in which we have these examples points to something systemic. And, the other repetitive pattern is that it's often the same people who get written out of the story.

L. Jaffee: Right. This is surely not unique to SU. It's a dynamic with any wealthy predominantly white university. The race and class divide of the city or town is exacerbated by the relationship to the university. Syracuse is a rustbelt city with extremely high poverty among Black residents. The construction of the promenade is part of closing the gates around who is imagined to be at this university, who is imagined to work at this university. And also, it's about reassuring wealthy white parents. Because part of anti-Blackness is presumptions of violence and danger, of unsafety. The closing off of walls functions to reassure the parents of largely white, wealthy domestic students or wealthy international students—parents of students who can pay full tuition—that this is a safe place for their kids to go. And then university administrations have figured out they can use disability and accessibility concerns to justify it. It's about ADA compliance, not about further cordoning off space.

L. Sheehi: That's the brilliance of the term access washing. Because ADA compliance finds traction, because you've mobilized it through good liberal humanist discourse. Because if you didn't, people would otherwise be saying, "what the fuck are you doing?" But when you're packing it in the idea of, "we're creating access." Who's the asshole that's going to be upset with that?— at least within the realm of liberal humanist discourse, because of course we know and see that issues of access are *always* contested. So that is part of it, the language in and with which fixtures, spaces, foreclosures come into being.

But, I also want to go back to settler-colonialism, because, as we're discussing spaces being imagined and people being disimagined, this example you're giving, and so many others, is also being done on stolen land. Now you have reworked ownership over stolen land. And



when you cloak it in the liberal humanist discourse of access, you're also further disavowing, further dissociating the dispossession that happened, and continues to happen, in that very spot.

The law is used to justify many of these projects, which is why I think there are a lot of disability justice activists who rightfully warn us around the limitations of the law as dictating access, because the law itself is entrenched in systems of violence that will always write people out. There are so many layers to this, and it is a live example of how disrupting processes-as-usual has to mean we are attentive and commute between all these layers as a commitment to ethical alignment with, for me, abolitionist principles.

The way that I see this connecting to Palestine is that the logic of settler colonialism repeats itself regardless of the current modern nation-State in which it's housed. You started us off with the state now known as Israel access washing by signing onto the Geneva Convention. In the same breath, the fascist Israeli government has overhauled their judiciary process—the changes have been aptly called “the reasonableness bill.” Which should give us pause, the way “reason” comes to guise fascism, to include expansion of the Basic Law which enshrines the supremacy of Jewish citizens of Israel. It's codified. Hierarchy and apartheid is codified and mobilized through the law, which includes disproportionate prison sentences, most recently. When we lay it out like this, it is not a jump to understand the intersection of disability justice with the question of settler colonialism more broadly, and in this case Palestine more specifically.

It is another very important and concrete example: you're a settler colonial state, you have just codified apartheid, how do you reconcile signing onto the Geneva Convention for disability justice? You are basically outing yourself saying, "There are certain people who meet these standards and others who never will." *Because of who they are*. Whether they're Palestinian, in this case, or Black or Indigenous in other cases, based on these two examples that we just reviewed.

L. Jaffee: Which to your point about individualized notions of disability rights through the law—which doesn't work for most disabled people in the US, either—I think one of the limitations of law is that disability is conceptualized in an individual sense. The law conceptualizes disability as it affects individuals and not as it affects communities, or as it affects national groups. National bodies have no recourse through disability law. Which, to return to the example of the construction of the promenade at SU, Syracuse is on Haudenosaunee land, as you were speaking to. So this \$6 million walkway has been constructed, ostensibly in the name of disability access, but on land stolen from the Onondaga Nation that's now owned and controlled by SU, which has unilateral power when it comes to decisions about land-use. This walkway can be built in the name of disability access because structural debility or disablement of oppressed peoples—for example, the intergenerational trauma of land theft on Indigenous nations—has been written out of the purview of "disability issues" within a settler-colonial framework or logic.

L. Sheehi: This is why it is extremely important for us to disrupt the seduction and to remember that if we're accessing structures that are part of a settler colonial system, one

which is constitutively violent, these structures, even while giving access to some, will always enact violence on people. Even by virtue, in the most simple terms, of how people access the very systems that are meant to protect them.

L. Jaffee: Absolutely. To that point—because I think this example is really illustrative of what you’re saying—I wanted to talk about how access washing has played out in the Israeli military. Ro’im Rachok is an Israeli military program that includes Autistic soldiers in the IDF, or Israel “Defense” Forces. An *Esquire* headline that describes the program says, “Six years ago, three former Mossad agents launched an experimental Israeli Army program to recruit those on the autism spectrum, harnessing their unique aptitudes—their “superpowers,” as one soldier puts it. The name of this big military success? Ro’im Rachok, Hebrew for “seeing into the future,” and it may bring neurodiversity to the broader workforce.

I’m thinking about the media attention that this program garnered and the way in which it fuels Israel’s image as this liberal inclusive bastion, and the taken-for-granted assumptions within a liberal humanist framework that this is so great. So Israel is including Autistic people in its military and surely—if you care about disability rights—that’s assumed to be a positive development. Zero conversation about Palestinians, zero conversation about why the Israeli military exists in the form that it does, why it’s needed—to maintain an occupation. That inclusion in Israel requires inclusion in the military because all Israelis join the military, because mandatory conscription is necessary to maintain a settler occupation.

So this is celebrated as a symbol of Israel's concern for disability inclusion, as a symbol of Israel's concern for disability rights. This narration ignores that Autistic Israelis' abilities are being capitalized on. Their neurodivergent abilities—or presumed abilities here—are being exploited to maintain a settler-colonial structure. Because the way the program is talked about is that Autistic Israelis have a superior ability, compared to allistics, to visually analyze satellite images “for the slightest sign of enemy activity” (Kuchner, 2019). Their abilities are celebrated and made legible as valuable, as useful to the state insofar as they serve the settler project of more efficiently locating, killing, and debilitating Palestinians. Autism is made meaningful—through a non-deficit lens—based on the settler logic that, because they're Autistic, they can read different maps, read different data sets with extreme focus, and that's valuable to the IDF. So Autistic citizens are made legible, made valuable, through their service to the settler state in the ongoing project of eliminating the Indigenous population, eliminating Palestinians. Disability as an identity is made especially legible through its utility in maintaining Israel's occupation.

Which I think really speaks to the limits of trying to export a particular cultural understanding of disability that ignores that level of the nation-state. That ignores anything about power dynamics between occupied and occupier. And again, this narrow framing for understanding disability doesn't work within the US settler state, either. Because it's based on a conception of ableism that doesn't include any analysis of settler-colonialism or imperialism, and specifically the ways they thrive off of a normalized ableist logic.

L. Sheehi: It's exploitative and coercive. It's mining—I mean, a “super power”! It's so sensationalist, too, and that part of it may be entirely lost in this language of inclusivity. I think that's maybe what you're talking about, the importing of the language of inclusivity—which again finds traction in certain places that espouse liberal humanist values—defangs the actual power relations that are happening.

I was at a talk that Robin DG Kelley was giving at Wellesley a couple years back, and he was reminding people that there's a way in which Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is so defanged. He said something along the lines of: a reminder to people, intersectionality is not an analysis of identity, it's an analysis of oppression. Just this reminder completely blows the *Esquire* headline out of the water. Because once you transpose it to an analysis of oppression, then there is a reminder to engage, as a mode of necessary disruption, in a reality-testing exercise: there is something else here at play, and that something else is an access to services, access to power, intimate proximity to the means of power. In this particular case of the settler-colonial state that is now known as Israel—Identity is a central piece of that. It's being displaced into disability identity by this media coverage, but what's missing from the conversation is back to the Basic Law; it's what that Law codifies in terms of what constitutes the *most important* identity, above all. In the eyes of the law? In the eyes of the so-called democracy? In terms of access to *everything*, including the land.

Both these examples are very important because the endpoint doesn't change, but the discourse is actually really important and mobilized specifically in order to find traction.

That's the piece for us to be aware of when we're talking about these things, particularly in the context of Palestine, these liberal humanist codes of communicating find their way into people's psyche. And it makes them feel good. But most insidiously, it hides the violence.

L. Jaffee: And it's rewarded. The disability theorizing I have learned the most from and that has most shaped the way that I think is not produced in academia. It's not to, of course, dismiss or diminish academic scholarship around disability by any means, but I feel like so much of what I've learned that fundamentally shapes my thinking comes from disability justice organizations on the ground. And that is not accidental because I think even within more recent, more critical disability studies scholarship (as compared to earlier, more canonized disability studies scholarship) that takes up intersectional analysis, that takes up race and gender and to some degree class, questions of global power dynamics and transnationalism are often still not part of the conversation. I feel like part of that is because anti-imperialism is not en vogue. It's not "sexy" within academia.

**“What does it mean to do disability justice transnationally while avoiding imposing epistemologies of the North on Southern contexts?”**

L. Sheehi: Which is what we're trying to disrupt today. I think that ties into the next question about what possibilities can be reopened for decolonial disability futurities. I think that you are speaking to that directly. I cannot see a decolonial disability movement that doesn't firmly plant itself in anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-racism— which includes anti-Zionist discourse. How can we imagine our struggles being decolonial if they're not centered in internationalist solidarity movements? Or in rooting ourselves in practices of the global South and not engaging in saviorist models, but saying, and *meaning*, and knowing, folks

have been actually thinking through these ideas and finding ways to maneuver and create life, which is also at the heart for me when I'm thinking about a decolonial disability movement. How do we sustain life-making and life worlds, despite the structures that are meant to snuff that out? How do we even begin to seriously think about this, let alone act, if we're not talking about imperialism or capitalism?

L. Jaffee: Backtracking a little bit— “What does it mean to do disability justice transnationally while avoiding imposing epistemologies of the north on southern contexts?” has to do with how disability studies, and maybe too disability rights, has been concerned with the claiming of identity as a badge that you wear. I'm certainly not the first to say this. Many disabled theorists and activists of color have said things along the lines of not being primarily concerned with who calls themselves disabled because they understand that the implications of claiming identity or having that label differ based on race, on nation, on gender or sexuality (Bailey & Mobley, 2019; Mingus, 2011). The end goal of disability justice is not necessarily that you need to claim this identity. It's about the practice of it and the work that you're doing, and in what we can recognize as a disability issue. I was thinking about disability as a political identity in Palestine as something that is often also a product of resisting the occupation. For example, amputations sustained through Palestinian participation in the Great March of Return. The uneven distribution of particular disabilities as a result, not only of Israeli settler-colonialism, of the occupation, but also of resistance to occupation and the way in which disability emerges as a result of that. In the U.S., thinking about Indigenous peoples who have become permanently disabled from teargas or rubber bullets while protesting pipelines.

The point of which is not that you necessarily need to claim disability as an identity, but recognizing as people invested in disability justice, who we see as disabled and what we're able to recognize as a disability issue. Schalk and Kim (2020) describe this in an article introducing feminist-of-color disability studies, where they write "feminist-of-color disability studies likewise understands disability as a relationship to power rather than a legible identity to which one can lay claim" (p. 38). This idea of disability theorizing and analysis as about relationality—including one's relationship to power on a global scale—to me is more generative and clarifying than thinking of disability solely as an identity to be claimed.

**“What possibilities can be re-opened for imagining decolonial disability futurities?”**

L. Sheehi: Right—what the purview of disability justice is. I think you were saying that before, too. Both about what types of models, maybe of thinking or engaging this, are we bringing into certain spaces, but also the expansiveness in which we're thinking and engaging, too. I think this links back to where we met, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) is talking about disability justice. Borrowing from Robin Kelley's (2018) idea of solidarity not being a market exchange, if the endpoint is liberation, how do we *not* imagine or know that disability justice is a part of the Palestinian struggle, and the Palestinian struggle is part of disability justice?

That feels like a very simple expansion of the purview because we're talking about liberatory processes. The details, are like you're talking about, creating debility or maiming, like Jasbir Puar (2017) has talked about, policies of shooting people in the knees with the explicit intent to debilitate, all the ways in which you debilitate people or create disabilities in order to keep



that settler-colonial structure running the way it's meant to. These concrete examples help animate us what we are discussing. I think I offered this example in the SJP talk we did together of the pregnant Palestinian woman whose husband had an ID card under the Israeli apartheid system that would allow *him* to drive through the checkpoint, but she did not, the ID did not extend to her. Their car was stopped on her way to give birth, and because of the apartheid system, codified in IDs, and enshrined within the settler-colonial condition in Palestine, she was made to get out of the car and walk through the checkpoint, rather in the car. If we were to follow the logic of "reasonableness," people might deploy justifications of state and national laws to explain away the raw violence of that moment. But, in terms of the absurdity, the violence, and the regularity with which this happens, it becomes abundantly clear why disability justice is a Palestinian issue and vice versa.

L. Jaffee: I feel like the existence of the State of Israel is also an example of the danger or implications of not thinking of the ways in which liberation movements are inextricably linked. Zionism was one response to antisemitism, which is premised on ableism because part of antisemitism is the narration of the weak Jew, the sickly Jew. The Zionist response is: we need to build our own nation-state around this notion and ideology of a hypermasculine, hyper able-bodied, strong, Jewish identity. And while part of the Israeli-Jewish identity is hyper-ablebodiedness—thinking about Israel's arms industry, military might, and mandatory conscription, all of which are part of maintaining or entrenching the settler-colonial structure—with Ro'im Rachok, we also see how these logics are adaptive, malleable. In that example, autistic soldiers are now being written as valuable to the extent that their abilities render them useful to the settler-colonial state-making project.

This is the risk when our understandings of freedom or understandings of liberation are not looking at how all of these logics work in tandem; then you end up reproducing the same sorts of violence. As a part of the Jewish diaspora whose ancestors were killed in the Holocaust, the degree to which the state of Israel perpetuates ideologies that in some ways mirror or mimic Nazi logic is horrifying. The logic of elimination and the way in which Palestinian mothers are talked about by Israel's political leaders as a threat to the state. It's replicating these racist, settler logics about population management and elimination. The idea that Indigenous reproduction is dangerous—it's just another iteration of eugenic logic.

This is the risk of thinking about freedom in such a narrow, unimaginative way, to be on top of the hierarchy instead of obliterating the hierarchy.

L. Sheehi: Instead of getting rid of the conditions that would create the hierarchy to begin with. It's a displacement which also erases the conditions that created the extermination, persecution, and displacement of Jewish folks: a pernicious, racist capitalist, ableist process that came into being and as a European invention. It's a European imperialist, capitalist, colonial invention.

I hear you saying that these narrow ideas conscript us to forget. To forget how these systems came to be, to forget that hierarchies are not fixtures, to forget the roots of these conditions and instead see things as symptoms that then need managing.

Going back to this reopened imagination of decolonial disability futures: what would it be like for us to recognize, in every action, in every intervention, in every thought, that the very systems we live in rely on debility and disability? This may be a truism to some of us, but the practice of remaining connected to that truth becomes hard. They rely on debility and disability not only to drain life force and make people alienated individuals disconnected from collective struggles, but to sustain white supremacy, which is based on purity, productivity as it's seen by capitalism, exploitation, domination, and hierarchy that is enshrined in imperialism and settler-colonialism.

For me, decolonial disability futures means divesting from all those systems, which means divesting from all forms of exploitation and domination. This goes back to your point about the danger in using narrow frameworks because they might divest from one form of domination and exploitation, but actually shore up another one. That's what's incumbent upon all of us who are engaged in disability justice as part of a larger liberation movement, to be attuned to all the ways that domination and coercion can show up. You can't cherry pick one for the other and trade off one for the other.

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