"Passport, Please!": Subversive Resistance at the Checkpoint

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Abstract

Between 2016 and 2017, artist Mahmoud Obaidi exhibited his installation, *Fair Skies*, at the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar. In the installation, he included a series of stop-motion animation videos featuring plastic dolls. The videos re-enacted an actual confrontation he experienced while attempting to board a plane at the George Bush International Airport in Houston, Texas, in 2009. The piece critiques travel restrictions and race/ethnic-based profiling placed on individuals originating from Arab and/or Muslim-majority nations. In 2018, Nadia Gohar created *Self Portrait (Passport Photo Do's & Don'ts)*, a photo-based piece that consisted of self-portraits of the artist wearing various articles of clothing framed within passport-sized prints. Some photographs depict Gohar wearing glasses, a white *hijab*, or a black *niqab*; other images are over- or underexposed. Her piece responds to the restrictions placed on passport and citizenship applications, photos, and how certain cultural or religious signifiers deter approval. In the third example, artist Khaled Jarrar affirms Palestinian statehood by employing passports and postage stamps emblazoned with symbols associated with Palestinian culture. *Live and Work in Palestine* (2009–) uses official travel documents, like the passport book, as a symbol of resistance against occupation. The passport book and airport checkpoints serve as performative spaces/objects where subjects must both affirm and censor their identity(-ies) depending on geographical and religious identifiers. I position these artworks through a critical, yet satirical lens that evaluates the continued practice of racial, ethnic, and religious profiling used by border protection/enforcement agencies like the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) — the federal agency within the United States Department of Homeland Security. Throughout this article, I will argue how each piece magnifies profiling that is often enacted and enforced by airport security, checkpoints, and border patrol agencies as a form of corporeal control and humiliation. These restrictive practices are still employed, if not amplified, in an era of (un)fair skies.

Keywords

subversive affirmation, surveillance, airport and border security, passports, (im)mobility

"Passaporte, Por Favor!": Resistência Subversiva no Posto de Controlo

Resumo

Entre 2016 e 2017, o artista Mahmoud Obaidi exibiu a sua instalação, *Fair Skies* (Céus Justos), no Mathaf: Museu Árabe de Arte Moderna, em Doha, no Catar. Na instalação, incluiu uma série de vídeos de animação em *stop motion* com bonecos de plástico. Os vídeos recriavam um confronto real que o artista viveu ao tentar embarcar num avião no Aeroporto

Internacional George Bush, em Houston, Texas, em 2009. A obra critica as restrições de viagem basseadas na perfilação étnica/racial imposta a indivíduos provenientes de países de maioria árabe e/ou muçulmana. Em 2018, Nadia Gohar criou *Self Portrait (Passport Photo Do's & Don'ts)* [Autorretrato (O Que Fazer e Não Fazer Numa Foto de Passaporte)], uma peça composta por fotografias que consistia em autorretratos da artista vestindo diversos artigos de roupa, enquadrados no formato de fotos de passaporte. Algumas fotografias mostram Gohar a usar óculos, um hijab branco ou um niqab preto, outras imagens estão superexpostas ou subexpostas. A sua obra é uma reação às restrições impostas aos pedidos de passaporte e cidadania, às fotografias e a como certos elementos culturais ou religiosos dificultam a aprovação. No terceiro exemplo, o artista Khaled Jarrar afirma a soberania palestiniana ao utilizar passaportes e selos postais estampados com símbolos associados à cultura palestiniana. *Live and Work in Palestine* (Viver e Trabalhar na Palestina; 2009–) usa documentos oficiais de viagem, como o livro de passaporte, como símbolo de resistência contra a ocupação. O passaporte e os postos de controlo aeroportuários servem como espaços/objetos performativos onde os indivíduos devem tanto afirmar como censurar a(s) sua(s) identidade(s), dependendo dos identificadores geográficos e religiosos. Estas obras são analisadas a partir de uma perspetiva crítica, com um tom satírico, que problematiza a prática contínua de perfilação racial, étnica e religiosa conduzida por agências de controlo e segurança fronteiriça, como a Transportation Security Administration (Autoridade de Segurança dos Transportes; TSA), órgão federal do Departamento de Segurança Interna dos Estados Unidos. O artigo analisa de que modo cada obra intensifica a perfilação frequentemente exercida e aplicada pelos serviços de segurança aeroportuária, postos de controlo e agências de patrulha fronteiriça, configurando formas de controlo corporal e humilhação. Estas práticas restritivas mantêm-se em vigor — e, por vezes, são mesmo intensificadas — numa era de céus (in)justos.

Palavras-chave

afirmação subversiva, vigilância, segurança aeroportuária e fronteiriça, passaportes, (i)mobilidade

1. Introduction

"Terrorist, fanatic...extremist, militant", yells a United States Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agent dressed in black military fatigues. The intended recipient of the verbal assault gazes at the agent with a blank stare and endures the interrogation. However, the unwavering expression comes not from an actual person, but from a plastic toy created in the likeness of Iraqi Canadian artist, Mahmoud Obaidi. Using plastic dolls and stop-motion animation, Obaidi's short video references an event when the artist attempted to board a plane at George Bush International Airport in Houston, Texas. The stop-motion segment was part of Obaidi's *Fair Skies* (2010; 2016–2017), a multimedia installation that critiqued post-9/11 profiling of individuals with Arab reading-names and/or originating from Muslim-majority nations. To complement the video, a blue vending machine offered skin-lightening creams and blue-coloured contact lenses for visitors to purchase (Polacco, 2016). Obaidi's reason for including the creams and lenses originates from said experience at the Houston airport:

> the airport security had passed me, and everyone in line was blonde, and
> I knew in my head that he would come back to me (...). He came back

to me and asked about my passport. I have a Canadian passport. Then he asked where my stamp was and I replied page 17, then he said don't raise your hand at me and called for backup. (Obaidi as quoted in Polacco, 2016, para. 6)

The passport book and TSA checkpoint serve as objects/spaces where subjects must affirm and/or perform their identity depending on geographical origin, name, skin colour, and religious and/or ethnic identifiers.

The sociologist David Lyon (2008) examines how identity is realised and performed at institutional spaces like airports and checkpoints, affirming the notion that "national identification is very much bound up with citizenship and realized/enacted through the enforcement of 'passports, national identity cards, and biometrics' all of which are incorporated at airports and checkpoints" (p. 37). By analysing oft-enacted profiling methods utilised by transportation security agencies like TSA, I provide a reading of Mahmoud Obaidi, Egyptian visual artist Nadia Gohar, and Palestinian artist Khaled Jarrar's works through the framework of "subversive affirmation". Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse define subversive affirmation as

(...) an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. It is characterized precisely by the fact that with affirmation simultaneously taking place a distancing from, or revelation of what is being affirmed. (Arns & Sasse, 2006, p. 445)

Obaidi, Gohar, and Jarrar critique oppressive methods of control practised by American and other global security agencies. They employ humour and subversion to critique racial, religious, and ethnic profiling practices, specifically following 9/11 and the implementation of the 2017 "Muslim ban" initiated under the first Trump Administration (Executive Order 13769, 2017). Using a qualitative analytical approach, I discuss travel-themed works by Gohar and Jarrar to complement Obaidi's installation. Gohar and Jarrar critique various profiling techniques used at places like security checkpoints, passport applications and control stations. In her 2018 piece titled, *Self Portrait (Passport Photo Do's & Don'ts)*, Gohar photographed a series of self-portraits. In each photo, she dresses in different articles of clothing framed within Canadian passport-sized prints. Placed in small polypropylene plastic bags, the photographs depict Gohar wearing glasses, a white *hijab*, a black *niqab*, and an assortment of over-/ underexposed compositions. The piece serves to critique the passport and citizenship documentation process in Canada. Like Obaidi, Gohar's piece questions why specific clothing items, skin tones, and cultural and religious signifiers impede and/or disrupt the passport approval process.

Similarly, Jarrar also uses the passport book as an object of critique. In 2011, he released *State of Palestine* as part of the *Live and Work in Palestine* project (2009–). The

project started in response to restrictive border policies enforced by the Israeli government. Jarrar first performed the piece in Ramallah outside Qalandiya checkpoint in the West Bank (Murphy, 2011). Using the symbol of the sunbird, he stamped the passport pages of non-Palestinian tourists. The Palestinian Authority does not issue entry stamps since all border crossings fall under Israeli jurisdiction. Thus, Jarrar's act of stamping tourist's passports asserts his agency while reinforcing the right to Palestinian statehood and sovereignty. I argue that their interventions serve as a form of resistance against discriminatory security practices and lay bare the problematic methods used to taxonomize bodies at border and customs checkpoints/offices.

2. Airport Security and Modern Profiling Practices

Starting in the 1960s, a series of hijackings prompted the United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to begin a structured program of passenger profiling. In "Flying While Arab–Racial Profiling and Air Travel Security", Ellen Baker (2002) suggests that early profiling was based on a series of data points that measured behaviour, physical attributes, and unusual travel patterns:

> the theory was that potential hijackers could be identified by a list of personal attributes, i.e. a "profile" that cumulatively suggests a person is likely to be a terrorist. If a person fit the profile, his or her carry-on luggage was subjected to x-ray or other search procedures. (Baker, 2002, p. 1378)

Baker's analysis cites Gregory T. Nojeim's study titled "Aviation Security Profiling and Passengers' Civil Liberties", in which he concludes that throughout the 1970s and 1980s security profiling proved mostly ineffective in reducing or stopping potential terror-related attacks.

In a *New York Times* article from January 2001 titled, "Long Before Verdict, Lockerbie Changed Airport Security", Matthew Wald (2001) outlines how the 1988 Lockerbie Bombing changed modern air travel. In particular, how advanced x-ray machines, computer profiles, and extra baggage screening protocols were implemented to reduce hijackings and eliminate the potential for explosives to be smuggled onto planes: "the [US] Government has also made the major airlines develop a computerized system for determining whose bags should be screened (...). Details of that profiling system are also secret" (Wald, 2001, para. 6). After the explosion of Trans World Airlines (TWA) Flight 800[1] in 1996, the FAA developed more sophisticated methods. Though terrorism was never determined as a factor in the TWA crash, the FAA increased airport security and invested in new technologies used to screen passengers and their baggage.

By 1998, the FAA implemented the Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening Program (CAPPS) to detect and isolate suspected passengers:

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[1] Causes for the explosion of Flight 800 remain contested. Based on the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) report, the cause of the crash was likely "structural failure and decompression; Detonation of high-energy explosive device (bomb or missile); or Fuel/air vapor explosion in center wing tank" (Loeb, n.d. p. 6).

the program employed customized, FAA-approved criteria derived from a limited set of information about each ticketed passenger in order to identify 'selectees.' FAA rules required that the air carrier only screen each selectee's checked baggage for explosives using various approved methods. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004, p. 6)

According to National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (2004), all airlines were required to use CAPPS to screen passengers for potential explosive or weaponized materials and did not prioritise other types of terrorist actions like hijacking. In a critique of CAPPS, the report concludes that only three of the five hijackers on American Airlines Flight 11 were "selected" for further security screening on 9/11; however, they would find no explosive materials since their intention was not to use said methods to attack the Twin Towers and Pentagon (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004, p. 6). None of the other 9/11 hijackers were selected using CAPPS, thus furthering the need for new, more intense methods of parsing potential terror threats.

After 9/11, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (107th Congress—Nov. 2001, enacted Feb. 2002) formed the TSA within the Department of Homeland Security. The TSA's responsibilities include checking identification cards and screening bags and travel-related objects for explosives and possible weapons such as handguns or knives at security checkpoints. TSA's risk-based passenger screening includes pre-check and global entry as part of the Trusted Traveler program – which "you must voluntarily undergo a thorough background check against criminal, law enforcement, customs, immigration, agriculture, and terrorist indices to include biometric fingerprint checks, and a personal interview with a CBP officer" (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2024, para. 3).

TSA has garnered a negative reputation since its formation. After the agency was founded, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported an increase in profiling complaints filed by individuals of colour and Muslim-majority nations (American Civil Liberties Union, 2004). Thousands of travellers experienced racial, religious, and/or ethnic profiling at United States airports based on their skin colour, clothing, religious signifiers, behaviour, and even book covers. These profiling traits are part of the behaviour detection system used by the TSA to allegedly survey or detain potential security threats. Formerly known as the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques or SPOT, the program sought to reduce the risk of terrorist-related acts by training TSA and other security agents to identify suspicious individuals based on visual and/or behavioural cues. In an excerpt from a study on airline transportation security, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security noted the following:

TSA has also developed a passenger behavior detection program to identify potential threats based on observed behavioral characteristics. TSA initiated early tests of its Screening Passengers by Observational Techniques (SPOT) program in 2003. By 2012, the program deployed almost 3,000 behavior detection officers at 176 airports, at an annual cost of about $200

million. Questions remain regarding the effectiveness of the behavioral detection program, and privacy advocates have cautioned that it could devolve into racial or ethnic profiling. While some Members of Congress have sought to shutter the program, the 116th and earlier Congresses did not move to do so. (Elias et al., 2021, pp. 7–8)

In 2015, the ACLU filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against TSA, citing major issues with SPOT's behaviour detection program (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). They claimed the program "subject[ed] people of Middle Eastern descent or appearance, African Americans, Hispanics, and other minorities to additional questioning and screening solely on the basis of their race" (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d., p.2). The ACLU report further concluded that little to no scientific data supports the effectiveness of the program; rather, it resulted in invasive and harmful profiling that included interrogation, body searches, and refusal of flight. Though the TSA reports concluded that the system was deeply flawed, no accountability was enforced against the agency[2].

When President Trump assumed his first presidential term on January 20, 2017, he enacted several travel/immigration-based policies that sought to further restrict and profile individuals from Muslim-majority nations. On January 27, 2017, one week after Trump's swearing-in ceremony, he signed Executive Order 13769 a.k.a. "the Muslim ban". The order placed a 90–120-day moratorium on travel for individuals (including refugees) originating from seven Muslim-majority nations: Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen (Amnesty International UK, 2020). The orders stated:

> the United States cannot, and should not, admit those who do not support the Constitution, or those who would place violent ideologies over American law. In addition, the United States should not admit those who engage in acts of bigotry or hatred (including "honor" killings, other forms of violence against women, or the persecution of those who practice religions different from their own) or those who would oppress Americans of any race, gender, or sexual orientation. (Executive Order 13769, 2017, para. 4)

The enforcement of Order 13769 sought to profile, detain, deny, and ban individuals based on their country of origin, race, ethnicity, and orientation.

3. Satire, Humour, and Subversive Play in Post-9/11 Skies

These behavioural detection and profiling methods serve as a source of critique in Obaidi, Gohar, and Jarrar's critical works/interventions. Their work, however, is part of a greater artistic tradition in which artists use humour and satire as subversive

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[2] The Behavior Detection and Analysis program recently replaced SPOT in 2016 and is intended to "identify higher-risk individuals and route them toward additional screening, while protecting each passenger's privacy and civil liberties, and preventing unlawful profiling activities" (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2015, p. 4).

mechanisms for critiquing political injustice and social disparities. For example, German Dada artist John Heartfield provided biting critiques of the Weimar German and Nazi regimes through the use of photomontage (Schultz, 2015, p. 253). Heartfield reassembled newspaper and magazine images/words as a form of subversive mockery against political figures like Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring, often posing them in exaggerated or unflattering poses. Other more recent artworks, coming from street/ graphic artists such as Banksy and Shepard Fairey, use popular culture imagery, like Heartfield, to subvert political figures; critique contemporary social and cultural issues; address racial and gender injustice, and provide commentary on economic and environmental inequity.

In a similar tradition, Obaidi, Gohar, and Jarrar employ creative methods to critique, satirise, and challenge the impact of travel bans and racial/ethnic profiling methods endorsed by former President George W. Bush and continued by the President Trump administration. Their travel-based interventions may be read as "an abrasive and cathartic materialization of a social reality, where humour is offered as the entry point for the audience" (ArtFacts, n.d., para. 3). For example, Obaidi re-enacts his interrogation at the Houston airport using plastic dolls and stop-motion video. The dolls, coupled with the interrogation, elicit an uncomfortable response from the viewer. By taking a serious and humiliating act and recreating the event with plastic dolls, Obaidi offers an incongruous anecdote to an otherwise serious situation.

In "Theories of Humor", D. H. Monro (1988) outlines three theoretical frameworks concerning the reception of satire: superiority, relief, and incongruity. Superiority theory supposes that responses to laughter originate from the satirist's superior control over the subject or the idea that the joke or laughter is at the expense of another. Relief theory applies to humour or jokes that release tension or social pressures. In reference to Obaidi, Gohar, and Jarrar, Monro's third framework, incongruity theory best applies to their satirical, sardonic installations/projects. Incongruity theory is outlined as follows:

> (...) [it] may be said to consist in the finding of 'the inappropriate within the appropriate.' It is not merely that unexpected connections that are found between apparently dissimilar things: our notions of propriety are also involved (...). The humorist drags into light the inconvenient facts, which shatter these attitudes and puncture these stereotypes. (Monro, 1988, para. 18)

When applied to works like *Fair Skies* or *Self Portrait (Passport Photo Do's & Don'ts)*, the works compel participants to unpack the incongruous disparity between the satirical installation/intervention and the concerning practice of racial profiling. Viewers are challenged to reflect on their personal interactions with agencies like TSA or other border patrol units and consider what privileges afford them ease of access and entry.

The use of humour disarms and diffuses tension or anxiety through laughter and mockery (Monro, 1988). Considering Monro's analysis of humour and jokes, work like

Live and Work in Palestine challenges the audience to reflect on the politics of mobility and the travel limitations imposed on individuals arriving/residing from Muslim-majority nations. Monro (1988) states: "humor is more penetrating when it brings to light a real connection between two things normally regarded with quite different attitudes, or when it forces on us a complete reversal of values" (para. 14). Though awkward and uncomfortable, each piece challenges the viewer-participant to question why certain identities remain in conflict with border or passport control stations, while others are afforded particular benefits and privileges.

4. Mahmoud Obaidi: Not so *Fair Skies*

Upon entering the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha in January 2017, I approached a blue vending machine. Text emblazoned on the surface read, "Fair Skies- Quality products for a worry-free travel and a better world" (Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, 2017, pp. 2–3). A coin slot accepted currency to dispense one skin cream kit. Each kit contained pale pink pigments, hair dye, and blue contact lenses. The kiosk served as one element in the installation, or as Obaidi referred, "a performative installation", or an installation that provides dynamic, participatory elements or components (Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, 2017). Juxtaposed to the kiosk and vending machine, a TV screen displayed the stop-motion animation video depicting Obaidi and a group of TSA agents as plastic dolls. To complement the video, pedestals filled with plastic dolls lined the wall next to the TV screen. An interactive piece made of plexiglass invited participants to slide various skin tones over the top of Obaidi's portrait until he appeared with a light complexion, blue eyes, and blond hair.

Originally debuted at the 2010 Art Dubai show, the inspiration for the show originates from an incident at the Houston airport when the artist was travelling to the Netherlands. Coincidentally, Obaidi was leaving the opening of a group exhibition at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art titled, *Iraqi Artists in Exile*. The show featured thirteen Iraqi-born artists forced to leave their country in the aftermath of the 2003 United States-led invasion. While walking through security at George Bush International Airport in 2009, Obaidi was stopped by TSA agents and interrogated. He reflects on his experience:

> (...) I checked in and passed all the security checks, carrying my Canadian passport with me in my hand. At the departure gate I stood in line to board the flight placing my passport in my pocket and holding onto my ticket... Suddenly a loud voice bellowed next to me saying, "Sir, show me your passport?". (Obaidi, n.d., para. 3)

Obaidi soon discovered how even polite dispositions have no effect if certain profiling elements triggered TSA agents via the behavioural detection program. He continues by stating:

> I looked to my right; an immigration officer was staring at me...without looking at my passport he asks, 'why there is no entry stamp in your passport?' As I tried to point out to him the page on the passport with the stamp entry, the officer with an angry and louder tone orders me say 'do not raise your hands' then orders another officer to take me aside and check my identity through a computer placed on a desk a few steps away from the line. (Obaidi, n.d., para. 4)

In an attempt to draw attention to his experience at the airport, Obaidi goes beyond a mere tongue-and-cheek critique of the TSA. His work subverts the role of the travel kiosk and serves as a form of subversive infiltration (Merx & Nibbelink, 2022). Rather than ignoring the experience, Obaidi used the installation platform as creative hyperbole, a subversive play on identity politics in the post-9/11 era. The format of a faux sales booth invites viewers to transform their physical appearance, using skin whitening creams, blonde hair dye, and blue contact lenses.

Obaidi's intention was to place such items in actual airport bathrooms and provide individuals with dark hair or skin the opportunity to "pass" with ease through airport security checkpoints. According to the artist, when "you pass the checkpoint and [are] in the plane, you can wash your face" (Polacco, 2016, para. 8). His work, though parodic, serves as a form of subversive play that critically confronts how individuals must perform when confronted by airport security agents in post-9/11 skies. In the museum statement about *Fair Skies*, "the beauty kit then becomes a response and an efficient tool for achieving uniformity. Moving around the artwork, the visitor is a witness to the artist' own transformation in adopting a 'guiltless' appearance" (Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art , 2017, p. 3).

The term guiltless is glaring and unsettling within the context of the statement. As noted within the TSA behavioural detection program, individuals of colour are notoriously profiled, humiliated, and forced to "pass" in order to avoid enhanced screening. Thus, the performative installation may be read outside the space of the Mathaf. As the viewer-participant, the space exposes Obaidi's humiliation, calling into question one's personal experiences with security agencies like TSA. The goal of *Fair Skies*? To not only expose profiling practised by airport security, but to confront the view-participant with the oft-racist practices enacted by security agencies. Reflecting on the skin cream kit, the dolls, and the video installation, the humorous displays serve as vehicles for exposing how post-9/11 security practices continue to impact passengers of colour and those travelling from Muslim-majority nations.

5. Photo Play: Nadia Gohar's *Self Portrait (Passport Photo Do's & Don'ts)*

Nadia Gohar examines identity in the context of passport and immigration applications. Shortly after the close of *Fair Skies* in 2017, Donald Trump codified travel restrictions beyond the behavioural detection program. In response to Executive Order 13769, Gohar created *Self Portrait (Passport Photo Do's & Don'ts)* in 2018 as part of the

exhibition, *Executive (Disorder: Art, Displacement & the Ban)*, organised by the Artistic Freedom Initiative at the Queen's Museum in New York. Along with nine other artists, the show criticised the effects of Order 13769 on individuals travelling to the United States and other countries known for restrictive immigration and border patrol policies. Gohar's contribution focused on her experience of becoming a Canadian citizen and the precarious application process. The artist captured twenty-five standard Canadian passport-size photos of her visage with various accoutrements (Vartanian, 2021). In one example, she wears a black *niqab*, which covers her hairline and the lower portion of her face. A second example depicts the artist in a white *hijab*, showing the outline of her face and hairline. Other photos are overexposed or underexposed and often off-centred. The photos were placed in clear, polypropylene plastic bags and either stacked in rows of five or placed in a single line along the gallery wall[3].

Per the requirements for a Canadian passport photo, subjects must adhere to the following:

> (...) be clear, sharp and in focus; have uniform lighting and no shadows, glare or flash reflections; show a clear difference between your face and the background; show your natural skin tone; be taken in person by a commercial photographer or studio; be professionally printed on plain, high-quality photographic paper. (Government of Canada, 2023, para. 16)

Regarding facial expressions, the Canadian International Civil Aviation Organization recommends the following: "(...) passport photos show a neutral expression (...). A neutral facial expression means that your eyes are open and clearly visible; you're looking straight at the camera; your mouth is closed; you're not smiling or frowning" (Government of Canada, n.d.a, para. 18). Gohar remarks, that "[the piece] re-stages the mistakes which would revoke a visa/passport application, questioning the notions of fear and prejudice embedded in one's display of national identity and self-fashioning" (Gohar, n.d., para. 1).

As a form of subversive play, Gohar purposely manipulates each photo as a subtle protest against the rigid identification requirements outlined by the Canadian International Civil Aviation Organization. Like the TSA, Transport Canada is a government agency that regulates and enforces transportation policies. In "No Exit: Racial Profiling and Canada's War against Terrorism", Reem Bahdi (2003) studies post-9/11 racial profiling enforced by US and Canadian transportation agencies. She notes the following:

> (...) individuals are vulnerable to being subjected to higher scrutiny either because they look Arab or Muslim-women who wear the *hejab* for example- or because some other piece of information reveals them to be Arab or Muslim. Since 9/11, Arabs, Muslims, and those who look Arab or Muslim report being subjected to higher scrutiny at Canadian airports allegedly because decision makers consider them a greater security risk than the rest of

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[3] Different iterations of the installation depict the photos in either one continuous row or placed in rows of five.

the population by virtue of their real or perceived Arab or Muslim identity.
(Bahdi, 2003, p. 299)

Regarding Bahdi's assessment, Gohar's photos represent various application flaws by concentrating on signifiers that would otherwise "disqualify" or flag an applicant. By playing with various disqualifiers, Gohar reveals how specific religious articles, like the *hijab* and *niqab*, have historically flagged applicants.

Returning to Obaidi's *Fair Skies*, these types of identifiers warrant closer inspection by security agencies. Gohar's photos of her in the *hijab* and *niqab* support Bahdi's claim, however the blurred and off-centre images are rather enigmatic in the context of the photo series. The flawed photos serve to test the agency's strict passport photo rules that would result in technical rejections based on the blurred or off-centre visage. However, the two types of photos, one with technical errors and one that displays religious accoutrements, speaks to term the "flawed". The *hijab* and *niqab*, without waiver, are coded as passport flaws, and thus, would result in revocation, a flagged application, or rejection.

Similar to American passports, Canadian passports also designate place of birth and/or place of naturalization. A special form known as "PPTC 077" permits applicants to apply without listing their place of birth on official passports/documentation. The form reads:

> I have been advised by the Passport Program, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) that I may encounter difficulties with the officials of other countries such as additional questioning, the requirement to obtain a visa that would not be required if the passport showed my place of birth, or denial of entry, if the passport does not show my place of birth. (Government of Canada, n.d.b, para. 2)

Hence, even the passport can reveal information concerning a naturalised citizen's country of origin. As Gohar notes, this affects how individuals from Muslim-majority nations move through checkpoints and passport control stations.

6. The *State of Palestine*: Khaled Jarrar's Border Interventions

To complement Gohar's critique of the passport photo, Khaled Jarrar looks at how passports, stamps, and identification books reinforce one's sense of self, nationhood, and agency. Born in Jenin, Palestine, Jarrar critiques how Palestinian mobility is controlled by checkpoints, segregated road systems, and identification hierarchies. In 2009, Jarrar began *Live and Work in Palestine*, a series focused on affirming the State of Palestine through the application of passports and postage stamps. Entrants to Palestine do not receive identification stamps; only Israeli entry cards are issued via Ben Gurion Airport, the Allenby Bridge via Jordan, the Erez Crossing, or the Rafah Crossing via Egypt into the Gaza Strip. *Live and Work in Palestine* may be defined as

an object-based performance that focuses on the power of the passport and passport stamp. Jarrar's circular stamp was designed to include the phrase "State of Palestine" in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Enclosed within the circular text band, Jarrar included a sunbird to signify Palestinian nationhood. The stamps declare the existence of a non-existent state, a reference to the lack of recognition of a Palestinian state by the United Nations (Murphy, 2011).

This participatory, interactive project works to affirm Palestinian sovereignty and identity. Jarrar states:

> in this stamp, the tiny Palestinian sunbird drinks nectar from the jasmine rose, spreading its pollen and fragrance every morning and evening, as if it were the stamp that will be in your hands. Paste it on your messages, send them around the world, tell the story of the native bird struggling for freedom. The word "Palestine," in Hebrew, English, and Arabic, rejects racism in all its forms and stands against the annexation. (Froehlich, 2020, para. 6)

In *The Design Politics of the Passport: Materiality, Immobility, and Dissent*, Mahmoud Keshavarz (2019) contextualises the passport stamp as a performative designation, both affirming and denying the nations/States in which they contain and restrict. Writing on Jarrar's project, Keshavarz states that,

> (...) by stamping a visa from a non-existing territory—of course non-existing in the imaginary of the international community—into the existing legal passports, he redraws a map of Palestine and performs its borders. He reminds us that passports or visas are not simply products or signifiers of the borders but rather the very components that constitute border politics. (Keshavarz, 2019, p. 8)

By creating stamps that designate and assert Palestinian identity, Jarrar effectively works to reject municipal borders and boundaries that are enforced throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

Though Jarrar's stamp asserts a form of fictional intervention, the effect supposes a factual, real act. In "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2009) asserts that

> unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact. (Lambert-Beatty, 2009, p. 54)

The State of Palestine is marginalised under terms like "de facto", "mandate", and "occupied". Jarrar's fictional stamp asserts Palestinian identity as an act of becoming in

response to a colonial system intent on erasure and unbecoming (Bouarrouj, 2016). During an iteration of the performance at the 2012 Berlin Biennale, Artur Żmijewski and Joanna Warsza, contextualised Jarrar's stamp-performance as a "story of a state-to-be (…) instead of continuing again and again the discussion about a one- or two-state solution, using these stamps is a simple gesture that helps to create normality"(Żmijewski & Warsza, n.d., para. 3). To emphasise the state-to-be, Jarrar's performance intervention does not just parody the act of passport stamping; rather, the employment of the "parafictional" act serves as a strategy to both educate the audience while also critiquing the oppressive system of surveillance and control imparted by the Israeli government.

7. Conclusion

During a trip to Germany in the fall of 2022, I picked up a long-forgotten book to read during the trans-Atlantic flight. When I opened the most recent page, out slipped my bookmark: a notice of bag inspection tag from the US Transportation Security Administration. The statement informs the bag owner of the following: "[TSA] is required by law* to inspect all checked baggage. As part of the process, some bags are opened and physically inspected. Your bag was among those selected for physical inspection". The card, though seemingly innocuous, serves as a reminder of post-9/11 surveillance practices enacted on passengers moving through airports.

Racial, religious, and ethnic profiling continues to impede all forms of movement, not just through airports, but border patrol stations, checkpoints, and passport application sites. Obaidi, Gohar, and Jarrar proved that while TSA cards are the least intrusive action when travelling in the post-9/11 era, the potential risks include arbitrary and targeted detention, refusal of flight, arrest, or banishment from host countries. Whether through mock travel kiosks, sardonic passport photos or stamps, each artist demonstrates the intrusive act of having one's identity questioned, subverted, marginalised, and investigated based on historically racist and bigoted profiling practices.

This form of subjugation is furthered by the increase of biometric and artificial intelligence (AI) programs, like CLEAR or the Wolf Pack (Blue/Red Wolf) database/application, the latter of which is "trained" to identify Palestinians in the West Bank. In "Algorithmic State Violence: Automated Surveillance and Palestinian Dispossession in Hebron's Old City", Sophia Goodfriend (2023) examines how Blue Wolf collects biometric data of Palestinians without their consent. Throughout Hebron, Palestinians are surveyed using the facial recognition software and could face imprisonment, denial of entry, or interrogation based on what the data "decides" is a threat or not. The newest application to the Wolf Pack, Red Wolf, is a higher-quality AI program that stores biometric data and uses said information to track Palestinians as they move throughout the Occupied Territories. The tech was originally relegated to checkpoints; however, it is now utilised by Israeli Offensive Forces via mobile phone applications (Amnesty International, 2023).

(...) If someone passes by the checkpoint a lot, the soldier in the checkpoint can attach the face to the ID until the system learns the face. If a biometric entry does not exist on the individual in question, they are biometrically enrolled into the Red Wolf system, without their knowledge and consent, which thereby expands its database of Palestinian faces over time. Red Wolf expands its database of images by adding new face that passes a connected camera. (Amnesty International, 2023, p. 45).

Other programs used on the United States-Mexico and United States-Canadian border, like drones, intelligence relocatable long-range surveillance towers, and autonomous surveillance towers, have been criticised for specifically profiling persons based on biometric data signifies, as cited in numerous reports by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the ACLU (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2023). As border crossings, airports, and passport control stations amp up enforcement efforts, often guided by new AI tech, one must consider the title of Obaidi's installation: what do fair skies look like for the future of travel in the age of AI and advanced biometrics?

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