

Episode 242: Bajor as Allegory

[Women at Warp theme]

Andi: Hi. And welcome to Women at Warp, a *Star Trek* podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity in infinite combinations. My name is Andi. And thanks for tuning in. With me today is Grace.

Grace: Hey, everybody.

Andi: Hello, Grace. We also have a special guest, David.

David: Hi.

Andi: David, would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself and your connection to *Star Trek*?

David: Sure. My name is David Seitz. I am a professor of cultural geography and cultural studies in Claremont, California at Harvey Mudd College. Last year, I wrote a book that came out called *A Different Trek. Radical Geographies of Deep Space Nine*. And the second chapter of that book is dedicated to an interpretation of Bajor as political allegory. So, I'm thrilled to be part of a conversation about that.

Andi: So, what you're saying is you're the perfect guest for the topic, since our topic is Bajor as Allegory. I love it. Okay. Cool.

So, before we get into our main topic, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. Our show is made possible by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron, you can do so for as little as a dollar per month and get awesome rewards, from thanks on social media up to silly watch along commentaries. Visit www.patreon.com/womenatwarp.

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So, today, as we have mentioned, our topic is going to be the many, many allegories that Bajor represents in *Star Trek*, both in *TNG* and *DS9*. I really have to give you guys a very serious content warning here, because unfortunately, both the *Star Trek* interpretations and the real-world parallels that we're going to be talking about include a lot of really heavy topics. So, we're talking genocide, military, sexual servitude, forced labor, like you name it. You name the word crime, we're probably going to have to talk about it.

I really want to make sure that people understand that the conversation is going to be pretty heavy. So, I want folks to be ready and in the right headspace to listen to a conversation like that. So, we will be doing our best to tackle these subjects in a respectful and nuanced way, but we will be discussing a lot of traumatic topics.

Just as a heads up, our framing is going to be focused on how *Star Trek* explores these allegories and what the writers are attempting to say in their portrayals of these real-world tragedies. So, just bear that in mind. And then, of course, always we only have a limited amount of time, so I'm sure there are things that we will miss, but we will do our best to have as completed discussion as possible.

My last caveat before we start diving in, is that overall, there's a strong indigenous allegory across a lot of these storylines, and we feel like this is really important and we definitely will

probably be talking about that. But just because we have talked about that in depth on some of our other episodes, on Indigenous Representation, we will probably not take as strong a look at that as we might, just because we have already looked at that in some of the our other episodes. So, is that enough caveats [laughs] for us to get started with? I don't know. I could probably think of some more.

Grace: Caveats are plenty.

Andi: Yeah. Ye Olde Disclaimers. Okay. Cool. So, as I said, we're going to be talking about the allegories of Bajor. This is a topic I've been wanting to talk about, oh, for years. I still remember sitting down and watching *Ensign Ro* when I was first time trekking it and going, "Oh, this is Palestine." So, [chuckles] I'm excited to finally be tackling this topic.

There's, actually, a lot of behind-the-scenes evidence for what the writers were thinking through when they were thinking of Bajor and what they wanted to explore for that. Shocking no one, a lot of that is, is the Palestinians, our groups like the Kurds, the Jewish people, indigenous folks. And so, there's really a lot to get through here. They really became almost a stand in for a lot of different oppressed peoples, which I think is interesting.

Actually, I think that Ron Moore had a really cool quote about this, in that he said that, "While parallels do enter our discussions and sometimes are more overt than others, we don't really try to make Bajor a direct analogy to any specific contemporary country or people. Blending the experiences of many Earth peoples and races into our storytelling allows us to comment on these subjects without advocating for a particular political point of view, while at the same time allowing us to view the topics in a different light without the baggage of contemporary politics."

So, I found that interesting for a couple of reasons. One is that is exactly what an allegory is supposed to do.

Grace: Mm-hmm. Well spotted, Ron. Well spotted.

Andi: Good job, Ron Moore. I think you might be good at this sci-fi thing.

David: [laughs]

Andi: This is something that *Star Trek* has done from the beginning. Sometimes they've done it really well, and sometimes they've done it a little more clumsily. What is that, that episode where they have the face paint guys, that's the-

Grace: Oh, my gosh.

Andi: -allegory for racism?

David: Let this be your last battlefield.

Andi: Yes. Thank you.

Grace: That's what I thought.

Andi: [laughs]

Grace: They put the Riddler in two tone race makeup and said, "Bam, analogy."

Andi: [laughs] Yeah, I would not consider that one of our more successful allegories that they have explored.

Grace: Bless them for trying.

Andi: Indeed. And Ron Moore is not wrong. A lot of times, a little bit of distance is helpful when we're looking at stuff like this, because sometimes, folks, when they're looking at these hard political problems, they have a tendency to get defensive. If you're getting defensive, you're not necessarily emphasizing with the characters, and you're thinking more about, "Hey, this isn't me. I'm not doing this." So, when you put it in a more fictional context, it can sometimes be easier to put yourself into their shoes, a little bit more.

David: Yeah. I think you see in a lot of the creator's accounts of what they were thinking about when they were writing the visuals, this kind of kaleidoscopic idea, that depending on how you turn the kaleidoscope, you can see lots of different things. It's all of those things and more. And no pun intended.

Andi: [laughs]

David: I think that's absolutely true. I also think we have to be open to the possibility that, number one, [chuckles] that offers them a certain plausible deniability for offering more pointed commentary on particular issues. And number two, that even if that's not what the writers intended, it's become a social fact that lots and lots of people, including some of the actors involved in making *Star Trek* have noticed particular resonances with, say, Jewish experiences of the Shoah or Palestinian experiences of the Nakba.

And so, even if it wasn't what the writers intended or exclusively what they intended, people have used this to mobilize one another and push one another politically, and facilitate one another's growth and standing in solidarity with various oppressed peoples.

Andi: Yeah. I think that's 100% true. I think you make a good point about the distance also gives them the plausible deniability, because some of these political positions are not popular. They were especially unpopular at the time [chuckles] that these were made. It actually is interesting to me that one of themes that we're seeing in the behind-the-scenes discussions that they were having is how much they referenced the Palestinians. Michelle Forbes specifically referenced Palestine, when she was talking about *Ensign Ro*. Rick Berman said that they were not modeled on any particular single real-life group.

Grace: That sounds like a little bit of ass covering right there.

David: [laughs]

Grace: I'm not going to debate that, but at the same time, it's like, "All right--" Because there are some pretty clear analogies running throughout it.

Andi: Yes. Agreed. The other groups that he references in this, he says, "The Kurds," the Palestinians, the Jews in the 1940s, the boat people from Haiti, which is interesting way to put that.

Grace: Yeah. I was going to say, that's a phrasing.

Andi: Yes. Fortunately, the homeless and terrorism are problems in every age. I also thought it was interesting that he said the homeless. I don't think he necessarily means homeless. I think he means stateless.

Grace: Yeah. That makes a little more sense in this context.

Andi: So, let's talk about *Ensign Ro*. Let's get a little bit more specific into this.

Grace: Let's pivot away from being annoyed by Rick Berman for a minute.

[laughter]

Andi: If we're going to do that, we're never going to get anywhere. [crosstalk] I'm pretty much always low level annoyed with Rick Berman. So, I rewatched *Ensign Ro* today. And as I said, when I first watched *Ensign Ro*, the first thing I thought was, "Well, wow, this is a really clear allegory for Palestine." Partly, because the aesthetics. I was really struck re-watching it. I was like, "Wow, they really went hard on this."

From the beginning, they have a desert refugee camp situation going on. And then, they go into caves with a bunch of men wearing dark head coverings. Aesthetically, in set design and costume design wise, I really do not think you can escape the underlying connotations that this is an Arab allegory.

Grace: Which they, definitely, seemed to shy away from when we got more time on Bajor and more development of Bajor, as a planet.

Andi: Yes. Definitely. So, much has been said about how one of the first things that they do to *Ensign Ro* when she enters the ship is they ask her to remove her earring. And to me, the earring-- Well, the Bajoran's, in general, I feel like if we're taking it out of the political context and moving it entirely into the religious context has always been a stand in for spirituality that has a lot of rituals and also symbols. So, I feel like you could make the case that this earring could represent hijab. It could represent across the Star of David, any religious symbol.

Grace: Which more often than not in most organizations, "They've told us before, in Starfleet, there are certain things that you're just allowed to have." I think Kennedy has brought up a couple times, "No one's asking Worf to take off his baldrick."

Andi: Yes.

Grace: Everyone's cool with that for some reason.

David: I was also struck. I thought there was a loose resemblance between some of the clothes that folks were wearing in the refugee camp, and some of the patterns vaguely resembled keffiyeh.

Andi: Mm-hmm.

David: And then, the other thing that really struck me-- well, I guess two things that really struck me about this episode on rewatch, because like Andi, I rewatched it earlier today, was first, the way that these larger geopolitical colonial powers, whether it's the Federation or the Cardassians are manipulating extremists on the ground and propping them up in certain ways, and then using that, whether through false flag or through literally propping up different radical groups, which is what we see in the circle. The first three episodes of Season 2 of *DS9* to their own ends, to their own geopolitical ends.

So, whenever we're talking about reactionary formations among colonized people, I think we have to ask, "In what ways are the colonizer deploying that and using it?" But then the second is, I think there's a really powerful story in *Ensign Ro*, definitely about Palestine and

also about black solidarity with Palestine. Like, the role of Guinan in this episode in getting Picard to take Ro seriously.

Angela Davis has talked about how when she was in prison, many of the people who wrote to her-- People wrote to her from all over the world, but many of the people who wrote to her were Palestinian, and that had a really radicalizing effect for her in terms of understanding how her cause, the black freedom struggle, was intimately bound up with Palestine solidarity as well as with black feminism, queer of color formations, etc.

Grace: And the fact that we see a continuing relationship between Guinan and Ro just as characters, that feels important. The fact that she and Guinan have this thing of, "I see you. I understand. I want to help you as I can." And then, I know it's not the deepest connection ever, but we get in rascals, the two of them, de-aged, and-

[laughter]

Grace: -Guinan taking it on herself to be like, "Hey, I'm going to force you to have a good time here. I'm going to force you to have some silly time that you probably never actually got at this age."

David: I love that connection. They're both displaced peoples, like the [unintelligible 00:13:26] have their homes taken by the Cardassians. The El-Aurians, I think is the Borg destroy their home planet. Is that right?

Andi: Mm-hmm.

Grace: Yeah.

David: Yeah.

Andi: Something else that struck me-- There was a couple of things. One was Admiral Kennelly, which-- What a douche, right? But it struck me that the minute he could decide that this group were "terrorists," was the minute the rules didn't have to apply to them. He was like, "Well, they attacked us. They're terrorists. Therefore, it's totally cool for me to manipulate this political situation to get their death."

Grace: Well, when have we not seen that happen in real life in our world?

Andi: Yes.

Grace: That's part of what makes you go what a douchebag is. We've all seen a political situation where someone did exactly that. There's the very obvious most recent example, but there's no shortage of other ones.

Andi: Well, that's one reason why I think, David, what you said about the black solidarity piece is interesting to me, because one thing that I have been noticing a lot is, this is the same rhetoric we see when we're talking about an American context, and we're talking about criminals, felons, folks that are in jail. As soon as they have been put into this class of people--

Well, the prison conditions aren't really at the highest priority. And also, then, the state has the right to disenfranchise them, force them into labor, all of these sorts of things. That's a very similar dynamic to me is, you have a similar way of you classify someone into a group of people. You never have to justify how you've classified them there in a lot of these instances. And then, once they have been put into that bucket, then the rules no longer

apply and they don't have to follow the rule of law, or in this case for Admiral Kennelly, the Starfleet regulations and morals.

The other thing that really struck me was, when they first go to this camp and they talk to that first guy, Keeve Falor, I believe his name was, which I'm so impressed for me to remembering names today. I'm just like, "Take a moment and be proud of myself."

Grace: Yeah, take your happy moments where you can here.

Andi: I usually am like that dude. So-- [chuckles]

Grace: That bitch right there.

David: [laughs]

Andi: Yeah, pretty much. So, they talk to him, and one thing he said to Picard stuck out to me, he was like, "You've been innocent bystanders." And Picard's like, "Yes, that's true." And he's like, "Yeah, you've been innocent bystanders." [David chuckles] Like, "You've been just standing there watching this happen, and doing nothing about it." That to me was interesting.

Grace: Well, one of the things that long-term I found most interesting about *Deep Space Nine* as a whole, I know I'm jumping ahead a little bit, was how much it keeps coming back to the idea of, "Okay, this group of people was being subjugated. They had a military force occupying their planet, basically trying to destroy huge aspects of their culture." This federation was just standing there being like, "Well, we're busy running our own utopia here. We don't have to really do anything. This isn't our fault." Are they able to actually say they are utopia or that they are the good guys if they stood by and just let this happen? What am I trying to say? That political tangle there.

I think that as a whole, *Deep Space Nine*, is one of the shows that although it is very much through allegory addresses the most World War II America's lack of involvement right up until it was actually a problem on their stoop. Like, "Oh, this is going down in Russia, this is going on in Germany, the Polish. Not our problem. Oh, they attacked us now. Now, it's our problem." Just the incredible amount of time that it took for America to actually get involved in the war, because there was such a long span of time saying, "Not our problem."

David: If we read the federation in that light vis-à-vis Bajor, I also think it helps us to see the Maquis differently, to see the Maquis as something akin to the Abraham Lincoln brigade or the international brigades that went to Spain to fight fascism in the 1930s as it was being supported by Italy and Germany saying, "Fight fascism there before we have to fight it here."

Grace: Yeah, "Get in there and get involved with someone else's mess, so that we don't have to address how it's rising in our own backyards," kind of.

David: And like the Maquis, the Abraham Lincoln brigades are criminalized, they're surveilled by the FBI, [chuckles] they're not seen as-- It's a coalition of communists, anarchists and liberals, but they're all anti-fascist and they're all demonized by the US government as mucking up our nice isolationism that we've got going here.

Andi: Yeah. That isolationism-- I was thinking when Picard kept reiterating, it's against-- The prime directive really becomes almost the same stand in for the conversations that you see international politics about sovereignty, about how a state is allowed to do what they want within their own state, within their borders. It's really a similar concept. You can see where things really start to break down on an ethical standpoint. When you accept that as true,

well, then, you are completely fine with atrocities happening that you are aware of and do nothing to prevent or stop.

But one last thing I want to say about *Ensign Ro*, is that the piece that's not a Palestinian allegory here is actually the federation, because the federation truly is by standards, for the most part, bad moral shenanigans notwithstanding. [David laughs] Whereas in the real world, if we're thinking that the federation equals America, America is not a bystander. America is actively intervening and supporting one side, and that's where it breaks down a little bit. I don't know if they wanted to tackle that piece. So, that might be why we don't see that quite play out in *Ensign Ro*.

David: I know you had a conversation with Fiona Davidson earlier about this geopolitical identification with the federation as the US. Sometimes the federation is just as bad as the US, but sometimes it's actually better-

[laughter]

Andi: Exactly.

Davd: -in ways that it allows us to idealize ourselves.

Grace: Well, there's only so much you can do to not represent the country and the nation of origin from which the show is coming from for one thing. So, naturally, it's going to be American based. It'd be a little nice if they were able to think on a more international scale though.

Andi: Yeah. I think some of this is stuff that they don't even realize they're putting in there.

Grace: Oh. Absolutely not. No. That is just the creator bias at work.

Andi: Yeah, exactly. So, if we're moving over to *DS9*, where I think *DS9* is where we get the most nuanced and interesting allegories. *TNG* dipped its toe in, but *DS9* is really where the good stuff is.

Grace: What does it say that it wasn't until they had Captain Sisko that they were really willing to get the federation's hand dirty in behind the backstory for the whole thing? I feel like there's something to be said there, but I don't feel like I'm qualified to say fully what.

David: [chuckles]

Andi: Well, I think *DS9* in general just does a much better job of critiquing the federation.

Grace: No, absolutely. That's the number one complaint I hear from people who didn't like *Deep Space Nine* is, they were like, "Well, they made everything all dark and uncomfortable." [Andi laughs] It's like, "Yeah, you should feel uncomfortable when thinking about America's involvement in various political turmoils throughout history." [Andi chuckles] That's the idea, bruh.

David: It's place based, and I think it's harder to run away from consequences when it's place based.

Grace: Absolutely. Yeah.

David: But I also think that's what-- People often criticize the shift to Bajor, the planet, as necessarily a reframe. Suddenly, Bajor is now only allegorizing events in Europe. Certainly, it

is, but not only there I think, because there's this focus on land and on Bajoran's relationship to land and to place as something that's part of their political theology, their metaphysics, their cosmology that I think really resonates with different experiences of indigenous peoples in the Americas, and beyond and certainly including in Palestine.

Andi: I think that's an interesting point about the focus on land, because for both *Shakaar* and *Sanctuary*, land is a huge piece of it. Agriculture, farming and just general ownership over the land are both pretty huge themes in those episodes.

Grace: Yeah, absolutely. The ability to grow food and tend land, and be able to nourish your people is a bedrock, important thing of civilization. I know that with the concept and idea that the federation is post scarcity that that isn't actually as much of an issue anymore, because in theory, they can just replicate stuff that would probably be something whose importance is lost on the federation and on these federation characters that are our viewpoint most of the time.

Andi: That's actually a really good point, because one of the things that came up in *Ensign Ro* was how easy it was for Picard to get some replicators and get them something as simple as blankets. The fact that they didn't have access to what is basic technology to do something like that is horrific.

Grace: Yeah. It's always a stupid analogy, but I always mentally go back to the movie, *Cast Away*, where he spends how long of the movie trying to make fire, and then he's back in civilization just playing with a lighter like, "[beep], man. It's that easy here."

Andi: Yeah. It comes up in *Shakaar* too, because the technology-- It's actually a fight over the technology that would make the land useful and fertile again. So, the access to the technology is where the scarcity is. You know what I mean? It's like, we're not really post scarcity if not everyone has access to the replicator.

Grace: Yeah. Definitely in our modern society with the way of the world and the way of forced obsolescence in technology, you can't help but think about forced scarcity. It's like, "Is this actually something that's rare or is this something that is being made rare in order to turn a profit?" I know that's conceptually not supposed to be a thing in *Star Trek*, but it's always at the back of my mind like, "Okay, would this be considered a scarce and valuable material if it was more of a priority to the people who were in charge of distributing the technology or distributing resources for outside of the federation?"

David: And it comes up. I'm glad you brought up *Shakaar*, because the debate between Winn and *Shakaar* is, "Should folks in these province be allowed to farm for their own subsistence and survival and reproduction, because they don't have replicators, or should these soil reclamators be used for export-oriented agriculture, which definitely suggests commerce and profit?" since Bajor isn't part of the federation at this point.

Andi: I think we're going to have to talk about food more and specifically access to food. That definitely is something that comes up in *Wrongs Darker Than Death or Night*.

David: Mm-hmm.

Andi: But I do want to going in slightly chronological order, because we hop skipped a little bit. I do want to go back to *Duet*, because I feel like *Duet* is our first example of the Bajoran allegory as specifically the holocaust and specifically-

Garce: Absolutely.

Andi: -the experiences of the Jewish people and others in the holocaust. That is a departure from where we started. This is the first episode that really explores that allegory.

Grace: This is the point where it gets really hard to say, "Oh, no, it's not any one culture specific allegory, because it's so entrenched in this story." The story itself of the episode is loosely based off of the play, *The Man in the Glass Booth*, which was about the Eichmann trials, which was about holding accountability for Nazi War crimes. One of Leonard Nimoy's best dramatic performance is apparently was in a stage production of *The Man in the Glass Booth*. So, the Jewiness just comes and comes.

Andi: [laughs]

David: And Lawrence Pressman, who plays Kira's Cardassian surrogate father in a couple of episodes, he was also in an acclaimed stage production of this play. So, there's lots of *DS9* man in *The Glass Booth*-- or *Star Trek Man in the Glass Booth* connections happening here.

Grace: Well, when you've got a piece of work that's that seminal of a live production, especially with *Star Trek's* history of having actors coming from a live theater in a stage background, that's going to come up. It would be going through and be like, "Wow, how many *Star Trek* actors starred in a community theater production of *Cat on a hot tin roof*?"

[laughter]

Grace: What are the odds?"

David: There's a really great photo of Kate Mulgrew and Keith David in-- I forget if it's *Titus Andronicus* or what [unintelligible [00:27:15]

Grace: Oh, it's *Titus Andronicus*. I know exactly what you're talking about.

David: You know that photo? Yeah.

Grace: Yes, they look amazing.

David: They do. But getting to *Duet*, yeah, I think the references [unintelligible 00:27:25] are crystal clear. I think we can also think about how those references and some of the content itself also help us to draw links between the Shoah and the Nakba, which a lot of, I think, really brave anti-Zionist-Jewish activists have also been doing.

Judith Butler shows us how Iran is a resource for thinking about Jewish critiques of Zionism. The things that really struck me about this episode in rewatching it last night were-- When Marritza is performing as Gul Darhe'el, this view of Marritza comes out where you see a deep hatred of the feminine. He talks about Marritza is weeping like a woman. You see insect like references, like Marritza is-- he's like, "That bug? You think that's me?"

Certainly, in both the Third Reich and in current incarnations of the Israeli government, there are these references to Palestine as snakes, as insects. All that dehumanizing rhetoric, of course, Hitler and Goebbels were masters of comparing people to non-human beings.

Grace: Well, anytime a group of people is comparing another group of people to literal vermin, you know that something is very wrong.

David: Yeah. His willingness to stand in and say, "We're all of us guilty," it's such a powerful illustration of Arendt's thesis about the-- Even if she was wrong about Eichmann as an

individual who was actually more important than she thought, that even a mere filing clerk could say, "We're guilty, all of us. And all of us need to atone," is so powerful.

Andi: Yeah. I still remember when I was watching *Duet* for the first time, that was the moment where I was like, "Oh, *DS9* is for real. This is legit. This is a show that's going to be able to take on hard topics and do it really brilliantly." To me, the number one thing I took from *Duet* is basically exploring how the kind of dehumanizing language you both were referencing and the kind of actions that you take after those dehumanizing statements all do damage to you as well.

So, when you have convinced yourself and all of the work that you do to justify violence actually helps kill a part of yourself. I do think that when we are talking about situations like this, the focus should usually be on those harmed, first and foremost. But I do find it interesting to explore what that does to the oppressors and what it does to them personally.

I think that this episode does a really good job of showing, both how he was impacted by his culpability in these terrible crimes, but also making it clear that the crimes themselves were the most important thing and the victims of those crimes were the most important things. So, I thought they handled that really well and balanced it really well to show like, "Yes, doing things like this hurts you on a human level that you may not recover, but you still made the choice to do them, and now the reparation has to be to those you harmed."

Grace: Yeah, Nietzsche was absolutely right. You stare into that abyss, the abyss will stare back into you and become a part of you. I know we've had definitely some pop culture examples of points where they were like, "But what if we did the story about how it made the Nazis sad too?"

Andi: Oh, yeah.

Grace: This is not one of those stories. This is definitely one being like, "No, this is more than just, 'Oh, well, now I'm sad, because I had to kill people.'" It's definitely like, "Nope, culpability was at work here. I just did what they asked me to," which we don't see quite so much. There's very much--

I'm trying to think of how to frame it verbally, but I'm trying to remember the name of the comedian. He had a whole act about it. He's like, "We sent men over to Vietnam completely unprepared for a fight that they were in no way going to be able to win and that they had no reason to fight. And now, years later, we're sending a bunch of good-looking white guys back to Vietnam to make a movie about how sad the soldiers were about having to kill all those people."

Andi: Yes.

Grace: That's the gist of it. When we take the focus away from the people who are actually, actively having war crimes committed against them and make it about, "Oh, but the perpetrators were sad sometimes too," then we're completely disregarding the scope of the damage that was done to people culturally.

Andi: Yeah. I think it's funny that you brought that up, Grace, because I was going to bring it up to you. I have never seen this act that you're referencing, but I do remember seeing a tweet once where they were like, "Americans will invade your country and kill your people and destroy your country, but then they'll make a movie about how sad they were while they were doing it."

Grace: Exactly. There is nothing short of that you can say other than, "No, that's attempting to rewash history." You can't say that any conflict of that level happens without someone-- There had to be people who felt guilt, there had to be people who felt remorse, but at the same time, placing the Fifi's of the white guys going in and invading to destroy a culture, so that the country could be used, strip mined for parts, basically. That's completely dehumanizing the people who were the victims in this situation.

David: Maybe there's a distinction to be made here between forms of exceptionality on the individual level and also American exceptionalism, let's say, or German exceptionalism or whatever it is, that there are of dominant forms that end up recentering the perpetrator in some way. And then, there are non-dominant forms which are much psychologically healthier, but much rarer that actually continue to mind or be troubled by actions in ways that prompt something like genuine atonement or reparation.

Sally Weintrobe, who's a wonderful psychoanalyst who writes about climate change, talks about how we all have an inner exceptionalist in our heads. Neoliberal culture is giving us all kinds of reasons to listen to that exception. But there is also another psychic agency within us that if we're able to swim against the current, as I think Murriza is, but maybe a lot of those Vietnam movies are not doing, then other kinds of relationality become possible, like the respect that Kira has for Murriza, which is so rare.

Grace: Mm-hmm. And that respect that's earned from her, is just makes the whole final scene so devastating.

David: Mm.

Andi: Well, I also think that something that we should talk about with Kira in this is forgiveness. So, I am not a person that thinks that there is any obligation to forgive. I do think that on an individual level, sometimes it can be healing. So, I think that that's what they were hoping for here. But if you're going into a situation like this and your goal is forgiveness, that's recentering yourself, as David would say. But in this particular case, I thought they handled it well.

David: There's a liberal narrative of Kira that almost makes her out to be a forgiver. But I think that interpretation is wrong. I think [Andi chuckles] I agree with you. I think she remains a particularist. She's fiercely devoted to Bajor and she's fiercely anti-colonial. But maybe there's a sense in which she's a particularist with a heart for the universal. So, she's able to forge solidarity with a handful of Cardassians with some people in the federation who are contributing to the anticolonial internationalist politics she seems to. Or, I guess intragalactic politics that she seems. When she helps the Cardassians against the Dominion, it's not out of forgiveness. It's out of recognition that the Dominion is doing to them what they did to Bajor.

Grace: Yeah. I always mentally go back to the shot of, she's in charge of the station. Station is full of Cardassians and she just gets on the elevator with a bunch of them with her coffee and [David chuckles] morning paper and you have to have a moment of, "Oh, this is not the same Kira from Episode 1. This is not the adversary Kira."

Andi: I do want to talk about *Waltz*.

David: Mm-hmm.

Andi: I'm glad we're talking about it after *Duet*, because I was really thinking when I was watching *Waltz* today that they are very connected in theme in that *Waltz* is very much about the damage Dukkat has done to himself.

David: Mm-hmm.

Andi: Instead of him trying to atone, it's him showcasing for Sisko and for the audience how paper thin the justifications that he's been telling himself are and how ludicrous they are. He has somehow convinced himself he's not a monster, but at the end, he has this cathartic moment where he's like, "No, I should have killed them all."

It's really fascinating to me to see that kind of dissent. He spends 35 minutes of the episode trying to convince both Sisko and himself that he had to do all of the things that he did and he's using classic abuser logic like, "If only you wouldn't fight back, I wouldn't have to hit you."

Grace: "I was just trying to show the Bajoran's how much I loved them."

Andi: Yeah. "I was trying to protect them from central command, but they just weren't grateful enough." I thought it was really great, because that same abuser logic, we see that on a macro level in a lot of these conflicts. If they would just stop fighting, everything would be fine. He even says like, "If they would just accept their place." But no, they would never just accept their place as our underclass.

He really has convinced himself that he was a good guy in this situation. I think deep down, he knows that's crap and that's why he's devolving in this way and seeing all of the hallucinations that he's seeing and having basically a mental break here.

Grace: The hypocrisy just became too much.

Andi: Yeah. He's trying to keep two opposing truths in his head at once and it's breaking him apart. But this is basically the opposite of Marritza in *Duet*. [chuckles] So, I really think that they are spiritually connected.

David: I think for psychoanalysis, like the hallucinations that he has of, "Is it Weyoun, Damar and Kira."

Andi: Mm-hmm.

David: They're like these persecutory anxieties that are manifested in these hallucinations. But there's a sense in which a persecutory anxiety can also be a projection of guilt, if feeling guilt is like unbearable or impossible which I think is a cultural conditioning by Cardassian racism, and patriarchy make impossible for him to really integrate.

The thing that I love about this episode-- I guess two things. One is, there's a lot of talk in the first few seasons of *DS9* and its interpretation of Ducat is like, "Unnuanced villain, a humanized villain, a complex villain." If you look at interviews with a non-visitor, they were actively trying to ship Kira and Ducat, and she was like, "Absolutely not."

But I think insofar as that's true. I don't know how much I buy that, but insofar as it is. I do think that a limo gives a complex performance. What I like about *DS9* is that things can be complicated which we often hear as a cop out for calling things what they are in different colonial situation. There can still be clear power asymmetries that have to be acknowledged. There can be nuance, but we can't get away from the fact that the Cardassians did this to the Bajorans.

And then, the second thing that really stood out to me is the way that Sisko empathizes with the very Bajoran pride that Ducat speaks of with such contempt. I think that sense of pride,

like whether we're talking about Jewish people fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto against fascism whether we're talking about this idea in Palestine of Sumud or resistance on a spiritual level, whether we're talking about black people never stopping the fight to be free. I think Sisko can recognize something of what's happened to Bajor and Bajoran resistance in himself and in his own sense of history which I think is very powerful.

Andi: I also find it interesting that Dukat is so hyper focused on Sisko's opinion of him.

David: Mm. [laughs]

Grace: Right. Because he knows that Sisko is a guy will take no bullshit. So, he has convinced himself that Sisko's approval is the metric to pass to actually, fully convince himself, that he is not the evil guilty party here.

Andi: Yeah, he's really looking for absolution. Really.

Grace: And Sisko is like the third-party absolution that would absolutely, absolutes absolve him.

Andi: Yeah.

Grace: Because he is technically a religious leader of this group of people that he took part in the horrible mistreatment of.

Andi: Also, I think Sisko has proven himself to be an extremely practical leader, and he does do morally gray things in pursuit of a better outcome.

Grace: And he can live with that, computer, delete log.

Andi: Yes, exactly. So, I think Dukat recognizes Sisko as what he wants to think that he was doing. Like, he was intervening. Grace, did you know deaths were down 20% when he instituted his reforms?

Grace: Wow. God. We might as well throw him a parade.

Andi: I know. Right. The whole monologue he has is just so delusional where he's like, "The labor camps were better." [Andi laughs] It's like, "Do you hear yourself? You enslaved people and forced them to do labor and you think that because you gave them an extra ration here or there it makes it morally justifiable?" Pure delusion.

Grace: Which is unsettling when you think of situations where someone who is in full control of another group of people will go out of their way to have this theater of a happy culture there. One that I always think of is when Senator Leo Ryan was investigating Jonestown, they went out of their way to put together this whole song and dance show. Literally, there was a musical performance about how everyone there was so happy and doing great. It wasn't until someone slipped him a note saying, "Help us. Help us. Dear God, help us," that things went bad.

Because I think a lot of the time people who are on a power trip want to believe that they are in power because they should be. It's the fault of the people who are under their control for not being happy with it. So, we can add references to Jonestown on our content [Andi laughs] warning now. [David chuckles]

There's also a couple stories about the Jewish shtetls, and the people in charge being like, "No, do community theater, so we can show outsiders how happy and fine all of these jews

are doing." An example that comes to mind also is *Brundibár*, which was an Opera that they would have children in concentration camps in Czechoslovakia perform to show people inspecting and stuff that, "Oh, look at our happy little worker bees. Look, their children are singing." The children performing would have to sneak visuals and references into, "This is not all right. We are not happy here," but they would have to do it under the radar, this literal theater of, "look how happy the workers are."

David: Wow.

Andi: That's terrifying.

Grace: Yeah. They did a production of it at my synagogue when I was a kid. It was unsettling and rightfully so.

Andi: Something else that struck me was, and we're definitely going to get into this when we transition into *Wrongs Darker Than Death or Night*. Dukat has a really intense obsession with Kira, and really an intense obsession with Bajoran women in general. I think part of this like, I was helping them lie that he sold himself is because he really likes having power, absolute power, over these women and then giving them things as proof to himself of his own benevolence.

Grace: And that he just happens to have a bunch of women who are under his control, just fall into his lap. And hey, they had a really loving relationship. There just happened to be a huge power dynamic shift there, over and over again.

Andi: Yeah. I think this is our official transition to *Wrongs Darker Than Death or Night*.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: So, this was a really sad and disturbing episode right off the bat. The second that Basso, who's the Bajoran collaborator, he literally walks into this camp and says, "I'm here for comfort women." And I was like, "Holy crap." I could not believe that they actually invoked the term, comfort women.

Grace: Right. Talk about taking things from real life.

Andi: Yes. I knew vaguely about what the episode was. So, I knew that it was an allegory for this, but I didn't realize directly reference it.

David: They're so explicit. Yeah.

Andi: Yes, exactly. That shocks me. It also made me mad once I watched the episode, because what happened to Kira's mother was horrific.

Grace: Mm-hmm.

Andi: But the actual real life "comfort women," which is a horrible term that really sanitizes what happened to them, was not at all comparable to what they show in this episode.

Grace: No.

David: Mm-hmm.

Andi: That upset me, if I'm being honest.

Grace: No. You got to wonder, when the writers are using real life atrocities as the basis for fictional storytelling in this setting, does that do the initial victims of those atrocities a disservice?

Andi: Yeah. I feel like this was really easy to avoid. Just don't use that specific term. The rest of the episode does tackle really tough issues pretty well. There are parts of the episode that I thought were handled well, but I just don't see what evoking something so horrific and then showing a completely sanitized version of it, because-- So, the comfort women, which is probably the more popular term for them, but probably is not an accurate term for them.

David: I think pacific historians now are saying military sexual servitude.

Andi and Grace: Yeah.

David: Because comfort women is an official euphemism of the Japanese empire.

Grace: That's the PR term.

David: Yeah. It's from the perspective of the soldier. So, I think you even see that soldier say to Kira, "I want comfort, and I want it now." So, the protagonist of that is not the victim, you know?

Andi: Prior to and throughout World War II, imperialist Japan kidnapped women, mostly of Korean and Chinese descent, but also other women from Malaysia, the Philippines, even some Dutch women, and basically enslaved them into sexual slavery for their troops. It was a specific military policy, they were treated as essentially war supplies,-

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: -which was insanely dehumanizing. I think there's really no way to know exactly how many women, because so many of them died, and so little is known about some of the specifics. Obviously, the Japanese officials often destroyed the records, but the estimates are between 200,000 and 410,000 women that were put into servitude like this.

Grace: Jesus.

Andi: The conditions were horrific. They were not given medical care, they were not given adequate food, they were raped repeatedly. There's really no comparison between the real-life suffering that they went through and what they portray in this episode, which, while it is still coercive and horrible.

Grace: Is a fraction of the real terror.

David: Yeah.

Andi: That was not comfortable.

David: I also think there's an important connection to be made between the-- I guess I'll say, the feminist analysis, the history of the comfort woman phenomenon. Some of the things that Kira is agonizing over, learning this thing about her mother that tarnishes her idealized image of her mother as a figure of resistance.

I think this actually resonates with the criticisms that you all are lifting up of the writing here. There's an important book by a scholar in gender studies at UC Irvine named Laura Hyun Yi Kang, who points out that the history of the comfort women system was pretty well known in

Korea prior to the 1990s. It had been discussed, and then it became hyper visible on a global stage in the 1990s for a historically specific set of reasons.

So, there had been really spectacular, invisible and horrific use of mass rape of Muslim women in Bosnia in 1992. A number of east Asian economies, often part of the US imperial sphere of influence were on the rise in the 1990s. There was a restoration of civil rights and democracy in South Korea. When the Cold War ended, the UN had this new human rights agenda involving new issues from NGOs coming to the fore. And so, all of these and other factors brought new visibility to Korean and other women who were seeking redress around comfort women.

But what Kang points out, and I think this is what resonates with our critique of the writer's treatment of this issue, is that visibility did not necessarily lead to justice for those involved. There's another scholar too-- One of the questions that Kang asked is, "Why these women and why now?" I think that Katharine H.S. Moon, who's another scholar focused on a related system, makes a really important point.

Moon interviewed women who were sex workers, who were in some cases trafficked, but in some cases worked voluntarily as a complex term for US military personnel in Korea. The tropes around the comfort women and the strategies of folks seeking redress for the comfort women versus those used by what were called camptown women who were profoundly stigmatized and seen as voluntary sex workers and seen as-- There's a set of ideological terms in Korea that you know sleeping with a foreigner, much less doing it as a sex worker, very, very, very shameful, created this deserving, undeserving binary.

One, sheds light on a relationship with an ally that maybe we don't really want to talk about. The other sheds light on an enemy. The story that we can tell is of people who are innocent. All of this is violent, and abusive and needs to be criticized. But there are geopolitical factors that shape which forms of patriarchal violence become more or less visible, and which forms of gender-based violence become-- or which victims, let's say, gender-based violence become more or less sympathetic in public at different times.

And so, how we might bring that critique to bear on Kira, I think, is that she wants her mother to be this pure victim of this system. She discovers something that is messier and more complex, but also something that speaks to her mother as a figure of resistance in a way she didn't expect. Her mother used this system to send remittances to her children, and then the next generation was able to live to fight another day and was able to overthrow the occupation.

So, without wanting to excuse anything that happened, I think that there's a complex story to be told here about resistance and agency that only becomes possible if we think really, carefully in ways that feminists are about sex work, and about trafficking and about the political, geopolitical, and racial and economic histories that shape how those things become visible at any given historical moment.

Andi: Yeah. So, I do want to circle back on something that we touched on very briefly. Moving on from my discomfort of calling this comfort woman and invoking that, what I do think the episode did really well is showed what an impossible situation Maru was in. So, from the very beginning, this is where the food/hunger comes in.

In the beginning of the episode, it's very clear that they are slowly starving to death. It's such a precarious position that she is in with her family. And the way that they immediately, the very first thing that they give these women is food is really manipulative. Honestly, I have to feel calculated, especially since we see how calculated Gul Dukat is in manipulating and isolating Maru pretty immediately.

Well, let's be super clear about one thing. This is coercive. There's no agency here for her to consent to any of this. So, this is not voluntary. She has been kidnapped from her family and put in a situation where she really has no choice. And so, it might be a sanitized version, but it is still rape. I think that because it's not violent in the same obvious way, that it's harder for Kira to understand that that's what's happening. And so, then she starts moving into thinking of her mother as a collaborator. We actually have a genuine collaborator in this episode, Basso.

Grace: Yeah.

David: [chuckles]

Andi: I found him very interesting. I would have loved to know more about him, because, obviously, he seems like a pretty crap dude, but I am interested into, how did he get into this? Is it just to save himself? Is it just because he clearly loves having power over people and abusing it? I just found him kind of interesting. I would like to see him more. But Kira's mother is not a collaborator. She is a victim. Kira having to reckon with that, I thought was really powerful and sad. I certainly understand her complex feelings around this.

For one thing, she doesn't really have time to internalize any of this or process it. So, she's reacting in the moment to some of these revelations then that have totally turned her understanding of her mother on its head.

Grace: Yeah. The prophets are giving her no wiggle room emotionally here.

Andi: Yeah.

Grace: If O'Brien must suffer, then Kira and Nerys must suffer in the eyes of the prophets.

David: They really put her through the wringer. I like that it's Sisko who processes some of this difficult history with her. I love their friendship in general. I also think the way that Avery Brooks speaks about not only his own connectedness, but Sisko's connectedness to the history of people of the African diaspora, which have sometimes involved very complicated [chuckles] forms of agency and forms of resistance that have been messy from the outset in the context of profound deprivations of agency and freedom and choice, as you say. I think he provides her with an important set of resources for thinking about what does it mean for her to relate to her mother now, given this complexity.

Grace: And right after we've had our little saying about how complexity can sometimes be used to shield from a deeper conversation, this is a case of genuine complexity here.

Andi: What it actually made me think of more than the comfort women, like the general understanding of what comfort women, was actually more along the lines of European context, like France during World War II.

Grace: Oh, the ugly parades.

Andi: Yeah. I just don't feel like what they evoked and what they showed on screen were the same allegory.

Grace: I might be getting the phrasing wrong here, but for those who don't know what the ugly parades were, basically women who were known to have had sexual relations with Nazis were considered sympathizers after the fall of the Third Reich. People would beat the shit out of them, shave their heads and march them through town, calling them a whore.

While there's no nice way of saying, that's basically what happened to women who probably, realistically somewhere in a similar situation to Major Kira's mother.

Andi: Yeah. The reason why I think the situation that the French women were in occupied Paris more closely evokes this is because the comfort women example is very much specific military policy, like it was organized. Whereas a lot of this in other contexts, it wasn't organized. It was powerful men offering desperate women, money, food, whatever to make their lives slightly less miserable while they were living in an occupied city. That, to me, is way more comparable to this situation.

Grace: Absolutely. We told you this would be a dark one.

David: Yeah.

Andi: This is a very difficult topic. I'm going to be honest and say that I'm upset. Unfortunately, when it comes to violence, sexual violence is often hand in hand and right there with it, because at the end of the day, all types of violence are an expression of power. So, you're going to see examples of this in pretty much all conflicts that include violence. It's obviously a very upsetting thing to have to think about or discuss. I will say that *DS9* even making an attempt, and making an attempt that was pretty nuanced is impressive to me.

Grace: Especially, impressive since it was still the 1990s. It wasn't that far after that era of recognition for the comfort women, was it?

Andi: No.

Grace: This was still a new concept. And to be able to address it on your sci-fi show or attempt to, that's not nothing.

David: Yeah. Especially for an all male writers [unintelligible [01:00:19] which *DS9* so often was.

Grace: Yeah. Hey, guys, maybe that's not the best idea-

[laughter]

Grace: -to have atrocities against women written entirely by guys. Controversial stance here.

Andi: One we've made before. So, [chuckles] I'm going to say that I think that's our official policy.

Grace: That's kind of the hill that we're dead and buried on.

Andi: [laughs] Well, okay, so we have gone through a lot of stuff here. Some of it was very difficult to talk about. Is there anything that folks want to bring up that maybe we didn't get a chance to dig into during the rest of our conversation?

David: Can I say a little something about *Second Skin* and *Ties of Blood and Water*?

Andi: Yes, of course.

David: I think they're really important. I think they're difficult, they're profoundly difficult, but I think they're also hopeful in a certain sense.

Grace: Oh, very.

David: I think Kira's capacity to build alliances based on people's political commitments rather than their identities alone really shine through here.

Grace: *Second Skin* is literally the one I was planning to watch after we recorded,-

David: Yeah. Oh, my God.

Grace: -so that I could have [David laughs] a little bit balm to the wound.

David: A little bit of catharsis, you know?

Grace: Yes.

David: I also think about her very complex relationship with Tekeny Ghemor in light of the figure of-- Is it President Rillak in *Discovery*, who is Cardassian human and Bajoran? Because I think what Kira's rapport with Ghemor starts to think about them as kin in some complex way. And then, what Rillak literalizes-- [crosstalk]

Grace: She introduces him to Kirashakira. Sorry, I'm forgetting the name of the-- [crosstalk]

David: Kirayoshi. Yeah.

Grace: Kirayoshi. She introduces him to Kirayoshi, and everything.

David: And it is almost like his grandchild, because there's multiple layers of surrogacy. But I think, obviously, Ziyal is a product of violent, forced hybridity between the Bajorans and the Cardassians. But by the time we get to Rillak, we're thinking about more cosmopolitan forms of togetherness across these differences that become racialized. I see that as really hopeful.

A lot of the visions for a post nationalist, post Zionist future for historic Palestine that are coming out of progressive Jewish communities and especially out of Palestinian civil society, talk about a society where everyone can be there. Some land has to be given back. Some houses have to be given back. But everybody counts, everybody matters, everybody gets a vote, everybody gets a say in what the government is that rules over them.

Judith Butler has this beautiful idea of ethical cohabitation among unchosen neighbors that I wonder to what extent we can think about *Second Skin*, or *Ties of Blood and Water* or that figure of Rillak as holding open that possibility for us in some way in the future.

Andi: That's a much more hopeful ending than we could have had. I appreciate it. I'm trying to decide if I want to get into this. I've decided no, we're going to have to do a whole new episode about terrorism-

Grace: Yeah.

David: Hmm.

Andi: -and resistance, and how terrorism and resistance is shown in *Star Trek*. [laughs]

Grace and David: Yeah.

Andi: God, I'm signing myself up for another really difficult episode. [laughs] But I do want to discuss it, because it is important.

Grace: When you're watching the really intense, dark horrors of war and depression episodes, maybe follow it up with the Bajoran gratitude festival episode.

David: Ooh.

Grace: That is the [unintelligible 01:04:01] joy.

David: What's the name of the episode though? Sorry.

Grace: There's a couple of them, and they're mostly *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as-

David: Yeah.

Grace: -same episodes. But the idea of a culture being able to have expressions of joy, and happiness and festivities in the face of having been through so much horror and depression, that's very meaningful.

David: Kira's laughter too. There's so many ridiculous scenarios where Kira just lets it rip.

Grace: After you've seen her cry, her laughter means so much.

David: Yeah.

Grace: And also, a culture is not defined entirely by its suffering. Never forget that. They have the right to joy and self-expression as well, and not just being something to think of when you need to have a dark and heady moment.

Andi: One small thing I liked in *Sanctuary* was they had the Bajoran man who was doing music and quarks boss.

Grace: Yeah.

Andi: Having everyone just be transported by this beautiful music and trying to find him a place to have his art continue on after a period of time where Bajoran art was restricted and destroyed by the Cardassians, that to me gave me some hope too. Like, just the idea of now that there is peace that the art of Bajor could flourish again, I loved that.

David: I love *Sanctuary* so much. I love that moment, and I also love the more difficult moments in it, because it gives us a story about refugees who are moving from an allegorical global south location to another allegorical global south location, which is most of the world's refugees. That is so rarely thematized or allegorized in *Star Trek*. It's always about us being the north and them being these southern others. It's so thorny.

Grace: Honestly, *Sanctuary* could be its whole own episode for us to dig into.

David: Absolutely.

Andi: You're so right, because we think about refugee crises in Western media as very shown as a Western problem. But when it came to Iraq, when it comes to Palestine, the refugee populations are mostly like Jordan and Turkey.

Grace: Shit. Remember how much in the US we couldn't even stand it when a hurricane displaced most a bunch of Texans and people from Georgia? Do you remember how that turned so many places upside down?

Andi: Yes.

Grace: And to think of like, "Oh, well, their culture isn't handling it well." It's like, "No, there's no culture to handle that well."

Andi: Yeah. Having a system in place for refugee populations is very rare. It's hard to prepare for, but then it takes a lot of preparation to be able to absorb large populations like that. Okay. Well, wow, that was probably the most difficult episode I've ever been a part of. But I really, really appreciated this conversation and I really, really appreciated your guys' insights. I feel like this is important conversations to have. Honestly, one of the reasons why *Star Trek* is so beloved to me is because they even make the attempt to take a look at these ideas, because most popular media doesn't.

I just feel like we could use more depictions and popular media of these complex political problems, and sometimes solutions, and then also having the chance to unpack it and think about how it reflects our real-world problems, I think is valuable. So, appreciate both of your time today to talk about that with me.

David: Thank you. Thank you, both. It's an honor to be here.

Grace: Yes, thank you so much for being here. And thank you so much for having me in this conversation, both of you.

Andi: So, that's about all the time we have today. Grace, where can people find you on the internet?

Grace: You could find me across social media [@bonecrusherjenk](#), and dancing on the grave of Henry Kissinger.

[laughter]

Andi: Indeed. And David, where can folks reach out to you at?

David: Probably, the best way would just be to look me up. My email address is dseitz@hmc.edu. In addition to the *DS9* book, I had an article just come out about The Politics of Asylum in Voyager. I have an article coming out shortly about racialized masculinity and Harry Kim. So, feel free to look any of those.

Grace: That sounds fascinating.

Andi: It does. Well, great. And I'm Andi. You can maybe find me on Twitter [@firsttimetrek](#). I'm not on it very much anymore, but there is that.

Grace: There's not a lot left there.

Andi: [laughs] There's lots of bots, Grace. There's that.

Grace: Oh, no. But the bots are the problem that we were brought in to fix.

Andi: Oh, no. All right. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit womenatwarp.com. Email us at crew@omenearp.com or find us on Facebook or Instagram at [@womenatwarp](#). Thanks so much for listening.

Grace: Free Palestine.

[theme]

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