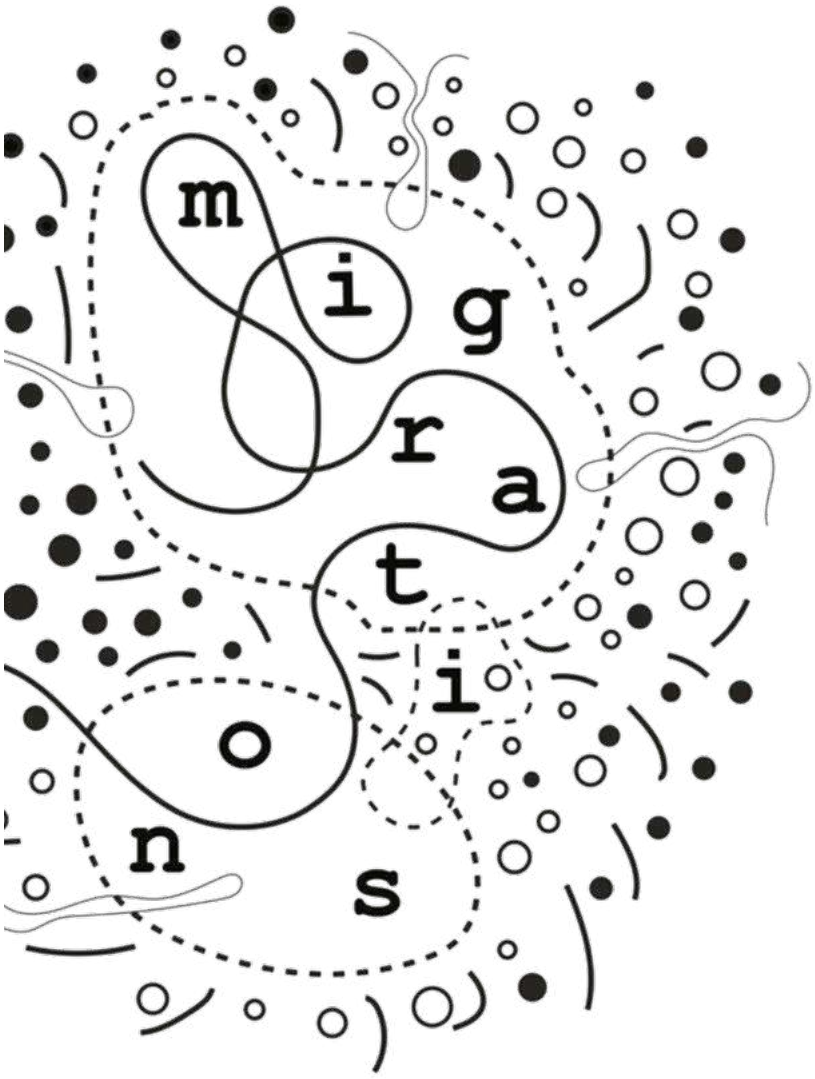
Border as Method: Art Historical Interventions

Session 2



Session 2
Border as Method: Art Historical Interventions

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The theme of the CIHA World Congress in Sao Paolo 2022 was, as we all know, "Migrations." This session emerged from the essential fact that the border, or borders in the plural, are central to the paradigm of migration: they are both sites of cultural contact and encounter, and harsh barriers to movement and human mobility. The great paradox about migration in our era of globalization, our supposedly increasingly "borderless" world, is that it has resulted simultaneously in a proliferation of borders — in the form of physical walls, security fences, barricades, and a general redrawing of boundary lines — whose goal is to prohibit and restrict human mobility. But borders do not merely thwart migration, they are also constantly changing horizons in motion, rather than permanent fixtures in geo-political space. In other words, borders are not merely on the margins of human experience, but they have somehow come to "inscribe themselves at the very center of contemporary experience."[1]

This quote, along with the title of this session, is derived from the 2013 book by political theorists, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, titled *Border as Method, or The Multiplication of Labor*. For these authors, based in Italy and Australia, respectively, the idea of "border as method" is about advancing a methodological agenda. They argue that the border is not merely a research object to be held up and analyzed as an autonomous thing; but rather a kind of semantic field—in their terms, an "epistemic framework" – and therefore a privileged lens through which to view our world. This means recognizing the powerful proliferation of borders around the world today, but equally the struggles against them and the acts of

translation and border- crossing — embodied, for instance, in the figure of the migrant— that constantly frustrate their acts of violence and power. To sustain the "border as method," then, is to recognize the constitutive role of the border within the field of migratory relationships, and to foreground the border as a privileged optic that can open up new and productive perspectives.

Accordingly, our contributors were invited to engage in a rethinking of the border — away from something that is pre-given, fixed or immutable, and towards a conception of the border itself as a social process, and as a horizon that is continually shaped and re-shaped in a variety of cultural practices and visual forms. We encouraged participants to embrace a vision of the border as a process through which social identities are shaped; as thresholds that both bring together and divide; as performances, practices, discourses, and symbols; as active sites of negotiation and contestation. In other words, we invited contributors to approach the border as an intricate social process, a dynamic historical or lived experience that is not reducible to the alienating forces of bureaucracy, or to the abstractions of the map or the state.

The papers that follow aggregate a heterogeneous set of works. They do not present a conclusive or closed view in global terms. Our contributors participated both virtually and in-person at the conference in Sao Paolo from all over the world: they are based at institutions in Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Hong Kong, Spain, France, South Africa, Beirut, the United States and Brazil. While the essays are primarily concerned with the field of modern and contemporary art, we have selected papers that reflect a range of approaches and encourage productive and open discussion. An important theme that emerged within the epistemic framework of the "border as method" was that the border persistently presented itself as a battlefield. The notion of the border as a territory of negotiation, of appeasement of conflicts, appeared to take a minor role. In its place, the border emerged as a place that fundamentally embodies practices of exclusion. It is a territory that exacerbates differences and consolidates relations of dominance and subordination that, over time, can resemble open, incurable wounds.

The time elapsed between the selection and the presentation of the works was marked by the unpredictable turn of the global pandemic. For two years we learned to live with the imposition of distance, isolation, to live with the fear of contamination, to build new borders. We developed strategies to avoid, on the physical plane, the contagion that we sought to grapple with on the intellectual plane. At the event, the presentations made up a hybrid program and reflected a free flow of ideas, the mobility of critical thinking and the need to update the discussion on edges.

Ultimately, certain conceptual formulations stood out that expand and destabilize the fixity of the border: “modalities of knowledge”, “untranslatability”, “porosity of borders”, “semiosphere”, “imaginary borders”, “paradox”, “scientific quality”, “the border of the border”, “symbolic aspect of the border”, “satirical simulation”, “dreamy forms of power” and “counterpoint archives”. Although they seem disjointed, these expressions converged, temporarily and provocatively, for us to project a constellation of issues. We hope that the texts gathered here can bring the reader closer to the concerns that motivated us. The displacements that these authors impose on us, the migrations of our thoughts, are part of our reading experiences. We are tempted to think that borders have been abolished in the globalized world. However, as we move, we can see that the edges take on varied forms and functions, they are also spaces for meeting and dialogue. In the search for a point of contact, we got to know each other a little more.

Endnotes

1 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or The Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

Border as Method

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ABSTRACT

My paper explores ways contemporary artists address the effects of the current deepening of capitalist relations on national borders. I show that while some practitioners produce artworks that reflect on borders in witty, ironic, and poetic ways, others make art that concentrates more intensively on border crossing's toll on those most in need of relocation. I conclude with a discussion of artists who focus on transport and communication's logistical coordination across vast landscapes, arguing that their productions make visible economic globalization's processual and infrastructural operations across the world's national borders.

KEYWORDS

Contemporary Art; Borders; Economic Globalization; Migration; Infrastructure

Neoliberal deregulation and financialization have profoundly transformed the twenty-first-century lifeworld. The effects of these processes have included not only capital's fluid flow into new markets but also more flexible professional classes, digital communications systems, and labor markets that work against durable personal and professional arrangements. The comfortable mobility that power requires and confers is one of the most discriminating factors around which a new kind of international class segregation and privilege distribution is taking shape. As sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello observe in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), the more versatile professionals and their services become, the lighter they travel, and the fewer ties they have to older unities such as family, class, and place, the greater their chance of getting ahead. (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 361-370)[1]. Neoliberal regimes have developed faster and less expensive travel infrastructures to accommodate a vital component of these new economic conditions, which have vastly extended social relations across space. These developments have made modernity more liquid, according to some, and enabled capital flows to circulate just about anything.[2]

Paradoxically, the same flows of global movement have led to a proliferation of borders, security systems, checkpoints, and physical and virtual frontiers. Today, every nation-state at once seeks to maximize the opportunities the circulation of people, resources, and information creates and yet close its doors to the migration forms these elements stimulate. As a result, countries are becoming increasingly vigilant about their borders' defense. A form of neoliberal nationalism has drawn up no-go buffer zones and constructed armored boundaries to restrict cross-border migration. The Berlin Wall and what it represented may have come down, but, as philosopher Étienne Balibar explains, the era of economic globalization, in its need to discriminate "between the two extremes--between those who `circulate capital' and those `whom capital circulates,'" has rendered nationalism pernicious. (Balibar 2002: 83) It has prompted stricter laws against refugees and asylum seekers, the ruthless eviction of economic migrants, and the erection of more fences and walls between nation-states than ever before.

Artists have addressed the new conditions of national jurisdiction in several ways. Some have turned borders into performance spaces, ludically traversing, circumnavigating, or accentuating them. Christian Phillip Müller's *Green Border*, 1993, a witty intervention carried out in the context of the Austrian pavilion at the 45th Venice Biennale, addresses the porosity of borders and the affective dimensions of nationality and state identification at the twentieth century's end. To make the work, the artist donned local costumes and illegally hiked across Austria's national boundary at eight different locations (the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Germany). In the process, he questioned the practice of defining borders between segregated national entities through drawings on a map.[3] The artwork casts the border not as a line at which one stops but as an indefinite area in which to proceed. It renders the border a mobile and uncertain metaphor for the performative, socially constructed, and contingent aspects of identity, which creative artists are exceptionally well-poised to negotiate. National boundaries, Phillip Müller suggests, are only social constructions and are often more imagined than real.

Other practitioners have accentuated the rigidity of borders or turned them into thought experiments to draw attention to their absurdness. Santiago Sierra's *Wall Enclosing a Space*, 2003, exhibited at the Spanish Pavilion of the 50th Venice Biennale, turned the building into a firm boundary that separated what was inside from the people outside. It functioned as a barrier to movement. The artist covered the word "España" on the edifice's facade with black tape and closed off access to the pavilion's primary entrance. Directions sent visitors to the back door, where security guards requested identification and permitted entry into the pavilion's empty interior only to those with valid Spanish passports. The guards locked out foreign visitors ineligible to travel to Spain without a visa. The implication was that Spain's current political situation emphasizes reactionary notions of ethnic roots and fixed places, especially for the border and who gets to cross it.

Raqs Media Collective's video installation, *Undoing Walls*, 2017, ruminates on the rationale for national boundary lines. The animation loop

shifts from what initially reads as an architectural structure to the collapsibility of a fluttering textile. In a distant echo of philosopher Angela Davis's reflection that "walls turned sideways are bridges," the artists based their thought experiment on the premise that an imagined "dysfunctional" wall structure could productively reimagine the function of borders. (Davis 1974: 137) The group proposes creating "a `welcoming' wall" that can operate as an alternative to human segregation in the context of the extra-juridical position of migrants. The wall will enable contact and interaction rather than divide communities. It will "become the site where counter-narratives are inscribed and resistance" to capitalism's exclusions can take place. "Can we play the system from within the system but according to its own rules?" the collective asks. "Can a wall become a conduit, as opposed to a divide, by rethinking its structure? Can we imagine a wall that is intentionally permeable? Or even a self-destructive wall that conjures against its own intentions?" (Raqs Media Collective 2017) By rethinking walls as ephemeral, porous, and fluid entities, the collective undermines their politically oppressive power and casts them as dynamic thresholds.

Sierra's and Raqs Media Collective's projects present borders as politically and culturally contested sites of belonging and not belonging. Sierra's *Wall Enclosing a Space* flaunts and reenacts these borders, and Raqs Media Collective's *Undoing Walls* tries to reconceive their operation. The two mischievously encourage spectators to contemplate the relationship between borders and contemporary art, especially the latter's increasingly transient conditions. At the same time, the artists marshal the contradictions and complexities of national boundaries and walls as metaphors to explore cultural, political, and artistic boundaries. They recognize that even border walls have boundary aspects and are as variable as the performative acts through which legal discourses construct them. Their stability relies on the process of perpetual articulation and rearticulation.

Some artists have pictured the border security apparatus and marshaled disembodied evidence of clandestine migration in aesthetic ways to evoke national borders' toll on those most in need of relocation. A case in point is Richard Misrach and Guillermo Galindo's project "Border Cantos,"

2004-16, which addresses the unseen human reality of the highly militarized U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Misrach's medium-format photographs focus on areas marked by human presence: the security-industrial complex, alternative infrastructures of mobility, and remnants of human movement. The pictures depict the dark reddish-brown border wall as a paradoxical structure: physically menacing on the ground against startingly beautiful (considering the subject) landscapes devoid of people. In some images, such as *Wall, East of Nogales, Arizona*, 2014, the corrugated steel border fence cuts through the landscape's rolling hills like a road or river, blending with pathways along which humans have long moved. In others, such as *Wall, Los Indios, Texas*, 2015, a solitary 36-slat segment of free-standing barrier looms uselessly atop a small patch of grass in a dirt field crisscrossed in tire tracks, resembling more a preserved relic or a museum piece than a functional element of a security apparatus. The carefully framed compositions repeatedly use perspective to dramatize the relationship between the border wall and the land.

Misrach also symbolizes the migrants' struggles by photographing objects found along the border. The items index migrant movement. The possessions are ambiguous. Abandoned under unknown circumstances, they point to the unknowable crossings of the people who desperately depended on them. *Artifacts Found From California to Texas Between 2013 and 2015*, 2013-15, presents a sampling of these artifacts: garments, glass and plastic bottles, cigarette packs, empty food tins, toiletries, books, backpacks, and children's toys shot in situ covered in dirt. Set in a forensic grid, each of the work's forty-eight photographs is a mystery that indexes the particular difficulties of undocumented migration; together, this long horizontal arrangement of frames makes up an abbreviated lexicon of border zone objects, from junk to keepsakes. Misrach's visual evidence approach acknowledges the limitations of the objects' symbolic power.[4] The migrants' journeys are embedded in the finds, though there is no easy way to transcribe them.

Galindo's sound sculptures reanimate the found objects and materials visually captured by Misrach. He transforms the detritus into musical

instruments and sonic environments. The installations and performances render percussive rather than melodic sounds, evoking fear, drama, and pathos along the border. Many suggest the movements of people walking briskly or running, the pitter-patters, rhythmic clangs, and other beats bringing anxious but determined footsteps to mind. Galindo uses bottles and beverage cans as wind instruments and fills jugs and jars with gravel or golf balls and spent shotgun shells to make shakers and rattles. A Border Patrol guard's flashlight becomes a trumpet. Liquid drips from a pierced, former water station barrel, resonating on a metal plate below. In *Teclata*, 2015, a wooden, piano-like hammer mechanism created with Border Patrol ammunition boxes activates empty cans, bottles, and a plastic cup. *Zapatello*, 2014, includes a shoe and glove that pound a rawhide-strung drag-tire like a drumhead. The shapes of the machine's cranks mimic the Border Patrol targets pictured in some of Misrach's compositions. The found elements in *Huesocordio*, 2012, a wooden, five-string instrument, are limited to five vertebrae while also incorporating three wind-up toy roaches. Based on haunting photographs of scarecrow-like effigies constructed of found migrant clothing pilloried on agave-stalk Xs Misrach discovered in the desert, the "arms" and "legs" of Galindo's *Efigie* are hollow and the wood resonant. Two steel cables stretch between the figure's outstretched arms, and thirteen more cross the tattered jacket's front. Galindo's instruments are documents of peoples' passing (literal and figurative) and memorials to those we may never see. As the composer says, the instruments enable the invisible victims of migration who might have survived the experience or perished in the crossing to speak through their belongings. (Misrach and Galindo 2016: 193) *Micro-Orchestra*, 2014, is perhaps the project's most chilling piece. Rendered from a plastic toy scorpion, a child's comb, and a small toothbrush, the makeshift instrument sounds off a spine-tingling cacophony of high-pitched screeches and scrapes that evokes the cries of unaccompanied minors crossing the perilous boundary zone.

The power of these sounds and their connection to the objects' physicality, history, and relation to the border is undeniable. Although Galindo's and Misrach's works could stand alone, their proximity enriches

both. Misrach's high-definition archaeological images are eloquent in their silence; Galindo's instrument-objects are poignant in making charged materials and landscape sing. Together, these artists transform the border's liminality into a multi-sensorial and multi-dimensional landscape. "Border Cantos" bears witness to the complexity and magnitude of the concerns and encourages a humanitarian perspective on the plight of migrants. It roots border politics in the context of individual human lives and reflects on an international order in which an accident of birth secures or loses the right to travel.

Other artists and art collectives have employed different narrator positions to address border crossing and mobility-related traumas. Their works are considerably less witty and ironic and more strictly political than Phillip Müller's, Sierra's, and Raqs Media Collective's, and arguably less poetic than Misrach and Galindo's "Border Cantos." For example, the Milan-based art collective Multiplicity produces project works that evoke the gulf between who can and cannot travel at will because of political and economic reasons. Its productions intertwine border politics and the migration crisis that has been at the center of worldwide attention in recent years.[5] The group's *The Road Map*, 2003, explores the spatialization of the West Bank's occupation and that territory's dynamic, constantly shifting, ebbing, and flowing boundaries in vivid terms.[6] "The territories of the West Bank," the group explains, "are almost completely covered with enclosure and fences. They are war zone barriers, bypass roads, military zones for the Israeli army, Palestinian villages and cities, refugee camps, areas with no jurisdiction, networks, and infrastructures. They are all arranged on top of each other like a giant web." (Multiplicity 2005: 172)

The Road Map's multimedia installation compares the time it took a person holding an Israeli passport with that of a resident of Palestine to travel the same seventy-kilometer distance through the area's charged and complex geography. In 2003, three members of Multiplicity, with their European Union identification papers, accompanied an Israeli citizen from Kiriat Arba to Kudmin (two Israeli colonies in Palestinian territory). They made a similar trip from Hebron to Nablus the following day, with someone holding a Palestinian

passport. The two routes start and end in the same latitude and even overlap at some points. But from a topographical point of view, the Israeli government has splintered the West Bank's infrastructure by a network of fast bypass roads, bridges, and tunnels that weave over and under one another to link the colonies and bypass Palestinian villages. (Multiplicity 2008: 71) The concentration of enclosures, fences, checkpoints and controlled corridors regulates the space. According to architect Eyal Weizman, "the bypass roads attempt to separate Israeli traffic networks from Palestinian ones, preferably without allowing them ever to cross. They emphasize the overlapping of two separate geographies that inhabit the same landscape. At points where the networks do cross, a makeshift separation is created. Most often, small dust roads are dug out to allow Palestinians to cross under the fast, wide highways on which Israeli vans and military vehicles rush between settlements." (Weizman 2002) As a result, the Israeli citizen's journey was a hassle-free one hour. By contrast, the Palestinian traveler, subjected to a vast array of security checkpoints, inspection stops, and other impediments, spent five-and-a-half hours commuting the same distance. Regulated by military roadblocks and security control, the tentative and arbitrary borderlines, in this case, function as daily reminders of the misery and hardship the ongoing conflict imposes on a large section of the area's population. Strict regimentation of territory and the splintering of space "into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable, and removable barriers" that "shrink and expand the territory at will" operate to define who matters and who does not. (Weizman 2017: 6)

The Road Map highlights the relational dimension of border zones. It reveals that what comprises those spaces for some, enabling fluid circulation, may impede others. The artwork also calls attention to politics' spatialization along racial, ethnic, and religious lines. For large numbers of people, this form of politics has everyday life implications. Borderlines regulate their daily existence. They generate their social and political conditions. Their discriminations of inclusivity and exclusivity underwrite an everyday violence. So does the border security industry, which has thrived under neoliberalism.[7] The Road Map's chart of Israel/Palestine's contested territory

through travelers' politicized movement reveals much more about daily life's conditions in this contested geopolitical space than any abstract map ever could.

Political theorists Sandro Mezzandra and Brett Neilson argue in *Border as Method* that economic globalization's new infrastructure has made national boundaries central to the heterogeneous organization of space and time. (Mezzandra and Neilson 2013) The new infrastructure loosens borders in contexts of economic expansion when there is a need for additional sources of labor and tightens them when the economy contracts. Keyed to a system that allows migration to flow because of structural changes in the economy, the borders of physical locations become boundaries that constantly assume new morphologies. They map the contemporary world's fragmented contours, generating tensions and conflicts well beyond the geopolitical line of demarcation between states. These contours function as neither endpoints nor starting points. Instead, they operate as mechanisms that propel daily life. In such a scheme, that which is human becomes the limit zone, and borderline lives grow exponentially.

Bouchra Khalili's *The Mapping Journey Project*, 2008-11, powerfully takes up this topic.[8] The multiscreen installation explicitly traces migratory routes to probe the diverse ways national borders function today. The "project" addresses what we could call, with the authors of Border as Method, a politics of "differential inclusion." (Mezzandra and Neilson 2013:163-166) In their theorization, Mezzandra and Neilson contend that rather than providing no space for actors to decide on their own migration or acting as a mere limit on already-formed subjects, borders "are productive of subjectivity." (Ibid.: 268) They operate dynamically, as much a means of inclusion as devices of exclusion. *The Mapping Journey Project* emphasizes that we can only correctly understand borders today in terms of circulation.

Comprising eight single-channel video projections focusing on economic globalization's labyrinth of migration regulations, *The Mapping Journey Project* draws attention to internal bordering practices neoliberal states use to assert control over global mobility. It relates the stories of eight individuals forced by political and economic circumstances to travel illegally

across frontiers throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Khalili encountered her subjects by chance in transit hubs across Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.[9] Following an initial meeting, she invited each to narrate their journey on camera and trace it in permanent marker on a regional map. The project investigates how individuals resist arbitrary boundaries of identities and nation-states. The stories the subjects tell are harrowing. An array of nebulous figures regularly rob, beat, and arrest the travelers--distinctions between smugglers, gangsters, border guards, and police ebb away. As a result, the characters' routes become a critical element in each's story, casting the cartographically delineated frontiers as sites of struggle.

The Mapping Journey Project's videos feature the subjects' voices and hands articulating and sketching their trajectories across the surfaces of maps. The videos unfold in one long shot with no cuts.[10] As the figures draw their trips on the maps using a thick-tipped marker, they obliterate the existing borderlines, alluding to their arbitrariness. The characters, whose faces remain unseen, perform their own identity and story as they author their narratives. Khalili avoids depicting humans as simply at the mercy of the state or of corporate power, emphasizing instead the extent to which, despite all odds, people exercise agency and transform their world under these conditions.

At the literal level, *The Mapping Journey Project* links migration to economic opportunity and perilous escape from regions mired in destitute poverty, violence, and environmental disaster. It casts the North African exodus toward Europe as a phenomenon induced by historical conditions and local privations. Khalili explores how clandestine migration produces transnational micro-geographies interwoven with international border politics. But in another register, the stories of the individuals Khalili follows highlight the shifting terrain between legality and illegality that increasingly characterizes national boundaries. Borders do not just restrict the inclusion of citizens and the exclusion of non-citizens. As Mezzandra and Neilson show, today's borders "differentially include (some) non-citizens," even if only temporarily, "as intensely subordinated labor power through legal categories

(such as `illegal')." (Mezzandra and Neilson: 159-166) The rights of these individuals are severely limited. When cheap labor is no longer required, the employer can easily and legally cut them from the payroll with little fear of reprisal. As a result, the migrants are perpetually susceptible to exploitation and constantly in fear of punishment or deportation. *The Mapping Journey Project* deconstructs the false line of "interior" and "exterior" that national geopolitical boundaries organize and presents these boundaries as material relationships often regulated by law.

Circulation and supply chain logistics that streamline distribution systems propel today's economy. The development of global commodity "networks of production and assembly" blurs the distinctions between fabrication, distribution, and consumption. Components, people, and knowledge move fluidly across frontiers and heterogeneous transnational spaces. The neoliberal order manufactures topographies of work and productivity by identifying industrial locations, zones, and hubs through calculations that balance labor costs against those of transport. Sophisticated coordination and distribution technologies are crucial to global commerce.

While commodity production drove international markets in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, circulation and supply chain logistics that streamline distribution systems propel today's economy. The development of what historians Terrence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein describe as global commodity "networks of production and assembly" blurs the distinctions between fabrication, distribution, and consumption. Components, people, and knowledge move fluidly across frontiers and heterogeneous transnational spaces. (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986: 157-170) The neoliberal order manufactures topographies of work and productivity by identifying industrial locations, zones, and hubs through calculations that balance labor costs against those of transport. Sophisticated coordination and distribution technologies are also crucial to global commerce. (Cowen 2014; Harney and Moten 2013; Tsing 2009). [11]

The centrality of infrastructure logistics to economic globalization was a longstanding preoccupation of artist Allan Sekula. His *Fish Story*, 1989-2005, casts circulation, transportation, and systematic coordination across oceans

as neoliberalism's dominant mode of production.[12] The artwork comprises over one-hundred color photographs organized as seven chapters or sequences, interspersed with twenty-six text panels across several rooms. To these, Sekula added two slide projectors, each containing eighty transparencies shown at fifteen-second intervals. *Fish Story*'s overarching subject is the world's container shipping industry's operation, especially its role as global commodity distribution's unseen bedrock. Long-distance supply chains have defined neoliberal capitalism since the 1980s. It used to be that manufacturing was a rich-country activity. Poorer countries supplied raw materials to rich-country factories and then purchased their exports. But, as economist Marc Levinson explains, in the late 1980s, "the combination of cheaper container shipping, vanishing communications costs, and improved computing flipped the script. Manufacturers and retailers adopted new strategies--arranging, for example, to buy chemicals in Country A, transform them into plastics in Country B, mold the plastics into components in Country C, and deliver them to an assembly plant in Country D. Container ships made it possible to move parts and components from one country to another at low cost, while technology, soon accelerated by the internet, allowed managers to oversee their supply chains from a headquarters far away." (Levinson 2021) Sekula emphasizes the uniform container's crucial part in that infrastructure. *Fish Story* explores the transformation of world trade that the standard cargo box facilitated. As Levinson clarifies, two factors drove this change[13]: "One was the lowering of labor costs. The gap between the pay of factory workers in China or Mexico and those in Western Europe, Japan, or North America yawned so wide that even if the low-wage workers accomplished far less in an hour of work, producing in Shanghai rather than in St. Louis made financial sense. The other was economies of scale. Factories serving the entire world could specialize, making a small array of products in enormous volume and lowering the cost of each unit." (Levinson 2021) The transport vessel's innovation was pivotal to the emergence of a more expansive form of capitalism that handles greater volume and extends production and trade beyond what was previously possible. "Cold War `containment' sought to limit the expansion of communism," cultural theorist

Rachel Price observes in comments that address the post-Cold War proliferation of shipping facilitated by the uniform cargo container. “Today all states seem to seek increasing containerization, to ship the greatest number of goods at once.” (Price 2015: 99)

In direct contrast to the prevailing fantasy of a derealized, dematerialized economy newly enabled by electronic instantaneity and the collapse of borders of all kinds, *Fish Story* tracks the plodding process across space that lies at the foundations of what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls “supply chain capitalism.” (Tsing 2009: 148-176) Mobilizing an abundance of photographs and text, Sekula’s project reflects on the slow, weighty transportation of goods over oceans, and the “isolated, anonymous hidden work, of great loneliness, displacement and separation from the domestic sphere,” aboard ships often registered in countries with few regulations and run by crews that seldom share a language. (Sekula 2002: 582) According to the artist, the uniform cargo containers hitched the stock market and harbor closer together than ever before: “If the stock market is the site in which the abstract character of money rules, the harbor is the site in which material goods appear in bulk, in the very flux of exchange... But the more regularized, literally containerized, the movement of goods in harbors, that is, the more rationalized and automated, the more the harbor comes to resemble the stock market.” (Sekula 1995: 12)

Fish Story connects the sea, port-side labor, container shipping, and long-distance trade to economic globalization’s unequal and destructive character. It reveals the tremendous damage the recent phase of globalization, in which highly trained employees in advanced economies create physical products to be manufactured where wages are lower, has wrought. It also touches on the extent to which this global marketplace’s impending catastrophe is in its utter destruction of the world’s oceans and Earth’s ecosystem. As the narrator states at the opening of *The Forgotten Space*, 2010, the important essay film Sekula made with Nöel Burch, “The sea is forgotten until disaster strikes. But perhaps the biggest seagoing disaster is the global supply chain, which — maybe in a more fundamental way than

financial speculation — leads the world economy [and Earth's environment] to the abyss." (Sekula and Burch 2010)

To document the global supply chain's political ecology as *Fish Story* does is to follow laborers and resources over oceans and other natural borders, across the boundary lines of nation-states, and through the economic divides that segment the Global North and Global South. It is also to track transport and communication's logistical coordination across vast landscapes. The operation of long-distance supply chains produces not "things" or "places," but sets of links or relations among them--an invisible but powerful global infrastructure. Operation here includes the effects of the channel's "noise" on that which they put into circulation. But it refers primarily to the production of what the authors of Border as Method describe as "the connections, chains and networks that materially envelop the planet enabling and framing the labor and action of subjects well beyond those directly involved in the execution of the operation itself." (Mezzandra and Neilson 2019: 246) The links Mezzandra and Neilson highlight — the factors that render border a method — establish relations crucial for the capitalist world system's function today. In probing these links and relations, artworks such as *The Mapping Journey Project* and *Fish Story* make visible economic globalization's processual and infrastructural operations across the world's national borders.

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Endnotes

1. Boltanski and Chiapello call this the "mobility imperative" (2005: 370) and argue that its assimilation places a premium on constant activity: "[I]n a connexionist world, mobility--the ability to move around autonomously not only in geographical space, but also between people, or in mental space, between ideas--is an essential quality of great men, such that the little people are characterized primarily by their fixity (their inflexibility)." (361)
2. Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 2) reasons that "fluidity" and "liquidity" are "fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity."
3. Müller's Green Border comprised eight reproductions of historical prints depicting border areas between Austria and its neighbors. Müller also built a round table-like object using the most common types of wood in Austria and exhibited trees native to Austria alongside information on their botanical migrations in the pavilion's open space. The timber and trees troubled the national pavilion's territorial divisions. The artist hung the photo series that documented his repeated illegal crossing of Austria's "green border" on the pavilion walls.

4. Richard Misrach (Kencresase 2016; Mallonee 2018) reasons that "every single one of these personal belongings has an incredible story of a human being." "Each item contains a mystery, a story of hardship and fear."
5. Citing International Organization for Migration's 2018 report, Peggy Levitt (2019: 214) notes, "in 2018, 244 million people, or 3.3 per cent of the world's population, were international migrants.... This means that, by some estimates, one out of every seven people in the world today is on the move."
6. On Multiplicity's Solid Sea 03: The Road Map, 2003, see Multiplicity 2005: 181-183, and Multiplicity 2008: 70-74.
7. As Rob Nixon (2011: 20) observes, "Security has become one of neoliberalism's signature growth industries, exemplified by the international boom in gated communities, as walls have spread like kudzu, and the marketplace in barriers has literally soared."
8. On Khalili's T*he Mapping Journey Project*, see Emma Chubb 2015: 268-295.
9. Khalili (Schoene 2021) explains the process of encountering the participants in her project: "I would not say that I find the subjects who participate in my projects but rather that I meet them and sometimes they find me, rather than I find them."
10. Two are in English, two in Italian, and the others in different Arabic dialects. For all the videos that are not in English, subtitles appear at the bottom of the screen.
11. Fredric Jameson (2010: 421-422) argues that the innovations of bit-structures such as the bar code and the uniform cargo container recast global capitalism's infrastructure. Both shifted power onto the side of retail. They "stand as the mediation between distribution and consumption."
12. On "the question of logistics--an object of dogged and nuanced inquiry in Sekula's maritime works," see Toscano 2018. On the increasingly common conjunction of contemporary art and logistics, Toscano and Kinkle 2015.
13. On the origins of the shipping container, see Levinson 2006. Peter Drucker (2007: 28) explains that the uniform shipping container grew "out of a new perception of a `cargo vessel' as a material handling device." The goal was "to make the time in port as short as possible. But this humdrum innovation roughly quadrupled the productivity of the ocean-going freighter and probably saved shipping."

Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Transcending the Borders in Post-Socialist Nationalist Hungary

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ABSTRACT

Hungary joined the European Union in 2004. Being a member of the EU does not prevent Hungary from enacting brutal measures at its national frontiers, fortified with a fence on its border with Serbia and Croatia, and aiming at ensuring border security by preventing asylum-seekers and immigrants from entering. The reference point has been the wall-building US with its similar mission of protecting its southern borders. However, the imaginary borders the regime daydreams about are much more distant: the lines drawn along the borders of the so-called Greater Hungary a hundred years ago.

The Memorial to Alliance in Budapest, commissioned by the reigning regime, advocates borderlessness regarding ethnic Hungarian communities — including minority Hungarians in neighboring countries like Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia. Still, the hidden idea behind embracing all the Hungarians is to return, even if in imagination, to greater Hungary by extending and not at all eliminating borders. The disguised function of the monument is to enhance and hypnotize the masses to divert them from everyday problems. All the visual elements of this monument under construction are intended to put in service affect, a populist tool so effectively used by authoritarian powers.

The monument is supposed to be completed by June 2020, the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Peace Treaty signed after WWI that truncated" Hungary. The interwar period of the country that lost almost half of its

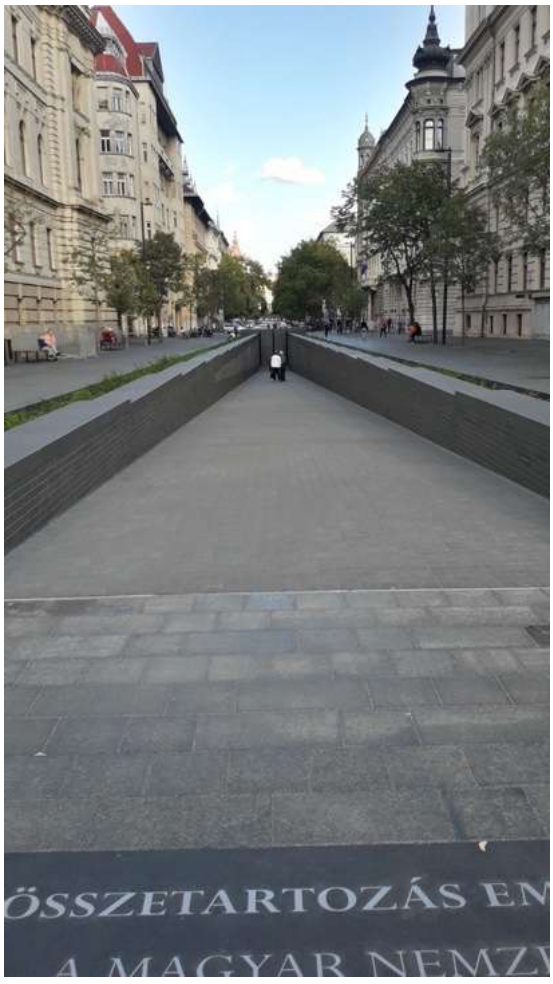
territory was about revisionism that led to an alliance with Nazi Germany in WW2. Lived state Socialism swept the issue of Trianon under the carpet and treated it as taboo, but it came back with a vengeance after the collapse of the Soviet Socialist system. Trianon and the previous boundaries of imagined greatness became a political tool in the hands of subsequent nationalist regimes: the wound has been kept open and instrumentalized for political purposes.

The paper is a case study intending to elaborate on how various visual and contextual elements of the memorial arouse the intended sentiments and fantasies of a "lost greatness" and power while communicating the opposite, the innocent and sentimental feelings of belonging that cross all the physical borders and transcend them.

KEYWORDS

Borders; Memorial; Monument; Nationalism; Trianon Peace Treaty

Although Hungary joined the European Union in 2004 and enjoys all the benefits of the membership, the country became the flagship of the process of re-nationalizing post-socialist countries. Being a member of the EU does not prevent Hungary from fortifying its southern border with a fence, aiming at ensuring border security by preventing asylum-seekers and immigrants from entering. The reference point has been the wall-building US with its similar mission of protecting its southern borders. However, the imaginary borders the regime daydreams about are much more distant: the lines drawn along the borders of the so-called Greater Hungary more than a hundred years ago.



The Memorial to Alliance in Budapest, commissioned by the reigning regime, advocates borderlessness regarding ethnic Hungarian communities–including minority Hungarians in neighboring countries, like Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia–but the hidden idea behind embracing all the Hungarians is to return, even if in imagination, to Greater Hungary by extending and not at all eliminating borders.

Fig. 1. Memorial to Alliance, Budapest, 2020.
Photo: Author

The monument was completed by June 2020, the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Peace Treaty signed after WWI that "truncated" Hungary. By the terms of the punitive treaty, Hungary was shorn of two-thirds of its former territory and around 3 million people got beyond the border of the mother state, founding itself overnight in newly created neighboring nation-states as a minority.

Although the memorial does not mention Trianon, it obviously refers to it, aided by visual, verbal, and conceptual elements. The local reception of the monument referred to some of them, such as the timing and its enormous size with symbolic numbers (it is 100 meters long). However, it mostly evolved around its historical meaning and the historical sources it relied on. It focused on the verbal elements of the monument, namely the Hungarian names of cities and villages given in 1913, at the onset of WWI, in the time of aggressive and forced "hungarianification" by which traditionally Romanian, Slovakian, Serbian, and German names were forcefully changed.[1]

Concerning its physical realization and the entire arsenal of visuality of the spectacle, even the most critical readings greeted it as a "contemporary public artwork" instead of the army of traditional, monumental, figurative, or allegorical statues that overpopulate the public space. On the one hand, the reception problematized the historical message verbalized on the wall, which referred to the pre-Trianon world and borders; on the other, it hailed the aesthetics of the "cutting-edge realization". As if the two aspects, the historical/verbal and artistic/visual, could be safely separated.

I intend to elaborate on how various visual and contextual elements of the memorial arouse the intended sentiments and fantasies of a "lost greatness", while communicating the opposite, the innocent and sentimental feelings of belonging that cross all the physical borders and transcend them. My main question is, what does visuality, spatiality, and the monument's iconography communicate? More accurately: does it contradict the historical meaning or rather consolidate it?

It is obvious, at first sight, that the monument strongly resembles Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran Memorial in Washington DC., the antithesis of the traditional monument type: it is anti-heroic, anti-monumental, one of the

first counter-monuments.[2] As opposed to the gigantic vertical statues on huge pedestals monumentalizing violence and glorifying war and hero, the horizontal monument provides the inverse of violence. The shared pain is evoked by the enormous open wound on the earth's surface. Not the heroes but the victims are enlisted in chronological order of their passing or vanishing, avoiding any military hierarchy. No direct or hidden moral lesson is provided, and no prearranged physical movement or prefabricated experience is incorporated into it. The symmetrical construction is dug into the ground, open from one side, making any free-floating movement available for those who approach it. The exhausting list of the deceased might evoke an association with a national cemetery located in the natural environment or of a mass cenotaph (empty, symbolic grave), as it is understood by those who place flowers or memorabilia next to the names. However, due to its low slope and openness, it still does not support the sensation of descending into a grave. The reflective surface of the black marble provides a meeting point for the living and the dead, yet, it does not arouse the gloomy sensation of shadow-falling thanks to the southern orientation of the structure and its natural green environment. It rather stimulates therapeutic contemplation and regeneration.

While the analogy with the Maya Lin memorial is profound, the differences, modifications, and distinctions are much more telling than the similarities of the recent analysis. The Memorial to Alliance is squeezed into an urban street in a densely built-up area. Although both memorials invite participation, while Maya Lin’s construction is inclusive and luring, the Hungarian version is somewhat claustrophobic and bundles into a narrow channel.

The visitor is forced to join the “funeral procession” that comes around the eternal flame at the end and leaves the same way as entered. There is no way to randomly, ad hoc approach it. The downward slope leading beneath the ground level and the two massive closing the path resembles some huge gravestones. Altogether, the whole structure closely resembles monumental tombs, mainly to the circular Mycenaean tholos tombs to which a narrow road, an entrance passage, a dromos leads. The tholos tomb (also

known as beehive tomb), a burial structure characterized by its false dome created by corbelling, was a late Bronze Age development in Greece. It was not just a burial place but also a symbol for public display of power; the tomb's proportion and size corresponded to the deceased's social and economic status. It gives an illusion as if being carved into a hill, but as opposed to the chamber tombs that were, in fact, rock-cut, tholoi were largely built, towering above the grave. The entrance passage was stilted on both sides, which fostered the illusion of entering the hill.

The contemporary alteration of the tholos tomb situated in the modern world in an urban environment is the exact inverse of the ancient type; the grieving does not process into the illusionary hill but to the illusionary grave placed underground.

By bringing the architectural construction into play it bears strong resemblances of a cenotaph where the procession of the mourners turns into the chamber, as seen on the funerary monument in Augustinian Church in Vienna, Austria created for archduchess Maria Christina of Austria by Canova in 1805. The life-size figures in the sepulcher escort the Archduchess off to her resting place and providing her support on her final journey.

Fig. 2.
Antonio Canova
Cenotaph of
Archduchess
Maria Christina
Augustinerkirche,
Wien,
1798–1805.Photo:
Paolo Villa, ©
Creative
Commons

Who is, or are those deceased that are memorialized by the grandiose construction, given that not names of deceased persons are carved into the granite walls bordering the path that leads beneath the ground level? Instead, one of the sacred national symbols - such as, the flag, crown, national soil -, that is, the national geography in form of the list of places of the Kingdom's geography in 1913 are engraved.[3] What could be the purpose to set out names of places on the walls of a dromos that descends beneath the ground into a grave?

Fig. 3. Memorial to Alliance, Budapest, 2020, detail. Photo: Author

According to Émile Durkheim, the nation acts as a secular substitute for religion in the modern age. Sacrifice, so fundamental to religion, also exists in the nation. the memory of which to be kept alive is the duty of the nation. Followers of Durkheim has suggested that not culture, language, ethnicity and territory, as it has been generally conceived, serve as the real cement of the nation but the shared memory of blood sacrifice which is periodically renewed.[4] The function of sacrifice and symbols of defeats is that they create a connection with the past, and provide a sense of historical injustice or grievance around which the community can be mobilized. They are able to reinforce the sense of the nation as durable or even indestructible entity.

Western nationalism adapted many features of Christianity. According to Marvin and Ingle, scholars of nationalism as secular religion: "The flag is the skin of the totem ancestor held high. It represents the sacrificed bodies of its devotees just as the cross, the sacred object of Christianity, represents the body sacrificed to a Christian god. The soldier carries his flag into battle as a sign of his willingness to die, just as Jesus carried his cross to show his willingness to die..."[5] In both Christianity and nationalism, the violently sacrificed body becomes the god renewed–in Durkheimian terms–the transformed totem. In Christianity the revivified totem is the risen Christ. In nationalism the transformed totem is the soldier resurrected in the raised flag. On the basis of his sacrifice the nation is rejuvenated.

Blood-sacrifice is coupled with birth and death, and as such its memory is capable of creating much stronger feeling of belonging, in each constructs, totem, god and nation, than the textual, verbal cohesion. War is one the ritual sacrifices. Group cohesion lies in this collective victimage, in a way, that the group sacrifices its members in order of its own survival.

Thus, "the underlying cost of all society is violent death of some portion of its members. To protect itself from acknowledging the cost of group unity, that render totem violence and its symbols sacred."[6] Thus, what keeps the group together is not the sacrifice of the enemy but the sacrifice of its own. According to Rene Girard the reason for the ritual sacrifice of its own blood offered to the totem-god-nation is offered by the all-time enemy,

which is a kind of “supplementary-sacrifice” mourned and lamented by the nation. In another wording: The ritual victim gives an acceptable reason to kill our own. According to Caroline Marvin’s point, that is important for us, “what constitutes the nation in any moment is the memory of the last successful blood sacrifice that counts for living group members.”[7]

However, not all blood sacrifice rituals consolidate the group bond; the successful ones must satisfy some conditions: it must touch every member of the group; the victimage must be unanimous; it has to be an event that pose serious risk to group survival; win or lose, the outcome must be clear and definite. And most importantly; “Time and space must be redefined. History begins from this moment; territorial borders are re-created or reaffirmed.”[8] As for the trajectory of the rituals, “only another ritual can repair a failed ritual” and seemingly the number of victims is not decisive in this regard.

The question arises, why could certain events perceived to be a national trauma, while other, similarly tragic and traumatic events do not gain the same status in the collective memory. Perhaps because national mythologies are not natural or given, but are reinterpreted time to time, and adjusted to the nation's actual needs. The “choice” of which traumatic event is to be elevated to the rank of national trauma depends on which one can satisfy the necessities of a national awakening.

It leads us to the following questions, how be rigged the mechanism of re-nationalization blast-off, how to add fuel to the fire of the smoldering national belonging after a long period of dormancy, for example in post-socialist nations after a long period of socialist internationalism? And most of all, whose interest is it to elevate certain events to the level of collective grievance while belittling or downright denying others? The principal point about rituals in nationalism could give us some clue in general. “The purpose of ritual is to sustain the group by repeating (at various levels of intensity) the act of group creation. A successful ritual stops time at the perfect creation moment. It repeats and freezes the retrospectively golden moment when the group was created out sacrifice.”[9]

In our case the interwar period offered the “perfect moment” which could have repeated and freezed the retrospectively golden moment. The core ideology and cohesive forces in “truncated Hungary” revolved around irredentism and revisionism. Politics and culture equally orbited around the mourning of the lost greatness of the nation, the cohesive force of which was nourished by pain and grievance felt over the disruption of the nation, symbolized by Trianon, which led to an alliance with Nazi Germany in the WW2. In lived State-Socialism the issue of Trianon was swept under the carpet supported and was treated as taboo. After the collapse of the Soviet Socialist system, it came back with a vengeance. Trianon and the previous boundaries of imagined greatness became a political tool in the hands of subsequent nationalist regimes: the wound has been kept open and instrumentalized for political purposes. Even if not in real politics, as Hungary became part of the European Union, but in symbolic politics this attitude has been resurrected and the narrative of Trianon-trauma reinvigorated.

The Hungarian rightist regime led by Victor Orbán that has reigned for three course in the last twelve years actively dreams itself back to the interwar period. Symbolic politics are in line with populist rhetoric that Hungarian sovereignty was lost during the two consecutive occupations of the country, first by the Nazis and then by the Soviets which period was rendered illegitimate. Consequently, the 1944 spectacle of Kossuth Square in front of the Parliament has been meticulously reconstructed.

In the crash course of re-nationalization of Hungary Trianon was that chosen trauma, and provided the national attitude that proved to be the most effective for the reigning regime to rebuilt the nation, and also offered the maximum of political benefits in form of votes coming from outside of the mother state from minority Hungarians who gained double citizenship.

In line with the idea that authenticity or an illusory nature of a symbols is irrelevant in regard of its impact on the imagined community, it hasn’t posed any problem, that Greater Hungary in means of modern souvereign nation-state did not really exist, and that in the time of peace-negotiations Hungary was part of a multiethic, multilingual empire, the

dualist Austro-Hungarian Monachy. Although, blood sacrifice, in the strict meaning of the word, was not connected to Trianon, still it could be designated a traumatic event, that pulled apart, "truncated" and crucified the embodied nation as was symbolised in the interwar period.

Conditions of the successful ritual, listed by Marvin, that consolidate the group bond mostly apply to Trianon. The condition as "it must touch every member of the group; the victimage must be unanimous" did not really apply, but it was solved by cutting through the Gordian knot. As the rhetoric goes: "those, for whom Trianon does not hurt, are not even Hungarians." In populist regimes, those who do not share the national narrative sanctioned by the ruling elite, who avoid or oppose the constant hate-mongering and scapegoating indoctrination, could easily find themselves outside of the conceptual border of the nation. Retrospectively, those who negotiated the peace treaty got labelled as enemy, and have been made scapegoats for betraying and giving away the nation.

The other condition of a successful ritual, the possible erosion of the group cohesion was fulfilled by the disperse of the population and became actual threat, amplifying the fear over group survival. At the moment when the territorial borders were re-drawn, time and space has been truly redefined, and a new history began indeed.

The Holocaust could not be elevated to the level of national tragedy and trauma, as the compliance of the country has never got acknowledged, and has never been part of the official historical narrative. As a result, victims of the Shoah have not entered to the collective memory which was clearly communicated by Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation erected in 2014. At the same time, the symbolic horizon of the nation was extended to the lost mythical territory, Transylvania through the Sekler flag put to hang on the Parliament next to the Hungarian one instead of the European Union one by the nationalistic regime.

Fig. 4. Péter Párkányi Raab, Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation, Budapest, 2014. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Furthermore, through the Memorial to Alliance. the horizon of the symbolic nation's body got extended to the living bodies of the nation that have got beyond the borders living in another host-countries, However, as Szabolcs László historian with Transylvanian origin, rightly points out the memorial is not centered around the once real trauma of families being torn apart, family members being rived from each other's, but instead, it mourns the lost territory, the shrunken borders.[10] It projects the virtual map of Great Hungary into the ether, and into the imagination of the visitor.

As for the location and orientation of the memorial, it perfectly fits to the official rhetoric, into the web of a sort of elaborated baroque program with its allegories and layered meanings. It pulled together the seemingly separate elements of symbolic politics in public spaces. The new Monument bridges the building of the Parliament with its reconstructed interwar surroundings and Freedom square, which gave place to the irredentist statues

in the post-Trianon time. Nowadays, the square is the visual demonstration of the official interpretation of history: the innocence of double victimhood.

By erecting the Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation on the opposite side of the same square, where the last remaining socialist monument, the Monument for Soviet Heroes, dedicated to the Great Patriotic War still stands, the regime killed two birds with one stone. Through a kind of "conceptual iconoclasm," it converted the meaning of the Soviet monument from liberation into a visual sign of occupation. The visitor of the newest monument marches toward this square.

Moreover, the choreography of the prescribed motion and the visitors' route shows remarkable consonance with the funeral processions and rituals (*pompa funebris*) in antic Rome (republican and imperial alike), in the Forum Romanum. In the very same way, as "for the members of the elite, the route and activities of the Roman funeral offered a valuable opportunity to display and increase their symbolic importance",[11] the Memorial to Alliance's sensorial impact and effects are carefully calculated in order to push through the official agenda and also to demonstrate power. The use and manipulation of symbol-laden public spaces, and surrounding architecture clearly resonate with the Roman practice of funerary procession.

The architecture, in both cases, is not just a neutral backstage design, but organic part of the ritual in which the visual rendering echoes the hierarchy of power. "Ancient texts and pictorial representations affirm that the Romans believed building of importance should be viewed frontally, ideally from an inferior position"[12] This is precisely the choreography that is followed by the funeral procession to the grave of the nation in Budapest! The funerary procession on its way back sees frontally and from an inferior position (from below) the three main entrance gates of the Parliament. The extended axis of the memorial points to the most important building, "house of the country", the physical and symbolic embodiment of power.

The Memorial to Alliance, is a megalomaniac crowning of populist stage design for the political performance of the Orbán regime. The memorial is a visual crystallization of the regime's mission to create ethnic cohesion on the base of collective grieving, and to hypnotize the population for its own

sake and interests. Seeking for homogenous ethnic community and cultural homogeneity the regime does not stop at the borders, advocated by the monument.

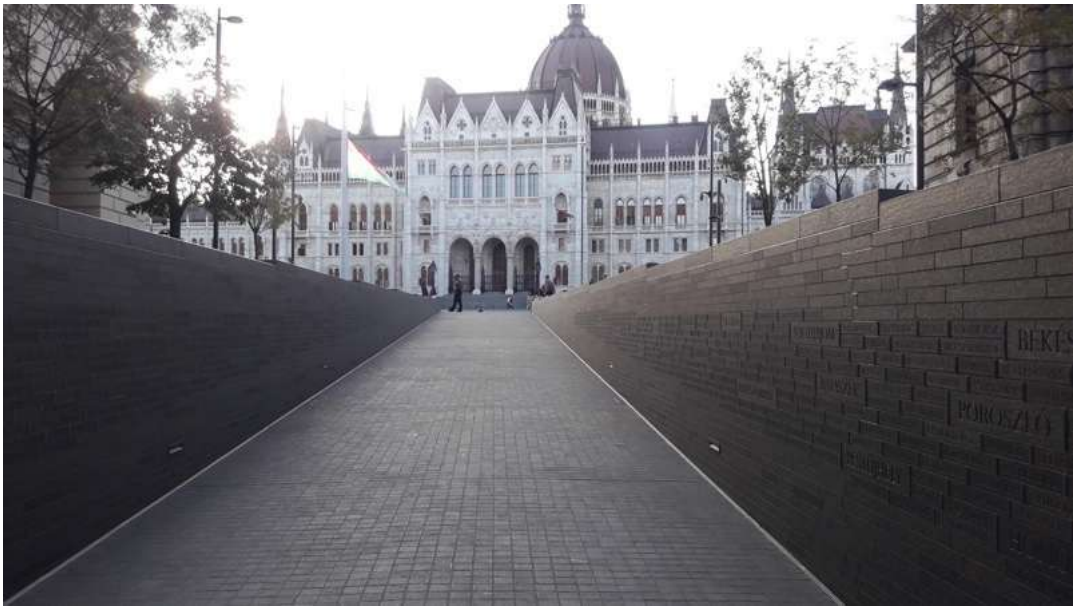


Fig. 5. Memorial to Alliance, Budapest, 2020. Photo: Author

The symbolic reenactment of a historical loss offered up to the masses effectively channels all anger, frustration, and anxiety felt over the growing inequality, insecurity and precarity of the society in the present into the past. No competing narratives are available in public space as the political, social and cultural discourses are tightly controlled. The "Hungarian people" (not at all citizens!) earned free tickets to the ghost machine running between past and present for taking an imaginary time-travel and are invited to participate in a psychedelic mass delusion to linger between present and past: forgetting about present worries and difficulties and perceiving the past as the source of anger and loss.

By the new millennium, the ex-East Bloc became a hostile region in which the anti-global and anti-EU stand is rather a smokescreen, an empty rhetoric hiding corruption and making it possible for the regimes to stay in power. The shared past and shared history are not considered in this

multiethnic, multicultural zone, but rather interpreted against each other. The fragile post-socialist democracies are on their way to being transformed into “illiberal” democracies, in an ongoing process in which Hungary takes the lead. Symbolic politics and memorial culture is a powerful tool in this transformation.

The newly erected memorial in the heart of Budapest is like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, advocating national belonging without borders, while putting back old ideas about Greater Hungary into the core of national mythology.

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1. Egri, “Vitatható-e?”
2. Young, "The counter-monument."
3. Egri, “Vitatható-e?”
4. Marvin and Ingle, "Blood sacrifice."
5. Ibid. 770.
6. Ibid. 771.
7. Ibid. 775.
8. Ibid. 776.
9. Ibid. 777.
10. Szabolcs, “Memory politics.”
11. Favro and Johanson, “Death in Motion.”
12. Ibid. 14.

Archival Borders in Contemporary Art Practices: Imagistic and Cultural Crossings and Exchanges Between Global/Colonial Junctions and Local Differences

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ABSTRACT

Taking into account that borders are not only fixed divisions between territories and people but that they also expand into a less defined zone of contacts and exchanges, this paper examines how some archival art practices deal with colonial and cultural transmissions and negotiations of images through borders. Here, two contemporary artworks are analyzed: *Colonial Modernity: the first mass in Brazil and Algeria* (2014), by French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, and *40 nego bom é um real* (2013), by Brazilian artist Jonathas de Andrade.

KEYWORDS

Archive; Borders; Contemporary Art; Images; Coloniality

Taking into account that borders are not only fixed divisions between territories and people but that they also expand into a less defined zone of contacts and exchanges, this paper examines how some archival art practices deal with colonial and cultural transmissions and negotiations of images through borders – physically or symbolically, as represented in archives. The archives borders, I argue, reflect a concise representation of more extensive borders of the territories and discursive areas they help to regulate. As significant representation and organizational devices, or, conceptually, as regulators of society – as pointed out by Michel Foucault ([1969] 2002) –, the archives can be "contact zones" (Pratt 1992)[1] and "borderlands" (Anzaldúa 1987)[2] in their own right. From within the archive, some art practices challenge the determination or disjunction of borders – the ones internal or external to the archive.

One relevant aspect of the diffused areas around borders as "contact zones" or "borderlands," and which the commanding and correspondent territory of the archive can represent, is that they are not only a zone crossed and inhabited by people but by the cultural references and imagery that travel and exist across them. The traveling images, signs, cultural references, and the discursive power they carry, are the material appropriated and intervened by the archival artworks focused on in this paper.

As Homi Bhabha, in reference to Martin Heidegger, observes, "a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing" (1994, 1). However, as Bhabha argues, our contemporaneity is marked by a sense of living on borderlines of a "present" that either unfolds from or breaks with previous mentalities and experiences – for instance, modernity or coloniality – and that co-exist with different cultures and temporalities it would be crucial to take into consideration moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences beyond borders – taking into account an "in-between" space of what does not settle within one side or another of a border. In these "in-between" spaces, the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated (Bhabha 1994, 4). Similarly, I argue, it is in the "in-between" spaces

created by what is approximated by archival practices that one can grasp connections and disjunctions of cultural crossings.

As Bhabha underlines, we should consider that the epistemological 'limits' of ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices (1994, 4-5). In this sense, "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond," which Bhabha has drawn out (1994, 4-5). In a similar way that a bridge can escort people from a bank to another and is a gathering place that crosses (Bhabha 1994, 5), an archive can be a gathering place and a bridge for the crossing of images from a bank to another between cultures. Archives can also be diffused zones of shared colonial references that cross between different cultural formations.

As Thomas Richards has observed, the archive was one of the tools used, for instance, for the long-distance control of the expanded borders of the British Empire — both factually and fictionally (1993)[3]. One of the consequences of the administration of borders afar by archives is that it makes them more "invisible" or "abstract." As Homi Bhabha observes from the stammering words of the character Mr. Whisky' Sisodia, in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*: 'The trouble with the Engeghish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don't know that it means.' (1994, 6).

In the same way that the archive can administer afar borders, it can, as the analysis of the artworks will demonstrate, make less tangible borders (such as the cultural ones) present or visible – even if as moving or dislocating frontiers. Intercepted, appropriated, and intervened by contemporary art practices, archives, the idea of the archive, and archival materials, can be used to critically examine the crossing borders and exchanges between modernities and coloniality that were/are disseminated globally, and modified and intervened locally. The archive as a gathering place can be used to critically examine what Bhabha referred to as the colonial text that articulates some interruptions, fragmentary symptoms, non-linear

relationships, disjunctive temporalities (1994, 173), and, one could add, uncanny repetitions.

The border relations of uncanny repetitions, disjunctive connections and crossing references of traveling images can be distinguished in two contemporary artworks — *Colonial Modernity: the first mess in Brazil and Algeria* (2014), from French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, and *40 nego bom é um real* (2013), from Brazilian artist Jonathas de Andrade – works which share some imagistic references and forms of operating within points of exchanges and disjunctions of colonial archives. In analyzing them, it can be argued, these art practices bring forward forms of tensioning and putting into motion contacts through borders, dislocating images that are relevant to national narratives and cultural identities from certain fixed positions.

Colonial encounters and post-colonial disjunctions through archival images

Fig. 1. Kader Attia: *Colonial Modernity: the first mass in Brazil and Algeria*, 2014. Oil on canvas and metal staples 68.875 x 95.75 x 2 inches

In *Colonial Modernity: the first mass in Brazil and Algeria*, a piece from 2014, Kader Attia stitches together two inaugural scenes: *The First Mass*

in Brazil (Fig.1: the smaller picture on the right), painted by the Brazilian painter Victor Meirelles in 1860, and, on the left, *The first mass in Kabylia*, created by the French painter Horace Vernet six years before, in 1854. With an undeniable similarity in their treatment of a shared theme, with almost identical composition and style, the influence of Vernet on Meirelles' painting has also been pointed out by art historian Jorge Coli (1998).

Brazilian academic painter Victor Meirelles made his version of the mass while staying in Paris. The theme of the painting, Brazil's first mass, came from what is considered Brazil's first document, the letter of discovery from Pero Vaz Caminha. Meirelles looked for inspiration for his painting in Caminha's letter per suggestion of his mentor, Araújo Porto-Alegre. For Porto-Alegre, Caminha's letter, which narrated the European arrival and "encounter" with the new land and its native populations, was a perfect document as a base for an academic historical painting – which was Meirelles' specialty. Coli (1998) observed that one could imagine that the letter, with its meticulous descriptions of the landscape, the people, and the scene of the mass, would be enough for the work's genesis.

However, Meirelles found inspiration for the composition in Horace Vernet's *The first mass in Kabylia* (Fig. 1: picture on the left), which was shown in the Paris Salon in 1855.

The episode portrayed by Vernet, the first mass of the French colonial force in Kabylia, Algeria, had happened two years before, in 1853, as part of a French colonial mission in North Africa. The mass scene celebrates the eventual defeat of the Kabylian tribe, the last stronghold against French colonization in the region. Commissioned to portray the colonial conquest, Vernet visited Algeria many times since the 1830s. It is said that Vernet actually staged a provisory altar for the mass in Kabylia (Coli, 1998). He then had double authorship as the stage director of the religious conquering scene – both in locus and its pictorial representation –shaping, as Coli calls, a "historical truth" about it (Coli 1998).

Nonetheless, similar operations of producing "historical truths" can be distinguished in other historical paintings, even when the scenes were not physically staged or personally witnessed. This is the case of Meirelles' First

Mass, which became a critical iconographical reference for a "founding act" that is considered the birth of Brazil but conceived as a historical landmark and an inaugural scene 300 years ago later than the original event itself[4]. This historical landmark was cherished in the construction and, to use a Benedict Anderson term, imagination of the nation after its independence in 1822 when there was a need to outline a tale of the country's origin. With much of the visual imagery of this narrative being created in the Second Reign to which Meirelles was a key figure as a commissioned painter, Vernet ended up inadvertently offering his vision to Brazil's historical imagination, I would argue, rather than historical truth – which does not stop such imagination having a historical ballast. After all, as Anderson defines, a nation is an "imagined political community" (2008, 32), shaped by imagination and the narration that forge an "original" past.

In Brazil's case, the historical ballast of a particular trans-colonial imagination meant the creation of a definitive historical image that has shaped the imaginary of Brazil's "origin" ever since. Ironically, since its creation, it has been praised for its "historiographical accuracy" (Estrada 1888). In 1888 Luis Gonzaga Duque Estrada analyzed that Meirelles' *First Mass* "could not be, but what is there" – being based on Caminha's letter, the painting was considered a perfect visual tale of "what history tells us and nothing more" (Estrada in Oliveira 2020, 202).

However, the "history" that Estrada refers to was based on the unilateral narrative of Caminha's letter, which showed a one-sided voice and point of view: that of a romanticized Portuguese perspective about the "arrival" in the "new" land. Caminha's letter was a poetic report addressed to the Portuguese king and bore the influence of the biblical account of arrival in paradise as a promised land. The native population was fitted into this account as a docile uncivilized population, marveled by the European arrival and ready to be guided by them. In this way, the native populations were portrayed in the definitive visual representation of Meirelles' painting.

Despite the formal similarities in Vernet and Meirelles' compositions and their theme, as well as in the colonial conquering presence, some local differences can be seen in the two paintings, not only in their geography and

landscape but also in the treatment of the local populations and their attitudes. While in Vernet's painting, the local army appeared in a very aligned and formal position of deference to the religious celebration, in Meirelles' scene, the local population is less rigidly distributed, suggesting a spontaneous interest and deference to the newcomers. This was a view in tune with Brazil's romantic attempt to include the local population in a national project – albeit an inclusion by submission rather than by agency. In that sense, Meirelles used Vernet's "template" colonial image and adapted it to Brazil's national project.

Since its creation, Meirelles' image became one of the most well-known paintings in Brazil and a sort of official visual account of Brazil's "birth", reproduced extensively in history schoolbooks, on paper money and stamps (Mello Júnior 1962). Becoming an 'icon' of Brazil's national history and its "discovery" narrative, Meirelles' painting created an afterlife for Vernet's colonial view across the other side of the Atlantic, expanding a colonial visual archive through trans-Atlantic borders (furthermore, Vernet's *First Mass* has disappeared, being at the same time outlived and surviving in its influence over Meirelles' Fist Mass).

Pointing to the connection between different national imaginations and their historical ballasts, Attia's work suggests a common colonial matrix that shapes these imaginations across very distant borders and different historical times. In this sense, Attia's disjunctive stitching together of both images is very telling of the non-linear relationships, disjunctive temporalities and uncanny repetitions of a "colonial text" (as Bhabha could have said), which Attia articulates within a colonial archive of mirroring historical paintings. Moreover, it points to an afterlife and continuation of the original image (Vernet's) that surpasses its historical, geographical, and cultural borders.

The relationship between the two paintings, as disjoined articulated by Attia, opens up a series of issues about cultural encounters and exchanges propelled by modernity and coloniality: among them, the existence of multiple modernities; the different historical times that co-exist within one chronological time; the different experiences of colonialism and coloniality in

different locations; and the transnational shared invention of modern nations and their nationalisms. The meeting of these images and their relationship of transference and influence, as exposed by Attia, also works as a negative blueprint of the lively encounters, exchanges, appropriations, translations, and adaptations between cultures, which has been discussed within the field of cultural studies concerning modernity, its migrations and diasporas (Hall 1996; Canclini 2005; Bhabha 1994). What we see in Attia's work is not the fruitful intercultural formations of the Black Atlantic, as analyzed by Paul Gilroy, or how the African people were at the center of triangulation and movement between margins that would change the world history and many of its cultures, as suggested by Achille Mbembe (2017), but the borders of a homogenizing colonial project spreading across both sides of the Atlantic. The projected unilateral views and the shared colonial imagination can be appropriated, fissured, and opened up by critical and aesthetic archival interventions such as Attia's.

Attia's work is in tune with how the notions of borders, especially national ones, have been reassessed by analyses of forms of cultural exchanges, approximations, and tensions such as the ones brought forward by post-colonial studies (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1990). The reshifting in notions of nationality, identity, and their interconnection with histories and memories opens up multiple possibilities of navigation between cultures and shared references, which helps to challenge fixed categories, symbolic stocks, and legacies related to these categories – also opening up trans-national shared tropes and decolonial conversations, which can be continued in the fissures of these re-opened borders. Stitching together copies of the two contemporary nineteenth-century paintings, Attia leaves exposed the mending of the mismatched encounters of cultures, stressing the survival of some of these stitches in the present.

In archival art practices, while sometimes stitches of cultures or shared projections are made visible in image encounters and frictions, like in Attia's work, other times stocks of images are mixed in ways that hide their mending together. Unpacking the relationship between these archival images – being by tension or by incorporation of each other –art practices can

illuminate further understandings about the encounters and negotiations through borders at stake in archival formations. They can also, as the analysis of Jonathas de Andrade's 40 nego bom é um real will demonstrate, use the archival force, or the impulse of archives in making connections, against the archive's authority or limits, "anarchiving" some of the orders and borders established by colonial archives.

Global transmissions and local interpretations of colonial archives

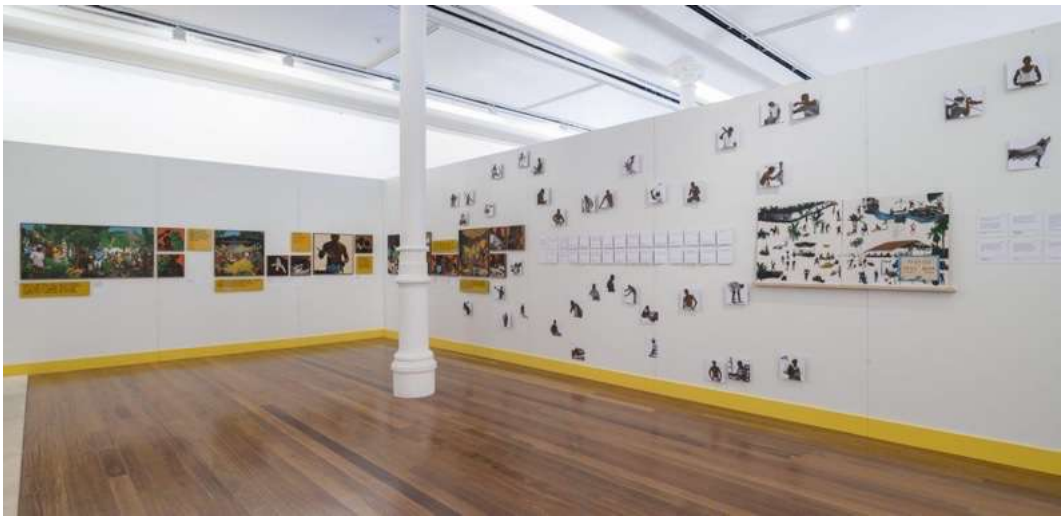

Fig. 2. Jonathas de Andrade: *40 nego bom é um real* [40 black candies for R$ 1.00], 2013 (installation view). 16 silk prints on wood, 7 acrylic engraved boards, 40 riso prints on paper, 40 laser prints on paper, variable dimensions

A parodic use of different visual and cultural references to unarchive a local identity and critically analyze colonial heritages fixed into a social structure is at stake in Jonathas de Andrade's work 40 nego bom é um real (Fig.2), from 2013.

Living and working in Recife, a large city in the Northeastern region of Brazil, Jonathas de Andrade draws on local archives (both literal and conceptual ones) as well as on images and references from different origins and scopes of circulation to create an installation that critically relates to certain aspects of his local "culture" – albeit, inserted in a globalized world.

The installation in question, *40 nego bom é um real*, resembles a cartoon structure and it narrates the production of a popular local banana sweet, the nego-bom candy. In the strips of serigraphy-printed images and blocks of texts that accompany them (Fig.3) one can see an illustrated step-by-step guide for the candy production – indicating what type and how many bananas to use to make the sweet, how green they should be, how much sugar to put in, and which color the mixture should be when cooking.

Fig. 3. Jonathas de Andrade: *40 nego bom é um real* [40 black candies for R$ 1.00], 2013 (detail)

The second part of the installation (right side of Fig.2) shows individual profiles of the candy production workers, in image and text, as well as a map of a fictional banana farm and candy factory. When further examined, the information contained in the images and narrative produced by de Andrade opens up an underlying archive of references that expand the significations of the work in relation to social and racial structures that are part of Brazil's

Northeastern society and, in larger scale, of the colonial legacy that shapes the region.

The region of the Northeast, which appears as an essential context to de Andrade's work, has a local culture considered traditional in Brazil, with distinctive regional traces. Despite some of its spontaneous manifestations, the region, which is very extensive, formed by diverse geography and different cultures, started to be characterized as one culture, having some of its diverse expressions inscribed as part of the same geographical borders.

Notwithstanding its image as traditional, the Northeast region is the creation of a 20th-century regionalist project that aimed to fortify the area politically. Basing the characterization of the region on aspects inherited from its plantation system past (reinscribed in characteristics reinforced in the present such as the rural heritage, the hard-worker, and mestizo population, the afro-descendent traditions), the regional response ended up generating a version of an "essentialist" identity that reflects colonial traces fixed in the present (dos Anjos 2005).

In this sense, the traditions and culture of the Northeast seem to be performed and carried on in the manner of what Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (2009) called "culture between inverted commas," that is, a self-referring fixed culture that populations create in order to represent themselves for others. Once defined and propagated, this culture starts to be performed by the population. In this case, it seems that the Northeastern culture got fixed on a performance of coloniality that is interpreted as part of the local traditions. Naturalized by everyday practices, this coloniality is exposed by de Andrade's work in the use of some double meanings that can be distinguished in local repertoires.

The first reference to the double meanings in the work is in its title, *40 nego bom é um real,* a phrase chanted by street vendors of the popular candy that can be heard in the streets of Recife. The literal translation of the chant into English would be something like "Forty Good (or Tasty) Blacks for one real." Although sounding like a very explicit form of racism to an outsider, the repetition of the chant becomes "naturalized" by the playful tone and its ubiquity in the streets. As de Andrade admits, it was only after hearing the

chant many times that he realized it represented an “audacious formula about racism, cheap labor, and a naturalization of servitude and of a racist and classist issue” (2014).

One of the strategies of de Andrade’s work is then to use imagistic and textual representations to create a dialectic of naturalization and denaturalization of racism – using a similarly playful and double-meaning tone to the chant itself. Only when examined closer does references to the survival of Brazil's colonial past in the present and representations of a contented 'servitude' of racialized people start to emerge in the apparently cheerful and celebratory images of the installation.

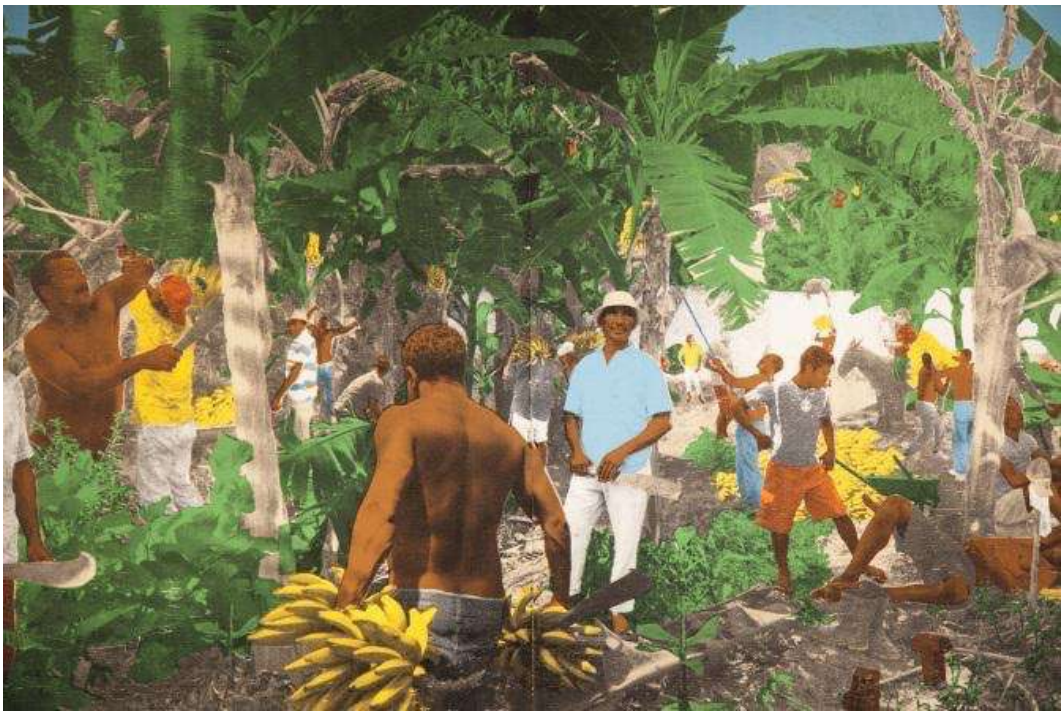

Fig. 4. Jonathas de Andrade: *40 nego bom é um real* [40 black candies for R$ 1.00], 2013 (detail)

A famous reference that reverberates in one of the images from *40 nego bom* [...] (Fig.4) is Victor Meirelles' historical painting *A Primeira Missa no Brasil [Brazil First Mass, 1861]*) – as also seen in Attia’s image montage (Fig.1) –, which shows Indigenous peoples laying on the ground and hanging

from trees while deferentially watching the religious service of their new colonial “masters.” It has been previously indicated how the success of Meirelles' painting disseminated a colonial iconography in Brazil that supported the construction of a national “history” and imagination in which native populations are a placid part of a colonial “civilizing' project”. A similar construction in relation to black and mixed-race people permeates the visual representation of 'typical' Northeastern workers in 40 nego bom – who appear in a similar pacified and languid position of servitude in the continuation of a colonial structure.

The list of references that emerge from examining *40 nego bom*[...] can be extended: some of its images remind of visual representations of racial stereotypes, such as those present in colonial-style advertising images as from the French chocolate drink Banania (Fig.5). De Andrade's bold color serigraphs might also remind one of the Warholian pop art visuality and its operation of image appropriation and reproducibility.

Without a doubt, de Andrade’s work considers the imagistic matrices that are part of contemporary cultures and the fact that stock images are available for appropriation and interventions. As Hal Foster has identified in relation to contemporary art of the early 2000s, image appropriations were also part of the strategies of art practices that presented an “archival impulse”, a notion of artistic practice "as an idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects and events" (Foster 2004, 3). These practices, Foster argued, “seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present” (2004, 4). To do that, they elaborate on, among other things, found images. The sources could be familiar archives of mass culture or more obscure ones. These works, stresses Foster, would be archival since they not only draw on informational archives but they produce them as well – creating new matrixes of citation and juxtapositions (2004, 5).

Fig. 5. Banania "y'a bon...": Frech chocolate drink advertisement, 1920s-30s

As Foster pointed out, the archival impulse followed a will to connect in the archive what is not necessarily side-by-side in the world (2004, 21). The will would be not so much to totalize as it is to relate, "to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs (sometimes pragmatically, sometimes parodically), to ascertain what might remain for the present" (Foster 2004, 21).

It is essential to underline that the images and references assimilated by Attia's and de Andrade's works are not treated by them as part of one global or historically unbounded imagistic archive (where everything could be connected to anything). However, they are treated as chained in processes of transmission and adaptation between "global" or transnational references and local or national aspects – guided by a common thread of colonial links.

In tune with this approach observed in the works of Attia and de Andrade, Andreas Huyssen has similarly argued that the "transnationality" of image technology and other "modern" media are reinterpreted and shifted by art practices from different parts of the world concerning specific historical contexts and notions of "memory" (2014, 59). That is, the borders of visual archives available to contemporary artists are enlarged by globalization and the digital era, but the selection and reinscriptions of the images often operate in relation to specific local histories, social issues, and memories.

What interests here is to reflect on how this will probe the signs of the past into the present or of other cultures in one's own is at play in the focused artworks in the sense of proposing not general or global counter-narratives but counter-narratives that create connections between specific colonial histories. That is, the archival art practices analyzed here seem to understand the powerful symbolic space of reinscriptions of borders and margins at stake in archives and use this potency to bring forward some illuminating connections between colonial pasts and presents, global and local cultures, and transnational modernities and coloniality, working with the "contact zones" or "borderlands" created by the transit of images in between these different areas and temporalities. One of the strategies is to make present and visible within new archival inscriptions that otherwise seemed diffused and invisible in the larger borders of everyday cultures and national narratives.

Another way of looking at these archival art strategies is how they use and dislocate globalized colonial archives to intervene in them with decolonial perspectives on local social and historical formations. That is, they can depart from archives of what Mbembe called "the Western consciousness of the blackness" (2017) to re-focus on how this general "Western consciousness" shapes specific histories or operates locally. Through archival imagistic operations, they point to globalized colonial borders reproduced locally. It is also from archives that they deconstruct certain borders and engage with decolonial practices.

In this sense, I argue that, by incorporating some of the references transmitted within multiple flows of global and colonial imagistic and cultural exchanges and by weaving further "transversal threads" between

them, works such as Attia's and de Andrade's challenge images' boundaries and negotiate the meeting and crossings of their symbolic lives. The network of possible references intertwined with the images underlines the archival potential of multiple connections between the past and the present, between different cultures, and between global transmissions and local issues.

Poignantly dealing with images that dialogue with certain shared tropes of colonial modernity, the artworks critically unfold common colonial matrixes that plurally reflect different cultures. Doing so, they also point to the archive (both in the sense of incorporating archival references and an archival logic of their works) as a place of maintenance of symbolic borders as well as a place from where they can be dislocated and tensioned.

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Endnotes

1. As Pratts defines, "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (1992, 4).
2. In the case of the borderlands explored by Gloria Anzaldúa they can be physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual or linguistic, as a result of two or more cultures that edge each other (1987). As Anzaldúa analyses, "a border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition" (1987, 3). She argues that around the U.S.-Mexican border, lifeblood of two worlds merge to form a third country – a "border culture". As Anzaldúa defines, having grown up between two cultures (the Mexican and the Anglo), and being a lesbian in a Catholic upbringing, she is a "border woman" (1987).
3. As Richards points out, "the narratives of the late nineteenth century are full of fantasies about an empire united not by force but by information" (1993, 1). According to him, most people involved in the British Empire in the nineteenth century were aware that the empire was a collective improvisation; that is, it was less of a unity than they would have liked it. Their tactics, then, was to try to fill the gaps in their knowledge with as much information as they could: they collected information, they surveyed, they mapped, they classified species, and they produced statistics. All this paper shuffling required some kind of archive for its unification. They pared the Empire down to file-cabinet size, argued Richards (1993, 4). As Richards concludes, "the truth, of course, is that it was much easier to unify an archive composed of texts than to unify an empire made of territory" (1993, 4). What Richard analyses is not only the 'information explosion' of the British Empire, but the theme of control of knowledge that crossed to the literature of the time. In this sense, the archives in fiction would also be an important archival source of the time.
4. The narrative of Brazil's "discovery" was an invention of 19th century romanticism in Brazil that answered to the necessity of construction of a national tradition. It was within this context that Pero Vaz de Caminha's "Discovery Letter" was first published in 1817 and turned into a celebrated document (Coli 1998).

"*I want to show something beyond this: I want to show life*." Khaled Jarrar's art beyond borders from the global turn perspective[1]

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ABSTRACT

As Wendy Brown stands in the *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2010), the first decade of this century has seen a great increase in walled states, a tendency that hasn't changed in the last decade. The art of Khaled Jarrar (Jenin, 1976) is the result of this global tendency and represents a valuable angle on this topic due to his experience of two of the most emblematic walls of our age, which stand between Mexico and the United States of America and between Palestine and Israel.

My purpose is to present a selection of the most significant works of this Palestinian artist to highlight the uniqueness of his contribution to the contemporary description and understanding of the border and its paradoxes from a global perspective. Indeed, this uniqueness is given by Khaled's ability to join different countries and histories in a "local-global continuum", quoting Darian-Smith and McCarty (2017), which goes beyond the geo-political landscape given by the concept of the nation-state. For his connection with key topics of contemporary art theory — such as global turn, postmodern hermeneutics, cultural studies, post/neo-colonial turn, and multiculturalism — Jarrar's reflection on the meanings of the border could be considered as one of the most emblematic voices of contemporary visual arts.

KEYWORDS

Border; Palestinian Art; Global Turn; Transculturality; Artivism

In July 2016, a small group consisting of Palestinian artist Khaled Jarrar, the Italian film-maker Matteo Lonardi and other Middle Eastern, European, and American members of the project CultuRunners traveled along the U.S./Mexican border from San Diego/Tijuana to El Paso/Ciudad Juarez. The trip was part of a multi-year artists' road trip filmed between the United States and the Middle East against the backdrop of the 2016 Presidential elections. This major project, called "Crossing the Line. Middle Eastern Artists in Trump's America", was conceived as a way of proposing a new type of journalism, which – as stated on the project's web page – "champions the soft power of artists to explore complicated subjects with empathy and insight".

As Wendy Brown stands (2010), the first decade of this century has seen a great increase in walled states; a tendency that hasn't been changed in the last decade. Along with his peculiar biography, the art of Khaled Jarrar (born in Jenin - Palestine, 1976) is the result of this global tendency and represents a valuable witness of his experience of two of the most emblematic walls of our age – one between Mexico and the United States of America, and the other between Palestine and Israel – and embodies a critical representation of these walls, and especially of their impact on the societies involved in the political and economical conflicts of these borders.

As I will try to demonstrate, Jarrar's participation in this project eventually extended far beyond the concept of "soft power" and the alternative journalism realm related to the project that gave rise to the installation of *No Man's Land*[2].

The artist's journey took him from San Diego to Ciudad Juárez in a 34-foot RV converted into a mobile artist studio, crisscrossing and following the U.S.-Mexico border included in this area, being part of a series of ten public space interventions meant to explore the ideological boundaries between the United States and the Middle East, in a context of increasing islamophobia as part of the generalized xenophobia instigated during the Trump era, traveling from the geopolitical border with Mexico and then within the south-eastern states, making the border not only a matter of

international policies but also as a national issue, looking back on American narrations about society and culture.

From this perspective, the project itself fits remarkably with the definition of Mezzadra and Nielson (2013) of the border as an "epistemic angle" from which we can try to analyze and forge our contemporary world[3]. Moreover, Jarrar's work goes one step further by proposing a public artwork that converts this space into an opportunity for dialogue and exchange, and not only on a bi-national scale: the making-off *No Man's Land* enabled Jarrar to interact with local people, showing through a selection of his video artworks the affinities between Palestinian and Mexican – and indigenous – people living along a militarized border.

Jarrar negotiated his narration with these communities, suggesting a global perspective that introduces a disruptive view in border art and curation that we can summarize as follows: intervening on the border not only to denounce the local and global problems implied in its existence and militarization – and, so, other borders: social, cultural and economical borders from which the geo-political one arose and which it perpetuates – but also to show it as a space for encounter and dialogue from a glocal perspective, a place from which we, as human beings, citizens and non-citizens, can build up new forms of inclusion and, thus, of social disruption. In this sense – and considering the recent global spread of cultural production that is suggesting this kind of use of the space of the border, actually recovering its sense of common space – geopolitical borders can be seen as key labs for future societies and cultures.

Jarrar also literally broke the border by using a part of the fence from Tijuana to make his ladder – as it is locally known, *Khaled's Ladder* or *La escalera de Khaled* – and, of course, by doing that he was likely to cross the line of another border: that of national and international law. This barely legal act – illegal and nude as many lives which cross the border, as Agamben would say – was the beginning of an artwork that is ironically literal, as many of Jarrar's, by turning a fence into a ladder.

This wasn't the first time Khaled broke up the wall and turned it into a piece of art: he had already intervened in the apartheid wall between

Palestine and Israel in the Ramallah area in 2012, using the concrete extracted from the wall to create playful and polemical sculptures such as the *Buddy Bear* (2013) or the *Volleyball* or *Football piece* (2013)[4].

Materiality itself tends indeed to be highly significant in Khaled's work. If both iron and concrete evoke the hardness of the wall and the isolation of the communities living alongside, and, in this sense, these works evoke a still-life on the border, their appropriation and alteration also suggest that even this hard material and its social effects can be subverted, as a form of resistance to the hegemonic narratives and practices which argue the need of a militarized border.

As quoted in the title of this intervention, there's still life on and beyond the border, resilient life. That's what Khaled's playful performances on the Palestinian wall whisper to the observe. And that's exactly what Jarrar wanted to show to the Mexican community he interacted with: the counter-narration of life on the border as a way to mutual understanding and as a strategy for the construction of a transnational society and culture, in contrast to the dramatic media coverage that practically portrays the area of the border wall as a war zone.

By "community" I am referring to those who are living and working along and across the border, including members of the local police who approached the artist while he was taking a closer look at the fence and beyond. The way Jarrar handled his encounter with the police was particularly interesting and was the same with the civilians living in the area that became the site of Khaled's ladder: he showed them some extracts from the series of short-films *Infiltrators* – Khaled's debut documentary – filmed in 2012 on – or it would be better to say "across" – the Palestinian border, again, to show life – ordinary and human life – of civilians living on the border to an audience that, despite the cultural differences and its poor knowledge of the historical background of the State of Palestine, was widely familiar with the informal crisscrossing practices of a border area's society and the concept of ghettoization[5]. These same practices have been continuously shaping their own identity, and also recalling another controversial topic about all militarized border areas that, regionally, was aggravated in the Trump era,

that is, systematic family separation: an issue that recurs significantly in Jarrar's interviews with civilians living in the border area both in Palestine and Mexico, and a practice that became strategically relevant in U.S. illegal migration policy, whose extreme consequence was the creation of specific centers of detention along the border which are tragically infamous.

Khaled's intervention goes far beyond the installation of the ladder as such, which can be interpreted, more precisely, as part of a wider performance of the artist on and about the border. The artist didn't limit himself to exploring the topic, as other contemporary artists would have done: he needed to go literally beyond borders by using his social interaction and work to create a connection on site. The outcome is not a self-referential documentary filled with conjectures the artists didn't share with locals, nor have the locals been exposed to narrative exploitation as passive subjects: rather it's the result of a blend of both planned and spontaneous collaborations and interactions on a transnational and transcultural level that shaped the performance and its permanent outcome, the artwork, from the beginning to its results.

Indeed, the making of the ladder itself was carried out in collaboration with students of the New Mexico State University in Las Cruces: another stop-over in Crossing the Line's road trip that allowed Jarrar to use the ladder to suture the boundary and strengthen the connections between the U.S. and Mexican border states communities in a very coherent way. The ladder's installation in Ciudad Juárez was a collaborative work with locals as well, and the placing didn't represent the end of this collaboration, rather, it was the beginning of a long-term process of communitarian re-appropriation of the border's public space where children played a first significant role. As Khaled's ladder was placed in front of the border wall in the surroundings of Ciudad Juarez, it very soon drew the attention of the civilian communities living onsite, particularly children, with the artwork not only becoming a sort of playground but also being intervened with textile works by children of the local indigenous community.

This unexpected appropriation not only fulfilled Jarrar's goal to give the local community a monument that, as a bridge, would bring people

together –transforming the object of the wall into its antithesis – but also enriches the artwork's narration of the border with a wider view, as the piece can also be understood as a vehicle for connecting a layered and global history of exclusion and resilience that follows the contemporary art and curation tendency to use the artwork – and the artist himself in this case – as a disruptive social medium, a counter-narrator, which is not new, of course: what is more recent is the global scale of the social and cultural connections enabled by the initiative, along with the significant recurrence of this phenomenon in the last two decades, especially in conflictive spaces like geopolitical borders. Jarrar's commitment to making people see beyond these spaces, and especially walls, is a recent, emblematic case related to this tendency.

A former captain of the Palestinian Presidential Guard, Jarrar is familiar with international policies, militarized geopolitical control, and bureaucracy.

Indeed, it is not a matter of chance if isolation, separation, and control represent emblematic topics in Jarrar's work. With this background, he devoted his career as an artist to a systematic subversion of these realms, and the multiple mechanisms of exclusion they represent, with a focus on the topic of the border in its diverse meanings: the "line in the sand", the wall, as well as invisible social and cultural borders that shape our contemporary worldview.

He often took advantage of this peculiar familiarity to propose a disruptive, and sometimes satirical, simulation of the practices of international policy, such as the bureaucratic ones, as in the case of the fake Palestinian Passport stamping action of 2011[6].

Or, and this is another interesting case that brings the artists back to the southern area of the US, quite close to the border, *Good at shooting, bad at painting*, where we can recognize another inclusive, transnational, ironic, and strongly political performance referred to the political use the CIA made of modern art, and especially abstract expressionism, during the Cold War as part of a global strategy of propaganda and control, subverting, again the

original, function of the medium, the weapon, to create a highly allusive piece of art in collaboration with local institutions and public[7].

And, more recently, Jarrar's online selling of handfuls of Palestinian soil to turn them into NFTs: a project ironically titled "If I don't steal your home, someone else will steal it", where the general virtual public is invited to the virtual acquisition of Palestine's disputed soil as a way to express transnational civil solidarity in response to the constant annexation of these lands to Israel and the consequently forced expulsion of Palestinian families[8].

Like *No Man's Land*, the artistic action is intended as a way to express transnational solidarity and understanding: a purpose that Jarrar has been chasing across all of his initiatives, often employing utopian and playful practices that convert the border into a place where a more humanistic and global narration is possible.

To touch things – showing that they aren't untouchable and unbreakable – and try to change their function and use them to make bridges between humans is exactly how the artist defines his work.

Jarrar embodies the ultimate role of the contemporary artist as a radicant infiltrator who turns a disputed public space into a method and an opportunity for social and transcultural dialogue, de-centralizing and de-colonializing the narration of the border by shifting it to the very center of a global debate about the concept of humanity.

From the global turn perspective described by Darian-Smith&McCarty (2017), Jarrar brilliantly uses the border as a method to show the interconnection and mutual constitution of global processes that manifest at multiple levels – transnational, regional, national, and local – turning the border into a privileged space for social inclusiveness and political expression.

The artist can be considered as a distinguished inheritor of the first transnational art initiatives and struggles that rose just on this geopolitical border from the seventies, who picks up this heritage and brings it to a wider perspective thanks to the opportunities offered by the mobility and the technological progress of the global era.

The interdisciplinary and multicultural nature of the project that led to *Kahled's Ladder*, along with the local and global implications and interconnections that emerged from both the project and the artwork, coincides with a global turn perspective strategy which is likely to be the most appropriate angle from which analyze contemporary cultural production, where artistic and curatorial border initiatives can be seen as fundamental nodes for the development of a global web of mutual negotiations, with both practical and theoretical consequences. These kinds of initiatives are forging an extremely fluid concept of society and culture that is shaping new trans-identities against and beyond the concepts of regional, national, and citizenship, establishing new and unexpected alliances with a supportive and disruptive vocation.

It's certainly too soon to understand the complete cultural effects of this kind of initiative and their global spread and recurrence – for example, we can mention other projects related to a global turn perspective from the curatorial field, like The Real DMZ Project for the Korean militarized border or Juntos Apartes for the border area between Colombia and Venezuela.

What can be argued, for the moment, is that they are powerful indicators of growing tendencies in contemporary cultural production whose potential can't be ignored as they are forging a future where the trans-suffix will definitively substitute that of post- or inter- to better describe the on-going cultural process of the construction of a growing alternative, horizontal and interconnected narration of the local and the global, denouncing the obsolescence of every social and cultural definition proceeding from the concepts of nation and race and systematically subverting them, on both a theoretical and a practical level.

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Endnotes

1. This statement is taken from Khaled Jarrar's interview with George Alistair for the International Solidarity Movement Reports in November 21, 2011. See: Khaled Jarrar, "An interview with Khaled Jarrar: Stamping Palestine into Passports", interview by George Alistair, International Solidarity Movement Reports, November 21, 2011, https://palsolidarity.org/2011/11/an-interview-with-khaled-jarrar-stamping-palestine-into-passports/.
2. João Inada and Matteo Lonardi, "Khaled's Ladder," filmed July 2016, video, 8:17, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/video/2016/jul/04/can-i-jump-palestinian-artist-at-mexicous-border-video.
3. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border As Method, or, the multiplication of labor* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), Preface, viii.
4. Khaled Jarrar, *Whole in the Wall: Khaled Jarrar* (London: Ayyam Gallery, 2013), 10-13.
5. Khaled Jarrar, "Infiltrators," filmed 2012, video, 70:00, http://idiomsfilm.com/movies/infiltrators/.
6. In this sense, the announcement of the performance at the Berlin Biennale in 2012 is very significant as it stated: "Get your passport stamped by Khaled Jarrar at Checkpoint Charlie". Once more, Jarrar's work enables a connection between the Palestinian wall and other historical border wall like the Berlin Wall. See: "Stamping action with Khaled Jarrar," last modified April 5, 2012, https://www.berlinbiennale.de/en/veranstaltungen/2105/stamping-action-with-khaled-jarrar.
7. Khaled Jarrar, "Good at Shooting, Bad at Painting," filmed May 12, 2018, video, 4:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLDpW-RZCHM.
8. Indeed, and in particular, the initiative arose as a critical response to the expulsion from the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah that occurred in the previous months. See: Kabir Jhala, "Artist Khaled Jarrar is selling handfuls of soil from Palestinian farmland–and has turned them into NFTs," *The Art Newspaper*, May 20, 2021, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/05/20/artist-khaled-jarrar-is-selling-handfuls-of-soil-from-palestinian-farmlandand-has-turned-them-into-nfts.