

From:

Jan Kühnemund

Topographies of “Borderland Schengen”

Documental Images of Undocumented Migration
in European Borderlands

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Analysing recent documentary films dealing with undocumented migration at the Schengen Area’s fringes and against the backdrop of what has been termed the ‘European refugee crisis’, Jan Kühnemund investigates the interface between migration discourses and image discourses. As an analytical framework, he conceptualises ‘Borderland Schengen’ as a visual-political transnational space emerging from the interplay of migration movements and border policies. Putting the spaces and iconologies of ‘illegal’ migration under scrutiny and aiming at establishing their protagonists as subjects, Kühnemund in this regard reads the films as attempts at discursive participation as an aesthetic political practice.

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Contents

1 Introduction | 7

PART 1: “BORDERLAND SCHENGEN”

2 Coordinates | 21

- 2.1 The continuous crises of immigration | 22
- 2.2 The Europeanisation of the crises | 26
- 2.3 Undocumented migration | 35
- 2.4 Terminology | 40
- 2.5 Framing figures, icons, spaces | 44
- 2.6 Transnational cinema | 51
- 2.7 Cinematic documentary | 54

3 The Transnational Social Space of “Borderland Schengen” | 61

- 3.1 Transnational social spaces | 62
- 3.2 Transnational film studies | 67
- 3.3 Borders and borderlands | 69
- 3.4 Institutional processes of Europeanisation | 75
- 3.5 Institutionalised improvisation in flexible geographies | 84
- 3.6 Exterritorialisation | 87
- 3.7 Cultures of border control and border practice | 93
- 3.8 “Borderland Schengen” as an analytical framework – and a method | 96

PART 2: BORDERLAND VISUALITIES

4 The Visuality and Mediality of Documentary Film | 101

- 4.1 Footage and authenticity | 105
- 4.2 The image’s truth | 108
- 4.3 Modes of the documentary | 110
- 4.4 Authorship and consumption; reality and knowledge | 116
- 4.5 Conventions | 120
- 4.6 Evidence and rupture | 125
- 4.7 Image spaces of migration | 127
- 4.8 The films’ mediality | 136

5 Representational and Performative Practices | 145

- 5.1 Representational orders | 146
- 5.2 Cinematic acts of creation | 149

- 5.3 The fictional capacity of documentary film | 154
- 5.4 Performance, authenticity and stereotype | 159
- 5.5 Performing migration narratives | 165
- 5.6 Performing in/visibility | 174

6 Attempts of Visibility and Recognition | 179

- 6.1 Image politics | 183
- 6.2 *Lampedusa* as a placeholder | 187
- 6.3 Narratives, figures and subjects | 193
- 6.4 Invisible bodies | 208
- 6.5 Discursive participation and opacity | 210

7 Transnational Social Spaces – Transitional Social Spaces | 217

- 7.1 Establishing the border space | 219
- 7.2 Regulated spaces: manifestations of the border | 227
- 7.3 Places of imprisonment | 231
- 7.4 Contact zones | 242
- 7.5 Normality – privacy | 246

8 Conclusion: Borderland Counter-Topographies | 251

Filmography | 265

Bibliography | 267

1 Introduction

A picturesque, wooden vessel surrounded by the ultramarine glistening sea. The boat is nicely painted in light blue and white – and the orange life jackets some of the estimated 150 passengers are wearing make a picturesque contrast. Most of the people on board are apparently of African descent. Densely jammed together, many of them are looking directly into the camera, empty eyed, it seems. Some elements of the group of people stand out. There is this one guy right in the centre of the image wearing an Argentinian football shirt. There is a tiny rusty exhaust pipe sticking out between the people in the rearmost of the boat – much more than everything else in this image illustrating the futility of the undertaking to cross long distances. There are some people towering above the rest, obviously standing on boxes or even the boat's railing. And then there is a caption reading "Boat-People". Us and them; here it's us, there it's them; we are individuals, they come in 'masses', 'swarms', 'waves' – the image makes it pretty clear who is who and who belongs where.

Cut.

Four young men gathered behind a head-high barbwire fence, all of them casually dressed and carrying sports bags or backpacks. One of them is slightly lifting the fence with a wooden stick in order to make way for a fifth young man to crawl underneath. The camera captures the moment as he succeeds and is about to unbend. He looks straight into the camera; apparently he is about to run right in the spectator's direction. Most likely, others crossed the border just seconds before; those still on the other side of the fence are certainly planning to quickly follow him. The clandestine – illegal, irregular – incident is taking place in broad daylight – which makes us voyeurs rather than spectators. At the same time, it signals the threats of 'uncontrollability' and 'invasion'. And that of similarity: they look just like us, like normal young men, wearing blue jeans and caps, hoodies and sneakers.

Cut.

A three-year-old, drowned, washed up on a beach, lying face down in the surf near a Turkish resort; a "grim-faced" (Smith, 2015) police officer carries him away. The caption explains that the "dark-haired toddler, wearing a bright-red T-shirt and shorts" (ibid.) is called Aylan Kurdi, and was on his – or rather his family's – way from Syria to the Greek island Kos when their boat capsized. A refugee, a child. A victim. Producing images that the British newspaper *The Guardian* characterises as "distressing, shocking, tragic" (ibid.). And yet: "Within hours it had gone viral becoming the top trending picture on Twitter under the hash tag #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik (humanity washed ashore)" (ibid.). Despite the horrors it implies – or maybe even exactly because of the horrors it implies – the image of Kurdi's lifeless body has become an icon. But what exactly does it stand for?

Cut.

Just three flashlights, shreds of what in the media and the political arena is currently commonly referred to as the *European refugee crisis*, and presented as "a perpetual emergency" (Andersson, 2016, p.1055). What they have in common is their magnificent self-evidence. They illustrate that current migration movements on a visual level impart specific places and spaces, distinct icons, figures and narratives that are entangled with specific forms of visibility and an overall mediality of the discourse. And there are myriads of other images that illustrate the events of and responses to the crisis: military vessels combing through international waters, fulfilling the European Frontex mission, border patrols lowering the Schengen Area's turnpikes, military staff and private security companies intending to stop migration from happening by erecting fences that primarily result in diverting migration routes, making them more dangerous; troublesome-looking European politicians at their summits selling yet another concept, directive, response or policy; professing to struggle for humanitarian solutions that eventually turn out to be primarily rhetoric and symbolic – not so much in being a drop in the ocean as in justifying the respective responses by means of a specific image politics that is part of an engineering process linking the images to acts of testimony, authentication and annotation (Holert, 2008).

If what we see in those images represents a *refugee crisis* at all (and I will come back to this question in the following chapter), then it is a perpetuating crisis in slow motion, and primarily a humanitarian crisis – and a *border* crisis. It is apparent that large numbers of people are on the move; we can trust the respective images enough to state that we can see it; and the movement is even comprehensible and hardly surprising – and, above all, nothing really new. And, yet, most of the photographic and film images deployed to accompany news and reports of people trying to reach Europe, fleeing war or economic hardship in other parts of the world, are impressive if not overwhelming; many other adjectives fit and don't fit at the same time. The majority of the images illustrate migration and flight as dramas that, however, draw on well-known figures, icons and metaphors: the victim, the threat, the refugee, the 'waves', 'floods' and 'swarms' of people, illegal

acts of border-crossing and of smuggling, the fence, the boat, Lampedusa, the sea. Seen it before. They tell the old tale of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ – they know their ‘Other’ very well. They leave no questions, no doubt; they homogenise and victimise – and, above all, they emotionalise. But what they have on offer is rarely more than pity or fear or a complex combination of both. If, in other words, we are in fact talking about a crisis – and a crisis that is extremely visual – it is unfortunately at the least a crisis of the *visual*. On the contrary, the set of icons representing migration, illegality and the crisis at the same time must be considered extremely stable. The iconic dead body of a three-year-old in one of the examples above does not fundamentally put this representational regime in question; rather, it fuels the visual and the news industry.

Although the three images presented above are taken at very different geographical locations, at the same time they are all set in a specific migration space, a space that is, on a more general level, primarily framed by a Europeanisation process that in return is heavily entangled with migration movements. While the Schengen Area has been established adhering to a paradigmatic interdependence of abolished internal borders and strengthened external borders, contemporary European border zones reach far beyond its actual demarcation lines and thus establish a “heterogeneous and hierarchised space of circulation within graduated zones of sovereignty” (Hess and Tsianos, 2007, p.36). At the same time, this border zone is constantly being redefined, restructured and rehierarchised by the concrete interplay of a highly flexible policy implementation and everyday migration movements. This book seeks to conceptualise this border zone as “Borderland Schengen” – a transnationalised (Faist, Fauser and Reisenauer, 2013) space emerging from the interplay of the visual, the political, the social and the spatial. It imparts the remote, hidden spaces of migration management and detention in Europe and the continent’s capitals as well as the countless places and routes of migration carving through what is perceived as the continent’s fringes and peripheries, the transit countries in Eastern and South-eastern Europe as well as on the African continent. It establishes a border zone in which various transnational networks, migration projects, border-crossing practices, spatial strategies and strategic knowledge, visualisation techniques and technologies, policy-implementation strategies and clandestine economies overlap and establish a specific geography of undocumented¹ migration – time and time again temporally and spatially fragmented by means of specific political tools, for example the Dublin Regulations

1 The definition of ‘undocumented’ applied in this work will be further outlined in the following chapter; generally speaking, it aims to, in the widest possible sense, account for migrants who according to European legislation do not have legal status (who have, in other words, *been* illegalised), who are threatened with the loss of legal status or who are in some sort of conflict with the European border regime although they only move through its peripheries.

and the concurrent Eurodac database, that apparently primarily contribute to establishing the border zone as a space of permanent – spatial, social, legal – transit,² or of hypermobility (Fröhlich, 2015).

What has been said so far emphasises the paramount necessity to approach the field of undocumented migration in general and “Borderland Schengen” in particular as fields in which the political and the visual cannot be understood independently from each other. In fact, one of the starting points of this work is the observation that there is hardly a currently socio-politically relevant field where the political and the visual merge as significantly and as rigorous as in debates around immigration to Europe. The binarism of inside and outside and the question of on what grounds a person should be permitted to enter the European Union, particularly as an immigrant, have accompanied the process of European integration since its early stages in different forms and manifestations (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2014) – even though it can be observed that the most dynamic areas in this regard are the already-mentioned transit zones, the areas that can be unambiguously considered neither inside nor outside.

What all manifestations have in common is that they enter a complex interplay of political decision-making, social relations, legal status and visual representations. Images, in other words, play an increasingly important role in shaping political debates and laws as well as our perceptions and understandings of them – at the same time, policies do not exclusively aim at regulating immigration itself but just as well at governing and recoding its visibilities (Karakayalı and Tsianos, 2007), its meanings and interpretations. Considering the *refugee crisis*, political measures in this regard seem to react much more to the visibility of the crisis than to what usually is considered at the core of political discourses and decision-making, its roots, implications and consequences. The examples used above in this regard also point to the paramount significance of film and visibility concerning the institutionalisation of the rejection of immigration (Rass and Ulz, 2015). The images not only bear witness to self-evident events; at the same time, they already include the form and justification of the legislative or executive responses to it. In return, however, can those images not be understood as representations of a reality that can be located outside the image itself – but rather as specific re-articulations

2 ‘State of permanent transit’ is in this work understood as a life situation in which mobility and immobility unpredictably take turns, in which the legal status can change in the blink of an eye under the condition of potential surveillance and in which social networks constantly have to be re-established – either due to the legal and political mechanisms structuring the migration spaces or connected to strategic decisions by the person concerned.

of ‘migration’ as societal constructions that form constitutive elements of the European migration regime (Kuster, 2007).³

The images adhere to a specific economy: while mediated images play an important role in the establishment of a crisis in the first place, the gaps between political rhetoric and the visibility of a political issue fill more or less automatically. What has happened since mid 2015, when the *refugee crisis* was proclaimed in an interplay between the political sphere and media, cannot per se be considered an unsolvable crisis – but has been turned into and still is being perpetuated as a crisis by means of a complex political-visual process making particular elements and aspects visible and others invisible, by dramatising certain facts and events and by suggesting particular interpretations that in many cases are closely linked to national agenda setting and national identities – and in consequence embedded in an accelerated nationalistic discourse that complements the mediated events by an even more insistent claim for integration as a disciplining dispositive (Mecheril, 2011). The visibility of the crisis, in other words, regulates not only *what we see* but also *what is and what can be* – and it plays a crucial role in justifying political and legal measures taken in order to respond to the crisis, both on a European and a national level. Looking at migration processes in general and the *refugee crisis* in particular, it is hence crucial to scrutinise the production of images as visual-political processes – the visual in this regard is a constitutive element of the political, and vice versa.

At the same time, proposed solutions to what has now been visual-politically constructed as a constant crisis or a continuous state of exception that primarily needs to be governed hardly imply any kind of change in political agenda setting but merely stay at the rhetorical and symbolic level (Andersson, 2014). The rhetoric does often remain in appalling contrast to political measures and the actual implementation of border protection. In the fall of 2015, for example, the European Council and the European governments’ Ministers for Home Affairs negotiated the distribution of refugees among the member states – coined ‘burden sharing’ (Traynor, 2015b) – and some states, including Germany, applied a strong humanitarian rhetoric. Parallel to those negotiations, the European Union in October 2015 launched the second phase of its EUNAVFOR Med mission, a military border operation in the Mediterranean Sea reaching deep into international waters, conducting “boarding, search, seizure and diversion, on the high seas, of vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking” (EUNAVFOR, 2015).

3 See also Brigitta Kuster’s forthcoming volume “Die Grenze filmen” (“Filming the border”), in which she investigates how and to what end filming practices contribute to the reproduction of migration and border regimes. Starting from the assumption that audiovisual environments at the same time inform and form migration movements, she analyses different films that reflect on primarily irregular passages to Europe (Kuster, 2018).

Interestingly enough, while Germany’s Chancellor Merkel at that time was perceived as one of the most refugee-friendly politicians in Europe, the German Bundeswehr sent the highest number of vessels in order to facilitate border protection by military means (ibid.). Although contradictory at first glance, read against the visual-political background of the two developments, both eventually make sense.

The first one is connected to the sudden and certainly spectacular visibility of flight and refuge in Europe and is following rather moral or ethical arguments instead of political insights or recognition. The second one, however, builds upon the ongoing invisibility of migration at the European fringes and a clear lack of interest by media to cover the issue at all. This is also thanks to a clear allocation of roles in, for example, the Mediterranean area or the Aegean Sea – while Europe states its desire to protect those refugees who made it to their territory and whose asylum claims are considered eligible, it denies responsibility for those who are caught in the border zones; moreover, its rhetoric and political measures regarding the smugglers and so-called traffickers⁴ operating in the European border zones is ruthless and its responses are highly militarised – the whole political approach at the same time relies on a specific governance of visibility and invisibility.

The central figure of undocumented migration discourses is the ‘illegal immigrant’ – visual processes contribute considerably to the construction of this figure and, in general, to the construction of groups as insiders or outsiders and to the definitions of memberships; at the same time, they play an important part in the production of the very categories applied to describe such groups. Illegalisation, in other words, is not merely a political or juridical process or discourse; it is, to a remarkable extent, a visual process. While “those immigrants are made *illegal* by political and juridical strategies” (Bischoff, Falk and Kafehsy, 2010, p.7), the production of the categories and the perception of a state of exception is entangled with visual processes, with images and with the knowledge they imply and transport. As Mitchell puts it, “law and migration engage the realm of images as the location of both the sensuous and the fantasmatic: concrete, realistic representation of actuality, on the one hand, and idealized, or demonized fantasies of migrants as heroic pioneers or invading hordes, on the other” (2010, p.13).

Reichert (2011) emphasises the key role that media images play not only in reiterating the figures but also in the very construction and dissemination of border spaces and facilities – like the border fences of the Spanish exclaves in Morocco,

4 The terms ‘smuggler’ and ‘trafficker’ are often used interchangeably in media and EU statements; while smuggling usually takes place upon the consent of the smuggled person and does not involve any kind of exploitation, victims of human trafficking are usually either moved from one place to another against their will or exploited during or after the journey. Smugglers, not traffickers, are consequently the primary targets of the EU mission (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Ceuta and Melilla – as icons for *Fortress Europe*. In order to provide a certain border (and border policy) with legitimacy and authority, it has to be made plausible and politically justified in the context of its media representation. Visuality hence signifies “a change in consciousness, which accords visual practices a [...] substantial role in thought processes and in the acquisition of ‘knowledge’” (Bischoff, Falk and Kafehsy, 2010, p.7) The representations and visualisations of processes of illegalisation and of illegality, as well as reversed processes of recognition, can hence “only be properly analyzed in relation to the actual concrete form” (ibid.). Following this argument, this book seeks to deploy documentary film images in order to analyse “the actual visual images, figures, symbols, narratives, metaphors – the material forms – in which symbolic meaning is circulated” (ibid.), and in which ‘the illegal’ as a subject is at stake.

Images are, however, not immediately connected to the arrival or the emergence of the migrant; they precede him/her, even more so in the case of undocumented migration that per se lacks a certain visibility – “before the immigrant arrives, his or her image comes first, in the form of stereotypes [of e.g. ethnicity, gender, race], search templates, tables of classification, and patterns of recognition” (Mitchell, 2010, p.13). But not only are images quicker than the immigrants; they are in most cases much more successful in crossing geographical distances and borders. Hence, and this is again quite obvious from the examples referred to above, “illegalized immigration is a highly iconic topic” (Bischoff, Falk and Kafehsy, 2010, p.7) that is, due to its very character, almost exclusively visible through media. Films carry the potential to expose the relationship between images of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ that facilitate the construction of a national (or supranational) entity on the one hand and the role such images play with regard to immigration policies and the production of knowledge for governmental practices (Friedrichs, 2010) on the other.

As Reichert (2011) stresses, not only must the figures of border-crossing migrants be understood as being entangled with gendered processes of bordering; the border itself is a gender-sensitive issue that is ordered by means of power, sovereignty and interests. In this regard, the ‘illegal immigrant’ may, however, be considered a symbolic resource that can be strategically deployed and rewritten if necessary; by means of alternative narratives and/or a hybrid positioning, films potentially thwart hegemonic orders (Rass and Ulz, 2015). The borderland in this regard may be understood as both a conflict zone and a contact zone (Pratt, 2011). It is consequently another of this work’s central presumptions that not only is it necessary to scrutinise and re-formulate the narratives embedded in the images presented in the beginning, but that there are other images too, other narratives and figures – sometimes even the same narrative wrapped in other images, the same images wrapping alternative narratives. Icons that refuse to be consumed easily, images that are interested in and have the potential to account for motivations, aspirations and subject positions. This work seeks to identify such images in contemporary documentary films about undocumented migration; moreover,

even against the background of the omnipresent *crisis*, documentary film is considered one of the very few places where the increasingly complex and relevant issues of visibility and recognition of undocumented migrants at the European Union’s fringes are being raised at all. Looking at the examples mentioned above does in this regard also imply questions concerning the angle of observation and the image’s potential to provide a space for the establishment and recognition of a subject that is not reduced to being the ‘Other’. In the specific context of the closely controlled European border zones, this also poses questions regarding the overall structure of visibility.

By referring to documentary films dedicated to the phenomenon of undocumented migration, this work grounds in an apparent contradiction. If visibility is, however, understood as a category of knowledge and the document in question as a visual technology, the contradiction turns into an obvious interdependence. Documentary film in this regard cannot be primarily concerned with trying its best to be the most adequate reproduction of reality and truth but must reflect its mediality and its being entangled with mechanisms of knowledge production and image politics – the migration apparatus, in other words. The production of the documentary image in this regard is, above all, a practice – and it may, in an analogy to Benz and Schwenken’s (2005) statement about migration practices, be considered a stubborn practice itself.

To further delineate the book’s aspirations, I would like to roughly outline the choice of films for this work. The selection is based on a number of formal criteria but is mainly characterised by understanding migration as a non-linear social process and by approaching documentary filmmaking in a transnational and cinematic way⁵ – implying artistic autonomy and transparent authorship on the one hand and a self-conception and mission located beyond the creation of images that have a *news value* on the other. In order to account for recent developments and discourses, the production period has been limited to the years 2005 to 2016. The selected films resemble feature films in terms of their length (i.e. 60 minutes minimum) and audience rather than taking the form of short clips for news coverage. Eight films are central to this work; they are all set in European borderlands. BAB SEBTA (CEUTA’S DOOR, 2008), COME UN UOMO SULLA TERRA (LIKE A MAN ON EARTH, 2009) and A SUD DI LAMPEDUSA (SOUTH OF LAMPEDUSA, 2006) follow migrants on their cross-border routes and trajectories. While the first approaches European demarcation lines from a southern perspective, and in fact remains on the African continent throughout, primarily in Morocco and Mauritania, the second one, co-directed by an Ethiopian and an Italian filmmaker, revisits the transnational narratives of a handful of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees who lived through long and unpredictable transit periods in the Libyan Desert to eventually arrive in

5 The films’ approaches and characteristics of transnational and cinematic documentary film will be further detailed in the following chapter.

Italy; the third one functions as a kind of prequel to the latter as it follows actual migration routes between Nigeria and the Mediterranean.

LA FORTERESSE (THE FORTRESS, 2009) and SUR LE RIVAGE DU MONDE (STANDING ON THE EDGE ON THE WORLD, 2012) are set at two specific places that are remote to actual European demarcation lines but at the same time are closely connected to the European migration regime, spanning “Borderland Schengen” as far as Mali on the one hand and Switzerland on the other. LA FORTERESSE observes the microcosm of a reception centre in a Swiss village while SUR LE RIVAGE DU MONDE captures the hopes, dreams and fears of a group of migrants who, in their attempt to make it to Europe, are being stranded in a run-down house called ‘The Ghetto’ in Bamako.

Three further films dare to apply a thematically wider perspective. The Austrian-produced LITTLE ALIEN (2009) is particularly interested in the narratives of unaccompanied minor refugees; the filmmaker wanders European borderlands from the eastern borders between Slovakia and Ukraine via Greece and Austria to Morocco’s harbour city Tangier, passing various institutionalised and informal spaces and places of minors’ migrations. KURZ DAVOR IST ES PASSIERT (IT HAPPENED SHORTLY BEFORE, 2007) enquires into the issue of the invisibility of women who have been made victims of trafficking in Austria by means of hyper-real re-enactments of the women’s narratives. And, finally, HAVARIE (SHIP-WRECKED, 2016) is the result of the – failed and yet completed – quest for images adequately illustrating migration movements and relations across the Mediterranean; by means of a drastically decelerated found footage clip of a refugee rubber boat, it spans a translocal narrative web across the sea.

All films implicitly or explicitly address spaces and iconologies of *illegal* migration and document frictions between European migration policies, iconologies of migration and the dialectics of migrants’ invisibility and visibility. In common is their ability to be read as filmmakers’ attempts at discursive participation as an aesthetic political practice, and to establish their protagonists as subjects in the first place. The majority of the films have been produced by filmmakers with a personal migration narrative or experience. At the same time, the contradiction of the terms documented/undocumented is an implicit though central element in all films. Documenting and visualising human beings that, per definition, are invisible – and, in many cases, have to remain invisible as the only form of protection available – are challenges the films are meeting in quite different ways.

The films show a considerable number of individuals on the move through European border zones, on “dangerous and fragmented” (Schapendonk, 2012, p.27) journeys. They aim at establishing a relationship with their protagonists that allows for perceiving them as subjects, recognising them as agents and appropriators of their own narrative. In doing so, the films often also deal with their protagonists’ recognisability (Butler, 2009), that is the “general condition where recognition can take place” (Schippers, 2016, p.26), not least by putting the iconologies underlying current migration discourses under scrutiny. Instead of applying representative modes, the films’ images and motives are characterised by visual

performative approaches – focusing their own mediality as well as deploying the fictional capacities of documentary film (Rancière, 2004) in a way that allows new perspectives on the phenomenon and its protagonists; in this regard, they are interested not so much in their protagonists’ mere visibility as in their recognition and opacity (Glissant, 1997). On a visual and a narrative level, they aim at irritating the self-evident in order to reveal the intolerable (Foucault, 1977a) – their protagonists’ experiences and narratives provoke affective images – overall pursuing a cinematic experience that imparts the potential non-actualisability (Deleuze, 1997a) of experience and thus endures in a space of the non-knowable and provokes thought. And although most of the protagonists are in a protracted state of transit, they inhabit those border zones none the less and constitute a social space including specific routes, places, artefacts, social practices, geographies and symbols of migration. The documentary filmmakers concerned in this work investigate those border zones of migration also as spaces of autonomy and appropriation; they wander through both strictly regulated spaces under close surveillance and the clandestine spots that allow people to have a break – their temporary homes so to speak – not least following a participative approach to filmmaking practices.

Any writing concerned with undocumented migration is certainly a highly normative undertaking. I would like to underline that I am not pretending to be able to present my argument from a neutral point of view. The ethic-normative fundament of this work can be found in the claim for a set of non-negotiable human rights that goes beyond what international migration law and refugee conventions are currently able to warrant. Assuming the fundamental human right to move on the one hand and a moral obligation of the North to – instead of threatening migrants’ lives by means of dramatically militarised border protection missions – provide secure flight corridors, this ethic-normative fundament hence is one that understands human rights as authorising powers much more than disciplining ones.

Against this background, the book seeks to critically investigate the interface between migration discourses and image discourses; more specifically, it takes into account how the dialectical relationship of undocumented migrants’ mobility and immobility, their visibility and invisibility, is contoured on a visual level – how the movement of people is translated into film images and how those images are entangled with specific (and conventionalised) iconologies, motives and figures, with image politics and migration policies, but also with their own mediality.

As its title suggests, this book concentrates less on the *refugee crisis* referred to above. However, it became an extremely strong subtext over time. When preparations for this work started in 2013, there was something that, looking back today, might be referred to as a *subtle* crisis, a more or less perennial but comparably gently dramatised flow of (images of) refugees, asylum seekers, migrants heading towards Europe. Since mid 2015, at least, the crisis has become acute – but so far it does not in the least seem to have had a positive effect on the people subsumed under the term *undocumented migrants* in this work. What is currently considered

an acute crisis is, however, interesting as it has the function of a magnifying glass in many regards – and none of the observations made with regard to the crisis is all new.

This book is consequently also about the fact that undocumented migration – which we currently see (or, rather, which is mediated to happen before our very eyes) in the form of a crisis – has a history in many regards. On a *political* level, it grounds in a Europeanisation process that contrasts internal freedom of movement with tight external borders and that settled on a particular culture of border control (Zaiotti, 2011) and governmentality; on a *social* level, it grounds in a perception of immigration as a threat to European societies and in integration discourses that emphasise discipline, integration and assimilation, and that still misinterpret migrants as representing the ‘Other’; on a *spatial* level, it grounds in a dialectical relationship of mobility and immobility and adheres to the logic of control and surveillance; and on a *visual* level, it grounds in specific iconologies, stereotypes and figures of migrants and migration that in return are a crucial element of image politics justifying policy measures, societal exclusion and spatial structures at the same time.

In order to be able to account for the political, social, spatial and visual processes and their entanglements, this book eventually seeks to outline the shape of “Borderland Schengen” by means of enquiring into its topographies – in a way that Katz understands topography – as a method; i.e. by means of “a detailed examination of some part of the material world, defined at any scale from the body to the global, in order to understand its salient features and their mutual and broader relationships” (2001, p.1228). The documentary films in this regard are understood as reading a sense of sedimented process off the different layers of the border zone; translating this into a topography “situates places in their broader context and in relation to other areas or geographic scales, offering a means of understanding structure and process” (ibid.). While in contrast to Katz’s suggestion, the main point of reference in this work is the visual, not geographical space, the enquiry at the different levels envisages identifying the contour lines along which spatial, social, political and visual processes connect and interact; the emerging topographies, on the one hand, theorise the connectedness of processes and places in a multifaceted way – but, on the other hand, they also connect distant places and processes in a way that “enables the inference of connection in uncharted places in between” (ibid.); their connection is not homogenising but analytical – creating “a geographical imagination for a more associative politics” (Katz, 2011, p.58). The work, however, seeks to transgress a purely descriptive level in order to also account for the potentials provided by reading the documentary films as aiming to establish a counter-topography that connects “disparate places and social formations by virtue of their analytic relationship to a particular material social practice, social relation, and/or cultural form” (ibid.).

This topography is characterised by different dimensions that also structure this work. Part 1 of the book will be concerned with outlining the theoretical and

methodological features of “Borderland Schengen”. While in the following chapter I will shed light on the broader coordinates and positioning of this work – the *refugee crisis*, undocumented migration processes, transnational cinematic documentary film – the third chapter is dedicated to explicating the theoretical and methodological framework by means of sketching my understanding of “Borderland Schengen” against a background of transnational theories. Part 2 of this book will then explicate the visuality of the borderland by means of an in-depth reading of the documentary films introduced above. The fourth chapter investigates how and to what end the documentary films measure the topography by critically reflecting their own mediality, how they conceive and capture their images and, in consequence, their relationship with the migration-control apparatus. While the fifth chapter then primarily enquires into the representational and performative qualities of the films’ images and pays attention to their strategies to fictionalise and narrativise, the subsequent chapter deals with the specific strategies applied to destabilise well-known figures and icons of *illegal migration* in order to establish a space in which new (discursive, recognisable) subjects emerge that appropriate their projects and narratives. The seventh chapter accounts for the filmmakers’ strategies to establish the geographical spaces of migration in general and how they approach the border in particular, the manifold places and routes of migration that include productive contact zones as well as places of absolute control. The concluding chapter then primarily addresses the question as to what end the topography outlined can also be read as a counter-topography.