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FICTIONAL REFUGEE CARTOGRAPHIES: A REAPPRAISAL OF CARTOGRAPHIES BEYOND TRUTHFUL REPRODUCTIONS OF LANDSCAPE

Abstract

This article attempts to simultaneously connect fiction, emotions, and (im)mobility in migration maps. It presents the works of three cartographers that conceive fictional maps to engage with emotion and subjectivity in the narration of refugee stories. Inspired by non-representational theory, the article reflects on how such fictional maps question the ontological foundations of cartography. The study supports that the case studies challenge three different dimensions of such ontological basis. The map in *Im Land der Frühaufsteher* problematizes an understanding of cartography as a reproduction that merely attempts to mirror natural realities. The second, *Crossing Maps*, exemplify a processual understanding of cartography: a means to co-create relationships and human bounds, going beyond the idea of the map as an artifact that has to deliver spatial information. The third, *Constellations*, shows how cartographies can be considered as objects having no inborn ontological security and that are, on the contrary, constantly recognized and reappraised in a contingent interaction between creators and users.

Keywords

Non-representational cartography; fiction; emotions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Maps have long been considered as systematic, objective depictions of space, therefore having little or no relation to the realm of emotions. They have been frequently associated with scientific objectivity and considered “natural” endeavors to represent geographical landscapes, usually responding to practical necessities¹ Over the last three decades, though, the epistemological assumption of cartography as an objective form of knowledge has been substantially challenged by a consistent body of literature stress-

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¹ J. Cristofol, A. Guilló, “Alternative Cartographies”, *antiAtlas Journal*, 1 (2016).

ing maps' character of products – and reproductions – of power relations². Drawing on these premises, researchers have later supported an understanding of maps as productive – and not just representative – of realities³. Others have gone even further and, with post-representational cartography, have performed a thorough rethinking of maps' nature, criticizing their ontological security by stressing their processual character of “contingent, relational, and context-dependent” unfolding practices⁴.

Formulating mapping as a processual – more than representational – practice troubles traditional understandings of maps, not just by countering their power laden spatial representation, but by resisting their ontological premises of objective, professional, product-oriented exercises. In this spirit, this article attempts to exemplify such a broad understanding of mapping, opening the landscape of cartography to embrace a wide-ranging array of spatial practices: performative, participatory, imagined maps that powerfully transcend the mere physical reproduction of spatial representation. Beyond some notable exceptions⁵, theoretical critiques to traditional ontological conceptions of maps have often refrained from proposing illustrative examples of such analysis. Aware of this, we attempt to relate the theory to the discussion of three cases of cartographic production that trouble the traditional “ontological status” of maps as natural reproduction of geographical landscapes.

This article attempts a simultaneous connection between fiction, emotions, and migration in maps. Such a connection is prompted by understanding a becoming, unfolding nature of maps, as contingent practices that come into being every time producers and readers engage with them⁶. In this light, maps are perfectly suited to encourage a narrative process that can help to reveal intangible elements such as imaginaries, emotional, affectual, and memorial trajectories⁷. Mapping, considering these premises, emerges as a compelling practice that can give expressive life to questions such as (non-) belonging and the sense of home that are crucial issues in the scholarship of refugee studies⁸.

2. IMAGINED MOBILITIES IN REFUGEE CARTOGRAPHY

This article welcomes the call for a new mobility paradigm. It does so primarily by focusing its attention on the migratory paths of refugees, illegal migrants, and asylum seekers. It recognizes such figures as key subjects to understand affordances, restrictions, and limitations of contemporary global scale movements of people. Their elaborate journeys often connect peripheries with global cities, using different modes of

² J.B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map”, in *Classics in Cartography*, edited by M. Dodge, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2011: 271-294; M.S. Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

³ J. Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping, and the Geo-Coded World*, New York: Routledge, 2004.

⁴ R. Kitchin, M. Dodge, “Rethinking Maps”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 31, 3 (2007): 331.

⁵ G. Peterle, “Carto-Fiction: Narrativising Maps through Creative Writing”, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 20, 8 (2019): 1070-1093; M. Tazzioli, “Which Europe. Migrants' Uneven Geographies and Counter-Mapping at the Limits of Representation”, *Movements*, 20, 1 (2015).

⁶ Peterle, “Carto-Fiction: Narrativising Maps through Creative Writing”: 1070-1093.

⁷ S. Caquard, W. Cartwright, “Narrative Cartography: From Mapping Stories to the Narrative of Maps and Mapping”, *The Cartographic Journal*, 51, 2 (2014): 101-106.

⁸ D. Alinejad, D. Olivieri, “Affect, Emotions, and Feelings”, in *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*, edited by K. Smets et al., London: SAGE Publications, 2020: 64-73.

transport, with significant repercussions on their personal security⁹. Such movements involve moments of intense mobility and periods of restriction, detention, and severe immobility, suffering personal relations of exploitative character. Interestingly for the present paper, Urry's conceptualization of mobilities goes beyond a merely corporeal travel to include imaginative movements: journeys performed "through the images of places and peoples"¹⁰; such mobilities happen across multiple print and visual media and are, as such, examinable through different methods, including the investigation of texts.

With such premises, the article navigates the productive domain of refugee cartography, a sphere of mapping that has long been a symbolic battlefield between conventional and counter-cartographies. Since the so-called "2015 EU migration crisis", possibly as a consequence of the intense and unprecedented mediation of the phenomena, the domain has witnessed the emergence of a "slowly growing collection of brave and inspiring attempts to come up with different cartographic visualizations"¹¹. New cartographers attempt to challenge the hegemonic production of maps that often *dehumanize* individuals by framing migrants and refugees as *problems*, migration as a *crisis*, or crossing borders as a *transnational crime*¹². Map makers strived to resist such framings, creating maps that cast light on migrants' and refugees' personal perspectives while underlining enduring patterns of global injustice. In such a creative environment, some producers move beyond mere representational resistance to perform an essential ontological objection to traditional cartographies, a phenomenon that this article tries to chart and capture.

It is thus worthwhile to consider the symbolic and aesthetic aspects of mapping alongside and in conjunction with their political dimensions. In doing so, we follow Leurs et al.'s suggestion to study both "the politics and poetics" of refugee maps¹³. Proceeding on two parallel analytical levels, in this article we reflect both on aesthetic and creative aspects of emerging refugee cartography (poetics) as well as on symbolic representations and how it relates to power relations, institutions, and migration policies (politics). While the latter is well ingrained in the discursive investigation of maps in a context of power relations in the spirit of critical cartography, with the former we intend to go beyond investigating maps as mere representations of a physical world (*mimesis*), and – borrowing De Certeau's reflection on *poiesis* – to explore their potential to generate new realities¹⁴. Such an understanding resonates well with our aim to investigate mobile subjects frequently confronted with forced immobility: individuals that have to shift their aspirational mobility to an imaginative, creative dimension.

On this, Perkins has illustrated the profound dichotomy historically dividing the critical approach that problematizes the mapping process and its power-laden nature, and research that investigates cartography works as a form of applied knowledge¹⁵. While avoiding ostentatious statements of reconciliation of profoundly distinct strands, this article draws great inspiration from van Houtum and Bueno Lacy's work on Fron-

⁹ J. Urry, "Mobilities and Social Theory", in *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, edited by B.S. Turner, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009: 477-495.

¹⁰ J. Urry, *Mobilities*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007: 47.

¹¹ H. van Houtum, R. Bueno Lacy, "The Migration Map Trap. On the Invasion Arrows in the Cartography of Migration", *Mobilities*, 15, 2 (2020): 209.

¹² R. Risam, "Beyond the Migrant 'Problem': Visualizing Global Migration", *Television & New Media*, 20, 6 (2019): 566-580.

¹³ K. Leurs, I. Agirreazkuenaga, K. Smets, M. Mevsimler, "The Politics and Poetics of Migrant Narratives", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23, 5 (2020): 679-697.

¹⁴ M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013: 15.

¹⁵ C. Perkins, "Cartography: Mapping Theory", *Progress in Human Geography*, 27, 3 (2003): 341-351.

tex's "migration map trap"¹⁶. In a critical spirit, the two authors recognize how map production is often controlled, governed, and systematized, respecting a hierarchical order of appearance that is ubiquitous in the media sphere¹⁷. At the same time, later in the text, they provide an outlook of alternative, creative cartographic efforts to deviate from the hegemonic iconography, giving extensive descriptions of their visualization and narrative strategies.

Inspired by van Houtum and Bueno Lacy's invitation to cast light on such creative attempts, we aim to investigate how refugee cartography evolves beyond the mere geolocation of migration flows, seizing maps' possibilities to decipher and tell stories, and engage with the emotional dimension of such spatial narrations¹⁸. The present study explores fictional maps as a means to engage the emotional dimension of spatial experiences¹⁹. It includes maps that, despite being distributed in different media formats – performative art pieces, comic book tables, silkscreen prints – all conceive fictional maps to engage with emotion and subjectivity in the narration of refugee stories. Proposing an in-depth study of three such projects – *Constellations*, *Crossing Maps*, and *Im Land der Frühaufsteher* – we investigate fictional maps from a multimodal perspective (studying the interplay between text, images, composition, and colors in the communicative effort), from a narratological perspective (investigating the combination of factual and fictional storyworlds), and, lastly, we reflect on their ontological critique of cartography solely conceived as a truthful reproduction of landscape.

3. THE SPATIAL EMOTIONAL TURN

Our exploration of fictional cartographies is firstly rooted in what can be called a spatial-emotional turn in social and cultural studies. Broadly speaking, this turn can be seen as a move away from the traditional understanding of emotions and space as non-cultural or non-social phenomena. Quite on the contrary, this turn emphasizes the interactions between emotions and space: both elements considered as productive factors of cultural and social relations.

In classical social and cultural theory, the role of emotions has long remained underexplored²⁰. This historical omission possibly has to do with a dichotomous conception of emotion versus rationality: a hierarchical division based on the primacy of reason over "the crudeness of senses"²¹. This celebration of rationality over emotions is well present in Kantian universalism, a philosophical tradition that conceived a neat hierarchical separation between the two. According to this view, emotions are constructed "as irrelevant to judgment and justice, but also as unreasonable, and as an obstacle to good judgment"²². In sociology, the full commitment to rationality – and the early demise of emotional factors among others – inspired functionalist migration theories that have

¹⁶ van Houtum, Bueno Lacy, *The Migration Map Trap*.

¹⁷ M. Georgiou, "Does the Subaltern Speak? Migrant Voices in Digital Europe", *Popular Communication*, 16, 1 (2018): 45-57.

¹⁸ S. Caquard, W. Cartwright, "Narrative Cartography: From Mapping Stories to the Narrative of Maps and Mapping", *The Cartographic Journal*, 51, 2 (2014): 101.

¹⁹ Peterle, *Carto-Fiction*: 1073.

²⁰ A. Reckwitz, "Affective Spaces: A Praxeological Outlook", *Rethinking History*, 16, 2 (2012): 241-258.

²¹ K. Wahl-Jorgensen, *Emotions, Media and Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019, 23.

²² S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, 546.

long represented the mainstream lens to study mobility. In particular, push-pull models explain human movements starting from the assumption that people are utterly *rational* decision makers and motivate their journey with the aim to optimize income and utility²³. Against such reasonings, the approach rooted in the autonomy of migration has proficiently questioned “the individualized subject laboriously calculating the cost-benefit ratio of his/her trip and then starting an itinerary with fixed points of departure and arrival”²⁴.

Problematizing the essentialist division between emotions and rational political processes, an emerging body of literature recognizes how this separation is often a symptom of a “culturally specific and ideologically laden” western epistemology²⁵. The emergence of an interdisciplinary emotional turn thus gradually inverts the trend, with plenty of researchers exploring emotions, affects, and feelings as promising niches of research²⁶. Emotions are increasingly recognized as crucial in shaping social and political realities. Scholars note their pivotal role “in the way we make sense of ourselves and the collectivities and communities we inhabit”²⁷ and how emotions can animate active participation in politics, being a generative force in the conception of social alliances²⁸.

Another necessary building block for our current discussion is the so-called spatial turn in social sciences, which has led scholars to pay more attention to questions of physical, virtual, and symbolic space and place in relation to social reality. Social sciences have, for a long time, favored time over space as their epistemological compass to study social processes²⁹. From the 1980s, though, the spatial dimension of analysis has started exceeding its traditional domains of application, namely geography, architecture, and planning, progressively finding relevance in fields such as sociology, philosophy, history, or literary criticism³⁰. Advancing this turn in media and migration, Salovaara-Moring investigated how the spatial trope “Fortress Europe” has been instrumental in the diffusion of a dichotomous conception of foreigners as *others*³¹. Such a metaphorical construction of a spatial border provides a defined distinction between *us* and *them*, showing how media discourses can display originative agency in propagating and mainstreaming specific political-economical conceptions of space.

While stemming from different scholarly debates, the emotional and spatial turns have been brought into a fruitful dialogue. Thrift – despite not distinguishing between emotions and affects³² – supports a spatial politics of affects, encouraging research to

²³ H. De Haas, “A Theory of Migration: The Aspirations-Capabilities Framework”, *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9, 1 (2021): 8.

²⁴ D. Papadopoulos, V. Tsianos, “The Autonomy of Migration: The Animals of Undocumented Mobility,” in *Deleuzian Encounters: Studies in Contemporary Social Issues*, edited by A. Hickey-Moody and P. Malins, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007: 225.

²⁵ Alinejad, Olivieri, *Affect, Emotions, and Feelings*: 287-309.

²⁶ e.g., R. Waerniers, L. Hustinx, “The ‘Affective Liminality’ of Young Immigrants in Belgium: From Ruly to Unruly Feelings on the Path towards Formal Citizenship”, *Citizenship Studies*, 24, 1 (2020): 57 - 75.

²⁷ Wahl-Jorgensen, *Emotions, Media and Politics*: 1.

²⁸ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

²⁹ M. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, *Diacritics*, 16, 1 (1986): 22-27; E. Soja, “Taking Space Personally,” in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by S. Arias and B. Warf, London: Taylor and Francis, 2008: 11-35.

³⁰ Y. Blank, I. Rosen-Zvi, “Introduction: The Spatial Turn in Social Theory”, *Hagar* 10, 1 (2010): 1-6.

³¹ I. Salovaara-Moring, “Fortress Europe. Ideological Metaphors of Media Geographies”, in *Geographies of Communication The Spatial Turn in Media Studies*, edited by A. Jansson and J. Falkheimer, Göteborg: Nordicom, 2006: 105-122.

³² S. Pile, “For a Geographical Understanding of Affect and Emotions: Commentary”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35, 1 (2010): 7.

carefully account for emotions with particular interest to “cities” as the urban locations of such engagements³³. Similarly, Reckwitz introduces the multidimensional notion of affective spaces (or spatial-affective atmospheres), a useful research paradigm to account both for the emotional relations between subjects, and the spatial settings in which relations are embedded³⁴. Addressing the spatial-emotional “blind spot” is particularly relevant when discussing media and migration. Researchers note how this is a field in which the study of the spatial dynamics of emotional experiences has persistently remained marginal³⁵. Such a void seems to persist despite a wide recognition that the conditions of transnational migrants could evocatively expose the spatial-emotional dimension of migrants’ embodied experiences. In this spirit, the present article investigates refugee cartographies in response to Alinejad and Olivieri’s invitation to deepen the connection between emotion, media, and situated bodily practices when researching spatially mobile individuals³⁶.

4. ON FICTION, CARTOGRAPHY, AND EMOTIONS

This article presents the work of map makers that conceive fictional cartographies to narrate refugees’ lived experience. Nevertheless, before delving into the corpus of such fictional atlases, it seems appropriate to examine academic literature that has confronted the emergence of such an inventive strand of mapping. From a careful review of previous writings on the topic, three parallel debates seem to segment the academic production in interlinked spheres: studies investigating the storytelling potential of cartography, works that explored maps of fictional worlds, and academic investigations that focused on the links between cartographies and emotions.

Storytelling and Non-representational geography. In the spirit of non-representational geography, authors conceive a relational way to understand storytelling. Cameron notes how geographical stories can express highly personal, intimate elements and still – in the interaction with the audience – exceed their domain to reflect more significant societal and political phenomena. Their relational character, therefore, forces a departure from considering geographical stories as directly conveying messages and accepting that “their normative, emotional, and moral effects” have to be subject of a process of interpretation and mediation³⁷. In this spirit, Lorimer invites focusing on “small stories” as spaces of knowledge. He indicates stories that concern a local, routinary, intimate life dimension as being particularly apt in accounting for spatial experiences and expressing subjectivities that are often marginalized in hierarchical media order of appearance³⁸.

Cartography and the story. The storytelling potential of cartography did not go unno-

³³ N. Thrift, “Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect”, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 86, 1 (2004): 57-78.

³⁴ Reckwitz, *Affective Spaces*: 254.

³⁵ D. Alinejad, S. Ponzanesi, “Migrancy and Digital Mediations of Emotion”, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23, 5 (2020): 621-638.

³⁶ Alinejad, Olivieri, *Affect, Emotions, and Feelings*: 287-309.

³⁷ E. Cameron, “New Geographies of Story and Storytelling”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 36, 5 (2012): 574.

³⁸ H. Lorimer, “Telling Small Stories: Spaces of Knowledge and the Practice of Geography”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 28, 1 (2003): 197-271.

ticed for long in critical geography, a field in which numerous scholars already examined the maps' potential to spatially render personal experiences or to provide a subjective understanding of places. Researchers note how, progressively, cartographers explore the relationship between maps and narratives. Cartwright observes how the use of mapping practices to tell stories enjoys a new popularity in contemporary artistic practices³⁹. Bulson introduces "literary cartography", addressing the active role of maps in the narrative structures of certain novels⁴⁰. In this vein, an emerging body of literature begins to investigate how cartographies can tell stories, taking distance from the audacious attempt to be simple reflections of the natural world to engage with spatial realities in a more creative atmosphere⁴¹.

Navigating academic research between literature and cartographic studies, Rossetto refers to Cooper and Gregory's mood maps⁴², warning on the intricate relations involving authors and readers when engaging with maps related to spatial experiences. Such knotty entanglements complicate a phenomenological appreciation of "the fluid, embodied and experiential engagement of both authors and readers with the spatiality of literature"⁴³. Similarly, scholars recognize how the intersection of geography and narrative studies went beyond a conception of space as a static narrative container. For instance, Hones moves towards a framework that sees text, space, fiction, and location as indissoluble and co-productive⁴⁴. Such a conceptualization urges scholars to focus on how fictional settings emerge in an interactive process between "authors, narrative voices, and the readers" and are therefore utterly contingent and insecure⁴⁵.

Cartography and fiction. The relationship between maps and reality is at the core of a substantial amount of studies exploring cartographies of fictional worlds. Scrutinizing fictional maps, Barbara Piatti recognizes their knowledge generating potential. For Piatti, blending two apparently antithetic media production domains (cartography and literary fiction) can work effectively to shed light on "the production of places, their historical layers, their meanings, functions and symbolic values"⁴⁶. Peterle proposes the notion of *carto-fiction*, a concept that indicates a combination of fictional writing and cartographic practices to envision and think over maps in "an autoethnographic and self-reflexive perspective"⁴⁷. This composite of creative texts and cartographies would, therefore, help explore ways urban spaces are experienced, perceived, and rendered in maps: a useful framework to narrate the intimate and the subjective dimensions of maps.

Cartography and emotions. Naturally developing out of the debate on the carto-fictional blend, scholars investigated the spatial significance of emotions in cartographic prac-

³⁹ W. Cartwright, *Cartography and Art*, Berlin: Springer, 2009.

⁴⁰ E. Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination 1850-2000*, London: Routledge, 2009.

⁴¹ S. Caquard, "Cartography I: Mapping Narrative Cartography", *Progress in Human Geography*, 37, 1 (2013): 135-144.

⁴² D. Cooper, I. N. Gregory, "Mapping the English Lake District: A Literary GIS: Mapping the English Lake District", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36, 1 (2011): 89-108.

⁴³ T. Rossetto, "Theorizing Maps with Literature", *Progress in Human Geography*, 38, 4 (2014): 517.

⁴⁴ S. Hones, "Literary Geography: Setting and Narrative Space", *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12, 7 (2011): 685-699.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 697.

⁴⁶ B. Piatti, "Cartographies of Fictional Worlds", *The Cartographic Journal*, 48, 4 (2011): 222.

⁴⁷ Peterle, *Carto-Fiction*: 1091.

tices⁴⁸. Gartner finds relevant correlations between users' emotional response to spaces and the ability to orientate into the environment⁴⁹. Marković's research revolves around the concept of landscape, exploring different cartographical representations of landscape-rooted emotional spaces. Emotional cartography, in such conception, comprises original maps that attempt to provide tangible renderings of the immateriality, going beyond what is immediately visible to delve into what is absent, concealed, or imperceptible at first sight⁵⁰.

Caquard and Griffin try to systematize the fuzzy corpus of literature investigating the relationship between maps, mapping, and emotions. Their review points out three main themes emerging in the research, i.e. three different dimensions of the recent emotional turn that has concerned both cartographic practices and academic research⁵¹. Firstly, the researchers identify cartographies that are made to collect emotions connected to places. Secondly, the mapping process can be generative of emotions, in such a way that they become productive agents in the shaping of cartographies. Finally, maps can generate emotions when exposed to audiences, evoking passionate reactions among the readers.

The previous sections have explored the corpus of academic literature that has inspired the investigation of fictional cartographies engaging with emotions in the narration of refugees' quests. Before presenting the analytical outlook of the three case studies, the following section will clarify the methodological structure of the paper and introduce the research objectives that have directed the investigation.

5. METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Alternative, counter maps emerge prominently into the landscape of refugee cartography. Yet, few studies have tried to link theories on new ontological conceptualizations of mapping to concrete examples of fictional and emotional cartography. To address this gap, we performed exploratory research oriented to the development of grounded theory⁵². We considered the following research objectives as leading pointers to empower the investigation:

1. to outline a multimodal account of how refugee cartographies engage with emotions in the account of spatial mobility stories;
2. to investigate how map makers reconcile factual and fictional storyworlds to question the notion of truthful and objective cartography;
3. to discuss how such fictional emotional maps challenge ontological conceptualizations of cartographies as natural reproductions of nature.

The exploration is presented as a series of three case studies. The framework of the Exploratory Research proves particularly useful since we take distance from a con-

⁴⁸ e.g., A.L. Griffin, J. McQuoid, "At the Intersection of Maps and Emotion: The Challenge of Spatially Representing Experience", *Kartographische Nachrichten*, 62, 6 (2012): 291-299; A. Poplin, "Cartographies of Fuzziness: Mapping Places and Emotions", *The Cartographic Journal*, 54, 4 (2017): 291-300.

⁴⁹ G. Gartner, "Putting Emotions in Maps – The Wayfinding Example", Accessed on May 4, 2021. URL: http://www.mountaincartography.org/publications/papers/papers_tarewa_12/papers/mcw2012_sec3_ch08_p061-065_gartner.pdf 65.

⁵⁰ N. Marković, "How to Read 'Emotional Cartographies': Rethinking (Carto)Graphic Representation and Semantics", *Abstracts of the ICA*, 1 (2019): 1-2.

⁵¹ S. Caquard, A. Griffin, "Mapping Emotional Cartography", *Cartographic Perspectives*, 91, 1 (2019).

⁵² R. Stebbins, *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001.

firmative type of research, attempting on the contrary to reach developments of new theory emerging from data⁵³. As is often the case in exploratory studies, the technique of snowball sampling empowered the completion of a tentative mapping of the field of fictional refugee cartography⁵⁴. After identifying possible candidates for the analysis, we recruited other candidates investigating similar objects from the same creators, in the same distribution sites, and issued by the same publishers. The exploration of web repositories of counter cartographies such as *antiatlas.net*⁵⁵, edited volumes such as *This is not an Atlas* by the Kollektiv Orangotango⁵⁶, or attending conferences such as the “Assembly: Chronicles of Displacement” by the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art⁵⁷ turned out to be particularly useful for the completion of the sample. The snowball sampling technique allowed the charting of 23 examples of alternative cartographies that, from a preliminary examination, took a distance from traditional attempts to reproduce geographical views of natural entities.

This primary selection induced a reflection of the use of fiction in narratology, considered in the world-based conception of Ryan as the attempt to construct an imaginary world that is “told to be imagined”⁵⁸. Such a conception opposes fictional to factual statements that are, in this dichotomy, “told to be believed” in a distinction based on the endeavor to authentically reproduce real worlds. For Walton, a fictional discourse produces an imaginary world that pretends to be real and that readers should mentally construct and envision⁵⁹. On the contrary, factual discourses – those told to be believed – attempt to perfectly approximate the actual world in an open effort to minimize the distance between the storyworld and the physical reference world.

In this stage, the use of fiction emerged therefore as a possible common denominator of a substantial number of cases in the data, appearing as a productive first category to empower the exploration. The operationalization of the first category prompted us to consider the examination of the literature on narrative, post-representational geography and with reference to the works of scholars interested in the storytelling, narrative, literary dimensions of cartography. In a constant iteration between such literature and the data, maps’ engagement with emotions emerged as a helpful second category to empower the exploration, and inspired a further selection of the samples. Borrowing a conceptualization from the scholarship on emotional cartography, in this stage of our research we have operationalized the concept of emotion as “embodied experiences” that can emerge in the interaction with the environment⁶⁰. Emotions are, in this light, conscious and expressed through concepts (e.g. anxiety, hope, joy), and seen in an open opposition to affects: the latter often understood as pre-conscious and therefore inexpressible⁶¹.

In the article, we discuss three case studies that emerged from such mapping. Their choice is intended to reflect the different ways cartographies engage with fiction-

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ R. Swedberg, “Exploratory Research,” in *The Production of Knowledge*, edited by C. Elman, J. Gerding, J. Mahoney, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020: 17-41.

⁵⁵ *antiAtlas des frontières*. Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://www.antiatlas.net/>.

⁵⁶ S. Halder, B. Michel, *This Is Not an Atlas: A Global Collection of Counter-Cartographies*, Sozial-Und Kulturgeographie, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018.

⁵⁷ “Assembly: Chronicles of Displacement”, Art Event & Exhibition in Singapore, November 16, 2020. <https://sagg.info/event/assembly-chronicles-of-displacement/>.

⁵⁸ M.L. Ryan, “Truth of Fiction versus Truth in Fiction”, *Between*, 9, 1 (2019): 2.

⁵⁹ K.L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

⁶⁰ Caquard, Griffin, *Mapping Emotional Cartography*: 4.

⁶¹ Pile, *For a Geographical Understanding of Affect and Emotions*: 7.

al, made-up storyworld and with the emotional dimension of refugees' journeys. Even more, the three maps challenge a traditional ontological conceptualization of cartographies to three different degrees, providing suitable raw material to present a reflection on the nature of the practice. For each of the analyzed cases, the investigation proceeds under a threefold analytical lens. Firstly, the cases are introduced with a brief denotative investigation that, in the spirit of multimodal analysis⁶², elucidates how map makers make use of interactions and combinations of different modes of communication to engage with a cartographic storytelling and with the expression of emotions. Secondly – in a narratological perspective – the investigation focuses on their conception of fictional narrative spaces, or storyworlds, that vary substantially in relation to their distance to the reference physical world. Finally, inspired by literature on non-representational geography, the analysis focuses on ontological repercussions of investigating cartographies that extend beyond the domain of natural reproductions of the physical world.

As stated before, this paper draws particular inspiration from works of non-representational theory. In doing so, it looks at storytelling in geography not just as discursive reflection and framing of relations of power, adding to that dimension an effort to recuperate “the living, feeling, experiential and relational dimensions of being”⁶³. Such an effort entails considerable methodological challenges linked to researching such fleeting and contingent elements of migration⁶⁴. Yet, while non-representational theory has often stressed the significance of “inexpressible affects”⁶⁵, this paper welcomes emotional cartography's attention to the meaning-making potential of expressed emotions.

In this light, the researchers are aware of the contingent and experiential character of their production, and at the same time persuaded that the investigation of the emotional dimension of mappings with multimodal analysis produces insightful analysis on “how modes of representation mobilize, produce and seek to shape emotions”⁶⁶. In the spirit of exploratory research, this first analytical stage provides solid ground for further generalizability of the conclusions, obtainable possibly through the concatenation of future analytical steps. While the exclusive association of post-representational geography to specific research methods is debated in the scholarship⁶⁷, a further stage of ethnographic analysis could supply an authentic viewpoint to accurately grasp the complex subjective engagements between authors, readers, and maps⁶⁸.

6. ANALYSIS

The previous sections have introduced the theoretical building blocks empowering the present exploration of refugee fictional cartographies. Firstly, the spatial-emotional turn prompts us to examine the creative production of map makers focusing on the interactions between emotions and space occurring in the conception, production, and

⁶² K.L. O'Halloran, B.A. Smith, “Multimodal Text Analysis”, in *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, edited by C. Chapelle, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

⁶³ E. Cameron, “New Geographies of Story and Storytelling”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 36, 5 (2012): 587.

⁶⁴ P. Vannini, *Non-Representational Methodologies: Re-Envisioning Research*, New York: Routledge, 2015.

⁶⁵ Pile, *For a Geographical Understanding of Affect and Emotions*: 7.

⁶⁶ L. Bondi, *Emotional Geographies*, New York: Routledge, 2012: 10.

⁶⁷ Vannini, *Non-Representational Methodologies*: 11.

⁶⁸ Pile, *For a Geographical Understanding of Affect and Emotions*: 5.

consumption of any media work. Secondly, the debates around literary, fictional, and emotional cartography set the theoretical scene to the study of maps that engage creatively with spatial realities, rejecting the limiting connotation of natural reproduction of geographical sceneries. Finally, non-representational geography inspires a reflection on the nature of maps, assessing fictional cartographies' ontological alternatives to the traditional conceptualization of map-making.

6.1. Im Land der Frühaufsteher: *maps as productive of a fictional storyworld*

Denotative investigation. The first example connects with attempts to evoke emotions through maps' aesthetic features revealing a typically absent intimate dimension of spatial experience⁶⁹. In this respect, the emotional appeal of maps and their effect on users is certainly not a novel segment of studies. Van Houtum and Bueno Lacy convincingly explained the emotional "cleansing" effect of the maps produced by governmental agency Frontex: spatial visualizations in which bold continuous red lines reproduce refugees' pathways from their departure countries to Europe. The multiple arrows pointing to Europe hide the emotional and material asperities besetting refugees' trails, making it seem as if they could move "with the same nonchalance as any middle-class tourist"⁷⁰. Conversely, fictional cartographers that are conscious of the emotional appeal of maps can overturn the emotional cleansing, causing rich, vivid, subjective place-related emotional refugees' accounts. The comic book *Im Land der Frühaufsteher* by Paula Bulling contains a cartography that powerfully exemplifies this relationship between maps, fiction, and emotions⁷¹. In a full-page illustration already analyzed by Singer, a knotty long path through a dark forest isolates the Halberstadt asylum center from the closest train station, evocatively rendering the struggle to escape the monotony of living isolated in the refugee shelter⁷². The refugees are portrayed as several miniature characters proceeding slowly through a fictional maze, while the large distance they cover on foot deliberately seems to be attempting to induce a sense of alienation and solitude to the reader, articulating the confusion of exploring a new country. The fictional maze visually magnifies the distance between the refugees and the urban context, a portrayal that evokes the embodied experiences of despair, vulnerability, discomfort, and fear in navigating such a spatial setting. The composition, following Lorimer's argumentation, tells a "small story" that involves a local, ordinary, emotional dimension of life experience that, nonetheless, reveals significant geographical knowledge. On the one hand, the design seems intended to provoke the immersion in purely personal, mundane, emotional spaces. On the other, it generates connections to power relations in mobility settings, producing a metaphor that narratively condemns the segregation of foreign *others* as immobilized bodies at the peripheries of our urban realities.

Fictional/factual storyworlds. Considering the fictional dimension of the production, Bulling merges elements that can be considered as truthful and verifiable in the reference world with elements that pertain to the domain of fictional invention. According to

⁶⁹ Caquard, Griffin, *Mapping Emotional Cartography*.

⁷⁰ Van Houtum, Bueno Lacy, *The Migration Map Trap*: 8.

⁷¹ P. Bulling, *Im Land der Frühaufsteher*, Berlin: avant, 2012.

⁷² R. Singer, "Cute Monsters and Early Birds: Foreignness in Graphic Novels on Migration by Shaun Tan and Paula Bulling", *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 11, 1 (2020): 90.

Ryan, the distance between the world of fiction – the storyworld – and the actual reference world can vary substantially⁷³. The Halberstadt asylum center (ZAsT) is an existing hospitality facility located in the German state of Saxony-Anhalt, and it is arguably located in the extreme periphery of the urban landscape: these elements of Bulling’s storyworld factually correspond to a physical reality. At the same time, Bulling intentionally designs an intricate knotty path that develops from the asylum center and connects it to the train station. Here, the fictional element composes an imaginary storyworld, and invites the reader to imagine it for its own sake. The audience is not prompted to believe in a truthful reproduction of the path, but to imagine it and share the frustration of being immobilized in such remote areas. A fictional storyworld appears therefore as conceived to visualize refugees’ immobility, and – following Urry⁷⁴ – to criticize refugees’ forced mooring at the urban periphery.

Ontological implications. Bulling’s map prompts some pertinent consideration on the ontological implications of such cartographies for the nature of the practice. As described in the previous section, Bulling’s map does not fully mirror an existing nature. Instead, it deliberately produces a “made-up space”, creating a fictional storyworld to convey the spatial isolation of certain individuals at the urban periphery. Bulling’s map departs from a natural and realistic reproduction of territorial space to create an imaginary world used as a means to convey a political message that condemns the spatial segregation. Ontologically considering this design as a map, therefore, problematizes ideas of cartography as merely the natural mirror of nature. However, such a critique is limited to a representational scale, as the ontological construction of the map still appears as being securely tightened to be a stable product of spatial representations that reproduce an earthly landscape as it would appear if one looked at it from above.

6.2. Crossing Maps: *de-naturalizing the mapping process*

Denotative investigation. *Crossing Maps*⁷⁵ results from participatory mapping sessions that involved a collaboration between refugees, artists, and academics, giving light to embroidered pieces of cloth, and colorful felt pen sketches, but also to audio recordings that bear witness to refugees’ recollection of their trips⁷⁶. In *Crossing Maps*, the narrative effort counters the “normative” refugee-officials interactions taking place in governmental settings. Asylum seekers are normally requested to produce “verifiable” stories – chronological and sequential accounts of their movements that are instrumental to the grant of statuses. Criticizing the normative terms of such “truth seeking” accounts, in *Crossing Maps* refugees are invited to develop emotional alternatives: they are asked to use different colors on their embroidery, choosing them according to the emotions evoked by different stages of their journey. Emotions are here rendered chromatically, with the use of green for tranquility, red for danger, orange for fear, purple for stress. On the one hand, such a project might raise concerns over the epistemic violence related to

⁷³ Ryan, *Truth of Fiction versus Truth in Fiction*: 2.

⁷⁴ Urry, *Mobilities*: 155.

⁷⁵ F. Fischer, L. Houbey, M. Moreau, S. Mekdjian, A. Amilhat-Szary, “Cartographies Transverses”, *antiAtlas des frontières*, Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://www.antiatlas.net/fischer-houbey-moreau-mekdjian-amilhat-szary-crossing-maps-cartographies-traverses/>.

⁷⁶ S. Mekdjian, M. Moreau, “Re-dessiner l’expérience: art, science et conditions migratoires”, *antiAtlas Journal*, 1 (2016).

the expectation on the refugees to do emotional labor to produce the cartography⁷⁷. At the same time, the attempt to use the mapping process as a relational tool to build triangular relationships is significant. It involves the maps, the academics, and the refugees, who – according to the cartographers – are given freedom of representation and are not asked for any narrative consistency⁷⁸. Going back to Cameron’s considerations on the political dimension of the story in geography, storytelling can constitute “a situated practice of transformative change”, not only because of its representational content, but at a more elementary level by creating relations between people, places, and objects to perform alternative and marginal subjectivities⁷⁹.

Fictional/factual storyworlds. In *Crossing Maps*, the mapping process critiques the symbolic violence of officials-refugees interviews, and directly questions the notion of “truth” in refugees’ narrative as a particularly restrictive and subjugating imposition⁸⁰. Any formal attempt to a factual depiction of a migration trail is challenged, questioning the single way that leads to a “complete, accurate and truthful map”, and embracing mapping as a contingent and relational practice⁸¹. Intentionally, the distance between the reference world and the storyworld is never explicitly revealed in the map making process, giving light to a composite mix between narrative elements to be believed – that appear as pertaining to the domain of factuality – and elements for the audience to be imagined that relate to a fictional world. As in Peterle’s exploration in carto-fiction, the process of map making is envisioned as an almost ethnographic process of narration in which imaginative engagements that create, transform, and influence space are mixed with realistic elements such as the referral to real locations, circumstances, and individuals⁸².

Ontological implications. In *Crossing Maps*, the cartographers direct their attention away from the outcome, the latter intended as the creation product that conveys spatial representations about the world. In this respect the authors declare themselves to be inspired by the equivalence principle of Filliou: “well done = poorly done = not done”, making explicit their indifference to the physical outcome of this cartography⁸³. Their interest lies, contrarily, in the process of mapping as a practice of appointing emotions on a map: a co-mapping, a collaboration that attempts to create maps with the refugees rather than creating maps about them. The products are therefore seen as entirely instrumental, simple means to establish interpersonal relations with little regard to their representational content. Maps are “meeting places” and relational tools, intended as a means to establish non-hierarchical relations, in a stark contrast to the authority relationship during interviews with government officers. Ontologically, the creators of *Crossing Maps* perform a processual understanding of maps and in this way de-naturalize the historical evolution of cartography⁸⁴: beyond cartography as an institutionalized profession, a scientific practice, and form of knowledge, enlarging the ontology of maps to embrace performative, participative, and spontaneous effort that transcends understanding mapping as just the production of a tangible outcome.

⁷⁷ G. C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, *Die Philosophin*, 14, 27 (2003): 42-58.

⁷⁸ Mekdjian, Moreau, *Re-dessiner l’expérience: art, science et conditions migratoires*.

⁷⁹ Cameron, *New Geographies of Story and Storytelling*: 575.

⁸⁰ D. Fassin, C. Kobelinsky, “Comment on juge l’asile. L’institution comme agent moral”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 53, 4 (2012): 657-688.

⁸¹ Kitchin, Dodge, *Rethinking Maps*: 333.

⁸² Peterle, *Carto-Fiction*.

⁸³ Mekdjian, Moreau, *Re-dessiner l’expérience: art, science et conditions migratoires*: 1.

⁸⁴ Pickles, *A History of Spaces*: 17.

6.3. Constellations: *contesting maps' ontological security*

Denotative investigation. Bouchra Khalili's *Constellations* represents another example of a composite engagement with fictional maps and emotions.⁸⁵ After inviting migrants to retrace their journeys with a marker on an atlas, Khalili translates their individual journeys in the form of star constellation prints. Contesting *normative* geography with a universalistic utopian narrative, the artist reflects on how to produce subjective intimate cartographies of mobility that challenge the restrictive, exclusive, and bio-political conceptions of national borders. Khalili's use of colors, dots, and lines to produce an astronomical landscape lends itself to different allegorical interpretations. Firstly, stars are reference points that can guide the movement in spatial settings – like seas and oceans – where landmarks are absent. Secondly, the stars epitomize Foucault's "heterotopia": sites that are both existent in reality, but are also symbolic representations of utopia, therefore embodying the aspirational and imaginary perfect destinations for refugees and migrants⁸⁶. As noted by Pugliese, Khalili's project communicates "the everyday concerns, emotions and events" that constitute the lives of clandestine subjects⁸⁷. Once again, emotions intersect a cartographic production engaging with the immaterial dimension of such mobilities. Khalili enquires about what is usually absent, hidden, or obscure in cartography and deploys spatial-emotions on the map through the symbolic design of stars, attempting to lead the audience into utopian landscapes by articulating refugees' longing, hope, or wonder.

Fictional/factual storyworlds. As in *Im Land der Frühaufsteher*, Khalili mixes elements that could find confirmation in the physical world with imaginary elements that entirely pertain to the fictional world. The maps are firstly drawn on geographical atlases: while being recorded on camera, refugees go over their journey to Europe, and retrace their stops with a marker, joining with lines the cities that served as intermediate stages of the trip. Here, the storyworld matches with the reference world; the narration is therefore "told to be believed", and has physical correspondence to the geography of borders and cities. Khalili afterwards re-mediate such traced paths, creating star constellations in silkscreen print. The storyworld here departs from a perfect correspondence with the reference world to the fictional invention of constellations of stars and planets, produced to convey the emotional landscape described above. Once again, Urry's conceptualizations of mobility and mooring help to understand the creation of a fictional storyworld that magnifies physical distances in the reference world. Constellation draws attention to refugees' immobility, a mooring in which the aspiration to move and reach must be transported to the imaginative dimension.

Ontological implications. By transforming maps that are hand traced on an atlas into silkscreen prints of star constellations, the artist re-territorializes what used to be earthly maps as imagined galaxies in the cosmos. The artist plays with the spatial instability of the fictional setting, and – re-deploying the maps in the new context of the outer space – she transforms cartographies into simple plotting of colors, dots, and lines. Such a trans-

⁸⁵ B. Khalili, "The Constellations Series. 8 Silkscreen Prints", 2011, Accessed May 4, 2021. <http://www.bouchrakhalili.com/the-constellations/>.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*.

⁸⁷ J. Pugliese, "Technologies of Extraterritorialisation, Statist Visuality and Irregular Migrants and Refugees", *Griffith Law Review*, 22, 3 (2013): 571-597.

lation denaturalizes maps' ties to the representation of any natural geographical reality, towards the inclusion of imaginative, more-than-representational practices. Khalili's constellations - simple dots, colors, and lines - appear to have no ontological security: their stable attachment to a spatial representation is made obscure and uncertain, raising questions about the extent to which they can still be regarded as maps. Understanding these maps as having no ontological security prompts us to reflect on the identification of (all) cartographies as such. Therefore, this identification is referred back to a process of reciprocal interaction between maps, creators, and readers. Following Kitchin and Dodge, "A map is never a map with ontological security assumed; it is brought into the world and made to do work through practices such as recognizing, interpreting, translating, communicating, and so on"⁸⁸.

7. DISCUSSION

The article intended to provide the results of an exploratory study performed in the domain fictional cartography, developing three case studies that deepened maps' engagement with factual and fictional storyworlds, along with a consideration of their potential to fruitfully engage with emotions. Doing this, the article welcomed Caquard's invitation to investigate the multiple hybridizations happening "between cartography and creative disciplines; between the grid map and the story map; between fiction and reality; between the map and the territory"⁸⁹.

The exploration has found a promising niche of fictional cartographic productions that combine maps with fiction and emotions to promote a progressive agenda of refugee narratives. Refugee maps, it emerges, reproduce Urry's imaginative mobilities by using fiction to construct made-up worlds that are told "to be imagined". Furthermore, they engage with emotion to perform a subjective, mundane dimension of storytelling that implicitly problematizes refugees' coerced immobility, and their marginalization at the peripheries of our urban reality. Doing this, they conceive cartographies that go beyond systematic, objective depictions of space and embrace ontological understanding of cartographies as unstable entities that have no inborn ontological security: communicative objects that are constantly subject to a recognition and interpretation in an interaction between creators and users.

Fictional element. The analysis of the three cartographies highlights their attempt to generate fictional storyworlds. Where factual contents claim to "naturalistically represent real-world events", such fictional storyworlds explicitly highlight the creative construction of their storytelling and narration: they are imaginative, inventive artistic productions in alignment with literary works⁹⁰. Here, the use of fiction appears as deliberately employed to deliver emotional alternatives that open up maps to the portrayal of refugees' mobility. The three cartographers flaunt and exaggerate their fictional "made-up" nature, performing an ironic critique to "truthful" and verifiable accounts that asylum authorities compel refugees to produce. These mappers, conscious of the natural epics of refugee cartography, imagine and create fictional maps to express the spatial-emotional elements of refugee journeys. They reject the idea that their product

⁸⁸ Kitchin, Dodge, *Rethinking Maps*: 335.

⁸⁹ Caquard, *Cartography I*: 140.

⁹⁰ E. Keightley, "Fictional Media Content", in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by W. Donsbach, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2008: 2.

has to naturally represent the real world, preferring to focus on the creation of evocative fictional storyworlds that resonate well with their engaged, participative and critical activism.

Re-subjectivization of the space. The multimodal investigation of the three productions exemplifies an emerging spectrum of fictional cartographies attempting to perform a re-subjectivization of space through a deeper visual and textual engagement with spatial-emotional landscapes. By visualizing fictional knotty paths, co-creating knitting embroideries that chromatically render emotions, or re-mediating journeys into constellations of stars, the maps attempt to overthrow traditional communicative modalities often embedded in institutional maps and data visualization. The denotative analysis highlights how maps seek to resist and challenge bio-political conceptions of refugees as utterly threatening or vulnerable individuals. On the contrary, the maps appear as original attempts to produce deeper awareness of spatial experiences, engaging with emotions and subjectivity. They reveal “small stories” with personal aspirations, anxieties and wishes, and exhibit an intimate perspective on human mobility, inviting users to a subjective appraisal of refugee migratory routes, while at the same time stimulating a critique of refugees’ immobility: a condition in which mobility is deferred to an imaginary world. Taking inspiration from Griffin and McQuoid’s prognosis that “the time is ripe for cartography to open up its practice to whole new worlds of the human experience, including emotions”, such maps reproduce what is often missing, invisible, or suppressed in institutional refugee cartography, engaging with a mundane, personal, and local dimension of storytelling⁹¹. In this light, while such stories do not straightforwardly expose and counter power relations, discourse, or ideology inherent in traditional mapping practices, they still use storytelling as a political means of transformative change, performing alternative and marginal subjectivities that are often absent in traditional geographical representations. The fictional refugee cartographies exemplify, then, one possible way to take distance from western methodological conceptions that foresee a neat separation between emotions and rational political processes. In her seminal book, Ahmed powerfully posited how a cultural politics of emotions could create community coalitions to marginalize *other* bodies⁹². She illustrated how xenophobic communication strategies used emotions such as love (i.e. for an ideal homogeneous nation) and anxiety (i.e. towards a multicultural future) to advocate their exclusionary agendas. With the opposite intentions, fictional cartographies engage with emotions to promote a re-subjectivization of the refugee, overturning a political use of emotion that has unfortunately long remained a field dominated by exclusionary and xenophobic movements.

On the nature of cartography. On the one hand, the analysis rooted in multimodality and narratology has prompted an appraisal of how maps visually and narratively attempt to counter what is traditionally represented in conventional cartographies of migration: the hegemonic production that has often *dehumanized* individuals by framing refugees as *problems* and migration as a *crisis*. On the other, drawing from non-representational geography, this article attempted to go further and elaborate on ways such fictional maps challenge ontological conceptualizations of cartographies as natural reproductions of nature. In these respects, the three cases illustrate a spectrum of practices that, to different degrees, problematize such natural ontological conceptions of cartography. The case

⁹¹ Griffin, McQuoid, *At the Intersection of Maps and Emotion*: 291.

⁹² Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

studies have supported how the map in *Im Land der Frühaufsteher* can problematize an exclusive understanding of cartography as merely a reproduction that attempts to mirror natural realities. *Crossing Maps*' analysis has suggested a processual conceptualization of cartography as means to co-create relationships and human bounds, going beyond an idea of the maps as products that merely have to deliver spatial information. With *Constellations*, we advanced the hypothesis of cartographies as objects that have no inborn ontological security but that, on the contrary, are constantly recognized and reappraised in a contingent interaction between creators and users. Drawing on the three maps' inherent critique of a traditional ontological understanding of cartography, we could speculate that such practices transcend the domain of counter-cartography, intended as an alternative mapping practice interested in exposing and countering power relations in cartographic production⁹³. More than a decade ago, Kitchin and Dodge warned that most prevalent conceptualizations of counter-mapping failed to challenge maps' "ontological status"⁹⁴. In their views, most counter-cartographers would still envision the possibility to produce a truthful reproduction of the space, obtainable when a map opposes or clears the relations of power that traditionally adulterate its production. The refugee cartographies presented in this article, on the contrary, appear to go beyond attempts to counter inherent power relations, questioning the ontological foundations of the practice itself.

⁹³ Harley, *Deconstructing the Map*.

⁹⁴ Kitchin, Dodge, *Rethinking Maps*: 332.