

Refugees as Innocent Bodies, Directors as Political Activists: Humanitarianism and Compassion in European Cinema

Refugiados como cuerpos inocentes, directores como activistas políticos: humanitarismo y compasión en el cine europeo

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Abstract

This article explores the ways in which refugees and humanitarianism appear in European film productions. It argues that European films often present images of innocent and victimized refugees in order to raise compassion of their liberal spectators. In the meanwhile their directors are praised for their humanitarian activism as they are considered to save refugees and their suffering from anonymity and placing their stories and humanity on the screen. Examining a number of European productions of the 2000s (Children of Men, Dheepan, In This World, Terraferma, and Welcome) this study suggests that politics of humanitarianism and of filmmaking on refugees share a similar problematic approach: in order to prove refugee eligibility for asylum and to raise compassion, they seek to establish the precarity and innocence of refugees, especially through showing their bodily pain.

Keywords: Refugees; Innocent Bodies; Political Activists, European Cinema.

Resumen

Este artículo explora las formas en que los refugiados y el humanitarismo aparecen en las producciones cinematográficas europeas. Sostiene que las películas europeas a menudo presentan imágenes de refugiados inocentes y victimizados para aumentar la compasión de sus espectadores liberales. Mientras tanto, sus directores son elogiados por su activismo humanitario, ya que se considera que salvan a los refugiados y su sufrimiento del anonimato y ponen sus historias y humanidad en la pantalla. Este estudio examina algunas producciones europeas de los años 2000 (Children of Men, Dheepan, In This World, Terraferma, y Welcome). Se sugiere así que la política del humanitarismo y del cine sobre los refugiados comparten un enfoque problemático: para probar la elegibilidad del refugiado para el asilo y para elevar la compasión, buscan demostrar la precariedad y la inocencia de los refugiados, especialmente enseñando su dolor corporal.

Palabras clave: Refugiados; Cuerpos Inocentes; Activismo Político; Cine Europeo.

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Introduction

In 2015 Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* won the Palme d'or at Cannes film festival. The film is about three Sri Lankan refugees who seek asylum in France. A Tamil soldier, Dheepan, meets Yalini, a young woman, and Illayaal, a twelve-year-old girl, at a refugee camp in Sri Lanka. They form a fake family in order to improve their chances for the approval of asylum application. Rather than focusing on their possibly arduous journey towards France, as commonly represented in films on refugees, *Dheepan* depicts the characters' lives in a violent banlieue in the outskirts of Paris where the police seems to have left completely and gangs, almost exclusively made of ethnic minorities, rule. The refugee characters of the film come out of a civil war in the Global South and find themselves in drug-related violence in the margins of the Global North. Along with minority characters in the French banlieue, the three Sri Lankan refugee characters are caught up in a cycle of violence as they move between different zones of crisis.

Dheepan's success shows how much violence and temporality of crisis have become central to the articulation of ethnic and racial difference in today's Europe. While Muslim minorities continue to be a source of anxiety due to the recent acts of terror in Paris and Brussels, Syrian refugee crisis and its impact in Europe is in the headlines more than ever. Without doubt there is a refugee crisis, not only in Europe but globally. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, in the last four years the global refugee population grew by 5 million persons (45 percent), major cause of increase being the Syrian conflict. By mid-2015 the total number of refugees were estimated to be 15.1 million, only to be surpassed in the mid-1990s during the war in former Yugoslavia and genocide in Rwanda when the numbers were up to 18 million (UNHCR, 2015). As the September 2015 New York Times headline declares

"the scale of refugee crisis" seems to be increasing rapidly (Aisch, Almkhtar, Keller and Andrews, 2015).

The fact that refugees are associated with crisis and catastrophe, however, has been a discourse used in the European mass media for decades. Especially as of the 2000s, refugees and migrants appear in European mainstream news in relation to emergency situations: as victims of human trafficking, suspects of terrorism, "bogus" asylum seekers who pose an imminent threat to social welfare systems, or hyper-fertile individuals within a declining "European" population (Celik, 2015). These communities are portrayed as potential threats to European safety and threats to already diminishing welfare systems in Europe. The news items take injury as the basis of political identity (Brown) of ethnic and racial Others, giving them roles either as perpetrators of or particularly in the case of refugees, sufferers from violence. These categories can quickly become interchangeable, as November 2015 terror attacks in Paris shows. Syrian refugees that were formerly considered as victims of human trafficking or applicants of asylum deserving humanitarian aid may be considered as potential terrorists. In the mainstream European media, the lives and experiences of ethnic and racial Others of Europe are marginalized into extreme temporalities defined by rupture, crisis, and emergency (Celik, 2015). These social, economic, and political states of crises often call for urgent measures or remedies.

Within this temporality of crisis that calls for immediate action, humanitarianism, action that provides "temporary care" in situations of crisis and emergency (Ticktin, 2015: 82) becomes the prevalent form of political response. The refugees have become the primary figures to bring Europe, both crisis and opportunity for political activism, for "refugees are the prototypical face of the emergency" (Calhoun, 2010: 33). In what follows, I will explore the ways that refugees and humanitarianism appear in European

film productions, films that present images of innocent and victimized refugees in order to raise compassion of the liberal spectators, works by directors who are praised for saving refugees and their suffering from anonymity and placing their stories and humanity on the screen.

Redeeming refugee stories of suffering

Le Figaro review of *Dheepan* suggests a correspondence between the film's narrative and the iconic image that elicited much media attention at the time of the film's premier, that of 3-year-old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi's lifeless body washed up onto a Turkish beach: "*Dheepan*, Jacques Audiard's last film was in the theaters when the emotional tsunami was triggered by Aylan Kurdi's image. The drama of migrants became a unique reality: the last Palme d'Or of the Cannes festival highlights it in a glaring way..." (my translation) (Devecchio, 2015). Kurdi and *Dheepan*'s stories have no common points beyond being about refugees yet it is the director's (as well as Kurdi's photograph's) attention to an individual refugee's drama that is being praised by the press. Similarly, *The Independent* reviewer underlines how the director gave a "face" to one of the thousands of refugees coming from war-thorn countries: "*Dheepan* is a radical and astonishing film that turns conventional thinking about immigrants on its head, and takes a faceless immigrant coming from a war barely covered in the media and turns him into a Travis Bickle-type anti-hero" (Aftab, 2015). In both reviews, the mediatic and filmic visibility of refugees are collapsed and the director takes or is given a humanitarian role of retrieving refugee stories from anonymity.

Similar to mass media images of refugees stranded at sea or waiting at the border, European film productions frequently depict these displaced populations as suffering victims: that of human trafficking in border spaces or of exploitation as undocumented workers in the destination countries. The representations of refugees in European film productions often use tropes of suffocation and voicelessness. Refugees are part of the background picture, portrayed as the ultimate victims of globalization, whose voiceless and suffocated bodies become symbols of misery of the world. In Damjan Kozole's *Spare Parts* (2003), a film that focuses on the lives of human traffickers, for instance, one of the most memorable scenes is when three refugees are forced into the trunk of a car, where they suffocate; their corpses are thrown into a river. In Alejandro González

Iñárritu's *Biutiful* (2010) undocumented Chinese workers at a sweatshop in Barcelona die in their sleep from the toxic gas from a heater, and their bodies are thrown into the Mediterranean, symbolizing double suffocation through the drowning of the corpses. In both films the focus is not on the thoughts and desires of non-white refugees but on the sentiments and dilemmas of the white main characters who bear the guilt of refugee deaths.

The potential problem with these images, as is with humanitarianism, is that it moves people on the basis of compassion for strangers, an emotion "denoting privilege: the sufferer is *over there*" (Berlant, 2004: 4). Compassion, connotes detachment, distance and a hierarchy between the subject and the object of compassion. While she considers "affective politics that moves beyond as a state of emergency" (Ticktin, 2016: 268) as potentially fruitful, Ticktin notes that

insofar as it focuses on individuals and not structural realities, compassion cannot by itself further a politics of equality. Perhaps more importantly, in its current, institutionalized forms humanitarianism actually maintains *inequality*, in that it separates out two populations: those who can feel and act on their compassion and those who must be the subjects (or objects) of it... (Ticktin, 2016: 265).

This inequality or hierarchy between those who feel compassion and those who are objects of compassion is evident in *Terraferma* (Criales, 2011), a film that received sponsorship by the United Nations Refugee Council and was selected to represent Italy for the Foreign Film category at the 2011 Academy Awards. *Terraferma* takes place in the island of Linosa and shows a fisherman family first saving and then hosting an unnamed pregnant single mother and her child from an unnamed African country. Throughout the film the African mother refugee is portrayed as barely visible and audible. She hides in the dark corners of her host's garage, stands in a bent posture, is passive, timid and submissive, and is often placed in the margins of the frame. Her hosts and saviors, the Italian family, on the other hand, is represented as the active decision makers who defy authorities, risk imprisonment and endanger their economic well-being by aiding these precarious refugees (Phillis and Celik Rappas, forthcoming). On and off screen humanitarianism "requires innocent sufferers to be represented in the passivity of their suffering, not

in the action they take to confront and escape it” (Ticktin, 2016: 259). It is worth underlining that the director and scriptwriter Crialesé’s choice of displaying the faith of a pregnant single mother and her young son is not a coincidence considering that they may be considered as the most precarious among other groups of refugees, hence have the most potential of raising compassion among the spectators of the film.

Children as Victims: Establishing the Innocence of Refugees

Like in *Spare Parts* and *Biutiful, Terraferma* focuses on the lives, experiences and point of view of the European characters rather than those of the refugees. There are, however, films like *Dheepan* that place refugees at the center of their frames and narratives, in which the spectator hears the refugee characters’ voices, perspectives, dreams, stories, and goals—even if they are often limited to reaching Europe. Michael Winterbottom’s *In This World* (2002) which won the Golden Bear at Berlin Film Festival along with BAFTA award, for instance, is one of the first European films that had refugee main characters. The film traces the journey of two young Afghan refugees, Jamal and his cousin Enayat, towards Europe. The film starts at Shamshatoo refugee camp in Pakistan. A voiceover explains the history of the camp and the condition of Afghan refugees with detailed figures and statistics, emphasizing the role of America’s war on terror in creating the dire conditions that they live in. Accompanying images show children, solitary and in groups, smiling, posing for the camera, playing in the dusty fields or working. It is among these images that the spectator first encounters Jamal, the main character, introduced by the narrator as “an orphan, who works in a brick factory and gets paid less than a dollar a day.”

Soon the camera starts tracing Jamal’s journey, transitioning from a documentary that dryly provides statistics on the conditions of refugee camps to a narrative film that traces the story of an individual refugee among the thousands. Through the film Jamal and his cousin Enayat are followed closely in their journey through Iran, Turkey and Italy. In the process Enayat (a repetition of the aforementioned trope) dies due to suffocation after being stuck for a long time in a container. At the end of the film, Jamal succeeds in going to London by himself and just as in the opening sequence he is seen working in harsh and exploitative conditions, this time in a small kitchen washing dishes. The final scene returns to images

of children in Shamshatoo refugee camp, suggesting a cycle of misery as a similar faith may await other children in the camp.

The final intertitles of the film show, “on the 9th August 2002 the asylum application of Jamal Udin Torabi was refused, he was however granted exceptional leave to enter and now is living in London. He will have to leave Britain on the day before his eighteenth birthday.” The use of handheld camera throughout the film, nonprofessional actors with the same name as the characters and these final lines all suggest the authenticity of the film and Jamal’s story. Apparently Jamal, the actor who plays the main character, tried to use the film to migrate to the UK (Loshitzky: 2010, 129). The film transcends from fictional to real world, aiming to challenge the hostility and build sympathy for refugees risking their lives to be in Europe (as suggested by the director in 2003 Berlinale press conference) along with serving a practical cause, changing a refugee’s life for the better. When asked by a spectator if the ultimate aim of his film is to change prejudices, Winterbottom responds half-jokingly, “Obviously I’d love my film to change the world”. As in the example of *Dheepan* humanitarian activism pursued through film production is not limited to the content, the theme and the characters of the narrative; it extends to the film’s publicity as well as its reviews and criticism.

Yosifa Loshitzky praises *In This World* suggesting that it “humanizes the immigration debate, transforming it from a crime drama or even a terrorism drama...into a “mythic human drama”” (Loshitzky, 2010: 127). Bruce Bennett, on the other hand, notes that the director’s choice of focusing on a refugee orphan is a rhetorical device that “connotes innocence and victimhood...opens up a possibility of narrative resolution for (liberal) European audiences in which they can imagine themselves as benevolent saviors” (Bennett, 2013: 175). Indeed, images and stories of suffering children are often at the forefront of calls for humanitarian aid from Western donors (Dahl, 2014). *In This World* is a visual marker of the humanitarian focus on the representation of the refugees as innocent victims of wars and other conditions beyond their control and hence deserve to be protected since “their innocence is what qualifies them for humanitarian compassion” (Ticktin, 2016: 257). This expectation of refugee innocence renders children as “perfect victims” who become “the face of humanitarianism” (Ticktin, 2016: 257), just as Jamal in *In This World*. A poignant example of this

phenomenon in the mass media is the image of Aylan Kurdi's corpse that "gave the "migrant crisis" a new face: innocence. It shamed Europe into action" (Ticktin, 2016: 258). Indeed, after Alan Kurdi incident Germany, France and the UK decided to increase the number of refugees that they are willing to accept.

Another European production that has an adolescent refugee as the main character, Phillip Lioret's *Welcome* (2009), suggests refugee's eligibility for asylum not only through an emphasis on his youth and the innocence of his dreams but also through his honesty and hard work. Bilal is a young Kurd from Iraq who, just like Jamal in *In This World*, aims to reach London, is caught on the way and is forced to remain in Calais, France until his asylum case is resolved. Bilal first attempts to cross the English Channel in a lorry but fails because the bag he needs to hold on his head to avoid Frontex security controls reminds him of the torture he went through in a Turkish prison. So the film narrative first establishes the eligibility of Bilal for asylum due to his going through corporeal violence. Then his innocence is further built through the corporeal risks he is willing to undertake to reach London: Bilal decides to reach London through swimming the English Channel.

This impossible dream brings him close to Simon, a disillusioned swimming instructor. In the film even though Bilal cannot be considered as a child, the relationship between the two main characters and Simon's assumption of a surrogate father role infantilizes the refugee character. From the beginning, the relationship between the two male protagonists is also established as a hierarchical one since Bilal is Simon's student, and he is much younger than Simon. Gradually Simon adopts Bilal, caring for him and hosting him. But this adoption is "well-deserved" as its built solidly on Bilal's innocence, going to London to follow his dreams (of reaching his beloved and becoming a football player) and working harder than any other refugee in the film to accomplish his goal. Throughout the film, while other refugees are seen as chatting in groups and conspiring on how to beat the immigration controls Bilal is seen alone practicing swimming day and night in the pool. His child-like innocence is further established when his friend Zoran steals a precious object from Simon's apartment and Bilal is first blamed for it, then recuperated. The paternalistic bond between the two protagonists is reinforced when Simon gives Bilal his ex-wife's wedding ring gift to offer his beloved when he reaches London and later on when he tells the coastguard that

his 'son' is missing once Bilal takes a plunge into the Channel.

Welcome builds on the idea of humanitarian aid in the opening scene that shows humanitarian activists, providing food to refugees queued in a long line. The camera first shoots a group of refugees eating and then the close-up reveals a white hand giving a black hand a bowl of rice, an image that recalls the racial hierarchy established often in humanitarian aid posters. But the idea of humanitarian activism is mainly established through the hierarchical relationship between the middle aged white European and the refugee character, a hierarchy between the compassionate European and the innocent refugee. Just as in *In This World*, the vulnerable body of the refugee that faces closed borders and comes face to face with death is the one deserving to be in Europe.

Corporeal Pain as Marker of Asylum Eligibility

Beyond showing experiences of most precarious characters such as children and pregnant women what is the proof of innocence/ eligibility of asylum for refugees in films? The proof of innocence established often by the narrations or images of the character's going through violence and crisis. In *Dheepan* only after going through the hell of Parisian suburbs the main characters settle in a peaceful London suburb. In *Terraferma* the African single mother refugee's innocence and asylum eligibility is further proposed by her narration of routinized sexual violence that she experienced in a Libyan prison. In *In This World*, Enayat's suffocation and death, the suffering Jamal experienced through losing his best friend is crucial for justifying and recuperating his illegal presence in London. Refugee characters are represented primarily through the challenges that their bodies are forced to face, ultimately revealing their vulnerability or their survival. The refugee bodies face extreme situations of humanitarian crises happening under the noses of European spectators. In these films, the challenge often emerges from nature, rather than the bureaucratic mazes that asylum seekers go through. In the end characters like Jamal and Bilal become identifiable and rather epic heroes as they deal with and try to defeat natural conditions that test their bodies. Bare life, survival, and continuation of life are central categories that the refugee lives are considered to be within the bounds of.

After 2015 massacres in Paris Germany decided to gear its policy towards deporting as quickly

as possible, in the words of the chief of the German Chancellory, “those who are not persecuted and who come from a safe place” (in Lennard and Hermsmeier, 2015). Persecution becomes the proof of innocence and of eligibility for asylum. Indeed, according to the 1951 United Nations Geneva Convention refugee is defined as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” While in the 1970s nine out of ten applicants were granted asylum, nowadays the number is two out of ten (Fassin, 2016). This is partly due to the declining economic conditions in Europe and the lack of need for outside sources of affordable labor. Asylum is much more of a “favor” and “a scarce good” and the question of whether they are “bogus” refugees or their claims are authentic is much more of a question of debate (Fassin, 2016). So who is granted asylum? Who is considered as the most persecuted? Or how can refugees render their suffering more believable?

In order to provide an answer to this question, first, I would like to focus on a particular scene from Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón’s UK-produced dystopic science fiction *Children of Men*. The film portrays the world of the near future as a place of human infertility and anarchical chaos, and within UK this leads to extreme forms of discrimination against refugees. At the core of the action is the protection of a non-British citizen, a black refugee woman Kee who holds the key to the resolution of the world’s biggest problem, as she is miraculously pregnant after eighteen years of human infertility. The main character Theo’s goal is to save Kee from the police state that hunts down refugees as well as from the Fishes—a resistance group that wants to use Kee’s baby to instigate an uprising. Theo’s intention is to deliver her safely to a humanitarian group of doctors.

Refugees in the film become epitomes of the fragility of the body facing the chaotic present. They ask for food in sign language, sob hysterically in fear, cough their lungs out, are locked in cages, speak or protest in languages other than English or in broken English, are stripped naked, and mourn over the dead bodies of their children. The central refugee character in the film, the representation of Kee is a refugee who is considered worthy of protection not due to her political or social identity as a refugee, but as a result of her basic attachment to humanity as bare life, as a mother of the much-awaited baby that will save

humanity from perishing. She is the future mother of humanity; yet, devoid of her social character, she is reduced to bare life or her biological function that needs to be protected. What moves Theo, the main character is the fragility of the pregnant body. Kee reveals her pregnancy to Theo in a barn. Until that very moment Theo did not seem to care for the concerns and safety of this or any other refugee, or for any political cause for that matter. Only once the pregnancy is revealed and he sees her naked pregnant body does he become determined to help her out.

The revealing of pregnancy scene gives a hint as to who can be granted asylum and whose demand for humanitarian aid and protection is more believable: the bodies of refugees are required to *reveal* themselves for truth. The body, especially the body that needs medical care, has become the new bearer of reality for refugees. In their research on the asylum applicants in France, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtmann points out that in the 1970s refugee status connoted political dissidence in the country of origin and a refugee’s narrative was sufficient for claiming political asylum. In the 1980s narratives of trauma and violence certified by reports of psychiatric experts became required evidence for asylum applicants. These reports gradually started to avoid the accounts and narratives of refugees themselves. In the late 1990s even psychiatric expert certificates of trauma have lost their validity in asylum applications. Instead, medical certificates that validate corporeal evidence of abuse and torture have become a necessity to strengthen the refugee’s asylum application (Fassin and Rechtmann, 2009). That is, the refugee who applies for a political asylum has to show torture wounds or evidence of sickness, such as a medical report of AIDS that might be the result of rape, which supposedly prove his or her eligibility for humanitarian medical aid and asylum. Miriam Ticktin’s research show that undocumented immigrants in France, in order to benefit from the “illness clause” and gain the right to stay in France and receive treatment, often look for ways to infect themselves with AIDS or other serious illnesses: “with humanitarianism as the driving logic, only the suffering or sick body is seen as a legitimate manifestation of a common humanity, worthy of recognition...” (Ticktin, 2006: 39).

Such treatment of refugee bodies is not particular to France. A striking Agence France Press image of Angelina Jolie’s 2007 visit to Damascus shows her in the background looking at a refugee’s naked body. The refugee’s face is hidden outside the frame

and his body is covered with torture wounds revealed for Jolie and the camera's gaze. The caption over the figure explains: "UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador and Hollywood star, Angelina Jolie *studies*,...the wounds of a burnt Iraqi refugee..." (my emphasis, *AFP* 2007). Similarly, an August 2015 interview with a medical specialist on the US National Public Radio, is titled "Before Obtaining Asylum, Refugees Must Show The Scars Behind The Stories." The interview reveals the significance of refugees' ability to present the wounds of physical torture as "objective evidence" in support of their asylum applications in the US (*NPR* 2015).

Fassin's more recent work observes that two groups are especially favored in asylum applications in France: women at risk of being subjected to female circumcision and homosexuals who risk prosecution in their home country (Fassin, 2016). The fact that these are the two favored groups to receive asylum status suggests that the definition of refugees status in Geneva convention—that is "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 1951)—is narrowed down to the right of choice and social identity that is predominantly connected to corporeal practices. French official asylum policy of accepting women under the risk of female circumcision, for instance, significantly increased the asylum acceptance rate of Malian nationals, a peaceful and democratic country, as opposed to political opponents such as Kurds from Turkey or from Bangladesh, much less democratic regimes (Fassin, 2016). Moreover, in order to get asylum gays and lesbians "have to prove that their sexual orientation has been made public through their behavior or even their declaration of it, thereby putting them at risk of being the targets of homophobia" (Fassin, 2016). Granting asylum to these applicants on the one hand shows the West as "a promoter of women's rights and sexual equality" on the other hand the way they are granted boils these liberties down to liberty from corporeal violence, taking the focus away from other forms of discrimination, racial, ethnic, religious or ideological (Fassin, 2016).

Conclusion

Humanitarianism moves people (especially in the Global North) into action on the basis of compassion for strangers, while the central criterion for political action has become a solidarity based on common humanity. Yet the conceptualization

of humanity is human existence taken down to its biological minimum, which is "below the real minimum of the truly human, the capacity for speech and shaping social life" (Calhoun, 2010: 34). Refugees are the ultimate personifications of this "bare life" and they remain outside the zone of politics so long as their lives are administered within the zone of humanitarianism. As Agamben explains, "The 'imploring eyes' of the Rwandan child, whose photograph is shown to obtain money but who 'is now becoming more and more difficult to find alive,' may well be the most telling contemporary cipher of the bare life that humanitarian organizations, in perfect symmetry with state power, need" (Agamben, 1998: 133-134).

Dheapan, Terraferma, In This World, Children of Men, and Welcome are exemplary of a moral economy distinguished by the contemporary global ascendance of humanitarianism, an economy in which the challenges on the bodies of refugees play a central role in presenting how the world's misery that once remained distant, has come close to the homes of European spectators. Devoid of their political and social characters, refugees embody victimhood in need of humanitarian aid in a chaotic world. With the rise of humanitarian discourse heroism of the ordinary and often troubled white men and women characters (Simon in *Welcome*, the Italian family in *Terraferma*, Theo in *Children on Men*) in films, and white directors who are out to represent the underrepresented individual stories, become the models for political activism. The absence of humanitarian action and reaction to the misery of the world, on the other hand, gets to be the target of critique, which inadvertently puts into the center white men's conscience and potential guilt. As Laura Agustín explains with regard to humanitarianism "the victim identity imposed on so many [migrants] in the name of helping them makes helpers themselves disturbingly important figures" (Agustín, 2007: 8).

In closing, it needs to be noted that this article does not aim to deny the instances of violence that refugees suffer or the injustices they face. The intention is to draw attention to the problems of a naturalized and essentialized category of "victim", the politics of its wholesale attribution to a certain group of people, and their resulting detachment from multiple forms of political and social identity. As anthropologist Miriam Ticktin points out, in a schema that does not leave room for refugees other than innocent/ guilty or victims/ heroes "there is no way to recognize them,

no law or language by which to give them space to live or die regular or mundane lives” (Ticktin, 2016: 259). The refugee who is portrayed as a victim, or as the body in need of humanitarian aid, serves the conscience as it safely advocates morality and compassion, posing no challenge to the established class and race hierarchies. As psychotherapist and scholar of performance studies Diego Benegas Loyo explains (in relation to activism in post-dictatorship Argentina) we need to think of victims (in his case, survivors of torture) beyond the category of patient. Their traumatic experiences shall be evaluated beyond association to violence and passivity. In order to make “room for politics in a psychology of trauma” we can focus on realms of refugee agency and political action, as subjects who experienced trauma need to be recognized “as political agents with the capacity to change the world” (Benegas Loyo, 2013). I end this article with a hope for the visibility of refugees as communities and fictional characters with desires and identities other than those fixated on the wound and injury, a visibility that allows refugees relating to non-refugees beyond the current limited palette of affects (compassion or fear) associated with their presence in Europe.

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