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ARTICLE



Contemporary art on the current refugee crisis: the problematic of aesthetics versus ethics

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on contemporary artworks outlining the current refugee flow from the Middle East to the West, namely to European countries together with the US and Canada. Drawing primarily on Jacques Rancière's conceptualization of ethical art versus aesthetics, I explore how various journeys of refugees in its many forms have been represented in the contemporary art scene. My aim is to concretize the theoretical debate surrounding the 'political' engagement of critical art on the issue of refugee representation through various prominent artworks and art practices starting with the well-known image of Alan Kurdi's and Ai Weiwei's replication of this image in his artwork. I will analyse when and in which configurations aesthetics and ethics can be found in contemporary art on the issue of the 'refugee crisis'. I argue that art on refugees can be grouped into two primary categories that I define as 'human condition assessment' and 'agency empowerment'. As such, I demonstrate in practice how contemporary art on the current refugee crisis both employs and moves beyond the ethical subject matters by challenging abject victimhood as well as the ideal of egalitarian art for the under-represented and thus assumingly voiceless, depoliticized refugees.

Introduction

The images of the painful refugee journey, news images of refugees crowded precariously into sinking boats, the reports of the conditions of daily life in the European refugee camps, as well as the escalating supremacy of border policy in the West, have become trademarks of humanitarian tragedy in recent years. This contemporary 'refugee crisis' is generally understood as the displacement of millions of refugees who are fleeing war and persecution from the war-torn Middle East to Europe and North America. All of this at a time when immigration has been increasingly characterized by matters of security and conditions of insecurity as attributed to state policies on the 'War on Terror'.¹

While the news of thousands of Syrian refugees pouring into boats and risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean in order to escape the civil conflict at home have become a

¹Richard Victor Ericson and Kevin D. Haggerty, *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

regular part of news media coverage, not only have civic institutions and NGOs begun to draw attention to the ongoing humanitarian crisis but also individual artists and artistic collaborations have focused on the refugees' emergency situation. The artistic depiction of suffering and victimization has been widely discussed since Theodor Adorno's famous precept that, 'writing a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric'.² With growing incidences of conflict and war throughout the Middle East and the humanitarian crisis surrounding the flow of refugees, I contend that the question of art on suffering must once again be undertaken in relation to the artistic upsurge for this specific case.

Since the end of the Second World War, after Auschwitz as Adorno predicted; the art scene has been dominated by works that have emphasized on the failure of utopian thinking and human progress as well as the impossibility of universality. On the contrary, in the prior modernist era, Kantian good is good because of the interest-drive, for potentiality in utility, whereas the beautiful is objectively good and universal independent from the spectator's interest.³ Thereby, the expectation for a Kant's 'disinterested' disembodied subjectivity in art's appreciation derives from art's supposed ability of changing the 'partition of the sensible'⁴ that aesthetics defines. Contrasting to art ideally envisaged as autonomous from politics and societal conventions in the modern age established in the era of Kant and Schiller and the romantic predecessors of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and following the postmodern scepticism towards universality, contemporary art resides in its utility of moral or political value to constitute forms of common life without the context of a sense of harmony and universality of the judgment of taste.⁵ As such, beauty has been regarded as an ideological construction whose norms vary historically and across cultures,⁶ and artworks become beautiful according to the interests that they declare, aim at or are assumed to project in the first place. Thus, the understanding of artistic value has also been revised as parallel to the same ethics of plurality in the democratization process of human rights. As such, political re-generation of human rights concerns in art creation and reception eventually possess an emphasis on 'right' and 'wrong' conduct for representing the Other that one does not share his pain and denotation of 'good' and 'bad' for the human condition. Based on the recognition of diversity of human rights concerns and its effects on the artistic practices, I explore in this article the ways in which art space currently accommodates the journey of the refugee and refugee's portrayal.

Although the artistic approaches on 'refugee crisis' claim to be political, they distinguish themselves from humanitarian approach that define 'good' as help, i.e., 'providing assistance to those in need'⁷ in the ways of representing the sufferings of the victims, the voiceless Others, while they cannot represent themselves. Therefore, their objective exceeds 'politics of pity'⁸ that assumes 'politics' between two classes of people defined as fortunate or unfortunate and only consisting of concern of the

²Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *Prisms*, ed. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 34.

³Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Revised edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Tra edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010).

⁵Mads Anders Baggesgaard and Jakob Ladegaard, eds., *Confronting Universalities: Aesthetics and Politics under the Sign of Globalisation* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011), 21.

⁶Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, and Vered Maimon, eds., *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham: Duke Univ Pr, 2009), 3.

⁷'Deliver Humanitarian Aid,' United Nations, 7 December 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/deliver-humanitarian-aid/>.

⁸Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

former for the latter.⁹ I aim to analyse the traits of this ‘political’ claimed art and provide a better understanding of the question of ‘what is politics’ and ‘what is political art’. I contend that there are two major types of contemporary art on refugees. The first—the more popular one—presents a current assessment of the human condition. The artwork of *Human Flow* (2017), documentary film by Ai Weiwei, could be given as an example of this form of art. It is generic in the sense that it engenders a sublime feeling that encloses universality for human failure without a Kantian negative pleasure accentuated on it and conditioned by the expansion of human imagination.¹⁰ The second type of refugee art aims to empower agency for refugees who are seen as ‘voiceless’ in the global public sphere. This type of art practices aims to promote the image of already-granted subject position for refugee portrayal in the general public with underlying thematic that refugees are entitled to logos and political life in contrast to depoliticized, dehistoricized and universalized figuration of the refugee as mute victim.¹¹ Humanitarian representations of the refugee amount to a blanketing and generalizing depoliticized depiction of refugees as helpless victims, thereby obscuring the particularity of different sorts of refugee experience. Both of these types of artistic practices target remedying as observed in the abject victimhood of the refugee that exists either in the corporeality of media representations of the refugee and migrant labourer with an emphasis on the visual suffering of her isolated body¹² or in the restrictive discourses that deem refugees as economically superfluous, or biologically or politically dangerous to the national health and body.¹³ As such, these critical artistic methods aim to differ from humanitarian approach of aid to the ‘needy’ or ‘oppressed’ people who are living in the ‘disadvantaged’ parts of the world, and try to empower agency of the refugees or to contemplate on human condition by moving beyond the purpose of raising awareness about the situation of refugees.

Hence, contemporary art on the ‘refugee crisis’ resides at the centre of this tension between the *aesthetic* and *ethical* drives of the art scene. In Jacques Rancière’s terms elaborated from Kantian and Schiller’s aesthetics, aesthetic art is political in so far as it carries a new sensorium to reconfigure the political as the capacity for dissensus whereas the ethical regime of art seeks to reflect the equal dignity and freedom of every individual with different interests, aspirations and values in the given political reality. In the ethical art that Rancière refers to, artwork and politics do not constitute two separate realities that reflect ‘what ought to be’ for the community.¹⁴ Thereby, art ends up forming a policing act in the ‘reduction of the people to the sum of the seen

⁹Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*, 4–5.

¹⁰Paul Crowther, ‘The Kantian Sublime, the Avant-Garde, and the Postmodern’, *New Formations* 7, no. 1 (1989): 67–75; Kant, *Critique of Judgement*; Stephen Zepke, ‘Contemporary Art—Beautiful or Sublime? Kant in Rancière, Lyotard and Deleuze.’, *Avello Publishing* 1, no. 1, accessed 15 December 2015, http://www.academia.edu/6464972/Contemporary_art_-_beautiful_or_sublime_Kant_in_Ranci%C3%A8re_Lyotard_and_Deleuze.

¹¹Liisa H. Malkki, ‘Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization’, *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377–404; Prem Kumar Rajaram, ‘Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 3 (2002): 260.

¹²Jenny Wills, ‘1’s Wide Shut: Examining the Depiction of Female Refugees’ Eyes and Hands in Stephen Frears’s *Dirty Pretty Things*’, *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees* 24, no. 2 (2007): 115–6.

¹³Ethan Blue, ‘National Vitality, Migrant Abjection, and Coercive Mobility: The Biopolitical History of American Deportation’, *Leonardo* 48, no. 3 (2015): 268–9.

¹⁴Rancière, *Dissensus*, 42.

parts of the social body and of the political community to the present relations between the interests and aspirations of these different parts' within the consensus. Hal Foster notes on the 'aesthetics of the after' (named after the disillusionment on Enlightenment after Auschwitz), especially on avant-garde movement, by stating that 'trauma was treated as an event that guarantees the formation of the subject, and in this register the subject, however disturbed, rushed back as survivor, witness, and testifier'. Such artistic endeavour reflects a kind of a celebration of the assumingly expository quality of 'abject',¹⁵ for not respecting borders, positions, rules with its embodiment of the 'in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'¹⁶ that risks the symbolic order of the political realm. Yet dissensus derives from the equality in the aesthetic art as the equality of sensorium without appointing a higher status for a specific part of consensus to permit an aesthetic democracy, which means reframing the very field of the given, of the sensible, the intelligible and, consequently, the possible to possess the equal dignity and freedom for subjectivization. Thus, the marginalized in the ethical regime of art must be the exemplary of their own case in the pre-existed consensual system such as their own particular experiences as refugees in order to be part of an artwork.

To understand the notion of politics in artistic endeavours and to question the tension of aesthetic versus ethical demands in art today, I will put forward a theoretical explanation for how art can claim to possess artistic value and a political undertaking on humanitarian matters while representing suffering. I will ask, what kind of politics these artistic strategies enrol in the context of the current refugee crisis. Drawing on Rancière's theory on dissensus and his distinction on ethical art versus aesthetic art, I demonstrate that contemporary art concerned with the current refugee theme has moved beyond the previous critical acknowledgements regarding the problematization of abject victimhood and participatory ideal for the underrepresented. As follows, I contribute to the contemporary discussion on art concerning the theme of suffering, the problematic of whether art can both outdistance the politics of pity¹⁷ and challenge 'refugee's abject portrayal'¹⁸ in mass media as a nameless flow¹⁹ that attacks the national body by the attempt of border passing.

Analysing contemporary art on the current refugee crisis: concepts and methodologies

My methodological exploration attempts to bridge evidence-based and knowledge-based patterns of research. I aim to extend the theoretical political approaches through aesthetics and ethics to the study of contemporary artistic representation and public debates that focus on refugees' and humanity's crisis. My case of art practices on the current crisis of humanity related to mass migration introduces these artworks as political texts or a kind of discourse produced by acclaimed artists or displayed by influential art venues and in public networks. This study necessitated a cross-reading of

¹⁵Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

¹⁶Robbie Duschinsky, 'Abjection and Self-Identity: Towards a Revised Account of Purity and Impurity', *The Sociological Review* 61, no. 4 (November 2013): 709–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12081>.

¹⁷Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*.

¹⁸Blue, 'National Vitality, Migrant Abjection, and Coercive Mobility: The Biopolitical History of American Deportation.'

¹⁹Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt Brace & Company, 1951).

theoretical analysis and empirical data. I link empirical assumptions that I collect throughout the artworks to normative ideas on the definition of politics. Artistic intention, expression and perception are the representations of an experienced world, and are embedded in the dominant discourse of what is assumed to be art and also 'political' art. As such, this critical analysis on the conceptualization of politics draws on combining reflected artistic expressions as impure outputs to verbal data such as art commentaries, audience notes and self-description of art installations. I use content and discourse analysis to find internal contradictions and omissions as well as recurrent themes to deconstruct artistic intentions and art perceptions while I suggest a philosophical understanding of the politics that the art space projects. Thereby, I 'test' here the configurations of the 'political' among artistic practices to clarify what is at stake in the partition of the political realm.

My particular objective here is to concretize the theoretical debate on aesthetics versus ethics in contemporary art through Rancière's conception of dissensus²⁰ as the capacity of politics in aesthetic art. Agamben argues that politics is conceptualized as the tension between inclusion and exclusion, between forms of life that the sovereign will protect and represent and those it will not.²¹ Therefore, 'by breaking the identity between the human and the citizen and between nativity and nationality, [the refugee] brings the originary fiction of sovereignty to crisis'.²² The refugee as the ultimate biopolitical subject, and bare life without even the 'right to have rights'²³ demonstrates the futility of seeking to represent political subjectivity in terms of state, nation and territory.²⁴ Rancierian understanding of politics differs from the commonsensical understandings of politics as well as Agamben's understandings of politics.

By introducing the notion 'dissensus' Rancière suggests a politics, which consists in blurring and displacing the limits of the political by re-enacting the equality of each through vanishing condition of the political.²⁵ Dissensus here as a term does not refer to 'a distinct way of understanding our perceived reality, but a modality that is primarily attuned to the process of sensory awareness'²⁶ in the sense of disrupting 'agency perception'²⁷. As such, dissensus in the sense of sensory awareness is defined as, 'a means of breaking down pre-existing habits of association and categories of classification', a process of traversing across the boundaries of 'sayable' and 'visible' as a reconfiguration of perception and signification.²⁸ Therefore, Rancière's dissensus as an excess to what is supposed to be the political realm does not primarily reveal the fiction

²⁰mentioned in the introduction part of the article.

²¹Iosif Kovras and Simon Robins, 'Death as the Border: Managing Missing Migrants and Unidentified Bodies at the EU's Mediterranean Frontier', *Political Geography* 55 (2016): 40–49.

²²Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2000), 21, <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/means-without-end>.

²³Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

²⁴Patricia Owens, 'Reclaiming "Bare Life"?: Against Agamben on Refugees', *International Relations* 23, no. 4 (2009): 567–82.

²⁵Rancière, *Dissensus*, 55.

²⁶N. Papastergiadis, 'A Breathing Space for Aesthetics and Politics: An Introduction to Jacques Rancière', *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 7–8 (1 December 2014): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276414551995>.

²⁷Jason Hart, 'Children's Participation and International Development: Attending to the Political', *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 16, no. 3 (1 July 2008): 407–18, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181808X311231>.

²⁸Papastergiadis, 'A Breathing Space for Aesthetics and Politics', 8–9; Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2009), 14.

of sovereignty introduced by Agamben's refugee term but conditions a free play that is not defined previously in the same realm.

In the following sections, 'Art as The Assessment of the Human Condition' and 'Empowering Agency through Art', I will explore the critiques of the emancipatory approaches involved in current, well-known visual artworks of different kinds and artists such as Ai Weiwei, Rohit Chawla, Jason de Caires Taylor, Dario Mitidieri, George Kurian. To clarify the problematic of aesthetics versus ethics, I will texturize theoretical reading with case study regarding artistic representation of refugee and the question of its politics.

Art as the assessment of the human condition

There is no doubt that the photograph of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, taken by Nilufer Demir²⁹ of Dogan News Agency significantly affected the Western public in drawing attention to the Syrian refugee crisis. This image of Kurdi lying lifeless along the shore with his sneakers on his feet went viral instantly when it was shared by Peter Bouckaert from Human Rights Watch.³⁰ It is estimated that the image's circulation reached 20 million people around the world in 12 h through social media.³¹ The original image of Kurdi was certainly enough to shock viewers and to construct a contra-image in response to the prevalent imagery of refugees as threats to the internal security of host countries. The abundant circulation of the photo throughout social media reveals that this photo was not at all ordinary because other photos of refugees struggling with death had never before attracted so much attention in the public sphere. Indeed, the image of Kurdi raised the interest in sponsoring refugees in Canada after the revelation of the fact that Kurdi's family had tried unsuccessfully to immigrate to Canada.³²

Indeed, the suffering that refugees went through and continue to go through is considered in the profane realm, as a fact of banal realities. The image of refugee pain on the news has been harshly interpreted as the prominence of alterity. Susan Sontag stated that in the culture of spectatorship, the pain of others titillates the viewer so long as it is kept at a safe distance.³³ That is why the victims of famine and massacre are always represented as people we do not know; when genocide recurred during the Bosnian war, we were reminded that the Balkans should not be considered part of Europe.³⁴ Thus, this otherization reflects the undermining of the political or psychological profundity of the refugee experience through abjective framing based on the corporeal exposure of the refugee journey and suffering. However, Kurdi's death, the death of the individual Syrian or Middle Eastern child became the interest of a global

²⁹Bryan Walsh, 'Alan Kurdi's Story: Behind The Most Heartbreaking Photo of 2015', *Time*, 29 December 2015, <http://time.com/4162306/alan-kurdi-syria-drowned-boy-refugee-crisis/>.

³⁰Walsh; Peter Bouckaert, 'Dispatches: Why I Shared a Horrific Photo of a Drowned Syrian Child', Human Rights Watch, 2 September 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/02/dispatches-why-i-shared-horrific-photo-drowned-syrian-child>.

³¹Farida Vis et al., 'The Iconic Image on Social Media: The Iconic Image on Social Media: A Rapid Research Response to He Death of Aylan Kurdi*', Visual Social Media Lab, December 2015, <http://visualsocialmedialab.org/projects/the-iconic-image-on-social-media>.

³²'Image of Alan Kurdi's Body Led to Spike in Sponsorship of Syrian Refugees', CBC News, 2 September 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/image-of-alan-kurdi-s-body-led-to-spike-in-sponsorship-of-syrian-refugees-group-says-1.3746552>.

³³Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 1 edition (New York: Picador, 2004).

³⁴*Ibid.*, 71.

unity and hence, something extraordinary. His image cannot be watched with detachment as other similar images have been over the span of this crisis. I contend that Kurdi's image does not reflect the image of 'the Other' or the misery of the refugees in particular, but rather the misery of the human race and the universal loss of human dignity. To be sure, the people sharing Kurdi's photo cannot feel the pain of the refugees. But, the image creates sympathy through resemblance, altruism through narcissism and thereby calls for urgent action in the current political system. That is notable precisely because Kurdi is not disfigured, the image shows picturesquely beautiful child wearing perfect toddler clothes and shoes without any mark of his identity as Syrian, Middle Easterner, as refugee. In a way, Kurdi's fate has been separated from his specific geography and socio-political-economic status. That is why the image is understood to show a shocking injustice. Otherwise, Kurdi's fate as refugee would not have been considered sad but an ordinary picture that proves 'the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward—that is, poor—parts of the world'.³⁵ Besides this, the image creates an ethical responsibility for the viewer. Although sharing Kurdi's photo online does not mark the formation of a political collective to concretely remedy the refugee crisis or prevent the causes of forced migration, it does signify a symbolic act in correcting the viewer's own position for the well-being of his own human dignity.

This political aspect of the artistic assessment of the human condition follows a specific pattern that can be conceptualized as an egalitarian transition in the embodiment of the artwork. Here, the artistic gesture inhabits the transfer of a banal object/issue to a cultural stage of high value. Such a gesture contains the democratic endeavour because it attempts to attract attention to 'underrepresented' issues or subject matters at the centre of public debate through the artistic undertaking. This revaluating act reflects the artist's way of doing in regards to communal affairs and prioritizes the values of an equal chance of visibility for every segment/matter of the community. Boris Groys asserts that the innovative value of art always derives from the tension that it provokes between the cultural and profane realms of the current social value regime: 'a choice based on the principle of aesthetic contrast, foreignness, exoticism, or difference-³⁶'. Thus, the contrast between two realms, and the revaluation between the two by the artist, becomes the source of attention, the demonstration of artistic ability and the political act. Thereby, the artistic ability that is present in such works lies in the way that the artist sees and his or her ability to demonstrate to the audience the alternative ways that cultural and profane realms can be organized. In that sense, Kurdi's picture has allowed the transition from the profane to the cultural realm, and has encouraged people become interested in the banal tragedy of the Middle East. The image of an 'ordinary' event, the death of a refugee child, united people based on a universal concern about their own humanitarian failure. As such, the image portrays the human condition and not a specific local event. *Human Flow*, the documentary movie by Ai Weiwei endorses this egalitarian line of contemporary art ethics by naming the movie 'Human' instead of 'Refugee' Flow.

Yet, is Kurdi's image egalitarian in the sense of nullifying the distinction between the refugee and the citizen? Here, the political aspect of the original photo is its quality of

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Boris Groys, *On the New*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (New York: Verso, 2014), 102.

encompassing a local issue as a universal concern. Does the fact of the pain of refugee becoming a universal matter of human rights make refugees equal to the citizens of the better world? What kind of politics does this artistic gesture entail? The question here is whether such a change of perception from the profane to the cultural realm can affirm a dissensus in Rancière's terms, namely an aesthetic art that urges a surplus in the distribution of the sensible. How can we accommodate the 'political' value of these artworks of 'human condition assessment' in the regime of critical art which particularly demands awareness raising in the community?

I will try to answer these questions by examining Ai Weiwei's artworks on refugees. Weiwei continuously documents the perilous journeys that migrants and especially Syrian refugees undertake through his Instagram account. Weiwei's account features multiple photos and videos of asylum seekers as they finally reach the European shore and it presents the daily conditions of the growing refugee community in several locations around the Mediterranean. In his installation Ai Weiwei covered the Konzerthaus in Berlin with thousands of refugee life jackets in order to highlight the scale of migrants taking to the seas every day. Along with his team, he wrapped 14,000 discarded life vests around the columns overnight. Indeed, the critical stance taken Weiwei's art does not aim at educating the viewer, to inform the public about why refugees have to run from their countries or to indicate what should be done to remedy this humanitarian failure. Rather, the artistic value in Weiwei's art derives from the talent of representation and the ability of the artwork in attracting attention in the representation of refugees, while 'bad news' has been normalized and has become banal especially in regard to the Middle East. When the artist Weiwei mimicked Alan Kurdi lying on the beach of Lesbos in Rohit Chawla's photograph for India Today Magazine,³⁷ he was criticized for using the popularity of the original image to further his flourishing artistic career.³⁸ In an interview with CNN, Weiwei stated: 'For me to be in the same position [as Kurdi] is to suggest our condition can be so far from human concerns in today's politics'.³⁹ In this sense, the artist asserts that this artwork is committed to the humanitarian cause. Yet critics have claimed that Weiwei's self-as-Alan Kurdi artwork contributes nothing in terms of bringing the spotlight to the serious issue that have been ignored in regard to refugees, such as the political background of the Syrian civil war, the factors that brought about ISIS, or the role of the Western interventionism and imperialism in this humanitarian tragedy. In other words, Weiwei's artwork has been interpreted as, 'not critical of the system that produced the tragic end of Alan Kurdi' but 'maintaining the status-quo'⁴⁰ because it does not shed light on the plight of Syrian refugees. According to this critique, the artist does not expose the causes of the violence, and thus, blocks the

³⁷'Artist Ai Weiwei Poses as Aylan Kurdi for India Today Magazine', India Today Magazine, 1 February 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/artist-ai-weiwei-poses-as-aylan-kurdi-for-india-today-magazine/1/584804.html>.

³⁸Nitasha Dhillon, 'Ai Weiwei's Photo Reenacting a Child Refugee's Death Should Not Exist', Hyperallergic, 3 February 2016, <http://hyperallergic.com/272881/ai-weiweis-photo-reenacting-a-child-refugees-death-should-not-exist/>; Niru Ratnam, 'Ai Weiwei's Aylan Kurdi Image Is Crude, Thoughtless and Egotistical', *The Spectator* (blog), 1 February 2016, <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/02/ai-weiweis-aylan-kurdi-image-is-crude-thoughtless-and-egotistical/>.

³⁹Stephy Chung, 'Ai Weiwei Poses as Dead Syrian Child on Beach', CNN, 1 February 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/01/arts/ai-weiwei-alan-kurdi-syria/index.html>.

⁴⁰Dhillon, 'Ai Weiwei's Photo Reenacting a Child Refugee's Death Should Not Exist.'

way for those wishing to engage in the politics necessary to stop this human crime. Instead Weiwei is seen as romanticizing the issue with artistic stylization. It is claimed that his artwork presents a, 'careful composition, printed tastefully in black and white ... and a tree artfully cropped in the mid-distance'⁴¹. As a result, the violence that refugees endure becomes fatal and the only remedy is thereby urgent humanitarian aid to repair the after effects. That is to say, for the critics the artist does not accomplish his responsibility for engaging in a critical act against the present social institutions that have created such a humanitarian tragedy and does not facilitate social change for the well-being of society.

Indeed, these types of 'human condition assessment' artworks on the refugee crisis follow a very specific pattern of political engagement. What Weiwei especially focuses on in this particular artwork is the human failure to save Kurdi, embodying innocence lying on the beach rather than Kurdi's own suffering. The subject of his artwork is the human condition today and the intention behind the artwork was to raise awareness of the misery of humanity and not Kurdi's specific victimhood. He does not show 'what ought to be', he does not envision the emancipatory act, and therefore his art is considered 'apolitical' within the jargon of critical art with an emphasis on socio-political change or the articulation of an oppositional attitude. As such Nitasha Dhillon⁴² in the *Hyperallergic* online forum of art and culture and Niru Ratnam⁴³ in *the Spectator* magazine have stated that Weiwei's representation of Kurdi in his artwork has reduced the terms of the political in the engagement of the refugee crisis in public debate.

In another example, artist Jason de Caires Taylor created underwater sculptures in Europe's first underwater museum, Museo Atlántico, in Lanzarote, Canary Islands. All of the sculptural figures in this piece are intentionally created in order to be transformed as they become slowly colonized by marine life (see [Figure 1](#)). Refugees are part of the



Figure 1. Taylor, Jason De Caires. 'The Raft of Lampedusa'. Museo Atlántico. Lanzarote. 2015.

⁴¹Ratnam, 'Ai Weiwei's Aylan Kurdi Image Is Crude, Thoughtless and Egotistical.'

⁴²Dhillon, 'Ai Weiwei's Photo Reenacting a Child Refugee's Death Should Not Exist.'

⁴³Ratnam, 'Ai Weiwei's Aylan Kurdi Image Is Crude, Thoughtless and Egotistical.'

underwater scene, but they are not the only piece of the composition. Among these figures are concrete figures representing refugees as well as selfie-taking tourists. The installation does not intend to be a memorial or tribute for the lost lives of refugees who have drowned in the Mediterranean but a memorial for today's human condition. The artwork serves as a reminder of human passivity and of the collective responsibility of humanity today. The artist stated that his underwater installation indicates a, 'disturbing image of the world we're creating'.⁴⁴ For the figures of refugees, Taylor composed a contemporary remake of 'The Raft of Lampedusa' (Figure 1), Géricault's original work, which is already considered a synthetic view of human life abandoned to its fate.⁴⁵:

So what, he wonders, happens when you sink it in the sea? In this place, so often a realm of death, it will be transformed by new life in all its bizarre multiplicity—Taylor expects octopus to colonise it.⁴⁶

Taylor has thus created art as a depiction of the demise of the human capacity for progress. In this diagram, sufferings and misfortunes are too vast to be changed by any human act. What remains is for art on the refugee crisis to reveal the ugly truth about human nature. This view point does not tend to create a discursive challenge that leads to social pressure on the institutions and political actors to change or to pacify border policies while at the same time avoiding the act of questioning the perpetrators or the systems that permit such inequality and injustice. A concrete political act to remedy the human condition is therefore unforeseen while a discursive act of equalization between the profane realm and cultural realm has been accomplished in the embodiment of the artwork.

However, even the discursive political act of equalization in these human condition assessment artworks is questionable. Groys argues that the seemingly democratic landscape of contemporary art still holds the antagonistic boundary between the cultural and profane realms precisely because aesthetic value is still derived from the indication of tension between them.⁴⁷ For instance, according to Groys, Duchamp's Fountain illustrates an immanent interpretation of a profane urinal in the cultural sphere, 'the urinal acquired a position in the archive's value hierarchy and gained cultural value as Fountain'.⁴⁸ But while Marcel Duchamp's ready-made artwork *Fountain* (1917) gained a privileged place in art museums, the numerous brethren not exposed in the museum were left in their usual non-privileged places.⁴⁹ Therefore, such an artistic gesture of democratization as a means of equalization between the cultural and profane realms does not accomplish its task of democratization in the public sphere except in the specific case of an art event. As long as the death of a refugee is banal, except for that of Kurdi, the artist that undertakes Kurdi as such, the artwork can signal an artistic value and the audience can sense that there is a democratic move within the artwork because

⁴⁴Susan Smillie, 'Drowned World: Welcome to Europe's First Undersea Sculpture Museum', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/feb/02/drowned-world-europe-first-undersea-sculpture-museum-lanzarote-jason-decaires-taylor>.

⁴⁵Severine Laborie, 'The Raft of the Medusa', Louvre Museum, accessed 4 August 2016, <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/raft-medusa>.

⁴⁶Smillie, 'Drowned World: Welcome to Europe's First Undersea Sculpture Museum.'

⁴⁷Groys, *On the New*, 102.

⁴⁸H. Abdullah and M. Benzer, 'Our Fate as a Living Corpse: An Interview with Boris Groys', *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 2 (1 March 2011): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276410396909>.

⁴⁹Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London; New York: Verso, 2016), 1–2.

the categories and roles distributed to the constituents of the community still hold in the appreciation of the artwork. Therefore, 'human condition assessment' artwork may also be considered as not 'egalitarian' or 'critical' enough, not because they do not promote change, but because they maintain the same logic of signification in the consensus, in other words, ethical. Here, I take consensus as defined by Rancière, that 'implies positing an immediate identity between the political constitution of the community and the physical and moral constitution of a population'⁵⁰. The viewer knows the *ethos* that defines the 'ways of being' in the artwork before the artwork refers to a domain of moral values in its own embodiment, hence it accomplishes its ethical goal. Thus, the ethical act that carries a political message of equalization between profane and cultural significations is stamped by the categories of consensus, which is based on an understanding of politics as conflict resolution instead of a disruption of perception. As such, art assessing the human condition defines 'what ought to be' in the sense of universalization of human history as 'good' and 'correct' form for the well-being of community through the artwork.

Thus, the political feature of art assessing human condition comes first from the ethical stance on an issue that is included in the profane realm as part of banal subject matters, and from transferring it to an artistic theme in the cultural scene. Here, the egalitarian act has been assumed to be the ability of contemporary artistic creation for revealing a profane issue and to transfer this issue to the cultural realm in a way that the well-being of the society can be considered through the ethical embodiment of the artwork. In the artwork in which Weiwei mimics Kurdi, there is a figurative equality between the artist and the refugee. The artist replaces the victim by taking on the mask of bare life,⁵¹ lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence. The only way that Ai Weiwei's image can be considered as art and part of cultural realm is that the audience recognizes the impossibility of the artist to make art and thus his act of 'lying there' as the object in his own artwork without the artistic ability of looking back. At the same time, it becomes artwork through the democratic gesture by declaring equality with Kurdi's fate through engaging with art of the ethical regime. Therefore, Weiwei shows 'what ought to be' in his ethical move, by claiming that bare life equals to logos, and that a refugee's death must equally interest everybody as much as a globally known artist's art. In a parallel fashion, Taylor's undersea statues of refugees reproducing *The Raft of Medusa* (1819) depicts refugees and offers them a privileged place within the artwork. However, the creativity in this artwork derives from the power of the contrasting feature between the banal reality regarding the refugees and the original artwork housed at the Louvre Museum. In Weiwei's installation at the Konzerthaus, the contrast between the neoclassical columns of Berlin's Concert Hall commissioned by architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel in 1821 as a new theatre in the Greek classical style and the discarded refugee life jackets still exists and is present in the very consideration of the artwork when they are put together by the artist as the embodiment of the system of shared values and a political co-belonging. This coincides with what Rancière describes as the artistic duty to repair the broken

⁵⁰Rancière, *Dissensus*, 100.

⁵¹Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, 1 edition (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998).

parts of the consensual system.⁵² As such, these artworks follow the ethical regime of art, seeking harmony between the constituents of society instead of aesthetic equalization via surplus of sensorium to disrupt the constituents and the roles distributed to them in the society.

In other words, although the boundaries between the valuable and valueless seem to be disappeared in the ethical embodiment of the artwork, artistic innovation still stems from this tension, and hence, this very discernibility. Art audiences are expected to perceive this contrast and appreciate the irony involved in their recognition of the artwork as art. Therefore, the artwork does not mark the removal of the antagonism but marks an alternative combination without touching the underlying consensual structure of value. Such an act plays with the present distribution of the sensible but does not form a dissensus of aesthetic art that necessitates the reconfiguration of social roles, namely the partition of the sensible and the settled relations of the subject and action⁵³ in Rancière's terms.

Empowering agency through art

The other types of prevalent artworks on the issue of the refugee crisis are those that aim to challenge the problematic of objectification in the depictions of horror. Here, rather than encouraging the normalization of human misery through extreme exposure to it, the logic of speaking on behalf of the victims is criticized. As such the abject horror of the camp in Agamben's perspective derives from the banalization of life through stripping away of political and legal representation through producing bare life.⁵⁴ Jean-François Lyotard defines the terms of victimhood in *The Differend*⁵⁵ as, 'the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong...one becomes victim if one loses these means.' In the pictorial diagram of objectification, the audience and the artist play the witness to the testimonial of the assumed 'speechless' victim. However, the type of artworks, that I define as 'agency empowerment', is mediated mostly by art initiatives that attempt to overturn the hierarchical connection between the victims as objects and the viewers as subjects. Here, art attempts to find artistic referents in order to facilitate the expression of the victim to claim agency for them to become part of *bios politikos* (political community).

On the other hand, 'empowerment of agency' as the goal of the artistic engagement suggests a universally understood value that links the good to the beautiful.⁵⁶ Such a goal does not include attaining beauty, but rather a representation of the good as useful in Kantian terms mobilized for the common good of society. There are various creative programmes in which the artistic expression of the direct experience of refugees are fostered for the promotion of community well-being through the act of giving back the subject position to the victimized. These initiatives are led by artists in collaboration with the UNHRC, UNICEF for refugees. These art projects aim to provide channels for refugees to tell their own stories without the mediation of reporters and news media. Such community-based creative engagements attempt to, 'provide a platform to raise awareness and encourage refugees to realize

⁵²Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 60.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁴Anthony Downey, 'Zones of Indistinction Giorgio Agamben's "Bare Life" and the Politics of Aesthetics', *Third Text* 23, no. 2 (2009): 109–25.

⁵⁵Jean-François Lyotard, *le Différend* (U of Minnesota Press, 1988), 8.

⁵⁶Hinderliter, Kaizen, and Maimon, *Communities of Sense*, 4.

their own potential⁵⁷. These art projects present refugees as subjects of their own stories rather than objects in need of a storyteller. One example is the project Art with Syrian Refugees at the Za'atari Syrian refugee camp in Northern Jordan. On this project's website, the project team explains that the project aims, 'to give voice to refugee children who are often forgotten about in the barrage of horrific news stories about the Syrian war'.⁵⁸ In another example, the UNHCR invited refugees to paint UNHCR tents with the goal of 'transforming shelters to vibrant works of art'. Hannah Rose Thomas, who worked as a creative director for the UNHCR on the project stated that, 'the goal was to turn these symbols of loss and displacement into beautiful pieces of artwork, in order to raise awareness for the plight of refugees'.⁵⁹ The objectives here were to give voice to the victims of forced immigration, to change the negative perceptions about refugees or bring a sense of understanding to the host country and community.

Galleries and museums have also hosted major exhibitions following the same objectives of agency empowerment for refugees. *Citizens and Borders*, a series of discrete projects at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, focused on histories of migration, territory and displacement starting in June 2016. One of these projects was Bouchra Khalili's *The Mapping Journey Project* (2008–11), a series of videos that details the stories of eight individuals who have been forced to travel illegally throughout the Mediterranean basin.⁶⁰ Khalili invited each person to narrate his or her immigration experience and trace it in thick permanent marker on the map. The videos feature the subjects' voices and their hands sketching their trajectories. The project claims that because migration is narrated by those who have experienced it, it resists the forms of representation and visibility demanded by systems of surveillance, international border control and the news media.⁶¹ *Lost Family Portraits* (Figure 2) precisely reflects the creative gesture of boundary passing between the profane and cultural realms. In this case, the artist, Dario Mitidieri photographed refugees through re-composing a traditional style family portrait with missing family members represented by empty chairs (see Figure 2).⁶² For this, Mitidieri went to a refugee camp in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon and invited families to pose. Mitidieri agrees that war photography has changed and that the gruesomeness of war is in overdrive because, 'there are so many terrible images of war and they are ubiquitous and most media outlets won't show them.' However, the new aim in war photography is to document people's stories: 'we're making it real by telling their stories'.⁶³ While the artist provides the means of installation, the idea is to make the subject guide the artist in telling their own story of loss. Thus, this type of artwork tends to 'create agency'. More importantly, the refugee becomes part of the humanity of individuals rather than the humanity of the masses in the representation of specific losses and particular family histories. The refugees who are portrayed are not forced into the role of victimhood as long as they do not need an outsider to testify or a witness to tell

⁵⁷ Lauren Parater, '7 Art Initiatives That Are Transforming the Lives of Refugees', UNHCR Innovation, 18 September 2015, <http://innovation.unhcr.org/7-art-initiatives-that-are-transforming-the-lives-of-refugees/>.

⁵⁸ 'Art with Syrian Refugees: The Za'atari Project', *Joel Artista* (blog), 27 July 2013, <https://joelartista.com/syrian-refugees-the-zaatari-project-jordan/>.

⁵⁹ Parater, '7 Art Initiatives That Are Transforming the Lives of Refugees.'

⁶⁰ Bouchra Khalili: *The Mapping Journey Project* | MoMA, The Museum of Modern Art, accessed 1 October 2016, <http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1627>.

⁶¹ Bouchra Khalili.'

⁶² 'Lost Family Portraits—2016 World Press Photo Contest—People, Third Prize Singles', World Press Photo, accessed 14 August 2016, <http://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2016/people/dario-mitidieri>.

⁶³ Joanna Moorhead, 'Portraits of Syrian Refugee Families—and an Empty Place for the Missing', *The Guardian*, 30 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jan/30/portraits-of-syrian-refugee-families-and-an-empty-place-for-the-missing>.



Figure 2. Mitidieri, Dario. 'Lost Family Portraits'. 2015. The Beqaa Valley.

their own story. What makes *Lost Family Portraits* distinguished from other artworks on this theme is the fact that the artwork takes the refugee theme as a part of universal cultural genre of family portraits.

In these projects, refugees become artists or artists facilitate refugee engagement in art workshops in order to give them voice. The refugees in these agency empowerment art initiatives are no longer victims who are the, 'object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak'⁶⁴. The question here is 'do agency empowerment art initiatives distribute the sensible in ways contrary to this current understanding'? Are they ethical or aesthetic?

In the current consensus, Rancière asserts that only intellectuals, artists or social workers are assumed to be political in the traditional sense because they can talk on behalf of the masses and are concerned with the suffering of others: 'the political, in this sense, is drawn from tragedy' and, 'it is the capacity of anyone to concern himself with shared affairs and to put aside one's ordinary language and small sufferings, and to appropriate the language and suffering of others'.⁶⁵ In the discourse of humanitarian aid there is a clear split between what is assumed to be the humanity of the masses and the humanity of individuals in Rancière's terms.⁶⁶ The people of bare life,⁶⁷ a humanity of masses who is conceived outside of the political body, can only participate in the world of thought and of culture through the assistance of the people of political existence, the humanity of individuals. As such although refugees do create art in these art initiatives, they become artists only in their ability to reflect the refugee theme. Eventually the refugees in these agency empowerment art initiatives will return to maintaining their ways of being in the current consensus. They are not expected to

⁶⁴Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Reprint edition (London: Verso, 2011), 97.

⁶⁵Jacques Rancière, *Figures of History*, Tra edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 50.

⁶⁶Ibid, 45–7.

⁶⁷Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

interfere or offer commentary on other issues and problems, but only to reflect on their own particular experiences as refugees. Therefore, agency empowering art seems to follow an ethical regime in its artistic conduct. However, a true dissensus of aesthetic art would mean a rupture in the 'distribution of the sensible' so that the victim is no longer required to be the victim and the survivor does not need to testify for the victim in order to raise awareness for the sake of humanitarian aid. Hence, artwork empowering agency repairs the broken social bond between refugees and the rest of world's citizens but does not disrupt the logic of how the sensible has been partitioned. This art can be understood as formulating a policing act in the sense of a reduction of politics to consensual logic, rather than a politics of dissensual surplus to the consensual order. The artwork resides in the constituents of the community as they are representative of a particular local, religious or social community and hence in the ethical regime.

Aesthetic art on refugees

Yet, Rancière signals other ways of obeying the artist's duty, figurative or otherwise, once artwork has ceased being subject to the norms of representation: 'the task of art is showing what cannot be seen'.⁶⁸ Showing 'what cannot be seen' correspond to the dissensual gesture, a perceptual change where specific acts distributed amongst specific actors are disrupted. The political purpose of this artwork does not prioritize awareness raising, humanitarian help or social justice for the victim. Rather the artwork disorients the emphasis on the issue of refugees. Hence, democratization exists only in the artistic gesture about the transition between the realms but re-enacting the equality of each and all qua vanishing condition of the political.

In another example, the director George Kurian's documentary movie *The Crossing* (Figure 3), presents a convincing example of dissensus in this light because the refugees



Figure 3. Kurian, George. Poster image of 'The Crossing'. 2015.

⁶⁸Rancière, *Figures of History*, 72.

documented in the movie are from the professional classes. This firstly contrasts the common imagination of victimhood as a feature of working class or underclass. The movie is composed of various footages filmed on smartphone cameras in order to provide the audience a firsthand account of a refugee's struggle as well as their personal lives with equal emphasis through direct narration. In various festivals commentaries *The Crossing* is reviewed with particular emphasis given to the professions of the refugees: 'Some of them are journalists, some are teachers and musicians, but they are all bonded through a common desire for peace, even if it means being uprooted from their culture and their families'.⁶⁹ Here, the protagonists of the movie, namely the refugees who are documented, similar to any other group of individuals, come from diverse backgrounds and occupations. They used to have careers but due to the circumstances of war, have ended up in the refugee camps. Here, there is no clear boundary between the audience possessing cultural capital and time for watching this documentary in festivals and the refugees documented in the movie. In the current consensus, the audience of festivals has been assumed 'to possess the political capacity of concerned with others' suffering and to appropriate the language and suffering of others'.⁷⁰ However, the documentary does not document Others' story of victimhood or lack of political existence. Thus, the difference between the audience and the refugees in *The Crossing* does not arise from inequality but consists in producing different relations between the words of refugee and the class with privilege of concerning with others' pain.

Consequently, the documentary does not follow the usual imagery of humanitarian intervention's structure based on hierarchical roles and actors with assigned actions, so that the audience does not watch the 'Other' who is in need of the humanitarian, political and educated actor to tell their experiences to the global public. In this documentary, the refugees themselves are from the educated, middle classes and what is at stake in their refugee journey is not only their life but the loss of their previous relatively comfortable positions.

Aesthetic art does not just raise political awareness as ethical stance but also 'presents a shift of emphasis, a change of relations and a dispute over the place in which things belong in aesthetics'.⁷¹ *The Crossing* combines previously unrelated elements that dislodge the existing categories of perception. The shift in perspective takes place through dis-identifying the categories such as the victim and the saver, the refugee and the humanitarian. Such an aesthetic act dissolves the common perception through presenting a surplus to the perceptual logic. While doing that, art challenges arbitrary limitations on the principle of 'equaliberty'⁷² where equality and freedom are explicitly equated and identified with each other, in the understanding of human rights and brings out universality through a 'displaced activation of politics' aka dissensus. As such,

⁶⁹'The Crossing,' DOXA Documentary Film Festival, 1 April 2016, <http://www.doxafestival.ca/film/crossing>.

⁷⁰Rancière, *Figures of History*, 50.

⁷¹Papastergiadis, 'A Breathing Space for Aesthetics and Politics,' 12.

⁷²Étienne Balibar, *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, trans. James Ingram (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2014), 49.

Étienne Balibar states: "There are no examples of restrictions or suppressions

of freedoms without social inequalities, nor of inequalities without restrictions or suppressions of freedoms, be it only to put down resistance, even if there are degrees, secondary tensions, phases of unstable equilibrium,

and compromise situations in which exploitation and domination are not homogeneously distributed across all individuals."

the duality of the terms 'human' and 'citizen' becomes null through the universality of equality for liberty and the universality of liberty for equality.

Conclusion

Aesthetic art re-considers the artistic gestures such as the democratic gesture and agency empowerment of ethical art regimes, yet it accomplishes the political act not through the artistic gesture as the representation of the social bond but through the change of perception in the sensation of the artwork. This kind of art challenges the contingent stabilization of universal values in the sense of consensual logic while it exposes an understanding of universality that emerges from the bottom up. This article has demonstrated current prominent artworks on the refugee crisis that embody the debate on political art that Rancière defines as the problematic of aesthetic art versus ethical regime of art. 'Human condition assessment' artworks are charged of the ironic transfer from the profane to cultural realm and do so through emphasizing the contrast between these two realms. 'Agency empowerment' art initiatives attempt to break the speechless position of refugees in their own representation, but such initiatives may be too loaded down with the educational mission. In this sense, despite their emphasis on equality, artworks of ethical concern can only become peace-making representations. As such, ethical artworks regenerate humanitarian *politics of pity*⁷³ although they claim to remedy humanitarian portrayal of refugees as victims for which others need to show concern. Here again, the politics is assumed to be exchanged between two already fixed agents without any further role to take.

Rancière's preference is known to be aesthetics for its capacity for dissensus while he conceptualizes ethics as the annulment of politics in its undertaking of social promise based on representational togetherness for the assigned parts of the community. Although the notion of the aesthetic gesture in Rancière does not sit at these categories of 'social bond' in assessing human condition or 'agency empowerment' in art on refugees as mentioned above, I argue that Rancière's view of dissensual art in fact plays with both of these ideas. Thereby, it resists to both the stabilization of universal values in ethics and the denial of universal values. Aesthetics dissolves the ethical understanding of politics, precisely the *politics of pity*⁷⁴ through the use of its artistic tactics in disoriented ways to change the emphasis in the issue of the 'refugee crisis'. In doing so, it displaces the limits of the political beyond the range of humanitarian aid in the conceptualization of art. Art and politics do not unify in aesthetics but consist of different embodiments. Art does not accomplish its political promise in its own embodiment but blurs the borders of the political realm. Democracy acquires the meaning of open-ended transformation through the activation of political equality. Hence, equality in perception has been prioritized instead of equal rights for reaching the interests. Such opening promises to remedy fixed consideration of power, hence the assumed relation of act and actors in political realm aka 'agency perceptions',⁷⁵ thereby promotes equal-ibertarian action for politics

⁷³Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*.

⁷⁴Ibid

⁷⁵Hart, 'Children's Participation and International Development', 412.

Still, there is no doubt that human condition assessment artworks and agency empowering art initiatives reflect the understanding of politics and political engagement today and possess a powerful resource in the running of consensus to bring the issues of social justice to the centre of public debate, such as the rights of the refugees. I have demonstrated how these artworks with an ethical stance attract public attention through democratic artistic gestures either by connecting the experiences of refugees from the profane realm to the question concerning universal humanity in the cultural realm or by designing spaces for artistic performances for refugees to express their own individual stories. While these art practices do not inscribe a surplus in order to disorient the politics of immigration, border policy, the logic of human rights, or the understanding of the refugees, and neither do they create other ways for engaging the political, they certainly facilitate an increase in social engagement for the assumed constituents of the community as such refugees and citizens. Indeed, the image of Kurdi lying lifeless on the shore brought the refugee question to the centre of global public debates and led to a positive political outcome for the easing of the immigration processes for refugees. But the representative view of the community and the world's society would eventually be limited to conflictual based understanding of sharing communal benefit. The main issue, in my view, and as acknowledged from a Rancierian point of view, is that a problem cannot be resolved with the same methods and means of the politics that have already created the problem in the first place. That is why there is a need for works of art that create dissensus through aesthetics rather than the insistence on the consensual ethical approach in the art scene.