

## Performing technologies in EU, Israeli and Palestinian security cooperation

Dr Catherine Charrett *ISRF Early Career Fellow 2018*

*NOTE: The Early Career Fellowship application form has been updated since this proposal was submitted.*

### **Abstract**

This research aims to explore the networks that form around state security technologies in the European Union's engagement with Israel and Palestine, and it uses performance art to critique these relationships. The project uses a feminist methodology to observe how different technologies produce political relationships, which I argue impact on how the EU regards Israeli versus Palestinian sovereignty. In the project I will conduct fieldwork to map EU-Israeli and EU-Palestinian cooperation and joint ventures in the development of different security technologies. This project addresses how masculinity performed through techno-scientific practices constitutes Israel a strong sovereign actor, and how the EU's state building "assistance" to Palestinian actors works to weaken ideas of Palestinian sovereignty. A gendered focus prevents taking these diplomatic relations for granted, and it encourages a critique of how the reproduction of certain masculinities maintains the status quo.

This project engages in cross-disciplinary activities between politics and performance to address the complexity of EU relations with Israel and Palestine. In this project I will construct and deliver a performance piece on the differing technological networks. The performance piece, I argue offers a critical perspective on EU policy in an inviting way, encouraging action rather than antagonising or excluding key players. Furthermore, in translating academic research into performance art I am able to disseminate my research to a wider audience, within and beyond academia. This offers the public the opportunity to view research on state diplomatic practices in a way that is straightforward and inclusive.

This project is dedicated to disseminating this research to varied audiences in academic, community and governmental circles. As such, the performance fosters bonds between the public and government over a topic that is central to international security concerns. The performance invokes an emotional response from its viewers, which I argue encourages active participation in politics.

## **The Research Idea** *The innovative thesis of the project*

This project enquires how different interactions with security technologies shape the way in which external actors relate to Palestinian versus Israeli sovereignty. It argues that while some technologies reproduce ideas of state efficiency, control and sovereignty, others reproduce ideas of weakness, disorder and illegitimacy. This project explores EU-Israeli cooperation in the research and development of sophisticated weapons and surveillance technologies, which it argues reproduces Israel as sovereign actor. Differently, the EU's assistance to the Palestinians with state building infrastructures, the construction of carceral technologies and the training and management of their police force reproduces is observed as reproducing an idea of failed sovereignty. These differing relationships, I suggest impact on the EU's engagement with the actors, namely the reluctance to place economic sanctions on Israeli companies, and the lack of regarding Palestinians as legitimate negotiating partners.

The innovative thesis of this project is situated in the production of a performance piece to disseminate the research findings. I will produce and show a performance using artefacts and materials from fieldwork. Performance as a method uses the theatre space to present alternative realities, in this case alternative relationships to technology within Israel and Palestine. I argue that this artistic process encourages audiences to have a transformed perspective of relations between the EU, Israel and Palestine. Moreover, it provides a space for the public to engage with the academic study of diplomatic affairs. The performance piece will be shown in academic, theatre and community spaces, as well as filmed for further dissemination.

## **Background** *Current research reference points and their limitations*

Investigations of EU engagement with Israel and Palestine have highlighted issues around state-building and security sector reform in the Palestinian territories (Bouris, 2014; Parsons, 2011) and have explored Israel's military-industrial complex and EU-Israeli security cooperation (Graham, 2011; Weizman, 2011). Much of the literature focuses on economic reasons for the EU's reluctance to impose sanctions on Israel, seeing invested interests in the continued cooperation between the actors. A gendered critique of these relationships understands how the technologies themselves shape identities and political relationships. Within the field of International Relations feminist and postcolonial scholars have explored how techno-scientific discourses shape masculine subjectivities (Masters, 2004; Wilcox, 2016). My work contributes first, by

providing a thick empirical study of how masculinities are reproduced through networks of technologies and actors in the field of security. Second, my work contributes to feminist approaches in International Relations that have encouraged using alternative methods to reproduce knowledge in a way that challenges existing dominant frameworks.

The field of International Relations has begun to explore the possibilities in cross discipline conversations between performance and politics (Edkins and Kear, 2013; Rai and Reinelt, 2015), but the production of performance as a method of research dissemination is very new to the discipline. Building off positive responses to my performance piece, "Politics in Drag: Sipping Toffee with Hamas in Brussels," from both artists and academics, I suggest that such this performance presents a unique opportunity to investigate a complex and enduring political situation through creative means.

**The Focus** *How the research provides a fresh approach to real-life problems*

Israel acts as a showroom for the world's most advanced weapons systems, whereas Gaza acts as a laboratory for the testing of these weapons (Graham, 2010b). Since 1996 Israel has enjoyed exclusive rights to EU grants for research and development, and this cooperation was reaffirmed on 8 June 2014 with Horizon2020, which allows for over a billion euros in shared investments, as well as scientific exchange and joint projects. Significantly, Israeli security companies such as Elbit systems and Israeli Aerospace Industries benefit from this access. Israel is regarded a "hot spot" for innovation and its relationship with the EU in the development of counterterrorism and urban warfare technologies are argued to reproduce Israel as a legitimate sovereign actor.

Concurrently, the EU has been the principle external driver of state building processes in the Palestinian territories, taking a lead role in improving law enforcement capacities. Security sector reform is a major segment of EU state building initiatives and in 2008 projects under the EU Co-ordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support (EUPOL COPPS) were renewed allowing for technical exchange and joint operations. The EU channels resources for the construction of infrastructure and provides management training. Despite years of state building initiatives Palestinian sovereignty is not recognised. Rather, Palestinian governing bodies continue to be the receivers of further training to monitor their borders and control internal dissent. This projects asks how the

networks that form around these initiatives reproduce Palestine as unable to perform sovereignty.

**Theoretical Novelty** *What conceptual innovation the research is aiming at*

The theoretical innovation of this thesis is using the materiality of technology as a starting point from which to investigate different ideas of masculinity. Here technology is treated as being productive of the social and political world. Applying a technological gendered analysis of EU relations with Israel and Palestine opens up new avenues for critiquing EU policy in the region. Gendered based critiques are concerned with the reproduction of hierarchies and asymmetrical power relations in political and social systems, which occur through the ordering of different gendered identifications. The feminist theoretical exploration of the case in this project provides a unique way of analysing how cooperation in technological innovation sustain political hierarchies. Israeli technologies invoke ideas of innovation, entrepreneurship and provide EU-Israel actors the opportunity to push boundaries together and build sustainable partnerships. The development of state building infrastructures in Palestine puts the EU in an advisory role, helping the Palestinian Authority to take responsibility for law and order within their territory.

The turn to performance art in this project provides an opportunity to critique gendered hierarchies and tackle how different technologies reproduce ideas of legitimacy. In using strategies from queer and drag performance, such as parody, melancholy and exaggeration my performance piece is able to present these networks around technology in a way that critiques their legitimacy. In presenting different uses of these technologies the performance invites different critiques of EU policy towards Palestine and Israel.

**Methodology** *How different disciplinary inputs will interact in empirical inquiry – specific methodological examples are often helpful for non-specialist readers*

1) Develop a feminist framework for analysing EU cooperation with Israel and Palestine. This framework will provide mechanism for observing how different gendered characteristics circulate through technologies, which have the power to shape political identities and relationships. The methodological approach is concerned with techno-scientific performances of masculinity, looking at discourses around efficiency and innovation, and postcolonial masculinities looking at dominance and control.

2) Conduct document analysis and fieldwork to first investigate EU-Israeli joint ventures in the research and development of state security technologies. This will include the analysis of press releases, corporate documents, and joint venture agreements, as well as visits to locations in Israel and Europe. Second, I will investigate EU support to the Palestinian Authority under the EU External Action Service missions. I will investigate EU policy directives and I will visit the principle training location in the West Bank. I will conduct select interviews. The objective is to observe differences in EU-Palestinian and EU-Israeli interactions over these state security technologies.

3) Develop a performance piece to present my findings. Using artefacts from my fieldwork, such as photographs and brochures, and interview material I will produce a performance piece. This piece will be shown in academic and theatre spaces, and filmed for future dissemination. The objective of the performance is to show alternative uses of these technologies in a fashion that challenges the status quo. Audience members will be invited to interact with the different technologies in a way that interrogates the reproduction of dominant masculinities within them.

**Work Plan** *How the work will be organised over the award period and what outputs are intended.*  
The principal output from this research project is a performance piece, which will be produced and disseminated during the award period and a journal article for a leading academic journal in the field of International Relations.

September-October 2017 Complete the development of a theoretical and methodological framework for identifying different iterations of masculinity linked with state security technologies and state sovereignty. Present framework at a major international convention.

November 2017 Contact theatre venues, academic institutions and community centres to arrange performance bookings. November-December 2017 Investigate EU-Israeli techno-scientific cooperation under Horizon2020, relying on secondary sources and document analysis. Investigate EU-Palestinian security under the European Union Coordinating Office for Palestinian Politics Support. Identify key networks and locations to visit.

January-February 2018 Conduct fieldwork in Israel, the West Bank, and Europe to observe locations of joint ventures in research and development and management training. Conduct select interviews with participants and managers in these networks. Take photos and collect artefacts, such as publicity material, strategic frameworks, and other related objects and documents.

March-April 2018 Produce a performance piece using networks tracked, artefacts found and interviews conducted during the field-work. Performance production will include consultation and collaboration with performance artists and scholars.

April 2018 Produce publicity material for the performance.

May-June 2018 Disseminate performance piece in academic, community and institutional spaces in the UK and other European locations. Film performance for further dissemination.

July 2018 Write reflective article on performative feminist methodologies in International Relations and submit to leading journal, European Journal of International Relations.

**Outcome** *What further steps and what longer-term outcome are envisaged.*

The further development of this project centres first, on an expanded dissemination of the research output with an emphasis on political impact, and second, on strengthening the interdisciplinary work between performance and politics.

I will circulate the filmed performance to my contacts within the EU and I will aim to show the performance within the European Parliament building. I will develop a feedback process whereby EU parliamentarians are invited to comment on the work. This performance, as well as my first performance piece are critical of EU positions, but the presentation of these critiques are considerate of the social and political constraints faced by the institution. The performances are a call for EU diplomats and bureaucrats to reflect on their actions and the possibility for change. As such the dissemination of this work will contribute to transforming the way in which EU figures may consider their position towards Israel and Palestine.

A core belief of this project is that drag or queer performance can challenge routine politics and enable ways to imagine breaking free from existing social or institutional rituals. As such, I will continue I will continue my interdisciplinary work and continue showing the performance beyond the award period. Longer-term outcomes will focus on developing the connections between politics and performance, both at Queen Mary, University of London, my host institution, and external to Queen Mary. I will present the work at various interdisciplinary workshops and publish an article on the need for alternative approaches to engaging with politics.