CyberOrient, Vol. 19, Iss. 2, 2025, pp. 81–88

Comment:

Lurking Terror in Andor: The Subaltern from Above

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Abstract

This essay draws discursive parallels between the Disney+ science fiction TV series *Andor* and the Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilization's (ANAMED) documentary exhibition *Palestine from Above* to explore curatorial and storytelling methods employed in resistance against colonial powers. It argues that both productions tell stories "from below" by strategically counterposing street-level narratives of resistance against the technological and archival–discursive dominance of an aerial gaze of a colonial power. In both cases, subversion of oppressor's "techniques" and "technics" is the key dynamics in the curatorial approach, storytelling, and art production. The essay establishes the Empire's aerial weaponry and surveillance in *Andor* as the show's true antagonist, representing a pervasive and technofascist terror from above. This futuristic depiction is then compared to the historical framework presented in *Palestine from Above*, where the colonial control is critically analyzed through juxtaposition of artistic interventions in the archival evidence with the very evidence used to enforce control. It is then concluded that Andor's fictional universe provides a powerful lens for understanding the real-world mechanisms of oppression documented in the exhibition. Ultimately, it underscores the anomalous and unique presence of *Palestine from Above* within the current Western cultural landscape and the necessity of engaging with counter-hegemonic storytelling and curatorial productions to enrich public discourse.

Keywords

Andor, Popular Culture, Palestine from Above, Colonialism, Curatorial Practices

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One can watch the first episode of *Andor* through to the post-credit scene at the end of the first season and witness the spectral–spectacular technology hovers over the oppressed (Gilroy 2022). *Andor* has been telling stories of multifaceted resistance vis-à-vis a seemingly omnipotent autocracy (i.e., the Galactic Empire) armed with superior technology designed to maximize oppression. The Empire's spacecrafts are simultaneously terrifying and dazzling, as we witness through the eyes of young Cassian Andor—the show's protagonist—when the flaming hull of a crashing imperial spacecraft rips through the blue sky of his primeval homeworld (Figure 1). Cassian and his cohort of kids react with agitation, jumping and screaming in a language that the audience is not meant to understand, already divided between wonder and terror at the fallen wreck. Spectacle of the crashing spacecraft sharply contrasts with the tribal conditions in which these children live—foreshadowing of disputing rebel factions against the backdrop of a not-so-omnipotent Empire.



Figure 1. Still from *Andor*, season 1, episode 1, "*Kassa*," created by Tony Gilroy (2023). Image by Disney+.

Around the same time as the airing of Disney's Star Wars show *Andor*'s second season, the Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED) in Istanbul, opened an exhibition titled *Palestine from Above*[1]

[1] I took part in the production of the exhibition as the ANAMED exhibition and event specialist.

(Anani et al. 2025). It encapsulates various colonizations of Palestinians from the 19th century onward, jumping between chronologies and themes (of partition, appropriation, subjugation, devastation). The curators follow a fine thread of looking towards Palestine from elevated perspectives: from the surrounding heights in myths, from the cockpits of WWI British aircraft, or through the lens of snipers positioned safely inside settler military towers, and via remote screens streaming footage from drones menacingly hovering above Palestinians. Mahmoud Alhaj, a Palestinian artist whose video piece *Control Anatomy* is displayed in this exhibition, stresses settler armies' obsession with naming their aircraft and missile systems after the Griffin—a chimeric monster known for harassing inhabitants' livestock (Figure 2; Alhaj 2023). He documents these aerial aggressions that have gradually transformed into myth, gaining colloquial names and euphemisms while turning into a constant in the Palestinian imagination. Frago Tbakhi's short story, *12 Worlds Interrupted by The Drone* (Tbakhi 2020), stands as a dramatic symptom of this phenomenon.



Figure 2. Still from *Control Anatomy*, Mahmoud Alhaj (2023), video, 17:00. Courtesy of the artist.

The techno-fascist spectacle depicted in *Andor* directs a powerful lens, through which one could figure out the severity of the actual technologies of surveillance and destruction displayed in the *Palestine from Above* exhibition, challenging audience to discover that the Empire's concrete tools of domination in *Andor* are amplified versions of the mundane violence brought upon Palestinians (Vera-Phillips 2025; Marlborough 2025; Marsh 2025).

In *Andor*, people (human or otherwise) push back against the Empire's aggressions through various means: discoursing in the senate, gathering in ever-moving guerrilla camps; infiltration, appropriation, and assassination. We consistently witness the protagonist's attempts to repurpose key technologies, spacecrafts, and their crucial components, while the Empire plunders planets' natural resources on a scale of annihilation (Ghorman), disrupts generations-old rituals (the Eye of the Aldhanis), and destroys indigenous crafts (Ghor). All the while, resistance forces subvert imperial technologies and methods to fight back. Luthen Rael weaves an eclectic network of counterintelligence, guerrillas, and assassins; Mon Mothma rallies fellow senators against the Empire; Cassian Andor undertakes whatever messy operation comes his way. The Empire—not in response but as its inherent nature—extracts more resources and labor, causing ever greater destruction whenever and whatever it requires, to create the ultimate weapon of destruction. A vicious ouroboros, The Empire, in the post-credits scene at the end of season one, appears to be building the Death Star—arguably the most iconic airborne carrier of terror this fictional galaxy has ever seen.

Another iconic star, one that has become a symbol of extreme aggression against Palestinian lives (human or otherwise), haunts the *Palestine from Above* Exhibition. Raja Shehadeh relates how Israeli settlers abused Palestine Exploration Fund maps to exhort land from Palestinians (Shehadeh 2008). That kind of abuse of historical evidence is countered in the exhibition by Forensic Architecture, an interdisciplinary research agency investigating state and corporate violence, who produced videos in the exhibition that subvert colonizers' archives and tactics and documents to reveal the havoc brought upon Palestinians. Kamal Jaafari's video *Bon Voyage* is a testimony of Kafkaesque conditions Palestinians face when moving in and out of their

homeland (Jaafari 2020; Barsamian and Said 2003, 183–184). Faris Shomali and Zaina Zarour's work (2021) elaborates on the settler aspiration on Palestinian soil. It is positioned side by side with pictures of famed singers, actors, and scientists signed up in tree planting campaigns endangering endemic plants of Palestine (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Laboratory preparation of fertilized seedlings of foreign pine, to be planted in Palestinian land. Jewish National Fund.

Khalil Sakakini, a young teacher who lived through the British siege of Jerusalem in WWI, describes airplanes raining ammunition over the city and his constant fear of being a target of random violence. While strolling in the streets on various errands, he keeps looking up. Years later, in 1931, when the Zeppelin company arranged a tour over Jerusalem—bringing pioneering Zionists along with various bourgeois and aristocratic passengers

aboard—a diary kept by one of the passengers fantasized that to the viewers below, the aircraft "seemed a divine revelation, a creature from a fairy tale" (Figure 4). One could surmise that the actual experience was closer to the fright the young Sakakini had felt, or the frenzy that young Cassian and his friends would go through—an amazement mingled with terror. History revealed that the creature from the fairy tale was the Griffin, the missile system the oppressor built against the people of the land. The exhibition deliberately juxtaposes the colonial gaze from above (maps, aerial paintings, drone footage) with the street-level perspectives from Palestinian artists and archives: their narratives, images, and even their restitution of what has been destroyed through subversion of the destroyers' gaze from above.



Figure 4. Still from *The Orient Flight LZ 127–Graf Zeppelin*, Amer Shomali and Dia' Azzeh, videos, 27:08, 03:41, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

The Empire's ultimate killing machine—the Death Star—is an amplified version of warplanes, the Zeppelin, and later drones. It represents the ultimate

fantasy: minimizing the human contact with, and denying the humanity of, the targeted oppressed. Both *Andor* and *Palestine from Above* adopt similar narratives and discourse against extreme violence. They tell tales of resistance by focusing on the minutiae of life under oppression, not only bear witness to the tactics of the violent, but record and amplify the voice of the subaltern—not only remembering the lost ones but seeking the lives and stories of those who survived, keeping hope alive. For, as repeated many times in *Andor*, "rebellions are built on hope."

Note:

Andor is streaming on Disney+, *Palestine from Above* can be visited until January 25, 2026 at the Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations in Istanbul.

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