Borders, Bordering, and Irregular Migration in Novels by Dorothee Elmiger and Olga Grjasnowa

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BORDERS, BORDERING, AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN NOVELS BY DOROTHEE ELMIGER AND OLGA GRJASNOWA

This article analyses two recent German-language novels which explore in complementary ways the complexity of borders and the experience of irregular border crossing.[1] Dorothee Elmiger's *Schlafgänger* and Olga Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* offer socio-political, anthropological, psychological, and poetic perspectives on the function of borders in the twenty-first century.[2] Elmiger's experimental text addresses this issue through a polyphonic narrative which fills the border space with a kaleidoscope of stories that outline how different bodies experience, cross, and perform borders. By connecting different real and fictional border spaces and bordering processes, *Schlafgänger* redraws border lines and creates a new inclusive geography of the border that emphasizes variation and simultaneity. This focus on the dynamic process of connection can also be seen in its attempts to identify a better and more heterogeneous working model for social coexistence than a fortress mentality. In contrast to Elmiger's broad perspective, Grjasnowa homes in on the Syrian experience of civil war and flight to Europe, outlining how it unmakes and remakes identities and biographies. *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* centres on two middle-class professionals who end up illegally crossing borders and fleeing to Germany. While geopolitical borders are shown to be porous, the other bordering processes that these figures encounter prove more impermeable. By exploring the experience of microgeographies of bordering, the novel shows how, in crossing borders, the refugees become what Julia Schulze Wessel calls 'Grenzfiguren *par excellence*'. As 'Grenzgestalter, Grenzverletzer, Grenzbewohner und Grenzpersonen',[3] they carry the border with them after they have crossed the territorial line, effectively extending the border zone.

Borders are understood here as both territorial and non-territorial constructs that encompass geopolitical as well as socio-cultural, ethnic, and metaphorical boundaries (or borders).[4] This draws on the growing field of

[1] This term is used throughout to describe a form of unauthorized mobility which differs from authorized mobility by regular routes. The category includes people on the move who may meet the criteria for refugee status in the narrow sense of the 1951 Refugee Convention and others who may have to move for other reasons, e.g. economic or environmental.

[2] Dorothee Elmiger, *Schlafgänger* (Cologne: Dumont, 2014), and Olga Grjasnowa, *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2017). Further references to these novels will be included in parenthesis in the main body of the text using the following abbreviations: Elmiger's *Schlafgänger* will be denoted by 'S' and Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* by the abbreviation 'Gins'.

[3] Julia Schulze Wessel, *Grenzfiguren: Zur politischen Theorie des Flüchtlings* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), p. 88.

[4] This is in line with David Newman's understanding of borders: 'All forms of social and spatial categorisation and compartmentalisation constitute discrete entities, wherein the points at which

border studies and moves beyond a purely spatial framework to explore representations of social and political forms of ordering society. Since the 1990s, territorial transformation, the rise of nationalism, and the revival of ethno-regional movements have led to an increased interest in borders as an academic subject.[5] This interest has grown exponentially since 2015–16, when the sharp rise in the number of people trying to enter the European Union in search of refuge and protection from war, violence, and persecution led to a 'European refugee reception crisis'.[6] This crisis polarized public discourse and put borders and border controls back on the EU political agenda, challenging utopian imaginings of a borderless Europe which had been promoted at the end of the Cold War. Although borders had seemed to become less visible after the Schengen Agreement abolished checks on movement at internal borders,[7] in 2015 identity checks and controls began to resurface in the Schengen Area (for example, at the German–Austrian border) in order to prevent unwanted arrivals. According to Nicholas De Genova, the number of refugees arriving was strategically deployed to reconfigure the tactics and techniques of border policing and immigration and asylum law enforcement in the EU.[8] But it also generated other borders 'in Form von gesamtgesellschaftlichen Belastungs-grenzen, jene der Integrierbarkeit' and 'Grenzen der Aufnahmekapazitäten der sozialen Systeme der "Gastländer"'.[9]

In their concentration on securitization, hardening the external borders of the European Union supranational state (and of the nation states involved), and outsourcing border controls to key transit countries, EU attitudes seem

the entities begin or end, or undergo change, are defined by some form of border—be it visible or abstract' ('Territory, Compartments and Borders: Avoiding the Trap of the Territorial Trap', *Geopolitics*, 15 (2010), 773–78 (pp. 773–74)).

[5] David Newman and Anssi Paasi, 'Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, 22 (1998), 186–207 (pp. 186–87).

[6] Karina Horsti refuses to use the popular description of a 'European refugee crisis' as this suggests that the problem is caused by the refugees. Instead, she argues that this was a crisis caused by how they were received ('Introduction: Border Memories', in *The Politics of Public Memories of Forced Migration and Bordering in Europe*, ed. by Karina Horsti (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 1–14 (p. 3)). This term is also used in Andrea Rea and others, *The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe: Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2019).

[7] This treaty led to the creation of the Schengen Area in 1985, but it was supplemented by a further Schengen Convention in 1990. The main aim of Schengen was to abolish checks at internal borders in the Schengen area for member states; these were transferred instead to the external boundaries. Schengen was also supposed to foster enhanced co-operation in asylum and immigration policy, policing, and information exchange. For a detailed analysis of Schengen see William Walters, 'Mapping Schengenland: Denaturalising the Border', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (2000), 561–80.

[8] Nicholas De Genova, 'Introduction: The Borders of "Europe" and the European Question', in *The Borders of Europe: Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, ed. by Nicholas De Genova (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 1–36 (p. 4).

[9] Rüdiger Görner, 'Arbeit an Grenzen', *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Germanistik*, 7 (2016), 183–91 (p. 183).

to centre on imaginaries of the border as a territorial line which can be blocked up to prevent unwanted movement. However, since the early twenty-first century, border studies research has been moving away from 'labelling borders as territorial dividing lines to interpreting borders as socio-cultural practices, experiences and discourses'.[10] This has radically altered how we understand borders by drawing attention to the 'increasingly complex technical and ideological processes and institutions that states mobilise to contain flows, not least of all mobile people'.[11] Multifaceted and polysemic,[12] borders are erected and maintained through acts of differentiation (bordering) that take place in multiple locations within and beyond the state's territory.[13] This extension of the realm of the border as a space in its own right is encapsulated by the concept of the 'borderscape'. A portmanteau of landscape and border, the borderscape offers an alternative border imaginary which reflects how borders operate beyond the territorial line in ways which shape the border area.[14] Borderscapes are fluid and relational sites of social and cultural interaction where the border is in a 'constant state of coming into being'.[15] The border emerges and is performed and perceived differently, depending on who encounters it and why.

According to Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe, figural representations are central aspects in border formation. They not only represent the borderscape but, as Johan Schimanski shows, they also engage in borderscaping in the sense that they actively attempt to modify it.[16] Located at the intersection of politics, culture, and aesthetics, fictional border narratives offer a particularly productive space for studying border experiences, because, as David Newman notes, 'It is at the level of narrative, anecdote and communication that borders come to life.'[17] Through storytelling, external and internal borders are made visible, border experiences become comprehensible, and

[10] Søren Tinning and Anthony Cooper, 'Introduction', in *Debating and Defining Borders*, ed. by Anthony Cooper and Søren Tinning (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 1–12 (p. 3).

[11] Anssi Paasi, Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola, Jarkko Saarinen, and Kaj Zimmerbauer, 'Introduction: Borders, Ethics, Mobilities', in *Borderless Worlds for Whom?* ed. by Anssi Paasi and others (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1–18 (p. 2).

[12] Harald Bauder, 'Toward a Critical Geography of the Border: Engaging the Dialectic of Practice and Meaning', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 101 (2011), 1126–39 (p. 1128).

[13] Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, 'Bordering, Ordering and Othering', *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 93 (2002), 125–36 (p. 126).

[14] For an extended explanation of this concept see Elena Dell'Agnese and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, 'Introduction: From Border Landscapes to Border Aesthetics', *Geopolitics*, 20 (2015), 4–13, and Chiara Brambilla, 'Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept', *Geopolitics*, 20 (2015), 14–34.

[15] Anke Strüver, 'Europeanization in Cypriot Borderscapes: Experiencing the Green Line in Everyday Life', *Geopolitics*, 25 (2018), 609–32 (p. 612) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1550390>.

[16] Johan Schimanski, 'Border Aesthetics and Cultural Distancing in the Norwegian–Russian Borderscape', *Geopolitics*, 20 (2015), 35–55 (p. 43).

[17] David Newman, 'The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in Our "Borderless World"',

readers can gain access to multiple perspectives, helping them to remap their border imaginary. This is political, as Dieter Lamping shows, and the border has been the topic of many twentieth-century German-language novels, especially after Germany's division.[18] However, there is also a new wave of border narratives that respond to the problems of the present and critically explore borders and the effects of irregular border crossing and exclusionary border policies in the twenty-first century.[19] Recent examples include Benjamin von Wyl's critical Swiss Heimat novel *Land ganz nah* (2017), Max Annas's dystopian *Finsterwalde* (2018), Timur Vermes's political satire *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (2018), and Saša Stanišić's *Herkunft* (2019).[20] In the two novels under discussion, borders affect migrants *and* non-migrants. While Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* concentrates on what it means for migrants to cross borders, Elmiger's text also explores how communities can be changed by border crossers.

In her study of representations of asylum in Britain, Agnes Woolley identifies an emerging tendency in narratives of asylum to reflect critically on how far the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers are actually communicable.[21] This insight can easily be extended to representations of irregular border crossers more broadly, as these also generate discussions about the ethical and aesthetic problems of *who* speaks about crossing borders and *how*.[22] In *Schlafgänger*, Elmiger reflects self-consciously on problems

in *Border Poetics De-limited*, ed. by Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe (Saarbrücken: Wehrhahn, 2007), pp. 27–57 (p. 41).

[18] In *Über Grenzen*, Dieter Lamping notes German literature's concern with borders in the twentieth century. He gives examples of texts about borders and border regions such as René Schickele's *Das Erbe am Rhein* trilogy (1925–31), as well as works which concentrate on fleeing across geopolitical borders during National Socialism. Examples here include Anna Seghers's *Transit* (1944) and Hans Sahl's *Die Wenigen und die Vielen* (1959). The German–German border has also been at the centre of numerous works, such as Uwe Johnson's *Das dritte Buch über Achim* (1961), Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), Peter Schneider's *Der Mauerspringer* (1982), and Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld* (1995). See Dieter Lamping, *Über Grenzen: Eine literarische Topografie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2001), pp. 9–10.

[19] Christian Petzold's *Transit* (Piffl Medien, 2018) shows that these problems are not new. Based on Anna Seghers's novel about fleeing National Socialism, the film places Seghers's characters in Marseille in an undeterminable time that seems closer to the present than the past. It focuses on the experience of waiting and of negotiating an unwieldy bureaucracy designed to keep people out. Interweaving the past and the present emphasizes continuities in the insecurities that contemporary refugees and asylum seekers face, despite the 1951 Refugee Convention.

[20] Benjamin von Wyl, *Land ganz nah: Ein Heimatroman* (Göttingen: Lector, 2017); Max Annas, *Finsterwalde* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2018); Timur Vermes, *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (Cologne: Eichborn, 2018); Saša Stanišić, *Herkunft* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2019).

[21] Agnes Woolley, *Contemporary Asylum Narratives: Representing Refugees in the Twenty-First Century* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 3.

[22] The critical reception of Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, ging, gegangen* offers a recent example of this. See e.g. Nicholas Courtman, 'Seeing the Human in the (Queer) Migrant in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, ging, gegangen* and Terezia Mora's *Alle Tage*', in *Edinburgh German Yearbook 10: Queering German Culture*, ed. by Leanne Dawson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2018), pp. 153–76. For

of representation and the limitations of language and perspective. Here, the titular 'Schlafgänger', the twenty-first-century irregular border crossers, are not given their own voice. Instead, their experiences are woven in by other characters. Their voicelessness expresses an incommunicability, but the novel also tries to find an alternative way of making the impact of borders comprehensible through the image of falling, which will be explored in the following. In comparison to *Schlafgänger*, *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* is a more straightforward narrative. The experiences of Amal and Hammoudi are relayed in the third person, but the novel offers another perspective by including three maps, positioned at the beginning of each of the novel's sections. These offer a perspective on borders that is simultaneously alternative and complementary to the plot. As codified representations of a limited area of the world, maps are an essential tool of the border-making process as they help to make borders recognizable. By placing the maps in dialogue with each other, Grjasnowa emphasizes that maps are authored and can be altered.

In their representations of borders and bordering, both novels adopt what Chiara Brambilla calls a 'double gaze', a dual perspective which allows them to negotiate the 'big stories' of nation-state construction alongside smaller personal stories.[23] This double gaze shows that the political is personal and vice versa. By highlighting the porosity of borders, including the highly securitized US–Mexico border, Elmiger tries to undermine populist calls for a hardening of Swiss borders, which have been gaining ground with the increasing popularity of the Swiss People's Party (SVP).[24] Grjasnowa slows down the story of traversing and getting stuck in borderscapes. By keeping her gaze firmly on those crossing borders (and not on the impact of their arrival on the host society), she forces readers into a close encounter with the other. As Shameem Black highlights in her reflections on the political potential of border-crossing fiction, 'novels cannot bring about new and enduring solidarity by themselves', but by representing the lives of others across social borders, they can envision expansive forms of public cultures, which means that 'they may still work to enlarge their readers' horizons of possibility'.[25]

alternative readings, see Anne Fuchs, *Precarious Times: Temporality and History in Modern German Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 231–52, and Christiane Steckenbiller, 'Futurity, Aging, and Personal Crises: Writing about Refugees in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, ging, gegangen*' (2015) and Bodo Kirchhoff's *Widerfahrnis* (2016)', *German Quarterly*, 92 (2019), 68–86.

[23] Brambilla, p. 25.

[24] See Alan Robinson for a good account of the relationship between Elmiger's writing and Swiss domestic politics: '"Ein Land der Anwesenden": Dorothee Elmiger's Political Engagement with Switzerland', *German Life and Letters*, 69 (2016), 387–401.

[25] Shameem Black, *Fiction across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late-Twentieth-Century Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 253.

Falling for the 'Schlafgänger': Borders, Bordering, and the Stories of Others

Dorothee Elmiger's *Schlafgänger* is an example of fiction which crosses borders at the level of content and form. In its exploration of different kinds of borders, the novel stretches the term to encompass the borders between political, but also physical and mental, states. By linking the geopolitical borders of Switzerland and the US border in southern California with the thresholds between wakefulness and sleep, reality and nightmare, mental wellbeing and instability, and falling and not falling, Elmiger creates a complex architecture of connection which tries to apprehend border crossing by making it, and its transformational and destructive effects, visible. This analysis focuses on how Elmiger engages with the challenges of representing borders and border crossing and argues that *Schlafgänger* finds a way of illuminating the violence of the border while simultaneously allowing the experience of illegal border crossing to remain fundamentally unrepresentable.

Unlike *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, which depicts stories of departure and (non-)arrivals through a trajectory of flight, *Schlafgänger* breaks away from accepted ideas of plot and adopts a more experimental form. It is set largely around a table in an unspecified location and narrates an ongoing conversation between eleven discussants.[26] Only some of these are named—Esther, Herr and Frau Boll, their son Fortunat, and A. L. Erika. Others are referred to by their profession or location, emphasizing their social function—the Journalist, the Logistician, the Writer and the Student from Glendale. Winnie, the American translator, spans both categories. In the absence of a unifying plot, the topics of their conversation—which include sleep and sleeplessness, mass movement and borders—and their relationships take centre stage. Personal links between the characters are revealed over the course of the novel and narrated at a remove. The Logistician and Winnie met and lived together briefly in Basel before she had to return to the US; she translates works by the Writer and knows A. L. Erika. The latter, the Writer, and the Student from Glendale all met at a US conference on falling. A. L. Erika appears to be fascinated by the Writer, but this does not seem to be reciprocated. Esther is the Logistician's sister and she is married to John, a violist from Brazil who lives in Switzerland. Esther and the Logistician both know the Journalist, who is reviewing the works of the Writer. While the Bolls form a separate unit here, they have geographical connections to the US through their family history of emigration.

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[26] As Alan Robinson notes (pp. 397–98), this is a structural device which Elmiger had already tested in her 2010 text 'Die Anwesenden', which was published in *NZZ Folio*; here, the characters come together in Elfi Baum's flat and talk about their surroundings and what they have observed. It may also be inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In its heavy reliance on random assemblage and juxtaposition, *Schlafgänger* also seems to be influenced by the style of Walt Whitman's poem 'The Sleepers', which is referenced in the novel.

Despite these personal links, or perhaps even because of them, the conversation between the discussants is often cooled down and stilted. Interpersonal boundaries stay largely in place, and where pockets of intimacy arise, for example when the Student from Glendale reads Walt Whitman's poems to A. L. Erika one night, they are narrated from an external perspective, in this case by the Writer, who is kept awake by the noise (*S*, p. 14). Rather than a dialogue, the conversation consists of a series of short monologues with thematic echoes which do not generally prompt an emotional reaction from the listeners. Nonetheless, the narrative form seems to be deliberately calibrated to demonstrate a way of possibly overcoming interpersonal divisions and boundaries.

In the novel, themes, imaginings, and experiential moments are introduced and dropped, then later picked up, expanded, and retold, sometimes by other interlocutors.[27] This polyvocal co-telling has three main effects. (1) It helps to forge chains of connection and association and (2) it allows different versions of events and perspectives to coexist without resolving any ambivalences. (3) In joining together to tell their stories, the conversation partners form a microcosmic community in which every story and each retelling has a role to play. Their ability to pick up conversational threads and repeat narrative elements introduced by other characters suggests at least a basic interest in their stories. The narrative form thus seems to represent an attempt to translate the Journalist's conclusion that 'es nicht darum gehe, vorzugeben, man könne sich vorstellen, was andere erlebten oder fühlten, es gehe aber mit Sicherheit darum, sich genau dafür zu interessieren' (*S*, p. 125) into a structural principle.

Schlafgänger tries to understand borders by moving beyond what Chris Rumford calls 'seeing like a state', a form of seeing that analyses borders in terms of state sovereignty and security, in order to begin to see 'like a border'.[28] In this refocused mode of seeing, borders are explored where they arise through a mix of perspectives to show their polysemy. Territorial boundaries in the US and Europe are visited and described by tourists and residents with the right credentials who are unaffected by their work. Stories of real and imagined, legal and illegal border crossings are aligned so that impersonal

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[27] For example, Bernardo's opening question from Hamlet—'Who's there?'—is repeated by different characters throughout the novel. Playing with language and identity, Winnie used to ask this question when the Logistician came home from work while she was staying with him in Basel (*S*, p. 21). It is then echoed by different characters in the narrative present (*S*, pp. 21 and 106), sometimes to coincide with the arrival of a new conversation partner (*S*, p. 55), but also perhaps to draw attention to a felt disturbance by an unseen and unsettling presence. In this way, the question seems also to apply to the shadowy figures that cross the border, who remain unnamed and storyless.

[28] Chris Rumford, '"Seeing like a Border": Towards Multiperspectivalism', *Cosmopolitan Borders* (2014), 39–54.

images of clandestine crossings caught on thermal cameras are supplemented with fearful descriptions of risky journeys and camping in forests at night (*S*, pp. 41–42 and 15). These are juxtaposed with more comfortable tales of cross-border train travel by so-called trusted travellers. Borders are monitored by guards and transgressed by shadowy, storyless figures of unknown ethnicity who cannot cross legally. Meanwhile savvy Swiss shoppers engage in every-day acts of smuggling across the border to secure better deals, while others capitalize on the opportunity of the border by smuggling in illegal goods in the cavities of their bodies. These bodies have borders which are violated in the name of national security (*S*, p. 17). State violence against foreign bodies finds its distorted echo in the Journalist's stories of irregular border crossers who attempt to avoid identification by etching away their fingerprints. This destructive act in turn generates a reactive shift in bordering practices as fingerprinting is delayed until the skin regrows. By taking into account the position of those at, on, or shaping the border, Elmiger unfolds this as a complex and relational space which can never be fully open, nor fully closed.

The novel also shows that borders have consequences for the everyday life of migrants *and* Swiss citizens, even if their mobility is not affected by them. The story of Esther's husband, John, illustrates how the border can travel to appear where he is. As he looks different to the Swiss white ideal of belonging, John is regularly singled out and asked to verify his credentials. This lived reality contaminates Esther's own sense of belonging in Switzerland by feeding her fears that John may be continually at risk and they may be better off elsewhere. The Journalist and the Logistician are also unsettled by the effects of borders. Living at the border and working in sea imports, the Logistician is unable to maintain his own boundaries and ends up overwhelmed by the injustice of border control systems which allow some goods, animals, and people to travel freely while others are grounded or blocked. This leads to a form of nervous exhaustion, generating a different kind of border crossing between mental states. It is the Journalist, however, whose comments, recalled by the Logistician, draw attention to the impact of the creeping tactics of bordering on the Swiss social fabric. Co-opted into the everyday surveillance and poli-cing of others, civilians are encouraged to report begging on trains (*S*, p. 140) and telephone a Securitas hotline if asylum seekers housed in a residential area are too close to their homes. In both cases, this will result in removal of the offenders from the public sphere: 'und dann werden die abgeholt' (*S*, p. 139). As Alan Robinson notes, the historical associations with other forms of othering that this phrase evokes are left without comment.[29] However, the Journalist connects this behavioural pattern to an excessive desire for public order which leads pedestrians to chastise him for his slow pace (*S*, p. 138)

[29] Robinson, p. 406.

or for cycling in a pedestrian area (*S*, p. 140). This behaviour is described in universal terms: 'es werde mit Verachtung nach unten getreten, es werde nur mit Missgunst in die Welt geschaut' (*S*, p. 140). While this may be an overly general simplification, it does flag up that alternative forms of social coexistence are needed. The stories of border transgression, control, and personal violation unsettle the status of the border as a line of security and protection, interrupting and defacing 'the apparently smooth and seamless surface of certainty and securability and make it appear uncertain, fraught and difficult'.[30] Rather than its resolution, border security and control are shown to be part of the border problem.

Despite the polyphony of the text, irregular border crossers are not given their own voice to describe their experiences of crossing the border; they remain silent, fugitive figures with 'flüchtige Existenzen' (*S*, p. 67). Where their stories do feature, they are folded into the narrative by the discussants in a form of inclusion, even though their own voices are absent.[31] This form of what Annemarie Mol and John Law call 'exclusive inclusion' is not without its dangers, as A. L. Erika's experiences at the US–Mexico border show. While there, her interest in border stories leads her to imagine illegal border crossings. She pictures dancers at a disco crossing deserts and smuggling drugs (*S*, pp. 34–35) and repeats the same thought crime with Christopher, a shop worker from Mexicali. Rather than asking about his background, she transports him in her thoughts into a dangerous border crossing and imagines the outline of his body showing up on a thermal camera (*S*, p. 37). Instead of fostering an understanding of, or an empathetic connection with, the experiences of these figures, her curiosity about their status creates a titillating imaginary spectacle and reinforces the asymmetrical power relations that marginalize foreigners whom she imaginatively takes possession of and illegalizes, if only briefly.

The titular 'Schlafgänger' lead an even more shadowy existence. They occupy the Logistician's home, and it is unclear whether they are real or simply a manifestation of his crisis. By calling them 'Schlafgänger' (*S*, p. 86) he associates them with a Swiss domestic history of movement and marks them apart from the 'Grenzgänger' who can move freely across borders without being affected by them. The renaming links these twenty-first-century irregular migrants with nineteenth-century Swiss provincial workers who had to rent temporary beds in private houses until urban housing provision caught

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[30] Louise Amoore and Alexandra Hall, 'Border Theatre: On the Arts of Security and Resistance', *Cultural Geography*, 17 (2010), 299–318.

[31] See e.g. the telephone call between the Journalist and the Logistician, during which the former recounts a newspaper story about people who etch away their fingertips to avoid identification in detention centres; the Logistician imagines Achidi John telling the story of his arrival in Hamburg (but notably not why he was smuggling drugs) after he read about his death in the newspaper (*S*, pp. 17–18).

up with the needs of the labour market. It recasts them as potential workers whose position is precarious. Even their resting place is temporary, and they might be suspected of being 'Schläfer'. It also creates a new chain of association. In their need for rest, the irregular border crossers are connected to wider humanity, as sleep functions throughout as a leveller (*S*, p. 9). The similarity to the term 'Schlafwandler' connects them with the Logistician, who, suffering from nervous exhaustion and sleeplessness, finds himself wakefully sleepwalking through, and unable to relate to, his environment (*S*, p. 12). They unsettle the Logistician and prevent him from sleeping, but his sleeplessness prolongs their presence, which he finds oddly reassuring.

In its attempts to articulate the border, *Schlafgänger* draws on a multi-locational repository of border sites which is co-created by the discussants. Real locations where different characters reside (Basel, St Gallen, and Los Angeles) are brought into conversation with spaces from a fictitious travelogue by Bebi Suso which Fortunat and the Writer have read, and the fantasies of place sketched by some of the characters using the recurring phrase 'Der Ort, an den ich denke' (*S*, pp. 7, 13, 27, 35, 41, 43, 103, 127, 135). This leads to a new temporal and spatial geography of the border. Geopolitical and socio-cultural borders with different degrees of softness and hardness in Switzerland and the US are connected with tales of natural borders and descriptions of inhospitable places and landscapes such as deserts, seas, and thick forests that are difficult to traverse.[32] These stories of place move the *where* of the border so that it is not just connected to the edges of the nation or to walls and fences, but to other obstacles to mobility. In Herr Boll's fantasy of place, for example, the forest makes orientation difficult because 'der Wald breitet sich in jede Richtung weiterhin aus, und der Mann hat keinen Plan für diesen Fall, und jeder Baum, den er hinter sich lässt, pflanzt sich vor ihm scheinbar wieder auf' (*S*, p. 41).[33]

The novel also tries to apprehend what it means to cross a border by juxtaposing different kinds of borders between states. On the one hand, this

[32] The descriptions of the highly securitized US–Mexico border by A. L. Erika, the Writer, and Fortunat reframe proposals to strengthen Swiss border policies in order to stop unwanted migration flows. Their stories show the limitations of increased surveillance and controls in stopping irregular traffic, which is simply rerouted along new and riskier paths.

[33] Through these stories, Elmiger outlines different facets of the border. Fortunat's story of place shows how the border has a filtering function, which means that it appears for some and not for others. Initially focusing on a ferry, the *Ikaros*, which travels from Venice to Patros (*S*, p. 135), he then tells the story of Icarus, who drowned when he flew too close to the sun. The spectacle of his inability to cross borders is observed by passengers on a nearby ship. Frau Boll and the Student from Glendale add a historical dimension by focusing on the *Mexico*, an American ship which set sail from Liverpool in 1836, and which sank off the American east coast during a snowstorm at the beginning of 1837 (*S*, p. 103). The sinking of the *Mexico*, which was crossing the Atlantic with 112 immigrants on board, is intended as a reminder to the reader of the fragility of their circumstances; at other points in history, people from Europe died trying to cross borders in search of a better life.

exploration of border variations highlights the persistent omnipresence of borders. It also calls attention to their ability to leak and blur. The boundary between sleep and sleeplessness, for example, is depicted in the Student from Glendale's story about Peter Tripp, a US journalist who stayed awake for over two hundred hours as part of a publicity stunt. Tripp's story shows how borders may be fluid and blurred. By not crossing into sleep and staying awake, he enters into a hallucinatory and paranoid state and 'am achten Tag habe er, obwohl wach, aus medizinischer Sicht alle Merkmale eines Schlafenden aufgewiesen' (*S*, p. 11).

On the other hand, Elmiger's exploration of falling can be read as an attempt to find a metaphor for border crossing which can help to make it comprehensible for those who stay in place. Connecting border experience and border representation, the image of falling is used symbolically to convey the potentially devastating impact of illegal border crossing. As Aimee Pozorski suggests, falling is often included as a figure 'for the difficulty of referring to something that it is impossible to fully assimilate'.[34] In the novel, falling and crossing borders are initially connected by the Writer and the Journalist. While the Writer talks about borders at a literary conference on falling, the Journalist describes irregular border crossers as people who risk 'den Fall, den Sturz' (*S*, p. 42). Attracted by the promise of improved circumstances, border crossers figuratively leap into the unknown and potentially expose themselves to the violence of the state whose borders they have crossed.

When the Logistician climbs onto and falls off his roof, his fall can be seen as both a representative and a border-crossing act. As Alan Robinson notes, this fall can be read as an effect of 'empathetic over-engagement or over-identification with the migrants' which causes an intolerable loss of self.[35] By attempting to force a connection with those who, when crossing borders, try to make their own bodies 'disappear' in order to evade detection, the Logistician, in this reading, loses himself to psychosis and risks annihilating his own body. However, if we see his fall as an attempt to render the clandestine territorial crossings of irregular migrants highly visible, his falling body takes on a representative function. It stands in for the other unseen bodies in motion that experience biographical free fall when they cross boundaries. His fall also returns the body to an 'unbodied' discourse of movement and flows. As a Swiss citizen who can cross the Swiss–French border freely, the Logistician must change the terrain in order to perform a border crossing. The fall reinstates a border for him to cross, namely the border between falling and not

[34] Aimee Pozorski, *Falling after 9/11: Crisis in American Art and Literature* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 10. Pozorski explores cultural representations of falling in a post-9/11 context where figures of falling are associated with the victims of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. This figure connects violence, trauma, and aesthetics.

[35] Robinson, p. 402.

falling. It also represents a dynamic intervention in the border landscape. By climbing onto his roof and sitting still, the Logistician interrupts the border crossers and quite literally stops traffic. Unsettled by his precarious position, the crowd actively try to keep him awake in order to prevent an unintentional fall. Read positively, this can be seen as a social act which creates temporary connections and an interest in the Other.

The works by the Dutch–American conceptual and performance artist and photographer Bas Jan Ader, which are repeatedly referenced in the novel, suggest yet another dimension here. In his early works—such as *Fall 1, Los Angeles* and *Broken Fall* (*Organic*)—Ader staged falls to explore how the body was affected by the conditions of its fall. In *Schlafgänger*, the story of the Logistician's fall is not narrated by the Logistician, but put together from different sources, including newspaper articles which rely on witness accounts (*S*, pp. 38 and 75) and images that evoke Ader's fall from his own roof in Clarendon, Los Angeles.[36] Encapsulated in video which has outlived the performance and the performer, Ader climbs onto and falls from his roof, accelerating his downfall and drawing attention to the interplay between free will and determinism and the shift from agent to object. Although Ader's landing was protected, the Logistician's fall, which seems to mimic Ader's in certain details (*S*, pp. 38 and 75), is a free fall which risks death. This creates a circular effect; the fall is a placeholder for the destructive impact of border crossing, which is often not visible. As an embodied depiction of border crossing, the fall brings the body back in, but, in its conspicuous absence as a narrative event, it becomes a figurative expression of something that cannot be adequately represented in words. This is a concern both of Ader's work[37] and of Elmiger's novel. Thus, throughout the text different characters reflect variously on the difficulties of adequately representing real experiences in written or verbal form. Their attempts and failures may reflect Elmiger's own misgivings about the problems of representing borderscapes and border crossings in written form. Towards the end of the novel, for example, the Journalist notes that 'das Schreiben dränge im besten Fall beharrlich und mit Nachdruck auf Veränderung', but that some situations require a 'Form des Widerstands, die unmittelbar und ebenso extrem sei wie die Situation, auf die

[36] Winnie seems to have spoken to the Logistician about *Fall 1, Los Angeles* (*S*, p. 20). Many of Ader's works are referenced in the novel and *Nightfall*, *In Search of the Miraculous*, and *Broken Fall* (*Organic*) appear in different guises. That the Logistician's fall should be placed in this frame is suggested by the fact that Ader's works are commented upon repeatedly, for example when characters attend exhibitions in Basel (*S*, p. 101) and Dortmund (*S*, p. 125), where his work is displayed. His performances are also echoed in certain stories. His project to cross the Atlantic 'in search of the miraculous' in a small boat is evoked when Winnie reads a book about this while on a sea journey to Europe.

[37] The mixed-media piece *I'm too sad to tell you* demonstrates this. It uses stills from a recording of Ader crying which are captured on postcards inscribed with this message and mailed to his friends.

sie reagiere' (*S*, p. 131). However, as Alan Robinson notes, the novel leaves
open what form this resistance might take.[38]

In its content and form, *Schlafgänger* seems tentatively to imagine a way
of overcoming the social divisions of bordering through engagement. Here,
it is particularly an interest in the stories of others that can generate change.
Reflecting critically on the potential and pitfalls of attempts to represent the
border, the novel illuminates the complexity of borderscapes. By juxtaposing
different kinds of mobility, including high- and low-risk travel, adventurism
and colonialism, legal and illegal movement, Elmiger creates a narrative world
of bodies that move freely and bodies whose movement seems to threaten
ideas of freedom. She uses the narrative themes and form to invite readers
to rethink positions within, beyond, and across border spaces and to review
attitudes. She also shows how structures of fear are mobilized to erect or
reinforce boundaries and how citizens are co-opted into bordering processes.
Schlafgänger appears to be a plea to preserve difference and plurality without
stereotyping; to promote an empathic and responsible engagement with others
in a way which strengthens the social fabric. In its deployment of falling, the
novel calls attention to the transformational and destructive consequences
of border crossing, while the stories of the 'Schlafgänger' themselves remain
deliberately unexplored. As we shall see in the following, Grjasnowa adopts a
different approach.

Border Subjects and Border Crossings: Maps, Cooking, and Performing the Border

In *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, Olga Grjasnowa uses the fates of her charac-
ters Amal and Hammoudi to recreate a pre-war Syria and write a story that
explores the personal impact of its collapse.[39] In its attention to their experi-
ences of crossing borders and becoming asylum seekers, the novel offers an
explanatory narrative for flight which Elmiger is careful to avoid. Amal and
Hammoudi are portrayed as people with agency who decide to leave Syria and
to continue their journeys towards Germany. Although they manage to cross
territorial borders, social and cultural borders conspire to keep them out with
different effects. While Hammoudi dies in an attack on the asylum centre
where he is housed in the German province, Amal manages to eke out a space
for herself in Berlin by taking up the mediated role of a refugee on a German

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[38] Robinson, p. 405.

[39] Stuart Taberner has explored how this novel promotes a pragmatic cosmopolitanism while
criticizing cosmopolitan memory and multidirectional memory. In his reading, the Holocaust is
invoked to empower a defence of human rights, but he shows that the novel also calls this into
question: 'Towards a "Pragmatic Cosmopolitanism": Rethinking Solidarity with Refugees in Olga
Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*', *MLR*, 114 (2019), 819–40.

TV cookery show. As a refugee-who-can-cook, she inhabits the border as an in-between space while simultaneously overcoming it.

In this novel, Grjasnowa explores the biographical impact of crossing internal as well as external borders. By resurrecting everyday life in pre-war Syria, she offers readers an insight into the daily cost of being-in-place and shows how citizens become soldiers, oppositional fighters, and refugees.[40] Before the war, Amal lives a privileged life in Damascus. As a budding actress, she is able to identify and mimic social codes, maintain strategic friendships, and engage in public performances of loyalty to the state. This helps to protect her from the state forces who use violence to suppress opposition and uphold an imaginary order in which '*Baschar ist unser Gott*' (*Gins*, p. 120). However, her profession also brings her into contact with the fledgling protest movement in Damascus, which is popular among her peers who long for social change. After she becomes fascinated with the protest movement, Amal comes to the attention of the secret police, who beat, threaten, and briefly incarcerate her. Her situation becomes more precarious when her political awakening as a protester coincides with a personal awakening brought about by the discovery that her father has another secret family. Ultimately, it is this discovery which leads her to become mobile as she loses the extended protection which her father's status as a wealthy businessman had afforded her.

Amal's story highlights the invisible borders of belonging in Damascus. Although she formally belongs in Syria, her participation in the protests illegalizes her so that she no longer has access to and enjoyment of the full rights of citizenship. Hammoudi's story further flags up the capriciousness of the Syrian state. Although he had studied abroad and secured a job as a plastic surgeon in Paris, where he hoped to have a different future, the state interferes with these plans and forces him into a reluctant homecoming by revoking his right to travel when he returns to renew his passport. A victim of a hardening of the border, Hammoudi is initially out of place in Deir az-Zour. He is alienated by forgotten socio-cultural codes of corruption and intimidation, and manages to find his way back into the community only when the protest movement offers him an outlet for his frustration. When conflict breaks out in the area where he lives, he stays and works underground as a medic and leaves only when his life is endangered by shifting power structures.

Highlighting the fragility of belonging and the ease with which it can be unmade, both plotlines illustrate why it is unsafe for Amal and Hammoudi to stay in Syria and why leaving is necessary. The journey elsewhere becomes an attempt to recoup the opportunities that they once had. While Hammoudi

[40] Amal's and Hammoudi's experiences are interwoven with those of other family members, such as Amal's half-brother Nidal and Hammoudi's brother Naji, to create a web of Syrian lives inside and outside the boundaries of the nation. When conflict breaks out, these characters take on different roles.

tries unsuccessfully to return to Paris, Amal initially goes to Beirut and then on to Turkey with her partner Youssef (*Gins*, p. 219). Their decision to flee to Europe is a decision against a precarious life in Turkey, where they are dependent on 'Erdogans Gnade' (*Gins*, p. 232). Rather than adopting Rumford's perspective of 'seeing like a border' as Elmiger does, Grjasnowa tries in this novel to 'see like a migrant' in times of political upheaval. Preoccupied with surmounting obstacles to mobility, this viewpoint refuses to criminalize those who cross borders to remain alive or in their search for a better life. From this perspective, survival or indeed arrival may not even be the main motivator. As one of the children on board the boat to Greece explains to Hammoudi, 'es ist nicht schlimm, wenn wir sterben, ich will nur nicht zurück' (*Gins*, p. 260).

If we examine how Grjasnowa articulates border crossing, she ensures a keen focus on this experience by slowing down the story of departure and crossing borders but speeding up aspects of the arrival in Germany. The depiction of flight reworks and extends by now familiar stories from news reports of overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels, opportunistic smugglers, fake lifejackets, risky sea conditions, and dramatic rescues. Although both Hammoudi's and Amal's flight paths cross through İzmir in Turkey, they take different routes. Amal and Youssef almost perish at sea before they are rescued by the Italian coastguard, while Hammoudi is stranded in Lesbos and then brought to Greece, where he begins the trek through Europe. Both journeys feature extensive periods of waiting, clandestine crossings, fleeting moments of legality, acts of human kindness and aggression, and episodes of extreme physical danger. By retelling these episodes in the narrative present, Grjasnowa forces a prolonged personal encounter with the experiences of drowning and violence, which makes them more difficult to dismiss than abstract news stories of border crossings that are quickly replaced.

For Amal, border crossing is a significant site of identity formation, and it radically changes her life. When the boat she is in capsizes, she rescues Amina, a child entrusted to her by a mother who drowns, and becomes part of a fake family forged at sea in precarious circumstances. In order to protect Amina, she pretends that she is married to Youssef and that Amina is their child. While her role as Amina's mother gives her hope for the future and something to live for, it also locks her into a loveless relationship with Youssef. This prevents her from being free, but also from putting the past behind her. Having crossed the border, Amal is shaped by it.[41] Becoming a refugee in Germany means losing her social capital and her ability to attract attention

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[41] This experience also has longer-term consequences for her. When Amal is flying to the US after she has been granted refugee status in Berlin, she experiences extreme panic at the very sight of the sea. This may perhaps be prompted by the memories of her journey or the prospect of once again crossing borders. Her decision to return to Berlin on the same flight without attending the audition can be seen as an attempt to take control of her life by deciding where she wants to

freely so that she moves 'zögerlich und eingeschüchtert' (*Gins*, p. 281) around Berlin. If her refugee status renders her invisible ('Niemand beachtet sie mehr': *Gins*, p. 281), Hammoudi's fate shows the fatal dangers of becoming visible when he is the victim of a racially motivated vigilante attack on the facility for asylum seekers where he is housed. Hammoudi's death makes it clear that the border does not just appear differently for people with different credentials, so that some are allowed to pass while others are immobilized. It can even manifest itself differently for people with the same credentials. Although Amal and Hammoudi have both fled violence in Syria, only Amal is able to pass.

In her treatment of borders, Grjasnowa shows that they are more than just lines on a map, although she does *also* show that they are lines on a map; in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern*, the story of border crossing is told through the maps that are included at the beginning of each of the three sections in the novel. As visual representations of the territories under discussion, these maps are in dialogue with the plot. They help orient the reader (quite literally), but they also provide a visual frame for the respective section that can direct the reader's gaze. The first map, for example, prefaces the section on everyday life in Syria which outlines how Amal's and Hammoudi's lives are unsettled by a hardening of the internal and external borders. In its visualization of territory, the map produces a sovereign Syria, highlighting its national borders in dark grey broken lines that dominate the page. While it cuts across other territorial markers such as rivers and roads, this political border organizes space, but neatly erases the people whose lives are also shaped by this ordering. It is an instance of the 'dehumanization of the landscape' and 'cartographic cleansing' described in borders research.[42] From the outset, then, the interaction between these maps and the story presents a political fantasy of power *and* the biographical effects of this on the people in place.

The maps in the novel are also in dialogue with each other. By mapping and remapping territories, Grjasnowa reroutes boundaries and changes our perception of space, signalling to the reader that spatial relations are not static, but processual and fluid. This is clear in the second map, which remaps the territory depicted in the first, recalibrating the power of geopolitical boundaries. Displaying a wider range of countries, this remapping thins out the boundaries between states, now represented only by a faded white line. This visual depiction serves to deterritorialize the landscape and make the space traversable for the border crossers. The sea, depicted in darker grey, ominously dominates the page, creating new hurdles. Unlike land, the sea is not

be. However, this decision about her future is at least co-determined by the past, which continues to unsettle her present.

[42] See Henk van Houtum 'The Mask of the Border', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, ed. by Doris Wastl-Walter (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 66–77 (pp. 69–70).

presented as a territorialized space, but political practices (of intervention and non-intervention) nevertheless shape how it operates, as the flight paths of the novel's main characters show. By including the place names of key staging posts on the journeys, this map invites the reader to imaginatively visualize flight paths, move figures across the map, and become interactive co-conspirators, as it were, in helping the characters to cross borders.

The third map, which precedes the section on attempted arrivals, departs from the terrestrial to depict a segment of the night sky. Showing star patterns and constellations and part of the Milky Way, in its very construction this highlights the arbitrariness of mapping. It reminds us of the limits of our perspective, which is affected by time and space. What we see depends on the *where* and *when* of our location. By connecting certain stars, the map shows how people have tried to make sense of the universe by plotting and organizing the night sky and tracking what they perceive to be relational patterns. While it picks up on a plot-point whereby stars function as a point of orientation for the displaced Hammoudi, this map also reminds us that the night sky can be continually remapped as new features become visible at other points in time and space. By moving from the national to the transnational and celestial, these shifts in scale, perspective, and focus render geopolitical borders irrelevant and alter our understanding of transnational relations and our sense of our global significance. Taken as a series, the three maps show, therefore, that our understanding of the world can be unsettled and that the relational structures that maps produce are created through the act of mapping and can thus be changed. This adds a critical dimension to Grjasnowa's novel, which suggests a plea to unfix our perspective and refocus our gaze so that we can begin to see differently.

If the map series offers a glimmer of hope that perspectives can change, the depiction of social divisions and hierarchies of entitlement that recur throughout the novel present a more sobering picture. These patterns can be seen in very different locations: from a Syrian prison where inmates form hierarchical groups that determine their position in the cells and their rights and privileges (*Gins*, p. 282) to the Serbian border where guards use their local knowledge and professional status to divest border crossers of their last possessions for their own gain (*Gins*, pp. 270–71), or the German provincial town where neo-Nazis try to eliminate those they perceive as threatening their privileges by attacking the asylum centre where they are housed (*Gins*, pp. 305–06). Staging different confrontations between the 'titular gods' who are not shy in taking what they want and the powerless Other, the novel suggests that, in a divided world where the privileged protect and grow their interests, the only certainties are greedy opportunism and death.

Nonetheless, in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* Amal is able to find a way out of the

border zone when she is offered the opportunity to participate in the fictional TV cookery show 'Mein Flüchtling kocht'. Capitalizing on audience interest in 'foodie' culture and real-life disasters, 'Mein Flüchtling kocht' provides a safe space for viewers to encounter the Other. In the show, a female refugee prepares dishes which introduce the audience to 'die *orientalische* Küche' (*Gins*, p. 289), while she narrates her own story. The format and title suggest a simultaneous form of cultural appropriation through the possessive adjective ('mein') and and exoticization that raises questions about the representation and instrumentalization of refugees on television more generally. At best, by positioning the refugee as an expert and a cultural mediator, this type of show might help to draw on the viewer's interest in exploring new culinary cultures and tastes to erode resentments and stereotypes of refugees, which could help to break down social barriers. At worst, it could be seen as packaging and exploiting traumatic experiences for financial gain and/or mass entertainment and consumption. Moreover, by policing the borders of what foods and food-related practices are deemed acceptable, it could also reinforce social divisions and strengthen stereotypes.

Ironically, by *becoming* a German TV refugee Amal is able to secure professional opportunities for herself that open possible futures for her in Berlin and beyond. In order to appeal to the target audience and become 'their' refugee, she is stylized into a sanitized vision of authentic difference with 'wenig Make-up, das Haar mittellang und lockig, die Kleidung dezent und teuer' and borrowed designer ethnic jewellery (*Gins*, p. 292). If Amal was able to cross borders by concealing her difference and not attracting attention, here she must continually inhabit the border and perform the role of an unthreatening, but exotic, Other in order to be acceptable. Amal, however, is not completely consumed by the Western desire for a refugee who can cook. Instead, she manages to find a way of performing this role while making it personally and politically useful for her. Taking advantage of the TV format, which prioritizes the chefs' personal stories over their culinary dexterity, she uses her knowledge that 'die Menschen im Westen nur noch Symbole konsumieren' (*Gins*, p. 292) to dish up publicly a new personal and national identity.

For Amal, cooking is a way of connecting back across the borders to another time and place. It recreates smells and tastes, and, when she prepares dishes in Berlin, 'beschwört sie Erinnerungen herauf, nicht nur ihre eigenen, sondern auch die der Menschen, die sie die jeweiligen Gerichte gelehrt hatten, und die der Generationen zuvor' (*Gins*, p. 295). By cooking up an exotic and tasty culinary culture that will appeal to sophisticated palates, she rescues the culinary capital of her childhood to create a cartography of flavours. This reaches across borders to construct a Syria for viewers which is simultaneously

nostalgic and aspirational. Remarketing her version of her family cuisine as national fare, she uses it as a political tool to redress the Western dismissal of refugees by asserting a self-confident national culinary culture.

By way of conclusion, Elmiger's *Schlafgänger* floats the possibility of an interest in the stories of others as a way of potentially overcoming social divisions, whereas Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* seems to call into question any prospects of social solidarity by showing how boundaries and hierarchies of exclusion are reformed in social settings. National and even natural borders can be surmounted, but social and cultural divisions extend the border zone eternally to make an arrival seem impossible (as Hammoudi's violent death shows). While Germany could be a home for border crossers who would like to earn their own living and contribute to the economy, their position of non-belonging in Germany is reinforced through bordering acts that publicly demonstrate their exclusion. Although Amal is granted asylum status in Germany, she is able to secure her place only when she manages, in entrepreneurial fashion, to package and sell her story and her recipes. Elmiger's novel shows that it is not only irregular border crossers who are affected by proposals for increased border control. Rather than protecting Swiss community and belonging, heightened controls endanger these by disseminating fear, insecurity, and suspicion, which are shown to be corrosive. If Grjasnowa allows readers to cross borders vicariously by following Amal's and Hammoudi's stories, Elmiger's kaleidoscopic sketch recreates the simultaneity of experience in the borderscape with one conspicuous gap: the personal experience of irregular border crossings is omitted, even though it is discussed from other angles, and readers are offered an experience of the border through the image of falling. In their focus on border crossings, these novels show that practices of exclusion are not restricted to external boundaries. Instead, the border flexibly reasserts itself wherever irregular border crossers are, making it difficult for them to arrive in place.

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