# The composition of an identity

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# Abstract

When discussing groups of people that hardly have a voice of their own in the
society, it is important to examine the conceptions that are created and maintained
through the use of visual material. This research unwraps the seemingly evident
representations communicated in photographs of migrants and explains the
conceptions to which the visual signs refer to.

The theoretical perspective is in social constructionism, which sees our knowledge
of the world as an understanding that people construct between them (Burr 2014, 4).
The research material is consisted of 37 images and 4 videos of an online campaign
page of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). I combine close
reading method and discourse analysis to analyze the visual content and to study the
arising discourses on identity. Using the concept of semiotics, I dismantle the images
into their semiotical functions. I refer to visual rhetoric in order to examine the
persuasion that exists in the certain ways of constructing the world and the meta-
beliefs (Atzmon 2011, XIV).

The discourses on identity in the campaign present the migrant in multiple roles and
personalities. The use of visual signs that support the most prominent constructions
is repetitive and consistent, implying conscious planning on the presenter's side. The
discourses found in the campaign function in three ways: making statements through
emotional relation, giving countering perspectives and reasoning to migrant-related
topics and attempting to construct an individual identity of a migrant instead of the
customary collective identity.

**Keywords:** visual culture, social constructionism, humanitarian photography,
identity, semiotics, discourse analysis, visual rhetoric

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

**W**ho are you shown as when a photo of you is presented? Is it what you think is you – or a reflection, or a formulation of you?

Our understanding, our comprehensive conclusions of other people are often reliant on the visual clues that we are offered about them. In the times where a falsified image can be used as an evidence of "alternative facts" (Näsi 2018), it is important to look into the ways of visual representation. An image has a lasting power; things we've seen are even more depended on than the information available to us. Who to believe? The problem here is that it often goes unnoticed and misunderstood that what we see is selected to be presented for us. A decision has been made, as a matter of fact countless decisions along the way, either conscious or unintended. It ranges from *where* we are recording an image, of *what* we are taking an image, *how* we frame it, the ways in which we *modify* it, *which* image we choose to use to where we put it, as well as what we *say* alongside the image through text or speech. The 'photographic truth' has been discussed countless times from countless of perspectives, but what is also relevant to focus on is the power of presenting something as the reality.

All of this is especially relevant when we choose to present images of those in an oppressed position in the society. Photography is a fundamental part of the "modern visual economy" where the Western audience, "we", watch "others" suffer in distant locations (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 2). At the same time humanitarian organizations have increasingly shifted towards the use of photography in their communication activities, and especially photography that focuses on people. Although the "right" to describe yourself seems self-evident to many, there is a clear power imbalance when images are being created of those who don't have the possibility to represent themselves through imagery, not to mention the contrast in the volume of publicity available for those generally representing and those outside the mainstream. Power and politics are inseparable from photography and photographic practices (Tagg 1998, Rose 2001, cited in Nissinen 2015, 301).

When we look at representations from a constructive viewpoint, it can be clearly identified how intertwined representations are with the constructive agency of power positioning and political agenda. In my research I start from this notion that there is no such thing as a neutral photograph; that a photograph cannot be perceived as a straightforward visual depiction of 'reality'. With this in mind, I will look into the constructed identities of humanitarian photography. I will examine the signs in humanitarian photography from the angle of social constructionism, understanding visual artifacts as participating in the construction of the reality in social interaction. My focus is on the personality characters and what kind of perception of a person is constructed through the use of visual signs. In addition, I will also discuss what is the meaning of the constructed reality of identities in humanitarian photography in the larger context of the society and the power of images.

The topic links to the research fields of visual communication, social constructionism and semiotics. My perspective on representations is constructive, meaning that the basic assumption of a visual representation is that it does not *reflect* reality, but rather *constructs* reality. What is challenged from the image is what kind of reality it constructs and how. (Seppänen 2005, 78.)

The visual aspects of humanitarianism have not yet been widely covered in academic research, let alone from the perspective of humanitarian photography (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 3). However, there is a considerable amount of related research in the fields of photojournalism, visual politics and mass media that can be implemented and utilized to explore the topics of the representation in photography. What this research adds to these spheres of discussion is the focus on the photographic power to create conceptions in the society, and the ways of using visual language in the process of presenting deliberate perspectives.

The chosen images are not random, but portray and construct perceptions on mi-

grants. The chosen images create frameworks within which we understand migrants in a certain way. The presenter, in this case ICRC, holds the power of choose and create the frameworks that are being shown to the viewer. These are not arbitrary, but selected with intention as well as subconsciously. Giving a closer look to the frameworks, in other words discourses, that are being offered we can clearly see what the perceptions on this group of people are that are being offered to us as a viewer.

I am interested in the identities of humanitarian photography because it can reveal some of the hidden structures of our society and tell us how we define the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid through means of visual depiction. Definitions and perceptions affect how we treat each other, and thus it is intriguing to study those signs that build our understanding of people. A general glance is not enough to find the way to the constructed realities, but requires a close look into the smallest details – those that we think that might go unnoticed, but in fact contribute to what we gather to understand as the surrounding reality.

The motivation for this topic is represented both in my professional career as a graphic designer and in my artistic interests. At the time of writing, I have been involved in the very same processes of selecting images for campaigns for development organizations for already almost three years, and have seen the practical procedures of creating campaign narratives. Meanwhile I have also pursued an interest in photographic identities and the role of photography in the society throughout my studies, especially the power relations of photography and abilities to construct realities. I have examined the history of anthropological photography in Africa during European colonialism, and have conducted photography-based projects that explored the implication of material methodology on visual reading of identity. Thus, the topic of this research is a natural continuum, diving deeper into the constructions of identity and the position it holds. With this research I aim to more concretely understand the visual signs that possess the power to create perceptions.

Through close analysis and discourse analysis, the research will answer to the question of what kind of identities are constructed of migrants through the use of visual representations, in this case photographs. I will use the perspectives of visual semiotics, social constructionism and visual rhetoric in the process of deconstructing the campaign imagery and identifying the discourses that are used to construct the reality of a visual representation.

In this research I will firstly explain the key concepts of humanitarian photography and social constructionism. Humanitarian photography offers us the context, and social constructionism the angle from which to look at the topic. Moving forward to the methodology of the research, I elaborate on the emphases of visual semiotics, social constructionist discourse and visual rhetoric, which function as the base for the analysis model of the research material. After explaining the structure and summary of the analysis process, I will present the findings of the research. From there I expand on the signification of these results in the larger context, discussing the meaning of visual language and the power it withholds.

# 2. Humanitarian photography

The term "humanitarian photography" refers to the photographic imagery that humanitarian organizations use in their communication activities to raise awareness and funds (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 1). It is a practice that simultaneously aims, amongst other goals, to document distress, depict a story of those affected, demonstrate organizational achievements and communicate processes to partners – all of it at the same time or with varying emphases. The difference to photojournalism is the strong bond to the organizational background, which sets the framework for photographic production.

Humanitarianism itself cannot be described in one, unified way. Its meaning varies largely both between time and actors; taking different forms and developing over time and being defined in a multitude of ways between different individuals and organizations (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 8-9). Humanitarianism in its Western form can be said to have emerged in the late nineteenth century, when certain groups of individuals, organizational actors and Western audiences came to share basic ideas of who should be the recipient of aid and the model how the aid should be delivered (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 9). The corner stones for most of these organizations were laid in liberalism, capitalism and partly Christianity, which had implications on the models of practice and power positioning (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 10).

Humanitarianism developed together with photographic technologies (Marien 2006, 6-32, cited in Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 3). Towards the end of the 19th century, photography had a more and more established role of functioning as an evidence of something. It served as proof of the things invisible to the eye, or of faraway places, or of conclusions otherwise not possible to rationalize. It was perceived as a "method of naturalistic documentation" (Price and Wells 2000, 14). In humanitarian context, photography was used as a tool to communicate the suffering of distant areas to Western audiences mainly by missionaries, reformers and journalists (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 3-4).

Originally, much of the communication activities of Western humanitarian organizations relied on *negative* imagery – depicting despair and devastation, and culminating in images of malnourished young children (Lissner 1977, 189, cited in Lidchi 2015, 276). However, in the aftermaths of the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s, the communication methods of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) underwent a major change (Nissinen 2015, 298-299). In October 1984, BBC broadcasted a compiled footage of the situation in Ethiopia by Mohammed Amin and Michael Buerk. Until then the disaster had gone largely ignored, but the proceedings that evolved from the airing of this footage were unprecedented. The famine gained extremely wide publicity, provoking a variety of fundraising and informative actions and culminating in the dual-venue Live Aid Concert in July 1985. It made charity fundraising into a popular act of the large masses. (Lidchi 2015, 280-82.)

The success of such movements was seen in two ways by the NGOs. The generated publicity and funds were something that they had been long struggling to reach, but on the other hand it was also understood how the depictions of the distress were tailored for the wider audience in a highly questionable manner. The complexity of a famine was reduced to a question of money and food, and the whole issue was "dehistoricized, depoliticized and trivialized" into a simplistic picture of a poor country needing Western help. (Lidchi 2015, 280-82.) The photographic subject matter was centralized to "'convey the helplessness and the passivity of Ethiopians'" (Lidchi 1993, cited in Nissinen 2015, 298).

However, depictions of this type did not continue their seemingly successful parade for an unlimited time. NGOs were claimed to be "capitalizing on suffering", and this caused the ethics of photography to gain center stage in the discussions in humanitarian contexts. NGOs began to create their codes of conduct for producing photographic material, and a first directive set of guidelines was published for a wide European NGO audience in 1989. The consequences of these events in the field of

humanitarian communication during the Ethiopian famine can be seen even today. There has been a clear shift occurred towards *positive* narratives of success and empowerment, but it is also visible in the tendency to opt for reductionist visual depictions of humanitarian issues as it is known for effective results in mass communication. The discussion of ethics of photography and NGOs formulating their codes of conduct for visual content continues, which is definitely relevant due to the growing role of NGOs in global politics. (Nissinen 2015, 298-299.)

It might be needless to say that even in its simplest description of documenting human suffering, humanitarian photography is far from being a neutral form of photographic practice. With it comes a complexity of elements of power positioning, the discourse of we-others and conveying knowledge (Dencik and Allan 2017, 1180). Specifically, it includes the question of how the reality of human distress is constructed through the use of visual representations.

Why these representations are important in the society is because they help to legitimate discourses, practices and actions (Brough 2012, 177). This means that while photography still has the evidence value of the truth of the identity, the images chosen by Western people for Western audiences create and maintain the prejudices. The effect that a realistic style in humanitarian photography has is that it makes the photograph seem like a denotation; simply a direct depiction of reality (Lidchi 2015, 287).  Henrietta Lidchi has concluded that realistic or documentary photography "functions both as a *reflection* of reality and as a *discourse* on it" (2015, 292, emphasis in original). The major problem with the combination of humanitarian photography and photographic reality is that is has the capability of presenting the powerless people as "fixed realities" (Lidchi 2015, 277).

These prejudices and concepts are those that guide the decisions and actions inside the society, even if we claim to be free of underlying frameworks of understanding

people and phenomena. Therefore it is extremely relevant to look into the ways of photographic representation of people. The roots for constructing the understanding of certain groups are not necessarily shaped in our own experiences, but in the imagery we are being shown in everyday life.

The visual aspects of humanitarianism have been largely ignored and there is not yet much study on the topic (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 3). It is essential to note that most of the existing research on both humanitarianism and photography has had and continues to have a Eurocentric and North American emphasis (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 3). This inevitably has an effect on the scientific positioning and interpretation processes, which I am also conscious of in my research.

In this research I focus on the constructed meanings of the visual narratives in humanitarian photography. I do not aim to comment on the differences between the represented 'reality' and the factual situation, but to dig deeper into the sources of visual constructions. NGOs have a "certain way of seeing the world, generating discourses on how the world is" (Lidchi 2015, 293) – and this is where my interest in the topic lays. It is not looking at the reality itself, but the different discourses of constructed reality that I wish to look into with a detail that will reveal something of the communicative conventions and the perspectives of our society.

# 3. Theoretical framework

# 3.1. Social constructionism and the representation of identity

Social constructionism is a theory that suggest that our knowledge of the world is an understanding that people construct between them (Burr 2014, 4). Much of our experience of "reality" is built through social interaction, social influence and interpretation (Gergen 1985, 265, cited in Galbin 2014, 82). In general, social constructionism invites us to question the seemingly self-evident reality and observe the the effects of social interaction on our understanding of the world around us. Social constructionism doesn't seek to find the absolute truth (Galbin 2014, 84), but focuses on the complexities and interrelatedness of what we perceive as reality. It challenges the assumptions of truth, and aims to dismantle the structures of the prevalent views of reality.

The constructed reality is always in relation to time and space: it is influenced by the cultural, political and historical circumstances (Gergen 1999, cited in Galbin 2014, 84; Burr 2014, 4). The meaning of context is vital; rather than trying to make a clinical study of social interactions in a group and erase the surrounding environment from the research results, social constructionism embraces all the variables, interventions and peculiarities and places them under the lens of analysis.

> *"...Meaning is made by human beings together; it is social. Meaning ... is fluid, volatile and always open to change through this medium of social interaction"* (Burr 2015, 50)

Social constructionism can be divided into two major forms of theory and research. **Micro social constructionism** studies the everyday discourse between people, whereas **macro social constructionism** has a focus on material or social structures and the concept of power that these structures withhold (Burr 2015, 24). The emphasis in my research is on macro social constructionism due to the position that it has in the society. The focus is on what decisions have been made to portray a particular

group of people, and what kind of implications these decisions have on the general perception of migrants.

In the research of media and visual communication the aspect of social construction-ism is significant. From the perspective of social constructionism, it is interesting to see how events, people and places are being formed into 'reality': what is being said, told or shown to the audience? What kind of decisions the newspaper journalist, photographer or interview source is making when telling a story? Social construc-tionism links to media literacy in the sense that it is important to understand how a story or an image should not necessarily be observed as an objective truth, but as an understanding of reality seen and explained by someone. There is always a decision of formulating a message, and awareness of the socially construct realities makes us aware of the interrelated structures of communication.

A key concept in social constructionism is the idea of **anti-essentialism**. Essential-ism sees things and humans having a "particular essence or nature" which explains their being and behavior. In the case of people, it sees personality characteristics and actions as core "human nature", something that simply belongs to them as individual beings. In an essentialist view, the way a person is defined and categorized deter-mines the expectations for what he does or feels. For example, a shy person is pre-sumed to feel uncomfortable in social situations or a recipient of humanitarian aid is assumed to feel gratitude. Essentialism conditions thinking, but through the lens of social constructionism these expectations are questioned. Social constructionism counters this viewpoint by questioning the existence of a personality altogether. How there could be a given nature if the whole understanding of reality is a "product of social processes"? This means that the essences, or in other words "natures", asso-ciated with individual or groups are seen as entirely constructed realities, and not something that is elementally existing. This view of anti-essentialism is relevant in my research as essentialism is closely connected to roles and identities within photo-

graphic narration. Essentialist thinking guides us to restricted view of personalities, and reductionist interpretations of phenomena. (Burr 2015, 6-7 and 32-34.)

As already indicated, social constructionism sees identity as socially constructed and not as a given, essentialist form (Burr 2015, 121). Instead, an identity raises and exists in social interaction, and tells more about the one formulating it rather than the identity or the person themselves (Burr 2015, 122-123). The socially construct identity is often a product of intention, instead of merely 'being'.

My interest in social constructionism comes principally from Foucault's notion on how our representations both produce and reinforce power relations, and define how we see and treat people (Burr 2015, 20). The ability to question preconceived conclusions is fundamental since these constructed norms possess so much power over the structures of our societies. The power of controlling such notions of reality is invisible power that is not unveiled without detailed scrutinization. To see beyond the normative processes is also to understand the dominance that is being practiced in all dimensions of the society.

From the perspective of visual content in the society, the constructive dominance is the process of creating norms and categorizations of how something *should* look. This twines into my research topic of humanitarian photography in multi-fold way. In one hand it is the repetition of institutionalized visual practices that reinforce the understanding of certain groups or areas, and thus taking support from hegemonic discourses. On the other hand, it is the creation of new 'norms', new constructed realities that possibly spread into the communication in the society and become the prevalent way of describing. In either way, the goal is to become aware of these underlying processes and increase the ability to notice when power has been used through visual language.

# 3.2. Social constructionist discourse

**A discourse** is a concept that is key to multiple research fields. In social constructionist sense, it refers to the "set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements" and more that are used to construct a particular version of events or people (Burr 2015, 74-75). A discourse is not a topic, but the way and the perspective a topic is constructed (Burr 2015, 75-76). It's a way of constructing what we want to express. A discourse is a relatively unified system of meaning that is constructed in social practices and simultaneously construct social reality (cf. Foucault 1986, 107, Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105, Laclau and Mouffe 1987, 82, cited in Jokinen, Juhila and Suoninen 2016, 26-27). Each discourse uses different rhetorical elements to construct a specific way of understanding the reality of a topic. For example, two discourses on the same topic of refugees could be the discourse of refugees as victims of uncontrollable events, or the discourse of refugees as seeking to overtake the labor market in the destination countries. Regardless of which one of these example discourses, it emphasizes different aspects and uses different kind of vocabulary, be it textual or visual, to refer to the constructed understanding on this particular topic.

> *"Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others."*
> (Hall 2001, 72, cited in Burr 2015, 79)

Central to the concept of constructivist discourse is the idea of a 'text'. In addition to textual phrases, a 'text' is also "anything that can be read for a meaning", ranging from the interpretation of architecture and buildings to the message emitted from the choice of clothes or the photos we choose to show of ourselves to others. In this sense, everything around us 'speaks' a meaning, and can be thus considered as a text (Burr 2015, 78), including visual artefacts such as photographs. In this research, the

'text' is the photographs of the campaign: the chosen elements that withhold certain information on the discourses they intentionally or unintentionally link to.

In order to be understood, we often need to make communication choices that support the conventional ways of constructing and representing (Jokinen, Juhila and Suoninen 2016, 25). However, the use of discourses is not straightforward and contradictory discourses can be used even in the same sentence. This is characteristic to human communication and doesn't necessarily mean that what we say often makes no sense. There is a delicate way create a balance between the different constructed realities, and any conversation shifts around different pools of meaning-making.

When we look at discourses in the macro social constructionist sense, in other words from the viewpoint of the constructed structures in society, a discourse can be defined as something that also sets limits and defines our actions. Thus, it is not only the conventions of formulating meaning, but also how meaning is being used in social practices (Burr 2015, 73). It is fundamental to understand that the use of discourses is in no way random or unintentional, but often speaks of the prevalent ways of thinking. By inclining on certain discourses we define the perspective on a topic, and how it can be seen, understood and acted upon in the society.

In this research I will look into the discourses in humanitarian photography. These discourses construct the reality communicated in the images and have further meaning in the society and its structures. The aim is to find at least some of the prevalent discourses of humanitarian imagery, and understand firstly the elements of construction and secondly the implications that it has in the society. It is a much further step than simply conducting a photo analysis on the images. By understanding the discursive repertoire, it is possible to see into the ways of changing or shifting persistent and often oppressive ways of visual depiction.

I am also aware of the fact that the words and descriptions I use in the research are not free from being parts of certain discourses themselves. This means that despite being conscious of this I might partially reinforce some of the prevalent discourses. However, questioning all of the choices being made does not advance the research or the problematics of the topic itself. It is inevitable to make use of discourses in order to communicate, but it is possible to do so while being aware of my choices.

## 3.3. Visual semiotics

Our thinking is guided by language, framed by language, and language is not what only reflects our thoughts, but actually "provides a way of structuring our experience of the world" (Burr 2015, 53-54). In this research I refer to **semiotics**, the theory of signs, in order to reach to the roots of meaning-making. Semiotics is the study of "signs and their action in process of signification" (Skaggs 2017, 39), and in addition verbal and written language, its theories can be applied to visual language as well. It studies the image as a *sign system* that is similar to language, offering a structured way to dismantle an image, and relate it to a larger cultural context (Seppä 2012, 128).

One of the models to reach towards the smaller, meaningful units of language is through the theory of Charles S. Peirce. He defines the sign in a tripolar way, using the concepts of **representamen**, **interpretant** and **object**. The representamen is something that represents something to someone, addresses someone, for example a spoken word, a written word or a picture. The interpretant is the image created in the mind from this representamen. It is a concept or idea that exists in the mind of the viewer, emerging in the mind of the viewer when experiencing the representamen, for example by seeing or hearing it. (Peirce 1932, 2.228, cited in Pharies 1985, 14.) The object is what the sign "refers or points" to, yet doesn't have to be an object of material kind (Pharies 1985, 15).

More essential from Peirce's theories to this research is his understanding of the sign's representation. According to him, the sign can be understood in three ways: as an **icon**, **index** or a **symbol** (Seppä 2012, 136; Hill and Helmers 2004, 15). A representation is *iconic* when there is a clear resemblance between the object and the representamen, for example a photograph of a person is an iconic sign of that person. An *indexical* icon has an "existential relationship" to the object, however requiring sufficient understanding of the surrounding culture in order to understand that connection. A handwritten letter is an indexical sign of its writer, or a pair of worn-out shoes refers to their owner. As for the *symbolic* representation, there is no apparent similarity or realistic connection to the representamen. The relationship is conventional, and relies on the interpretant, "the mind's eye". A sign that evokes the concepts of, for example, reliability or masculinity is a symbolic sign – entirely depending on the cultural agreements of understanding. (Seppä 2012, 136-138; Hill and Helmers 2004, 15-16.) However, in most cases images don't belong exclusively in one single category, but rather operate in all of the layers at the same time. For example, a photograph is often both iconic and indexical. A photo looks similar to what they depict, but at the same time we are aware of the process that has existed in the creation of the image which in turn has had implications to what we are able to see. (Peirce 1931-1958, 2.281, cited in Seppä 2012, 139.)

In the Peircean theory the interpretant; the created image in the mind, is not solid: its meaning is defined by the reader (Crow 2016, 21), and it can be endlessly re-interpreted (Seppä 2012, 134). I see his theory of semiotics to be fitting with the idea of social constructionism, as social constructionism sees the meaning to be in constant formulation in a similar way how Peirce sees the meaning of a sign to be in a continuous process of re-shaping and re-formulating. The reader has an active role in the process of reading the signs, being affected by the surrounding culture and individual history (Seppä 2012, 134). Since meaning is a historically and culturally related concept (Burr 2015, 4), in this research the Peircean theory of semiotics offers flexibility

in terms of understanding the process of making meaning. It also presents the possibility for change. If a meaning of a sign is not perceived as fixed, it will be perhaps possible for us to re-construct the problematic ways of communicating a message.

## 3.4. Visual rhetoric

A necessary reflection upon the signs that generate meaning and the signs that generate socially constructed understanding of reality is the connection of visual material to persuasion (Hill and Helmers 2004, 1). **Visual rhetoric** is a theoretical framework that perceives visual artifacts as not only containing meaning, but also as a medium filtering much of the creator's beliefs and intentions to the audience (Atzmon 2011, XIII). Visual elements are seen as affecting attitudes, opinions and beliefs (Hill and Helmers 2004, 2), through "articulating rhetorical structures" (Atzmon 2011, XIII). Sourcing from the study of textual rhetoric, the visual rhetoric examines the influential power of visual artifacts. It is highly related to the concepts of social constructionism and semiotics, but looking beyond the understanding of the constructed meaning towards the intention behind it.

Fundamental from this framework to this research is the notion of the use of persuasion to certain ways of viewing the world or generating meta-beliefs (Atzmon 2011, XIV). The intention of a visual artefact is not always an explicit goal, as could be said from a photo of a bunch of bananas in the weekly offer leaflet of a supermarket. There, the visual artefact is placed mainly solely for a realistic reference of the product and with the intention to grab the viewer's attention and to buy the product. Instead of these straightforward objectives, we must understand the holistic effect of persuasion on how we understand the world. As viewers we are constantly affected by the intentions of the one creating and placing a visual artefact into our field of vision, both consciously and unconsciously. Visual artefacts play a key role in the creation of "cultural belief systems" (Atzmon 2011, XIV), constructed frameworks

within which we are able to look at the world through dominant discourses. Deriving from these shared belief systems a creator of a visual artefact is able to construct a perception that can seem so self-evident to us that the critical reading is forgotten and the persuasive power remains hidden (Hill and Helmers 2004, 4). With the help of the perspective of visual rhetoric, I aim to expose at least some of the imposing force.

Visual and verbal artefacts cooperate in the process of provoking a targeted response from the viewer (Hill and Helmers 2004, 20). In this research the textual parts have been also taken into consideration, but only through their effect on the reading of the photograph. Since the focus of the research is on the meaning and power of the images, the deep analysis of the textual parts has not been included.

# 4. Methodology and research material

# 4.1. Research question

The question that I will answer to in this research is **what are the identities that are constructed of migrants through the use of photography**. My aim is to understand what are the realities that are being constructed of the migrants in the campaign. I am interested to see how is the *concept of a migrant* being built and used within the context of the campaign. These concepts can be also called discourses, sets of meaning that are constructed and utilized in social interactions, which I will explain further later in this research. In other words, I will look into how visual material, in this case photographs, contribute to the construction of a conception, a mental image, of migrants.

I will also examine to what kind of larger discussions these identities relate. Through examining the constructed identities and the ways how they have been built I will be able to understand a part of the bigger sphere of power relations in photography.

# 4.2. Research material

For my research material I have selected one campaign from an international humanitarian organization, specifically its photographic content. The requirements that I set for the campaign was that it should have an emphasis on photography, and it should specifically be oriented towards depicting people through photography. In the process of searching for the campaign I went through numerous story pages from various organizations, including Amnesty, UNHCR, and more. Unfortunately, many of the found campaigns resembled mostly traditional photo reportages from the field and did not convey much beyond recording the events in a point-and-shoot style of photographing. My goal was to find a campaign that would use visual language to construct the story or concept of an individual being. After a careful search, I finally found one that was exactly about the construction of identity and person.

The chosen campaign is a webpage commissioned by the International Committee of the Red Cross and designed by Fifty & Fifty design company in San Diego, California, in 2017 (International Committee of the Red Cross 2017). "Missing on the Road" is an interactive story page. It displays the stories of a selection of migrants in Central America who have went missing during their journey, partly including information about their families as well. The page is available both in English and Spanish. The English page, however, includes elements that are hand-written in Spanish and are not translated into English. It consists of 37 images and 4 looping video clips. In my research I will interpret only the photographic content, and not give a deep analysis for the textual parts.

The campaign page is an interesting choice as it is mostly depicting people that have went missing, meaning that the ways of depicting the identity are limited and, in most cases, mean combining elements from family or authorities to convey an identity and story of one person that is not present to help visualizing his or her story by themselves. Thus, the person is a story told by someone else, and not in their own terms. As my research focus is on identity, this act of constructing an identity of a non-present person through limited amount of tools poses a fascinating question of how did the campaign makers then at the end decide to present these people.

MATERIAL:

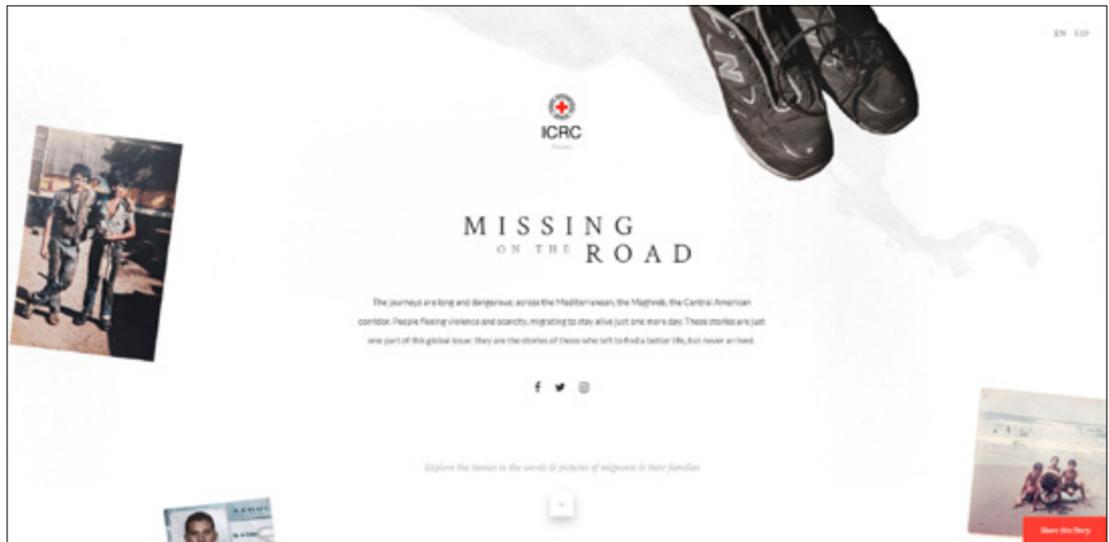International Committee of the Red Cross: "Missing on the Road"

http://www.missingmigrants.icrc.org

Image 1: Example from campaign page.



Image 2: Example from campaign page.

# 4.3. Research method: Close reading and discourse analysis

As my research method I will use a combination of close reading method and discourse analysis. **Close reading** is a research method that has been originally applied to written text, but can and has been implemented to a multitude of sources, in other words 'texts': visual, vocal or material, or even a combination of these (Vanhanen 2015). It is "intensive reading and re-reading" (Moya 2015, 9), examining the 'text' in hand in the most detailed way possible. According to a definition of J. Pöysä, close reading refers to a process of multi-phased reading, moving from details towards an understanding of the whole. The 'texts' that are under analysis are not necessarily linear or organized, but rather intertwined or overlapping with each other. In practice close reading means immersing and re-immersing to the 'text', possibly repositioning, deepening or changing the understanding of it with each reading. As a result, it will generate a way to move towards more thematic understanding (Vanhanen 2015). To support that move, I will use discourse analysis as an additional methodology to shift from the detailed understanding to the thematic understanding.

In fact, **discourse analysis** is somewhere between a theoretical framework and a research method. In this research it works as a base to further interpret the representational overview that has been reached in the close analysis phase. Discourse analysis inspects the use of language, in this case visual language, with a focus on how the social reality is constructed. It anchors the notions to the perspective of social constructionism. The "social reality" can define itself in virtually countless ways, but some of the ways of structuring become more dominant than others. Discourse analysis aims to understand what are these dominating ways of structuring understanding, in other words discourses. Discourse analysis consists of a variety of emphases, theoretical assumptions, that define the angle of looking at the constructive power of language. In this research I focus on the notion where the use of language is seen

as constructing the socially shared reality. The use of language is not only seen as describing the world, but also *creating meaning* and *structuring* and *constructing* the reality as we understand it. Even neutrally appearing depictions, such as photographs, are saturated with underlying assumptions of what the reality is. (Jokinen, Juhila and Suoninen 2016, 14-22.) Fundamental to this kind of perspective in discourse analysis is its goal to discover and bring constructions visible (Fairclough 1992, 41, Potter and Wetherell 1987, 81, cited in Jokinen, Juhila and Suoninen 2016, 22).

In my research this means that I will look into the details of each image, dismantle it and examine the signs that are used to construct the image. From these detailed notes I will be then able to pull larger thematics and point out to which discourses the used signs unite to. The selected methods are particularly suitable for the research material for their ability to scan beyond the obvious reading of an image, going deep into the semiotic power that the image withholds. The angle of discourse analysis will help me to observe and understand the constructed realities by stepping away from the easy option of taking representations for granted, but understanding the meaning of intention and power behind the seemingly neutral image.

I will not focus on all the possible discourses that appear on the images, but will limit the range of closer analysis to those that deal with the construction of a person's identity. For example, discourses of the reasons of migration will not be included as such, but due to their relatedness to the topic they might be lightly studied. Despite of that, the main emphasis will remain on the constructions of identity.

## 4.4. Analysis questions

The plan of analysis is to go through each image individually and examine the image through different layers of analysis. There was no pre-existing analysis model that I could follow, so I defined the analysis procedure specifically for this purpose, com-

bining the emphases of the different theories and perspectives that are linked to this research. The purpose of the analysis model is to unveil the relevance of small details of the image, proceeding further to the discursive functions.

The starting point, the denotative layer, is for namely describing what is in the image in a rather clinical manner. The purpose of this is to gather all the elements that exist in the image, even though their initial existence in the image might seem irrelevant or unimportant. From there I proceed to the connotative layer. Here I look into the thoughts, ideas and assumptions that are generated by the information listed in the denotative layer. The next layer, the representative layer, looks closer into the referred concepts of thought that the image has created. It answers the questions of what does this image want to say, and will lead us to the discursive layer where I will reflect on the found representations and link them to larger discourses that exist in the discussion about migrants. How the analysis functions is going from examining small details to understanding their position in the whole system of making meaning. The structure of the analysis is as follows:

**CLOSE ANALYSIS LAYER**

1. Denotative layer
   - What is in the image?
   - What is happening in the image?
   - Who is in the image?
   - Where is the image located?
   - What is the text that is placed in proximity of the image?
   - What is written in the text?
   - What elements are used in connection with the person?

2. Connotative layer
- What does the image resemble?
- What kind of identity is constructed of the person?
- Which elements create the identity?
- What kind of mood or atmosphere is in the image? Which elements create it?

3. Rhetoric layer
- What abstract idea, concept or message is the image representing?
- How does the image attempt to persuade the viewer of the representation?

4. Discursive layer
- To which discourses do these representations link to?
- What is the discourse on identity?
- Which representations construct the discourse(s) on identity?

**DISCOURSE ANALYSIS LAYER**

In the discourse analysis layer, I will gather the fragmented discourses of the campaign together and examine them holistically. Some of the images indicate to several discourses at once. How the discourse analysis layer differs from the discursive layer in the close analysis phase is the aim to look at the discourses from a perspective of a socially constructed and shared perspective, whereas the close analysis phase only names these discourses.

See Appendix II for a complete example of one analysis process for an image.

# 5. Analysis: From details to discursive concepts

**T**he process of a layered analysis through over 40 images and videos was heavy. It required starting fresh with each image each time and examining the image piece by piece and layer to layer. This kind of analysis method does not give much space for looking into the interrelatedness of the images, but once I proceeded to look through the analysis notes of all the images, I was able to start to see repetition and connections. A close reading analysis lays everything open from the images and enables pointing out repeating or otherwise prominent representations. With this in hand, it is possible to see to which discourses the images simultaneously construct and link to. The point of the analysis done in this way is to understand the meaning of images in the construction of our thoughts.

Discourses are also only hypotheses of the identification of a discourse; were the images analyzed by someone else, this person might recognize discourses different from my findings. However, that doesn't question the existence of a discourse: when description of a discourse can be formulated into one and grounded on several findings, it is not merely my personal perspective on the image, but an understanding of its structure which refers to the larger set of communicative elements.

## 5.1. General description of the page

The main colors of the webpage are white, light and dark grey, black and red that appears to be a brighter red than the ICRC's defined red brand color. Throughout the page there is a light grey background map of Central America and Mexico, and an animated grey route that begins to move in the background after the second section, "Departure". The text is set mostly with a serif font; however, some smaller text elements have a sans-serif font. There are also hand-written elements placed through the page. As the viewer scrolls forward on the page, there are slight shifts or effects that are applied to the images, such as a small movement of the image, or an image effect that causes the image to get lighter or darker. The page is dynamic, and

includes several links to additional information. In this research, any content that is behind the links has been left unanalyzed.

## 5.2. Description of the sections

The landing view is a centrally aligned module with four images with shifting animation placed around the borders. In addition to the landing view, the page is divided in five sections: "Instability", "Departure", "Migration", "Disappearances" and "Support & Restoration". Each of the section covers is a large image or video that takes over the whole browser screen, accompanied with the section number and title. The video backgrounds are short, looping clips.

The first section, "Instability", sheds a light on the situations migrants face in their country of origin: gang violence, poverty, economic inequality, limited access to education and the separation of families, since some family members have already migrated elsewhere. In addition to text, the first section comprises of six images, one video and two elements of hand-written text that are partly overlaid with one another. There is also one translated quote from the one of the hand-written text elements.

The second section, "Departure", discusses the dangers of the journey, the financial risk the migrants have by taking loans, and how the financial burden inherits to the family if the migrant disappears and the reasons why contact is lost with the migrants. The section consists of one video and two images, two handwritten texts of which one is translated to a quote. The elements are again partly overlaid with one another.

The third section, "Migration", has a different set-up from the previous two section, as it scrolls and expands horizontally. It introduces the stories of seven individuals who are making their journey to the destination country. Each individual story con-

sists of a hand-written note, 1-2 pictures and a translated quote from the hand-written note. The number of days the persons have been on the road is also included, both in hand-writing and in the text elements. The photos are either scanned polaroids or digital images placed on a polaroid mockup; it is difficult to say if they are originals or a result of photo editing.

The migrants that have went missing during their journey are the topic of the fourth section, "Disappearances". The section functions in the similar manner as the third section, and the individual stories are reveled scrolling horizontally to the right. Each story consists variably of a portrait picture, a hand-written note or illustrative pictures. After the stories, the route animation that has grown throughout scrolling on the site, now expands to multiple branches of itineraries in the background of the webpage.

The last part, "Support & Restoration", is a section that reveals the finding of one missing migrant, Mauro Murcia. It also includes an explanatory text of the values and actions of ICRC. The end of the page is two small subsections with social media sharing functions and information on the producers of the site and their production roles.

# 6. Findings: The constructions of migrants

In general, the material clearly indicates that there are multiple defined roles that the identity of the migrant is placed in. The photographs consist of delicate indications to specific discourses, consistently and thoroughly referencing to the larger conceptions of migrants. Next, I will go through the most prominent and relevant constructions of the discourses on migrants.

## 6.1. The migrant as a loved person and a family member

The main concept that evolves around the campaign is the idea of love and caring. We see individuals showing their sorrow and sadness, personal items placed here and there as kind of memorial objects of the lost people. The migrant is in the center of these emotions, being portrayed as the subject of longing, memorizing and sorrowful emotions. This discourse of the migrant as a loved person and a family member is the most prominent one of the campaign, and it is repeated throughout the different campaign sections. Through these photos the migrant is portrayed as a person who is *searched for*, *memorized for* and *is being a subject for someone's emotions*, all of which contributes to the idea of the migrant as someone who is cared for and is important to someone, as these actions generally require an emotional and/or familial connection in order for it to happen. Highlighting these actions underlines the emotional value of the missing person to their families.

One of the indications to the migrant as someone who is searched for is the documentaristic images of personal belongings (Image 3). Throughout the campaign it's possible to see images of objects that are photographed using a camera flash and cut out from their background. While these same images link to other discourses as well, they partially construct the idea of the lost migrant being searched for. They resemble evidence of the search; found items that have been discovered during the process. The search process indicated that there has been some kind of inventive

to start looking for the person, and
that is the initiative of the family
of the missing person. Their worry
and caring has started the process of
search, and these are the results of
those efforts.



Image 3: Shoes.

The second type of images in this
discourse are the images of memories (Image 4). In most cases, they showcase a
happy moment in the past. In the example, a wall of family photos includes more
unofficial portraits in additional to the studio ones, showing the history of the family.
The images are arranged neatly in gold frames on the wall, and nothing additional is
placed nearby to disturb the value of these images. There's only a slight cast of light
on the wall, and the mood in the room seems to be quiet, creating an atmosphere of
respect and value to those being represented in the photographs. Some of the pho-
tographs are more personal, stepping closer to the actual formation of the family
and things that they have shared together. The photos are a representation of the
memory of the lost person, not simply them as a person but the whole experience of
a shared time together. The visual memories of these moments are kept visible in the
daily life of the families, and the moments they depict are cherished. They are pre-
cious reminders of the past, and the photograph acts as a tool to memorize the lost
person through the re-immersion in the happy action that was shared in the moment
of capturing the photograph. Some of the photos on the wall are later showed in
connection to the more individual presentation of the persons, for example alongside
their name in the section of missing migrants. This kind of repetition emphasizes
even more the perspective of an individual history, and one's life as a whole.

Thirdly, the migrant is portrayed as a subject for someone's emotions (Images 5 and
6). These images link to the previous category, but expand from the indicated mem-

Image 4: Photo wall.

ory to the emotions it raises in its viewer. Thus we don't have to look far to discover the reason for the apparent sadness in the images, but it is placed in an obvious and comprehensible manner next to the presentation of emotions. In the example image below the old man is portrayed highly emotional and immersed in his sorrow, but also placed in the middle of the memories of love and caring that are represented through the multiple family photos behind him. We are then immediately guided to understand his sorrow as his loss for the missing family member, and not some other potential explanation. Through his emotional response the missing migrant becomes then the one being longed for, being loved and missed.

Another example of this discourse is an image of an older woman writing the name of a missing person, presumably her son, on a card (Image 7). It is a very sensitive matter to see her spell the name of her lost son, as it makes the loss concrete and also reminds us of the hard process she is going through both with the surrounding society but with herself as well. It is a link to the possible authoritative processes that she has had to involve in after the family member has went missing, and hand-writing

Image 5 and Image 6: A man sitting on a couch.

in general referring to the act of making notes, writing a diary or otherwise bringing out one's thoughts out from the mind on the paper. Through writing her memories she could be sustaining her memories, and going through a mental healing process by letting out and processing her thoughts. In a way it seems to symbolize that she is not giving up, but preserving the caring for the lost person in her mind and heart. The lost migrant is the reason behind her actions and emotions.



Image 7: Woman writing on a card.

## 6.2. The migrant with a lost future

A perspective that is largely introduced in the campaign is the idea of the hopelessness of the future. It's often not directly presented, for example as could be expected to be done through dramatic views of the current situation, but instead indirectly indicated through the use of old photos. A happy image of the past gives us an insight into the mindset of the person at the time of taking the image. Many of the images rely on youthful positivity, showcasing everyday life situations where one generally would feel hopeful and positive about the future. Such scenes include photos from school prom (Image 10), days at the beach and snapshots from sunny moments on family trips. It is in those moments when one can generally be expected to see the promising future ahead of them. The viewer sees the persons as people with opportunities, like something good could and probably would happen to them. How these images work in constructing a discourse on the lost future is by the contrast we come to understand very quickly after looking at the image. We can clearly see the hopes and potential that these people had in the past, yet are faced to realize the tragedy of the present, as these wishes have not come true. The examples of this kind of imagery in the campaign are numerous. They portray the belief in the future that was once present in the past, and underline the connection to the current time where it no longer exists. They are a representation of hope and the tragedy that followed later. What these images reach is the transformation of hope to despair – the migrant has lost their future, and there is not much to look forward to. The happiness and hope are a past reality for these people.

The old photos give a very personal view into the history of an individual. There, in the past, life seems promising and balanced. Many of the scenes are a memory of a time where the choice of going on a migrant journey probably wasn't in the minds of the subjects of the photographs. The lost hope could alternatively be portrayed through more brutal scenes, but in these photos the decision has been made to make

the message clear by making a link to the aspirations of the past. It's also meaningful to understand that the current reality of being a migrant is not the dream of these people. They had different ideas in the past, yet the current situation has guided them towards these choices. Bringing up the discourse of the past hopes discusses a different narrative than the one where migrants are solely seen as making their journey to exploit the social system of the destination country or for other largely unsupported reasons. It's not this inhumane journey or the utopian idea of another country as a place for opportunities they dreamed of when graduating from high school or playing with their friends under the sun.

Despite of that, one of the images shows a man posing on a sunny day in front of a supermarket that has the word "U·sa" plastered on its façade (Image 8). With the bright whites and saturated blue sky it's almost a dreamy image, and the message behind it is equally linked to a fantasy. It's a reference to the historical idea of the USA as a country of opportunity, success and richness. It's presented as a reason for the migrant to begin their journey. The migrant is thus shown as a person who is influenced by this fantasy, and sees it as an option for a better life. In the case of this image the illusion quickly dissolves and takes a tragic turn, as it seems to have become the fate of the man to go towards his dream and face the worst possible consequences. The idea of the US as a land of the dream is turned into a grotesque misfortune, even more emphasizing the discourse of the migrants with the lost future. The image acts as a link both between history and today, and the dream and the reality.

In addition to the happy images of the past, the discourse of the migrant with a lost future is also constructed both through the concepts of idleness and frustration. A very particular example from idleness is one of the looping videos where a group of young men is walking down the street on a sunny day (Image 9). The camera follows them, and later goes past them, presenting the same emptiness that the young men are seeing in front of them. It seems that they are coming from nowhere, and con-

Image 8: Man in a photo book



Image 9: Group walking on the street. Image 10: A girl in a prom dress.

tinuing towards nowhere. As they have nothing in front of them and nothing to do, this scene creates an atmosphere of lack of opportunities and unpromising future. The video clip seems to say that these young people are on their way to problems, and all that is there is in front of them is a stagnant life situation with very little opportunities.

As for frustration, in many of the photos there is a young man posing with an unfriendly facial expression and tense body posture (Image 11). Although some of the texts placed next to images of this category talk about positivity and uncompromising perspective, half of the texts support the transmitting anger by highlighting disappointment and cynical attitude in the wording. The photographed people are often placed in front of a concrete wall or metal



Image 11: Man in front of a fence.

mesh fence, implying the stagnation and limited possibilities they have. What that means for the discourse of futurelessness, is that they are shown as being unable to move forward also conceptually. The perspective around them is closed, forwarding the viewer to consider their life situation in a same way.

## 6.3. The hopeful and religious migrant

There is also other kind of hope presented through the images: hope that is still there and not lost. The hopefulness of these migrants is portrayed through the use of religious signs. What is being made use of to create this perspective are the common symbolics of Christianity. Close to 'holy scenes', the images repeat postures and colors that are familiar to us from biblical images. In addition to the numerous

Image 12: Sunset. Image 13: Pregnant woman.

religiously infused visual signs, the texts also offer many examples where a religious perspective has been introduced through the choice of words.

A particularly strong example is the combination of two images: a young pregnant woman looking down at her belly, and a landscape image of a setting sun (Images 12 and 13). Here, a worrying mother is holding her belly and looking down. Despite the distressing setting, her posture repeats the humbleness of a prayer. The setting sun in the pastel colors is an equally divine scenery, using the concepts of the trust for tomorrow and the new day. Both images have blue, serene tones, and link to 'heavenly' visual codes. The migrant in question, the woman, becomes then the trustful migrant who is faithful in her belief and despite the challenges, relies on God to take care of her and her baby. There is a promise of a new day that will come after the setting sun and the night.

Despite its ambiguously religion-linked name, the ICRC is an impartial and neutral organization (International Committee of the Red Cross 2017), and therefore doesn't

explain the frequency of signs used of Christian origin. A discourse of the migrant as a religious person has perhaps been used to introduce a reason behind the ability to thrust oneself into the dangerous journey and yet keep going. Using such discourses of faith and religion seems to be an opening towards the individual motivation and values. The campaign uses religious connotations several times, and not only in the sense of a general description of religion, but its meaning to each individual. What it aims to describe is the power of faith that supports these people.

A risk that this discourse presents is that the migrant can be seen as being on their own in the hands of God – and might imply thinking that they are better on their own, too, without secular support. Most of the discourses presented in the campaign offer reasoning for the act of departure, such as showing the futurelessness and threatening scenes of the country of departure. While hardly any of the used discourses indicate the inviting reasonings for the journey, such as better living conditions or employment, the religious discourse represents the motivational argument for the continuation of the journey. For me personally, it is a mystery how one manages to step on the dangerous journey, let alone attempting it several times. The religious discourse answers to this by being the only perspective shown of what keeps the migrant continuing on their path.

## 6.4. The suffering family member

While images of emotional family members support the idea of the lost migrants as loved individuals, they also create an image of the family members under paralyzing sorrow. The presentation of the identity of the family members is firstly the victim of the sorrow. Their life is not shown as continuing forward, but frozen in the grief. They are not presented in a state of mourning that would be explicitly externally visible, but rather being still and unable to fully function in the everyday life. Whereas in the other perspectives of the campaign the people can be portrayed as survi-

vors, here the reality is contrary. The sorrow is presented as a force that has taken over the whole life, concretizing in the frozen postures and dark shadows in the surrounding environment. In the images we can read signs of hard life and distress, such as sun-spotted skin, half-smiles and half- frowned faces. Of the suffering family members are shown only the grief and dark emotions, and nothing else defines their identity. They are often placed in a close proximity of some kind of symbol of the lost family member, be it family photo frames or the home where they all once lived together. Their presentation is stripped from anything that would indicate much of their own individuality, but rather focused in the grandness of the emotion due to the loss of a family member. The family members are shown as voiceless, quietly accepting the tragic situation, but not continuing forward.

In the example, a motionless woman is sitting on a bed (Image 14). The daylight sun-rays filter into the room and the air looks dusty, while her gaze is downwards and her posture is powerless. She is portrayed as a victim of the grief, suffering in the loss or uncertain situation of a family member. She seems unable to act, letting the day pass in front of her.
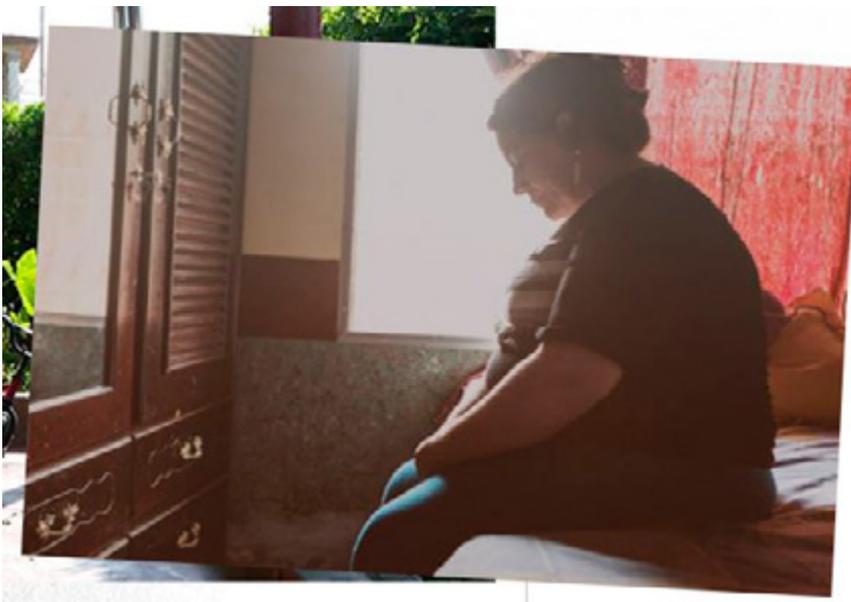


Image 14: Woman sitting on a bed

The extent of sorrow is also shown through compulsive behavior, such as fiddling with an item while being photographed. Here, a close-up detail is shown of the old man's behavior (Image 15). A picture is being taken of him, yet he is unable to hide his actions. The focus is on his nervousness and unconscious actions that reveal a great deal of his feelings and mental strain. In the image that was introduced earlier the same old man is shown sitting in front of an arrangement of family photos (Image 6). The heavy weight of the family photo frames is quite literally on his shoulders, pushing him down to his pain. A light sheds on the family photos, but it offers only little consolation in the large amount of shadows. He's portrayed as a victim of traumatizing pain, and the reason for his sorrow is shown right behind him.

These images of the old man are also an interesting example of a combination of masculinity that is traditionally emotionally restricted, and the openly shown feelings. In his hands he is holding a stetson hat, conventionally a symbol of masculinity and strength. Through these actions and symbols he admits to be weak despite his role as the head of the family and openly shows it. It implies that the suffering is so strong that it crosses male stereotypes.



Image 15: A close-up image of an old man holding a hat.

Image 16: A woman holding an photo.

Another example between the grief and compulsory behavior is the cover image for section four, "Disappearances" (Image 16). The image shows the hands of an old woman holding a printed image of a young woman. Of her is shown only the dark emotions through the massive amount of shadows, and the wrinkled paper strengthens the feeling of attachment. It demonstrates how distressing the sorrow is to those going through it. The image is a cherished but painful memory.

Another angle on the same topic is the discourse of family members in their 'new normal' life. Such scenes include imagery of family members doing actions that are slightly aside from the expected and the 'regular', implying that something has changed in the setting of the family. For example, a boy is shown placing or taking clothes from the drying rack (Image 17). Although I don't see any specific in the situation where a child is helping out in household chores, in this context such everyday action has been brought up for a reason. Considering his serious facial expression and the concrete presentation of his task of helping with the laundry, it seems to direct to the realization that there are some previous proceedings that have led to this specific situation. What could be said, for example, that since their family mem-

ber has disappeared, it is now the child's job to help the single parent in the everyday tasks to make up for the missing workforce of a familial unit. It is thus the new normality of their life, and is shown as the extent of the consequences when a family member goes missing. From here, we can easily understand that such an unbalanced setting will presumably have current and also further implications on this boy's life.



Image 17: A boy hanging clothes.
Image 18: A dog laying in front of a house.

Even pets are used to emphasize the changed setting in the families' life. In the same arrangement with the boy in the 'new normal' life, a dog is waiting in front of a house for his owner to return (Image 18). Together they are a strong indication to the idea of a family as an unit, and all the members it can consist of. Even the dog seems to be presented in a state of distress, and in the whole combination there is no hope for better times being presented. The family member of the lost migrant is then shown as futureless, frozen unit who is left back home to manage in the changed life situation.

## 6.5. The migrant under a threat

In many images, the migrant is also presented as a small individual under a large threat. Mostly, the danger that is imposed on the migrants is presented as 'invisible'. The sources of threat are underlying and prevalent in the atmosphere, yet not concretely shown or pronounced. There is a general threat in the images of this category,

and it's brought into the surface of acknowledgement by mentioning the danger and threat in the text. Instead of portraying the concrete danger, the undefined layer of threat sparks up imaginary scenarios of what could be happening next in this seemingly neutral or even happy scene. It resonates with the emotions of the viewer by linking to the primary feelings of fear. The threat becomes an understandable factor, and it is easy to relate to the position that the migrant has. The discourse of the migrant under a threat is a bridging discourse, bringing the viewer and the migrant closer together by a shared emotion.

An example of such discourse is the section cover video for "Departures" (Image 19). A migrant group is walking in a disorganized manner over a street, but most of the image is covered in dark, leafy forest. The overwhelmingly large trees suggest that the group is on their journey facing a threat bigger than themselves. The danger of the trip is emphasized, and the smallness of an individual underlined by the contrast between the large forest and the tiny figures of the group. There is even a small mosquito flying through the field of vision, adding authenticity. It's like a scene from a fairytale: the characters are walking through a dangerous forest, and don't know what awaits them. The sinister scenes raise inescapable questions. What will happen next?
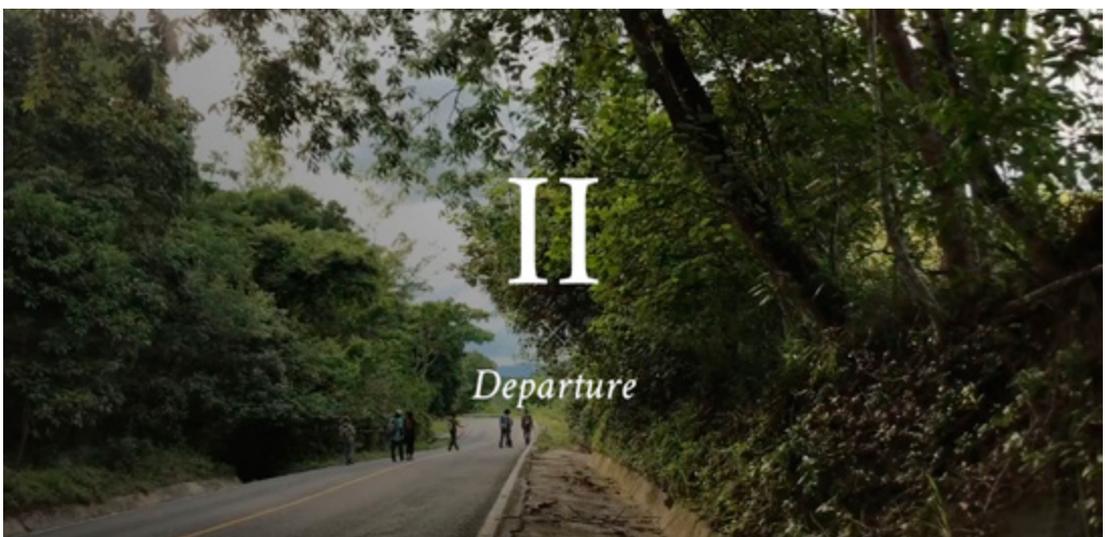


Image 19: A group walking on the road.

The hazard becomes the expected, as in stories, and creates a worry for the characters in the scene. The grandness of the forest and the other natural threats portrayed in other images of the campaign connotate to the huge risk that the migrant needs to take on their journey.

As being under a threat, migrant is portrayed as a small character in the midst of a sinister, uncertain scene that is out of his or her reach to control. By bringing in the emotion of fear and in some cases a personal view of the migrant himself, the threat becomes tangible and understandable. How this affects the discourse of the migrant being under a threat is that he is shown as a solitary unit in the waves of the danger, going through the uncontrollable situation. Their actions are shown as a survival story, relating to any kind of children's tales where the character is facing unprecedented danger and monsters. The migrant is the hero of the story, and the viewer is left to wait in tension what will happen.

The cover for section three, "Migration", shows the uncertainty from a personal perspective, emphasizing the confusing situation from an individual angle. It is a looping video clip of train tracks that are arriving to a village (Image 20). The camera, which is in this case set up as if it was the person's gaze, is moving irregularly from side to side and slowly forwards. It resembles a situation where the migrant is arriving to an unknown village, confusedly looking around and trying to grasp what are the threats and opportunities in this specific location. From this perspective the viewer can literally step into the shoes of the migrant and comprehend how the uncertainty of the forthcoming makes him fearful and cautious in his actual steps.

A few images also use blurry images and movement as to indicate the insecurity of the person. In the example, the person is moving in the shadows with an expressionless face (Image 21). He's between here and the future, being shown as the potential disappearing one. There is only a small difference between survival and defeat, and

III

Migration

Image 20: Train tracks during daytime.



Image 21: A man against a blue wall.

Image 22: A wardrobe.

this person is moving in that blurry area. The future of the migrant is unknown, and the continuous, undefined threat is posed all over the image.

Also objects are used to conceptualize the idea of threat and problems. One specific example is an image of a messy clothes bundle that is shown alongside an image of a lost migrant (Image 22). The lack of perspective and the unformed pile of clothes refer to the complexity of the situation. It seems unsolvable, and so is the migrant's life. The image doesn't necessarily define the identity of the migrant, but correlates to the framework of his life. It's a confined space, and doesn't offer much room. It's like a view into the mind of the migrant, creating an idea of a troubled person with little opportunities.

# 6.6. Migrant as an individual

In some parts of the campaign, the migrant is shown pronouncedly as an individual. It is done by offering fragments of identification papers, documentaristic photos of personal belongings and also through the hand-written text elements. On a larger scale, the concept of individual identity is shown in two ways: through the official documentation of individuals as a part of a certain system, such as a country or state, or through the ownership of items that one has acquired due to personal taste or interests. These are elements which support the idea of an individual by giving signs of how being an individual can be expressed in the society as a system and in the society as separating oneself into a singular unit. In other words, these items indicate the existence of self as a citizen and part of a society, and the expression of self through the individual choices of appearance and ownership. The meaning of using such visual language is to make the singular migrant stand out from the masses by relating to the documented existence of one as an individual being, and the implementation of individual freedom such as interests, hobbies or style. These are naturally not the only means of expressing the individual being, but the almost only ones that are available to put into a visual format when the person in question is not present. Thus the photographic material collected for the campaign has focused on these two parts, and has expressed the individual through objects that are fundamental in expressing identity as a part of a system in addition to the personal expression of it.

In many of the cases where the migrant is brought up inside the discourse as an individual, the object is being presented similar to an evidence (Image 23). The outlined images are floating against a white background, separated from the context of place or time. The emptiness around is an important factor, explaining the kind of examinative gaze that we are laying on this person through his belongings. A camera flash has been used in order to be able to document the item in the highest possible quality. This way of presenting material links to the authoritative processes that mi-

grants face. The items act as a proof
of the history of an individual, linking
to country of origin, registration and
bureaucracy. They increase the au-
thenticity of the story of a migrant as
an individual, assuring the existence
of the person and particularly their
individual existence.



Image 23: Yellow identity card.

As for the personal belongings, the
documentaristic way of portraying them
lifts the object into a relic of memories.
Mundane objects are placed prominent-
ly through the campaign. One of the
items in the personal items category
is a pair of socks (Image 24). At a first
glance, it might seem like a completely
irrelevant piece of the campaign, but



Image 24: A pair of socks.

especially this photo reveals its importance with closer examination. It doesn't seem
probable that the family of the lost migrant would hold on to these as a conscious act
of keeping a memory of the lost family member, but it is rather a situation where it
has been impossible to let go of even such everyday item. This item, despite it being a
commonplace thing, is remarkable for the family as a sign of the lost family member.
It's a small thing that might remind them of his or her individual features, and thus
makes this person an individual being. It tells of the preferences or choices of this
person, which participate in preserving the memory of him.

Another factor that contributes to the idea of the migrant as an individual are the
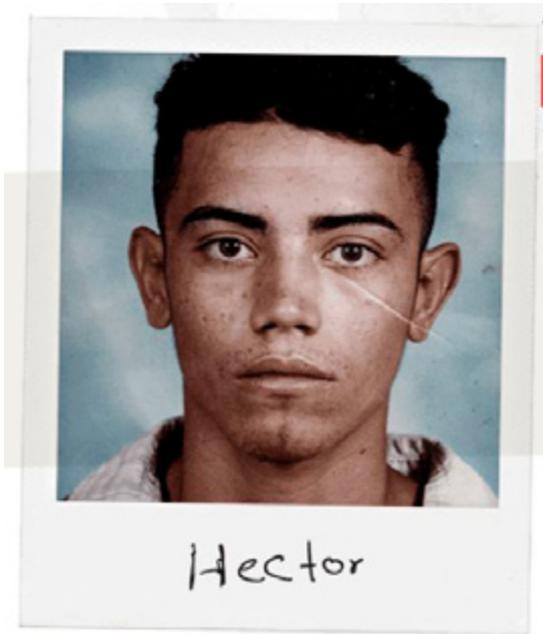direct portrait photos of the people. The images of this category are very calm and

Image 25: Portrait of a young man against a blue backdrop.

neutral, but at the same time demand attention from the viewer to look directly in the eyes of the people. Some of them are very closely cropped like this example of a photo of Hector (Image 25). There is no other place to look than into his eyes. It asks to allow that connection with another person, to come closer to him as an individual being. By doing so it is a big leap from perceiving the migrants as unidentified masses, and his face doesn't go unnoticed.

I see this as a discourse that is set to function against the discourse of migrants as a 'flood'. By showing the individual side of each migrant in questions, it dissolves the idea of migrants as a collective, homogenous mass. The migrant is presented as a singular unit, as a valuable person with preferences and opinions. It is not to say that a group couldn't be valued, but it is remarkably easier for the general viewer to react to an undefined group in an emotionless manner than to a clearly identified individual. The discourse of the migrant as an individual completes the idea of one migrant as a whole person, both as a citizen and through their preferences and opinions. It introduces the viewer to him even in his absence.

# 6.7. The migrant as a caring parent

One of the side discourses presented in the imagery is the one of the migrant as a caring parent. Linking closely to the discourses of love and sorrow, this perspective emphasizes the responsibility and role as a care-taker and provider instead of the more emotional side of a familial relationship. This is not a perspective that is clearly visible in the most of the images, but rather indicated through the text. How these images function is that the text transforms the situation of the image. For example, the visible toughness of the migrant is converted into persistence for the sake of his family by mentioning familial values and the responsibility of parents. Without the text, these same elements could be understood as persistence solely for the sake of himself and his future, but with the aid of the text the viewer comes to realize the bigger reasoning behind his actions.

One of the more concretely parent-oriented images of the campaign is the one of a man making a phone call (Image 26). His upright position, neutral but active facial expression and setting of making the phone call from his personal space of a bed indicate that he might be making a phone call to his family during his journey. This is to show that before he went missing, he was taking care of his responsibility of maintaining a connection to his family. However, as we know that he has now disappeared, we are forced to look at the line of connection that is



Image 26: A man calling.

now broken, both concretely and conceptionally. It is then a sad scenery to see him doing his best to take care of his family and knowing that this is no longer the case. The discourse of a caring parent is then reinforced through the viewer's emotional reaction to this image.

The responsible parent discourse is an important add to balance the discourse of the suffering families. While we see mostly the distress of the families of a lost migrant, the concept of a responsible parent dissolves the potential blame on their departure. It has been decided to show in the campaign that the parent is or was doing their best, and not just simply going forward as a singular unit. The emphasis on the parental comments in the texts, such as wanting to offer a better future for their children, gives a reasoning for the departure and a motivation to having left their families and going forward. In the campaign the discourse of the responsible parent has been offered as a justifying discourse. The wish to offer a better future for your children answers the questions regarding the reasons for a migrant journey, and explains why a parent would leave their children. Including signs from such discourse gives a fuller picture of the migrant's perspective, and has been intended to discuss more emotional values of the journey rather than those of individualistic sense. The journey is shown as a sacrifice to offer opportunities for the child, and not as a way to prosperous life for an individual being.

## 6.8. The migrant as a survivor

There is also a character that is introduced as active, persistent and as someone with willpower – the migrant as a survivor. Although this discourse is not very repetitiously or prominently shown in the campaign, it's still clearly indicated as a side discourse. In these images, the migrant is shown smiling and their whole face turned towards the camera, posing in a relaxed manner. Signs of struggle are present in their faces and surroundings in the suffered skin and unknown locations, but the decided-

ness on survival is indicated in their quotes and gazes. The belief in the future exists, but it is more the fundamental power of oneself than an external reasoning.

An example of the migrant as a survivor is one of the 'on the road' polaroids of the migrants on the move. In this image, a man has taken the image of himself, looking directly into the camera and smiling (Image 27). The self-taken image creates an idea of independence and self-reliance. He's an active character, not waiting to be photographed but taking the lead in his own hands. He hasn't included anything else in the image than himself and a glimpse of a background fabric. He's in a relaxed place, being able to take the moment to take his eyes off the surrounding and focus on the image taking. He seems to belief in the future and himself, but not necessarily in others, not even for taking an image.

Despite the smile, his face looks like he has suffered on his journey, and his quote supports this notion. Thus the positivity is not necessarily an easy feature to uphold, but more a decided way of continuing forward. In this case, the faith in the future is not religious, but faith in inner strength. He's shown as the migrant who is positive through the strength of his mind, keeping the attitude and willpower despite the challenges.



Image 27: A man taking a selfie.

Another example of the survivor discourse is the image of another migrant, Prudencio (Image 28). He's been photographed standing on an empty field on a sunny day. He is also looking directly into the camera and smiling, but is posing his body sideways. On an empty field it indicates his freedom of movement, and his ability to

Image 28: A man standing on a field.

decide on his departure. It seems like the pose has been taken for only a few seconds and he could leave at any time, but the decision to do so is clearly his own. In the image there is space available around him and a possible direction is indicated. He's a survivor with opportunity, going forward on his own will.

Smiling, taking direct eye contact and being an active character in the image, for example by taking the image yourself or standing in a position that suggests direction of departure, all indicates to the ability of being able to take care of yourself and to the persisting belief to a better future. Within all the other discourses, this one is where possibility is concretely shown. While being a more minor perspective on migrants in the campaign, it adds the almost necessary element of positivity. The future is challenging and complicated, but not solely harsh and unreachable. The migrant in this discourse is not presented as a victim, but as persistent and holding a core power of decidedness. The belief is not a fairytale, but a battle of the mind.

# 7. Conclusion

**T**he intention of this research was to find out what kind of identities are constructed of migrants, using photography as the means to formulate the conceptions of this particular group of people. The way to get to the roots of these constructions was by closely analyzing the images and the references that were being made by using visual language. Before proceeding further to the concluding notes, it is important to remark that the individual images did not point to individual discourses, but mixed and collaborated in the construction of the conceptions of migrants. Therefore, there are no hard borders between the images and their bigger meaning, but it was still possible to examine the relations from the photographic level to the discursive level.

All in all, I see that the constructed identities of the campaign function in the following ways:

1. Making statements through emotionally relating to the topic rather than using rational reasoning
2. Giving countering or alternative perspectives and reasoning on migrant-related topics by offering an individual story
3. Attempting to construct an individual identity of a migrant instead of a collective group identity

How this campaign differs from most migrant-themed campaigns is the emphasis on the emotional reasoning instead of factual reasoning. There are no infographs and almost no numbers, but fragments of personification, layers of time and history and varying emotions and feelings. It's a very different approach to depicting the migrants as a group. The campaign aims to give answers and information, but not in the rational, hard-facts manner that we are used to seeing when discussing migrants, but from an angle of emotional experience and offering a surface of relating to another individual being and their story. The emphasis on emotional discourses is remarkable, making a large difference to the more widespread discourses that rely on economical or background-oriented factors.

Most of the constructive power of the images lays on the indexical representation of the signs. A majority of the signals refer to logical yet cultural relationships between the visual artifact and the interpretation. They point out to commonly shared concepts, using small details to create interpretations that are generally relatable. Such concepts include widely understood ideas of love, family relationships and hope, showcasing emotional sensitivity in an uncensored yet relatable way. For the general audience this is a good reference point, functioning as a connection to moments of caring or sorrow to which at least most of us can instantly relate to.

Many of the discourses, such as the discourse of the responsible parent, are carefully utilized to give a countering answer to the bigger, prevalent discourses in the general discussion on migrant-related topics. An example would be the discourse of the responsible parent, with its existence responding to the discourse of a migrant arriving to a country to benefit from the social security system. In the campaign, the migrant is shown doing his departure out of parental responsibility, with which it is easy for the viewer to agree and understand. In that sense, the images create another perspective on the widely discussed topics, concretely showing an alternative reason for the migrant's actions. The degree of intertextuality, referencing to other images, is intentionally simple, as intertextuality requires a certain amount of pre-existing recognition in order for it to function properly (Hill and Helmers 2008, 5). I see that the referred concepts have been kept easily readable and referencing to simple conceptions in order to reach a maximal audience.

The campaign does well in depicting the migrant as an individual with a history, preferences and opinions and their meaning as a person to various people, as being a loved, cared and unique person. My initial assumption was that through this research, I would be more inclined to discuss the concept of 'otherness'. However, the depictions of migrants in this campaign are not really supporting the idea of mi-

grants as 'them'. Instead, they are very much focused to include various elements of a person as a story. The objective is not to differentiate, but to relate and understand. The details in the images offer parts of what one's identity consists of, and refrains from presenting a person as an embodiment of otherness. Giving out details of a person is a more wholesome way of showcasing someone, and the viewer is guided to see beyond the superficial level of stereotypes or seeing migrants as one, unified and unidentified group.

As for ICRC as the presenter of the images, it is clear to me that the generated discourses are mostly intentional and conscious. The degree to which the discourses are formulated and repeated indicates that there have been specific goals of perception for this campaign to fill on the topic of migrants. That doesn't take away the fact that there are still perspectives told that are rather accidental, or tell something about the presenter's unsaid motivations, but the most prominent discourses that I have demonstrated here are all created deliberately. What that tells about the organization is their awareness of the power of visual representations. They are able to construct visual artifacts that relate to the selected discourses, and don't really make any sidesteps in the presentation of individuals.

# 8. The photographic power – and the awareness of it

**S**pecifically, my focus was to understand these images on the mind and their meaning on the power of such constructed discourses in the structures of the society. In many cases, the approach of humanitarian photography could be critically described as framing organizational success for Western image reading. With this I am referring to the guided structuring of humanitarian photography for the organization's benefit, constructing a carefully planned view of the actions and outcomes as the 'happy beneficiaries' alongside brand visibility such as logos and other recognizable elements.

The campaign of the ICRC repeats this kind of methodology only in one image, leaving rest of the photographic content to describe the individuals. ICRC's campaign has also stepped away from sensationalism, the need to entertain the donor audience with excessively attention-grabbing and extravagant content (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 11). Instead, we can see fine-tuned representations with details that require careful examination to be exposed. Contrary to shock-value, the campaign operates in subtler emotional layers.

What the campaign doesn't yet reach are the new modes of NGO communication. These channels are now increasingly focused in representing "resilient and self-reliant" recipients of aid in their visual repertoire (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 16), and "re-engaging" people in conflicts by using multiplatform methods, for example a project by Save the Children UK to recreate a destroyed school (Dencik and Allan 2017, 1187). Another example is an interactive video story on infrastructure projects in Colombia by UNOPS, with which I have also worked with in 2017. Social media platforms are also being put to use in the quest of finding new possibilities for visualization (Dencik and Allan 2017, 1187). The aim of these new practices is to find more "human-centered narratives" into the myriad of communicative methods (Dencik and Allan 2017, 1186). The intention of this is to step away from the one-directional storytelling, and at the same time away from the discourses that are defined for 'the

other'. The goal is to allow the space for self-defining narratives. Even though such practices will still need to be critically examined, it is a move forward and to a fairer communication.

As for the readers of the images, in the time of 'fake media' the accuracy and truth-fulness of photos is questioned on an everyday basis when it comes to actual events and happenings. Photographs are scrutinized and analyzed by professionals, but the general audience lacks skills to critically evaluate and investigate what is being presented to them. It is no surprise since the amount and flow of images has so rapidly changed.  The enormous quantity of images that we are witnessing today eradicates the value of the original, leaving us with just a bunch of representations (Price and Wells 2000, 20-21). These are representations that are "up for grabs", open for choosing and refusing, while transforming and structuring our view of the world around us. While self-representation has become almost an art form of its own for constructing the desired reality, the skills for reading images of others have not necessarily developed.

Since my professional career has so far been so heavily influenced by issues relat-ed to the topic of my research, I see that going through the process of researching discourses on migrants has enabled me to have more and more angles from which to look at photographic representations. It brings me to an even more solid realization of the importance of the awareness of power in photography, and all the limitless ways in which we can continue to repeat oppressing visual language – or, to break and restructure it. In my further research, I am interested in examining the discours-es of power, but also of normality: what those are, how they are formed and also what are the discourses of anti-normality (Burr 2015, 82). The power of defining normality is in the hands of the mainstream, just like the power of defining underrepresented groups is in the hands of the overrepresented public.

This research sheds a light on the often unnoticed ways of forming the images of the mind that create what is our understanding of the reality around us. Going forward, what I would like to call for is the responsibility of the presenter; the responsibility of those using visual depictions of people for various purposes, and the responsibility of the reader; the responsibility of the receiver to question the offered representations. The awareness and capability to do more than just repeat the conventional and learned constructions of people should be the goal of each actor working in communication-related contexts. Who do I show this person as? Can I find out something about this person, maybe even ask if they see themselves in the way I have used their visual representation? An image of a person should not be valueless, just like the person it is a visual sign of is not worthless.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Missing Migrants campaign screenshots

ICRC
Presents

# MISSING
### ON THE
## ROAD

The journeys are long and dangerous: across the Mediterranean, the Maghreb, the Central American corridor. People fleeing violence and scarcity, migrating to stay alive just one more day. These stories are just one part of this global issue; they are the stories of those who left to find a better life, but never arrived.

f   y   ☺

*Explore the stories in the words & pictures of migrants & their families*

∨

Share this Story



I

✕

*Instability*

Share this Story



*It is estimated that nearly 500,000 people cross into Mexico from neighbouring countries in Central America every year (UNHCR Mexico Fact Sheet 2017). Different reasons motivate these journeys, but the experiences are often the same.*

Share this Story

# HOME ISN'T SAFE

- - -

Surging gang violence and extortion make looking after a family difficult, regardless of whether you own your business or work as an employee.



Share this Story

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# LACK OF
# OPPORTUNITY,
# POVERTY,
# INSECURITY

- - -

creates uncertainty,
undermines stability -

Share this Story

---



- - -

creates uncertainty,
undermines stability -

_Marsa, hija mia_
_donde quiera que esté_
_piensa que tu mamá_
_te adora y que tú eres_
_especial_

"  _Marsa, my daughter, wherever you are,_
_know that your mother loves you and_
_that you are very special._

Share this Story

## ECONOMY INEQUALITY

puts a strain on families' ability to thrive. In recent years, growing economies have not included everyone, and many families continue to struggle to get by.



Share this Story

## EDUCATION CUT SHORT

Chronic violence is a fixture of everyday life for many. As a result, many children enter adulthood deprived of a meaningful education.



esa es
si caes
por que ca
Aprende A
siempre

Share this Story

## EDUCATION CUT SHORT

Chronic violence is a fixture of everyday life for many. As a result, many children enter adulthood deprived of a meaningful education.

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Family separation is a common cause and consequence of migration. People with relatives living abroad frequently migrate to reunite with their loved ones.



Share this Story

# II

## Departure

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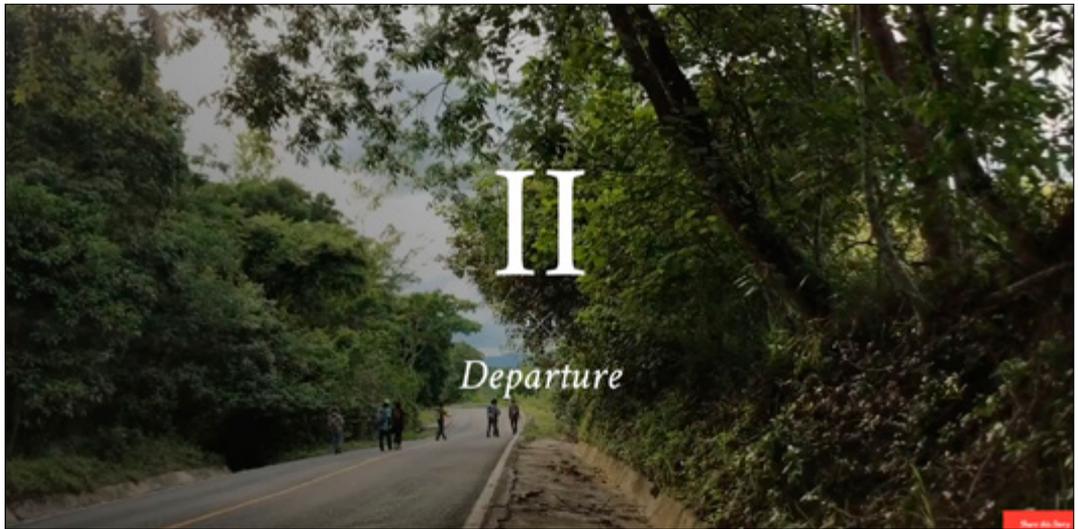


*Whether seeking a better life, steady work, or a little stability and safety, the migrant's vulnerability escalates the moment they depart.*

---
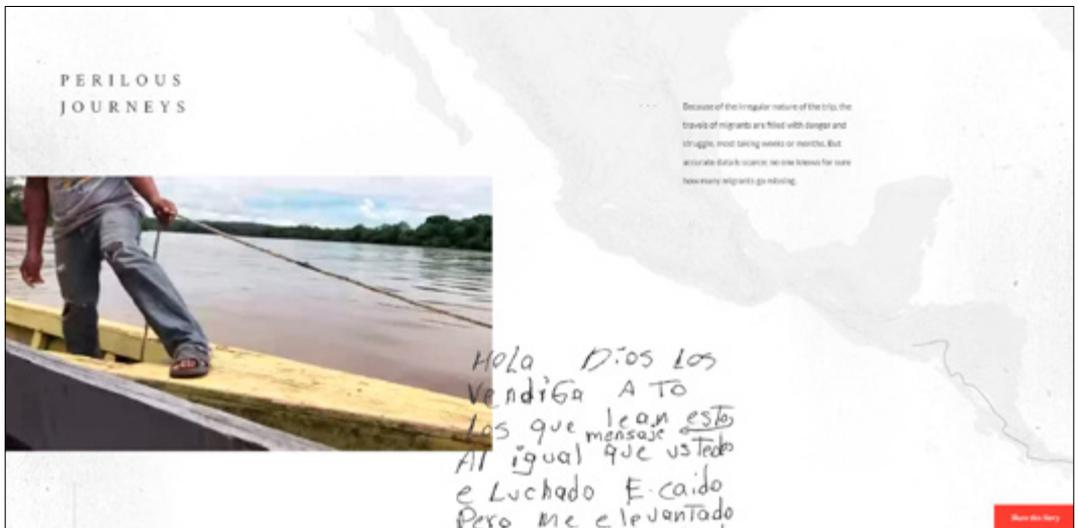
## PERILOUS JOURNEYS

Because of the irregular nature of the trip, the travels of migrants are filled with danger and struggle, most facing weeks or months. But accurate data is scarce; no one knows for sure how many migrants go missing.



HoLa DiOS LoS
VendiGa A To
Los que lean esto
mensaje
Al igual que usTedes
e Luchado E caido
Pero me eleVanTado

## FINANCIAL BURDEN

Many have to take out expensive loans, either from banks or individuals, to pay for the trip. Repayment is based on the hope of finding work and sending money home.



Hno Te amamos muchos
Te esperamos con Todo
Nuestro corazón
Tu madre y tus hermanos
Te queremos Muchooo

> *Brother, we love you very much. Your mother, your brothers and your sisters miss you with all our hearts.*
>
> BORIS YAMILETH MEZA

## INHERITED DEBT

If the person disappears, their family must struggle to repay the loan. Under this debt, businesses and households suffer, often leaving families worse off than before the person left.

## LOSING TOUCH

Migrants often lose contact with their families because of the dangers of the route, their irregular status, or because they lack the means to call their relatives. Losing touch with relatives may increase the risk of going missing and the uncertainty has a psychological toll upon families.



# III

## Migration

Connected to each missing migrant is a family living in uncertainty, not knowing if their loved one is dead or alive. These pictures from Central America are one part of a global story. It is a story woven by a common thread of pain, loss, and unknowing for the families left behind.

Share this Story

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## ALEXANDER

1095 days on the road

*[handwritten Spanish text]*

Alexander 3 años en transito.

My name is Alexander. I come from El Salvador. I've been travelling for a long time. I've been on 14 trains but I haven't suffered as much as others, thanks to to God. I've fallen to my knees and cried with sadness, pain and loneliness. I've been hungry and gone without a drop to drink. I've been cold and faced discrimination and insults, but I've also been helped a lot. Everything you come up against can knock your hope of moving forward.

Share this Story

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## FOFO

52 days on the road

No confies en nadie
Cuidate y cuida a
tus compañeros.
Cooperen para que
logren su cometido
pero sobre todo NO
Te dejes vencer.

Don't trust anyone. Look after yourself and those travelling with you. Work together to achieve your goal. But above all, don't let yourself be defeated.

FOFO 52 Dias internado cancun.

Share this Story

## MARIA DELMY
*4 days on the road*
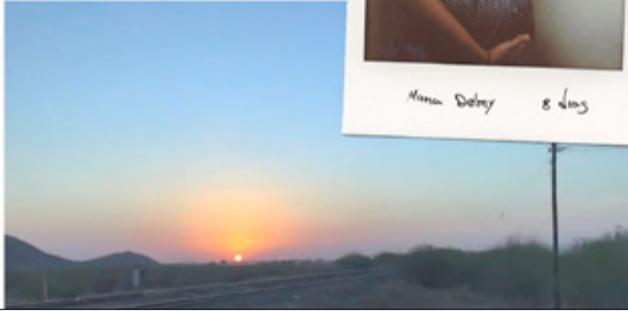


Maria Delmy    8 dias

Bueno en motivo de mi viaje es para poder llegar donde mi familia ya q' es muy importante para mi los extraño mucho pero se que dios nos ayudara para que nos podamos encontrar con nuestra familia, los extraño dejamos nuestras casas para poder llegar nuestra vidas saludables y mejor ya que este camino es muy cansado o agotado pero suerte dios lo hará

> My reason for taking the journey is to reach my family. That's really important to me. I miss them a lot but I know that God will help us get there. We've left our homes to make better and healthier lives for ourselves. The journey is exhausting but God will help us.
>
> –MARIA'S HUSBAND

Share this Story

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## JOHNSON
*4 days on the road*



Johnson y tenemos 4 dias en camino un mucho sufrimiento

Amis Kelido Amigos yo les digo q eneste camino para estados unidos es mui duro yo imis Amigos emos sufrido mucho emos caminado y Aguantado Anbre yse ibAberda estraño mucho Ami Familia en prinsipal Ami ijo xq es el mas es pesial q tengo grasias

> To my dear friends, I'd just like to say that this journey to the United States is very hard. Me and my friends have suffered a lot. We've walked a long way and managed without food or anything to drink. I really miss my family, especially my son. He's the most precious thing I have.

Share this Story

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## JORGE
*4 days on the road*



4 días de camino

... sali de ... unico ... e este ... para valientes ... e echorle ganas es un camino duro pero con la fe en Dios todo es posible sigamos adelante

> All I can say is that you need to be brave on this journey and willing to go through all the effort. It's a tough road, but your faith in God will keep you going.

Share this Story

*My gorgeous mother, I know that you miss me
but don't worry. I'm fine. And to all of my
friends who still want to make the journey, I'd
like to say that it's very tough. You'll be hungry,
won't sleep and sometimes get attacked.*

madresita bella se quere
extrañas pero no te
piocupes estoi bien y para
mis amigos que todavia
estan queriendo aser viaje
los mando desir en
este mensaje que este
camino es muy dayo
se sofre anbre desbelo
aves asaltos

Juan Antonio 7 días

---

PRUDENCIO
*40 days on the road*

*My fellow Hondurans, my name is Prudencio. Before deciding
to leave our country, think hard. For me, this is the third time
I've made this journey and it's not easy at all. You suffer a lot.
There are moments of joy and moments of suffering, in my
experience. I would say don't do it because it's very difficult.
There are thieves everywhere. I will leave you with this message.
Prudencio Moncalado, Honduras.*

os Hondoreños mi nombre
dencio antes de que kieran
la nuesgro País Piensen
e yo ya es mi terara ves
urando y este camino
es nada facil veniren
Men se sofre mucho
omentos de alegria y
momentos de sufrimiento
y yo que lo e vivido no

Prudencio 40 días

---

# IV
*Disappearances*

Migrants are considered missing when families cannot establish contact. They may be alive but are detained without access to communication, or they take risky routes and their remains are never found or identified. Migrants or their families may also choose not to seek help for fear of the risks it may bring.

People who pass away along migration routes are sometimes buried without identification or registry, making it difficult for authorities to trace them and for families to be informed of the fate or whereabouts of their missing relatives.

Share this Story

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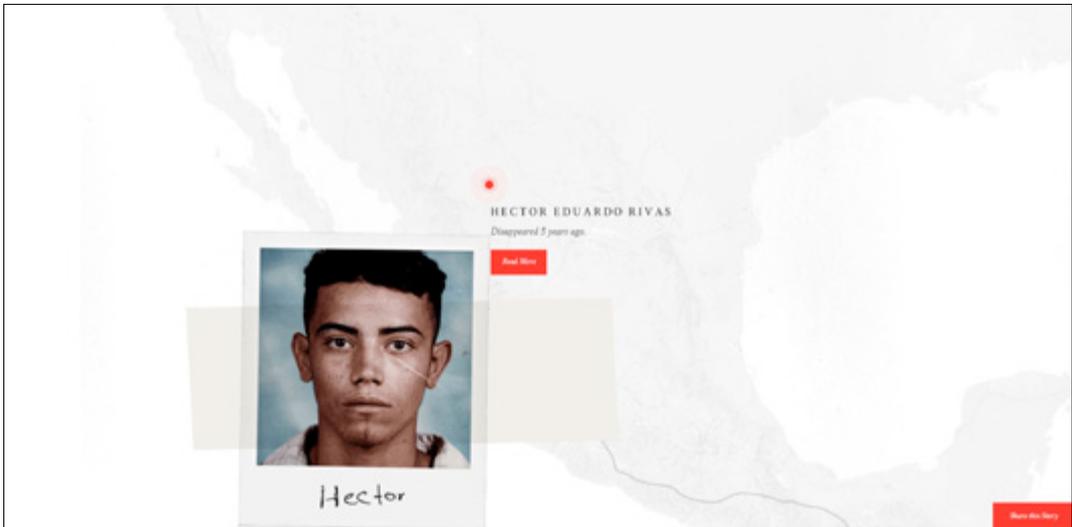
HECTOR EDUARDO RIVAS

*Disappeared 5 years ago.*

Read More

Hector

Share this Story

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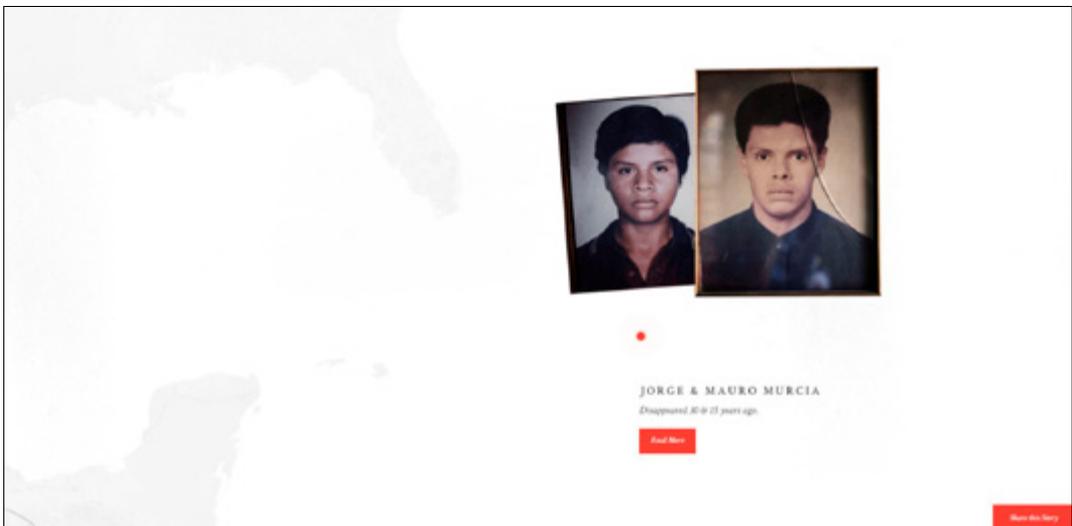
JORGE & MAURO MURCIA

*Disappeared 10 & 15 years ago.*

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MARVIN LEONEL MEZA
Disappeared 28 years ago

Hno te amamos muchos
Te esperamos con Todo
Nuestro corazón
Tu m... y tus hermanos
T... Muchooo

Brother, we love you very much. Your mother, your brothers and your sisters miss you with all our hearts.
DORIS MEZA (SISTER)





ISAIAS HERNANDEZ BENITEZ
Disappeared 25 years ago

Isaias Hernandez Benitez
des soparesio ase $5...

alga tu
Esperan
tus 2 H.
Sorre qu
mucho
Zendig
Incul
ADio
pronto

olga tus Hijos ti
Esperan Pronto con
tus 2 Hisitos Dios
Sabe que te quiero
mucho Dios ti
Vendigo Dande ti
Incuentre
ADios Hija mia
Pronto ti Velo

OLGA EDELMIRA
ROMERO MEDINA
*Disappeared 8 years ago*

Read More

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desaparesio en 2011

BALVINO XINICO XICAY
*Disappeared 6 years and 4 months ago*

Read More

Balvino xinico xicay
el tube comunicasion con el
el 28 de marzo ya no sabemos
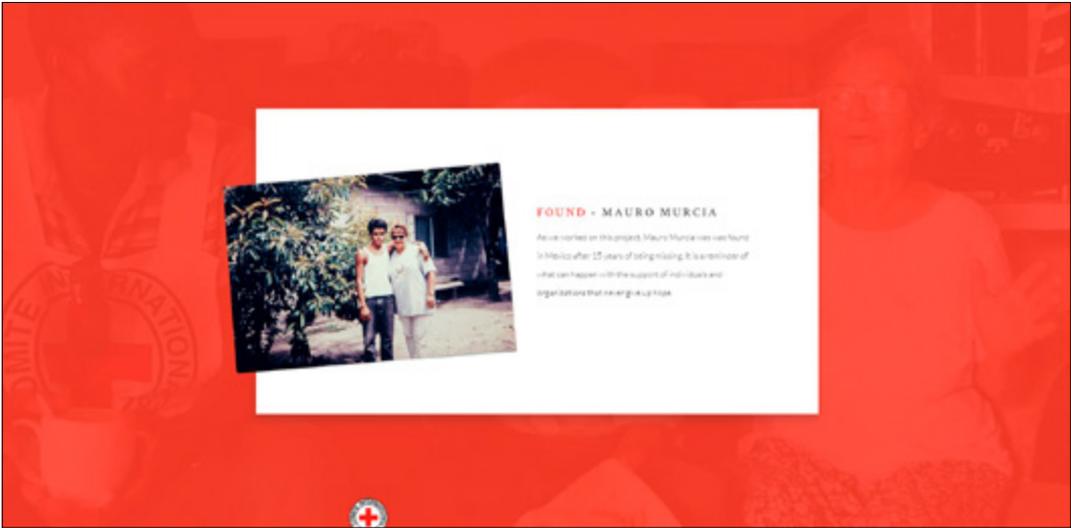nada de el

Share this Story



SALOME OXLAS CARRIO
*Missing 12 years, 3 months*

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Te extrañamos papá como
quisiera que tu estubieras
con nosotros papa pero
no sabemos nada de ti
ojala que estas vivo o que
sabemos algo de ti estariamos
orguyoso y que mi hermana y
esta grande y yo igual te
extrañamos mucho.

Share this Story

*What support is there for these families?*

Scroll to find out



**V**

*Support & Restoration*



FOUND - MAURO MURCIA

## ICRC

*As a humanitarian organization, the ICRC doesn't differentiate between the reasons why people leave their homes. What concerns us is their vulnerability once they do.*

*And so we work to help migrants become less vulnerable—through mobile medical clinics or even just a phone call home for reassurance. We work to bring families together.*

*And when someone goes missing, we do our best to find out what happened—and to bring them home. Because finding out the fate, the story, of the missing is a humanitarian act.*

Learn more about missing migrants

## *Share This Story*

HELP SPREAD AWARENESS

# Appendix 2: Example of one analysis



| Basic description of the image | A school picture of a girl |
|---|---|
| DENOTATIVE LAYER | |
| What is in the image? | A girl is posing in a formal dress and hairdo, wearing a white ribbon across her dress. |
| What is happening in the image? | A girl is looking slightly away from the camera, or doesn't notice being photographed. She has a serious face and is looking straight in front of her. |
| Who is in the image? | In the image is a high school-aged girl, dressend in formal dress, makeup and hairdo. She's approximately 16 years old. She's wearing a white ribbon across her chest, and we can read the words "MADRINA" printed on it. |
| Where is the image located? | It's not possible to identify the location, but possibly in a school event or other official event. We can see a blurry form of another person behind her, which suggests that there is probably more people around her as well. |
| What is the text that is placed in proximity of the image? | The text explains some of the reasons for migrants to leave their home. Below her image there is also a hand-written note in Spanish and translated to English in normal font. |
| What is written in the text? | "LACK OF OPPORTUNITY, POVERTY, INSECURITY<br><br>...creates uncertainty, undermines stability…<br><br>Mersa, my daughter, wherever you are, know that your mother loves you and that you are very special." |

| | |
|---|---|
| What elements are used in connection with the person? | A formal dress, earrings, a white silk ribbon going over her shoulder and across her chest, formal hairdo and makeup, blurry shapes of people behind the girl. |

**CONNOTATIVE LAYER**

| | |
|---|---|
| What does the image resemble? | The image resembles a formal school party, such as graduation or ball. The picture is worn-out and the dress is old in its style, so it suggests that this image is quite old. Maybe it's a picture that a parent has taken in a school event, however the girl seems a bit nervous and uncomfortable in the whole setting. |
| What kind of identity is constructed of the person? Which elements create the identity? | A high-school girl who was selected to represent some category or picked for some reason to wear this ribbon. She is serious, and doesn't seem to enjoy the attention or the general setting of the event. Her facial expression gives out the insecurity of a young person. |
| What kind of mood or athmosphere is in the image? Which elements create it? | The setting for this image seems to be a formal school party where this girl has had to dress up and wear makeup, perhaps a graduation party. She looks serious and concerned, and is focused on posing with a neutral face. |

**RHETORIC LAYER**

| | |
|---|---|
| What abstract idea, concept or message is the image representing? How does the image attempt to persuade the viewer of the representation? | The past, the memories, the future that one can see in front of them when graduating from school. The image is a representation of the past and history of those who now face difficulties in their life. A school photo like this has a ambience of a promising future, but in the context of the general setting we come to understand that this hope has disappeared for this girl – and for many like her. <br><br> The representation of the future that has vanished in front of the person. |

**DISCURSIVE LAYER**

| | |
|---|---|
| To which discourses do these representations link to? | The memories, lost opportunities, the prosperous future that once existed, longing for one's child and the future they once had. |
| What is the discourse on identity? | The girl is a representation of the past and the hope it withheld at the time. She's the youth with a hope, but in the context of the text and the general setting of the page we turn to look at her lost opportunities. It implies that there was once hope, but not anymore – and that it is not the migrants own choice to have lost this hope. The lost hope could be portrayed in a different manner, but the campaign mostly portrays the loss in the future through portraying the belief in the future in the past, and underlining the connection to the current situation where it no longer exists. <br><br> The lost future of a migrant. The promising youth, the promises of the future in the past. The migrants as people who thought the future can carry them and are now in a completely different situation. The transformation of hope to despair. |
| Which representations construct the discourse(s) on identity? | The worn-out photo of a positive memory in the past. The expectations for the future that exists in the connection with graduation parties or school events. The concept of the bright future that one can hope for the young people. The faded-out memory of a future that tragically transformed into dangerous migrant journeys. |

# Appendix 3: List of images