

45° 6'10.54"N,
16° 5'50.19"E

THE LANDSCAPE AND THE FURY

DIRECTED BY NICOLE VÖGELE

PRESS KIT



LOGLINE

On the Bosnian-Croatian outer EU border the paths of migrants and locals cross. The scars of the 1990s war connect to the fate of today's refugees. A deeply telluric film, a kaleidoscope of landscape and fury.



SYNOPSIS

Ravnice, at the north-western tip of Bosnia. If this weren't where the green border with Croatia and thus the EU's external border runs through, it would be one of the world's most uneventful regions. Only a few houses, a couple of sheds – randomly dotted across the hills. The idyll of this seemingly unspoilt landscape is deceptive. Dark dreams still slumber in its soil, many mines from the Bosnian war are yet to be cleared.

Amid all this, people trudge through the night, the rain and the snow in search of shelter and a better life. People from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Burundi, they have become pawns in our politics. At times, the wind carries their screams through the night. When they are brutally chased across the border out of the EU into the grey blackness of the woods. Discouraged and disorientated, they find themselves in the middle of nowhere that is Ravnice. The villagers know of the fate of refugees, they once shared it. They open the old school building to them and so their exhausted bodies and souls find a moment of safety, far away from official camps and NGOs.

Meanwhile, daily routines happen around them, everyday life continues. Despite flight. Despite wars. Wood has to be chopped and corn harvested. Children practise poems. The sporty roaring of motorbikes shakes up the tranquillity of afternoon coffee rituals. The imam calls to prayer. Somewhere dogs bark and over the border a large flock of birds draw irregular circles in the sky.

Swiss director Nicole Vögele (*CLOSING TIME*, *NEBEL*) spent several years investigating and reporting on this border region. She was the first journalist to film the illegal pushbacks of the Croatian police. Now she returns as a cineaste. Observing, delving deeper, not prying with direct questions, giving the seasons, the weather and the forest as much space as the people. The result is a portrait of a perhaps inconsolable, haunted landscape, as if in the throes of a nightmare. But also a portrait of human resilience and warmth. A bright flicker in the darkness.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As with my last film *CLOSING TIME*, for *THE LANDSCAPE AND THE FURY* we spent a long time at a specific crossroads, we observed, watched and collected. The result once again, is a sort of panorama, but this time in a place that is heavily politically and historically charged.

The external EU border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina stretches across 932 kilometres. 932 kilometres of forest, fields, hills, mountains. It's absurd, if you think about it: The EU's external border is an almost thousand kilometers long strip of nature and remoteness. Protected by this lack of scrutiny, the Croatian police have set up a sophisticated pushback system. It mostly happens at night. That's when the police officers transport the apprehended migrants to a border stone, a border river and escort, chase or beat the people out of the European Union. Back into Bosnia. This is the everyday life of the political consensus: "Protect external borders".

2018, a coincidence led me to Sarajevo. For a couple of weeks, I lent some friends a hand, on the Balkan route. I handed out clothes, organised warm showers and fire wood. Almost all refugees told of the horrors in the woods. I spoke to hundreds, of the THOUSANDS affected. Broken arms, knocked out teeth, serious head injuries. Hardly anyone was reporting this; Croatia firmly claimed it all to be lies. Despite books filled with testimonies, politicians successfully denied these human rights violations ever existed. Evidence was needed and quickly. But "quickly" took a few years.

2019, I was able to capture the first video evidence of an illegal deportation for Swiss television. We still lacked evidence of the brutal violence involved in illegal deportations. In 2021, after months of investigations with collaborators from Lighthouse Reports, Der Spiegel, ARD and local media, we were able to capture the first close-up images of a Croatian special unit beating people and we thus had proof that these violent troops were financed by EU funds.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For my investigations, I spent months in the Bosnian border woods. With thermal imaging and wildlife cameras, telephoto lenses and hidden microphones, camouflaged, crouching in the same bush for days on end. One night, the Bosnian hunter who was waiting with me on his vantage point, began to talk about the war, about the hills opposite that he defended back then and his best friend's blood that splattered across his face, when he was shot right next to him. In moments like these everything shifts out of focus and flows together into one great blur, not least of all, time. Present and past. That's when you want to grasp at something that is more powerful, than just logical processes and facts.

It is this backdrop that gave way to the filmic essay *THE LANDSCAPE AND THE FURY*. I should be saying so much more with these images and experiences piling up inside me. The moment when a deeply disturbed Iraqi family suddenly appears next to where the local children are playing football. The very unique topographies of the hidden pushback spots, their aura. Much of all this would at

most have fit in-between the lines of a journalistic reportage. A great deal of it would have been lost. The monstrosity in these green hills, the heavily trodden ground, in these forests full of mighty trees. It does not manifest itself immediately. It oscillates. A kaleidoscope of pain in the rustling leaves. With my stubborn approach as a filmmaker, I wanted to grapple with this spot on earth, this spot of world soul. Perhaps I'd call it an attempt to "capture a floating truth".

Nicole Vögele, April 2024





The spectres of Europe are not exactly these “secular and sacred” people, dressed in plastic raincoats and trying to cross a border...: they are the questions they rise to our present, to our own desires and to our political memories. They appear as spectres because their disquieting strangeness makes us feel anxious about our former home.” (Georges Didi-Huberman, 2017: 75)

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FILM

BY NADIN MAI, CRITIC OF “THE ARTS OF SLOW CINEMA“

When the Berlin Wall fell in autumn 1989, we believed that the epoch of walls and frontiers would be over. It was a time when people came together, when they showed that they had far more in common than what they had been made to believe. It was an age of hope, of optimism, a triumph of the human.

Thirty years later, there is little left of what spurred people on at the time. That which divides takes center stage. The Mediterranean has become a mass grave of 30,000 people who started their journey full of hope and dreams. Along the Balkan route, migrants are violently pushed back by national police forces. A 186-kilometre-long wall, five metres high and topped with barbed wire, built along the Polish-Belarusian border, has become the new physical symbol of Europe’s migration policy.

The time for walls and fences, for illegal push backs and deportation centres is now. Chronos no longer walks towards the future. He looks over his shoulder to see a past that catches up with the present.

“Seeing them reminds me of old times”, says an elderly woman to another over coffee. It is here on the Balkan route that Chronos is caught up with. It is here, in the region of the former Yugoslavia, at the Bosnian-Croatian border, that the passing-through of migrant groups changes the course of time. Swiss director Nicole Vögele observes the hopeful from a respectful distance, allowing each of them to become part of the mountainous landscape they need to cross.

Each migrant is a little dot on screen, covered and protected by a landscape that still carries the wounds of past wars. Old tanks in the woods,

unexploded mines in open fields. The war - their war - may be over, but the scars and wounds, with their potential to kill, remain. And yet, it is those very wounds that build a protective cocoon around those who flee, who dream, and who risk everything they have.

At night, the wind howls, the rain pours down, the police chase and forcibly remove. What remains are traces of those who tried: a jacket, a shoe, a broken mobile phone, photographs, now covered with autumn leaves and inspected by eager insects in search for food. And a hypnotising drone sound that is as unsettling as it is foreshadowing.

High-pitched screams in the woods, the wind in the trees, the beeping of mine detectors - Vögele’s film is as focused on sound as it is on



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FILM

images. Her film is hypersensitive to the sensory experiences that mark so much a migrant's journey through unknown land, always afraid of being caught by the police and sent back across the border. The proximity of sound is balanced by the distance in the images. The director always shows in context, never singles out. The people are embedded in their surroundings, are part of a collective, a community. The migrants may be passing through, their presence ephemeral, and yet their coming and going in this almost intimate Bosnian-Croatian border region is permanent.

The locals help as they can, reminded as they are of their own struggles in a war-torn country thirty years ago. They give food, clothes, phone chargers.

And when a few migrants sit outside an old, now unused and rundown school, which serves as a

resting place for those on the move, and warm themselves at a fire at night, little distinguishes them from all those people who lost their homes during the Bosnian War. It is a repetition of what has been. It is this repetition that we want to lock away by forcibly removing migrants. It is this repetition that we don't want to be remembered of. We remove and deport in an attempt to chase away the ghosts of the past.

But the more we chase, the more we're haunted.

It is a place where survival ... and the future meet. ... It's childhood. (Georges Didi-Huberman, 2017: 85)

The people we see in Vögele's film have no past. They have been parachuted into our present and we're asked to experience their cyclical time, their never-ending present with them. They only exist

in the here and now; their linear time, their linear life story is suspended until they find a place to stay, until they are granted the right to stay, to work, to feel safe and secure once again.

One of the men bought a small inflatable swimming pool for the children. It's summer, the sun is hot, and the group seeks to recover from several days of hiking through the woods before they continue their journey. A moment of joy, of innocence, of happiness. A moment of triumph. The happy screams of playing children are a reminder that life continues, even if time is suspended. But only children are granted this magic power over time and life. Adults, on the other hand, walk in circles, imprisoned as they are in a never-ending present.

"I didn't think we would end up here again", we hear in the off.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FILM

So it is that a group of people finds itself back at the same place they started off at. The landscape is as protecting as it is deceiving. Everything looks the same, only the seasons change. Autumn, winter, summer - seasons come and go, but the landscape itself never changes.

Are we in Bosnia-Herzegovina? Are we in Croatia? Where is the frontier?

This is where Vögele's film takes its power from. There is no frontier, except an arbitrary line drawn on a map, an arbitrary line wars had been fought over. The landscape knows no frontier. Time knows no frontier. Nor do hopes and dreams. It is, in fact, Vögele's film that shatters the frontiers: those who fled war in the past help those who flee war in the present. Several temporal layers overlap, here in the woods at the Bosnian-Croatian border, amongst

shepherds and sheep, amongst teachers and school children.

Nicole Vögele's new film *THE LANDSCAPE AND THE FURY* adds to a growing body of work by filmmakers who use their cameras in an attempt to make sense of what's happening at our borders. Agnieszka Holland (*GREEN BORDER*), Matteo Garrone (*IO CAPITANO*), Gianfranco Rosi (*FUOCOAMMARE*) as well as Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (*HUMAN FLOW*) and many others have used images to show what cannot be put into words. Some films scream with anger, others with despair. *THE LANDSCAPE AND THE FURY* does neither. Vögele's film is a quiet, patient observation of what is, rather than of what should be. It is a portrait of humanity, of the human in people who have more in common than which divides them. It is an observation of solidarity between those who know, those who endured

and survived, an observation of the hand-in-hand relationship of past and present, of history and history-in-the-making. *THE LANDSCAPE AND THE FURY* is a deeply human portrait of life at a border, which doesn't divide but brings together.

Nadin Mai (The Arts of Slow Cinema)





CREDITS

A documentary film by Nicole Vögele

Cinematography Stefan Sick • **Editing** Hannes Bruun • **Location Sound** Jean-Pierre Gerth / Jonathan Schorr
Music alva noto • **Sound Design & Mix** Jonathan Schorr • **Grading** Timo Inderfurth

Produced by Beauvoir Films, Aline Schmid & Adrian Blaser
In coproduction with SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen • SRG SSR

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Aargauer Kuratorium • Swisslos-Fonds Kanton Solothurn • UBS Kulturstiftung

NICOLE VÖGELE

AUTHOR & DIRECTOR

NICOLE VÖGELE is an independent filmmaker and journalist, based in Zurich and Berlin. She started her professional life with an apprenticeship as a commercial clerk but soon found her way into journalism. Most of her journalistic career she spent reporting for Swiss Television (SRF). Nicole Vögele studied journalism at MAZ Lucerne and documentary filmmaking at Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg (Germany), where she graduated 2017. Her heart always belonged to the poetic storytelling and the investigative truth seeking. Nicole Vögele was part of various collective investigative projects. For Cryptoleak she was awarded the 2020 Swiss Journalist of the Year Prize also her investigations on the EU's external border received various awards. Since 2021 Nicole Vögele holds the professorship of Moving Image at the Dresden University of Fine Arts. Her short films *FRAU LOOSLI* (2013), *INTO THE INNARDS* (2014) and the middle-length feature *NEBEL* were premiered at international film festivals (Berlinale, Visions du Réel, Dok Leipzig etc). Her first documentary feature *CLOSING TIME* was awarded at Locarno Film Festival in 2018 and screened around the globe.



FILMOGRAPHY

2018 *CLOSING TIME* | Documentary (118')

2014 *NEBEL* | fog | Middle-length Documentary (59')

2013 *IN DIE INNEREIE* | Into the Innards | Essay (20')

2013 *FRAU LOOSLI* | Mrs Loosli | Short Documentary (40')

BEAUVOIR FILMS

BEAUVOIR FILMS produces author-driven documentary and fiction features for festival and theatrical releases as well as TV. We work with directors who have a distinct visual and narrative approach and strive to push the boundaries of storytelling in compelling and creative ways. The film *WALDEN* by Daniel Zimmermann receives the Special Jury Prize 2018 at the Karlovy Vary Festival and is presented at Sundance 2019. *CLOSING TIME* by Nicole Vögele wins the Leopard Jury Prize at the Locarno Festival 2018. *THE GIRL AND THE SPIDER* by Ramon & Silvan Zürcher received two prizes at the Berlinale 2021. *MARGUERITE'S THEOREM* by Anna Novion is an official selection of the Cannes Festival 2023.



After graduating from the University of Fribourg, **ALINE SCHMID** studied in Stuttgart to become a scriptwriter. After working at several festivals, she became head of distribution at Cineworx in Basel, then administrator of the Cinéma Tous Ecrans festival in Geneva. With Intermezzo Films she co-produced several films including, *SONITA* (Winner at Sundance/IDFA). In 2013, she took part in the Emerging Producers programme at Jihlava and in Cannes' Producer on the Move in 2015. In 2016, she founded Beauvoir Films in Geneva.



ADRIAN BLASER came 1992 for his studies to Lausanne. He worked at the Théâtre de Vidy and became Jean-Stéphane Bron's assistant on the film *MAIS IM BUNDESHUUS - LE GÉNIE HELVÉTIQUE*. He became production manager and in 2008 worked at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade before joining the set of *CLEVELAND VS WALL STREET* (2010). In 2011, he joined Bande à part Films in Lausanne as an executive producer (*L'EXPÉRIENCE BLOCHER*, *MOKA*, *LES PONT DE SARAJEVO*, *L'OPÉRA DE PARIS*, etc.). In 2017, he joined Beauvoir Films.



THE LANDSCAPE AND THE FURY

138 Minutes

24fps

DCP 1.85:1 / 1998x1080 (2K Flat)

5.1 Surround sound

Switzerland

2024

Languages: Bosnian, Farsi, Dari, Kurdish, English

landscape-fury-film.com

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