



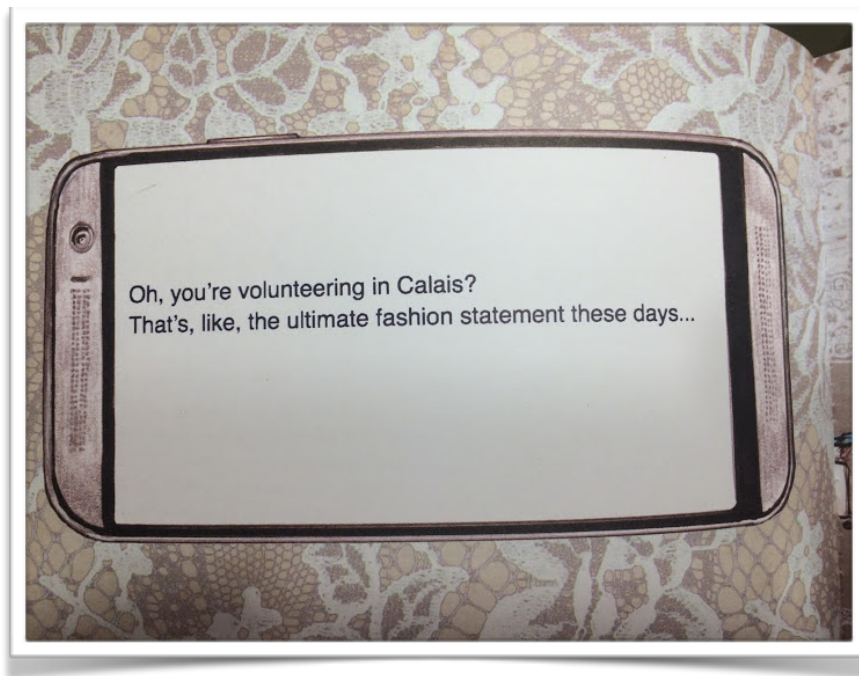
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Threads: From the Refugee Crisis:
Creative Nonfiction and Critical Pedagogy



Threads: From the Refugee Crisis, a graphic reportage by British cartoonist, nonfiction writer, and activist Kate Evans, documents the abysmal living conditions and inhuman treatment of the refugee population in a camp in Calais, France, also known as the “jungle,” at the hands of French riot police and British anti-immigration officers. By the time *Threads* was published in 2017, the “jungle” had already been dismantled, but with a history of 10,000 asylum seekers, forced to languish for months and years, much like the detention center in Woomera, Australia, it has become a symbol of Europe’s anti-humanitarian policy and refusal of basic human rights to one of the most vulnerable populations (Buken 80). As a representational

technique, Evans draws sketches of the wrenching reality of this intractable problem, as she witnessed it herself, to narrate how Europe's sovereign states dehumanize human subjects and punish those who are already fleeing war and political unrest in their home countries. Evans' skillful drawing speaks of literary and artistic excellence where traditional forms of reading and learning are blurred, and a piece of nonfiction is transformed to serve as an historical archive. *Threads* also has an underlying metanarrative about the non-refugee volunteers who work in the refugee camp, but find themselves equally disadvantaged when they dare to challenge government policies.



The sketches in the book describe the ten days that Evans spent as a volunteer in the camp, where she documents the appalling living conditions of the asylum seekers as a witness, but what makes her narrative fascinating is her conscious effort to not speak *for* the migrants but to speak *with* them as she details their harrowing experiences. In

her endorsement of the book, Alison Bechdel writes how Evans' aligns art with reality by transforming "the human 'flood' into shimmering droplets as she works and eats with the refugees, getting to know them as individuals, forging intimate connections while sketching their portraits." In other words, Evan's representation does not engage in a coercive rearrangement of the Other's desire, but instead forms an equal relationship with the subjects of representation. To do so, Evans rhetorically represents the asylum seekers as agents of history and not passive victims, and she uses different visual techniques, like the use

of neutral skin color for all the characters in order to avoid stereotypical identity politics, similar facial reaction to violence. The use of humor to address xenophobia is particularly effective because it puts a human face to the “refugee crisis” and advocates for the right to live with dignity. To fully understand the socio-political and economic ramification of the government’s anti-immigration policy, Evans simultaneously compares her own experience as a “free” citizen with that of the dwellers of the camp, and criticizes policies that exploit human lives for biopolitical warfare. She puts forward the same question that Hannah Arendt asked long ago about the notion of human rights, which is based on the existence of a “human being as such,” a question put to crisis whenever Europe is faced with refugees (Arendt 299). The realistic sketches capture the ugly side of humanitarianism that force asylum seekers in “non-places” like the refugee camps and detention centers, leading them to dwell in a permanent state of exception. Moreover, it excludes the migrants from any legal protection while compelling them to abide by the law, creating a subaltern condition of living with no human right (Buker 70).



By addressing issues that are either silenced or misrepresented in the mainstream, *Threads*, quite literally, draws “history from below” and makes marginal voices visible in places where it has been stopped from historicization, and presents the refugee as a human who is affected by war, food insecurity, lack of political representation, but is a conscious subject who has a right to history of their own. Evans, with her sketches, counters the image of the “refugee” that is variously constituted to mean either objects of pity or subjects of threat to the western civilization, “signifying the [...] impossibility of occupying one pure and distinct position” (Buken 79). By literally creating a different

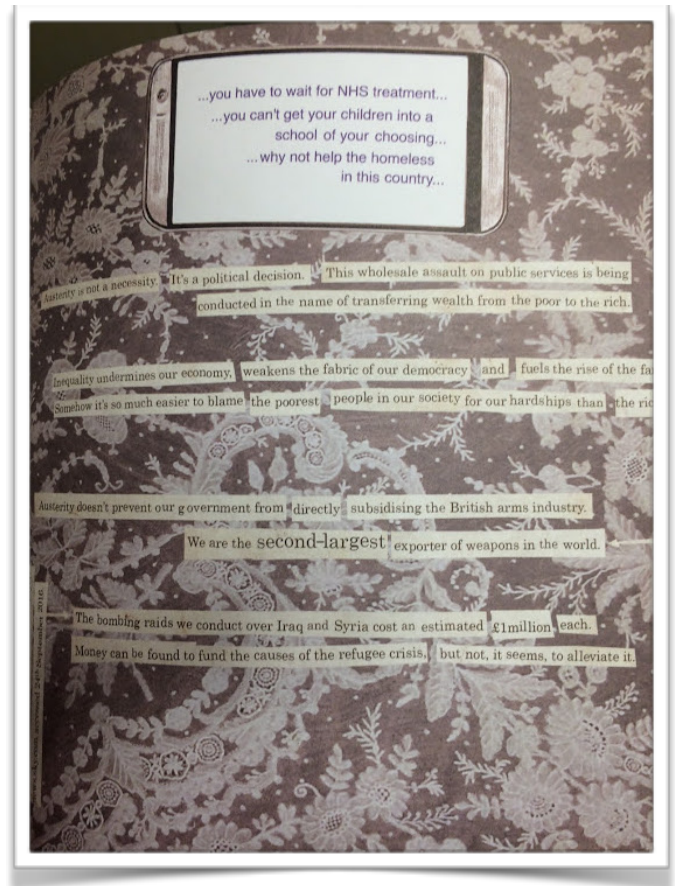


image in order to deconstruct the established image of asylum seekers, Evans questions the method of “objective” journalism and social media campaigns in the era of heightened communication and technological advancements that makes it difficult to consider the refugee as an eligible candidate for asylum. By showing the refugee population in a positive way, the negative stereotype of the refugee as an abuser of the welfare system is destabilized (Buken 79). Therefore, Evans’ pictorial narrative acts as an effective and affective counter narrative to the daily reproduction of false history and negative stereotype about the refugee population in the media and elsewhere for consumption of the common people, profit of multinational corporations, resulting in the mass reproduction of xenophobia, racism, and sexism.

Threads, then, is a kind of book that, to use Rob Nixon’s definition, “expose silences that can be dismantled through...rhetorical creativity, and by advancing counter histories in the face of formidable

odds” (Nixon). With this perspective in place, this article critically examines this text as a non-fiction important for literary studies in order to interrogate the “real” and reality facing Europe’s *refugee crisis*, with “real” being that which is constructed for ideological gains and reality is on the surface, yet hidden from plain sight.

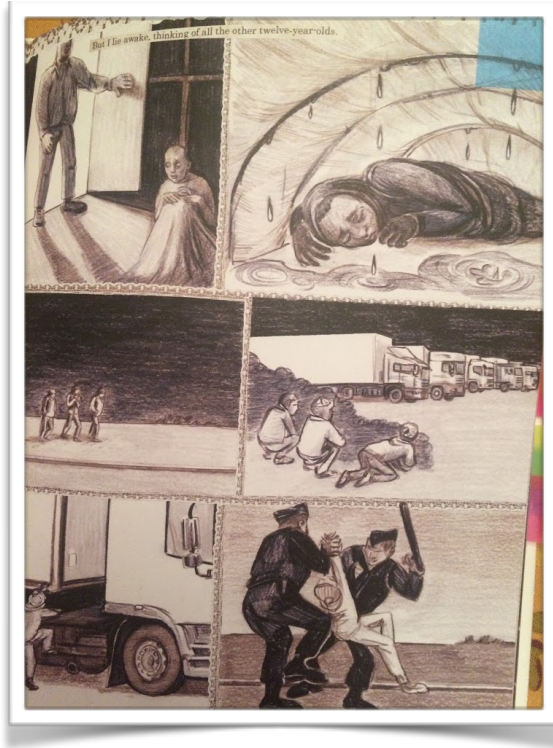
There are two main arguments here: First, by addressing issues that are hidden from the public view, *Threads* challenges those who engage in victim blaming and encourages readers to take responsibility without reducing the human subjects to objects of pity. And second, at a time when curriculum choices are influenced by media coverage, and right-wing fundamentalist and anti-immigrant groups are flooding social media and other public spaces with negative stereotypes that rob the disenfranchised people of their dignity, *Threads* restores it back. *Threads* has the potential to alter the classroom into a radical space or what Nancy Fraser’s calls a “subaltern counterpublic” by forcing students to critically answer questions like: *What role does Europe play in creating the refugee crisis? why is the concept of “worthy” refugee problematic? And, who profits from this practice, even if the end result is death?*

History from Below

My understanding of the phrase “history from below” is influenced by historian Ranajit Guha’s reading of the peasant insurgency in colonial India against the history written by the ruling classes, and Gayatri Spivak’s deconstructive method of reading subaltern subjectivity in the global present. Guha’s theory proves that the investigation of peasant movements was otherwise dominated by leaders, the peasants left behind no traces, the material for such a study was sketchy and they appeared in the historical record as already interpreted:

There... were certain codes of official discourse and language through which the colonial state articulated its relationship with the peasantry so if one paid attention to the everyday records of law and order under colonialism, one could read them ‘against the grain’, i.e. against their own

stated intentions. What one needed to do was crack the codes through which colonial officials interpreted acts of peasant protest.” (Sarkar 6-7)



Spivak, influenced by Derrida, theorizes “reading against the grain” as a method of learning to learn by unlearning, a process that entails a consciousness about the difference between knowledge and truth. Knowledge is something that one acquires through association with education, cultural, social institutions and practices in the name of ideology, but does not guarantee the truth. Therefore, one has to be able to question one’s knowledge system, facts, information sources and reality by learning to unlearn and “read against the grain” in order to question the idea of the “real” in the reality that one lives in. In most cases, it is a reality that is fraught with feel-good multiculturalism, yet

celebrated by many because people fail to distinguish the lack between the real and the ideological. In the case of capitalist society, even if one is aware, there is a disavowal of reality because one benefits from it.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, as ilan kapoor explained in his Kapuscinski Development Lecture in May 2015, is a great example of this theory because it represents the failure of communism for the west, leaving capitalism, as a system of profit, unchallenged. After 1989, the west and the US in particular, resisted the spread of communism and celebrated capitalism as the only viable option, transforming an ideological goal to reality. This celebration, as is evident today, is a complex process because it entails willful negation of capitalism’s contribution to unequal distribution of wealth and designing newer methods of exploiting “third world” laborers and natural resources, leading to global warming, controlling of food resources and creating food insecurity, and the creation of the police state (kapoor “Kapuscinski

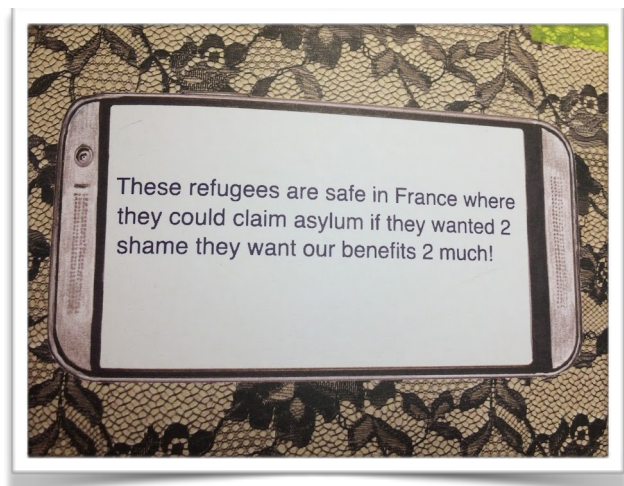
Lecture”). The truth, therefore, is ideological and can only be learned if this reality is challenged, so history from below or reading against the grain is only possible when there is unlearning of facts. Unlearning, however, is a challenging process and it puts one’s identity into crisis by forcing one to give up on the enjoyment that pleasures the self and help retains one’s identity vis-a-vis the Other. This I-other identity politics can be traced to Edward Said’s central argument in *Orientalism* and more recently in ilan kapoor’s theory about celebrity humanism, influenced by Slavoj Zizek qua Lacan’s theory of surplus value leading to surplus enjoyment.

For Said, Orientalism is a process of documenting a false account of colonialism, written by the colonizers for the liberal humanist subjects of the metropole. The orientalist presented the Orient as a barbaric and uncivilized place, everything that the Occident is not, veiling Europe’s main intention and presenting colonization as a civilizing mission (Macaulay “Minutes on Indian Education”). So, in theory, Europe established itself as the savior (I) and the colonized native (Other) as the “white man’s burden,” but in practice, it reaped profit by exploiting the native Other’s land and devaluing its worth in the global market (Kipling “White”). It is, however, ironic that even after the end of the colonial era, and this idea has been vehemently criticized and refuted by the “non-west” in global platforms, the image of the “non-west” has not been erased from Europe’s memory and continue to recreate the non-west as poor and helpless in order to justify its superior position, similar to the patronizing attitude that the metropolis had towards the colonies. This connection is most eloquently discussed in ilan kapoor’s book about the subject of the Europe’s humanitarian crisis, using Zizek’s theory of surplus value leading to surplus enjoyment (kapoor).

kapoor argues that the idea of the Other as a lacking subject whose lack can only be fulfilled by the “I” is at the heart of Europe’s humanist gestures. One’s understanding of wanting to help is actually a need guided by desire, jouissance, and wish fulfillment in order to retain Europe’s identity as the savior, driven by the enjoyment of the leftover or surplus value in this situation. The surplus is the excess of

being whereby one is not only a “homo oeconomicus, “who rationally calculates costs and benefits,” but also a compassionate and moral being (Foucault 10). It adds to the human value of western subjects and their worth vis a vis Other lives, who are lacking subjects and hence in need of help, and that elevates one’s position and identity in the world. This is tied to the earlier argument about the celebration of capitalism because of its benefits and how the west’s economic policy help keep the division between the first and third world alive, in the production of charitable subjects for the west, and strengthen the west’s position as the benevolent master. The other side of charity, of course, is hatred for the Other by demonizing them as a threat to border security, as stated earlier. So, on the one hand, the Other is a subject of charity who has to be grateful for what is given, but on the other hand, these charitable subjects become a threat if they demand their human rights.

If Kapoor’s argument can be used as a lens to study Europe’s attitude towards the refugee lives, Evans’ narrative becomes relevant. She carefully presents both sides of story and draws the reader’s attention by inserting real text messages that are circulated as a mass campaign to vilify the refugees and blame them for the crisis faced by Europe, not the other way around. For example: “[t]hese cute refugee babies grow into vile adults who want to destroy our country and all that’s in it” (32), “These refugees are safe in France...they want our benefits 2 much” (27), “we need to purge this scum with fire there’s no other choice” (152). As for the volunteers and human right advocates of Europe, who are against government’s



anti-immigrant policy and support the asylum seekers, Evans presents their vulnerability by expressing her own frustration to events as they are vilified by their fellow citizens. She loses her optimism and faith in volunteer work that cannot guarantee any long-term solution, and by sketching detailed scenes of harassment that both the campers and the volunteers undergo, she creates a momentary bond between them in a time of extreme distress.

During her second visit to Calais, Evans learns about a makeshift camp in Dunkirk where the residents of the “jungle” have been forced to relocate. Upon visiting the camp, she is shocked to see that it is “quite literally, the pit,” and submerged in “drainage ditches, puddles, floods, thick, sticky mud.” This is an extreme case of state brutality where “police officers uphold the law by preventing refugee children from sleeping in dry beds” as a show of power and control. An already powerless group of people are further alienated and tortured with impunity as a lesson to the people who dare cross borders in Europe to save their lives.





Her drawings show how the children are equally brutalized, yet, the volunteers can do nothing but silently distribute oranges to the camp residents. It is here that Evans breaks down and screams: “What are we fucking doing? We can’t solve this with oranges! The kids are all here! They’re all stuck

here! When does this stop being somebody else’s problem?” In asking “what are we doing?” she opens it up for discussion on both ends about the responsibility of the common people of England and France, who are voting citizens with rights, and well-meaning people wanting to help refugees, but their work has no real impact in improving the state of the migrants stranded in the camps. In other words, the ideology behind volunteer work is what Evans is interested in making people think about. *Who is benefitting from it and why? Are people really interested in solving problems and hold the European policy accountable for creating further crisis, or should they be satisfied with only distributing oranges and feel good about their charitable disposition? Evans’ questions become relevant in connecting the dots and asking what is happening in reality?* In one scene, she is standing outside her children’s school to pick them up and witnesses the dismantling of the camp on her cell phone through live streaming. Evans presents this as a meta-affective moment for her and the readers whereby the people around her are going about their daily lives when only a few hundred miles away, human lives are being destroyed with impunity. This is intended towards the readers as well: *What good is all the charity*

work and volunteering when one cannot stop the torture of human lives that are considered less valuable because of their lack of citizenship status?

These queries become more relevant because of the statistical results that show how the west is good at raising money but not so good at spending it. At least for the United States, for every \$6 raised, only \$1 is spent in real causes. Evans includes herself in this category of people who want to help but are unable to do so and calls herself a “bumbling white-western do gooder,” drawing an “unglamorous, gormless version” of herself in the book. By her own admission, one of her friends told her “you know, you don’t actually look like a potato.” She responds by saying, “[b]ut I feel like a potato. I deliberately drew [it]...as a representation of how out-of-my-depth I felt in that situation” (7). While Evans’ cynicism is more about the helpless situation of the volunteers, this is applicable to most of Europe and north America who are not against the refugee populations migration to the west per se, but do not think to ask the hard questions about external factors that contribute to militarization, civil war, food insecurity, and which force people to migrate outside of their home country: “Whether young or old, rich or poor, on the left or right, far removed from the crisis or at ground zero, Europeans tend to reward certain characteristics while penalizing others. Economic considerations, humanitarian concerns, and anti-Muslim sentiment are foremost in their minds” (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner).

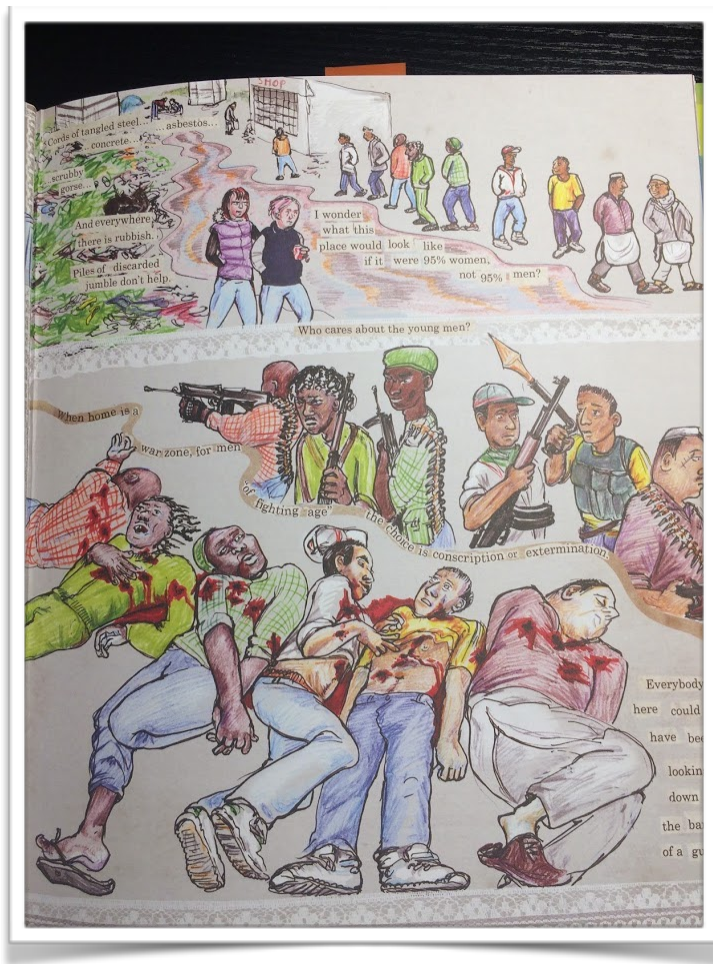
kapoor’s point about why we are happy to help those who are out of sight but not when they are in front of us is helpful in this context. Western audiences are comfortable with charity performances overseas but find themselves unable to negotiate with the situation when it presents itself at their door steps. He examines this mindset by focusing on the charity initiatives of Hollywood celebrities like Bono, Angelina Jolie, Oprah, and others who perpetuate capitalism’s cause by making profit out of “third world” poverty and argues that the celebrities’ charity initiatives lead to marketability of the celebrity as products that can be consumed without guilt and embody the idea of liberal humanism that leads to a feel-good multiculturalism. I return to Slavoj Zizek’s example of drinking Starbucks coffee knowing about

multinational corporations' exploitation of laborers in coffee plantations in south America and cleansing our consciences by donating a dollar to starving children in Somalia. Therefore, at the end of the day we are not just consumerists championing the cause of global capitalism, but also contributors to the betterment of the world. The enjoyment here is perverse, but nonetheless gives pleasure because it helps retain one's identity within the logic of capitalism (Zizek).

Similarly, in imagining the other as victims in need of saving, one can also retain one's identity as the benevolent western subject (master) and, in turn, retain the west as the Subject and the rest as subjects of the west (Spivak 22). This enjoyment, however, comes from a feeling of privilege and entitlement that is connected to white supremacy, nationalism, racism, and sexism. To refer back to the colonial era and the moral argument about the "white man's burden," one can argue that the 19th century rhetoric is still relevant because while discursive practice surrounding charity is rooted in liberal humanism and savior complex, it is driven by market economy and profitability. The rhetoric is returned to mean that I am doing charity because I can, not because I consciously and unconsciously participate in creating crisis situations and therefore it is my responsibility.

The question remains as to how does this affect the average person who is not able to go to Africa like Angelina Jolie or Bono? The answer to that is: they are the targeted consumers of this charity work and who are made to go through double layers of transference of desire and enjoyment: 1. Celebrities desire for charity as one's own and 2. coercive rearrangement of the celebrity "other's" desire (charitable subjects of the global South). The second one is more effective in stereotyping the non-west because the "charitable other" has to be wanting charity or fit the bill of a charitable subject as constructed in the western consciousness, leading to the idea of an "ethical" refugee or a desirable refugee (Ong). For example: if we see images of a refugee child or woman (often considered a victim) hungry, begging for food, and blaming the Middle East as a problematic zone, it satisfies the western audience and helps retain the fantasy of the gendered Other as in a perpetual state of distress. On the other hand, the image of an

abled bodied young Muslim refugee man is a threat and a prime candidate for plotting and threatening the sanctity of the western world.



The ethical refugee, therefore, provokes empathy that is almost always laden with pity because the refugee has to be a pitiable object whose sustenance depends on the benevolence of the west. Pity comes from that image, as discussed earlier, but also something that has been discursively created in the colonial era with “saving brown women from the brown men” and continues with statements like “saving the Taliban women from the Taliban men” (Spivak and Lila-abu-lughod). It is possible to argue against Evans’ own position as a white European writer and her ability to “give” agency to the marginalized refugee population, but while celebrity humanists have

played a big role in constructing a reality “on the basis of exclusion, gaps, inconsistency,” and cover up “the broader politics of inequality... by turning it into spectacle and shows,” Evans has done the opposite (kapoor 115). She has politicized the issue by addressing the gaps and including the excluded. Her representation does not reduce the Other to mute spectators in the face of the sovereign state’s violence. If anything, she deconstructs the real in the reality that is invested in constituting the west as a benevolent subject of the civilized world. By showing the application of brutal force in order to transform the asylum seekers into helpless subjects, she turns pity into guilt and questions Europe’s brand of humanity. While it

is reactionary, it is extremely important for engaging in crucial conversations like the one where Evans' friend Jet tells her about a family of four, a pregnant woman and her three young children being tortured by the French riot police. This particular image is one of the most affective in the book as Evans sketches the mother assaulted by multiple officers and slapped repeatedly while the children watch with fear and tears rolling down their cheeks. In an interview, Evans said that she used full frame page, intense colors,



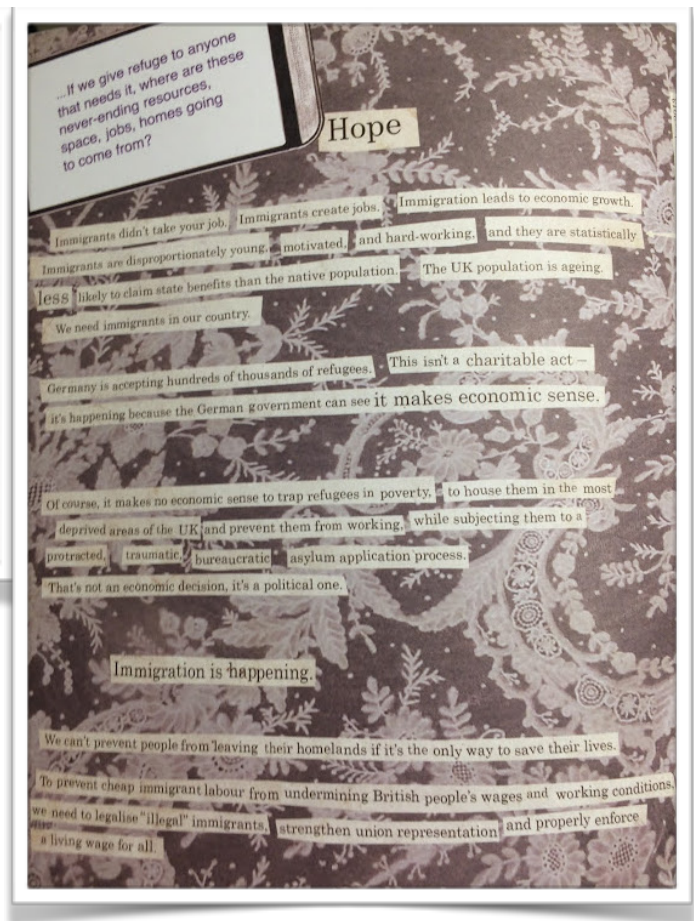
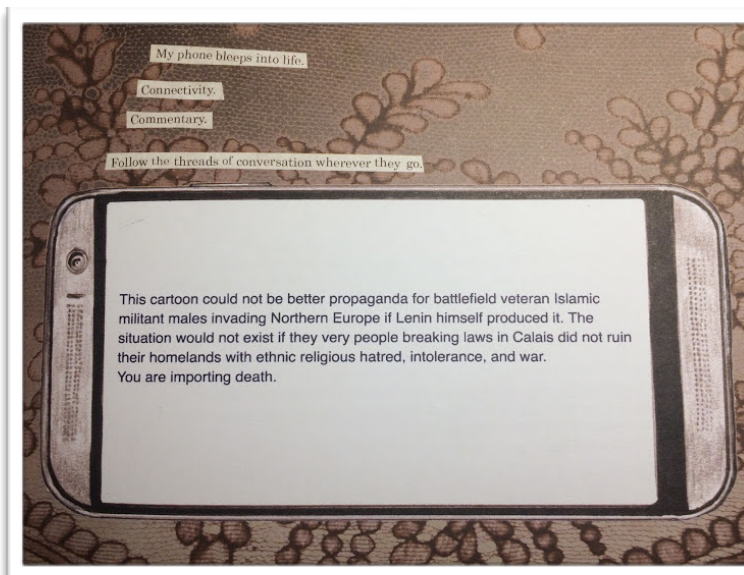
every literary trick to intensify the representation of the families harrowing experience. While this is a conscious effort to highlight a mother's plight, what makes her work of representation

different is that even in a moment of crisis, the mother, who is being tortured, does not look like a docile subject. As the policemen are assaulting her, she stares back at them in defiance. Evans says: "I give her agency. I give her a moment of resistance. That is an artistic representation documenting a real event. It is

up to you to decide whether I am an artist or a journalist” (“Comics Activism” 7). Evans is talking about the artistic technique of drawing this scene; it is possible to read “give” as giving or adding value to the sketch by representing agency and resistance, as she imagined the woman to do when she was being held by the riot police. This imagination is not romantic and does not aim to give excess voice either because there is an uncanny similarity between this scene and the one where Evans imagines herself in prison for helping asylum seekers cross over to England.

Both these sketches involve imagination about individual reaction to events and actions that is fearful, yet the expressions are similar. In fact, the migrant mother is faced with excessive violence and yet, she is more defiant than Evans who, to a certain extent, looks passive in comparison. The scene is intentional because it shows the mother’s courage and not weakness. This is also a moment of solidarity where Evans “gives” herself and the other woman equal agency out of genuine empathy and her ability to imagine a mother’s helplessness when she is threatened with being separated from her children or the whole family’s future is put to stake. Evans does so without placing herself in a position of power or attempting to save the woman because, in both the scenes, they are subjected to state violence and just because they are forced to accept certain decisions, it does not mean that they are docile subjects, yet they are forced to comply by the law. When represented thus, pity is replaced by anger and that is what Evans’ main question is, “at what point does it stop being about someone else...?”

The question here is: how can we mitigate a coercive rearrangement of the other’s desire and read the refugee crisis from a position of empathy without pity? It is not that easy because empathy, thought of as a humanizing gesture, entails interpretation, translation, and transference in order to feel what the other is feeling, and is never an innocent process (Pedwell 167, 168). Although human capacity for spontaneous matching feeling is believed to be universal, the reader’s position, understanding of facts, and cultural context affect ways in which humans share feelings. It can evoke negative emotions, whereby the readers become sympathetic towards the narrative and the characters, and instead of feeling pain, feel pity for the



pain. Research has shown, however, that when reading about the victimization of the non-western subject, it is often romanticized as informing about the other with the promise of “affective flexibility” and spontaneous empathy ((Pedwell 167,168). Evans’ sketches avoid this trope and it is well evident in other places as well. The illustration of young men drawing picture is a direct resistance to that understanding of the maleOther in a particular way, as shown by the real text messages and the fear of adult refugee male: “This cartoon could not be a better propaganda for battlefield veteran Islamic militant males invading Northern Europe if Lenin himself produced it. The situation would not exist if the very people breaking laws in Calais did not ruin their homelands with ethnic, religious hatred, intolerance, and war. You are importing death” (23).

She counters this narrative of hatred with contrasting sketches of men “hunched over, coloring in with felt-tip pens” and the Syrian chef in Brighton whose mouthwatering kabobs make Evans and her husband wonder if the real fear among Britishers is that the immigrants will teach “the English how to cook?” (35, 26) By showcasing their expertise in different areas, she restores worth to the asylum seekers as

human beings who are part of the working force and contribute to the economic growth of Europe. Her sketches invite empathy without alienating the Other from the modes of production narrative altogether and uses every opportunity in the book to portray the asylum seekers as building beautiful homes with practically nothing, playing shadow cricket with no bat or ball yet, enjoying the process as they would if the conditions were different and they had proper cricket gear. Evans adds humor in places to prevent the narrative from becoming too dark and in her own words, “[c]omics storytelling also facilitates the judicious use of humor. There are funny wry or silly aspects to most situations, and by drawing them out and sprinkling parts of the narrative with them... [it serves] people’s underlying humanity and resilience” (“Comic activism” 3).

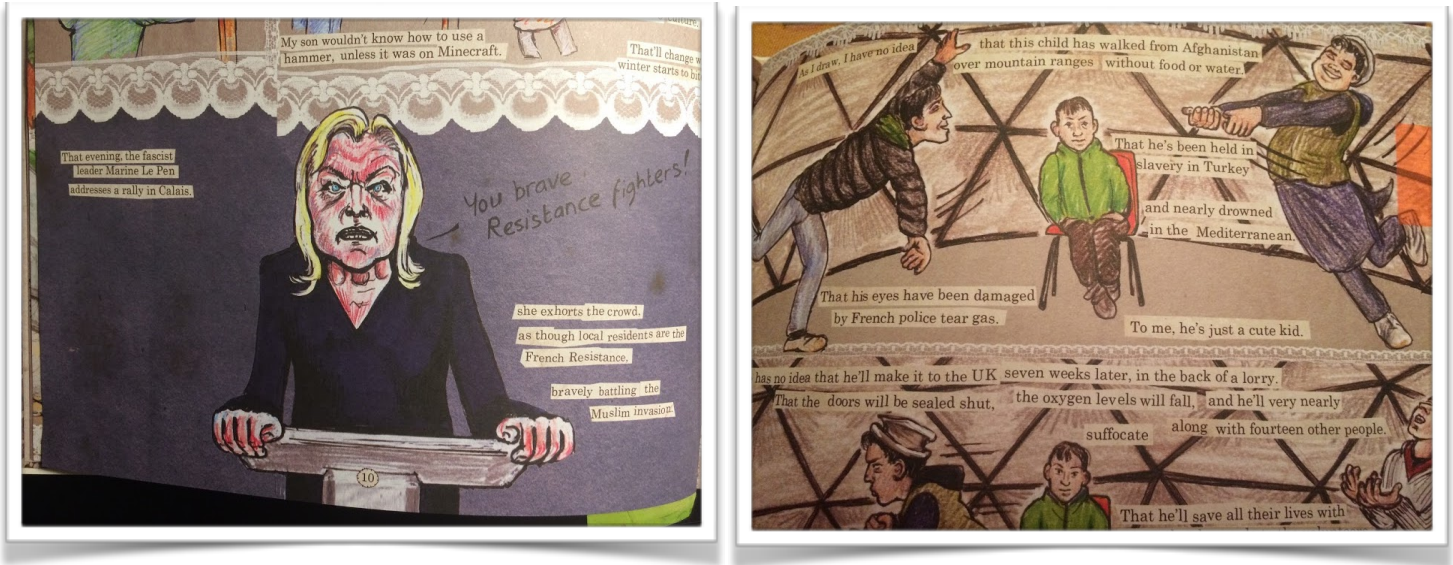
There is, however, a continuous tone of disdain and criticism that challenge reality with the real. She draws the migrant men as creative, sensitive, and imaginative human beings and not some fanatic religious goon whose sole purpose of coming to Europe is to kill non-Muslims of the west. One can argue about the romanticizing of the “ethical” refugee but it is no secret that the refugee population has helped bring positive changes in the socio-cultural and economic landscape of many countries and the last page of the book reiterates the same.

Towards a Pedagogy of the Subaltern Counterpublic

The second point of this article is about teaching as a form of activism where the classroom can be used as a subaltern counterpublic, a concept theorized by Nancy Frazer to argue against Habermas’s concept of the public sphere that is gendered and class based. Subaltern counterpublic, then, is a discursive arena where members of the subordinate groups (in this case, marginal subjects of discussion that are not considered important or mistaught in Anglo-American academy) invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations to the identities (Frazer 22). In the case of reading a text like *Threads*, “oppositional interpretation” can be interpreted as a rhizomatic and

critical thinking exercise and the training of learning to unlearn. There is so much information in the public domain, as mentioned earlier, that the negative image of the refugee has become a permanent fixture. The word refugee and its meaning has gone through a process of economic, cultural and political imperialism and become associated with either poor, hapless, victim, docile, and/or terrorist, danger, and a threat. So, learning to learn by unlearning is a reading method that unties words from their meanings without engaging in a further meaning making exercise. It is only then that it will help us treat refugee population and refugee studies less as a charitable cause and more as a serious area of study. *Threads* is a wonderful text in that direction, and along with special attention to the language, storyline, images, it also speaks with those people who are alienated from mainstream historical narratives.

Evans' parallel commentary about the political and military operations leading up to the refugee crisis is particularly helpful (*Threads* 9, 10). She adds bits and pieces of the silenced voices in the narrative from the stories she heard in the camp: "The American came they gave my brother a job interpreting. One night we got a note saying he should stop working for the Americans or he will be killed. A few days later he disappeared and then we didn't see him. The one morning his body was outside our door without his head," "If our answers didn't satisfy the interrogator, they would pour boiling hot water on us," "There is no hiding place for gay people like me in my country...they will throw petrol on a tyre and set a gay person ablaze," "to leave everything behind. To leave your loved ones and not know what is going to happen to them, I was lucky. I am grateful that I am alive, but I thought, "you know what? why am I even alive? What is the point of being alone in the world anyway?" (140, 141). In so doing, she does not reduce the refugee as subjects in crisis, rather as people who are subjected to crisis. When Evans and her friend are unable to stop the assault and arrest of a teenaged Syrian boy by border security forces in Calais, she tries to explain the situation by saying "you have no idea what the lad has been through..." the security personnel cuts them short and responds by saying "yes, well some of them have tragic stories."



The ending of the book with paper cut body images of children who are “hung to dry” stares at us with the question of who is paying the worst price of this crisis and who is benefitting from it: “While empathy is interpreted as positive because it ‘humanizes’ ‘others’ through individualizing, what about those ‘others’ who cannot be encountered or known as individuals, precisely because structural relations of power

enforce absolute distance or segregation – or indeed ensure that the only modes of encounter possible are violent ones premised on regulation, oppression or annihilation?” (Pedwell 167, 168) The entire book is filled with explicit drawings of unaccompanied children that haunt readers: “it was never only about the children, everyone here



is unaccompanied.” By showing the number of children who went missing in Calais (129), Evans questions the mindset and humanitarian concerns of the western audience that overlooks all this and assures itself that the immigrants are opportunists and the children are evil who will counter-colonize Europe.

The real text messages circulated in England and outside of it that Evans cites while narrating the abysmal condition of the “jungle” and state brutality in Calais, shows the lack of awareness about global politics and economic issues as well as the ignorance of the non-refugee population in the host countries, and that adds more violence to this humanitarian crisis. Moreover, *Threads* is not the only one, there are quite a few documentaries made on the “jungle,” and irrespective of the film makers ideological goal, what strikes most is the comments made by the viewers online. The documentary “Dead End: The Calais Crisis” shows the daily struggle of living in Calais, and the campers’ futile attempt to cross over to the UK presents a harrowing picture of human existence. Yet what strikes most is the reaction of the viewers below the documentary link on YouTube, that are hateful, xenophobic, racist, and gendered:

Obese pope 2 years ago- “Poor “refugees” with nothing to their names.....yet they manage to have somewhat modern mobile phones.....yeah really struggling,”

Copulative 3 years ago (edited)- “I watched until 9:28 then I couldn't bear to watch this crap no more..At 9:00 Yeah can't sleep, no work, no food, no life, And now I need not go back and fight for my country, When I can go to the UK and have 10 children and live off the welfare,”

Sheeba K3 years ago-”So yesterday these Calais migrants refused to move to the trailer homes provided by the French government. They are warm, have electricity, water and food but these people refused to move in. Unbelievable entitlement on their part. They also attacked a school bus full of children, one child went into an epileptic shock because of it - so much for being peaceful,”

Milos Milosevski 3 years ago- “half of this mofos have a better phone than me,

Alex Seaton 2 years ago-Still doesn't remove the fact Normal Truck drivers that are Trained for trucking And not Riot control are being harassed And attacked,”

Fritz Lee 2 years ago- “Hold on a Minute !! Most of these "Refugees" haven't walked thousands of miles across Europe, they jump trains in small groups, all planned, that eventually the ticket inspectors give up and let them stay!! Cameron, liar that he is says they're coming to Britain for Jobs and the wonderful people!! Utter bullshit!! They're coming to Britain for the welfare benefits!! These people cannot stand Us!!! Close Our borders immediately,”

Ballshippin3 years ago- “When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, young Russian men didn't run away and try to claim refuge in a faraway country while leaving all the women and children behind, hell those young men did the complete opposite and ran towards the Nazis to kill them, many of whom didn't even have a rifle or basic training. Why are so many of these young Syrian men cowards? They say they are ready to die for Allah but will let a child drown to save their own skins. Every one of these “refugee” males are COWARDS.” (RT Documentary “Dead End: Calais)

The Brexit campaign preyed on this mindset. In the beginning when the people of UK showed little interest in leaving EU, politicians and right wing media outlets used pictures of refugee movement across the world as a way to convince the Britishers that these these were pictures from the UK border. After the Paris attack, the pictures collected momentum. The Leave campaign slogan to “take back control” was, in the minds of many voters, a promise to reduce immigration. The refugee was turned into an opportunity seeking, manipulative body that needed to be stopped from entering the country. Even the most conservative estimates show, the arrival of refugees has a demonstrable positive impact on the economy of the host country. Here again, the reasoning for accepting refugees seems apparent: The influx of motivated individuals fills up demand for workers. When they spend money on consumption of goods and

services, it increases aggregate demand in the country, which in turn boosts the GDP growth rate (Shashank).

Threads leaves behind ample scope for rhizomatic thinking exercises and teaches students how to become critical thinkers. Critical thinking is an important selling point in humanities education today, but the Anglo-American education model of profitability allows very little scope for that. This book gives ample scope and raises some very important questions about humanities education, and the role of the teachers and students. Evans not only documents the plight of the people who are forcefully displaced from their homelands, but also of the non-refugee people, who are genuinely invested and wants to participate in decision making processes to avoid humanitarian crisis in the future, like it happens in a democracy. She pokes at the illusion of a democratic nation because democracy, if anything, is a facade and yet another way for the sovereign state to control the mind and body of its own people. Evans' nightmare about being arrested and taken away from her children if she tries to help an asylum seeker in need is an example of that (150). Through this illustration, it becomes clear that even as a British citizen, and the sovereign state's promise of safety and security to its people, she is equally powerless, and it is a matter of time when the state decides her to be worthy of protection and when it strips her of her citizenship right. In interviews and elsewhere, she often says: "we need to open our borders, prioritize humanity over nationalism" but, by her own admission, in the scene where she sees the border patrol office torture a young boy who lost his parent a day prior to that and mocks Evans by saying "yeah, some of them have sad stories," she is unable to protest it. In the book, however, she writes that she screamed in her mind "IT'S NOT A STORY!!! THIS IS REALITY!!!!", because that is what she wanted to do in that moment (139). As a citizen of a free nation, she has no freedom to do more than that.

Evans ends the book with a positive thought, but the problem is, she too engages in a fantasy world in order to fulfill the lack between what should be done and what can be done. She creates a "reality" that is far from the real, with pictures of hope of a new camp in Dunkirk that was opened by the

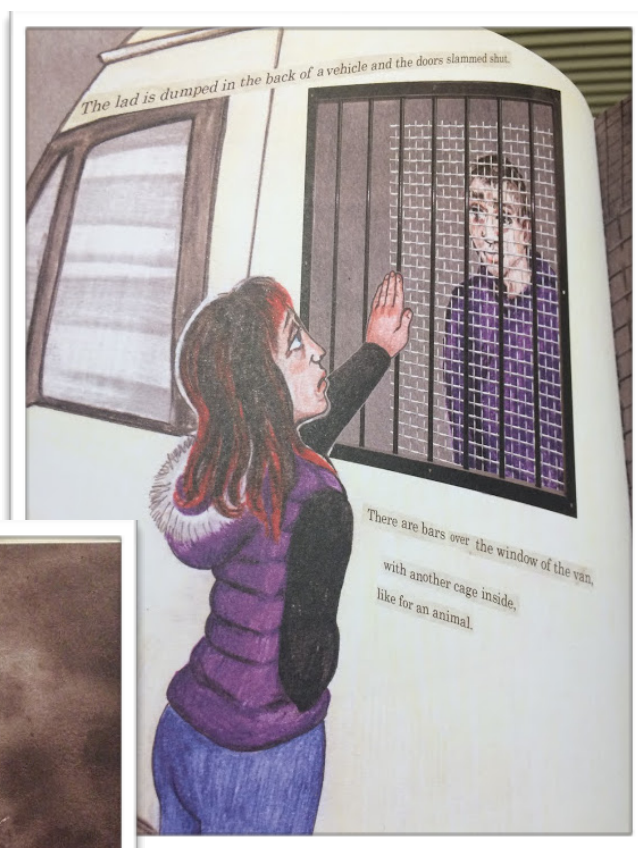
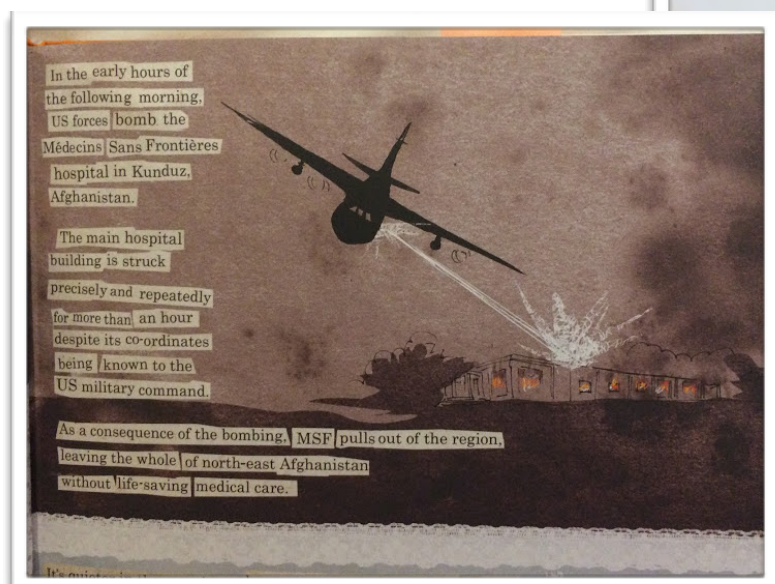
mayor and Medecins Sans Frontieres. She leaves the readers with “[w]hile the bomb still fall and the bullet still reign, there will be refugees in Calais. Hope springs eternal: hope looking for that good chance, that one chance, however slim” (170). The reality, however, is far from ideal and the recent reports show that “...even the new camp is showing signs of wear and tear. ‘The shelters are run down and the showers are really bad now—hundreds and hundreds of people going through them for a year’” (Rouch).



Threads is a comic reportage

about the jungle, but it is also literature that “pushes the boundaries of imagination for a different kind of affective journey” to be able to tell the story of a space and the people that occupied it (Pedwell 176). It is useful as a critical interface for thinking about the transnational politics of power,

to teach effect and discursive practices in ways that are not easily understandable because the information available to us does not always reflect what currently exists on the ground (Pedwell 176, 177). This, to me, is the counter history and “history from below” that will remain silenced if we do not read “against their stated intention.” There is so much out there about the helplessness of the refugees, but very little about the daily struggle and resistance against state orchestrated violence. The illusion of the privileged position of the non-refugee within global capitalist economy needs to be understood as well. Until and unless we reposition ourselves and resist the sovereign state (back to retaining one’s own position as the benevolent master), one cannot put humanity over nationalism.



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