



**Utrecht University**

**Contemporary European Art Images of Asylum  
Seekers: From Case Studies to Issues of  
Representation**

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## Abstract

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Europe is facing nowadays one of the largest migration waves, one it has not faced since the second world war. Between 2015-2017 more than million asylum seekers arrived in the continent, in search of a safer place to live. The framing of this migration as a crisis for Europe is based not only on the acuteness and intensity of this movement, but on the 'Otherness' of the migrants, as they originate mainly from Muslim majority regions in the Middle East and Africa. They are often depicted as a threat to the physical security, economy and cultural identity of their hosts by mainstream media channels.

Here I examined the ways migrants and Asylum seekers coming to Europe in the recent 'crisis' are portrayed and depicted in contemporary Western art by selecting and discussing five artworks as case studies; *Three installations* by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, *Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus* by Italian artist Marco Tiberio, *Villa de Calais* by Henk Wildschut, *The Average Face* by Dutch artist Jeroen van der Most and *Where Children Sleep* by Swedish artist Magnus Wennman.

Using visual and critical analysis as a research method, this study investigated how asylum seekers and migrants are presented as a group and as individuals in contemporary artworks and compared to the current depiction of asylum seekers in the European media. To address the concept of the migrant "Other" in the eye of the European "us" in the context of artistic and media representation I further employed the framework of postcolonial paradigm from the field of cultural studies. This discourse enabled a critical reading of the political and cultural power relations that are reflected and projected from the works. The study revealed a complex image of the way artists refer to the migration crisis. The act of choosing an object of the artwork, hence making the selected object the center of discussion, does not necessarily change the way the object is viewed.

The role of artists in society is debatable and controversial, but one of the common perception, is that artists try to undermine status quo, to question popular assumptions, alternate images and create a new perspective. However, as I show here most of the contemporary artworks merely duplicate of the image of the media, calling for a sincere examination of the artists' fulfillment of their humanistic role in the face of this migration challenge.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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The recent asylum seekers migration wave into Europe which has started in 2015 is the largest since World War II, according to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), Global Trends Forced Displacements report. The 'migration crisis' is one of the most sensitive social and political issues Europe is currently facing. The continent is witnessing large amounts of asylum seekers who have been forcefully displaced from their homeland due to violent military conflicts, oppression, and deepening poverty. According to the UNHCR, in 2014 alone, more than 200,000 of refugees and immigrants passed through the Mediterranean Sea to find safety in Europe, whereas the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that more than 1,011,700 migrants arrived by sea in 2015, and almost 34,900 by land (Lee, Helke, and Laczko).

The migration crisis has received various reactions from different political parties and media bodies due to its alleged influence on Europe's social and economic stability. The migration wave, in some cases, was seen as a threat to the strength and stability of the European Union and to its capacity to accept asylum seekers from war zones around the world (Lesser et al.). While generally asylum seekers coming to Europe have been placed in positions of vulnerability and helplessness, they are perceived as a collective threat to the society and its national identity. Asylum seekers, due to their cultural, economic, social or ethnic situation might "(...) find it especially difficult to fully exercise their rights before the justice system as recognized by the law" (Ippolito and Sánchez 2). The vulnerability of asylum seekers may arise from the trauma that lead them to flee from their home country and in addition the difficult situation they are confronted with while awaiting of proceeding their application for international protection in the host country. More so, asylum seekers face the difficulty to make a living while waiting for a decision in their case, while they are mostly dependent on state support and funding (Brandl and Czech 250). Nonetheless, often asylum seekers are perceived as a threat to the physical territory, the economic threat and to national identity.

Alexandria J. Innes notes that "All asylum seekers are treated with the suspicion as a potential threat" (462). The mapping of threats which asylum seeker bring to the Europe, according to Innes article, reflects the challenge that the EU members states are experiencing when dealing with admittance of asylum seekers. In relation to the responses of the European media to the migration crisis, I found it relevant to explore other forms of representations in the public sphere, which reflect, as well as influences and form its public's opinion on the topic. I found the arts can play a significant role, in

mirroring the public's attention, trends, and state of mind. Stuart Hall names that approach in cultural representation as the 'reflective approach', which "the meaning lies in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and the visual language functions like a mirror, to *reflect* the true meaning as it already exists in the world" (Hall, Evans, and Nixon 10).

In the paper, I will mostly use the term 'asylum seeker' to cover more broadly those who seek protection from war, natural disaster, and poverty. Some distinguish between the 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers'; Refugees define the displaced persons by the nature of their flight from their country of origin. This definition often applies to large groups in flight from war or natural disaster. Asylum seekers, on the other hand, only acquire the title when seeking admission to a state, either at the border or once inside. Accordingly, they often travel without documents and tend to come intermittently, such as in small family groups or individuals (Innes 457). Therefore, often the term asylum seekers refer only to ones who seek protection in a state, under a refugee status. Therefore I chose the term 'Asylum Seekers' as it includes also those who seek to escape poverty, violent civil conflicts, and natural disasters, but I will expand this definition to encompass also those refugees in their journey towards asylum in Europe, and not only those who are under the legal definition of asylum seekers.

I argue that the media coverage of asylum seekers revealed to some extent the way the European society react to new comers who are portrayed as foreign and as 'Others' by the Eurocentric point of view. The fact that most of the asylum seekers are arriving in Europe from the Middle East, as well as other Muslim majority countries has contributed to the dichotomy between the European 'Us' and the asylum seekers 'Others', building on the cultural differences between the language, religion, and social etiquettes in European countries and asylum seekers countries of origin. The construction of oppositional binaries in the media is emphasizing the notion of 'Us' as a 'developed west' versus 'the Others' as 'backward East'. The art sector, similar to mass media, have sought to address the issue of the migration crisis. Artists from all around the world, and especially in Europe, documented, reflected and shared their perspective on the newcomers' situations as they arrived in Europe. Artists have reacted to the way the local society and governments have perceived and treated them.

Studying contemporary artworks which have reflected upon the asylum seekers situation I was curious as to explore whether art can offer any kind of alternative to the media's depiction of asylum seekers? Whether recent artworks are able to present a different narrative to the perceived threat and danger that the asylum seekers pose to European society, and if this current art can illustrate a more complex view of asylum seekers than the binary dichotomy that is perpetuated in the media today?

Can art show the human side of the 'migration crisis', its people, their experiences, and hopes without delving into heated and complex political discussions? Can art reach different audiences that the media does not? Often the media shows asylum seekers in large groups, but what about the individuals in this group, can art reveal their stories? Can art really confront the migration crisis in a non-biased way?

I intend to investigate these questions in this study, to learn about whether and how Europe's is facing contemporary social issues from the lens of the art world. I investigate whether art can suggest a human depiction of the asylum seekers and to contradict the often simplistic image that is portrayed in the mainstream media.

While researchers and scholars are highly engaged with researching the visual representation of asylum seekers in traditional channels of media like newspapers and mass broadcast media, an examination of how contemporary art participates in this discourse is largely neglected in the field. The aim of this study is to discuss the conventions in contemporary art in representing the European migration crisis and to examine its controversies. Specifically, this study aims to challenge notions such as representation, dehumanization, power relations and how asylum seekers are defined and viewed within the European society.

In the course of this study I shall examine issues of representation and identification of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe, employing theoretical perspectives on 'Social Difference' and 'Otherness', in the light of the cultural visual analysis of Stuart Hall, which regards specifically the representation of minorities in modern culture (2014). Additionally, I will employ post-colonialism paradigms by Edward Said (2003) and Gayatri Spivak (1988) as well as perspectives on post-human philosophy by Giorgio Agamben (1998) who discusses the position of a refugee as a unique status in collective society. My investigation herein will implement visual analysis through various art forms such as installation, photography and digital art.

The method of visual analysis I employ in the thesis is a specific technique suggested by Ossian Ward in his book *Ways of Looking* (2014). Ward is a leading British art critic and curator who provides a useful scheme for how to engage with contemporary art in galleries, museums or outside of these institutions. He provides a six-step model for understanding contemporary art based on the concept of the *Tabula rasa* — a clean slate, i.e. a fresh mind. Ward's method empowers the viewer in gaining tools to understand contemporary artworks and its contexts even if viewers have no art-oriented education. Utilizing the *Tabula rasa* approach enables me to better analyze the art works discussed in the paper in a nonbiased perspective, after looking at the artworks in a fresh mind to

look at the artworks through the lens of different authors and scholars who addressed the asylum seekers situation in modern society. The paper is constructed into four main sections. First, I shall provide factual background on the current 'migration crisis' in Europe, its social and political impact on society and the modes of representation that repeat frequently in the media. The Methodology chapter overviews the particular modes of visual analysis that apply in the thesis. Subsequently, the Analysis chapter will discuss the five artworks selected to address the issue of representation, structured according to the visual analysis methodology. The concluding chapter sum up the scope of the thesis and offers an additional discussion on the relationship between mass media depiction of asylum seekers and compares it to the reviewed artistic representation in of postcolonial and humanistic contexts. In the conclusion, I suggest steps that should be taken by artists who wish to address the asylum seeker situation in Europe and how their visual representation can more truthfully and genuinely reflect the journeys, the arrivals and the challenges that asylum seekers are confronted with.

## **Chapter 2: Background**

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### **2.1 The Refugee Crisis**

The recent 'migration crisis' has been defined as such since 2014 when immigrants left their homeland to seek a better and safer place to live. People have migrated before 2014, however, a combination of war and political and economic crises in the Middle East, Africa, and other countries have pushed people to look for new lives elsewhere and to ask for asylum in Europe. For example the continued conflict in Syria, the ongoing violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the authoritarian oppression in Eritrea. The majority of the asylum seekers arrived from Muslim-majority countries. The highest rates are coming from countries like Syria (46.7% of immigrants), Afghanistan (20.9%) and Iraq (9.4%) according to UNHRC (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) database for 2015. According to the statistics, the countries currently most affected by refugee migration are Germany, Hungary, and Sweden. For example, nearly 1,800 refugees per 100,000 of Hungary's local population claimed asylum in 2015, whereas in Sweden there is 1,667 application per 100,000 locals. The EU average in 2015 stood at 260 requests for every 100,000 residents.

In 2015, more than 1 million immigrants and refugees entered Europe, an increase of about four times that of the previous year. By the end of 2014, more than 60 million people around the world were categorized to be in a state of 'forcible displacement' – the highest level of forced migration

since World War II according to UNHCR report for 2015. The majority of immigrants seek asylum in EU countries, due to its relative proximity to the crisis zone and its immigration and asylum seeker acceptance policies that enable them a possibility to live under better socioeconomic conditions and with a higher degree of security.

## **2.2 Socio-Political Issues Arising out of The Crisis**

This massive wave of immigration to the EU has raised political, economic, cultural and religious tensions in the host countries. The difficulty of accepting so many asylum seekers in a short period led to disagreements on asylum policy between EU member countries. The influx of immigrants to Europe is highlighting sensitive issues in the European society. Astrid Ziebarth in the Policy Brief of The German Marshall Fund of the United States writes that some critics believe that the German policy of welcoming immigrants has encouraged others to move towards Europe and especially Germany (Lesser et al.).

The massive immigration to Europe in recent years has raised fears and insecurities from the refugee's groups and individuals coming to Europe. In her article " When the Threatened Become the Threat: The Construction of asylum Seekers in British Media Narratives ", Alexandria j. Innes is detecting three main threats of asylums seekers to the Europe that were mentioned earlier: a Physical threat to the territory, economic threat and a threat to social identity. The responses to the threats are expressed in different ways and from different parties. Innes is showing how the physical threat to territory in the UK articulates with "security measures being located in physical boundaries around the state to protect its sovereign territory"(Innes 465). She describes that asylum seekers are not citizens of Britain and as such conceived to be different and alienated from citizens, contributing to the notion of their 'otherness' and justifying their rejection and the closed borders policy of the UK. The threat to the EU economy is expressed as the concern for a burden on their welfare and health systems. More so, Some believe that asylum seekers are financially motivated to benefit from the generous welfare conditions in the EU and to exploit their worthy of government subsidies (468). In addition, countries who accepted many asylum seekers and are outside of the EU are asking from the European Union to assist to share the burden of processing the immigrants ("burden sharing") and asking for financial aid and reform of the immigration regulations and policy (Lesser et al. 6). The acceptance of asylum seekers in other countries in Europe prevents them from entering the EU and thus to become a burden on the EU's countries systems and institutions. Also, the threat to EU identity is expressed in France where a large percentage of the population believes that there are terrorists among the refugees fleeing to Europe (Lesser et al. 3). European concerns about the newcomers to the continent are driven by unjustified assumptions and primal fear from the 'other.'



Instead of being looked at as vulnerable individuals, asylum seekers are portrayed as a homogenous group with universal characteristics, shaped with attributes of criminals and as if they want to take something away from European territory and privilege (Innes 473).

### **2.1.3 Issues of Representation**

Often in the European media, the immigrants coming to the shores of Europe are seen as an ominous threat to the 'native' society. Terence Wright, in his essay *Moving Images: the Media Representations of Refugees* (2002) refers to the visual aspects of refugees in the popular media like television and newspapers. He argues that "The visual representation of refugees plays an essential, yet neglected, role in forming the stereotype of "the refugee" "(Wright 54). According to the *Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU* from 2015, the media in European countries have covered the fields of the Refugee and Migration Crisis in different ways, emphasizing different predominant themes in the coverage. The coverage differs in language and terms used as well as in topics of interest like humanitarian issues versus threat issues like terror or cultural threats. For example, in Italy, the media covers more humanitarian issues than in Britain while risk themes like welfare threats and cultural threats are more common in Britain and Spain (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore 2). From the conclusions of the report, raises an uneasy notion that the media coverage is biased towards negativity and unfavorably of the covered topics. The covered issues tend to vary widely from region to region in reporting asylum and immigration. In some countries, there is hostility and negativity in press publications about refugees, especially in the UK, where only a few newspapers like the *Guardian* and *Daily Mirror* were sympathetic to refugee's issues (10). Also, the rise of far right parties and their resistance to refugees has been reflected unevenly in the media. Lastly, the coverage of the benefits that Europe can gain from accepting asylum seekers and immigrants was extremely little, specifically in Swedish and German media (13).

### **2.1.4 Art and cultural responses to the crisis: case studies.**

The refugee crisis has evoked reactions of both European and non-European artists to the issue. While looking at coverage of asylum seekers in art installations, photographs, and digital works, some recurrent themes of representation occur. I have detected five art works of contemporary artists which I believe represent the way asylum seekers are presented in the arts today. I wish to discuss these five artists who responded in different ways of expression to the crisis.

- **Ai Weiwei**, the famous Chinese artist, has created several works related to the refugee crisis in Europe. In his works, he tries to raise the awareness of politicians and the citizens and stimulate them to take action and give a hand to the immigrants coming to Europe. The

artist's installations are colossal and located in central locations in European capitals. In 2016, in the Konzerthaus in Berlin, he covered the building's columns with 14,000 salvaged refugee life vests. Earlier that year, he used twenty-two rubber boats in the Palazzo Strozzi's façade as part of the installation entitled 'Reframe' in Florence, Italy on September 2016. The third installation was located in the pond of the Austrian Gallery's Baroque at Belvedere Palace.

- Marco Tiberio is an Italian artist who lives and works in Brussels. He conducted a series of photographs called the *Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus*, showing the hand-built homes of migrants who wait for asylum in Europe, in the refugee camp of Calais, France, also known as "Calais Jungle."
- Henk Wildschut, a Dutch artist, who similarly to Tiberio, documented Calais Camp for almost ten years. In his work *Ville de Calais* he shows the rapid growth and decline of the unofficial camp throughout the years, from an improvised camp into a village in the outskirts of the French city of Calais. In the collection of photos, Wildschut documented systematically the colorful shacks and shelters and sometimes the inhabitants of the camp. He published his work *Ville de Calais* in a book that follows the same name in 2017.
- Jeroen van der Most, is a Dutch artist, analyzing international refugee's influx data to find how refugees' integration in society will affect the look of *The Average Face* in several countries. In his art, he emphasizes the differences between the current average features and the likely hypothetical one. Using Google images and facial recognition algorithm and averaging calculations.
- Magnus Wennman is a Swedish artist who photographed *Where Children Sleep* in Europe and the Middle East. He worked in a partnership with the UNHCR and the Fotografiska (The Swedish Museum of Photography) to create an exhibition to raise awareness about refugee children, while they await an uncertain future.

These artworks raise questions on the ways asylum seekers are represented in the media and in the arts which I will examine further in the study. One mutual point to consider in the artworks is the use of objects to represent the refugees. Often, artists are using masses of tents, constructs, boats and life jackets to refer to the large numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Europe. What effect does the use of masses of objects have on the viewers? What emotions and feelings does it evoke? Is it enabling the artists to refer to the individual story of the asylum seekers?

Using objects to apply or to define refugees is a repeating theme in the work of many artists (European and non-European). The tendency of using objects is may reduce the people's individual experience to an everyday object. "(...) the selective nature of the visual image frequently objectifies

them, dismissing their historical, cultural and political circumstances" (Wright 64).

A counter theme in the representation of refugees focuses on close and intimate empathetic look of the artist on his subject. Photography projects and exhibitions are articulating the misery and the suffering of the refugees, without taking into account the complexity of their stories. That raises more questions on how are artists are dealing with the suffering of their subjects? And how artists evoke empathy and identification with their artwork?

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

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### 2.2.1 The Oriental and the 'Other' from a Postcolonial Perspective

Edward Said coined the term *Orientalism* in the 70's in his book which carries the same name; "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). Therefore, Orientalism is the process of Western countries, such as Britain, France, and now the United States, constructing and representing the Orient's identity as how the West perceives it, not as it truly is. This Western reference to the Orient date back to the period of British and France colonialization of the Middle East at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In modern day society, this is embedded in the representations of the 'Orient' in the media coverage of the refugee crisis. Said asserts that the notion of the Oriental is a western (British and French) cultural enterprise defined as "[...] irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike and "different"; and thus conversely the European is rational, virtuous, mature and "normal" (Said 40). Said suggests that the Oriental was framed in such a way due to a relative closeness between the colonial states and the local population. Thanks to this proximity, since the 19th century the West was able to form itself as opposed to the characteristics of the Oriental.

Many of the refugees are coming from Middle Eastern countries, thus the European media and artistic expression towards these newcomers can be understood in the context of the power relations between Europe and the Middle East. It is not difficult to see how the Middle East and the asylum

seekers coming from the area being identified with negative characteristics, such as those mentioned above by Said in current media coverage of the war and its effects. Those with more power have the ability to represent themselves, as well as others through their own perceptions. Those who do not possess the power to represent themselves are subject to false representations by others as well as in negative stereotypes, which in turn are portrayed to the public as true representations of the subordinate group.

Although Said drew a distinction between Europe and the 'Orientals,' he points out that Islamic culture and civilization has stood opposed to the Christian west. This was due to the fear of Europe for the Orient, which was framed as a representative of Islam who "(...) was considered a degraded and usually, a virulently dangerous representative" (260). Years after the peak of the colonial age of Europe, it seems that in some of the media publications European assumptions about the 'Orient' and Islam are still valid and present, more so in the current situation. When a massive immigration wave from Muslim-majority states is coming to Europe, the refugees are quickly depicted as the 'Other,' set against the native European society.

Issues of representation in culture and the arts have interested scholars over the years and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where the media played a significant role in forming the notions of the masses. Stuart Hall, in his essay *The Work of Representation* (2014), offers a new reading of the aspects of the image. According to Hall, representation "is the production of meaning through language" (Hall 13). Only through the use of a system of signs and symbols, it allows us to gain an understanding of the meaning behind the representations. Meaningful categories are organized and classified and result in social conventions.

Stuart Hall claims that a "regime of representation" is a way of creating meaning through difference. Through representing what is the Orient, Said is also representing what is not the Orient, or its opposite: the Occident. By using the "us vs them" dichotomy, Hall reaffirms the importance of creating a difference by stating, "We need 'difference' because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the 'Other'" (Hall 235). It is obvious in Western culture that Orientalism has greatly contributed to the way that people of the Middle East, or part of the Orient, are represented. We are able to see that by creating a difference between "us" and "them" we are able to create a representation of each, respectively.

Moreover, Hall states, “Binary oppositions are crucial for classification because one must establish a clear difference between things in order to classify them” (164). By making a clear connection between the “regime of representation” and how it is constructed through oppositional binaries, it is clear that we as a society create the “regime of representation” by simplifying differences to binaries. We can see this for example in the Eurocentric dichotomy of the ‘developed’ West in versus the ‘backward’ East, The construction of stereotypes results from the creation of set categories that have specifically defined attributes. The creation of two separate categories is problematic because in doing so, we are presupposing a possible spectrum by forcing people to identify with one category or the other, leaving out those who could potentially complicate the binaries. For example, There are many people that make the generalization that all Muslims pose a threat to their country's national security because they automatically connect them to terrorist groups such as ISIS or Al Qaeda, therefore, arguing that they all are a homogenous group (Cryder).

Said also emphasizes the threat that the East poses to the West by saying that, “No one will have failed to note how “East” has always signified danger and threat during this period” (Said 26). In addition, Hall contends that “Stereotypes get hold of the few ‘simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized’ characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity” (Hall 258). These binaries and stereotypes, in turn, create and enforce hierarchical systems of value and power. In the light of Said's and Hall's theories, the discourse about cultural representation becomes crucial when it comes to representation of minorities such as migrants and asylum seekers. In this study, it will be used to follow the standard language used to represent this particular group in the media and other forms of visual expressions like photography, paintings, and installations.

The postcolonial perspective on the visual representation of asylum seekers arriving from Muslim-majority countries by mostly European artists is beneficial in an understanding the cultural production generated in contemporary media and visual arts. Kobena Mercer, in his article "Black art and the burden of representation" states that a work of art dealing with 'otherness' is ultimately expected to be 'representative' of the whole 'other' story. Thus, a single artwork or exhibition is expected to 'stand for' the totality of the meaning of black art, gendered art and in this study's case, refugees' art. Mercer defines the overwhelming pressure on artists and curators as the ‘Burden of Representation’. His argument is relevant for this study because it prevents the researcher to assume that one overview on individual artworks cannot condense and contain a complex story within a

single, brief discourse while discussing artworks and exhibitions dealing with the 'other' in society, or to whoever is not part of the hegemonic society and may be considered as 'Subaltern' (Mercer 62).

Post-colonial theory enables us to 'read' critically the current visual texts, in the press and the arts, in the national and in the international sphere. Some of these artworks echo Gayatri Spivak article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1989). In her article, Spivak is dealing with the notion of 'the subaltern' as a paradox situation for ethnic minorities as they are represented in the media, by others, usually by scholars from the West, and not by themselves. Spivak is writing on the subaltern in colonial India and is aiming to give voice to the silenced colonized person and in her example an Indian woman. She stated that "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 92), in reference to all of those who are taking the role of representing the weak but are not part of the local society. Although her work was dealing with women in colonized India, she drew attention to the oppressed and marginalized of all kinds in Western society (Cere 12). While Spivak's concern was mainly with the production of academic knowledge, particularly with the ways in which academic disciplines continue to produce and maintain subalternity, we can usefully import the concept for the analysis of artistic and journalistic representations of asylum seekers, which is characterized by a noticeable absence of a careful delineation of the experiences, hopes, and fears of such communities (Harindranath 3).

Hence, the artworks discussed in this paper are taking the position of talking for 'the oppressed' (the refugees) but at the same time are leaving them out of the discussion. When looking at these artworks from Spivak's perspective, often it seems that refugees are not visible in the artwork and are not playing as active agents who can call for help or change the situation in their home country. They are illustrated in shaky shelters, in a newspaper article, as living in poverty and violence and as crying out for help. That description contributes to their marginalization into a narrow definition of their need. It dismisses them as complex, multi-dimensional human beings, and depicts them as only beggars for attention while waiting for the salvation by the 'Western'. Thus, Spivak is referring to several epistemic issues regarding the attempt to implicate issues of representation and identity formation, examining the value of the practice involves, both positionality and the set of 'ethical and political questions: Who speaks? Who speaks for whom? Whose voice is listened to, whose voice is spoken for, and importantly- who has no voice? This clearly relates to Spivak's concern about the representational politics of the subaltern (Harindranath 6).

### 2.2.2 Dehumanization and the Homo-Sacer

Media and cultural studies have shown that often asylum seekers and immigrants demonstrated in dehumanized way. In many cultural references like the arts and news coverages, they are shown in large groups and through the focus on the vehicles, they arrive with like boats or trains and with the relative absence of individual photos of asylum seekers. In the light of the article "The Visual Dehumanization of Refugees" by Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison & Xzarina Nicholson, the authors argue that refugees are commonly presented with a dehumanizing approach. They are often stripped of their recognizable facial features and with a focus on large groups of people or represented as a mass of objects like boats, tents and life vests. The authors assert that usually, without the association of the asylum seekers images to the humanitarian challenge they are not appealing for a generous humanitarian help from the public but are rather seen as a threat to sovereignty and security (Bleiker et al.). Therefore, the asylum seekers situation fails to attract a compassionate response publicly and politically. The debate about the dehumanization of asylum seekers in cultural responses, including the arts is highlighting the need in looking differently on the current situation of asylum seekers and encourages to search for different ways of representation.

The view of the asylum seeker or the refugee in a dehumanizing way have been discussed extensively in the work of Giorgio Agamben, *The Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) and his article "We Refugees" (1995). Agamben is investigating the notion of the zone of indistinction in the value of human life. Agamben's work in *Homo Sacer* is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's notion of *Biopolitics* as he indicates that in his text (Agamben 5). In Foucault's statement according to which man was, for Aristotle, a "living animal with the additional capacity for political existence,"(7). Thus, Foucault is concerned with the questions: who has the right to decide over life and death and who is deemed to be worthy of living? *Biopolitics* refers to the domain of life over which power has taken control: "[i]t is a form of power that disseminates through society as an effective tool in power relations to and the conduct of populations" (Larraniga, De, and Doucet 520). Bodies are willing to the power of the state; their right to live is restrained by the sovereign. Foucault argues that before the 19th century, the state had the power to let people live or to sentence them to death, which he calls the power to take life or to let live (Foucault 241). Death in that time used to be a spectacle, a ritual, meant to signify the power of the state; public beheadings and shootings were quite common ways to discourage citizens from disobeying the state's power. This gradually changed and rather by explicitly putting people to death, the state now has the power to invest in

subjects and to enable life for them, while the subjects they do not invest in are left to die. Foucault calls this to make live or to let die. For Agamben, the original act of the sovereign is the creation of sacred life or bare life. He argues that there is a distinction between a life outside of administrative interface (*zoë*) and life that indicates being part of the political domain (*bios*). The difference between the two forms of life - *Zoë* and *Bios* - are embedded in the in the foundation of Western democracy, as it was created in ancient Greece. "The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, *zoë/bios*, exclusion/inclusion" (Agamben 8). Agamben uses the figure of the refugee to challenge the link between citizen, nation, and state. Asylum seekers are often seen as an exception, not belonging to the new society they seek refuge in, and obviously not to that which they left. They belong neither here nor there, and they are inside and outside of society at the same time. Therefore the analysis of the case studies in this paper in the light of Agamben theory of the *homo sacer* is useful in understanding the dehumanization of refugees and their depiction as represented by objects or by a generalization of their figure. The discussion about the representation of asylum seekers arriving to the hegemonic European society is echoing Foucauldian ideas that discourse generates modes of power and exclusion. According to Foucault, "(...), the state is envisioned as a kind of political power which ignores individuals, looking only at the interests of the totality or, should say, of a class or a group among the citizens." (Foucault 782). The state has the power to control the lives of its subjects, including the foreigners among it. Therefore asylum seekers are constructed as a distinguished, sometimes, a hazardous group to the security of the state.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

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### 3.1 Visual Analysis Scope

This study will encompass the following artworks by five different artists that are active in the visual art field in Europe:

1. Three installations in the cities of Berlin, Vienna, and Florence by the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei.
2. *The Average Face* by the Dutch artist Jeroen van der Most.
3. *Where Children Sleep* by the Swedish artist Magnus Wennman.
4. *Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus* by the Italian artist Marco Tiberio.



## 5. *Ville de Calais* by Dutch artist Hank Wildschut.

This selection represents various visual expression media such as videos, installations, and photography to tackle the 'refugee crisis' in Europe and is based on exploring leading museum exhibitions, art magazines, and popular media publications to trace the contemporary modes of representation of asylum seekers. For example, artworks presented in the Foam Museum for Photography in Amsterdam, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York and leading newspapers like *The Guardian* and *The Times*.

All of the artists that I have chosen to analyze are European, with the exception of Ai Weiwei, the well-known Chinese artist. Ai Weiwei is relevant to my discussion mainly because he is one of the leading contemporary artists today who persistently deals with issues of human rights and migration. His artworks are presented and embraced in leading museums and galleries all over the world and especially in Europe. Secondly, his relevance to my research is because he started his career as an artist in the West; he studied and lived in New York from 1982-1991, and he is currently residing in Berlin, Germany. Ai Weiwei has experienced attempts to shut down and sabotage his work due to his criticism of the Chinese government and due to his support for the freedom of speech in particular (Ai and Ambrozy 2). His perspective about the migration crisis, human rights and freedom of expression is, therefore, highly influenced by Western perspectives.

Ronald Barthes writes on the importance of paying attention to visuals in *The Rhetoric of the image* (1993). Images are a powerful storytelling tool, conveying messages with the profound potential to catch and influence the public view (Barthes 152). Using visual analysis methodology is a tool to give meaning to the visual data produced by media, culture, and artworks. Visual analysis is also useful in this study to interpret the expressive forms that artists produce on the European immigration crisis and to examine whether and how their particular interpretation is connected to the media on the crisis.

In her book, *Visual Methodologies*, Gillian Rose explores the importance of visual analysis in the current Western society. "Looking carefully at images, then, entails, among other things, thinking about how they offer very particular visions of social categories such as class, gender, race, sexuality, able-bodiedness and so on." (Rose 7). The visual is always influencing cultural constructions in society because we are surrounded by different kinds of visual artifacts: photography, film, videos, and artworks. The variety of the images offers different perspectives on the world we live in and transmits different notions through the pictures. It has also been argued that visuals and images contribute to the construction of social binaries (8). Rose argues that the visual is

a central form in postmodernity. "However, in postmodernity, it is suggested, the modern relation between seeing and true knowing has been broken"(4). Thus a set of tools is needed to interpret and comprehend the visuals that surround us.

In the research, I chose to interpret the artworks with the help of Cultural Studies and Postcolonial discourse. "From a Cultural Studies perspective, all people engage in culture, in the making of symbols and the practices of representation (verbal, visual, gestural, musical, etc.)" (D'Alleva 76). The visual and textual symbols in the artworks imply on the culture the artworks forms within; it pinpoints on the political and social values and on the power relations in society. Colonialism, for example, has been a dominant political source which shaped political and cultural identities as well as a new distinction of identities across the globe (77). Essentially, we can understand better how the cultural ideas about race, gender and class are organized and established by following such contextual questions: What kind of messages are encoded within the artwork? What kind of semiotic symbols are used by the artist? How does the image help to shape the viewer's sense of self in relation to others? And, does it display any racial or gender hierarchies? (84).

The visual analysis approach I will use is based on Ossian Ward's book *Ways of Looking*. Ward suggests a six-step scheme when coming to review contemporary art. He recommends a method named TABULA, as referred to the phrase *Tabula Rasa* in Latin, meaning, clear table or a blank slate. To him, looking at contemporary art doesn't necessarily require a scholarly academic knowledge in the history of the art or art criticism. In order to comprehend contemporary art, the viewer needs to acquire simple skills that he or she can quickly adapt. He uses the acronym TABULA to illustrate the steps which one should follow when observing and analyzing contemporary art.

The first step, represented by the letter **T**, stands for **Time**. The viewer must give some time and attention to the artwork, "a few minutes of calm contemplation" (Ward 14). The second step is **A** for **Association**. In this phase, the viewer should ask himself: can I relate to the artwork? Is it provoking any kind of reaction? Does it resonate certain thoughts and memories? The association is crucial for the understanding of the artwork and the social and personal connotations it evokes. Sometimes the attraction to the artwork is merely visual fascination; however, there may also be different "hooks" for the viewer to get attached to the artwork. These might be humor, meditative qualities or a strong political message.

The next step is (**B**), which stands for **Background**. The viewer should follow the context in which the artwork was created or the interest of the artist in the topic of the artwork. The label attached to

the work can suggest the intention of the artist, and give the background needed for understanding the artwork. For example, the place where the artwork was created can sometimes provide all the necessary data, and often, seeing another artwork by the same artist can give means to the intention of the artist.

**(U)** Is for **Understanding**. After realizing the association that the work evokes and gathering enough data on the background of the work and the maker, an initial comprehension should occur. In that point in the process, the message of the work is clearer to the viewer, even if not yet complete.

After four phases of analysis of the artwork, Ward suggests to **Look Again (L)**. A second look at the work may enable one to spot details that were missed before. Even a seemingly facile work can be revealed to contain extra layers of meaning and connotation. Another look encourages a stronger engagement with the artwork.

The final step in observing an artwork is **Assessment (A)**, evaluating the work and understating its message or gain an appreciation for it, summarize and finalize the viewer's impression.

Ward is emphasizing the importance of translating the artistic creations into a language that is familiar to the viewers. He states: "Contemporary art is steadily becoming the *lingua franca* of international culture (...) more surprising that so few (...) are spending any time to help viewer unpick and translate these invading swarms of creation" (Ward 22). In this paper, I will use Ward's method and approach to analyzing the case studies. Ward suggests following the scheme in its *TABULA* order. However, this order is relevant while observing an art piece in a gallery or museum. Whereas in this paper I will take the freedom to change the order of the scheme on a case by case basis.

### **3.2 Selection Criteria and Method Application**

For the visual analysis of the artworks, I have chosen images from each that represent both the complete work and the specific artist's expression. The selection of the images was based on the following criteria:

1. Clear visualization of the artwork, the objects and the people that are represented. The depiction of the characters in their immediate environment.
2. Clear depictions of appearances of people and objects- clothing, skin color, object color, and materials.
3. Inclusion of objects that are used as symbols and metaphors for displacement and refuge.

4. The formats and methods by which the artworks were created was varied in order to discuss different expression modes, such as installations, digital artwork, documentary or staged photography.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

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### 4.1 Ai Weiwei Installations

**T:** Since 2015, Ai Weiwei has been acting to raise awareness to the global refugee crisis. He posted on his social media channels, photographed, posed by himself and made huge installations addressing this issue, placing these in Central European cities. Ai has visited holding camps in Greece, the Turkish-Syrian border, and the U.S-Mexican border.

In 2016 he set up a temporary studio in Lesbos to raise awareness to the asylum seekers' situation. Lesbos was and still is major destination for asylum seekers that reach it by dangerously crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey in their attempt to reach Europe. In 2016, Ai Weiwei launched three large installations in Berlin, Vienna, and Florence.

In Berlin, Ai covered the pillars of the concert hall with 1400 life vests of discarded by refugee on the beaches of Lesbos after being used on their way across the sea from Turkey (Fig. 5) . In



Figure 1: Doris Salcedo, *Istanbul*, 2002

Florence, as part of his exhibition "Ai Weiwei. Libero" he covered Palazzo Strozzi façade and windows with twenty-two orange rubber boats (Fig. 6). In Vienna, he turned his life jackets installation displayed in Berlin into a floating installation. He spread them in 201 rings, which together formed a giant 'F' letter, naming the work *F.Lotus* (a play of words on the flower, the word 'Fuck' and 'afloat'). The installation covered the Austrian Gallery's Baroque pond at Belvedere Palace (Fig.7).

**A:** In the three installations, the artist is using masses of objects to represent the urgency of the refugee crisis and to protests against governments and political parties for not taking action to help the asylum seekers and provide them rescue. In one of his interviews in March 2017 he says: “If we see somebody who has been victimised by war or desperately trying to find a peaceful place, if we don’t accept those people, the real challenge, and the real crisis is not of all the people who feel the

pain but rather for the people who ignore to recognise it or pretend that it doesn't exist. That is both a tragedy and crime.”(Cafolla).

The use of objects such as life jackets and boats to represent masses of people is a common technique that Ai uses. In other installations such as his *Sunflower Seeds* 2009, he uses 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds that cover the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern. Ai is known for "rendering commonplace objects in precious materials- coal hives in bronze, junk doors in marble and watermelons, back scratchers and even urine in porcelain" (Ai and Pins 94). As opposed to his use in hand made sun-flower seeds made especially for the installation, in these three installations, he uses 'ready-made' objects, the common life jackets that were in previous use by asylum seekers, to create the art pieces.



Figure 2: Ai Weiwei, *Scene of Dead Syrian Toddler, Lesbos Greece, 2016*

Other artists like David Hammons, Robert Gober, and Doris Salcedo created large-scale installations in city centers to raise the awareness of the public to certain social and political situation. Ai is influenced by these artists and similarly is breaking free from the confines of traditional galleries and museums. Often, Ai is using daily objects like chairs, bottles, and tables to create his public installations (Sooke). It is possible to find the same use of simple, daily objects to address a bigger issue like human rights and political and social issues.

**B:** Ai Weiwei is a Chinese artist, born in 1957, he grew up in China's far northwest desert and when the Cultural Revolution has ended he returned to Beijing and then relocated to New York, where he lived from 1981-1993. In 2011, Ai was arrested in Beijing for 'economic crimes' and was held a prisoner in an unknown location for nearly three months (Ai and Pins 7). Today, Ai Weiwei is one of the most influential artists in the world, while he keeps referring to his arrest by Chinese government and continues to address human right violation issues and especially freedom of expression, every work of his receives the attention of both global and cultural arena (Sooke). Constantly, he continued to refine his art, which encompasses different mediums, including architecture, sculpture, photography and social media.

Ai Weiwei actions and artworks are trying to provoke the audience. For example, posing as the drowned boy Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi, he encourages attendees at an event to wear life jacket of refugees and to take selfies with them to create a sensation. As a well-known artist, his work attracts much attention from global media. His works and his deep involvement in the refugee's situation in Europe is highlighting critical issues like human rights, the need for humanitarian aid and criticism

on the European policy towards these migrants. Ai is creating activist art installations that are popping in central areas in western cities, taking over a large area and placing the political issues concerning the refugees in the center of public attention.

**U:** As an artist who relates to Western notions of human rights and freedom of speech, Ai Weiwei is taking the freedom to become the face and voice of the refugees coming from the Middle East to Europe. Weiwei believes that someone has to speak for the 'weak' refugees since they have no proper status in European Society, they cannot protest against the treatment they are getting from the European authorities.

By 'speaking for' the refugee, Ai is echoing Gayatri Spivak's perspective on the way privileged groups are representing weaker groups in society. In her article "Can The Subaltern Speak?" Spivak is dealing with the term 'subaltern,' as a word to define how proletarian voices are deliberately silenced by dominant, bourgeois capitalist narrative (D'Alleva 81). Spivak's query 'Can the subaltern speak?' underlined the power of representation, arguing that the subaltern remained in its inferior position because of the lack of a significant enunciatory power. That is, the subaltern is subaltern precisely because it cannot speak in such a way as to be heard and acknowledged.

Spivak is referring to two ways of representation of the "Other" and she distinguished them by the German words *Vertretung* (political representation) and *Darstellung* (representing by 'placing there'). Spivak explains the two terms into representation by proxy and by the portrait. *Vertretung* is stepping in someone's place, stepping into someone else's shoes while representing him/her. *Darstellung* literary means to 'place there' (*Dar* is there, *Stellen* is to place). It is possible to discuss this difficulty in terms of the intellectual's or artist's responsibility to present the voice of the subaltern transparently, to perform the role of a conduit for subaltern interests and representations. Nevertheless, the danger of denying the agency to the subaltern persists when it is represented by others, a practice that could well extend the process of producing the subaltern (Harindranath 5).

"(...) these are two ways of representing. Now, the thing to remember is that in the act of representing politically, you actually represent yourself and your constituency in the portrait sense, as well. You have to think of your constituency as working class, or the black minority, the rainbow coalition, or yet the



Figure 3: Nilüfer Demir, *Alan Kurdi lying lifeless on the beach*, Bodrum, Turkey, 2015

military-industrial complex and so on". (Spivak and Harasym 108)

Ai is using the first form of representation according to Spivak, as he is taking a right to speak for a group and identifies as one of them, although he is not. Spivak says, that using *Vertretung* as an act of representation, "is defining the subject as a sovereign deliberative consciousness (...) that is, in fact, a rather narrow sense of self-representation, which you cannot avoid (Spivak and Harasym 109). According to her definition of representation, while Ai Weiwei is using his status and influence as a leading artist to mark the asylum seekers as poor, faceless masses. As the asylum seekers are defined by objects mimics the way the sovereignty of Europe and the European media depicts them. For example, the *Guardian* is describing protests of citizens against the dehumanizing term for asylum seekers "swarm of people" used by Britain former prime minister David Cameron (Elgot and Taylor).



Figure 4: Ai Weiwei, #Safe passage, Lesbos Greece, 2016

On the other hand, Ai is including asylum seekers in some of his works, using the second form of representation, *Darstellung* (representing by 'placing there'). He photographs refugees with the hashtag #SafePassage, which is part of his documentation on social media channels (Instagram and Facebook). By having a Selfie photo with him, or photographing Ai helping the newcomers exit the boats when they are nearing the shore, he gives them the opportunity to 'speak for themselves' and to represent their situation truthfully. According to Spivak's notion, this act might be read as *Darstellung*. Ai is enabling the opportunity for the refugees to 'speak for' themselves and to call for help or to protests on the difficulties the European authorities are putting up. Here, the asylum seekers are playing an essential part in his digital displays; by including the refugees in his photographs, he has them participate in the artwork. One of the exceptions of representation in his work is the photo of Ai posting like the dead Syrian Toddler, Alan Kurdi (Fig. 2). In this photo, Ai is drawing attention to a singular, identifiable tragedy of a very young asylum seeker that drowned and his body was swept to the shores of Turkey. The infant's photo horrified the world and brought international awareness to the realities of the migration crisis. Nonetheless, many were outraged by the image of Ai Weiwei, labeling it as "crude, thoughtless and egotistical" (The Guardian, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Ai tried to identify himself with Kurdi, however, the comparison between a refugee child dead at the age of three and a highly successful living artist can be criticized as a cynical act. Social

media overflowed with scathing comments, and many accused the Chinese artist of blatantly cashing in on refugees' devastation (ibid).

Ai is using both forms of representation: *Vertretung* (political representation) and *Darstellung* (representing by 'placing there') in his work. Nonetheless, I argue that although he includes the refugees as active participants in his artworks, they do not initiate the creative process or participate in publishing its outcomes. Therefore, their participation is limited and passive, thus the action of representation is lead by the artist, who is 'speaking for' the refugees.

**L** In another look at the installations, they stand in contrast to the historic building they are covering, making a correlation between the old classic buildings and the contemporary mass production of objects such as the life jackets. The opposition between the construction and the materials to the setting of the installation attracts the eye of the viewer. Judging by the many results found in various digital search channels, the installations have drawn the publics and the media attention. However, whether or not they have affected decision-makers and the European society, is hard to tell. Nonetheless, Ai Weiwei has achieved the impact he intended. In an interview with *The New York Times*, he said: "Maybe the most powerful thing I can do is film them — to show that piece of reality. I know so little about those people, about these conflicts" (Pogrebin).

Ai Weiwei, like many other artists, is seeking an *affect*. *Affect* is an ambiguous term when it is related to art; the "affect" is dealing with emotions, sensations or emerging forces that join into contact points from body to body, body to subject/the world or between subject and subject. *Affect* is not focused on the sign, the meaning or transmittable information, thus it is a raw pre-feeling constructed by the social context of the artwork. *Affect* is intimate and impersonal at the same time. However it is not a feeling, but it can be felt and become tangible. Sara Ahmed argues that *affect* is allowing signs to accumulate cultural meaning and value (Ahmed 91).

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmad is referring to the public nature of emotions that asylum seekers and immigration draw in the UK. She explores how "emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" (Ahmed 1). She explains how news reports about illegal immigrants or 'bogus refugees' are circulating the social domain, contributing to the 'Othering' of the asylum seekers, attributing 'Others' as the source of our feelings.

"The 'illegal immigrants' and 'bogus asylum seekers' are those who are 'not us', and who in not being us, endanger what is ours. Such others threaten to take away from what 'you' have, as the legitimate subject of the nation, as the one who is the true recipient of national benefits.



The narrative invites the reader to adopt the 'you' through working on emotions: becoming this 'you' would mean developing a certain rage against these illegitimate others." (2)

By Using life jacket of refugees gathered from the beach of Lesbos, Ai Weiwei is trying to evoke emotion and action in the viewers. He wishes to affect them, and by connecting in several installations the notion of urgency to the situation of the asylum seekers in Europe with the masses of the objects they have carried with them along their journey, he is creating an *Affect*. The refugees' life jackets and boats are bringing a new meaning, that is inseparable from the refugees themselves. The life jackets that are covering the Konzerthaus in Berlin or the Strozzi Palazzo in Florence are as if are knocking forcefully on the doors of the aware yet indifferent audience that is visiting these spaces to enjoy a performance or exhibition in a safe, cultural space. The life jackets are used as a synonym for the people who are asking to be saved and to perhaps be part of the culture that is symbolized by the buildings which they are occupying with their equipment. Moreover, by translocating the life jackets and the inflating boats from Lesbos, the entry point into Europe in these refugees' journey he implies that they are already present in the space, and therefore should be treated as such by the authorities and by the local society.

**A:** Ai Weiwei's installations are noteworthy in their central place in a highly visible location in main European cities. Their size and the use of the objects as a cover for the buildings, or as a shape that creates the 'F' word is emphasizing the scope of the migration issue in Europe as a problem that must be addressed. However, a suspicion arises that Ai is using the platform given him to protests for the asylum seekers to promote his art and to predicate his status as an influential activist artist in our times. Secondly, the use of objects to represent the asylum seekers situation, without including people or individual's stories in the installation is replicating the media attitude to the asylum seeker. The media is often depicting the asylum seekers as a faceless mass, threatening the culture, strength and the capital of Europe. For example, the use of the media in words such as "influx", "occupation", "invasion" and "flood," project the discourse used in natural disasters in the context of asylum seekers (Yinanç). "By doing that we forget the fact they are human beings escaping tragedies or trying to find a safer future for themselves and for their families" (Kaya 8). Many life jackets of refugees crowding and swarming of cultural assets in Europe may raise empathy and concern to the asylum seekers situation but on the other hand, they can also evoke fear and anxiety because of their large quantity and close relation with the negative linguistic depiction of asylum seekers.

Furthermore, by representing asylum seekers by objects, Ai is referring to the way European media views refugees in the first place. In the majority of the media images (66%), asylum seekers

have been described in large groups, from a distance, with a focus on the object they are using, like inflatable boats, and typically depicted males (Bleiker et al. 398) creating a focus on the masses of asylum seekers instead on their individuality. "Images of groups, by contrast, tended to create emotional distance between viewers and the subjects being depicted" (399). Ai use of real life jackets for the island Lesbos can be interpreted in two ways; on the one hand he is replicating the approach of the media in its perspective on refugees, and on the other hand, he might be criticizing the media by creating massification and objectivization of the asylum seekers. I tend to refer to the former interpretation of Ai's work, although there may be criticism of his work, when the asylum seeker is depicted as no longer an identifiable victim, the viewer sees an abstract, non-human but a political problem that might threaten its sovereignty and security.



Figure 5: Ai Weiwei, Konzerthaus Berlin Installation, Berlin, 2016



Figure 6: Ai Weiwei, Libero installation, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2016



Figure 7: Ai Weiwei, *F Lotus*, the installation, Vienna, 2016

#### 4.2. *Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus* | Marco Tiberio

**T:** Marco Tiberio, an Italian photographer who is working and living in Belgium and Tunisia created his Photo series *Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus* from 2015 to 2016 while he participated in Masterclass at Fabbrica Research Center in Italy, a design research center financed by United Colors of Benetton, which supports young artists at the beginning of their professional career. Tiberio was interested in investigating visually the recent 'refugee crisis' in a different way. Therefore he chose to focus on Calais camp, also known as 'The Jungle.'



Figure 6: Bernd and Hilla Becher Industrial Facades, 1972-1995

**B:** 'The New Jungle', often called 'Calais Jungle' was a migrant camp in northern France, in the vicinity of Calais near the international train tunnel to London. During its peak, it sheltered approximately 5000 migrants from countries like Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Eritrea. About 62% of the camp population were young men under the age of 33. The camp was established in 1999 by the French Red Cross in the name Sangatte. In 2002 the camp was closed by order of France's prior minister of the interior, Nicolas Sarkozy. All the while, migrants have continued to arrive at the area and settled in the woods of the port city of Calais. The camp turned into an informal settlement,

which includes along with the temporary housing shelters also makeshift churches, shops, and restaurants. However it was known for its poor sanitary conditions. Tiberio focuses on the contemporary homes of the refugees, coming from across the world, and leaves out the people who are living there. In an interview with Tiberio in *City Lab Magazine*, he says: "I wanted to show people's skills and resilience." Tiberio who speaks English, French, and Arabic, conducted many talks with the asylum seekers living in the camp and as a result chose to document the architecture of their shelter. Throughout the project, he took more than 100 photos and the final series contains 18 pictures; each one depicts an original structure of a home in the Calais Camp.

**A:** In his choice, Tiberio expresses a fascination with the resourceful human imagination to create appropriate homes from simple materials with the lack of suitable equipment. He shows, how in the toughest conditions, people can create a place they can call home. He noticed how different these constructions were. The huts reflect the experience and skills of the person who built them; some cabins are designed for a temporary stay, while others have been constructed to last while its residents often wait over a year to get their papers and visa that will allow them to stay, whereas others spend only a few months in the camp.

A movement of artists called the "New Topographics" inspired Tiberio. It was active in the mid-seventies. His photos, like other photographers using the same technique, were inspired by the human-made buildings and structures, focusing on parking lots, factories, and warehouses and glorifying them as an appreciated invention of the human mind (see fig. 7). The industrial structures are all presented in a beautiful simplicity and modesty, like early photographers used to document true nature (Collins). Applying a typological approach to the various tents and improvised structures used as homes and businesses in the camp, Tiberio documented the individual buildings straight on, allowing the details of fabrics, plastic tarps, wooden framing, and other handmade architectural features to come through (Knoblauch).

**U:** The images Tiberio presents, despite their visual pleasantness, stay impersonal and distant from the humane story they wish to tell. Tiberio mentions the presence of the people living in the camp, but in the pictures, there is no sign of them. The shelters are meant to represent them and their innovative minds, but the poetic attempt of Tiberio to tell their story is not succeeding when looking at the photos. His photos are highly aesthetic and stand in contrast to the poor and shattering sheds the asylum seekers call home. The dichotomy that stands out in the images- between the clean aesthetics and the shaky shelters together with the absence of its inhabitants is creating an uneasy

feeling for the viewer- on one hand the images are well made, the composition is centered and creating a stable and static atmosphere- on the other hand, the stability of the image is standing in contrast to what it is the picture- a temporary structures made out of all sorts of materials and which is not built to last. Therefore the artist is creating an aesthetics of the suffering of those who live in the camp and leaves out the challenges and the difficulties of living in such conditions.

**L:** A second look at the photos reveals both sympathy and empathy in the pictures. Tiberio documents the structures from an eye-level height, from a straight perspective. He does not try to create admiration or a false appearance of the camp; he is providing photographic evidence of the occurrences in the camp. Elizabeth Edwards binds together the influence of evidence and *Affect*. She claims that:

(...) ultimately photographs are evidence of *affect*, of how people feel, and think and negotiate their worlds, and as such photography and photographs are at the very heart of the anthropological endeavor. What was simply unproblematic evidence has become *affect*, and the processes of affect have, in their turn, become an evidential force in anthropology as a humanistic discipline. (Edwards 248)

The discipline of photography is an anthropological evidence to the situation of people in the world, thus the image evokes emotions, memories and subjective experiences which are relevant both for the observer and for the observed at the same time (236). His typological survey assembles an outlook on how the other half of the world, and especially forcedly displaced people, live in uncomfortable conditions, essentially homeless in detention centers and camps (Feuerhelm). Tiberio emphasizes the structures devoid of their inhabitants or the people who built their own architecture of necessity. Although providing an evidence of the daily living conditions is not enough, when the absence of the people in the landscapes is clearly evident.

**A:** After the project has reached its end, Tiberio binds the photos in a booklet called *ImmoRefugee*, self-published by Tiberio's design studio *Defrost*. The booklet can be used as a guide to the real estate in the camp. It contains elements from the design in commercial advertisement leaflets. As such, the book creates a parody of typical real estate flyers, which describes the property's characteristics. Some of the houses are marketed as "not to be missed", "an excellent opportunity" or "unique deal". The areas of the camp are organized in neighborhoods: they are divided by nationalities and ethnicity. The ironic phrasing and the distinction of the camp into small ghettos stand in contrast with the fragility of the places called home (Knoblauch). Although he put most of his emphasis on the architecture of the camp, Tiberio reveals in the collection of images an



additional perspective to his work. Through parody and irony, he comments on the humane aspects of life in the camp. The content and the contrast added in the booklet makes the artwork more whole and complex. It allows the viewer to react with bitter humor to the contrast between the shelters and tents and the written description of the properties. It helps evoke affection and compassion for the people living in the camp.



*Figure 7 : Marco Tiberio, Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus, Calais France, 2016*



Figure 8: Marco Tiberio, *Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus*, Calais France, 2016



Figure 9: Marco Tiberio, *Marco Tiberio, Invisible Cities, Architecture of Exodus*, Calais France, 2016

### 4.3 *Ville De Calais* | Henk Wildschut

**T:** Dutch artist Henk Wildschut has followed the gathering of migrants coming from Africa and the Middle East in the outskirts of Calais, France. Between the years 2006-2017, Wildschut documented the life in the temporary camp. Gradually, the camp which started in the forest, turned into a city, with houses, shops, churches, and mosques. In his continuous work, Wildschut captured the daily life in the camp and followed the traces that these 'invisible' people left there. In 2017, the work of Wildschut was published in a book called *Ville de Calais*. In this book, the readers can find photos of the architecture of the camp, including private huts and tents together with commune areas like shops and restaurants. Also, Wildschut documents several people in the camp, following their consent to being photographed. A short explanatory text is added to the photos, referring to when and where the photo was taken. Especially when there is a person in the image, the text adds some more information on the individual. For example, the person's original whereabouts and his life ambitions. There are hardly any photos of children in the book and women are completely absent from the

documentation. *Ville de Calais* is showing the transformation that the camp has gone through, from an assembly of sporadic shelters in the forest to one of the biggest migrant's camps in Europe, accommodating up to 6000 occupants in its peak until the French authorities ordered to remove the camp in October 2016. The last photo of Wildschut, from January 2017, presents the bare ground of what was left from the Calais Camp. In his book *Ville de Calais*, he presents the daily life in the camp and shares his thoughts and feeling from an outsider perspective. *Ville de Calais* contains 328 pages in the format of a 'coffee table book.' The medium of the book is essential to the understanding of the context and the setting of the photographs.

**A** Wildschut is capturing aspects of the life in the camp. He begins with documenting the aerials of the camp, as he further continues to focus on detailed photos of houses and their indoors, sacred designated areas like churches and mosques, restaurants and other facilities. After a while, when he wins some of the residents' trust, he also photographs the people in the camp. The people's photos are few, comparing to the majority of the photos which deal with the architecture of the camp and its meeting points.

**B** Henk Wildschut is a Dutch photographer, born in 1967. He exhibited his works in galleries and museums in Amsterdam, Shanghai, London, and Rome. In addition to his self-initiated art projects, he has worked as a photographer in Dutch national newspapers, magazines and communication agencies. According to his biography published on his professional website, the main focus of his work is on laborers, illegal immigrants and people on the run. His interest in immigrants and refugees has started in 2005, while he documented shelters in different locations such as the south of Spain, in Dunkirk and in Patras. In 2010 he published his book *Shelter* which gathered his documentation project around Europe. He states that "Shelter became the symbol of the misery that refugees experience". After completing a commissioned project about food for the Rijksmuseum, in 2015, Wildschut returned to his interest in immigrants and asylum seekers, with his project *Ville de Calais* that was first exhibited in Foam Museum for Photography in Amsterdam and later became a book carrying the same title.

**U:** In the photographs, an outsider's look is present. The outsider look defines the subjects and the people living in the camp as a distinguished 'other' from the photographer, and the intended audience of his photos. It is reflected in the pictures of structures and shelters with an exclusion of the people using it. Stuart Hall in his study of representation refers to how certain representations have had impacts groups of people, such as the ways in which binaries are able to construct stereotypes of those groups of people. Hall contends in his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and*



Signifying Practices that a “regime of representation” is a way of creating meaning through difference. By using a binary, “us vs them” dichotomy, Hall reaffirms the importance of creating a difference by stating, “We need ‘difference’ because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the ‘Other” (Hall 235). The outsider's look of Wildschut's photos, is contributing to the dichotomy of binaries of –'us'- the West and 'them'- the asylum seekers coming from the Middle East and Africa, thus-the 'Orient', as the 'us' articulates in the gaze of the European photographer, and the 'them' are the absent asylum seekers, represented by their poor sheds and shelters and the tough conditions they are facing.

The image is detached from the asylum seekers' current situation, they are isolated in their position without a hint of their personal history, their former profession, skills, and talents. Therefore, the photos do not raise solidarity and identification with the people in the photos, to the viewer, there is no common ground for emotional attachment to the few people presented. Anna Szörényi discusses this distinction in her article "The images speak for themselves? Reading refugee coffee-table books"(2006). She argues that the practice of collecting photographs of refugees in a 'coffee table' format in a particular style and approach is missing the aim of presenting the asylum seekers as a whole person. She argues that although photographers try to emphasize empathy and humanitarian concern at their audience, by appropriating suffering of others and turning them into a ‘thing’ which is sold for profit, their action produce the opposite. "It is here that the border between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is reproduced within the very attempt to make refugees look like human subjects" (Szörényi 38).

**L:** while looking again at the pictures, the minimal presence of people in most of the pictures, and especially of women and children, are reinforcing the invisibility of the suffering of the refugees, making it easier to accept that humanitarian crisis is emerging in 'third world' countries but also in the 'back yard' of Calais, France. "In this way, this photograph can be read as narrating its own critique of the practice of turning atrocity into aesthetics" (31). On the other hand, the documentation of Calais camp provides a continuous insight into nature and the facilities of the camp. By documenting the Calais Jungle for more than ten years the artist is illustrating a clearer notion of how the camp looks from the inside and the conditions which the asylum seekers are living in. Nonetheless, the distant perspective of the photographs, even after the artist's long presence in the camp of Calais convey a message of the distinction and binary between the artist, as white, European male, coming from the Netherlands, and the refugees, who are mostly arriving from underdeveloped or warstruck countries.

The distinction between the artists as representative of a Eurocentric gaze and the 'Others' is also discussed in Emmanuel Levinas essay *Totality and Infinity* (1979). Levinas wrote it as a response to the cultural and philosophical crises followed by the two world wars in Europe. He presents his theory on exteriority, and the ways western thought is confronted with the 'Other'. Levinas claims that there has always been a neglect in considering the 'Other' in Western thought. He refers to Socrates when he says that "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by the interposition of the middle and the neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being" (Levinas 43). The perspective of the 'Other' as not part of 'the same' but as different from the 'I' may be abolished when the face of the 'Other' is represented. The 'Other' is always a part of the subject- and does not exist by itself. "We call it 'the same' because in representation the 'I' precisely loses its opposition to its subject" (126). For him, the approach to the human face evokes the most basic mode of responsibility for the other. The look of the face prevents oneself to act violently. In the relation to the face the "I" usurps the place of the 'Other', which then is granted the "right for existence" as a subject.

Levinas asserts that the confrontation with the physical face of the 'Other' summons an ethical challenge to the individual. The face of the 'Other' is the most exposed and vulnerable feature in his body (194). It is being used as a metaphor for the way the 'Other' reveals its presence, which is undeniable by the subject looking at it. The revelation of the face evokes empathy and sensibility. The ethical relation of love and responsibility for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness.

A "The face resists possession, resist my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance of the grasp" (197) and "the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity" (213). Thus the omission of the individual faces and the bodies of the asylum seekers in Wildschut's work helps to maintain the distinction between 'we', the European and 'them' the refugees as a gap that one cannot overcome. Also, it prevents the viewer from feeling an affinity for the situation of those living in Calais camp. Instead of faces, individual stories of asylum seekers, their past, their struggles and hopes for the future, he chose to deflect his documentation to the less controversial side of the camp, by documenting its buildings, and architecture. Wildschut devotion for a ten-year photography project is highly appreciated and was rewarded for his ongoing photographic documentation, capturing the rapid development and dismantling of the refugee camp near the port of Calais. Even so, the photographs who shows traces and marks of these transient and

indicates on the invisible existences of the camp's inhabitants are neglecting the retraces of their itineraries or making their portraits. I believe a more human aspect of his work would have contributed to the sense of empathy and identification with the asylum seekers, rather than leaving a broad, yet incomplete documentation of the lives in Calais Camp, that will continue to perpetuate a distant gazing on the destiny of asylum seekers on Europe.



Figure 10: Henk Wildschut, *South Side, Ville de Calais, Calais, France, 2015*



Figure 11: *Henk Wildschut, Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> of March, Ville de Calais, Calais, France, 2016*



Figure 12 Henk Wildschut, *Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> of March, Ville de Calais, Calais, France, 2015*

#### **4.4 The Average Face | Jeroen van der Most**

**A:** In his work, Jeroen Van Der Most is using an algorithm to visualize how the average face in a given country is affected by the integration of 10,000 Syrians in that society. In his work, he collected hundreds of portraits of Syrians, Americans, Dutch, German, and Saudi Arabians, processed them by automated facial recognition computer algorithm and superimposed them. By building a tool that will allow him to calculate the average face of the region based on the distance from the nearest refugee camp. According to Van Der Most; "Based on refugee data and extrapolation techniques I visualized the effect of potential refugee inflow per country." (*Creator Magazine* 2015). The *Average Face* was intended to explore differently the way the western societies often think on the alienation matter of refugees in a more personal way. By using statistics and percentages, the work provides a visual suggestion to the average standard facial features of a region and shows how it will not be much affected by the possible refugee influx in a country.

**B:** Van Der Most is dealing with one of the most important issues concerning refugees coming to Europe – the fear that refugees as foreigners will affect and threaten European national identity. "Increasing numbers of asylum seekers amplify the strength of the 'Other' regarding the threat to societal identity" (Innes, 471). To address the issue of supporting and opposing the argument of receiving refugees, Van der Most uses simple Google images. By using generic Google images, he reflects the simple use of common people in researching for data. The images found by Google image search may not be accurate. Usually, the data is found according to the picture name, the website that the image is linked to, and location of the user and the uploaders of the pictures (Yee et al. 401 ). The standard data found influence the way we consume and are affected by stereotypical images, which create the common notion on a region's appearance.

The images of the artwork are blurry and vague. On the one hand, Van Der Most reveals his artistic techniques while providing a view to the 'behind the scenes' of data collection and images superimposition by leaving the layers visible. But on the other hand, the vagueness of the photos of Syrian refugee also comment on the way they are often depicted in European Society, as a faceless, nameless crowd (Bleiker et al. 406).

**U:** The use of Van der Most's digital technique and spreading the images via social media makes the artwork accessible and approachable to a large audience. At the same time, the generic and digitalized pictures create distance between the viewer and the refugees. Not showing them with detailed facial features and as individuals creates a distant perspective on refugees. The digital platform that Van Der Most employs may allow a neutral discussion in the matter of whether Syrian refugees will change the face of society, but at the same time, the heavy digital processing makes it hard for the viewer to relate to the issue from a more sensitive and emotional perspective.

Another point is that the viewer can notice the average face in different nations, which turns out to be quite similar to one another. The *Average Face* started as an experiment of the artist, and soon gained a lot of media attention due to its relevance to the 'refugee crisis' Europe is facing.

**L:** Van der Most deals with a sensitive issue in the representation of refugees, the human face. The issue of presenting the face is even more important while acknowledging that most of the times, specific features of refugees are absent from media descriptions and portrayals. "Asylum seekers are rarely presented as individuals with names, lives, skills and histories – they are simply vilified as we become increasingly insular and suspicious" (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore 43). As mentioned before, the human face is a key in evoking empathy and compassion, as Levinas described it the 'Other' is not the incarnation of God, but precisely on his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the

manifestation of the height which God is revealed" (Levinas 79). Levinas has stated that without addressing the face of the 'Other' it becomes difficult to include the 'Other' in the general society. However, although Van der Most is using the portrait of many faces of refugees and non-refugees, the digital technique he is using to pile up the images, and calculating their average is creating a blurry, non-specific face. By doing so, he is making it hard to the viewer to identify the average face of the Syrian or Afghan.

**A:** To some extent Van der Most is creating an equality and unity between the Western face and the asylum seeker's face and undermines the influence that the foreign faces will have on the average face of the region. The merger between the faces raises criticism to one of the fears that Europe holds from the arrival of refugees in their homeland. At the same time, the viewers can acknowledge how slight the differences are in the average Dutch, German or American Face after an assumed integration of 10,000 Syrians. *The Average Face* is a layered piece that in first sight does not attract a particular emotion but an intellectual, calculated interest. This second look reveals the subtext of the artwork, a critical perspective of the artist against the fear of Europe for the integration of refugees.

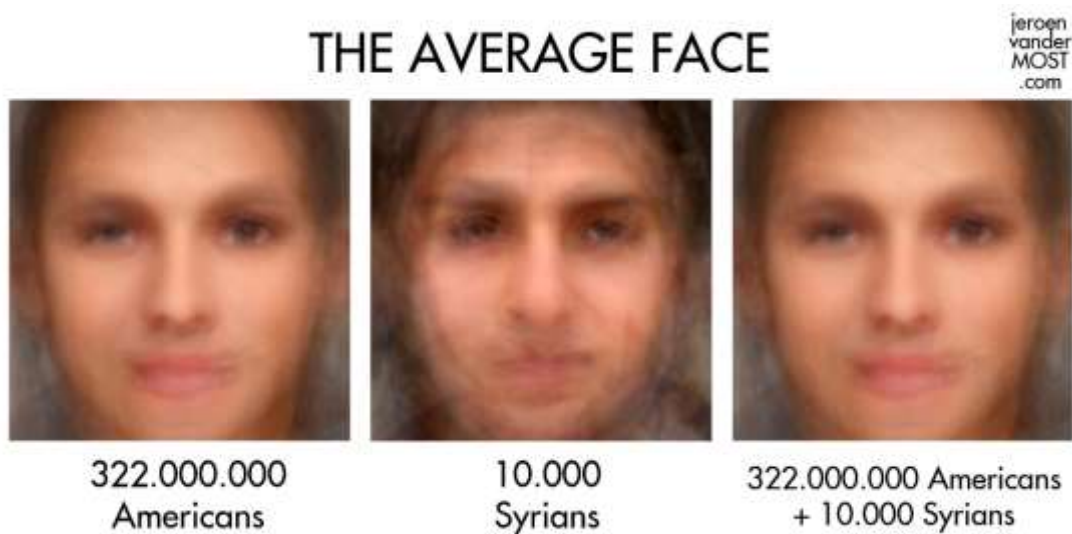


Figure 13: Jeroen van der Most, *The American Average Face*, the Netherlands, 2015



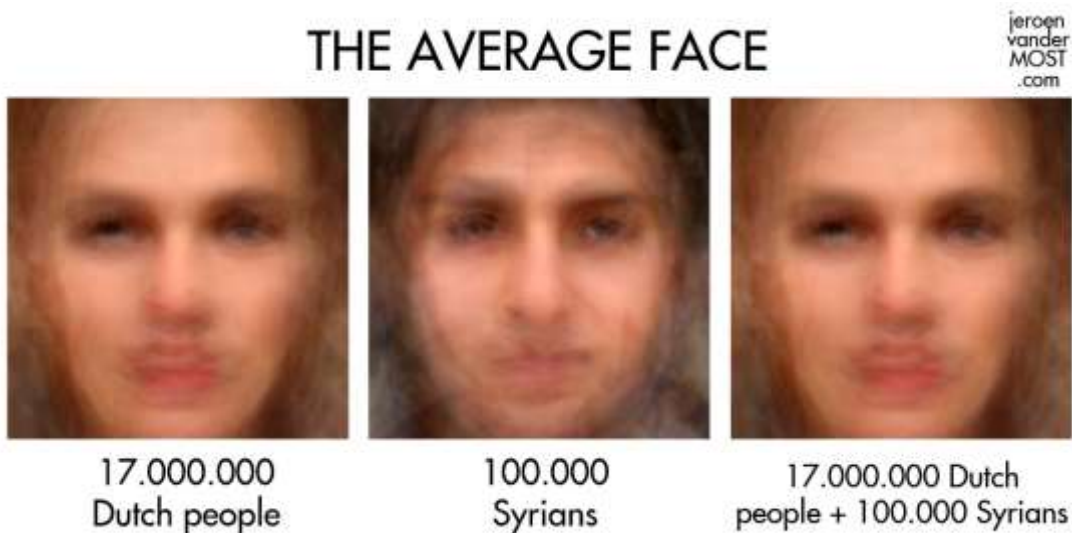


Figure 14: Jeroen van der Most, *The Dutch Average Face*, the Netherlands, 2015

#### **4.5 *Where the Children Sleep* | Magnus Wennman**

**T:** In September 2015, a heartbreaking picture of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian toddler that drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, was published in international media by Turkish Journalist Nilüfer Demir. Quickly, the photographs of his body, swept into Turkey, causing a dramatic change in the level of international concern toward the refugee crisis.

**B:** Not long after the photographs were published, Magnus Wennman, an award-winning Swedish photographer, created the photo series *Where the Children Sleep* in June 2016. Wennman partnered with UNHCR and Fotografiska, the Swedish Museum of Photography, to raise awareness of children refugee's situation in the world.

**A:** *Where the Children Sleep* is an exhibition that makes it very hard for the viewer to stay indifferent to the uncertain and dangerous situation of the children. The exhibition is raising some ethical and moral questions about the act of photography of children sleeping and in particular refugee children. Firstly, Wennman takes photos of one of the most vulnerable populations among asylum seekers- children. According to a Unicef report published in February 2017, more than half of the refugees in the world are children, some 50 million children have migrated to another country or have been forcefully displaced in their country. According to the texts accompanying the exhibition, some of the children are traveling with their parents (see Fig.19). However, in the

pictures, they are mostly shown to be all alone, except for the mother that covers her face in Fig. 19. And even in that picture, the focus is on the child and not on the parent. The pictures carry references to other themes, such as sacredness and innocence in classical art pieces. Often in the arts, presentation of children cherish the ideal of childhood innocence. One of the characteristics of this ideal childhood has been embedded in the modern era since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and presents a naturally innocent child. Anne Higonnet calls it the *Romantic Child* (Higonnet 15). The *Romantic Child* is presented as being close to nature, barefooted, big eyed and utterly unsexual. This kind of depiction demands the protection by adults and justifies the need to shelter children from various threats (12). Wenmann's photos follow that ideal of romantic childhood. However, he is redefining the innocence of the refugee children in different ways. For example in Fig. 18, the blond, blue-eyed child is staring fiercely into the camera. His gaze is mature and bold. By contrast, in Fig.17 the text that accompanies the photo of the two girls that are sleeping under the bridge is suggestive of their sexuality, as their father is quoted as saying that some "men in cars asked if they could buy the girls for a few hours" in exchange for food. While some of the pictures in the series are photographed in nature, the images shown here puts the children refugees in neglected urban areas, thus breaking the connection between nature and children and by extension between childhood and innocence. Wenmann's children, who sleep on cardboard and pavements wearing dirty clothes seem like they do not deserve the same compassion and protection because there are not innocent enough (224).

**U:** Wenmann is illustrating the problematic situation that most refugee children are in. Specifically, they are homeless, have no safe place to be or someone who can take care of them. His series of photos is revealing the sensible situation of the children and evoke strong empathy and compassion towards the photographed subjects. In that sense, Wenmann achieved UNRHC's aim to raise awareness of the topic. However, his action of taking pictures of vulnerable children in war zones is also raising ethical and moral questions. Ariela Azulay, in her article "Photography without Borders", discusses the 'board-less studio' of the documenting photographer in war zones, and in human-rights violations areas. She states: "The studio without borders is not a private space over which the photographers operating in having ownership and the power or authority (...). Nor it is a public space in which anyone can participate in the same manner"(Azoulay 672). Her claim is even clearer when the subject of the photography are vulnerable children. The photographer may invade the privacy of his subject in a manner that is uncomfortable and intrusive.

**L:** Taking a second look at the series, photographing children sleeping becomes even more of an invasive act, entering into one of the most intimate moments in a person's day, the time of going to sleep. Because of the intimacy that is created between the children and the audience, the images are



very moving and touching. However, they are suggesting that the photographer was documenting the children without their consent and in a very private moment. The children are in a public space (in street corners, in the woods, or under a bridge) against their will and they are not part of a safe, communal sphere. The use of their images can be regarded as exploitative even though the images were approved by the children's parents or older siblings, or by themselves. It still remains a disturbing act. Wenmann's approach to the children refugees echoes Giorgio Agamben theory on the *homo sacer*. He describes a distinction between those who are in and outside of society, between the legal and illegal and between citizens and non-citizens. He uses the Greek words *zoë* and *bios* to signify life. While *bios* is a life that specifically indicates being part of the political domain, *zoë* is the life that is outside of the political interference, restricted to the realm of the home (Agamben and Heller-Roazen 8). The *homo sacer* as Agamben presents it, is a figure who, under Roman law, was judged of committing a crime (Agamben and Heller-Roazen 71). As a punishment, his rights as a citizen were taken and he was banned from society. Consequently, he became a *homo sacer*, a sacred man, someone who could be killed by anyone without it being considered a murder. On the other hand, according to Agamben, since a person's natural life, *zoë*, was considered sacred, he is not allowed to be sacrificed in a ritual ceremony. The *homo sacer* thus "presents the original figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the original exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted" (83). Refugees and asylum seekers, due to their 'in between' situation in society they can be considered as *homo sacers*. Excluded from their society and not yet under the laws of the new country they arrived at. Agamben calls that situation an 'inclusive-exclusion'. "What has been banned is delivered over to its own separateness and, at the same time, consigned to the mercy of the one who abandons it - at once excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured" (110). Therefore, the refugee's children exceptional state leaves them exposed to threats of violence and exploitation but also to the intrusion of journalists and artist photographers into their intimate sphere.

**A:** Wenmann photo has a powerful effect on the viewers. Who can stand apathetic to an image of a sleeping child, who lives in poverty, in an insecure situation? To begin with, the photos served a specific goal of UNHCR, to raise the awareness in Western countries to the status of Syrian asylum seekers fleeing from their country. It is not a coincidence that Alan Kurdi's photo (Fig. 3) was published and embraced as one of the symbols of the 'migration Crisis' by organizations dealing with the topic. *Where the Children Sleep* raised the attention of the western society to the problematic situation of children refugees. Nonetheless, the fact that the photographer entered a very intimate zone to get the pictures, together with how he challenges the audience with more than an innocent

children's photo, makes this series of artworks controversial and intriguing at the same time. He raises questions about the role of the photographer in delivering a sensitive story in times of war and about how the audience is receiving and reacting to the images.



*Figure 15: Magnus Wennman, where children sleep, 2016*



*Figure 16: Magnus Wennman, where children sleep, 2016*



*Figure 17: Magnus Wennman, where children sleep, 2016*

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

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Europe is experiencing a refugee crisis that is the largest since the Second World War. People from various war-torn and conflict area countries have been forcefully displaced from their home and make their way into Europe in the hope of finding shelter. Their arrival has attracted tremendous media attention as well as artistic expressions that respond to and reflect on this issue.

The aim of this research was to observe and explore the different expressions of the crisis in contemporary art and to examine how these expressions are influenced by or diverge from the media's depiction of asylum seekers. Previous research has mainly focused on asylum seekers representations in the media and in popular culture in different European countries, emphasizing the semantics used to describe their arrival and the context in which it was covered. These aspects were analyzed to expose the predispositions underlying these depictions, pointing at the diversity in media coverage on the asylum seekers' issue between various countries in the EU. For instance, that humanitarian themes were more frequent in Italian coverage than in the British, German or Spanish press, while themes regarding the threats posed to welfare system or cultural traditions, were the most prevalent in Italy, Spain, and Britain (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore 4).

This focus on the media language used to describe the etymology of the migration influx and the depicted risks, challenges and possible solutions it brings to Europe did not turn their gaze towards recent artistic expressions that nonetheless engaged this crisis.,

In this paper, I referred to contemporary artworks produced in the last three years, from 2015 to 2017, in order to study different approaches towards the representations of asylum seekers by four European artists and one Chinese artist, Ai Weiwei that is prominently active in western countries. For the research, I used visual analysis, postcolonial perspectives and post-human philosophies that enabled me to review the artworks and relate them to the social implications arising from particular views of forced-migration.

I have selected artworks presented in different public sites and from different mediums, ranging from major exhibition halls and museums to popular media publications. Despite my effort to reach a wide variety of points of view and perspectives, none of the artworks I reviewed here, was made by a woman. I believe artists from all genders and cultures would produce different images of the 'migration crisis' and asylum seekers situation in Europe. The main methodology used in the analysis is the *Tabula Rasa* approach, which has been derived from a particular way of looking at artworks in a museum or a gallery, without necessarily seeking historical and political references of the artworks. In this regard, an historical, longitudinal study could shed new light on the way artists are representing asylum seekers and reveal the emergence of new archetypes and trends.

Understandably, the proximity of the overview on the artworks and the closeness of the creation of the artworks to the crisis itself limits a particular retrospective on it, however reference to previous emigrational crises and their artistic representations may be of further interest.

In the analysis of the artworks, I found similarities in the themes that artists are dealing with as well as in their approach to the 'migration crisis'. A primary, recurrent theme is the facing and confrontation of the European society with the 'Otherness' of the incoming asylum seekers which is amplified by the media focus on the differences in language, traditions, religion and customs between the migrants and the host population. The threat by this 'Otherness' contrast to the 'local' is directly targeted for example in the work, *the Average Face* piece by Jeroen Van der Most he addresses the fear of integration with the Syrian newcomers to Europe, revealing the distinction between the faces and at the same time criticizing the threat and fear Europe experiences from these immigrants.

Additionally, the artworks can also be examined with regards to the absence of specific expressions. Ai Weiwei in his three installations, Henk Wildschut with *Ville de Calais* and Marco Tiberio with *Architecture of Exodus* are particularly ignoring individual stories, experiences, and journeys. They are focused instead on the representations of asylum seekers as a large unified whole and not privileging the diversity and uniqueness of individuals, thus creating an opposite effect, a much more alienated and distant from the one they perhaps aimed to achieve.

To some extent, these artworks follow the course the European media has taken in depicting asylum seekers in recent years. They are hardly challenging the perceptions of the media about the situation of asylum seekers and continue to reflect the 'asylum seekers problem' by the same means as journalistic media. For instance, the prominent use of material objects as representative images echoes the media's use of words like 'swarming', 'influx' and 'flood', creating an association of asylum seeker arrival with that of a natural disaster which is especially reflected in the artworks of Ai Weiwei and the photography works on 'Calais Jungle', by using masses of objects to embody the asylum seekers..

Emmanuel Levinas in his work *Infinity and totality* has referred to the importance of the human face to arouse empathy, compassion, and responsibility for the 'Other', a feature that is missing from most of the artworks. Levinas employs the powerful metaphor of the "Face" to articulate the irreducible character of the human 'Other'. The Other's face speaks to the Subject in a personal and intimate way. The face, at the same time, projects a gaze that overwhelms and makes demands of the subject. So, its presence is also intimidating. Levinas' attraction to the metaphor of the face is due to the fact that the face, contrary to an empirical object, presents itself, speaks and hence cannot be objectified. The face calls the Subject into dialogue; Moreover, as a fragile part of the body it is vulnerable and weak, and as such calls for help. The presence of the human face is obliging one's responsibility to the 'Other', it commands to feel emotion, empathy, affection, identification, and guilt (Mkhwanazi 142).

In all of the artworks, the asylum seekers are represented as inhabiting an exteriority zone, an in-between area in the society they are in. Ai Weiwei's work represents a part of their journey, on their way to Europe by using life vests and rubber boats. In *Ville de Calais* and in *Architecture of Exodus* they are represented in the 'Calais Jungle' a temporary migrant's camp with tents and improvised shelters. The *Average Face* presents a hypothesis about the effect of Syrian asylum seekers on European or American Society, implying that while they are not part of society at the moment there is little to fear if they become so. *Where the Children Sleep* portrays children in the outskirts of society, sleeping on the roadside or in the woods, without a permanent shelter. Nonetheless, there are many asylum seekers that have already lived in similar asylum centers or even have their own house or business. The settlement of asylum seekers in Europe fixes an image of a nomadic refugee, who are in a constant flee, and perhaps do not even want or need a permanent place to stay in... Moreover, their depiction as *homo sacers* (the figure who inhabits the zone of indistinction) strengthens their distance from 'normal society' and pushes them apart from the European society. This reinforces their position as foreign and alien to the European society.

Surprisingly, the approach of the artworks that have been analyzed here indicates a correlation between the media presentation and artistic expression, while one could expect a conflict relation between the two. The main connection between the media depiction and the artworks was their emphasis on the faceless masses of asylum seekers, by using objects like life vests, boats, tents, and shelters, without addressing personal and individual stories of asylum seekers. Most of the artists referred to the 'problem' of asylum seekers coming to Europe and did not focus on the 'people' coming to Europe. McLuhan wrote, "The artist is the man, in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness"(McLuhan 65). Thus, I had expected the artistic perspective to serve as an antidote to media portrayals, that it would allow us to see a broader picture and the interrelationship among variables, as well as to predict and anticipate their social and cultural implications.

Possibly, the closeness of the artists to the issue in time and in place makes it harder for them to reflect upon the issue and present an alternative viewpoint to that presented in the mainstream media. I believe a more profound and complex depiction is needed in order to do justice to the people forcefully displaced from their home. Tania Cañas, director of RISE (Refugees, Survivors, and Ex-Detainees), a refugee and asylum seeker welfare and advocacy organization in Australia, has developed a simple methodology for artists who wish to engage with asylum seekers and address the 'migration crisis'. She asserts that although many times the intentions of the artists are good and want to show 'the human side of society', they are neglecting their own biases, privileges, and frameworks. The organization's slogan is: "Nothing about us without us". Meaning that artists who wish to deal with representations of asylum seekers should critically interrogate their intentions and to be sensitive to the reduction of varied humans with different skills, knowledge, and experiences to a single narrative.

Susan Sontag has argued that "Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers."(Sontag 79). Hers is sound advice. The artist's foremost role is to evoke this compassion by representing the humane aspect of their asylum seeker's subjects. As I have shown here, many artists who chose refugees, asylum seekers and impoverished immigrants as subjects for their work did not do so. Thus, they fail to counter the often biased and one-sided perspective presented by the mainstream media which, as noted here, is based on the depiction of asylum seekers as statistics of a demographic threat to safety, economy, and culture of the European citizens that host them.

## Chapter 6: References

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