

MARIA-CAROLINA CAMBRE
ADRIANA CICCAGLIONE
YOLANDA HERNÁNDEZ-ALBÚJAR
LIZ HINGLEY
ÁNGEL IGLESIAS ORTIZ
ASKO LEHMUSKALLIO
BIRGIT MERSMANN
MARIA NILSSON
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REUBEN CONNOLLY ROSS
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IMAGINATIONS
REVUE D'ETUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

TRAVELLING BY PHOTOGRAPH: REPRESENTING AND REFRAMING MIGRATION

Guest Editors: Carolina Cambre, Asko Lehmuskallio

Issue 13-2, 2022

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REPRESENTING AND REFRAMING MIGRATION

MARIA-CAROLINA CAMBRE

ASKO LEHMUSKALLIO

“The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even but a millimeter the way people look at reality, then you can change it” (James Baldwin 1979).

Millions of people find themselves displaced both internally and externally due to conflict, extreme weather events, severe economic and political instability, or a combination of push factors that signal an era of mass migration is underway. The frequency, scale, and magnitude of displacement events, and the consequent rise in migration witness a historical shift globally. Measuring and tracking migration presents significant challenges, but comprehending the implications of an entire era of mass migration is another. On the one hand, despite the efforts of many governments, the complex dynamic of migration “can never be fully measured, understood and regulated” (UN World Migration Report 9) because so much of this dynamic is clandestine, undocumented, and chaotic. On the other, there is no one synthetic image that can generalize the idea of migration or migrants (cf. Knorr Cetina 2009). Yet the phenomenon and the people are often essentialized in the increasingly heated arena of public debate, with migration being explicitly and implicitly misrepresented. Migrants are not a homogenous group, nor are their needs: health vulnerabilities, resilience factors, age, and gender are key dimensions that particularly need to be considered. These factors need to be better understood in order to begin to address both the

challenges and opportunities they may present, and what this special issue provides is a closer look at the complexity, irreducibility, and power of migration images.

THE POLITICS OF MAKING MIGRATION VISIBLE

Learning about the shifting contexts and features of migration is increasingly important, not least in our digital age where novel platforms have and will become a decisive space of representing, misrepresenting, conducting surveillance, and shaping discourses of international migration. Moreover, this is a moment when a politics of divisiveness has simultaneously demonized and weaponized international migration to be used as a political tool, according to the UN World Migration Report, that downplays “the significant benefits and enrichment migration brings, and steadfastly ignor[es] shared migration histories” (7). Unfortunately, politicization of migration and migrants is not new, as John Berger and Jean Mohr (1975) observed nearly half a century ago: “[T]he migrant is not on the margin of modern experience—[s]he is absolutely central to it” (10). The ever-increasing number of border walls bears grim witness to this politicization, with about 15 walls having been erected at the time Berger and Mohr were writing *The Seventh Man* compared to the five that existed just after World War Two. Despite wide international critique, today in 2022 there are now over 70 of these costly walls or fences including the walls by Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Croatia to block a million or more war refugees from the Middle East; Israel’s 436-mile “separation fence” referred to by Palestinians as the “Apartheid Wall”; Saudi Arabia’s 600-mile barrier on the Iraqi border; Norway’s 11-foot-high fence at its Russian border; the “Great Wall of Calais” in Northern France; the 435-mile Kenya-Somalia border wall; and Donald Trump’s “big beautiful wall” expanding an already 700-mile-long barrier between the United States and Mexico, with many more on the drawing table or under construction (Gammage 2018).

Walls don’t necessarily prevent people’s movement, but they do materially and symbolically separate those who belong and those who

do not. As geographer Reece Jones notes, “The way that walls do work is as a symbol. The material object of the wall stands in for all of the other complex issues about borders, migration, and trade” (qtd. in Gammage 2018). Thus they are a visible and tangible manifestation of a nation’s desire to block the flow of millions of refugees and migrants fleeing war, environmental disaster, or persecution, rather than investing in the difficult processes of building policies investing in migrants and creating paths to citizenship. These tactics perversely profit nations that rely on migrant workers as a source of labour that can be exploited cheaply because the lack of citizenship protections allows them to be dehumanized: they are often unironically referred to as “stock” (World Migration Report, 33).

In a prescient way, Berger and Mohr (1975) had already observed how various European economies had become dependent on labor from poorer nations, and they created their photo-book to call attention to this and foster an idea of working-class solidarity. At the time of publication, the press ignored their work, and critics dismissed it, despite the book being translated into multiple languages, and being widely read (Berger 2010). The “intimate address” or family photo album visual approach was not taken seriously among the cultural elites, although the black and white word/image series depicted migrant experiences in ways that resonated affectively with migrants themselves. Still today, the moments depicted condense glimpses of shared experiences: dreaming of returning home, the departure, the journey, the arrival, “the deaths far away, the black foreign nights, the proud obstination [sic] of survival” (Berger 2010, 9). As James Baldwin (qtd. in Romano 1979) claims in the epigraph, the “world changes according to the way people see it.” While Baldwin originally was referring to writing, taking the word “seeing” literally we can attest to how images mobilized in mainstream visual representations of migration are marked by certain Euro-Western iconographic conventions that highlight a series of tropes that have become normalized in part due to the dominance of Western news media and the use of frequent repetition. The migrant is depicted as poor, in need, helpless, or used as a token for symbolic self-representations by celebrities and artists alike, as Lilie Chouliaraki (2017: 2019) has shown. If

Berger and Mohr offered a counterpoint to these kinds of reductions, it remains clear that we continue to need ways for seeing and showing differently.

TRAVELLING BY PHOTOGRAPH

This collection offers a set of stylistically diverse and non-reductive pieces to offer counter-narratives, recasting how migration can be seen and thought. These counter-narratives flourish in a minoritarian fashion, from the ground up, and often include practices of documentation by migrants themselves, shared digitally online through collaboration with artists, activists, and scholars. The polyvalent nature of representation contests established iconographic conventions of demonization, or reductive sentimentalization of migrants. This ethico-aesthetic paradigm recognizes an ethical imperative to contest exclusionary visual discursive constructions that seek to build on the commonality of experience. Our aim is to shift the structure of meaning: by grounding images in the social contexts of embodied stories and experiences through a principled politics of witnessing (Cambre 2019), we disempower reductive and misleading visual discourses by focusing on the look as a medium (Lehmuskallio 2019). Because we take the assumed correlation between seeing and knowing seriously, a correlation that suggests that our ways of seeing are tightly interrelated with our ways of knowing (Mitchell 2013), we have positioned the authors in this issue in ways that refract and pivot around this idea to highlight the cracks and fissures that undo this tenuous link. By diversifying the ways in which migration may be “shown” and “seen,” this issue highlights the roles that images have in suggesting how to see.

IMAGES OF MIGRATION

Photography has long been concerned with processes of human movement. With Europe’s ongoing so-called refugee “crisis,” some photographs became the subject of intense, repeated analysis. One example was the striking 2015 photograph of Alan Kurdi, a young Syrian boy who drowned along with family

members and others in a devastating migration journey and was photographed dead on a beach in Turkey. Cultural and discursive systems through which graphic images and gestures are framed and filtered (Cambre 2019) call for a critical eye. In particular, the social *work* images do when they participate in these systems influence both how the images/gestures come to construct meaning and how such meanings accrue importance and stick to an image. Many analyses, often through semiotic approaches, or for illustrative or documentary purposes, overlook the photograph's active role in the production of human knowledge and its *use* in constituting a shared reality itself. We ask what it would mean to engage differently in seeing; to engage in ways that “consider the simultaneous material and social nature of both invisible and visible presentation” (140). Indeed, photography and migration have a long, complex relationship, but a relationship which has been under-theorized in favour of the specific analysis of individual photographs or cases. Today, the hopes, fears, and dreams of migrants are, ubiquitously, transformed into photographic images, which themselves reflect, reassemble, and reconstitute the migrant experience itself.

Many scholars have stressed the crucial importance of research that centres visual images for the purposes of witnessing and intervening in the public imaginary (Sliwinski 2011; Sontag 2003; Zelizer 2010; Campbell 2007; Cambre 2019; Nikielska-Sekula and Desille 2021). Some show the limited effectiveness of providing photographic testimony of distant suffering (Moeller 1999; Sontag 1978), as well as the invisibilities that can be created (Campbell 2004, Grønstad and Øyvind 2019), and the limits of representation when it comes to human suffering (Didi-Huberman 2012), its instrumentalization (Keenan 2004), or aestheticization (Baudrillard 2006). Following sociologist Fuyuki Kurasawa (2011, 2015), in attending to how material and/or symbolic value can accrue or dissipate through ways in which “mediated representations [are] inserted into public discourses and given meaning via interpretive practices” (5, 2015), we situate these essays with an awareness of their participation in a visual ecology that draws on technical, institutional, and social infrastructures to organize the “socio-visual field” (2015). The images that migration it-

self evokes contribute to the formation of communities of interpretation that can be mobilized in different ways to enable *other* ways of seeing migrants, movements, and the ways in which images and information themselves travel, shift, or mutate and produce logics of legitimization or delegitimization. We consider an image not just a photograph taken, nor a camera just a photographic device; rather we complicate the situation by understanding them as fluid and discursively constructed in various ways: cameras are sites of decision making, and particular images a means to facilitate specific decisions instead of others (cf. Lehmuskallio 2020). Both of them play a part in how we perceive, relate to, and make decisions on matters of migration and movement.

MIGRATING IMAGES

When considering images of migration, besides reflecting upon the roles that humans on the move have for our understanding of the present condition, we also need to reflect on the ways in which images are made to move, flow, flood, and migrate, and how these and similar metaphors themselves are used not only regarding migration, but also for thinking about images and human beings (Henning 2018).

Increasingly since the 1980s and 1990s, the manifold ways in which images move have gained dedicated attention. Arjun Appadurai's (1996) work on the cultural dimensions of globalization gave the image centre stage in conceptualizing modernity at large, especially with regard to ways in which images and the imaginary play key roles in forming imagination as a social practice. Diasporic communities, living far apart from their country of origin, could continue to share cultural points of reference with their friends and relatives by following the same newspapers and television shows from afar, for example by subscribing to cable television and buying internationally sold newspaper prints. Since the 2000s, with increasing digitization of both the news as well as the entertainment industry, access to local media content has become easier, such that today migration from one part of the world to another does not necessarily

mean a cut in the media one consumes. The mediated images one has learned to rely on continue to be accessible, although they usually need to be complemented with other forms of mediated information that are used to help navigate the everyday within the diaspora. Media anthropological work (e.g. Ginsburg et al. 2002; Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005) clearly shows the importance of spatiotemporally connected, accessible media content to people living in very different kinds of circumstances.

The role of the image in this constellation is more complex than might initially seem to be the case, as images play different kinds of roles for different kinds of audiences and citizens. A key notion of the image is that it is seen with what W.J.T. Mitchell calls a paradoxical trick of consciousness, “an ability to see something as ‘there’ and ‘not there’ at the same time” (1986, 17). We have learned to see images in a particular way, so that we understand that we are facing an image, and that this image needs to be apprehended in specific ways in order to be understood. The dialectic between “there” and “not there” is in itself based on our ability to move our attention between what is depicted and how it is shown. Images, from this perspective, need to be apprehended through the movement of our capabilities for attention, too.

This paradoxical trick of consciousness most likely does not rely on a simple mechanistic switch of attention, but importantly, the ways in which we attend to particular kinds of images plays a role in what we actually get to see. Photographs, famously, allow us to meander on the visual surface of a print, to pay attention to the aspects of the image that we find particularly fascinating or disturbing. We move our eyes in order to direct our foveal gaze on the surface of a print, so that we actually may attend to an image that emerges in our interactions with the depicted surface. Depending on our motivations, interests, and the context of seeing, we may see different images from each other, even though looking at the same print.

Highlighting the importance of the role of movement in attending to images provides us, in the context of discussing images of migration, with the possibility of seeing and attending to them differently.

Scopic variation is not only a matter of having a wider or different set of pictures available, but also a question of how we pay attention to images—that is, how we see. For cultivating particular modes of seeing, Tim Ingold has underscored the importance of the point and the edge for optical visibility, maintaining that “we have inherited from Greek Antiquity the comparison of the act of looking to the bowman’s shooting an arrow towards its target; and from Renaissance theorists of perspective the notion of the line of sight as a taut thread that cuts orthogonally through the plane of projection” (2017, 101). In short, a prevalent model for optical vision is based on the idea of vision as a cut, which is less interested in surface characteristics of the picture plane, than in the ability to produce forms of vision that can be formalized, mechanized, and automated. Ingold’s notion of optical vision describes the widely applied concept of immutable mobiles, which interestingly enough was developed based on studies of images, visual technologies, and visual cultures (Latour 1986). Bruno Latour specifically takes up perspectival projection and the Dutch “distance point” method for drawing pictures in order to explain how optical consistency can be maintained across a range of drawn images created in a variety of situations. These kinds of images, working as immutable mobiles, provide an answer to the problem of mobilization by allowing one to carry inscriptions of that which is absent, while doing so in a way that maintains a two-way relation between those doing the inscriptions (e.g. draftsmen, painters, and later photographers) and that what is inscribed (parchment, paper, film). Ingold’s optical visibility and Latour’s immutable mobile thus refer to a specific “paradoxical trick of consciousness,” for which that which is seen is flattened out, provided with a scale that can be changed at will, and can be reproduced and spread at little cost. It is this kind of visibility, and these kinds of images, which have become paradigmatic for today’s visual cultures that rely ever more on the ability to circulate images. These kinds of images are increasingly set in motion by prescribed cultural techniques (e.g. perspectival projection and the Dutch “distance point” method for drawing pictures); iconographic conventions; as well as by machines, be it a camera device, a social media platform, or an automated facial

recognition booth at a gas station. Importantly, these kinds of images are the ones which most easily become stereotypes, not least because they need to fit particular kinds of technical instruments and technological infrastructures.

While Latour is fascinated by the work that immutable mobiles, based on optical visibility, are able to accomplish—consider the centralization of resources, the accumulation of wealth, the production of value—Tim Ingold argues for *haptic vision* as a counterpoint to the flattening prevalent in this rendering of optical vision. The main fallacy that theories based on optical vision fall into, is to disregard the importance of surfaces for our understanding of the world. As Ingold succinctly puts it: “What if surfaces are the real sites for the generation of meaning?” (2017, 100). By seeking intensively for deeper layers beneath surface appearances, we tend to disregard and destroy precisely the complexities that lie before us.

Haptic vision, in this understanding, stays with surfaces, dwelling with them, seeking out texture and composition of that which is apprehended. It follows folds and creases as characteristics of surfaces, without projecting a straight line between two points on the surface, and hence focuses attention on how the texture of a surface unfolds, allowing one to make inferences about the composition of that which is apprehended. If optical vision focuses on a face in order to detect marker points that are used to model the specifics of a face, for example for purposes of facial recognition in border control, haptic vision stays with the surface of the skin, being interested in the materiality, plasticity, and specificity of the face itself. When considering migrating images, this shift in perception from the optical to the haptic is a shift in movement, too. Immutable mobiles, based on optical vision, are created with the purpose of collecting, centralizing, and standardizing practices of collection, archiving, and analysis. As Latour has expressed, immutable mobiles are created in order to master the problem of mobilization, but we suggest that they are never fully successful in doing so. While experiences are gathered during movement, immutable mobiles seek to stop and freeze this movement in order to contain it and scale this containment across space and time (be it for the purposes of colonial explorers, ethnographers,

botanists, or technically automated sensor networks forming “smart cities” or border control systems). In contrast, haptic vision is interested in a different form of movement; it “seeks not to freeze the surface corrugations in some momentary form, so that they may be modelled [...] but to join with the currents and with the wind. It is to feel the waves, the ripples and the swish of the field as *movements*.” (Ingold 2017, 103, original emphasis).

These kinds of movements that become of interest for haptic vision mark surfaces over time; they affect how surfaces become. Faces and hands, exposed during a lifetime to their immediate environments, show wear and tear; in some cases due to exposure to wind and weather, ropes and ploughs; in others due to their constant exposure to paper, pens, or digital screens. The movement of our bodies within specific environments impacts surface characteristics, and in doing so the ways in which we attach to the world. Haptic vision, thus, in its interest in movement along and within surfaces, is kin to other movements that surfaces are prone to experience: the wiping of the face, the washing of hands, the bruising of the body; but also forms of caressing and beholding or stopping and pushing.

The visualities that these two modes of vision, optical and haptic, advance are of different kinds. Optical vision, in its focus on reflections, appearances, and a quest for truth beyond the surface, is interested in imagery that can be modelled, reproduced, and distributed via the marvels of our technological systems, whereas haptic vision calls for a kind of movement that stays with the surfaces it encounters, without advancing quickly beyond them. Both forms may overlap and exist together, but what we would like to point at with this distinction is a need to pay attention to particular ways in which specific pictures are made, as well as to the ways in which we attend to them, depending on our specific motivations and tasks at hand.

For considering migrating images, it is helpful to bear these modes of encounter in mind, when considering how we might envision and develop modes and metaphors of migration which are not stereotypical, dismissive, or belittling. For example, the “flood” of migrants, their constant “flow” are problematic metaphors that make us think

about the movement of people across borders along notions of optical visibility, advocating stereotypical, easily reproducible and circulatable images. In contrast, a focus on specific encounters and the complexities inherent in these, the attention to wear and tear of the bodies involved, opens up other kinds of images and imageries that allow different kinds of encounters to emerge.

If imagination indeed is a social practice, images are central in directing social imaginaries. When considering images in and of migration, we need to pay attention not only to what is represented, but how, and with which modes of attention it is apprehended. A focus on edges, lines, and points generates other kinds of images than does a dwelling on creases, folds, and hollows. It is these tensions which the papers in this issue address from their respective perspectives.

THE PAPERS IN THIS ISSUE

We begin with reflections by Reuben Ross on his interview with Swiss photographer Jean Mohr, who is well known for his long career documenting the plight of the displaced and dispossessed and as a long-time collaborator with John Berger. With Berger, he published *A Fortunate Man* and *A Seventh Man*, exploring migrant labour in 1970s Europe. Later, with Edward Said, he published *After the Last Sky*, which melded text and image to create a narrative about Palestinian life. In conversation with Mohr, Ross takes readers on a journey through the development of Mohr's unique approach to photography and the construction of visual narratives. In particular, he offers insights for visual researchers, particularly those engaged in studying processes of migration or zones of conflict, ways of constructing more effective, more engaged, and more experiential accounts of complex social realities, noteworthy for their creative experimentation with the construction of visual narratives.

Next, Birgit Mersmann takes a close look at specific photodocumentaries to demonstrate how photo portraits represent a central genre therein, strongly coupled with the photobook format. Mersmann notes how humanistic and humanitarian photography has often fo-

cused on the portrait, and takes a deep look at how these already established conventions inform documentary images dealing with human migration. This paper explores two major ways portraits appear interwoven in photobooks, and in particular those produced by Fazal Sheikh through long-term engagement and “slow storytelling.” This analysis helps Mersmann address the questions of how real-life migration experiences as survival stories and personal biographies become inscribed in the portraits of refugees and migrants, and which practices and form(at)s of portraits are chosen to document migrant lives.

Moving more intimately towards the migrant experience, Yolanda Hernandez and Adriana Ciccaglione stage an encounter between two researchers in the form of a reflexive case study to examine the possibilities of using photovoice as a form of resistance against narratives of hate through a feminist theoretical frame. They ask how researchers seeing and being seen is implicated in the construction of knowledge, and how it is legitimized: does it succeed in promoting visibility and social transformation? Hernandez and Ciccaglione explore the potentials offered for visual activism by springboarding from Diane Arbus’ unique photography and a photovoice project on being a migrant woman in Spain. The authors find images enable doing work at the margins, from the margins, and for the margins in order to create alternative spaces that nourish the development of different subjectivities and understandings of the self and society.

In a visual essay, Liz Hingley’s research shows how mobile devices mediating her work with migrants arriving in Coventry, United Kingdom can contribute to redefining narratives around migration in galleries and museums. The text, separately followed by images as a standalone gallery, draws on digital migration studies to examine processes and contexts of the significance of SIM cards in forging a sense of security, identity, and belonging, and explores how they act as digital passports for individuals. Telling the story through the words and photographs of these Syrian refugees is refracted through their reception of miniature SIM sculptures, intricately inscribed with their own words and messages, and then exhibited and later transformed into pendants for participants. These usually hid-

den mobile phone components take on the status of contemporary cultural artifacts and highlight the resettlement experiences of recently arrived refugees, and their aspirations for the future. Hingley works to “open up” the smart phone to reveal the urgent need for deeper appreciation of the meaning and materiality of personal digital ecosystems (Blanke and Pybus 2020) for refugees negotiating a sense of home.

Next, Patricia Prieto-Blanco takes a triple-layered approach with eleven Irish-Spanish families through observation of photographic practices using different styles of photo-elicitation and narrative interviews, semi-structured interviews, and three follow-up interviews. Participants in this in-depth process were able to co-produce interpretations of their own using abstract symbolic representational techniques to generate insights into their perceptions of how their own images move and migrate across media, platforms, and contexts that thicken their affective weight. Their stories are presented with attention to how knowledge is developed and shared around photographs, which in turn become carriers with performative potential.

Angel Iglesias Ortiz presents a pictorial journey reflecting on the borderscape of the Mexico-United States border marked by the dividing wall/fence. In this piece, Iglesias Ortiz works on multiple levels to unpack the static-fluid binary set up by ideas of border walls and their material and metaphorical affordances. The visualization of the fence is used to guide personal reflections of the everyday and the politics of exclusion and inclusion. It thus provides the author’s perspective as someone who follows the lines of the wall and allows them to provoke some divergent lines of thinking, seeing, and responding using the ethnographic descriptions afforded by the images taken on the move, perhaps fleeting or furtive, in a landscape devoid of human subjects that nevertheless reveals their presence.

Critiquing the traditional and established practices of photojournalism writ large, Maria Nilsson’s “Spaces of Empathy: Visual Strategies in Photojournalistic Imagery of Migration” explores a Swedish case of images of migration and the shifts and movements that happened representationally as the nation’s immigration policy became

stricter. By taking different positions around a particular photograph being analyzed in one case and a set of photographs of one family over a span of four years as a narrative of lived experiences of forced migration, Nilsson argues for a broader, more interdisciplinary sensitivity in photojournalism that opens the field to a more explicit acknowledgement of the ethics of witnessing, and by extension an empathetic lens that expands rather than constricts viewers' understandings of the human experiences of forced migration.

Shirley Van der Maarel's visual essay presents an alternative way of representing refugees' experiences in rapidly depopulating areas of rural Italy through a cartographic visual narrative. To represent how migrants arriving in Italy live in an alternate geography that doesn't map onto the world of Italian nationals at home, Van der Maarel creates a visual essay that works as tour guide for the reader into a heterotopia. Drawing on phenomenological metaphors and images, she evokes and mediates connections that refuse to impose structures on experience and endeavor to remain open-ended conversation. Her process entails a triple movement that begins with creating the guide collaboratively during ethnographic fieldwork. Using images, sound, film, and text, this hyperlinked visual essay maps a world-in-movement that makes readers also move, back and forth between sites, pages, image, and text. Here images travel across borders—not the geographical ones between countries, but the invisible ones between people.

This special issue explores the politics and poetics of photography as historically and fundamentally intertwined with the experience of migration by contesting simplistic, stereotypical accounts of the migrant, often produced with means of optical vision. Like the migrant, photographs travel, move, and multiply; divorce from context; and inhabit a shifting mobile space as they oscillate between the limelight and liminality. Using diverse and context-specific means, the following papers explore the conceptual and phenomenological relationship between the photograph and the migrant experience, and the migrant nature of photographs themselves, not just in and out of context but as moving through diverse and ephemeral media. As such, this collection, through the thematic of migration, joins togeth-

er papers that would otherwise be scattered across disciplines and publications adhering to specific forms for presenting research in line with traditions associated with the arts or social sciences. Instead, disciplinary boundaries are crossed and innovating forms of representation used in order to transgress limits of what to say and how to express it. Similar to the notion of haptic vision, here specific approaches are not ironed out in order to fit a specific technical mould, but are allowed to retain surface characteristics in the hope that these open up avenues for novel kinds of interrelations. We believe this is a generative approach for critical insights into the specific cases being explored, as well as to the broader topic of migration and photography, too. We hope the reader will be able to move across these papers and through them as if they were a sort of palimpsest in the spirit of Walter Benjamin's Arcades project. Benjamin as flâneur strolling through the city helps him engage a kind of montage between seeing and thinking. This dimensional seeing, a kind of phenomenological "layered now-being" whereby "the commonplace aspect of the commonplace is penetrated and dispelled" is what we hope this collection will create openings for, so that readers can sense "a kind of fluid, 'running' palimpsest, a sustained and even kaleidoscopic dissolve" (Eiland 2016). We hope to provide avenues for readings that can garner insights through and between the layers of these pieces in open and non-reductive ways. The images, created both with text and optical media, hopefully resonate haptically, too, allowing us to oscillate between optic and haptic visuality, and hence to consider novel forms of becoming.

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THE PHOTOGRAPHER PHOTOGRAPHED: A CONVERSATION

WITH JEAN MOHR

REUBEN CONNOLLY ROSS

The Swiss photographer Jean Mohr, who died in November 2018 at the age of 93, is well known for his long career documenting the plight of the displaced and dispossessed. Especially noteworthy are his collaborations with major intellectual figures, through which he experimented with the construction of visual narratives. His celebrated books with John Berger include *A Fortunate Man*, an intimate portrait of an English country doctor, and *A Seventh Man*, a meditation on migrant labour in 1970s Europe; with Edward Said, he published *After the Last Sky*, a reflection on Palestinian life through the fusion of text and photography. Partially based on a short interview conducted with Mohr in early 2018, this paper reflects on his life and work, taking the reader on a journey mediated by our conversation. In particular, I explore the development of his unique approach to photography and the ex-

Le photographe suisse Jean Mohr, décédé en novembre 2018 à l'âge de 93 ans, est connu pour sa longue carrière de documentation du sort des personnes déplacées et dépossédées. Ses collaborations avec de grandes figures intellectuelles, à travers lesquelles il a expérimenté la construction de récits visuels, sont particulièrement remarquables. Ses livres célèbres avec John Berger comprennent *A Fortunate Man*, un portrait intime d'un médecin de campagne anglais, et *A Seventh Man*, une méditation sur le travail des migrants dans l'Europe des années 1970 ; avec Edward Said, il a publié *After the Last Sky*, une réflexion sur la vie palestinienne à travers la fusion du texte et de la photographie. Partiellement basé sur un court entretien réalisé avec Mohr au début de 2018, cet article réfléchit à sa vie et à son œuvre, entraînant le lecteur dans un voyage médiatisé par notre conversation. J'explore en particulier le développement de son approche unique de la photographie et la construction ex-

perimental construction of visual narratives. In so doing, I argue that Mohr's work offers social scientists, particularly those engaged in studying processes of migration or zones of conflict, ways of constructing more effective, more engaged, and more experiential accounts of complex social realities.

périmentale de récits visuels. Ce faisant, je soutiens que le travail de Mohr offre aux spécialistes des sciences sociales, en particulier ceux qui sont engagés dans l'étude des processus de migration ou des zones de conflit, des moyens de construire des comptes rendus plus efficaces, plus engagés et plus expérimentiels de réalités sociales complexes.



Figure 1: "Hebron. Portrait of Jean Mohr, delegate of ICRC." (Copyright Jacques Cuenod / ICRC 1949)

The Swiss photographer Jean Mohr, who died in November 2018 at the age of 93, is well known for his long career documenting the plight of the displaced and dispossessed. But his collaborations with major intellectual figures are especially noteworthy for their creative experimentation with the construction of visual narratives, offering more effective, more engaged, and more experiential accounts of complex social realities. For social scientists, then, there is much to learn by examining Mohr's life and work in greater detail, particularly for those studying processes of migration or zones of conflict. So, in the summer of 2018, I arranged a short trip to Switzerland to meet with him. On a sunny afternoon, I found myself walking up a leafy road—not far from the shores of Lake Geneva—leading toward Mohr's house. I rang the doorbell, waiting apprehensively, and a young woman opened the door. "Bonjour," she smiled. "Monsieur Mohr," I said, "is he here?" The woman directed me around the side of the house, where I entered a small glass conservatory. In the corner, Mohr was sitting quietly in an armchair; he was visibly tired, though his demeanour was gentle and polite, and he appeared pleased to meet me. I sat down opposite him, took out my notebook, and set my dictaphone to record, as we began a sweeping conversation that would touch upon numerous aspects of Mohr's life and work.

I began by asking Mohr why photographers, including himself, so often seemed attracted to the topic of migration. He took some time to answer. "Well, because it's something very special in the last century," he replied. Indeed, though migration has been a central feature of the social life and political economy of Western Europe for possibly hundreds of years (Moch 1995; Castles et al. 2014), its scale has greatly intensified in the last few decades; as Stephen Castles stresses, "international migration has never been as pervasive, or as socioeconomically and politically significant, as it is today" (2014, 317). And, especially since the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, the experience of migration has also been the subject of intense visual scrutiny. When I asked Mohr how he perceived changes in patterns of migration during his lifetime, I sensed a despairing tone in his voice. "It seems that it becomes more and more

hard to be accepted, to find work, and to find a place to live in the last 10 or 20 years,” he tells me. Perhaps the responsibility of photographers to engage with issues of migration, then, has only increased.

For Mohr, the topic of migration, along with related problems of acceptance and belonging, is also very personal. Born as Hans-Adolf in Geneva in 1925, he was the third of six children to Elisabeth Lempp and Wolfgang Mohr, both of German nationality. In 1936, as the National Socialist regime was quickly consolidating power in neighbouring Germany, the entire Mohr family applied for Swiss naturalization; in 1939, Mohr became a Swiss citizen and had his name changed to the less conspicuous Jean. And yet, because of his German heritage, he had been forced to endure fierce discrimination throughout his childhood. “At school, I was very often called ‘dirty German,’ amongst other pupils,” he remembers. “To go from my house... to the school, I had very often to change, every day, a new way to go to school and to come back, to avoid this treatment.” Perhaps this helped him to develop a sensitivity to injustice that would later inform his photography? “Yes, probably,” Mohr mused.

In his mid-twenties, he became a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Initially, Mohr was sent to the Middle East as part of a team acting on behalf of Palestinian refugees; traveling to Beirut, as well as Jericho and Hebron, he took an East German Exakta camera with him so he could take pictures for his father back home. “When my mission in Palestine ended, I returned to Geneva,” he explained, “then I chose to go to Paris and study fine arts.” Having previously studied economics at the University of Geneva, Mohr enrolled in classes at the Académie Julian, a private art school well known for its illustrious alumni, in 1951. Around this time, Mohr was admittedly more interested in painting, recounting even a slight disdain for photography; taking a picture with the mere press of a button and the wind of a lever, he felt, seemed far too easy. It was a conundrum that had once troubled the great Man Ray, writing: “I photograph what I do not wish to paint, and I paint what I cannot photograph” (qtd. in Berger 2013). But photography would eventually win Mohr over, and he returned to Geneva the following year, where he began work as a freelance photojournalist.



Figure 2: "On the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Car of the International Committee of the Red Cross." (Copyright Jean Mohr / ICRC 1950)

He started working for various branches of the United Nations (UN)—the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO), and the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—documenting their international programs in far-flung countries. The WHO, in particular, had long recognized the importance of photography in publicizing their various projects and engaging with wider audiences; when it launched its glossy *World Health* magazine in 1959, Joan Bush, a former employee of the Magnum photography collective, was hired as its head photo editor. Yet, Mohr recalls feeling uncomfortable about his work for such organizations: “[H]ere I was, a white photographer,” he says, “sent by the headquarters to any place in Asia or Africa and there was something paternalistic about the whole thing” (1978, 2). Indeed, the history of so-called humanitarian photography, and its strange preoccupation with “the pain of others” (Sontag 2003), is fraught with such ethical problems. “It focuses viewer attention on suffering, framing it as unjust yet

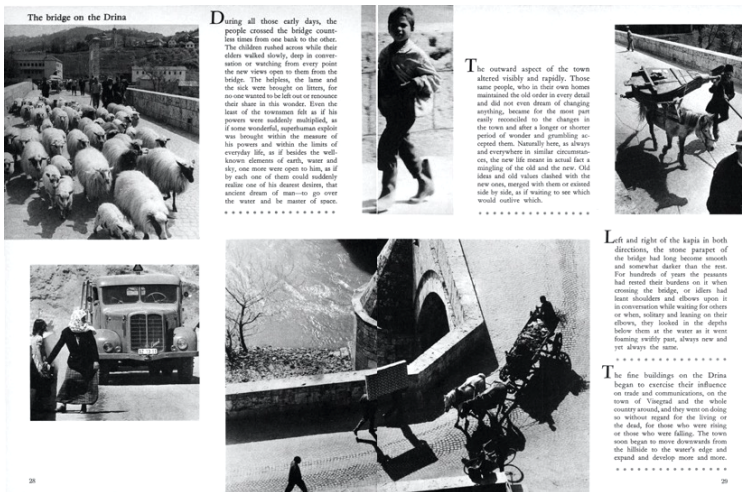


Figure 3: "The bridge on the Drina" in World Health (December 1962, 28-29)
(Copyright Jean Mohr / WHO 1962)

amenable to remedy,” note Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno. Yet, even more problematically, it also “erases distracting political or social detail that would complicate the duty to act” (2015, 6). Nevertheless, in those early humanitarian projects, Mohr was already experimenting with the juxtaposition of text and photography—a decidedly radical style that would come to define his later work.

In 1962 the path of Mohr’s career changed drastically when he was introduced to John Berger. Having recently moved to Geneva with his wife, a translator for the UN, Berger had established a reputation in the United Kingdom as an outspoken art critic. A committed Marxist and prolific writer, he had already “stormed the British establishment through the sheer force of his intellect and personality” (Sperling 2018, 46); now, he was in search of a collaborator for a new book project. Having asked his friend, filmmaker Alain Tanner, if he knew any photographers, Berger was put in touch with Mohr. They agreed to meet, marking the start of a friendship and creative collaboration that would last over 50 years, the nature of which the pair

would frequently examine. “How should a photographer and writer collaborate?” Berger once pondered. “What are the possible relations between images and text? How can we approach the reader together?” As just one possible answer to such questions, Kelly Klingensmith suggests that “Berger and Mohr’s collaborative works each attempt to convey experience, specifically that of the underprivileged, and through a variety of experimental means.” Their central aim, she suggests, is “to adopt such experience into historical and narrative continuity” (2016, 169).

Their first major collaboration began in the summer of 1966, when Mohr and Berger spent six weeks following the life of John Sassall, a country doctor in Gloucestershire, England. While Berger concentrated on writing a poetic account of Sassall’s life and work, Mohr took vivid photographs of his most intimate moments with patients; engrossed in their respective methods of observation, the pair rarely even spoke to one another. Remarkably, upon reviewing their material back in Geneva, they discovered that each had independently tried to produce the book in his own medium. “We found we’d replicated one another’s work entirely,” recalls Berger. “That’s not what we wanted at all, so we reworked it so that the words and pictures were like a conversation; building on, rather than mirroring, one another” (qtd. in Francis 2016). With the help of graphic designer Gerald Cinnamon, their work was carefully woven together into a single, creative totality. The result was *A Fortunate Man* (1967), a book described as having “pioneered the fusion of text and images in photodocumentary” (Francis 2016, 62).

The pair had undoubtedly taken inspiration from *Country Doctor*, an influential photo essay by American photojournalist W. Eugene Smith. In the summer of 1948, Smith had spent several weeks following the life of Ernest Guy Ceriani, a doctor in rural Colorado; just like Mohr and Berger, he creatively combined text and photography to tell his story. But Mohr and Berger took Smith’s model further, offering a radically new kind of “visual narrative,” one that combined text and photography in a way Berger later described as “simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic” (2013, 56). Since its publication, the book has had an unexpected im-

pact, particularly in the medical community; it has been praised as “the most important book about general practice ever written” (Feder 2005) and is now considered mandatory reading for trainee doctors across the United Kingdom. “I believe it is a classic,” writes Denis Pereira Gray of its enduring pedagogical value, “with a timeless quality which will allow it to help successive generations of general practitioners” (1982, 505).

Back in Geneva, my conversation with Mohr turned once again to the topic of migration. In 1973, Mohr and Berger started work on a new project, this time about migrant labour in Europe. After the Second World War, many European countries had sought to attract foreign guest workers to fuel their recovering economies. By the mid-1970s, over 8 million migrants resided in northwestern Europe alone; one in seven manual workers in the United Kingdom and one in four industrial workers in Belgium, France, and Switzerland were then of foreign origin (Moch 2003, 177). Those *gastarbeiters*, as they were known in Germany, were initially expected to return to their home countries and were granted few legal rights, compounding their already marginalized socioeconomic status (Boyle et. al. 1998). The book Mohr and Berger produced, *A Seventh Man* (1975), again combined text and photography to document the migrant experience and examine its material circumstances. It was, as Berger writes, “a little book of life stories, a sequence of lived moments,” allowing us to “grasp more surely the political reality of the world” (2010, 8).

I asked Mohr how he had approached the project. “I felt it was very important to say exactly where the migrant worker was coming from, how they crossed the borders and then tried to find the proper way to be accepted and to work,” he explained. Was he involved in composing the text that accompanied his photos? “No, I didn’t feel that I was able to really write about these people,” he replied, “especially because John was a real writer and I just wrote captions. But I felt that I could feel what they were feeling.” That capacity for empathy, his ability to develop such seemingly intimate and meaningful, however fleeting, relationships with his subjects, palpably comes across in many of Mohr’s photographs; as Geoff Dyer suggests, “it is as if the photographs are not taken by Mohr but given by his sub-

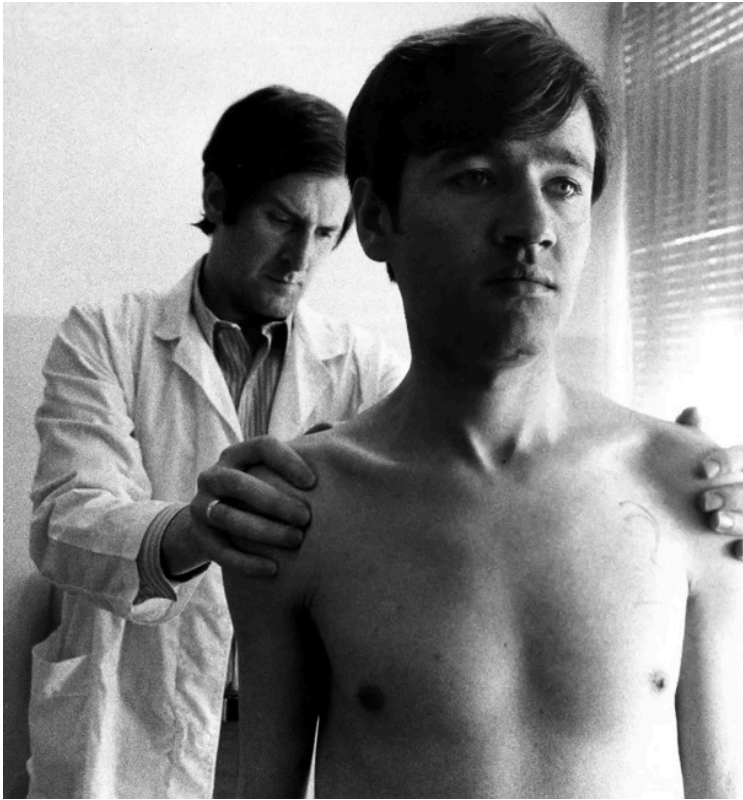


Figure 4: "As of 1972, nearly half a million Turkish workers are employed in the Federal Republic of Germany, most of them in industry. The candidates have to be in perfect physical condition. Here, an examination of the back and the spinal column."

(Copyright Jean Mohr / ILO 1972)

jects" (1986, 117). So, I was surprised to learn that, most of the time, Mohr and the people he photographed did not even share a common language. I asked if he felt this limited his interaction with them. "Probably my attitude was more important," he clarified. "They understood that I was quite sensitive to their situation, so they could trust me."



A friend came to see me in a dream. From far away.
And I asked in the dream: 'Did you come by photograph or train?'
All photographs are a form of transport and an expression of
absence.

17

Figure 5: A Seventh Man (1975, 17)

Initially, the pair had intended to make a film. But, due to insufficient funding, they instead settled on producing this “book of moments,” arranging fragments of Berger’s text and Mohr’s photography into

three carefully composed chapters that, in many ways, resembled film sequences. Unlike a film, however, the viewer is not constrained by the linear passage of time. “The reader is free to make his own way through these images,” Berger tells us, a practice much like recalling a memory, triggering a succession of others, irrespective of hierarchy, chronology, or duration (2013, 101). As Howard Becker explains, “by selecting the connections to be made from the very many that could be made between the images in any sequence of richly detailed photographs, the viewer constructs the meanings that form the experience of the work” (2002, 5). Thus, the narrative is assembled in the mind of each reader, linking the past with the present, objective reality with subjective experience, one physical space with another, and the book can now acquire a new “living context” of its own. In so doing, *A Seventh Man* powerfully demonstrates how visual narratives may help in not only documenting the migrant experience but actually reconstituting it across spatial and temporal boundaries—a form of “migratory aesthetics,” perhaps, serving as “both product and critique of a migratory world” (Durrant and Lord 2007, 13).



The migrant takes with him his own resolution, the food prepared in his home, which he will eat during the next two or three days, his own pride, the photographs in his pocket, his packages, his suitcase.



Yet his migration is like an event in a dream dreamt by another. As a figure in a dream dreamt by an unknown sleeper, he appears to act autonomously, at times unexpectedly; but everything he does – unless he revolts – is determined by the needs of the dreamer's mind. Abandon the metaphor. The migrant's intentionality is permeated by historical necessities of which neither he nor anybody he meets is aware. That is why it is as if his life were being dreamt by another.

Figure 6: *A Seventh Man* (1975, 46-47)

Following *A Seventh Man*, Mohr and Berger sought to explore the storytelling potential of photography in closer detail. Their next book, *Another Way of Telling* (1989), is a collection of stories, reflections, and photographs, loosely organised around the subject of mountain peasants in rural France. But it is also a complex and theoretically sophisticated book about photography itself. “Everyone in the world is now familiar with photographs and cameras,” write Mohr and Berger. “And yet, what is a photograph? What do photographs mean? How can they be used?” In attempting to answer such questions, the pair tackle a number of notoriously tricky issues in photographic theory: among them, the ambiguity of photographs, their relationship to the past, and their ability to disclose, or obscure, some notion of “truth.” In one notable passage, Mohr even contemplates the reasons why a photographer might choose not to take a picture at all: fear, perhaps, or ethical hesitation? Sometimes, he writes, it is so that the experience can be “indelibly printed, not on film, but in my memory” (1989, 79).

In his discussion of the book, Edward Said reflects upon its theoretical, as well as political, significance. Much like *A Seventh Man*, he argues, *Another Way of Telling* is a brilliant experiment in form, an attempt at pushing the creative boundaries of what combinations of text and photography can do. But in it, he also detects an implicit, if not yet fully formed, argument for an altogether new type of visual narrative. “At the heart of the book is, I think, an argument against linear sequence—that is, sequence construed by Berger as the symbol of dehumanizing political processes,” writes Said (2000, 150). If linear sequence is understood as part of a broader ideological strategy for enforcing particular “ways of seeing” (Berger 1972), then to deliberately subvert it is, no doubt, an overtly political act. As such, through the construction of such “counternarratives,” or those that directly oppose or subvert conventional, hegemonic ways of understanding the world, Mohr and Berger demanded revolutionary change, the potential consequences of which went far beyond the pages of their book. “Berger calls this an alternative use of photography,” writes Said, “using photomontage to tell other stories than

the official sequential or ideological ones produced by institutions of power” (2000, 146).

Impressed by Mohr’s work, Said decided to get in touch. In 1983, while serving as a consultant to the UN for its International Conference on the Question of Palestine, he recommended that photographs by Mohr be hung in the entrance hall of the Palais des Nations, where the conference was held in Geneva. His proposal was approved, and Mohr soon left on a special UN-sponsored mission to the Palestinian territories. For Mohr, this was the continuation of a lifelong concern with the plight of the Palestinian people; he had first visited Palestine on assignment for the ICRC in 1949, just a year after Israel’s proclamation of independence. In the immediate aftermath, an estimated 700,000 Palestinians had been forcibly expelled from their homes; today, the UN records over five million Palestinian refugees spread across the Middle East region alone. As Mohr surely recognised, the history of Israeli-Palestinian relations is deeply entangled with the politics of vision and visibility. The “oppressive relationship between the Israeli occupiers and the Palestinian occupied,” Gil Hochberg writes, “is articulated through and manifested in [the] uneven distribution of ‘visual rights’” (2015, 3). So, as a photographer, Mohr had an important role to play.

But, upon completing his trip to Palestine, the UN’s response was unexpected. Oddly, Mohr was forbidden to attach any words to his photographs, with the exception of a name or the place represented. This peculiar constraint, perhaps meant to limit the impact of the photos by preserving their ambiguity, was particularly ironic for Mohr. It conflicted directly with his enduring interest in exploring, along with collaborators such as Berger or Said, the complex relationship between text and image. “I often feel the need to explain my photos, to tell their story,” wrote Mohr in *Another Way of Telling*. “Only occasionally is an image self-sufficient” (1989, 42). A similar sentiment was expressed by Walter Benjamin, troubled by the fact that the camera could transform even a rubbish heap into an object of aesthetic beauty. He believed words could not only help resolve the problem but would radically transform the social function of the photograph. “What we must demand from the photographer,” wrote Benjamin, “is



Figure 7: "Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967. Ramallah, Kalandia. A few days after the Six-Day War, an Israeli officer considers an ICRC proposal, under the gaze of a Palestinian boy." (Copyright Jean Mohr / ICRC 1967)

the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary

use value” (2003, 95). While Mohr certainly recognized this dilemma, he nevertheless agreed to the UN’s arcane terms, and the photographs were exhibited with minimal written explanation.

Despite this hurdle, Mohr’s photographs were a success, and Said found them deeply moving. “Many Palestinian friends who saw Jean Mohr’s pictures thought that he saw us as no one else has,” he wrote. “But we also felt that he saw us as we would have seen ourselves—at once inside and outside our world” (1999, 6). Indeed, Mohr’s photographs seemed to acknowledge, or even underscore, the tensions between insider and outsider, fiction and reality, photographer and subject; a kind of “double vision,” as Said succinctly put it, that suitably reflected the Palestinian experience of exile and estrangement. “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two,” he wrote, “and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*” (2000, 186). In a similar way, writes Krista Kauffmann, Mohr’s photographs embody a kind of “self-conscious vision that always also critiques its own conditions of viewing” (2012, 94), an attitude that clearly came across as Mohr thoughtfully reflected on his life and work.

The photographs displayed at the Palais des Nations, in addition to Mohr’s work from previous trips to Palestine, would later form the basis for a more sustained collaboration with Said. “The whole history of the Palestinian struggle,” Said was convinced, “has to do with the desire to be visible” (2006, 2). Alternative visions of Palestinian life, he reasoned, were urgently needed; ones that could offer more nuanced and historical understandings of a complex political situation and a misrepresented people. On the so-called “question of Palestine,” Said had described his approach as having been “grounded in a sense of human rights and the contradictions of social experience, couched as much as possible in the language of everyday reality” (1980, xv)—perhaps also a fitting description of Mohr’s work as a photographer. And so, it was no surprise that he initiated a new project with Mohr: an experimental book that, like the Berger collaborations, would combine words and images in a radically new way,

constructing an alternative narrative of Palestinian life. “Let us use photographs and text, we said to each other,” recalled Said, “to say something that hasn’t been said about Palestinians” (1999, 4).

When Said visited Mohr’s home in Geneva, he found an enormous archive of over eight thousand photographs from Palestine dating back to 1949. He spent several weeks carefully making his selection; spreading photographs across the floor, he grouped them into series, then into four thematic groups, and finally arranged them into individual page layouts. It was a remarkably abstract process, recalled Said, comparable to making music. Indeed, as Gerry Badger suggests, “it is useful to think of musical qualities like point and counterpoint, harmony and contrast, exposition and repeat” when assembling photographic sequences, particularly as they “are more abstract in actuality than they might appear, even when the photography is ‘documentary’ in nature” (2014, 18). So, as Said composed his symphony of photography and text, he was guided more by his feelings than by any conventional narrative logic. “What I have quite consciously designed... is an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in works of social science, in popular fiction,” he wrote. “It is a personal rendering of the Palestinians as a dispersed national community—acting, acted upon, proud, tender, miserable, funny, indomitable, ironic, paranoid, defensive, assertive, attractive, compelling” (1999, 6).

Published in 1986, *After the Last Sky* was described by Salman Rushdie as “a very personal text, and a very moving one, about an internal struggle: the anguish of living with displacement, with exile” (1986, 11). As Mohr’s poignant photographs and Said’s lyrical text intermingle across the book’s pages, they reveal the realities of Palestinian life in a way that few have done before. But at the same time, the book offers much more than a simple portrait of the Palestinian people: it demands from the viewer a deeper and more profound engagement with the politics of seeing. “We do more than stand passively in front of whoever, for whatever reason, has wanted to look at us,” writes Said. “We are also looking at our observers” (1999, 166). Like *A Seventh Man*, the book seems to acquire a “living context,” as the viewer becomes an active participant in the construction of the

Palestinian narrative. But here, *After the Last Sky* goes a step further: there is often an uncanny sense that, through the combination of Mohr's photographs and Said's text, the Palestinian people acquire a political agency that holds the viewer themselves accountable. And for that reason, *After the Last Sky* remains, to this day, a powerful reflection on the struggles and contradictions of Palestinian life.

I asked Mohr to tell me more about his other projects in the years since his collaboration with Said. Despite his advancing age and a bout of health problems, he continued working diligently with international organisations, as well as developing new artistic projects closer to home (notably, he spent years photographing the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande). In 1988, he received the prize of the City of Geneva for the visual arts—the first time it was awarded to a photographer—and, more recently, several major exhibitions have offered important retrospectives of Mohr's work. In 2003, *Side by Side or Face to Face*, an exhibition of 70 photographs from Israel and the Palestinian territories, went on show in Geneva and other selected cities—including Jerusalem, Gaza, and Ramallah. And in 2013, to help mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the ICRC and the signing of First Geneva Convention, *War from the Victims' Perspective* went on show in more than 40 cities. Organized into four sections—"Portraits of Exile," "Temporary Landscapes," "The Children's Diaspora," and "Life Goes On"—it chronicled the everyday experience of living through conflict in a presentational style unmistakably reminiscent of Mohr's collaborations with Berger and Said.

Today, Mohr's work may be more pertinent than ever. His photographs of John Sassall, the country doctor whose dedication to his patients was infallible, are now even more poignant, as neoliberal reforms have slowly eroded Britain's National Health Service (NHS). The relevance of *A Seventh Man* has only increased, as over 150 million migrant workers are now employed around the world, and European attitudes toward immigration have turned increasingly xenophobic (Baumgartl and Favell 1995). And, as the "question of Palestine" remains unanswered, Mohr's photographs still offer a powerful critique of the nature of exile and the role images can play in the face of political oppression. Above all, Mohr demonstrated how careful-

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which are all pretty depressing and hopeless. Then there is the fragmented text that attempts a reassuring commentary and a generally optimistic explanation of much that happens; in this other text Halabi seems to be glossing a quite different story from the one he actually narrates. He speaks, for example, of being an Israeli patriot, then admits that he 'never particularly liked Israeli society' for its treatment of him; a moment later he credits Israeli television for breaking down his 'prejudices on that score.'

Ramallah, 1984.



I thought of Halabi when I first saw Jean Mohr's remarkable photograph of an elderly Palestinian villager with a broken lens in his glasses. There is an irrepressible cheerfulness to the photograph as a whole, although the shattered lens still stands out with considerable force. A symbol, I said to myself, of some duality in our life that won't go away – refugees and terrorists, victims and victimizers, and so on. Having said that, however, I was dissatisfied with the concept behind the thought. If you look at the photograph honestly, you don't see anything about the man that suggests either pathos or weakness: He has a strong and gentle face; his smiling expression is obviously genuine (even if there is also a touch of wistfulness in it); and he radiates a welcoming, modestly assertive attitude which is very attractive. The blotch is on the lens, not in him; his other eye seems perfectly serviceable, and even if his vision is a little smudged, he can still see more or less everything there is to be seen.

What the photograph tells us is nothing so simple as a contradiction in the man's attitude to life. He has, after all, agreed to be photographed without either taking the glasses off or having them repaired. He has adjusted, and he seems relatively content

128

Figure 8: After the Last Sky (1999, 128)

ly considered combinations of text and photography could be used to construct sophisticated visual narratives that are at once poetic, socially engaged, and politically arresting. For social scientists, par-

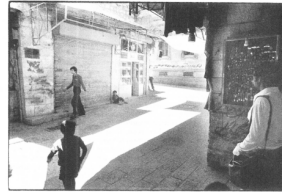
STATES
 Eadie again. The facts of my birth are so distant and strange as to be about someone I've heard of rather than someone I know. Nazareth – my mother's town. Jerusalem – my father's. The pictures I see display the same produce, presented in the same curiously plentiful way, in the same rough wooden cases. The same people walk by, looking at the same posters and trinkets, coveting the same secrets, searching for the same profits, pleasures, and goals. The same as what? There is little that I can truly remember about Jerusalem and Nazareth, little that is specific, little that has the irreducible distinctness of tactile, visual, or auditory memories that circumscribe nothing to time, little – and this is the 'same' referred to – that is not confused with pictures I have seen or scenes I have glimpsed elsewhere in the Arab world.

Palestine is exile, dispossession, the inaccurate memories of one place slipping into vague memories of another, a continued necessity of general wars, passive presences scattered around in the Arab environment. The story of Palestine cannot be told accurately. Instead, the past, like the present, offers only occurrences and coincidences. Random: The man enters a quiet alley where he will pass cucumbers on his right, tomatoes on his left; a priest walks down the stairs, the boy dashes off, sashel under arm, other boys loiter, shopkeepers look out for business, carrying an airline bag, a man advances past a display of trinkets, a young man disappears around the corner, two boys side amiably. Tomatoes, watermelons, arcades, cucumbers, posters, people, eggplants – not



Jerusalem, 1979,
A marketplace

Jerusalem, 1979,
A marketplace



31

Nazareth, 1979,
Portrait of One Kiteless



Figure 9: After the Last Sky (1999, 30–31)

ticularly those studying processes of migration or zones of conflict, his work shows how such narratives might offer more effective and more engaged accounts of complex social realities, ones that might, as Luc Pauwels puts it, “[express] insights in novel, more experimental and experiential ways” (2015, 315).

Back in Geneva, my conversation with Mohr had now come to an end. I put down my notebook and stopped the dictaphone recording. Then, to my surprise, Mohr got out a selection of his photographs to show me; just a few of the hundreds of thousands he had taken during his lifetime (his complete archives were donated in 2009 to the Musée de l’Elysée in Lausanne). There were photos from Romania in 1961, Uzbekistan in 1966, India in 1977; from Cambodia, Algeria, Sri Lanka, and even Lapland. But one in particular caught my eye: in 1979, while in Jerusalem, Mohr had encountered two young children playing in the street. Holding up a used Polaroid film pack as if it were a camera, they mimicked Mohr, pretending to take his picture. He, in turn, took theirs. It was a moment that seemed to sym-



Figure 10: "The photographed photographer." (Copyright Jean Mohr / Musée de l'Elysée 1979)

bolise Mohr's unique approach to photography: his ability to capture his subjects with complexity, sensitivity, and even a little humour. "A photograph," John Berger once wrote, "is a meeting place where

the interests of the photographer, the photographed, the viewer and those who are using the photograph are often contradictory” (Berger and Mohr 1989, 7). And throughout his life, Mohr had helped confront those contradictions, leaving behind an indelible legacy that we—as both photographers and the photographed—can surely all benefit from.

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MIGRANT PORTRAITURE AND LIFE IMAGING IN FAZAL SHEIKH'S PHOTODOCUMENTARIES

BIRGIT MERSMANN

This article explores the role of migrant photo portraiture for life imaging by providing a close reading of two photobooks by contemporary photographer Fazal Sheikh – *A Sense of Common Ground* (1996) and *The Victor Weeps. Afghanistan* (1998). Visual storytelling is a core feature of this social and humanitarian photographer's work, through which two main questions are addressed: how are real-life migration experiences as survival stories and personal biographies inscribed in the portraits of refugees and migrants? Which form(at)s of portraits are chosen, and which practices of portrayal are employed for the purpose of documenting migrant lives? Based on Jean-Luc Nancy's portrait theory and Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'bare life', the author introduces a process-analytical category of the 'migrant/refugee portrait' in order to grasp the complex (de-

Cet article explore le rôle du portrait photographique de migrants dans la construction d'une représentation visuelle de leur vie, en se livrant à une lecture en profondeur de deux ouvrages photographiques du photographe contemporain Fazal Sheikh: – *A Sense of Common Ground* (1996) et *The Victor Weeps. Afghanistan* (1998). La narration visuelle est au cœur de l'œuvre sociale et humanitaire de ce photographe, qui pose deux questions principales: Comment les expériences vécues de migration ressenties comme des histoires de survie et les biographies personnelles sont-elles inscrites dans les portraits de réfugiés et de migrants ? Quelles formes de portraits sont choisies et quelles pratiques de représentation sont employées pour documenter la vie des migrants ? S'appuyant sur la théorie du portrait de Jean-Luc Nancy et la notion de Giorgio Agamben de "vie mise à nu," l'auteur présente une catégorie de procédés analytiques du portrait de communautés de migrants et de réfugiés destinés à ex-

)figuration processes connected with the sociopolitical issues of human displacement. In Sheikh's long-term portrayal of migrant/refugee communities and his concept of relational portraiture, she recognizes an effective documentary photo practice for de-othering and demigrating the portrait of the migrant as a stereotypical representation of the 'other'.

pliquer les processus complexes de (dé-)figuration associés aux questions de déplacement de populations. À travers son long travail de représentation de communautés de migrants et de réfugiés, et son concept de portraiture relationnelle, Sheikh révèle une pratique de photographie documentaire visant à dé-autériser et démigrer le portrait du migrant en tant que représentation stéréotypée de "l'autre".

The visualization of human migration is connected to documentary photography and photojournalism in particular ways. Movements of people from one place to another require what could be termed a travelling camera, able to track the widely branching network of human migratory routes, nodes, and abodes. In the contemporary world of global migration (Mavroudi & Nagel 2017; Papastergiadis 2000), the condition of travelling photography for production of visibility in migration has been reinforced. Temporally and geographically extensive travels to sites all over the world have become an essential prerequisite for documenting the global dimensions of human migration and displacement via photography. In the context of contemporary photography of migration, its power to this end is attested to by long-term photo documentation projects committed to a form and ethos of visual documentation that has been described as slow photojournalism.¹ Characteristic of this approach are longer production times and long-form narratives of in-depth storytelling.² This work method privileges the creation of published output in forms such as the photobook as an alternative, globalization-critical, and reflective "slow-down medium" of journalistic photography.

The connections among human migration, commitment to long-term travel, and slow photojournalism are exemplified well by Sebastião Salgado, Jim Goldberg, and Fazal Sheikh, who invested lengthy phases of intense documentation in the production of their photobooks.

To realize his global-scale photo project “Migrations. Humanity in Transition,” Salgado travelled to 40 countries, conducting photography over a span of six years. The arrangement of his material over such an extended time and such vast geographical distances was facilitated by infrastructural and other support from his own press agency, the Paris-based Amazonas Images.³ The concrete results of his long-term photo documentation project on global migrations were presented in the form of two photobooks, *Migrations: Humanity in Transition* (2000) and *The Children: Refugees and Migrants* (2005). Jim Goldberg, in turn, spent four years in work that led him to nearly 20 countries, from Russia and the Middle East to Asian and African countries, to photodocument the stories of refugees and immigrants who had arrived in Europe. This long-term project was chronicled in a compendium of four photobooks under the title *Open See* (2009). Finally, photographer Fazal Sheikh has travelled widely, to very different regions of the world, among them conflict zones, to work with people living in displaced and marginalized communities. His engagement in photo projects in Africa, Afghanistan, India, and Israel/Palestine is characterized by longer-term commitment to each particular place and/or community. The photobook plays a central role in his work: it serves as a medium for visual narration as well as a means of global communication and orientation for audiences. In his view, this form represents “the best possible, the most complicated, the most accessible, the most engaging way of working because it doesn’t have the limitations of something like an exhibition. An exhibition has a restricted number of viewers. Books are much longer lasting. And for me, personally, books are a means of growing. One informs the next” (qtd. in Jobey 2009, 31). His valorization of the photobook medium is expressed in the fact that, since gaining international acclaim, Sheikh has created his own photobook series, the International-Human-Rights Series (IHRS).⁴ In keeping with the characteristics ascribed to slow journalism (Le Masurier 2015, 142), he values accuracy, quality, and reportage of context; seeks out untold, visually undocumented human stories; relies on the power of the narrative (of slow storytelling); encourages co-production, even with the people photographed; and views the audience, too, as col-

laborators. In addition to editing his own photobooks, he positions his photodocumentary work in the exhibition field. By crossing the border between photojournalism and (documentary) photo art, he reinvents the practice of photo documentation in the era of global media while creating genre-migrating images.

A closer look at the above-mentioned photodocumentaries reveals that the photo portrait represents a central genre therein, strongly coupled with the photobook format. Since portraits have always been the focus of attention in humanistic and humanitarian photography, it may be unsurprising that they are prevalent in documentary images dealing with human migration. Two major functions and meanings of the portrait appear interwoven in the photobook in constructive application: 1) portrayal of human individuals (also in relation to their groups and communities) and their personal lives; and 2) portrayal of human, social, cultural, political, and economic life conditions in a particular place, time, and situation.

Considering both perspectives, this article explores the role of migrant photo portraiture for life imaging by taking Sheikh's photobooks as its central material. Visual storytelling is a core feature of this social and humanitarian photographer's work, through which two main questions can be addressed: how are real-life migration experiences as survival stories and personal biographies inscribed in the portraits of refugees and migrants? Which form(at)s of portraits are chosen, and which practices of portrayal are employed for the purpose of documenting migrant lives? Before delving into the detailed analysis of Sheikh's photo work, substantive image-theoretical considerations of the notion and meaning of migrant portraiture are required.

1. 'THE OTHER PORTRAIT': FIGURATION IN MIGRANT PORTRAITURE

"Avec le portrait – avec ces façons, ces manières, ces éclipses et ces ruines – se joue le sort de la figure en général: de la représentation, de la fiction, donc de la présence et de la vérité; du visage, de la présence et de l'absence. De l'autre, de sa

proximité, de sa distance. Dans le portrait se retrace, se retire, se rejoue, très sensiblement sous nos yeux la possibilité pour nous d'être présents" (Nancy 2014, 12).

This characterization of the portrait, offered by image philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, features several aspects that appear highly relevant for approaching migrant portraiture as a power of figuration. Two semantic senses etymologically inscribed in "portrait(ure)" play a pivotal role in the photodocumentary depiction of migrants and refugees. They seem to be in partial contradiction with each other, although they are intrinsically connected in forming a kind of pairing: drawing forth and withdrawing. The word "portrait" is linguistically derived from the Latin word *protractio*, a nominalized form of the verb *protrahere*, which means "dragging out." It refers to extracting the essence, or a characteristic element, and making it a salient visible feature. The "other" meaning of the portrait is derived from the Italian *ritratto*, a concept that entered general use in Renaissance times for technical reference to a portrait/image. This came from the verb *ritrarre*, which signifies "to represent"/"to depict" but also "to withdraw" and "to retract." Proceeding from this second etymological meaning of the portrait (*ritratto*), Nancy has built a complete portrait theory of what he defines as "the other portrait," *l'Autre portrait*, in his seminal work of the same title (2014). He focuses on the withdrawal inherent to the portrait as a form of visualization. Accordingly, he defines the other portrait as a portrait of "l'autre retiré, l'autre en tant qu'autre du même (ou du propre, ou du soi) considéré dans en retrait – une retraite, un recul, voire une disparation" (2014, 13 f.).

Portraits of flight and migration mediate the two complementary meanings of the portrait in their own distinctive ways. They venture into the field of possibility of "being present" and being represented, of rendering visible the lives of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons, who are withdrawn from visibility as "others." Portraits of migration and refugeeism are depictions of transitoriness and fugacity, of the withdrawal from life, of the absence of a dignified human life. They are representations of what Giorgio Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer* (1998, 71 ff.) has defined as the "bare life." On one side,

their imagery is on retreat, as they display defiguration as a visual consequence of the disintegration and degradation of life. In this regard, they are “other portraits” in the sense of Nancy’s *altro ritratto*. On the other side of this “other,” withdrawing portrait, they are revealing and protruding portraits in that they draw absence into presence in search of potentialities and modalities of figuration and representation.

Art historian and image philosopher Gottfried Boehm has called attention to the fact that early definitions emphasised the importance of portraiture as a process of figuration relying on depiction capabilities, before the portrait gained form and qualification as an image genre of *individuum*-bound human likeness (1985, 45 *ff.*). This process-oriented approach to portraiture as an ability to (re)present informs the following efforts to identify the strategies and concepts of migrant portraiture employed by Sheikh for capturing the moving and transitory life experiences and memories of refugees and migrants. These are tools for de-othering and demigrantizing the portrait of the migrant as a stereotypical representation of the other expelled from states, cast out of societies, and often also stripped of human rights.

For purposes of analysis, the category “migrant portraiture” is articulated as a common denominator of two meanings: it refers to the photographic portrait image of migrants, encompassing that of refugees, exiles, and displaced persons,⁵ and to the portrait of migration as a depiction of the societal phenomenon of human displacement. The latter facet even allows for an understanding of migrant portraiture as migratory portraiture. Through this double codification, it becomes possible to interlace the representation of persons (from individuals to groups) with portrayals of their living conditions—here, the migrant or refugee condition in specific (geo)political, social, and cultural circumstances of contemporary history. Furthermore, in the notion of portraiture, the representational strategies of *depictio* and *descriptio* are joined in a unique way. This meshing creates a fruitful entry point for analyzing photodocumentary

portraits as specific media and social configurations of migration (hi)stories.

2. SOMEBODY TO HOLD ON TO. RELATIONAL PORTRAITURE IN SHEIKH'S PHOTOBOOK *A SENSE OF COMMON GROUND*

The contemporary (post-)migrant condition of living in many places in the world (Feldman 2015; Nail 2015; Moslund et al. 2015) is the core subject of Sheikh's photodocumentary portraits. Thus far, he has published five photobooks on the topic of displacement, refugeeism, and migration:⁶ *A Sense of Common Ground* (1996), offering a portrait of camps for African refugees in Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi; *The Victor Weeps* (1998), a portrait of Afghan men, women, and children who for two decades had been living in refugee villages in northern Pakistan on account of the wars in Afghanistan; *A Camel for the Son* (2001), a portrait of Somali refugee women in northeastern Kenya; *Ramadan Moon* (2001), a one-person portrait of Somali refugee Seynab Azir Wardeere, who was under threat of eviction from an asylum-seekers' centre in the Netherlands; and *Portraits* (2011), in effect a meta-photobook on the motivic figure and socio-cultural configuration of the portrait, composed from portraits featured in the other four photobooks.

In his marked photographic interest in the portrayal of displaced people, Sheikh has been driven by his own biography. A second-generation immigrant to the United States, he was born in 1965 as the child of a Kenyan man and American woman in New York City, where he grew to adulthood. His family's migrant path can be traced back to Pakistan: his grandfather was born in (historical) northern India before moving with his family in 1912 to Kenya, at that time a British colony. In Nairobi, the grandfather became a wealthy landowner and businessman. This family history of migration is an important anchor point for understanding Sheikh's photographic work, particularly *The Victor Weeps*, which, in portraying Afghan exiles in northern Pakistan, was motivated by the search for his family roots in Muslim culture and society. Having spent considerable time in Nairobi and being fluent in Swahili, Sheikh can be considered

a migrant between US and Kenyan society, between Western and African cultures. Echoing sentiments of many people with a bicultural background, he once confessed to feeling like a foreigner in Africa on account of being perceived as an American (Jobey 2009, 17). Indeed, his portraits express his longing for assimilation with the people he photographs, to be aligned with them. Sheikh is in constant search of the “other” for finding and defining his self, not in terms of identity but in how he is related to the world. For this reason, his portraits of displaced people amount to self-dialogue portraits. The fact that he began with self-portraits in his early photography, when he was studying photography and art history at Princeton University, and moved on to “venture out into communities” (Jobey 2009, 17) to capture portraits of the other in extreme living conditions affirms this inner portrait connection between introspection and outrospection.

A Sense of Common Ground (1996) was Sheikh’s first photobook publication. In 1992 he had been awarded a Fulbright scholarship to photograph among the Swahili-speaking communities on the Kenyan coast. Upon his arrival in Nairobi, he was confronted with the influx of half a million refugees fleeing various war zones in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. With the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sheikh obtained authorization to photograph within the refugee communities. He travelled between camps in Kenya, Malawi, and Tanzania for three years, but the decisive visit would be his first trip to the Sudanese refugee camp in Lokichoggio, on Kenya’s northwestern border with Sudan, in June 1992: it determined his method of working and how he would portray the refugees’ situation in the camp. In the introduction to *A Sense of Common Ground*, he reports on how his fellow photojournalists worked to catch the story quickly and keep to the parts of the camps indicated by the UNHCR public officers.⁷ Sheikh recognized the act of photographing as not a quick snapshot but a long-term process of familiarization, of developing mutual interest, trust, and a sense of knowing. First of all, it required permission from the people, their consensus and collaboration. Only under social-relations conditions of mutual agreement and active participation could the photog-

rapher reach his goal: “to be aligned with the people” in the portraits (qtd. in Jobey 2009, 17) in a kind of familial bond.

The photobook *A Sense of Common Ground* is divided into five chapters, each of which covers a particular refugee situation in Kenya. The first one shows portraits from the Sudanese transit camp in Lokichoggio and the more permanent refugee settlement in Kakuma; the second is dedicated to the Ethiopian camp in Walda; the third is devoted to Somali refugees living in camps near Dadaab and Marafa; the fourth addresses circumstances at the Mozambican camps in Malawi; and the fifth considers Rwandan camps in Tanzania. The introduction to each chapter provides concise yet detailed background information on the particular political, ethnic, and/or religious conflicts that caused the refugees to leave their home countries, among them the civil wars in Sudan and Mozambique, the tribal family wars in Ethiopia, and the Rwandan genocide. Comparable to a journalistic report, the introductory portion of each chapter provides, in addition, concrete statistics related to the number of refugees and a map clarifying the refugees’ routes and camp locations. This form of presentation makes clear that the unique portraits captured in the various places have not become generalized into a “composite character” and thereby helps the reader to remain oriented. They are clearly located, politically situated, and textually framed.

The image alignment, page layout, and chapter-level organization follow a similar pattern across all five sets of refugee (hi)stories. Sequences of single, double, or triple portrait images filling entire pages of the book; series of nine photographs on one page; and framed photographs set against a white background are interrupted by foldout folio spreads. In triptych format, these bring out the vastness, infinitude, and deadliness of space—be it in panoramic photographs of almost deserted landscapes, of burial grounds, or of large groups of refugees. Thanks to this image arrangement, portraits of individuals, when unfolded to wide-angle images, become positioned in the larger environment of the refugee camp community and the open, endless space of nature.



Figure 1: By Fazal Sheikh, a group portrait of Sudanese unaccompanied minors at the Lokichoggio refugee camp, in Kenya © Fazal Sheikh

A group portrait of about two hundred unaccompanied minors⁸ (Fig. 1), captured in the Lokichoggio camp shortly before the children were to continue their migration southward to the next camp, is highly illustrative of this open embedding.

This presents a loosely gathered group of Sudanese child soldiers turned refugees in the open bush land of the desert. They resemble a group posing for a school photograph. By the formal adoption of this portrait type, a social bond and communitarian sense are established among the figures of the minors in this large and anonymous crowd. Only one boy stands out in front of the rest, individualizing the experience of the mass. His gesture—he presents his toy airplane to the camera—could be read as an expression of escape, or the lack of it.

Besides portrait images, the photobook contains personal testimonials—namely handwritten letters in which refugees offer accounts of their situation. The first letter, printed in the second chapter (p. 28), was formulated by elders of the Borana people who had fled the civil war in Ethiopia. It describes the persecution of the Borana tribes by the ruling Transitional Government of Ethiopia and also ongoing tribal clashes in the refugee camps in Kenya that had resulted in the disappearance and killing of Borana refugees. The final words of the letter are an appeal for international assistance: the elders beg for help, to protect them and allow them to return to their homes in Ethiopia. In the second letter (p. 44 *f.*), a group of Somali elders living at the camp in Liboi protest against the decision to close the camp and transfer them to two other camps, further north, which direction for them signified “the way of death.” These personal testimonial ac-

counts, juxtaposed with a photo portrait of their authors, illustrate that the refugees' lives are not safe even in the camps; they are exposed to persecution, violence, sexual abuse, and killing. In doing so, they articulate the power of Sheikh's (photo-)documentary method of approaching and living with the people, especially the communities of elders, for directly witnessing their life stories and giving visual and written form to these personal testimonials in his series of photographs.

With his refugee portraits taken on site while living in the camps, Sheikh attempts to revise the stereotypical mass media representation of African refugees. In his view, "the lives of those people are more complex than the way that they have been represented. Being an African or refugee is only one facet of who they are as human beings. I would like to balance out the equation, to broaden and challenge our preconceptions as structured by the media" (qtd. in Light 2010, 3).

What portrayal strategies does this photographer apply to broaden the representational scope of the photo documentation of refugees? The overarching objective behind the visualization could be characterised as a portrayal practice of derefugization, a concept I introduce as one complementary to demigrantization (Römhild 2015; Yildiz & Hill 2015). In Sheikh's portraits, the refugees are not reduced to their status and role as refugees. They are not presented as anonymous human figures but individually identified by name⁹ and by the camps where they live. Their agency is acknowledged also in that they are represented not as displaced persons, victims of their past and present life circumstances, but as reorienting individuals who "have grown with their circumstances," carving out "who they are now, for better or worse. Not only for worse" (qtd. in Jobey 2009, 19). Almost without fail, Sheikh captures the refugees in "bettering" circumstances: in moments of friendship and love, as they are about to be repatriated, or in recovery. An example is shown in Figure 2, which includes Athok Duom, recovering from malaria. The figures are seldom singled out (or zoomed in upon) with the effect of declar-



Figure 2: Fazal Sheikh's triple portrait of Akuot Nyibol (centre) with Riak Warabek (right) and the pregnant Akuot's daughter, Athok Duom, who is recovering from malaria, at the Sudanese refugee camp in Lokichoggio © Fazal Sheikh

ing them victims or heroes; they are shown in togetherness, manifesting human bonds.

The choice of double, triple, and group portrait as the predominant formats for portraying refugees emphasizes the element of social humanity that Sheikh values highly. By using a simple Polaroid camera that produces both a positive and a negative, Sheikh embraces a slow production process. His refugee portraits can be described as formal

but not formalized portraits. They are characterized by a simple, direct, and respectful rendering of the person(s) being recorded. One facet of the respectfulness is expressed in the middle distance that the photographer takes (and retains) between his standpoint and the position of the photographed subject(s). He is clearing the stage for the subjects to present themselves to the camera while he withdraws to a position of receiving, letting the pictures come to him. In *A Sense of Common Ground*, one finds no close-ups and no affect images that put expressive faces on display. Usually, the subjects are represented as two-third or full-body figures, with space around them indicating the environment. There is not a single bust-like portrait in these series. That would signal closeness and reduction. His subjects are shown instead in their full corporeal presence, and, most importantly, they are positioned in a way that highlights their physical location and personal (bodily) integrity. They are comfortable and stable on wooden chairs or embankments, standing solidly in a group, and—in a motif that permeates the photobook—shown in front of trees or even sitting in them (as in the case of the picture of Agai Miriam Aden, an unaccompanied minor in the Kakuma camp). Spatial situating, bodily grounding, and symbolic rooting can be identified as major strategic features in Sheikh's portrait repertoire. The combination of uprootedness, fugitivity, and transitoriness of the refugee condition is counteracted by stabilizing placements. Here we encounter re-rooting and repositioning.

The mythological uprootedness of the baobab tree, which appears in many of the photographs as a background figure or a trunk to lean on, becomes symbolic of the movement and tension between deracination and the new, firm root-taking. One might, as Eduardo Cadava has argued in his article on Sheikh's portraits (2011, 14 ff.), understand the recurring motif of the tree in *A Sense of Common Ground* as a tree of life, a branching-out figure of family genealogies, inheritances, and legacies. The positioning and re-rooting of many refugee figures in the lines and networks of tree trunks can be interpreted as an act of inscribing them in lines of ancestry and family history, in parallel with the reproductive life cycle of nature.

Another salient motif tied in with the familial bonds is visible in the close bodily contact that many refugees in the images maintain. In a literal sense, these portraits are touching images, presenting in numerous ways and configurations the touch of hands in deeply reaching gestures of belonging and togetherness, trust, comfort, and protection. Hands might be placed on the chest as self-touching, self-holding, and self-protection; they might rest on shoulders or heads; they may equally support heads or hold other hands, those of loved ones; or they might hold objects (sticks, toys, etc.) or images, whether holy images or portraits of family members who are deceased or otherwise beyond the reach of those hands. The photographs with the touch of hands reach out to represent the intimate social relations and family bonds upheld in the refugee communities. Taken together, they express the attempt to hold on to physical, social, and emotional life but also articulate efforts “to carry and hand over, to hand down, like a kind of legacy or inheritance, a fragment of the past” (Cadava 2011, 21).

In some portraits, the touching hands express the difficulty and burden involved in “holding on.” For example, in the portrait of Nya-pa Deng and her daughter in Lokichoggio, the male hand upon the bare head of the child has the weight of a burden. It is ambiguous in that its gesture is protective yet at the same time violent also, with a firm grip on the head as if pulling it away. This impression is intensified by the photo’s composition. The male figure is cut off by the frame—only this hand and a slight contour line of the man’s body remain. The severing of family bonds and the violence of separation caused by flight and migration are hauntingly captured in this double/triple portrait. A similar composition, again with the cropped-out and faceless figure of the father, is found in the portrait of Hadija (Fig. 3).

Sheikh’s detailed caption informs the viewer that this eight-year-old girl, Hadija, remained silent ever since she was separated from her mother while crossing the border from Somalia to Kenya. Here, the father’s hand speaks of tender bonding and strong protection as the man reaches out from behind his daughter to rest it on her shoulder, to hold (on to) her. The expressive face of Hadija forms a stark



Figure 3: Fazal Sheikh's portrait of Hadija and her father at a Somali refugee camp in Kenya © Fazal Sheikh

contrast to the child's muteness. It is the stillness of photography that enables the muteness to speak vividly. The border at the top of the image cuts directly through the mouth line of the father figure, underscoring the reliance on bodily gestures' communication. Ac-

According to Cadava, this touching portrait of Hadija reflects how, in the words of Judith Butler, the precariousness of life can be grasped: “One would need to hear the face as it speaks in something other than language to know the precariousness of life that is at stake (...). We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense” (Butler qtd. in Cadava 2011, 6).

3. COLLABORATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE COMMUNAL PORTRAIT: SHEIKH'S *THE VICTOR WEEPS*

Sheikh's photodocumentary *The Victor Weeps* can be viewed as a semi-autobiographical book, for it couples the search for his own migrant family history, particularly that of his grandfather, with family stories of Afghan refugees in northern Pakistan. Here, the photographer's personal interest in family life stories becomes evident as the main motivation for his photodocumentary storytelling. Personal encounters with the refugees for an exchange of individual accounts demarcate the beginning of the photo-portraying procedure, with Sheikh first asking “the members of the community for their willingness to collaborate in the documentation” (Light 2010, 2). He commented thus on his way of working: “In my recent work among the Afghan villages of exile, the elder's agreement to work with me, to provide insight, as well as protection, has been crucial” (ibid.). With this collaborative community approach as a given, “[t]he act of photographing becomes an event in the village. We construct the image together. Many of the people have never been photographed before, and the Polaroid provides a point of reference for discussions that follow in which the residents of the community offer their opinions on how the documentation may unfold” (Light 2010, 2).

In the testimonials and evidence provided, the documentation in the photobook is rich and quite varied. It operates on the basis of close interweaving between photography and text. Afghan children's drawings serve as a preface, opening the photobook. They are followed by panoramic photographs of ruined cityscapes from the

Afghan capital, Kabul, captured a month prior to the Taliban's capture of the city. Turning the pages that display these images of the ravages of war, one finds them juxtaposed with Afghan poems commenting on the devastation, on the loss of faith and life. After this unflinching portrayal of the reasons for fleeing Afghanistan, there is a personal account by author-photographer Sheikh. Under the title "The Land of Afghans," he reports on his moving encounter with senior members of the Muslim community in the refugee village of Bizen Khel. This text precludes a sequence of portraits of male elders, most of whom had been Mujahideen fighters. The set of portraits constitutes the first part of the photobook. They are accompanied by personal biographical accounts and a letter from the elderly people in the images but also by poems and poetic comments. The letter, between two of the photo portraits, was written by former elders and commanders of the Agra District, in Afghanistan's Logar Province. In it, they describe their decision for the tribe known as Ahmed Zai to migrate to Pakistan in consequence of the Soviet-Afghan war and there seek international support to enable a return to their home villages. The second part of the photobook follows the same image-and-text composition. Dedicated to portraits of elderly women and children, it holds a mirror to the social hierarchies and gender divisions in Muslim communities. Whereas the biographical portraits earlier in the book highlight the historical hard facts of the Afghan war and the seizure of power by the Taliban through the lens of family history, the second part explores personal war memories and future-focused imagination through "dream stories." Finally, the third part of the book follows the route of the Afghan refugee exodus in reverse, thereby emphasising personal and communal storytelling of remigration and return. It shows portraits of people living along the migration passage between the tribal regions of northwestern Pakistan and the Afghan capital. In the manner of an insert frame, this section sets forth portraits by Jalalabad-based studio photographer Ridzwanul Haq (see Fig. 4), thereby forming both a hybrid and a contrast between Sheikh's own photo portraits and those by the Afghan portrait photographer.



Figure 4: Portrait photographs from Ridzwanul Haq's work at his studio in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, featured in Fazal Sheikh's photobook *The Victor Weeps* © Fazal Sheikh

Faced with the ruling Taliban regime's prohibition of figurative images, the studio photographer had decided to offer his portraits to Fazal Sheikh. In consequence, the studio portraits become travelling photographs themselves, migrating to the pages of the photobook for a place of refuge, medium of protection, and source of remembrance.

The larger portrait of Afghan exiles living in northern Pakistan is constructed by a complex sequence and interrelational layering of

different material forms and media genres of portraiture, among them Sheikh's own portrait photographs of men, women, and children in the community; portrait photographs of deceased relatives that community members brought to him to be photographed; found-footage studio portraits; and autobiographical textual portraits of both the author-photographer and the refugees portrayed. "I was weaving together something much more complicated, not just because of the found pictures, or the testimonials, but also because of my own relationship to the place," explained Sheikh (qtd. in Jobey 2009, 21) in describing his portrayal strategy. With this statement he stresses the role of the photobook as (semi-overlaid or fully overlaid) auto-documentary to connect his own life story of returning to the land of his forefathers with the life stories of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The portraits of the community's male elders as presented in the first part of the photobook are very respectful, even though most of them use close-up images. The elders are shown in their traditional clothing as Afghan people and partly also as Mujahideen, with a turban, an Afghan pakol, or a Peshawari topi on the head, and a long beard. The focus of these photographs is on the head and face, appearing out of complete darkness in an almost magical light(en)ing of strong contrasts, be it in profile, three-quarters, or frontal portrait format. The spotlight of the camera is directed at the furrowed faces of the elders marked by their life experiences as fighters, victims of war, and refugees, as fathers and community leaders. Usually, the gaze of the person portrayed is directed away from meeting with the camera (Fig. 5). It is withdrawn from the viewer, in being directed downward/sideways or being hidden by closed or half-lidded eyes or by hands held in front of the face in a rather protective gesture.

When the gaze is oriented toward the viewer head-on, there is no suggestion of direct eye contact and personal address. Instead, the viewer reads reclusiveness, introspection, and even emptiness due to the shadowing and blurring of focus at the eyes. Often, the front-on views are presented from slightly below. This perspective conveys a sense of distance despite the extreme closeness to the person. Most, though not all, of the portrait images are accompanied by a piece of

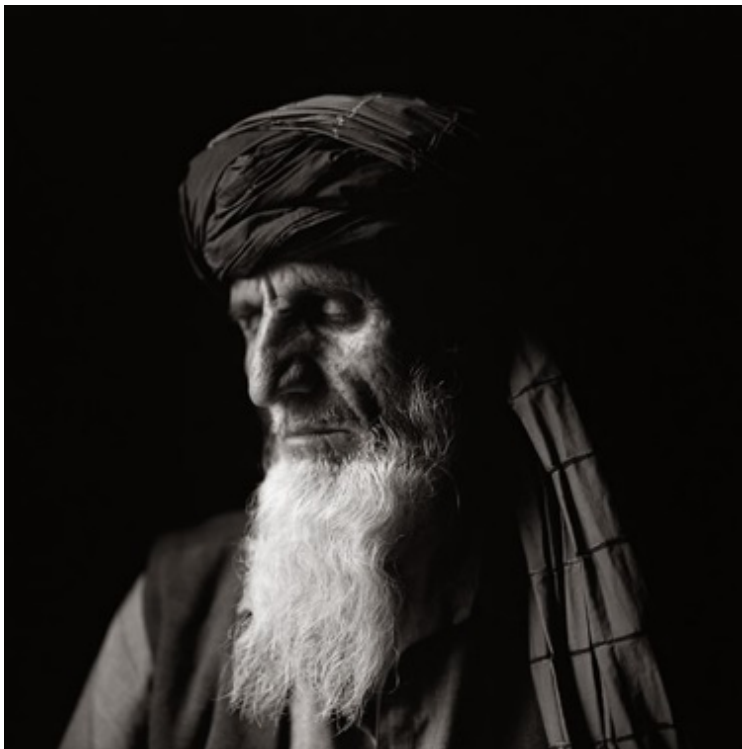


Figure 5: Fazal Sheikh's portrait of Nasruddin © Fazal Sheikh

text, such as an autobiographical account, a poem, or a prose statement by an Afghan poet or historian identified by the image subject as an expression of his view on life and the current situation of Afghan people. This text is directly connected with the image in the layout, too—they are on the same spread of pages. This parallel text-with-image arrangement emphasizes that the portrait images can be fully comprehended only in light of the subject's autobiographical account or chosen excerpt. Rohullah, for example (shown in Fig. 6), tells the reader about the death of his cousin Qari Monir in 1981.

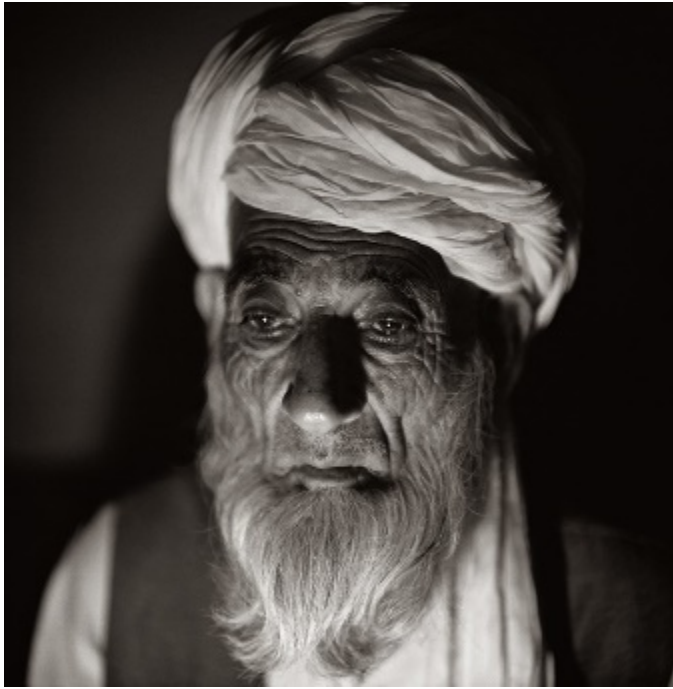


Figure 6: Fazal Sheikh's portrait of Rohullah © Fazal Sheikh

In his personal story, he gives an account of how his cousin, together with other elders and mullahs, disappeared in the desert, having been taken there by communist troops, with a shepherd later finding the bodies of the 14 missing leaders, Qari Monir among them. They had been buried alive. He cites this incident as what convinced him that the communists “were willing to kill us all, not just those who were fighters [...] so we decided to leave the village and take our families to the safety of Pakistan” (Monir qtd. in Sheikh 1998, 61).

In some cases, the photographic portrait is presented as a standalone image filling one side of the two-page layout while the other page is left blank, without any textual comment. This composition gives voice to silence, to a person's speechlessness in the face of the dramatic, trauma-producing events of war, flight, and exile. Muteness

is made visible. Here, storytelling, based on personal encounters between the photographer and the photographed, also allows for voicing personal histories and biographies of suffering that cannot be readily deduced from single photo-portrait images alone. In the case of the woman's image in Figure 7, one might not even be able to state with certainty that this photograph of the person identified as Rohgul qualifies as a portrait photograph, since the face, the marker of a person's identity as an individual, is hidden behind the latticed screen of the burqa.

The objects shown that surround the represented figure—the crutch and the rotated shoe lying on the ground—can be taken as signs for imagining what might have happened to Rohgul, as referring to a handicapped person who nearly lost her life; yet the classical portrait of an *individuum*, her character, status, and expression, is withdrawn in this photograph. This is stressed by the closed gesture of the woman, gathering up the burqa draping in front of her body (while, in so doing, she reveals parts of her feet and legs). From her first-person account, we learn that she had been married to a police officer and enjoyed a good life in Afghanistan until, in 1989, her husband was shot on his way home by one of the Mujahideen factions. Her neighbourhood became the front line between warring Mujahideen forces, and the fighting left her youngest son, Fawad, dead and Rohgul herself seriously wounded. Although doctors at the hospital advised her to have her leg amputated, she refused and ultimately managed to keep it. In the end, she fled to southern Pakistan to live with her cousin. The final passage of her personal account expresses her hope of returning to the land of her birth “when the government gives its people jobs rather than Kalashnikovs” (Rohgul qtd. in Sheikh 1998, 140). Only when the photo and text are read in combination, when the visual depiction and textual description are considered jointly to bring visual and oral storytelling together, does the image of Rohgul turn into an individual(ized) portrait of the person as well as a personal(ized) bio-image of Afghan war history. The text-image approach to life documentation is a clearly defined method in Sheikh's photographic work. “It seemed to me almost impossible to sever one from the other—and wholly inappropriate,” he stated in



Figure 7: Fazal Sheikh's portrait of Rohgul © Fazal Sheikh

conversation with Liz Jobey, continuing: "I came to believe that the photographs did something very well, but working with the issues I was engaged with, I found it important to flesh out what the photographs didn't do. They were not getting to the depths of what I needed, so I used the people's voices" (2009, 21).

Precisely for voicing their life stories, the Afghan refugees photographed by Sheikh often brought their own portrait photographs into the conversations, among them snapshots of dead relatives or

portraits of heroic fighters who had been killed in the war. These personal photo portraits are included in the photobook as visual testimonials of war victims. They are displayed in particular presentation modes, one of which is hands holding out the photograph to show it to the camera. The gesture is demonstrative, perhaps partly reproachful, but at the same time loving, caring, and protective. It also points to photographs as images that are handed over and collectively shared. On a more general level, it is evidence of photography as a mode of transmission.



Figure 8: Fazal Sheikh's presentation of a portrait shown to him in 1997 at an Afghan refugee village in Ghazi, Northern Pakistan, of a child killed in Soviet bombardment ©

Fazal Sheikh

The touching hand here connects the lives of the surviving refugees with the lost lives of their deceased family members, most of them sons and brothers killed in Mujahideen fighting but some of them uninvolved children. If this body part is shown as an open palm from which one can read the family's war history (as in Fig. 8), it transforms into a *pars-pro-toto* portrait of the person presenting it.

Another form of memorial portrait demonstration is visible in presenting the photograph on the ground. The stony and dry subsoil forms a stark contrast to the portrait photo.

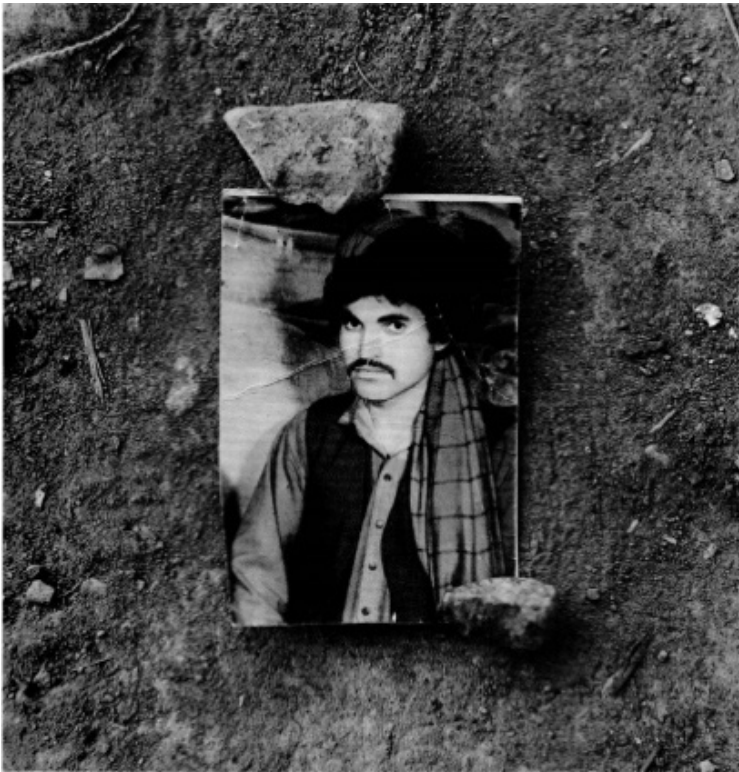


Figure 9: Fazal Sheikh's presentation of Abdul Malik © Fazal Sheikh

In the case of Abdul Malik (Fig. 9), the paper print of the photographic portrait is anchored to the naked earth with stones to prevent it from flying off. If considered in conjunction with the photographs of burial grounds interspersed with the victim portraits, this and the other images of lost persons set against the earth can be interpreted as death portraits, recalling the presence of the person in absence. Through his pictures of the photographic portrait, Sheikh is able to inscribe biographies of suffering and heroic martyrdom directly in his visual storytelling.

In this context, it is important to note that the portrait never exists in isolation in Sheikh's work. In no case is it a single image. Embedded in a series, it forms numerous relationships with other portraits. In the interrelational bonds thus constructed, even non-portraits (such as landscape and gravesite photographs) can be reinterpreted as portrait pictures. Neither is the portrait-based interconnectedness limited to the confines of the photobook as a narrative unit of storytelling. Sheikh often circulates and recirculates his portraits from one photo project to the next. The migration of the people portrayed is reflected in the migration of portrait images throughout his *œuvre*.

Furthermore, the life cycle of portraiture is expressed in Sheikh's repeat visiting and re-photographing of people. Aiming for long-term life documentation, he wanted to find out what became of the refugees he had photographed. Accordingly, in *A Camel for the Son*, portraits from the earlier work *A Sense of Common Ground* were republished in a new arrangement: with a slightly different narrative order, new portraits of the people portrayed were presented alongside the old. Particularly with the most recent group of portrait revisits, Sheikh was able to demonstrate how babies and children had grown into adolescents in refugee camps, spending most of their precious lifetime there. The portrayals did not always determine how the newer portraits were cast; sometimes, in the reverse of this, the course of life was decisive for the life imaging in the portraits. This is illustrated well in Sheikh's photobook *Ramadan Moon*, in which the light-and-shadow play in the portrait images of Somali refugee Seynab Azir Wardeere is an illuminative reflection of the phases of the moon as a natural cycle of life. Finally, the more recent photo-

book *Portraits* can be seen as a meta-portrait, in that it was compiled from portraits originating in all of his various photo (book) projects. Far from being an image-rich refugee-themed coffee table book, it contains the entirety of the textual information necessary for reading the images in accordance with their original publication context, but within a new entity. By assembling and connecting individual portrait images into a new order, it establishes cohesion and togetherness in its cycling and recycling. As Cadava (2011, 11) has pointed out, the togetherness thus created “here means otherness—it is what moves the image away from itself, what prevents it from existing ‘on its own,’ what ensures it will be transformed and altered in relation to the other portrait.” In the end, this togetherness of compiled portraits constitutes global humanitarian portraiture of displaced, expelled, and excluded people around the world.

4. PHOTODOCUMENTARIES AS REFIGURATION ZONES: THE DEREFUGISATION OF REFUGEE PORTRAITURE

In the photobooks discussed above, the life imaging of refugees and exiles follows a sociopolitical agenda of humanitarian photojournalism and photodocumentarism. Within this framework, it ventures into issues of humanity, humanness, and human rights. The life condition of displacement in turbulent times of migration casts into relief the fundamental question of the right to live and what it means to be human. The refugee, deprived of civil and civic rights, excluded from any form of political participation, introduces, according to Hannah Arendt, a breakdown in our contemporary understanding of human rights. In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she connects the decline of the nation-state with the end of the rights of man. Binding human rights to citizen rights, she argues that “the paradox involved in the loss of human rights is that such loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general—without a profession, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify” the self (1958, 297). From today’s perspective of transnationalization, it can be stated that “[t]he crisis within human rights arises from the fact that, with the appearance of the refugee, the presumably sacred and inalienable rights of man are

shown to be entirely alienable, to lack any protection or reality at the very moment in which they can no longer be understood as rights belonging to citizens of a state, or to members of a particular political community” (Cadava, 2011, 8). In all-too-humanness, the “bare life” of the refugee, the loss of human rights takes fleshly form.

The Sheikh photodocumentaries considered here capture this bareness of life while carefully documenting the particular causes, effects, and larger consequences of mass migration and refugeeism in clearly defined locations and tightly confined communities. They portray displaced, dispossessed, marginalised, silenced, and victimized people who, devoiced and without a face, lack means of self-articulation and self-representation. Portraiture is employed as a method, imaging genre, and visualization strategy to render the faceless seen, to give the silenced a voice with which to tell their stories, to allow the effaced to reface. The photobook lends itself to this. It serves as an apt medium for the process of portraiture in that it provides ample possibilities for narration and storytelling via both image sequencing and photo-text links. It permits both creating personal accounts of individuals and generating local micro-histories of refugee communities, such as that of the Afghan exile community in Northern Pakistan in *The Victor Weeps*.

The portrait image as a figuration of the particular plays a vital role in the photobooks analyzed here for counteracting the universalizing and anonymizing effect of refugee representation. It entails particularization of the portrayal of human displacement on the level of the photobook narrative, as well as of the portrait of human beings on the level of the individual image. The portrait as an image of the particular turns anonymous refugee figures into individualized subjects and persons. Sheikh’s portrayal strategy is intended to transcend the refugee status and role image of the photographed subject and dive into the complexity of this individual’s personal life story. The reconstruction of the *persona* is achieved through intense conversation and co-creative collaboration with the refugees, without neglect for their social environment. As Sheikh’s photo work involving the Afghan refugee village in northern Pakistan attests, even portrait photography can become a communal event of life-recording. First-person ac-

counts and documents selected by the subjects themselves; the naming, localizing, and situating of each person photographed via the image caption; and the participatory practice of autobiographical descriptions of portraits support this personalizing subject-centred approach. Only in the format of the photobook as both a medium of visual storytelling and an archive for documentation can the complexity of personalized lives be unfolded. In the words of Sheikh, it is “the individual and his testimony that allows us to access broader themes—through the specific to gain entry to the universal. [...] I try to encourage the medium to pierce the alienation in a return to the basics of humanity” (qtd. in Light 2010, 4).

In Sheikh’s photography, the practice of refugee portraiture operates on the basis of relational portraiture, as defined by photography theorist Daniel Palmer in his study *Photography and Collaboration* (2017, 109 ff.). With this practice, photography is employed as a communication instrument and a social means of establishing cross-cultural encounters and interpersonal, among them inter-community, relations, thereby empowering the subjects to participate in the photographic act and co-create the final result. It is the medium’s potential for collaborative knowledge-generation that affords a qualitative shift from mere contact zones of photo creation to refiguration zones of photographic documentation. In Sheikh’s photodocumentary work, the traditional “informal contract between the photographer and the photographed” that tends “towards the presentation of an objectified ‘other’” (Palmer 2017, 109) is replaced by a “civil contract” of photography characterized by reciprocal human encounters and relations. A civil (re)contract(ing) of photography, as advocated by Ariella Azoulay (2008), enables anyone—even a migrant, refugee, or stateless person—to pursue political agency and resistance through photography, whether by addressing others through photography or by being addressed by photographs. A new citizenry in migrant and refugee photography, if grounded in relational portraiture, can aid in diminishing, if not completely avoiding, the othering of the photographed. After all, it contributes to a construction of relational variants of the “other portrait” in which the derefugization of refugee portraiture becomes graspable and comprehensible.

For moments of intense human encounters, the bodies, faces, and images in migration are put on hold. Through the contracted stillness of photography, the fleetingness of human migrancy is drawn into the media presence of social life imaging.

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NOTES

1. The technical term "slow photojournalism" was introduced around 2015 with reference to long-term assignments of photojournalists (see Padley, 2015).↵
2. The main goal is "to look further than the immediate (hard) news. This makes it necessary to stay longer in a certain area, even though the world's press may already have left. As a result, the photographer not only continues to be an observer but also becomes a participant in daily life" (Sikking, 2010).↵
3. He established it alongside his wife, Lélia Deluiz Wanick, in 1994.↵
4. One special feature of this series, which is funded by Switzerland's Volkart Foundation, is that all of the photobooks are made available free of charge on Sheikh's Web site. See <https://www.fazalsheikh.org/fazal-sheikh/international-human-rights-series.html> (accessed on 4 September 2018).↵
5. Although from perspectives such as that of human rights law, there is a need to distinguish among migrants, refugees, and displaced persons (formal definitional issues are addressed at <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html> and <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/displaced-person-displacement/>), the reality of changing life circumstances is testament to widespread fluctuations and transitions between the defined categories in real life. The concept of "migrant portraiture" is introduced

here as an open and collective frame to include all the various groups of displaced people who are in conditions of migranthood. In that sense, it calls into question the division between "migrant" and "citizen" as Gregory Feldman has (2015).⁴

6. Alongside photobooks, Sheikh's work on issues of migration has comprised a series of photographs of migrant workers in Brazil's Grande Sertão and one of immigrants crossing the border between Mexico and the United States.⁴
7. He later reported: "As soon as we landed on the sandy spit at Lokocho, the journalists began working. Their stories had to be compiled in hours as they were leaving in the afternoon on the return trip to Nairobi. As I watched them work throughout the day, I noticed they were drawn to the areas that the spokesman had suggested would provide the best footage" (Sheikh 1996, 2f.). He recalled "feeling a sense of unease, an inability to follow along and take the expected photographs. As the days passed, the preconceptions that had been foisted on me in the initial briefing and the shock of the first encounter began to fade away, allowing a broader sense of the refugees and their situation to emerge. It was at this point that I began to ask the community elders and the refugees to collaborate with me in making the images" (qtd. in Jobey 2009, 15).⁴
8. The unaccompanied minors from southern Sudan were boys between eight and 18 years old who had been abducted from their homes and taken to Ethiopia, where they then were trained to fight in the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) against the Islamic regime of northern Sudan. After the Ethiopian government fell, these boys had to return to Sudan, where the SPLA was later defeated. Then, they fled across the border to Kenya on foot.⁴
9. In some cases, the information in the captions includes the symbolic or holy meanings of the forenames.⁴

GENDER AND MIGRATION: RESISTING WITH A CAMERA. A RESEARCHER TO RESEARCHER EXPERIENCE

YOLANDA HERNÁNDEZ-ALBÚJAR
ADRIANA CICCAGLIONE

This manuscript is a reflexive collaboration between two differently situated researchers. It meets at the crossroad of knowledge and visual activism at three levels: it uses a case study to analyze the possibilities of photovoice as a form of resistance against narratives of hate; it reflects on the ways in which the observed and the observer cooperate to construct from their own perspectives a legitimized knowledge aiming to promote visibility and social transformation; finally, it revises whether photovoice may become a form of visual activism and, if so, the ways in which images may be used toward this goal. Using as a point of departure the work of the photographer Diane Arbus and a photovoice project on being a migrant woman in Spain, the authors elaborate on the power of images to work at the margins, from the margins, and for the margins.

Ce manuscrit est le fruit d'une collaboration réflexive entre deux chercheuses situées à des endroits différents. Il se situe au carrefour de la connaissance et de l'activisme visuel à trois niveaux : il utilise une étude de cas pour analyser les possibilités du photovoice comme forme de résistance aux récits de haine; il réfléchit aux façons dont l'observé et l'observateur coopèrent pour construire à partir de leurs propres perspectives un savoir légitimé visant à promouvoir la visibilité et la transformation sociale; enfin, il examine si les images peuvent devenir une forme d'activisme visuel et, si c'est le cas, les façons dont elles peuvent être utilisées à cette fin. En utilisant comme point de départ le travail de la photographe Diane Arbus et un projet de photovoice sur le fait d'être une femme migrante en Espagne, les auteurs élaborent sur le pouvoir des images de travailler aux marges, à partir des marges et pour les marges.

INTRODUCTION

This manuscript is a reflexive collaboration between two differently situated researchers meeting at the crossroad of knowledge and visual activism at three levels: first, it uses a case study to analyze the possibilities of photovoice as a form of resistance against discourses of hate, which we define as a series of contextualized practices by which dominant groups construct “negative representations of the dominated group” (van Dijk 1992, 115) able to incite discrimination and even physical violent acts against specific groups. Second, it reflects on the ways in which the observed and the observer cooperate to construct from their own perspectives a legitimized knowledge aiming to promote visibility and social transformation. Finally, it revises the ways in which images may become a form of visual activism or not, depending on the use we make of those images.

The idea for this project emerged during a workshop called *Las Resistentes*,¹ a series of seminars on feminism and women’s empowerment for social transformation, in which participants learned and applied the method of photovoice to engage in discussions and understandings of gender-based experiences in the Spanish society. Adriana, an immigrant journalist from Venezuela, and I, a Spanish sociologist working on migration met at the seminars and decided to collaborate in the analysis of the photovoice project she realized in reference to visual activism. I approached Adriana because her pictures reminded me of Diane Arbus’ photography: poignant and personal, and intimately different from the other photovoices I was used to. Fascinated by her representations and style, I invited her to be part of a project in visual sociology and resistance. Starting from her initial participation as an interviewee, our partnership progressively evolved into a collaboration in which Adriana took a leading role in analyzing and presenting her insights about what it means to resist with a camera.

Adriana and I come from different disciplines, each of us carrying with herself specific views of community engagement and social transformation. Yet we found a comfortable fit in our desire to bring

our subjectivities into research: Adriana's trajectory as a journalist and her personal experiences as a migrant woman provided the ground for a powerful and elaborated visual storytelling of her everyday life. On my end, as a visual sociologist interested in gender and migration, I associated these personal stories to broader theoretical frameworks and understandings of power dynamics in society. I have been a migrant for over eighteen years: I have lived in three different countries, and even now that I am back to Spain, my cultural roots are foreign to Seville, in southern Spain, where the seminar took place. This work is the product of our synergic and yet different ways to understand and talk about migration. It goes beyond using photovoice to analyze gender and migration but rather engages in a methodological debate about the practice of photovoice itself and the questioning of democratization and resistance in research.

In what follows, I will first introduce Diane Arbus' work as the inspiration to think of photography as a tool of resistance against the hateful political discourse on migration that was performed in Spain during the 2019 election period. Then, I give a brief description of this project's political background, which is of utmost importance as it contributed to the general social mood regarding migration. Next, Adriana will introduce a photovoice inquiry on her experiences as an immigrant woman in Spain. Following that I will then reflect on Adriana's process of self-exploration, research, and resistance as a possible form of visual activism, highlighting its potentials and limitations. Finally, in the conclusions, Adriana and I collaboratively discuss the importance of including in our research forms of knowing that extend beyond the academic to embrace community-based empowerment and activism.

DIANE AND ADRIANA: INTERPRETING THE WORLD THROUGH A CAMERA

“Giving a camera to Diane Arbus is like putting a live grenade in the hands of a child.” This was the opening sentence of a *New York Times* article in September 2003 by Arthur Lubow. The words were pronounced by Norman Mailer in

the 1970s, after seeing the portrait that Arbus made of him. With those words, the writer and art critic referred to the merciless honesty of Arbus' photography and the power with which her camera captured what was considered unportrayable in her historical time. As a photographer, Diane Arbus boldly moved from the fashion industry to the street, where she pointed her camera toward unusual subjects, most of whom were experiencing and reproducing the societal margins through their own bodies. bell hooks beautifully defines margins as "part of the whole but outside the main body [...] a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives" (1989, 20). Arbus and her Rolleiflex² (Gross 2012) followed those people in the sites in which they survived. It was an anthropological voyage into deep urban, social, and cultural undergrounds.

One of the most innovative aspects of Arbus' work, which allowed her to stand apart from other photographers, was that she reconfigured the relationship between the photographer and the person photographed into a collaborative experience (Bosworth 2005). She did not pretend to objectively narrate the worlds of the people she photographed. Rather, she wanted to expose how these "others" perceived the world in which she was living. This "seeing" from their own perspective implied a complex and yet inevitably limited exercise of empathy, empowerment, and resignification on both sides, that of the watcher and that of the watched. It opened up social and political constructions to new possibilities and understandings, because when photographs and images are able to reposition viewers on a different side, to make them see what they did not see before, they become weapons of critical thinking and even rebellion. This sort of visual provocation is what Mailer acknowledged in Arbus' photography: she narrated the world from the other side, rather than the other side of the world, and she did this without any trace of prescribed charity or voyeurism. As she wrote in her autobiography, "I work from awkwardness. By that I mean I don't like to arrange things. If I stand in front of something, instead of arranging it, I arrange myself" (Arbus 1972, 12). Sociologically speaking, this subjectivization of the social phenomenon under observation was a

break from structuralism and from the empiricism of the time. Diane Arbus' work and her style of "borrowing" through her camera the world around her, represented in many senses an exploration of the arguments claiming for new epistemological possibilities of knowledge and the ontological role of research.

We used the symbolic sphere of photography as a strategic tool to move people away from their normative and accepted status quo and to instill new ideas for social interpretation and order. Pictures hold the potential to make visible the power dynamics of a society, if used in the right way and context. Similar to Diane Arbus' art, a camera can become a means to deconstruct, construct, and reconstruct narratives of normality, domination, and resistance. In this manuscript we narrate the ways in which one of the researchers involved in this project, Adriana, used the camera to give a personal account of herself as a migrant woman in Spain, at a time in which the right to participatory citizenship and recognition has been questioned by some political parties in the last few years, as we will discuss in the following section of this manuscript.

Similar to Diane Arbus, Adriana used the camera with boisterous honesty to position the viewer on the other side of the social spectrum, to question power, and to invite viewers to see from a non-dominant perspective. She did more than capturing representational images of her experiences: she made visible discourses and narratives of discrimination and hate towards migrants that are present in some public discourses, especially from the Spanish far right. This is the position of the unportrayed, of those who often swim against the current and need to resist it.

THE STORY BEHIND: A POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The significance of Adriana's photographs needs to be politically and socially contextualized. The recent breakthrough of far-right political parties in the European sphere has represented a change of public discourse around social phenomena such as migration and gender (Edenborg 2018). During both the regional political campaign in the autonomous region of Andalusia in 2018

and the presidential electoral campaign in 2019, politicians talked about the “migration crisis” as a main social issue. This highly politicized concern moved voters around discourses of national identity and defense, in a populist turn similar to the one experienced recently in the United States with Donald Trump, in the United Kingdom with the Brexit, in Italy with Matteo Salvini, and in Brazil with Jair Bolsonaro.

Under the premises of public security, economic protectionism, and cultural safeguard, some parties strongly opposed the arrival of migrants, especially if coming from Middle Eastern countries. With political slogans such as “we do not want an Islamized Europe” or “we will start the Reconquest”³ (alluding to the end of Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century); and misleading information such as “there are more than 50 million African migrants saving money to come to Spain,”⁴ migration was presented as an obvious issue for Spain. Statements of this kind tend to jeopardize populations that are already vulnerable, as public hostility against migrants during political campaigns has a negative influence in the natives’ social perception and attitudes toward the newcomers (Wayne 2008).

In parallel to the migrant discourse, gender has also been at the core of recent political campaigns in Spain. Strong grassroots feminist movement have been highly visible since the massive street demonstrations of March 8 in 2018 and 2019,⁵ and an increasing number of women have felt empowered to express their concerns regarding gender equality and violence. Most feminist groups framed women’s rights as human rights; this argument was key to construct a collective awareness about vulnerable populations, such as undocumented migrant women. Even more, the well-established and now popular Spanish Feminist movement has actively called its sympathizers to become not only agents of gender equality but also a street force to put a brake on the political advancement of the far right. For example, many feminist platforms endorsed a manifesto in favor of the rights of migrants and other vulnerable people.⁶

The interplay between dominant political discourses and the counteraction of feminist activism served as the background of this man-

uscript. Within this challenging social context, Adriana's account emerged as a form of activism opposed to the many discourses of hate that have impacted her life. Her photographs had a double function: on one side, they were qualitative data documenting her understandings of and opposition to anti-immigrant discourses. On the other side, they were a historical testimony of the changes of public discourses in our society. In this manuscript, Adriana's collaboration was instrumental for introducing her own photovoice project and her own constructions of gender and migration, grounding the conclusions in the politics and practices of everyday life.

ADRIANA: EXPERIENCES FROM THE OTHER SIDE

I discovered photovoice as a research and data collection technique when I prepared to start a course and workshop called *Las Resistentes* in 2019 in Seville, Spain. To prepare for the course, I read an article by Christopher Yañez-Urbina *et al.* (2018) in which photovoice is described as a participatory action that allows for new reflections about our own realities. I understood photovoice as a form of activism that facilitates people's participation and social transformation, a concept that adheres to the root of Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris's (1997) principles. It also reminds us that, beyond the theories that are so important for knowledge and for channeling actions, lie experiences, both lived in their immediacy and elaborated afterwards.

My experience as a migrant woman was different from that of the other group members I was working with during the course. In these circumstances, I developed my own project, "Venezuela with the voice of an immigrant woman." This was a photovoice project in which I worked for four months, preparing photographs and selecting six of them, to be shown at the *Las Resistentes* exhibition in Seville in 2019. In addition to being a woman, a migrant, a mestiza, and a feminist, there is another crucial component to my identity: I am a journalist, and this pushed my desire to communicate what it means for a person from South America to be in another continent, living unfamiliar experiences that, at times, have been incomprehen-

sible to me. When doing photovoice, however, I stripped myself of the journalistic mission to report events objectively “as they are,” in order to let my subjective voice as a woman flow. Also, most journalistic photography responds to the latest event or information. It is, in other words, a medium to inform about something. My photographs, instead, lose this connection to the new and the need to notify: they are timeless. A personal voice that, at the same time, became collective since it is the echo of many other Venezuelan and Latin American women who live in Seville. I realized that neither the perfect photography nor the photojournalistic vision was necessary. Instead, the power of the voice relied in transmitting a testimony through images. The workshop instructors asked us to take six photographs through which we could tell a story that was local and, at the same time, universal. What has happened to me in Seville could occur in other places and with other names and experiences.

My photos: The voice of a migrant woman

I took more than thirty images through a digital camera, an analog camera, and a lomography camera. All of the photographs were in black and white to accentuate the predominant features of the images in their greys. Ted Grant once said that if a person was photographed in color, he photographs her clothes, while if he photographs her in black and white, he photographs her soul. That was what I wanted to capture, elaborate, and convey, how I felt and saw myself deep inside, a body crossed by many circumstances at the same time. I photographed my body to talk to the audience, expecting to be seen and heard.

The suitcase is open on a bed, with my hand grabbing the flag of Venezuela (figure 1). The closed hand is the rooting, as I wanted to keep my nation with me. I am a forced migrant; I have experienced an imposed exile which I consider a form of violence from the Estate towards its citizens. I am not alone: by 2020, more than 4 million are part of the Venezuelan diaspora due to the Complex Humanitarian Emergency (CHE)⁷ and the political, economic, and social unrest of the country.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

The second image is a single photo, even if it may seem a montage (figure 2). I used an analog camera and left the shutter open, for the light to record in the film the various movements of my face. I am looking at different directions to convey the out-of-place feeling I had when listening to many different voices, advice, and suggestions. I had to process so much information coming from many people that, at some point, I lost my way and I just did not know what to do.

Both Spanish and foreign women experience street harassment in urban everyday life. This is me, lowering my dress in a public space waiting for the tram (figure 3). There, some men make unwanted compliments, looks, and gestures that I live as violence. These attitudes exclude women from public spaces which are designed by and for men.

The fourth image shows the unexpected discrimination I faced when I arrived at Seville and realized that, as in my country, a job is preferably given to a man than to a woman, regardless of his qualification (figure 4). I realized that, just because of his sex, a man has privileges that I don't enjoy. To represent this, I used an old rocker and asked



Figure 4

a friend to be on the top while I sat at the bottom. This image is the opposite of the balance and equality that feminism pursues and that we must seek.

The fifth photograph shows my breasts and my hands holding a bouquet of carnations (figure 5). One of the main obstacles I encountered when arriving to Seville was the weather. The first winter caused me hypothermia. I was not used to the Spanish weather; it did not belong to my biography. To me, it was a limit to my integration. I try to adapt to it, like any other person who arrives to a city with a different climate from that of her lands and origins.

The sixth and last image are two self-portraits combined in one (figure 6). The first self-portrait is me (Adriana) smiling and showing my cellphone with a picture of myself again holding the Venezuelan flag. It represents two sides of my being: on one side is what I show to the world. On the other, what I keep inside of me. I used the flag to close the circle of the story of my photovoice, which began with this symbol.

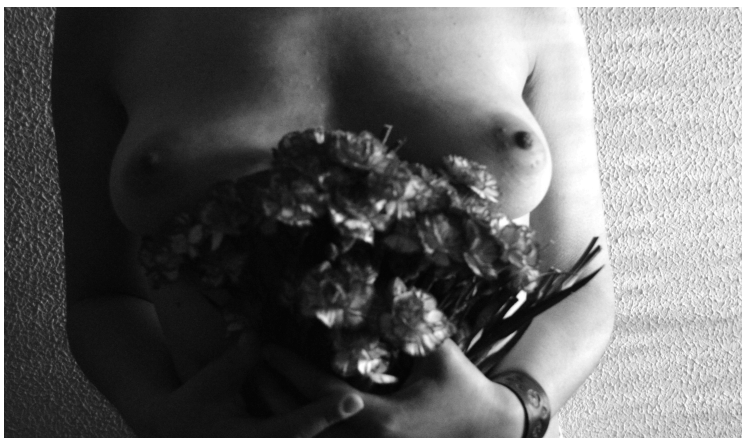


Figure 5

THE RESISTANCE

The process of activist storytelling has a long trajectory in sociology, anthropology, and human geography (Nos Aldás 2015). To use photovoice in migration research reveals the complexity of such processes but also uncovers the individual that experiences it in first person. Migrant women live conditions of vulnerability, especially when they move without the necessary planning and economic resources, as is the case of many Venezuelan refugees and asylum seekers who have fled the Complex Humanitarian Emergency. Both in the countries of origin and arrival, the bodies of most women attempt to resist all types of abuse, discrimination, exclusion, violations, and unfavorable situations in an array of areas, such as health, employment, right to decent housing, leisure, and food. Under these circumstances, the camera and the photovoice become a tool to denounce and show the different factors that affect us, as women and migrants, in our attempt to integrate into a new society. Images then should inform organizations, institutions, and social groups with power to develop policies that improve the conditions of the less-favored segments of the population. This is why photovoice



Figure 6

evolves as a tool of resistance and fulfills the purpose of moving awareness and of achieving changes.

Visual activism begins by identifying and recognizing problems, and then by photographing, showing, and denouncing them. In the workshop *Las Resistentes*, we as participants had the opportunity to show our work in a public exhibit. I took advantage of my personal platform as a journalist to draw attention to it and invite as many people as I could. This was important to the project, an intrinsic part of it. To resist stereotypes about migrant women and to change existing discourses of hate against diversity, I had to expose them first. To me, the photovoice became a significant strategy to do so.

RESISTING WITH A CAMERA: WHAT IS VISUAL ACTIVISM?

Similar to Diane Arbus, Adriana's photographs carry with them a dialectic and inseparable tension between her understanding of resistance and the images from her personal experience. In her photovoice, Adriana did something unique: she photographed herself in a sort of autobiography or autoethnography of intimate experiences. This turn was a far more personal choice than just taking pictures of objects and people signifying resistance, which is what the other course participants did. Adriana took the assignment one step further: by placing herself in front of the camera and not behind it, she embodied resistance. The feminist literature considers embodiment a crucial practice⁵ through which the body is read as the plateau where the biological, the social, the symbolic, and the personal interplay and, at the same time, perform games of power as well as of resistance. Through her methodological choices, Adriana transformed an individual account of distress, sadness, and anger into a shared and empowering experience. In front of the camera, she was not a mere observer who reproduced her own image of reality, but an active and social constructor of it. Even more radically, Adriana's move symbolized that women both can and need to become the physical representation and embodiment of the reality to be represented.

Although closely related to activism and, arguably, a necessary basis for it, empowerment, understood as “a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change” (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995, 569) cannot substitute social engagement and change. Although activism encourages empowerment and vice versa, still they are two distinct sides of related processes. Since Wang and Burrell (1994, 1997) first used photovoice to promote reproductive health among rural women in China, they paved the way for this technique to become a widespread practice in much community-based participatory research. Empowerment, visibility, self-advocacy,⁹ and engagement are regularly mentioned among the many positive outcomes of using photovoice while working with vulnerable populations (Nykiforuk, Vallianatos, and Nieuwendyk, 2011). Nonetheless, as Deborah Barrett (2004), Luc Pauwels (2015), Linda Liebenberg (2018) and Fairey (2018) notice, it is important to remember that these characteristics are not inherent to photovoice. Rather, they are ambitious outcomes or expected objectives facilitated by images. The process of photographing acts as a medium and not as an end: as Pauwels states, “making pictures may be a valuable part of a process to improve the situation of underrepresented or marginalized people, but there is nothing intrinsically or automatically empowering in using pictures” (2015, 129). Furthermore, when not planned correctly, photovoice projects might cause more damage than good to vulnerable populations (Barret 2004, Kihato 2010).

From our conversations, it emerged that the empowerment that Adriana experienced did not come from taking pictures and building an individual narrative around them. Rather, it derived from the decisions and choices she faced throughout the entire process, including the writing of this manuscript. In dissecting such progression of visibility and enfranchisement, we identified six main stages: first, thinking about the message a person wishes to convey, and what kinds of images best contribute to communicate that to other people; second, reflecting on the ethical concerns and personal safety involved in taking the pictures; third, situating the images in their social and political context; fourth, creating a storytelling to accompany each

image; fifth, selecting and organizing the photographs around a bigger story or metanarrative that acknowledge their relationship with the contexts of the third stage; and finally, presenting the project to others to dialogue about the rationales, challenges, and outcomes of the whole process.

Images for social change and activism might convey different messages to different audiences (Cabañes 2017). This is an important challenge we needed to address, especially in the case of migrants and refugees whose images are typically instrumentalized by institutional practices and political interests. Visual activism is from this perspective a matter of negotiation and patronization of knowledge that simultaneously intersects numerous actors or agents. For instance, mass media representations play a key role in public perceptions of refugees and migrants, eventually influencing audiences, policies, and the migrants themselves (Wright 2002). In a photovoice project, migrants such as Adriana are the subjects behind the camera: they choose what to portray and how to engage the photovoice potential to counter oppressive power games.

Still, the risk of appropriation and misrepresentation of meanings, purposes, and messages of the images exists. Critical reflexivity allows this issue to be addressed (Gemignani 2017). Authors need first to reflect on their personal and social positions toward the object and act of representation. After they have gained some awareness of their subjectivities and subjectivations, they need to critically consider what alternative positionings and narratives may accompany the photos. Yet the right message in the wrong place is still at risk of missing the target and its desired impact at the political level. It is important, then, that photographs and narratives are purposefully and critically chosen and are presented in places and contexts that are ready to listen (Dreher 2009).

The above reflections hold that even if the method of photovoice might be a valuable instrument to support research and community engagement with migrants, producing images, talking about them, and showing them do not automatically translate into community empowerment. And even in the instances in which empowerment

may occur, such experience does not always lead to activism. In other words, there is no magic formula to convert a photovoice project into visual activism.

Still, we would like to note two intertwined positions that Adriana and I took during our collaboration and that might be useful to shed some light on. First, we stressed the importance of crossing disciplines to facilitate reaching out to different audiences. Second, we presented our work to these diverse audiences in order to keep the research open, as a work in progress rather than a finished project. In our experience, this is the most overlooked phase of photovoice research: instead of presenting the pictures and narratives as final products, they should be seen as becomings that allow for “constructing constructions and narrating narratives” (Gemignani and Hernandez-Albujar 2019, 140) that are always evolving, relational, and relative.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Adriana and I came from different disciplines that, as for any field, carry unique epistemological and communication styles. As a journalist, Adriana had a preference for telling stories and dialogue with others. Her openness to share her very personal photovoice project beyond the workshop responded to this inclination as well as to our commitment to find broader audiences. Adriana was familiar with spreading her stories through multiple communication and social channels, which she did to promote the photovoice exposition at the end of the seminar. As a sociologist working in academia, my audiences were somewhat more reduced, and I was unfamiliar with sharing stories that do not comply with the traditional academic format. My goal was to dwell in the social context and the processes I observed during the workshop of *Las Resistentes*, and to establish a dialogue with the existing literature and theories concerning photovoice and activism.

To combine these two styles of knowing and sharing required a reciprocal adaptation that enriched our own perspectives on migration and pushed our understandings of visual activism. In my own field,

classic (positivist, post-positivist, and empiricist) academic discourses tend to describe, explain, and predict social phenomena in a form of “expository” analysis (Bal 1996). Under these premises, the subject of study is involved only to a certain degree (typically to collect data), but they are missing when analyzing data and writing academic manuscripts. In the case of visual research, to display images that do not belong to the researcher, who nonetheless has the final word about the theoretical framework that accompany them, is also a subtle form of appropriation and power. By writing and thinking about this article together, we broke apart from these traditional research roles and positions. Adriana’s pictures are a source of information, but she also takes part on our insights about photovoice and activism. Participatory and critical visual activism requires, first, avoiding the use of participants’ images as commodities for one person’s research (Szörényi 2006), which can simply be used as an existing product detached from its author and its user. Second, challenging the research hierarchies involved between researcher and researched (Chalfen, Sherman, and Rich 2010, Gemignani 2011) required ongoing negotiations that eventually blended traditional roles. For both of these requirements, it was necessary for Adriana and me to collaborate in all of the steps of the inquiry.

OUTREACH TO DIVERSE AUDIENCES

The second position we took concerns sharing the outcomes with broader audiences, a usually overlooked part of visual activism. As Wang (1997) argues, photovoice implies the researchers’ ongoing effort to ensure that both its messages constructed through the images and its social activism are brought forth through publications, exhibitions, public meetings, and any combination of these. While most photovoice projects end up with a one-time photograph exhibit or display, we engaged with innovative possibilities to reach out to new audiences in order to underscore how we used images to communicate with others our message of nonconformity and our invitations that resistance and alternatives to the status quo were possible.

This phase of the project, like the previous ones, also depended on the commitment, time, resources, and creativity of the actors involved. In addition to the photography exhibit, we presented Adriana's photovoice and our collaboration at two conferences, we wrote this manuscript for publication, and planned to explore other platforms to share Adriana's visual narrative and our partnership experience such as a blog. These initiatives constituted "listening spaces" that keep open the conversation about discrimination against migrant women and explore alternative ways to resist to such discrimination.

Creative thinking is important, but creative thinking is more than creativity: it is creativity with a purpose. For visual activism, it concerns the "interaction of pixels and actions to make a change" (Mirzoeff 2015; 297) in a journey in which the means becomes the goal, and the goal transcends the individual to become social. In the methodological case here presented, individual critical picture taking promoted social awareness, engagement, and resistance in an evolving variety of audiences. In other words, any action to actively search for new, larger, even unexpected audiences is a means to encourage transformation and to sustain participation in social activism. If and how this action is able to provoke significant changes is difficult to assess. Yet a qualitative evaluation is undoubtedly not the end of the process but an integral part of it, even more so when social activism is the goal.

CONCLUSIONS

Adriana's photographs were a unique type of account. They offered personal interpretations of some experiences that migrant women in Spain may live. Similarly to Diane Arbus, Adriana pointed the camera toward herself, and captured what was happening in the societies from which her experiences were being fed. Her pictures and her narrative represented an opportunity to gain access to legitimate discourses that may contribute to the knowledge we have of our society. It changes our perspective and gives to the camera the means of resistance. This essay describes a

collaborative researcher-to-researcher approach to visual activism and draws on a multidisciplinary and pluricultural perception of gender and migration. Since Judith Butler's theoretical framework on the construction of gender and sexuality and Zygmunt Bauman's work on globalization and migration, identity construction has been progressively understood as a subjectively positioned process that moves among multiple relations of tension and resignification. Although fluidity and flexibility should guide the citizen of the future, conservative discourses and rigidities seem to gain strength in public arenas. Opposition to such discourses might come from a number of fronts, but when counter-acting activism is the goal, we should privilege the voice/vision and experiences of those who live in first person the consequences of discriminatory discourses. Images represent a valuable tool to channel activism and resistance when used to promote critical thinking and to question the status quo of dominant discourses and social orders.

This photovoice project on migration and resistance documents a project on critical reflexivity in visual studies and visual engagement. Influenced by our readings of Diane Arbus' work and her unconventional urban portraits, we presented Adriana's images and experiences. Her personal story might be specific, but it is not, by any means, merely anecdotal. Rather, her photovoice can be understood as a manifestation of the voice and testimony of many migrant women in Spain. Their stories are tales of uprooted bodies and displaced subjectivities attempting to find novel and legitimate spaces of action in a political context that leaves little space for empowerment. They are women who face challenges in places which non-migrant people find accommodating, or at least unthreatening. Furthermore, we also presented the importance of critical reflexivity in the process of picture taking to keep the focus on social transformation and empowerment and to keep the photovoice participatory rather than paternalistic.

As John Grady (2007) reminded us when talking about advertising, images act as social indicators of group relations. As such, they help us to better understand not only the social and political context in which we live, but also the ways in which we participate ~~to~~ it,

whether by conformance or resistance. When done reflexively, using a camera to tell stories opens up possibilities to transform implicit, normalized, or disregarded social phenomena into noticeable and problematizable political processes. The camera becomes the narration through which the author can host affective and material forces for change and transformation. For such possibility to materialize into something tangible, the camera needs to produce more than images. Visibility is key in this endeavor, because it goes beyond representation to expose the power dynamics that occur in society. As such, the public exhibit at the end of the workshop project as well as this article are key to reach to audiences and expose the issue. The camera per se is not enough, but when used purposefully and critically, it may articulate the world in ways and modes that may incite awareness. We make a case for considering photovoice as a multi-dimensional and complex road that entails thinking and producing as well as collaborative sharing, discussing, and negotiating the images, the process of taking them, their meanings and actions, and the political or power-based circumstances surrounding the images and the photovoice. It is only within such necessary epistemological complexity that we can consider photovoice a tool for activism and social change.

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NOTES

1. For more information about the course and its content visit: <http://las-resistentes.saharasevilla.org/curso/>
2. Arbus used mostly a Rolleiflex 6x6 producing a characteristic squared format.
3. 9 de Abril Palacio de Congresos de Córdoba <https://casoaislado.com/santiago-abascal-no-queremos-una-europa-islamizada-vamos-a-iniciar-la-reconquista/>
4. Pablo Casado, the head of the second-most important party in Spain, declared to the press "Hay estudios policiales que dicen que hay un millón de inmigrantes esperando en las costas libias" que van a tomar "las rutas españolas" 29 July 2018 https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/Pablo-Casado-rechaza-acogida-inmigrantes_0_797920524.html
5. During the 2019 International Women's Day Celebration on 8 March, official sources estimated more than 770,000 participants only in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/03/08/actualidad/1552079524_186232.html
6. <http://aieti.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/COMUNICADO-.pdf> more than 20 collective groups signed the manifesto.

7. CHE has been defined by the UN as a “humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society in which there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority, as a result of internal or external conflict, and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of a single agency” (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, IASC, 1994).¹
8. Judith Butler, borrowing from the phenomenological tradition of Merleau Ponty in *Bodies that Matter* became a leader in the field of feminist theory and the constitution of the body.²
9. See for instance www.photovoice.org, www.photovoiceworldwide.com, or https://foodarc.ca/makefoodmatter/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/VOICES_PhotoVoiceManual.pdf.³

A KEY TO HOME: ILLUMINATING THE ROLE OF THE SIM CARD IN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

LIZ HINGLEY

This paper considers how creative research mediated by mobile devices might contribute to upending inherited notions of refugee powerlessness and passivity in galleries and museums. A collaborative project, undertaken in 2019, explored the significance of SIM cards in forging a sense of security, identity, and belonging for Syrian refugees on a resettlement program in the U.K. This “opening up” the “body” of the smartphone in the process of creating artworks reveals the urgent need for deeper appreciation of the meaning and materiality of personal digital ecosystems (Blanke & Pybus 2020) for refugees negotiating a sense of home.

Cet article examine la manière dont une recherche créatrice réalisée à l'aide de smartphones peut contribuer à renverser dans les galeries d'art et les musées les notions d'impuissance et de passivité ressenties par les réfugiés. Un projet collaboratif, entrepris en 2019, a exploré le rôle des cartes SIM pour forger un sentiment de sécurité, d'identité, et d'appartenance parmi des réfugiés syriens participant à un programme de relocalisation au Royaume-Uni. Cette “ouverture” du “corps” du smartphone au cours du processus de création artistique révèle le besoin urgent d'une appréciation plus profonde de la signification et de la matérialité des écosystèmes numériques personnels (Blanke & Pybus 2020) pour les réfugiés qui tentent de reconstruire un sentiment d'appartenance.



Gold plated silver SIM artwork/ Key to Coventry Cathedral

INTRODUCTION

The text and subsequent sequence of photographs in this essay must be viewed together; they are necessarily complementary, and of equal importance, in my material approach to investigating ways that the networked infrastructure of smartphones expand the meaning of home and identity for refugees.¹

This creative research project was developed in 2019 with the aim of using visual ethnography to contextualize and better understand the experiences, values, needs, and aspirations of Syrian refugees settling in the United Kingdom. In response to an invitation from the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry to make portraits of individuals who had recently arrived from Syria, I proposed to co-create and exhibit artworks in response to the museum's existing collection and dialogue with local Syrians. I sought to subvert common constructions of difference and impersonal depictions of "vulnerability" and "powerlessness" in existing photography depicting migration (Chouliaraki & Stolić 2019), and instead offer a creative opportunity without a dictated course of action or outcome, the process of

which might contribute to both the experience and understanding of resettlement.

Coventry has the highest rate of population growth of any U.K. city outside of London, and migration is the main driver of this growth. Immigration has always been a part of Coventry's reality, and it has become a particularly important feature of the city's economic transformation in recent years (Griffith & Mackela 2017). At the time of this project, Coventry had welcomed hundreds of refugees on The Syrian Vulnerable People's Resettlement Scheme, a unique program designed by the local Citizens Advice Bureau, Coventry Law Centre, and the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC), facilitated in collaboration with The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Refugees are greeted at the airport by representatives of the city council and CRMC. Within four hours of their arrival, they are given a package with their name on; this contains a key to their new home, a library card, and a mobile phone SIM card charged with £20 credit. These items are carefully considered for their potential to make meaningful new connections, provide a sense of autonomy and mobility, as well as granting access (to one's home, to the library, to regional digital infrastructures). One man, who had a successful career as a lawyer in Syria, took a job supporting newly arrived refugees and shaping the program of welcome with the CRMC. He observed the "extreme happiness" at the moment they put the U.K. SIM card in their smartphones, "connection and communication is everything, the best gift." These small material artifacts are the site in which networked connectivity is enacted, setting off a chain of reactions that both augment the sociality and data memory of users. One young man I talked to described the experience:

"Receiving the package was like an incredible feeling of welcome and acknowledgement that someone was thinking of us... When I first arrived my SIM card from Jordan stopped working and I felt totally out of touch with the world. When I got a U.K. SIM card I began to feel part of this country... All my family and friends were waiting for news. The first thing I did was call them and send them pictures of my new bedroom."

SMARTPHONE SUITCASES

During informal meetings at the CRMC, as well as the central City Library, I met and fostered relationships with Syrian refugees who had arrived to Coventry within the previous two years. In groups and individually, we discussed what material items they value in creating and maintaining a sense of home. Few mentioned or could recollect any belongings they retained on their journey to the U.K. from Syria, apart from their smartphone. All individuals had either their own smartphone or agreed access to one owned by family or friends. They noted their increased use of smartphones since arriving to the U.K. Such an observation is consistent with Gillespie et al.'s (2016, 2) characterization of the smartphone as, "an essential tool for refugees." In one meeting Abdul summed up his feelings: "The phone is life, the phone is the suitcase."

The SIM card gifted on arrival unlocks the "smartphone suitcase," connecting it to local carriers and thus enabling contact with scattered family and friends, personal data memories, as well as apps, which facilitate functioning in a new place. The SIM can be viewed as a unique key to access regional digital infrastructures, theorized as "signal territories" by media scholar Lisa Parks (2013). A signal territory is anchored within, yet not isomorphic with, state bounds; it connects with a digital global network, thus locating, orientating and transcending geographical borders. A SIM card activates a phone number, which provides a permanent location and secure contact base that works far better than a postal address today. Whereas earlier generations of migrants turned to photo studios, postcards and postal services to record and send images back home, now a quick snap on the phone camera, posted onto WhatsApp, immediately communicates everyday life. However, this channel of connection has limitations and is part of learning a new way of life, as one man described:

"It took me and the others (refugees arriving at the same time) around four months to work out where to go to top up our SIM cards with credit and how to communicate what we needed. We were very careful with our credit. The periods of connec-

tion were like windows onto a new life in Coventry between here, and family and friends not here.”

My conversations identified how refugees sought to maintain existing relationships and forge new ones, through what Blanke and Pybus (2020) call the fabric of the mobile phone ecosystem—the open infrastructures of the web and the enclosed walled environments of platforms, apps, and personal data. Most participants emphasized the vital role of Google Maps and Google Translate in navigating their new lives in Coventry. A few spoke of using the messaging app Next Door Neighbour to build relationships with their new local community by running errands for neighbours in need. Transnational emotional relationships were once mediated through letter writing and postal services (Thomas & Znaniecki 1996), more recent work notes the “vital role of the telephone” among asylum seekers (Leung et al. 2009, 7), and Uimonen (2013) discusses the role of place bound internet cafes for maintaining strong ties and keeping up to date with world news. Those I encountered in Coventry explained that they relied on the city library for public internet access when they lacked credit to connect their SIM card or wanted to stream Syrian films and cartoons, which a number of participants noted “transported” them to a feeling of “home.” However, this point of connection cannot compare to the critical sense of autonomy and physical intimacy afforded by the personal smartphone. One woman participant elaborated:

“It [the smartphone] is a part of myself and part of my personality—it is like a vital body part—it helps me mentally to feel alive [...] I can say that it gives me a much bigger feeling of freedom than a car or bike...”

The proliferation of accessible personal digital devices in recent years challenges us to consider the data communicated through and archived within mobile devices as tactile representations of shared emotional experiences, akin to physical letters or photographic prints. In linking Syrian networks of belonging to regional digital infrastructures, the networked infrastructure afforded by the SIM card

on mobile devices can extend the feeling of presence in a new place. This draws on the work of David Conradson and Deirdre McKay (2007), who insist that migrant subjects are multiply located, with strong senses of attachment and responsibility to family, friends, and place. They assert the importance of emotions and feelings in understanding both mobility and placement in social life. In McKay's study of a Filipino family, located in Hong Kong and the Philippines, she describes this as a "translocal field of intimacy [that] elaborates on previous co-present relations" (2007, 191). The immediacy of digital connection can enable an intense embodied *presencing* of others as near-perpetual companions in life (Frosh 2018). For the refugees I met in Coventry, the networked connection afforded by the SIM card represents contradictory feelings of both empowerment and fragility, proximity, and distance. It nourishes a sense of intimacy with scattered loved ones, as well as facilitating new experiences and knowledge that draws them apart. As one woman shared:

"In the first few weeks I took photographs of everything with my phone and shared them online until the credit ran out. It was all so new and exciting to try to understand and explain to my family and friends. But now I deliberately don't share because it hurts. It hurts me because I want them to be here, and it hurts them because they want to be here."

METHODS IN MAKING

The project engaged approximately 30 people including a core group of ten who created the artworks, five women and five men between the ages of 15 and 60. The concept of the SIM card artwork developed in response to informal conversations with participants about the objects they most value in creating and maintaining a sense of home, as well as explorations of the Coventry City archives. As discussed above, the SIM card gifted on arrival to the city is seen to symbolize independence in a new place and understanding of self in relation to past, present, and future. A participant articulated, "The sim card is like the petrol in the car, the phone is the car. I would feel imprisoned without it."

The reflective and relational nature of art making informed and enriched our exchanges, understanding of each other, and outcomes. In most meetings an interpreter assisted when translation was required, but our non-verbal communications, mediated by mobile phones and drawings, proved the most engaged and insightful. In person and through WhatsApp messages, participants shared pictures of themselves, their friends, and locations in Syria, as well as photographs they had taken in the process of discovering and mapping Coventry. Photographs as repositories of history and memory acquired new dimensions when incorporated into descriptions of their new life in the city. The weather and terrain in Syria and the U.K. were compared through photographs of sun-bleached, semi-rural landscapes, and those of Coventry's famed post-war architecture set under rather greyer skies. Participants were also invited to share feelings and stories by drawing. This responsive process of making became vital to my perception of their current values, connections, and struggles.

The anthropologists of material culture Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam emphasize the role of learning by doing, ethnographic analysis of the embodied creativity and improvisation inherent in making is a mutual learning process (Ingold 2013). The participants' drawings illustrated ambitions for their lives in the U.K., they revealed family networks and professional skills. Our dialogue circled around their eager desires to tangibly contribute to the city of Coventry. These desires included, among many other things, setting up the city's first Syrian restaurant and cookery school, as well as offering their skills in the arts of calligraphy, music, and hairdressing.

A few Syrian women were keen to have portraits taken in their "Coventry clothes." Muna explained that she felt liberated from the more formal expectations of women's dress in Syria and wanted to promote this freedom within the Syrian community online. She dreamt of establishing a clothes design business for Muslim women in the U.K. fusing Middle Eastern and British styles. One man proudly asked me to photograph his daughter in her Taekwondo outfit, a sport she had taken up on arriving to Coventry, so that he could share it on WhatsApp. He explained how the networked smartphone is essential for his family to maintain and develop their "two selves":

“It is a way for my children to remember the faces, the places, the language of Syria, and for our family to build a secure future life here.”

I organized a group tour of the Herbert’s archives for the participants to consider how artifacts narrate the stories of people who have shaped the city’s story. We were particularly drawn to the stories emanating from the extensive collection of keys dating from the 12th-19th century. In medieval Coventry esteemed residents and visitors were presented with a “Key to the City,” as a symbolic gesture of welcome, empowerment, and connection. We decided to base our archival artworks on the design of the SIM card, the contemporary welcome gift, which acts as a key to unlocking a networked sense of identity and fostering feelings of “home,” emotions that are essential to imagined futures, as Yuval-Davis (2011, 9) describes in her investigative book on the politics of belonging. This precious SIM card also signifies the complexity of resettlement and conflicting feelings of attachment to their new lives in Coventry, and ties to loved ones who do not share the same spatiotemporality.

I commissioned a silversmith to make replica SIMs in solid silver. The participants’ designs based on their drawings were engraved onto the SIMs, as presented in the photographs below. To mirror the codes on the back of standard SIM cards, participants submitted meaningful numerical configurations, such as dates of arrival in Coventry, deaths of loved ones in Syria, and birth dates. The use of silver was symbolic; refined silver smithing is a craft with which the city of Coventry has long associations, and silver is also the most conductive metal—an emblem of connection. The sculptures were gold plated to replicate the layer of gold on actual SIM cards and to emphasize their treasured emotional and practical value today. In the exhibition the SIMs, engraved with the experiences, needs, and aspirations of recently arrived Syrian refugees, were presented alongside selected keys from the museum’s collection dating from the 12th through to the 19th centuries. The new artifacts were also acquired by the Herbert collection.

Participants requested that the SIM artifacts be fashioned into pendants to wear around the neck, and that I make professional portraits of them. The SIM pendants that sit close to the skin draw attention to how meaning and matter entangle. Ideas arising in dialogue likened the smartphone to a limb, and the use of it akin to blinking or breathing. Deborah Lupton argues that materializations and extensions, alternative ways of knowing and enacting bodies and selves, are central to selfhood. Lupton (2016) sees our personal digital data as reliquaries of our humanity, testament to our lived experiences and unique identity. In this case, the SIM pendants, engraved with personal numbers and visual messages, materialize the sensitivity of this matter in an intimately worn item and highlight the ways that our digital data and devices are vulnerable to identification and control.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

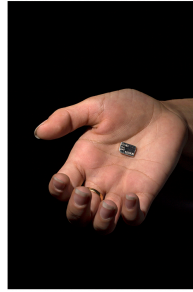
This investigation touched on the symbolic, emotional, and practical value of the SIM card as the overlooked backbone of modern mobile communication—a key to unlocking transnational as well as local networks, fabricating personal data and imagined futures. This preliminary creative research revealed a responsibility to better attend to the unfolding and generative ways that humans and smartphone infrastructures intermesh in academic research, resettlement programmes and museum collections.

The collaboration built on previous studies with refugee migrant groups that cite the fundamental role digital technology can play in building social capital, and hence social inclusion (Alam & Imran 2015). Our critical “opening-up” of the smartphone will contribute to ongoing investigations that seek ways to materially express the multidimensional agency and sense of belonging afforded by the SIM card. This minute overlooked artifact enables individuals to make connections across place and time, facilitating a sense of identity and belonging. The research participants and I view the SIM card as a precious and evolving storyboard of intimate relationships.

Following the amplified reliance on networked mobile devices during the COVID-19 pandemic, the potential for severe isolation has

been thrown into the spotlight, as well as questions over the tracking of private data by governments and tech companies. Recent literature on the ethics of data use questions whether and how it is possible to balance the right to privacy with the right to be protected from harm, and the right to be left alone with the right to be seen (Taylor 2016). From the moment of connection via the intimate mobile device, refugees are thrust forth from powerlessness to possibility and dependence. A number of U.K.-based migration charities (Bristol Refugee Rights, CMRC) and scholars (Felsberger & Subramanian 2021) are currently campaigning for mobile internet access to be addressed in relation to other human rights. This emerging discourse over the right to mobile internet access, also recognized by the World Health Organisation (2017), demonstrates a shift in global understanding of what makes us human and the contemporary meaning of home and belonging.

In response to Leurs's & Smets's (2018, 1) thoughtful call for "a reflexive politics of knowledge production," I will close by asking, how might we better include the networked materiality of digital data and smartphones in narrating and archiving contemporary stories of migration?





Keys of Coventry in chronological order, 11th-17th Century, from the Herbert Museum and Art Gallery Collection


I am a hairdresser. To me the
Sound of scissors is like music.
In Syria I made money with my
Scissors to build my house and
support my family.
I am still waiting to be able to
use my scissors here.

Fadi
42
Hama countryside





∞
This Symbol is about the infinity of love.
When the two lines are closed the love is together
and complete.
In this picture I drew the lines open because
I am not allowed to marry my boyfriend.
The birds represent freedom, they take my
love to him.
My family is not together in this country.
I am not able to marry until they are
reconnected as my mother needs me.
Lilal Shekmanous.
26 years old.
Syria-Qameshli.







Installation of Keys, Sim Card artifacts, Light box photographs, The Herbert Gallery,
Coventry 2019

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NOTES

1. All images, quotes, and writings are shared with permission.↵

(DIS)AFFECT, PHOTOGRAPHY, PLACE

PATRICIA PRIETO-BLANCO

Migrants are connected for a variety of reasons (Leurs and Prabhakar 2018, p. 247), and in a myriad of ways (Cabalquinto 2018; Özdemir, Mutluer, and Özyürek 2019; Gencil Bek and Prieto-Blanco 2020). Drawing from a larger project of ethnographic nature (Prieto-Blanco 2016b), this paper argues that photographic practices advance socialization in transnational families, and that each practice activates certain relational affordances to support bonding and familial intimacy. This also serves to offer an alternative reading of phatic communication (Malinowski 1923) as an emotion-based process. Finally, the paper proposes to understand (digital) photography as a medium of (inter)action and experience for transnational families.

Les migrants sont liés entre eux pour un grand nombre de raisons (Leurs and Prabhakar, p. 247) et d'une myriade de manières (Cabalquinto 2018; Özdemir, Mutluer, and Özyürek 2019; Gencil Bek and Prieto-Blanco 2020). S'inspirant d'un plus grand projet de nature ethnographique (Prieto-Blanco 2016b), cet article argumente que les pratiques photographiques aident à la socialisation au sein des familles transnationales et que chaque pratique active des potentiels relationnels pour soutenir les liens et l'intimité familiales. Cela permet également d'offrir une lecture alternative de la communication phatique (Malinowski 1923) comme un processus reposant sur les émotions. Enfin, l'article offre une compréhension de la photographie (digitale) comme un moyen d'(inter)action et d'expérience pour les familles transnationales.

INTRODUCTION

While for many current constellations of hardwares, softwares, and, analogue objects (*polymediations*, Herrmann and Tyma 2015) represent a shift brought about by the context of COVID-19 and remote work/socializing, a complex landscape of *new* mediations has been present in the everyday of transnational families for years now (Madianou and Miller 2012). This paper uses a conceptual framework focused on the contextualization of photographic exchanges within “socio-technical” photographic practices (Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016) and potential emotive character of photographic exchanges to analyze (digital) photographic practices in eleven Irish-Spanish families for eighteen months. The research design was particularly informed by narrative inquiry and visual sociology (Bach 2007; Bell 2013; Squire 2015), and three research methods were originally developed for this research—three phased consent process, visualization of circle of reference, and the home tour of photographic displays. All participants participated in four stages: a narrative interview with a photo-elicitation element; a second narrative interview followed by a visual exploration of their photographic displays at their homes; semi-structured interview about their photographic practices; and in three follow-up interviews. For readers interested in the methodological approach and research design, allow me to refer you to a previous piece of mine (Prieto-Blanco, 2016a). The aim of this paper is to argue that photographic practices of Spanish-Irish families complement analogue “third places” (Oldenburg 1989, 23) by subsidizing social interactions and advancing (informal) socialization. It will be argued that success depends on the “relational affordances” (Kono 2009) of the technology/medium employed, and that concrete affordances (publishing, indexicality) are activated to support strategies of inclusion and exclusion (boundary work). The next section provides the theoretical contextualization of the argument, before findings are presented and subsequently discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the scholarly use of affordances has been inconsistent (Wright and Parchoma 2011, 249-250), it is a term that allows the exploration of interactions between humans and non-humans—i.e. Bruno Latour’s hybrid actor (1999, 181), or Ian Russell’s “Humedia” (2007). Affordances are always framed by systems, which include artifacts, actions, and social contexts. Tetsuya Kono provides a more comprehensive and pragmatic definition of the term: “Affordances are the dispositions of the environment; an individual can integrate some of them into his or her action” (369). Thus, affordances are necessary conditions for action produced and maintained by conventions, and when perceived render intentional responses possible (Kono 361, 369). Images need media to become visible, our bodies being one of those (Belting 2001). They are “transmitted in the interplay between media carrying images and bodies directing their attention in perceiving them” (Lehmuskallio 2012, 40). Often the images carried by media are of our bodies, which Mikko Villi describes as “mediated presence” (2015). Sometimes, the mediation of presence allows for tele-cocoons to emerge, “[...] a zone of intimacy in which people can continuously maintain their relationships with others who they have already encountered without being restricted by geography and time” (Habuchi 2005,167), such as I will argue below, kinship making. Obviously, not any *place* is a tele-cocoon, but could any place *become* one? How would this happen?

By looking at the affordances activated through concrete practices, I believe we can start outlining patterns of interaction between people and images/objects. For instance, my research with Irish-Spanish families revealed that social processes such as socialization of young children (read below), go on through photographic exchanges and related visual practices. Their visual practices were organised in social settings around shared understandings and objects. Antoine Henion argues there is a process of attachment—affective attachment, one may say—that reveals relations between people and things as well as between people, and that does not need to be beneficial, as attachment could signify “a bind, restriction, restraint, and depen-

dence” (2012, 4). The way we relate to each other—or using Hen-ion’s vocabulary, attach to each other—is emplaced and experiential, and “concerns shared history, common property and shared objects” (Jamieson 1998, 200). It is exactly this important connection of emplacement between human and nonhuman actors that is highlighted here with the aim to explore in depth the social life of (digital) photographs, thus advocating for an approach to media that accounts for the social relations existing in and through material worlds (Edwards 2002, 2009, 2012), as well as for their “ever more complex organizational patterns” (Couldry and Hepp 2016, 35-36).

Working with Spanish-Irish families was fundamental to explore social processes that go through media, because their specific geographical settings meant that family members lived in different countries and interacted physically face-to-face at best a handful of times a year. They turned to digital media to mediate social interactions, thereby sustaining affective relationships and extending their home beyond their house (Rose 2003, 9-15). In spite of their seemingly transient and ephemeral character (Murray 2008; Grainge 2011), digital media offer the possibility of frequent and constant communication, co-presence (Villi 2015) and tele-cocooning (Habuchi 2005). This suggests some degree of performative force: (Austin 1961, 119, 287). Photographic practices comprise three stages: participation, repetition, and emplacement, which foster and sustain emotional interactions among members of transnational families, and are supported by flexible polymediations and some concrete affordances (publishing, indexicality). At the same time, as research participants explain below, their families often include chosen family members who live in near geographical proximity. In forming “families of choice” (Weston 1997) that support their emplacement and sense of belonging, transnational families contribute to the contemporary elasticity of family, and of friendship (Watters 2009; King-O’Riain 2015). Family and family making no longer depend on rules, but on feelings of affection (Beck-Gernsheim 1998; Jamieson 1998; Gabb 2008), which may explain why even people “normally living alone” are extensively involved in family relations (Inglis 2015, 75). Contemporary family—whether transnational or not—seems to respond to an

ongoing process of negotiation ongoing as a commitment and negotiation as a variation in responding to individual and collective situations of proximity, distance, and propinquity, many of which are mediated. Could photography be thought as a tool of kinship making?

Constellations of hardwares, softwares, and analogue objects (poly-mediations) offered these Irish-Spanish families opportunities to negotiate feelings of familial affection, by creating places that family members inhabit, even if only momentarily. I suggest that mutual participation is present in photographic practices of transnational families, and that photographs are employed as social objects (Engeström 2005) circulating within existing/developing larger everyday media practices. Photographs are used to do intimate boundary work. How could this mediated boundary work be best observed? This paper argues that ethnography and narrative inquiry allow for the affective experience of mediated attachments to be observed/explored. Through emphasis on fieldwork stories, this paper argues that, in transnational families, photographic practices are processes of attachment, whereby affect is articulated. But, as one might say, the proof is in the pudding.

FINDINGS

Photographs that travel

Celia, a Spanish migrant living in Ireland and mother of two, explains that when an image appears in her WhatsApp, she knows that somebody has intentionally sent it, and the image still retains “the magical meaning” and the sense of permanence that she attributes to analogue photographs. Celia’s phone was on the kitchen table while we talked about the photographs she had recently shared. She took it and started showing me some. She was explaining how she only takes photographs with her camera phone and how these are a way of transforming geographical distance into emotional closeness, for example between her children and her cousin, who lived in Ireland with them for over nine months. Ever since, they have kept in touch regularly, mainly through phone messaging.

Celia: "It's been four years since. Four years of relationship really. [...] I send her loads of photos, mostly of the kids so that they have a relationship. I like to keep her posted on our day-to-day lives. For example, I have also sent her photos of the recent snowfall"².

In Pedro's case, geolocated and synchronized photographs allowed his family members abroad to "have a walk around the house." Gala's story of her daughter's prom night includes a photograph travelling by phone from Ireland to Spain, and by foot in Spain from Gala's cousin's phone to Gala's mother's living room. As these insights reveal, sending photographs to relatives who live far away is a common practice for transnational families. Moreover, they suggest that networked photographs not only mediate physical presence by giving the illusion of being there, but also mediate social presence by giving the illusion of being together. A connection is established over distance that allows for digital third places to emerge. The question of generating a common place, of emplacement of their photographic practices, arises again. And my suggestion is that: a) photographic practices of transnational families respond to connectivity, reflexivity, and material emplacement; and b) it is through synaesthetic, discursive, and pragmatic qualities that transnational families make their intentional choices among the myriad of mediation choices at their disposal.

Let's look at the photograph of prom night in more detail. Gala made use of the affordances of propinquity and publishing to share the image of her daughter's prom immediately, and only to whom she wanted to. In this case camera phone photography didn't fix the unexpected or spontaneous, nor did it enhance phone communication per se (Rivière 2005, 177-178). Instead, it provided a connection and a sense of belonging to those involved in the visual practice (producing, sharing, storing, viewing). The platform used to share the photograph, WhatsApp, allowed Gala to implement control strategies regarding inclusion/exclusion. Here and in further examples below, it becomes clear that Irish-Spanish families perceived WhatsApp as a tool that allows for social co-presence to be generated and managed

for a particular group. I believe that the clear parameters of publishing present in WhatsApp partially explain its popularity regarding the sharing of more intimate images.

[Talking about ways in which she shares images]

Celia - [talking about her artificial sister-in-law (cuñada postiza)]: “With her for example, the way to keep in touch, although I don’t know if you are interested in it, we have made a blog about cooking so then we take cooking photos.”

Patricia: “Ah, well that is ok.”

Celia: “It is a way of maintaining the relationship.”

Patricia: “I will ask you for the address of the blog.”

Celia: “Ok, well so far we only have a couple of things. She has published some and she has added her sister and her sister--in-law also. For example my artificial sister-in-law has uploaded photos of her daughter. The other day my cousin, I mean the father, who is my real cousin, and my goddaughter, well we all shack up together but [...] They two made a potato tortilla together, although as far as I know my cousin is not into cooking, but well, the two of them made it. And there are photos of her [Celia’s goddaughter] adding the eggs and mixing them and so on. But, well, what would have been amazing is a photograph of my cousin because he was wearing a glorious apron, one of those that make you look like a Greek statue.”

Celia knew about the apron because, parallel to the production of content for the blog, there was an exchange of snapshots in WhatsApp between her and her artificial sister-in-law.

The choice of medium/technology, i.e. the configuration of the poly-mediation, whether it involves camera phones, video conferencing or social media (or several at the same time, as we are starting to observe with regard to homework and COVID-19), seems to respond as well to boundary work, to frequency, and relevance. Be-

longing/membership(s) is managed through both variables. Messages are generated and shared as often as required by the group, inasmuch as they are relevant to the group. And as they do so, they bring about a sense of continuity to the relationships they mediate. The dialogues in which digital photographs are often embedded have no foreseeable end, despite being continuously interrupted. Pedro: “My sister is more prone to send photos. But that is not the norm. The norm is that it [the photo] leads to a conversation: ‘Hello, how are you doing?’ And then you talk about other things.”

In fact, continuity (which can be interpreted as the commitment of keeping in touch) is a key element of photographic practices of transnational families. The sharing of photographs generates a temporary and partial obliteration of physical distance. It also creates a space of sharing intimately, a tele-cocoon. Like other places of informal socialization, tele-cocoons seem to also respond to belonging, congeniality, spontaneity (Oldenburg 1989) as well as to conventions, norms, and repetitions. In short, we may want to consider tele-cocoons as mediated third places, and explore how digital photographic practices seem to ensure that the socialization process will go on. It will be forever resumed. Thus, the sharing becomes as important as what is being pictured (Lobinger and Schreiber 2017). In other words, image content is contextualized through socio-material and affective processes.

[Talking about the ways in which they share images impacts on the images they share]

Maria: “It depends, if they [their children] are au naturel or in their pyjamas...”

Pedro: “That is true, if the children are naked for example I do not like to send photos of the children naked via Internet. From the waist up that is ok. I mean, if they are in the bathtub and you can’t see it, ok. And I am careful that they are not exposed. But it gives me the creeps, you know. And then those photos in which... So it is somebody’s name day and you go to sing to their bed and everybody is in their pyjamas and they have bad

hair and so on, well I might send those photographs to parents and siblings and that is it.”

Maria: “And to one very good friend. Yes, somebody who knows me but not the neighbor.”

[Talking about the photograph she took on her daughter’s prom night]

Gala: “Well, yes. Not the ones I took, but the ones that thousands of people who were there took, yes. Those are on Facebook from that night. But not mine. [...] I believe I showed this one to somebody from Dario’s family or... no... no it was to my neighbours. My neighbours, yes, I showed it to them.”

[Talking about the ways in which she shares images]

Yessica: “Not by email. Normal email, no. I would say that among us, well maybe a little less with my brother who lives here [Ireland], but 99% [of the time] what works really well is Facebook. Also there is my brother’s daughter who is a teenager now and she has Facebook. [...] but it is getting out of her hands because she already has three hundred and fifty friends and he told her ‘you need to do a selection of people who are really your friends and the ones who are not.’”

The fieldwork stories suggest that photographic practices of transnational families revolve around sharing, co-presence, and belonging. They produce, share, and store photographs in a myriad of ways, using networked technologies and isolated ones (as we shall see below). In the midst of choice and difference, there seems to be a constant: photographs are treated as active testimonies of everyday life, i.e. as indexical signs. The affordance of indexicality, which “[...] is only realized and significant as it is activated, as it were, by particular practices (Rose 2010, 29), seems to be activated throughout. The same applies to the affordance of publishing. When the affordance of indexicality is activated, there is a need to control the potential effects of sharing: reaching unintended audiences, stress, and discomfort. Because while the indexical nature of emotional traces of photographs

surely shapes the sharing process, the affordance of publishing ultimately determines who is in control, and therefore how photographs are shared. As Yessica puts it: “It is a matter of not losing control over the distribution of my photographs.” Publishing in social media differs from platform to platform, but participants expressed very similar views when it came to their perception of it and the strategies of control they had in turn developed. Hence, again, platforms such as WhatsApp, which allow for great control regarding publishing, were preferred by transnational families. Indexicality and publishing seem to be activated throughout, even when the photographs are not digital/digitally mediated.

Yessica: “And why in the living room? Because we spend 80% of the time in the living room [...] We play here. Well, I am also a woman, I am a bit ... I mean I also like that when people come for a visit ... I don’t know, but not having photos on a wall is like there is no life in the house. I don’t know, but that is how I see it.

Patricia: “Where else do you have photographs?”

Yessica: “In the corridor. Yes, here for example I have the photographs of my sister-in-law’s wedding. Up there we have the family, well the siblings anyway.”

Patricia: “These photographs are more formal.”

Yessica: “Yes, that is it. These ones are here because they hired a professional photographer for the wedding, and the photographs came out really beautiful and great to be enlarged. So I chose the ones that suited me best, which were the family, my son with the telephone because it is very cute, and myself with my son because my daughter wasn’t here yet [...] and then over there was another of the whole family, but I am not sure how but when using the stairs it broke [...] so I replaced it with one of us four.”

Patricia: “Of the family now”

Yessica: "MY, MY family now. On St. Patrick's Day."

Analogue photographs are perceived as a constant presence in the family. Their materiality not only offers durability but also stability, a crucial factor when it comes to socialization. One could argue that paper-based photographs transmit a sense of ontological security, because as analogue objects, they exist in the world and hold a degree of permanence. Pedro commented, "So to speak, people look at digital photos for five minutes, and they like them, but that is it, then they save them onto their hard drives, and they do not open the photos any more. But then when you go back, my parents have some on the fridge. So I think it is worth [to print them] and so we give it more importance." It is no coincidence that Pedro mentions the refrigerator here. Using the refrigerator as a display allows for spatially distant family members to be incorporated into the everyday life of the household. Refrigerators become "a kind of communications centre [...] where one can place information in the confident knowledge that one's fellow household members can then have no excuse for saying that they did not see it" (Morley 2007, 263). In houses where the refrigerator is panelled, an alternative display was available, and placed around the kitchen/eating area. Celia had a notice board next to the refrigerator; Pedro and Maria created a family collage. Like refrigerators, these displays are constant companions of transnational family life.

Mediated interactions are fundamental for transnational families if only because face-to-face encounters are very limited. The routines linked to cooking and meal sharing explains why family photographs coexist next to spaces for the chores of everyday life. According to recent sociological work on kinship (Weston 1997; Beck-Gernsheim 1988; Gabb 2008; Inglis 2015; King-O'Riain, 2015), a proactive attitude is fundamental in order to create, reaffirm, and sustain family ties. Digital photographs seem to function as prompts for further interaction, while photo-objects may be seen as aide-de-memoires that contribute to levelling out the irregular pattern of interaction/participation of transnational families. The combination of everyday life, domesticity, and communication make refrigerators very dynamic sites

of exhibition. The efficiency associated with invoices and errands intersects with processes of family-making. The act of keeping in touch responds to the affective and the chore-like.

Sometimes these analogue versions are used to contain misfortune, a practice that is far from new, but in fact strongly resembles the Victorian tradition of using the parlour to display images of the deceased, often decorated with dried flowers, hair, and textiles. The emotional challenge that permanent and temporary absences pose is partially mitigated through these images. In the case of Yessica, she placed the last photograph of her father on her refrigerator (the image shows him hugging her son and another of his grandchildren). The activated affordance of indexicality allows Yessica, her partner, and her children, to treat the photograph as if it was alive (Lehmuskallio 2012). The indexicality accounts for its authenticity and testimonial role; the punctum pierces twice: distance and absence (Villi 2014). In this particular case, it is almost as if the real affordance of the refrigerator, preserving food, had been transplanted into the photograph (transformed into a perceived affordance of affect, perhaps?). In Gala's house there were also analogue photographs of deceased family members. They were located on top of a chest of drawers, which is placed between the eating and the living area. In transnational families, printed photographs respond to contexts of analogue photography, such as framing and exhibiting on walls, mantelpieces, or albums. The ubiquitous but fragile co-presence that digital means such as video calls and phone messaging offer, is complemented by paper-based photographs, in which time has frozen. Photographs on refrigerators are an expression thereof, but there are others.

Pedro and Maria do in fact do more than that. On the door of their living room, they have a large collage displaying all family members in Slovakia and Spain. Photo frames are present in every room of the house except for the bathrooms. They send analogue photo Christmas cards to relatives and friends every year. And Pedro's mother creates her own "poster" to celebrate every birthday and name day of a member of the family, which she prints, laminates, and sends. The one below had arrived a few days before one of our encounters to mark Pedro's and Maria's daughter's birthday.



Figure 1: This handmade “poster” combines the flexibility of digital manipulation with the robustness of printed photographs. Being laminated speaks to durability and to Pedro’s and Maria’s fondness of hanging images around the house. The central image depicts the grandparents together with the grandchild during one of their visits, which manifests the networked character of this seemingly analogue print.

Digital and analogue photography and photographs coexist in the everyday of Irish-Spanish families, and both seem to respond to different social processes. Digital practices respond to everyday desires and pressures of sharing certain instants, mediating experiences, and bringing worlds together; while analogue practices seem to respond to questions of durability and remembrance/memory. It is almost as if the analogue transmits a sense of ontological security because analogue objects exist in the world only as they are, and hold a degree of permanence. The digital seems to transmit a sense of togetherness/belonging, but one that responds to relevance, and thus needs to be endlessly renewed/re-experienced/resumed.

DISCUSSION

Phatic Photography

The photographic practices of Irish-Spanish were impacted by a myriad of technological and sociocultural factors. In addition, availability and use of new media are also impacted by media literacy migration and buying power (Madianou and Miller 2012; Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014). In the field, the cost of cameras, camera phones, laptops, and prints was mentioned as a significant factor to the practice. For example, for Yessica and her husband, the purchase of a digital camera (as a luxury item), could be justified only by a big event, in this case, their first pregnancy. Pedro and Maria invest on prints and other technologies of display (digital frames for instance) and interaction (a smartphone) so that their parents can see their grandchildren. A few months into the fieldwork, Celia mentioned she was working on an analogue album for her goddaughter (Celia did some analogue black and white photography before having children), and that it was going slowly because it was both difficult and expensive to craft. Towards the end of the fieldwork, Yessica's mother was handed down a laptop so that she could be more present in the Irish lives of both Yessica and her brother.

The polymediations employed by transnational families work as affective currency (Ahmed 2004, 118-120). Emotions are attached to the constantly resumed communicative exchanges within the family, which often involves photographs. Many of the stories of mediation of Spanish-Irish family life were described as alternatives to spending time together in person. Celia talked about their cooking blog in these terms; so did Dario about a blog he had going with his dad; Pedro and Maria talked about grandparents reading goodnight stories to their grandchildren over Skype; Yessica explained how she would "go out for coffee" with her mum over Skype, and how every now and then she would look at photo albums and prints with her own children, something that Gala, her husband, and their two daughters also did. The mediation of kin keeping involves analogue and digital outputs. It is a complex practice in which different affordances

are activated to support the development of social ties based both on normative and elective frameworks.

As we continue to see, photographic practices of transnational families are essentially a series of repeatable and customary acts, whereby affect is mediated and tele-cocoons emerge, allowing for intimate interactions to take place in them and through them. Celia, Gala, Pedro, and other participants consider photographs as extensions of experiences shared with others, and as such, they are not just click-bait: they are constitutive and the result of ongoing relationships. When present in the routines of everyday life (whether on the door of the refrigerator or as a background image on the screen of a camera phone), photographs enable participation in place-related affairs (Agnew 2011, 23-24), activate social solidarity, and contribute to create a sense of belonging. In this context, photography is being in transformation. It creates a mode of action whereby actors visually share tacit and intersubjective knowledge. As social objects (Engeström 2005) and objects of affect (Edwards 2012), shared photographs allow transnational families to engage affectively. They expand possibilities for interaction over spatial distances. Distinct tacit knowledge is developed around shared photographs, which both imbues them with agency and performative force. Photographic exchanges are much more than the casual swapping of snapshots. These back and forth interactions, seemingly impromptu and casual, respond to an appeal for emotional communication and, arguably, function at a phatic level.

The phatic is the communicative factor that regulates relationships of proximity and social contact (Malinowski 1923). Processes of inclusion and exclusion in a group are in the first instance phatically managed through interactions that are socially and materially located. The originality of phaticity in the digital era resides in its ubiquity and immediacy, but the phatic acts are still emplaced, structured, and contextualized by a community. The phatic element of digital photography allows for an engagement with the reciprocal, intersubjective, and often tacit knowledge and actions that presuppose, but are also the fabric of, contemporary digital photographic prac-

tices. Connectedness and empathy are established phatically in first instance.

In short, for transnational families, phatic interactions activate three dimensions of communication: social binding, experience sharing, and mediated cohabitation. The engagement in these customary, repetitive, and always emotive interactions results in what I call the “phatic community” (Prieto-Blanco 2010). Within phatic communities, exchanged photographs function as both initiators as well as outcomes of established phaticity. The photographs exchanged work as externalizations of shared experiences, and as such, they are enablers of community via both immediate identification as well as anticipated remembrance. Photographic exchanges establish and sustain kinship in spite of distances apart. By the structural repetition inherent to these exchanges, social capital is created (Prieto-Blanco 2017). Children are socialized in larger family units, and photographs become intrinsic elements of networks of social support. As performatives, shared photographs are felicitous only for the phatic community.³ Senders and receivers become bonded in phatic interactions (Lobinger 2016; Jänkälä, Lehmuskallio, and Takala 2019; Ehrlén and Villi 2020) that take place in phatic zones, where cultural expectations have the potential to become malleable, flexible, and expanded. Thereby, experiential contexts are reinforced, intersubjective knowledge is developed, and implicit knowledge surfaces along with the acknowledgment of failure to comprehend the cultural other (Loenhoff 2011). This moment can productively lead to a further exploration and generation of empathy towards cultural and social difference.

As Roswhita Breckner discusses, photographs are created with the intention of surpassing reality by adding something new to it. The process of visualizing moments, as well as looking at the resulting images, brings about a unique and striking phenomenon (*Erscheinung*) as well as potential for change (Breckner 2014, 128). The Spanish-Irish families who collaborated with me certainly shared photographs in phatic zones, and these images precipitated processes of inclusion and exclusion as well as redefined the ability to act upon social realities. The near future will tell to what extent digital pho-

tographs continue to sustain and develop (dis)affect over time and space, particularly if their distribution as automated actions further evolves.

Furthermore, the conceptualization of phatic photography presented here has implications for the wider research and discussion of phaticity. The analysis of data and the theoretical framework proposed here can be further expanded by scholars interrogating interpersonal communication and the different functions of language. This investigation has unveiled the productive value of the phatic dimension of everyday, intimate visual communication, demonstrating that it is fundamental in processes of socialization of transnational families. Minimal communicative acts through which presence is reaffirmed are acts of emotion, varying in degree of depth but strengthened by perpetuity. The (dis)affective nature of phaticity leads to the creation and corroboration of circles of reference and to the establishment of intimate modes of interaction. Even the barest form of phatic communication encapsulates tacit and intersubjective knowledge, being thus an instance full of contextualized meaning. This line of research was timidly pointed out by Bronislaw Malinowski (1923) and only significantly developed by other scholars (La Barre 1954; Ruesch 1972) since then. The present investigation signals the potential of the phatic to further understand emotional communication and its mediation, and points to a number of ways to further expand the work herein.

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NOTES

1. Austin acknowledged the potential of non-verbal means of communication to perform as successfully as verbal means, as long as they are conventional, i.e. customized to the group. Theory of language is applied here from the standpoint that language is in constant evolution and that it is co-constructed by users, techniques, and technologies in place. It is worth mentioning that language theory has already been employed to research pragmatics of media use (Langford 2001, 2006).↵
2. This and all other quotes have been translated by the author for the purpose of readability. The original languages of quotes were Spanish and Spanglish.↵
3. Even if approached more simply as signs, exchanged photographs are still always taken, distributed, and recalled in reference to the shared experiences they point to, whether that experience was lived together at the moment of image production, and/or whether it takes place across generations and locations, or time and space—either way the paramount element of "phatic communion" (Malinowski 1923) remains.↵

THE WALL AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION AND
INCLUSION AT BAJA CALIFORNIA BORDERLANDS: A
PICTORIAL JOURNEY

ÁNGEL IGLESIAS ORTIZ

The essay considers the border wall between Mexico and the United States as its primary visual, symbolic, and material reference to reflect on the politics of exclusion and inclusion entangled in everyday discourses and practices in Baja California's borderlands. Everyday bordering applies not only to governmental technologies of control but also to these sorts of politics. The essay proposes that the wall represents an exclusionary symbol that is nonetheless challenged by those who attempt to embed inclusion in this context. The pictorial journey shows aspects of common situations next to the wall between the Mexican cities of Mexicali and Tijuana.

Cet essai considère le mur frontalier entre le Mexique et les États-Unis comme son principal référent visuel, symbolique et matériel, dans le but de réfléchir aux politiques d'exclusion et d'inclusion imbriquées dans les discours et les pratiques quotidiennes des régions frontalières de la Baja California (*Basse-Californie*). Le quotidien du voisinage frontalier concerne non seulement les technologies gouvernementales de contrôle, mais également ces types de politiques. L'essai argumente que le mur représente un symbole d'exclusion qui est néanmoins remis en question par ceux qui tentent d'assimiler l'inclusion dans ce contexte. Le journal de voyage en images montre des aspects de situations courantes dans les environs du mur entre les villes mexicaines de Mexicali et de Tijuana.

This essay stages a pictorial journey¹ through Baja California's two main border cities: Mexicali and Tijuana. This voyage along the Mexico-U.S. border begins in Mexicali and follows

the wall, or *la línea*, about two hundred kilometres westward toward Tijuana. In this essay, I consider the wall as a decisive method for shaping lived everyday experience. This function characterizes the Mexico-U.S. border where the wall structures both the space and the everyday experience of people in both countries. Following the idea that particular institutions and forms of visibility define our perception of the world (Mirzoeff 6-9), my pictorial journey takes the border wall between Mexico and the United States as its primary visual, symbolic, and material reference to consider the politics of exclusion and inclusion entangled in everyday discourses and practices in Baja California's borderlands. The essay particularly highlights the entanglement and implications of the border wall's visibility and materiality with the enactment of politics of exclusion and inclusion at the Mexico-U.S. border. Everyday bordering applies not only to governmental technologies of control (Yuval-Davis 71), but also to these sorts of politics. In contexts such as Baja California's borderlands, exclusion is related to the socio-political production of who is deemed "illegal." This discursive formation, built with a number of resources such as images, is used to maintain a representation of "illegal immigration" (De Genova).

Drawing on critical border studies literature, this exploration of the Mexico-U.S. border is informed by views on the situation of migrants and deportees at this border (Anguiano and Villafuerte, Slack et al.) and the spatial imaginary between these two countries (Alvarez). I also consider critical perspectives on border art depicting the human condition along this boundary (Bonansinga, Regan) and how text and visual imagery react to state border policy (Madsen). In addition, the use of artistic expressions (Pötzsh, Schimanski), and border aesthetics (Rosello and Wolfe 7) allow us to see the wall as a productive element and rethink the border experience. This essay proposes that the wall represents an exclusionary symbol that is nonetheless challenged by those who attempt to embed inclusion in this context. At the Mexico-U.S. border, the wall is one of many elements characterizing immigration interdiction (Heyman 622). The wall, however, conflates different temporalities and symbolisms, thus exposing contingency. As rightly stated by Abou Farman:

"[...] a wall, has an insistent exteriority and definitive materiality. [...] It is in your face. You run into it. [...] You cannot even see the other side. And yet, people always do. People always see through walls, find holes, overspill the bounds of both conceptual and physical limits. The materiality of a wall that is meant to mark the ultimate and simplified limit always falters or falls to the creativity of life" (4).

The journey connects the hard border that the wall materializes with its symbolic and metaphorical dimensions (Vila). Relying on the notion of borderscape (Brambilla, Rajaram and Grundy-Warr), I address the multiplicity of flows, complex conditions, and interactions happening around the border. This entails thinking of the border between these two countries beyond its traditional understanding as an unchanged and definitive structure. Through the lens of borderscape, the journey hereby intertwines amid the divisions actualized at any border while also considering the fluidity of borders and the situation of those experiencing nation-state borders. I also use this notion to address the tensions and paradoxes emerging from the politics of exclusion and inclusion and to reflect on different strategies of resistance against hegemonic discourses (Brambilla 19-20). It is argued that in these borderlands, the everyday normalizes part of the exclusionary dimension of the hard border. Nevertheless, despite this context of division, the politics of inclusion appear in specific expressions, namely border art and other written and visual testimonies displayed on the wall. The everyday thus projects the tension between the security infrastructure preventing or diverting migration and the hopes that accompany human mobility. The everyday connects with the concept of borderscape through the varied and differentiated encounters taking place at the borders (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr xxx).

Structured around the three stages of the journey, the essay will show the entanglement of the politics of exclusion and inclusion through pictures, personal observations, and informal conversations and interviews made during the journey. Overall, I aim to present the subjective experience of some social phenomena through the picto-

rial journey (Banks 96-97). The visualization of the wall guides the reflection of the everyday and the politics of exclusion and inclusion. Before presenting the stages, I will briefly sketch my analytical approach and the general context behind the journey. I then describe the first stage of the journey, covering my first encounter with the Mexico-U.S. border in Mexicali. This stage shows different aspects of the everyday in this city. The second stage presents the natural scenery between the two cities and its implications for migration movement. The last stage focuses on a specific area of Tijuana where I reflect on the main topics addressed in this essay.

APPROACH AND CONTEXT

The photo-essay explores the everyday in the cities of Mexicali and Tijuana and highlights the multiple conditions, paradoxes, and tensions, such as bordering practices and structural violence, emerging from the politics of inclusion and exclusion. For this, I draw on the co-constitution of visibility and materiality in order to address issues of hierarchies and discourses of power (Rose and Tolia-Kelly 4). With this practice-oriented approach, I question what is made visible and study the constitution of visibility and materiality. The configuration of visual and material practices connects with processes, embodied practices, and technologies (Rose and Tolia-Kelly 3). In my analysis, I address how a process, such as bordering, and embodied practices, such as the everyday near the wall, take place in this social setting. These sorts of processes and practices are contrasted with the current situation of persons who have endured deportation from the United States and live in Tijuana. For instance, during my fieldwork, I observed that deportees embody and experience different forms of exclusion. Through different interviews with deportees in Tijuana, I confirmed the exclusionary experiences they endure during and after the deportation process. I rely on a methodological approach that combines an ethnographic and visual-discursive perspective, concentrating on everyday life and the related social context (Jenkins 5). For the content of the pictures, I employ the compositional interpretation approach which pays attention to the elements and content of the picture (Rose 62-63).

The wall is part of the U.S. general deterrence strategy which started in the 1990s and early 2000s. During Donald Trump's presidency, the wall was renovated in different border areas covered in this essay. The context behind the journey is related to the situation experienced during autumn 2020. The number of persons reaching the Mexico-U.S. border has declined due to the mobility restrictions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and because the Mexican government has imposed stricter controls on its border with Guatemala after the migrant caravans of 2018 and 2019. These measures can be framed into the strategy of "pushing the borders out" (Johnson, et al.) applied by the U.S. government. During the journey, it is possible to notice certain differences about the presence of migrants between the two cities. Due to the restrictions, the presence of recently arrived migrants seems reduced in Mexicali. I asked local people about their arrival, and all agreed that very few new migrants had reached the city in 2020. The majority of migrants in Mexicali who arrived with the caravans stayed in local shelters. Nowadays, it is still possible to see them experiencing conditions of homelessness in different parts of the city. In Mexicali, the number of migrants on the streets is clearly lower than in Tijuana. The majority have moved to other border cities. In Tijuana, the arrival of migrants is continuous, but it is more difficult to specify their number. The population of almost two million inhabitants and the size of the city conceals the number of unregistered population.

FIRST STAGE: THIS IS LA LÍNEA

La línea stands a few kilometres away from Mexicali's international airport. The road from the airport heads north, and metres before the wall, it turns left. The closest part of the wall before the turn has barbed wire on top. Barbed wire is one of the main "security components" constantly present in this borderline. After the turn, the road follows a straight line, and the wall seems never-ending.

In fact, it is almost uninterrupted until Tijuana's beachside. At first sight, the massiveness of the wall seems unreal. The presence of the wall is visually striking, and the feeling of a hard border is constant.



Figure 1: First view of the wall in Mexicali

When a material object defines identities, it becomes a political aesthetic project (Farman 4). After some kilometres, the name of the road makes an ironic pun. *La Avenida Cristóbal Colón* (Christopher Columbus Avenue) is the main street along the border. In Mexican school textbooks, Columbus is referred to as the “discoverer of America,” and his figure is not questioned in official/government discourses. The debates about decolonization going on in different parts of the world are not taking place here. This avenue bears witness to one of the most notorious divisions within this continent. This is one of the many places where the “Global North” physically prevents the “Global South” from entering. Here, the wall concretizes the division, but this sort of geographic taxonomy also enacts discursive borders that conceal the social inequalities and exclusions between regions.



Figure 2: First view of the wall in Mexicali

Beyond the euphemistic, and even colonialist, taxonomy, it is necessary to see the symbolic dimension of the wall, which grounds discourses of negative difference associated with the inhibition of mobility.

Just in front of the wall, on the left side of Columbus Avenue, the type of housing grabs my attention. The first example of the everyday next to the wall shows houses that seem to match a middle-class income level, and after some kilometres, there are also professional services and business-related places. A marked contrast to this housing appears after passing one of Mexicali-Calexico ports of entry. At the end of the second border street, *La Calle Internacional* (International Street), the houses are made of cardboard and pieces of plastic and wood. Some other constructions are abandoned and broken.

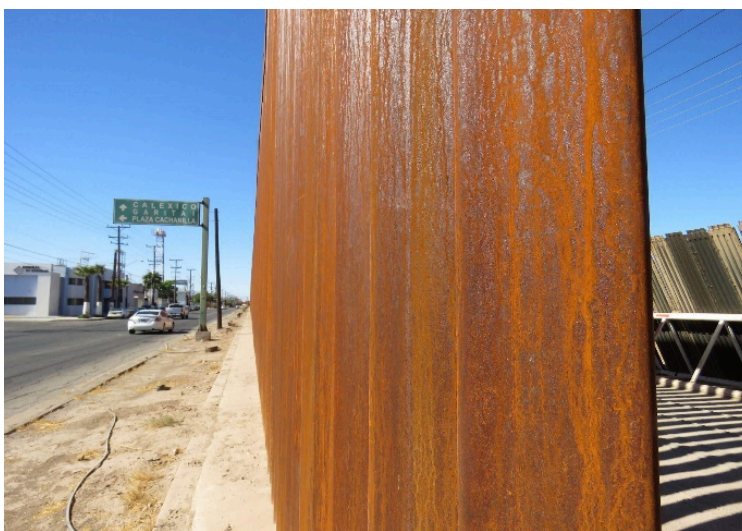


Figure 3: Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

Overall, the housing types along Columbus Avenue and International Street exemplify the socioeconomic disparities common in countries like Mexico. These contrasts are part of the structural violence that has been normalized in the everyday.

As I stand next to the wall and look at both sides, the longitude of the wall seems surreal. It has been reinforced and renovated, and in some parts there is a secondary wall. At the end of October 2020, the U.S. government celebrated the building of nearly 650 kilometres of new “border wall system” between these two countries (U.S. Department of Home Security). At some point on the “old wall” reads the words *Mexicali, calor del bueno*. The expression refers to the extreme heat conditions and may also hint to the warmth of local people. The desert climate of the area causes an average temperature of 40 degrees centigrade during the springtime and summertime, with maximum records of 50 degrees centigrade.

The politics of exclusion is also constituted by the climate and topographic features of the area. These features are used in the U.S. secu-



Figure 4: Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

riety and immigration strategy. The Baja California-California border has been sealed in order to channel migration to the Sonora-Arizona desert. As part of my fieldwork, I went to the wall on many different days to see the daily activities. From the first visit, I noticed that very few pedestrians, not migrants, were in Columbus Avenue and International Street. Only a few people walked where the boulevard ends near Mexicali's old city centre. It was not until the third visit that I saw some migrants. They were four men from Central America, standing on the street waiting for someone to offer them any kind of job. This is a common way for migrants try to earn some money. It is also common that the only assistance that migrants get comes from activists and religious organizations. The lack of governmental attention to migrants and deportees increases the precariousness of their situation.

With the following six pictures, I illustrate different aspects of Mexicali's daily activities beside the wall. The pictures offer a view into the common situations and social conditions in the city. Firstly, figures five and six show a mural condemning violence towards



Figure 5: Mural in Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

women. The mural is dedicated to the victims and demands a better future for all women. Although it does not directly address other forms of violence or social concerns, this issue is entangled with structural practices and expressions of violence affecting Mexican society and these borderlands.

The mural resonates with the events of direct violence that women have endured in other Mexican border cities such as Ciudad Juarez. This mural can thus be projected into a larger context in which different forms of violence are entangled. For instance, women are the main workforce in the *maquiladoras*, or manufacturing plants, along the Mexico-U.S. border. Even though these factories are linked to the



Figure 6: Mural in Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

discourse of neoliberal economic development and free trade, they fail to provide sustainable economic development for the workers and have instigated new practices of structural violence such as low salaries, precarious labour rights, territorial violence, and slum-like housing conditions (Méndez and Berrueta). I consider this mural as an example of what Chiara Brambilla defines as a counter-hegemonic borderscape (20). The mural, which stands facing the wall, opens a sense of resistance against forms of control enforced by direct and structural violence.

Figures seven and eight exemplify the daily activities that take place one block away from the wall. A contrasting view shows a high-end German-styled restaurant and a street vendor. The restaurant is regarded by locals as an “exclusive place,” while the vendor personifies labour precariousness.



Figure 7: Social contrasts beside the wall 1

Street vending is a common activity for locals and also for migrants. As I talk with locals about migrants who have arrived in recent years, the conversation irremediably distinguishes between “good” and “bad” migrants. Haitians are regarded as hard workers and honest and likable people. Some people from Central America who arrived in the last migrant caravan are seen as the opposite. Drawing on what Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (xxx) write about differentiated encounters in a borderscape, it is necessary to map the contradictions and borders that emerge in different situations. In this case a specific conjuncture, such as the arrival of the migrant caravan, triggers contradictory encounters and a sharp differentiation process. Social distinction, made by the informal categorization of “locals,” shows a double process of bordering by elaborating a normative taxonomy of who is valuable or not, and by othering the ones considered to be non-locals. I notice during the in-



Figure 8: Social contrasts beside the wall 2

formal talks, that this way of bordering “the other” is unnoticed by the persons doing the categorization. Social disparity is in fact a border, institutionally normalized and maintained through daily practices, which further segregates people. The categorization portrays the overlooked entanglements of the politics of exclusion and inclusion in the everyday.

The last pictures from the first stage illustrate the routine in the ports of entry between the two countries. Long queues, surveillance, barbed wire, and the “visa regime” are the elements grounding the politics of control and exclusion. For instance, Mexican citizens re-

quire visas to enter the United States, and the Mexican government demands the same for citizens of all Central American countries except Costa Rica and Panama. Both governments prioritize a person’s economic situation as the primary requirement for entry. This modality of bordering rewards personal economic advantages and increases the ubiquity of the wall. In the current situation of pandemic restrictions, only persons with residency and workplaces in the United States are allowed to cross, while for the rest of population, the border is closed. These restrictions create further distinctions between inclusion and exclusion. The requirement of visas is part of the normalized procedures of the spectacle of enforcement against “illegality” (De Genova 1181).



Figure 9: Mexicali-Calexico Port of Entry



Figure 10: Mexicali-Calexico East Port of Entry

Street vendors, endless queues to enter the United States, barbed wire, and concrete blocks coexist day by day at one of Mexicali's ports of entry. These blocks (figure 10) were used to prevent persons of the migrant caravan from approaching the port on the Mexican side. These blocks represent the extension of the hard border and the materialization of more stringent measures against migration. The combination of sovereignty, national security, and social distinction enact the politics of exclusion on the everyday at this borderline. This social context is another example in which hierarchies and privileges restrict social equality.

SECOND STAGE – IN THE MIDDLE OF...

This intermediary stage presents the landscape of these borderlands. As with other “natural barriers” seen around the world, the topographical and climatic conditions become part



Figure 11 Mexicali-Tijuana highway

of the immigration interdiction. The road between Mexicali and Tijuana crosses some areas of the Sonoran Desert of Baja California.

The dryness of the area adds a sense of helplessness to the landscape. To my surprise, it is possible to find personal belongings such as shoes, clothes, empty backpacks, and even suitcases. This means that the border is not far. In fact, it is located about six kilometres away on right side of the highway (figure 11).

While this inaccessible and isolated region attracts cross country runners, it is a high-risk area for migrants because of the challenging conditions of climate and terrain. Finding the belongings, presumably of migrants in transit, is distressing. The personal belongings attest to the unrelenting human toll of crossing the border, where the security structure and natural conditions are a deadly combination. At this remote borderscape, the fluidity of the border seems inexistent, and the wall appears to prevail.

Continuing on the way to Tijuana, concerns about the presence of criminal organizations and security appear at the military checkpoint before the ascent to the mountains called *Sierra de Juarez*. All vehicles must pass through the checkpoint, but only the ones chosen by the personnel are searched meticulously. The selection is arbitrarily applied, but buses, trucks, and pickups are selected more often.



Figure 12: Personal belongings

Mexican society is still suffering the consequences of the failed strategy known as the “war on drugs” enforced some years ago. As the journey continues, very impressive views of the wall between Mexicali and Tijuana appear in the mountain road named *La Rumorosa*.

Even the desert landscape contributes to the feeling of being in the “middle of nowhere,” and the presence of the wall emerges as an all-pervading, dividing structure. This picture is a blunt reminder of the hegemonic logic that exacerbates difference in its negative and exclusionary dimension.

THIRD STAGE – BIENVENIDOS A TIJUANA

Tijuana’s reputation and media representation are commonly linked to criminal activities, direct violence, and migrants trying to cross the border. This public image is a simplistic



Figure 13: Personal belongings

reduction of a city of almost two million inhabitants. The complexities affecting Tijuana's social context are known, but the spectacularization and exoticization in the city's public image conceal all the aspects of the everyday. Direct violence, in the form of homicide, is a constant feature in everyday Tijuana life. This situation necessitates a broader explanation of the social and political context of the country and Mexican border cities. Structural violence remains the key factor from which other forms of violence develop. Endemic poverty, social marginalization, economic disparities, institutional corruption, the partial and precarious rule of law, and plenty of institutional weaknesses are the coexisting conditions that affect the social con-



Figure 14: View of the wall from la Rumorosa mountain pass

text. Direct violence is the consequence of the sum of the issues previously mentioned. Despite this complex scenario, Tijuana is a growing cosmopolitan city that challenges common historic stereotypes of it (Alvarez). Tijuana exemplifies a range of differentiated encounters between the arrival of deportees and their intrinsic exclusion with the cosmopolitan features of the city.

In the past, Tijuana was one of the main points of entry into the United States. However, the strong securitization implemented on the Baja California/California border in the early 2000s and the massive number of people deported from the United States have changed its status. At the present moment, it is the Mexican city that receives the biggest number of deportees from the United States; thousands of people remain and wait in the city (Albicker and Velasco 100). Deportees face all kinds of personal and legal problems upon their arrival. Their new lives start in precarious emotional and material conditions. I interviewed the activist Maria Galleta,² and according to her

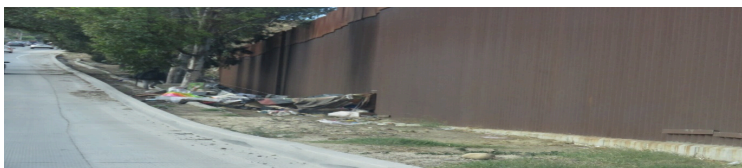


Figure 15: Homelessness in Tijuana

experience, deportees arrive in a state of denial; they are in shock, feeling that they have lost their entire lives. After deportation, people encounter extremely critical conditions during their first days in Tijuana. The conditions include not only the search for places to stay and eat, which shelters provide, but also the emotional distress that affects them. If people do not receive economic support from their families or friends after deportation, shelters give them their only opportunity to get a place to stay. But not all persons get places or stay permanently at the shelters.³ The picture below illustrates the level of precariousness that homeless persons endure in the city.

It is beyond absurdity that the wall is used to hold the “tent” of the person staying there. Homelessness, depression, and alcohol and drug consumption are constant situations in deportees’ everyday lives. For instance, in the area known as *el bordo* (dam)⁴ hundreds of homeless persons live in extremely precarious conditions. A study shows that 91 percent of them were deported (Velasco and Albicker 8-9). In 2018, a local newspaper reported that about three thousand homeless persons were living in Tijuana’s central area (Torres).

The personal stories reveal similar patterns despite distinct particularities. I talked with Mexican deportees who have lived in Tijuana for some years. Their stories start with the physical and psychological mistreatment they suffered when they were arrested and held in the detention centre before deportation. They undergo family separation when the U.S. federal government imposes a “period of inadmissibility.” This means that these people are banned from re-entering the United States on the grounds of the legal circumstances that supported the decisions to deport them. The ban lasts three to

ten years and may even result in permanent expulsion (USCIS 2020). These measures are part of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) of 1996. Consequently, thousands of families endure long periods of instability and separation. It is common for the members of these families to have different residency statuses in the United States. For instance, I interviewed a deportee who had one son who arrived in the United States during his childhood. These cases are known as “dreamers,” and these persons have certain rights and permission to stay in the United States under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Her other two sons have U.S. citizenship. Due to different residency statuses, the spouses and/or children of deportees do not visit them while they are living in Mexico. For this reason, many deportees will try to cross again into the United States, and this is when the hard border materialized by the wall and the attendant security structure create a rupture from their previous lives. Considering the politics of inclusion and exclusion, people who have been deported endure double social rejection. In the United States, they have been referred as “illegal aliens” and will be prosecuted with federal charges if they cross and are arrested again in the U.S.; in Mexico, *deportado* (deportee) joins a social category associated with stigmatization and certain disregard. Deportation conveys a permanent bordering process in which the person completely endures the politics of exclusion. Yet there are many cases of people⁵ who have been able to resume their lives in a positive way after deportation.

Out of all the areas of Tijuana, I decided to focus on the one called *Playas de Tijuana*⁶ because of its particular features. Playas has been a historic place registering the dynamics and changes along the Mexico-U.S. border. Natural, structural, and emotional elements make a unique landscape that complements the thousands of life stories of those who have passed through this place. Before presenting this iconic place, I show two pictures that were taken on the way to Playas.

Empathy is overshadowed by one of the most impressive views of the hard border.



Figure 16: Via de la Juventud Avenue, Tijuana



Figure 17: View of the double wall, Tijuana

Ultimately, the view of double fencing in such shape sends an unequivocal statement about bordering. The wall becomes a sort of metallic reptilian fortification, crawling over and dividing the land; it is an emotionless construction to discourage and separate peoples. Nicholas De Genova impeccably explains the view on the previous

picture: “The Border Spectacle, therefore, sets the scene – a scene of ostensible exclusion, in which the purported naturalness and putative necessity of exclusion may be demonstrated and verified and legitimated, redundantly” (1181).

Finally, the last stage of the journey reveals the aesthetic, emotional, and natural elements that make *Playas de Tijuana* an exceptional place because of the entanglement of varied and differentiated encounters. *Playas* is characterized by rather powerful aesthetics on display and for being a “meeting place.” On the weekends there are families and couples attempting to meet through the wall. *Playas* attracts locals and visitors and has a different environment from the other areas of the city. A more “touristic and relaxed” atmosphere is experienced. This atmosphere may conceal, to a certain extent, the heavy symbolism of the wall and the movement of persons who may attempt to cross the border. At this borderscape, the greatest contrast is between the structures of surveillance and division and the attempts to overcome this division. In other words, the wall that stands in *Playas* exemplifies a borderscape’s notions of different encounters, their paradoxes, and the ways hegemonic discourses and practices are challenged. The whole wall and area are permeated by an in/visible emotional burden.

For instance, a number of people are seen leaning on the wall in figure 18. In this area, I witnessed the very brief encounter of a family. Four adults and one child were waiting at *Playas*. Suddenly, two people on the U.S. side approached the wall before the Border Patrol had noticed them. The encounter lasted less than two minutes. Two units of the Border Patrol arrived and removed them. One of the members of the family remained leaning on the wall watching the Border Patrol leaving. This situation made visible the emotional burden at this place.

As with other parts of the physical structure separating both countries, the border wall becomes a canvas (Regan 151). This is the productive aspect considered from a border aesthetic perspective. The wall in *Playas*, named *Mural de la hermandad* (Fraternity mural), is known for the paintings, messages, murals, thoughts, and names of



Figure 18: Playas de Tijuana 1

migrants written on it. Many of these names refer to the ones who passed away or disappeared. Thus, the mural on the wall becomes a memorial in remembrance of those who are missing, but also a commemoration that envisions a different future. The paintings and messages mobilize imaginaries and symbolic resources that appeal to different temporalities. The wall registers the names of the past, the needs of the present, and the hopes for the future.

As considered in the conceptualization of a borderscape, there are differentiated encounters happening in this area. One example of the encounters takes place in the “door of hope” (figure 20). Since 2013, the pro-migrant organization Border Angels has arranged meetings authorized by the U.S. Border Patrol. The door is next to the U.S. flag, with a red heart painted in the centre. It can only be opened from the



Figure 19: Playas de Tijuana 2

U.S. side. The park next to the wall is the *Friendship Park San Diego-Tijuana*. It seems hard to believe that friendship can flourish surrounded by surveillance cameras, barbed wire, and all the paraphernalia that characterizes immigration interdiction. But sometimes, the physical barriers are suspended on the rare occasions that the door of hope opens.⁷ During these meetings, separated families are allowed to be together for a few minutes. However, these meetings do not wipe away the consequences of the hard border.

The other pictorial elements near the door, the silhouettes of human faces, three persons representing a family, and two fingers intertwined, appeal to the human factor undermined by the politics of exclusion. The drawings, murals, and messages make visible the self-representation of those who challenge the hegemonic logic of the



Figure 20: Mural de la Hermandad 1

dividing wall. In line with Brambilla, regarding the counter-hegemonic aspect within a borderscape, I suggest that the human factor, mobilized by these kinds of symbolic expressions at the wall, opens a space for the politics of inclusion. The symbolic humanisation of the wall challenges the dominant logic of the hard border. In other words, the human factor is a counteracting force that appears in the everyday of these borderlands.

On the other hand, a secondary encounter takes place between the deportees' hopes and the politics of exclusion. There is a permanent tension between those who meet on both sides of the border and the surveillance paraphernalia enforcing the division. Those who want



Figure 21: Mural de la Hermandad 2

to overcome division have made the *Mural de la hermandad* as a collective instrument to rethink the border experience.

The picture below is another example of the tensions and encounters coexisting at this point of the border. The wall dividing the beach and continuing to the Pacific Ocean is one of the most iconic views along the entire Mexico-U.S. border. Currently, the wall has human faces,⁸ which re/represent the stories of deportees who arrived in the United States as children.

These faces convey personal dreams that are broken by the exclusionary enactment of distinction. The picture also exemplifies the co-

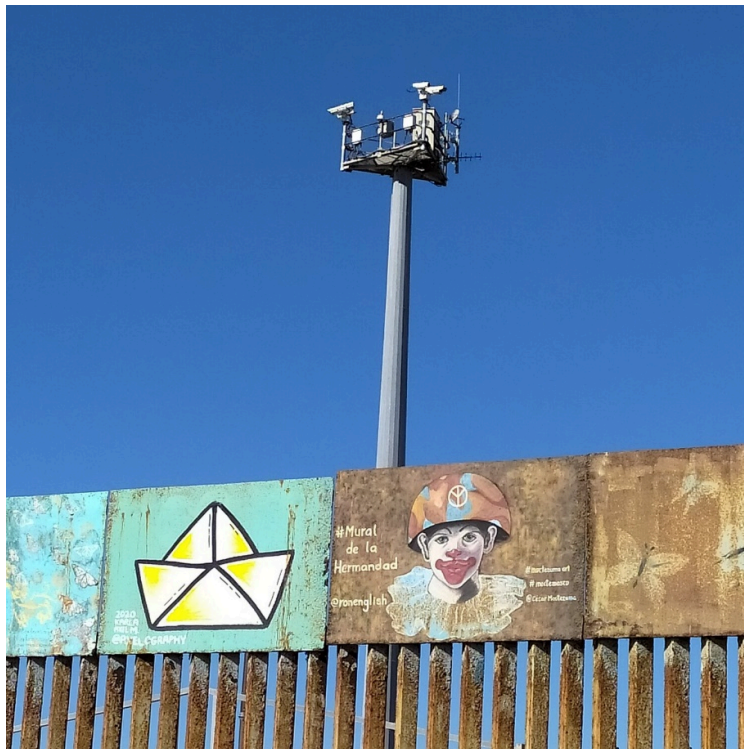


Figure 22: Mural de la Hermandad 3

existence of security infrastructure, which acts as an instrument of exclusion, and the drawings and messages of inclusion written on the wall. Thus, the wall symbolizes division yet encourages endeavours to maintain unity. It is also a place to write that there are no borders and to dream of flying towards freedom. This complex multiplicity is part of the politics of exclusion and inclusion that occur along any border.



Figure 23: Playas de Tijuana Mural Project

CONCLUSION

Through the different stages of the Baja California borderlands, the paradoxes happening in the everyday and the entanglements of the politics of inclusion and exclusion are apparent. These paradoxes unravel at the place where the division enforced by the wall and related infrastructure coexists with the hopes and personal losses of migrants and deported persons. From the perspective of border aesthetics, the wall is a canvas that expresses alternative visions against the politics of exclusion. The wall in *Playas de Tijuana* is a productive space that opens a window of resistance to the hegemony of the hard border. The paintings on the wall of kites,



Figure 24: Part of the wall in Playas de Tijuana

butterflies, and children playing have a performative force on the politics of exclusion. However, few deportees have the possibility of reuniting permanently with their families. In these borderlands, the social context develops between conditions of social disparity and processes of bordering, alongside attempts to overcome the exclusions and familiar forms of violence. Despite the hard border seeming to prevail, the meetings in Playas and the messages written on the wall keep the hope of reintegration open.

Considered as part of a borderscape, certain experiences around the border become factors for change and resistance. In this essay, I have linked the politics of inclusion with the human factor and shown how this is displayed on the wall. One aspect of change is the need to humanize borders through the experiences of those who inhabit



Figure 25: Part of the wall in Playas de Tijuana

them (Brambilla 217). The wall has a dominant meaning of division, but there are further tangible and intangible divisions and exclusions in the societies of both countries. In contrast, the murals and paintings turn the wall into a means of expressing what inclusion implies for those who have been excluded.

The work of activists, academics, and deported persons challenge intangible borders and exclusions. In these borderlands, the project *Humanizando la Deportación* (Humanizing Deportation) shows the contrasting experiences of people whose lives have been deeply impacted by the politics of exclusion. Deportees endure negative social bordering on both sides of the wall. They have become the forgotten

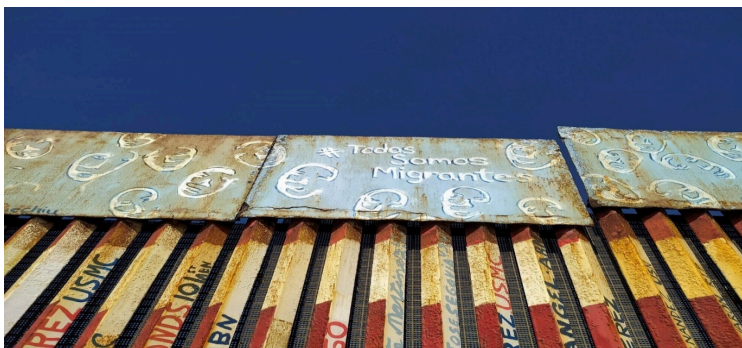


Figure 26: In the wall reads: Todos somos migrantes (we are all migrants).

people of migration. As exemplified by deportees, the quest for inclusion not only consists of questioning the different walls, such as security infrastructure and discourses of sovereignty, but also requires an increased social awareness about the needs of a neglected population. The politics of inclusion thus also entail the possibility for family reunions and deportees' hopes of no longer being considered unlawful. Humanizing this social context requires visualizing the overlapping politics of exclusion and inclusion around the wall and dismantling the hierarchical structures and border regimes that decide who is accepted and who is rejected.

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NOTES

1. The journey is related to the fieldwork of the research project “Everyday Entanglements of Violence and Peace at the Limit(s)”. I want to thank Kone Foundation for the financial support. The journey took place during November 2020. There were mobility limitations and difficulties making interviews due to the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic.↵
2. She is the founder of the organization *Madres y Familias Deportadas en Acción* (Deported Mothers and Families in action). This organization helps migrants and deportees have a place in shelters, make free phone calls, and get psychological assistance.↵
3. Shelters have very strict rules on the consumption of alcohol and drugs. The place in the shelter can be denied or revoked if the rules are not complied with. The majority of shelters are managed by religious and charity organisations. The Mexican federal government and Baja California government established a shelter for arriving migrants in January 2020.↵
4. This refers to the dam or channel in which the Tijuana River is funnelled. The dam goes across the city and the borderline. The majority of homeless people stay in the area near Tijuana’s city centre and next to the border.↵
5. See for instance video stories about deportees by the project *Humanizando la Deportación* run by the University of California, Davis. For information about the project, see: <http://humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu/en/about-the-project/>. Accessed 19 December 2020.↵
6. I am referring to the beachside area near the wall. Playas de Tijuana (Tijuana Beach) is a growing neighbourhood which also has socio-economic disparities. The area near the Pacific Ocean is expensive while the one farther from the beach registers limited economic development.↵
7. This event had been arranged since 2013, but it was suspended after 2018. The “meetings through the wall” taking place during the weekends have also been cancelled because of mobility restrictions related to the current pandemic.↵

8. As part of the *Playas de Tijuana Mural Project*, started in 2020 and completed in 2022, the question posed by this mural is: “Who counts as a childhood arrival to the United States?” For information, see the artist’s website <https://lizbethdelacruzantana.com/about>. Accessed 27 December 2020. ↵

SPACES OF EMPATHY: VISUAL STRATEGIES IN PHOTOJOURNALISTIC IMAGERY OF MIGRATION

MARIA NILSSON

This essay explores visual representations of migration by drawing on a Swedish case to reflect on broader questions regarding the position of the witness, including the photographer and the distant spectator, and on how photographs may contribute to an understanding of the experience of forced migration. Through an interpretative analysis of imagery recognized by the Swedish Picture of the Year contest, I identified mostly empathetic visualizations, according to the five positions of visibility suggested by Chouliaraki and Stolic. Engaging a different set of imagery, I delved into an extended exploration of one family over a span of four years as a narrative of lived experiences of forced migration. Methodologically, this essay begins within the area of photojournalism, but suggests the inclusion of varied visual forms and genres in the empirical materials.

Cet essai examine les représentations visuelles de la migration en s'inspirant sur un cas suédois, afin de réfléchir à des questions plus larges concernant la position du témoin, y compris celle du photographe et du spectateur distant, et à la manière dont les photos peuvent contribuer à la compréhension de l'expérience de la migration forcée. À travers une analyse interprétative de l'imagerie reconnue par le concours suédois de l'Image de l'Année, j'identifie des visualisations essentiellement empathiques selon les cinq positions de visibilité suggérées par Chouliaraki et Stolic. En utilisant un ensemble différent d'images, j'ai exploré en profondeur une famille sur une période de quatre ans comme un récit d'expériences vécues de migration forcée. En termes de méthodologie, cet essai débute dans le domaine du photojournalisme, mais suggère l'inclusion de formes et de genres visuels divers dans les matériaux empiriques.

INTRODUCTION

“The pictures I didn’t take on the Sea of Death,” reads the headline of an article written by a Swedish photojournalist covering a rescue operation in the Mediterranean Sea (Hoelstad). The text is accompanied by the sole image the photographer made that day, of a man and a young boy clinging to a piece of wood to stay afloat as the rescue boat approaches. In the article, the photojournalist shares her observations of men, women, and children in the water, and describes the crew attempting to bring the refugees to safety. The image-maker shares additional information: of a young girl who drowned and who was a close relative of the father and the boy she photographed, and of helping to administer CPR to another child who survived. Yet their main focus is the description of what an image might have shown had she taken it.

Over one million refugees crossed the Mediterranean hoping to reach the European Union during 2015, according to the UNHCR.¹ The rescue operation described above took place in the fall of 2015, shortly after the death of Alan Kurdi, the young Syrian boy who perished while trying to cross the Mediterranean with his family. As is widely known, images of the Syrian boy’s lifeless body went viral, causing a debate about the ethical boundaries of photojournalism (e.g. Fehrenbach and Rodogno; Mortensen et al.). The images also contributed to policy debates about migration. The Kurdi imagery in particular became a symbol in the solidary movement “Refugees welcome” formed in various cities to support refugees as they arrived (Proitz). Thus, beyond the apparent news value of photographs from global conflicts and humanitarian crises, the images are instruments shaping public opinion, in this case about migration and about people forced to flee.

The photojournalist’s account inspired this essay by raising a series of questions: about how photographs contribute to our understanding of the experience of forced migration; about who has the right to photograph; and about the responsibilities of witnesses, including photographers and spectators at a geographical distance. These questions frame the focus of my inquiry in this paper, and I explore them

by engaging with literature on visual media frames, witnessing and spectatorship, and by drawing on visual examples, specifically from Swedish photojournalism. Sweden received over 160,000 asylum applications during 2015, twice as many as the previous year, the increase due in part to the conflict in Syria.² Until 2016, the country's migration policy had been welcoming, in particular in 2014 when Sweden was the only country in the world to guarantee asylum to Syrian applicants.³ However, in 2016, a law was introduced to reduce the number of applications, purportedly for a more sustainable policy.⁴ My focus on Sweden as a case study, and as a node for global migration, brings larger issues about witnessing and agency as they relate to photography into view.

As part of this process, methodological questions on photojournalism and migration arise. Journalism research focusing on news photographs has identified recurring, frequently reductive frames of migration. A common empirical focus in visual framing research is on images in news stories selected as empirical materials (see Fahmy et al.). While these studies contribute knowledge about how imagery supports certain recurring media frames and tropes, there appears to be less of a focus in the literature on visual reportage and other visual forms. Furthermore, as Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic discuss in their analysis of news photographs of refugees, a narrow methodological focus on binary positions—with the refugee visualized as either victim or threat—may risk overlooking ambiguities and alternative positions of visibility.

The interpretative analyses presented in the following pages focus on two interrelated sets of images, meant to serve as examples of photojournalistic practice, strategies, and visualizations. The first set of images were made between 2015 and 2017 and recognized by the Swedish Picture of the Year contest. I chose to analyze contest entries since images recognized by a jury of peers are indicative of professional discourses, norms, and ideals (e.g. Andén-Papadopoulos; Kedra and Sommer). I conducted a qualitative interpretative analysis in order to explore how the imagery visualized refugee migration, drawing on Chouliaraki and Stolic's typology of visibility.

The second set of images are photographs and videos published in extended coverage about a family fleeing the war in Syria, specifically the family the photojournalist encountered during the rescue operation described above. News photographs frequently focus on moments of crisis. Here, I instead consider a series of articles about one family published between 2015 and 2019. The aim is to address an aspect of visualization I believe is not frequently included in journalism research about migration, that is, a person's experience beyond the flight and arrival in the host country. Through a narrative analysis of imagery interacting with the texts, I explore how the extended coverage contributes to our understanding of the family's experience.

The following section contains a targeted review of literature on visualizations of migration in the news media and writings in the field of visual studies, as well as writings on witnessing and agency. The subsequent section explains the empirical examples and methods of analysis. Next follows a presentation of the analyses, while in the concluding section I reflect on the ethics of photographing, the position of the photographer and the spectator as witnesses, and how images may contribute to spectators' engagement and understanding of the experience of flight.

WITNESSING AND VISUALLY FRAMING MIGRATION

The photograph is the foremost tool for journalistic witnessing, particularly crucial in breaking news and crisis coverage (Zelizer). According to Stuart Allan, "The importance of bearing witness to what is transpiring in harrowing circumstances is a lynchpin in war and conflict reporting" (133).

A photojournalist is a witness on site who must be close to events to secure images (Bock). Their work is shaped by various factors—including the assignment—such as whether they work for a news organization or an NGO (Dencik and Allan). Furthermore, briefs or preferences expressed by editors may guide the shoot, such as a request for a certain type of image or visualization, which may preclude alternative vantage points based on what takes place on site (Bengtsson Lundin). Furthermore, freelance photographers in particular may

adapt their approach to themes, topics or aesthetic approaches that might yield publication opportunities (Láb and Štefaniková). Thus, the routines of media organizations and visual discourses, including those promoted by photo contests, contribute to shaping how photojournalists approach the assignment and the kind of pictures they make.

Another factor is previous coverage and established conventions for visualizing the topic, which the work of the photojournalist corresponds to and tends to reproduce. Research on media frames and representations of migration specifically has identified two recurring themes or tropes in news photographs of migration: the refugee as either victim or threat (see Bleiker et al.; Chouliaraki and Stolic). The figure of the refugee as victim may evoke empathy through scenes of massification, such as in refugee camps (Wright). However, while conveying a sense of urgency, such portrayals may risk reducing refugees to anonymous, passive, and distant bodies without agency (Hyndman, qtd. in Chouliaraki and Stolic, 1164). The trope of the migrant mother and child in need, for instance, is useful in journalistic narratives of polarization and conflict. Yet, while images of children may evoke compassion, the news media have been criticized for further exposing people in a vulnerable position. Research on migration coverage during 2015 specifically addresses some of these questions in analyses of the news media's publications of images of Alan Kurdi (see Fehrenbach and Rodogno; Mortensen, Allan, and Peters; Mortensen and Trenz; Proitz).

The figure of the refugee as threat, meanwhile, may evoke fear and justify securitization discourses and policies (Chouliaraki and Stolic). This visual figure feeds into a journalistic narrative building on simplification, and is part of a discourse where migration is considered a threat—for instance to sovereignty or national or political ideology (Nair; Wolthers). While the male refugee is less frequently portrayed as a victim, the figure of the refugee as threat has been found to be predominantly male and frequently young (Kedra and Sommier; Musarò). Furthermore, the male refugee has been associated with terrorism in media coverage (Chouliaraki and Stolic). In addition, borders, which are frequently visualized in the coverage, are al-

so a prominent part of discourses of securitization (Chouliaraki and Georgiou; Kedra and Sommier; Nair).

Visual strategies, alternative frames, and the news photograph as an instrument for empathy have also been identified in studies focusing on media coverage of migration in the context of 2015. Chouliaraki and Stolic, in an analysis of photographs published in newspapers across Europe, found various positions of visibility, each encouraging different “public dispositions” to act (1172). While these authors found few examples of the welcoming position “hospitality,” they attribute this to the limitations of civil society. Furthermore, an analysis of entries to the global photojournalism contest World Press Photo identified an emergent rhetorical figure, that of the nurturing father (Kedra and Sommier). These authors identified a number of other rhetorical strategies and explored narrative in visual projects as an interaction between image-maker and migrants. An analysis of a photo reportage published on a mainstream news site, in another study, identified a visual language and an unusual story focus, yielding low news value yet a space to connect to the experience of migrants marooned in a no-man’s land (Nair).

The photojournalist’s work is also shaped by access, and by actors who control the setting and may set events in motion for the benefit of the camera (Bock; Sliwinski). In the Mediterranean region during the height of the migration flows of 2015, restrictions of access and the presence of a large number of photojournalists reportedly resulted in a saturation in media attention for those already in a vulnerable position and a certain lack of variety in the visualizations (Bengtsson Lundin). Furthermore, the presence of a photojournalist may help but may also put the people photographed at risk, an awareness expressed by image-makers in studies addressing the ethics of photographing (Linfield; Bengtsson Lundin). People in a vulnerable position are dependent on journalists’ personal and professional ethics enshrined in codes of conduct and practice. Yet, depending on the situation, they may not be in a position to decline to be photographed. Some photojournalists have articulated awareness of this power imbalance in the photographic situation, and may attempt to mitigate this, such as by asking for permission to photograph or framing the

image to cast the person in a respectful manner (Thomson; Bengtsson Lundin).

Furthermore, while the encounter between the photographic subject and image-maker is represented in the resulting image, unlike a reporter, a photojournalist seldom has the space to reflect upon it within the news format. However, some photojournalists today use social media, such as Instagram or Twitter, to post images and reflect about the topic or experience (Pantti), while others write articles about their experience. Thus, social media, as well as other venues for a personal form of storytelling and reflections, are resources some photojournalists draw upon in their work. The image-maker can also be personally affected, according to research finding that covering crises may have a traumatic impact (Bock; Linfield; Yaschur).

Witnessing and the civic role of the spectator have been explored by media studies and visual studies scholarship. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski have expounded on the notion of a media witnessing that implicates both seeing and saying. John Peters, though not writing specifically about visual images, considers witnessing a civic act different from the act of seeing, which does not necessarily compel to acting on what one has seen. Ariella Azoulay suggests that photographs can offer a space for empathetic contemplation through the creation of a citizenry of photography. Sharon Sliwinski, in the book *Human Rights in Camera*, draws on the writings of Hannah Arendt and other scholars to examine the emergence of human rights as a juridical concept, and the role of the media and in particular photography in exposing human rights abuses. Based on a set of case studies from the 20th century, Sliwinski proposes that images as an “aesthetic meeting” may produce a community of spectators. She further argues that the act of photographing and viewing images are a constitutive part of investigations of human rights violations. However, “When world events capture distant spectators’ attention, what is starkly evident—and deeply important to reflect upon—is the great diversity of affective responses” (33).

A number of scholars have remarked on a tension between the public’s high expectations on photography and the transformative po-

tential of witnessing injustices, and at the same time a disappointment with the shortcoming of photographs to yield those results. Among them is Susie Linfield, who in *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*, an examination of the potential of photography to affect change, remarks: "...Seeing does not necessarily translate into believing, caring, or acting. That is the dialectic, and the failure, at the heart of the photograph of suffering" (33). To remedy this, Linfield proposes an ethics of showing on the part of image-maker, the news media and the public.

Sliwinski, in turn, recounts the experience of a photojournalist covering atrocities committed in the Balkans in the 1990s, believing that the images would provide proof leading to international intervention. This photographer later expressed disillusionment and doubts about his work's ability to affect change (Sliwinski 119-122). Examining the international community's failure to intervene in the atrocities in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia and other human rights violations although evidence existed, Sliwinsky attributes this to the news media's failure to cover the crises thoroughly and accurately, as well as a lack of political will. Furthermore, she draws on a number of scholars and survivors of atrocities, including Theodor Adorno, who, as cited by Sliwinski, critiques a misguided belief that injustices will not be repeated if the international community is aware of historical atrocities (136-138). Nevertheless, in the work of human rights, according to Sliwinski, the task of the spectator is to bear witness to that which cannot be put into words, "the differend," attributed to Jean François Lyotard, in order to conduct the "attendant labor of finding idioms for them" (Sliwinski 33).

EMPIRICAL MATERIALS AND METHODS OF ANALYSES

In order to address how imagery recognized by the Swedish Picture of the Year contest visualized refugee migration, in terms of the positions of visibility, I selected entries on the topic of refugee migration that were nominated⁵ in *Årets Bild*, The Swedish Picture of the Year, the country's leading photojournalism contest. I chose to study contest entries since images recognized by a jury of

peers are indicative of professional discourses, norms, and ideals (e.g. Andén-Papadopoulos; Kedra and Sommier). Furthermore, photojournalism contest imagery is widely circulated, thus potentially reaching a wide public (Kedra and Sommier).⁶

I selected entries nominated in the 2016, 2017, and 2018 contests. The three consecutive years were selected to coincide with extensive migration into Sweden. A total of 15 entries on the topic of refugee migration were identified and included, among them ten single-image entries, four photo reportages, and one multimedia entry. The entries spanned different journalistic and photographic categories and genres, including domestic and international news, everyday life and reportage.⁷ I conducted a qualitative interpretative analysis of the selected imagery, drawing on Chouliaraki and Stolic's typology of visibility: *biological life*, which refers to a state or situation where physical survival is at stake, *empathy*, *threat*, *hospitality* and *self-reflexivity*—each encouraging different “public dispositions” to act (1172). I share the view of these authors that the typologies identified are neither finite nor stable.

When exploring how extended coverage may contribute to our understanding of the experience of forced migration, I selected a nominated image in the contest that was part of a story that received attention in Sweden at the time, and followed the publication of an article written by a photojournalist taking part in the rescue operation in the Mediterranean that I mentioned in the opening section of this piece (Dagens Nyheter; Sveriges Radio P4 Sjuhärad). This image portrayed a Syrian father and son who had made their way to Sweden after being rescued by a coast guard boat sponsored by the media organization Schibstedt, the owner of the newspapers *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Aftonbladet*. The rescue operation was financed through a fundraising campaign by the two newspapers to benefit the Swedish Coast Guard, which contributed two vessels and volunteer crew (Östman). The project ran for about six months during 2015 and 2016 and saved nearly 2,000 lives (Jelmini). The initiative took place at a time when numerous refugees died as they attempted to make the Mediterranean crossing in overcrowded boats in order to

reach the European Union. The image recognized by the contest jury was made by a staff photographer of the *Svenska Dagbladet* newspaper who had been on assignment on board the ship. Later on, reconnecting with the family once they had made it to Sweden, this photojournalist photographed and made videos for additional stories about them, and also wrote about the experience. I conducted a narrative analysis of articles and other media forms published in *Svenska Dagbladet* between 2015 and 2019, with a particular focus on visual imagery. My aim was to construe a narrative of the family's experience.

SPACES OF EMPATHY

While imagery corresponding to the position of biological life, according to the typology, may create a space for solidarity, there is arguably a more limited space for agency on the part of the person portrayed. This was also found in some of the examined imagery—such as in a photo reportage of unnamed people pictured in a refugee camp, and children pictured near drowning. Media portrayals of refugees have been criticized for taking them out of context through prevalent figures or tropes reducing them to “refugees” without a connection to place and without a past. According to this critique, readers learn little about the cause of the flight, or about the experience of those who flee. In the entries I examined, underlying causes as well as reception in the host country were part of some, though not all, visualizations and accompanying captions. Place was present in some entries, though refugees were also frequently shown separated from settings and place, such as in a series of photographs focusing on the journey.⁸ In another international news reportage entry, the visual story is sequenced to begin with the cause of flight—war—and conclude with journey's end.⁹ This reportage visualizes the entire journey, and since there are different individuals and settings in each picture, I interpret the journey as an experience shared by all refugees seeking asylum in Europe. I have identified a range of positions in this series, from biological life and empathy to hospitality, an interpretation based on the editing of

the photo reportage where the narrative leads up to arrival in Sweden in the final frame.

Empathy was the most prevalent position found in the materials. This was particularly the case for images of children. This is not surprising, given that images of children, widely used in humanitarian photography, appeal to spectators' desire to protect the innocent. Furthermore, photography is a tool for journalism to evoke strong emotion. However, children *were* a major part of the refugee story in 2015 since entire families migrated, crossing the sea and making their way across the continent, as was the case in Europe. The contest jury selected a number of images of children to represent the refugee story during the selected years, including the image selected as the top news photograph of the 2015.¹⁰ A more surprising finding was the empathetic portrayal of men. Maternal figures are frequently positioned to engender empathy in visualizations of refugees, according to the literature. Single images of men among the contest entries included a news photograph of a young man visually portrayed as a protagonist through placement as well as image composition.¹¹ The young man is depicted carrying a baby while walking along a highway, while other refugees are seen behind him in the distance. Shot from a low vantage point, the young man towers above viewers. Yet, his gesture cradling the child evokes parental care more commonly seen in representations of mother figures. The protective father figure appeared in other imagery of families, including gestures of shielding children from injury or harm,¹² echoing the findings of Kedra and Sommier who identified a nurturing father figure as an emerging rhetorical device. There were in fact fewer images of mother figures than fathers and young men in the examined materials from the Swedish photo contest. While this visual focus may be due to various factors, such as a family waiting to be reunited with female family members who are still in the country of origin, it nevertheless recurred in the examined materials.

The position of threat was not as common, perhaps a reflection of the empirical material and the contest aim to reward best-practice visualizations. I identified only one example of explicit threat: in one

of the few breaking-news images on the topic, showing a male asylum seeker being restrained after attacking the minister of migration during the minister's visit to a hospital temporarily housing refugees.¹³ While the image and caption do not provide information about the reasons for the altercation, the scene nevertheless shows conflict, which is absent from other examined entries set in Sweden. A possibly latent threat, in turn, can be discerned in visualizations of refugees in transit or in a position of uncertainty, such as the news photograph of border police checking the papers of two young men on a train, the young men, seated, looking up at the police officers standing above them.¹⁴ The possible threat, as I interpret it, is suggested from the vantage point closely aligned with the police officers. In line with Chouliaraki and Stolic's findings, a non-threatening position can be turned into threat, depending on the context in which images circulate and shifting discourses about migration.

Hospitality emerged as a position in different entries showing interactions between father and child from two different families awaiting asylum in Sweden. In one of them, an everyday-life category entry of a father and son fishing, their interaction is foregrounded in a documentary-mode image appearing to catch a slice of life unbeknownst to the photographic subjects.¹⁵ This image, which depicts a moment of bonding, will be further discussed in the following pages in connection with the *Svenska Dagbladet* coverage of the Syrian family. Everyday routines were also the focus of a reportage about a family residing in temporary housing at a camp site along with European migrants.¹⁶ Such everyday scenes provide points of connection. The photo reportage from the camp site shows adaption to life in the new country, although in a transitory setting intended for vacation trips rather than migration. This contradiction is foregrounded by the season. It is winter, a time when the camp site is closed to vacationers, yet the facility is kept open to rent space to migrants, a sign of a shortage of housing for refugees in the country.

While the reportage from the camp suggests a lack of hospitality, given the migrants' apparent visual isolation from Swedish society, the content—including activities and socialization in the camp—and

the mood rather indicate that the image-maker intended to frame the story in a positive light. However, other contest entries can be read as critical of Sweden's reception of the refugees, such as the news photograph showing families camping out in the snow at the point of entry,¹⁷ and the photo reportage of an immigration bureau office void of people, an anonymous setting for a first encounter with the host country.¹⁸ I interpret these visualizations as self-reflexive and offering a critical view of how refugees fare as they arrive in Sweden.

ENCOUNTERING THE SWIRAKLY FAMILY

A video posted on the *Svenska Dagbladet* news site, made by a staff photojournalist on assignment to cover a rescue operation of refugees in the Mediterranean, visualizes the experience of encountering death and being faced with the dilemma of whether or not to photograph the scene, an encounter discussed in the opening section of this essay (Hoelstad). The video focuses on the crew and their frustration, expressed in the soundtrack, at not being able to save everyone. A photograph the photojournalist had made previously, of a man and his son clinging to a board to stay afloat as they are about to be rescued, is inserted into the video. Through camera movement due to the rocking of the boat, the video evokes a feeling of chaos and confusion on the cramped deck.

The photojournalist first encountered the Syrian family the Swiraklys on the day of their rescue described above, as she took part in a fruitless attempt to save the life of a little girl, a cousin of the boy and the niece of the father of the family she would go on to cover in several stories. The photograph she made a few months later in Sweden, of the father and his son fishing in a tranquil lake, is a striking contrast. (The image, recognized by the Swedish photo contest, was discussed in the previous section.) The image was published as part of a photo reportage about the family (Fröberg and Hoelstad, 7 August 2016). Another image from this reportage made after the family's arrival in Sweden shows the boy swimming in a lake. According to the caption, this is the moment when the boy overcomes his fear of water after the near-drowning experience.

The photojournalist and a reporter who also was on board the rescue vessel published additional stories about the family and their lives in Sweden during the next four years. The father and son are photographed living in a sparsely decorated apartment, communicating with the mother and the boy's sister and older brother who are in Syria waiting for asylum permits and reunification in Sweden (Fröberg and Hoelstad, 3 April 2016; Fröberg, 25 February 2017). In another story, the photojournalist and reporter cover their arrival and reunification at the Stockholm airport (Fröberg and Treijs). Other reportages—consisting of text and photographs or video—show the boy starting school, and the father waiting to begin a Swedish course that will lead to chances of employment (Fröberg and Hoelstad, 4 November 2017; Treijs). The family is also shown reflecting on their experience (Fröberg and Hoelstad, 9 February 2019). In a video posted on the *Svenska Dagbladet* news site accompanying one of the stories, the father, seated in a studio against a dark backdrop and with a grave expression, narrates his family's harrowing experience of flight (Fröberg and Hoelstad, 7 August 2016). He recalls the war and his son's traumatic experience of the sea crossing. This is the most extensive testimony from a family member in the analyzed coverage. This testimony evokes Sliwinski's notion that some experiences cannot be narrated. In the case of this father, it apparently took a year before he was ready to tell his story to the media.

A few years after their arrival in Sweden, the family appears to be in a sort of limbo in some images depicting social isolation and passivity. The family members are shown interacting with each other, yet with few other social contacts outside their home, except at the son's school. The isolation may be due to the fact that the parents are not yet able to work or study, as explained in one of the articles, or it could be the result of the journalists' presence and story focus. A certain formality is conveyed in some imagery—such as in an image showing family members waving from the balcony as the journalists arrive (Fröberg, 1 January 2016), a photograph filling a descriptive function in the story. In contrast, other images, interpretative of a mood or feeling, convey the relationship between members of the family. Thus, there are various genres or forms of photojournalism

in these stories, ranging from those that are visually driven to others more bound to the text and the topic of the story, each filling different functions in the reportages (Langton).

Told over time and in different media formats and genres, the coverage focuses on a family moving from the status of refugees to settling in the host country. Readers learn about their background and experiences, their reasons for fleeing, the trauma of flight, and the challenges of life in a new country. Such a personal focus on one family or person to represent a larger issue, in this case migration, is a common strategy in journalism, frequently used to personalize a complex issue. In light of the literature on media visualizations of migration, we may consider the strategy humanizing in that it gives a certain agency to the subjects of the story, such as in the aforementioned video testimony about the crossing of the Mediterranean. In contrast to the video and imagery from the rescue that directly visualize trauma, most other visualizations of the family made in Sweden have an everyday-life, non-dramatic focus. Emotions are however visualized in moments of celebration, such as the family's reunification at the airport captured on video.

Another element of the narrative developing over time—visually as well as in the texts—is the journalists' and, by extension, the newspaper's support of the family's striving to build a future in Sweden and their advocacy for them, such as participating in meetings with representatives of the Swedish Migration board. The interaction between journalists and family members are represented within visual imagery and in the text in various ways. It is foregrounded in the coverage of the boat rescue, as related by the photojournalist in her article, and in the video and photographs she made that day. Here, the photojournalist expresses the emotional impact the rescue experience had on her, recounting the impossibility of photographing and even accurately describing what she witnessed. This can be seen as an ethics of showing, following Linfield, and a witnessing where enunciation through writing makes journalism into a civic act (Peters).

Thus, emotion and connectedness are foregrounded in the various narratives, through a focus on family members' perspectives and in the inclusion of the journalists, in particular the photographer and her bond with the family, such as in a description of her interaction with the boy. Furthermore, readers learn that the family who lost their daughter at sea names their newborn girl Malin, after the photographer, who took part of the effort to save their daughter (Fröberg and Hoelstad, 8 December 2016, Sveriges Radio P4 Gävleborg). Thus, the encounter and relationship between photojournalist and the family are an integral part of the narrative.

DISCUSSION: THE TASK OF THE WITNESS

My interpretative analysis of contest entries found various visualizations of refugees and their experience, including a focus on families and a nurturing father figure, in effect evading a stereotypical portrayal of migrants as distant, anonymous masses. The typology with five positions allowed for the identification of a broader range of visibility than the more commonly identified binaries in visual framing research, victim and threat. The most prevalent position found in my material was empathy, echoing the literature.

I believe there are a number of possible factors resulting in the prevalence of empathy in my materials rather than hospitality and self-reflexivity, which may invite identification and reflection and potentially foreground agency on the part of the subject. One factor could be the visual parameters and frames favored by the contest jury. Another could be the photojournalists' choice of contest entries, catering to a prevailing trope, theme, or topic within the professional discourse. Yet another possibility is that assignments and media focus on crisis, conflict, and impact. When it comes to migration, media focus is frequently on crisis rather than structural issues or long-term processes. For instance, in 2015, the humanitarian situation in the Mediterranean called for media attention, and so did the movement of refugees through the continent as well as their arrival and reception in the host country. Each topic had high news value related to

humanitarian issues and asylum policy. However, the experience of people after the immediate crisis, once they have moved into housing, albeit temporary, doesn't appear to be in the media's focus as much. Another important factor is, of course, that there may be a lack of civic engagement on the part of the spectators, as Chouliaraki and Stolic suggest.

A subjective point of view was found in several contest entries, a departure from a distant and neutral position commonly associated with journalism. An important aspect of a photographer's perspective lies in the choice of images or story to enter in a professional contest. A subjective approach and personal storytelling may be due to the contest policy, specifically that entries can include unpublished imagery. As a result, in the submission of entries in this contest, an image-maker can edit the story to make a certain argument. Furthermore, a recent subjective turn in photojournalism favors stories and images focusing on individuals and personalized stories (Nilsson 2020).

The recurring stories about the Swirakly family are shaped by the norms and routines of the news organization as much as by the journalists conducting the coverage. However, most images and videos published in these stories were demonstrably the result of collaboration and the consent of the family members to be photographed, filmed, and interviewed. Furthermore, in some entries, such as videos, family members speak about their experience, thus narrating in their own voices. This, in turn, may open space for agency and engagement with spectators, in particular since serial coverage potentially explores experiences or issues in depth.

Furthermore, while personal interaction between journalists and the people they cover challenges the professional code of neutrality and impartiality and is generally frowned upon in news coverage, such a connection is frequently foregrounded in reportages and interactive projects, such as those discussed here. I also found explicit examples of witnessing, on the part of the photojournalist and family members, such as the photojournalist's reflecting on her decision not to photograph but rather to write what she saw, which I interpret as a

form of witnessing, following Peters. In that moment, the photojournalist expressed ambivalence about her professional role and wrestled with an ethics of showing (Linfield). And the father in the family narrated a traumatic experience, a form of witnessing that is personal and also communicates to a community of spectators (Sliwinski). What sets the analyzed stories published over time apart from the contest entries is a focus on everyday life—non-dramatic moments and relationships in mundane settings. Further research on photojournalism might look into such varied visual forms as well as forms of extended coverage over time. In this respect, the stories about the Swirakly family, although not analyzed here according to the typology, appear to offer a space for spectators to engage, through commitment to following the articles, but perhaps more as a fellow citizen than a witness of crisis.

The question of how photographs contribute to our understanding of the experience of forced migration must be discussed in specific context, as in the examples provided here. The work of photojournalists, which is the focus of this essay, is shaped by a number of factors, as discussed previously. Furthermore, a story may call for dramatic images showing the impact of an event, such as the plight of refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean. As a result, images made and selected for publication may or may not portray people in a way that evokes empathy—and those people may or may not have agency or speak to their experience. These are some of the limitations of journalism and, by extension, photojournalism.

By sponsoring the rescue vessels in the Mediterranean with its own journalists on board, the Swedish newspaper also eschewed a position of neutrality. While my analyses focused primarily on visual images and practices, it is important to also draw attention to how news organizations shape the coverage. The news organization's initiative can also be interpreted as support of a certain migration policy by foregrounding the plight of refugees. Thus, the newspaper and its owner took a humanitarian position, in effect aiding the refugees on humanitarian grounds. However, the boats also provided access to unique coverage. The participating newspapers ran stories where their photographers and reporters who had participated in the op-

eration recalled the horrors of seeing people drowned, yet satisfaction at being able to help (Bardell and Wiman). While this kind of testimony is frequently used in crisis reporting, it also foregrounds the intervention of journalists as agents of the story.¹⁹ As a result, while the sea rescue fulfills a humanitarian obligation to assist those at risk of drowning, the news coverage arguably risks placing people experiencing flight in the position of “deserving refugee.” The Swedish news organization, as sponsor of the operation, foregrounds its own empathy with the coverage, an effect found by Chouliaraki and Stolic, who found that the position of self-reflexivity tended to focus on the efforts of the benefactors.²⁰ Elements of this position can also be found in the coverage of the Swirakly family, though more so in the text than in the images, showing the challenge of maintaining a focus on the protagonist and their agency when the storyteller is in focus.²¹

Sliwinski and Linfield, in their respective work, discuss image-makers’ witnessing and their response to the experience as constitutive of the visualization. These authors also discuss photojournalists’ reflections on the boundaries, limitations, and potential of photography and their profession. From the perspective of a photojournalist, the challenge may be how to adequately capture and visualize the impact of atrocities or trauma. A spectator’s challenge, in turn, is to not turn away but to engage with the image. According to Sliwinski, “[...] such encounters with the incommensurable are encounters with the ground zero of history and politics itself (136)[...] But even angst demands to be communicated, indeed, perhaps *especially* this feeling, this brush up against the incommensurable, this aesthetic meeting with injustice that drives the world spectator to share the evaluation with others” (136-137). What follows is an expanded responsibility on the part of the public to engage critically with history, photographs, and the photojournalists doing the coverage, and to call for empathetic visual portrayals.

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NOTES

1. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/12/5683dob56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html>.
2. <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/pong/statistiknyhet/asylosokande-grund-for-bosattning-utlandsk-bakgrund-medborgarskapsbyten-adoptioner-hushallsstatistik-och-medellivslangder-2015/>.
3. <https://unric.org/sv/sveriges-oeppna-armor/>.
4. <https://www.regeringen.se/496b04/contentassets/fba5199a65f348269d82a8e6e146bdag/andrade-regler-i-utlanningslagen.pdf>.

5. Nominated entries are those awarded either first, second, or third place in the contest. In the context of the contest, nominated entries are publicly circulated in the contest yearbook and in the annual exhibition showcasing the contest.↵
6. The Swedish Picture of the Year contest, founded in 1942, is open to members of the Swedish Press Photographer's Club, PFK. Only professional photojournalists and photojournalism students may become members. A jury of peers, usually with one jury member from each of the Scandinavian countries, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, meets to judge the entries. The selection process is based on a blind review of submissions.↵
7. In a previous study, I analyzed portraits of children experiencing forced migration. Those images are therefore excluded from this analysis, with one exception: an image made by photojournalist Malin Hoelstad, of a father and his son fishing, discussed here as a visualization of a father figure, and as part of extended coverage of one family. The image won 2nd place in the domestic everyday life singles category in the 2017 contest.↵
8. 2nd place, international everyday life singles 2017. Photographer: Magnus Wennman. 1st place, international news singles 2018. Photographer: Christoffer Hjalmarsson. 3rd place, international news singles. Photographer: Anders Hansson. 1st place, international reportage 2018. Photographer: Christoffer Hjalmarsson.↵
9. 2nd place, international reportage 2016. Photographer: Anders Hansson.↵
10. Specifically, the news photo of the year 2015 is a close-up of a child in repose set against a dark backdrop, eyes wide open. Kedra and Sommer, who analyzed this image and others in the series of images of children sleeping on the ground, in a forest, or on sidewalk, found that the image-maker uses the rhetorical figure of "oxymoron," that is, two incompatible positions which, in turn, raise questions in viewers.↵
11. 2nd place, international news singles 2016. Photographer: Roger Tureson.↵
12. 2nd place, international news singles 2018. Photographer: Niclas Hammarström. 1st place, multimedia 2018. Photographer: Niclas Berglund.↵

13. 3rd place, domestic news singles 2016. Photographer: Bosse Nilsson.↵
14. 1st place, domestic news singles 2016. Photographer: Anders Hansson.↵
15. 2nd place, domestic everyday life singles 2017. Malin Hoelstad. I analyzed this image in a previous study (Nilsson 2020).↵
16. 1st place, domestic reportage 2017. Photographer: Linus Sundahl-Djerf.↵
17. 2nd place, domestic news singles 2017. Photographer: Jessica Gow.↵
18. 2nd place, domestic reportage 2017. Photographer: Magnus Hjalmarsson Niederman.↵
19. On the anniversary of the rescue operation, *Aftonbladet* was present when a rescued family, now residing in Sweden, met with crew members who had saved them (Nygren).↵
20. Chouliaraki further develops this argument in *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism*. Polity, 2013.↵
21. This tension has been pointed out by Chouliaraki, who notes that the position of self-reflexivity tends to focus on the efforts of the benefactors, an argument treated more extensively by Chouliaraki in *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism*. Polity, 2013.↵

GUIDED INTO A WORLD UNKNOWN: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAKING OF A VISUAL ESSAY WITH REFUGEES

SHIRLEY VAN DER MAAREL

The constant presence of refugees in the media has constructed its own reality, at the expense of lived reality. Any work concerned with refugees' lived experience will need to find ways to encourage people to see beyond this discourse. Based on research with refugees placed in depopulating villages in Italy, this article follows the process of collaboratively creating a visual essay that reflects the lived reality of refugee participants. The essay's aim is to let readers share in an experience, rather than merely documenting that of others. This article reflects on efforts to achieve this through experimenting with the essay's form, poetics and aesthetics. In doing so, the article discusses an alternative way of communicating research and presenting a visual essay.

La présence constante des réfugiés dans les médias a construit sa propre réalité, aux dépens de la réalité vécue. Tout travail visant à parler de l'expérience vécue par des réfugiés devra donc trouver les moyens d'encourager les gens à voir au-delà de ce discours. S'appuyant sur les recherches menées parmi des réfugiés placés dans des villages abandonnés d'Italie, cet article suit le processus de création collaborative d'un essai visuel qui reflète la réalité vécue des réfugiés ayant participé à cette recherche. Le but de l'essai est de permettre aux lecteurs de partager une expérience, plutôt que de simplement documenter celle des autres. Cet article rend compte des efforts déployés pour y parvenir en expérimentant la forme, la poétique et l'esthétique de l'essai. Ce faisant, l'article discute d'un moyen alternatif de communiquer les résultats d'une recherche et de présenter un essai visuel.

The constant presence of refugees in the media has shaped how people see, think, and talk about refugees. This public discourse is not grounded in refugees' experiences, but in

(political) interests that construct their own politicized and mediatized reality, at the expense of any actual or lived reality (Strömbäck 239; Krzyzanowski et al. 6). This is what I was confronted with in conducting and communicating research with refugees placed in Italy's depopulating villages. Interested in how refugees create a home in a place others choose to abandon, I spent three months with primarily young African refugee men¹ in four different villages in Valle di Comino, a valley between Rome and Naples.² In communicating research findings, I struggled finding the words that would encourage others to see beyond mediatized realities; not just to agree, disagree, or nuance the public discourse on refugees, but to have a different conversation altogether.

In response, I worked with research participants to create a visual essay. The project became both a method of *conducting* research (van der Maarel) as well as a way of *communicating* the research. This article discusses the latter, by considering the multimodal use of photos, videos, audio and drawings to offer glimpses into lived realities, and reflecting on how playing with the essay's design can evoke experiences rather than merely describe them.

The essay's format was inspired by the Subjective Atlas series.³ Where a standard atlas takes a bird's eye perspective, the subjective atlas tries to grasp what it means to be in an area from the diversity of human perspective. Rather than place being predefined, it turns it into a question. The research participants might be geographically living in Valle di Comino, but what really surrounds them? What are their physical surroundings, but also what surrounds them socially, emotionally, virtually, and what thoughts, memories, stories, concerns, and questions surround them? Based on conversations and observations, different pages were created, each exploring one aspect of their surroundings.

As we made the materials for the visual essay, and as I put them together on a page, what slowly emerged was a world. Though living in the same geographical location, the lack of interaction with Italians and in Italian daily life meant that refugees did not share in the world that Italian residents inhabited.⁴ Rather than only describing,

documenting, or offering evidence of lived experience, the essay experiments with form, poetics, and aesthetics to evoke meanings that let readers briefly share in an experience (Pauwels 2). To share an experience, is not to have the same experience. The closest one can get is to share in the same space (Irving 98-99). When Andrew Irving (100) is “walking fieldwork” he takes the rhythm of his walking partner and thus shares a temporal space. Annika Lems (43-46) used life story interviews to enter a narrative space, and Steven Feld (464) used audio recordings to share in the Kaluli’s sonic space.

In a similar manner, the visual essay was conceptualized as a guide; a way for readers to be guided into a world shared with research participants. This is reminiscent of Trinh T Minh-ha’s “speaking nearby” (Chen). The nearby implies closeness (being there), but also distance (not being quite there yet). In the visual essay, descriptions, images, and stories give an understanding of an everyday life and express research insights (Sutherland), while the use of metaphors, ambiguities, and the polysemous nature of images and video (Barthes 38), are always pointing beyond these stories. By defying closure, the work tries to resist taking a definitive position in the public debate on refugees and thus maintain both the proximity and distance of the nearby. The full visual essay is accessible online via www.land-unknown.eu/guide. In what follows I discuss elements from the making of the essay, to provide an insight in the way it recreates a world and guides readers into it.



How to begin a story? With the objective of recreating a world, one starting point could be place. Valle di Comino is an inland depopulating valley surrounded by the Apennine mountains between Naples and Rome. It is sparsely populated, and like many other depopulating villages, it is characterized by a vicious cycle of abandonment where shops and businesses move away, jobs decrease, older people pass away, and young people move away. The image above portrays the sparsely populated valley where the research took place. Starting this story as such, however, would make it seem as though place is already defined, located on a map, and able to be visited simply by driving there. Instead, the essay's intention was to turn place into a question; to guide readers into a world that does not exist geographically, but that can only be explored by engaging with the people inhabiting it.



Thus the story might begin with two of the participants, Amadou and Koné, trying to find their way through a pathless forest. It is an apt metaphor for the way many of the refugee participants were navigating ambiguous asylum procedures (Tuckett), incomprehensible languages, and unknown Italian customs. It however gives the impression that this is a story about a world unknown to *refugees*, where instead it was meant to be a guide for *readers* to explore a world unknown.



Walking through Villa Latina, one of the villages hosting refugees, there was a small building with frosted windows, one of which was broken. Through the window I saw a micro world, with remnants of people and stories, as well as new life reclaiming this abandoned place. This became the cover for the visual essay. Rather than being a guide to a particular place or the lives of particular people, I invite readers with this image to be guided by a curiosity for what is alive in the ruins (Tsing 20–25).



If place is not outside our bodies, but the result of bodies dwelling in place (Ahmed 9; Ingold), then presumably the best way to explore a place is to be guided by the people inhabiting it. Taking this literally, I asked Rana to guide me through his beloved Arpino (watch the video at www.land-unknown.eu/discover-arpino-with-rana). To the camera he spontaneously presented himself as a tour guide. While showing the sights, what stands out is how his understanding of place is always pointing beyond place; weaving his own memories and life stories through what he had learned about this place.



Yaya

Posta Fibreno

I was living in an island in Senegal, so there are no cars, in the middle of the sea. When I would wake up, from my bedroom I can see water, the sea. So that's why when I see the water here, I think I am in my house, or in my village. The first time I came here was with a group of people, with lots of different nationalities, and I feel good, I feel comfortable and happy. To meet people that are so open and also when you are together with the other people, you cannot feel... you can feel bad but at the same time you can feel good things.

Continuing to explore how people understood their physical surroundings, I asked participants to bring me to their favourite places.⁵ Similar to Rana's Arpino, also Yaya and Koné's stories show how the meaning of place cannot be predefined, but is instead the product of experiences elsewhere, in their case expressing a longing for social interactions that they missed in their everyday lives.



Koné

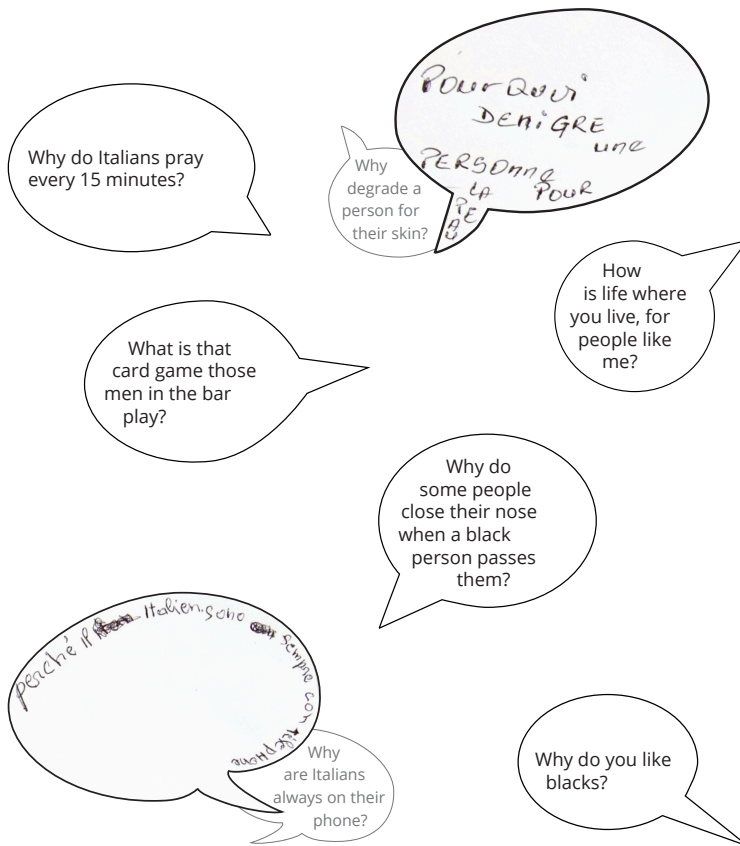
Garden bar, Atina

Ici en Europe, pour trouver les gens, pour échanger, il faut aller dans les bars. Ici il y a toujours du monde. La première fois j'étais venu ici pour un ami qui voulait faire un transfert avec Western Union. Ici, tu prends un café, tu trouves des amis, c'est amusant. Les personnes ici sont trop gentilles, ils sont souriants avec toi. Ça attire les clients. La première fois que je suis arrivé, bon... j'ai trouvé ça genial. Je ne changerais rien, ça me plaît comme ça.

Social interactions rarely took place between Italians and refugees, who lived largely parallel lives in the villages. Exploring the gap between these separate worlds, I asked the African refugees what they would want to ask Italians. As they wrote and spoke, it seemed that what mattered were not the answers to the questions, but the fact that they had these questions at all. Instead of having Italian residents answer these questions, I included them in the essay to reveal the space between Italians and refugees, that participants were confronted with in everyday life.



As well as expressing a gap in understanding, the questions also express ways of understanding the world. For example, church bells in the region would sound every 15 minutes. Based on the Islamic call for prayer, Koné had assumed that this must mean Italians are praying every 15 minutes.⁶ The question “why do you like Blacks” had been directed at me personally. Based on the more common experience of being ignored by Italians, Khalifa had interpreted my interest in their lives to mean that I liked “Blacks.”



Similarly, when Amadou wrote “why are Italians always on their phone,” he was not looking for an answer, but expressing an experience. He explained it to me as a great pun, for so often he had heard Italians critique Africans for being on their phones, now he would question *Italians* for being on *their* phones.

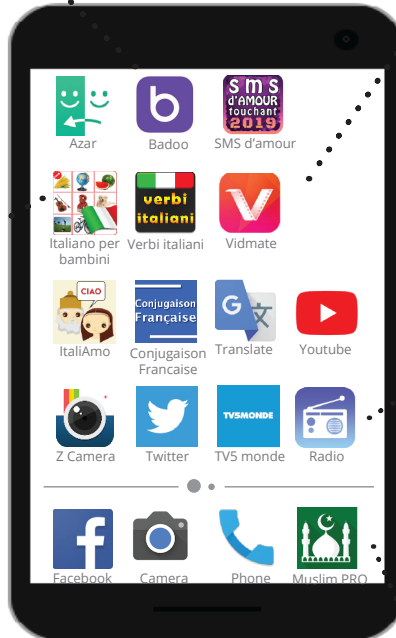
To explore the world of the phone, I asked Amadou and others to guide me through their phones, and from these stories recreated two typical phone screens.

Meeting new people This is just a fun way of meeting new people. Look, if you open Azar it starts a video chat with a stranger who is nearby. This is how you make friends. Sometimes I look at SMS d'amour to know what kind of nice things I could say to women.

Vidmate There is no internet in my room, so I download music and films to watch in my bed.

Italian learning Before, I was using these apps a lot to learn Italian, but now I know it all already. ItaliAmo is in Chinese, I don't speak Chinese, but it teaches you Italian too.

Radio Radio Kiss Kiss is my favourite. On the other stations they talk a lot in Italian and I don't understand that.



Muslim pro The times for prayer change with the position of the sun. This app reminds me to pray throughout the day. It wakes me up every morning - just before sunrise. I also read from the app, it has lots of different languages.

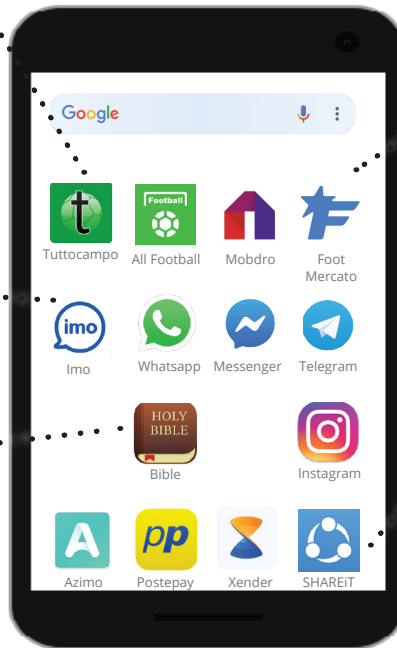
Tuttocampo is for Italian football. It also includes the team I am playing for: Marafica. Here you can see our team players and the goals. They only show one team player though, and only his goals, even though I have also scored 5 times. They are not being fair, it is because we are an all-African team, and we are too strong.

Football apps I check All Football to know which team is playing, then I watch the match on Mobdro. Through Foot Mercato I can follow player transfers.

Messaging I call my mum in Guinea through Facebook. Some friends use Instagram to text, others use Imo or Whatsapp, that's why I have different ones.

Sharing offline The internet is so weak, but if you use SHAREIT you can transfer files and also apps by connecting both to the same network without internet.

Bible I prefer to read the bible on my phone. Every week I copy a quote and place it on my 'wall' in the app. Now I'm on a five-week streak.



These phone apps express a multitude of experiences, interests, and needs. The apps for finding new people, and staying in touch with friends and family elsewhere, show how social relations were created and maintained through the phone. The Bible and Qur'an apps are standing in for a religious community that could not be found in the surrounding area, as the nearest mosque was many kilometres away, and even Christian refugees were unable to go to church because the already limited bus network did not operate on Sundays.

Intrigued by the importance of football, illustrated by the many football apps that were used, I asked participants to draw their favourite teams. Listen to photo below here:

www.land-unknown.eu/listen-to-watching-football



5th of March 2019, Champions League, Ajax versus R al Madrid. Ajax surprises the world by winning 4-1, continuing to the quarter finals, throwing R al Madrid out of the league.



Sidike My first team, my last team. This team is my happiness.



Yaya El Hadji Diouf is my hero and he started playing for Liverpool. When he left Liverpool, I remained with the team. I will remain with Liverpool for the rest of my life. Have you seen this motto: 'you'll never walk alone'.



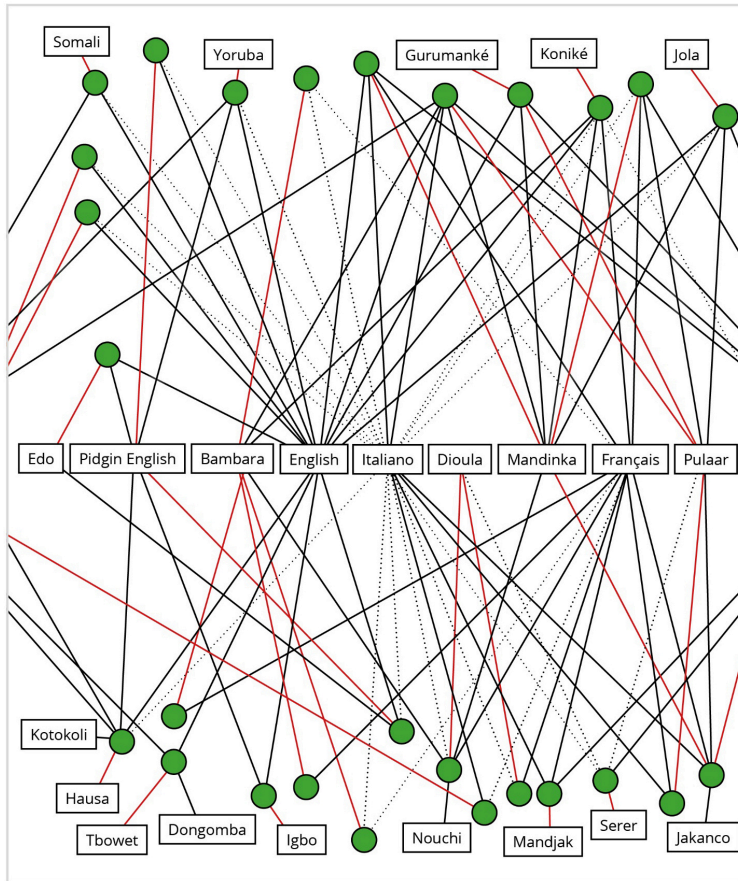
Souleymane J'ai connu ce club gr ce   mon cousin. J'avais 10 ou 11 ans quand il m'a appel    venir regarder, Juventus contre R al Madrid. Il me parlait du style de jeu de Del Piero. Apr s le match j' tais impressionn  de l' quipe.

What I thought would be a quick process of sketching, turned into hours of painstakingly copying every detail of the football emblem. As we worked together, talked about their teams, and watched football matches, for a moment I shared in the joy, frustration, and home that is football.

The image and sounds also give a glimpse into life inside the refugee house. There were houses like this one all across the valley, sometimes with as few as three people, other times as many as 26. Most of the refugees were from across Sub-Saharan Africa, and rarely would they live with people from their own country or ethnic group. As a result communication was complex. Amadou could be speaking Mandinka, then turn around and continue in Pulaar, answer a question in broken English, and then turn to me to speak in Italian. For an untrained ear, all African languages merge into one, so that the number and diversity of languages might not immediately be recognized or appreciated. In an effort to explore the world of communication, I mapped with participants the different languages they spoke.

The maps shows that in this rural valley in central Italy, more than 27 languages could be heard on a daily basis, by people who spoke an average of four languages each. The map was intended to make this great linguistic capacity visible for Italian residents, who often complained that refugees did not speak 'the language'. What was for me an effort acknowledge and celebrate the beauty of language, actually made some participants uncomfortable as I was not only making their language skills visible, but also the ethnic identities that were associated with those languages. To circumvent this issue, the map does not include any names, and people are only represented by a green dot. This made the map even more complex, evoking even better the chaos and complexity of everyday conversations.

Readers can enter this world of communication by tracing how one person (green dot) might communicate with another, in a shared language (white box), through the lines that indicate speakers' linguistic ability: native (red), fluent (black), conversational (dotted).



By reflecting on the creation of a visual essay, this article explored the question: how might we communicate other people's lived experiences, especially when these are being framed by politicized and mediatized realities. The visual essay responds to this through a triple movement where creating shared experiences was at the heart of the making process, the reading experience and the essay's intended impact. Rather than being guided by a discourse on refugees, the shared making of the essay's materials was a way for participants to guide me through parts of their lives, beyond the realities presented in politics and the media.

This invitation to enter a world was then extended to others through a visual essay that experimented with an alternative reading experience. The essay presents the materials in such a way that it raises as many questions as it provides answers, thus defying closure and maintaining the distance that is necessary in "speaking nearby." (Chen). Instead of offering a comprehensive narrative and thus explicitly or implicitly confining people to a story told about them, the visual essay only discloses the world in-part, through glimpses into lived realities. Moreover, the essay plays with form, poetics, and aesthetics in an effort to evoke experiences in readers, rather than only describe the ones of others. It was assumed that it is not a specific mode (text, image etc.) that is particularly evocative, but the way it is employed. The essay thus appeals to a multimodality where people, stories, images, and experiences temporarily hold together on the page, creating a micro-world that readers can briefly share in.

Lastly, by maintaining both distance and closeness, understanding and misunderstanding, a sense of familiarity and strangeness, it is hoped that the essay triggers curiosity, so that readers, including the residents of Valle di Comino, feel encouraged to seek contact and share in experiences with others also outside the page.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IMAGE NOTES

Photos of Yaya and Kone's favourite place (Figure 5 and 6) were made by Silvia di Passio. Drawings of football emblems (Figure 11) were made by the participants Yaya, Sidike, and Souleymane. App icons (Figure 9 and 10) were taken from the App Store/Google Play. All other materials created by the author.

NOTES

1. A note on terminology. When I use the term "refugee" I refer to the people who were hosted in the asylum facilities, where most of them were awaiting asylum, and a few of them had been granted or were

rejected asylum. Italians in the region would generally not use the word refugee, which they instead associated with victims of wars they had seen on TV. Italians who worked with refugees would generally use “richiedenti asilo” (asylum seekers), “migranti” (migrants), or occasionally “immigrati” (immigrants). The average Italian resident, however, would use “extracomunitari” (non-EU citizens) or “i neri” (black people). The refugees themselves would use the term “African,” unless referring to someone from outside of Sub-Saharan Africa, in which case they used the relevant nationality.↵

2. The research was part of an MA degree in Visual Ethnography, Leiden University, supervised by Dr. Mark Westmoreland. Research on site took place between January and March 2019, in the valley of Valle di Comino, Italy. The valley hosted just over 100 refugees in shared housing and apartments. The majority of refugees were men (82%) from across Africa (83%). The full visual essay includes the creative contributions of 15 people, but is based on research activities conducted with 40 research participants, primarily young men from across Sub-Saharan Africa.↵
3. See www.subjectiveeditions.org.↵
4. This is not to say that refugee participants experienced the world in the same manner, nor that there is a single world shared between them. Rather, it is to say that there is a space shared between refugees in a way that there was generally not a shared space between Italian and refugee residents. For more on world-making, see for example Nelson Goodman (Goodman).↵
5. Over the course of one day, with a group of refugees and a local photographer, Silvia di Passio, we visited participants’ favourite places in the valley. This activity was inspired by *A Monday in Kabul*, a work by Dutch photographer Marieke van der Velden (van der Velden).↵
6. In the villages, church bells would sound every 15 minutes to indicate time. There are two different kinds of bells, one to indicate the hour, and a different bell for the minutes; once, twice, or three times for respectively for 15, 30, or 45 minutes past the hour.↵

CONTRIBUTORS

CONTRIBUTORS

Cambre, Carolina is an associate professor at Concordia University and Associate Researcher at IRCAV-Paris 2020-2025. Her work explores vernacular visual expression asking: How do people produce and direct the visual space? How is the image a doing? What are the social and cultural work/ings of images? She works through visual sociology, sociology of information, image studies, and politics of representation. She has projects on visual processes of legitimation, representation of online sharing, and polymedia literacies. She is the author of *The Semiotics of Che Guevara: Affective Gateways* (Bloomsbury 2015/16); co-author of the forthcoming *Toward a Sociology of Selfies* (Routledge); and co-edited *Mediated Interfaces: The Body on Social Media* (Bloomsbury, UK) with Katie Warfield and Crystal Abidin, as well as *Visual Pedagogies: Concepts, Cases & Practices* (Brill | Sense Publishers, NL) with Edna Barromi-Perlman and David Herman, Jr. (forthcoming).

Cambre, Carolina est professeure associée à l'Université Concordia et chercheuse associée à l'IRCAV-Paris 2020-2025. Son travail explore l'expression visuelle vernaculaire en posant les questions suivantes : Comment les gens produisent-ils et dirigent-ils l'espace visuel ? Comment l'image se fait-elle ? Quels sont les rouages sociaux et culturels des images ? Elle travaille à travers la sociologie visuelle, la sociologie de l'information, l'étude des images et la politique de la représentation. Elle a des projets sur les processus visuels de légitimation, la représentation du partage en ligne et les littératies polymédias. Elle est l'auteur de : *The Semiotics of Che Guevara : Affective Gateways* (Bloomsbury 2015/16), co-auteur du prochain ouvrage *To-*

ward a Sociology of Selfies (Routledge) et co-éditeur de *Mediated Interfaces : The Body on Social Media* (Bloomsbury, UK) avec Katie Warfield et Crystal Abidin, ainsi que *Visual Pedagogies : Concepts, Cases & Practices* (Brill | Sense Publishers, NL) avec Edna Barrromi-Perlman et David. Herman Jr. (à paraître).

Ciccaglione, Adriana is a journalist with a bachelor's degree in social communication from the Universidad Católica Cecilio Acosta (Maracaibo-Venezuela). With more than fifteen years of experience as a journalist, she founded the magazine *Estampas Larense* of the newspaper *El Informador* (2005), among others. She has been awarded the Order Jacinto Lara (2012) and the National Prize for Cultural Journalism (2009). She currently lives in Seville, Spain, where she works as a freelance journalist and manages her blog, *Lipsticks in Quarantine*.

Ciccaglione, Adriana est une journaliste titulaire d'une licence en communication sociale de l'Universidad Católica Cecilio Acosta (Maracaibo-Venezuela). Avec plus de quinze ans d'expérience en tant que journaliste, elle a notamment fondé le magazine *Estampas Larense* du journal *El Informador* (2005). Elle a reçu l'Ordre Jacinto Lara (2012) et le Prix national du journalisme culturel (2009). Elle vit actuellement à Séville, en Espagne, où elle travaille comme journaliste indépendante et gère son blog, *Lipsticks in Quarantine*.

Hernández-Albújar, Yolanda is a professor at the University of Loyola Andalucía, Spain, where she teaches courses on Migration and Anthropology. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Pittsburgh and a Master's from the University of Florida. Her main interests move around issues of gender and migration, identity, and culture. She incorporates visual methodologies into her research and has conducted numerous workshops with refugees and migrant women on photovoice.

Hernández-Albújar, Yolanda est professeure à l'Université de Loyola Andalucía, en Espagne, où elle donne des cours sur la migration et l'anthropologie. Elle est titulaire d'un doctorat en sociologie de l'université de Pittsburgh et d'un master de l'université de Floride. Ses principaux intérêts tournent autour des questions de genre et de

migration, d'identité et de culture. Elle intègre des méthodologies visuelles dans ses recherches et a dirigé de nombreux ateliers sur le photovoice avec des réfugiées et des migrantes.

Hingley, Liz is a photographer, curator and anthropologist. She is currently Artist in Residence at Kings College London (Digital Humanities) and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham. Liz's work explores the systems of belonging and belief that shape cities around the world. Her practice is inherently collaborative and seeks to create connections between disciplines, geographies and generations. Liz's projects have received numerous awards, including the Lens Culture portrait prize, PhotoPhilanthropy Award, Prix Virginia and Getty Editorial Grant. Her work reaches international audiences through publications, workshops and exhibitions, from galleries to gardens, from hospitals to streets. The book *Under Gods* (Dewi Lewis publishing, 2010), supported by a scholarship from Italian research and communication institute FABRICA, became an international touring exhibition. As a Visiting Scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Liz published *End Of Lines* (2013), *Sacred Shanghai* (Washington University Press 2019) and *Shanghai Sacred* (GOST books 2020). She has previously held positions within SOAS University, The Migration Research Centre, University College London, and the University of Austin, Texas (Art History). As curatorial advisor to Side Gallery, UK, Liz curated exhibitions with a focus on eco feminism, environmental justice and migration. She is a trustee of the AmberSide UNESCO world heritage collection of photography and film.

Hingley, Liz est photographe, conservatrice et anthropologue. Elle est actuellement artiste en résidence au Kings College de Londres (Digital Humanities) et chercheuse honoraire à l'université de Birmingham. Le travail de Liz explore les systèmes d'appartenance et de croyance qui façonnent les villes du monde entier. Sa pratique est intrinsèquement collaborative et cherche à créer des liens entre les disciplines, les géographies et les générations. Les projets de Liz ont reçu de nombreux prix, notamment le prix du portrait Lens Culture, le prix PhotoPhilanthropy, le prix Virginia et le Getty Editorial Grant. Son travail touche un public international par le biais de publications,

d'ateliers et d'expositions, des galeries aux jardins, des hôpitaux aux rues. Le livre *Under Gods* (Dewi Lewis publishing, 2010), soutenu par une bourse de l'institut italien de recherche et de communication FABRICA, est devenu une exposition itinérante internationale. En tant que chercheuse invitée à l'Académie des sciences sociales de Shanghai, Liz a publié *End Of Lines* (2013), *Sacred Shanghai* (Washington University Press 2019) et *Shanghai Sacred* (GOST books 2020). Elle a précédemment occupé des postes au sein de l'université SOAS, du Centre de recherche sur la migration, de l'University College London et de l'université d'Austin, au Texas (histoire de l'art). En tant que conseillère en conservation pour la Side Gallery, au Royaume-Uni, Liz a organisé de nombreuses expositions axées sur l'éco-féminisme et la justice environnementale. Elle est membre du conseil d'administration de la collection de photographies et de films AmberSide, inscrite au patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO.

Lehmuskallio, Asko is a Full Professor in the New Social Research program, and focuses in his work on the intersection between visual studies and media studies, with a special interest in media anthropology and digital cultures. He leads a research project on Banal Surveillance funded by the Academy of Finland, and is a co-founder of the Visual Studies Lab. Lehmuskallio has held several positions abroad, including Visiting Scholar at UC Berkeley, United States, and the Sussex Humanities Lab, United Kingdom, and as Rudolf Arnheim Guest Professor at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany. Among his publications are the co-edited works *Digital Photography and Everyday Life* (2016) and *Mobile Digital Practices* (2017) and the Finnish-language *Entanglements between Bodies and Documents: A History of the Finnish Passport* (2020), co-authored with Paula Haara. In addition, he has co-curated two well-received exhibitions at the Finnish Museum of Photography, *#snapshot* (2014-15) and *Documenting the Body: A History of the Finnish Passport* (2020).

Lehmuskallio, Asko est professeur titulaire au sein du programme New Social Research, et concentre son travail sur l'intersection entre les études visuelles et les études sur les médias, avec un intérêt particulier pour l'anthropologie des médias et les cultures numériques. Il dirige un projet de recherche sur la surveillance banale financé par

l'Académie de Finlande et est cofondateur du laboratoire d'études visuelles. M. Lehmuskallio a occupé plusieurs postes à l'étranger, notamment en tant que chercheur invité à l'UC Berkeley, aux États-Unis, et au Sussex Humanities Lab, au Royaume-Uni, et en tant que professeur invité Rudolf Arnheim à la Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, en Allemagne. Parmi ses publications figurent les ouvrages co-édités *Digital Photography and Everyday Life* (2016) et *Mobile Digital Practices* (2017), ainsi que l'ouvrage en finnois *Entanglements between Bodies and Documents : A History of the Finnish Passport* (2020), coécrit avec Paula Haara. En outre, il a co-commandité deux expositions bien accueillies au Musée finlandais de la photographie, *#snapshot* (2014-15) et *Documenting the Body : Une histoire du passeport finlandais* (2020).

Mersmann, Birgit is a full professor of modern and contemporary art at the University of Duisburg-Essen. She is an art historian, literary scholar and image theorist with a profoundly transcultural research and teaching profile. With Burcu Dogramci, she co-founded the research group “Art Production and Art Theory in Times of Global Migration” in 2013 (<https://www.ag-kunst-migration.de/>). She participated in the research group “Entangled Histories of Art and Migration. Forms, Visibilities, Agents” (2018-2022), funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation). She is the co-editor of the first international edition of the *Handbook of Art and Global Migration. Theories, Practices and Challenges* (ed. with B. Dogramaci, Berlin/Boston 2019). Her interdisciplinary research spans the fields of image and media theory, contemporary photography, modern and contemporary Western and Far Eastern art, art and migration, global art and art history, museum studies, transcultural and translational studies, and the interrelationships between the written word and the image. Her recent monographs and edited books include *Okzidentalismen. Projektionen und Reflexionen des Westens in Kunst, Ästhetik und Kultur* (ed. with Hauke Ohls, Bielefeld 2022); *Über die Grenzen des Bildes. Kulturelle Differenz und transkulturelle Dynamik im globalen Feld der Kunst* (Bielefeld 2021); *Bildagenten. Historische und zeitgenössische Bildpraxen in globalen Kulturen* (ed. with Christiane Kruse, Paderborn 2021); *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cul-*

tural Diversity (ed. with Hans G. Kippenberg, Berlin/Boston 2016); *Schriftikonik. Bildphänomene der Schrift in kultur- und medienkomparativer Perspektive* (München 2015).

Mersmann, Birgit est professeure titulaire d'art moderne et contemporain à l'Université de Duisburg-Essen. Elle est historienne de l'art, spécialiste de littérature et théoricienne de l'image avec un profil de recherche et d'enseignement profondément transculturel. En compagnie de Burcu Dogramci, elle a cofondé le groupe de recherche "Art Production and Art Theory in Times of Global Migration" en 2013 (<https://www.ag-kunst-migration.de/>). Elle a fait partie du groupe de recherche "Entangled Histories of Art and Migration. Forms, Visibilities, Agents" (2018-2022) financé par la DFG (foundation allemande de recherche). Elle est co-éditrice de la première édition internationale du *Handbook of Art and Global Migration. Theories, Practices and Challenges* (éd. avec B. Dogramaci, Berlin/Boston 2019). Sa recherche interdisciplinaire couvre les domaines de la théorie de l'image et des médias, de la photographie contemporaine, de l'art moderne et contemporain occidental et extrême-oriental, de l'art et de la migration, de l'art mondial et de l'histoire de l'art, des études muséales, des études transculturelles et translationnelles et des interrelations entre l'écrit et l'image. Parmi ses monographies et ouvrages récents, on peut noter *Okzidentalismen. Projektionen und Reflexionen des Westens in Kunst, Ästhetik und Kultur* (éd. avec Hauke Ohls, Bielefeld 2022); *Über die Grenzen des Bildes. Kulturelle Differenz und transkulturelle Dynamik im globalen Feld der Kunst* (Bielefeld 2021); *Bildagenten. Historische und zeitgenössische Bildpraxen in globalen Kulturen* (éd. avec Christiane Kruse, Paderborn 2021); *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity* (éd. avec Hans G. Kippenberg, Berlin/Boston 2016); *Schriftikonik. Bildphänomene der Schrift in kultur- und medienkomparativer Perspektive* (München 2015).

Ortiz, Angel Iglesias is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Tampere Peace Research Institute, Finland, in the field of Peace and Conflict Research. His dissertation was on Exploring Social Objectivity through Hegemony, Antagonism and Heterogeneity. Outlining a Conceptual Approximation.

Ortiz, Angel Iglesias est un chercheur post-doctoral à l'Institut de recherche sur la paix de Tampere, en Finlande, dans le domaine de la recherche sur la paix et les conflits. Sa thèse portait sur l'exploration de l'objectivité sociale à travers l'hégémonie, l'antagonisme et l'hétérogénéité. Esquisse d'une approximation conceptuelle.

Prieto-Blanco, Patricia lectures in Digital Media Practice in the Sociology Department at Lancaster, United Kingdom. Her areas of expertise are visual methods of research and photographic practices. For her PhD, she worked with transnational families and looked at how they incorporate photography in everyday routines, addressing media practices in the contexts of migration, kinship and intimacy. She serves as Technology Advisor in the board of IVSA (International Visual Sociology Association), and is the Vice-Chair of ECREA Visual Cultures Section. She is an advocate of interdisciplinary, participatory, and practice-based research.

Prieto-Blanco, Patricia enseigne la pratique des médias numériques au département de sociologie de Lancaster, au Royaume-Uni. Ses domaines d'expertise sont les méthodes visuelles de recherche et les pratiques photographiques. Dans le cadre de son doctorat, elle a travaillé avec des familles transnationales et a étudié la manière dont elles intègrent la photographie dans leurs habitudes quotidiennes, abordant les pratiques médiatiques dans les contextes de la migration, de la parenté et de l'intimité. Elle est conseillère en technologie au sein du conseil d'administration de l'IVSA (Association internationale de sociologie visuelle) et vice-présidente de la section Cultures visuelles de l'ECREA. Elle est partisane d'une recherche interdisciplinaire, participative et basée sur la pratique.

Ross, Reuben has a background in Film Studies and Visual Anthropology. His work explores diverse issues of urban and visual culture, with a particular focus on the consequences of transnational migration and the challenges of living in a global capitalist economy. He is also a doctoral student at The Lisbon Consortium, part of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, where his research examines the histories of super-diverse streets in selected global cities; visual research methods are central to his work.

Ross, Reuben a une formation en études cinématographiques et en anthropologie visuelle. Son travail explore diverses questions relatives à la culture urbaine et visuelle, avec un accent particulier sur les conséquences de la migration transnationale et les défis de la vie dans une économie capitaliste mondiale. Il est également doctorant au Consortium de Lisbonne, qui fait partie de l'Universidade Católica Portuguesa, où ses recherches portent sur l'histoire des rues super-diverses de certaines villes du monde ; les méthodes de recherche visuelle sont au cœur de son travail.

Van der Maarel, Shirley is a Visual Anthropology PhD candidate at the University of Manchester with a background in Philosophy, Human Rights, and Social Design. Using creative and collaborative research methods, she tries to understand—with all the senses—how people experience sociopolitical issues. Her work has led her to create film, photography, and research projects across the world, including in Italy, China, Lebanon, Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria. Currently she works in depopulating villages in Italy to explore how life, place, and community is reimagined and remade at the edge of the world.

Van der Maarel, Shirley est une candidate au doctorat en anthropologie visuelle à l'université de Manchester, avec une formation en philosophie, en droits de l'homme et en design social. À l'aide de méthodes de recherche créatives et collaboratives, elle tente de comprendre (avec tous les sens) comment les gens vivent les questions sociopolitiques. Son travail l'a amenée à créer des films, des photographies et des projets de recherche à travers le monde, notamment en Italie, en Chine, au Liban, en Ouganda, au Kenya et au Nigeria. Actuellement, elle travaille dans des villages en dépeuplement en Italie pour explorer comment la vie, le lieu et la communauté sont réimaginés et refaits au bord du monde.