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28

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## THE COUNTER/ACTUAL: ART AND STRATEGIES OF ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE

**Summary.** The article explores how a number of artists have employed the counter/actual as a form of past-talk in a conscious intervention into socio-political and ethical issues arising from the Israeli occupation of Palestine. I argue that such uses of the counter/actual more effectively foreground the injustices arising from the occupation while not only problematising the process of representation but also deconstructing the ways in which histories are intimately intertwined with relations of power and practises of legitimisation; they do not simply reproduce “the (f)actual” but work to repossess the past from the dominance of hegemonic interests.

**Keywords:** Palestine, counter/actual, spatialities, vertical power, the past, history, Larissa Sansour, Emily Jacir, China Miéville, Khalid Jarrar.

### THE COUNTER/ACTUAL: ART AND STRATEGIES OF ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE

The counter(f)actual provides imaginative flexibility and interpretative fluidity, encompassing historians’ what-if narratives as well as artists’ and novelists’ more “literary” constructions of realities that resonate with but do not mimetically correspond to past, or present, actualities.<sup>1</sup> Within history, the sub-genre of historiographical counterfactual speculation considers the third conditional—if events had been slightly different, what then would have happened? Such narratives stress the importance of contingency in historical explanation while simultaneously emphasising the relative importance (or lack thereof) of individual incidents or persons in how-things-came-to-be-the-way-they-are. Even though such narrations are counter-to-the-facts, they antithetically work to reinforce the factual epistemological status of history and the distinction between fact and fiction. Tucker argues that “the only way to examine the contingency of history is to study it empirically, and attempt with the help of theoretically based counterfactuals to find out how sensitive particular historical outcomes were to initial conditions.”<sup>2</sup> Yet the speculative and imaginative construction of causality in such accounts is no different to that employed by historians in their explanations of the supposedly factual. Histories do

not offer an epistemologically-privileged glimpse into the (f)actual; they do not correspond to reality. Instead, just like historians’ counterfactual speculations, and the counter/actual worlds imagined by artists and novelists, they problematically represent a particular perspective; they use past-talk to explain the now.

In this article I want to look at how a number of artists have employed the counter/actual as a form of past-talk in a conscious intervention into socio-political issues of the present, namely the Israeli occupation of Palestine.<sup>3</sup> I use the term counter/actual to describe not that which is fictional but that which speaks *otherwise* to particular hegemonic or widely accepted narratives.<sup>4</sup> I argue that uses of the counter/actual not only effectively highlight the injustices of occupation but also problematise the process of representation through a deconstruction of the ways in which histories are intimately intertwined with relations of power and practises of legitimisation. Such forms of artistic past-talk therefore do not simply reproduce “the (f)actual” but instead attempt to change “the contents of public discourse and the contours of public space” and, in doing so, they both repossess and repurpose hegemonic forms of past-talk.<sup>5</sup> Many of the counter/actual narratives discussed below work to subvert “the

positions of victor and victim by sabotaging the relations between the real and the fictional.”<sup>6</sup> By abandoning the documentary genre, these narratives, in effect, de-realise documentary evidence and thus not only render uncertain the immediate political significance of hegemonic representational depictions of Palestine and Palestinians but also reject the inequality inherent in them. The counter/actual provides the means for the imagination and assertion of a new vision or definition of reality.<sup>7</sup>

The counter/actual also offers a means of problematising any potential for the representation of and response to atrocities and the destruction of hope in situations of extreme violence and conflict. The interweaving of documentary practices—the use of archival footage and eye-witness testimony—with more imaginative, anecdotal, or counter/actual elements makes “visible and audible speech that has been willingly or unwillingly concealed or simply ignored.”<sup>8</sup> Lamia Joreige’s *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* is a documentary-style video in which she walks along the former Green Line that divided Beirut, tries to locate the position of the various checkpoints from archival newspaper photographs, and asks residents if they knew anyone who was kidnapped or killed by militias during the Lebanese wars (1975–1990).<sup>9</sup> The interviewees relate multiple stories of kidnapping, sometimes adding that it is “common knowledge” who took the disappeared. Yet this recollection of the past contrasts starkly with the “memory deficit” and “state-sponsored amnesia” that is official Lebanese policy.<sup>10</sup> In this situation, the “actual”, that is, the kidnapping and death of friends, neighbours, and relatives, is consigned to a counter/actual world of non-remembrance and mass cultural amnesia. Joreige, however, effectively challenges this counter/actual present “reality” through her documentary practises.<sup>11</sup> The rearranging, reinterpreting, and interweaving of archival materials and personal testimonies in her documentary practise acknowledges that the collation of all evidence relating to a particular event is an impossibility, and that “some facts, dramas, and experiences will never reach us and will remain unspoken, buried [we can only] presume that they are there, yet missing.”<sup>12</sup> These “documentary fictions” challenge the idea

of a singular, unique truth and instead provide incomplete, shifting truths that encourage critical scepticism with regards to the possibility of there ever being incontrovertible evidence or an objective basis for representation.<sup>13</sup>

The counter/actual can also challenge the narrative of dominant forms of representation: it embodies a plurality of perspectives, offers subversive, unofficial histories, and problematises our unquestioning reliance on form when judging which texts we use to ascertain *the* truth.<sup>14</sup> In *The Atlas Group Archive*, Walid Ra’ad creates the real through the unreal, documenting the Lebanese civil war through an archive of images, text, video, and other documents he has produced, located, and preserved. His various notebooks, photographs, and videos simultaneously look like archival materials and do not. Although these archival documents may ultimately be imaginative constructions, many of the elements on which they are based originate from “the historical world”. Ra’ad’s various counter/actual notebooks, recording cars used in car-bombings and documenting found bullets and shrapnel, imply that the sources themselves—and the documentary facts we apparently extract from this historical evidence—really tell us nothing; it is our contextualisation, construction, interpretation, and use of the information that creates a story.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more importantly in the context of the works discussed below, Ra’ad seeks not only to redefine the idea of the fictive but also to discourage examination through the reductive binary of fiction and non-fiction. Rather than be interpreted as a “disavowal of truth and referential meaning,” he argues that fiction provides “a medium for the construction of truth producing images that are psychologically significant and historically meaningful.”<sup>16</sup> The counter/actual does not provide an authentic and somehow originary account—far more usefully, it offers a future-orientated narrative of relevance to the narrator and intended audiences; it offers the building blocks of a new reality, “the story that may cure you.”<sup>17</sup>

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige interweave the counter/actual with the actual in *The Lebanese Rocket Society—A Tribute to Dreamers* (2011–2013), a documentary that details the long-forgotten

Lebanese involvement in the space race and rocket research in the early 1960s and explores the significance of its absence from memory today.<sup>18</sup> While most of the film, based on archival footage and contemporary interviews, narrates how Prof. Manoug Manougian and his students built and launched more than ten rockets designed for space study and exploration, the last section shifts genre and provides an animated speculation on the counter/actual—what would Lebanon have been like if the space project had continued? In the animated future-world, there is a National Museum of Space which narrates the history of the Lebanese Rocket Society, the launch of the first Lebanese satellite into space in 1969, and the subsequent role satellites have played in the economic, military, and scientific development of Lebanon into a safe and prosperous nation. Hadithomas and Joriege draw attention to how past narratives structure and constrain our imaginaries, how they affect our imagination of the future, how they reinforce meta-narratives, but also how they could be used to liberate people from overwhelming mythologies. In a time when the term “rocket” has become a synonym for “missile” and the idea of Lebanese scientists working on space research seems inconceivable, they wanted to capture a moment in which a different future was possible—a moment full of hope, a moment before the defeat of 1967 transformed the Arab world and overwhelmed the possibilities of past futures.

The counter/actual is a form of mythopoesis—not the production of false stories but a means by which stories are “told and shared, retold and manipulated [...] stories that may give shape to some kind of ritual” alternative histories that offer counter-manipulation strategies against hegemonic discourses as a means of intervention: a creative force through which alternative visions of the world are effected.<sup>19</sup> Larissa Sansour’s recent sci-fi video trilogy employs the counter/actual as a means of foregrounding and contesting the spatialities of neo-colonial power in the context of Palestine/Israel.<sup>20</sup> Through these works, she demonstrates how historical and mythical narratives, embedded in both archaeological and architectural praxis, are used to legitimise the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their homes as well as

the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. All three of Sansour’s works focus on Palestinian dislocation, their forced removal from their land, and their desire to find a home: all three create counter/actual spaces for Palestinians to inhabit. *Space Exodus* (2009), referencing both Kubrick’s *Space Odyssey* and the moon landing by Armstrong, imagines a world in which the first Palestinian astronaut goes into space.<sup>21</sup> As with Hadithomas’s and Joriege’s work, Sansour here uses the counter/actual to imagine a more hopeful, optimistic possible future and, in doing so, challenges our expectations concerning national inevitability. In *Space Exodus*, the Palestinian astronaut, played by Sansour herself, lands on the moon and plants a Palestinian flag, sharply reminding the viewer that the idea of a viable Palestinian state is daily being eroded by Israel, with the complicity of other major world powers, and that Palestinians may currently have a greater chance of establishing their state on the moon than in their own land. The moon, therefore, becomes “a land without people for a people increasingly without land.”<sup>22</sup> When shown as part of an art exhibit in museums and galleries, the film *A Space Exodus* is often accompanied by the installation of small vinyl sculptures of tiny *Palestinians* that are scattered through the gallery space. These sculptures resemble a futuristic version of Handala, the boy who featured in Naji al-Ali’s cartoons, examining the complexity of life for Palestinian refugees but also symbolising their resilience and hope for justice, self-determination, and freedom from oppression.<sup>23</sup> The scattering of these *Palestinians* in places around the world recalls the Palestinian de-territorialisation, or “exodus”, following the violence of the Nakba.

The horror that it is only in space that the Palestinians will find a home is further exacerbated by the conclusion of the film. The astronaut is seen floating out into space, futilely calling mission control in Jerusalem but met only with radio-silence, suggesting not only a future of ongoing exile and oblivion, with Palestinian ties to their homeland and Jerusalem severed, but also that, in the enveloping silence of space, no-one hears their voice and they are destined to fade into oblivion. Sansour’s use of the counter/actual— together with icons of Palestinian nationalism (the flag, reference to the sunbird, use of traditional embroidery in the

flag) and the ambiguous (and unresponsive) presence of mission control in Jerusalem—expresses a sense of Palestinian belonging and identity while simultaneously facing the stark possibility that Palestinians will remain eternally homeless in a permanent state of un-belonging. In this context, the use of the counter/actual liberates this narrative of belonging and displacement from the forms of representative repression inherent in many cinematic, documentary, and textual narratives of Palestinian nationalism and resistance. Such films, through their location in refugee camps, occupied territory, or diasporic exile, are not only necessarily intertwined with, and thus reactive to the hegemonic discourses of the Israeli state, neighbouring Arab governments, or the Palestinian Authority, but are also impinged upon by inflections of orientalism and Islamophobia. By employing the counter/actual Sansour's work offers a potential openness for future imaginations of Palestinianness while still functioning as "an act of resistance and a weapon of culture."<sup>24</sup>

Sansour's dystopian *Nation Estate* (2012) imagines the nation state of Palestine as a giant sky-scraper with different floors housing state infrastructure (hospitals, universities, markets, passports, energy, sanitation), heritage institutions used as indexical markers of nation-hood (museums, archives, etc.), and the entire population of Palestine living in floors named after Palestinian cities.<sup>25</sup> A pregnant woman returns home, arriving via the sleek Amman Express. Having passed through a biometric security check, she enters the spacious and largely deserted, futuristic skyscraper. Taking a lift from the foyer, she arrives at Bethlehem and, crossing a square enclosed with ancient stone-walls, enters her apartment. This futuristic depiction of Palestinian life provides an ironic counter-point to the actual realities of life for Palestinians subject to Israeli military control. In this counter/actual world, Palestinians can easily move between cities via the elevator rather than waiting, often futilely, for arbitrarily-given permission to continue their journey at Israeli checkpoints. Similarly, adverts in the lift remind travellers that this week's water supply is provided by Norwegian Fjords and the water pipes for peace program— a contrast to the way in which Israel currently restricts the

water supply to Gaza as a means of controlling the effectively incarcerated Gazans.<sup>26</sup>

The presence of reconstructed ancient buildings within the skyscraper (for example, the Dome of the Rock Mosque on the Jerusalem floor) foregrounds the importance such buildings have in imagining national identities, as well as the role that excavated and/or reconstructed archaeological ruins play in consolidating and legitimising the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem and expansion into the West Bank. In particular, architectural remains of public works or aristocratic homes from first century Herodian Jerusalem, such as the Herodian Mansion and the Burnt House, not only attest to the civilisational splendour of the Israelites but also—through the narratives of their construction and destruction—articulate a national-historical tale, and stand as "the cultural heritage of a returning modern nation."<sup>27</sup> Their depiction of "eras of national ascendance and moments of national demise" testify to the establishment of a splendid Hebrew city and culture, a culture that was destroyed by the Romans and forced into a long exile, before finally returning to their homeland.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, emphasis placed by Israeli guides in various archaeological museums on the foundational status of the Hebrew city as original and built on bedrock—in contrast to the later accretions of Byzantine, Arab, or Islamic buildings—combined with the archaeological (re) construction of the old Jewish Quarter of Ottoman Jerusalem, has worked to present the city as an "old-new (Jewish) place and the symbolic center of the unified capital of the Israeli state."<sup>29</sup>

The Palestinian nation embodied in a futuristic colossal high-rise is a perfectly controlled, museum-like utopia, yet a poster on the wall in the entrance foyer encapsulates the dispossession that the stylish tower block embodies. Referencing Franz Kraus' iconic *Visit Palestine* poster from 1936, published by a Zionist Development agency during the British colonial occupation of Palestine, the poster depicts the *nation estate* skyscraper clearly surrounded by a wall—the controversial separation or apartheid wall that Israel is building in the occupied West Bank and which is gradually appropriating and colonising more and more Palestinian territory.<sup>30</sup> Despite the



slick aesthetic of the skyscraper, it doesn't present a future equitable division of resources and land, together with freedom and self-determination for the Palestinian people. It is instead, as the wall and gun turrets shown at the end of the film make clear, a form of incarceration. As Foucault noted: "in the world of prisons [...] the vertical is not one of the dimensions of space, it is the dimension of power."<sup>31</sup>

An olive tree, the only organic element in the building stands out from the highly stylised, imposed architectural form, providing perhaps a metaphor for the inability of Palestinianness to be fully contained in the ever-decreasing, constrictive spatialities demarcated by the architecture of occupation. In the occupied West Bank, the special security zones, military outposts, check points, road-blocks, separation barriers, and the link roads, tunnels, and fly-overs that connect the ever-increasing illegal Israeli settlements have fragmented the occupied West Bank into a territorial patchwork of separated, sealed spaces in which the imagination and performance of nationality and sovereignty is virtually impossible. Control over natural resources, security concerns (a desire to maintain military dominance), and the need to link and sustain the fragmented Israeli settlements means that, even within these spaces, Palestinian control only extends over the surface area. Thus, Sansour's dystopian imagining of a partitioned, vertical Palestinian space is not so counter/actual as might initially appear. While the Palestinian Authority has nominal (and extremely limited) horizontal authority over sections of the West Bank, Israeli sovereignty is vertical; Israel controls the militarised airspace as well as underground resources—a power reinforced through the vertical architecture and geology of occupation, the tunnels and fly-overs linking settlements which are themselves built on the commanding heights of hill-tops.<sup>32</sup> As Weizman argues, it is through the transformation of space and the power inherent in the vertical that the colonisation of the West Bank is taking place.<sup>33</sup>

Sansour's montage of archival photographs, live action, and computer-generated imagery in *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2016) similarly addresses the futility of using facts to achieve justice. She uses the counter/actual to explore the

role myth plays in the creation of facts, the narration of history, and imagination of national identities: *In the Future* is a fictional film that addresses the present day reality of political problems in Palestine of the Israeli occupation.<sup>34</sup> The protagonist, a self-proclaimed narrative terrorist, is the leader of a narrative resistance group who make underground deposits of porcelain carrying Palestinian DNA as historical interventions.<sup>35</sup> They deposit tableware "as facts in the ground for future archaeologists to excavate" in order to support future claims to the lands and to thereby create a *de facto* nation.<sup>36</sup> These facts will, in the future, reify the long-term existence of the people they are imagining through the discovery of their excavated pottery and their subsequent insertion into a national narrative by archaeologists. The aim of the resistance group is to influence history, to create a new reality, and support future claims by their descendants to their occupied and vanishing lands. While the film presents a dystopian, science-fiction vision of a counter/actual world, it is also clearly about the situation in Palestine/Israel—the role that archaeology has played in the construction and legitimisation of a modern state and occupation of another's land, and the attempts of Palestinians to establish a nation. The porcelain that the narrative terrorists are depositing is decorated with a design based on the Palestinian *keffiyeh*, and the film is intercut with archival photographs of Palestine and Palestinians. Sansour uses a counter/actual genre of expression rather than a documentary style because she doesn't want Palestinians to always be the subjects of a documentary, to unceasingly be those who are analysed and examined, subject to the audience's pitying or horrified gaze. Sansour seeks to avoid the representational inequality inherent in hegemonic depictions of Palestinians.<sup>37</sup>

The film's intertextual references to the Turin Shroud and the Last Supper foreground the way in which, in the context of Israeli colonialism, religious narratives are used to establish facts and determine the physical, geo-political boundaries of a modern nation state. Sansour argues that it is the power to control narrative, rather than any claim to truth, that ensures historical legitimacy. While the resistance leader of

*In the Future* says she “used to see archive and documentary as shortcuts to a truth-based counter-measure to the versions of history written by [her] rulers,” now she doesn’t—“truth is beside the point.”<sup>38</sup> Her project is “not about getting history right, but about making it useful.”<sup>39</sup> Archival resources—historical and archaeological *evidence*— don’t tell you what happened, they “don’t depict history, history is the story we tell about these photos and this story was never immune to fiction, religion, folklore or myths;” telling this story *is* a “narrative intervention.”<sup>40</sup>

The choice of Sansour and the narrative terrorist to use pottery shards as a weapon in their conflict over land is a direct reference to the significance that pottery had for Zionist archaeologists in the twentieth century, for many of whom it functioned as an emblem of continuity and a signifier of the lasting presence of Jewish communities in Palestine. It was with Albright’s identification of pottery shards as “Israelite pottery” that “a body of evidence in which the ancient—the *historical*—nation would henceforth inhere” was generated.<sup>41</sup> The rhetorics of Israeli state legitimisation are often articulated through a historicisation of religious discourse and a metanarrative of redemption and return. The claim to historical rights to the land is based on Biblical narratives of a Hebrew presence in the region thousands of years ago. The excavation of Galilean “Jewish or Israelite ruins,” pottery, and artefacts is seen as a “physical confirmation of the modern Jewish right to the land” and ‘fundamental to this cartography of continuity.’<sup>42</sup> In the early twentieth century, when Albright was excavating Tell el-Ful, he found ceramic material from the Iron I period that he classified as “Israelite,” on the basis that they appeared to represent a new culture in early Iron Age Palestine and thus could *only* be Israelite: a conclusion that presented itself as reasonable, primarily because of the fundamental role that biblical texts—and their narrative of an ancient Israelite invasion—played in the establishment of an interpretative framework for archaeological finds in Palestine.<sup>43</sup> The interpretation of pottery remains formed a significant part of archaeologists’ identification of a distinct, ethnically Israelite culture, different to that of the Canaanites. However, it was biblical narratives that provided the

interpretative context which enabled these ceramic assemblages to be treated as providing evidence of a critical break in the material-cultural record that might signify conquest and thus the arrival of the Israelites, rather than as ruptures that might simply indicate internal changes among existing peoples.<sup>44</sup> The mythico-religious texts provided a cultural framework within which the archaeological remains could be constituted as empirical facts. In turn, these archaeological remains validated biblical texts as authentic and reliable sources: the privileged institutional position of archaeology and its designation as a hegemonic discourse confirms the “myths of the past and defends them against scrutiny.”<sup>45</sup> Sansour, therefore, draws attention to how archaeology has been instrumentalised as a political tool; the importance of who tells the story; and the absurdity of locating present-day claims to sovereignty in shards of ancient pottery situated many metres below the surface.

This role of archaeology in providing geo-political legitimisation for states as well as a hoped-for autochthonous ontology is addressed in China Miéville’s counter/actual novel *The City and The City*.<sup>46</sup> In the novel, there are two “distinct” nations/states—Ul Qoma and Beszel—that co-exist in an uneasy, slightly hostile patchwork of overlapping and coterminous territory. While the two peoples may at times walk, drive, or even live “grosstopically” on the same street, through an elaborate performance of unseeing, they do not acknowledge the “other,” nor do they “breach” and enter the other’s territory.<sup>47</sup> Thus, while the cities exist as distinct and separate political and cultural entities, spatially they co-exist and overlap.<sup>48</sup> Such a dichotomisation (and politicisation) of space recalls Weizman’s argument, cited above, concerning Israel’s colonisation and occupation of Palestine through the fragmentation of Palestinian socio-cultural and geographical territoriality. The Israeli fly-overs, tunnels, and the “separation wall” provide “physical arrangements [that] deny even the possibility of a cognitive encounter,” enabling Israelis to travel “without even noticing the Palestinian traffic,” making Palestinian inhabitants “unseen.”<sup>49</sup> In both the counter and the actual worlds, an intensive socialised learning of clues concerning modes

of dress, ways of walking, talking, and architectural styles leads to an internal attitude by which interaction between the two groups of people is forestalled or prevented. Sa'adia Mandel, head of the architecture department in Ariel College in the West Bank, notes that his "architecture students watching out of their classroom windows 'see the Arab villages, but don't notice them. They look and they don't see.'"<sup>50</sup> Developing the political analogy further, *The City and The City* centres on a police investigation into the murder of a young woman who was doing an archaeology PhD, providing an opportunity for an indirect discussion on the intersection between archaeology, politics, and identity. Most archaeological sites are apparently located in Ul Qoma, which has a "mawkish sanctimoniousness about history," and which, through efforts of state archivists and export restrictions, keeps protected the artefacts that are interpreted by Ul Qoman nationalists as indicating "evidence of some Ul Qoman specific thing" from the "pre-Cleavage era."<sup>51</sup> Theories concerning the time before "the Cleavage", the time of the founding of Ul Qoma and Beszel, centre on notions of splitting and convergence, being the same people and different people—an approach that resonates with archaeologists' explanations of the emergence of the Canaanites and Israelites, based on ideas of arrival and conquest, rather than internal rupture and renaming.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to the above works, Jacir and Jarrar *perform* the counter/actual, that is, they perform that which Palestinians cannot do. In *Where We Come From* (2001–03) Jacir asks various Palestinians, living in exile as stateless refugees or under military curfew in the occupied territories, what she can do for them in Palestine, a place that she can travel freely within, but they can't.<sup>53</sup> She then undertakes these simple tasks and gestures, recording the act in a photo/text juxtaposition of wish and wish fulfilment. For example, she travels to Gaza to eat *sayadiyeh*, as the person making the request is a Palestinian citizen of Israel and can't travel to Gaza; she walks in Nazareth because the person asking has a West Bank identity card and isn't permitted to travel there; she visits a mother and gives her a hug and a kiss, because her son left Gaza for Ramallah in 1995

and has not been allowed to return, despite having Gazan identity papers; she travels to Haifa's beach and lights a candle there at dawn to remember those who gave their lives for Palestine, on behalf of Mohammad, whose parents were exiled from Jerusalem in 1948, and who now lives in Riyadh with a Jordanian passport.<sup>54</sup> Here, the counter/actual embodies "the kinds of things that maybe all Palestinians will be able to do someday," but which they cannot do today, and, in doing so, it "allegorizes their deprived political status" and lack of basic human rights as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the General Assembly of the United Nations, including "freedom of movement, personal independence, equality, and protection from discrimination and degrading treatment."<sup>55</sup> As with the other art works discussed above, *Where We Come From* foregrounds the spatial control that Palestinians are subject to through their visual absence.

Khalid Jarrar's counter/actual artistic intervention, *State of Palestine*, protests the refusal of other states to recognise Palestine as a nation. In this work, Jarrar has invited passers-by in Ramallah and other countries to have their passports stamped with his own custom-designed stamp that reads "State of Palestine" in Arabic and English and includes the motif of the sunbird.<sup>56</sup> Here, the counter/actual imagination and performance of bureaucratic functions associated with the modern nation state not only emphasise the fact that Palestine is effectively prevented from functioning as a state through occupation, economic embargo, and land fragmentation, but also draws attention to the physical restrictions imposed on Palestinian movement by Israeli checkpoints, curfews, and the denial of visas, which effectively imprison Palestinians in occupied territory—something the artist has repeatedly experienced at first hand. Invited to participate in an exhibition in the U.S., Jarrar needed to obtain a U.S. travel visa, but because Palestine is not recognised as a state by the U.S., there is no consulate there, so Jarrar had to apply for permission from the Israeli army to travel from occupied Palestinian territory to Israel. The permission was denied. Ironically, although Jarrar was successful in crossing into Israel illegally and obtaining a U.S. travel visa, he had to

travel to Jordan to fly to America—and when trying to cross into Jordan, he was told by the Israeli army that he was banned from travelling for two months for “security reasons” and denied permission to leave the occupied West Bank.<sup>57</sup>

Through a counter/actual performance of a relatively normal bureaucratic function of the state—the stamping of passports and production of postage stamps—Jarrar draws attention to effective Palestinian lack of control over their borders: not only because of Israeli army control over the movement of Palestinians into, from, and within Palestine, but also because of Israeli control of the actual location of the border. Although the Palestinian Authority has a nominal presence at checkpoints on the borders of the Palestinian West Bank, it is the Israeli army who control access.<sup>58</sup>

Responding to Said’s call to “furnish the world with some narrative evidence” of the ethnic-cleansing and massacres of Palestinians as well as the brutality of Israeli occupation, many scholarly histories and historical analyses have been produced that respond to *all* the available evidence.<sup>59</sup> These accounts have challenged the accuracy of the hegemonic Israeli narrative of the 1948 “voluntary flight of the Palestinians from much of Palestine” and the argument that their occupation is in reality a defensive measure and “a formula for a peaceful settlement” rather than a means of extending Israeli sovereignty further into occupied lands;<sup>60</sup> but they have not dislodged the dominance of the narrative, despite inconsistencies between it and available sources. Indeed, as Pappé has argued, the historians he categorises as the neo-Zionists themselves acknowledge the findings of new historians in Israel—that Palestinians did not leave voluntarily, and that their ethnic cleansing was necessary for the establishment of Israel.<sup>61</sup> Thus, although historians argue that “facts speak for themselves,” it is obvious that this is not at all the case. “Facts” serve dominant socio-political and economic interests and, as Sansour says, “[t]ruth is beside the point. Legitimacy is not a rational concept, it’s emotional, psychological.”<sup>62</sup> Historians have “furnished the world with evidence,” but the world has not taken notice—injustice and violence continue.

In using the counter/actual, the artists discussed above draw attention to instances of neo-colonial injustice and absurdities of the *status quo*. Moreover, they explicitly deconstruct the disciplinary paradigms that are used to legitimise such realities, without uncritically reproducing normative relations of power, affirming the inevitability of the *status quo* or anaesthetising any “last pang of intellectual and ethical consciousness.”<sup>63</sup> It is, of course, quite possible to address the widespread injustices and violence in Israel/Palestine without recourse to history. The argument over Palestine, as Howard Halle states, does not revolve around “the question of just *who* is indigenous: the Jews who conquered the place three millennia ago, or the Arabs who did so 2,000 years later.”<sup>64</sup> Rather, the conflict centres on *historical* presents; it is an argument about political authority, provision of justice, human rights, and equitable division of resources for everyone who lives in Israel/Palestine and the occupied territories, as well as those who have been forced from their homes and live in exile or in refugee camps.<sup>65</sup> In this situation, the use of the counter/actual not only questions representation and perspective in a way that histories do not—it also challenges the way in which stories are narrated, problematises political agendas, draws our attention to the current “facts on the ground”, and incisively and effectively highlights the actual injustice and inequality faced by people today.

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- Notes**
- <sup>1</sup> *Counter[f]actual Strategies in History Writing, Literature, and Arts*, Jagiellonian University, Krakow 16–17 November 2017. The workshop contributed greatly to my understanding of the possible uses and meanings of the counter[f]actual and the counter/actual in a variety of genres and contexts, I am very grateful to the organisers and participants.
- <sup>2</sup> Aviezer Tucker, "Historiographical Counterfactuals and Historical Contingency," *History and Theory* 38/2 (1999): 273.
- <sup>3</sup> I have chosen to specifically discuss works by Emily Jacir, Larissa Sansour, Khalid Jarrar and China Miéville as counter/actual interventions in the debates surrounding the Israeli occupation of Palestine, but I also discuss a number of works situated in a Lebanese context (notably those by Lamia Joreige, Walid Ra'ad, and Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige in order to exemplify some of the points I make concerning the uses that the counter/actual can have in the context of representation in conflict and post-conflict situations. For more on each of the artists discussed see the references cited below and in the bibliography.
- <sup>4</sup> I understand *narrating otherwise* to be a practice similar to Simon's "remembering otherwise," Roger I. Simon, *A Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) passim.
- <sup>5</sup> Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Contemporary Art Practices in Post-war Lebanon: An Introduction" in *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2006), 84.
- <sup>6</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Les films de Khalil Joreige et Joana Hadjithomas," n.p. cited in T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: the art and politics of documentary during global crisis*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 197.
- <sup>7</sup> Demos, *Migrant*, 197–8.
- <sup>8</sup> Lamia Joreige, "Here and Perhaps Elsewhere" in *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2006), 18.

- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.; Lamia Joreige, "Houna wa Roubbama Hounak," accessed 17 April 2018, [http://www.lamiajoreige.com/films/films\\_houna.php](http://www.lamiajoreige.com/films/films_houna.php).
- <sup>10</sup> Demos, *Migrant*, 180 and 181. For the second quote Demos cites Sune Haugbolle and Anders Hastrup, "Introduction: Outlines of a New Politics of Memory in the Middle East" in *The Politics of Violence: Truth and Reconciliation in the Arab Middle East* ed. Sune Haugbolle and Anders Hastrup (London: Routledge, 2008), 13.
- <sup>11</sup> This idea of the past constituting a counter/actual world different to that officially remembered is reinforced by the built environment in that many of the physical traces of the civil war in Beirut have been demolished and erased.
- <sup>12</sup> Joreige, "Here," 18.
- <sup>13</sup> See the discussion in Demos, *The Migrant Image*, ch.7.
- <sup>14</sup> Joreige, "Here," 18.
- <sup>15</sup> Files Type A: Fakhouri: "Already Been in a Lake of Fire\_Notebook Volume 38"; Files Type A: Raad: "Let's be Honest the Weather Helped," accessed 12 October 2017, <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/data/TypeA.html>.
- <sup>16</sup> Demos, *Migrant*, 190 quoting "Walid Raad. Interview with Alan Gilbert," *Bomb Magazine* 81 (2002): 40.
- <sup>17</sup> Demos, *Migrant*, 190–91 citing Ra'ad in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Walid Raad: and the Atlas Group," *Bidoun* 2 (2004), accessed 17 April 2018, <https://bidoun.org/issues/2-we-are-old>.
- <sup>18</sup> Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, <http://hadjithomasjoreige.com/the-lebanese-rocket-society/>, accessed 22 August 2018. See also Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *Summer, Autumn, Winter ... and Spring. Conversations with Artists from the Arab World*, ed. Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath (Milan: Skira, 2014), 70–1, and Claire Norton and Mark Donnelly, *Liberating Histories* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 177–8.
- <sup>19</sup> Wu Ming 1, "Why not show off about the best things? A few quick notes on social conflict in Italy and the metaphors used to describe it," (December 2002), accessed 26 February 2018, <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/giap/giapdigest18.html>. Fredrik Liew, "Connecting Öyvind Fahlström" in *Manipulate the World: Connecting Öyvind Fahlström*, (London: Koenig Books and Moderna Museet, 2017), 28–30.
- <sup>20</sup> Larissa Sansour, *Space Exodus*, (2009), see Sansour, "A Space Exodus (2009)," accessed 6 March 2018, <http://www.larissasansour.com/exodus.html>. The film is also available online at <https://vimeo.com/21372138>. Larissa Sansour, *Nation Estate*, (2012), see Sansour "Nation Estate (2012)," accessed 6 March 2018, [http://www.larissasansour.com/nation\\_estate.html](http://www.larissasansour.com/nation_estate.html). Larissa Sansour and Soren Lind, *In the Future, They Ate from the Finest Porcelain*, film, photo and installation, (2016) see <http://www.larissasansour.com/Future.html>, accessed 6 March 2018. I would like to thank the artist for providing me with access to the films for the purposes of research.
- <sup>21</sup> Sansour, *Space Exodus*.
- <sup>22</sup> Helga Tawil-Souri, "A Space Exodus: A Truly Palestinian Film," *Jadaliyya* (2/4/2011), accessed 5 March 2018, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23863/A-Space-Exodus-A-Truly-Palestinian-Film>.
- <sup>23</sup> "Handala: Through the Eyes of a Palestinian Refugee," accessed 17 April 2018, <http://www.handala.org>.
- <sup>24</sup> Tawil-Souri, "A Space Exodus".
- <sup>25</sup> Sansour, *Nation Estate*.

<sup>26</sup> As Ariel Handel and others have demonstrated Israeli checkpoints are not intended to function as part of the apparatus of surveillance or security but are instead designed to produce uncertainty and thus minimise, not regulate, Palestinian movement. Handel, "Exclusionary surveillance and spatial uncertainty in the occupied Palestinian territories," in *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine: population territory, and power* edited by Elia Zureik, David Lyon and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, (London: Routledge, 2011): 268–71. Israel has asserted control over all underground aquifers in the West Bank and 83% of the water from the West Bank aquifers is diverted to Israeli cities or illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2012), 19. Their control over water prevents the development of Palestinian agriculture as well as making life extremely difficult for urban residents of both the West Bank and Gaza.

<sup>27</sup> Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 206.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 206–7 and 142.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 167 and 219. For a more detailed discussion see chapter 1 Norton and Donnelly, *Liberating Histories*.

<sup>30</sup> For Kraus' poster see "Franz Kraus," accessed 1 April 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz\\_Kraus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Kraus). For a version of Sansour's poster see [http://www.larissasansour.com/nation\\_estate.html](http://www.larissasansour.com/nation_estate.html), accessed 17 April 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Quote from Michel Foucault, "The Force of Flight," in *Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography* trans. G. Moore, ed. J. W. Crampton, and S. Elden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 170 quoted in Stuart Elden, "Secure the volume: vertical geopolitics and the depth of power," *Political Geography* xxx (2013): 2, accessed 5 March 2018, <https://progressivegeographies.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/secure-the-volume-vertical-geopolitics-and-the-depth-of-power.pdf>. In stills accompanying the video installation, the wall and gun emplacements are visible from the apartment. The wall is made from concrete slabs much like the "separation barrier". See [http://www.larissasansour.com/nation\\_estate.html](http://www.larissasansour.com/nation_estate.html), accessed 5 March 2018.

<sup>32</sup> For the illegal Israeli use of natural resources in the occupied West Bank see the comment on water use in n. 23 above.

<sup>33</sup> On the politics of verticality see Eyal Weizman, "The 'Vertical Apartheid' of the Israeli Occupation: Eyal Weizman," in *Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine*, (15/08/17), accessed 17 April 2018, <http://apjp.org/the-vertical-apartheid-of-the/2017/8/16/the-vertical-apartheid-of-the-israeli-occupation-eyal-weizma.html>; Weizman, "Introduction to the Politics of Verticality," accessed 17 April 2018, [https://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politics/verticality/article\\_801.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politics/verticality/article_801.jsp); Weizman, *Hollow Land*. See also Elden, "Secure the volume".

<sup>34</sup> Larissa Sansour and Soren Lind, *In the Future, They Ate from the Finest Porcelain*, film, photo and installation, (2016) see <http://www.larissasansour.com/Future.html>, accessed 6 March 2018; Sansour describes the film as a fictional film that addresses the present day reality of political problems in an interview with Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMV5VzViUuI>, accessed 6 March 2018. For a more detailed discussion of this work, see Norton

and Donnelly, *Liberating Histories*, ch. 6. I would like to thank the artist for providing me with access to the film for the purposes of research.

<sup>35</sup> Sansour notes that the porcelain fragments carry Palestinian DNA in the Bluecoat interview cited in n. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Sansour and Lind, *In the Future*.

<sup>37</sup> In the Bluecoat interview cited in n. 37 Sansour explains the shift in the genre format of her work by saying that what is happening in Palestine-Israel is so surreal that people did not believe what she was saying in a documentary-style format; she felt it was more honest to work in a more surreal way.

<sup>38</sup> Larissa Sansour and Soren Lind, "In the Future, They Ate from the Finest Porcelain (extended consultation)," *Ibraaz* (6 May 2016), accessed 5 March 2018, <http://www.ibraaz.org/projects/130#>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Abu El-Haj, *Facts*, 105 and 111 n. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Neil Asher Silberman, *Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 9; Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground*, 55 and 79.

<sup>43</sup> Abu El-Haj, *Facts*, 11, and 104–5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., chapter 5, especially 122–3.

<sup>45</sup> Sansour and Lind, "In the Future [...]" (extended consultation)."

<sup>46</sup> China Miéville, *The City and The City*, (Basingstoke: Pan, 2011), first published by Macmillan in 2009. I would like to thank Jerome de Groot for bringing this novel to my attention and noting how it can be read as a commentary on, or analogy for, the situation in Israel/Palestine.

<sup>47</sup> For the neologism "grosstopically", see Miéville, *The City* passim esp. 98, 160.

<sup>48</sup> For a slightly more detailed discussion of space in Miéville, *The City*, see Kate Moloney, "Beszel, Ul Qoma, and the Alterity of City Space," accessed 12 March 2018, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/first/en123/cwl-litcrit/thecityandthecity/closereading/>; see also Miéville, *The City*, 86.

<sup>49</sup> Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 181, the second quote is apparently from Danny Tirza, mentioned in Amira Hass, "Israel asks PA donors to und new, upgraded West Bank roads," *Ha'aretz* (5/9/2004), cited by Weizman, 181; c. f. Miéville, *The City*, 5086, 93, 161.

<sup>50</sup> Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 137 citing Esther Zandberg, "As close as you can get," *Ha'aretz* (3/4/2003).

<sup>51</sup> Miéville, *The City*, 75–6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 51, 106.

<sup>53</sup> Jacir has an American passport which enables her to travel more freely in Israel and the occupied territories.

<sup>54</sup> For examples from Emily Jacir, *Where We Come From* (2001–03), see Emily Jacir, Stella Rollog, and Genoveva Rückert (eds), *Emily Jacir: Belongings. Arbeiten/Works 1998–2003* (Wein: Folio Verlag, 2004), 50–59. For further examples and images from her installation see Pat Binder and Gerhard Haupt, "Emily Jacir: Where we come from," *Nafas Art Magazine* (Oct. 2003) accessed 13 March 2018, <https://universes.art/nafas/articles/2003/emily-jacir-where-we-come-from/>.

<sup>55</sup> Edward Said, "Emily Jacir," in *Emily Jacir: Belongings*, 49; Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 104, 121.

<sup>56</sup> Khaled Jarrar, *State of Palestine* (2011), see Alistair

George, "An Interview with Khaled Jarrar: Stamping Palestine into Passports" accessed 17 April 2018 <https://palsolidarity.org/2011/11/an-interview-with-khaled-jarrar-stamping-palestine-into-passports/>. Jarrar has also produced postage stamps from Deutsche Post with the same inscription and motif on them, see Genevieve Quick, "Palestine to Mexico," *Art Practical* (10/11/16), accessed 5 March 2018 <http://www.artpractical.com/feature/border-crossings-from-palestine-to-mexico/> and also <http://blog.berlinbiennale.de/en/projects/state-of-palestine-by-khaled-jarrar-2-20395>.

<sup>57</sup> Quick, "Palestine to Mexico".

<sup>58</sup> See Weizman, *Hollow Land*, particularly ch.5 "Check-points: the split sovereign and the one-way mirror".

<sup>59</sup> Edward Said, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13/3 (1984): 38

<sup>60</sup> Ilan Pappé, "The Vicissitudes of the 1948 Historiography of Israel," *Journal of Palestine studies* 39/1 (2009): 6; Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 10–11.

<sup>61</sup> Pappé, 'Vicissitudes,' 9–10.

<sup>62</sup> Sansour and Lind, "In the Future,"

<sup>63</sup> Davies, *Historics*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Howard Halle, "The Hugo Boss Prize 2008: Emily Jacir," *Time Out New York* 701 (5 March 2009), accessed 30 November 2017, <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/the-hugo-boss-prize-2008-emily-jacir>.

<sup>65</sup> Kenan van de Mierop, "Historical Presents: A Study of the Debates Around Reparations for Slavery in the United States and France, the Post Racial Era and the Age of Commemoration," (PhD diss., University of Ghent, 2015).

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## KONTR/FAKTAS: MENAS IR ANTIKOLONIALISTINIO PASIPRIEŠINIMO STRATEGIJOS

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip menininkai, kurie įveiksmia kontr/faktą kaip pokalbio apie praeitį strategiją, sąmoningai aktualizuoja sociopolitinius ir etinius aspektus, kylančius Izraelio okupuotoje Palestinoje. Teigiama, kad tokios kontr/faktinės praktikos daug veiksmingiau pabrėžia neteisybę, kylančią okupuotoje valstybėje. Taigi taip ne tik problematizuojamas pateikimo procesas, bet ir dekonstruojami ryšiai, kuriais istorijos glaudžiai susijusios su galios santykiais ir įteisimo praktikomis. Pažymėtina, kad taip ne tik iš naujo perkuriama tai, kas suvokiama kaip aktualu ir tikra, bet ir iš naujo nustatomas santykis su praeitimi bei jo vieta dominuojančioje hegemoninių interesų sistemoje.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Palestina, kontr/faktinis, erdviškumas, vertikali galia, praeitis, istorija, Larissa Sansour, Emily Jacir, China Miéville, Khalid Jarrar.

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