

“Everyone in Gaza is disabled:” Childhood, Menstrual Justice, and Disablement in Palestine

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Abstract: Starting from the “Everyone in Gaza is disabled” Twitter/Instagram post by @palestinepromise, this piece explores the links between menstrual justice and disability justice in the context of a Palestinian genocide under which all Palestinians are rendered disabled by an Israeli Western-funded attack on Palestinian land and life. First, I outline a menstrual justice framework that incorporates three central axes: disability justice, an end to occupation, and the ungendering of menstruation. Next, I analyze three social media posts from Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, created by Palestinian and Pro-Palestinian content creators, @palestinepromise, journalist Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1), and @fitnfulI, which loosely align with the goals of disability justice, end of occupation, and ungendering, while also challenging Western media’s orientalist and homonationalist views on Palestine. Finally, the piece turns to the film *Farha*, by the Palestinian filmmaker from Jordan, Darin J. Sallam, to consider a brief menstrual representation of a young bleeder in the film. Grounded in Palestinian liberation, this piece strives to record some of the important cultural resistance work Palestinian and pro-Palestinian creators have undertaken in their envisioning of menstrual justice as necessarily linked to the end of occupation, disability justice, and the refusal to suture menstrual bleeding to both adulthood (which denies Palestinian childhood) and womanhood (which denies the existence of menstruators of other genders).

Keywords: [menstruation](#); [Palestinian liberation](#); [ungendering](#); [disability justice](#); [menstrual justice](#)

Doi: [10.37514/PEI-J.2025.27.4.06](https://doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2025.27.4.06)

Content warning: *While I do not go into detailed descriptions of violence, this piece discusses Palestinian genocide and mass disablement, and will bring up specific examples of violence in the discussion of the film *Farha* in the final section.*

As the Israeli, Western-funded genocide on Palestine started to intensify in October 2023, countless social media creators, on platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, began to direct the public’s attention to the disabling effects of the onslaught. In addition to the 100,000 plus as of January 2025 (but in reality growing) wounded Palestinians, and the effects of starvation, exposure, illness, and deprivation, many content creators posted at the start of the genocidal intensification on how the population at large was being disabled through what Jasbir Puar rightfully identifies as “targeted debilitation” and “the right to maim” (Puar 2017, xi, 128), wherein as L.J. Jaffee outlines “Israeli settler-colonialism is contingent upon ‘disabling’ the Palestinian population” (Jaffee, 117). For example, on Twitter, creator @palestinepromise (now no longer on Twitter) posted an image-text from Instagram of how “Everyone in Gaza is disabled” (Figure 1). As the image from @palestinepromise with black handwritten style type against a pale orange background reads:

Everyone in Gaza is disabled. It’s not just the wounded, cancer patients, & women in childbirth. It’s children with braces that can’t be adjusted. It’s contact wearers with no saline. It’s air strike-shattered glasses with no optometrist. It’s asthma sufferers lacking nebulizers & inhalers.

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It's diabetics grappling for insulin & glucose monitors. It's people with chronic illnesses who need regular treatment. It's women with endometriosis & even debilitating period cramps. It's the deaf yearning for hearing aids. It's people navigating their mental health with no support. (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Access Text: An Instagram post; the image is square with a pale orange background. "Everyone in Gaza is disabled." is written in black handwritten-style type at the top, with the text mentioned ("It's not just the wounded...") below. The top left-hand corner has a black, white, and green dot with a red explosion radiating from the black and "Free Palestine" written above it in a red outline, all caps. The post is by @palestinepromise. The location tag is Gaza, Palestine. The post is reposted by @folkoftheshelf.

Unlike the "we are all disabled" statement sometimes heard in Western contexts that has been critiqued by disability activists and scholars as "a hollow attempt to claim solidarity," (Carlson and Murray, 2), "Everyone in Gaza is disabled" is a different sort of statement. As elucidated by crip activist and writer Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in a piece posted on the *Disability Visibility Project* (Jan 26, 2024), the phrase "Everyone in Gaza is disabled" asserts that disability justice must think about Palestine and about how disability is necessarily connected to settler colonialism and empire. Taking an expansive view of disability in this sense recognizes that disability does not occur in a vacuum but that it is directly connected to other forms of injustice, and in Palestine, to a broad Israeli genocidal tactic to intentionally maim, wound, and destroy Palestinians. Panelists at a 2024 NWSA panel on disability, Madness, and Palestine (Liat Ben-Moshe, L.J. Jaffee, Yasmin Snounu, Nirmala Erevelles, Kali Rubaii) alongside many other scholars, including Puar and Rita Giacaman, emphasize the point that debilitation is not a side effect of Israeli settler colonialism in Palestine but its main focus.

As someone who writes on menstrual justice in dialogue with disability, I am compelled by how pro-Palestinian disability justice visions, in their expansive view of disability, leave space open for menstruators. @palestinepromise writes that "Everyone in Gaza is disabled. ... women with endometriosis & even debilitating period cramps." This piece is grounded in feminist disability studies frameworks and particularly those related to pain such as articulated by Cara E. Jones, Ela Przybylo, and Alyson Patsavas, critical menstruation studies including the work of Chris Bobel and Breanne Fahs, and Palestine studies such as the work of Jaffee, Snounu and co-authors, Edward Said, Nadia Abu El-Haj, and Ilan Pappé and co-authors, to argue for

a robust model of menstrual justice that is committed to the liberation of Palestine. First, I outline a menstrual justice framework with attention to how it complicates ideas of “girlhood” and menstruation as well as how it must center disability, antioccupation, and anticolonialism. Next, I look at the robust ways in which Palestinian and pro-Palestinian social media posts argue for menstrual justice, focusing on three posts that align with the menstrual justice principles I outline of centering disability, ending occupation, and ungendering. Finally, I look at how menstruation is portrayed in the film *Farha* (2021) directed by Darin J. Sallam, a Palestinian filmmaker from Jordan, and representing a young bleeder’s menstruation amidst the context of the 1948 Nakba. My arguments in the context of this special issue on “Girlhood and Menstruation” are that a menstrual justice framework is needed to fully liberate menstruators. Menstrual justice, in turn, needs to be understood robustly as including a commitment to thinking menstruation in dialogue with the perspectives that disability justice offers, a commitment to challenging colonial occupation, and an acknowledgement of the limits of gendering menstruation through language of womanhood and girlhood. Specifically, I argue that despite what Puar (2007) years ago critiqued as Western media’s homonationalist and white feminist framing of Palestine as a “backwards” place, Palestinian and pro-Palestinian narratives of menstruation, as exemplified by three social media posts and the film *Farha* (2021), actually portray a truly robust vision of menstrual justice, including for children who menstruate.

Menstrual Justice: Focusing on the Three Pillars of Disability Justice, End of Occupation, and Ungendering

In her groundbreaking work, Margaret E. Johnson outlines menstrual injustice as “the oppression of menstruators, women, girls, transgender men and boys, and nonbinary persons, simply because they menstruate” (1–2). In other words, menstrual injustice includes the economic, social, relational, and emotional costs that menstruators pay as a consequence of having menstruating bodies that are socio-culturally denigrated. A framework for menstrual justice, as outlined by scholars such as Margaret E. Johnson, Swatija Manorama and Radhika Desai, and Ela Przybyło, is in turn committed to addressing and eliminating menstrual injustice while recognizing the complex, varied, intersectional, and geopolitically diverse conditions menstruators navigate. In this section I will briefly outline a menstrual justice framework, its grounding in justice models, and what a focus on the three specific principles of disability justice, end of occupation, and ungendering menstruation provide for thinking menstrual justice.

As a justice-based framework, menstrual justice is cognizant of the limits of a rights-based framework, recognizing that institutions including governments are often ignorant and unreceptive to the variegated needs of menstruators and other marginalized social groups. Menstrual justice approaches menstruation intersectionally and as connected, though distinct from, other social justice undertakings including reproductive justice, disability justice, racial and gender justice, and trans justice. For example, scholars such as Iris Lopez, Dorothy Roberts, and Loretta Ross discuss how reproductive justice emerged as a framework from women of Color in the U.S. who recognized the limits of a reproductive rights agenda that was only serving white women and ignoring histories of eugenics, forced sterilization, and coerced birth control on the bodies

of Puerto Rican, Indigenous, Black, and other People of Color. As the collective, Sister Song, outlines, justice in the reproductive context acknowledges bodily sovereignty through freedom to have or not have children but also other elements like access to nutritious food, clean drinking water, and safe environments free from occupation.

Similarly, disability justice, as outlined by Patty Berne and the art troupe Sins Invalid, goes beyond thinking about rights for disabled people and seeks to imagine worlds that are built with disabled people in mind and that foster care, community, cross-disability solidarity, collective liberation, and access as matter of course. And trans justice, drawing on the Trans Justice Funding Project, asserts freedom to bodily autonomy, access to affirmative medical procedures and medications, while envisioning communities beyond the scope of transphobia including for the most marginalized trans people such as sex workers, incarcerated people, and migrants. Menstrual justice is linked to all these visions for justice, yet it is also distinct. It is valuable to understand the links between trans, disability, and menstrual justice because too often these are understood as pertaining to separate bodyminds (Price), as if disabled and trans people do not also menstruate. Yet notably, it is also important to recognize menstrual justice as distinct from reproductive justice with which it is often implicated because menstruation is not only about fertility. Many menstruators do not want to and will not have children, and understanding menstruation solely through reproductive frameworks can be dysphoric to them. Also, subsuming menstruation under reproduction often leads to the issue of it being sidelined in research and as important *only if* it is linked with obstacles to fertility. Further, because menstruation is often tied to pain and menstrual disabilities such as endometriosis (Endo), fibroids, and Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), in many ways menstruation makes more sense in dialogue with a disability justice framework.

In *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, Ela Przybylo and Breanne Fahs write that “menstrual justice ... includes thinking about menstruation, menstrual pain, and access to menstrual products intersectionally, ... seeing access to menstrual products, including pain control, as a human right as well as understanding menstrual pain as a form of chronic pain that necessitates proper access to care” (2020, 376). Recognizing that menstruation often coincides with pain (dysmenorrhea), which can be severe, ongoing, and chronic, and that it can intensify many menstrual disabilities (those disabilities that are linked to, aggravated by, or associated with menstruation, such as Endo, fibroids, and PCOS), menstrual justice must be perceptive to the realness of menstrual pain and disabilities as well as to questions of access. Access includes access to menstrual products such as tampons, pads, and cups, to painkillers for managing period pain, to health care, as well as to menstrual suppressants that are electively (and not coercively) chosen. Lack of access to menstrual products, including due to period poverty, also exacerbates mental health and psychological distress, including depression and anxiety (Muhaidat et al.). Access also necessitates that the products that are available do not introduce further harm into the bodies of menstruators, as was the case with Procter & Gamble’s 1975 super absorbent tampon, Rely, in the U.S., which increased the chance for Toxic Shock Syndrome leading to many deaths and injuries, as discussed by Sharra Vostral, and as is the continued case with the high concentration of toxic substances found in menstrual gear (DeVito et al.; Vaughn). A menstrual

justice framework strives to be attuned to disability justice through an attentiveness to pain, to the demands of disabled menstruators, to the links between menstruation and disabilities, and to what OB/GYN Charis Chambers named and Przybyło discusses as “period trauma” (Przybyło 2025, 64; Bunch)—or the many ways periods are traumatic for menstruators. Because menstrual disabilities, menstrual trauma, and menstrual pain are all frequently minimized by medical professionals and society at large, an investment in centering these as part of disability justice is important (Hoffmann). Further, drawing on disability frameworks, such as those on pain (as explored by Patsavas and Margaret Price), justice and liberation (as in the work of Berne and Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018), and robust understandings of access (as Logan Smilges explores), strengthens understandings of menstrual justice.

End to colonial occupation is, I would argue, also a central tenet of menstrual justice, as it should be of all justice frameworks. Under conditions of occupation, war, and genocide, menstruators of all ages are bound to have more difficult experiences with menstruation. While menstruation is difficult even under conditions of peace and safety, it becomes a horror for people under occupation, war, and genocide, with menstruators commonly experiencing little to no access to period products, no private places to wash and change any fabric that might be modified for menstrual absorption, little access to running water, little access to pain relief, and few opportunities to rest and recover. As I will discuss in the following sections, this is certainly the case for menstrual bleeders in Gaza, for whom access to menstrual products is blocked by Israeli control of aid. The horror of menstruating while in an occupied nation undergoing the horrors of war, is often attested to in journalistic exposés. While historians and media have historically failed to cover the specific injustices of menstruating while at war or under occupation, existing exposés suggest that it becomes one of the most harrowing experiences for survivors—trying to manage menstrual flow without access to toilets, water, menstrual gear, and pain management all while undergoing brutal attacks on one’s nation, community, and home (e.g. Batrawy). This is all the more so for young bleeders—children and girls—who have not yet learned how to manage their periods or who perhaps experience menarche during a siege or colonial invasion. In Gaza, there is an estimated 249,000 menstruators who are children or adolescents (Taha, 1).

Palestinians under occupation also face brutal conditions in Israeli prisons if abducted or detained, including lack of access to menstrual products, menstrual shaming, and violence. Also, because many children are abducted and imprisoned, some also experience their first periods in these conditions. Malaka Shwaikh, drawing on journalist Reem Abu al-Laban’s work from between 2015 and 2021, writes that in interrogation rooms, prison cells, and *al-posta* prison vehicles, prison authorities exert “gendered control over menstruating bodies” (36). In similar ways, control over menstruating bodies, including through a denial or limit on menstrual products, is prevalent in prisons around the world, including in the U.S. (Shwaikh, 34). Menstrual justice thus needs to advocate for access to safe, nontoxic conditions free from war, genocide, abduction, imprisonment, and colonial occupation, all of which make the menstrual experience a harrowing one unlike any other.

In their published work, Przybyło outlines a list of upwards of 10 elements of menstrual justice, one of which includes ungendering. Ungendering “questions the naturalization of certain phenomena as the property of gender, including the idea that menstruation is the property of only one gender” (2025, 15; 2024). While historically menstruation has been fused to womanhood, Przybyło argues this is disadvantageous for menstruators for several reasons. First, it is factually inaccurate because many women do not menstruate, ranging from postmenopausal women to sports athletes to transgender women (some of whom nonetheless experience period symptoms), and because many people of other genders do menstruate including transgender men and nonbinary people. Second, children who menstruate are *not* women, and using the language of womanhood to describe menstruating children rhetorically denies them their childhood, as I will explore in the context of Gazan and Palestinian menstruators. This is especially important because as the age of menarche or first period drops around the world, more and more menstruators are in fact children, and not women, and it is incumbent on researchers to use language that rhetorically emphasizes this (e.g. Demerath et al.). And third and finally, the use of the language of women to describe menstruators also does a disservice to cisgender women by binding the two together and suggesting that women must bleed and that bleeding is a sign of “true womanhood.” Ungendering, instead, follows critical menstruation studies scholar Chris Bobel to opt for *menstruator* language to acknowledge the problematics of describing menstruators as women. Removing the gendering of menstruation is a step toward menstrual justice because it allows for more inclusive, broad, and descriptively accurate language that strives to do less harm, while recognizing that children as well as people of all genders can and do menstruate and that many women do not. While there are many more elements to menstrual justice and menstrual justice needs to be thought of as flexible framework amenable to change across geopolitical contexts, the three pillars of disability justice, end to occupation, and ungendering provide an important starting point.

Menstrual Justice for Palestinians on Social Media

Now that I have unpacked the importance of justice frameworks and focused on three central principles of menstrual justice, I want to focus on three tactics that Palestinian and pro-Palestinian content creators articulate online in relation to menstruation: (1) that disability justice and menstrual justice are linked, (2) that menstrual shame and secrecy are tactics of a Western genocidal imperialism, and (3) that menstruation needs to be ungendered not only to recognize that people of all genders menstruate but also that a large portion of menstruators are *children* and not women. As readers will observe, these three tactics loosely align with the three principles of menstrual justice I outlined above by articulating a link between menstrual and disability justice, focusing in on an analysis of how Western media and Israeli occupation make it intentionally difficult for menstruators in Gaza to exist, and looking at how creators center ungendered language toward emphasizing that children and people other than cis women also menstruate. In what follows, I discuss the importance of these interventions and how they challenge Western media’s gaze by way of discussing three social media posts. The first post on Twitter/Instagram by @palestinepromise, with which I started this piece, makes a deliberate link between disability justice and menstruation in occupied Gaza; the second, a TikTok by journalist Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1) refutes a Western imposition of menstrual

shame and instead refocuses us on the links between menstrual product access and Israeli occupation; and the third, a Twitter post (of an Instagram post) by @fitnfulI, refuses to buy into a homonationalist logic that locates Palestine as unqueer and untrans by asserting the importance of ungendering menstruation.

Importantly, these three narratives are vital interventions made by content creators that are not frequently covered in Western news media which tends to speak of Gaza as a “war-zone” and the lack of period pads as a natural byproduct of a “war-zone,” avoids mentions of Israel’s genocide of Palestinians, talks about menstruators as women (and sometimes “adolescent girls”), and discusses menstrual secrecy as part of “Gaza’s traditional society” (i.e. Batrawy for *NPR*). Such Western media framings have several effects. By rendering period product scarcity a natural byproduct of war, Western media intentionally avoids Israeli culpability for both the genocide and the blocking of aid to Gaza. Further, by talking about the issue using the language of women and “adolescent girls” only, Western media retrenches a homonationalist vision of Palestine as a place queer and trans people do not exist while simultaneously erasing Palestinian childhood. And through language such as “secrecy” and “Gaza’s traditional society,” Western media deflects from the problem of Israeli genocide and blocking of aid and renders Palestinian society as retrograde, backwards, and of a different time—all common rhetorical tactics of settler colonial powers. Palestinian and pro-Palestinian social media creators advocating for menstrual justice explicitly challenge these faulty narratives and refocus the conversation on menstrual justice. Further, through social media, Palestinians take back the “permission to narrate” their experiences of genocide, occupation, and survivance, something that is routinely denied them by Zionists, Israel/is, and their apologists (Said, 31). In short, then, social media platforms, even if imperfectly and inconsistently, did and do offer Palestinians the opportunity to narrate firsthand the atrocities that ensued after October 2023 and are thus vital texts for studying Palestinian resistance.

First, some of the pro-Palestinian content I have seen online deliberately links menstrual justice to disability justice. There are several reasons why this link is an important if often under-utilized one. First, disabled people menstruate. Second, many disabilities are connected to menstruation (i.e., Endo, chronic pain, fibroids, PCOS). Third, and importantly, not having access to menstrual products is an access issue. The last of these is the connection we see most strongly in the @palestinepromise post with which I opened this article. @palestinepromise is drawing attention to the fact that under an Israeli occupation and genocide, access to medicine and assistive technologies needed to be able to hear, see, move, manage trauma, as well as manage pain and bleeding, is not available—indeed—is actively, deliberately, strategically barred as part of an Israeli strategy of disablement. This expansive view of disability justice recognizes that menstruators require menstrual gear and painkillers, among other technologies, and that these access technologies are just as important as glasses, canes, chairs, prosthetics, or hearing aids. Preventing access to items like menstrual gear is in turn another tactic by which Israel dehumanizes and debilitates Palestinians.

Writing on Gaza under siege, Christine Sargent and Michele Friedner reflect on experiences of children relying on cochlear implants to communicate who after October 2023 were suddenly not able to charge them and of recently implanted children who are unable to attend therapy sessions to access post-

surgery care. In parallel though distinct ways, menstruators who rely on pads, tampons, or pain control, and who are not able to access them, are being barred from their access needs. I am not saying that menstruation in itself *is* a disability per se but that disability justice is a highly effective tool through which to understand menstrual justice. Access to menstrual gear and pain relief are both human rights and access needs for menstruators. Not being able to manage one's bleeding in a way that is gender affirmative and culturally appropriate is a form of bodily and psychological violence utilized by colonizers and occupiers.

While menstruation is a difficult experience even under conditions of peace due to pain, potential dysphoria, and cultural misogynist discourses that denigrate the bleeding body, what is important to recognize is that in Gaza access to these products is actively being blocked by Israelis at the border through both the prevention of aid entering Gaza and the active destruction of aid—that is scarcity is being manufactured by Israel. Even in the first months after October 2023 when some limited aid was coming in, menstrual products were not commonly included, as reported by Palestinians online. Casting shade, Peabody-winning journalist and content creator Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1) shared in a video from Dec 7, 2023, “the thing is I don’t know where’s the UN women, where’s the UNFPA, where’s the UNICEF, the UNRWA, where’s the rest of the INGO’s I don’t know if [...] they are not wise enough to put pads too in the 8 trucks that entered Gaza” (Figure 2).

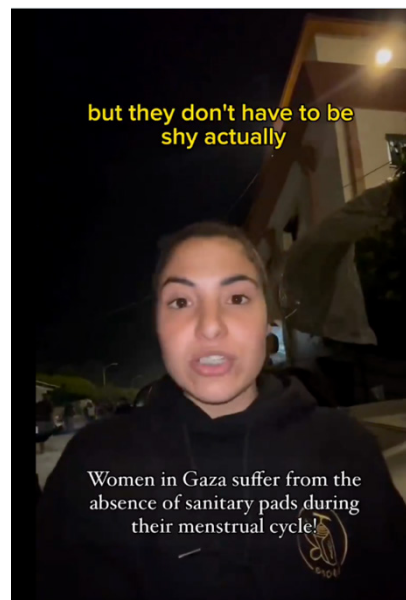


Figure 2: Access Text: A still from a TikTok by @wizard_bisan1. Bisan, with light olive skin, dark hair, and in a black sweatshirt, is speaking against a dark night background with a building behind her left shoulder. At the top in yellow sans serif is text of her speaking, which says “but they don’t have to be shy actually,” and at the bottom in white serif is text she added, “Women in Gaza suffer from the absence of sanitary pads during their menstrual cycle!”

In those first months after October 2023, as people on Twitter reported, menstruators who had access to birth control took to menstrual suppression. One reason for this was that birth control was still available in some pharmacies and was substantially cheaper than pads. Here menstrual suppression was less an

affirmative opportunity to decide when and if one bleeds but a response to conditions of displacement and lack of access to menstrual gear—in other words, essentially a tool of eugenics. As reported on social media, most menstruators used tent scraps and other textile fragments instead of menstrual pads or tampons. In addition, due to ongoing displacement and bombing by Israelis there were and are few washrooms and few private places to care for one's body; for example, in Rafah it was estimated that one toilet serviced 480 people ("Menstrual Health Management;" Taha, 2). The management of periods, not even mentioning menstrual pain, which is common for upwards of 80% of menstruators (Ju, Jones, and Mishra; Grandi et al.) and 90% of children and adolescents who menstruate (Ghandour et al.), is barred through lack of access to menstrual products, washrooms, water. Preventing menstruators from being able to manage their periods is another tactic of disablement that not only aims at attacking the body but also at demoralizing Palestinian bodyminds and painting Palestinians to a Western audience as uncivilized, bleeding, unmanaged – "fortified by racist and ableist portrayals of Palestinians as inferior, deficient, and subhuman" (Jaffee, 122).

Yet Pro-Palestinian and Palestinian online content creators refuse this link between shame and bleeding. As Bisan (@wizard_bisan1) shared in the video mentioned above from Dec 7, 2023:

women now are simply exposed to psychological and physical health risks because there's no products to use during their periods women are shy to tell you of this but they don't have to be shy actually the world is not shy to let us to death for 62 days now so they don't have to be shy to tell you that there's no pads to use in Gaza (Figure 2).

Appearing in a black sweatshirt with her dark brown hair pulled back against a white building and the night sky, Bisan tells it like it is: the shame should not belong to menstruators, it should belong to the West for partaking in a genocide that is making it impossible to meet basic access needs. Shame, notably, is a common tactic imposed on women—cis and trans—especially in Western contexts. Menstrual shame has a long Western history that has been strategically utilized by menstrual product companies to sell menstrual products, as Przybylo and Fahs (2020) discuss. Menstrual shame also has the effect of individualizing the menstrual experience, making it a personal burden a menstruator must bare alone and hide from non-menstruators around them—usually cisgender men. In the context of violent genocidal occupation, shame is also intentionally manufactured to make it impossible for menstruators to take care of their bodies and to, again, destroy the spirit of the people. Menstrual justice, instead recognizes, as Bisan does, that "oppression is inextricably intertwined with the Israeli state's settler-colonial project in the region" so that lack of menstrual product access and menstrual shame are manufactured (Jaffee, 117).

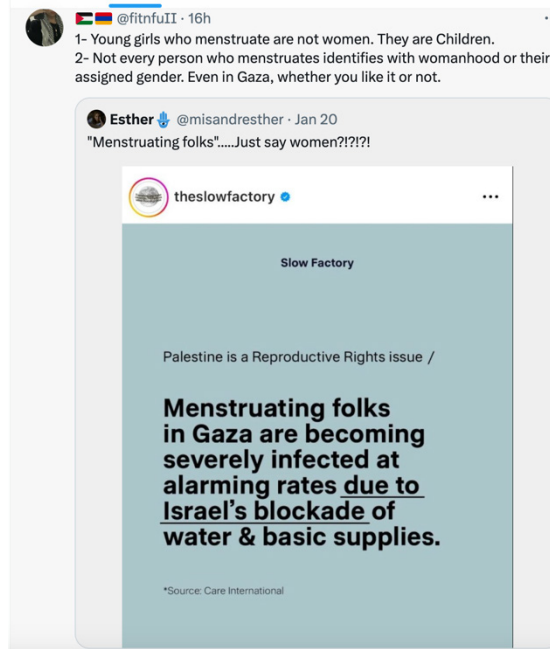


Figure 3: A Twitter-reposted Instagram post. The IG post is black sans serif text against an ashy pale blue background. The text by @theslowfactory reads, “Palestine is a Reproductive Rights issue” and in bigger bolded font, “Menstruating folks in Gaza are becoming severely infected at alarming rates due to Israel’s blockade of water & basic supplies.” This post was added by user Esther (@misandresther) to Twitter with the comment “Menstruating folks Just say women?!?!?” and then Esther’s post was reposted by @fitnfulI, as discussed below.

Finally, content creators are also challenging women-only menstruation language. This has two important goals. First, it challenges the Israeli and U.S. deployed homonationalist idea that Gaza, Palestine, and Muslim-majority countries in general are by default homophobic and transphobic and that there are no queer and trans Palestinians. As a post on Twitter by @fitnfulI indicates, “Not every person who menstruates identifies with womanhood or their assigned gender. Even in Gaza, whether you like it or not” (Figure 3). This post by @fitnfulI, who on Twitter indicates they are Gazan and use they/any pronouns, is a response to another user @Esther who responds to an IG post created by @theslowfactory, which uses menstruator-forward language. With black sans serif text against a grey-blue background @theslowfactory IG post indicates: “Menstruating folks in Gaza are becoming severely infected at alarming rates due to Israel’s blockade of water & basic supplies” (Figure 3).

Menstruator language is, importantly, not a placeholder or replacement for “women.” Rather it is a term used within critical menstruation studies, such as by Bobel, to challenge the idea that only women menstruate as well as that all women menstruate. @Esther responds to the menstruator-forward language by saying “Menstruating folks’.....Just say women?!?!?” to which @fitnfulI adroitly responds, as described earlier. Transexclusionary radical feminists like JK Rowling argue against this language on the grounds that it erases some of the specificity of women’s experiences. I disagree with this claim and believe that menstruator language can actually sharpen our analysis of how menstruation has been historically used against women by attaching menstrual bleeding to women through essentialist notions of womanhood.

The second important goal of challenging a woman-focused language around menstruation is likewise adroitly observed by @fitnfulII, namely that it erases Palestinian children. As they write “Young girls who menstruate are not women. They are Children.” This claim is so crucial in a Palestinian context. The “womaning of menstruation” (Przybyło 2025, 43) not only denies that other genders menstruate but also ties bleeding to *adult* womanhood even while menarche is occurring more and more frequently in children. This relates very deeply to the dehumanization of Palestinians since in Western accounts and media portrayals Palestinian children are frequently denied their childhood, portrayed as adults, as men, women, and even more frequently as “terrorists.” It is thus vital to undermine ideas that menstruation is the property of adult women and adult women only and that menstruation is a sign of “womanhood” and “adulthood” as a means to reassert the childhood of young bleeders. I will also add here that I have seen other Palestinians online make the argument that using the language of “menstruator” is in itself dehumanizing or that this level of attention to language is a neoliberal colonial tool distracting us from taking action to end genocide. While I disagree with both these arguments, the first for the reasons already specified and the second because it detracts from the importance of the role that menstrual trauma plays in genocide and the importance of gender and trans liberation, it is also useful to understand that ungendering, as Hortense Spillers and more recently other scholars including Riley Snorton have argued, has been used historically to disenfranchise and dehumanize people. While I do not think this is what is happening in social media posts that advocate for ungendering as part of a robust framework of menstrual justice, it is true that ungendering is used by Israel to discount the specificity of the lives destroyed. The three social media posts I analyzed, loosely correspond with a vision of Palestinian menstrual justice that: dialogues with disability to recognize the way Israel intentionally manufactures disability in Palestine, including through lack of access to period products, emphasizes justice as necessitating the end of war and occupation, and understands that ungendering menstruation plays a role in seeking robust menstrual justice for all menstruators.

Echoes of Menstrual Justice in *Farha* (2021)

As many following the Palestinian genocide on social media quickly learned due to the educational efforts of Palestinians and allies, October 2023 onwards is not the first time that Palestinians have been displaced, mass murdered, and mass disabled, while the land they steward is mercilessly razed along with trees, non-human animals, water supplies, universities, hospitals, and homes. In this section, I begin with a discussion of the 1948 Nakba for context and then move into an analysis of Darin J. Sallam’s film *Farha* (2021), set during the Nakba. I pay attention to the possibilities and limits of understanding the film as a vision for Palestinian menstrual justice, reading into some of the debates to point to how the film might be considered a *hasbara* film, or a film that is either explicitly or indirectly sponsored by Israel with the goal of minimizing Israeli culpability for genocide.

As a means by Western powers to create the state of Israel on stolen Palestinian lands, mass killing and displacement of Palestinians took place in an unprecedented way in 1948, known in Palestinian Arabic as Al-Nakba, or catastrophe. During this ethnic cleansing, Zionist settler militias murdered an unknown

number of tens of thousands of Palestinians, razing villages to the ground and poisoning wells, and forced about half of the then Palestine's population into displacement, an estimated 750,000 people. The villages, towns, and the majority of Palestinian land, was then settled by Zionists and replaced with Hebrew names. Zionism, in this sense, "is an ideology and a political movement that subjects Palestine and Palestinians to structural and violent forms of dispossession, land appropriation, and erasure in the pursuit of a new Jewish state and society" (Salamanca, Qato, Rabie, and Samour, 1). The Nakba, in turn, is less a historical event, and more part of the structure of settler colonialism, "manifested today in the continuing subjection of Palestinians by Israelis" (2). Darin J. Sallam's film *Farha* (2021) focuses on the events of the 1948 Nakba by way of a 14-year old protagonist, by the same name, as she sees her villages sacked first by the British army and then by Jewish settlers, her family murdered off, and her way of life ended.

Sallam is a Palestinian diasporic director based in Jordan, and *Farha*, her first full-length feature film, was premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2021 and has been available on *Netflix*. Sallam's film is based on a story she heard from her mother (Bsoul). As Sallam indicates, "I wanted to take this opportunity to show this other side of the narrative. It's always talked about from the Israeli side, but the Palestinian side has been ignored in cinema" (Carew, 78). Yet, it is important to point out that reviews of the film, such as by Terri Ginsberg and John King, have argued that *Farha* might actually be a *hasbara* film, that is a film that is directly or indirectly sponsored by Israel or its allies to portray Israelis positively, normalize settler colonialism, and orientalize the image of Palestinians, although there were also outbursts of Israeli anger at having the Nakba represented at all when *Farha* was made available on *Netflix*. Reviews by Samah Bsoul, Ahmed D. Dardir, and Terri Ginsberg and John King, argue that *Farha* softens the Nakba for viewers, evokes vague language in relation to Zionist settlement and anti-Palestinian violence and murder, and engages in orientalist portrayals through an easy storyline, reductive costuming, and the rendering of Palestinian gender relations as intrinsically patriarchal. In the words of Ginsberg and King, the film "offer[s] audiences little ... with which to advance their knowledge of that heinous event or to heighten their sympathy for Palestinian resistance" (256). Taking these critiques into account, I want to recognize the constraints, including financial, under which Sallam likely worked to make the film possible and how the final outcome, as "covert *hasbara*" (257) might not fully embody what she imagined, though she may not be able to comment on this. And yet I still think it is valuable to think about how the film encapsulates messages of Palestinian justice including menstrual justice, especially alongside the social media posts I already analyzed. It also importantly centers a story of a young girl in the context of the Nakba, even if it does so in imperfect ways. While Palestinians are denied in Edward Said's words, "permission to narrate," this is perhaps even more true for Palestinian women, girls, and gender minorities (31). As one story among others, *Farha* contributes to the extensive evidence on the Nakba, the "endless sea of memories from events that are now documented beyond doubt by historians, even Israeli ones" (Ofir, n.p.), even if this documentation and acknowledgment has led to little material change and, indeed, atrocities against Palestinians are even celebrated by Zionists as necessary for the Israeli state (Abu El-Haj, 259).

For most of the film, 14-year old Farha (played by Karam Al-Taher) witnesses the atrocities that unfold at the hands of Zionist settlers from behind the closed door of a cellar where she is hiding, and where very limited light leaks in, contrasted with the beginning of the film in which viewers get a glimpse into Farha and her community's vibrant life, filled with family, food, friendship, reading, and the flows of growing up. She finds herself in the cellar, because as Farha's father is looking for firearms to defend his family and community from the violent settlers, he asks her to stay in the cellar, with a dagger for protection, locking her in. As viewers we stay with Farha in that dark space, listening in on and partially seeing the events that unfold. The horrors of genocide unfold in the village, as a family of two parents, two children, and a baby is executed in front of Farha's home, which she can see through the cracks.



Figure 4: Access Text: A film still from *Farha*, showing the brief moment in which Farha discovers her first period. Farha, with olive skin and dark disheveled hair is in the cellar, with her back against the cellar door and a white wall behind her. A ray of light is on her hair in the otherwise dimly lit space. She holds up her hand, covered in blood, with an expression of shock on her face.

During her time in the cellar, Farha also begins to menstruate (Figure 4). This happens shortly after Farha has witnessed the murder of the family, with the freshly born baby left behind. With the baby crying in the background, Farha grasps her abdomen in pain and discovers blood on her dress. Reaching under she removes her hand with fresh red blood and horror on her face, the scene connecting with the fresh blood of the massacred family from shortly prior. The scene ends with Farha singing to herself while lying on the ground near the cellar door as the day turns to dusk. What does this short scene of menarche tell viewers about menstrual justice as it intersects with Palestinians' ongoing fight for liberation?

I have not seen mentions of this brief scene in any reviews of the film, speaking to the ways in which menstruation, including menarche for young bleeders, is often sidelined and ignored in narratives of war, occupation, and colonial violence. Sallam's brief inclusion of the moment, barely notable, could be argued to be merely a background element that speaks to Farha's coming of age during the Nakba or it could be understood as speaking to how the trauma of what Farha witnesses forces her body to grow up too quickly. I read the quiet moment as a textural element that enfleshes Farha as embodied, menstruating, and having to navigate the trauma of a first period amidst the horrors of Zionist violence and settlement. Here I see menstrual justice as directly connected to the pillar of ending occupation, as we get momentary insight into

the twin horrors of having to navigate a highly gender-coded new bodily experience alone and in a violent context. While the cellar protects her body, Farha is deeply affected by being an intimate witness to the ethnic cleansing of her village, the presumed death of her dad, the separation from her closest friend, and the horror of the murder of the family she saw through the cellar door. Although I am not claiming the film is outright making an argument about menstrual justice, it is presenting a portrait of a 14-year-old person having to contend with ethnic cleansing while also menstruating—and even this is highly extraordinary.

Yet, while as a 14-year-old Farha is a child, I would suggest that the context of when menarche happens—shortly after seeing a heinous crime—positions her as less a child and more as someone “becoming a woman” and here I would agree with critics’ observations of orientalizing messages in the film. As a coming-of-age narrative, menstruation functions here against the menstrual justice principle of ungendering which can keep intact the childhood of very young menstruators. Instead, I get the impression that we are to interpret Farha as having to grow up too quickly because of the atrocities witnessed, and that the placement of the menstrual bleeding scene following the massacre of the family retrenches that she is not a child who got her first period, but a person who is being catapulted into adulthood or womanhood. Yet even in this sense, the film perhaps suggests that menstrual justice, and the right of children who menstruate to *remain* children, is not possible in a context of violent occupation, settlement, and colonization. In this sense, Sallam’s brief portrayal of Farha as a young first-time menstruator can work effectively to amplify the need for menstrual justice to always remain attuned to geopolitical contexts, to the need for the liberation of Palestine, and to decolonization as the route to truly just menstrual futures for children.

Free Palestine: Toward Menstrually Just Futures

In this piece, I explored menstruation and girlhood in a Palestine under occupation through a menstrual justice perspective informed by critical menstruation studies, feminist disability studies, and Palestine studies. Outlining a framework of menstrual justice as including disability justice, end of occupation, and ungendering, I proceeded to look at Palestinian and pro-Palestinian social media posts advocating for menstrual justice as well as Darin J. Sallam’s representation of menarche in *Farha*. I argued that a menstrual justice framework must be invested in ending settler colonialism in Palestine and everywhere, for the reason that menstruators, including young menstruators, suffer under colonial occupation and war. Through the blocking of aid that causes lack of period products, absence of sanitary and private conditions to rest and remove menstrual gear, and the traumatic effects of war and genocide on both individual and collective bodyminds, there is no menstrual justice, including and especially for young bleeders, without a free Palestine.

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