

13 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

## Panel 9. Affective Technopolitics of Genocide

Convenors:

*Stephen Hughes, University College London*

*Hania Tayara, University College London*

**Keywords: affect, activism, technopolitics, war**

Genocide, as defined by the United Nations (UN), means "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group". The genocidal acts included within the UN definition such as "killing [...] causing serious bodily or mental harm [...] conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction" are of interest to STS scholars when they are facilitated by or directly achieved through technoscientific means.

The organisers of this panel are interested in gathering together scholars who want to explore how science and technology are being used to commit genocidal acts in various contexts. The language of affective technopolitics is chosen to focus attention to the catastrophic physical and psychological effects that technoscientifically-enabled genocidal acts have on the targets of those acts and the powerful emotional impact of these acts across the world ranging from despair, horror, and fear to courage, hope, and solidarity. We are also interested in exploring the lack of affect – indifference, denial, and apathy.

The organisers are interested in STS perspectives on the affective technopolitics of genocide. For example, what are the affective impacts of using drones to make loud buzzing sounds to remind people they are occupied/in constant danger? What emotional effect does it have when everyday technologies like pagers are used in mass-killings? How do people feel when learning that decisions to kill have been decided by algorithms? How can technological resistance like the use of eSIMs to maintain secure and reliable communication, access medical resources, and provide patient care produce hope and solidarity? What emotional investments are encouraged or discouraged when genocide is "livestreamed"? What role does social media play in creating and strengthening relationships of care and opposition to genocide? We are interested in broader commentary on the role of STS in navigating these issues.

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## ID 299 - "Speculative Gen AI: Redefining Reality, Power, and Violence"

*Donatella Della Ratta, John Cabot University*

**Keywords: Generative AI, violence, Palestine**

This talk critically explores the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of speculative generative AI within the framework of synthetic realism, a visual paradigm where AI-generated images fabricate hyper-realistic yet entirely fictional realities. Drawing on Heather Dewey-Hagborg's concept of "generative representation" (2018), the discussion examines how these synthetic visuals—detached from indexical and empirical references—gain legitimacy through established traditions of representation rooted in Western visual culture. These images occupy a liminal space between the plausible and the factual, challenging conventional notions of authorship, representation, and truth. The talk raises critical questions about the implications of speculative generative AI: What does it mean to imagine and build futures through synthetic imagery? How do such visuals destabilize established understandings of representation and reality? What ethical dilemmas arise when these technologies are deployed in politically charged contexts? By bridging theoretical and ethical perspectives, the talk interrogates how generative AI reshapes narratives of power, visibility, and erasure in contemporary media landscapes. A key focus is the potential for speculative imagery to become "operational" in warfare and violence, drawing on concepts introduced by Harun Farocki (2004) and expanded by Jussi Parikka (2023). The analysis includes government-sanctioned AI-generated media, such as "Gaza 2035," an Israeli-made visual projection of a hyper-modern, Gulf-style Gaza that erases Palestinian cultural heritage and, symbolically, Palestinians themselves from a vision of the region's future.



Another example is Turkish-produced AI-powered videos that imagine future genocide memorials honoring Palestinian victims, portraying future generations questioning the inaction of their ancestors in stopping the indiscriminate violence beginning in October 2023. By situating these speculative images within the broader context of their operational roles in mobilizing public sentiment and enabling sophisticated forms of violence, this talk contributes to ongoing debates on the ethics and aesthetics of AI-generated media. It urges a rethinking of authorship, creativity, and the implications of synthetic visualities as tools of speculative world-making that navigate the blurred boundaries between creation and destruction.

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## ID 375 - Deconstructing the New Age of Digital and Technological Apartheid and Genocide

Hania Tayara, University College London

**Keywords: Genocide, affective AI, military technology, Palestine, settler colonialism**

Is the development of a technology shaped by its social and political environment or vice versa or both (Winner, 1977)? Can a technology be political as an object within itself (Winner, 1980)? How can technology be racist? Can racism be embedded within the design? Can racism be automated (Benjamin, 2019)? These are some of the questions this work asks about Israel's infamous military and AI surveillance technologies.

Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza has often been described as "the first ever live-streamed genocide". However, in mainstream media, Israel is referred to as the "startup nation", viewed as a leader in cutting edge technology and innovation. This narrative erases the settler colonial nature of the state and the violence inflicted by Israel on the indigenous Palestinian population using these very same technologies. One stark example of conflicting science communication narratives is the Israeli pager attack in Lebanon, where Israel was hailed for its technological prowess, with news outlets and experts using words like "audacious" and "extraordinary" to describe what can be legally classified as a terrorist attack.

Beyond science communication, this research considers how some of these violent technologies are used as an affective means of inflicting terror on Palestinians. For example, the use of the Zinanah. This is the word Palestinians use to refer to an Israeli drone that flies over citizens in Gaza making a buzzing sound, having the purpose of creating fear of an ever-looming Israeli attack. These technologies are classified as biopolitical techno-borders: technologies used and developed by Israel to control Palestinian bodies and enforce separation.

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## ID 611 - Sonic Resistance on Three Wavelengths

Tom Western, University College London

**Keywords: sound, resistance, radio, liberation, anticolonial**

Within the sensory assault of genocide, sound carries particular resonance. The constant buzzing of drones or zinanah (Tayara 2024) overhead; the perfidious use of loudspeakers – itself a war crime – playing the sounds of babies crying to lure people out into sniper fire; the sonic desecration of religious buildings, with mosque sound systems used by IOF soldiers to sing and to play EDM. Genocide has a soundtrack. Long part of imperial militaristic violence, such uses of sonic infrastructures constitute an intensification of what Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2017) calls the "occupation of the senses" under settler colonialism, which, as part of genocidal violence, become an obliteration of the senses, as well as of land and of life itself.

This paper listens to this sonic obliteration, but it also listens to three forms of sonic resistance. It, first, tunes into the work of the Sonic Liberation Front and of collective radio projects sounding out the Palestinian struggle and linking it to forms of anticolonial resistance elsewhere. Second, it places these practices into technopolitical history, hearing how radio – or what Edwin Hill Jr (2013) calls "le poste colonial" –



played a central role in anti/colonial soundscapes: at once a relay point of imperial structures of governance and subject formation, and a space for developing solidarities and emergent modes of resistance. And third, it recounts a collaborative "Mediterradio" project produced by the author with friends, gathering recordings from Alexandria, Nablus, Damascus, and Athens, and hearing Eastern Mediterranean relations as a feedback loop in which forms of struggle are in constant circulation.

In so doing, the paper seeks to hear how sonic infrastructures are turned into affective technopolitics of genocide, but also turned against them. And how radio wavelengths in particular – borrowing from Fanon – become a means of combatting colonial occupation, and "believing in the liberation" (1959: 97).

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## **ID 864 - Weaponising apparently harmless portable objects: Street level categorizations of trust in post 'Pagers Attack' Lebanon**

*Tobias B. Back, Forsvarsakademiet*

**Keywords: Trust-in-technology, hybrid warfare, mass-killings, ethnomethodology**

Trust-in-technology typically emerges through routine usage and familiarity. However, the September 2024 'Pagers Attack' in Lebanon and Syria was a stark reminder that this apparent trustworthiness can be weaponised in hybrid warfare operations, as the mundane ubiquity of pagers and walkie-talkies transformed them into potent vectors for attack. According to the Protocol on Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, "It is prohibited to use booby-traps or other devices in the form of apparently harmless portable objects which are specifically designed and constructed to contain explosive material." Yet, just how such seeming harmlessness is produced and recognised in practice remains un-specified. Drawing on media interviews conducted in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, we analyse the local emergence, formation, and enactment of new social-moral practices of engaging with technology at street level. We ask: what ascriptions of trust or trustworthiness are explicated in and as civilians' own, locally occasioned technology-contexted activities? Through an ethnomethodological treatment of post-attack statements, we explore the affective impact of technological mass-killings. Our findings demonstrate how these impacts extended beyond the immediate targets, creating a spillover effect of distrust from generic to a range of personal electronic devices, and moreover how Lebanese society's members engaged in a collective re-assessment and categorisation of 'apparently harmless portable objects' to navigate this new, however momentary, landscape of trust and/in technology. Additionally, we explore how the attacks spurred new forms of technological resistance and solidarity as people developed alternative communication strategies to maintain connection and hope.

