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## Abstract

Combining the theoretical frameworks of refugee studies, feminist critical theory, and pedagogical studies, this thesis examines contemporary young adult (YA) refugee literature as a form of sustainable pedagogy in the English classroom in Norway. Following Ahmed (2014), hooks (1994), Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2021) and Stonebridge (2021), I develop the formulation *sustainable pedagogy* as a relational process and as an act of transmitting knowledge in relation to reading and interpreting refugee literature from a critical, ethical, and affective perspective. Grounded on a transdisciplinary feminist methodology (Taylor et al., 2020), my project proposes a literary and pedagogical analysis of six YA refugee texts across various genres. The three discussion chapters engage with the main themes of touch as borderland, com-passion as pedagogy, and response-ability as integral elements to the sustainable pedagogy proposed in this thesis. Weaving together literary analysis with methods in education, such as observation and discussions in the classroom and interpretations of in-service teachers' essays, I discuss the complex representation of refugee subjects and communities in YA refugee literature and the values this genre can bring to the English classroom in Norway. The realms of the literary and the pedagogical are intertwined in my thesis, and this decision stems from my understanding of literature as a pedagogical means that can bring aesthetic, ethical, and affective engagement to the classroom (Dernikos, 2018; Zembylas, 2015). Lastly, this thesis recognizes the importance of teaching and learning with YA refugee literature as a way for in-service teachers to engage intellectually, ethically, and response-ably with the criteria in the new curriculum LK20 (*læreplan*) for English.

## Sammendrag

Gjennom å kombinere det teoretiske rammeverket fra flyktningstudier, feministisk kritisk teori, og pedagogiske studier, undersøker denne avhandlingen samtidslitteratur om flyktninger for unge voksne som en form for bærekraftig pedagogikk i engelskklasserommet i Norge. Med bakgrunn i Ahmed (2014), hooks (1994), Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2021), og Stonebridge (2021), formulerer jeg begrepet *bærekraftig pedagogikk* (*sustainable pedagogy*) som en relasjonsprosess og en metode for å videreføre kunnskap relatert til lesing og tolkning av flyktninglitteratur fra et kritisk, etisk, og følelsesmessig perspektiv. Basert på en transdisiplinær feministisk metodikk (Taylor et al., 2020), presenterer mitt prosjekt en litterær og pedagogisk analyse av seks tekster om flyktninger i forskjellige sjangre skrevet for unge voksne. De tre diskusjonskapitlene tar for seg hovedtemaene berøring som grenseland (*touch as borderland*), nestekjærlighet og medfølelse (*com-passion*) som pedagogikk, og evnen til å svare (*response-ability*) som sentrale elementer i den bærekraftige pedagogikken beskrevet i denne avhandlingen. Gjennom sammenkobling av litteraturanalyse med undervisningsmetoder som observasjon og diskusjon i klasserommet, samt tolkning av tekster skrevet av lærere som tar videreutdanning, diskuterer jeg hvordan flyktningindivider og -samfunn blir komplekst representert i flyktninglitteraturen for unge voksne, og hvilke verdier denne sjangeren kan bringe med seg til engelskklasseromet i Norge. Det litterære og det pedagogiske er sammenflettet i avhandlingen. Denne avgjørelsen kommer av min forståelse av litteratur som et pedagogisk verktøy som kan gi estetisk, etisk, og følelsesmessig engasjement i klasserommet (Dernikos, 2018; Zembylas, 2015). Avhandlingen anerkjenner betydningen av å undervise og lære med flyktninglitteratur for unge voksne som en måte for lærere å engasjere seg intellektuelt, etisk og ansvarsfullt med kravene i den nye læreplanen i engelsk (Kunnskapsløftet).

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Political Contexts & Discourses on Refugee Subjects and Communities

Although mass displacements, colonial histories, and the creation of nation states have defined and marked Western history since the so-called Early Modern Period, the figure of the refugee has become of greater interest and discussion only after the Shoah of Jewish people[1] during the Second World War (Stonebridge, 2021). Despite the numerous ethical, philosophical, and political studies written in these decades, millions of humans are still being affected by ongoing processes of colonialism, white supremacy, and the total disdain for the life of the Other (Khosravi, 2019; Stonebridge, 2018). As political theorist Wendy Brown (2010) properly reminds us, this disregard for the lives of Others has defined the nature and identity of nation-states since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 when state sovereignty and its border politics started to affect and determine the lives of citizens and refugees. Being a refugee today speaks about a myriad complex of processes, including the crossing of borders that are often closed by military forces and walls, human rights that may or may not be granted on the basis of national regulations that are totally disconnected from the lived experience of being displaced, and political representations of diversity and alterity as a social threat to the national citizen (Brown, 2010). Philosophers, public intellectuals, and refugees, such as philosopher and Holocaust survivor Hannah Arendt (1979), Palestinian refugee scholar Edward W. Said (2000), and Palestinian refugee poet Yousif M. Qasmiyeh (2020), among many others, have written about the experience of being placeless, bringing to light ethical concerns and denouncing the ill treatment of refugees. However, politicians all around the world have disregarded these scholars' words and, instead, they have been using military and police forces at national borders, vacillating responsibilities for sea rescue in international waters between Europe and Africa while leaving thousands drown every day, and building prisons for asylum seekers (Boochani, 2018; Quintano, 2016).

In these politics of inhospitality, Norway, like many other countries, has shown ambivalent behaviors towards migrants and refugees. Described as an outstanding contributor to international refugee protection in the last decades and one of the greatest donors of

[1] The history of the Jewish diaspora, however, can be traced back to centuries before Christ. It is important though to also mention the massive displacements of African people caused by slavery and indentured work, during Western imperialism and colonialism, though those who escaped would not receive the label "refugee" then.

UNHCR (UNHCR, n.d.), Norway has 244.660 people with refugee background (4,5% of the population) living within its borders (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2022). Nevertheless, in parallel with these recognitions and numbers, Norway has adhered to the international political distribution of refugees in Europe according to so-called quotas, a system that, in my view, dangerously defines refugees as tradable goods and thus depriving them of their dignity. The country has also enacted the deportation of refugees from Norway to war zones considered "safe", such as Kabul in Afghanistan, and has adopted a generally skeptical and fearful immigration policy since the early 2000s. Jan-Paul Brekke and Anne Staver (2018) accurately define Norway's turn to a stricter control of its borders in conjunction with the refugee management crisis in 2015 as *renationalization* characterized by restrictive measures such as temporary permits for minors. Thus, the messages that Norway has sent to refugees and Norwegian citizens seem to be quite paradoxical, confusing, and worrisome. They have also led me to begin to consider the philosophical implications of this rhetoric, together with the impact that these public discourses and policies have on educational contexts. What actions does a nation need to take to be considered hospitable and generous to others?

The inhospitable dimension of the Norwegian nation-state takes the form of control to grant perceived security and comfort to its citizens within the borders of the nation, while implementing racist, anti-immigration forces and measures or by avoiding discussions about present systemic racism in the society, institutions, and workplaces. The Norwegian society is not exempt from adopting ethnic residential segregation of migrants and refugees who are relocated into specific cities or areas of the city, together with assimilation policies[2], which means that the culture, the language, and the values of the person are undervalued and are instead expected to change in order to reflect the hosting society[3]. Furthermore, systemic racism and discrimination contribute to defining refugees as subjects in need and without agency (Galloway & Gjefsen, 2020; Søholt & Lynnebakke, 2015). In the last ten years, since the Syrian Civil War started, the country has shared political discourses and implemented policies about refugees that are not strange to worldwide right-wing and populist hostile rhetoric. Fremskrittspartiet, one the political parties that was part of the previous governing

[2] In their edited book *Undoing Homogeneity in the Nordic Region. Migration, Difference and the Politics of Solidarity*, Keskinen, Skaptadóttir, and Toivanen (2019) engage in a refreshing conversation about cultural homogeneity in the Nordic countries by rejecting the nationalistic and historical ideas that see it as necessary for social union and safety.

[3] Indigenous Sámi peoples have endured these policies of assimilations for a long time too in Norway. The Trondheim-based artist-researcher Sissel M. Bergh (2020), in collaboration with Frode Fjellheim, has documented the assimilation and erasure of South Sámi history and language in the coastal areas of Møre and Trøndelag in her work and video documentaries, such as "Dalvedh".

coalition, states on its own webpage the political will of prioritizing Christian refugees in the resettlement process, using the Christian history of Norway as a justification for this intention (Fremskrittspartiet, 2020). Moreover, the leader of the same party and Minister of Immigration and Integration in 2015, Silvy Listhaug, has often expressed critical views against a diverse society, and particularly against Muslim traditions, stating that "the borders of Norway are not open" (as cited in Haugan, 2020). Norway has thus followed the political trends of other countries in Europe and the Americas and has been strategically working towards defining itself politically as hostile towards and unsustainable for refugee communities through the use of discourses of the nation where minoritized subjects, including refugees, allegedly do not belong. Stubberud, Akin, and Svendsen (2019) show the fallacy of the Norwegian asylum system for queer unaccompanied minors, for example, whose lives are endangered when asylum is denied, or characterized by isolation and bullying if and when they are granted resettlement.

In contrast to the reality that I have just described, there is a push from different social actors to build bridges between the many communities in the society, and to welcome refugees into Norway. The city of Trondheim, for example, is part of ICORN, the International Cities of Refuge Network, which is "an independent organization of cities and regions and hosts offering shelter to writers and artists at risk, advancing freedom of expression, defending democratic values and promoting international solidarity" (ICORN, n.d.). Poets and writers within this network, such as the Iranian poet and human-rights activist Asieh Amini, have actively collaborated with other institutions and refugee subjects to build an inclusive cultural environment in the city. It is also meaningful to acknowledge the generous work of Afghanistan-born, Trondheim-based poet and public intellectual Gulabuddin Sukhanwar, director of the Literature for Inclusion[4] initiative in Trondheim, who organized the Migration Literature Week in 2020 and 2021 within the frame of his project. These key events allowed a great number of literary encounters with national and international writers and guests, offering a space for immigrant and refugee voices, all under the umbrella of community building. These are examples of how refugees become actors of primary importance in the creation of the society and of the city, generating and circulating positive affects, such as compassion, joy, and love, that lead to the sustenance of agency, resistance, and transformation, among other ethical impulses.

[4] This platform aims at fostering inclusion in the community through the arts and literature and has invited numerous migrant and refugee voices from the country and abroad to share their works with the community in Trondheim.

In terms of the local context for this thesis, I also want to stress the role of Mangfoldhuset, a politically, religiously, and ideologically independent organization that works for social equity and the creation of a diverse and inclusive society in the region, and Kunsthallen, a contemporary art institution, which is in constant dialogue with different groups in the city. In these particular venues, refugees in Trondheim produce political, ethical, pedagogical, and affective literacy for the entire city. I recognize in their key role what Hanna Musiol (2021, April 14) befittingly vindicates as the need to "reclaim, de-segregate our cities, honor our urban communities and address complex urban relations, experiences, subjectivities, affect and mobilities" (1:39:00). The diverse voices of refugees in Trondheim certainly bring to light the complexities, tensions, and incongruences of the relations between refugee, migrants, expats, Sámi people, and white Norwegians in the city, while showing that diverse identities, texts, and experiences are crucial for the revitalization of public space. I here want to highlight that the university where this thesis was written is strongly connected to the work of refugee subjects and communities as well[5].

Witnessing the collaboration between colleagues at the university and refugee actors in other cultural institutions in the city has taught me the ethics of knowledge creation, helping me to 'learn and unlearn' how to forge a more inclusive dialogue with the common aim of envisioning a just educational system and a just society. From some close friends with refugee backgrounds, I have learnt about how refugee subjects are constantly discriminated against when it comes to recognition of their knowledge and education from parts of the world such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, and Turkey (just to mention a few). Thus, I have unlearnt that knowledge is a democratic concept owned by Western countries and instead I consider it a tool that can be used by governments to exercise forms of control inside the national borders and actively devalue refugee subjects and their previous knowledge. I want to state clearly here that I strongly condemn these practices, and I reflect on the importance of alliances in contexts of power and responsibility for how knowledge by and about refugee stories is shared with the community. In this sense, I see this research as a form of humble ethical restitution in that the knowledge in these pages aims at continuing the work of

[5] I want to highlight that Sukkerhuset (The house of sugar), one of the buildings in the Kalvskinnet campus where my department is located, used to be a sugar deposit that directly connects Norway to the slavery trade in the 18th century. The history of the building is nowhere to be found at the university premises, showing a terrible lack of awareness of the importance of visibilizing ongoing colonial histories today. For further reference on scholarship denouncing the colonialism integral to the world of research, from an Indigenous perspective, see Linda T. Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples.*

response-ability[6], which entails the ability to respond to the Other but also being accountable to oneself and others, and alliance with the refugee subjects and communities in Trondheim, placing the emphasis on storytelling.

### 1.2 A Note on Positionality & Motivation

Positionality is one of the ethical concerns that I have addressed throughout the entire length of my project. In addressing my position, I have paid attention to Cree-Métis Indigenous studies scholar, Deanna Reder (2016), who aptly claims that "all knowledge is generated from particular positions, that there is no unbiased, neutral position possible" (p. 7). I am a white immigrant from Italy and a privileged background, who works in a university in Norway with a generous PhD funding package. Situating myself as an immigrant woman and white researcher in Norway means acknowledging my privilege, my position as an outsider to the refugee community, and my ethical responsibility as an ally to avoid the perpetuation of power inequalities, discrimination, and institutionalized racism towards refugees. As Black feminist thinker bell hooks (1989) pertinently puts it, "[w]hen we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce or perpetuate domination" (p. 43). My work as a white researcher within Norwegian academia, and in the field of refugee studies, puts me in a powerful position and I have, if I listen to Toni Morrison (2019), the ethical duty to share this power with others who have been discriminated against and marginalized (p. 200). As my work is situated at the intersection of feminist, refugee, pedagogical, and literary studies, I have further adopted the ethics of positionality in order to keep myself accountable, starting for example from the choices of the primary sources for my study. To the best of my abilities, I have taken on the response-ability of selecting literary material that does not harm the refugee community or perpetrate stereotypical and discriminating discourses.

In the introduction to their written conversation, *A Pedagogy for Liberation. Dialogues on Transforming Education* (1987), Paulo Freire and Ira Shor reflect on the meaning of motivation. Freire (1987) claims that "[m]otivation takes part *in* the action" (p. 4), whereas Shor (1987) points out that motivation is "inside the act of studying itself, inside the students'

[6] Feminist and queer theorist Donna J. Haraway uses this concept in Haraway, D. J. (2008). *When species meet*. In Chapter 5. "Voices of Response-ability in Martha Arual Akech and John Bul Dau's and Vesna Maric's Autobiographical Novels," I explain this term and engage at length with it to discuss the reasons why it is preferable to the concept of responsibility in discourses about displacement and hospitality.

recognition of the importance of knowing to them" (p. 5). My motivation for this project is somehow tied to my own experience with an educational system that hooks and Freire refer to as *banking education*, which is, according to hooks (1994), "based on the assumption that memorizing information and regurgitating it represented gaining knowledge that could be deposited, stored and used at a later date" (p. 5). In this type of educational system, knowledge is a powerful tool to mark the division between teachers, the knowledge bearers, and students, the knowledge containers. When I was a student in an Italian humanist high school "liceo classico" in an old, fascist grey building, I was told that I would be trained to develop critical thinking there. In turn, what happened in reality was humiliation, assimilation, and the opposite of learning to ask questions; dominant approaches and answers were imposed as universal and right with a total lack of consideration for personal interests and the future development of the individual. A poverty of ethics disguised as rich and elite knowledge was simply property of our teachers and professors. My negative experience as a high-school student continued, in fact, at the university level with banking-model lectures where I was only absorbing content. It did not take long before I realized that I was forgetting knowledge the day after the exam, while the sense of inadequacy towards the school subjects was increasing more and more, together with a sense of injustice connected to the fact that my parents were paying for a sterile education. I am strongly against this type of education and the toxic power dynamics it brings in itself; thus, in my teaching and in my research, I have not considered myself as the knowledgeable person, and even worse, my students as containers. Instead, I have aimed at creating knowledge together *with* them, and from our experiences of reading and discussing the primary texts and the critical theories together, relationally. Unfolding and sharing my memories and part of my personal story regarding my educational path is crucial to understand my motivation and purpose for researching the topic of this thesis (Hampton, 1995; Kovach, 2000). Having shed light on these vital elements that define my study and situate me in relation to it, the next section will present my research questions and a general outline of the thesis.

### 1.3 Thesis Overview & Research Questions

My PhD thesis seeks to offer an examination of young adult (YA[7]) refugee literature as a pedagogical resource in the English classroom, with a particular focus on the Norwegian education system. This research hence entails considering what type of knowledge about

[7] This thesis considers YA literature as a literary genre for teen audiences (12+) (Cadden et al., 2020). I engage with the liminality of the genre more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

refugee subjects and communities this literature can create, and how this knowledge can be and is transmitted through a sustainable type of pedagogy. Two main research questions have driven my doctoral study:

- How are refugee subjects and communities represented in YA refugee literature?
- What is the role of ethics and affect in these portrayals?

Two additional questions, centred on pedagogical issues, have further led my research on YA refugee literature:

- What can YA refugee literature bring to the English classroom in Norway?
- How does refugee literature fit in the new Norwegian curriculum?

My corpus of analysis includes six contemporary YA refugee texts of various genres: Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* (2012) and Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out & Back Again* (2011), both novels in free verse; Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* (2018) and Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi* (2015), two graphic memoirs; and Martha Arual Akech and John Bul Dau's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl. Escaping Civil War in Sudan* (2010) and Vesna Maric's *Bluebird. A Memoir* (2009), both autobiographical novels. For a detailed discussion and reflection on the process of selecting primary texts, see Chapter 2. Transdisciplinary Feminist Methodology: Complexities and Alliances. In relation to the representations of the young refugee subjects in these literary texts, I have been interested in understanding how their identities and cultural belongings are portrayed in relation to the other members of their community and families. This thesis seeks to show the complexities and ambivalences of these bonds, where affective, ethical, and pedagogical impulses circulate, shaping identities and relations with the family and the nation. As I explain in detail in Chapter 2 regarding my methodology, I have conducted literary analysis of the aforementioned six primary texts, and I have complemented my interpretation with some classroom observations, discussion with my students, and analyses of their writing as methods. In the fall of 2020, I taught the course LVUT8083 English 1 (5-10) Year 1 for a class cohort of in-service teachers in the Department of Teacher Education at NTNU. These were in-service teachers who took extra credits in English in

order to fulfill the requirement of 60 relevant credits[8] to teach the subject across grades 5-10 (which mean pupils who are 10–14-year-old approximately)[9].

As part of the course, the in-service teachers wrote an essay where they analyzed one of the primary texts. The in-service teachers, who all had previous experience in teaching different subjects in upper-primary and secondary school, and in adult education in Norway, reflected on the ethical value of refugee literature for their personal learning process as teachers, and on the ethical value these texts could have in their own classroom with their pupils and students. I have analyzed and discussed some of these essays (according to those who gave consent to participate to this study; see Appendix A) moved by the interest in finding out how these student teachers engaged with some of these primary texts not only in a literary and critical way, but also the pedagogical value they see in this literary genre. The discussion of the pedagogical value of the literary texts is placed in relation to some core values and competences after grade 7 for the English curriculum (*læreplan*) [10] in Norway in order to understand how the literature responds to various institutional instructions for teachers of English in the country. Moreover, putting the literary representations for young adults in dialogue with the curricular questions was a necessary part to point out possible omissions in the Norwegian curriculum.

### 1.4 YA Refugee Literature: Overview and Educational Contexts

The genre of refugee literature offers new imaginaries, perspectives, and languages to describe the experience of being in the world as a refugee (Bakara, 2020; Cox et al., 2020). Following human rights scholar Hadji Bakara (2020), I seek to shift the focus from the discourses around xenophobia, hate, and racism, to the voices of the refugees (and their allies) who constitute an "aesthetic resistance" to the other rhetoric (p. 291). These narratives can change political discourses by delineating a new identity for the citizen, who would engage instead in response-able and more equal forms of alliance, and the refugee, who

[8] To teach English in lower secondary schools in Norway, there is a requirement to have at least 60 credits that are relevant to the subject (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021).
[9] Considering that in Norway grades 5-7 correspond to upper primary grades, but are also middle grades (mellomtrin in Norwegian), it is appropriate to state that this thesis discusses YA refugee literature for middle graders and young adults as a sustainable tool in literature and language education in upper primary (5-7) and lower secondary (8-10) schools.
[10] In 2020, a new curriculum (*læreplan*) for upper-primary and secondary school was approved and introduced by the Directorate, the executive organ of the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway responsible for kindergarten, primary and secondary school. The new curricula are also referred as Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020 (The Curriculum Agency for the Knowledge Promotion 2020), abbreviated as LK20. This thesis uses the new curriculum and LK20 as synonyms.

would stop being a passive victim to become, in turn, creator of diverse social, political, and cultural scenarios. As Bakara (2020) aptly reminds us, "refugee writers have always been special witnesses to the shifting ground of political life" (p. 289). In my view, these writers have not only been witnesses to the changes in political situations and experienced the consequences of theses shifts on their own bodies and lives, but they have also described and transmitted their personal and political knowledge in ways that impact artistic and aesthetic realms. The refugee literary voices I consider in my dissertation engage exactly in this type of act of aesthetic, political, and ethical storytelling.

By stating this, I do not imply that any type of political storytelling is also immediately ethical, as Sara Ahmed (2014) rightly points out in her work on how political discourses and narrative have been used to spread hate and fear against minoritized subjects and communities, for example. The relation between aesthetics and ethics in storytelling has been fiercely critiqued by some literary scholars, such as Harold Bloom (1994), who coined the expression "School of Resentment" to define scholars "who wish to overthrow the [Western] Canon in order to advance their supposed (and nonexistent) programs for social change" (p. 4). The defense of the literary Western canon against ethical elements for social justice speaks to me about the privilege and fear of change the word 'canon' brings in of itself. I do not recognize any form of competition between aesthetic, ethical, and political elements in refugee literature, but, instead, I see, in their coexistence, a form of alliance that revolutionizes and exceeds the canon towards inclusion, diversity, and equity.

The history of refugee literature, also referred in the past as exile literature, summons among its writers those authors who were exiles and refugees themselves, such as Franz Kafka, George Orwell, and, in more contemporary times, Yousif Qasmiyeh, Emithital Mahmoud, Marjane Satrapi, and Malala Yousafzai. As literature and refugee studies scholar Lyndsey Stonebridge (2020) claims, refugee writings not only portray the refugee experience but also connect it to politics and history (p. 17). In my view, refugee literature speaks about the affective and social entanglements that define the refugee subject as displaced, yes, but also as situated in and connected to historical and political moments. Through language and different literary genres, representations of refugees can engage their non-refugee readers in common response-ability for social justice, but they are not enough for social action and change (Bernard, 2020, p. 77).

Within this broad literary genre, refugee literature for children and young adults, which generally portrays young refugee characters as main protagonists (and their relations with parents and grandparent is some cases), has gained popularity in the last decades (Hope,

2018; Bernard, 2020; Rickard Rebellino, 2018). Since the publication of the first children's novel about refugees, Ian Serraillier's *The Silver Swords* (1956), a large number of authors has started to narrate their own or other people's experiences as refugees with the purpose of introducing children to this complex phenomenon. Childhood literacy and young adult literature scholar, Linda T. Parsons (2016) contends that these stories "mirror the experiences of children in our embodied world" (p. 20) and can encourage and inspire comfort and resistance, help heal from traumatic events, and foster connections (p. 21). Although these stories are of crucial importance for the discussion of contemporary displacement of young subjects, the genre of YA refugee literature has been understudied in the humanities and in the social sciences (Bernard, 2020; McWilliams, 2019).

Indigenous studies scholar Mandy Suhr-Sytsma (2019) aptly describes YA literature from the mid-twentieth century as a genre that "depicts adolescence as fluid, potential-rich, and rebellious stage that young adult people begin to move out of as they come of age and come to terms with the social institutions that shape their worlds" (p. xiv). This definition speaks to me about the genre as a sustainable narrative in as much as it represents identity as a dynamic process in definition, and it engages with power structures affecting YA peoples' lives. Furthermore, by representing problems that teens and young adults encounter in their lives together with possible solutions to overcome them, and by focalizing through the individual subject's perspective, contemporary YA literature as a genre can speak to young adults convincingly. When YA literature represents the struggles that teenagers with a refugee background can face, it can have the power to dialogue with these particular subjects and groups. Moreover, texts under the category of YA literature that Roberta S. Trites (1998) incisively defines as "subversive" (p. ix) have the power to question political and social frameworks and relations, such as borders and (in)hospitality systems that affect the lives of adolescent refugees today.

Although adolescence is a critical period of passage and change, and YA literature itself has been seen as "potent and transformative" (Talley, 2011, p. 232), the research interest in YA refugee literature has remained marginal in the field of education. In comparison, in the twenty first century, refugee literature for children has awakened the interest of researchers in educational sciences because it highlights urgent social, cultural, and political issues such as racism, violence, and inequality (Bergner, 2016; Dolan, 2014). Yet, there has been little research so far on the role of refugee literature for young adults as a sustainable tool in literature and language education in upper-primary and lower-secondary school. Previous research has studied the strategies through which this type of literature can

help refugee students identify themselves with characters in the books and non-refugee students understand and appreciate other people's lives and cultures (Stewart, 2015). Literacy scholar Mary Amanda Stewart (2015) proposes that reading and writing activities based on refugee literary stories can facilitate teachers' knowledge of their students. In her intervention as teacher and researcher, Stewart (2015) carried out a study in Texas (US) with a class of 9th and 10th graders with diverse backgrounds that was moved by the interest in understanding how readers experience refugee literature and how the genre shapes them. While working in the Norwegian context, I share with Stewart (2015) the need to explore one's positionality and the personal understanding of the students and their reading experiences. Children's literature scholar Julia Hope (2018) further investigates the uses of refugee literature to teach English literacy in primary and upper-primary schools in the UK and considers the experiences of both teachers and students. In contrast to Hope's (2018) research, my thesis expands beyond the implications of reading refugee literature in the upper-primary setting by also incorporating texts for lower secondary graders in years 8 to 10, which corresponds to an age between 13 and 16 approximately in Norway. Moreover, situating the study in Norway means discussing teaching and learning experiences in a context that is considerably mono-cultural, less diverse, and less accustomed to refugee issues[11].

My doctoral work seeks to contribute to the conversation around the literary and pedagogical value of YA refugee literature by addressing the ethics and affects this genre can bring to the English subject in the Norwegian classroom. My thesis thus participates in the field by further bringing the perspective of in-service teachers[12] with English as a foreign language, together with my own voice as literary critic and educator. My research expands the conversation started by Stewart (2015) and Hope (2018) in the school classroom by considering the role of refugee literature in the space of the university classroom. I argue that researching the university setting allows for ethical, philosophical, and critical conversations around the role of YA refugee literature in promoting social justice and sustainable pedagogical approaches based on com-passion[13] and response-ability. Moreover, this study offers an insight on the complex meanings of *sustainability* as illustrated in refugee literature

[11] In the last five years, nonetheless, the figures regarding children with refugee background between the ages of 6-15 has increased to 20.000, and those of adolescents between 16-19 years old to 10.000, adding a total of 244.660 refugees in Norway in 2022. The number of children and adolescents with refugee background attending school in Norway is not available (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2022).

[12] This thesis uses the term *in-service teachers* to signal the double positionality of the experienced teachers who are also students.

[13] Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy uses this term. For further reference, see Nancy's (2000) *Being singular plural*. In Chapter 4. "Com-passion as Pedagogy in Thi Bui's and Leila Abdelrazaq's Graphic Memoirs", I engage with this term and discuss its connection to pedagogical values in the primary texts.

through the lens of critical theory. Furthermore, I have looked at the pedagogical value of the literary texts with particular focus on how they can allow for the exploration of identity, compassion, and response-ability as essential elements in the development of what I call a *sustainable pedagogy* in the English classroom.

### 1.5 The Complexities of Sustainability: Pedagogy, Ethics, and Affect

Discussing sustainability in research today means for me, first and foremost, pointing out the criticalities inherent and connected to this notion, which has been used today across disciplines and every aspect of life to refer to resources, behaviors, and strategies. Probably the most famous and used approach to sustainability today is the UN collection of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were adopted in 2015 by the UN Member States in order to globally cooperate "for peace and prosperity, for people and the planet, now and into the future" (United Nations, n.d.). The goals cover a wide range of aspects that characterize life, from improving education, gender equality, access to resources, economic development, climate action, and peace, to a focus on sustainable cities and communities, just to mention a few. The SDGs have been quoted and written about when discussing sustainability by researchers across all disciplines today (Biermann et al., 2022; Steele & Rickards, 2021). Going against a complacent attitude toward this list of goals and an uncritical discussion of sustainability, scholars and activists in education (Wulff, 2020), Indigenous studies (Tsosie, 2018), and environmental studies (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016), have pointed out urgent issues related to the sustainability development goals, such as the separation of different goals instead of promoting an idea of sustainable development where different aspects in life are connected, or the failure to address critical issues within sustainability and the causes of underdevelopment (Consortium on Gender, Security & Human Rights, 2017). Gender scholar Valeria Esquivel (2016) aptly underlines how the SDGs fail to attend to the structural causes and lack the usage of the language of human rights (p. 18). Esquivel's (2016) work is particularly relevant in my consideration of the tensions in using the notion of sustainability next to refugee literature as these concepts do not seem to speak the same language.

The deceiving nature of the notion of sustainability has been one of the reasons for Indigenous people's historical and ongoing resistance all over the world, showing how sustainability is not a matter of development but a matter of survival. Thus, when referring to sustainability in research, it is vital to begin with the work of Indigenous scholars and activists, such as Linda T. Smith, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Kim TallBear, who

have denounced contemporary misuses of the word *sustainability* spreading the collective illusion that colonial frames and capitalist powers have ceased to exist. As they convincingly affirm, practices of sustainability are actually sustained through extraction and wasteful accumulation of resources, marginalization, aggression against minoritized subjects and groups, and cultural appropriation of their values and practices. Following their lead, in the last few years, sustainability has become a very popular and contested expression in relation to environmental issues, calling for the attention of Western scholars in the humanities and gender studies as well. I share Libe García Zarranz's (2021) awareness that our times are characterized by "inhumanity, divisiveness, and uncertainty" (p. 121), and I welcome her invitation to look for the complexities and incongruences in the term *sustainability*.

Johns-Putra et. al. (2017), editors of the collection *Literature and Sustainability*, explain that it is impossible to reduce sustainability to a single definition, but that this concept can function to initiate discussions and reflections, and they call literary scholars for an engagement with the complexity of sustainability (p. 5). Public intellectuals, academics, and activists in different areas of the humanities have engaged with the complexities of sustainability in different ways. For example, Stonebridge (2018) points out that sustainability and human rights have become a paradoxical juxtaposition. In *Refugee Imaginaries*, Stonebridge (2020) problematizes the current mainstream definition of the refugee as someone who suffers persecution (UNHCR, 1951), in opposition to voluntary migration (p. 9). Stonebridge (2020) prudently underlines that this distinction is unsustainable as attributing agency to 'voluntary migrants' erases dynamics of colonial and capitalistic persecution and violence from discourses about human rights and displacement.

Environmental humanities scholar Stacy Alaimo[14] (2012) also underlines the ambivalences of sustainability, and aptly talks of this concept as a "pervasive paradigm" (p. 564) created in connection to sustainable economies, but that today is "fueled by anti-immigration fervor as well as by the desire to entrench systemic inequalities during a tie of economic instability" (p. 559). Alaimo's (2012) words refer to a tendency in the United States, but I argue that sustainability needs to be problematized and discussed in Norway too. In the country, sustainability has become a synonym for a green approach that proposes different ways to reduce consumption, waste, and pollution. At the same time, however, Sámi reindeer herders are facing daily practices of obstruction by the government (Balto, 2017),

[14] My thesis finds inspiration in the work of environmental humanities and posthumanism, with whom I share various points of interest, but does not situate itself in these fields directly.

while Norwegian companies perpetrate aggressive colonial extractive practices that cause environmental disasters[15]. It appears obvious then, that sustainability is not sustainable for everyone, that it carries contradictions and inherent problematics, and that Norway, as other Western countries, is not engaging with this concept in a critical way.

As I have previously explained, racist and xenophobic political discourses and policies are being adopted by Norwegian politicians and institutions, while the educational system is also affected by systemic racism, and minoritized children suffer from a lack of representation in literary texts (Mpike, 2019; Svendsen, 2014). In this regard, I recognize an existing tension within the Norwegian society that demands transdisciplinary critical inquiry, including the fields of education and pedagogy as well. At the same time, I pose ethical questions to those who are involved in the conversation about sustainability at university today, including myself, to consider who is not participating in the discussion and why they are excluded from it and by whom.

Environmental humanities scholar Lynn Keller (2012) and lecturer in English Mandy Bloomfield (2014) pertinently ask who benefits from sustainability; who is sustainability for? I argue that refugee literature challenges contemporary approaches to sustainability by demanding critical considerations of ethical concepts such as voice and representation. The refugee voices clearly denounce their needs for sustainability in the familiar, social, and educational spheres they inhabit. Moreover, the young generations of refugees who narrate about issues of identity, belonging, affective relations, and response-ability participate in the discussion of sustainability by being active participants in fighting for social justice. The voices of young refugee characters in many of the primary sources discussed in this thesis show the tensions in contemporary unsustainable discourses about hospitality, such as the distinction between savior and victim that does not consider the complexities of the refugee subjects and communities. Johns-Putra et al. (2017) claim that the formulation *critical sustainability* "could reposition the term (sustainability) towards a reflection on who we are in relation to others" (p. 4). In light of that, I claim that refugee literature can be a sustainable pedagogical practice that "unsettles cosy, optimistic narratives of sustainability" (Bloomfield, 2014, p. 21).

Situating this project at the intersection of critical studies, education, and the literary field has allowed me to also visualize the ethical and the poetic aspects of sustainability with

[15] I think, for example, of the case of the Norwegian aluminum and renewable energy company Hydro (also co-owned by the Norwegian government) that polluted the land and killed at least 19 people in Brazil in 2015 (Phillips, 2018).

a specific interest in analyzing the unique contribution that literary representations of refugee subjects and communities can offer to the notion of *sustainable pedagogy* that I seek to unravel in this thesis. The tension that characterizes discourses around refugee representations and voices in society is also present in these literary contexts. Keller (2012) contends that "literature can keep us on the track towards genuine sustainability" (p. 581), emphasizing that imagining a new possible and "desirable future" is the duty of literature that aims at sustainability (p. 582). As I read Keller (2012), envisioning different scenarios of being is not only necessary, but it is what defines sustainable literary discourses (in opposition to literature that reaffirms sexist, racist, homophobic, and transphobic discourses). The literary texts that I have selected for my analysis in this thesis do meet the description of sustainable literature by Keller (2012) and engage with the project of conceptualizing a sustainable pedagogy in imaginative ways. First of all, they show the complexity of displacement, such as borders and borderlands, and the ethical and affective variables that make it intricate. These narratives do not provide a simple nor coherent answer or solution to these complexities but propose novel tools to read these intricacies and stay with them. They are also imaginative exactly because they refuse a one and for all description and representation of the refugee subjects and communities. Thus, I argue that the texts comprising the corpus of my thesis highlight how ethics, aesthetics, and affect need to be intrinsic and integral to any response-able and critical definition of sustainability.

As I affirm in this thesis, a sustainable pedagogy of refugee literature hence needs to be com-passionate, response-able, situated, uncomfortable, and made of tensions and alliances. Such a sustainable pedagogy would then open more capacious ways of reading and understanding the selected texts with a critical, affective, and ethical perspective. In this sense, a sustainable pedagogy of refugee literature would not only challenge and interrogate the readers' views on refugees (Vasquez et al., 2013) but also transform and open up alternatives of "response-ability, resistance and alliances" (García Zarranz, 2021). Significantly, the entire thesis is centered around the experience of being in relation, of touching the Other, and analyzing all the contradictions, tensions, and empowering solidarities happening in the relation.

For me, introducing these concepts and dynamics in the Norwegian university classroom entails discussing positionality issues, critically reading literary narratives of displacement in relation to contemporary representations of refugees in media and political discourses, and initiating ethical reflections on how to be an ally to refugees in educational contexts. In other words, I argue that a sustainable pedagogy needs to bring an ethical

transformation into the classroom by situating the refugee character as an embodied and relational subject at the center of the narrative. Consequently, refugee literature as a vehicle for sustainable pedagogy can allow students, through reading and interpretation, to see the power structures involved in the narratives about refugees, and lead to new affective and response-able practices in the classroom where they learn *with* refugee voices. Thus, theoretical concepts such as marginality, ethics of human rights, and affect can participate in the development of a sustainable pedagogy, recognizing how marginality is the effect of political and social power dynamics of discrimination, inequality, and assimilation. An ethical pedagogy has the Other – the one who is different from oneself (Levinas, 1985) and implies an intimate relation of response-ability – always at the center, and thus otherness remains central to ethics (Carrière, 2019). In my view, the pedagogical discussion of refugee literature cannot happen separately from an ethical and philosophical perspective; on the contrary, they enhance each other and the dialogue between the two contributes to knowledge creation in both fields. Thus, this thesis aims at intervening in the conversation happening at the intersection of the pedagogical, the literary, and the critico-ethical spheres.

### 1.6 YA Refugee Literature as Sustainable Pedagogy in the Norwegian English Classroom

In a context where Norwegian society is becoming more and more diverse, and even small towns are gaining citizens and residents with migrant or refugee background, teaching culturally and racially diverse students is becoming a daily reality. For example, 18 per cent of children of compulsory school age have an immigrant background (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d.). Schools and teachers then have the opportunity of teaching classes where that richness is increasingly present. However, educators receive little concrete or clear direction on how to make their teaching truly inclusive and just. In a study on race and racism in a Norwegian lower secondary school, pedagogy and gender scholar Stine H. Bang Svendsen (2014) points out how dynamics of racism and discrimination can take place every day in the classroom in insidious ways. Svendsen (2014) states that problems of racism and exclusion can be solved only if "the White majority accepts responsibility" (p. 21), recognizes the problem and actively tries to dismantle it. In this thesis, I attempt to engage with power dynamics in the classroom thoughtfully, paying attention to how processes of racialization can affect teaching (and research) practices also in Norway (Husu & Clamidinin, 2017).

In the context of the Norwegian society and its educational system, minority children are underrepresented, or to use Michell Mpike's words (2019), "excluded*"* from literary representation. Thus, refugee literature constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge for the implementation of diverse education in Norway. As my colleagues Angelina Penner and Agata Maria Kochaniewicz, and I (2019) discuss in the piece "Et helt uakseptabelt angrep" ("An unacceptable attack," my translation), research in social sciences in Norway has been threatened by direct attacks and accusations of being partial and biased. Thus, conducting educational research on a sustainable pedagogy through analyzing and learning with YA refugee literature seems urgent. As Suzanne S. Choo (2017) reasonably argues, in this critical historical and social moment, when threats come from radicalization and extremisms, educators need to consider how to cultivate hospitality toward the marginalized in society (p. 336). These concerns are addressed in the Norwegian Core Curriculum that refers to the importance of respecting and endorsing values such as human dignity, identity and cultural diversity, critical thinking and ethical awareness, democracy, and participation, among others, to foster a democratic environment in the classroom (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). Specifically, the section for competences in English explicitly refers to how education must lead pupils to think critically and act with ethical awareness (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a). In this thesis, I look at the aims of the curriculum in English[16] to point out in which ways they acknowledge or, in turn, avoid conversations about how to teach YA refugee literature in ethical and affective ways.

As I have presented my positionality as a non-refugee scholar, it is important to underline that none of the in-service teachers who contributed to this thesis had refugee background, and that only a few of them had experience teaching classes with refugee pupils/students, and only one in-service teacher had an immigrant background. Investigating the pedagogical value of literature, and in the particular case of this study, of refugee literature at university level with in-service teachers is a scope that requires greater scholarly exploration in the Norwegian context. Thus, this study is innovative in its inclusion of the views of the potential users of the sustainable pedagogy I develop in this thesis. The interpretative analysis of the students' essays points toward a holistic approach to education, in opposition to a model of education that aims at testing and measuring knowledge. I argue that an inclusive and just education can itself be tested and measured, possibly in other ways than through numbers, marks, and national tests, through ongoing processes of assessment

[16] An online version of the English curriculum (ENG01-04) is available here.

and evaluation to counter the social effects and affects a banking model of education can have on the individual and on the society. Alaimo (2012) points out that sustainability today has become a comfortable concept that tends to keep the problem at a safe distance from each one of us. This thesis aims to show that sustainability means instead to become involved with the problems that affect our communities. Hence, this research will hopefully be of interest and support to teachers who feel in a position of discomfort when thinking about the ethical implications of introducing refugee narratives in the classroom. Furthermore, this study seeks to attract the interest of researchers in teacher education and refugee studies, together with future teachers and in-service teachers who want to use refugee literature in the classrooms and are curious about how philosophy and other theoretical approaches can open alternative affective approaches to the teaching of refugee literature in English. My research provides a study of refugee literature in English and its use in the classroom with the hope of helping teachers talk about the ethical issues at stake when analyzing the representation of refugees with their pupils and students and prepare them to face confrontation and resistance as well.

### 1.7 Theoretical and Methodological Orientations

Taking into account that the combination of refugee literary studies and pedagogical studies is still a new approach, my PhD thesis proposes to consider critical theory, ethics, and affect as a bridge. Migration and refugee studies scholar Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2021) claims that there is a necessity for refugee studies to listen to debates happening in parallel in the fields of critical theories, such as feminist studies, and actively engage with these debates. In my view, critical theories not only serve the purpose of investigating the world, but they provide tools to envision new imaginaries and possible social dynamics. As the conversation between pedagogy, literature, and theory is an ongoing one throughout this thesis, different theoretical frameworks and concepts will be presented and included in every discussion chapter. Not only is theory a component of the chapters, but it impregnates every one of them, and flows together with the discussion.

As explained in more detail in Chapter 2, all discussion chapters bring traces of theoretical conceptualizations from refugee studies, intersectional feminist theories, theories of affect, and feminist, radical and affective pedagogies. Critical theories have informed and shaped the way I have envisioned, defined, and practiced the notion of sustainable pedagogy in relation to YA refugee literature. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) scholars such as bell hooks (1994), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have extensively dissected issues of marginalization and racism in relation to pedagogy. At the

same time, they have all pointed out how the elements of imagination, transformation, and alliances are crucial for pedagogy. Although these scholars do not have a refugee background, their feminist takes on pedagogy are fundamental in my analysis of YA refugee literature as a sustainable pedagogy, since I not only examine issues of marginalization and racism, but I also imagine ways for affective and ethical changes in educational practices through the critical incorporation of refugee narratives in the classroom.

My transdisciplinary feminist methodology has also informed my research questions and my interest in investigating the ethics and affects involved in the representation of YA refugee literature and its pedagogical value in the classroom. This has meant scrutinizing how refugee identities are represented, the affective and pedagogical agency these representations have, and the response-ability they carry with this agency. Moreover, as developed in Chapter 2, my methodology, theoretical frameworks, and research methods have allowed me to question power structures in the knowledge that refugee literature can bring to the classroom, both in my analysis of the literary representations and in the discussion of the in-service teachers' critical reflections of the primary texts.

### 1.8 Detailed Overview of Chapters

Following my Introduction, Chapter 2 offers a detailed description of my transdisciplinary feminist methodology. I here explain my choices in relation to the exploration of the complexities, tensions, and incongruences when approaching YA refugee literature as a sustainable pedagogy. Afterwards, the thesis continues with three chapters where literary and pedagogical analyses, discussions, and reflections are brought together. Every chapter offers a thorough investigation of various texts that include myriad refugee representations across various genres with a focus on the encounter with the Other as a complex, ethical, and affective borderland. Every discussion chapter ends with some pedagogical reflections deriving from my interpretation of the in-service teachers' essays and classroom conversations.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the complexities of touch as an ambivalent affective borderland as illustrated in two contemporary YA refugee novels in free verse, *The Good Braider* (2012), by Terry Farish, and *Inside Out & Back Again* (2011), by Thanhha Lai. I examine how touch can become both an oppressive affect and a site of feminist transgenerational alliance that defines the identities of the two girl protagonists, Viola and Hà. I draw on Anzaldúa's (1987) theory of the borderland to delve into the paradoxical nature of the border in the texts. I further draw on Ahmed (2014a) to analyze touch as the physical

and metaphorical act of encounter between bodies and as means of knowledge acquisition and transmission between the two refugee girls and other female characters in the stories. In the last part of the chapter, I develop the discussion around refugee literature as pedagogy by analyzing four essays written by the in-service teachers on representations of identity and cultural belonging in *The Good Braider*.

Chapter 4 explores Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* (2018) and Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi* (2015), focusing on the representation of com-passion as a pedagogy in the two graphic memoirs. I argue that com-passion allows for the creation and transmission of, once again, transgenerational knowledge. Instead of focusing on the refugee subject like I did in Chapter 3, I here explore the relation between the characters, the family, and the nation. By drawing on Lauren Berlant's (2004) theory of compassion as a site of contradictions, I look at the complexities of compassion in the two graphic memoirs. Moreover, I rely on Jean-Luc Nancy's (2000) notion of "com-passion" and Gregory Seigworth's (2020) conceptualization of affect as pedagogy to discuss the pedagogical values of com-passion in the two texts. The chapter ends with a pedagogical reflection about accessibility of literary texts and the work of accountability of book publishers today.

In Chapter 5, I analyze the voices of two teenage refugee girls as political and ethical agents of response-ability in two autobiographical novels: Martha Arual Akech and John Bul Dau's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl. Escaping Civil War* (2010) and Vesna Maric's *Bluebird: A Memoir* (2009). I unravel how response-ability touches the protagonists, Martha, John, and Vesna, and how it affects their encounters with other refugees throughout their journey and communities in the hosting countries. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas' (1985) theory of the Face, I discuss the ethics of the response-able encounter between refugees in the two autobiographies. Moreover, I rely on Karen Barad's (2012) conceptualization of "response-ability" to analyze the representations of the refugee subjects as responsible for the others and how this role affects them from a pedagogical perspective. I close the chapter with the analysis of four other essays written by different in-service teachers who engaged with the concepts of responsibility and hospitality in relation to *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*.

Finally, in my Conclusion, I propose future directions for transdisciplinary feminist research on YA refugee literature as a form of sustainable pedagogy, and offer some recommendations to my academic institution and department for enacting forms of alliance and reciprocity toward refugee subjects and communities.

# Chapter 2. Transdisciplinary Feminist Methodology: Complexities and Alliances

## Abstract

In this chapter, I present my transdisciplinary feminist methodological approach, which entails reflection on and scrutiny of the relational practices that constitute this thesis. As a model for this methodology, I follow different traditions within transdisciplinary feminist research (Taylor et al., 2020) and affective methodologies (Berlant, 2004; Seigworth, 2020). My transdisciplinary feminist methodology continues the work of these scholars, but also aims at filling the gap in research situated at the intersection of literary studies and pedagogy in the general field of teacher education. The chapter explains some ethical choices regarding terminology, positionality, and the meaning of sustainable pedagogy that are foregrounded in this thesis. I then move on to explain how a transdisciplinary feminist methodology determined the choices of literary analysis, classroom conversations, and analysis of the in-service teachers' responses to the literary texts as intertwined sources of knowledge. Thus, encountering the Other through touch is reflected not only in the relation with the primary texts, but also in my relation with the knowledge produced by the in-service teachers who contribute to the research on YA refugee literature as a pedagogical means that can bring aesthetic, ethical, and political transformation to teacher education and to the English classroom.

### 2.1 An Overview of Transdisciplinary Feminist Methodology

This chapter presents my transdisciplinary feminist methodology, which entails addressing the complexities of this approach and explaining how this framework has allowed me to develop my analysis of YA refugee literature as a form of sustainable pedagogy. As I stated in my Introduction, this methodological approach has granted me with the possibility of both engaging in the complexities of refugee representations and sustainable pedagogy, but also letting tensions and intricacies inform the design of the entire thesis. In other words, my transdisciplinary feminist methodology moves from linear and binary discourses around knowledge in research and in education to engage with the entanglements and complexities that characterize definitions and processes of creation of knowledge. These tensions start to emerge already in the definition of transdisciplinarity. The meaning of transdisciplinary research and the difference of using the prefixes inter/multi/trans is today an object of discussion with no consensus within the research community (Hirsch Hadorn, et al., 2008; Lund et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). I have looked at definitions provided by feminist researchers, such as Christina Hughes (2020), who connects transdisciplinarity to the concept of discipline and claims that disciplinarity can give the impression that "knowledge is coherent, and even absolute" while transdisciplinarity allows an understanding of knowledge as "intra-relational, situated and contingent" (p. 1). Following Hughes (2020), doing transdisciplinary research entails, first of all, questioning the meaning of discipline and disciplinary knowledge, together with the hierarchical relationships of power involved in it.

In my PhD thesis, for example, I question disciplinary boundaries and unbalanced power dynamics when I claim that critical theories and literary representations can be a form of pedagogy. For Hughes (2020), "transdisciplinarity is not, either, the same as inter-disciplinary research where a researcher may draw on more than one discipline or knowledge field but in essence leaves that disciplinary knowledge intact" (p. 2). In relation to my work, I have not used the prefix "inter-" because one of the goals of my research is precisely to let the transformation in each discipline happen. The methodology that I have designed and followed in this doctoral thesis is the result of reflections on the relational bonds, tensions, and bridges between literary studies and pedagogy. Applying a transdisciplinary feminist methodology translated into an innovative way of writing my thesis at the intersection of these disciplines. Thus, the structure of the entire thesis is informed by the intention of finding out which modes of pedagogy emerge when we put literature and education in constant dialogue (Nordstrom, 2020). In other words, I draw from stylistic elements from both fields, such as adopting the monograph format for this thesis, which traditionally

belongs to the field of literary studies, together with the incorporation of pedagogical methods used in education, such as classroom observation, and the decision to include theory in every chapter, resulting in an embedded composition.

The use of a transdisciplinary methodology helped me recognize the absence of refugee voices within academia and among teachers in the Norwegian school, and how this absence can reinforce the rhetoric of division "us/them" in teacher education. This means that refugee voices are not considered part of the knowledge creation in the academic sphere, but an object of knowledge. This system thus reinforces uneven power structures, inequality, and discrimination. In this context, I had to acknowledge my involuntary involvement in a possible act of "taking-the-space" that is not simply personal but systemic in academia. As I state in my Introductory chapter, I have always considered my position as a PhD candidate a privileged one, due to the social and economic stability it has provided me, although temporarily. However, this privilege came also together with the ethical responsibility to be accountable, acknowledge, and learn with the work of refugee scholars and actors who enact forms of resistance against erasure and discrimination in the Nordics and beyond.

Transdisciplinary research has been defined as a methodology that aims at contributing to the knowledge creation process by connecting different disciplines and seeking solutions to real-world problems (Lund et al., 2020). For this reason, it has been crucial for me to draw on the work of theorists and artists with a refugee background as one of my methodological decisions, since their work is integral to the knowledge creation process when it comes to changing stereotyped discourses and representations of refugee subjects and communities. I here consider, for example, the Palestinian poet Yousif Qasmiyeh, refugee born, raised, and educated in Baddawi Camp, who is *Refugee Hosts*' Writer-in-Residence and whose poetry functions as epistemology and methodology for 'writing' life in the camp. I have also learnt with the Sudanese American slam poet, Emithital Mahmoud (2018a), who is UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador and participated to the first TEDx Talk ever in a refugee camp, namely the Kakuma camp. The poet, who escaped Darfur at a young age with her family, uses her verses to advocate for refugee rights and fight stereotypes and barriers, providing an example of experimenting with new formats, genres and transforming a space of horror and hostility, such as the refugee camp, into a site of new knowledge. Though coming from different contexts, both Qasmiyeh (2020) and Mahmoud (2018) create knowledge that is inclusive and more ethical, providing invaluable contributions to academic research on human rights, refugee representations, and political notions, such as identity, culture, nation and responsibility, by showing how the conversation

must include all the actors in the community. Thus, I think of their poetic work as a methodology that echoes the transdisciplinary impulses in this thesis, since the borders of the literary, the pedagogical, and the ethical become "porous" (Morrison, 2019, p. 200) when trying to generate a sustainable pedagogy to analyze representations of refugee subjects and communities in contemporary YA narratives. Education scholar Jasmine B. Ulmer (2020) fittingly claims that "approaching knowledge building differently (and our various roles in it) is not only acceptable, it is necessary" (p. 243). I agree that this is key in order to interrogate, cross, and dismantle hierarchical boundaries and barriers in an academic world that, as Ahmed (2021) reminds us, is still using forms of oppression and discrimination.

Unlearning dynamics of erasure and silencing within knowledge creation in academic spaces from these authors and scholars defines the methodology of this thesis not only as transdisciplinary but also feminist. Feminist thinking embraces this thesis in its entirety, and for this reason, it is crucial I clearly define what this concept means in this thesis. In this attempt, I find Ahmed's (2017) words about living a feminist life of great inspiration:

> [feminism] does not mean adopting a set of ideals or norms of conduct, although it might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world (in a not-feminist and antifeminist world); how to create relationships with others that are more equal; how to find ways to support those who are not supported or are less supported by social systems; how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls. (p. 1)

For me, a feminist methodology is informed by the inequities and borders that define society and educational systems also in Norway (Svendsen & Skotnes, 2022). This awareness brings me to ask ethical questions about how to live with these tensions and attempt to resist them. It appears clear, then, that my research is grounded on a long tradition of feminist anti-racist scholarship and activism. In particular, Audre Lorde's (1984) Black feminist theories, Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) Chicana theory of the borderland, Judith Butler's (2009) insights on vulnerability, and Sara Ahmed's (2014) conceptualization of affect have informed the feminist framework of this thesis. They have all inspired my work as they challenge discriminatory, patriarchal, and racist politics, while proposing more ethically just and equitable social and political imaginaries. These feminist theorists, scholars, activists, and writers speak raw and brave words that denounce the injustices, marginalization, and inequity that some social groups experience, not sparing their readers any discomfort and uneasiness.

At the same time, their poetics of imagining new ways of being, becoming, and living do not offer simple answers but are deeply founded in the complexities, entanglements, and ruptures of sharing political and social spaces. One voice among them, the self-identified Third-World feminist scholar Uma Narayan (1998), invites readers to stay with the contradictions that are necessary and needed in research. The difficulty of learning to stay with discomfort and tension are some elements that define my methodology too, since my formulation *sustainable pedagogy* does not have the goal of finding simple answers and solutions but, in feminist philosophers Donna Haraway's fashion, "stays with the tension" as part of the research process. According to Hughes (2020), "Transdisciplinarity requires a feminist researcher to be both traveller and novitiate as we have to consistently and repeatedly leave our disciplinary comfort zones and go into unfamiliar knowledge fields often without a map or wayfinder" (p. 2). Together with some discomfort for crossing beyond the familiar and the known, the traveler and the novitiate need curiosity, imagination, and wonder in order to find their way into unfamiliar knowledge fields. In my view, a transdisciplinary feminist methodology designed to examine representations of refugee communities and their pedagogical value allows for ethical and affective research to happen, while enabling the confrontation with the fact that we, academics, do not own absolute knowledge, and still want to find novel ways of knowing and learning with. This thesis is hopefully innovative in its intention to act as a bridge between different disciplines, proving that being in the borderland of transdisciplinarity can be uncomfortable but crucial for the establishment of fruitful and sustainable conversations with subjects and communities within and outside academia.

### 2.2 Sustainability: A Quest to Transdisciplinarity

Engaging in constructive conversations entails addressing the critical issues clinging to discourses and definitions of sustainability today. My transdisciplinary feminist methodology aims at thoroughly engaging with a problematic and contested term that is currently used for various purposes in political, environmental, and social spheres. As explained in detail in the Introduction, my approach further attends to the challenges of using 'sustainability' as a concept with inherent ethical values. Inclusion and ethical research, two concepts that have been the focus of attention of transdisciplinary feminist research, are fundamental in my definition of sustainable pedagogy. Thus, my methodology also contributes to my formulation of *sustainable pedagogy* via YA refugee literature, since it is a pedagogy based on ethical research for social justice. According to researcher, author, and teacher Helen Kara (2020), "Using a transformative research framework may help all

concerned to address power imbalances and differences within the research project but doing so will still take time and effort above and beyond that needed for core research tasks" (p. 54). Throughout the research process, I have listened to Kara's words attentively and reflected on my own positionality and the issues of authority and power imbalance that it brings within itself. I am aware that adopting a transdisciplinary feminist methodology does not automatically translate into a positive change, as Kara (2020) rightly underlines. Therefore, ongoing questions about power dynamics within literature, pedagogy, and sustainability discourses and practices have become central in my thesis.

The choice of a transdisciplinary feminist methodology to study sustainability has been pursued by other colleagues in literary studies also in Norway. I think, for example, of Musiol's (2021) transdisciplinary project *Narrating Sustainability*, which tries to grasp the complexities of sustainable discourses from the humanities, environmental psychology studies, and design. I could also mention the transdisciplinary group led by García Zarranz, *TransLit: Sustainable Ethics, Affects, and Pedagogies* (2018-2022), of which I have been a member. Participating in this research has meant to continuously engage with issues of sustainability in the context of the English classroom. Moreover, a critical look at sustainability discourses within academia led me to recognize the ambivalences and incongruences that characterize them, as I have explained in my Introduction, and as I continue exploring in my discussion chapters.

Speaking of paradox, I would like to refer to some news that reached me on the university channel in the spring of 2022 and that continued shaping my methodological framework: NTNU decided to open its doors and 'gates' to thousands of Ukrainian students from Autumn 2022. These were indeed some welcoming news in terms of hospitality and responsibility towards refugee subjects and communities, and a sign that Norway is open to what these students and researchers can offer to the educational environment here. As I celebrated these needed news, I could not help but also think about the many refugees from the global South whose degrees and qualifications are not recognized as valid here in Norway; teachers, museologists, political scientists, lawyers, and philosophers whose previous knowledge and education is daily devalued in this country. In my view, this situation is simply unsustainable. Norwegian-Maltese journalist, translator, and human rights activist, Kristina Quintano (2022), among others, has asked if racism and Islamophobia can be a reason behind the double standards that we witness today in the refugee policies in Europe, including the Nordic countries (20:46). Racism is present in Norway in all spheres of social, economic, and political life, from color-blind behaviors, savior discourses, and lack of

awareness of discriminating dynamics, to the more evident and visible hate speeches (Mjøs Persen, 2022).

A transdisciplinary feminist methodology brings awareness and knowledge about the tensions in the affective encounters between humans, showing how this term has in itself conflicting and problematic connotations such as racism, vulnerability, precarity, marginalization, and invisibility of refugee subjects and communities (Arendt, 2003). I must also point out the homogenous whiteness that characterizes this same educational and research institution where I have written this PhD. During Migration Literature Week 2021, I had the pleasure to converse in person with Quintano, together with Iranian Kurd writer and refugee Behrouz Boochani, author of *No Friends but the Mountains* (2018) where he describes his incarceration in the Australian asylum prisons in Papua New Guinea. From our conversation emerged the urgent need for defining racism in Norwegian society as a contemporary existing problem that fails to reach the sustainable goal of inclusive and equitable education, while contributing to defining Norwegian society in its identity and forms (Boochani and Quintano, 2021). Refugee stories today demand that we do not take for granted the meaning of *human being*, also considering the fact that the educational system and the curriculum in Norway rely deeply on this term and on the related concept of *human rights* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b). This thesis aims at unsettling and making oppressive discourses and practices visible, while proposing a model of transformative ethical, affective, and response-able pedagogy. I emphasize that a transdisciplinary feminist methodology is imperative to capture the nuances involved in the contested notion of sustainability. This means looking at the relational, ethical, and affective dimensions of sustainability in relation to YA refugee literature today and in my conceptualization of *sustainable pedagogy*. In this way, the reading, researching, teaching and learning with the literary representations of refugee subjects and communities in these narratives poses ethical questions and demands that connect tightly to the field of sustainability studies (Bloomfield, 2014; Musiol, 2021). At the same time, my sustainable pedagogy urges a reconsideration of the role of affect and emotion as necessarily entangled with ethical and educational issues, as I explain next.

### 2.3 Affect and Ethics as Methodological Lenses

When applied to my transdisciplinary feminist methodology, affect is the concept that crosses the borders of the literary and the pedagogical, hence becoming a foundational tool for my research. Affect becomes the borderland where relations, tensions, hybridity, and

imagination can happen, opening up for the possibility of a new ethics of literary and pedagogical research in the Norwegian contexts. Research-creation and education scholar Stephanie Springgay (2011) reflects on affect as "not benign or innate and given, but co-produced through proximal encounters – then, how we understand affect shifts from something passively bound to the body to an event that is becoming" (p. 79). Relying on Springgay (2011), I consider affect as a methodological tool that allows the researcher to recognize the tensions that constitute the relational encounter with the Other. Applying affect to the formulation of *sustainable pedagogy* brings touch, relationality and borderland as complex spaces and places to the front. In other words, knowledge is formed by the embodied, interrelated affective encounter. Thus, affect as a methodological lens is another piece in the intricate puzzle of the variety of knowledges integral to an understanding of YA refugee literature as sustainable pedagogy, as I argue in this thesis.

Affect is, for example, one of the constant themes of my literary analysis, as illustrated in Chapter 3 where I explore the complex relational bond between mothers and daughters in displacement; when I analyze the com-passionate relationship between refugee character and family, on the one hand, and the nation, on the other in Chapter 4; or when I examine the response-able encounters among refugees in Chapter 5. Furthermore, affect constitutes a concept that is central to the theoretical framework in this thesis. My interest in the role of affect and emotion in refugee narratives has been strongly influenced by Ahmed's scholarship (2014). In her work about how emotions circulate within societies, shaping bodies and spaces, I have found a resonance with my personal way of experiencing and reading the world, together with my understanding of knowledge, of what constitutes it, how we gain it, and exchange it. The initial positioning of my research in relation to the field of affect studies found further confirmation when I designed my methodological approach, and with the investigation of pedagogies of affect. Pedagogy for me is not a solitary event, but it takes place as a shared experience. Relationality and the idea of sharing affectively is hence integral to my methodological and theoretical frameworks and to the refugee literature under study.

Drawing on theories of affect as a relational force within research has allowed me to develop my transdisciplinary feminist methodology and the choice of methods around relationality. Seigworth (2020) states that "…affect study should never settle (like dust), resolve (like precipitate in a solution), or establish some kind of boundary or border for what counts as 'in' and 'out'" (p. 93). His words resonate with my methodology in that it is fluid and it emerges in full affective form across disciplinary boundaries. Bridging literary studies,

feminist theories, and refugee studies to develop a sustainable pedagogy of literature has become a joyful experience. García Zarranz (2016) contends that joy can become an "ethics of dissent in relation to feminist practice" (p. 17) and wonders what would happen to academia if "joyful insurrection" became "contagious" in higher education (p. 24). In relation to my methodological choices, and my project as a whole, joyful insurrection means feeling and walking research paths that are inclusive and response-able.

The formulation of critical humility by English and multimedia scholar, Warren Cariou (2020) guided me in this learning process. Cariou, who is of Métis and European heritage, discusses how critics of Indigenous literature need to learn from Indigenous storytellers and the Elders that humility is a value in teaching and learning:

> Humility has an openness to learning. As a mode of listening. A way of showing respect, to the world, to the people speaking, and to the gift of the universe itself. In order to listen, you must be humble enough to put your own thoughts out of your mind, to make that effort to follow thoughts of another person in a sustained, respectful, and engaged way. (p. 6)

Cariou's (2020) words speak directly to my formulation of sustainable pedagogy where listening with respect and engagement is a fundamental part of the encounter with the Other. This process of listening with humility further requires the embracement of discomfort as a pedagogical tool in order to practice a form of sustainable pedagogy. For example, a transdisciplinary feminist methodology has allowed me to recognize that adopting an ethics of positionality in my research did not come only with a sense of humility, but also with discomfort. It is essential that I acknowledge here the work of Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou, Māori) (1999; 2021) who claims that the term *research* is "one of the dirtiest words" (p. 1) in Indigenous communities and proposes a different way of doing research where Indigenous Peoples are the subjects instead of the objects of knowledge. Integrating positionality as one of the core ethical bases of this research has brought me to face contemporary practices of Western colonial appropriation. It is then crucial to admit that this project does not look at the complex position of the refugee subjects and communities who are resettled on Indigenous lands, and how this situation affects even more the safety of Indigenous peoples, including Sámi Peoples.

The tension and discomfort that characterize feminist research is present already in positioning myself as a white researcher, and an outsider both to the refugee community and to the community of Norwegian teachers. My self-location has then complicated my position within the Norwegian educational system and in the EFL classroom in Norway. Throughout

my research path, I have had the ethical obligation not to ignore this friction but acknowledge it and make it part of my methodology. Writing a discussion of the in-service teachers' essays did not come without discomfort, since the awareness that their words brought were the results of many years of previous experience in the Norwegian educational context, which I started to know only in 2015, when I moved to Norway. Interpreting and commenting on someone else's work puts the author of the essay in a vulnerable position and the researcher/writer in a position of power. Moreover, I cannot forget to mention the feeling of disappointment that emerged at times when reading and analyzing some of the essays written by the in-service teachers caused by some expectations I had in relation to their academic performances. As Duggan and García Zarranz (2022) contend, "[d]iscomfort makes us rethink our position(s). It makes as aware of things we don't want to acknowledge" (p. 5). Looking at my own discomfort in the eye made me recognize I was uncomfortable because the students did not learn everything I thought was important, thus I had failed as a teacher. This recognition permitted me to move from disappointment to care towards the types of knowledge the in-service teachers were offering to me and to this study.

Allowing discomfort in the pedagogical and research relation permitted to engage with ethics of response-ability. According to Mark Boylan (2017), "investigating specific pedagogical practices, frameworks for conceptualizing critical teacher education pedagogy need to be developed and interrogated, such as the model of pedagogies of discomfort, enquiry, compassion and respect" (p. 381). A constant critical interrogation of my practices and an understanding of discomfort as an ethical feeling in the learning process towards transformation have thus characterized the research process of this thesis. Recognizing the discomfort, tensions, and the contradictions, staying with them, and learning with them are integral parts of my methodology. Transformation can certainly be uncomfortable. In this sense, Michalinos Zembylas' (2015) concept of *pedagogy of discomfort* has also influenced my research position. Zembylas (2015) describes pedagogy of discomfort as "grounded upon the idea that discomforting feelings are valuable in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities and thus create openings for individual and social transformation" (p. 170). Zembylas (2015), who extensively draws on Butler's ethics of vulnerability and responsibility to discuss the relationship between discomfort and education, claims that discomfort can happen in the classroom in a context of safety, where students and teachers can address uncomfortable topics and imagine also new scenarios and pedagogical imaginaries. His view on the pedagogical value of acknowledging discomfort as necessary for the learning process is also a crucial aspect of my formulation of

a sustainable pedagogy because in order for social transformation to occur, the entire community needs to participate in the dialogue, even if that means discomforting those of us occupying unequal positions of privilege and power, for example.

### 2.4 Selecting the Literary Corpus: A Feminist Venture Crossing Liminal Spaces

Practices of inclusion and response-ability have also guided my transdisciplinary feminist methodology regarding the choice of the literary corpus of this research. As detailed in my Introduction, I have analyzed six contemporary primary texts in this thesis: *The Good Braider*, *Inside Out and Back Again*, *Baddawi*, *The Best We Could Do*, *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan*, and *Bluebird: A Memoir*. These are all texts that are deemed suitable for young adults (+12 age), thus can be defined as YA literature. Adopting a methodology that looks at tensions and borderlands also allowed me to consider the liminality of YA literature in relation to the definition of young adulthood, youth, and adolescence. As James Bucky Carter (2014) aptly points out, youth is a "social construct" (p. 51). It varies socially, culturally, geographically, and historically. Karen Coats' (2011) defines adolescence as "defined by its state of flux and impermanence. Adolescence is a phase someone goes through" (p. 325). In this thesis, having an open definition of young adult is important not only in consideration of the possible readers[17], but also in relation to the young refugee characters who are represented in these texts.

In order to engage also in conversation with the peculiarity of every genre, and to discuss how the primary texts can challenge and transform the canon, I decided to pair the texts according to their genre—two novels in free verse by Farish and Lai, two graphic memoirs by Bui and Abdelrazaq, and, lastly, two autobiographical novels by Akech, Dau, and Maric. The decision to compare the primary texts according to form emerged from my desire to investigate how different literary genres offer diverse forms of representation of the refugee characters, and how certain themes were represented in distinct ways within the same genre. The different but related themes such as borderland, com-passion, and response-ability together with interrelated ethical and emotional aspects portrayed in the narratives are discussed in Chapter 3,4, and 5. Ethical criteria in relation to plot, authorship, and the ethics of the publishers have further informed my choice of corpus.

[17] I here think, for example, of the composition of the in-service teachers' classes, whose pupils' age might be from 11 to 15+ years.

All primary texts represent stories of teenagers in contexts of displacement and refuge in ethical, respectful, and non-stereotypical ways. However, it is important to signal that the reader encounters not only the younger protagonists, but also the stories of the family members and other refugees Viola, Hà, Thi, Ahmed, Martha, John, and Vesna meet throughout their narratives. Furthermore, the narrative voices in all the texts are the ones of the refugee subjects, which is crucial for centering the refugee experience as a source of knowledge. The positionality of the authors, also, was a crucial aspect for me to consider in relation to issues of ethical representation of refugees. Some authors are refugees themselves, have a family history of flight, or have had close contact with refugees, whereas others are interested and specialized in migration literature, for instance. In my view, they all share the ethical impulse to write about refugee stories from alternative points of view and help raise awareness and activate empathy and other complex affects among readers.

Lastly, looking at the ethics of the publishers meant considering possible efforts of the publishing companies to foster practices of inclusion and to engage in educational practices. Although I engaged in a work of feminist care and pedagogy in choosing the primary texts, having in mind that the in-service teachers could use them in their own school classrooms, I have identified two particularly critical points in the representations I have chosen. The first one is the absence of LGBTQ+ characters in these texts. The other one is an absence which I have noted in refugee literature in general, namely the lack of representations of displacement due to environmental reasons. While sustainability discourses and concerns within academia and research are mostly focusing on ecocriticism and environmental humanities (Myren-Svelstad, 2020; Ruthven, 2021), the literary corpus of this thesis does not engage explicitly in these considerations. In turn, the main focus of attention in the selected texts is on the condition of the human being in relation to self and others with a focus on ethical, affective, and relational processes. The attention to ethics and affect of the encounter also is present in my approach to my methods, which I explain next.

### 2.5 Feminist Transdisciplinary Methods: Literary Analysis and Pedagogical Reflections

Working at the intersection of different disciplines has allowed me to adopt methods that traditionally belong to different fields, including literary studies and education studies. According to Kara (2020), "the methods must flow from research questions, and not the other way around" (p. 237). My research questions about sustainable pedagogies in relation to YA refugee literature, together with my transdisciplinary feminist methodology, have determined the choice of my methods. As Alexandra Allan (2012) explains, feminist research is

intimately concerned with the ethical issues of power, representation, and voice in the relationship between researchers and what is being researched, and how they must be handled in sustainable ways (p. 99). In my thesis, I have combined literary analysis with pedagogical methods, such as classroom observations, conversations and analysis of the in-service teachers' responses to the literary texts, with the purpose to discuss in a transdisciplinary way how refugee subjects and communities are represented in YA refugee literature, the role of ethics and affect in these portrayals, and what values YA refugee literature can bring to the English classroom in Norway in relation to the new curriculum.

In part, this thesis reflects on discourses and practices in English didactics happening in this very moment in Norway. The LK20 also refers to the necessity to engage pupils with ethical concepts such as democracy, human dignity, and citizenship, in line with international measures (Dypedhal & Lund, 2020, p. 11). Throughout my discussion of the values of YA refugee literature in the English classroom, I have been in conversation with the LK20 to identify the ways the genre fits in it. This dialogue is crucial to situate this project in the field of research in teacher knowledge, in particular in relation to the "understanding of curriculum content and goals" (Toom, 2017, p. 808). It appears clear, then, that the literary and the pedagogical are closely intertwined and entangled in this thesis, which engages in an innovative form of literary analysis that brings together also other methods from the field of pedagogy and social studies. The literary analysis combines close-reading and interpretations of the primary texts, positionality narratives, and critical theory. Throughout my analysis, the quotes are intertwined with my voice as a researcher via contextualization, interpretation, and incorporation within my narrative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 232). I have been using different types of quotes: short, eye-catching quotations, embedded quotes, and longer quotations (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 233). These combinations are significant as short quotations can be more incisive, while longer quotes allowed me to dive deeper into the authors' perspectives and connect these ideas to develop and strengthen my argument.

In considering the encounter with literary texts as a practice of *learning with*, I bear in mind the work of education and affect scholar Bessy Dernikos (2018), who gracefully describes her relation with 'data' in these terms: "I did not treat data as if it were a still object that I could dissect and examine […] I view all data as alive – as active matter with which I might engage in ongoing and opened conversations" (p. 13). Her vital words speak to me about how the relational, ethical, and affective nature of research has worked as a compass in my relationship with YA refugee literature I have encountered while writing this thesis. Together with close reading of the primary texts, I have also analyzed and discussed the in-

service teachers' critical responses to the texts, read copious feedback on my writing, heard challenging questions from my supervisors, critical friends, and colleagues during conference presentations, Q&As and teaching at NTNU. According to Ulmer (2020), including these conversations and acknowledging how they shape and informed our writing are feminist practices that contribute to creating knowledge differently:

> In order to inflate our achievements and sense of scholarly worth, we are encouraged not only to erase our immediate friends and colleagues, but also the scholars who have influenced our work. Refusing to do that is, I suggest, a modest but important feminist task. (Ulmer, 2020, p. 245)

Ulmer (2020) hence encourages transdisciplinary feminist researchers to "write in a way that is actually relational" to the communities that researchers belong to (p. 244). Approaching my research as a relational encounter situated me as one of the myriad voices discussed in this thesis, and it also gave me a joyful sense of belonging with the tensions and affective imaginaries this transdisciplinary feminist methodology advocates for. By valorizing a transdisciplinary, affective transformative pedagogy, this thesis brings the importance of relationality at the center, together with the refugee subjects that inhabit them. Learning with the borderland in affective and ethical way is mandatory for a sustained and sustainable transformative pedagogy, as I claim in this thesis.

Furthermore, this thesis unravels the relation between refugee literature and pedagogy, focusing on how the literary can inform processes of teaching and learning, and the development of one's awareness and positionality as a teacher. According to Grossman and McDonald (2008), it is necessary for researchers in this field to address "the complexities of both teaching as a practice and the preparation of teachers" (p. 184). This study addresses these complexities by discussing how teaching and teachers' preparation for it can be shaped, and perhaps transformed, through being exposed to YA refugee literature (Dernikos, 2018). I have considered how the encounter with refugee literature has shaped my location as a researcher/teacher, and how the in-service teachers understand this encounter in their essays. In particular, I have looked at the tensions and complexities that YA refugee literature can bring to the English classroom in relation to the role of teachers in the pedagogical event of the classroom, and to some curriculum objectives connected to intercultural competence.

### 2.5.1 Teaching as Ethical and Affective Praxis

In this practice of weaving together literary analysis and interpretation, together with other pedagogical reflections, teaching has played a pivotal role as integral element to my

methodology. The classroom has functioned as a sounding board for my personal interpretations of theories and primary texts, because I could discuss these aspects with the in-service students who participated in my study[18]. During teaching, the communal aspect of knowledge creation and collective reflection took place. Bringing theory to the classroom has taught me that no theory is absolute, but, in Haraway's terms (1988), *situated*. Listening to how a theory resonates with us is a crucial approach to philosophical and theoretical debates, and in research in general, and defines teaching as a listening practice between teachers and students. As Shor (1987) properly states, "the primary goal is for theory to embrace everyday living. This problem of merging critical thought with daily life is always a challenge. Perhaps nowhere is it more important than in teaching" (p. 3). Using theory in the classroom was a challenging opportunity as it required me to both understand it and translate it for the students, make it digestible, but also be open to their interpretations, unexpected twists and unpredictable comments or questions. Thus, theory opened for reflections, for situating me and the students in relation to the words we were reading, and offered moments of transformation, both for me and the students. Moreover, these theorical discussions served the purpose of preparing the in-service teachers for the task of writing their literary and pedagogical analysis of one of the primary texts. Transformation in my understanding of pedagogy stands on the fundamental principle that teachers do not own the knowledge, but the process of knowledge transmission is a collective relationship between the teacher and the students (hooks, 1994). Ethical reflections through the reading and interpretation of critical theories have shaped my understanding of education and my performing of the role of teacher and researcher. It means to me that there is a constant reflection on my role, on the power dynamics in the classroom, on the vulnerability component existing in the educational process.

My understanding of teaching as a complex practice and my interest in the relation between refugee literature and the English curriculum in Norway. Their essays have pedagogical value as well as insight into the process of researching teacher education, where the student is also an experienced teacher familiar with the Norwegian social and educational contexts. Addressing the additional question about the relation between YA refugee literature and the new curriculum has been crucial in my formulation of *sustainable pedagogy* as the school curriculum was undergoing a general change in 2020. As Grossman and McDonald

[18] It is important to underline that similar conversations happened also with other groups of students in other courses, but only a group attending the LVUT8083 English 1 (5-10) course participated in writing the academic essays that I have included in this thesis.

(2008) aptly claim, "teacher education programs respond to changing conditions and policy shifts" (p. 186). This consideration is key for my interpretation of the connection between the new curriculum and the pedagogy of refugee literature in teacher education, in particular to understand how preparing the in-service teachers intellectually, ethically, and responsibly speaks to the criteria in the new curriculum for English. As Sandra Cooke (2017) rightly claims, "for ethical deliberation to be part of the reflective process, the teacher must first have ethical knowledge" (p. 429). Aware of this crucial step, discussing ethical concepts and gaining ethical knowledge have been essential preparatory phases for the in-service teachers' analysis of the literary texts. In relation to my own analysis of their pedagogical reflections, in turn, gaining knowledge about the ethics and affect of teaching was fundamental for attaining to the task of interpreting their essays.

### 2.5.2 The In-service Teachers and their Essays as Sustainable Knowledge

The in-service teachers also acted as researchers[19] when they conducted literary analysis of two primary texts. According to Grossman and McDonald (2008), "teacher education exists at the nexus of multiple institutional and policy contexts" (p. 185). Involving in-service teachers in this study allowed the consideration of the multiple institutions they belong to – the university classroom and the school classroom. Their perspectives, knowledges, positionalities, and needs are crucial features in the creation of knowledge in the field as they contain the complexities of the different institutions involved in the pedagogical process. Considering their previous knowledge and experience, and the relevance for their professionalization was compelling for the design of the task, where literary analysis is strictly connected to theories and curricula/pedagogical objectives[20]. My transdisciplinary feminist methodology determined my analytical approach to the in-service teachers' contributions in the sense that I recognized the tensions between problematical approaches and more ethical and response-able reflections they shared with me in their essays. In other words, the in-service teachers' critical responses to YA refugee literature expand the investigation of the complexities these representations can bring to the English classroom in Norway. Their contributions, through group conversations and personal reflections in their

[19] For their academic essays, the in-service teachers were asked to use peer-reviewed sources, which meant for them to familiarize with the research process. Moreover, they read Achille Mbembe's (2018) Address at the Holberg Debate and Hannah Arendt's (2007), We Refugees (See References for complete titles).
[20] In 2020, during the course with the cohort of in-service teachers, I designed three tasks for them to chose one for their individual text assignments (See Appendix B). Two of the tasks, which were chosen by the eight in-service teachers who participated to this study, are also included in Chapter 3 and 5.

written essays, constitute invaluable knowledge about the current educational system in Norway. As I will discuss in detail in Chapters 3 and 5, these essays offer strategies for introducing this literature in the English classroom. At the same time, their materials have allowed me to consider what competences are needed today by teachers in Norway in order to adopt a sustainable pedagogy through YA refugee literature.

In Norway, the doctoral research that has focused on the role of literature in English didactics amounts to four theses, to my knowledge (Larsen, 2009; Lund, 2007; Munden, 2010; Wiland, 2009). Ulrikke Rindal and Lisbeth M. Brevik (2019) claim that there is a lack of research on pedagogies of literature and/or on "teachers' and students' perceptions related to such teaching" (p. 428). Thus, this thesis aims at contributing to this critical conversation, beginning to fill this gap in research in Norway by focusing specifically on the pedagogical, ethical and affective role of refugee literature in the English subject and the in-service teachers' perceptions of its teaching. As Beck and Kosnik (2017) prudently state: "As emerging experts, then, teachers should have a major voice both in the organization of ongoing learning sessions and in the discussions that occur within those sessions. This serves to increase the quality and value of in-service professional development initiatives" (p. 116). In this thesis, the in-service teachers were the experts of their classroom dynamics and their encounters with their pupils, together with the knowledge they brought about the Norwegian school system. Thus, the tasks I formulated had to be relevant for them. Moreover, listening to them, reflecting out loud during our first session, allowed me to shape our upcoming classes. I understood what was relevant for them, what theory needed to be discussed together, and what elements they did not consider and needed to be tackled as a collective. In discussing educational research, education scholar Gert Biesta (2020) claims that "the purpose of education is to educate students" (p. 151). I consider this definition incomplete as during the pedagogical encounter, teachers *and* students learn together. The in-service teachers' role as both teachers and learners speak to my formulation of sustainable pedagogy as a practice where teachers constantly learn together with the students, and thus, where I, as their teacher, co-learnt with them.

Consequently, this plurality of voices and knowledges demonstrates an attentiveness to the ethics of knowledge creation in this academic setting and the need to include perspectives from in-service teachers, not as data and participants, but as active agents of knowledge co-creation in the fields of literature and education. In light of this ethical

consideration, the in-service teachers are addressed as *Authors*[21] in my discussion chapters, in order to signal a shift from an extractive interaction to a more equal and intimate practice of co-creation.

### 2.5.3 The Role of Reflexivity, Creativity, and Intuition in the Research Process: Positionality and Discomfort as Sustainable Pedagogical Ethics

My transdisciplinary feminist methodology has required reflexivity, creativity, and intuition, not only intended as tools but also as necessary processes that I have gradually learnt while writing this thesis on the complexities of YA refugee literature as a sustainable pedagogy. Kara (2020) claims that "reflexivity locates you within the research" and allows the researcher to pause and ask themselves questions about their positionality within the research process, their emotions, and their knowledge, the understanding that the researcher in not neutral in the research process but is affected by it (pp. 95-96). The classroom conversations, for example, fostered my reflexivity and were vital for it to happen in order to process the in-service teachers' words in the classroom. Ulmer (2020) defines her experience of "listening" during data collection and interaction with research participants as a "practice" (p. 239). Entering the classroom environment gradually and getting to know the in-service teachers allowed me to practice listening[22] to their words, needs and contributions. Furthermore, I became attentive to classroom dynamics and allowed them to further guide my research questions, the classroom conversations, and the writing of my critical literary analysis.

Together with reflexivity, the encounter with the in-service teachers and with YA refugee literature has also allowed me to adopt creativity and intuition as integral elements of my research. As Kara (2020) sensibly points out, "creativity is understood differently in different countries" (p. 14). Reflecting on the meaning of creativity in Norway has permitted me to gain a deeper insight into the educational system in the country and also the perspectives of the in-service teachers when they analyzed the primary texts that I proposed to them in the classroom. According to Smith and Carlsson (2006), "in Scandinavian countries creativity is seen as an individual attitude that helps people to cope with the challenges of life" (p. 202). Following this line of inquiry, creativity is thus a form of

[21] The use of italics is to stress the empirical material the in-service teachers contribute with to the study.
[22] By looking at listening from both Indigenous and settler colonial perspectives in Canada, Dylan Robinson (2020) reflects on ways to decolonize practices of listening in music and sound studies in *Hungry Listening. Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*.

'healing' activity or strategy to face obstacles. If applied to research, the Scandinavian intuition of the healing power of creativity, along the troublesome path of doing research, seems to me an extremely positive aspect to remember. Creativity as that 'super' tool to overcome obstacles and struggles. Thinking creatively through the lenses of feminist theories has brought me to a personal shift with regards to the world of education. As Zoe Todd (2016) accurately claims, the shift carries an uncomfortable feeling with itself (p. 15). The experience of discomfort was a necessary step in my research that allowed me to define my position in relation to education and the power relations that define it. According to Bridges et al. (1997), "education is an area of research in which the change that is sought is one in which individual (personal) and collective (public) change is crucial. So educational research is research which participates in both personal and political changes" (p. 193). This thesis brings the personal experience to the level of the political, intended as the community and the encounter with the Other. Personal pedagogical practices are political as they affect and are affected by the Other; thus, they need to be sustainable, which means ethical, affective, and transformative regarding the power inequities that define current classroom dynamics in Norway.

According to Kara (2020), using creativity in research also involves the element of intuition as a feature of "human knowing" (p. 15) [23]. Intuition is present in all phases of the study from my close reading of theories and of the primary texts, to the choice of the theme of the analysis and my re-storying. Intuition and creativity have further helped me in several different moments of my research. One example is when, in my first year, inspired by *The Good Braider*, I wrote my first conference paper in free verse. Using the poetic word to write an academic text granted me the possibility to connect scrupulously and more intimately with the primary text and the feminist theories I was presenting in my research. Moreover, poetry allowed me to express my vulnerabilities as a first-year doctoral student presenting at an international conference for the first time. I let myself be really touched by the novel and the poetic and theoretical words of feminist and queer authors, such as Adrienne Rich (1972), Audre Lorde (1984), and Judith Butler (2009). Thus, creative thinking and trusting my intuition opened the doors to alternative forms of writing to the canonical academic paper. Looking at research in a creative and intuitive way has further allowed me to find methods

[23] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (2017) with a long list of other contributors across disciplines provide interesting insights into the ways human and other-than-human can live and learn together to survive in the Anthropocene, in their collection *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*.

that "resist the familiar, the assumed and the taken-for-granted" (Mannay, 2016, p. 32). For me, resisting the familiar means becoming aware of the canonical and challenge my thinking process with new ideas, while resisting the assumed, which means to become aware of any stereotypical views I could have on the society I live and work in. Furthermore, reflexivity and intuition helped me in the choice of writing this thesis as a monograph. More than the format itself, intuition and reflexivity, combined together, drive the story of this thesis, chapter after chapter. In this way, the story of touch as a relational complex borderland that I discuss in Chapter 3 further applies to the whole study, which was built word after word, chapter after chapter. Even the focus on the senses was due to intuition, as the sensorial experiences of the characters in *The Good Braider* and *Inside Out & Back Again* poetically resonated with me. As well, trusting my intuition was vital for finding the tensions and pedagogical lessons in the in-service teachers' essays.

In approaching research with creativity and intuition, I have searched for "allies" to have by my side along my research journey. As the example of creative writing of my first conference paper shows, theory has been my best and trustworthy friend. Theory – the "lens through which you can focus your investigation" (Kara, 2020, p. 86) – is a dynamic, orienting compass that guides the researcher from the first steps of thinking the research questions to the dissemination of the results. Kara (2020) further points out that it is necessary for a researcher to become aware of the influence theories have on their way of seeing, feeling, and thinking (p. 87). In the first reading stage of my PhD, I have trusted my emotions and feelings, and listened to how the theories I was reading were resonating with me and my previous knowledge, preconceptions, and epistemology of the world. In this way, theory connects to the creative, intuitive, and emotional aspects of my research.

However, a transdisciplinary feminist methodology has also informed my understanding of being an ally for refugee subjects and communities, a position that carries in itself important ethical tensions. As gender and culture scholar Anne Mulhall (2020) properly puts it, being an ally is close to solidarity and "entails challenging an order of things of which [people in academia] are beneficiaries and that in doing so we may free up some space for people to do the creative and intellectual worldmaking that only they can do" (p. 98). Recognizing the existence and the necessity of contradictions within the alliances themselves is a necessary step in order to resist and allow transformation. Recognizing the tension in being an ally meant to not see myself as someone who gives voice, sadly a too common expression which wrongly implies their lack of voices and perpetuates violent silencing practices, whereas instead to define my role of literary critic, teacher and researcher as an

"amplifier" (Lizzo, 2022) of refugee voices, and to let the words of refugee characters and authors speak their truth. A transdisciplinary feminist methodology possesses the humility to know, as Cariou (2020) would gracefully put it, that there are elements in knowledge that we cannot know completely, or maybe "there are even aspects of it some or all of *shouldn't* know" (p. 8). It is on this note about the impossibility of knowing, of grasping all the knowledges and experiences that YA refugee literature can offer that I invite you to approach the following discussion chapters in this thesis.

# Chapter 3. Touch as Borderland in Terry Farish's and Thanhha Lai's Novels in Free Verse

## Abstract

In this chapter, I analyze the concept of touch as the borderland where identity development and cultural belonging are defined in YA refugee literature. In the first part of the chapter, I focus on the representation of touch in two novels in free verse: Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* and Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out & Back Again*. Drawing on Anzaldúa's (1987) and Barad's (2012) theorization of borders as sites of ambivalence, I discuss touch as a borderland, since it involves an encounter where tensions and contradictions coexist. Further employing Sara Ahmed's (1997) insights on touch as movement, I consider touch not only in the sense of physical contact but, more in general, as a mode of affect that shapes the development of the girl protagonists' identity and cultural belonging. I draw on Lefebvre's (2004) conceptualization of identity to look at touch as a ritual that allows the young refugee girls to define their identity and cultural belonging as fluid and relational. The relations with the mothers and the other women in their communities are also crucial for the development of the identity and cultural belonging of Viola and Hà, the two main characters in the texts. In my view, relationality occurs in these novels through touch, which I define as an ambivalent encounter in that it activates relations, but it can also hurt and oppress. I further rely on Narayan's (1998) notion of contested cultures to discuss how touch in the mother-daughter relation can represent a violent and disruptive mode of affect. Defining touch as an ambivalent affective borderland connects to my broader formulation of sustainable pedagogy inasmuch as it informs the discussion about the ethics of the encounter with the Other. In the last part of the chapter, I offer a pedagogical reflection on the perspectives and materials shared by the in-service teachers in 2020 who also analyzed the notions of identity and cultural belonging in *The Good Braider* as connected to pedagogy and touch.

### 3.1 Introduction: On Borders and Borderlands in Refugee Literature

Anzaldúa (1987, 1990), who rewrites the history of the US-Mexico border from a Chicana feminist perspective, showing its violent and transitional character, is one of the most influential theorists, poets, and activists in border and borderland studies. Anzaldúa's insights on the border and its violence, and on the borderland as a site of ethical, poetic, and political encounters have shaped many fields of study, including migration studies and refugee studies (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020; Khosravi, 2019). In the last three decades, the field of refugee studies has become more and more concerned with the connection between the state of the refugee subjects and communities and the border politics of the nation-state (Cox, 2020). Responding to a new raise of a xenophobic rhetoric of border security, defense and nationalism in Western politics, refugee studies has widened its area of investigation to the border. Researching at the intersection between border studies, the humanities, and refugee studies, Emma Cox (2020) claims that borders and their politics have been canvassed as spaces where human encounters are represented (p. 143). According to anthropologist Chiara Brambilla (2019), social studies and the humanities have increasingly focused on the "relationships across space and time pointing to borders as relational and dynamic sites" (p. 1). I situate my work in this thesis in a long transdisciplinary tradition of research on borders and borderlands as sites of relationality (Anzaldúa, 1987; Brown, 2010; Houtum, 2012).

Turning to narrative, literature scholar Johan Schimanski (2006) defines the border as "first and foremost a form of barrier which may be crossed" (p. 42). Schimanski (2006) proposes a theoretical approach to the poetics of borders from the dynamic perspective of the border-crosser and how to read these crossings in literature. Shifting the focus from the study of the borderline itself to the stories happening at the border and in the borderland is also central to my study. As Henk van Houtum (2012) aptly claims, stories that cross spatial, temporal, and relational borders matter more than the borderline itself (p. 412). Houtum (2012) proposes a new approach to border mappings, where stories of individuals and collectives, together with their emotions and interactions are mapped. This opening to the stories happening at the border offers a more inclusive discussion of the perspectives of the subjects inhabiting these spaces. I claim that these stories can offer narratives of inclusion only if they take the community into account too, and, for this reason, the focus of this thesis is on the relation between young refugee subjects and the communities they inhabit and encounter. Consequently, expanding the focus from the border as both a material and symbolic site to further consider its inhabitants allows to move from a study of the border strictly to the more complex concept of the borderland as an affective and ethical site.

Anzaldúa's (1987), Schimanski's (2006), and Houtum's (2012) relational approaches to the study of the poetics of borders in literature are key to this chapter where I turn to the representations of the borderland in YA refugee literature[24]. In particular, I discuss the borderland as an ambivalent affective site that allows for the development of transgenerational alliances, feminist identities, and cultural belonging across borders.

### 3.1.1 On Touch as Borderland

The tensions, complexities, and ambivalence connected to the border and the borderland are central themes in the representations of refugees in the media, literature, and film (Connell, 2020; Cox, 2020; Wolley, 2020). In this first chapter, I explore the intricacies, strains, and oppositions in portrayals of touch as borderland in two contemporary YA refugee novels in free verse. The ambivalence of touch sits at the center of my enquiry, since this sensory affect can entail a joyful encounter, but it can also become violent and oppressive. As Barad (2012) rightly points out, touch is a borderland where pleasures, tensions, and contradictions coexist. Thinking with Barad (2012), I consider the sense of touch as a liminal site of paradoxical encounters and relations, as illustrated in *The Good Braider*, by the white American author Terry Farish, and *Inside Out & Back Again*, by the Vietnamese American writer Thanhha Lai. Further employing Ahmed's (1997) insights on touch as movement, I articulate touch not only in the sense of physical contact but, more in general, as a mode of affect that shapes the development of the girl protagonists' identity and cultural belonging. I here also employ Henry Lefebvre's (2004) conceptualization of identity to look at touch as a ritual that allows the young refugee girls to define their identities and cultural belonging as fluid and relational.

In my analysis, I focus on touch as a border site of relational encounters that simultaneously allows for the development of cultural belonging and identity, while signaling the prohibited for Viola and Hà, the two girl protagonists of the two novels. By prohibited and forbidden I mean behaviors and identities that the two girls are not allowed to inhabit and make theirs because of discriminatory and oppressive gender roles imposed to them by their mothers. I rely on Narayan's (1998) notion of contested cultures to illustrate how touch in the mother-daughter relation can become a violent and disruptive mode of affect. It is crucial to

[24] Part of this research has been published in the chapter "Writing about my mother: Representations of alliances between mothers and daughters in YA refugee literature" in the book edited by Maria Lombard, *Reclaiming Migrant Motherhood: Identity, Belonging, and Displacement in a Global Context* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

underline how "the forbidden and the prohibited" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3), together with the violence the refugee subjects experience in the borderland are also caused by the reality and materiality of the border. As Mulhall (2022) properly puts it, "the border is everywhere for the person whose presence in a state is always precarious" (personal communication, August 26). Keeping these words as compass to interpret representations of refugee identities in YA refugee literature, this thesis proposes to look at forms of resistances happening in these bordering and borderland sites and temporalities, while being attentive to the impact of the border regime and its deep violence on minoritized communities. It is fundamental to situate the tensions between the mothers and their daughters in these violent contexts where the subjects are deprived of their rights and survive through traumas. Examples of these prohibitions and how the girls overcome them will be examined later in the chapter.

Approaching touch as borderland further allows for inquiry of the ethics of the encounter with the Other, one of the main themes of this thesis inasmuch as it informs my formulation of sustainable pedagogy of YA refugee literature. Responding to the Others who are different from oneself in ethical ways constitutes the focus of the discussion in the last part of the chapter, where I analyze the perspectives and materials shared by a group of in-service teachers in 2020 as part of a session at the university. Their contribution is crucial for the understanding of how the notions of identity and cultural belonging in *The Good Braider* are connected to pedagogy as a complex and ambivalent borderland.

### 3.1.2 Introducing Terry Farish's and Thanhha Lai's Poetical Worlds and their Reception

Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* (2012) is the story of Viola, the narrator and the focalizer of the novel, and her family from Sudan to Portland (USA). The YA refugee novel, which is written in free verse, is a poetic narration of Viola's struggle to act as a bridge between two different cultures. The book offers an insight into the generational and cultural conflict between Viola and her mother in contexts of displacement. By portraying scenes of war, death, rape, and abuse in the story of the refugee Viola and her mother, Farish' novel contributes to the genre of young adult refugee literature by challenging some of its expectations. Pauline Schmidt and J. Eanan Nagle (2017) claim that the complex themes portrayed in these scenes go "beyond those of many young adult novels" (p. 96). I claim that the novel not only goes beyond the genre of young adult novels, but it also enriches it by bringing the voice of the teen refugee inside the canon. In other words, the representation of the refugee character as simultaneously vulnerable and capable of surviving traumatic experiences both challenges and

enriches the genre, making it more inclusive. Surprisingly enough, *The Good Braider* has not been the object of academic interest yet. However, it has received considerable public attention having been awarded several prizes, such as the Lupine Award Juvenile/Young Adult and the Boston Authors Club Young Reader Award, and having been shortlisted in contests, such as the ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults and the YALSA's Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults. This recognition has also extended to the Sudanese community, with the Sudanese American performer OD Bonny writing a song in tribute to Viola and the community of South Sudanese women displaced in the US (Curious City, 2013). Representing the community of Sudanese women in Portland, Maine, and listening carefully to their stories is a crucial aspect for Farish, who, aware of not having the experience of displacement herself, relies on thorough research and the stories from subjects within the Sudanese refugee community (Farish, 2012). From this perspective, Farish' novel differs from Thanhha Lai's in terms of positionality and ethics, a point I will return to in my analysis.

In turn, Lai gleans from her personal family history of flight to give poetic voice to the emotions, the memories, and the struggles of the fictional character and narrator Hà, in *Inside Out & Back Again*[25] (2011). The young refugee flees war in Sai Gon and relocates in Alabama with her mother and her three older brothers in 1975. The novel poetically portrays fragments in the form of poems of Hà's life from 1975 to 1976, depicting her life in Vietnam, their escape by boat and their move to the US. In that time lapse, the girl faces different challenges connected to the trauma of war and being a victim of racism in her new American school (Ha, 2013; Morrison, 2012). Bunkong Tuon (2014), whose analysis focuses on representations of accommodation and resistance in Lai's novel, rightly maintains that the novel has the ability to disrupt one-dimensional representations of the Vietnamese refugee subject. For Tuon (2014), the novel "provides a counter-narrative of war" as war is not represented as a heroic act for the nation, but depicts its traumatic consequences on children both at home and in the displacement it causes (p. 536). Mai-Linh K. Hong (2016) also looks at *Inside Out* as a counter-narrative of American mainstream discourses, stressing out how the novel reframes dominant representations of rescue and hospitality of Vietnamese refugees in the US. As Sandra Cox (2015) aptly claims, Lai's novel in free verse has a "radical potential for changing the conversation about children's rights" by portraying Hà as a traumatized but also competent and capable subject (p. 2). Cox' s argument (2015) is fundamental for my analysis of touch as an act through which Hà actively forges her identity and positions herself in relation to others.

[25] In the chapter, I abbreviate the title as *Inside Out.*

Indebted to the previous studies about Lai's novel in verse, I unravel how touch functions in *Inside Out* as a borderland both oppressing and helping Hà in her struggles against trauma and racism.

Many of the symbolic borders that both girls need to face and overcome are connected to the development of their identity and cultural belonging. These include the perception of their bodies in the US; their relations with their mother tongues and the English language; fitting into the new school system; and the distance and loss of meaningful objects from their motherlands. Significantly for my discussion here, both Viola's and Hà's stories of inhabiting and crossing these symbolic borders rely on descriptions of their sensorial experiences. Rachel Rickard Rebellino (2018) stresses the potential of the senses in war narratives and claims that with "words left unsaid, the attention to sensory details rather than sequential events, and the cognizance of layout and space – [poetry] create[s] opportunities for wrestling with the difficult moral and ethical questions that accompany a war narrative" (p. 167). In *The Good Braider* and *Inside Out*, smell, taste, and touch predominantly represent the girls' recollection of memories, losses, and their experiences of identity development and cultural belonging. This chapter focuses on how touch is represented in the two narratives as an affect that defines the encounter with the Other and shapes the development of identity and cultural belonging of the two war refugee girls. For Ahmed (1997), "The re-forming of the relation between the self and other through touch is suggestive" (p. 28). In the following sections, I put selected passages from the literary texts in relation to theoretical perspectives on touch, borders, borderlands, identity, and culture to analyze the complexities of this affective and ethical site of encounter.

### 3.1.3. The Novels in Free Verse as Borderlands

Both *The Good Braider* and *Inside Out & Back Again* are novels written in free verse. Mike Cadden (2011) surveys the verse novel for young adults and points out that this literary genre started to circulate already in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries[26] and regained popularity in the 1990's with authors such as Virginia Euwer Wolff and Karen Hesse (p. 21). Cadden (2011) has aptly located the novel in verse in a space between fiction, poetry, and drama, defining it a "transitional text" (p. 26). The first transitional impression readers encounter when approaching the reading of the two novels is emptiness on the page. The rhythm of a language that plays with pauses echoes the oral dimension of poetry. Pauses and

[26] Among the most famous authors who published verse novels for children there are Adelaide O'Keeffe (1776-1865), who is considered the author of the first verse novel for children, and Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810).

breaths, typical of poetry, are translated on the written pages into white blanks between verses and a large empty space on the page. In both books, the pauses between the poetic words characterize the pages. If the character's spoken voice is what the reader 'hears' in the novel, the silence impressed on the page is also speaking. In my opinion, as it happens on a theatre stage or while telling a story, the silence is a crucial element of the narration. Farish (2013) recognizes in the silence and spare words the quality of helping readers connect the meaning of the verses to their own imagination (p. 7). As I understand Farish, in the empty space and in silence, readers can find the time and possibility to reflect on and come with their own ideas about the poetic words. Rickard Rebellino (2018) detects in the emptiness between lines and poems in a novel in verse forms of "gaps in knowledge" that shift the attention from the reader to the emotional elements of the narration (p. 165). As Cadden (2011) aptly suggests, readers of novels in verse 'hear' the voices of the narrators/characters who tell their stories. Not only the first-person narration reminds us of the oral dimension of theatre, but also the recurrence to the immediacy of images and the poetic voice. I argue that both *The Good Braider* and *Inside Out & Back Again* cross this aesthetic border between fiction, poetry, and drama, and I agree with Cadden et al. (2020) who define the genre a "hybrid form" (p. 242). These two texts stand as examples of artistic and literary works that contribute to defining borders as entities in continuous change and becoming, and as inclusive points of contact between different artistic and literary styles.

Both Farish and Lai have claimed in interviews to have chosen to write in free verse after several failing attempts to write in prose. According to Farish (2013), a novel in verse is able to be loyal to the characters' life pace, offer close-ups and intimacy to the story, play with the language, and respect aspects of the culture of origin such as music and language. As Farish (2013) claims in an interview, she chose poetry in order to give a more formal and sacral connotation to Viola's life. While Farish's choice of writing a novel in free-verse seems to be dictated mostly by her sense of respect and homage to the community she is representing in the novel, Lai turns to the novel in verse in order to be able to convey the musicality of Vietnamese, her mother tongue. Language is certainly a crucial aspect for Lai's novel. The author has claimed several times that she could not write in prose, which she felt would pose an obstacle to the expression of Ha's emotions. The pauses and blanks on the pages seemed to help communicate the immediacy of feelings. Furthermore, the choice of verse was also influenced by the author's mother tongue, Vietnamese, which Lai describes as a language rich in images. As she was thinking in Vietnamese first and then translating into English, the verse reflected the rhythm of the Vietnamese language. Lai (2019) has been open regarding her struggles with

English, both in the novel and in interviews, and talks about how she has been accepting her linguistic "lopsidedness" (p. 109). I argue that Lai further undertakes a political act when, for example, she refuses to cross the linguistic border and intentionally does not translate some Vietnamese expressions. I consider Lai's choice meaningful because it creates an "unsettling effect" to the non-Vietnamese speaking readers and, at the same time, puts these readers closer to Ha's position when arriving to the US[27].

### 3.2 Touch as Ambivalent Encounter: Violence and Resistance in the Relation with the Mothers

For Ahmed (1997), touch is an ambiguous concept that "can involve the physicality of a bodily contact, and it *can* involve being moved or affected" (p. 27). Thus, touch means both "being affected or moved by the presence of another […] and coming into physical contact with another […] Those two meanings are irreducible to each other, and exceed each other" (p. 27). At the same time, touching and being touched presuppose the existence of another subject. They are separated and connected through the movement, either physical or affective or both. Ahmed (1997) hints at the possibilities that the exploration of touch can bring to the discussion of the encounter with the Other in relation to international feminism in academia (1997). Ahmed's (1997) theorizing is key for my analysis of touch in the two novels, since I read it both as a physical encounter and as an affect that characterizes the relations between the girls and their mothers. In my view, touch implies a recognition of the Other as different, but in the two novels for young adults, it is also an affect that shapes the relation with the mothers in such a powerful way that it further forges the identity of the two girls. I thus refer to touch as a physical and affective act that takes place through the tactile encounter and in myriad liminal spaces. In both novels, the mothers touch their daughters literally but also figuratively through gestures, affects, words, and silence, affecting them and their worlds in ambivalent ways that both oppress and empower them.

Anzaldúa, in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), proposes an alternative perspective to the mainstream colonizing discourses on borders as barriers from the 'threatening Other':

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them.* A border is a diving line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague

[27] This is also a common strategy in other diasporic/transnational writers. In Canada, for example, Japanese Canadian Hiromi Goto uses Japanese in her writings as a political act too to resist assimilation and counter the imperial use of English as a colonial language.

> and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (p. 3)

I would argue that the vagueness and indeterminacy in Anzaldúa's definition of the borderland are also features that characterize the representations of touch in the two novels. I claim that the mothers' touches can contribute to defining the identity of their daughters as "the prohibited and forbidden". However, touch is characterized by ambivalence, as both mothers seem to condemn the girls but also save them. Furthermore, I aim to prove that the ambivalent maternal touch also contributes to resisting oppressive and violent rules and traditions connected to gender stereotypes and identity roles.

In *The Good Braider*, when Viola is raped by a Sudanese soldier, the reaction of her mother, Tereza, is ambivalent. Tereza initially responds to Viola with harsh and condemning words: "I will send you away […] What kind of *girl* would be on the road at *night*?" (Farish, 2012, p. 34). The mother figure is reproducing here a discriminatory law and tradition according to which a violated girl is associated to dishonor and shame. For the mother, the violation by the soldier thus makes the body of the girl a place of shame and dishonor not only for her but for the family and the Sudanese community. The violence in the mother's words becomes imprinted on her daughter, thus enacting a form of detrimental touch. I recognize in the violent first response of the mother a mirror of the violent culture that condemns the woman for the violence of which she is the victim. This violence, however, is interrupted later by the mother herself when she decides to allow Viola to stay with her and flee Sudan to save her from the threats of soldiers. These are Viola's words:

> I kneel in the dirt.
> My mother kneels, too.
> My mother's arms and legs are strong around me,
> and then we rise
> as if we are one person. (Farish, 2012, p. 50)

The mother's touch is this time portrayed as a strong and comforting act of resistance. Tereza's bodily embrace to her daughter is a metaphor of the rejection to adhere to a violent tradition. At the same time, touch here also signals the transgenerational bond between the woman and the girl, a feminist alliance of love and support. In this encompassing embrace, touch crosses the borders between generations and the fragilities of the individual are overcome in the strength of the touching union. At the same time, rising as one person is only made possible by the kneeling together in the dirt, a surrender position in front of the pain and humiliation that war and rape have brought to their lives. By surrendering and staying

with her daughter's pain, instead of sending it away and hiding it, the mother makes their transgenerational alliance stronger. The result of this acceptance and love is Tereza's decision to flee Sudan and save her daughter's life. Hope Morrison (2012), in her review of the novel, claims that they flee the country because of the shame the rape has brought to their family (p. 15). I disagree with Morrison on this point and claim instead that the decision is also forced by the fear for their lives, as the lines above illustrate.

In another episode in *The Good Braider*, touch is represented as an affect that can hurt. Tereza punishes Viola for disobeying her orders against seeing her friend, Andrew, with a corporal punishment that leaves Viola's hand severely injured. Once again, the violent touch informs how the patriarchal system operates. According to Anzaldúa (1987), women can lay a decisive role in the formation, establishment, and transmission of culture in a male-dominated society:

> Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through culture. Culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. (p. 16)

By punishing Viola with corporal abuse, followed by silence, Tereza is represented as a woman and a mother transmitting dominant and oppressive rules about gender roles to her daughter Viola. However, I have also identified examples from the novel where the touch of the mother saves her daughter. Thus, touch is represented as an ambivalent force. I recognize this ambivalence also in the position of the mother, who is herself a victim of patriarchy, as she cannot avoid transmitting the rules of the system to her daughter in order to keep her safe. The ambivalence of touch, then, provides a deeper insight on the role of women in a patriarchal society, where they can be both victims of and complicit in/with the perpetuation of oppressive and hurtful rules. Applying the ambivalence of touch to the representation of the mother's behavior in this scene resonates with Barad's (2012) question: "Is touching not by its very nature always already an involution, invitation, invisitation, wanted or unwanted, of the stranger within?" (p. 207). For Barad (2012), touch is made by the contradictions of being involved, entangled with the Other and also within oneself. I recognize in Viola's disobedience the "stranger within" somehow. The bond between Viola and Tereza is also seated in the familiarity of a shared patriarchal system.

In related ways, the mother's words act as a violent touch on her daughter, Hà, in Lai's *Inside Out*. Hà reveals that she has broken a rule imposed to her by her mother, during Tet, the first day of the lunar year:

> But last night I pouted
> when Mother insisted
> one of my brothers
> must rise first
> this morning
> to bless our house
> because only male feet can bring luck.
> (Lai, 2011, p. 2)

I suggest that the mother, to whom Hà refers as Mother, is represented in *Inside Out* as a silent guardian of the patriarchal tradition in the Vietnamese culture, and, as such, she reproduces traditional discriminatory and repressing gender stereotypes that undervalue the young Hà. Here, Mother's touch comes from her words that affect her daughter's position in the family and activate her feelings for the injustice she suffers as a result of the discriminating and undervaluing roles attributed to women. Narayan (1998) claims that

> for many of us, women in different parts of the world, our relationships to our mothers resemble our relationships to the motherlands of the cultures in which we were raised. Both our mothers and our mother-cultures give us all sorts of contradictory messages, encouraging their daughters to be confident, impudent, and self-assertive even as they attempt to instill conformity, decorum, and silence, seemingly oblivious to these contradictions. (p. 8)

Narayan's (1998) definition of the relationship with the mother and culture resonates with my analysis of the bond between the daughters and their mothers and their cultures in these two novels. Towards the end of *Inside Out*, when Hà reveals to her mother her action and her fear that touching the floor had caused the war to explode, Mother touches her instead with reassuring and comforting words:

> *My child,*
> *How you shoulder the world!*
> *I was superstitious,*
> *that's all.*
> *If anything,*
> *you gave us luck*
> *because we got out*
> *and we're here.* (Lai, 2011, pp. 214-215)

The mother's admission, however, does not stop her from continuing the discrimination one year later. As Rickard Rebellino (2018) aptly points out, the novel, which begins with the celebration of Têt in 1975, ends with the same celebration one year later (p. 172). I contend that the reproduction of the discriminatory gender rules by Mother once again defines the ambivalence of touch as borderland. Hà's reaction this time is different though. The girl seems indifferent to her exclusion from blessing the house but expresses a different wish:

> This year I hope
> I truly learn
> to fly-kick,
> not to kick anyone
> so much as
> to fly. (Lai, 2012, p. 260)

In the affective and social borderland where she is prohibited from using her feet to touch and bless the house, Hà finds a new meaning to the touch she can perform with her feet. In the act of flying, of not touching the floor at all, the girl takes distance from a tradition that does not include her, and dreams of a much more empowering action, such as flying and being free and independent.

### 3.3 Touch as a Nurturing and Empowering Borderland

After analyzing how touch can hurt and oppress, I here engage with representations of touch as a nurturing and empowering borderland. In *The Good Braider*, touching a piece of elephant bone that is given to Viola by her mother infuses her with endurance, resistance, and strength. I recognize the value of an amulet in the elephant bone that Viola holds in her hand, as she counts on it to give her strength: "Maybe we are family, me and the elephants" (Farish 2012, p. 23). Later, in Portland, Viola will be able to see the elephant again in the body of a fallen tree and touching it makes the image alive:

> The elephant comes back in Portland several times.
> I see a tree has crashed on its belly in our path,
> And I reach up to the gnarled trunk where it rests
> On the tops of its branches.
> […]
> Suddenly it is a breathing animal to me.
> It is an elephant. I touch its bark and belly.
> […]

I feel powerful.

I made a tree into an elephant. (Farish, 2012, p. 115)

Viola's touch gives life to the tree and transforms it into an alive animal, which symbolizes strength and life for the girl. Bringing back to life a symbol from Sudan and her roots, an elephant that she thought was lost, empowers her. Touching the elephant in Sudan worked as reassuring and nurturing affect for Viola, and it continues to work as an empowering affect for the refugee girl in the US. Moreover, touch also becomes a creational force which defines Viola as a creative subject.

In *Inside Out*, touch is further represented as a rebellious act against the ritual. Hà's touch in reaction to Mother's prohibition to bless their house back in Vietnam is an example of touch as resistance:

An old, angry knot
expanded in my throat.
I decided
to wake before dawn
and tap my big toe
to the tile floor
first. (Lai, 2)

Hà's challenging reaction to Mother's prohibition reminds me of the rebel that Anzaldúa (1987) describes:

> There is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. (p. 16)

As Anzaldúa refuses constraints and limitations coming from the patriarchal Chicana dimension that she critiques and against which she uses her physical strength, also Hà, using the strength of her toe, rebels and rejects gender roles stereotypes. I see a key symbol of resistance in the ten-year-old Hà's toe, that although silent and unseen, breaks patriarchal rules. However, after discussing Hà's brave reaction to limitations imposed on her, it is important to consider her emotional reaction to them. The girl's anger, an emotion that she often feels throughout her story, is described by the metaphor of the knot that 'expands' in her throat, which, I claim, portrays the feeling of being silenced, suffocated, and, consequently unheard, by discrimination and inequality. For Narayan (1998), the act of

representing the mother-culture through feminist lenses is a political act attempting to challenge and change discriminatory accounts of a universal notion of culture (p. 9). Narayan's words about the political function of representations of identity and culture speak to my formulation of sustainable pedagogy, which I define as politically and ethically charged. In my view, culture is portrayed in the novels as a reassuring space of belonging but also as a violent vehicle of oppression. Viola and Hà use touch in a way that allows them to change the notion of cultural belonging as something that pertains to the individual and not the opposite. Through transgenerational feminist practices of touch, the girls negotiate ways of existing in relation to their cultures, becoming agents who define their own identities as fluid and in movement.

In both Viola's and Hà's stories, I hear Anzaldúa's (1996) poetical words from her poem "To live in the Borderlands means you":

> In the Borderlands
> You are the battleground
> […] you are at home, a stranger,
> The borders disputes have been settled
> […] you are wounded, lost in action,
> Dead, fighting back;
> […]
> To survive the Borderlands
> You must live *sin fronteras*
> Be a crossroad. (p. 5)

I see an extremely powerful ambivalence of the borderland in this poem, where violence and death coexist with envisioning the survival through the embodiment of the crossroad.

Viola and Hà survive the violent borders that are imposed on them and challenge and change some of them, through constant and painful struggles and acts of resistance. They inhabit the borderland and become themselves borderlands, with all the tensions and contradictions, but also the possibilities for transformation that borderlands are made of.

For Narayan (1998), "[w]hat may set feminist daughters apart is the ways in which they insist that these differences require us to rethink notions of what it is to 'be at home' in a 'culture', and to redefine notions of 'cultural loyalty, betrayal, and respect'" (p. 9). Viola and Hà navigate their ways among the contradictions to define their ways of belonging to their cultures. Both stories portray the struggles in the girls' attempts to navigate cultural loyalty, betrayal, and respect. Their navigating these contradictions which are instilled mostly by their

mothers clearly shapes not only their definition of belonging, but also of culture, and in the very end it also affects their mothers' behaviors. Thus, culture and mother-culture find a different form of existence also for the mothers through the resistance of their daughters first.

### 3.4 Touch as Joyful Encounter: Transgenerational Feminist Alliances

The representation of touch also as a joyful encounter in the two novels is both physical and metaphorical and forges transgenerational feminist alliances between Viola, her mother and her grandmother, and Hà, her mother, and her friend-teacher, MiSSSisss WaSShington[28]. Inspired by García Zarranz's (2016) theory on joyful insurrections that informs my affective and transdisciplinary methodology, if not this entire thesis, I use the term "joyful"[29] here as well to point at the ethical encounter with the Other, a sustainable type of touch, that instead of oppressing and discriminating, liberates and protects the refugee girls, allowing them to be themselves and process their traumas. According to Ahmed (1997), "'being touched' does not over-come the distance which separates others (as discrete beings). Being touched suggests becoming closer to each other in which *movement* across the division of self-other may take place, but movement which does not abolish the division as such" (pp. 27-28). Viola's relation with the ritual of braiding hair and Hà's relation with the Vietnamese rituals to celebrate the new year show the importance of being touched in their definition of identity and cultural belonging. At the same time, they engage with touch as ritual in different ways – Hà rebels against it, while Viola finds her way to adhere to the ritual. In both cases, touch as ritual is represented as a relational, fluid, and challenging encounter and enactment for the two girl protagonists.

In *The Good Braider*, touch is represented as a transgenerational joyful act in the act of braiding hair, which is portrayed as both the physical and the metaphorical touching of the Other relationally and ethically. It is represented initially as a collective ritual that testimonies resistance and life endurance in hostile environments and war situations. Paul Dash (2006) highlights that "[d]iaspora people have used their bodies as a canvas on which to articulate their presence as subjects" (p. 27). Discussing this African hair ritual, Valerie Boyd (1993) claims how:

> For centuries women have communed together while scratching secrets from each other's heads; black women, in Africa and throughout the diaspora, have a long history

[28] This is the original spelling in Lai's novel.
[29] For more on joy, Tracey Michae'l Lewis-Giggetts has recently published the book *Black Joy. Stories of Resistance, Resilience, and Restorations* (2022).

> of greasing, combing, twisting, and braiding each other's locks while contemplating and sometimes solving the problems of the world, both big and small. (p. 43)

Boyd (1993) underlines the communal aspect of the ritual and how powerful for the female community this act is. In *The Good Braider*, I recognize the power of the community when the Sudanese women meet to talk about the war and fleeing, while braiding hair in the meantime:

> Women come to our courtyard for my mother's braids.
> When I was young my little fingers
> rode on her long narrow one.
> Her fingers danced over my cousin's hair like feathers,
> shaping twists and lines with a single tiny bead
> slipped on the end.
> I learned to braid by feel more than sight. (Farish, 2012, p. 18)

According to Sweta Rajan-Rankin (2021), "touch represents an important socio-cultural ritual through which collective belonging is experienced" (p. 11). In Juba, Viola seems to attend and engage with braiding as a young member of the women's community without questioning the nature of the ritual. In her study on Sub-Saharan African migrant women, Florence Kyomugisha (2015) defines identity as collective: "the notion of being is extended to other human beings, nature and the supernatural world. Life comes to the individual through the ancestors and the parents, and it is protected and fostered in a community" (p. 73). In light of these considerations, it seems fundamental to consider the role of the community in Viola's identity formation. In Viola's life, the community is a broader formation including other Sudanese women and the elder women who gravitate around Viola and her family both in Sudan and in Portland and take care of them. For example, when in Cairo Viola's little brother, Francis, dies of illness due to the poor conditions of their journey, lack of water and nutrition, the other Sudanese women also present in the city assist Viola and her mother who is broken by the pain (Farish, 2012, p. 67). This painful and intimate moment of kinship still cannot bring the people back into her life. Always in Cairo, Viola also longs the absence of her grandmother, Habuba, who was left in Juba due to her being too weak to overcome the journey. This pain makes Viola stop braiding her hair:

> I am not who I used to be
> We were three, like three strands
> We lay, three of us, on the steamer, warming each other.
> Without the third, I don't know what to do. (Farish, 2012, p. 82)

Viola seems to be missing her grandmother but also a part of herself that is now lost. In other words, losing her grandmother makes Viola have doubts about her own identity and role in society. The loss makes Viola experience and understand that her own identity as an individual and social being is vulnerable. African American Literature and Culture scholar Amani Morrison (2018) invites readers to approach the study of identity and culture by looking at "the ways black hair shapes and affects social terrains" (p. 92). I welcome Morrison's suggestions and thus I discuss how the practice of braiding hair with her mother and grandmother in Viola's narrative represents touch as a joyful borderland that defines identity and cultural belonging.

When asking the Levinasian question "Who are you", identity is open to change by defining itself, and defined by the change brought from the encounter. Once in the US, which is another physical space that is not familiar or 'home', the meaning of braiding changes again in the novel. After a short time in Portland, Viola decides to cut her hair very short, declaring: "this is the way I look in America" (Farish, 2012, p. 101). I argue that Viola's act of cutting her hair short is an example of what Butler (2015) would define as "speech act" and "bodily enactment" (p. 18). Through cutting her "broken hair" (Farish, 2012, p. 101), Viola speaks and tells the world around her who she is, and she lets her body enact her words. Viola is removing the signs of pain reflected in her broken hair and is also declaring her own identity by taking distance from a tradition that she does not feel she belongs to. For Lefebvre (2004), rhythm is the foundation of identity; both are fluid and always changing (p. 82). Without fluidity and change there is no rhythm, and the same goes for identity. Rhythms are relational and create entities in relation to each other. Rhythm acts as a "wave motion" and puts people in relation to each other (Barnhart, 2019). Viola's decision to cut her hair and change her look is a dynamic way to relate to the new country in which she lives, and, at the same time, she takes distance from Sudan, where she learnt to braid.

Towards the end of the novel, braiding takes another meaning, becoming a metaphor for Viola's life. After Viola has revealed to Mrs. Mejía, her teacher here, that she does not braid hair anymore, the teacher says:

> You *do* braid.
> In your very young life, you've braided together
> The few good things you've been granted
> So far on your journey. (Farish, 2012, p. 186)

The teacher, who is a migrant herself, helps Viola understand that braiding can be both a communal and individual everyday act, but also a transtemporal act of braiding lived experiences. In my view, braiding hair is here represented as the borderland where different

times and places meet, and where the refugee character is actively weaving events, memories, emotions, and affective bonds in her daily life. Looking at braiding from this perspective will allow Viola to start braiding hair again. Through the teacher's words, braiding obtains a new meaning in that it is not just braiding hair, a cultural and traditional act for Sudanese women and for Viola, but an act concerning experiential knowledge. Viola, who has braided her life experiences, is the keeper of her identity, her relations, and her memories.

In the borderland, Viola puts her identity in constant dialogue with the Sudanese traditions. Talking about identity and tradition, Stuart Hall (1996) reminds us that identity is not a reiteration of tradition, "not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes" (p. 10). The term 'routes' characterizes identity as dynamic, as in constant becoming, which is the representation of identity portrayed in Farish's novel. I claim that the borderland of braiding is the space and time in which Viola comes to terms with her roots and her routes, her personal journey in constant dialogue with herself, her family and the Sudanese and American societies.

If, on the one hand, braiding is a bonding ritual and an act of identity development and cultural belonging, it is represented also as a borderland touch where the tensions connected to tradition, gender stereotypes and identity are transmitted. Braiding stands as a cultural element connected to the value of a woman:

> How could a white girl know
> How only someone you trust should braid your hair,
> How someone bad could work magic against you?
> How could a white girl know
> What the braid means to an African man?
> How a braid factors into the girl's value as a bride,
> Her beauty and quick tongue,
> Her education,
> Her prospects as a mother.
> Her virginity.
> All these things add value.
> How can this white girl know? (Farish, 2012, p. 147)

This passage not only speaks about positioning braiding within the Sudanese female community but also about situating the author herself outside this community. The question, "How could a white girl know," urges readers to attend to the position that Farish occupies in relation to the story she writes. As a white woman, she does not belong to the community of

the Sudanese women, an aspect that must be addressed in relation to this narrative. I interpret this question as a humbling act from the author, who, in my view, enacts a form of alliance with Viola and her community, by representing a narrative without stereotypes and generalizations, but rich in complexities instead.

In *Inside Out*, the transgenerational alliance emerging through touch is also an example of transcultural coalition, as it involves Hà and MiSSSisss WaSShington, an American neighbor who helps the girl learn English. The retired teacher not only helps Hà with the language, but she becomes a confident for the young girl; both do share painful memories and experiences reciprocally though. When Hà is screaming her hate for the new society in which she lives, MiSSSisss WaSShington throws her own body on the girl trying to calm her down, and:

> she pats my hand.
> The one gesture
> dissolves the last
> of my hate spell. (Lai, 2011, p. 211)

Touch is here represented as a nurturing, caring, and loving gesture. Moreover, in MiSSSisss WaSShington's embrace, Hà is finally free to express her feelings and see them acknowledged. The girl's feelings are welcomed by the teacher/friend's hug and accepted. In other words, the woman accepts the refugee girl in her vulnerability, thus allowing her to show her pain and trauma. The cathartic embrace that removes Hà's spell seems to contain an element of magic, a crucial aspect in both Lai's and Farish's novels. In these narratives, the joyful encounters with the Other further refer to the magical power within the encounter. The poetic verses and words bring the element of magic, a key element in children's and young adult literature, in the discussion about the ethics of the encounter with the others. Magic and imagination are fundamental elements of the joyful touch of the Other, a touch that does not dissolve differences but recognizes and welcomes them. This representation of touch speaks directly to my formulation of sustainable pedagogy that entails the envisioning of the possibilities of the encounter with the others, their stories, pains and traumas.

### 3.5 Borders and Borderlands with YA Refugee Literature in the English Classroom

Continuing my analysis and discussion of the complexities of touch as borderland, this section adds an extra layer of complexity by situating the encounter with YA refugee literature in the Norwegian educational context. Guided by my third research question, this part considers what ethical values and concerns *The Good Braider* can bring to the English

classroom. In particular, I discuss how YA refugee literature has touched four in-service teachers who wrote their literary and pedagogical analysis and reflections about the novel in free verse in a university classroom where I was the instructor. In this chapter, I examine a sample of four essays out of eight essays written by the in-service teachers for their course portfolio. In the analysis and discussion of these essays I use literary analysis tools, such as close reading, and observations of classroom dynamics. Their essays bring knowledge about the ethics of the encounter with refugee literature in the English classroom. They inform the tensions and borderlands that define the pedagogical encounters and provide fundamental pedagogical considerations where the ethical encounter allows collaboration and ethical transformation in relation to power dynamics in knowledge creation.

My interest in power dynamics in relation to knowledge creation in the classroom has informed the teaching approach with the group of in-service teachers, and the formulation of the task for their final academic essay. My teaching practices often involve group reflection and discussion activities before I invite the students to engage in written assignments. Normally, embodied learning through body group sculpture is an activity I propose to my students to learn theoretical concepts. In the case of this group of in-service teachers, we were not allowed to perform group embodied practices, as the course took place in the classroom under Covid-19 restrictions in Autumn 2020. Working as a collective, although keeping distance, we discussed ethical implications in the question "Who is a refugee?". Together, we reflected on the term and how it relates to the values of critical thinking and ethical awareness in the Norwegian new curriculum. These values are defined in the core curriculum as "a requirement for and part of what it means to learn in different contexts and will therefore help the pupils to develop good judgment" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a, para. 4). Together, in the classroom, we discussed the themes of identity and cultural belonging and how they are represented in Farish's young adult novel. At the end of the course, and as part of their obligatory coursework, the students we required to write an academic essay following this task and guidelines I composed:

- One of the competence aims after Year 7 (LK20, 2019) states that students in Norway should be able to "reflect upon identity and cultural belonging". How can Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* help teachers introduce those values in the EFL classroom in order to create an inclusive and diverse environment? Write an essay where you

> analyze the novel drawing on some of the theories about identity and 'the Other' used in class.[30]

Asking the in-service teachers to consider the relation between YA refugee literature and inclusion and diversity in the classroom from a pedagogical perspective was motivated by my interest in understanding possible limitations and strengths that can emerge from the encounter with this literary genre.

Furthermore, this discussion reflects the urgency to engage critically with current discourses in English didactics in Norway that look critically at intercultural competence (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020). Researchers in Norway (Bland, 2020; Heggernes, 2019; Rindal & Brevik, 2019) claim that literary representations can foster intercultural learning and intercultural competence in the English classroom in relation to the competence goals of democratic citizenship, critical thinking, and empathy development in the curriculum to discuss multicultural classrooms, ethics, and inclusion. In this thesis, I consider the general definition of competence provided by the Ministry of Education and Research (2019) in the core curriculum for primary and secondary education in Norway: "the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations. Competence includes understanding and the ability to reflect and think critically" (p. 13). I particularly appreciate this definition that considers challenges as a resource to gain skill, and as an ability that necessitates of critical thinking. Darling-Hammond (2006) states that "several researchers into teacher competence, knowledge and teacher education have highlighted the importance of moral and ethical knowledge for teachers because of the moral expectations associated with the teaching profession" (as cited in Toom, 2017, p. 808). The pedagogical reflections do not explore teachers' moral values[31] but look at the contribution that ethical concepts found in YA refugee literature can offer to the teachers in the educational path. As Auli Toom (2017) rightly claims, teachers' ethical competence is absent from the curricula, although it is a key competence for their work in the classroom (p. 808). Teachers' beliefs and world-views are influenced by the curriculum and the education they receive. Geert Kelchtermans and Eline Vanassche (2017) properly point out that the classroom, and thus teachers and their pupils and students, do not exist in a

[30] A list of the Competence aims after Year 7 is available here.
[31] For the relationship between moral and ethics in teachers' practices, see Bullough, R. V. J. (2017). Learning moral and ethical responsibilities of teaching in teacher education. In D. J. Clandinin & J. Husu (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 333-337). SAGE.

vacuum and claim that "the teacher education curriculum should help student teachers to critically interrogate the political and societal discourses that pervade and frame their working conditions" (p. 452). This section aims at pointing out the discourses that pervade literature pedagogy in Norway today, but also share the possibilities that an ethical pedagogy of YA refugee literature can bring to the classroom in relation to a more equitable encounter with refugee subjects.

### 3.5.1 The Limits of Intercultural Learning and Empathy

YA refugee literature can bring a deeper level of engagement with the learning and teaching competences by questioning what constitutes knowledge in the Norwegian classroom today. The LK20 states that "the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" and advises that pupils "shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019c, para. 3). Furthermore, the core curriculum refers to the importance of acknowledging, respecting, and valuing identities. The in-service teachers' written essays bring extremely valuable contributions to the ongoing conversation about what teachers need to create safe diverse classroom environments, and how they can possibly achieve that through engaging with ethical representations in YA refugee literature.

For *Author 1*, refugee literature can be an "opportunity in school to learn and understand refugees' situation by gaining knowledge about them" before interacting with refugee pupils (para. 4). Thus, representations of identity in the novel in free verse can bring information and factual knowledge. As Dypedhal (2020) aptly points out, the English subject curriculum has changed the learning skills from "knowing about" to being able to participate in discussions, provide descriptions and reflections on a specific topic or text, thus moving the attention from "factual knowledge" to "intercultural learning" (p. 59). It seems clear to me, though, that the changes in curriculum objectives do not translate in an automatic change in what the teachers decided to focus on and consider knowledge. As for a long time, content and facts have occupied a privileged position in the teaching of literature in the English classroom, referring simply to 'intercultural learning' may not be enough to guide teachers in their pedagogical practices to create inclusive and safe educational spaces. In relation to this issue, Hoff (2020) duly stresses out that

> It is important for teachers to keep in mind that the learners' intercultural perspectives are not broadened as an automatic result of their *exposure* to otherness. … The

> learners' attitudes to and preconceptions about English-speaking [and non-English-speaking] cultures must therefore be brought into the open in the classroom so that they can be examined and countered. (p. 81)

For *Author 1*, the discussion of the term 'refugee' could bring knowledge about the reasons for being a refugee and inspire ideas about how to help refugee classmates. Thus, introducing YA refugee literature in their classroom could help non-refugee pupils define their identities as allies to their refugee classmates. And this author continues by arguing that knowing about the refugee experience can foster abilities to welcome, help, and become friends with non-refugee classmates (para. 1). It is without a doubt crucial to encourage non-refugee pupils to be able to do that, but, at the same time, the issue of privilege is not considered by the author. Along similar lines, *Author 2* claims that refugee literature can help non-refugees develop understanding, empathy, and critical thinking when they state the following: "Refugee literature can be used to explain the refugee crisis happening today, and to understand previous crisis and violence of human dignity, like the one in Sudan. Furthermore, to create understanding and empathy for the difficulties refugees must cope with both on their frightening journey to safety and in their meeting with a new culture in a new country" (para. 6). For *Author 2*, therefore, refugee literature not only brings factual knowledge but also empathy towards the refugee subjects.

These contributions from *Author 1* and *Author 2* resonate with prevalent contemporary discourses in research (Carlsen et al., 2020; Dypedahl & Lund, 2020; Brevik & Rindal, 2020) which refer to empathy as the affective skill corresponding to intercultural knowledge and comprehension (Dypedhal & Bøhn, 2020). Thus, knowing and thinking about refugees can foster empathy in non-refugee pupils. However, attributing the possibility to develop affective and ethical skills only to non-refugee pupils seems to work only in one direction – from non-refugee to refugee. I am afraid that the lack of consideration of the pedagogical challenges and tensions, together with the idea that refugee representations in literature can constitute knowledge per se, mirrors the complacent view of literature's value in the classroom. The same language used by *Authors 1* and *Author 2* sounds informed by previous research on the benefits of using literature for English didactics (Birketveit & Williams, 2013). Anna Birketveit and Gweno Williams (2013) define literature as a tool that can "open up imaginative perspectives, interrogate values and assumptions, and lead to enhanced understanding of global cultures and differences" (p. 7). I agree with Birketveit and Williams on the imaginative and questioning role of literature in the classroom. However, in relation to literature's ability to understand other cultures and differences, questioning power

dynamics is vital to foster inclusion and equity in the English classroom in Norway. In turn, this thesis proposes a non-complacent understanding of literature as a tool which can also reinforce stereotypes and oppression.

The issue of emerging stereotypes in the classroom while reading and discussing *The Good Braider* is tackled by *Authors 1* and *Author 2* in different ways. Author 1 proposes to tackle racist affect, which they define as "fear of the powerful […] in the encounter with the vulnerable" by the dramatization of a scene in *TGB* to understand the vulnerability that refugees experience (para. 4). This pedagogical approach, however, signals the risks that refugee subjects are only seen as vulnerable, in contrast to the core elements of a sustainable pedagogy of refugee literature that acknowledges the vulnerabilities of refugee subjects and communities, but also their agency. Unfortunately, role-playing activities are still seen as a valid tool also by researchers (Hope, 2018) to use when introducing refugee literature in the classroom. Clearly, this ethical tension and challenge is connected to the issue of representing someone else, while also labelling them as vulnerable. It is crucial to bear in mind hooks' (1994) words about "the privileged act of naming" that "often affords those in powers access to mode of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place" (p. 62). hooks' insights are crucial for the discussion of the identity of refugees in the classroom, as it underlines power dynamics in identity definitions. It is vital to let the pupils define themselves in their uniqueness, without attaching labels and categorizations that remove complexities from their identities as individuals. As Magne Dypedahl and Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund (2020) rightly claim, nuances and ambiguities must be acknowledged in the classroom (p. 12). Dypedhal and Lund (2020) seem to refer to complexities in relational abilities and within subjects and content, and claim that

> the main task of foreign language education is not to provide learners with extensive lists of rules for how to behave in various contexts, but rather to keep increasing learners' awareness of the close relationship between language and context, and to prepare students to cope with the complexity of contexts. (p. 16)

For learners to acknowledge and know how to behave with the complexities that form identities, it is essential that teachers do not perpetrate stereotypes about refugees.

*Author 1* envisions, instead, a possibility for refugee pupils in their classroom to "be seen and heard" by others (para. 2). However, this possibility is not followed by the possible responses that refugee pupils could have to these representations, and the ethical, affective, and pedagogical values these responses might have for the classroom. Author 2, in turn,

refers to the possibility that generalizations and stereotypes could be made by teachers and pupils, and claims that teachers have a responsibility to avoid them as "that will not show justice to the diversity between individuals" (para. 5). The author's words speak to me about the impossibility of justice where stereotypes are reproduced and attached to pupils. In their discussion about the role of critical pedagogies to enhance teachers' competencies, Monica Miller Marsh and Daniel Castner (2017) rightly claim that teachers' task is "to make power relations visible and to work alongside her students and other community members to promote collective action that leads to social change" (p. 875). At the same time, the LK20 claims that this vision, can "promote curiosity and engagement and help prevent prejudices" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019d, para. 2). For Boylan (2017), a critical teacher education system which introduces discomfort can disrupt "hegemonic taken for granted beliefs and prejudices" (p. 378). Discomfort is also part of the critical and transgressive pedagogical approaches by Zembylas' (2015) and hooks' (1994) who insist on the pedagogical value of discomfort. For a sustainable pedagogy it is crucial that a plurality of voices is fostered in the classroom, and that possible prejudices are faced in order to overcome them.

For Dypedhal and Lund (2020), "intercultural communication is understood as any dialogue in which tension may occur as a result of different 'lenses'" (p. 19). This definition seems to put the responsibility for tension only on the glasses that every person wears, while avoiding considering power structures, systemic discrimination and marginalization that create people's experiences of society and the world. In light of this consideration, Dypedahl's (2019) definition of intercultural competence as "the ability to relate constructively to people who have mindsets and/or communication styles that are different from one's own" (p. 102) needs to be complemented by a critical understanding of society and classroom dynamics. I propose that YA refugee literature shifts the attention from the need for intercultural competence to the need for ethical competence. In Norway, where the school curriculum strongly focuses on democratic values, the classroom has the potential to become a real democratic space where pupils encounter tensions and conflicts and learn to participate democratically. However, the absence of ethics and affect from the general discourses about intercultural competence seems to be an obstacle to the development of ethical competence in the classroom. What would happen if YA refugee literature were used by teachers and pupils as a venue to open up spaces of real democratic discussion in the EFL classroom?

### 3.5.2 Teachers and Pupils Learning *with* the Refugee Subjects

The following contributions by *Author 3* and *Author 4* provide knowledge that could answer that question. Author 3, for example, describes Viola as "a role model" for their pupils showing the impact and importance of education in the definition of someone's identity (para 5). In this case, the refugee character becomes a teacher for the classroom pupils. The author's perspective on storytelling as a pedagogical tool is also shared by *Author 4* who engages with the literary text as a pedagogical source of ethical transformation. *Author 4* proposes that an analysis of identity in *The Good Braider* as *liquid* (quoting Bauman, 2004) can foster a supportive and inclusive EFL classroom (p. 5). The author comments on Viola's words "I am an American girl from Portland, Maine. But I am also a girl from Juba" (Farish, 2010, p. 213) with an insight from their personal experience as a teacher of refugee students:

> I often get an intriguing question when students are filling out personal forms. Some course participants wonder if they can write Syria *and* Norway in the box 'My homeland'. In other words, if they can identify themselves as both a person from Syria *and* a person from Norway, including all the cultural competences this entails. Conceptualizing identity in this way moves us from a deficit-oriented perspective on refugees, but rather to see the resources and strengths every individual brings. (*Author 4*, para. 5)

I recognize in the in-service teacher's essay how reading and critically analyzing refugee literature have taught them to reflect about daily encounters in the classroom and make evaluations of these encounters as pedagogical impulses. Moreover, I glimpse in the in-service teacher's excerpt what teacher and researcher Delvin Dinkins (2009) would poetically define as "the intersection of their own autobiographies with those of the students" (p. 272). This intersection of personal experiences is particularly valuable for the understanding of what sustainable means in relation to knowledge creation, namely seeing the refugee subject as a resourceful and active agent of experience and knowledge.

In another moment, *Author 4* explicitly connects their discussion of Viola's identity to their own identity as teacher and the identity of their students. They claim: "In my work as an EFL teacher for refugees, these are reflections I have encountered in the classroom, and the challenges that refugees experience has *[sic]* pushed me to reconsider the ways in which we think about identity" (para. 1). *Author 4* claims that refugee representations and their interaction with refugee students have shaped their understanding of identity. The teacher then becomes not only a reflective agent, but also a learner, learning with their refugee students. In the discussion around teacher education, Boylan (2017) proposes to move the

focus from social justice to ethics in order to grasp and attend to the complexities of teacher education. Boylan (2017) claims that social justice is a "malleable term with multiple meanings" (p. 370), while explaining how ethics in critical teacher education can address issues of social class and oppression and bring "concerns of the marginalised in the curriculum" (p. 374). One of the challenges of teaching inclusive pedagogies and diverse literatures in the classroom entails teaching and learning *with* diversity, where different knowledges, cultural backgrounds, values, believes and positions interact.

The discomfort voiced in the classroom by some in-service teachers in relation to lack of competence for teaching a multicultural classroom is a first sign of this problem which points at lack of professionalization courses and resources. Moreover, terms around affect, ethics, and power dynamics, as they emerge from refugee literature, pose pedagogical challenges to the teachers. In this sense, a sustainable pedagogy of YA refugee literature brings an awakening call to the English classroom that emphasizes the fact that teachers need more than understanding, empathy, and content mastering; they need affective, ethical, and critical approaches to the literature that questions notions of power, racism, and inequity. In my view, a sustainable pedagogy of YA refugee literature is ethical when it allows collaborative knowledge production in the classroom and the undoing of the teacher and researcher as the only person who bears knowledge. Consequently, sustainable pedagogy is sustainable for the subjects involved when their positionalities are questioned and reshaped in a process of equitable power distribution that not only defines the subjects, but also the concept of education. A sustainable pedagogy of YA refugee literature proposes that it is necessary to develop ethical and affective encounters where power dynamics and privileges are acknowledged, and transformative positionalities are adopted.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has been an exercise of 'braiding' the poetic representations of affective touches with feminist questions about identity development and cultural belonging. I have discussed touch as an ambivalent and contradictory borderland as represented in the YA refugee novels in free verse by Lai and Farish. The literary and pedagogical exploration of affective encounters will continue in the next chapter where I examine other tensions and contradictions in the affective realm that define relations in portrayals of displacement. The connection between touch and affective encounters is further discussed in Chapter 5 through the lens of an ethics of response-ability (Barad, 2012; Oliver, 2015).

# Chapter 4. Com-passion as Pedagogy in Thi Bui's and Leila Abdelrazaq's Graphic Memoirs

**Abstract**

In this chapter, I analyze the notion of compassion in YA refugee literature, focusing on how this affect constitutes a form of sustainable pedagogy. I examine two graphic memoirs, Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* and Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*, explaining how these refugee narratives for young adults commit to compassion as a pedagogical affect. I unravel how the graphic memoirs offer pedagogical moments and how they represent new compassionate ways to look at knowledge creation. I argue that Abdelrazaq's and Bui's narratives enact a form of pedagogy by illustrating how knowledge transmission does not only concern reason but also entails an affective process. I claim that Bui's memoir represents the pedagogical in the encounter with the fragilities, vulnerabilities, and incoherence of the family. In turn, Abdelrazaq's memoir portrays pedagogical instances of compassionate knowledge creation and transmission about Palestinian history and traditions. It is crucial to underline that compassion as pedagogy shapes the image of the family and the nation in the two memoirs reimagining models of relationality and belonging beyond the idea of patriarchal family and nation. Regarding my theoretical framework, I draw on Nancy's (2000) notion of "com-passion" to analyze the representations of what I call *com-passionate intimacies* in the two memories. Furthermore, I engage with Seigworth's (2020) conceptualization of affect as pedagogy to examine the relational components of compassion as pedagogy. Lastly, I draw on Berlant's (2004) formulation of compassion as a site of contradiction to consider the complexities of this affect in the two memoirs and its potential for dreaming and imagining new futures. In my view, theorizing compassion as pedagogy can propose more capacious educational approaches to refugee narratives while allowing for a discussion of the ethical dilemmas and contradictions that compassion itself brings to the conversation around sustainable pedagogies in this thesis. In the last part of the chapter, I discuss possible obstacles in the access to YA refugee literature in the English classroom in Norway.

### 4.1 Introduction: On Touching Compassion

In chapter 3, I analyzed the concept of the borderland, focusing particularly on the tensions and the alliances in the relationship between refugee daughters and mothers in novels in free verse. I defined touch as borderland where the encounter with the Other affects the girls' development of identity and cultural belonging. In this sense, I have this far considered touch as an affective and pedagogical act that can create a sense of belonging and feminist transgenerational alliances in the displaced borderland. This chapter seeks to continue reflecting on touching while turning to the notion of compassion in YA refugee graphic memoirs. Hilary Chute (2011) addresses literary scholars and teachers in her discussion of how comics engage with life narratives in multimodal ways. Chute (2011) employs the following words to describe the act of drawing: "a kind of touching the past. Comics is above all, a haptic form. It demands tactility, a physical intimacy with the reader in the acts of cognition and visual scrutiny" (p. 112). I concur with Chute that graphic stories commit to an act of touching, but instead of considering that in relation to the reader, I propose to look at the touching experience within the graphic memoir as an intimate form of cognition.

This chapter thus is informed by my inquiry of the tactile experience in histories of displacement to canvass how touching with compassion and being touched by the affect of compassion is represented as a form of pedagogy in YA refugee graphic memoirs. In particular, I examine the graphic memoirs *Baddawi* (2015), written and illustrated by Leila Abdelrazaq, and *The Best We Could Do* (2018) [32], by Thi Bui, focusing on the representation of compassion as pedagogy. As feminist postcolonial scholar Sneja Gunew (2009) aptly maintains, a Eurocentric belief in the superiority of reason over feeling in the practice of learning is still prevailing in the work on affect in the Humanities (p. 11). Turning to affect in the discourse of pedagogy of refugee literature thus seems to me inevitable today when discourses from politicians worldwide around displacement and refugees are so deeply impregnated and constituted by "sticky" emotions and affects (Ahmed, 20014 p. 16) such as fear and hate. Dernikos et al. (2020) claim that "We are living in uncertain times – moments where bodies, spaces, and things are continually disciplined, managed, marginalized, and even violently erased" (p. 10). In this context, it is urgent to consider affect in relation to literary representations of minoritized subjects and investigate the ways affects such as compassion can produce counter-discourses to hate and fear. Including compassion in the

[32] In this chapter, I abbreviate the title as *The Best.*

discussion of sustainable pedagogy thus points to the entanglements between the social and political life, and education contexts and processes.

### 4.1.1 On Compassion and Other Affects

In a myriad of ways, scholars in different disciplinary fields have attempted to define affect and, yet, they have come to agree on the resistance or impossibility to define this term. In my thesis, where I agree on the impossibility of providing one definition, I adopt philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi's (2021) approach to affect as something that is "transindividual, directly relational, and immediately eventful, it overspills on all sides the interiority of the psychological subject" (p. xiv). I find Massumi's approximation particularly relevant for my research, since he refers to affect as that which exceeds the individual subject. His theorization of the subject as "transindividual" is key for my thesis on refugee representations, given my focus on the relations, the collective, and the community. Moreover, Massumi (2021) underlines that affect allows the subject to be in relation with others (human and more-than-human), going beyond the subject's individuality. If emotion belongs to the individual, affect then belongs to the transindividual relational encounter.

In their study on affect in education, Dernikos et al. (2021) propose to look at affect focusing more on what it does than on what it is. Following their line of investigation, I consider compassion's pedagogical role in YA graphic memoirs as a doing. I will get back to this point later in the discussion. Before doing that, I deem necessary to provide some definitions of compassion by scholars in different fields to situate the discussion.

In the field of refugee studies, where I locate myself as a researcher, Bernard (2020) and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2021) strongly advocate for an awareness of the moralistic use of compassion in relation to discourses about refugees, warning readers about the negative use of compassion to reinforce the rhetoric of the victim/savior and deprive refugee subjects of their agency. It is, then, already a matter of fact that compassion alone is not enough to change discriminating and oppressing discourses about refugees. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020) also claims that narratives where refugees are portrayed both as vulnerable and suffering[33], or actively engaged in the social dynamics of the hosting countries, can encourage compassion and solidarity from the non-refugee community (p. 2). However, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020) warns against this rhetoric, as it can lead to the attribution of agency solely to non-refugee

[33] These portrayals are also common in depictions of Indigenous Peoples. See, for example, Eve Tuck's notion of "damage-centred" research in Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 409–427. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15.

subjects. Consequently, agency would be taken away from refugees, who are "acted upon" instead (p. 3). In the two graphic memoirs I analyze in this chapter, compassion is portrayed as belonging to the refugee characters and their complex relations towards the family and the nation in ways that grant the refugee subject agency. The effect of this circulation of compassion is a reshaping of the power dynamics among the subjects involved. At the same time, I argue that the subjects' capacity for compassion leads them to action in that they are not only affected by compassion, but they also affect compassionately. Consequently, the refugee subjects are portrayed as responsible for the compassion. In contrast with other narratives that perpetuate the pernicious victim/savior binary, the two graphic memoirs that I analyze here introduce the refugee character as the compassionate subject with capacity to act relationally.

In my discussion of compassion, I also consider the tensions, contradictions, and knots that reside in this affect as illustrated in refugee literature. Seigworth (2020) further reminds us that the field of affect studies belongs to "the knots and tangles and incoherencies and ambivalences that aren't to be straightened or resolved" (p. 91). By discussing representations of compassion in the two memoirs, I have brought to light how compassion circulates in these stories of displacement written by minoritized authors and whose characters are refugees themselves. I have looked at how compassion is an affect that circulates inside refugee stories, which contrasts with research on compassion mostly focusing on the role of the subjects who feel the emotion for those who suffer. In this sense, then, compassion has been theorized as an emotion that belongs to those who are not directly suffering; it departs from them and affects the sufferers in different ways. Martha Nussbaum (2003), for instance, defines compassion as narrow, polarizing, and eudemonistic in the American context after 9/11. She also points out that for compassion to be a social and political force that does not discriminate, it needs to be supported by an "education in common human weakness and vulnerability" (p. 24) to recognize the obstacles to compassion itself. Nussbaum (2003) suggests that "the education of emotion, to succeed at all, needs to take place in a culture of ethical criticism, and especially self-criticism" (p. 25). Zembylas (2012) also looks at compassion as critical pedagogy for social justice claiming that that sense of "shared fate" is necessary for compassion to function in sites of ethnic conflict[34]. He

[34] Other models of critical pedagogies, such as bell hooks' 'engaged pedagogy' (1998), Paulo Freire' pedagogy of the oppressed (1997), and Sandy Grande's 'red pedagogy' in Native American contexts (2004) discuss the role of pedagogy in the development of critical consciousness.

proposes the sharing of pain and vulnerabilities from both sides of the conflict for overcoming it and educating into human rights.

The insights on ambivalences and criticality of compassion presented by Seigworth (2020), Nussbaum (2003) and Zembylas (2012) are crucial for my formulation of sustainable pedagogy, a pedagogy that can be affective and compassionate, but only if based on the recognition of the incongruences and criticalities it carries and entails. Strom and Martin (2017) claim that affect could be the resource to understand the contradictions and complexities of today's Western world (p. 5). Thus, this critical study on the literary representations of compassion can enhance the understanding of complexities and contradictions not only of the educational dimension in Norway but also of the social one. Berlant (2004) also formulates compassion as a site of contradiction and claims that "it implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers, with the emphasis on the spectator's experience of feeling compassion and its subsequent relation to material practice" (p. 1)[35]. The use of the term "spectator" sounds provocative to me here as it marks the distance between the one who sees/the viewer and the sufferer. Still, this is another definition that puts compassion on the side of the spectator/seer/feeler, who is affected by the pain of the Other and is expected to act responsibly and ethically for re-establishing social justice after the rupture of human rights. In this chapter, I claim that compassion is an affect that belongs to the refugee subjects who make use of it to act, and not react, pedagogically, ethically, and responsibly. This perspective on compassion, as an emotion belonging to the refugee characters and circulating from them, is crucial for understanding the active role of refugee subjects in the field of education, social justice, and human rights.

### 4.1.2 Introducing Leila Abdelrazaq's and Thi Bui's Graphic Worlds

Turning to the workings of compassion as pedagogy in the primary texts of analysis, *Baddawi* portrays the life of the author's father, Ahmad, in the refugee camp of Baddawi in Beirut, Lebanon. As most graphic novels about the Middle East, the memoir is drawn in black and white, signaling Abdelrazaq's association with Arab identity and the influence of a black-and-white avant-garde stylistic choice (Reyns-Chikuma & Lazreg, 2017, p. 760). The

[35] I claim that this definition has tensions in it as it excludes the possibility of the sufferer to feel compassion and affect with it. The *Refugee Hosts Project* is an example of research in the humanities that goes against this take on compassion. By looking at spaces and relationships in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, the project has engaged the local communities of refugees in different projects aiming at representing networks and resistances within the refugee camps, where refugees are active agents of hospitality. More on this project in chapter 5.

graphic memoir begins with an introduction to the Palestinian exodus to Lebanon and other neighbor countries after the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1948 and finishes when Ahmad leaves the camp for the US thirty years later. As Abdelrazaq (2015) writes in the Preface to her memoir, this story is not only about her father, but also about the millions of Palestinians who have suffered exile and displacement since the Israeli occupation and ethnical cleansing that started in 1948 (p. 12 and 18). Ahmad's personal story is hence framed, strictly connected and dependent on the shared history of the Palestinian nation. The title of the memoir, Baddawi, is the name of the camp in Beirut, but the word also means 'nomad', which I interpret as a clear reminder of the condition of displacement of the Palestinian people. The narrative follows Ahmad's life in the camp from 1951 to 1980 when he leaves and moves to the US for studying. Abdelrazaq is both author and first-person narrator of the story, a narrative strategy that manages to convey an intensification of identification and thus affects such us empathy and compassion. In *Baddawi*, the identification of the author-narrator with Palestinian identity is strictly connected with the representation of compassion as pedagogy. By representing scenes of painful events and history that affected the lives of her father and grandparents, *Baddawi* functions as a site of compassionate connection between the author, her family, and their shared national identity.

In turn, *The Best* presents the story of Thi Bui and her family before, during, and after the Vietnam War. Bui's debut memoir is drawn in black, orange, and white and is told from the author's perspective, who is the focalizer of the entire story. *The Best* begins with the image of Thi in labor and giving birth to her son, which occupies the very first chapter of the memoir. Thi's fear and pain is conveyed both through words and images that show her body in labor at the hospital, the surgical instruments, and the blood. The theme of birth comes back in the memoir through the representation of Thi's mother's pregnancies and births. Sally McWilliams (2019) sustains that being mothers does not bring them closer (p. 324). I disagree with McWilliams, and I claim that the act of giving birth opens the narrative and allows Thi to start her path in the exploration of her emotional and affective connection with her mother in a very authentic way. This emotional connection with her mother and then her father becomes one of the main threads in the narrative, which alternates memories of Thi's parents since they were children, until they fled to the US and resettled there as refugees. Throughout the entire memoir, affective pedagogical moments of knowledge transmission take place between Thi and her parents, affecting her relationship with them. When I say affective pedagogical moments, I mean that Thi's parents are depicted as a source of knowledge when they share their stories with her, and that the emotional bond with her

parents is thus not only forged through the transmission of knowledge but also sustained by the same knowledge transmission. In other words, this circulation of embodied knowledge activates the affect of compassion between the characters. Thus, knowledge is not only rational but also embodied and affective, and, as such, it becomes, following hooks (1994), a mode 'of engaged pedagogy'.

The two graphic memoirs tell stories of refugees from different geographical, historical, and political contexts, but they have in common the intention of re-telling personal, familiar, and national histories through transgenerational knowledge transmission in affective ways. As Gunew (1994) rightly puts it, "minority discourse is thus not simply an oppositional or counter-discourse. It also undoes the power of dominant discourses to represent themselves as universal" (p. 42). Abdelrazaq's and Bui's graphic narratives undo power dynamics in terms of the representation of the Palestinian occupation and genocide and the Vietnam war, respectively, making Western discourses non-universal.

### 4.1.3 Contextualizing the Texts as Critical, Affective, and Pedagogical Sources

Both primary texts belong to the genre of the graphic novel representing refugee stories, which includes representative titles such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus. A survivor's tale* (2003), Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993-1995) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003) (Babic, 2013). In the last twenty years, scholars from the humanities and the social sciences have shown an increasing interest in using graphic novels such as *Maus*, *Palestine* and *Persepolis* regularly in higher education courses to discuss "memoir, cultural history, postmodern literature, and area studies" (Heer & Worcester, 2009, p. xi) and as tools to "enhance secondary school students' critical visual literary and literary experience" (Rimmereide, 2021, p. 99). I think *The Best* and *Baddawi* follow their steps and need to be part of this canon. Although *Baddawi* and *The Best* are quite recent texts and the scholarly interest in them is still limited, it is important for me to mention the work done by other scholars so far. The critical value of both texts has been discussed by in the contexts of the humanities and refugee studies primarily. Anna Bernard (2020) provides a general introduction and insight to Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*, defining it as a coming-of-age story among graphic narratives in the broader genre of refugee writing. For Bernard (2020), the graphic memoir juxtaposes past and present temporalities, public and private stories and "demonstrates the memoir's capacity for visual intertextuality and intermediality" by referring to Palestinian art and literary traditions (p. 75). In this chapter, I discuss how compassion circulates in the narrative, focusing on the representations of Palestinian art and traditions.

*Baddawi* has also been rightly analyzed as a graphic memoir that engages with the notion and the lived reality of the camp. Focusing on the discussion of urban space in comics, Dominic Davies (2020) underlines how *Baddawi* represents the camp as a vibrant part of the city of Beirut. Although this study does not directly relate to my discussion of compassion as pedagogy, it is a significant thought provoker about the paradoxes of visibility and invisibility of refugee camps and their inhabitants in Norway too[36]. Bernard (2020) also points out that the memoir represents "the camp as a dynamic site of sociality, creativity and culture as well as exploitation and violence" (p. 75). In my discussion, I expand Bernard's reflection on the contradictions in the camp to explore how compassion, with its knots and incongruences, not only circulates among the inhabitants of the camp but also across generations outside the camp.

Published only a few years later, and also in the US, *The Best* has been included within the subgenre of Vietnamese American graphic memoirs that resist the dominant and stereotypical military American narrative about Vietnam. In this sense, *The Best* does actual decolonial work (Earle, 2018; McWilliams, 2019). McWilliams (2019) provides a thorough analysis of the novel as a "multilayered feminist" work that explores affective transgenerational connections, memories, and traumas, creates archival knowledge in the field of Vietnamese diaspora, and "destabilizes the rhetoric and realities of U.S. exceptionalism and assimilation" (p. 315). McWilliams (2019) rightly underlines that Thi's parents both face violence in their motherland, but also reproduce discourses of assimilation and discrimination once resettled in the US. McWilliams (2019) contends that Bui's memoir "unfolds the interconnected complexities of familial relations, trauma, memory making, and critical reflections that produce and sustain Vietnamese diasporic collective survival and its affective archive of belonging" (p. 339). I concur with McWilliams (2019) in that the family can sometimes 'silence' memories and stop their continuation from one generation to the other, while, at the same time, passing traumatized silences. However, while McWilliams (2019) prioritizes the depiction of past family trauma, my argument starts from a discussion of trauma also in relation to futurity, a point that McWilliams only mentions briefly.

Both memoirs, which have been discussed by previous research as archives of affect (Cheurfa, 2020; McWilliams, 2019), represent the collective as intimately intertwined with

[36] In Norway, under current law, there are no refugee camps, but only asylum-seeking centers. Asylum seekers live in these centers from the moment of arrival in Norway until their application for refugee status is accepted. No asylum-seeking center is located in the main cities, and Oslo, the capital, does not have any asylum-seeking center (https://www.udi.no/asylmottak/adresser-til-asylmottakene/).

the personal. As postcolonial literature and comparative studies scholar Hiyem Cheurfa claims (2020), *Baddawi* is a "graphic narrative of collective remembrance" (p. 377). I claim that compassion is a fundamental affect in Abdelrazaq's retelling of the collective Palestinian history as deeply entangled to the personal history of her father and the community where he lives. In turn, in her discussion of *The Best*, McWilliams (2019) contends that affect has a powerful role in the creation of historical memories in the diasporic Vietnamese identity. The scholar reflects on how the emotions travel throughout temporal and spatial frames via generational connections, emphasizing the presence of post-memories in diasporic culture. According to McWilliams (2019), Thi shows empathy towards her parents by "seeing and apprehending – and viscerally sharing – their losses of home, comfort, family cohesion, and culture" (p. 318), or at least trying it. I extend McWilliams' study and argue that Bui also uses compassion to imagine new ways of belonging to the family by defining alternative relational bonds with her parents. For Stella Oh (2020), Bui's memoir is an "archive of feelings … transmitted from one generation to another" (p. 84), a point that is crucial for my discussion because it informs my analysis of com-passion as an affect where pain is transmitted from one generation to the other, and that allows future generations to transform that pain into new feelings.

Previous research has also hinted at the pedagogical values of the two graphic memoirs. Harriett Earle (2018) rightly, but briefly, points out that *The Best* is a new form of graphic narrative that is "educational, entertaining and affective" (p. 88). I find the intersection of affective and pedagogical elements in this analysis relevant for my study. Cheurfa (2020) underlines the pedagogical value of the work of Abdelrazaq for representing the history of Lebanon and Palestine. Significantly, Abdelrazaq includes a glossary of Arabic terms and fundamental historical references at the end of the memoir, a gesture towards recognition of difference, but with an intention to establish bridges across cultures. This choice seems to me pedagogical, but still less radical than using terms in a different language without providing a translation, which would have important ethical repercussions for challenging the primacy and universality of English language in the Western world and for including other voices and languages in the representation of refugee narratives. This aspect is key to me and to the discussion of inclusion in the EFL classroom. Nova Robinson (2019) also examines the representations of "precariousness of life for Palestinians in Lebanon before and during the Lebanese Civil war" (p. 115). For Robinson (2019), Abdelrazaq's text can function as a critical pedagogical resource in the classroom to teach about the civil war in Lebanon and to move "the focus from the geopolitical to the personal" (p. 115). Drawing on

these previous studies, this chapter attends to the relationship between compassion and pedagogy as represented in both memoirs. I claim that both Bui's and Abdelrazaq's graphic memoirs belong to this new type of multimodal storytelling that brings educational and affective realms to the narrative (McCloud, 1993, p. 121). I argue that the complex affect of compassion circulates in the memoirs, shaping spaces such as family and nation. Inspired by the previous studies I have mentioned in this section, my analysis considers *The Best* and *Baddawi* as affective and educational archives where compassion circulates in pedagogical and imaginative ways.

**4.2 Com-passion: Staying with the Pain**

Nancy (2000) reminds us that compassion is not "a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Compassion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness" (xiii). Nancy (2000) uses the spelling "com-passion" to underline the aspect of being together, close and in intimacy with the pain of the Other and being affected by it. In the following discussion of this affect, I adopt Nancy's spelling given how com-passion in *Baddawi* is represented in relation to the pain out of the loss of the nation as other. In one passage, Abdelrazaq uses the recipe to make za'atar in symbolic ways to portray the intimate exchange of knowledge between Ahmad and his mother, problematizing the loss of the nation for Palestinian people. Za'atar is described as "a staple in every Palestinian household … a mixture of dried herbs, sesame seeds, salt and various spices" (p. 31) (see Appendix C). The entire process of making za'atar takes three pages and several panels in the memoir where the plants, the hands of the gatherers, and the collective work around the table to pound the herbs happens (pp. 32-33) (see Appendix D and E). The protagonists of this fragment of narrative are Ahmad and his mother working, her hands holding and showing the thyme, and objects such as a bowl of olive oil and the bags full of thyme. I want to particularly highlight two elements in the bottom panel – the pan where sesame seeds are roasted and the jar that contains their za'atar. Abdelrazaq accurately draws the smell of the roasted seeds as four thick lines that leave the pan, merge into 2 lines, embrace Ahmad in the panel above, and touch the speech balloon to continue bringing the perfume to imagined places (p. 33). This crossing into another panel is for me a visual transgression made possible by the use of a multimodal text. This visual strategy speaks about the power of visuality, affect, the senses, and storytelling as all connected in the affective process of knowledge creation and transmission to cross borders and frames. Furthermore, the embrace of the familiar smell

around Ahmad is a caring gesture that contrasts with the violence happening all around the child. The reminder of how za'atar is connected to the history of occupation and oppression of Palestinian people is drawn in the next page. The jar containing the za'atar contains another deeply symbolic message that is made clear by the mother's words: "You know, Ahmad, next time you gather thyme for the za'atar, it will be in Palestine" (p. 34) (see Appendix F). I interpret this moment of com-passion, represented multimodally in the text, as a form of pedagogy where the mother and the son allow themselves to mourn the loss of the nation, but also to dream about the future.

The transgenerational passage of knowledge that starts from the gathering of thyme and the making of a traditional recipe allows the affective and imaginative response in Ahmad and his mother. Knowledge about the family and the Palestinian nation is transmitted through the sharing of recipes and storytelling as vehicles containing loss and pain, but also hope for the future. After his mother's words, "Ahmad wondered what Palestine would be like. He thought of his mother's stories" (p. 34). The presence of these apparently opposite affects delineates knowledge transmission as ambivalent, which echoes Berlant's (2004) theorizing of compassion, in my view. According to Berlant (2004), "compassion measures one's value in terms of the demonstrated capacity not to turn one's head away but to embrace the sense of obligation to remember what one has seen and, in response to that haunting, to become involved in a story of rescue or amelioration" (p. 7). Following Berlant (2004), I recognize both the obligation to remember and to ameliorate in Ahmad's words about za'atar and through storytelling.

My formulation 'staying with the pain' arguably permeates the frames of every chapter in *Baddawi*. Palestinian embroideries, *tatreez*, characterize the space of the narration, with the result of framing the visual reading experiences within the Palestinian historical and cultural dimensions. According to Bernard (2020), the Palestinian patterns "frame" the narrative in *Baddawi* (p. 75). I claim that the act of framing the story into Palestinian embroidery not only situates the memoir and its story within the Palestinian tradition, but also functions as a com-passionate constant re-positioning of Ahmad's story within a pattern of national diaspora. If the embroideries represent the traditional Palestinian cultural dimension that frames the narrative as a constant reminder of the national diaspora, the ways in which panels are drawn could depict the history of the Palestinian border. The lines of each panel are not straight but seem slightly bent and malleable. This visual element reminds me of the constant erosion of the Palestinian border by Israeli occupation as visually represented in

Palestinian films (Makki, 2022), but also of the movement and displacement of the Palestinian people.

Another explicit reminder of the Palestinian culture and displacement is the main character, Ahmad, who always wears the same clothes throughout the story. The choice of the striped t-shirt 'uniform' is not casual. As Abdelrazaq (2015) explains in the preface to the novel, it is the character of Handala, drawn by the famous Palestinian artist and cartoonist Naji al-Ali in 1975, which inspired the drawing of Ahmad. Handala never faces the reader but would turn around once the Palestinian people returned home (Abdelrazaq, 2015, p. 11). Al-Ali was killed in 1987 and his character is still not showing his face and has become, in all this time, a symbol of every Palestinian person who lives in displacement since 1948. As Abdelrazaq claims in the introduction to her novel (2015), *Baddawi* is the story of every Palestinian waiting to go back home. If the characterization of Ahmad wearing the symbolic striped t-shirt is a reminder of the Palestinian diaspora, Abdelrazaq's father's face is shown throughout the entire story, in contrast to Handala, who never does that. I argue that this strategic representation constitutes a form of com-passionate intimacy, where the author-narrator is in intimate relatedness and difference with her father's history of displacement and pain.

Instances of com-passion in *The Best* are found between Thi and her parents. Earle (2018) recognizes the importance of the figures of the parents and how the narrative of identity development is present in the novel in relation to their traumatic life experiences (p. 93). Bui (2018) claims that writing the memoir stemmed from the following: "bridging the past and the present… I could fill the void between my parents and me. And if I could see Viêt Nam as a real place, and not a symbol of something lost… I would see my parents as real people… and learn to love them better" (p. 36). Bui is telling the history of her family to explain her feelings towards her parents and the relational and affective dynamics between them. In my view, Bui conveys com-passion towards her parents when she portrays moments of knowledge transmission between them. In describing her relationship with her mother, Thi is affected by her mother's pain: "Maybe Má felt judgment coming from me, or maybe she felt uncomfortable talking to our family about her former life" (p. 136)[37]. In the image that accompanies Bui's words, the mother, referred to as "Mother" by the narrator, looks away outside the frame (maybe she looks at *her former life*?), serious and silent when interrogated

[37] Unfortunately, the images from Bui's *The Best* cannot be reproduced at this time. You can access some of the book's content for free here and from Abrams Books, which also includes a teaching guide.

by the daughter. Her silence and her cross-legged position both convey Mother's distance and inaccessibility of her story to her daughter. In contrast, she engages in speaking and gesturing when talking with Bui's husband, as shown in the panel below: "Whatever her reasons were, Má talked more freely about herself to my husband, Travis, in English, than to me" (p. 136). The fact that the mother uses English to narrate her story may also point to the fact that using a foreign language can allow her to distance herself from her own story. During Mother's conversation with her son-in-law, Thi sits in the back with a sulky expression on her face while her mother does not want to share her history with her directly but yet allows her to witness their conversation. Oh (2020) refers to "communal witnessing" to talk about Bui's narrative of traumatic memories (p. 86). I instead read this scene as an example of a "private witnessing" that defines the relationship between the mother and daughter. The tension between respect of the private realm and allowing someone in are two ethical aspects of the affective pedagogy here represented. On the one hand, the multimodal text illustrates how the mother is depicted as having agency and as a weaver of her own stories. On the other hand, this panel shows readers how Thi is affected and in a relationship of com-passionate intimacy with her mother and her pain.

*The Best* further represents com-passion as pedagogy in its portrayal of the vulnerabilities of the father figure. Thi (2018) claims that she had to distance herself from her father, and then to learn to ask her father "the right questions" before he began to open up and share "anecdotes without shape, wound beneath wound" (p. 92). Bui and her father are hence affecting and affected by one another. Words and images complement each other in *The Best* to represent the vulnerability that is part of the practice of knowledge transmission. The father's body is presented as weak, sick, always surrounded by cigarette smoke in their house in the US, and traumatized (Bui, 2018, p. 84). This portrayal of the father contributes to disrupting the dominant and violent stereotype of hegemonic and toxic masculinity based on the idea of a strong autonomous body.

In another instance, the vulnerability shifts from father to daughter in a sequence of four long vertical panels, positioned in parallel with each other and occupying two pages. In the first panel, the 7-year-old father appears in the foreground lost and concerned while fleeing his home with his family. In the second panel, the father is centered in the frame and the girl Thi is below, almost like at/from a high-angle perspective. The same visual technique is used also in panel 3, where Thi looks vulnerable, alone, and defenseless at the center of the empty panel. By juxtaposing the images of the two children, almost mirroring each other, the memoir shows how her father's pain, terror, and trauma have affected Thi (p. 129). Thi

finally understands her own feelings as an extension of her father's: "Afraid of my father, craving safety and comfort. I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own" (p. 129). These panels represent the turmoil and disturbance in com-passion that is transmitted visually by the representations of father and daughter next to each other, but also in their own loneliness, in a painfully com-passionate intimacy. I suggest that the visual strategies of representing the father and the daughter alternatively in the foreground and from high-angle perspectives may also involve the reader in this turmoil of circulation of com-passion, as the identification and the affective response moves from father to daughter and back again. The sequence of panels, in fact, ends with the dark shadow of the now adult father in the foreground, making his terror and suffering closer to the reader.

In another moment in the narrative, Thi remembers the period spent at home in the US with her father, while the mother was out of the house working, and her fear caused by her father's words and behavior. In my view, the father seems to have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression: "Bố told us scary stories not to entertain, but to educate us" (p. 73). These are the father's words: "If you hear a voice calling your name that you don't recognize … don't answer it. It is the spirit trying to trick you into opening your mouth to enter your body" (p. 73). And Thi continues: "he just didn't know … how to PROTECT us" (p. 74). The threatening and scary moments of education come back 200 pages later, when Thi remembers the lessons that her parents taught her and her siblings:

> They taught us to be respectful, to take care of one another, and to do well in school. Those were the intended lessons. The unintentional ones came from their unexorcised demons … and from the habits they formed over so many years of trying to survive. (Bui, 2018, p. 295)

A close up of young Thi's eyes and nose is positioned at the center of the page, above the two panels representing the parents. This strategy, where Thi's mouth does not appear may symbolize the impossibility of the young Thi to speak while witnessing the parents' demons. I interpret the smoke that moves in the two panels with the parents as a symbol of the demons they carry in themselves and to the family. The words, instead, belong to the adult Thi, who is able to show com-passion for her parents only later through her adult narrative voice. This speaks to me about the trauma and pain of Thi, before she is able to speak com-passionate words for her parents.

### 4.3 Com-passion as Pedagogy

Seigworth (2020) relevantly proposes pedagogy as "affect's first lesson, or maybe affect is pedagogy's first lesson" (p.87). As I understand his words, the use of the term 'lesson' already opens to the pedagogical dimension where the process of learning and teaching happens. Moreover, affect teaches us about the encounter that must happen in pedagogy, and that without that encounter pedagogy cannot exist. As Seigworth (2020) later states, "affect and pedagogy are inextricably inseparable" (p. 87). Affect is a pedagogy as it unravels the relationship with the world around, where histories continue to exist for generations, as both *Baddawi* and *The Best* illustrate. Seigworth (1999) defines affect as "our /first/ and remains, throughout our lives, as our /most fundamental/ relationship to the worlds around us" (para. x). The pedagogical and relational impulses in his approximations to affect interest me particularly, as they are key in my formulation of sustainable pedagogy as a relational and affective process. Different representations in both memoirs speak about this relational and pedagogical impulse in com-passion. For instance, Bui's words and the drawing of the borders of Vietnam as carved inside her body are deep portrayals of Thi's relation with and knowledge about Vietnam in *The Best*. Instead, the dark images of war and soldiers represented in *Baddawi*, together with images of Ahmad, show how affect is the most fundamental relationship with the world across temporal frameworks. According to Claire Gallien (2018), refugee literature has a temporality that "reaches beyond the past, nostalgia, and trauma, but also beyond the present and its many urgencies [and opens for] postcolonial futures" (p. 725). I recognize the inclusion of trauma, past and present, in *Baddawi* and *The Best* as affective ways to look at the future.

Moreover, these depictions speak about Barad's (2012) work on compassion as: "the very condition of possibility of feeling the suffering of the other, of literally being in touch with the other, of feeling the exchange of e-motion in the binding obligations of entanglements" (p. 219). I would argue that this compassionate entanglement is conveyed through the representation of different temporalities of the pain of Palestinian people in *Baddawi*. Different temporal frameworks are co-existing in the same page, together with Ahmad's narrative, as to say that that part of history, with the pain and trauma it brought, has not disappeared. War is juxtaposed to the children's games in the chapter "The Night Raid". The children, who cannot go to school that day because of the raid, are seen playing on the beach. Behind them stand the black shadows of the Israeli and Lebanese soldiers who arrived, the night before, at the same beach to attack and kill Palestinian people in the camp (p. 40) (see Appendix G). It is illustrative to also describe the ways in which the violence brought by

the soldiers is portrayed in this panel. Visually, the black ink to draw the sea and the weaves materializes slowly into the figure of the soldier, one detail after the other as in cartooning style where a sequence of image becomes animated. From waves with monstrous teeth, to rifles emerging from the sea, until the final dark human figure stepping on the sand. In this image, I see the violence not only against the Palestinian people, but also to the land and the betrayal committed by the soldiers against the ecosystem. They take advantage of the darkness of the night sea to bring death and destruction. This representation also speaks about the affect that García Zarranz and Duggan (2022) describe as that which "makes us aware of the unruliness of our bodies and feelings, our liveness, our imagines 'selves' as inextricably interwoven with others (human and nonhuman). It is easily moved, shifted, shaken" (p. 2). The scholars' words resonate with the representation of the soldiers, the nature, and the children affected in the encounter with each other. The same black shadows of the armed soldiers and of the deaths they leave behind continue on the next page, where the same visual juxtaposition allows them to be where the children run, and play smiling in the streets of the camp (p. 41) (see Appendix H). I claim that Abdelrazaq's technique to represent different temporalities in the same panel teaches readers about the brutal interruption of war in the everyday educational and pedagogical path of the children.

Moreover, these passages echo Gregg and Seigworth's (2010) words about "a body's *capacity* to affect and to be affected" (p. 2) in various ways. In the drawings of the shadows of the soldiers on the same page with Ahmad and his friends, I observe this body's capacity to affect and to be affected. The contrasting effect between Palestinian children and the soldiers created by the visual juxtaposition of different temporalities happens also through the juxtaposition of different bodies –the faceless silhouettes of the soldiers (and their victims) drawn next to the smiling and cheerful children. Being faceless does not remove their identity of soldiers and agents of death, but it does remove their individuality, and the possibility of a com-passionate encounter. At the same time, some Palestinian characters in the panel are also drawn without eyes. Could this mean that the violence is affecting them and taking something from them? Or instead, that even by closing their eyes it would be impossible to unsee and not to witness the destruction that is happening around them?

Looking closely to the position of the children in the panel, they are framed in the middle of the war scene, standing right above Abdelrazaq's words about the soldiers: "They did not want to leave any witnesses" (p. 41). Cheurfa (2020) discusses how *Baddawi* constitutes a literary testimony focusing on "the seeing child as witness to the Palestinian experience of displacement" (p. 360). I contend that Ahmad is not only a witness of the

history of displacement but also a transmitter of that knowledge who engages in it with com-passion. The representation of Ahmad and his friends who survived the raid and were able to witness it and share the history with future generations is for me a form of resistance. In this sense, I attribute this fragment of narration the ambivalent power of com-passionate pedagogy where the pain of the people who were killed is represented together with the hope for a future for some of the children. García Zarranz and Duggan (2022) speak about the temporality of affects as "transtemporal in that they can connect or disconnect past, present, and future frameworks" (p. 3). In Baddawi, affect allows past, present, and future on the same page. In this sense, I here agree with Cheurfa (2020) who claims that *Baddawi* is a "historically didactic graphic comic" (p. 366) and functions as an "act of resistance" against historical erasure (p. 365). I contend that, by representing a fundamental change in the relationship between the past and the present, com-passion functions as a pedagogy of resistance. By situating the children on the same page with the soldier's shadows of the past, future generations have the potential to become active agents of storytelling and social justice.

### 4.4 Dreaming and Imagining through Com-passion

For the Vietnamese American novelist and scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen (2009), compassion is a fundamental element that must characterize the act of writing and reading. This affect, however, may work against justice and equity: "compassion and its related emotions – empathy, sympathy, and pity – are hardly emotions that direct us or shape our narratives with any political or moral certainty" (p. 150). *The Best* and *Baddawi* propose a form of com-passion that before expecting a responsible response from the reader, enacts forms of resistance and empowerment through the tropes of dreaming and imagining. In *Being Palestinian: Personal Reflections on Palestinian Identity in the Diaspora*, Leila Abdul Razzaq[38] (2016) associates being Palestinian with dreaming, or the possibility to dream. Her words resonate with the words of Qasmiyeh who also authored a piece in the collection. In relation to dreaming, Qasmiyeh (2016) explains the following:

> As somebody who was born and brought up in a refugee camp, I have always felt that my Palestinian-ness is the pretext for understanding the "Other"; for thinking of those

[38] This is the way Abdelrazaq's surname is spelled in this work. In every other work of hers, her surname is spelled Abdelrazaq, as I do in this thesis.

> people whose rights have been diminished; for "dream[ing] while remembering" and "remember[ing] while dreaming." (p. 304)

Qasmiyeh associates his Palestinian identity to understanding the Other; these words speak to me about staying with the pain of those whose rights have been removed, and dreaming through the remembering of that shared pain. His words resonate with the trope of com-passion as a dreaming force in *Baddawi*. In the act of remembering and storying past histories, *Baddawi* commits also to an act of dreaming while remembering.

*Baddawi* portrays moments of knowledge creation about the history of Palestine happening mostly among children, who become agents and vehicles of the knowledge and the com-passion as pedagogy. On the contrary, except for Ahmad's mother, adults seem absent and far away from the educational and pedagogical dynamics represented in the memoir. Their absence resonates with the words of Said (1984), who speaks about the lack of literary narratives in the Palestinian literary tradition and the process of erasure and denial of Palestinian narratives from the general international community. He remembers his conversations over the phone with friends and relatives in Palestine and Lebanon, asking them to write and document the siege of Beirut in 1982 that resulted with the expulsion of the Palestinian Liberation Front out of the country. In response to their lack of engagement with the narration of the events, Said (1984) uses these words:

> Naturally, they were all far too busy surviving to take seriously the unclear theoretical imperatives being urged on them intermittently by a distant son, brother or friend. As a result, most of the easily available written material produced since the fall of Beirut has in fact not been Palestinian and, just as significant, it has been of a fairly narrow range of types: a small archive to be discussed in terms of absences and gaps-in terms either pre-narrative or, in a sense, anti-narrative. The archive speaks of the depressed condition of the Palestinian narrative at present. (p. 38)

The adults in *Baddawi* are also busy surviving. Except for Ahmad's mother who shares with him knowledge about Palestinian traditions and culture, teachers are almost entirely absent in the narrative. Their role as pedagogues is replaced by Ahmad and the other children. On the one hand, *Baddawi* counters the depressed condition identified by Said (1984). On the other hand, the novel seems to revolutionize the genre of Palestinian literature by attributing the role of knowledge creators and transmitters to the children.

In Bui's *The Best*, com-passion has the pedagogical force to imagine and create new relations with the family. The process of dreaming and imagining is mediated in Bui's graphic memoir by the possibility of healing from the pain of the past that was still haunting

her in her present: "What has worried me since having my own child, was whether I would pass along some gene for sorrow or unintentionally inflict damage I could never undo" (Bui, 2018, p. 327). Scared of transmitting transgenerational trauma to her own child, Bui seeks answers in her parents' history as war refugees. Thi feels the need to reconcile with her parents' silences and mistakes when she was a child and adolescent. In her act of reconciliation, Thi uses com-passion to recollect memories and overcome painful traumas of her past and her family's past. In this process of recollection, where the complexities of these relationships come to the surface and at the center of *herstory*, com-passion emerges as a pedagogical instrument of reconciliation. Reconciliation through com-passion allows Thi to imagine the future for her family, especially for her son. The memoir ends with two open panels where Thi's son plays by the sea while his mother looks at him from above and says, "But when I look at my son, now ten years old, I don't see war and loss" (Bui, 2018, p. 328). The mother's words continue in the last panel of the memoir, open as the open water in which her son is swimming, "I see a new life, bound with mine quite by coincidence, and I think maybe he can be free" (Bui, 2018, p. 329). The memoir ends with an open panel where Thi's son is swimming freely and peacefully in open waters. The initial fear, pain, and trauma seem to have been solved, giving space for hope and serenity in the future. A new generation living in peace and freedom is what Thi dreams of, imagines, and wishes for the future of her family. Imagining a peaceful and free future is the fuel of a sustainable pedagogy of YA refugee literature; the ethico-affective fuel that sustains pedagogical practices in times of resistance.

### 4.5 Obstacles to *Com-passionate Intimacies* in the Classroom

The reader of this thesis would now expect to find a final section where I bring the voices of the in-service teachers to the discussion of com-passion in the English classroom. In the previous chapters I have stressed how essential their voices are for the co-creation of knowledge about the values that YA refugee literature brings to the classroom. The in-service teachers' contributions in Chapter 3 shed light on the importance of empathy in the English classroom in Norway today. Thus, continuing to discuss the role of affect, in this case of com-passion, would have brought another layer of complexity to the discussion. However, this chapter ended up not including the in-service teachers' voices because of issues of inaccessibility to the primary text *Baddawi*. In 2019, when preparing the material for the data collection during my teaching with the in-service teachers in Autumn 2020, I decided not to add *The Best* to the syllabus as I did not deem it suitable for the grade target of that particular

course (grades 5-10); instead, I had chosen *Baddawi* as a more suitable narrative, also from the perspective that the in-service teachers might find it a good source to use in their own classrooms with their own pupils after studying it with me. However, only in 2020 I discovered that *Baddawi* was out of print and that the students would not be able to purchase it for the course at NTNU. The lack of accessibility forced me to leave the text out of the reading list for the course. The unavailability of the primary text prevented the reflection on trauma and com-passion with the in-service teachers. For Kathleen Stewart (2020), "Affect in the classroom was both an intellectual muscle and a social muscle that stretched the conceptual skin between an inside self and whatever was taking place outside it, pushing and pulling the subject into contingent, morphing shapes" (p. 33). Com-passion can change and shape those involved in the pedagogical encounters in Stewart's classroom, which echoes how com-passion shapes and carves Thi's skin in and by the encounter with the history of Vietnam and her family in a way. The intellectual and social muscle I had planned to exercise in the classroom with the in-service teachers was not used due to an issue of inaccessibility. The absence of the in-service teachers' voices in the discussion of what *Baddawi* can bring to the English classroom leaves a hole; a silence that must be acknowledged and faced. Recognizing the absences and the gaps in the conversation around YA refugee literature is also part of the sustainable pedagogy I propose in this thesis, which invites to inquiry and problematizing of these silences.

The fact that the primary text was not available for the students in that period of time speaks to the lack of access to certain resources for teachers at all levels of education in Norway. We are all witnessing attacks on minoritized voices in education today across countries such as the US, where school boards are banning *Maus* and LGBTQI+ stories from school libraries (Gross, 2022; Larabee, 2022), or in places across North America and Europe where teaching critical race theory or trans studies in school and university classrooms has become a risky enterprise (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). While this may not be the case in relation to refugee literature in Norway, censorship and lack of accessibility has targeted Sámi literary voices, through practices of erasure of their knowledge, in the history of the nation (Olsen & Sollid, 2022). Whether it is a past of displacement, or a contemporary unsolved occupation, genocide, and exile, these graphic memoirs indirectly challenge the pedagogical role of com-passion in Norwegian schools today. Elisabeth El Refaie (2012) presents the genre as a hybrid marginal medium that has not only been an object of repeated censorship throughout time, but also has allowed voices at the margins of society to be heard and to tell their version of facts (p. 32). The voices of the authors and of the characters in their stories are those of

subjects who belong to minoritized groups in American society, such as the Vietnamese American refugee Bui and the Arab Palestinian Abdelrazaq and their refugee parents respectively. The fact that *Baddawi* was out of print at the time speaks about the consequences of inaccessibility for education and research. Literature and gender scholar Marianne Hirsch (2004) comments of the relation between censorship and the visual representation of personal and cultural trauma in these terms:

> Sustained discussion of words and images, of reading and looking, seems especially urgent at a moment when trauma is instrumentalized as an alibi for censorship. […] Trauma that may be unspeakable but may be communicated viscerally and emotionally through the alternative cognitive structures of the visual. (p. 1211)

It appears obvious then that the intellectual and social muscle of com-passion necessitates of the availability of the primary texts to be stretched.

Parker Palmer (1993) talks about compassion in relation to education in *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* as follows:

> A knowledge of compassion aims not at exploiting and manipulating creation but at reconciling the world to itself. The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love. Hence, the act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, or allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community […]. (as cited in hooks, 2010, p. 160)

Com-passion thus brings pedagogy to the sphere of the community, of the collective.

As discussed in this thesis, Ahmed (2014) conceptualizes affect as a force that, generated in the private sphere, travels and circulates into the political, aesthetical, and ethical dimensions of the public. The two memoirs I have studied in this chapter represent forms of political storytelling where affect circulates from the private to the public realms and viceversa. *The Best* and *Baddawi* are literary works that Chute (2010) would define as "examples of politically invested aesthetic form" (p. 357). I would argue that this circulation is the element that turns these texts into political statements of pedagogy and responsibility. In the field of education, Bree Akesson and Olufunke Oba (2017) have looked at the role of using graphic novels in the social work university classroom to tackle social justice issues, pointing out how discussing the motivation of the authors is a critical element, together with using the texts as prompts for critical class discussions. While I have already discussed the positionalities of the two authors in the previous sections of this chapter, I here move to discuss the motivation of the publishers, which I consider an under investigated element in

the pedagogy of YA refugee literature today. Furthermore, considering the role of the publisher involves the teacher reader in a research task which is not expected today in the Norwegian curriculum.

### 4.5.1 The Role of Publishers: Accessibility and Accountability

These forms of pedagogy and resistance can be found in the work of the publishing companies that have worked with Abdelrazaq and Bui, namely Just World Books and Abrams Books. Considering the positionalities of publishing companies is another important task for the teachers of today. Thus, although the in-service teachers' voices are not present in this chapter, I hope the inclusion of a discussion of the positionality and ethics of the publishing companies can help them with the ethical task of choosing primary texts for their own classrooms. Leila Abdelrazaq (Just World Books, n.d.) describes the publishing house she worked with in these words: "Just World Books makes resources and space for much-needed conversations accessible to people, helping to increase public understanding around some of the most critical issues of our time" (para. 1). The reference to accessibility from Abdelrazaq is crucial to understand the power that publishers have in making spaces for minoritized voices like hers. Furthermore, Just World Books, based in Washington DC, collaborate with community-based organizations, such as the non-profit Just World Educational which is "dedicated to providing educational resources and experiences that inform and expand the public discourse in North America on issues of vital international concern. Its current focus is on issues of peace and justice, with particular attention to the Middle East" (Just World Educational, n.d., para 1). The cooperation between publisher and education is a crucial element to consider for a teacher who may want to use *Baddawi* in their classrooms.

The same effort towards creating an inclusive society by printing inclusive literature is mirrored in the work of Abrams Books, based in New York, that claim the following in their Mission Statement: "We strive to be inclusive in our publishing and our organization and to celebrate vibrant voices, cultures, and ideas" (Abrams Books, n.d., para. 1). I particularly appreciate the use of the pronoun 'we' that underlines that the publisher is part of the community and works for it to thrive and grow, and their "commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion" (n.d.). It is relevant to stress the use of the word equity, instead of equality, two concepts that are object of discussion in the field of educational studies in the Nordic countries today (Frønes et al., 2020). In today's society, which is less homogenous and more diverse not only for backgrounds and cultures, but also in relation to accessibility to

opportunities and rights, insisting on using the concept of equality, intended as "sameness in treatment" (Espinoza, 2007) to achieve social justice, means not to acknowledge the disadvantages some groups and individuals experience. As Frønes et al. (2020) aptly claim, equity can allow to actively "ensure that marginalized groups can use and realize this equality" (p. 2). I see in the work of both Abrams Books and Just World Books this active work of equity for granting spaces to minoritized voices. Their work for equity is for actual inclusion to take place. Abrams Books (n.d.) state a particular attention to accountability, as the following statement demonstrates: "we will identify and breakdown systemic barriers for marginalized voices by embedding diversity and inclusion in policies and practices; we will equip leaders with the ability to both manage diversity and be accountable for the results" (n.d., para. 4). These words are precious because the publisher acknowledges systemic discrimination that happens in the cultural field and invests energies in forming accountable leaders. In the publishing industry, those in power are expected to be accountable for the inclusion of diverse voices. Publishing companies have the power to choose which voices and stories are shared with the public and are told to the community. It is vital then to consider how power demands accountability in this industry, as a role model also for schools and educational contexts.

### 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed and discussed *Baddawi* and *The Best* as YA refugee narratives where com-passion circulates as a pedagogical force. By engaging in intimate and often ambivalent representations of the nation and of the family, the two graphic memoirs reshape history and imagine new presents and futures through words and images. The affective pedagogical value of the two multimodal texts was the focus of my analysis, which unfortunately missed the voices of the in-service teachers due to inaccessibility issues. Instead, I included a reflection on the power of accessibility and accountability in relation to the work of the two publishers, Just World Books and Abrams Books. These publishing houses constitute examples of organizations in power in the cultural field that remain accountable for their choices for the creation of an inclusive and just community where spaces are open to marginalized voices. Concluding this chapter on the note of accountability introduces a related ethical concept, that of responsibility, spelt as response-ability (Barad, 2012; Haraway, 2012), which will be the focus of the following chapter where young refugee characters in two autobiographical novels are discussed as response-able agents.

# Chapter 5. Voices of Response-ability in Martha Arual Akech and John Bul Dau's and Vesna Maric's Autobiographical Novels

## Abstract

In Chapter 5, I analyze the concept of response-ability in YA refugee literature, underlining its political, ethical, and pedagogical values for the English classroom. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the voices of the teenage refugee protagonists as political and ethical agents of response-ability in two autobiographical narratives: Martha Arual Akech and John Bul Dau's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl. Escaping Civil War* (2003) and Vesna Maric's *Bluebird: A Memoir* (2010). I explore how response-ability touches the main characters, Martha and Vesna, and how it affects their encounters with other refugee subjects and communities throughout their journey from Sudan and Bosnia to the US and the UK respectively. I rely on Haraway's (2012) and Barad's (2012) conceptualization of "response-ability", which entails the ability to respond to the Other but also being accountable to oneself and others, to discuss the representations of the refugee teens as response-able for the others. I then expand that discussion, putting in dialogue Barad and Haraway with Oliver's (2015) notion of witnessing collective experiences as a response-able encounter. Further engaging with Mbembe's (2016) notion of "necropolitics", I look at example of response-ability to vulnerability and invisibility in spaces of refugee displacement and hospitality, such as the camp and the city. I argue that the two autobiographies represent response-ability as an ethical and political relation, showing power imbalances in contexts of hospitality in response to refugees' vulnerabilities. Levinas' (1985) theory of the Face is also relevant for my examination of the response-able encounters among refugees in the two novels and how the refugee characters' responses to vulnerability are impregnated with pedagogical values. In the last part of the chapter, I look at the in-service teachers' analysis of *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*, as developed in a classroom assignment in fall 2020. This final chapter brings together the previous reflections on touch, borderland, and compassion and closes the discussion of *sustainable pedagogy*, with a strong focus on the ethical component that constitutes it.

**5.1 Introduction**

Connecting to my previous analysis of touch in the borderlands, and com-passion as a pedagogical force, this last chapter focuses on how the notion of response-ability (Barad, 2012; Haraway, 2012) is represented in the genre of YA refugee literature. Following the transdisciplinary feminist approach developed in previous chapters, I propose to begin by stressing the necessity to depart from the use of a conceptualization of responsibility that reinforces a rhetoric of victimhood. By rhetoric of victimhood, I mean the ethically questionable and dangerous depiction of refugee subjects and communities as only victims, powerless and agentless, with the consequences of excluding them entirely from decision-making processes that define their lives. Furthermore, this rhetoric deprives refugee subjects of their ability to decide for themselves and their families. Instead, this research adopts the notion of response-ability, following Haraway (2012) and Barad (2012), for embracing a truly social and just ethico-pedagogical approach to YA refugee literature. Conjugated by Haraway (2012) and Barad (2012), response-ability is an ethical conceptualization regarding the complex entanglements of responsibility in the relation with the Other. Thus, response-ability is an ability that makes and defines the subject as accountable for their responses to the Other. This chapter uses the concept of response-ability to investigate the relational encounter of the refugee subjects and communities and their responses to other refugees and hospitality frames operating in the camp and the city. Barad (2012) envisions response-ability as a gift that the Other gives us in the form of "the ability to respond and the longing for justice-to-come" (p. 219). By looking at response-ability as an ethics that originates in the refugee subjects it is possible to both recognize practices of power domination and disrupt them. This chapter analyzes representations of bonds and relations among refugee subjects and communities by looking at the refugee responses to the oppressions and inequalities of the rescue and hospitality systems.

This chapter engages with the voices of the Martha and John in *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* and Vesna in *Bluebird*, who not only denounce but also teach readers about how to respond to the demands of others and power inequalities in contexts of displacement. By scrutinizing representations of response-ability, my research unravels

> *the depths of what responsibility entails*. A cacophony of whispered screams, gasps, and cries, an infinite multitude of indeterminate beings diffracted through different spacetimes, the nothingness, is already within us, or rather, it lives through us. We cannot shut it out, we cannot control it. We cannot block out the irrationality, the

> perversity, the madness we fear in the hopes of a more orderly world. (Barad, 2012, p. 218)

It is crucial not to ignore but to denounce the violence, the injustice and inequity that inhabit, define, and create the borders and spaces and temporal frameworks of refugee subjects and communities. It is mandatory to remember that these borders, ethics of inhospitality, and necropolitics are the conditions of the existence of refugee subjects and communities today. These are three complex interrelated terms, and it is crucial to spend some time here explaining the ways they are intertwined. Used for the first time by philosopher, political scientist, and public intellectual Achille Mbembe (2019), necropolitics is the power of death over forms of life:

> the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating death-worlds, that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead. (Mbembe, 2019, p. 92)

I am interested in how the notion of necropolitics reveals a system of power that characterizes the systems of hospitality represented in the two autobiographical texts. In line with the general interest of this thesis in the relational encounters represented in YA refugee literary stories, this chapter investigates how relations between different agents, refugees and citizens of rights, contribute to discuss how practices of inhospitality, necropolitics, and othering permeate refugee discourses. At the same time, this chapter continues the discussion of the meaning of 'other' in refugee narratives. In chapters 3 and 4, the others were the refugee mothers, the family, and the nation in relation to the refugee characters Viola, Hà, Thi, and Ahmed who engage in relations with them through touch and com-passion. This chapter, which situates once again the young refugee character at the center, proposes to consider the Other as the person who is not self (Levinas, 1998). Furthermore, I also consider how the reader also becomes the Other, as Akech and Maric address them, through different stylistic strategies. Thus, the Other is defined by the agent who does the act of looking, who in this case is the refugee author. In order to signal the ambivalence in the gaze of the author who is also a character in their own stories, in this chapter I refer to the authors as Akech, Dau, and Maric and to the characters as Martha, John, and Vesna.

In the last part of the chapter, I look at the entanglements of response-ability in the in-service teachers' written essays about representations of responsibility and hospitality and their pedagogical values in *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*. Response-ability is the last feature of my formulation of sustainable pedagogy, which I claim must be response-able in that it allows

for a response to other minoritized subjects and groups (Ahmed, 2000), and to the existing power dynamics. This discussion concludes my formulation of sustainable pedagogy in that it engages with the pain and discomfort of the other and of the self and shows the necessity to become able to respond to it in order to engage in a response-able and sustainable pedagogical relation. Responding sustainably means for me to face, as a literary critic, an educator, and a citizen with rights, the injustice, fear it, get mad, and use that anger (Lorde, 1997) to answer and relate to the Other, for creating a just education.

### 5.1.1 From Responsibility to Response-ability in Refugee Discourses

Queer disability studies scholar Michelle Ciurria (2020) properly defines responsibility as "a hegemonic social practice, […] result of asymmetrical structured social dynamics" (p. 4). I mention this definition of the term to claim that narratives about refugees must depart from this unethical mode of responsibility, as it is not enough for a true change for social justice and equity. Responsibility is often used to discuss the burden that a subject or a nation is taking when accepting refugees and hosting them (Gottwald, 2014; Loescher, 2014). In this sense, the term places the attention on the power of the states and institutions managing the 'refugee crisis' and protecting refugees. It is crucial here to bear in mind the words of Canadian activist and writer Harsha Walia (2021) who states: "Such representations depict migrants and refugees as the *cause* of an *imagined* crisis at the border, when, in fact, mass migration is the *outcome* of the *actual* crises of capitalism, conquest and climate change" (p. 14). Informed by Walia's (2021) words, this thesis opposes the use of the expression 'refugee crisis' in the ethics of a response-able encounter with refugee subjects and communities and as a clear signal to reject mainstream hateful discourses. The pernicious rhetoric of the refugee as 'the other' continues to discriminate, exclude, and violate individuals and communities. The Norwegian Refugee Council webpage states that "A few countries take responsibility for most of the world's refugees. […] A few countries are bearing almost all the responsibility" (Christophersen, 2022). This language that considers exclusively the position of nation states as the unique agents of responsibility stands in opposition with my understanding of the active, ethical, affective, and political role of refugee subjects and communities. In my view, continuing to use this official version of responsibility towards refugee subjects and communities means perpetrating and solidifying the image of the refugee subject as a presence to tolerate and of hospitality as a burden, instead of an ethical response to the demand posed by the refugee other.

Carolyn Pedwell (2014), who works on the related term of empathy, convincingly discusses the problems and limitations of looking at empathy as 'the solution' to transnational social justice problems in the Western world (p. x). I agree with Pedwell and add that considering responsibility as the obligation to carry the burden makes this affect not sustainable but connects it to feelings of shame and guilt (Young, 2006). Contemporary mainstream oppressive nationalistic perspectives, such as that of the Norwegian Refugee Council, justify the intention of my research to stand in strong opposition and propose, instead, a more ethical, affective, and response-able discourse where refugee subjects and communities become directly involved in the political and social resolution of their own demands in terms of rights. Moreover, responsibility brings the focus on the most powerful subject, who is expected to act to solve the problem. In this way, the focus on the relation is missing. Response-ability, in my view, turns the attention to the relationality in the response instead. The two autobiographical narratives by Akech and Maric represent the refugee subjects as response-able witnesses and political and ethical agents, affectively engaging in a relation with other members of their communities.

In the discussion of the genres that constitute the field of refugee writing, Bernard (2020) refers to responsibility as a sense that can be shared among non-refugees through refugee literature (p. 77). Once again, the refugee subjects and communities are then vehicles of an ethical realization of the non-refugee reader and observer, perpetuating the systemic deprivation of their agency. In turn, Arendt (2003) discusses responsibility as a condition, personal and political, that demands a collective (p. 149). Arendt (2003) further claims that refugees, by not belonging to any community, "can not be held politically responsible for anything" (p. 150). Arendt thus separates political (collective) responsibility from the moral/legal (individual) responsibility. My argument does not enter into the ethical discussion of the innocence of refugees and stateless people, instead focuses on the refugees' participation within the collective. Scholars and poets, such as Stonebridge (2018) and Qasmiyeh (2021) stress the importance of refugee voices and storytelling as political and ethical expressions of the community. Following their work, I propose that Akech, Dau, and Maric, through their narratives, hold themselves accountable for themselves and their responses to other refugees and the hospitality system, weaving together the personal and the collective. In this way, their responsibility not only becomes political but also becomes a form of response-ability, as their actions contribute to changing the communities in which they live. They, in fact, are subjects able to respond to a demand coming from the others around them while being aware of their response-ability as ethical subjects.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018), who is also leader of the research project *Refugee Hosts*[39], has aptly researched responses of hospitality from refugees to other refugees in shared spaces and camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Her analysis focuses both on the solidarity between "overlapping" refugees who become "providers of support" for other refugees, and on the possible dynamics of power in sharing spaces and resources, hierarchies of inclusion/exclusion in this type of hospitality in the Global South. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018) has argued that "the refugee-refugee humanitarianism is filling a significant gap, providing material, emotional and spiritual support to individuals, families and groups who have been displaced" (para. 20). Her work and the work of the research project is crucial for my research as it defines who the Other can be for a refugee, namely other refugee subjects and communities. In this chapter, the Other for Martha, John and Vesna are other fellow refugees to whom they show response-ability. By relating to the stories of other refugee subjects and including them in their autobiographies, they show their concern for these lives. I claim that Vesna's, Martha's, and John's voices not only respond to the Other and their stories but also transform their own responses into aesthetical, ethical, and political demands. Furthermore, the refugee authors represent response-ability in their encounter with the Other in the form of the rescue and hospitality system. Through their responses, Akech, Dau and Maric disclose the inadequacies of those institutions that are appointed as responsible and hospitable strongholds within nation-state borders. I claim that Martha's, John's and Vesna's responses to the Other and their capacity to envision a just future are political, ethical, and affective gifts in and to themselves, the refugee community, and their readers.

### 5.1.2 Representations of Refugee Youth in Autobiography

I situate *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* and *Bluebird* in the broader genre of autobiographic narrative for YA given how the characters represented and the language used by both authors are suitable for young adult readers. These two books – as well as *The Good Braider*, *Inside Out*, *The Best*, and *Baddawi*, which bring new insights to the genres of novel in verse and graphic memoir – pose questions, resistance, and challenges to the canon of autobiography, while also providing new enriching elements to it. Literary scholars Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith (1992) claim that autobiography originated after the Enlightenment in the West as a

[39] This AHRC-ESRC funded project, supported through the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund (2016-2021), investigated the challenges and opportunities in local contexts of conflict-induced displacement. In particular, the project, which employed a variety of methodologies, focused on the relations between Syrian refugees and the hosting communities in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Resulting in in-depth ethnographic research, scholars from different fields collaborated with local researchers for the development of creative-writing workshops for local communities and refugees.

literary genre where the centering and uniqueness of the 'I' subject was "rational, agentive, unitary" and strongly identified with the "straight white Christian man of property" (xvii). They continue by underling how the subject of this genre proposed a form of collective identification, where collectivity is "amorphous and generalized" and differences disappear (xvii). Watson and Smith's (1992) definition of the first and long-lasting form of autobiography accurately speaks about practices of domination of the normative white male subject and the erasure of the colonized or minoritized other and of the differences that constitute collectivity. This definition is crucial for my research on Akech's, Dau's and Maric's autobiographies as they resist the problematic origins of this literary form by representing a strong connection between the writing subject and their communities[40], while addressing the differences that define the others they encounter and respond to in their narratives.

Postcolonial studies scholar Ulla Rahbek (2014) aptly stresses out that in contemporary autobiographies written by authors with immigrant background not only the author takes control of their narratives (p. 70), but also the description of the self is strictly entangled to the relation with the other subjects, the community, and the spaces they inhabit, together with the categories of race and class, which makes subjectivity "dialogical" (p. 71). Her perspective well suits both autobiographies analyzed in my chapter for the ways in which Akech, Dau and Maric, authors with refugee backgrounds, choose which details to include in their stories. Martha, John, and Vesna write about their life experience and their relations with other refugees using narrative techniques such as dialogues with them. In doing so, I claim that the representations of young refugees in *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* and *Bluebird* challenge the canon, and expand the meaning of autobiography. Furthermore, these autobiographies shed light on (neo)colonial practices of bordering and necropolitics as constitutional features of the humanitarian hospitality responses to refugees and displaced people.

Considering the position of women autobiographers, Bart Moore-Gilbert (2009) also claims that "history focuses on collective experience, … while autobiography is regarded as the record of more private domains of self-reflexive analysis and feelings", which makes autobiographies written by women forms of "(counter-) History" (p. 77-78). In relation to

[40] The relation between identity and community in literary autobiographies by female Canadian, African American, and Indigenous authors writing in English is discussed in feminist English literature scholar, Belén Martín-Lucas' monography *Yo soy porque nosotras somos. Identidad y comunidad en las auto/biografías de autoras en inglés* (2022).

autobiographies about vulnerable girls in contexts of crisis, Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall (2010) claim that women's autobiographies from girlhood to adulthood "re-center the narrator and displace the fiction on which the rescue paradigm depends" (p. 668). I particularly appreciate the two scholars' definition as it speaks directly about the sickness of the rescue and hospitality system towards refugee girls (and women), but also attributes to women authors ownership of the term "displace". Not only there is an appropriation of the term but also a transformation of the power dynamics involved in displacement, and its consequences. While contemporary language of displacement renders the refugee subject vulnerable and powerless, Martha and Vesna displace rescue discourses and narratives turning them into counter-stories, in line with Moore-Gilbert's terminology.

### 5.1.3 Introducing Martha Arual Akech's, John Bul Dau's and Vesna Maric's Autobiographical Voices

International migration and forced displacement scholar Nando Sigona (2014) describes the "'refugee voice' as a vehicle for expressing refugees' political subjectivity" (p. 371). For Sigona (2014),

> refugees' narratives of displacement and asylum are produced within a set of pre-given discourses and power relations, and yet by acting upon them and being political, refugees can open up transformative opportunities and unsettle given truths on the colonial footings of the humanitarian regime and its moral order[41]. (p. 371)

Voice stands as a critical word in the field of refugee studies, where scholars have tried to address the necessity to avoid expressions such as "giving voice" in favor of more empowering expressions. At the same time, refugees are still depicted as voiceless subjects. Furthermore, literary texts such as the edited collections *The Refugee Tales* (2016) have represented the violence of government hospitality institutions when it comes to listening to refugees' stories during asylum seeking interviews. These stories include storytelling of colonial and nationalistic practices during the interview moments, and how refugees must prove to be *worthy and traumatized enough* to *deserve* asylum in the hosting country. This chapter looks at the violent practices of hospitality institutions in Akech's, Dau's and Maric's

[41] Sigona is drawing here on Isin, E. (2002). *Being political: Genealogies of citizenship*, and Spivak, G. C. (1998) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' In C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*.

autobiographies, namely in the unattendance to their responsibilities, indifference, and inabilities to respond during the processes of asylum seeking for the characters in the texts.

*Refugee Hosts* researcher Leonie Harsch (2018) has recognized an unequal power relation between the refugee and the spectator/reader/benefactor who expects a certain narrative. Narratives about refugees have changed their structure and 'plot' in the last 20 years. The helpless victimized refugee, a common figure in the 1990s, has been replaced by resilient refugees. Harsch (2018) continues underlining the importance of questioning the reasons behind this homogenous narrative. In my view, there are different explanations to this change in how refugees are represented in literature – the necessity to provide a positive role model to other refugees and migrants, the need to change the victim narrative, and the Western and neoliberal idea of meritocracy and individualism in society that however fails to situate the refugee subject within a complex historical, political, economic, and social environment that can favor (or not) their survival. I claim that categorizing and limiting the figure of the refugee to a victim or a resilient subject are still two ways that do not consider the refugee as an ethical and political subject.

The voices of the refugees in the two autobiographical texts define them as political subjects in relation with others. In *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*, the two authors, Martha Arual Akech and John Bul Dau, alternate their voices in every other chapter. Their narrative voices provide different perspectives on the experience of being a war refugee from South Sudan, their lives in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, and finally the asylum in the US. Divided into six parts, Martha and John tell their story in this autobiographical novel: two Dinka children forced to flee their homes because of the civil war in Sudan in 1983. Through graphic descriptions, years pass by in different refugee camps in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya, until Martha receives asylum in the US in 2000, one year before also John is granted asylum in the country. John and Martha, who met in the UN camp of Pinyudu in Ethiopia, find each other again in the new country and form a family together. Written in four hands, the novel portrays all the horrors and suffering of John and Martha during the war, their escape, and their life together in the US. The narrative, at the same time, also offers a message of resilience regarding the war in Sudan and an experience of displacement that does not reproduce a narrative of victimization and suffering exclusively. The reader will see that in the following sections, the voice of Akech's occupies more space than Dau's voice. This choice is motivated by the fact that after the publication of *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*, Bul Dau has received a greater acknowledgement from publishing companies. His story, and the story of the lost boys, became the subject of the movie *God Grew Tired of Us: The Story of Lost Boys*

*of Sudan* (Dillon Quinn, 2006), while Akech's story was not further discussed. Consequently, my decision has been to grant Akech's words more space on the pages of this chapter, which also devotes a particular angle to the experience of girlhood in displacement, without solely focusing on it.

While Martha's and John's narratives mostly focus on their own and groups of others' experiences of displacement, *Bluebird: A Memoir* tells the story of the author, Vesna, and of many refugees she encounters throughout her journey from Bosnia to the UK, where she is finally granted refugee status in 1996, four years after her arrival. Maric also commits to political storytelling in her account of stories of other refugees she encounters in her journey. While in chapter 4 I discussed how the memoirs were telling stories of the family and the nation, *Bluebird* weaves personal and familiar memories with the ones from other refugees, strangers or friends who become fundamental to Maric's story. Including the stories of others in Vesna's memoir results in a plurality of stories and voices that contributes to a capacious representation of the refugees' subjectivities and identities as both individual and relational political subjects. Looking at the three authors' different aesthetical and political responses to other refugee subjects and the systems of (in)hospitality is the main interest of this chapter. As Walia (2021) rightly claims, "Analyzing the border as part of historic and contemporary imperial relations, […] forces a shift from notions of charity and humanitarianism to restitution, reparations, and responsibility" (p. 14). Discussing the response-ability in the refugee narratives in *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* and *Bluebird* allows to show the imperial character of contemporary borders and hospitality systems.

### 5.2 Response-able Voices and Gazes

In her study about life-story narratives about refuge in South Sudan, Nicki Kindersley (2015) interrogates the intentions and the expectations behind this type of stories – whether they can be a useful source of information or are just reproducing the aggressive and colonialist "eye-witness" approach (p. 206). In *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*, Akech's autobiographical narrative offers a complex representation of her life experience, which is not only an alternative response to the colonialist approach but also an ethical one that puts the refugee's gaze at the center of her story. This means that Akech has a political commitment to reclaim her response-able gaze. These are her words when she describes her first encounter with white people:

> The first white people I ever saw where those UN people at Pinyudu. They were Europeans, and they seemed so odd to us with their long noses and white skin. The

> men were much fatter than our Dinka men, and the hot weather was really hard on them. They wore these shirts that did not cover them up, and we could see hair, lots of hair, on their bodies, and sweat. This was so different from our own bodies. We would just look at them, stare at them, marveling. (Akech, 2010, p. 61)

I argue that Akech's affective response to the Other's body is a powerful lesson to every Western reader, and the humorous and ironic description can revise common colonialist tropes about the body of the colonized as different and inferior. By portraying curiosity, astonishment, and surprise in her reaction to the White body, Akech removes the ownership of these affects from the colonialist gaze. By repositioning herself at the center of the narrative, to use hooks' (2015) words, moving herself "from the margins to the center", Akech further relocates the Western readers from their central position. Martha is reappropriating herself of the gaze, thus enabling the possibility to look at the Other. Using Watson and Smith's (1992) words, Martha seems to "authorize an alternative way of knowing" (p. xx). By sharing her experience of looking at the White body and responding to it, she both claims her gaze and allows other racialized subjects to do the same, by setting a political and ethical example of a response.

In *Bluebird*, representations of response-ability reflect Haraway's (2008) words about response to other's stories: "I want to know how to live with the histories I am coming to know. Once one has been in touch, obligations and possibilities for response change" (p. 93). Haraway (2008) here discusses being in touch with other species, with more-than-human significant others. Applying this line of thinking to Maric's responses to the histories of other refugees is important to discuss response-ability in contrast to mainstream discourses that do not acknowledge the role of relations among refugees in the processes of rescuing and relocation. When Vesna starts working as interpreter in Hull's refugee office, she begins visiting an older woman, Anka, who was sent by her daughter to seek refuge and was then living alone in the UK. After hearing her story, Vesna claims:

> After that I visited her every week for a few months in her home in Hull. Whenever I went round, if she was upset or lonely or crying, I would ask: "Show me the pictures when you were a Miss, come on; tell me about your first competition, when you won that little dog on the leash". I would open the notebook of the photo of her as an eighteen-year-old beauty with a small dog in her arms, and she would start telling me the story, her sobs slowing down. (Maric, 2009, p. 203)

Vesna is learning how to live with Anka's history, both present and past, when she responds to the woman's sadness with an attempt to comfort her by using Anka's happy memories.

This encounter appears near the end of Maric's memoir, which follows Vesna in her path towards becoming a response-able subject. In her development of the ability to respond and care for Anka, Vesna represents herself as a relational political subject.

Gilmore and Marshall's (2010) definition of "circuit of feminist knowledge" speaks to me about a feminist pedagogical affect that characterizes Martha's and Vesna's response-ability in their encounters with other women during their experiences of displacement. Her friendship with Mary, who managed to escape with her mother from the threat of forced marriage, brings Martha to Nairobi, which represents another step towards her independence. As Martha claims in her story, Dinka women are not expected or encouraged to get an education (p. 109); however, Martha slowly starts learning English and the process of learning a new language generates in her curiosity and passion for learning more. When seeing Kenyan women, Martha claims:

> I saw women who were nurses and doctors and teachers, and I started to think: If this woman can do it, why can't I? I began to realize how much a good education could bring to your life. The Kenyan women with education were strong, they had a voice, they had equality. (pp. 109-110)

This change happens in Martha's life when she is 13 and she starts thinking about what education can do for her and for her to take care of her sister. I argue that Martha not only thinks about herself and her sister, but she desires to be an active voice and agent at home, in South Sudan. For Gilmore and Marshall (2010), "girlhood is a state through which feminist political critique and self-representation flow toward other women imagined as empowered subjects. Through this circuit of feminist knowledge […], new narratives and politics of rescue will develop" (p. 689). Martha represents a feminist political critique and self-representation for herself, and to imagine herself as a powerful woman she refers to the examples of other women around her, who have a voice and contribute to the cultural creation of their societies and countries. These women are an example for Martha who dreams of being an active and strong agent of transformation and creation in Sudan after the war: "It would be good to have strong, educated women with equality and a voice when the war was over and Southern Sudan was rebuilt" (p. 110). The circuit of feminist knowledge Gilmore and Marshall (2010) refer to allows Martha to see herself as an agent able to respond to the needs of her home and country.

In *Bluebird*, Vesna shows response-ability when she finds out that her boss was physically abusing his girlfriend:

> I went along to Alice and Archie's house with a couple of female friends. We took Alice out for a coffee and told her we knew about the abuse. I wasn't sure whether what we were doing was right or whether we were intruding into what was none of our business; after all, Archie was my employer. Alice burst into tears and told us to ring her sister. […] a few days later, Alice left Hull for ever. (Maric, 2009, p. 195)

Vesna's response-ability is directed towards another young woman she barely knows but represents a form of feminist alliance with her. The young refugee becomes an agent of rescue and responsibility toward another woman.

### 5.3 Witnessing the Relation with the Other as Response-able Encounter

In chapter 4, I discussed the role of personal and familiar stories to create an archive of com-passionate knowledge. Here I expand that discussion, focusing on the act of witnessing the relation with the Other as a response-able encounter, following feminist political philosopher Kelly Oliver's (2015) claims:

> What the process of witnessing testifies to is not the existence of fact but a commitment to the truth of subjectivity as addressability and response-ability. Witnessing […] is a commitment to embracing responsibility of constituting communities, the responsibility inherent in subjectivity itself. (p. 485)

Oliver (2015) connects witnessing to response-ability explaining how the act of bearing witness is transformed by the act of responding to what the subject sees and experiences in a more collective way. I propose to put Oliver's (2015) notion of witnessing in dialogue with Barad's (2012) definition of response-ability: "Touching is a matter of response. Each of 'us' is constituted in response-ability. Each of 'us' is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other" (p. 215). Martha and Vesna, through their autobiographical words, witness with response-ability, which means that they involve the Other and the collective in their stories.

In *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*, John witnesses the shared condition of displacement of other lost boys like him and responds to it by taking an active role in the collectivity they all create. When he finds other un-accompanied minors like himself, John helps build homes and shelters for the refugees in the camps. Furthermore, he starts a school in the Kakuma refugee camp (p. 103). After telling the story of Abraham, the neighbor who saved him and ran with him until John joined the group of Lost Boys in the camp, the schoolteacher, Atak, is the other person John remembers by name in his narrative and he also remembers the words the teacher used in their first lesson:

> "Good morning, pupils. I am your teacher, Atak," he said in Dinka. "When I say 'Good morning, pupils,' you say, 'Good morning, teacher' to me. Let's try it."
> "Good morning, pupils!"
> "Good morning, teacher!"
> "This is our first lesson. It is about respect," Atak said.
> We felt right at home. Respect is the first thing a child learns in a Dinka family – respect for mother, father, aunts, uncles, other children, and animals." (p. 104)

The teacher, by speaking John's language and sharing a value so integral to his culture, is able to give a sense of safety and belonging to John and the other children. I argue that John's ability to respond to his teacher by calling him by his name is also affected by the teacher's behavior with his pupils. John responds to his teacher by later writing about him and his teaching, and also by acting as a witness of a precious pedagogical moment happening in the camp involving Atak and the lost boys. Communicating in the same language and including an important value in their teaching seems to play a crucial role in John's education in the refugee camp. Respect is a crucial value for John, who, in the end of the quote, speaks about respect for animals too. This can point to a potential postanthropocentric pedagogy of refugee literature, where animals and nature are included in the collective and the community.

In *Bluebird*, the collective and the community are the Bosnian refugees and the British volunteers and people working in the rescuing system. Right after arriving to the UK, Vesna recognizes and denounces unwritten rules in her experience of the relational dynamics and roles between Bosnian refugees and British volunteers:

> It seemed to me that we, the victims, and they, the rescuers, would have perfectly defined roles, and I imagined swimming together in the comforting sea of empathy. I didn't yet understand what I came to understand later – that between the rescuer and a victim stands human nature and aside from empathy, there are self-righteousness, expectations, self fulfilment, and roles which at first are defined and clearly demarcated often become muddled and intertwined. (Maric, 2009, p. 34)

Vesna's imagination takes her to a "comforting sea of empathy", where she swims peacefully with other asylum seekers and their British rescuers. But a much more complex and less consoling reality soon wakes her up from that dream, as the roles become turbid. I appreciate Maric's choice of the terms "muddle and intertwined" to describe the complexity in the relations between refugees and rescuers, as these words appear to stain and signal that empathy is not that clean and transparent remedy in social relations in contexts of displacement. Moreover, the muddiness and twists of the affects Maric describes, speak to

Pedwell's (2014) definition of affect as fluid and plastic with the "ability to change and transform the ways in which they blur and imbricate categories of inside and outside, self and other …" (p. 1). Maric's poetic ability to respond to these affective encounters informs response-ability of a pedagogical value, as it teaches to see and inhabit relations between refugees and non-refugees.

As I continue to analyze the same passage by Maric, I recognize not only Maric's ability to witness and respond, but also a clear intention to address her reader. This strategy of addressing the reader, which connects the autobiographical genre to an oral stylistic feature of the form, speaks about the characters/authors witnessing and responding to a relation with the reader; a relation that is taken for granted, concealed, but that Maric and Akech bring to light and address explicitly. In *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*, Akech also uses this strategy, speaking directly to her reader. When talking about her childhood in Juba, Martha remembers when she and her sister Tabitha were playing in their family garden where the family used to grow groundnuts: "You call them peanuts, and we eat them just the way you do, as snacks or in peanut butter, which we also put in sauces or in our porridge" (Akech, 2010, p. 18). This is a clear call for the reader, "you", who Akech assumes to be not from South Sudan. As it emerges from Martha's narrative, events, places and situations are described in an almost instructive way, showing that the imagined reader is not familiar with Martha's traditions and culture, and the history of South Sudan. Once again, Akech's gaze looks at the implied Western readers (the novel was published by National Geographic in Washington DC) in the eye and addresses them directly, disrupting the power dynamics that kept the reader as external and far-away observer, and thus defining a new ethical relationship between refugee characters and Western readers. Maric addresses the reader by using the pronoun 'you' in one of the last chapters of her memoir. It is the first time Maric uses the pronoun 'you' and she has chosen an interesting technique – whereas in the entire memoir Maric writes her story in first person when writing about herself, in the chapter "Coming Home" (p. 212), she writes the entire part about her visit to Bosnia after receiving the refugee status using the second person pronoun:

> An overwhelming sense of liberation and fear is brewing inside you. […] You sit and listen to music and write things down in your diary and feel happy that you are moving, for this is what you really love – being on the move. […] Everyone is speaking your language and you feel excited. You want to hug everyone just for speaking your language. […] Everything has been frozen in your memory since you left and now everything is different. (Maric, 2009, pp. 213-219)

I claim that this strategy could be a way for Maric to directly address the readers, as to involve them and make them be in her shoes and imagine they get to experience what it means to visit home as a refugee.

### 5.4 Young Refugees' Ability to Respond to Necropolitics of Vulnerability and Invisibility

As Haraway (2012) spells it, "we are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, but not in the same ways" (p. 313). It is crucial to me to discuss Haraway's words here as she aptly considers the differences in the ability to respond to the Other, which is a fundamental aspect of my formulation of sustainable pedagogy, in as much as it is based on the ethics of positionality. Thus, considering the different responses of Martha and Vesna to the different situations the two girls experience, I claim that Martha and Vesna commit to what Nancy Hartsock (1990) defines "standpoint epistemology" by representing

> the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the center … an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world. (p. 171)

Martha and Vesna not only disrupt the mainstream narrative of Western rescue and hospitality humanitarian practices towards refugees and asylum seekers but represent a completely different experience than the one represented by humanitarian agencies today.

Martha's and Vesna's narratives enact forms of mutual response by recognizing and attending to the power imbalances that affect their lives, and that are directly responsible for their vulnerability. On the one hand, their stories reflect the vulnerabilities of young refugees caused by war and displacement, and by the institutions involved in their rescue and hospitality. On the other hand, their voices also portray counter-narratives of vulnerability as a non-permanent condition, in contrast with mainstream and dominating discourses that depict refugee girls as "permanently vulnerable" (Gilmore & Marshall, 2010, p. 669). Gilmore and Marshall (2010) point out that this representation "has obscured the economic, political, legal, and cultural formations, institutions, and crises that imperil specific communities" and thus look at some literary representations as forms of resistance (p. 669). I share Gilmore and Marshall's (2010) perspective on the necessity to acknowledge the fallacy of mainstream narratives of vulnerable girls and boys in displacement, but more than looking

at their resistance and resilience, this section turns to the ability to respond ethically and affectively to oppression in refugee narratives.

Martha responds to the gender oppression and discrimination that affect her and other girl adolescents in the camps. Akech's narrative portrays the issue of displacement as intimately and deeply connected to gender. In the second half of the novel, after having spent years in refugee camps, Martha writes about her encounter with the woman responsible for the UN refugee relocation program as follows: "the program had been specifically set up for boys because no one even knew the situation of the girls at the [Kakuma] camp. I realized in talking to her that we had been invisible" (Akech, 2010, p. 119). This passage from the autobiography speaks to me about collective responsibility as the UN is an organization that represents countries and their peoples to help others in need, refugees in this context. Martha's words reflect a form of denounce and obligation and should function as an awakening call for collective responsibility to act for girl refugees to be seen. As forced migration and refugee scholar Ulrike Krause (2021) reasonably underlines, there is a paradox in defining refugee camps as "humanitarian shelters" (p. 1), where refugees continue to feel threated, unsafe, and violated instead. The power dynamics affecting the work of humanitarian organizations and agencies in refugee camps outside Europe is probably very little known to Western readers, but it does not mean realities such as Martha's are not happening. It is crucial, then, to bear in mind that these are realities that are spread widely. Thus, narratives such as Martha's are vital for demolishing practices that make refugee women silent and invisible. Butler (2004) theorizes the importance of stories to disrupt hegemonic narratives, maintaining that we should open up to a new narrative that "decenters us from our supremacy" (p. 18). Akech's story disrupts the narrative of Western countries and people as saviors, while it opens to new possible solutions based on collective responses and responsibility. I recognize in this passage an example of Kimberlé Crenshaw (2019)'s conceptualization of intersectionality as a form of "institutional oppression" towards Akech and the other girls in Kakuma camps that contributes to making the girls in the camp even more vulnerable.

Carbado et al. (2013) aptly claim that "[a]ny analysis must necessarily limit itself to specific structures of power" (p. 304). The specific structure of power in the Kakuma camp is the United Nation Refugee Agency that is perpetuating dynamics of exclusion, discrimination, and erasure of the girls in displacement. The invisibility of the lost girls in the camp shows the intersectional relationship between displacement, gender, race, and age in the camp. Hostility can also be found within the same UN refugee organization, in the form of

gender discrimination and systemic racism. Polzer and Hammond (2008) describe invisibility as "a relationship between those who have the power to see or to choose not to see, and, on the other hand, those who lack the power to demand to be seen, or to protect themselves from the negative effects of imposed visibility" (p. 417). Thinking of invisibility as a relationship of power provides a precious insight into the powerful dynamic of privilege and oppression of the White hegemonic field of rescue and hospitality that is responsible for not seeing the displaced girls. García Zarranz (2019) defines response-ability as "an ethical compass from which to navigate, and not drown, in today's global age of indifference (p. 143). Her definition sounds suitable to Akech's ability to respond to the indifference she and other girls in the Kakuma refugee camp receive from the UN officials. Akech's ability to respond translates into her action for reclaiming not only her existence in the camp but also her right to a just protection.

The invisibility Martha talks about in her autobiography is portrayed in Maric's *Bluebird* in a different way. When Vesna's father unexpectedly and suddenly dies, Vesna, her mother, and her sister immediately contact the British Home Office to request leaving the country to bury him (Maric, 2009, p. 156). After a series of disrespectful questions about the place of the burial and the cause of death, which have nothing to do with Vesna's request to leave the UK to arrange the funeral, the immigration officer Ms Ray concludes her call with Vesna saying: "let me review your request with some of my colleagues and I will let you know" (Maric, 2009, p. 158). Vesna and her family are left for days without an answer from the office, which results in the impossibility to participate to the father's burial and funeral. When Vesna tries to reach out to Ms Ray, who had taken responsibility for the case, she is informed that the officer had left for holidays right after speaking to her; in other words, she had left without helping Vesna and her family. This episode, where great sorrow, pain, and mournfulness fill the pages, also speaks about the injustice the asylum seekers suffer from the indifference they receive from the people who are appointed to handle their cases. It would not be correct to use the verb 'help' because the Home Office is not appointed to help asylum seekers and refugees, but to 'manage' their cases. In Vesna's attempt to reach Ms Ray there is the ability to hold the person accountable, but there is also the truth about the hospitality system, which is not hospitable.

"Ethicality entails hospitality" (p. 217), claims Barad (2012). The inhospitality of the Home Office, however, shows the lack of ethicality in their actions. As the Home Office is necessarily constituted in a relation of entanglement, which in Barad's (2012) fashion means "relation of obligation" (p. 217), it also appears as a system of power that does not attend to

the relation with Vesna and her family, but becomes a form of inhospitality and impairs the asylum seekers' ability to respond. In contrast to the Home Office's indifference and unwillingness to respond, Vesna shows ability to respond by reaching out again and trying to talk with Ms Ray. For Sigona (2014), refugee voices inform, describe, and disrupt what is taken for granted. (p. 165). The next section will focus on the responses the young refugees enact to the inhospitality they encounter in their journeys toward resettlement.

### 5.5 Ethical and Political Responses to Inhospitality

Response-ability for Barad (2012) means "the possibilities of mutual response, which is not to deny, but to attend to power imbalances" (p. 55). Western hospitality towards refugees is full of paradoxes and mostly an illusion that hospitality is a value that defines the old continent, while hostility and savior rhetoric are dominating the management of the so-called refugee crises and the system of hospitality at the borders of Europe and within the continent. The concept of hospitality was the main focus of the *Refugee Hosts International Conference. Without Exceptions: The Politics and Poetics of Local Responses to Displacement*[42] at UCL (London) in October 2019, which was the result of years of work in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan with generations of refugees hosting other refugees, the role of the host taken by the refugees themselves. As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh claims (2018b), the hosting refugees become "active partners in processes of integration". My work listens to Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's invitation to recognize the hosting role of refugee communities and the challenges in the refugee-refugee encounters where "overlapping processes of marginalization and precariousness" happen (2018). As well as the refugee subjects in the *Hosts Refugee* project adopt forms of response-able hospitality toward other members of the community, also Vesna's mother, in *Bluebird*, proposes a new form of hospitality, where she reclaims her agency and dignity, and creates a new power dynamic between herself and the non-refugee *host*.

In other words, the mother, by re-interpreting the rules of hospitality, reveals the other face of humanitarian discourses in relations between refugees and citizens with rights. In the chapter titled "Friendship", Maric writes about a very unequal and toxic relationship between her and her mother and John and Myra, a couple of British volunteers who used to visit different families of Bosnian refugees. As Maric describes, the couple used to visit them twice a week, Vesna would try to converse with them and act as simultaneous translator to involve the mother

[42] An archive of the conference highlights is available at this link https://refugeehosts.org/our-work/refugee-hosts-international-conference/

in the conversation, with very little effort from the couple who would "sat back with their lips zipped up" (Maric, 2009, p. 146). As Maric tells, the awkwardness and discomfort are experienced also by the other Bosnian families, so Vesna's mother one day attempts to reciprocate the visit – "since you have visited us so many times, we are interested in visiting your home and seeing where you live. […]. We want to learn a little about you" (Marci, 2009, p. 151). After this request, the couple disappeared from Vesna's and her mother's lives. Has Vesna's mother broken what Jacques Derrida (1998) define as the "law of household", which means that the guest has to adhere to the rules of the host? The stranger is accepted in the house or state with the condition of respecting the authority of the householder. I argue that this particularly meaningful anecdote Maric shares in her memoir, represents the paradoxical and intricated relation host/guest that defines the hospitality system and discourse in numerous Western countries today. The rejection of the couple to host the refugee family in their homes, speaks exactly about the oppression in the rules of the hosts, and about the rejection of a response of reciprocity from the refugee subject. And although the British couple is visiting Vesna and her mother in their home, they impose a law of hospitality that belongs to the nation-state. This type of hospitality does not allow encounters and responses with the different, but continue to feed the toxic discourse of hospitality, where the rescuer is in a powerful position. At the same time, John and Myra represent the privilege of responsibility (Young, 2006) in humanitarian responses, which belongs only to citizens and not to refugees and asylum seekers.

By suggesting reciprocating the visit, by offering a visit to the couples' house, Vesna's mother disrupts the stereotype of the refugee as someone who has nothing to offer. At the same time, almost in a paradoxical way, the mother is challenging the certainty about what the host assumes the guest needs. By expressing her desire, the mother challenges the powerful position of the hosts to assign roles. Until that moment, in fact, Jack and Mary were performing a paradoxical role as both national hosts and house guests. Vesna's mother's words "We want to learn a little about you" (p. 151) remind me of feminist scholar Maurice Hamington (2010), about new forms of hospitality:

> Whether it is a home, the city, or the nation-state, hospitality operates at the border of membership, but it is precisely at the border where learning takes place – learning about self and Others through confronting differences. Expanding the notion of guest inclusion unlocks the epistemic power of hospitality. (p. 28)

Vesna's mother proposes a new form of hospitality and creates a new power dynamic between the host and the guest. She expands the notion of the refugee guest, as someone who can be a friend, but at the same time she is stating what she wants to learn about, which might

be different from what the couple expected from the refugees. This entire representation of the relation with the British hosts/guests and Vesna's mother's response to their behavior speaks about her ability to engage with the rules of hospitality.

### 5.6 Response-ability to YA Refugee Literature in the EFL Classroom: Towards Forms of Collective Teaching and Learning *With*

In my analysis, I have discussed how response-ability not only speaks about the future, but how it holds the elements of learning, teaching, and gaining the ability to respond, which connects the concept to my formulation of sustainable pedagogy.

This was the task that I gave them:

- Emmanuel Levinas (1985) explores the concept of responsibility in these terms: "Since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him" (p. 96). Inspired by this quote, write an essay where you discuss the concepts of responsibility and hospitality in Dau and Arual Akech's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl. Escaping Civil War in Sudan*. You can refer to the core curriculum, which contends that "pupils must also contribute to the protection of human dignity and reflect on how they can prevent the violation of human dignity", as one of your sources.

It is crucial to note that the in-service teachers did not write about response-ability, but about responsibility. This stems from the fact that when I wrote the task for the essay in 2020, my research was focusing on responsibility, a term broadly used in refugee studies. Following Haraway's and Barad's posthumanist and new materialist impulses, scholars in the field of educational research and art-based research have largely engaged with explorations of response-ability in the last decade (Bozalek et al., 2019; Taylor & Bayley, 2019). Vivienne Bozalek et al. (2019) have looked at how response-ability as a methodology can shape less competitive and more just peer-reviewing practices, where relational and caring practices take place. In the field of refugee studies, instead, responsibility is still broadly and almost universally used, while response-ability seems to be still a foreign concept. When I gave this task to the in-service teachers, my research was still focusing on responsibility, following the on-going discourses in the field of refugee studies. Only later, after reading the theories of response-ability that I used in my literary analysis, I shifted my focus. Following the structure of the section where I analyzed the in-service teachers' contributions in chapter 3, I here provide an analysis of the essays written by the four in-service teachers who wrote their analyses and reflections about *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*. I discuss some of the in-service teachers' reflections to point at possible issues that could emerge in the English classrooms if the

pedagogical interaction is not supported by ethics of response-ability. Moreover, I discuss other reflections from the in-service teachers as models of response-able pedagogy of YA refugee literature. Their reflections on responsibility and hospitality in relation to the literary text has contributed to the knowledge creation in this chapter and in the entire thesis. In particular, the four essays underline the tensions responsibility can bring to the English classroom in relation to YA refugee literature, and they contribute to the definition of sustainable pedagogy as a response-able collective practice of learning *with* refugee stories and the classroom community.

*Author 5* envisions the possibility of learning *with* refugee subjects and their stories. Author 5 refers to responsibility as an ethical affect that belongs to the characters of John and Martha in the autobiographical novel, and it is described as a tool to survive (para. 1). They connect this ethical concept to respect performed by the refugee characters in the novel, and claim: "taking the responsibility of accepting strangers, and treating them like a family, is a good example of showing how the refugees respected the fellow human beings, even during the most difficult times" (para. 2). The author stresses the fact that refugees must be recognized as human beings, a line of discussion that coherently responds to the core value of human dignity proposed in the task. The in-service teacher's analysis points out that John and Martha, with their ability to respond to others during their journeys and in the refugee camps, grant others with the human dignity that had been taken away from them by the war and having to survive. *Author 5* also suggests that YA refugee literature can be taught in the "English subject… [to]help the students to reflect on their responsibility and how they can prevent violation of refugees' dignity" (para. 2). The genre of YA refugee literature is here seen as a pedagogical tool, affecting both the teaching of and learning about human dignity. In this sense, the author is already anticipating the notion of response-ability, as developed by Haraway and Barad, in their focus on reciprocity and accountability.

However, it is imperative to understand that introducing YA refugee literature in the classroom and discussing representations and ethics of responsibility and hospitality does not automatically translate into response-able practices. This is because teaching practices in Norway are situated in an educational system that is still affected by power dynamics that challenge sustainable and response-able encounters with the Other. For example, an issue that emerged from the pedagogical reflections of the in-service teachers is that continuing to think about the encounter with refugee subjects and representations in terms of responsibility may reinforce the idea that the non-refugee teacher is bearing the burden to teach ethics of human dignity and hospitality. *Author 5* claims that "the curriculum (2019) does not specify the

word refugees" (para. 4), signaling the risk "that without explicit inclusion, refugee issues would be ignored completely" (para. 4). I recognize in the words of *Author 5* what Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) defines as responsibility: "an ability to respond, to respond to the world beyond oneself, as well as a willingness to recognize its existence" (p. 39). What is then the response-ability of the LK20 in terms of the act of not directly including refugee subjects in the discussion about human dignity? How does this response-inability affect pedagogical practices in relation to refugee literature today in Norway? Can the lack of inclusion prevent responsibility in the students to care for refugee subjects and communities? And as *Author 5* suggests, can the invisibility of refugee subjects in the curriculum impact the ability to bridge school practices with the rest of the society? These open questions prompted by the in-service teacher's responses to *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*, are key because of the interrogations and the actions teachers need to take in relation to the demands coming from diverse society and pupils today in Norway.

*Author 5* openly acknowledges the difficulty of the core values proposed by the LK20 to teachers in Norway today: "there is immense pressure on the teachers to build a safe bridge between the school and society" (para. 4). The experience of the in-service teacher and their knowledge not only of the curriculum, but also of the power dynamics affecting teaching practices in Norway today speaks loudly about the *burden* teachers experience when teaching ethical and affective issues. Furthermore, the pressure is further generated by the vast amount of responsibility that is put on teachers today in making the society a better place to be for everyone. At the same time, also pupils in lower and secondary schools are placed with responsibility of solving this problem, while other power actors and agents such as the curriculum and the school system remain absent from the discussion. The leaders of the NTNU-based *Den flyktingkompetente lærer* (*The refugee-competent teacher*) development project Tone Brendløkken and Ragnhild Liland (2022) rightly stress that teacher students feel unqualified and unprepared to teach multicultural and diverse classrooms in Norway (p. 210).

A reason for this issue, in my view, is to be found in the authoritative role that teachers still have as knowledge creators. *Author 6* seems to understand the role of the teacher as central in providing information to the pupils about Sudan and "the refugee situation" (para. 8) and asking questions about human dignity (para. 8). For the author, the responsibility to teach is placed in the figure of the teacher, who then becomes solely responsible for knowledge creation. EFL and education scholars Ewa Wilden and Raphaela Porsch (2017) encourage further research on the issues related to the central role of the teacher in the foreign language classroom (p. 20). This reflection enters the ongoing dialogue

by bringing knowledge about the risks this type of pedagogical approach can bring to the English classroom in Norway. As García Zarranz and Duggan (2022) wonder there are risks in "granting too much authority to the teachers […] and thus ending up reproducing uneven power relations" (p. 6). Their words have been resonating in my mind during the analysis of *Author 6*'s essay, where the teacher may fail to notice stereotypes and continue to reproduce oppressing discourse in the classroom. For example, when discussing forms of hospitality between refugees and Ethiopian tribes living near the refugee camp, Author 6 claims: "They stole food from the refugees" (para 6). This perspective clearly misses the colonial practices that today both create refugees and reduce access to resources for local tribes. If in this passage the conversation prompted by the novel does not produce an ethical conversation, but may reinforce social divisions and cultural stereotypes, another passage in the essay points to the necessity to adopting a transformative sustainable pedagogy of YA refugee literature. By reflecting on this, I want to underline two aspects which are connected to each other. Firstly, the teacher cannot be expected to possess all the knowledge in relation to representations of refugee subjects and the ethical dynamics that define displacement today. Secondly, in light of this previous consideration, it is crucial to adopt sustainable pedagogies which allow teachers to move from being alone responsible authorities in power, to being response-able educators who are able to recognize their own practices of power and the unconscious affects they may bring to the classroom. The response-able way Martha, John, and Vesna encounter, witness and respond to their own stories and the stories of other refugees can help teachers in the critical understanding of possible resistances they might have and in the development of their response-able pedagogies when teaching and learning with YA refugee literature.

*Author 7* seems to position the role of the teacher not above the pupils, but as someone who is responsible for "facilitating learning through discussions and debates in class" (para. 7), and whose "role is not to be an authority" (para. 6). This understanding of the role of the teacher as a facilitator, speaks to me of Bozalek's (2020) definition of response-able pedagogy, as a process that renders each other capable. In contrast to *Author 5* and *Author 6*, for whom the teacher stands alone in their response-ability to refugee literature and to teaching the values it can bring to the classroom, this essay speaks about an ethics of collective learning. Moreover, *Author 7* discusses the importance of setting "ground rules for behaviour in the classroom. [Rules should be] established in cooperation between teachers of each class, and the pupils [should be] involved in the process of making the rules" (para. 7). These words clearly speak about the necessity for collective response-ability to foster human

dignity in the classroom, which is an ethical imperative central to this PhD dissertation as well.

*Author 8* also reflects upon how YA refugee literature can foster a collective way of learning. The author relies deeply on their previous teaching experience in the multicultural classroom and brings their reflections from their long-time experience in the classroom in conversation with the analysis of *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* and the curriculum. The element that makes this essay particularly relevant to the discussion around response-ability is the author's perspective about the possible benefits that refugee literature can bring to the pupils and the school "as a unit" (para. 7). *Author 8* seems to suggest a relational and collective form of teaching and learning with YA refugee literature. In the collective experience of discussing and learning with refugee literature, *Author 8* also envisions the possibility of conflict and tensions emerging among the students when reading a passage from the novel where Akech describes her encounter with Muslims in Sudan in a controversial way. The in-service teachers' response states: "This description would probably create reactions among students in the classroom, especially the Muslim students" (para. 4). The author, probably because of their previous experience in teaching diverse classrooms, is able to see the Muslim students as an active component of the classroom dynamic and life. *Author 8*'s reflection speaks to my formulation of sustainable pedagogy, as based on the ethics of response-ability, which means being able to enter the encounter with the Other as an agent of active participation in the educational process. May this inclusive understanding of the real diversity of the students in the English classroom in Norway allow to envision an even more inclusive educational system where subjects with refugee background share the response-able, uncomfortable, and joyfully ethical role of teachers.

### 5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have claimed that YA refugee literature can represent refugee subjects and communities in visionary ways, given how it embraces their ability and agency as ethical agents in the society. These stories, while bearing witness to the refugee experience, represent refugees' abilities to respond to displacement. By bringing the attention to the role of relations and response-ability, Akech and Maric represent themselves as relational and response-able subjects (Barad, 2012; Oliver, 2015). Response-ability then becomes a force that can deconstruct the generalizations, stereotypes, and tokenism that define depictions of refugees today across different media and social discourses. Response-ability as the last element of the sustainable pedagogy I propose in this thesis, also shows the

need to leave discourses of responsibility when discussing refugee representations in order to embrace, instead, pedagogical practices that see the Other and act collectively while learning with refugee stories.

# Chapter 6. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Future Directions

## 6.1 Refugee Subjects Owning Ethics and Affect

This thesis comes to its conclusion after a complex, full, and joyful journey which has entailed the daily practice of *unlearning and learning with* refugee literature and refugee subjects and communities. My study, *YA Refugee Literature as a Sustainable Pedagogy: Ethics and Affect in the English Classroom*, has woven together reflections, analyses, and discussions about literary representations and their pedagogical values, where YA refugee literature not only acts as a tool but also becomes a com-passionate and response-able aesthetical and pedagogical teacher in the encounter with the Other in the English classroom. The central writers I have considered in this thesis, Farish, Lai, Bui, Abdelrazaq, Akech, Dau, and Maric, all actively contribute to disrupting simplistic and stereotypical representations of refugees, while they point at the necessity to eradicate forms of tokenism, voyeurism, and racism that deprive the refugee subjects and communities of their complexities, values, and agency. For characters such as Viola and Hà, touch stands as a borderland of tensions and belonging in relation to their relationships to their mothers. Thi and Ahmed are touched by the stories of their families and nations, and Martha, John, and Vesna are response-able of their stories and of other refugees' they encounter in their journeys. Through storytelling, they all thus appear as active agents of inter/transgenerational relationality with the family and the community, while engaging in the self-stylizing of their personal identity. These representations all point to the ability of contemporary YA refugee narratives to challenge and transform the genre of YA literature.

In all the six texts in this thesis, refugee subjects perform acts of transformation through the magic of the poetic verse, via images where different temporalities coexist, and by engaging with response-ability in relation to the brutalities of camps and cities. Through imagining alternative ways of living, these texts never lose sight of the violent impact of various border regimes on refugee subjects and communities (Abdelrazaq, 2015; Maric, 2009). Consequently, this research reflects on the different ways the aesthetical representations of violence, trauma, and death in the primary texts are constant reminders of how different realities can coexist in the lives of refugee subjects. Moreover, there are instances where the refugee characters are far from perfect, which illustrates how their complex characterization can beak stereotypes about refugee communities. Discussing these representations with a focus on borderlands and incongruences has allowed me to bring to the

surface the tensions in living between enduring violence and imagining a safer life for themselves and their families. As this thesis has showed, the texts offer readers instances of resistance against stereotypes that deprive refugee subjects and communities of forms of knowledge due to appropriation and devaluation. With poetic images, drawings, and auto/biographical words, not only do they resist, but they teach about what is needed to live with the Other and their complexities.

Learning with the refugee voices in the primary texts, this thesis offers a model for the teaching of refugee literature in the English classroom, signaling the need for more ethical, com-passionate, and response-able competences in the Norwegian educational context. hooks (1994) aptly refers to the necessity to let the encounter with the Other shape teachers:

> [t]o teach in varied communities not only our paradigms must shift but also the way we think, write, speak. The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself. (p. 11)

hooks' words directly speak to my formulation of sustainable pedagogy where knowledge is co-produced in the transformative borderland of the encounter with difference, and that teachers must be open to this shaping for it to happen. The in-service teachers' literary analysis of and pedagogical reflections on the primary texts show that "teacher knowledge integrates theoretical concepts and understanding, past personal experiences and beliefs, and practical professional experiences, at it is learnt continuously during and after teacher education through conscious reflection and continuous interaction with others" (Toom, 2017, p. 806). In order to guide teachers in the implementation of this sustainable pedagogy, my doctoral thesis recommends for action to be taken to include references to refugee life in the Norwegian curriculum (2019), since this is an absent subject at the moment. As the in-service teachers have confirmed, this addition is fundamental to foster discourses around refugee stories in the classroom.

At the same time, the LK20 appears as an instrument that can enable and support teachers; moreover, the curriculum emerges in this thesis as an institutional tool of power in relation to educating for ethical competences in human rights and hospitality dynamics. It stands as a statement of the visions of the institution about what education means, what teachers are supposed to be teaching, and what pupils should learn. It is mandatory that a shift takes place from intercultural competences to ethical competences in the Norwegian classroom. Leo Ajkic (2022), a Bosnian-Norwegian television host in the national Norwegian channel NRK, rightly claims that when talking about teachers we must "learn about racism, […] not only what to do, what not to do" (22:55). His words resonate with Cariou's (2020)

concept of critical humility in that teachers do not own absolute knowledge about refugee subjects, but they can and must learn from and with their stories about ethical and un-ethical pedagogical practices.

## 6.2 Touching Borderlands: Theories and Methodologies

Throughout the last four years, I have been heavily invested in proving that complexities and tensions are integral elements to YA refugee literature as a form of sustainable pedagogy. I have conducted research on young adult refugee literature as a tool to develop a sustainable transformative pedagogy using a feminist transdisciplinary methodology that draws on critical theory, refugee studies, literary studies, education studies, and affect theory primarily. I have further situated issues of genre, form, and the transformative affective and pedagogical capacities of the aesthetic at the heart of the research. Pairing, analysing, and discussing a variety of narratives that include first person narration, personal narrative, and autobiographical or quasi-autobiographical/auto fiction has allowed me to approach these refugee stories as forms of individual, familiar, intragenerational, and political storytelling. Moreover, I have scrutinized how affective and ethical practices define them as pedagogical and response-able (Anzaldúa, 1987; Oliver, 2015; Seigworth, 2020). Regarding genre, I have engaged with novels in free verse, graphic memoirs, and autobiographical novels in refugee YA literature, a variety which has permitted me to engage with how different aesthetic forms create knowledge and transmit transformative affective and ethical values. I have attempted to argue that these texts all declinate different ways in which touch as borderland defines the relational encounter with the Other (Mbembe, 2016; Narayan, 1998), particularly through silences and gaps between verse, the musicality of untranslated words, multimodal representations of different temporalities, the political enactment of witnessing others' pain, and the necropolitics of vulnerability and inhospitality.

Weaving the theoretical and methodological concepts of borderland and touch together, this thesis has explored representations of the encounter with the Other where the refugee subject is at the centre (Houtum, 2012; Sigona, 2014; Stonebridge, 2021). I am critically aware that some might consider this thesis a naïve interpretation of YA refugee literature for proposing a pedagogical value in aesthetic forms. I here follow transnational literature and gender scholar Nancy Kang (personal communication, September 20, 2020) who suggests that events like those happening in Greece in late 2020, such as the fire that

killed hundreds of people in the Moria refugee camp, hint at the possibility that the European media needs to change its form of self-representation as a place of salvation, liberty, prosperity, and abundance[43]. Media and political discourses are strongly based on visual images and their capacity to reach and affect people intimately (Ahmed, 2014). In light of that, YA refugee literature as an aesthetic means, rich in images, symbols, and representations, can and should be considered a powerful recipient of affect and ethics.

However, insisting on the transformative value of literature comes from the fact that these texts centre the refugee voices and subjects as response-able storytellers, who speak the truth they own. This is in clear contrast with other discourses around responsibility and hospitality where the refugee voices are too often erased or ignored by the arrogance of citizens and institutions. In turn, my interpretations on the in-service teachers' essays brought to light that simply reading these texts does not change structural systems of discrimination and racism in society and in educational contexts, and it revealed that it is imperative to develop ethical and affective competence at the same time by engaging in reading and discussion of relevant critical theories. The formulation of *sustainable pedagogy* that I propose insists on the necessity to introduce theoretical discussions next to the reading and learning about and with refugee representations. This thesis stresses that YA refugee literature, by providing examples of ethical, affective and response-able pedagogical moments and relations, can teach teachers how to approach this transformative process. Thinking and learning ethically, affectively, and response-ably with refugee storytelling has also allowed me to approach the classroom encounters with the in-service teachers as pedagogical lessons. Refugee literature thus informs the LK20 while challenging it in that it develops a com-passionate response-ability to teachers' needs in the Norwegian classroom.

Methodologically speaking, this thesis is further grounded on discomfort as an ethical and necessary pedagogical tool to uncover power dynamics in the classroom (hooks, 1984; Zembylas, 2015). Discomfort can and must change in the encounter with the Other into a sense of belonging to the co-creation of knowledge. Following Zembylas (2015), I have defined pedagogy as potentially transformative if teachers learn to stay with their discomfort and respond to it with joy and response-ability whilst building community together in the

[43] Kang acted as external reader during my midterm evaluation in September 2020. A sample of my writing was shared with her in that occasion. Kang's feedback functioned as a precious compass for developing my thesis further. After Kang's participation to my PhD journey, also Anne Mulhall, on whose work I have drawn in several instances in this thesis, helped me finishing my research. Mulhall acted as critical reader and respondent during my final seminar in August 2022 when she read 4 chapters of my thesis. This final work brings the traces of her analytical, generous, and caring feedback.

classroom. This is the discomfort that emerges from standing at the crossroads, and the joy for establishing a fruitful dialogue of ethical, affective, and response-able engagement. In relation to the values that YA refugee literature can bring to the classroom, I insist on the urgency to unlearn pedagogical practices where the teacher moves from acting as the one who delivers factual information about refugees to the one who learns with their stories. Unlearning in the classroom also means allowing discomfort to affect our responses to the Other, in an act of com-passion springing from the pain of those who experience discrimination and racism. Unlearning requires an opening to unexpected forms of knowledge and a transformative way of seeing the Other as knowledgeable. Unlearning makes space for other forms of knowledge, which must be co-created, com-passionate, and response-able (Ahmed, 2017; Cariou, 2020; Qasmiyeh, 2021), which are core aspects of my formulation of *sustainable pedagogy*.

### 6.3 Unexplored Tensions: An Invitation to Further Research

With a strong focus on sustainability, this thesis has engaged in a constant conversation and inquiry of the meaning of this term which has become today a buzz word used in the most varied contexts in our lives (García Zarranz, 2018-2022; Stonebridge, 2018). However, there are some tensions and issues connected to sustainability that this thesis has not included in its analysis and discussions. After having recognized the contribution of this thesis to the fields of refugee studies, literary studies, pedagogy, and affect studies, it is vital not to consider this research as exhaustive to the conversation about YA refugee literature and the tensions it brings to the classroom. With the ethical response-ability that comes with research, reflecting on and stating the limitations of this thesis is necessitated. Being open to the limits of my knowledge, I invite future researchers to continue the efforts of this investigation in considering some crucial aspects that were not thoroughly considered in this PhD project.

Firstly, although focusing on the tensions and ruptures that YA refugee literature can teach about, this thesis has not brought to the centre of its discussion the issues of refugee re-settlement on Indigenous lands, an aspect that is particularly relevant for the Norwegian social, political, and educational context. Speaking from the critical and ethical awareness of the centrality of this relational tension to the discussion of sustainable pedagogy, I strongly recommend this research to be expanded in that direction. I foresee the possibility of refugee literature to open for ethical discourses and forms of learning with about concepts of land,

neocolonialism, and interpersonal relations. Moreover, connecting refugee literature and Indigenous stories of oppression and resistance could also open to the urgent analysis of how colonial practices and armed conflict in general today cause not only war refugees, but also environmental and economic ones. This focus could bring further insights on the unsustainability of the dangerous term illegal migrant, an issue to which this thesis punctually but briefly problematizes.

Furthermore, in my analysis of affect as a pedagogical tool, this thesis has not considered different ways of feeling and understanding emotions, thus my general approach to the concept may speak to some about universality of emotions and forms of experiencing and representing them. Consequently, some subjects who experience the world in "bodily, cognitive, and sensory differences and capacities" (Adams et al., 2015, p.5) may feel unseen in the discussion of affect that I have proposed in my work. Aware of this limitation and that the work toward inclusion is in constant development, this thesis opens for future approaches and explorations that look at how affect is represented by non-normative subjects in the refugee community. Thus, continuing the path that this thesis has opened and has proven to be sustainable for the refugee voices that emerge as active affective agents, I suggest further research to integrate affect studies with critical disability studies in order to make the discussion more inclusive.

Further research also could expand the scope of analysis of YA refugee literature as sustainable pedagogy by selecting stories where LGBTQ+ refugee characters were represented, thus turning the focus to gender discrimination and inclusive pedagogical practices. This thesis, although discussing gender in relation to invisibility and oppressive borderlands, does not include stories of non-binary, queer, and transgender subjects and communities. Moreover, including other types of texts in the discussion of refugee literature can continue the conversation around gender and its intersections with race, ability, and age, for example. In these four years, I had the pleasure to discuss different multimodal texts representing young refugee subjects, such as animated shorts from the BBC *Seeking Refuge* series and other short movies, with various groups of students in the university classroom. Their enthusiastic responses to these texts suggest that a discussion of the aesthetical, ethical, and pedagogical values of these forms deserve greater attention in the transdisciplinary field of refugee studies in education. Considering the classroom dynamic, I encourage future research on the application of the model of *sustainable pedagogy* in the English school classroom in Norway, where teachers could experiment with theoretical discussion with their pupils, learn with them and with refugee storytelling. Bringing this sustainable pedagogy

model to the relational encounter between teachers, pupils, and refugee voices has the potential to forge ethical competences in the English classroom. Ultimately, I strongly advise future researchers to follow the practice of *learning with* refugee subjects and communities, and their stories, as that is imperative for a truly just, equal, and response-able sustainable pedagogy of YA refugee literature.

## 6.4 Refugee Voices: Let's Learn with Ethics and Affect!

Constantly circling to the relation between literature and pedagogy, this thesis has discussed the role of ethics as a necessary methodological and theoretical framework for pedagogical practices where borderlands, borders, and tension are bound to appear. In the ethical encounter with the Other, affect can be violent and damaging or can be healing, creative, and engender connection and transformation of self, family, and community. Affect and ethics have an indissoluble bond when teaching and learning with YA refugee literature. In this practice, which through ethics and affect can become transformative, a joyful resistance comes from learning with refugee voices about how to stay with the discomfort and being open to discourses of knowledge as something which is not owned to create borders, but a precious interrelation, transgenerational bond that comes from the encounter with the Other and to be shared by and with the collective. This thesis thus foregrounds forms of knowledge that undo the dominance of Western epistemologies, including disciplinary, colonial hierarchical binaries such as mind divorced from body or thought as free from emotion, stressing the necessity of learning with tensions and complexities. As an exercise of joyful transdisciplinary feminist research, I hope this thesis proves itself to offer an innovative example of research where literary words and images enter the pedagogical realm, bringing aesthetics, affects, and ethics as transformative forces in educational spaces.

## 6.5 Future Imaginaries or Present Realities? If You Dare to Make Space

Finally, this thesis comes with concrete recommendations for the institution where the research was conducted. It is mandatory to involve refugee voices in all phases of the process towards inclusion in order to even begin talking about sustainability and inclusion in education. As Sukhanwar (2022) claims, diverse voices must be active in the entire process at the institutional level, not solely guests, speakers, or spectators (personal conversation, November 22). NTNU as an institution should promote equity and inclusion, and needs to find the courage to open to real inclusion and diversity, for example in hiring practices and

student enrolment strategies, to face the tensions and challenges that come with a plurality of voices attending to the conversation. This is a first step toward the acknowledgment of the value these voices bring as active organizers, teachers, and students. It is then crucial to understand that the lack of engaging in this type of behavior directly translates into exclusion and lack of support to refugee subjects and communities living in Trondheim and in Norway.

Following the examples of scholars who have acted as role-models for me — I am thinking for example of Tone Pernille Østern, Stine Bang Svendsen, Hanna Musiol, and Libe García Zarranz, who practice forms of sustainable education — this institution and its leaders need a daily commitment to the transformative encounter with the Other. It is imperative to recognize the immense pedagogical work that refugee subjects and communities are already doing in the city of Trondheim. These voices cannot remain guest speakers, but instead forms of reciprocity need to be established to integrate them into the educational system as they already are culture promoters, community builders, and brave role-models for students and teachers at all levels in the educational system.

As part of *People on the Move*, a conference organized by the development project *Den Flyktingkompetente Lærer* that took place on December 1st 2022 at NTNU, I participated with a conversation titled "Refugee Voices as Pedagogy" with Gulabuddin Sukhanwar and Asieh Amini. Sukhanwar and Amini (2022) shared with me and the audience their positionalities as refugee subjects respectively from Afghanistan and Iran, and the role they have in the city of Trondheim. They taught me and the audience key issues regarding the relationship between literature, inclusion, and accessibility. In particular, Sukhanwar (2022) sharply pointed out that we need to keep asking whether there is hospitality in Norway, the country that tried to send him back to a war-afflicted Afghanistan, twice. I hence insist on the need for places of knowledge creation and transmission, particularly in this same institution where generations of teachers are formed, to remain accountable for their practices and to be allies to refugee subjects and communities. Refugee voices are already pedagogical voices in Norway, so I recommend staying with the transformative discomfort and humility that we, non-refugees, cannot and should not know. Let us remain in a silent attentive listening, while refugee subjects and communities' voices, already strong and high among us, continue to lead the way to a future otherwise.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: NSD Consent Form

### Are you interested in taking part in the research project "YA Refugee Literature as Sustainable Pedagogy: Ethics and Affect in the EFL Classroom"?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to study refugee literature and how it shapes us as students, teachers, and researchers. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

**Purpose of the project**

This is a doctoral thesis investigating the value of young-adult refugee literature in the English as a foreign language classroom in higher education in Norway. The project is informed by the following research questions:

How are refugee subjects and communities represented in YA refugee literature?

What is the role of ethics and affect in these portrayals?

What can YA refugee literature bring to the Norwegian university classroom?

How does refugee literature fit in the new Norwegian læreplan?

**Who is responsible for the research project?**

NTNU, ILU, is the institution responsible for the project.

**Why are you being asked to participate?**

I am inviting you to participate in the study as you attended the course LVUT8083 in Autumn 2020, and you wrote an academic essay about refugee literature as part of your portfolio.

**What does participation involve for you?**

If you chose to take part in this project, parts of your written academic essay for the course may be used in form of excerpt to discuss how refugee literature has shaped your pedagogical perspectives, and the connections between the literary genre and the Norwegian læreplan.

**Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

**Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- Stella Mililli, PhD student, in connection with the institution responsible for the project, will have access to the personal data
- Your name and contact details will be replaced with a code.
- Your occupation as a teacher will appear in the thesis, but no other personal information will be published.

**What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end 30. November 2022. At the end of the project, your data will be continued to be stored anonymously for follow-up studies and verification of the data inserted in my thesis. Your data will be stored in private devices (laptop, hard-drive) and only accessible by Stella Mililli.

**Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

**What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with NTNU, ILU, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

**Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- NTNU, ILU via Stella Mililli, stella.mililli@ntnu.no and Libe García Zarranz, libe.g.zarranz@ntnu.no
- Our Data Protection Officer: Thomas Helgesen, thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no
- Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader (Researcher/supervisor) Student (if applicable)

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# Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "YA Refugee Literature as Sustainable Pedagogy: Ethics and Affect in the EFL Classroom" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- ☐ to participate in (written essay)
- ☐ for my personal data to be stored after the end of the project for (insert purpose of storage e.g. follow-up studies)

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 30. November 2022

---

(Signed by participant, date)

## Appendix B: Text Assignment

**TA1 LVUT8083**

**Text Assignment 1 (1,300 words + References): Approved/Not Approved**

Deadline for submission: Friday, Oct. 2 (by midnight)

**OVERVIEW:**

The text assignment gives you an opportunity to practise close reading, to engage intellectually with a text and critical theories, to experiment with the language of critical analysis, and to formulate a compelling argument. First, choose a topic from the selection below. Then, make sure you familiarize yourself with the primary text (ie. reread and annotate the text). Use at least **two secondary sources**, which must be peer-reviewed*. You can use the MLA International Bibliography, together with other databases from the library (https://innsida.ntnu.no/en/litteratur). Ultimately, in this assignment you will have the opportunity to write about a topic that interests you, while learning the fundamentals of university-level essay writing.

* Definition of **peer review** from Merriam-Webster: "a process by which something proposed (as for research or publication) is evaluated by a group of experts in the appropriate field". When you look for an article in a database, make sure you always check the box "**Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals**".

**TOPICS:**

You may choose **ONE** of the following options:

1. The core curriculum (2019) claims that "critical thinking and ethical awareness are a requirement for and part of what it means to learn in different contexts and will therefore help the pupils to develop good judgment". With this aim in mind, write an essay describing the ways refugee literature can bring critical thinking and ethical awareness into the EFL classroom. You can focus on one or more key concepts and theories discussed in class (e.g. refugee, nation, representation).

2. One of the competence aims after Year 7 (LK20, 2019) states that students in Norway should be able to "reflect upon identity and cultural belonging". How can Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* help teachers introduce those values in the EFL classroom in order to create an inclusive and diverse environment? Write an essay where you analyze the novel drawing on

some of the theories about identity and 'the Other' used in class.

3. Emmanuel Levinas (1985) explores the concept of responsibility in these terms: "Since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him" (p. 96). Inspired by this quote, write an essay where you discuss the concepts of responsibility and hospitality in Dau and Arual Akech's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl. Escaping Civil War in Sudan*. You can refer to the core curriculum, which contends that "pupils must also contribute to the protection of human dignity and reflect on how they can prevent the violation of human dignity", as one of your sources.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

· This essay should be around 1,300 words long (+-100 words), which is approximately 4 pages, using 12 point Times New Roman type with 2.54 cm margins.
· The word count should be printed on the last page of the essay (before the References)
· The essay should be formatted according to APA standards (including in-text quotations and References).
· Use at least two peer-reviewed secondary critical sources.

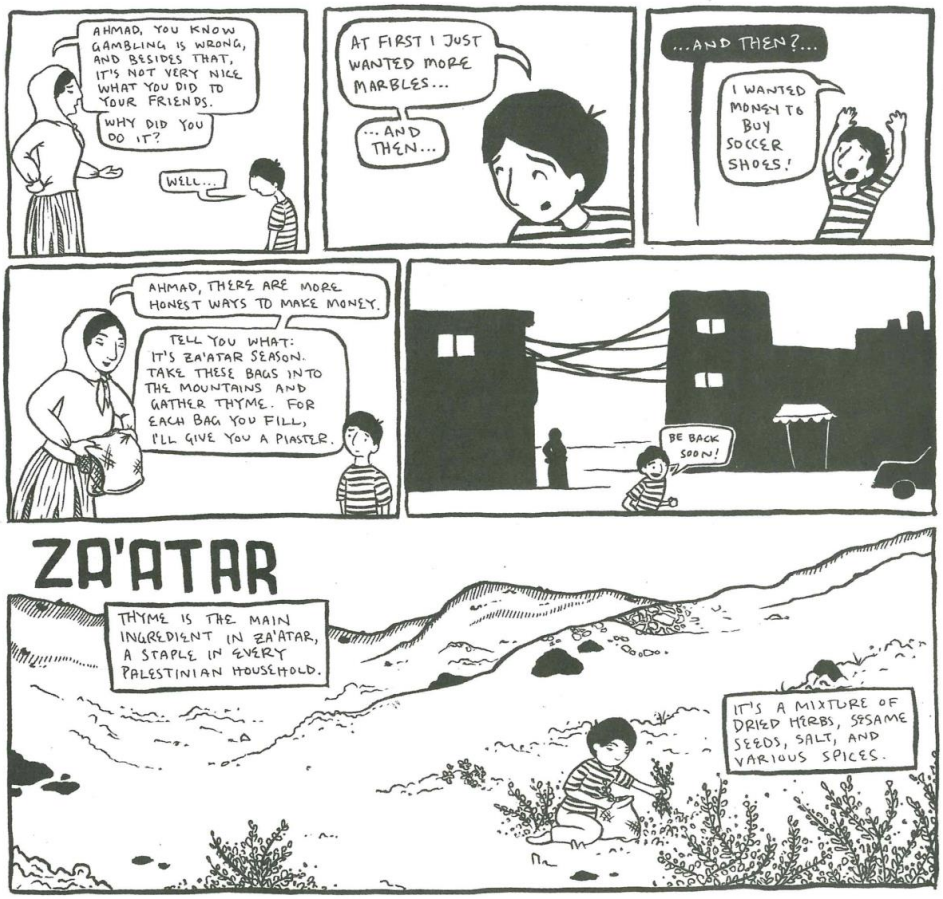
**EVALUATION CRITERIA:**

· The essay has a strong and clearly articulated thesis statement (that is, one or two sentences near the beginning of your paper that present your argument to the reader).
· The thesis is convincingly argued.
· The essay has a clear introduction and conclusion.
· Your thesis is supported by relevant claims.
· The essay has cohesion and coherence.
· In-text quotations are well-integrated into the body of the essay.
· The secondary sources chosen are relevant and effectively integrated into the main argument.
· The essay has been proofread for spelling, punctuation, and general correctness.
· The essay shows originality and creativity.
· The essay uses proper APA citation style in the essay and in the References.

**AVOID PLAGIARISM:**

Make sure you reference all the material that you use in your essay to avoid any problems. Summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting are good strategies to avoid plagiarism.

**Appendix C: From *Baddawi*, Abdelrazaq, 2015**

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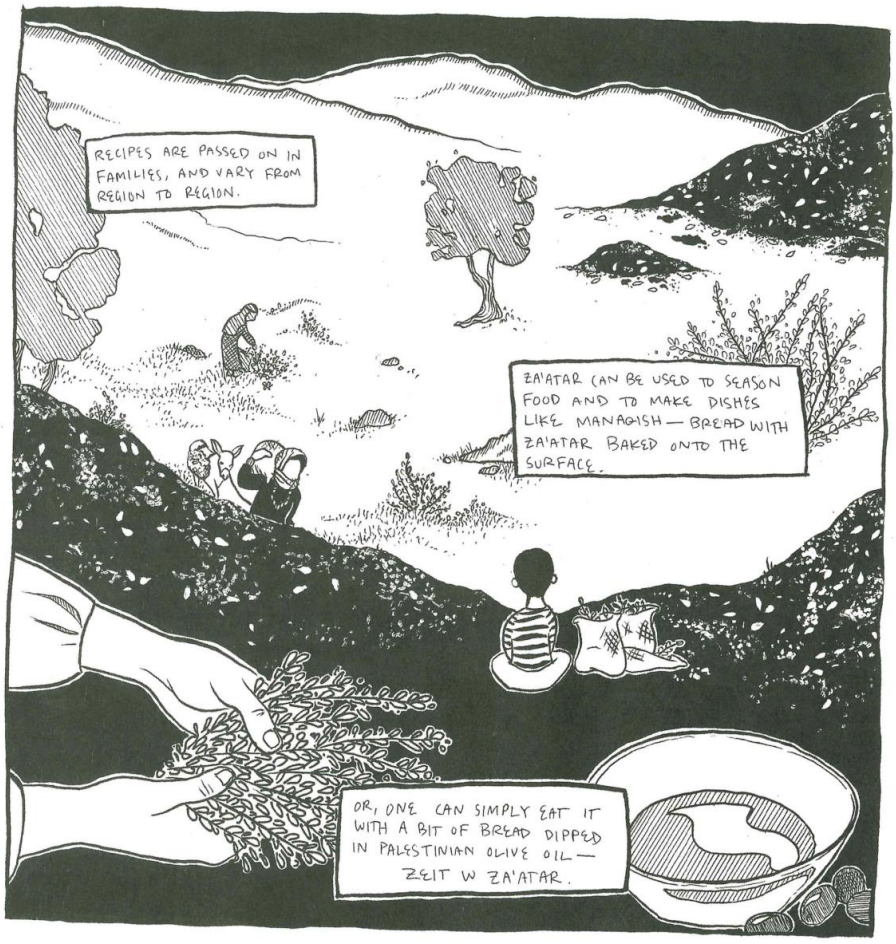


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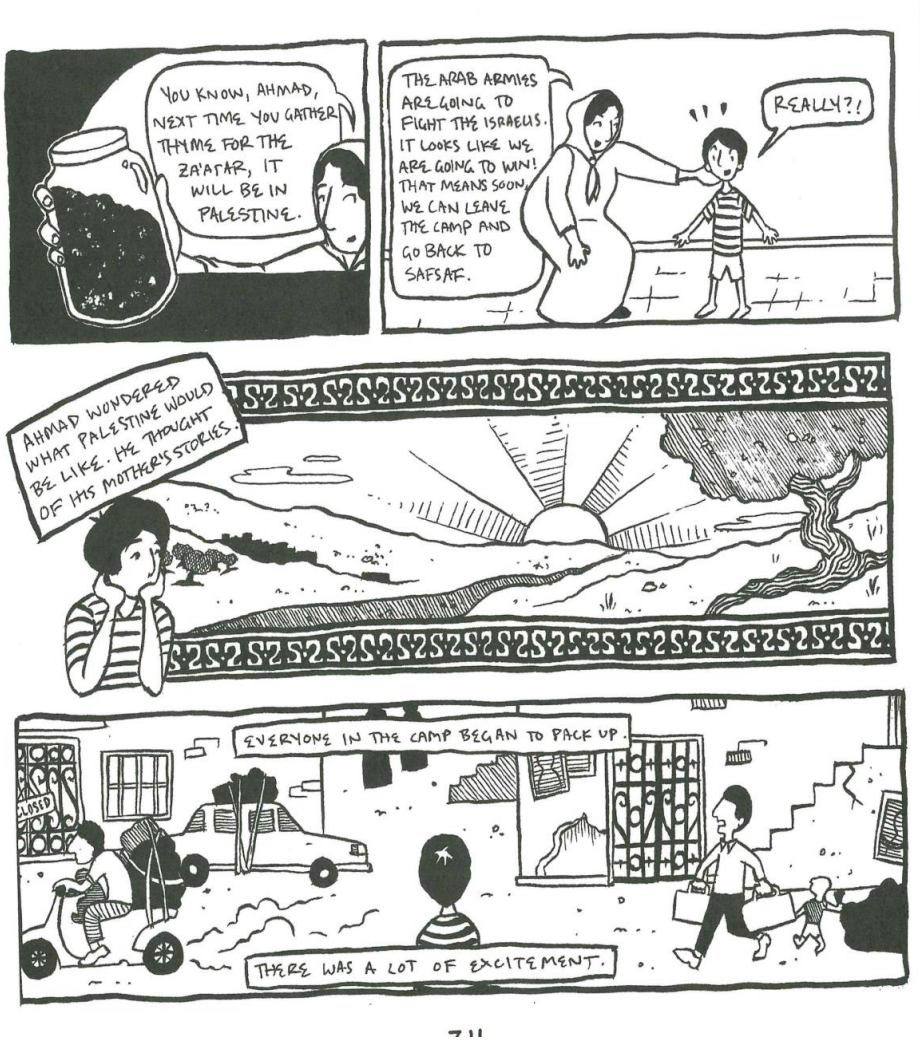


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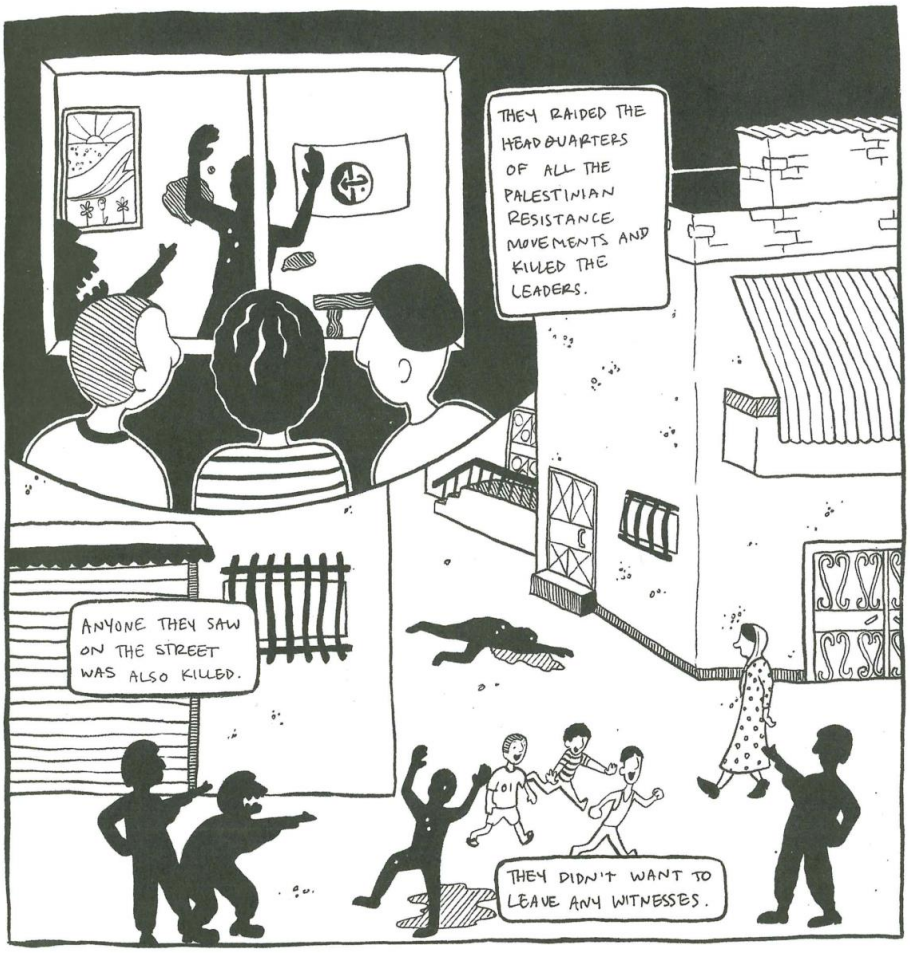


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