

**Framing Mnemohistory: An Exploration of Multimodal Strategies in  
Select Graphic War Memoirs**

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for the award of the Degree of

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in

**English Language and Literature**

By

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the thesis titled “**Framing Mnemohistory: An Exploration of Multimodal Strategies in Select Graphic War Memoirs**” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an authentic record of analysis and bonafide research carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. O. J. Joycee as my Research Supervisor, and Dr. Sijo Varghese C. as my Co-Research Supervisor at the PG Department of English and Research Centre, Vimala College (Autonomous), Thrissur. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published elsewhere for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, or any such title, or recognition. I also affirm that the originality of the study has been ascertained with the help of University-approved software for plagiarism-check.

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### **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**Framing Mnemohistory: An Exploration of Multimodal Strategies in Select Graphic War Memoirs**” is a bonafide record of studies and research carried out by **Ms. Deepthy Mohan** under my supervision, and submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. To the best of my knowledge, this research work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, or similar such title, or recognition. Its critical evaluation represents independent work on the part of the candidate and its originality has been ascertained with the help of University-approved software for plagiarism check.

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**Deepthy Mohan**

## ABSTRACT

The study explores the subtleties of the interplay between memory and history in select graphic war memoirs. The convoluted relationship between memory and history requires an effective medium of expression suitable for the articulation of emotions, anxieties, and confusion while recollecting a war-torn past. The study uncovers how the gaps and omissions in memory and history fit well within the structure of graphic narrative. Moreover, the numerous exceptional techniques of the medium of comics provide abundant opportunities for memoirists to experiment while presenting the multiple layers of memory and history. The graphic memoirs selected for the study include Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*, Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, and G. B. Tran's *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. The investigation delineates the concept of 'mnemohistory' as defined by Jan Assmann and applies it in examining how graphic memoirs endeavour to revisit history by engaging memory through a confluence of visual and verbal elements. Theoretical writings by Maurice Halbwachs and Marek Tamm on individual, collective, and cultural memories are employed to further the study. The transgenerational nature of traumatic memories is also dissected executing the concept of 'postmemory' by Marianne Hirsch. The episodic and fragmented nature of recollected history is analysed through the lens of critical studies made by the stalwarts of comic studies like Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, and Hillary Chute among others. The thesis attempts to establish the necessity of understanding the intricacies of the medium to decode the meanings spread across the space of panels and gutters of a graphic narrative. The analytical chapters establish how personal memories are interspersed with collective memories etching the aftermath of historical events involving trauma, death, pain, and loss. The crux of the study is the significance of a child as a witness to experiences of war and the role of a second-generation representative in reconstructing history.

Keywords: Graphic memoir, mnemohistory, postmemory, transgenerational, panel, gutter.

**പ്രബന്ധസംഗ്രഹം**

തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത ഗ്രാഫിക് യുദ്ധസ്മരണകളിൽ ഓർമ്മയും ചരിത്രവും തമ്മിലുള്ള പരസ്പരബന്ധത്തിന്റെ സൂക്ഷ്മതകൾ വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുകയാണ് പഠനലക്ഷ്യം. ഓർമ്മയും ചരിത്രവും തമ്മിലുള്ള സങ്കീർണ്ണമായ ബന്ധത്തിന്, യുദ്ധത്തിൽ തകർന്ന ഭൂതകാലത്തെ ഓർമ്മിക്കുമ്പോൾ വികാരങ്ങൾ, ഉത്കണ്ഠകൾ, ആശയക്കുഴപ്പങ്ങൾ എന്നിവ വ്യക്തമാക്കുന്നതിന് അനുയോജ്യമായ ഒരു ഫലപ്രദമായ ആവിഷ്കാരമാധ്യമം ആവശ്യമാണ്. ഗ്രാഫിക് ആഖ്യാനത്തിന്റെ ഘടനയിൽ ഓർമ്മയുടേയും ചരിത്രത്തിന്റേയും വിടവുകളും ഒഴിവാക്കലുകളും എങ്ങനെ നന്നായി യോജിക്കുന്നുവെന്ന് ഈ പഠനം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നു. കൂടാതെ, കോമിക്സ് മാധ്യമത്തിന്റെ അസാധാരണമായ സാങ്കേതികവിദ്യകൾ ഓർമ്മയുടേയും ചരിത്രത്തിന്റേയും പല തലങ്ങൾ അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിനിടയിൽ പരീക്ഷണങ്ങൾ നടത്താൻ അനവധി അവസരങ്ങൾ എഴുത്തുകാർക്ക് നൽകുന്നു. പഠനത്തിനായി തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പുകളിൽ മാർജെയ്ൻ സത്രാപിയുടെ പെർസപോളിസ്: ദ സ്റ്റോറി ഓഫ് എ ചൈൽഡ് ഇഡ് ആൻഡ് ദ സ്റ്റോറി ഓഫ് എ റിട്ടേൺ, ലൈലാ അബൂൾസാഖിന്റെ ബദാവി, ആർട്ട് സ്ലീഗൽമാന്റെ ദി കംപ്ലീറ്റ് മോസ്, ജി.ബി. ടാനിന്റെ വിയറ്റ്നാമേരിക്ക: എ ഫാമിലിസ് ജേർണി എന്നിവയാണ് ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നത്.

ജാൻ അസ്മാൻ നിർവചിച്ച 'നിമോഹിസ്റ്ററി' (ഓർമ്മചരിത്രം) എന്ന ആശയത്തെ മുൻനിർത്തിയാണ് പഠനം നടത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നത്. ദൃശ്യങ്ങളും വാക്കുകളും തമ്മിലുള്ള സംയോജനത്തിലൂടെ ഗ്രാഫിക് സ്മരണകൾ ചരിത്രത്തെ പുനഃപരിശോധിക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നതെങ്ങനെയെന്ന് വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുക കൂടിയാണ് പഠനോദ്ദേശം. വ്യക്തിപരവും കൂട്ടായതും സാംസ്കാരികവുമായ ഓർമ്മകളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള മാറീസ് ഹാൽബാക്കിന്റേയും മാർക്ക് ടാമിന്റേയും സൈദ്ധാന്തിക രചനകൾ കൂടുതൽ പഠനത്തിനായി ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നു. മരിയൻ ഹർഷിന്റെ 'പോസ്റ്റ് മെമ്മറി' (സ്മരണാനന്തരം) എന്ന ആശയം നടപ്പിലാക്കുകൊണ്ട് ആഘാതകരമായ ഓർമ്മകളുടെ കൈമാറ്റ സ്വഭാവവും പരിശോധിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. സ്കോട്ട് മക്നോഡ്, തിയറി ഗ്രോൻസ്റ്റീൻ, ഹിലാരി ചൂട്ട് തുടങ്ങിയ കോമിക് പഠനങ്ങളിലെ പ്രമുഖർ നടത്തിയ വിമർശനാത്മക പഠനങ്ങളുടെ കാഴ്ചപ്പാടിലൂടെയാണ് ഓർമ്മകളിലൂടെ പുനരുദ്ധരിച്ച ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ തുടർച്ച, ശിഥിലാത്മകത എന്നിവ വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നത്.

ഒരു ഗ്രാഫിക് വിവരണത്തിന്റെ പാനലുകളുടേയും ഗട്ടുകളുടേയും ഇടത്തിലുടനീളം വ്യാപിച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന അർത്ഥങ്ങൾ വിസങ്കേതനം ചെയ്യുന്നതിന് മാധ്യമത്തിന്റെ സങ്കീർണതകൾ മനസ്സിലാക്കേണ്ടതുണ്ട്. ആഘാതം, മരണം, വേദന, നഷ്ടം എന്നിവ ഉൾപ്പെടുന്ന ചരിത്രസംഭവങ്ങളുടെ അനന്തരഫലങ്ങൾ എങ്ങനെ കോമിക്സിലൂടെ രേഖപ്പെടുത്തുന്നുവെന്നും അവ വ്യക്തിഗത ഓർമ്മകളുമായും കൂട്ടായ ഓർമ്മകളുമായും എങ്ങനെ ഇടകലർന്നിരിക്കുന്നുവെന്ന് പഠനം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. യുദ്ധാനുഭവങ്ങൾക്ക് സാക്ഷിയായ ഒരു കുട്ടിയുടെ ഓർമ്മകൾ ചരിത്രത്തെ നിർമ്മിക്കുന്നതിൽ വഹിച്ച പങ്കിനെക്കുറിച്ചും തൊട്ടടുത്ത തലമുറയുടെ പ്രതിനിധികൾ ആ ഓർമ്മകളെ എങ്ങനെ കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യുന്നുവെന്ന അന്വേഷണമാണ് ഈ പഠനത്തിന്റെ കാതൽ.

**താക്കോൽവാക്കുകൾ:** ഗ്രാഫിക് ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പ്, നിമോഹിസ്റ്ററി, പോസ്റ്റ്മെമ്മറി, ട്രാൻസ്ജെനറേഷൻ, പാനൽ, ഗട്ടർ.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Introduction

Graphic narratives have evolved as a dynamic storytelling medium capable of handling diverse subjects from personal predicaments to global issues. In the contemporary world dominated by visual culture, the genre of comics that employs a montage of words and pictures, is worth exploring. The medium exercises a confluence of verbal and visual communication. In the age of global wars and violence, the need for a medium like comics that can document witness narratives in an engaging and enthralling way has made it even more noteworthy. Comics with its visual-verbal aesthetics makes war-generated traumatic histories visible. It endeavours to address history and memory inside the frame of panels and gutters transcending time and space boundaries.

The thesis proposes to explore mnemohistory (*Moses*, 8) as defined by Jan Assmann and propelled by memory studies. It investigates how comics endeavours to blend history and memory with their ability to juxtapose past, present, and future within their word-image hybridity. The study seeks to explore how the medium of graphic narratives acts as a suitable form to act as sites of mnemohistory. Multimodality is "... the integrated use of different semiotic resources (e.g. language, image, sound and music) in texts and communicative events" (van Leeuwen 281). Comic medium is equipped with verbal and visual modes of communication, making reading an enriching experience. Comic writers/artists indulge in experimenting with the specialties of the visual mode of

communication as well as retain the pleasure derived from reading traditional literary texts. The graphic memoirs selected for the study are Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*, Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, and G. B. Tran's *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*.

### **Definition of Comics**

The attempt to define comics is as old as the genre and several critics and writers have discoursed on the numerous characteristics of comics as part of their attempt to define it. There is a misunderstanding among people who think that the term 'comics' refers to comic books alone, resulting in the general belief that comics are books written solely for children. Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* discusses this in detail. He proposes that comics refer to the medium which is "... a vessel which can hold any number of ideas and images" (6). Roger Sabin in *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* observes that comics refer to "... a language: they combine to constitute a weave of writing and art which has its own syntax, grammar, and conventions, and which can communicate ideas in a totally unique fashion" (8).

Will Eisner, the comic legend, examines how the various components of a comic book take on the characteristics of a language and he proposes the term 'sequential art' (7) in his *Comics and Sequential Art*. McCloud adds to Eisner's definition of comics that they are "... juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence" (*Understanding Comics* 9). Comics should be regarded as a medium (Chute, "Comics as Literature" 452; Kukkonen 4) or language (Sabin 8; McCloud, *Reinventing Comics* 1). Comics, thus, is a medium/form or language used to write illustrated novels, editorial cartoons, comic books, graphic narratives, and webcomics among others.

## **Background of Study**

Understanding the evolution of graphic narratives is crucial in comprehending their features and advantages. The attempt to trace the evolution of graphic narratives must begin with the history of comics. Graphic narratives, employing the form of comics, indulge in a process of meshing together words and images. Pictures with accompanying texts explaining a story or event have been around for a long time. Though this combination of script and images may be traced back to cave paintings of the ancient period, for a better understanding of the comic medium it will be convenient to look from the viewpoint of the mode of production of such works. Hence, as Karin Kukkonen posits, "...comics are a medium narrating through images, words, and panel sequences, and they emerge from the production context of popular mass culture of the twentieth century" (102).

Starting from the newspaper editorial/political cartoons stage, comic art has undergone a metamorphosis fighting several criticisms and setbacks, especially during its initial stages of development. Will Eisner, Robert Peterson, Stephen Weiner, Robert G. Weiner, Jan Baetens, Hugo Frey, Karin Kukkonen, Neil Cohn, Hillary Chute, Randy Duncan, and Mathew J. Smith among others have written extensively on the history of comics and graphic narratives. Their writings have provided insights into the investigation undertaken in the chapter on the evolution of graphic narratives.

## **Illustrated Novels**

Andrés Romero Jódar examines the four most important genres that use a word-image combination: illustrated novels, comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels. He

describes that illustrated novels comprise a “closed frame written text” embedded with images inside (97). He adds that there are two divisions in the genre regarding the relationship between words and visuals. First, there are novels with illustrations included long after their original publication. For example, classical illustrated novels by Cervantes, Verne, and the like. Second, there are works that were originally published as illustrated books. Examples are Neil Gaiman’s *Stardust* and *The Dream Hunters*. In the former, the separation between the image and text is greater, and in the latter, the illustrated novel is conceived as a unity with more closely related illustrations and written text (97-98).

### **Comic Strips**

Jódar defines a comic strip as a “... verbal-iconical genre made up by one or several coordinated pictures (vignettes), usually humorous in tone, and based on a slapstick effect or sudden dénouement, producing a final laughter/joke” (99). Political cartoons that appeared in Sunday newspapers like *Yellow Kid* and *Little Nemo in Slumberland* can be observed as the precursors of comics. Certain features of comics like speech balloons and speed lines have been featured in them. The comic strip is the basic form from which the comic book and later the graphic narratives developed. They appeared in newspapers and magazines during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They became popular with the popularity and demand of newspapers and magazines with the advancements in printing technology and became an important feature of the newspapers by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kukkonen 102-104).

The adventures of Richard F. Outcault’s character, The Yellow Kid, in *Yellow Kid*, began to appear as a series in newspapers in America. He began to employ speech

bubbles in his literary works often. Sunday comic supplements gained popularity and special holiday editions also began to be printed to meet the upsurge in demand (Peterson 96-98, 103). Winsor McCay was one of the artists who developed comics further on the pages of American newspapers. His series *Little Nemo in Slumberland* which was published from 1905-15 expanded the possibilities of panel arrangement and page layout. Newspaper comics like *Yellow Kid* or *Little Nemo* reflected the emerging mass culture of the twentieth century and they dealt with the social and political matters of the period (Kukkonen 104).

### **Comic Books**

The comic strips later paved the way for the emergence of comic books. Robert G. Weiner observes that the original American comic books were collections of comic strips published in newspapers. They targeted children who collected them to read again. He further argues that the first modern comic work was a collection of comic strips in two books called *Funnies on Parade* and *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics* published in 1934 (10). The comic books of the 1930s were published as thin books, usually around thirty-two pages, with several stories. Comic books are different from cartoons or comic strips. While cartoons are single-panel images, the story unfolds over multiple frames in comic books (Chute, "Comics as Literature" 453-54). They soon became popular among their targeted audience, the children, because they were affordable and accessible.

The birth of superhero comics led to a surge in the publication of comic books like never before. The entry of Superman, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, ushered in a fresh era in the arena of comic book tradition. Other superheroes followed

like Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain America, Captain Marvel, and Plastic Man. Many superheroes became stars of the film too which augmented their popularity. Patriotic themes and the fight between good and evil entered comic books by DC and Marvel publishers during World War II. The chaos of the period was reflected in comic books and the superheroes were presented as powerful figures fighting the evil forces, capable of safeguarding the world from foreign threats. But after the war, there was no enemy for the superheroes to fight and by the end of 1940, the interest in superheroes waned (S. Weiner 2-4).

EC Comics headed by William Gaines started focusing on horror comics. Death and violence became common themes in comic books published by EC Comics. The *Tales from the Crypt*, *Haunt of Fear*, *Shock Suspenstories*, *Weird Science Fantasy*, and other crime comic books fascinated teenagers (S. Weiner 5-7). The wide popularity of comic books, especially among children and teenagers, and their commercial success led to a debate about their educational and cultural value in the United States during the 1950s. Fredric Wertham, a child psychologist, studied the impact of comics on children's thinking and conducted studies among his young patients to prove his assumptions. He published a book, *The Seduction of the Innocent*, in which he diagnosed "... a disease, namely juvenile delinquency and ... rampant moral deterioration of the younger generation, and traces it back to a virus, namely comics and their unsavory stories" (Kukkonen 110).

The public discussion about the negative effect of comics on youth gained momentum that led to the United States Senate hearings by 1954. Though the link between juvenile delinquency and the influence of such books on adolescent minds was

not proven in the Senate, the uproar forced the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) to install self-censorship in September 1954. A set of rules named ‘The Comics Code’ (S. Weiner 12; Kukkonen 111; Peterson 161) was issued which all comic books had to follow and new comic books had to pass the inspection of The Comics Code Authority to get published. This restricted the storytelling options of adventure and horror comics which led to a sharp drop in the sales figures of comic books (Kukkonen 110-111).

The events related to the issue of The Comics Code prompted the emergence of the ‘Underground Comix’ (S. Weiner 12; Kukkonen 117; Duncan and Smith 216; Chute “Comics as Literature” 456; El Refaie 31) movement during the 1960s. Comic books which supported the movement contained elements challenging the Comics Code which was not easy to get published. Hence, they relied on self-publication and were distributed on street corners and in headshops that sold hippie paraphernalia. The movement was successful and several underground comic books sold thousands of copies (S. Weiner 12).

### **Graphic Novels**

Chute’s “Comics as Literature” traces the evolution of graphic novels to the underground comic publication during the second half of the twentieth century. She points out that the first use of the phrase ‘graphic novel’ may be traced to Richard Kyle in his newsletter “The Future of Comics” published in 1964. Will Eisner popularised the term by employing it in a more commercial context. He marketed his book, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, as a ‘graphic novel’ to sell it to the publishers.

Chute defines a graphic novel as a book-length work written in the medium of comics (453).

Chute alleges that underground comics were “challenging and arresting because they mediated on the violation of taboos” (“Comics as Literature” 456). In her opinion, graphic narratives took shape out of this culture. They discussed serious themes and dealt with social and political subjects. Art Spiegelman published his works as underground comics. His *Maus* and two magazines, *Arcade* (1975-76) and *RAW* (1980-91) represent “an anti-narrative avant-garde aesthetic for the... medium of comics” (456).

Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey differentiate between graphic novels and comic books with respect to their form, content, publication format, and production and distribution aspects in *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* published in 2015. They did not find much of a difference between comics and graphic novels when it comes to their form. Both can follow the same drawing style, layout rules, and narrative dimension of comic books. In terms of content, graphic novels tried to distinguish themselves from superhero comics. There is incredible diversity and variety of content matter in graphic novels. Many are autobiographical, semi-autobiographical, and several others claim to be documentaries, reportage, or history. Graphic novels are published in typical book format that resembles traditional novel and prefers to avoid serialisation. After the self-publication period of the underground comix movement, graphic novels depended mainly on specialty shops or headshops for distribution. Later independent publishers like Fantagraphics, Drawn and Quarterly, Pantheon, Penguin, and Faber and Faber took over the graphic novel market. Authors like Charles Hatfield expressed suspicion toward any sharp division between graphic novels and comics by stressing the impracticability of

maintaining a professional graphic novel production outside the economic context of comics. He points out the impossibility of going unnoticed the financial support arising from the existence of comic book audiences and the possibility to pre-publish graphic novels in serialised comic book format (8-19).

Taking the examples of Frank Miller's, *The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, Jódar differentiates comic books from graphic novels by referring to how in the latter the characters are affected by the narrative progression of time. While in the earlier superhero comics, the characters remained unaffected by the passing of time. He adds that the comic book usually targets teenagers and children audience whereas the graphic novel is directly addressed to a mature and adult readership (105).

During the initial stages of development, graphic novels struggled to attract serious attention from the literary world. People associated them with children's books dealing with trivial subjects. It was with Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, that "... there was a book that graphic novel supporters could hold up proudly" (S. Weiner 35). *Maus* attracted adult readers and although slowly, but steadily the sale of graphic novels gained momentum. Another significant turning point that increased the popularity of graphic and comic books is their adaptation into films.

Books explaining and educating about graphic novels were published which included interviews with creators such as Gary Groth and Robert Fiore's *The New Comics* (1988), Stanley Waiter and Stephen R. Bissette's *Comic Book Rebels: Conversations with the Creators of the New Comics* (1993), and Andrea Juno's *Dangerous Images* (1997). Along with these texts which helped people to understand

graphic novels, a documentary film, *Comic Book Confidential* directed by Ronn Mann, was released in 1988. It included a short historical backdrop and interviews with artists which helped the sale of works such as *Maus*, *Watchmen*, and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* to U.S. and UK-based readers, booksellers, librarians, and educators (Baetens and Frey 86-87).

Baetens and Frey have also discussed on:

... two theoretically inflected works [that] became keystones for explaining the sophistication of comics and also how to begin to understand their mechanics as text-image works, again suggesting by implication that comics were not just child's play. These works are Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1985). These were high points of the explanatory literature ... that emerged to trumpet the graphic novel's importance. (87)

Numerous graphic novels such as Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* (1982), Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993), Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (1995), David Beauchard's *Epileptic* (1996), Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World* (1997), Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2000), Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), and many more have dealt with diverse and significant themes which gained public recognition. Facing the test of time, graphic narratives, with their capacity to play around with complex plots, unique characters, and novel techniques, have achieved a distinct place in the literary field.

### **Autobiographical Comics/Graphic Memoirs**

A sub-genre of graphic narratives which has carved a niche in the literary world with its ability to handle socio-political issues with a new vigour is autobiographical comics or graphic memoirs. Such works are also termed “graphic life writing” (Herman 231) or “autographics” (Whitlock 965). Elisabeth El Refaie traces the origins of autobiographical comics in the underground comix movement in the United States in the early 1970s when comics artists first produced subversive and sexual-themed subjects for adults (3).

The art of comics offers new possibilities for life writing. It gives impetus to representing the self and discussing the key concepts of identity. Christopher Pizzino argues that the “... language of comics is defined by discontinuity; each image is articulated in relation to others from which it is nonetheless distinct” (636). The numerous techniques exclusive to graphic narratives

... offer memoirists many new ways of representing their experience of temporality, their memories of past events, and their hopes and dreams for the future. Furthermore, autobiographical comics creators can draw on the close association in contemporary Western culture between seeing and believing in order to persuade readers of the truthful, sincere nature of their stories. (El Refaie 4)

Autobiographical writings detailing coming-of-age stories and other personal struggles are commonly discussed in the form of graphic memoirs. Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return* (2000), Craig

Thompson's *Blankets* (2003), David Beauchard's *Epileptic* (2005), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), David Small's *Stitches* (2009), and Riad Sattouf's *The Arab of the Future* (2014) are some well-known examples. Though the representation of memory in comic form deals with numerous themes like childhood struggles, family problems, or other personal experiences, the thesis focuses on the reconstruction of personal, social, political, and historical memories in graphic memoirs which provides alternate ways of interpreting and understanding the past.

Several graphic memoirs are written in the background of historically relevant events and reflect their repercussions in the lives of the writers and their families. Hence, they act as valuable records of history engaged in archiving the past. A controversial topic of discussion related to the representation of history in memoirs is the depiction of trauma which is often an ineludible companion. Chute argues that “[a]uthors like Spiegelman and Sacco, engaged with the horizon of history, portray torture and massacre in a complex formal mode that does not turn away from or mitigate trauma; in fact, they demonstrate how its visual retracing is enabling, ethical, and productive” (“Comics as Literature” 459). By referring to an instance in Spiegelman's *Maus* which depicts dead bodies from the concentration camp inside a present-day SoHo studio reflecting the memories invading the author's mind, Chute adds that comics is a “... structurally layered and doubled medium that can proliferate historical moments on the page” (459). Thus, the combination of history and memory engaged in the format of comics is worth investigating.

Golnar Nabizadeh draws parallels between memory and comics suggesting that “[m]uch like memory, comics are ‘polysemiotic’ – composed of words and images – and

are characterised by their diversity of representation and the potentially endless ways in which we tell stories about one another and ourselves” (3). The gaps and omissions of memories can also be equated to the discontinuous structure of comics. Chute argues that “... the medium of comics can perform the enabling political and aesthetic work of bearing witness powerfully because of its rich narrative texture: its flexible page architecture; its sometimes consonant, sometimes dissonant visual and verbal narratives; and its structural threading of absence and presence” (“Texture” 93-94).

The act of recollection is both a neurological and a creative process. Art and literature, including comics, offer a lens through which the theme of memory can be scrutinised. Comics, with their unique and multimodal narrative structure, can tackle the limitations of memory. They encourage the readers to participate in the meaning-making procedure. They establish a relationship between storytelling and time and carry traces of the past in words and images. For instance, the different panels in a three-panel comic strip can be interpreted as representing the past, present, and future as the reader’s eyes move from one to the next panel (Nabizadeh 4).

### **Memory Studies**

Astrid Erll in *Memory in Culture* published in 2005 observes that memory as an interdisciplinary phenomenon has become a key concept of academic discourse across established fields over the last two decades (1). Several authors from Plato and Aristotle to Maurice Halbwachs, Henri Bergson, Andreas Huyssen, Astrid Erll, Anne Whitehead, Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, and Jan Assmann among others became fascinated with the concept of memory and have written extensively on its various aspects. Erll argues

that "... memory is a transdisciplinary problem. What is nowadays called 'memory studies'... emerged as a multidisciplinary field" (2).

Whitehead observes that memory has been given great significance even before the introduction of alphabetical writing. The bards employed several mnemotechnic devices while reciting poems such as connecting the story to the current socio-political situation of the period in order to memorise the lines. She argues that before Plato, people were concerned only with the practical uses of memory and memory began to be discussed as a distinct concept in Plato's writings (4-5). In the Aristotelian tradition, knowledge is derived from the sense experience and the art of memory is merely an instrument that can heighten the sense perception. Whereas, in the Platonic tradition, the mnemonic images were considered to have the power to represent ideal reality and the part played by the mnemonist took on an added importance (Hutton 374-75).

Whitehead discusses that in Plato's *Theaetetus* (c. 360 BC), there is an episode that presents a conversation between Socrates, Theodorus, and Theaetetus. Through their dialogues, Plato states that the mind contains a wax tablet on which an object of perception can be imprinted as an object of thought which remains there for long periods. Depending upon the quality of the wax each person has, their capacity to memorise things varies. According to Plato, all knowledge and learning is an act of remembering. For him, memory is inherently dialectical, performed as a question-answer process (15-19).

Whitehead contends that "Freud drew on a specifically Platonic strand of classical mnemonics, returning to the Socratic dialogue for his formulation of the 'talking cure' and to Plato's image of the 'wax tablet' for his concept of the unconscious" (89). She adds that in a topographical model of the psyche, Freud distinguishes between the

conscious and the unconscious. For him, the unconscious becomes the place where the memory resides (93-94). In a brief essay on memory, “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’” published in 1924, Freud refers to the metaphor of the wax tablet for describing the unconscious. Freud explains that the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’ comprises a wax slab with a transparent sheet placed on top of it. The sheet has two layers of which the upper layer is a transparent piece of celluloid, while the lower layer is that of a thin waxed paper. The writing is visible on the upper layer and it can be erased by raising the two layers of sheets from the wax slab (qtd. in Whitehead 96-97).

The shift in focus in memory studies from individual memory to collective memory happened with the contributions made by Maurice Halbwachs. He gave a social dimension to the study of memory and has written extensively on individual and collective memory. He argues that “... the individual memory, in order to corroborate and make precise and even to cover the gaps in its remembrances, relies upon, relocates itself within, momentarily merges with, collective memory... A man must often appeal to others’ remembrances to evoke his own past” (50-51).

Olick et al. claim that in the past thirty years, a new phase is ushered in the field of memory:

The memory boom unleashed a culture of trauma and regret, and states are allegedly now judged on how well they atone for their past misdeeds rather than on future projects...the memory boom has supposedly also given rise to varieties of inquiry, including science, scholarship, memoir writing, curatorial work, oral history projects, and the like. (3-4)

A surge in interest in the past led to the pairing of memory and history in the field of memory studies. Tamm contemplates that during the last decade, memory studies have been dominated by a 'cultural turn,' with resourceful thoughts and ideas from critics and theorists especially in cultural studies. He recognises the German scholars, Aleida, and Jan Assmann, as the significant shapers of this turn, and based on the concept of cultural memory, both have worked out a new influential model of analysis for memory studies during the 1990s (Tamm, "Beyond History" 461). In mnemohistory, relevance is given to what is known of the past in the present and "... how particular ways of construing the past enable later communities to constitute and sustain themselves" (Tamm, "History as Cultural" 510).

Visual culture dominates every sphere today, penetrating human lives and thoughts. As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney suggest, the memory of the past is kept alive by new media practices, particularly in the domain of arts and academic studies (5-6). Traumatic histories related to wars and political upheavals form the theme of several contemporary graphic memoirs. The remarkable capability of comics and their capacity to engage the audience can no longer be denied. Whitlock maintains that comics uniquely mediate trauma in "boxes of grief" (970). Though there might be cultural differences, the visual grammar of comics has a universal character which makes it "... widely accessible and adaptable...and they engage in traumatic memory work across languages, cultures, and generations" (969). With their unique capacity to represent time in panels and gutters, they indulge in representing and reconstructing history through recollection.

### **Objective of Study**

The study is an attempt to explore how the potential of the graphic novel medium provides a vibrant platform for the expression of history and memory. It redirects attention from official histories to personal histories by identifying the differences between historical documents and memoirs. There is an attempt to discuss the role of historiographic narratives in comprehending the past and preserving historical memory.

The traumatic past harbouring wars and revolutions and their repercussions on the lives of victims form the nucleus of the study. Retelling history from personal experiences reveals the agony and the hardships of growing up amidst war. The study also elucidates the transgenerational nature of traumatic memories spreading its indelible impression on posterity that raises questions about self and identity.

The style and content of graphic narratives together form an effective medium of expression capable of handling the synthesis of memory and history. The study analyses graphic memoirs as sites of memory to reconstruct history by drawing parallels between the structures of memory, history, and the comic medium. The multimodal features and the multifarious techniques of the graphic form are dissected to appraise their versatility.

### **A Brief Account of the Works and Authors Selected for the Study**

Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir *Persepolis* was originally written in French. The English translations were published in two volumes, one in 2003 and the second in 2004. The first volume was translated by Blake Ferris and Mattias Ripa, and the second by Anjali Singh. Both volumes were brought out as a single book, *The Complete Persepolis* in 2007. The book has been made into a film co-directed by Vincent Paronnaud and Satrapi.

The coming-of-age story is written in the background of a politically turbulent context of the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. The author successfully blends individual and collective memories to enunciate the history of the sufferings faced by the common citizens of Iran. The multimodality of the graphic form employed by the author offers an intriguing insight into the history of Iran during the 1980s and 90s. The author resists historical silencing as she reinterprets history by looking through the prism of a graphic memoir. Her *Embroideries* is also a graphic memoir that focuses on the sex lives of women in Iran. Her other notable works include *Chicken with Plums*, *Monsters Are Afraid of the Moon*, and *The Sigh*. She has also directed films, *The Voices*, and *Radioactive*.

*Baddawi* by Leila Abdelrazaq is her debut graphic memoir published in 2015 revealing the story of the author's father Ahmad, a Palestinian refugee child. The hybrid form of graphic memoir enables the author to articulate Palestinian history of violence and violation of human rights which is often elided in any form of representation. A personal story revealing the history of Palestine, *Baddawi* interweaves memory and history, exploiting the nuances of the comic form. Abdelrazaq's art vocalizes the plight of the Palestinian refugees longing to come back to their homeland. *Baddawi* was shortlisted for the Palestine Book Awards in 2015.

Abdelrazaq's visual storytelling is rich and fights the erasure of the struggles of the Palestinians from the pages of history. Her work asserts the relevance of Palestinian culture and tradition. A witness-narrative, *Baddawi* engages in a process of historical archiving. Experiences of displacement and the resultant feelings of uncertainty and fear spread across the pages of the memoir. Abdelrazaq works on the themes of diaspora,

refugee life, history, and memory through her illustrations and animations. She has created an animated comic, *Still Born*, a graphic novella, *The Opening*, and another comic, *The Fig Tree*.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* first appeared as a series in the *RAW* magazine during the 1980s. Pantheon Books collected the first six chapters and published the first volume titled, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* and subtitled *My Father Bleeds History* in 1986. Pantheon published the second volume titled, *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*, collecting the last five chapters in 1992. Pantheon later collected the two volumes and published them as *The Complete Maus* in 1996.

*Maus* explores the blending of memory and history in intricate ways providing a rich reading experience. Spiegelman's choice of portraying his parent's story of surviving World War II and escaping Auschwitz in graphic form has given a different dimension to the story when presented along the lines of the second-generation memory. The topic of authenticity that usually arises during a discussion about a memoir ceases to be a topic in *Maus*. Spiegelman has done exhaustive research before writing the memoir which he delineates in his *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus*. The book presents the story behind the creation of *Maus* and it won the National Jewish Book Award in 2011. *Maus* earned him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 1992. His other notable work includes *In the Shadow of No Towers*, his musings on the events of September 11, 2001, which was published in 2004.

G. B. Tran's *Vietnamerica*, a spatially and temporally layered graphic memoir, was published in 2011. It explores the anecdote of the son of war-time refugees who had migrated to the U. S. after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Tran reconstructs a family story

using the apparatus of graphic memoir to mediate history. The memoir takes the readers on an emotional rollercoaster ride as the protagonist grapples with darkness while solving the puzzle of his family history torn into pieces in the Vietnam War.

Tran's work facilitates the reconstruction of history through memory, foregrounding the structural components of comics that permit the presentation of a fragmented past. He pieces together and rediscovers a scattered past by reassembling a fragmented family story. Switching different artistic styles, visual registers, and unconventional narrative structures, Tran manages to bring buried histories alive.

### **Literature Review**

Tracing the evolution of graphic narratives has been dealt with by a few writers who provide insight into the history of comics. Stephen Weiner's *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel* with an introduction by Will Eisner provides a detailed survey of the history of graphic novels. Eisner has closely analysed the growth of the industry of comics and discussed the milestone events and works that have contributed to the establishment of the art form as a serious literary genre. *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* by Roger Sabins is yet another book that traces the development of the genre as a prominent art form.

Robert S. Peterson examines the evolution of comics starting from the time of newspaper comics to digital comics in his book. In the "Introduction" he expressed his concerns over the study of graphic narratives being focused only on the "... modern, mass-produced comic books...[that] has limited the analysis of the form only to its modern manifestation" (xxi-xxii). He contends that the history of graphic narratives also

represents the evolution of visual literacy that has developed over thousands of years and conquered the world at large (xxi).

Karin Kukkonen's *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels* is a comprehensive introduction to comics and graphic novels. Spread across six chapters, she discusses various thematic issues in comic studies. The book's fifth chapter exclusively discusses the history of comics as "... an instance of popular culture which has undergone a considerable reevaluation toward the end of the twentieth century" (3). Chute is yet another critic who has written on the evolution of the innovative narrative form called comics. In her "Comics as Literature: Reading Graphic Narrative," she expresses her desire to treat "comics as a medium" (452). It presents a review of the various formats of comics focusing on non-fiction comics representing history.

In *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* Randy Duncan and Mathew J. Smith attempt to define comic books and the development of comic books in detail. *Graphic Novels and Comics in Libraries and Archives: Essays on Readers, Research, History and Cataloging* is a collection of essays detailing the impact of graphic narratives and their place in our libraries today. Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey discourse on not only the historical background of the development of graphic novels but also on their form and popular themes dealt with by them. *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* reviews the advancement of adult comics since 1945, exploring the underground comix milieu and outlining the main trends in graphic novel publishing. Drawing on theoretical studies of Benoît Peeters and Thierry Groensteen among others it shows various ways of interpreting graphic novels.

Comparing the graphic novel to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the novel, Jodar highlights the difference between a comic book and a graphic novel with respect to their perception of time. He substantiates his point by examining the Batman figure in Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. He proves that the protagonist is affected by human passions as well as by the passing of time which makes him different from the classical super-group of heroes. He defines the graphic novel as "... a hybrid genre in between the novel and the comic-book by making use of comics visual language, and novel literary narration" (105). He analyses four verbal-iconic genres directly related to comic books, namely, illustrated novels, newspaper cartoons, comic books, and graphic novels.

Whitlock explains in "Autographics: The Seeing 'I' of Comics" that "[b]y coining the term 'Autographics' for graphic memoir I mean to draw attention to the specific conjunctions of visual and verbal text in this genre of autobiography, and also to the subject positions that narrators negotiate in and through comics" (966). Whitlock argues about the ability of comics to produce nostalgia. He explores the potential of graphic memoirs presenting particular historical events by analysing Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*.

In *Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels*, Michel A. Chaney examines the pact between autobiography and memory established through visual-verbal combinations. Charles Hatfield discusses the issue of authenticity in autobiographical comics in his *Alternative Comics* and asserts that such works try to persuade the world to see one's self through "self-caricature" (114). He argues that in autobiographical comics, "... truth is a matter not of verifiability but of trustworthiness,

not so much a constant quality as the result of a continual renegotiation between the artist, his materials, and his audience” (150-51).

El Refaie in *Autobiographical Comics: Life Writing in Pictures* elaborates on the key properties, stylistic conventions, and narrative patterns of the autobiographical comic genre. She has borrowed concepts not only from literary studies but also from several other disciplinary fields like semiotics, linguistics, and media studies among others to analyse the various aspects of comics. Chute’s work is centered on the representation of history in non-fiction comics. She considers non-fiction comics as the strongest genre in the area of comics (“Comics as Literature” 452). Her *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics and Documentary Form* is a work par excellence and the study entails that “... the word-and-image form of comics expands the reach of documentary, recording facts while also questioning the very project of what it means to document, to archive, to inscribe” (7).

Nabizadeh explores the aspect of cultural memory in graphic novels considering comics as mnemonic structures. Her *Representation and Memory in Graphic Novels* is a scrutiny of the role of comics in framing testimony expressing marginalised and minority voices. Nabizadeh observes that the form of comics can give due respect to the fragmented traumatic memories of individuals coming from the background of war and oppressive regimes and “... it collects the fragments or shards of the past without seeking to conjoin them – or obliterate their coding” (17).

## **Thesis Statement**

Autobiographical comics or graphic memoirs open new opportunities as well as challenges to writers and readers. However, the field lacks research studies except for some noteworthy contributions by Gillian Whitlock, Charles Hatfield, Michel A. Chaney, Elisabeth El Refaie, Hillary Chute, and Golnar Nabizadeh. Autobiographical writing has its own merits of reflecting the social, cultural, political, and traditional milieu of the period concerned. When such writings collaborate with the features of the comic medium, it enriches the domain of autobiographical writing. As Chute states, “[t]he ability to use the space of the page to interlace or overlay different temporalities, to place pressure on linearity and conventional notions of sequence, causality, and progression, is a reason comics can address itself powerfully to historical and life narrative” (“Comics Form” 112).

The thesis proposes to explore how graphic memoirs endeavours to revisit history by engaging memory and analyse the reconstruction of history with reference to the present. It tries to draw some parallels between the structures of memory and the art form called comics and asserts that the literary genre of graphic memoir is an effective medium to discuss the synthesis of memory and history and to carry out historical archiving. The narrative techniques and stylistic devices experimented with by graphic memoirists are scrutinised to explore the merits of such a combination.

## **Methodology**

Contemporary memory studies have moved the focus to include not only individual memory but also collective memory, cultural memory, traumatic memory, mnemohistory, and various other nuances related to memory. The thesis draws its theoretical support from Maurice Halbwachs’ views on individual and collective

memory, Jan Assmann's concept of mnemohistory (*Moses* 8) and his readings on cultural memory, and a parallel reading of Marek Tamm's ideas on the relationship between history and memory. The study also refers to Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory ("Generation" 103).

Halbwachs has provided a social perspective on memory and has written about the relationship between individual memory and collective memory. He asserts that "... the individual memory... relies upon, relocates itself within, momentarily merges with, the collective memory.... The collective memory, for its part, encompasses the individual memories while remaining distinct from them" (50-51).

A topic of debate that attracted considerable attention in the field of memory studies is the relationship between history and memory. Kerwin Lee Klein suggests that the declaration that memory and history are not opposites has become one of the clichés of new memory discourse. He asserts that the advent of memory promises to rework the boundaries of history (128). Tamm claims that the comparison between memory and history gained critical attention when Halbwachs introduced the concept of collective memory as a contrast to history. He asserts that history and memory cannot be considered as equal concepts to contrast and considers it pertinent to treat history as "a mnemonic practice. ... the most fruitful way to comprehend history is to consider it as a form of cultural memory" ("History as Cultural" 500).

Assmann defines cultural memory as which "... comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" ("Collective Memory" 132). He has also claimed that "[c]ultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a

group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity” (130). Drawing from these claims asserted by Assmann, Tamm claims historical writing and cultural memory to be inseparable which “... determines the general framework within which the past acquires a meaning and history becomes possible” (“History as Cultural” 501).

Assmann proposed the term ‘mnemohistory’ (8) in *Moses, The Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, published in 1997. He emphasises that “[u]nlike history proper, mnemohistory is not concerned with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered” (8-9). Assmann considers mnemohistory as a branch or subdiscipline of history. He asserts that mnemohistorical studies aim to study traditions as “phenomena of collective memory” (9). He adds that the relevance of history comes from “... an ever-changing present in which these events are remembered as facts of importance. Mnemohistory analyzes the importance which a present ascribes to the past” (10). Erll also emphasizes two central characteristics of remembering: its relationship to the present and its constructed nature. He considers memory as a subjective and selective reconstruction of the past that takes place in the present (8).

Hirsch introduced ‘postmemory’ (103) in the article, “The Generation of Postmemory.” She proposed the term in connection with the works of second-generation writers and visual artists. It refers to “... looking backward...and...defining the present in relation to a troubled past” (106). In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Hirsch describes postmemory as “...the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (5).

The writings of the second-generation writers and artists who have inherited the haunting and painful memories of the previous generation reflect the presence of postmemory. The part played by the second generation in archiving history thus needs special mentioning. Re-writing history as a process is undertaken by the first-generation representatives and also by the generations that follow. As those who have a direct experience of historical events leave our midst, it is up to the following generations to express their experience which they gathered from living with the survivors for longer periods. Their narratives also deserve to be studied with equal relevance.

History can be resourced from purely historical documents and from that body of writings that include autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs. They are also storehouses of cultural memory of the society or nation concerned. The theoretical framework of collective memory, cultural memory, postmemory, and mnemohistory is significant to archive and interpret the past. “While it is important to study historical events for their own sake, we also need to pay more attention to how these events are interpreted and appropriated later on.... In this process of memory work the narrative plays a crucial role” (Tamm, “History as Cultural” 510). The intricacies of narratives acting as mnemonic structures should be studied to reveal the possibilities of archiving the past as well as the interpretation of it concerning the present. The thesis expects to unearth the nuances of the novel narrative techniques of the comic form while handling the combination of memory and history by implementing memory studies.

### **Structure of Thesis**

The study has been structured into six chapters that include the Introduction and the Conclusion. The introductory chapter will trace the evolution of graphic narratives,

focusing on the production mode of works that engage words and pictures. It will investigate the history of genres that employ the comic form like editorial cartoons, comic books, and graphic narratives. It will further orient towards the genre of graphic memoirs, the nucleus of the present research. The chapter will also introduce the major concepts and discourses borrowed from memory studies to analyse the research objectives. It provides a comprehensive structure of the thesis.

Understanding the stylistics of graphic narratives is crucial in comprehending the intricate meanings hidden beneath the word-image hybridity of the medium. This is because, unlike other genres, comics demand an increased involvement of the readers in the process of interpretation. Chapter two, “The Stylistics of Graphic Narratives” will provide an outline of visual culture as an academic field. It will engage in a detailed discourse on the numerous features and techniques used in the comic form that enunciates its multifarious advantages while dealing with novel subjects in a nuanced manner.

Chapter three titled “Graphic Mnemohistory on War: A Child’s Perspective” will examine the numerous aspects related to remembering a war-worn history through a child’s perspective. It will further investigate the novelties of the comic format utilised by the authors to interpret and understand the intricacies of war, death, and loss by a young adult. The chapter will apply the theoretical implications of collective and individual memories to scrutinise the far-reaching consequences of growing up amidst war on the life and future of children. It will examine how far the graphic format succeeds in conveying the feelings of insecurity, fear, and confusion involved in the recollection of war-generated traumatic memories of the past.

Chapter four, “Graphic Mnemohistory on War: A Second-Generation Perspective” examines the recollection of history from the perspective of second-generation representatives. Applying the concepts of postmemory and the transgenerational nature of traumatic memories, the chapter will discuss at length the synthesis of past and present in the space of panels and gutters. It will dismantle the ways in which the reconstruction of history in the present is undertaken through various mnemonic devices in graphic memoirs. The chapter proposes to give insight into the relevance of new mediums like graphic memoirs which can make war-generated traumatic histories visible. The Conclusion chapter will wrap up the discussion by highlighting and recapitulating the major findings of the previous chapters. It will also include a note on the scope and limitations of the research.

Understanding history is effectuated through the reconstruction of the past within the framework of the present. This combination of history and memory presented in the narrative layout of the graphic memoirs will aid in understanding the past. The various trajectories of the aspect of memory play a crucial role in archiving and accessing the past. Literary genres of autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs are reservoirs of the past and they aid in understanding the complex histories through commemorative writings. Comic form aids in overcoming the shortcomings in the oral and other written forms of narration with visual possibilities and gives a different dimension to the narrative. The final chapter, “Recommendations” will point out the shortcomings of the present study and suggest the scope for further research.

## Chapter 2

### Stylistics of Graphic Narratives

#### Introduction

The advent of Formalism which rose to prominence during the early twentieth century ushered in the rejection of factors outside the text that determine the essence of the text. The two schools of formalist literary criticism, namely, Russian Formalism and New Criticism gave preference to the form and structure of the text. It gave equal attention to the numerous literary devices employed by the authors. The plethora of new genres in literature like cli-fi, mythopoeia, cyberpunk, lucid fiction, and bizarro among many others, with their emphasis on innovative techniques, unwrapped novel possibilities for authors to experiment. One such genre which is marked by the distinctive quality of form is graphic narratives. The verbal-visual confluence of graphic narratives provides the author with immense scope for the expression of experiences suffused with emotions.

This chapter explores the advancement of visual culture, a trending subject of academic attention, and probes into the noteworthy contributions made by the stalwarts of the domain. Besides analysing the salient features of the comic medium, the study also investigates the numerous exclusive and exceptional techniques that graphic narratives furnish, making them a dynamic medium to handle myriad subjects. The term ‘stylistics’ in the title is used specifically with reference to the comic medium. Stylistics is used

... to refer to the specific visual dimensions of the artwork...[it] may also refer more broadly to such formal features as the layout of the page and the shape and arrangement of panels and speech or thought balloons...a consideration of

stylistics in comics may also comprise the specific use of language in this medium. (Forceville et al. 485-86)

### **Background Study**

The emergence of visual culture as a powerful medium of expression has contested the supremacy attributed to the spoken word. In an age of spectacle, the world of the modern man is infused with images, and the famous adage, ‘A picture is worth a thousand words,’ has been gaining increased attention. With the advent of digital technology, the scope of using visuals to attract attention began to be increasingly explored. For instance, a peep into the world of advertisements is enough to understand the umpteen ways companies use visuals and images that cater to their needs. As Nicholas Mirzoeff remarks in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, “Human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before...” (1).

Graphic narratives are comic books that employ a sequence of images with the integration of words. It is necessary to analyse the stylistics of the medium to comprehend it considering the nuances of the comic medium and the greater scope for reader involvement in meaning-making. Drawing on the critical works of Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, Karin Kukkonen, Charles Forceville, and Hillary Chute among others, this chapter will explore the key features of graphic narratives.

### **Literature Review**

W. J. T. Mitchell observes in *Picture Theory* that, “... all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no ‘purely’ visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism”

(5). Mitchell's works discuss various key terms that provide an outlook into different notions of image analysis. His work, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, reflects on two questions namely, what is an image and what are the factors that make words different from images? He argues that an image is an icon and that his essays analysing imagery and related notions may be called "essays in iconology" (1).

*Visual Culture Studies: Interviews with Key Thinkers* edited by Marquard Smith comprises a collection of thirteen interviews with intellectuals from various fields engaged in visual culture studies like Nicholas Mirzoeff, W.J.T. Mitchell, Peggy Phelan, and Mieke Bal among others. These interviews give insight into the history of visual culture and the book can be considered a project engaged in discussing the prospects of visual culture studies.

*Comics and Sequential Art*, published in 1985 by Will Eisner, was one of the first books to attempt serious academic research on comics. He preferred to use the term 'sequential art' (5) to refer to works that use pictures and words for storytelling. He defines the term in his book as "an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (5). Eisner's book is a discussion on sequential art and its ability to express things creatively. His *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* is another fundamental book concerning the basics of graphic storytelling.

Scott McCloud borrows the term 'sequential art' from Eisner and uses it as a beginning point in his attempt to define comics in his unique work of art and research written in comic form, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (5). McCloud explores various interesting factors of comics that help the readers expand their understanding of

the medium of comics. He discusses in detail the artwork, how it is drawn, and the way it is integrated into the text. His study explicates how an image evokes an emotional response in the spectator (121). Both Eisner and McCloud share similar opinions regarding the usage of empty spaces or gaps in comics. It is up to the artist to decide the empty spaces in his work; the more the usage of empty spaces, the greater the relevance of the reader's imagination (Eisner 41-43, McCloud 69). McCloud's work provides deeper insights into the comic medium and establishes connections with other art forms, allowing it to borrow ideas and methods from them.

Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* is a ground-breaking work that explains the workings of comics. Besides developing his theory of comics, Groensteen provides a wealth of ideas on various aspects of the medium including the functions of panels, speech, and thought balloons and the unique combination of visual, verbal, spatial, and temporal expressions. He introduces several key concepts like 'the spatio-topia' (21) and 'arthrology' (21). By spatio-topical system, he indicates the interaction between the various elements that constitute the comics with respect to space and place whereas arthrology is suggested as the relations between the images in a comic book (21, 22). He has also proposed the concept of 'braiding' in comics (145). It indicates a network that carries out the process of bridging the various fragments of the panels in the comics, giving it a structure (146).

Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey explore graphic novels as a form of visual and literary communication. They provide insight for future research on graphic novels through their work, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*. They discuss the historical background of the evolution of graphic novels and detail the key aspects of the same. *Studying Comics and*

*Graphic Novels* by Karin Kukkonen analyses the distinct characteristics of comics and graphic novels and it also discusses the key issues in comics studies. She has extensively written on comics and considers them as a multimodal medium in which images and narratives interact to convey the story (75).

Forceville and others in “Stylistics and Comics” analyse the use of language in the comic medium. They discourse on the various “stylistic devices – whether verbal, visual, or multimodal – that are available to the medium of comics...” (487). John Kennedy argues in favour of the visual counterparts of verbal figures of speech in his 1982 essay “Metaphor in Pictures”. Drawing from Kennedy, Forceville makes a detailed analysis of various pictorial metaphors in advertisements in “Pictorial Metaphors in Advertisements.” He expatiates upon the mechanisms underlying the pictorial metaphors in order to develop a vocabulary to discuss visual metaphors (2).

Pascal Lefevre, in “Some Medium Specific Qualities of Graphic Sequences,” calls the graphic novel a “hybrid medium [that]... shares many features with other media, but uses those features in unique ways; think of drawing styles, the *mise en scene* in panels; the way the verbal and visual elements are combined... the breakdown... of story elements into distinct panels, and the interaction between the individual panel and page layouts” (14). Neil Cohn attempts a parallel examination of the language of sequential images and verbal and sign languages through his *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images*. He argues for comics not to be considered a language, but they use a “visual language of sequential images” (2).

Reflecting upon the graphic novels of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Gorazde* and *Palestine*, Pramod K. Nayar in "The Visual Turn: Affect, Autobiography, History, and the Graphic Narrative" explains how history is made hypervisible by the medium of graphic narratives. In this digital world, where the visual is exploited as the major source of persuasion as well as information, he illustrates how graphic narrative operates as a vehicle of the 'visual culture of affect' that entertains, educates, informs, and immerses us (59-60).

### **Visual Culture**

In *Introduction to Visual Culture*, Mirzoeff observes:

[F]orms of visualisation are now being challenged by interactive visual media like the Internet and virtual reality applications... The gap between the wealth of visual experience in postmodern culture and the ability to analyse that observation marks both the opportunity and the need for visual culture as a field of study... Visual culture is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology. (1, 2)

Visual culture is now a well-established academic field. It is a big umbrella term that encompasses all disciplines that employ images or visuals in their field of study. Erwin Panofsky, Roland Barthes, E. H. Gombrich, W. J. T. Mitchell, James Elkins, and Nicholas Mirzoeff among others are significant names to mention in the field of visual culture. Various genres and media forms rely on visuals or images for the communication of ideas like films, documentaries, television, fine arts, photography, video games, and

advertisements among many others. Each has its own way of utilising images or visuals for communication.

Visual culture is structured around ‘pictorial turn,’ a term introduced by Mitchell in his seminal work, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (9). He observes that American philosopher Richard Rorty characterized the history of philosophy as “... a series of turns in which new sets of problems emerge and old ones begin to fade away” and Rorty calls the last stage of the history of philosophy a ‘linguistic turn’ (qtd. in Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 11). Mitchell calls the transformation taking place in other disciplines of the human sciences and public culture sphere a ‘pictorial turn’ (11). He states:

Whatever the pictorial turn is, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial “presence”: it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of a picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. (16)

Mitchell, while analysing why a pictorial turn is happening now, reminds us that the postmodern era is facing a paradox. On the one hand, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the development of new forms of visual simulation and illusionism. Along with this, there is the growing anxiety that this power of images may finally destroy the creators themselves. Traditional strategies to deal with this problem do not seem to be adequate and the requirement for a global critique of visual culture became inevitable (*Picture Theory* 15-16).

James Elkins, a leading scholar in the field, locates the origins of visual studies as an outgrowth of British cultural studies in the 1960s. It came into being with the mission to complement the passion of art history in fine art, incorporating methodologies from other disciplines, especially cultural studies (3). Mitchell in his article “Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture” observes, “I think it’s useful at the outset to distinguish between visual studies and visual culture as, respectively, the field of study and the object or target of study. Visual studies is the study of visual culture” (166). Yet the visual culture is not well defined but is still in the making.

Mirzoeff recognises the tendency to visualise things as an important feature of the modern era, that has not replaced language but made it more comprehensible and effective. He points out that the “... gap between the wealth of visual experience in postmodern culture and the ability to analyse that observation marks both the opportunity and the need for visual culture as a field of study” (3). One of the challenges in the fields employing visuals or images is finding proper theories for analysis. The theoreticians of formalism, structuralism, linguistics, semiotics, and many more have worked through the various aspects of the structure, signs, symbols, and images used in innumerable disciplines. Semiology, which is the science that studies the life of signs, was established by Ferdinand de Saussure and he argues in *Course in General Linguistics* that language is a system of signs (16). Saussure considers language and writing as two distinct systems of signs and the latter simply represents the first. While explaining the influence of writing concerning language, he claims that graphic forms of words are permanent and stable and have a greater impact than aural impressions. He mentions the two systems of writing, namely, the ideographic system and the phonetic system. In the former, each

word is represented by a single sign and the latter reproduces the succession of sounds that make up a word (23-26).

Roland Barthes studied Semiology with a new spirit. In his *Elements of Semiology*, he analysed signs using the two main semiotic concepts put forward by de Saussure, signifier and signified (35). To him, sign includes all types of signs: verbal, graphic, iconic, and gestural among others (47). His “Rhetoric of Image” is an essay that articulates his thoughts on the meaning-making procedure with respect to the scrutiny of the advertising image (33). Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* provide an analytical framework for the study of the syntax of visuals. They discuss the “... production of meaning in contemporary image-making and image interpretation.... Visual structures...point to particular interpretations of experience and particular forms of social interaction” (2, 3).

There are several media forms other than graphic memoirs like documentaries, movies, and other traditional literary works concerning the subject matter of reconstruction of history through memory. This study focuses on the advantages and specialties of using the medium of comics for the same. While films rely on motion and sound, graphic narratives make use of images and words. Both mediums have their unique ways of conveying gripping and engrossing stories. In comparison with films and documentaries, though the medium of comics has the disadvantage of being a static medium, there are numerous benefits of using this medium while presenting complex subjects that the thesis attempts to unravel.

A genre that engages a combination of visual-verbal language, namely, graphic narratives, requires special interpretative skills to unfold the wealth of ideas hidden

beneath the images and words scattered across their pages. The language of comics employed in graphic narratives needs to receive critical attention from the academic field. There is a need for developing a toolbox exclusively for the comic form, instead of analysing the medium through the lens of theoretical traditions meant for other subjects. Notable names of critics and philosophers who have made contributions to the study of the language of comics are Will Eisner, Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, and Hillary Chute among others. Their significant contributions to the field of comics provide answers to many questions and fuel new debates opening new doors of understanding.

### **The Grammar of Comics**

The unique feature of comics is the format that presents a montage of images and words. The narrative moves forward through words and images and their sequential arrangement. The ultimate test of the calibre of the work and the writer/artist lies in the proper balancing of words and imagery. There is no exact ratio of words and images and here lies the skill of the writer/artist. In certain cases, the writer does the sketches, but sometimes the writer and artist are two different persons. In such cases, there must be a good rapport between the two.

This sequential art which has its peculiarity of the interweaving of words and images could uniquely present emotions and experiences. The words when conjoined with images heighten the effect of the emotions depicted. Eisner asserts that "... the format of the comic book presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretative skills" (8).

A peculiarity of the comic medium is the role it entrusts to the readers. McCloud calls the reader of comics, "a willing and conscious collaborator" (*Understanding* 65). In

the expanse of the gutter in which the process of closure occurs, “the human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea” (66). It requires the reader to take into account the words used and images depicted and the structure, shape, placement, and relationship between the numerous components present in the graphic narrative while reading. Hence, in comics, the reader must take the entire creation all at once to appreciate the work.

In graphic novels, a straightforward linear explication of the work is not enough to understand the intricacies of the meanings involved. There are several literary devices and stylistics employed by graphic writers that point to the specific visual and verbal dimensions of the work. Several distinct features in graphic narratives need special attention and study to have a comprehensive understanding of the medium.

### **Salient Features and Techniques Used in Graphic Narratives**

The comic medium, with its dynamic visual-verbal interaction and numerous other exclusive techniques, opens multiple possibilities for the expression and interpretation of ideas. The text of the graphic narrative and the multimodal strategies and techniques spread across the panels and gutters give not only new reading experiences but also multifarious ways of expression. Comprehending the intricacies of meaning put forward by the plurality of images, icons, and text requires a semiotic understanding of the features of comics.

#### **Panel**

In graphic narratives, telling a story involves the presentation of certain events using images and dialogues in segments called panels. In other words, a panel is a space

that contains a blend of images and words that may or may not be bordered by a frame and organized in particular ways to reveal a story. Groensteen observes that "... the panel is presented as a portion of space isolated by blank spaces and enclosed by a frame that ensures its integrity" (25).

The structure of the panel, the area it covers, and its location concerning the page and the whole book are all factors to be analysed to understand its overall meaning and significance. In typical graphic narratives, the panels are positioned in a regular grid pattern which is read from left to right and from top to bottom. The readers are expected to follow a specific order while reading, but in certain cases, the writer/artist deviates from the usual pattern. The panels may not be arranged in any specific order and their shape and size may also vary. For instance, consider the page from *Palestine* (fig. 2.1). The panels are scattered across the page. The readers must find the order to be followed while reading the page.



Fig. 2.1. Joe Sacco. *Palestine*. Fantagraphics, 1993, p. 19.

In the medium of comics, time and space and their relation are of crucial significance. The reader's discernment of time and space is connected to the arrangement, size, and shape of panels, the gap between panels, or the overlap of panels. In short, the panel can convey that time or space is divided. "Comic panels, situated rationally, are, necessarily, placed in relation to space and operate on a share of space" (Groensteen 21). The various elements inside the panel aid the reader in inferring the duration of time and proportion of space indicated. A panel may depict a single moment or sometimes even inside a single panel there occurs a passage of time. The actions of the different characters who are present inside a single panel may not occur simultaneously. A time gap may happen between their actions. The experience of time is also influenced by reading speed.

The panel size may vary according to the requirement of the context. The artist uses certain techniques to catch the attention of the reader or convey some specific cues relevant to the context. For example, the panel may sometimes take up the space of an entire page. McCloud describes this 'bleed' as "... a panel runs off the edge of the page, ... time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the closed panel, but instead hemorrhages and escapes into timeless space" (*Understanding* 103). This is also known by the name 'splash page,' (Eisner, *Comics* 62; Forceville et al.; "Stylistics" 487; Duncan and Smith 139) which is "...a full-page panel, usually at or near the beginning of a comics narrative and used to establish the situation in which the story begins" (Duncan and Smith 139).

The writer can increase the impact of a page bleed if he introduces it after a series of ordered panels which will appear as a break in the uniformity of the panels which will

shake the reader's sense of security. A frameless panel conveys the message of unlimited space which is utilised to imply a threat as it takes the reader out of the cosiness of a confined panel. Sacco opens *Palestine* with a page bleed (fig. 2.2). He conveys the confusion and struggles of the protagonist in getting himself adjusted to a foreign place and a new job using the page bleed depicting total chaos.



Fig. 2.2. Joe Sacco. *Palestine*. Fantagraphics, 1993, p. 1.

McCloud discusses six categories of panel-to-panel transition in *Understanding Comics*: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non-sequitur. Moment-to-moment transition does not require much effort from the reader in meaning-making; scene-to-scene transition takes the reader across a significant distance of space and time. Aspect-to-aspect transition gives us an idea about the different features of a place, idea, or mood; the non-sequitur does not offer any explanation about the relationship between the panels (70-72). He observes, "... no matter how dissimilar one image may be to another, there is a kind of alchemy at work in the space between the panels which can help us find meaning or resonance in even the most jarring of combinations" (73).

Groensteen, in *System of Comics*, mentions the 'inset' and explains it as "... a frame welcomed within one or several other frame(s)" (86). An inset is when one or more frames come inside a bigger one (fig. 2.3). The inclusive panel most often represents a landscape or a large space that functions as a common background to the inset panel. At other times, the inset panel is used to highlight the relation between the inset panel and the inclusive panel, most frequently a relationship between the part and the whole. Groensteen adds that "... inset serves the purpose of the picture when it magnifies the background panel, whereas it more clearly serves the story when its purpose is the contextualization of the inset panel" (86).

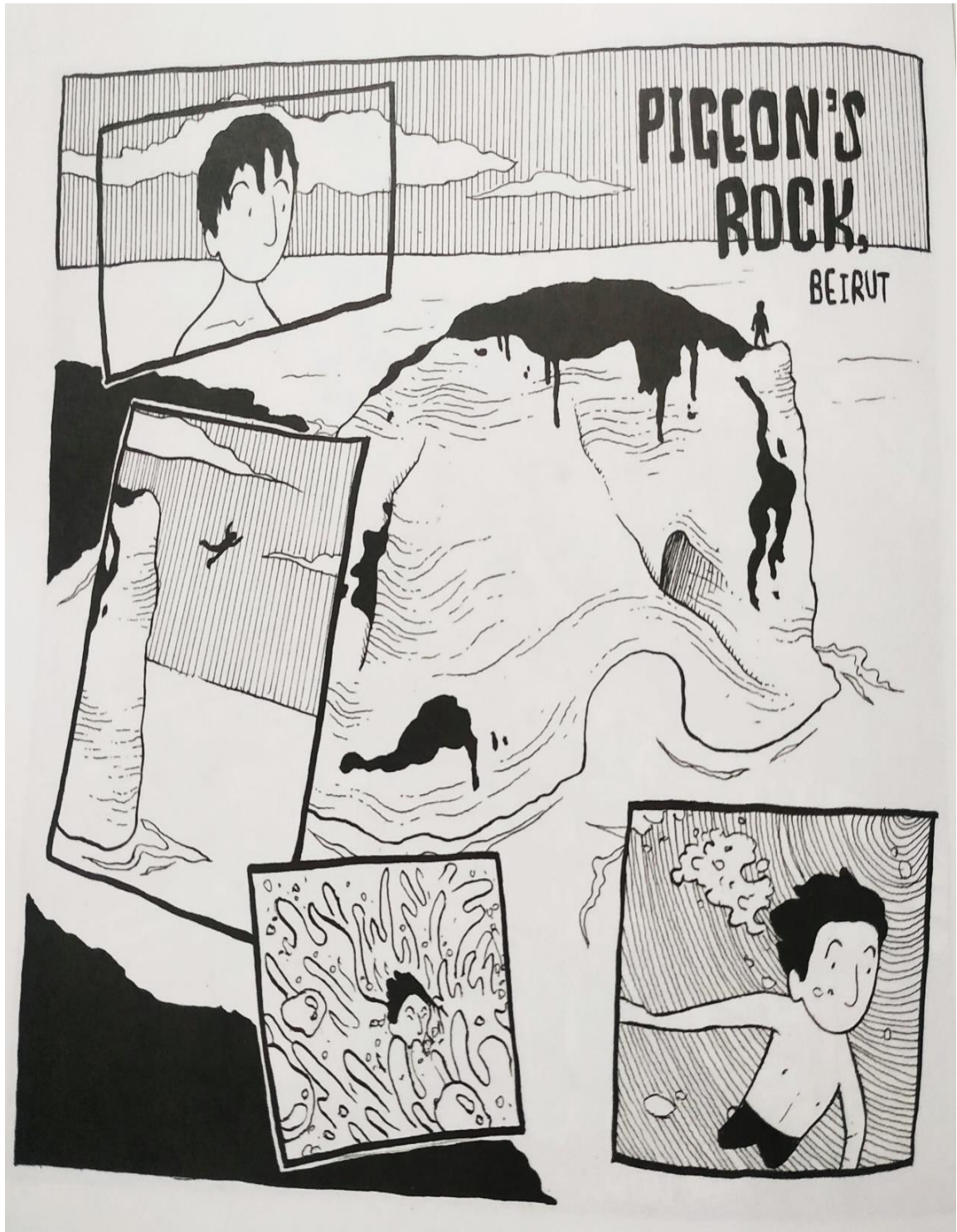


Fig. 2.3. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 68.

Groensteen discourses on 'double page' which he defines as "the part of the support (magazine or book), and the segment of the work, that is offered to the reader's gaze..." (35). The left-hand page and the right-hand page are dependent on each other allowing a smooth flow of reading. There might be a similarity in the panel arrangements of the two pages placed adjacent to each other. Furthermore, a single image or panel may take up the space of both pages (fig. 2.4 and fig. 2.5). The pages referred to are from *Vietnamerica* and depict the hustle and bustle inside an airport where people are frantically trying a way to escape from their country during the war. G. B. Tran uses page bleed to heighten the effect.

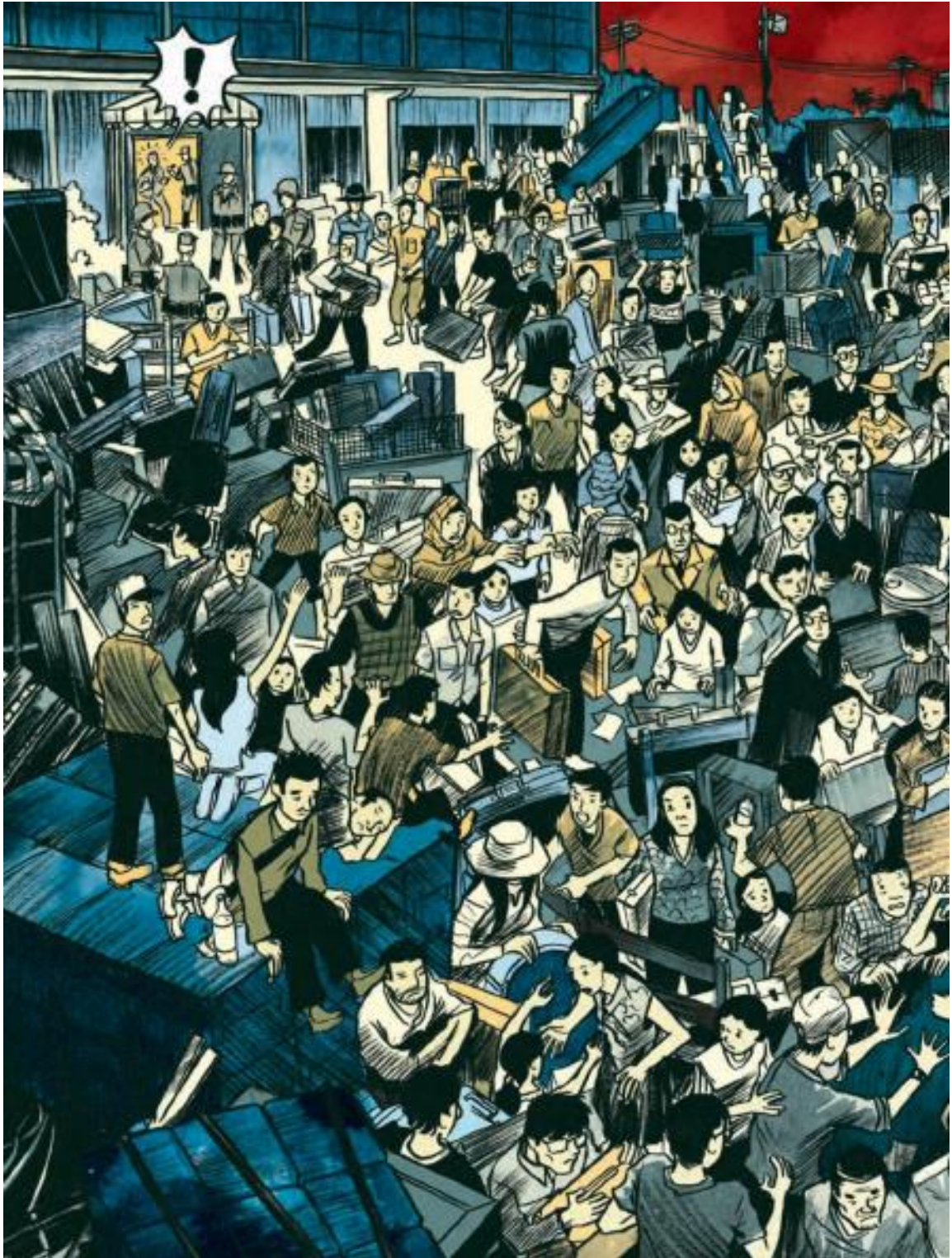


Fig. 2.4. G. B. Tran. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

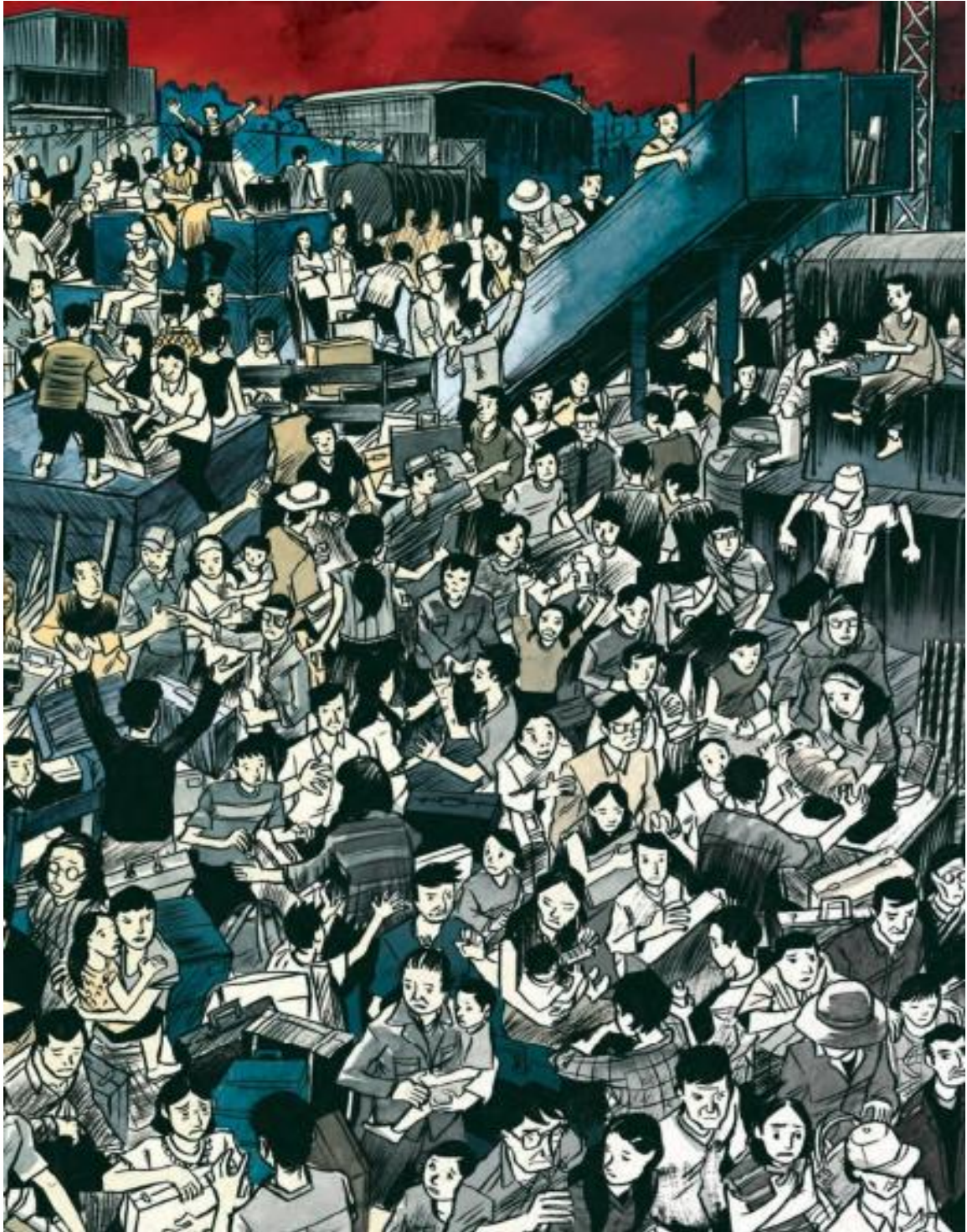


Fig. 2.5. G. B. Tran. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

Experimenting with new methods is reflected in the style of panels in contemporary graphic narratives too. For instance, in *Palestine*, which presents the condition of Palestine during Israeli occupation from the viewpoint of a journalist, Joe Sacco presents a page in the format of a newspaper (fig. 2.6). The arrangement of the panels on the page and the overall look of the page has the appearance of a newspaper article.



Fig. 2.6. Joe Sacco. *Palestine*. Fantagraphics, 1993, p. 4.

## Frame

A panel is separated from other panels by blank spaces or is enclosed within a border or frame. Panels usually have straight black borders, but their shape and size may vary to suggest different meanings. The shape of the panel may vary between squares, rectangles, round, oval, or polygonal. The panels on a page may or may not be surrounded by an outline termed a ‘hyperframe’ (Groensteen 30). It must be differentiated from a ‘multiframe’ which is “... the sum of the frames that compose a given comic – that is, also the sum of the hyperframes” (31). Groensteen in *System of Comics* describes the six functions of frame:

1. **The Function of Closure:** The frame is used to close a panel and to give it a shape. It encircles what an artist wants to include inside the panel. Closing a panel gives coherence to the narrative as it brings a time-space connection to the various segments. The shape and size of the frame may vary as per the wishes and requirements of the illustrator.
2. **The Separative Function:** The purpose of a frame is identical to that of the punctuation mark in language. It helps to signal the divisions between the different units of panels that together make up the story. The separation is indicated sometimes by an outline of the frame or simply by white space. At times the panels interpenetrate each other and even the elements of décor like doors or windows also act as frames.
3. **The Rhythmic Function:** The succession of frames helps in giving a rhythm to the text. Other elements like speech balloons and the use of colour also help in attaining this function. The intervals between the panels result in the rhythmic distribution of the story.
4. **The Structuring Function:** A frame structures a space. This makes it an inevitable component in the composition of the image contained within it as it informs the drawing

and later inflects its reading. The most common shape of a frame is that of a rectangle or square. This is mainly because it cooperates with the shape of the comic book or magazine which is its container. The rectangle or square shape is the most suitable to be placed as part of a sequence arranged in a strip. The selection of the viewing angle and all the principles that organise the image are catalogued by the form and dimension of the frame.

5. The Expressive Function: The frame of a panel can provide connotations to the image that it encloses. It helps in the interpretation of a panel and can even supply a reading protocol to instruct the reader.

6. The Readerly Function: Each frame indicates to the reader that there is content to be deciphered and it invites him to stop and scrutinize. Dedicating a frame to an image or element testifies that it has something, however slim, to contribute to the story. It attributes the panel a status which in turn asks the reader for his attention (40-56).

Contemporary graphic artists are all set to experiment with new forms and styles. Graphic narratives without panel frames are also drafted. Satrapi uses no frames for the panels throughout her graphic memoir *Embroideries*. Sometimes the speech balloons and at other moments simply the arrangement of the images gives the cue for panel division (fig. 2.7). On certain pages, she skips both panel frames and speech balloons and writes the dialogue near the image of the person who is speaking (fig. 2.8).



Fig. 2.7. Marjane Satrapi. *Embroideries*. Pantheon, 2005.



Fig. 2.8. Marjane Satrapi. *Embroideries*. Pantheon, 2005.

## **Gutter**

In comics, it is not possible for the writer/artist to depict certain details. Hence, he chooses significant moments from the story and presents them in the space of panels. This process which reflects the talent of the graphic artist is termed ‘encapsulation’ (Eisner 39; Duncan and Smith 131). It “...involves selecting certain moments of prime action from the imagined story and encapsulating, or enclosing, renderings of those moments in a discrete space” (Duncan and Smith 131).

McCloud discusses in *Understanding Comics* how the senses of human beings could reveal only an incomplete world. However, they can understand things completely even when they are revealed partially to their senses. This is made possible by applying knowledge from past experiences and they do this very often. “This phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole [is]...called closure” (McCloud 63). It is by taking advantage of this capacity of human beings that comic writers encapsulate only certain crucial moments of their story inside the panel, leaving the rest for the ‘gutter’ (66). The actions not presented in the panels happen in the blank space between the panels called the gutter. Gutter always calls for the participation of the readers to infer some information.

Groensteen contends that despite the discontinuous form in which the events are presented in comics, the resultant story forms an intelligible narrative. This is made possible because the gutter between two panels is “...not the seat of a virtual image; it is the site of a semantic articulation, a logical conversion, that of a series of utterables (the panels) in a statement that is unique and coherent (the story)” (114). The artist must take into consideration both the elements from common human experience and the reader’s

perception of it while selecting the images to present the story. This is to help the reader in recognising the meaning behind the images presented and comprehend the story.

Greater reader participation is required during the transition from one panel to the next.

The writer should foresee this and do the needful to convey his message to the reader.

Panels, in a way, fracture both time and space; it is the closure that allows the reader to connect these moments into a unified whole. Therefore, the reader has a significant role in inferencing what happened in the gutter and each reader does this in his style. This method of the participation of the audience has been used by filmmakers from the beginning. While the film makes use of this occasionally, comics must use it often. This calls for an intimate relationship between the creator and the audience and each reader handles that relation using his art and craft.

### **Speech/Thought Balloons**

A characteristic aspect of comics is balloons, though they are not a defining element. Eisner labels it as a "... desperation device [which] ...attempts to capture and make visible an ethereal element: sound" (26). The dialogues/words spoken by the characters and their thoughts are presented inside speech balloons. They are usually read from left to right and from top to bottom considering the position of speakers as well.

The colour, shape, and location of the balloons and the font of the text or pictograms enclosed convey cues to the readers. Hence, they have the potential to attain narrative significance. Considering the shape of them, there are several balloons used in comics: rounded balloons with an oval shape and a tail directed toward the speaker (fig. 2.9), thought balloons with fluffy cloud-form and a tail of bubbles (fig. 2.10), interrupted

contour balloons with a broken outline, serrated contour balloons with an oval shape and serrated edge (fig. 2.11), jagged contour balloon with sharp-edged protrusions to form a regular or irregular contour, rectangular rounded balloon with bulging edges and rounded corners, oval or circular balloons with four symmetrically placed angular protruding edges, rectangular straight balloons with straight edges and rounded corners and the like (Forceville et al. 58-60).

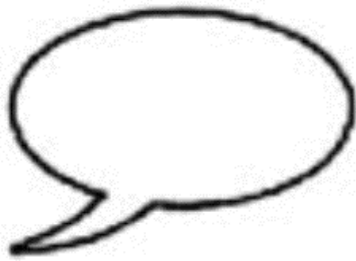


Fig. 2.9. Forceville et al. “Balloonics: The Visuals of Balloons in Comics” *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, edited by Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler-Forest, McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010, p. 58.



Fig. 2.10. Forceville et al. “Balloonics: The Visuals of Balloons in Comics” *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, edited by Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler-Forest, McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010, p. 59.



Fig. 2.11. Forceville et al. “Balloonics: The Visuals of Balloons in Comics” *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, edited by Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler-Forest, McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010, p. 59.

Thought balloons usually convey the dream or thought of the speaker. Serrated contour balloons may indicate that the speaker is angry or that the words are coming from a loudspeaker, radio, mobile phone, or such electronic device. Such balloons indicating the words from an electronic device sometimes are given yellow colour. Similarly, the difference in the shape of the balloons has its own purposes which are tactfully used by the artist. Typically, the tail of the balloon points to the speaker, but at times the speaker is not visible in the panel which is used to bring in a surprise element to the context. This surprise is more effective if the speaker is revealed only on the next page or in the coming week’s magazine. Stand-alone punctuation marks, pictograms, or onomatopoeias also appear inside the balloons.

#### **Visual Metaphor/ Metonymy/ Irony/Symbolism**

Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* made the claim that “... metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action, and only derivatively a matter of language” (153). They defined metaphor as “... understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (36). The possibilities of the use of visual/pictorial metaphors have been discussed by several critics like Kennedy and Forceville. Graphic artists may also

employ metonymy, synecdoche, and irony to present their ideas. Metaphors allow the readers to understand abstract ideas in connection with concrete things or experiences. They are used widely in prose texts and are very effective in visual/hybrid texts. Though visual/pictorial metaphors are employed frequently in advertisements and political cartoons, they are put to good use in graphic novels too.

In “Pictorial Metaphor in Advertisements,” Forceville points out that for the metaphors to yield results in visual or hybrid texts, as they produce in prose texts, they “...have to be applied with some flexibility and imagination” (4). He argues that “...elements such as physical resemblance, spatial resemblance, resemblance pertaining to size, and other properties that can be visualized play a more important role in pictorial metaphors than in verbal ones” (3).

Certain factors help readers to decipher the metaphors used by artists in their works. The cues from the visual, the context in which the metaphor occurs, the text used in relation to the visual, the experience and knowledge gathered in life by the viewer, and so on should be the contributing factors in comprehending the meaning behind such metaphors. Visual metaphors have been widely used by Spiegelman. His use of animal metaphor in *Maus* in which he presents Jews as mice and Nazis as cats has been a topic widely discussed in the literary field. Another example is the image of embroidery from *Embroideries* by Marjane Satrapi (fig. 2.12). The book is about the gathering of women for afternoon tea and indulging in a private talk on love, marriage, and sex. Embroidery, a traditionally female art, refers not only to the stories that the women in the gathering weave but also to a surgical procedure to restore the vagina to its virginal state.



Fig. 2.12. Marjane Satrapi. *Embroideries*. Pantheon, 2005.

Metonymy refers to understanding one thing in terms of another by "... using one entity to refer to another that is related to it" (Lakoff and Johnson 36). For example, in the sentence, 'The *Times* has not arrived at the press conference,' the word '*Times*' metonymically indicates the reporter of the *Times* newspaper. The major difference between metaphor and metonymy is that in metaphor both the target and source belong to two different domains whereas, in metonymy, the connection between the two things is within the same domain. One of the best-known variants of metonymy is synecdoche, which is "... a part standing for the whole" (36). For example, the word 'hand' used to refer to workers is a synecdoche. There are other types of metonymies like the place for the institution, the artist for the artwork, the place for the event, and the like (Lakoff and Johnson 36-39). There is the possibility of using all these techniques is not limited to being expressed verbally. These techniques have been widely used in visual mediums too. For instance, the picture of a gun is used to connote the Israeli soldiers which is a visual synecdoche in *Baddawi*.

Visual irony is another narrative technique applied in graphic narratives. Usually, this is accomplished using a combination of visual and verbal elements. The visual conveys a message that will be in sharp contrast with the words used in the panel/page or vice versa. For instance, in G.B. Tran's *Vietnamerica*, a combat scene depicts visual irony (fig. 2.13). In the first panel, the verbal elements present are part of a letter written by a sister to a brother who is serving in the army. The edge of the rectangle box inside which the words appear is depicted curled to give the visual impression of a letter. The words in the letter "We are glad to hear you are safe," (176) appear as a visual irony as it is placed in the background of a bomb explosion. The following panels depict the soldiers

at the war site which stand in sharp contrast with the details in the letter heightening the effect of the visual irony.



Fig. 2.13. G. B. Tran. *Vietnam: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010, p. 176.

An idea or message can be conveyed symbolically which is very commonly used by authors in the literary world. The message is suggested indirectly by using symbolism. An instance of such use of visual symbolism by Spiegelman is seen at the beginning of *MetaMaus* (fig. 2.14). He is depicted as trying to remove the mouse mask. The visual of a skull revealed underneath the mask symbolically conveys the message of how he has become so accustomed to using his mouse mask that it has become a part of his original face.



Fig. 2.14. Art Spiegelman. *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus*. Pantheon, 2011, p. 9.

#### Font/Font size and Onomatopoeia

The letters used and their font size can also be exploited to indicate differences from the conventional mode of meaning. Words in bigger font, capital letters, and/or boldface usually indicate that the speaker is shouting or that he is speaking angrily. It can give an authoritative voice to the speaker (fig. 2.15). A smaller font size suggests murmuring or fear. Text balloons with a question mark or exclamation mark are

employed to depict surprise or confusion. There are many such techniques that artists use in comics to modify their work.



Fig. 2.15. Craig Thompson. *Blankets*. Top Shelf Productions, 2003, p. 13.

Onomatopoeic words form a unique feature of the comic medium.

“Onomatopoeia is comics’ device par excellence to suggest sound” (Forceville et al., “Stylistics” 491). Here, words that sound like the referent are used. Many such words are rarely present outside the world of comics and many of them also differ greatly between languages. Many translated versions of works led to the introduction of new onomatopoeias in other languages and some such words from foreign books have become part of other languages. For example, the word ‘paw’ used for gunshots in English, is also used in French and Dutch comics (491-92).

## Colour

McCloud dedicates a chapter in *Understanding Comics* to discussing colour in comics. He identifies two reasons namely, commerce and technology, that intervenes in the relationship between colour and comics (186). It is expensive to print in colour and many comic and graphic artists find it difficult to afford. Cost-effectiveness is not the only deciding factor when it comes to the use of colour in comics. Several authors choose to use or not use colour for their own reasons. For instance, Satrapi's *Persepolis* is written in black and white for reasons other than cost-effectiveness. Chute recognises the influence of Persian art in Satrapi's drawings and she states that the "... minimalist play of black and white is part of Satrapi's stated aim, as with avant-garde tradition, to present events with a pointed degree of abstraction in order to call attention to the horror of history, by re-representing endemic images, either imagined or reproduced of violence" ("Texture" 98-99). Hence, artistic choice is also a deciding factor. The difficulty in getting the exact colour in print as indicated by the artists also led many of them to opt for black and white. However, the scenario is changing with the advancement in printing technology and the availability of high-quality paper.

Ian Hague observes that though colours can generate powerful emotional responses in the reader, the power of colour is vulnerable to changes in the reading environment (44). He considers colour as "... a very unstable component of the comic's composition" (45). Whereas Jan Baetens asserts in his analysis of Hergé's *Tintin* series that his treatment of colour "... help the reader better understand a fictional world whose coherence and continuity can never be taken for granted in a medium whose basic

publishing structure is the installment unit.... It helps identify the characters immediately...” (117).

Even though earlier superhero comic books used colour and graphic novels mostly remained black and white, after a period, artists began to experiment with their use of colour. Colour is used to add effect to the scenes depicted. They are used as cues by certain authors to suggest something. Different colours are used by some to suggest the change in the geographical place where the story is set. For instance, in *The Arab of the Future: A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978-1984: A Graphic Memoir*, Riad Sattouff uses different colours for specific places. Light blue for France, yellow for Libya, and Pink for Syria are used to suggest the difference in the geographical setting of the story.

### **Motion and Emotion**

Comics is essentially a static medium that from its earliest days faced the problem of presenting movement and the passage of time. Sense of movement is produced in comics either through the process of closure that happens in between panels or using certain techniques. The ‘speed lines’ (Kennedy 592; Duncan and Smith 136) are used to indicate the movement of objects or people (fig. 2.16). McCloud discusses in *Understanding Comics* about representing movement in comics. Earlier artists tried to represent motion by drawing sequences of multiple images. Later, the concept of movement began to develop with the introduction of what McCloud calls ‘motion lines’ or ‘zip-ribbons’ (111) that were used to show the pathways of moving objects through space. Artists used other techniques to depict the movements of objects like drawing multiple visuals of the subjects inside one panel and incorporating streaking effects in

which either the background or the subject remained blurred depending upon which object is focused (110-112).

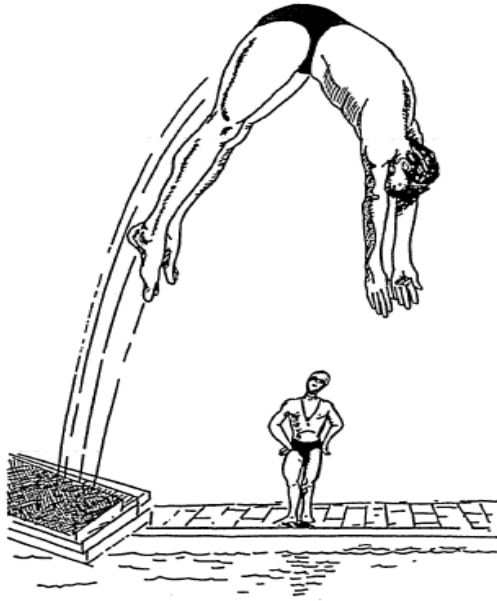


Fig. 2.16. John Kennedy. “Metaphor in Pictures.” *Perception*, vol. 11, 1982, p. 592, [www.researchgate.net/publication/17001708](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/17001708)

Similarly, communicating emotion in comics is accomplished through dialogues, body language, and the facial expressions of characters. This is also achieved using ‘emotion lines’ (Ojha et al. 306) or ‘pictorial runes’ (Kennedy 600; Forceville, “Pictorial Runes” 875; Ojha et al. 307). “A pictorial rune is a graphic device used in a picture which is a modification of the literal depiction of an object, making some aspect of the object become easy to depict, that aspect of the object often being difficult for the literal depiction to convey” (Kennedy 600). Ojha and colleagues agree that pictorial runes are devices used to represent events that are literally unrepresentable like movement and emotion. For instance, lines near a swollen thumb indicate pain, droplets on the forehead

give the impression that the person is tensed (fig. 2.17), wavy lines emanating from a garbage bin show a bad smell (fig. 2.18), and the like.



Fig. 2.17. Marzena Sowa. *Marzi: A Memoir*. Illustrated by Sylvain Savoia, Vertigo, 2011, p. 12.



Fig. 2.18. John Kennedy. "Metaphor in Pictures." *Perception*, vol. 11, 1982, p. 600.

[www.researchgate.net/publication/17001708](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/17001708)

Pictorial runes must be distinguished from pictograms "...which are conventionalized mimetic graphic elements, such as ♪, &, and \$; pictograms, thus, are stylized versions of entities that have a rudimentary meaning we know from outside the realm of comics" (Ojha et al. 307). Pictograms are certain artistic symbols used that are familiar in the world of real life, but that often have acquired typical meaning in comics. The artists can use them creatively which may convey different meanings. For example, the picture of a light bulb normally indicates a sudden idea that came into the mind of the character, but it can also sometimes be used to suggest a torch or spotlight. They are used mainly to convey the mental state of the characters and can appear both outside and inside the speech balloons.

#### **Body Language and Facial Expressions**

Visual techniques and symbols help graphic artists depict their characters' emotional status. But above all, the dialogue uttered, the facial expressions and the body language/gestures of the characters reveal their emotions and feelings more than anything else. For instance, a bulged eye indicates the person's surprise or confusion, and clasped hands show he is nervous. The comics, which use the visual medium, are particularly good at representing emotions. This is because of its ability to express emotions through eyes, positioning of mouth, hands, and other body gestures.

Facial expressions and body movements in comics are used to convey the feelings and emotions of the characters. Anger is conveyed by depicting tightly closed eyes or mouths, a red face, shaking hands, and the like. Usually, exaggerated facial expressions depicted in conventional comics are easily comprehended by the readers, but in complex

graphic narratives facial expressions may reflect complex meanings or it may appear confusing to the readers which requires them to use more of their interpretative skills.

The skill of the artist lies in depicting the apt moments of the character's movements and presenting them to convey the action and plot development. The face is a crucial space for the artist to convey the emotions and feelings of the characters. Hence, the body postures, gestures, and facial expressions amplify the emotions to be conveyed when they conjoin with the dialogue. McCloud asserts that "...pictures can induce strong feelings in the reader, but they can also lack the specificity of words. Words, on the other hand, offer that specificity, but can lack the immediate emotional charge of pictures, relying instead on a gradual cumulative effect... Together, of course, words and pictures can work miracles" (*Understanding* 135).

#### **Angle and Perspective**

The angle and perspective from which the story is presented have a purpose and meaning to reveal. Presenting the story from one character's point of view makes the readers see the world through his eyes. This helps the readers identify the protagonist. The author can direct the reader's attention to suit his narrative plan using the perspective or angle. Kress and van Leeuwen contend that the choice of distance can suggest different relations between the viewers and the character depicted and the artist must choose from the close shot, very close shot, medium close shot, medium shot, medium long shot, long shot, and very long shot according to his requirement (124).

The angle from which the character is drawn is also relevant in disclosing the quality of relationships. A close-up angle represents an intimate relationship between the

character and the reader; a medium shot affirms a certain distancing and a long shot indicates a distant relationship. The perspective can also be used to control the emotions of the reader. For instance, looking at people from above gives the viewer supremacy over the character/s portrayed, and an eye-level view assures an equal relation, whereas a low angle makes the character more powerful than the viewer. A full-frontal view of a character looking at the viewer invites a maximum degree of involvement from him and a profile view indicates a sense of detachment. Presenting a character from behind or over the shoulder helps the reader to see the world through his eyes and sometimes that person remains completely absent visually throughout the novel and the reader sees things from his perspective (Forceville et al., “Stylistics” 491).

### **Time and Space**

Comics, although a static medium, have the competence to present the passage of time. Every single panel gives us the impression of representing a single moment. But it is not always so which is proved by McCloud in *Understanding Comics*. He analyses a panel depicting several characters involved in various actions and reactions (fig. 2.19). The actions and reactions of each of the character that seemingly happens at the same time occupy a distinct time slot. In the panel, the flash sound of the camera has a duration, Uncle Henry’s words ‘smile’ surely preceded the flash, and the words of other characters presented inside speech balloons might have followed the flash had taken their time. But our eyes have been trained to view a single image as a single instant in time. McCloud concludes that in such panels single panel operates as several panels (95-97).



Fig. 2.19. Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. HarperPerennial, 1993, p. 95.

McCloud observes that “... in the world of comics, time and space are one and the same” (*Understanding* 100). Time can be controlled not only through the cues given through the elements inside the panel but also through various other techniques. The graphic artist can lengthen a pause in his book by increasing the number of panels depicting similar visuals (fig. 2.20). He adds that it may also be achieved by increasing the gap between the panels. Another technique suggested by McCloud is the configuration of the panels which makes a difference in the perception of time. A longer panel gives an impression of a greater passage of time when compared to a short one. Similarly, borderless panels or page bleeds indicate timelessness (101-103).

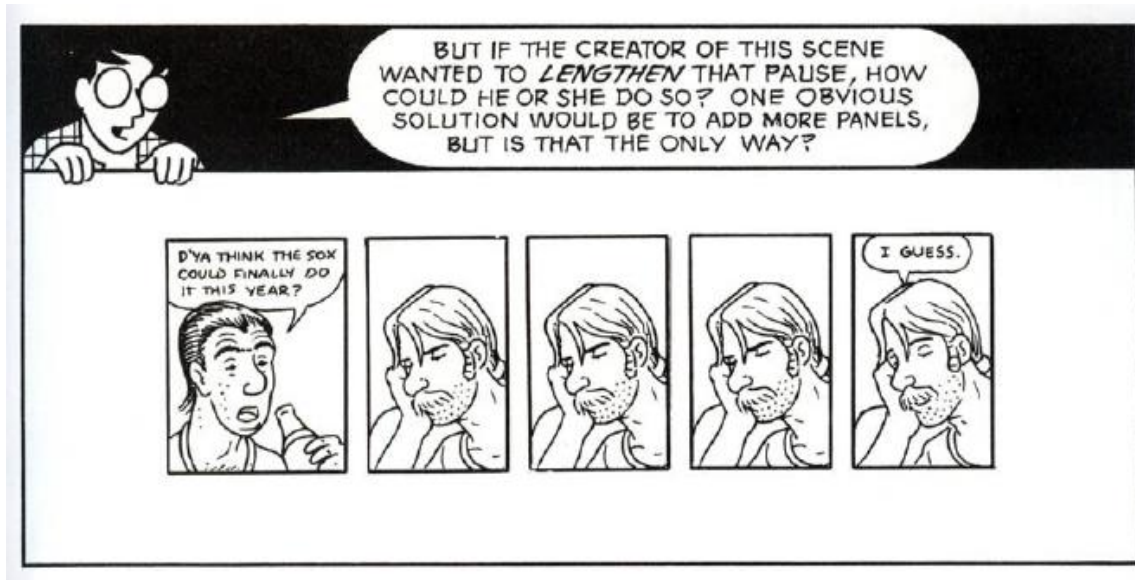


Fig. 2.20. Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. HarperPerennial, 1993, p. 101.

Groensteen makes a detailed study of space and time in comics under the concept of ‘spatio-topical system’ (24) in *System of Comics*. He asserts that three spatio-topical parameters are involved in the description of any panel, namely, the form or shape of the panel, the area it covers, and the site or location of the panel concerning the page and the entire book (28-29). Groensteen applies the process of “gridding” which “...consists of dividing the available space into a number of units or compartments” to comic writing (144). He analyses the entire process of writing comics through the lens of gridding, starting from the instant the writer divides the work into chapters to dividing each page into different panels.

McCloud observes that in comics, though wherever the eyes of readers are focused is considered the present time, the reader’s eyes “... take in the surrounding landscape of past and future,” (*Understanding* 104). Corresponding to McCloud’s

opinion, Groensteen mentions "... the co-occurrence of the panels...their simultaneous presence under the eye of the reader..." and as a result "...we are naturally inclined to credit narration to the sequence" (105). He introduces the term 'braiding' (145) to establish the connection between the various units of comics. He argues that "... every panel exists... in relation with each of the others" (146). He states:

Braiding deploys itself simultaneously in two dimensions, requiring them to collaborate with each other: synchronically, that of the co-presence of panels on the surface of the same page; and diachronically, that of the reading, which recognizes in each new term of a series a recollection or an echo of an anterior term (147).

## **Conclusion**

"Today's contemporary graphic novel is more associated with visual sophistication" (Baetens and Frey 94). Graphic narratives offer diverse examples that engage with a variety of themes and styles of representation. Since a greater degree of reader participation is required to decode the meaning spread across the frames and gutters of a comic book, it calls for digging deeper into the intricacies of the techniques used by graphic authors and artists. Expanding the expertise in the medium will help in comprehending them better.

Critical analysis of the medium offered by well-known figures offers insight into the universe of graphic narratives. Theoretical commentaries of Eisner, McCloud, Groensteen, Forceville, and Chute among others gave insight into the nature and stylistics of comics. The rich spatial grammar of comics with its own syntax and visual aesthetics

offers innumerable aspects to dwell upon. Apart from this, with the passage of time even the comic medium is moving from a conventional structure and is forming new trajectories which are engaged in complex and nuanced experiments with form and technique. This calls for new research undertakings to recognize the strength of the graphic medium and to explore the fresh avenues it opens in the field of literature.

## Chapter 3

### Graphic Mnemohistory on War: A Child's Perspective

#### Introduction

The visual-verbal witness documentaries in the form of graphic narratives endeavour to express diverse themes through their spatial syntax of panels and gutters. Graphic memoirs that seek to document war-generated histories produce new visual idioms and forms of expression. This chapter explores how graphic memoirs express the multilayered aspects of remembering a war-torn past through the reconstruction of history. Focusing on the relevance of the child as a witness to the experiences of war, revolution, dislocation, and trauma, the chapter examines the graphic memoirs, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return* and Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*.

#### Background Study

Chute remarks that there has been increased attention toward documentary experimentation in prose and the visual realm after 9/11 and the commencement of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam. She laments that despite the growth of comics as a major form of documentary investigation, a sustained critical study of documentary comics is lacking (*Disaster Drawn* 5). Details regarding historical events can be gathered from history books and historical documents. What is lacking in such official histories will be a description of the personal side of such events which can be gathered from life writing. The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War form the background of

*Persepolis*, whereas *Baddawi* details the life of a Palestinian refugee during the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The issue of veiling created innumerable problems in Iran which form a crucial chapter in the history of Iran. The ruling monarch Reza Shah Pahlavi started to introduce many reforms in the country in the fields of education and employment as part of his attempts to modernise Iran. In 1936, he passed the 'Unveiling Act' which insisted all women irrespective of age, social status, and religious inclination not wear a veil (Zeiny Jelodar et al. 67). Veiling has always been considered part of tradition and culture in Iran. Therefore, many middle and lower-middle-class women were reluctant to accept this new rule. Whereas, there were a few feminists who praised this step taken by Reza Shah. In short, the forced unveiling resulted in many protests and internal uprisings in Iran. A religious revolution took shape under the leadership of the religious cleric, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. These Anti-Shah movements which finally resulted in the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 are referred to as the Iranian Revolution or the Islamic Revolution. Khomeini became the new ruler and he reimposed the veil in 1983, preventing women from appearing unveiled in public (Milani 38).

Several historians like Pierre Razoux, Richard Cottam, and Michael Sterner among others have written on the Iran-Iraq War. The prolonged conflict between both nations lasted for about eight long years from 1980 to 1988. Territorial disagreements between Iran and Iraq, the Iranian Revolution of 1979-80, and differences of opinion between Ayatollah Khomeini, ruler of Iran, and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein were among the reasons behind the strained relations between the nations. Razoux describes

the Iran-Iraq War as a “terribly deadly war” and discusses the war detailing the human and material losses on both sides (470).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lasted over a hundred years. The conflict between the Jews and Palestinians, in the name of establishing a state of their own in the land to which both lay claims, remains unresolved. The UN formed the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), with representatives from eleven different UN member countries, to resolve the issue. They submitted a majority report suggesting the formation of two states, Jewish and Arab, with Jerusalem as an international entity, and a minority report proposing an independent federal state composed of an Arab and Jewish state. The Arabs rejected both reports. On November 29, 1947, the vote for partition as proposed in the majority report was held and UN Resolution 181 was passed. This resulted in the outbreak of war. The first phase was a civil war between Jews and Palestinian Arabs in Palestine and the second phase was an international war between the new state of Israel and the surrounding Arab nations. Over the course of the war and as part of the conflict between the Jews and Palestinians, approximately 700,000 Palestinians fled or were forcefully removed from their homes (Harms and Ferry 87-99).

The medium of comics when integrated with auto/biographical writing opens new avenues in the domain of literature. Life writing achieves innovative powers when it utilizes the apparatus designed for graphic medium. Jan Assman introduced the concept of mnemohistory while exploring the history of Egypt (*Moses* 8). Applying the concept of mnemohistory, the chapter attempts to examine how the past is “... modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present” (9).

*Persepolis* and *Baddawi* have several common features apart from both being graphic memoirs. Hiyem Cheurfa remarks that Baddawi "... models itself in terms of style and subject" on *Persepolis* (364). *Persepolis* is an internationally acclaimed literary piece of work that tells the story of young Marji who lives in Iran during the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. In the coming-of-age story of a young protagonist in the background of the atrocities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Abdelrazaq maps the traumatized mind of the main character in *Baddawi*. Like Satrapi, she also captures the attention of the readers through her black-and-white drawings.

The traumatic events and experiences that the authors attempt to portray through their work are accorded a different dimension when presented from the perspective of a growing child. Looking through the eyes of Marji and Ahmed, the young protagonists of *Persepolis* and *Baddawi* respectively, these graphic memoirs elucidate the intricate concept of war. They open the doors to the lives of people who live through such strenuous times and understand what it means to be a young person growing up amidst war. As the mundane everyday events, pains, hopes, struggles, and daily fragments of war unfold in the universe of panels and speech balloons, the readers get a poignant glimpse of the enormous concept of war, which is broken up into smaller pieces.

The use of various graphic techniques and mnemonic devices which the authors employ in these works will be scrutinised in the thesis through the lens of studies made by Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, and Hillary Chute. The chapter predominantly focuses on the fusion of memory and history as well as various other intricacies of the aspect of memory by utilising the theoretical framework provided by Jan Assmann, Marianne Hirsch, and Maurice Halbwach's reflections on various aspects of memory.

Beginning with an analysis of individual memory, collective memory, and postmemory, the chapter will set the stage to examine the recollection of trauma faced during childhood days. This will be followed by a study of the various mnemonic devices employed by graphic memorialists to scrutinize how children try to comprehend the colossal concept of war highlighting the graphic presentation of violence and death in the select memoirs. The focus of the thesis, namely, the graphic display of the synthesis of memory and history, is explored in detail leading to a brief discussion on the life of exile which to a great extent is an outcome of wars and revolutions.

### **Literature Review**

The slippery and elusive nature of traumatic memories resulting from historical wounds of wars and revolutions cannot be easily represented in any literary, artistic, or cultural form. Nevertheless, the graphic narrative format "... makes historical trauma available in a common format" (Nair 59). Their image-text configuration makes historical events "... real and accessible, and something more besides" (60).

Chute observes that the medium of comics, with its rich narrative structure, can "perform the political and aesthetic work of bearing witness" ("Texture of Retracing" 93). *Persepolis*, according to her, is a work of literary reconstruction that retraces the story of a growing child through the depiction of various versions of self. It alludes to the ordinariness of trauma which is a way of rejecting the idea that trauma is in any way normal or that it should never be considered normal ("Texture of Retracing" 105-6). Golnar Nabizadeh agrees with Chute in observing that Satrapi uses the comic form to explore the relationship between personal memories and cultural history (152-53). As *Persepolis* constantly reminds one about the significance of what it means to survive, it

accentuates the inherent instability of survival. By emphasizing the significance of witnessing, the text commemorates the individuals who have lost their lives in war and those who are victims of war and revolution.

Satrapi's unembellished visual style conveys the traumatic memories, enlivens the narrative, and reminds the reader that no imagination can fully represent trauma. Her style presents what Chute calls a "child's-eye rendition of trauma" ("Texture" 99). It generates a kind of aesthetic distance for the readers. Amy Malek also comments on Satrapi's simple art thus:

By using her simple style, clean, wood-cut-like images to depict otherwise disturbing scenes of torture, war, or suicide, she ensures that the readers feel sympathy, pain, and anger, but does not experience the gruesomeness that may otherwise turn them off from the book: their imagination are kept active, their hearts are strained, but their stomachs remain settled. (372)

Satrapi's simple cartooning style is reminiscent of the comic strips that appeared in Persian satirical newspapers and journals. Though it has resemblances to Persian art and miniatures, it has not employed the rich colours usually found in them. *Persepolis* can be considered a masterpiece in black and white. This black and white stands for the harsh contrasts presented in the work, like, fundamentalists and modernists, East and West, violence and peace, and so forth. Each of its chapters also begins with a title written in white inside a thick black frame.

Daiarisa Rumnong says in "The Struggle of Memory Against Forgetting" that using the hybrid nature of graphic narrative helped Satrapi protect her memory from

forgetting (13). She has presented an uncensored history through the memoir. Rumnong highly recommends graphic narratives as a vehicle to document life narratives and emphasises the need to explore more the possibilities it offers to authors in constructing narratives presenting myriad themes (15).

Cheurfa examines how Abdelrazaq uses the graphic form to present a witness narrative through *Baddawi*. According to her, the book invites the readers to participate in acts of bearing witness through a visual reconstruction of testimony. Cheurfa appraises how Abdelrazaq's memoir "... demonstrates both the significance of comics in channeling witness narratives and the merits of visual-verbal texts in representing the complexity of the historical Palestinian experiences of displacement across various spaces" (378). Similarly, Priyadarshini and Sigroha in their article "Recovering the Palestinian History of Dispossession through Graphics in Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*" attempt to study the work as an act of political resistance which presents an alternative history of Palestinians by commemorating their personal history.

Bidisha Banerjee evaluates *Baddawi* from the diasporic perspective and states that the memoir depicts the evolution of a Palestinian diasporic identity in the absence of a homeland, within the space of a refugee camp. She adds that how the book depicts refugee diasporic lives "... enable us to delineate the unique specificities of Palestinian diasporic communities that might otherwise be lost in the celebratory din of diaspora studies while opposing the abject characterization of camp identities" (28). María Porrás Sánchez, who has also studied the theme of the diaspora in the work, considers *Baddawi* suitable for engaging both young and adult audiences as it effectively manages to balance the collective and individual experience of violence and exile. She proposes that

Abdelrazaq use a two-fold strategy to convey the themes of violence and exile without traumatising the readers, namely, simple graphic treatment and the usage of a coming-of-age story. *Baddawi* manages to present Ahmad's plight as a universal motif (158-159).

Though many studies have been made on the trauma depicted in *Persepolis* and some others on how history is etched in the work utilising the specialties of the visual medium, not much exploration has been undertaken on how graphic memoirs can be looked upon as visual historiography. Historiographical memoirs can contribute a lot to the present and future generations by throwing light upon the personal, collective, and emotional memories attached to a historically relevant event or period. Even though many writings and historical documents exist on the Holocaust and life in concentration camps, the medium of graphic memoirs dealing with the same topic gives a three-dimensional view of the event depicted.

Furthermore, there has been a dearth of studies on *Baddawi* highlighting the visual depiction of Palestinian history through the reconstruction of childhood memories. The accounts of personal experiences of trauma, and memories of war survivors seldom get representation in official documents. There is quick access to such incidents through art and literature. These personal memoirs stand for collective memory and play a significant role as historical documents to record knowledge about the past for posterity. The possibility of comprehending a historically significant event is enhanced when it is presented in graphic format. The multimodality employed by the medium aids in a better understanding of complex concepts. A memoir that narrates Palestinian history becomes more important because Palestinians have not been granted the "... permission to narrate" their memory of exile (Williams and Ball 128).

### **Individual Memory, Collective Memory, and Postmemory**

Mnemonics, or the art of memory, expressed in literature is a storehouse of the past for posterity. Individual memory may not always be the memory of a single person alone, but that of many who contribute to making it a collective phenomenon (Halbwachs 23; Olick 19). In *Persepolis*, though the story is presented as memories of the protagonist Marji, it is not her memories alone that constitute the entire work. Marji's memories are interspersed with those of her parents, friends, and relatives. As Assman in the article "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" remarks:

Every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others. These "others," however are not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past. Halbwachs thinks of families, neighborhood and professional groups, political parties, associations, etc., up to and including nations. (127)

The episodes in *Persepolis* are reconstructed from Marji's personal experiences and from her recollection of conversations with her family members. The reminiscences made by those around her are imprinted in the mind of young Marji which are fused with her own memories. Since Marji's memories are of course interspersed with those of her parents, grandmother, Uncle Anoosh, and their close family friends, many of them constitute her postmemory. While describing postmemory, Hirsch argues how the second-generation members inherit the memories of the previous generation "...by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (*Generation 5*).

Hence, Hirsch's idea of postmemory indicates how memories can be transmitted through an account given by an individual to those who were not present during that event. The memories based on the experiences of Marji's parents and grandparents, which she comes to know of from her conversations with them, are not directly experienced by her. The experiences of prisoners explained by Siamak Jari are presented in the memoir by adding the colour of a child's imagination. These instances in the memoir correspond to Hirsch's concept of postmemory.

Marji gets acquainted with the history of Iran through interaction with her father and grandmother. She realises how her countrymen suffered from their own tyrannical rulers, Arab invasion from the West, Mongolian invasion from the East, and because of Imperialism. It is from her conversations with her grandmother that she learns about how her grandfather, a prince, was cheated on and removed from his position. The memories of her grandmother of her husband's sufferings in jail which she shares with Marji are instances of postmemory in *Persepolis*. A child's attempts to experience and understand what her grandfather might have felt when he was forcefully made to spend hours together in cold water as punishment could also be seen in the memoir. Young Marji spends hours in her bathtub and examines her palms which become wrinkled and numb because of laying in water for hours (Satrapi 25).

*Baddawi* is the story of the author's father, Ahmad who is a Palestinian refugee living in a refugee camp. But, Abdelrazaq writes in the "Preface" that, "... the story that you are about to read isn't only about my father...it is about five million people, born into a life of exile and persecution, indefinitely suspended in statelessness" (11-12). Ahmad is a representative of those five million or more people who had to flee their homeland and

live in refugee camps, struggling for survival. Abdelrazaq rightly says that for Palestinians, preservation is an act of resistance. By writing *Baddawi*, she is recording a memory that is a way of opening a window into Palestinian history that is often forgotten or omitted from the pages of history.

Hirsch refers to Halbwach's notion of collective memory while discussing the transference of memory between individual and collective remembrance. She contends that "...the break in transmission resulting from traumatic historical events necessitates forms of remembrance that reconnect and reembody an intergenerational memorial fabric that is severed by catastrophe" (*Generation* 32). Traumatic experiences, when presented through the medium of comics that engage "... the cognitive and narrative process...," act as "... new potential carriers of memory" (Spadaro 178). Both *Persepolis* and *Baddawi* act as instances or examples that show how traumatic experiences and stories of violence are transmitted from individual to collective experience.

Graphic narratives act as a medium to mix artistic form and cultural content. Memories presented in *Persepolis* mirror the cultural aspects of Iran and it is reflected not only in the events recollected but also in the art of Satrapi. The influence of Persian art and the numerous beliefs and religious aspects that are deeply rooted in Iranian soil are etched by the author which makes the memoir a ground for cultural memory studies. The discussions surrounding the problem of veiling and various other religious, social, political, and cultural aspects are presented before the readers using a collocation of words and images.

The religious and cultural aspects of Iran during the 1980s and the following years and the problems prevalent at the time find expression in the memoir. The story of

*Persepolis* begins in the year 1980, the year it became compulsory to wear the veil. In the first panel, the readers are introduced to Marji and her friends wearing veils and all looking alike. The historical incident of forced veiling imposed by the Shah had a great impact on young Marji's life which is reflected in the book through the personal experiences recollected by her. The superstitions surrounding religious beliefs and their exploitation by bureaucrats are laid bare through the narration of various incidents. Among them are the demonstrations for and against veiling, the strict rules imposing dress codes for women, the constant vigil to punish those who go against dress codes, and the struggles faced by the art students because of the strict religious rules that restricted their artistic freedom.

A family story set in a historical context, *Baddawi* interweaves individual and collective memories and archives the oft-omitted history of Palestine. The memoir is also an apt example of Hirsch's concept of postmemory. Abdelrazaq's memories are an intersection of historical memory and family memory transferred to her who is a second-generation representative. She reproduces her father's traumatic memories. As Hirsch remarks, "Second generation fiction, art, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma" ("Generation" 112).

Abdelrazaq has no direct connection with the historical incidents narrated in the memoir, still, her graphic depiction of the same is like paying homage to those who experienced such atrocities. The pain felt by later generations is different in nature from that of those who have experienced it first-hand, but they too are affected by the far-

reaching consequences of their parent's trauma. The lives of these second-generation representatives and sometimes the generations after will also suffer because of the haunting consequences of the traumatic experiences of their previous generations. This reveals the transgenerational nature of trauma.

*Baddawi* is not just an austere memoir but a repository of cultural memory.

Abdelrazaq incorporates numerous cultural symbols and imagery in the memoir. One fine example is the utilisation of 'tatreez,' Palestinian embroidery, as a visual characteristic of the comic. As Laila Farah maintains, one should see "... the embroideries that the Palestinian women create as silent speaking, a self-elected non-vocal form of expression of self-representation, identity, and collective memory" (240). Throughout the comic, one can observe many artfully crafted geometric motifs of Palestinian embroidery by which the author celebrates the Palestinian culture. By incorporating this pattern of Palestinian embroidery as an artwork in the book, she immediately links the work to traditional Palestinian culture. These patterns sometimes appear as mere decorations but at other times as filling the gutters and holding together the various panels that discuss historically significant incidents (fig. 3.1). 'Tatreez' appears on the front cover, and around the maps of pre-1948 Palestine incorporated in the book which serves as "... a salient marker of nationhood" (Cheurfa 373).

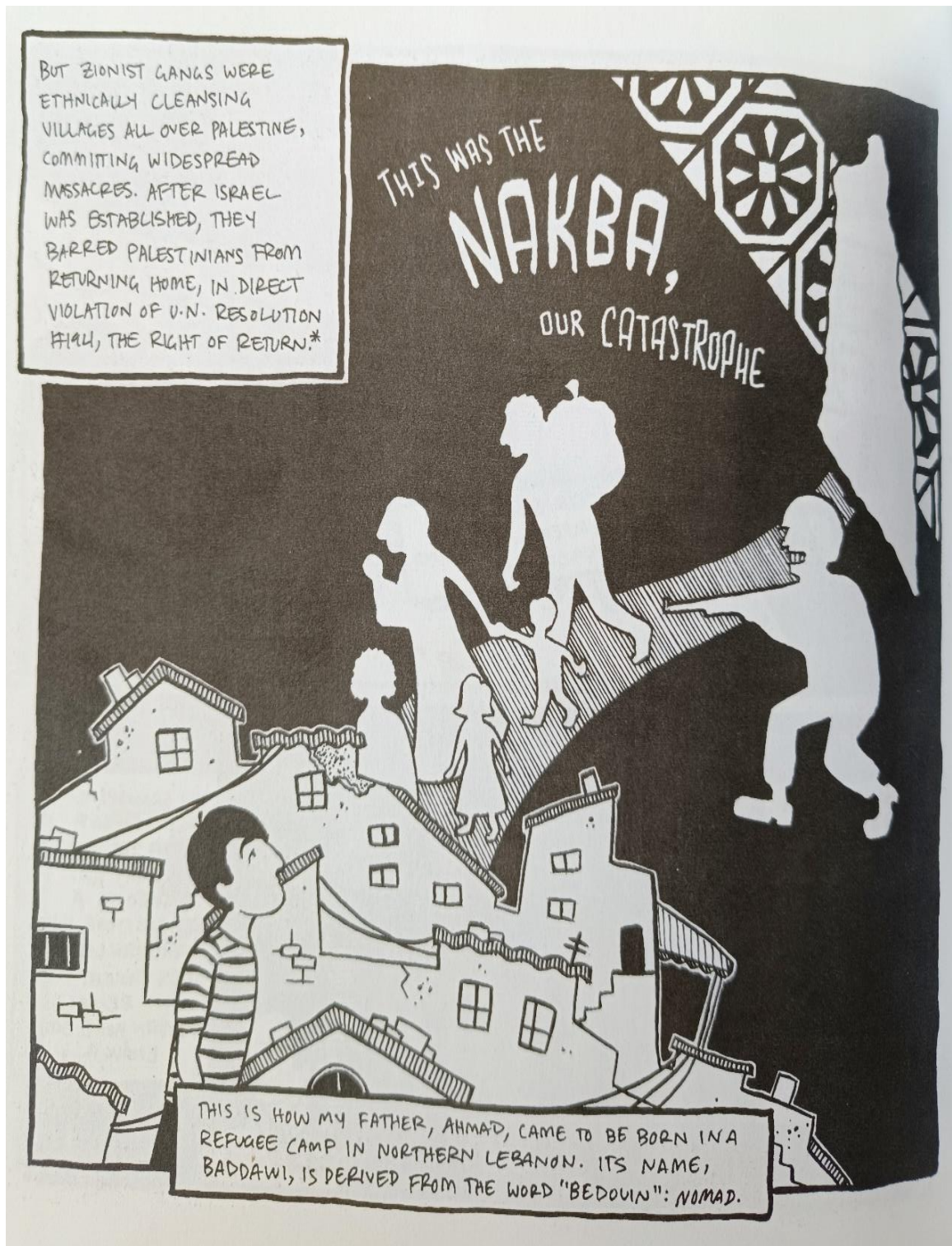


Fig. 3.1. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 18.

The memoirs mirror the religious beliefs and rituals of the communities to which the protagonists belong. The readers are provided a sketch of the culture and traditions of these countries through the use of various cultural and religious symbols and short descriptions of religious ceremonies. Ahmad details how during the Za'atar season he goes in search of thyme which is the main ingredient of Za'atar, a staple in every Palestinian household. He also talks about their attempts to celebrate Ramadan even in adverse circumstances as an attempt to cling to their traditions (Abdelrazaq 31-32, 37).

Abdelrazaq has not directly experienced the events narrated in the story and hence she is a secondary witness. She acknowledges her absence in her testimony on the dedication page of *Baddawi* thus, "...for all those children of immigrants who have not forgotten their parent's stories" (7). She also explains the lives of her grandparents in the background of the socio-political context, connecting them to the history of Palestine in the "Introduction." Thus, presenting the story of an individual, she is documenting Palestinian history. The graphic motifs of 'tatreez,' the traditional Palestinian embroidery pattern, are also used symbolically to connect personal and historical, individual, and collective, as well as past and present.

### **Recollection of Trauma During Childhood**

Olara A. Otunnu, UN Under-Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Forces, 1997-2005, writes in the "Foreword" of *Stolen Voices*:

In the last decade 2 million children have been killed in situations of armed conflict, while 6 million children have been disabled or injured. Over a quarter of

a million child soldiers are being used today in situations of armed conflicts around the globe. Since 2003, over 11.5 million children have been displaced within their own countries, and 2.4 million children forced to flee conflict and take refuge outside their home countries. The scourge of landmines results in the killing or maiming of between 8,000 to 10,000 children every year. (Filipović and Challenger v)

Memoirs exposing the experience of conflict by young people not only can act as tools for archiving the past but also bring the readers close to the lives of those young adults whose lives were shattered by violence. They allow the reader to look through the eyes of the young protagonists of these works and learn more about their lives beyond the factual description provided in historical documents. Readers from anywhere can identify easily with the universal symbol of the child. Furthermore, a feeling of empathy is simultaneously generated as the reader identifies himself with the protagonist within no time. The description of traumatic events, which naturally can disturb the mind of the readers, is given respite in the form of short descriptions of childhood fantasies and innocent talks narrated in the book.

A child narrator gives the adult reader an opportunity to regard the experiences narrated from a fresh point of view. As the child has limited access to and understanding of the systems and rules of society, they have a different view of them. Such works can be subversive in nature as in them one can observe various instances wherein the author utilises the inquisitiveness, curiosity, naivety, and innocence of the child in questioning and criticizing the adult world. A young chronicler can take the realism of the work to a higher level as the readers assume that the child is, to a great extent, away from the biases

of society. He/she can even make the readers think about their prejudices. To what extent the author can use this tool for social criticism and for a sarcastic view of the adult world may vary. According to the mastery of the author, he can create an appealing character who can win the reader's hearts, no matter a child or an adult. But a child narrator can heighten the sensitivities of the reader.

The concept of mnemohistory becomes relevant when it comes to graphic narratives. These memoirs are different from diary writing in that the memories recollected here are done at a later stage in their life by their respective authors. In *Persepolis*, Satrapi is remembering her own childhood experiences years later in her life which is presented in the form of a graphic memoir. It is the narration of some historical incidents that happened in her past as recollected by her that forms the background of the book. Similarly, in *Baddawi*, it is Ahmad's childhood experiences as narrated by him to his daughter that forms the story of the work, though Ahmad himself is the protagonist of the memoir. Likewise, the historical events which form the background of the story are recollected years later. In both cases, it is history as it is remembered that gets reflected in the respective works that explore the nuances of the graphic medium in dealing with such subjects.

A fluctuation in the language of such texts can also be possible as the language of the child protagonist and that of the narrator who remembers or makes comments upon the childhood memories will differ. Mostly the caption area is allotted to the narrator and the space inside the panel is assigned to the protagonist. In several coming-of-age stories, one can see the various selves of the author in the same work communicating with the readers. The graphic narratives have a language of their own and each writer/artist creates

visual lexicons in such a way that is easily recognisable for the readers. For instance, Satrapi introduces the readers to Marji by drawing her in a particular way with an innocent face and arched eyebrows. The opening panel presents a veiled Marji which also is a visual lexicon. This establishment of a visual lexicon helps the reader to immediately recognise Marji whenever she appears in the story.

The readers are introduced to the child protagonist Marji on the front cover of the book. She is depicted as sitting on a sofa along with her grandmother (fig. 3.2). She looks happily at her parents and Uncle Anoosh who are standing behind the sofa. The readers can immediately connect to her as the author has used the universal figure of a child. Though one can also see the face of the teenager Marji on the left side of the page, it is the child Marji who grabs the immediate attention of the readers. The teenage Marji presented with her eyes closed as if recollecting her childhood days. This is also hinted at by presenting child Marji and her family inside a cloud-like balloon.

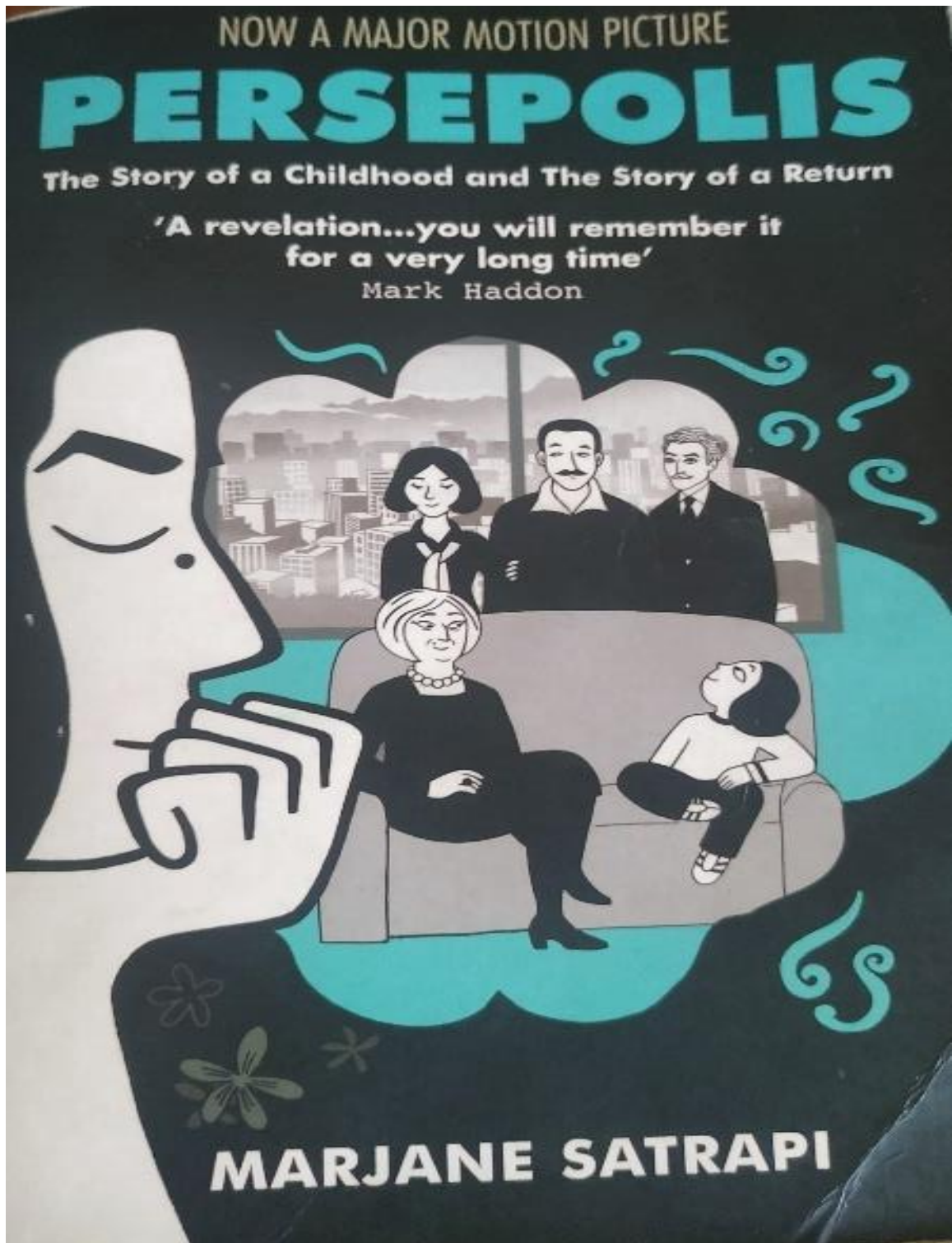


Fig. 3.2. Marjane Satrapi. Cover Page. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008.

The time depicted in the book is the tumultuous period of the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. Considering the situation, normal life was impossible for people in Iran at that time. The so-called Guardians of Revolution are everywhere to check if anyone is crossing the boundaries of rules set by the regime. Arranging parties, keeping audio cassettes, wearing make-up, and appearing unveiled in public are all against the law and those found guilty of breaching any of the rules are also severely punished.

Marji's family is progressive and liberal. Her parents allowed her to participate in all the discussions in the family, including political matters. As a result, she had her own opinions about everything and she developed a very independent nature. Being a rebel, Marji is not always ready to live abiding by the rules. She shares many instances in which she fearlessly questions the authorities at a young age. She continues to be a rebel even when she joins the University. She is courageous enough to question the college authorities who reprimanded the ladies of the college for the way they dressed. Though she is summoned by the Islamic Commission and given a warning, she gets a chance to design a uniform adapted to the needs of the art students of the college (Satrapi 300).

Just like Marji in *Persepolis*, Ahmad takes us through his childhood days up to his adolescence during a turbulent time in the history of Palestine. He spent his days in the refugee camp at Baddawi and other camps all over Lebanon where he moved with his parents in search of safety. The Palestinians were constantly attacked by Arab enemies and had to live in fear. Ahmad was born in the Baddawi refugee camp. His family moved to Beirut as his father found a job offer there. Unfortunately, they could not escape from the political and religious persecution even in Beirut. Ahmad's constant efforts to continue his studies even amid all these struggles are worthy of appreciation.

The readers meet Ahmad on the front cover of the book itself and he is presented as the exact replica of Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali's famous Handala image (Cheurfa 366). By this, Abdelrazaq is not only paying homage to al-Ali but also connecting the readers directly to the people of Palestine as Handala is a symbol of the Palestinian refugee child. He is presented as a 10-year-old boy standing with his back to the readers, wearing a striped t-shirt and his hands held behind him (fig. 3.3). The front cover of the book, as well as the title, is decorated with patterns of tatreez, the Palestinian embroidery, which is another visual icon employed throughout the book.

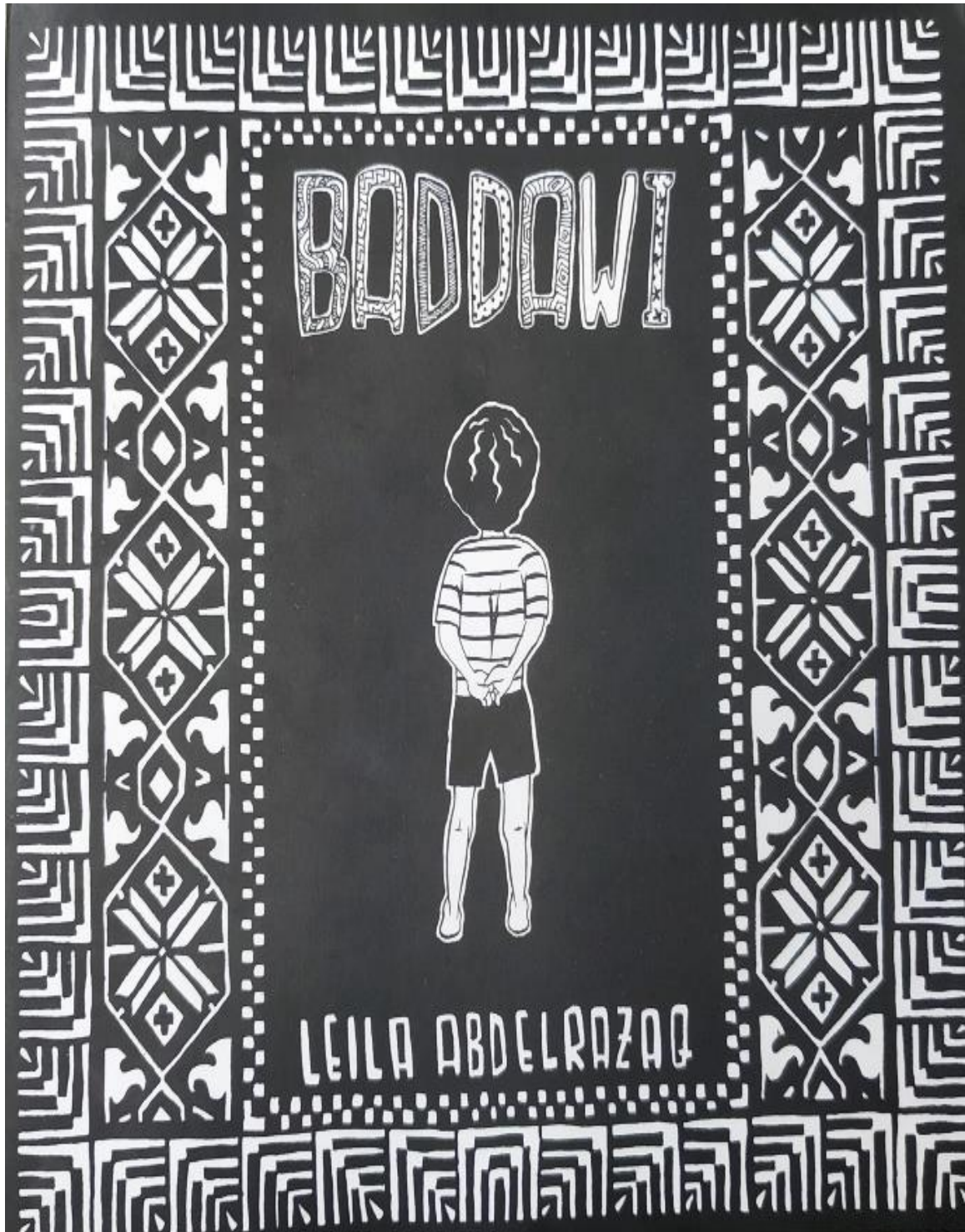


Fig. 3.3. Leila Abdelrazaq. Cover Page. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015.

Handala is always presented with his back to the reader as if the readers see through his eyes, over his shoulders, the happenings in Palestine. The attention gained by al-Ali's Handala resulted in his assassination in London in 1987. His assassination became a key incident which led to the establishment of comics as a powerful device in the Palestinian struggle. As Cheurfa proposes:

Abdelrazaq's adaptation of Handala highlights the qualities of her comic as a witness narrative, giving testimony about the first generation of Palestinians born into refugee camps. The comic emphasizes the significance of the figure of the seeing child and, in doing so, evokes the intersection between visual culture and the politics of resistance through acts of bearing witness. (366)

*The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank has proved already that war memories shared by a young adult will have a capturing and profound impact. If words alone have that much power, the verbal-visual combination should have a lot more to reveal. The candid writings help the wider reading public understand the ways in which war seizes and feeds on the innocence of youth, while their visual-verbal narrative lines, expand the reach of the documentary.

### **Visuals as Mnemonic Devices**

Visuals aid in retaining facts in memory and it is this peculiarity of visuals that graphic memoirists deploy in their fight against forgetfulness. They employ images and visual icons as mnemonic devices while conveying their memories through their works. Satrapi and Abdelrazaq have their own unique way of using their art while enunciating their purpose. Both use numerous graphic techniques to fulfill their enterprise. It can be

argued that the child protagonists of both memoirs also turned out to be visual symbols representing the respective countries to which they belong. Marji became a symbol of the Iranian resistance and Ahmad, a representative of the Palestinian refugee.

Satrapi's simple visual style uplifts the narrative to a different level. The difficulty of comprehending the painful and traumatic memories shared by the author is mitigated to a great extent because of her uncomplicated and easy visual style. Her simple visual idiom emphasizes McCloud's theory of "... cartooning as a form of amplification through simplification" (*Understanding* 30). She chooses to use black and white instead of colour to depict the horrors of violence and death. This use of black and white makes her work meaningful by presenting a complicated subject in a straightforward and simple manner. She succeeds in establishing that violence is not normal by presenting violence, which has become a normal thing in Iran.

Satrapi used several techniques of graphic narratives to convey her emotions and feelings related to her war-related experiences. Such experiences of a young adult may not be as mature as that of an adult. In many instances, the shock at witnessing the wounded and mutilated soldiers or listening to and imagining the tortures endured by political prisoners is expressed not only through words and visuals but also through stylistic devices available in graphic forms of art. Apart from the facial expressions, various other graphic techniques like page spread, page bleed, borderless panels, panels without words, pitch-black panels, blank panels, and panels with black backgrounds are used. Just as in prose, here too the author uses irony, symbolism, metaphor, metonymy, and others. The difference is that all these are presented using visuals or word-image combinations. Each of these techniques has its own purpose while conveying the message

to the readers. Such an art combined with the imagination of a child protagonist, which knew no bounds, finds expression in the memoir.

Visual metaphors and metonymies prove to be an effective tool that has a long-lasting impact on the readers. It has all the effectiveness of a verbal metaphor that we see in prose and has an added charm of the visual. They add to the depth and impact of the concept or idea conveyed through it. It also gives the readers a scope to actively participate in deciphering the hidden meanings and enjoy seeing the story evolve gradually. They also hint at the artistic creativity and intelligence of the writer/artist.

An example where Satrapi uses the image of flames is when she conveys the news about the crisis faced by people during the Iran-Iraq war. People from western and southern parts of Iran trying to escape to safer places are pictured as their cars being engulfed in rising flames which symbolically suggests the devastating power of wars. It can also be interpreted as Satrapi's failure to remember the event properly or a child's imagination of the same. Yet another example is a panel that presents the fire at the Rex Cinema Hall which was a planned massacre by the Shah (fig. 3.4). The shapes of flame-like screaming skulls remind the readers of Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream."

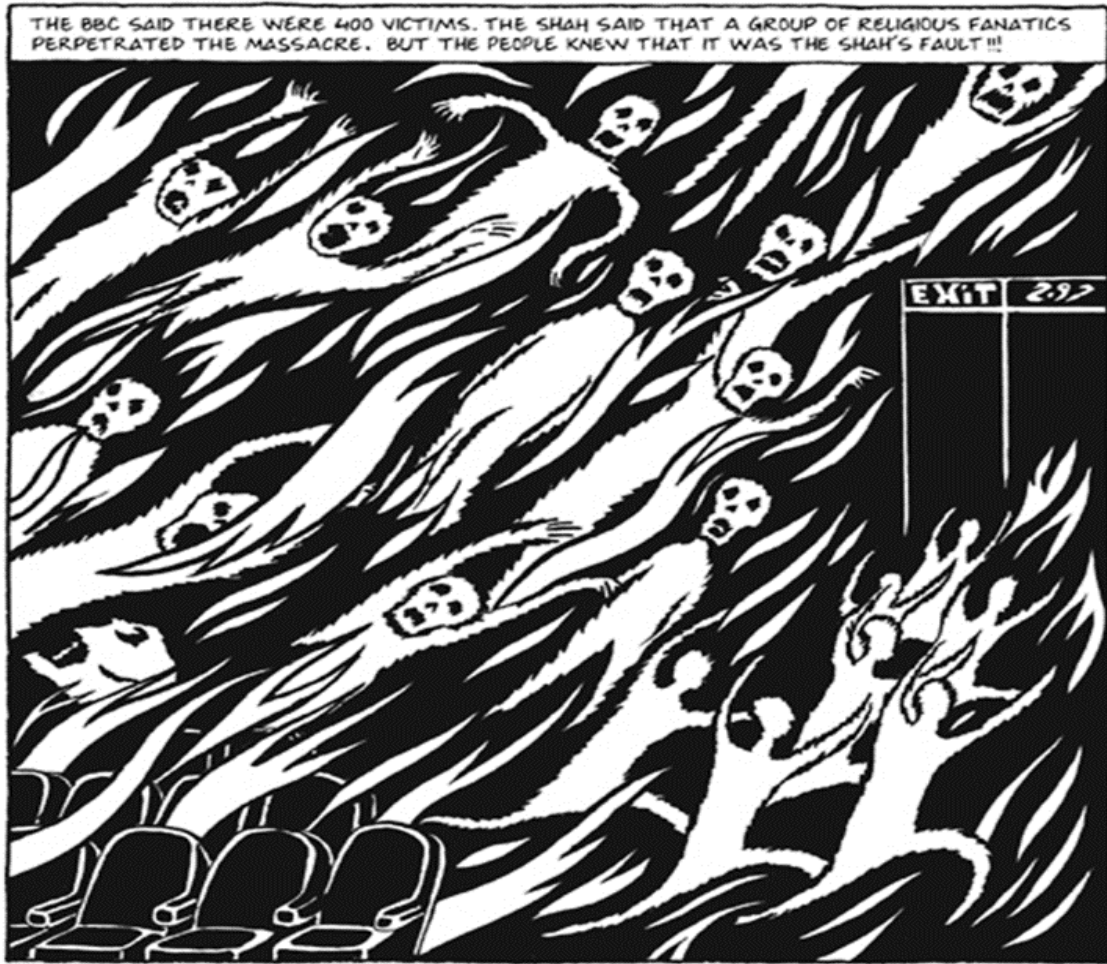


Fig. 3.4. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008, p. 15.

Marji feels torn between her Islamic religious beliefs and modern French education because of the unflinching rules in Iran. Through her self-portrayal, Satrapi depicts her tormented mind which readily captures the reader's attention (fig. 3.5). This visual symbol is an excellent example of how graphic works can present the exact feelings of the writer/artist using an image that can create a profound impact. The image opens the scope for deciphering the secondary-level meanings hidden beneath and becomes an emblem of Iranian women in a predicament.



Fig. 3.5. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008. p. 6.

In the picture of Marji portrayed in the figure above, in one half, she is presented as unveiled. On the other half, she is depicted wearing a veil. The panel is also split into two – on her left, there are some tools indicating modernism, and on her right are some leaf motifs representing tradition or religion. She looks sad in the picture. This split image of Marji and the background of Persian artwork on one side, and the backdrop of instruments of science and technology against the unveiled and modern Marji on the other side, is a metaphoric representation of Marji's mind in dilemma. Her confused and perplexed state of mind is symbolically presented through this visual icon. In another instance, Marji's attempt to assimilate into Western culture by running away from her past and her culture when she was in Vienna, is also presented symbolically (fig. 3.6). In the panel, Marji is seen walking in long strides as if running away from her parents. She uses this visual to evoke and pass on to the readers the memories of her struggles to

assimilate into a foreign culture. Her parents' dark silhouettes can also be seen in the background.



Fig. 3.6. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008. p. 195.

Satrapi's recollection of the feeling of shock that her younger self faced when she came back to Iran after her four years of life in Austria at seeing the streets named after martyrs of war and huge murals of martyrs on walls is evoked symbolically in the memoir. In one panel, a black silhouette of Marji standing on the ground underneath which skulls can be seen is portrayed (fig. 3.7). Here Iran is compared to a graveyard. In the adjacent panel, Marji can be seen standing in panic surrounded by skeletons representing victims of war. The guilt of having lived a life in a faraway place forgetting about the sufferings of the citizens of her homeland is symbolically portrayed in this image.



Fig. 3.7. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008. p. 253.

Abdelrazaq also uses a simple style in her graphic treatment of atrocity. Though there are depictions of dead bodies and scenes of bomb blasts, violence is never presented explicitly. This is mainly because both the victims and perpetrators are presented as featureless blank silhouettes. Thus, Abdelrazaq reproduces episodes of violence without traumatising the readers. She successfully does this making the memoir readable for both young and adults alike. She explores the nuances of panel shapes and the silence of the gutters to establish the same. This also gives an opportunity for the involvement of the readers in the interpretation of the various incidents recounted and makes them not mere spectators but an inevitable portion of the story. They are involved in deciphering the visual metaphors, metonymies, symbols, and various pictograms used and filling the gutters.

Presenting Ahmad in the image of Handala is an intentional attempt by Abdelrazaq to apply the symbolic significance of Handala to his protagonist. Handala is a symbol of Palestinian resistance. Equally important is the inclusion of Palestinian traditional embroidery *tatreez* which represents "... a living history created through silent expression, wordlessly stitching together their lost past and their survival as a people for the future" (Farah 242). These visual icons are mnemonic devices used to connect the readers with the memories of the author about Palestine and the struggles faced by their people.

Akin to the use of flames in *Persepolis*, flames are used metaphorically in *Baddawi* too. Following the raid of the Headquarters and the killing of Palestinian leaders, tensions rose in the camp. The portrayal of the Headquarters in flames reflects this idea (Abdelrazaq 43). Another instance of the use of visual symbolism is when Ahmad mentions the Agreement signed between Palestine Liberation Organisation Leader Yasser Arafat and the Lebanese Army General Emile al-Boustani. As a result of this Agreement, the camp was freed from the Lebanese army which is symbolically presented as two arms breaking free from shackles (44).

There is a metaphoric comparison of war to a game of chess. A page bleed is used where Ahmad talks about how he learned to play chess. It was during airstrikes when people ran to the basements of their apartments to save their lives that the elders encouraged the kids to play different games to keep their minds off the scary situation. Of all the games Ahmad learned to play at that time, he enjoyed playing chess. He calls it "... the game of strategy" (83) and compares it to war. This comparison is reflected in the single big panel in which the floor is designed like a chessboard and on top of the panel

are bombs blasting. On the very next page, he states the difference between the two – chess is logical. Here is another visual metaphor used. In a single big panel, at the bottom, kids are playing by throwing stones at each other, in the middle, soldiers are depicted shooting each other, and on the top, leaders like Hafez al-Assad and Ariel Sharon are portrayed playing with tanks and fighter planes (fig. 3.8). War has become child's play that has no logic.



Fig. 3.8. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 84.

Abdelrazaq makes use of visual symbolism to present Ahmad in a dilemma facing a tough situation of choosing between two options in his life. His parents wish him to marry his friend Manal and settle in his life. Ahmad wants to leave Lebanon and go to America to pursue his studies. The confused state of his mind is completely captured in a page bleed. In the image, the outline of the maps of Lebanon and America is shown intersecting the two roads respectively (fig. 3.9). Ahmad is standing with his back to the readers in front of two roads diverging in two different directions. The posture of Ahmad recalls the image of Ahmad on the cover page, that in turn reveals its metaphoric relation to the image of Handala. This possibility of braiding establishes a connection between various parts of comics. Added to the use of the image of Handala, the artist has also included the pattern of tatreez in the panel, both of which cement the relation of the story to the Palestinian resistance.



Fig. 3.9. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 113.

Visual synecdoche in the form of guns and fighter planes denoting soldiers and war respectively is employed in the memoir. Abdelrazaq also used the image of an eye with the Lebanese army symbol in the pupil to show that the army started closely watching and interrogating people in the refugee camps in order to find the culprits behind setting fire to the police headquarters (44). Apart from such carefully crafted visual symbols and metaphors, Abdelrazaq uses simple-looking silhouettes that refrain from the use of haunting images and at the same time present the story without losing its seriousness.

### **The Portrayal of War, Violence, and Death**

*Persepolis* is about the hardships of the Iranian people and the violence they endured due to wars and revolutions that rocked their country over many centuries. It portrays the violence both witnessed and imagined by Marji. Much of the violence presented in the novel is related to incidents narrated to Marji by her parents, relatives, or friends. These are thus conveyed to the readers through the imagination and recollections of those incidents by the child narrator Marji. They represent a child's attempts to understand violence and death. The visual representation of such incidents exhibits a gap between the imagination possessed by a grown-up and a child. For example, the burning of the Rex Cinema Hall in the chapter "The Bicycle," portrays a child's imagination of death by fire. The visual representation of this brutal murder resonates with the ineffability of such incidents and a child's perception and imagination of fiery death (Satrapi 15).

The dark side of the war is reflected not only in the words used but also in the artwork of Satrapi. The techniques of graphic narratives are deftly used here to give a

clear picture of the situation of Iran in the 1970s and 1980s revolutionary Iran. The bomb attacks, deaths, and tortures endured by those who opposed the regime, the panic faced by the common citizens due to war, wounded soldiers, and so on are described and interpreted from the viewpoint of a young adult. The bluntness of a child's interpretation and imagination contribute in myriad ways to making the reading of the memoir a heart-touching and horrifying experience. It helped the writer/artist also to make the work a sharp satirical weapon powerful enough to subvert established norms and systems.

The text features visual representations of massacre, death, and violence. They are presented more like young Marji's attempts to understand these events. A child's imagination might be far from realistic which is also a reminder of the difficulty in representing traumatic events in any literary form. One such instance is explained in the episode "The Heroes." Two political prisoners, who are also friends of Satrapi's family, visit them after they are released. Siamak Jari explains to them the tortures that they and other prisoners had to endure in prison. He talks about a prisoner named Ahmadi who did not survive these tortures. Marji's imagination of Ahmadi's final torture evokes in the reader the uncontrollable nature of trauma, which is also reflected in the borderless panel presentation. Siamak recounts the death of Ahmadi and he says, "...in the end he was cut to pieces" (52). Marji's imagination of a man cut into pieces may appear unrealistic. The panel portrays a man cut into seven neat pieces as if he is a doll (fig. 3.10). This clinical presentation of an image from a child's view reflects historical trauma more appallingly and effectively than any form of realism. The frames and the drawings used in the comic form and a child's perspective together reflects the inadequacy of any representation to

illustrate the horror of such an incident. The complete black background of the panel bespeaks the shock received by young Marji's mind listening to the explanation.

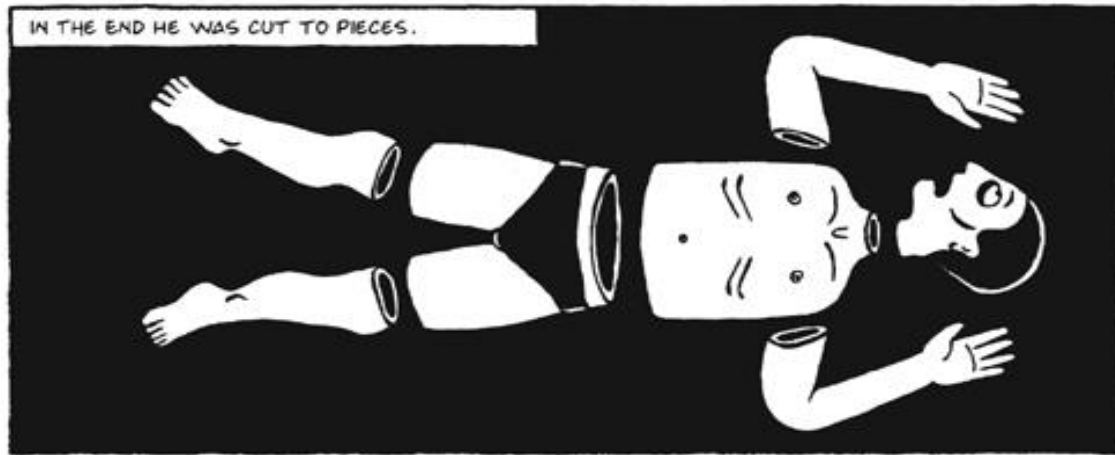


Fig. 3.10. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008. p. 52.

Satrapi takes support from graphic techniques, especially pitch-black panels, borderless panels, or a close-up of a frightened face or welled-up eyes to express strong emotions felt by the characters. An example of a borderless panel is that which gives us information regarding Uncle Anoosh's execution in the form of a newspaper report (70). With Anoosh's death, Marji is devastated and the feeling of her life losing its anchor is symbolically evoked by a visual of a child floating in darkness (71).

The lucid and uncomplicated visual style of *Persepolis* is a reminder that violence and death have become normal affairs in Iran. The ease with which each visual is presented, the simple form of the text, and above all the normalcy with which death and violence are presented are all pointers indicating the need for us to realise that these should never be taken as normal. Even though *Persepolis* presents violence as ordinary, it

implies that one should reject every attempt to consider it normal. The memoir is a true record of the trauma that people had to undergo because of the war. Marji shares with her readers her memories during the Iran-Iraq war of how every time the siren rang, people ran to the basements in fear to shelter themselves from bomb attacks. Their anxiety is explained by how they tried to contact their dear ones through telephones after every bomb attack. They call them to find out if they are alive and safe. Satrapi portrays all their mixed emotions in a single panel (fig.3.11).



Fig. 3.11. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008. p. 104.

The sacrifice that people had to make because of wrong decisions made by a small group of people who constitute the regime is huge. They are ready to exterminate the enemy outside the nation and within. Satrapi captures the enormity of the loss of lives during the war in a single panel that occupies one whole page of the book (fig. 3.12). The drawing may appear too crude – soldiers shooting, bombs blasting, severed limbs and hands, scattered corpses – and appear gory. Marji is seen both at the top left-hand corner as well as at the right-hand corner of the same panel – one, looking at the mass killings happening as if she is watching it from the sky above and the second, reminiscing about the million people who lost their lives in the war. She appears as opening a door as if she wants to escape from all this as she says that all these things are making her sick.



Fig. 3.12. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008. p. 116.

Marji and her family continued to live in Tehran even when the region became the target of Iraqi missiles. This was because her parents knew that her better future was linked to the French education she was receiving and she could get it there alone. Many people left the place in fear and Marji recollects how some people took shelter in the basements of big hotels known for their safety. But destiny is not something that one can control which is proved by the fate of Marji's neighbours, the Baba-Levys.

Marji was not at home when she received news that a missile had hit the Tavanir neighbourhood where she lived and she hurried home. Even though she feels relieved seeing her mother and realising that her family is safe, she at once feels disturbed hearing about the Baba-Levys. They had earlier taken shelter in the basement of a big hotel, but when a missile hit their house, they were at home as it was a Saturday and according to Jewish beliefs, they were supposed to be at home wherever they are on the Jewish Sabbath. When she walks past their house, she sees that the house has become a pile of concrete pieces (142).

A completely blank black panel with only the caption words, "No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger" (142), is used to depict the shock of Marji at seeing her neighbour Neda's hand with her bracelet in the middle of the debris. The shock that came at the realisation that the Baba-Levys were killed in the bomb attack is presented using this panel that occluded visual experience. The two previous panels depict Marji's close-up face. One with her eyes welled up and the other with her palms covering her eyes as if she could no longer look at the scene.

Marji also witnesses the severity of the condition during the war when she visits a hospital along with her father for the treatment of her uncle. Red crescent trucks are

parked in front of the hospital calling for people to donate blood for the wounded soldiers. Marji became upset when she saw wounded soldiers with dismembered limbs inside the hospital. She also hears from the Chief of Staff, Dr. Fathi, about the victims of the chemical weapons. The business tactics of nations can be gathered from the words of Dr. Fathi. She herself experiences the problems faced by patients with critical health conditions who must be taken outside the country for treatment. As the borders are closed because of internal strife, people must get a permit from the Health Ministry to leave the country. The officials are so adamant and they have no sympathy for the sufferings of the common citizens. People's lives are not given any value and Marji loses her uncle because of the indifferent attitude of the government health officials. All their attempts to take their uncle abroad for better treatment go in vain (120-25).

Marji and her friends are forced to live a double life in Iran because of the existing conditions. "Our behavior in public and our behavior in private were polar opposites...this disparity made us schizophrenic," says Marji (307). Satrapi tactfully hints at the psychological dilemma faced by the women in Iran by presenting an ironic juxtaposition of two contrasting images of Marji and her friends (fig. 3.13). Marji and her friends can be seen wearing the veil in the first panel, whereas, in the second panel, they are in modern outfits.



Fig. 3.13. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008. p. 307.

Everywhere there are encroachments by the guards. In order to keep themselves sane, they never missed an opportunity to arrange parties at night. But Marji could recollect a tragedy struck during one such party only with panic. One night when Marji and her friends were in the middle of enjoying a party, the guards arrived unexpectedly, and, in a hurry, the male friends ran to the terrace. To escape from the guards, one of their friends, Farzad, runs, falls off the roof, and dies. The whole incident was so scary that Satrapi describes it with the help of images and not a single word is used in about three pages wherein she recounts the accident (309-11).

Considering the hostile conditions prevailing in Iran and the rebellious nature of Marji, her parents make the tough decision of sending her to Austria. One can imagine how pathetic the condition of Iran is from the fact that Marji's parents are ready to send their fourteen-year-old daughter all alone to a faraway country. Even though the education she received and the modern perspectives she got from her family helped her during her stay in Austria, they were not enough to safeguard her from the bitter experiences she had to face in a foreign country totally different from her own. After struggling for about four years in Austria, she returns to her homeland.

Post-war Iran is also found to be suffocating for Marji. Though the war is over, everything in the streets reminds her of the war. The streets are named after one or the other martyrs and there are sixty-five-foot-high murals presenting martyrs adorned with slogans glorifying them. The panel in which Satrapi presents Marji standing on top of skulls and skeletons symbolically conveys to the readers how unbearable all this is for her as she feels surrounded by the victims of the war (252-53).

The words of Marji's father are a comment on the absurdity of wars and revolutions. "The West sold weapons to both camps and we, we were stupid enough to enter this cynical game. Eight years of war for nothing!" (255). People merely fall into the trap laid for them by those who are in power. Powerful nations are cheating poor nations for their benefit through various tactics. This game is repeated even inside the nations.

Marji feels shattered when she listens to what happened in Iran during those four years when she was in Austria. The number of people who lost their lives in war, those disabled by the war, ravaged by chemical weapons is so enormous, not to mention those who lost their minds from explosions and those who became orphans, widows, and refugees. People lost their lives, their loved ones, and all that they made using their life-long hard work. In comparison, Marji's sufferings in Vienna appeared to be of no importance to her.

Marji's decision to meet Kia, her childhood friend, is another instance of confrontation with the ugly face of war. Kia was forcefully sent to the war front and lost one leg and one arm during military service. Though she finds herself at a loss for words when she first sees him in a wheelchair, they eventually spend the whole afternoon talking and joking. Both never uttered a word about their unfortunate past. This episode of the Marji-Kia meeting teaches her a lesson in life, "...I learned something essential: we can only feel sorry for ourselves when our misfortunes are still supportable...once this limit is crossed the only way to bear the unbearable is to laugh at it" (268). Satrapi's use of irony and satire while presenting even harrowing experiences is commendable.

Marji was devastated to see the condition of war-torn Iran. The strict censorship that was imposed by the regime before the war continued to be followed without any change. The setback she received with the rejection of her project added to her woes and finally led her to make the decision to leave Iran. She and her fiancé have worked for seven months on their dissertation project on a theme park using mythological heroes. Though the project earned high grades at the university, when they met the mayor's deputy for the implementation of the same, he rejected it on the ground that the female mythological characters were unveiled. The enormous cultural constraints that obstructed her growth as an artist and in her own words, "the repressive air" (248) of her country forced her to make the decision of going to a foreign country despite the struggles she had faced earlier in Vienna. The difference is that this time she is mature enough and has learned from her experiences.

In *Baddawi*, Abdelrazaq makes use of various graphic stylistics like gradations of black and white, borderless panels, visual metaphors, facial expressions, body gestures, pictorial runes, pictograms, and so on to convey her message. Abdelrazaq experiments with a wide variety of panels like borderless panels, panels with landscape acting as the borders, inset panels, panels with cloud-like borders, as well as panels in different shapes and sizes. She also deftly uses black shadows and black-and-white backgrounds.

Abdelrazaq's style is simple though she is dealing with a serious and painful subject. Violence, death, and massacre litter the pages of the memoir, but the author has a unique way of presenting it. Most of the time the victims and the perpetrators are presented as silhouettes – black silhouettes in a white background or vice-versa. Through these blank silhouettes, she succeeds in demonstrating the situation without traumatising

the readers. The author's talent in reproducing the themes of violence subtly, but without losing its seriousness, should be appreciated.

*Baddawi* is littered with instances of violence faced by the Palestinian people. A lot of space is devoted to the depiction of the cruelties of the soldiers of Israel and the Lebanese army. The soldiers are indistinctly represented as featureless blank silhouettes with exaggerated grins. The only identifying factors are their guns and caps. The readers are also spared the sight of the gory scenes of the victims of gunfire by the army. The victims are presented as outlines with no features but with some holes in their bodies indicating gunshots. But this does not mean that Abdelrazaq's graphic art falls short of conveying the trauma and pain endured by the Palestinians. There are many instances in the work where we can see the direct as well as the symbolic presentation of events and the physical and emotional aftereffects caused.

There are many painful incidents in Ahmad's life reproduced in the memoir where the author has made efforts to avoid using haunting images which may otherwise be traumatic for the readers. In such instances, Abdelrazaq makes productive use of the gutters. They are not making the meaning vague or obscure; on the contrary, the readers are given the freedom to use their imagination to fill the gaps. As Chute contends, the gutter is "... both a space of stillness – a stoppage in the action, a gap – and a space of movement: it is where, in a sense, the reader makes the passage of time in comics happen" (*Disaster Drawn* 35). Abdelrazaq uses this strategy while unfolding the traumatic experiences of Ahmad's life.

Numerous panels that depict the atrocities of war are given a black background. Many such panels act as splash pages occupying the whole space of the page, setting the

climate of the story. For instance, while talking about Al-Naksa during 1967 in which about 300,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed by the Israeli army, the panel takes up the whole page with a black background (fig. 3.14). Two inset panels describe the incident with the words, "...also began what was to become the longest and most brutal military occupation of modern times in the West Bank and Gaza" (Abdelrazaq 35). The contents of the panel indicate the pathetic condition of Lebanon represented by dilapidated buildings and a cracked road. The road leads to Palestine which is indicated by a signboard and a small outline of the map of Palestine with the tatreez pattern inside. The panel also portrays Ahmad with his back to the readers allowing them to see through his eyes.



Fig. 3.14. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 35.

The fight between Israeli soldiers and the Lebanese army is described at different points in the memoir. In certain circumstances, the Israeli soldiers shot anyone they saw on the street. They raided the headquarters of all the Palestinian resistance movements and killed the leaders. Following the massacre and an incident of fire at police headquarters, tensions arose between the Palestinians and the ruling Lebanese army as the army began interrogating people in the camps.

Ahmad recollects the incidents relating to the massacre, later known as Bus Massacre, that triggered the 15-year Civil War in Lebanon. In the massacre, a bus full of Palestinian refugees was attacked by the Phalangists, the members of the Lebanese Phalanges Party. Here again, Abdelrazaq employs a page spread to portray the incident (fig. 3.15). The panel depicts a bus with broken windows and bullet holes all around. Outlines of dead bodies piled on top of one another lying in front of the bus display the loss of lives in the attack. A visual metonymical representation of the gun shooting is suggested by the outline of a white gun on a black background at the top of the panel. Fumes rising from the flames can also be seen in the panel. Apart from these image icons, three inset panels give short verbal descriptions of the incident including the death and casualty details. The panel occupies the whole page that underlines the gravity of the horrible massacre.



Fig. 3.15. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 80.

The memoir also tells how bomb and shell attacks become common in the lives of the people living in Lebanon. At one point, Ahamad is seen walking through the street that is suddenly hit by a bomb blast. The arrangement of the panels in the middle of the page seems interesting. In the middle, the shape of the panel is that of a semicircle and it is surrounded by five differently shaped panels. The sound of the bomb blast is suggested by the onomatopoeic word, 'BOOM,' and the visual effect is created using the pictogram (99).

Fighter planes flying above the skies became a common sight in Lebanon. People lost their lives and their loved ones due to the constant airstrikes and bomb attacks by Israeli fighter planes. A heart-breaking incident recollected in the pages is the death of Ahmad's cousin Zuheir's wife. The Chapter "The Cluster Bombs" depicts the incident that articulates the ways in which wars affect the common people. The shape and the arrangement of the panels that mention the Israeli fighter planes bombing the camp are quite extraordinary (fig. 3.16). The panels that occupy the page are arranged in such a way that it reminds the reader of a house in the camp. They demonstrate precarious lives in the middle of wars and conflicts. The first panel gives a close-up shot of the dough prepared for baking that is placed on a baking tray. The hands holding the tray are those of Zuheir's wife which the readers come to know of only later. The second and third panels display long and close-up shots of fighter planes in the sky. The fourth and the biggest panel has a black background except for the inset panel that it contains. The fourth panel shows a woman near an oven on one side and the fighter planes dropping the bombs on the other side. The inset panel presents the scene of the bomb blast.

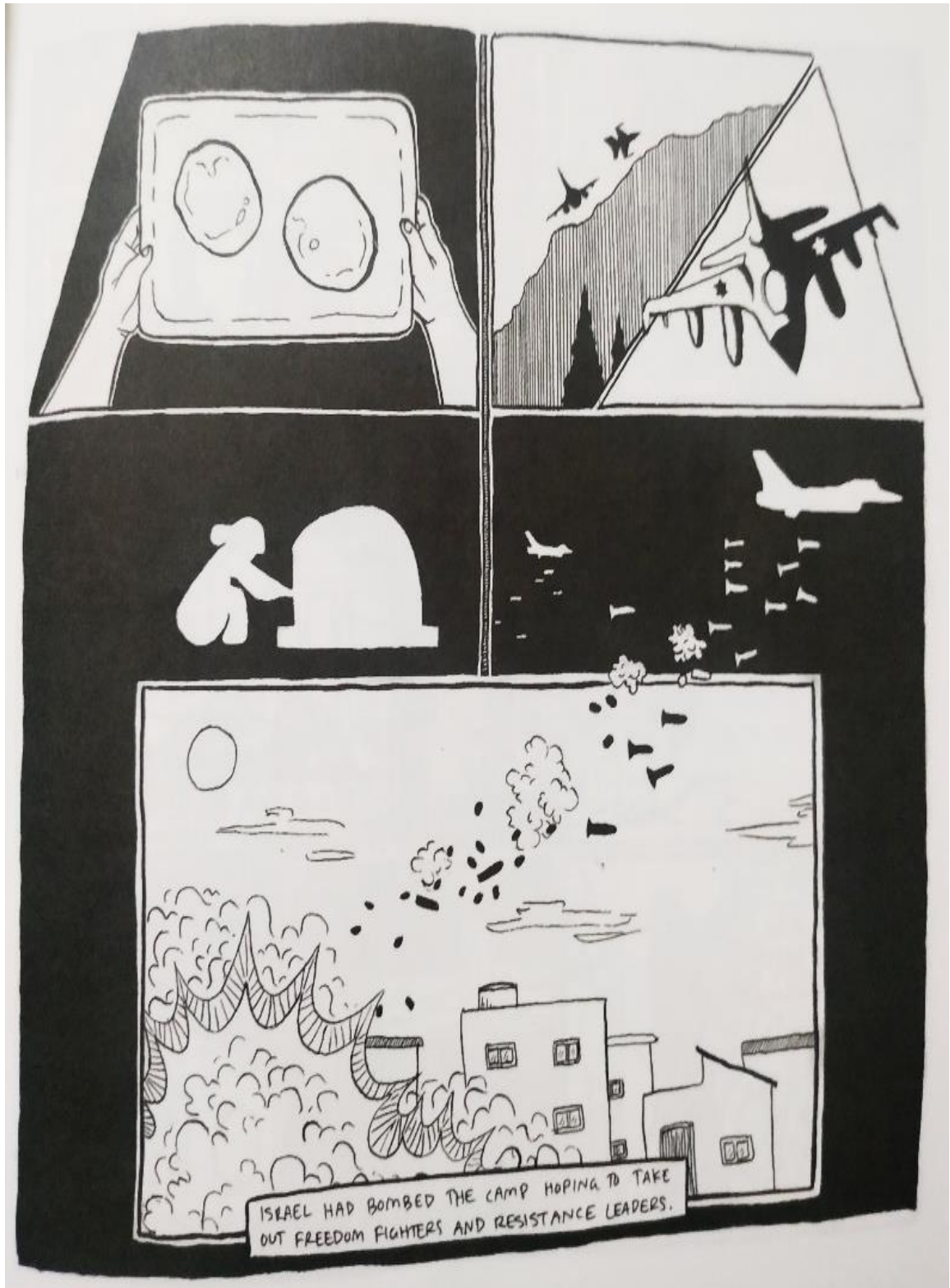


Fig. 3.16. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 63.

The following page reveals the death of Zuheir's wife from a conversation between Ahmad and another character. The whole area where the cluster bombs had fallen looked like a minefield. Ahmad witnesses people trying to clean the area and collecting unexploded bombs. As he himself picks up an unexploded bomb, he thinks about the situation of Zuheir's children and realises that they are still unaware of the tragedy that happened to their mother. In the last panel of the page is the picture of a bomb with the words, "Made in U. S. A." (64) lying in the foreground and Ahmad walking away in the background as he is asked to leave because he is too young to help pick up the bombs. The entire episode, with the interweaving of visual and verbal, evokes the psychological damage, trauma, and anxiety caused by war and violence.

Ahmad faces a painful loss when Abu Muhammad gets killed in another bomb blast. Abu Muhammad was one of those people in the camp who cared for Ahmad when he returns to Baddawi away from his parents and siblings to continue with his studies. He goes to him whenever he feels bad and needs emotional support. Abu Muhammad owned a local butcher shop and he always gave him free food saying that he is like his son as his own son is going to marry Ahmad's sister. Once when Ahmad felt emotionally disturbed, he went to meet him. After talking to him and feeling much better he left the shop. Moments later, there was a shell attack and he received the news that Abu Muhammed had been killed in the attack. He felt devastated and the mental trauma that he underwent because of this loss is unfathomable (99).

Abdelrazaq delineates Ahmad's traumatised mind in a page spread (fig. 3.17). The panel has a single-line caption written in white letters on a pitch-black background. The caption, "He slept with a knife under his pillow" (100) and the page spread is

symptomatic of Ahmad's disturbed mind. All that haunts Ahmad's mind gets a representation in this panel. Black silhouettes of unknown figures in the form of rising tides can be seen coming toward Ahmad who is lying crouched on the floor. He is surrounded by other threatening factors like a big tank, a pile of dead bodies, fighter planes dropping bombs from the skies, and rising fumes from bomb blasts. The panels on the following page also are a continuation of this page spread. In the first panel is the crouched figure of Ahmad surrounded by tide-like black shadows with extended hands trying to reach him. The following panel shows those hands completely encircling Ahmad and the third panel is a blank one. His life in Baddawi in the middle of the war and his personal losses made him realise that there is no safe place for Palestinians.



Fig. 3.17. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 100.

Graphic literature opens a new window to understanding traumatic experiences that are too difficult to express. Sometimes words fall short of describing trauma caused by several issues like natural calamities or man-made atrocities. Graphic narratives go a step further with their pairing of the verbal and the visual in sharing the traumatic memories experienced by humanity across various parts of the world. Chute says about images used in comics that they "... appear in fragments, just as they do in actual recollection; this fragmentation, in particular, is a prominent feature of traumatic memory" (*Graphic Women* 4). This discontinuity also testifies to the plight of survival under adverse circumstances where a chronological act of recollection may not be always possible.

Recollecting haunting and painful experiences is not easy. Expression of the same through the graphic format is preferred because of its flexible nature which can handle myriad subjects with a tinge of humour. More importantly, as many of the lived experiences of the memorialists are etched in their mind in the form of images, the graphic format provides the platform to present them as such.

### **The Verbo-Visual Amalgamation of History and Memory**

The personal merges seamlessly with the historical in *Persepolis*. The readers are given an account of historically significant events and they are presented from a personal perspective. The book affirms that the knowledge of our past should be preserved because it has an impact and meaning in the present. It is interesting to observe that the study of the past events as it is received and interpreted in the present which is termed as 'mnemohistory' (*Moses* 8) by Assmann can be applied to Marji's memories in order to

understand the significance of the work. The focus is not on just knowing the past for its own sake but on its later impact and reception.

Matters concomitant to veiling form a crucial chapter in the history of Iran. Veiling was a custom that was passed down from past generations. In Iran, women had to face a lot of problems because of the various contradictory decisions taken by their rulers which led to several internal conflicts and revolutions. None of them had given any consideration to the will of the women who had to follow these rules which made them mere puppets in the hands of the state and the rulers.

Political implications behind veiling and unveiling are discussed by Ashraf Zahedi in her essay, “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran.” She observes how each regime used “... encouragement, legal measures and physical force to impose its political will on Iranian women” (250). Every time a new ruler came into power, a new law on veiling was passed and each law “... deprived Iranian women of choice about their identity, self-presentation, and place in society” (263).

The details regarding the history of veiling in Iran can be gathered from historical documents. But then, what makes a graphic memoir dealing with the same subject different from historical documents should be investigated to highlight its importance. The episode titled “The Veil” appears twice in *Persepolis*, once in each volume. It signifies the importance of the veil which becomes the cultural icon of Iranian society. Both episodes talk about how Marji is forced to wear the veil, first when she was a schoolgirl and second when she finally decides to return to Iran after four years of struggle in Austria. Marji and her friends are introduced to the readers for the first time

in the opening chapter wearing veils and discussing the impact of forced veiling in their lives. The incidents related to forced veiling and unveiling in Iran form part of the history of the country. The memoir looks at it from the viewpoint of the personal experience of young Marji.

The overlapping of the personal and the historical can be observed in *Persepolis*. For instance, in the Chapter “The Cigarette,” a single page is divided into three tiers, the first and last tiers present scenes from the basement of Marji’s house, which represents the personal space. The panel in the middle presents the execution site wherein the blindfolded prisoners to be executed for speaking against the regime are lined up against a wall (fig. 3.18). Marji’s mother scolds her for skipping class and going out with her friends. She gets really upset and feels that her mother is a spoilsport. As part of her protest against her mother’s actions, she smokes a cigarette that she had stolen from Uncle Anoosh and she even calls her a dictator. The presentation of this incident that happens in the personal space of the basement of Marji’s house is interspersed with a gruesome incident of prisoners being executed for protesting the regime. This highly political and historical episode is sandwiched between scenes depicting Marji’s personal experience. Implementing this blending technique, the author is drawing a parallel between these two events which can be interpreted as an attempt to express her protest against the barbarous measures taken by the regime.



Fig. 3.18. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008, p. 117.

The readers are also given a clear picture of the sufferings that the common people of Iran faced during the Iran-Iraq war. Such narratives can even challenge official histories and explore the relationship between personal memories and official history. *Persepolis* is thus about the merging of individual and historical. History is presented in creative and visually striking ways. The visual and verbal intersections evoke the possibilities of multiple interpretations as well.

In historical documents, the loss of lives during war appears as mere numbers and dead soldiers are glorified, but the memoir gives a different picture that provides an intimate and close look at the problems and the consequences faced by common citizens during a revolution or war. For instance, the episode in which Marji talks about what happened in her school when her teacher asked them to write about the war is an eye-opener. Her classmate Pardisse who lost her father in the war wrote a touching letter to her father promising to take care of her mother and little brother. The reaction of Pardisse when Marji tried to console her by saying that her father is a hero and she should be proud of him is enough to fade the glory that many attach to martyrdom and self-sacrifice during wars. She says, "I wish he were alive and in jail rather than dead and a hero" (86).

During the war, people had to face not just food and fuel shortages but also flee for their lives. Marji's mother's friend Mali and her family lost their house and everything they had and took shelter in Marji's home. The newspapers are filled with photos of martyrs which unsettled young Marji. But amid all this, she had to comply with certain meaningless rituals at her school like lining up and mourning for the martyrs, marching, and beating their hearts as part of the religious ceremonies of the country. She says that she could recognise the attempts made by the regime and other officials to

glorify the war and martyrs only because of the secular education she received earlier. She also lays bare details regarding how families are forced to send their boys to the war front as soldiers by giving them false promises and instilling superstitious beliefs. Marji gets to know about this from her own experiences and from others like their maid Mrs. Nasrine and cousin Shahab who is in military service.

Mrs. Nasrine told Marji and her mother how her son who is just fourteen years received a plastic key painted in gold from school promising that if they join the war and are lucky enough to die, these keys would get them to heaven. The hollowness of such false promises is laid bare by Satrapi using an image that shows an explosion in a minefield (fig. 3.19). Ironically, the image presents human figures as black silhouettes scattered here and there with the painted key still around their necks. Many parents sent their young sons abroad in order to safeguard them from joining the army and are living in the dreaded fear that they would never ever meet them again. Marji's uncle who had sent his oldest son to Holland died without being able to see his son just as he had feared. Many others live in constant fear and are petrified every time they hear about young boys who are of their kid's age getting slaughtered on the war front. All these personal fears and sufferings are never mentioned in any history texts.



Fig. 3.19. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, Vintage Books, 2008, p. 102.

Marji gets to know about the pathetic condition on the war front from the account given to her by Shahab. He said that every day he sees buses full of kids arriving to join the war. They targeted mainly kids from poor families and convinced them that they would get all things in the afterlife. They mesmerise them with patriotic songs and toss them into the battlefield only to lose their lives. The government took drastic measures to keep the people on their side like filling the walls with belligerent slogans and glorifying martyrs (101).

Abdelrazaq's memoir contains many instances where there is an interspersing of memory and history. The personal experiences narrated have socio-political connotations as the narration involves the historically significant events of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Lebanese Civil War. The author makes it clear in the "Preface" that the preservation of the past is an act of resistance for the Palestinians. Abdelrazaq participates in this act of resistance by archiving the past and preserving it through the publication of her father's memories in the form of a touching graphic memoir.

In *Baddawi*, there is the reconstruction of the childhood and adolescent days of the author's father in the book. Equal space is occupied by episodes of historical relevance like The Nakba and The Naksa or The Six-Day War and the Lebanon Civil War. *Baddawi* opens with The Nakba, a turning point in the history of Palestine and the life of Palestinians. The event which is described by Abdelrazaq as "our catastrophe" (18) became a turning point in the family of the author. It made millions of Palestinians, including his grandparents and parents, refugees. Abdelrazaq's father, Ahmad, who is the protagonist of *Baddawi* was born in a refugee camp and remained a refugee all through his life. Ahmad's story is sketched on the larger canvas of the history of Palestine.

The story opens with a description of what happened on 29 October 1948, the day on which Israeli soldiers came to Safsaf as part of their ethnic cleansing of Palestine that started in 1947. There is a convergence of history and personal experience at the very opening of the memoir. Ahmad's grandparents, Jiddo and Teta, lived in the Safsaf village and they were among those millions of people who had to flee their homeland running for their lives from the Israeli soldiers. In the "Introduction," Abdelrazaq portrays Ahmad's grandparents, among other villagers, leaving Safsaf under the cover of night to a refugee

camp in Northern Lebanon. It was in the refugee camp in Northern Lebanon named Baddawi that Ahmad was born (17-18). His parents who left their village in the hope of returning to it soon were never able to set foot there in their lifetime. They represent all those Palestinians with the same fate of spending their whole lives yearning to return to their homeland. Living a life of exile, bearing the tag of a refugee, is never easy.

Ahmad's struggles also started at a very tender age. Abdelrazaq takes the readers to the land of Palestine through the description of the historical incidents that changed the life of the citizens of Palestine.

The struggles of the Palestinians which continues to date can be gathered from newspaper articles and television news. On the contrary, presenting incidents from the view of a personal experience gives a different dimension to them. The form of comics, especially the drawings, makes history visible or "hypervisible" (Nayar 59). The multimodality of the comics enables the expression of histories beyond cultural, national, or even language boundaries. While examining historical incidents for its own sake is important, paying attention to how these events are comprehended later should also be scrutinised. Experience enhances the significance of an event when it is recollected and analysed later. Mnemohistorical study enables discerning of how the next generations receive and interpret memories of the past, highlighting the importance of learning lessons from the past.

### **Memories of a Life of Exile**

The personal memories depicted in the memoirs throw light upon many unknown and dark areas that have not been represented in any historical documents. It reveals the most intimate and personal side of the life of people who have suffered and are still living

their lives bearing the aftereffects of wars and other such disputes. Living a life of exile or refugee life can be a consequence of war. The feeling of dislocation, struggles of assimilation, identity crisis, longing to return to one's home country, and so on are all problems that follow.

The adversities of living a life of exile are also evident in the pages of *Persepolis*. Marji's memories of her life in Austria, the cultural shock she receives there, her struggles to assimilate, and her eventual return to Iran only to leave it once again to France make up the second part of *Persepolis*. She had to face a lot of difficulties in Austria – a new language, a new culture, and a new environment.

The cultural shock she receives in Austria makes her life there a real struggle. Marji recalls how while in Austria she strived to assimilate into the Western culture. She tries to run away from everything that connects her to her country. She adopts a method of escapism and attempts to detach herself from anything that relates to her home country. As time goes by, she realises that running away from who you are and what you are is not a solution to anything. She accepts the truth that despite all her attempts to make herself appear a different person, she cannot live a peaceful life. She fails miserably in her efforts to forget about her past and the truth dawns upon her that it is useless to pretend to be a different person. The experiences teach her the lesson that one should learn from the past, take what is good, and discard the bad.

Though Marji takes the decision to leave her home country because of the hostile conditions there, at least she is able to take control of her life. There are millions of people in many parts of the world who are forced to leave their homeland for umpteen absurd reasons. Some of them succeed in adapting themselves to the new atmosphere, but

there are many more who struggle their whole life in vain. Whichever the case, the yearning to return to their country which they can call their own keeps haunting them. Such a story is shared by Abdelrazaq through *Baddawi* which is a repository of Palestinian memory. Apart from the difficulties of life in a refugee camp, Ahmad had to face segregation just because he was a refugee.

The difficulties of an exile life and the longing for the homeland are presented graphically in *Baddawi*. Ahmad's attempts to imagine Palestine, his homeland that he knows only from the stories told to him by his mothers and relatives, is one such instance (fig. 3.20). While presenting such images, Abdelrazaq has included patterns of *tatreez* as they connect "... exile experiences, memory, and Palestine" (Porrás Sánchez 158).

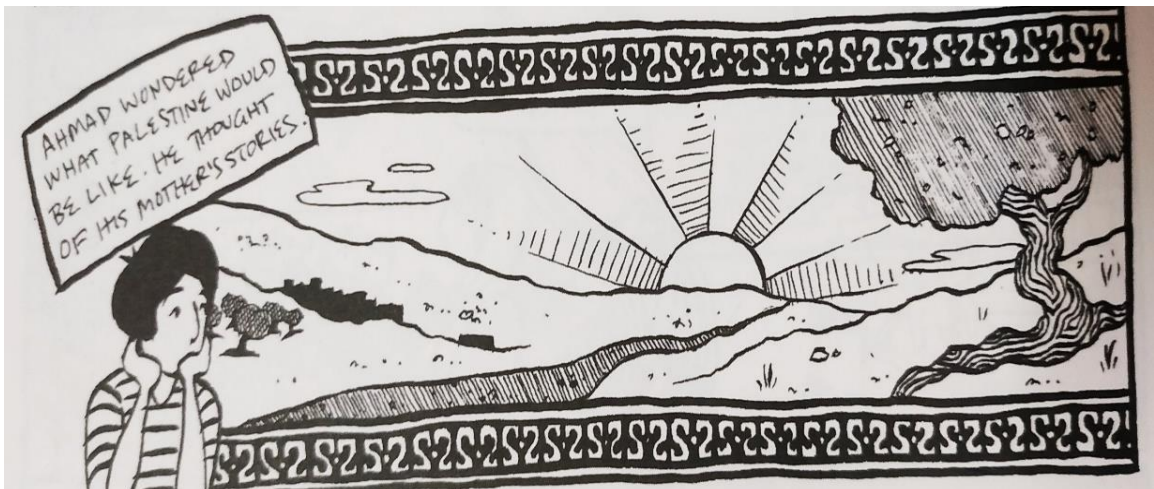


Fig. 3.20. Leila Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, Just World Books, 2015, p. 34.

As we reach the conclusion of *Baddawi*, Ahmad is shown to be in a dilemma. He has to choose between staying in Lebanon or leaving for America to start a new life. And he sets off for the United States leaving the readers with several unanswered questions. His visa only granted him permission to enter the United States, but not to return to

Lebanon. However, with the lessons he learned from his life in Lebanon, he decides to take any risk to get out of there and pursue his studies. For Ahmad, as Sánchez Porras remarks, "... the immediate threat of violence disappears, although the exiled condition remains," (156). Considering the bitter experiences that Marji, the protagonist of *Persepolis*, had after leaving her home country and living in Austria, the readers are left with even deeper concerns for Ahmad. He might also have faced struggles in a foreign country where he would only be accepted as a foreigner despite all his attempts to assimilate.

The life and experiences Ahamad shared are insights into the world of refugees. The feelings of alienation, dislocation, anxiety, separation from family, and trauma are all part of refugee life. The memoir focuses on the life of a refugee child and these feelings and emotions inseparable from such experiences are subtly presented using visual icons by Abdelrazaq. The author emerges as the spokesperson for the victims of violence whose stories are often silenced.

## **Conclusion**

Graphic narratives have produced new visual icons and ways of expression. The visual-verbal form of witness narration presented from a young adult's perspective in the select memoirs "... are able to draw what cannot and has not been represented in official visual documents and historical archives" (Cheurfa 364). Word-image hybridity expands the scope of archiving and documentation. Furthermore, the numerous techniques unique to them can be exploited to the maximum to project emotions without losing their essence. This makes them an apt medium to express painful and traumatic memories.

The visual grammar of comics when combined with life-writing unfolds the possibility of creating numerous visual mnemonic devices in the form of images, icons, and symbols which avail meaning of their own in relation to the context. The graphic memoirs draw attention to the problems faced by children living in countries torn by wars as the protagonists re-articulate them and crystallise memories in narrative panels leaving possibilities for the reader's participation in gutters. The evidence of trauma, violence, and anxiety at the heart of the war-ridden countries is crammed into the space of panels to display as "... comics, with its proliferation of frames, suggests plenitude" (Chute, *Disaster Drawn* 16). Through the visual-verbal tropes, they mirror the events that hampered the lives of millions of people that continue to have crippling effects on the lives of the present as well as future generations. These memories gathered from childhood days force us to go beyond mere numbers denoting death and images of countless faceless refugees to know and feel empathy for them. Subsequently, they reconstruct history and combat historical erasure.

## Chapter 4

### Graphic Mnemohistory on War: A Second-Generation Perspective

#### Introduction

The recent advancement of memory studies as a field of inquiry in academic and popular importance is mainly because of the Holocaust and the work of and about “the second generation” or “the generation after” (Hirsch *Generation 3*). The possibilities to apprehend historical or traumatic events become less as years pass by and as the witness survivors leave our midst. Fundamental questions concerning history, memory, and identity engendered the need for new forms of representations to discuss the same.

The chapter investigates the prospects that unfold, using graphic narratives to share transgenerational memories that involve pain, unrest, trauma, death, and personal losses. It focuses on the second-generation experiences and interpretations of personal memories of struggles endured during times of war and revolution. It underlines the combination of history and memory in graphic memoirs by examining the same as applied in Spiegelman’s *The Complete Maus* and G. B. Tran’s *Vietnamerica: A Family’s Journey*.

#### Background Study

Murrey and Millet, in the “Preface” to *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, describe World War II as “... the deadliest conflict in modern history” (vii). The horrors of the war surpassed the worst battles in world history. Military operations continued from the Battle of Kursk in July 1943 to the Crimea in early May 1944. In June 1944, the Soviet forces attacked the German Army and after June 6, 1944, a similar war

began on the Western Front. The assault of the Anglo-American forces on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day initiated military operations in northern Europe that lasted till May 1945. Adolf Hitler pursued a revolution with the aim of eliminating the Jews altogether. The Nazis had murdered at least 12 million non-German civilians and prisoners by the end of the war (vii). “The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC defines the Holocaust as the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies during World War II” (Friedman 1).

Several authors like Andrew Wiest, James Edward Westheider, Kevin Ruane, and Mark Philip Bradley among others have written books detailing the history, reasons, and results of the Vietnam War. The war was fought between North Vietnam supported by communist countries like the Soviet Union and China, and South Vietnam supported by anti-communist countries like the United States. The United States wanted to prevent a Communist takeover of South Vietnam by the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese (Westheider 107). American involvement in the war and other atrocities resulted in the death of millions of civilians. Nearly 5,000,000 people lost their lives during the conflicts in and around Vietnam that ended in 1975 (Wiest 85).

Spiegelman’s *Maus* is a seminal work that archives Holocaust memories. The critical success of the work paved the way for the future generation of comic and graphic novel writers to experiment with novel subjects in graphic form. *Maus* is not only a story of the survival of the Holocaust by Spiegelman’s parents, but it also deals with the subject of how the children of the Holocaust survivors suffer from the burden of their parent’s struggle for survival. The text is an attempt to study history through

commemoration. James E. Young observes in *At the Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, "Some critics like Michael Foucault have suggested that because every record of history, even the archival, is also a representation of history and thus subject to all of a culture's mediating forces, the study of history can only be the study of commemorative forms" (11).

*Vietnamerica* retraces the experiences of Tran's family during the Vietnam War followed by their life as refugees. Through the stories of Tran's extended family, the memoir presents the narrative of a family living amidst a war. It portrays the uncertainties of life in times of war enduring the painful feelings of isolation and displacement. The hybrid nature of comics is engaged to construct a fragmented family story to unearth the history that stretches across several generations.

Studies by Marianne Hirsch, James E. Young, Hillary Chute, Scott McCloud, and Thierry Groensteen on the various aspects of comics and graphic memoirs are applied to analyse the works. The transgenerational nature of traumatic memories is analysed by implementing Hirsch's concept of postmemory. Applying Hayden White's studies on historical texts, the study will construe the significance of historical narratives in archiving the past.

### **Literature Review**

Young, in "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and After-images of History," praises the potential of the graphic medium that succeeds in looking at the Holocaust in *Maus* as history under the present condition (678). Quoting Young in his article, "No Time Like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*,"

Erin McGlothlin argues how temporal blurring occurs in *Maus* resulting in the linking of past and present (179).

Hirsch's *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* introduces the term, postmemory, with reference to the impact of the Holocaust on the second generation. She investigates photography's iconic power, which "... function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world" (36). She argues that the inclusion of photographs in *Maus* creates a space for postmemory. Her *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* is an influential work that analyses the experiences of second-generation survivors who inherit the traumatic history of their parents. Similarly, Stanislav Kolar applies the concept of intergenerational transmission of trauma and postmemory to analyse *Maus* and concludes that the transfer of trauma from parents to their children is not a mechanical act, but it has its social, cultural, and psychological dynamics resulting in a transformed trauma (237).

Candida Rifkind examines the multi-layered narrative structure of *Maus* in "Drawn from Memory: Comics Artists and Intergenerational Auto/biography." She contends that Spiegelman uses the visual language of comics to present the multi-layered "... process of listening, imagining, visualizing, drawing, and narrating a collaborative auto/biography of father and son" (402). Chute, who also examines the narrative medium of the work, argues how the comic medium, with its unique features, allowed Spiegelman to rebuild history interlaced with different temporalities ("The Shadow" 220). Jeanne C. Ewert argues for the need to have more studies on the textual devices used in *Maus* which clearly establishes it as a Holocaust narrative.

How the verbal-visual medium helps Spiegelman to fill in the blank spaces and re-interpret history is the subject discussed in Naila Sahar's "Multimodal Historiography in Spiegelman's *Maus* and *MetaMaus*." She emphasises *Maus* as an attempt to probe into the past and examine how past incidents are passed down to the next generations playing a crucial role in moulding the present (73). The advantages of re-interpretation of history and the use of mimesis at the levels of content and form are explored by Andreas Huyssen. He maintains that Spiegelman uses the mice-and-cat representation of the Holocaust as a distancing mechanism to escape the stereotyping of certain ethnic groups (75-76).

A reading of Dominic Davies and Candida Rifkind's *Documenting Trauma in Comics: Traumatic Pasts, Embodied Histories, and Graphic Reportage* facilitates a broad and in-depth reading of the representation of traumatic pasts in graphic form. A collection of critical writings by Ian Hague, Nicola Streeten, and Candida Rifkind among others, the book initiates a discussion on the complex trajectories of research into the relationship between comics, traumatic memories, and witness documentation (9).

*Maus* is a work that has attracted a lot of critical attention. Many aspects related to it became a topic of literary and academic discussion. There are books and articles written on the narrative structure, historical aspect as well as traumatic postmemory present in it, but not much critical attention is received by the mnemohistorical aspect presented in graphic form that explores the distinctive combination of history and memory. More studies should be made on how the stylistics of graphic form can best present the fragmented transgenerational traumatic memories of the past that affect the life and sense of identity of generations that follow.

Caroline Kyungah Hong studies *Vietnamerica* as a transnational and transhistorical graphic memoir. She explores the contribution made by *Vietnamerica* to Asian American literary and cultural studies and demonstrates how this graphic work proves to be an example of the potential of Asian American graphic narrative (12). Harriet Earle discusses two graphic works namely, GB Tran's *Vietnamerica* and Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* in "A New Face for an Old Fight: Reimagining Vietnam in Vietnamese-American Graphic Memoirs" to elaborate on how the new age of comics storytelling, has embraced memoir as the central genre. In her opinion, comics presenting contrasting perspectives on conflict give voice to those who are silenced by the mainstream narratives of conflict (103). Earle also investigates the specialties of Tran's artistic style and use of flashbacks in her article, "Traumatic Analepsis and *Ligne Claire* in GB Tran's *Vietnamerica*."

Like Spiegelman's *Maus*, *Vietnamerica* also makes use of photographs and maps highlighting their historical value. Following the ideas put forward by Hirsch on the significance of the maps and photographs, Mary A. Goodwin investigates the special historical value of maps, photographs, and other topographical images used in *Vietnamerica*. Alaina Kaus argues *Vietnamerica* is proof that the comic medium is apt for dealing with subjects like self-reflexivity. She adds that it is also a reminder that total knowledge of the past is impossible and readers should think beyond singular representations of history (17). Long Bui applies Hirsch's concept of postmemory to *Vietnamerica* in the article, "The Refugee Repertoire: Performing and Staging the Postmemories of Violence." The article explores how the children of refugees use literary works to represent post-war trauma in their own terms (113).

## Historiographic Narratives

The possible presence of subjective and fictional elements in historiographic narratives that stand against the objective and factual elements that are considered pivotal in understanding history posed criticisms against them. Hayden White in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* discusses this aspect in detail. He speaks along the lines of R. G. Collingwood that in order to understand a historical record, which to a great extent will be incomplete and fragmentary, historians will use “the constructive imagination” (83). This will help them to know what must have been the case by utilising the available evidence (83-84).

White maintains that it is not easy for anyone to understand a historical event if presented as mere facts. In order to make it comprehensible to the readers, the historian should trace the story contained in the evidence or hidden beneath it. Only then would a historian be able to give a plausible explanation for the body of historical evidence. This process of weaving a story out of the collected pieces of evidence is possible by “... the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motif repetition, variation of tone, and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like – in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. (84)

This entails that a historical document may contain certain fictional elements and involve the imagination of the historian. If a historian is doing this to make the historical events that he is presenting through his work comprehensible, one cannot belittle a literary work dealing with a historically relevant incident by saying that it contains fictional elements or that it is subjective. Besides, the memoirists are not claiming that

their works are history, instead, their works are to be considered as attempts to make sense of the complex past and preserve historical memory.

### **Rebuilding History through Comics**

The visual-verbal strategy of graphic narratives has the capacity to convey emotions and feelings more effectively utilising the various stylistic devices distinctive to comic form. The pain and trauma lurking behind the images used in the graphic memoirs aid in expressing the struggles of survival faced by people during wars and revolutions to a great extent. Graphic narratives "... make the roiling lines of history readable" (Chute, *Disaster Drawn* 233). *Maus* and *Vietnamerica* provide fine examples of how even a single visual can knock the readers out of their comfort zone and force them to think outside the box. There are immense possibilities that this medium offers in presenting complex subjects in a nuanced manner. One such area that requires deeper examination is the reconstruction of history along the lines of memory deploying the resources of the graphic medium.

The process of rebuilding history is an agonising experience for Vladek. This painful reliving of history is bloodletting. This is reflected in the subtitle of the book, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I: My Father Bleeds History*. He even admits to Artie (the name by which Spiegelman identifies himself in the memoir) towards the end of the second volume of *Maus* that he tried his best to forget all the memories of war until Artie approached him with his questions about the past (Spiegelman, *Maus* 258). Reading along the lines of Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Young contends, "*Maus* also suggests itself as a model for what I would like to call 'received history' – a narrative hybrid that interweaves both events of the Holocaust and the ways they are passed down to us"

(“Holocaust” 669). Thus, this piece of historical memory presented in the form of a graphic memoir is an attempt to understand the complex history of the Holocaust that defies any attempt at definition.

The comic book format provides ample opportunities to connect the story to the past. For instance, in Chapter 1, “The Sheik”, the page where Artie is depicted as insisting on Vladek that he should tell him about his past, Spiegelman packs the panels with pointers to the past. It includes not only the conversation about Vladek’s past but also other indicators like the camp tattoo on Vladek’s hand, and the framed photograph of Anja (*Maus* 14).

Historical graphic narratives today have become powerful tools to engage in questions related to serious political issues. According to Chute,

... the graphic narrative is a contemporary form that is helping to expand the cultural map of historical representation... Epitomizing the possibilities of the new comics form, *Maus*, interlaced with different temporalities whose ontological weave it frames and questions through spatial aesthetics, rebuilds history through a potent combination of words and images that draws attention to the tenuous and fragile footing of the present. (“Shadow” 214, 220)

Tran’s *Vietnamerica* is his attempt to rearticulate a historical narrative from a personal point of view. Using memory, with all its gaps and breaks, Tran attempts to heal the fractures in his family by taking a journey to the past and presenting it before posterity to read and understand. GB (the name by which Tran identifies himself in the memoir) is trying to get hold of a past by returning several times to those days travelling

along the memory lane of several characters. The innumerable graphic techniques, especially the use of visuals, make it an apt medium to present a story harbouring on postmemory.

The traumatic memories shared by others in bits and pieces are difficult for Tran to understand which in turn makes his task of giving it a structure to reproduce it in any aesthetic form an uphill task. Groensteen proposes that in a graphic novel, every panel is connected to each other like a network. It is here in terms of this network that “braiding” (145) happens. He explains that “... braiding deploys in two dimensions, requiring them to collaborate with each other: synchronically, that of the co-presence of panels on the surface of the same page; and diachronically, that of the reading, which recognizes in each new term of a series a recollection or an echo of an anterior term” (147). This implies that the inherently fragmented form of comics proves to be an apt medium to tell GB’s story which is fragmented and complex in nature. Despite its fragmented nature, the comic form offers possibilities to connect segments with each other.

### **The Second-Generation Survivor and Effects of Postmemory**

The literature of the second generation projects the continuing consequences of historical events that demand urgent attention. Literature produced by the children of genocide survivors acts as valuable evidence of history. Studies based on such memoirs reveal the complex psychological problems faced by the second generation. Marita Grimwood’s *Holocaust Literature of the Second Generation* attempts a study of the writings of the second generation highlighting the intergenerational dimension of the Holocaust memory and engages in close textual readings of such writings.

The graphic narrative *Maus* is based on interviews that Spiegelman conducted with his father Vladek, a Holocaust survivor. Vladek's recollected memories are presented by Spiegelman in a verbal-visual medium that made its mark in the history of the comic world. It archives the horrors of the concentration camps and the struggles for survival faced by Vladek and his wife Anja during their life in Poland in the years 1933 to 1944. The memoir is also a larger canvas that portrays myriad issues that arise related to the Holocaust and World War II as well as the troubles faced by Spiegelman in the creation and publication of the book.

The memoir should also be studied in terms of the transgenerational traumatic memories inherited by second-generation survivors. There is no doubt that the trauma and pain directly experienced by first-generation survivors are unfathomable. Artie, who is a representative of the second generation, is also a survivor of another sort. Though he was born after the Holocaust, the story reveals that he is burdened by the trauma that he has inherited from his parents. Hirsch states that second-generation survivors suffer from postmemory which asserts that the experiences of their parents have been "... transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (*Generation 5*). She has also made an extensive study of how the inclusion of "... family photos, and the familial aspects of postmemory would tend to diminish distance, bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation" (38).

Both Artie and GB, at a particular point in their lives, set out in search of their family history. The inherited trauma starts to create issues related to their identity and knowingly or unknowingly generates in them a desire to go in search of their family's past. Artie, who has a strained relationship with his father, finds even his father's silence

difficult to cope with. The interview with his father by Artie happens in 1970 at Rego Park where his father is spending his life in old age. Vladek recollects his life in Poland during the years 1933 to 1944. *Maus* presents not only the story of Artie's interviews with his father but also the struggles he faced during the production and publication of the book.

The lives of the second-generation representatives are weighed down by the effects of postmemory. They not only witness the aftereffects of these traumatic experiences of their parents, but they also become the recipients of transgenerational trauma. The traumatic memories of parents get transferred to the children and it becomes an overwhelming burden on them. Artie's feeling of guilt is a consequence of this. The memories of the post-war generation about the Holocaust are those that the victims have passed down to them in the form of recollections made by them in their diaries and memoirs. They will remember the time they spent in the company of survivors listening to their appalling stories so much so that the lives and losses of the survivors become part of their own life stories (Young, "Holocaust" 669-670; Hirsch, *Generation 5*).

*Vietnamerica* presents GB's family story through a multiplicity of voices and in Tran's complex visual style. Since these multiple voices that recollect memories of their pasts are presented in the memoir as GB's attempt to build up his family's history, the whole narrative appears complex. There is no linear narration of the story that happens in the book. A linear chronological development of the story is not possible in most cases that present a traumatic past. This is because the first-generation survivor who tells the incidents of the past, because of the emotional distress that they have undergone, could not recollect the incidents chronologically. Only some of the pages of *Vietnamerica* are

numbered which is also an indicator that this "... non-sequencing meshes together different parts related to wartime and post-war life" (Bui 126). Certain pages that are numbered are also left blank which points to the possibilities available for postmemory generation to fill in using their understanding of the past.

Several factors compel these second-generation representatives to go in search of the past of their parents. Their strained relationship with their parents is just one of the reasons. Sometimes other unexplainable reasons also urge them to know about what their parents and grandparents had to suffer in the past. The desire to know about their original homeland to which many of them do not even have any emotional attachment is also an outcome of this inexplicable reason. At certain points in their lives, they set out in search of the story of their parents which they gradually realise have an intricate connection with their own self-realisation and identity.

GB is a Vietnamese-American, who was born and brought up in South Carolina and Arizona. He is the youngest of four siblings. His parents, Tri Huu Tran and Dzung Chung Tran fled to the United States after the fall of Saigon in 1975. GB did not have any intention to know about Vietnam until he made a trip there with his parents for the first time when both his grandparents died within months of each other. For most of his life, GB was ignorant of his family history and never made any attempts to know Vietnamese history and culture. When GB's father gave him a book about the Vietnam War as his graduation gift, he just threw it in his storage. He admits, "Born in America, I was clueless about their lives in **that Vietnam**" (Tran 207). The author uses the letters in bold to refer to Vietnam in times of the Vietnam War.

GB's paternal grandmother Le Nhi says to him that he should ask questions about his parents' past as there is a lot about his parents that he did not know. Her words that they will not be alive forever to answer his questions act as a reminder to him (Tran). Many may have to face questions intrinsically connected to their self and identity at some point in their lives, the answers to which may be crucial in understanding each one's life. They must go in search of answers to these questions that lie in the past. GB also finally resolves to learn about his family history which he does by listening to the memories recollected by his mother, father, and other friends and relatives. This makes *Vietnamerica* an excellent example of postmemory. From the memories recollected by his parents, and relatives, GB tries to build up his family history which to him is like solving a jigsaw puzzle.

In the memoir *Baddawi*, which is discussed in the previous chapter, the author is also a representative of the second generation. She deals with her father's experiences in the book, but she never appears in the book like Artie in *Maus* or GB in *Vietnamerica*. It is her understanding of her father's past that she portrays in words and images, though her father is presented as the protagonist of the book. Thus, technically *Baddawi* is also an example of postmemory.

The first generation lives their entire life bound by what they have experienced. The scars left on their psyche are reflected in their actions, behaviour, language, and even in their thoughts. Their emotional distress makes it too difficult for them to testify and their valuable experiences and stories get gradually forgotten with the passage of time. Hence, it is up to their children to preserve the memories which constitute valuable pages in history. The efforts made by some of them to preserve these memories by presenting

them in literary forms can also be seen as their attempts to make sense of the traumatic experiences of their previous generation. Hirsch observes, “Second-generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma” (*Generation* 34).

### **Spatial and Temporal Nuances of the Comics**

The inherent spatial and temporal features of graphic narratives are best suited to present recollections of turbulent histories, fragmented stories, multiple perspectives as well as traumatic experiences. As Chute states, “[c]omics can express life stories, especially traumatic ones, powerfully because it makes literal the presence of the past by disrupting spatial and temporal conventions to overlay or palimpsest past and present” (“Comics Form” 109). Chute rightly recognises comics as “... a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially” (452). The spatial and temporal aspect of the comic form enables the writer/artist not only to divide and separate but also to unite and connect.

The various incidents narrated in *Maus* take place in different time periods. *Maus* opens with a brief two-page sequence introducing Vladek and child Artie in 1958. After that, the story jumps forward to the 1970s depicting Artie expressing his intention to Vladek about creating a comic book based on his father’s war and Holocaust experiences (Spiegelman 5-14). In between narrating Vladek’s experiences in war, Spiegelman jumps forward in time to portray his interviews with his father as well as his conversations with his wife Françoise. At one point he depicts himself wearing a mouse mask and talking directly to the readers about the publication and critical success of *Maus I*. He is then

interviewed by a German reporter wearing a cat mask and American promoters wearing dog masks. After the interview, he attends a therapy session with Pavel where he discusses his apprehensions regarding his strained relationship with his father. He returns to his studio and continues with his narration of Vladek's experiences (201-7). In short, the events narrated in the book are not presented in sequential order.

“In No Time Like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*”

McGlothlin discusses Stephen Tabachnick's classification of three narrative layers in *Maus*. One layer is the story of Vladek's struggles for survival during his life in Auschwitz. The second focuses on Artie's relationship with his parents and the effect of their trauma on his life as a second-generation representative. The third layer depicts the problems related to the production of *Maus* as a book and Spiegelman's concerns about imagining an event that he has not directly experienced. The boundaries between these narrative layers merge seamlessly with one another at many moments. McGlothlin adds his own analysis of the three narrative layers by stating that the first level of *Maus* contains the story that deals with Vladek's life in prewar Poland, his life as a soldier and civilian during the German invasion, his experiences in Auschwitz and liberation. The middle narrative layer deals with Artie's interview with Vladek. The third level of narrative examines Artie's struggle with understanding and presenting his father's story in graphic format (181-82).

Several critics have noted the two narrative layers in the book, but only a few have spoken about the three narrative layers in it. McGlothlin, by recognizing the third narrative layer in the text, adds that this layer consists of the author's reflections on getting to know about his father's story and the consequent problems he faced related to

his attempts to present it in comic form (180). Young comments on the significance of this third layer of narration and points to the fact that Spiegelman highlights not only the significance of testimony but also the central role played by him in extracting the crucial details of the event. He remarks that the interaction between father and son has generated a unique story (“Holocaust” 676).

The presence of different narratives results in the mixing of past and present throughout *Maus*. It is also the result of the episodic nature of memories. The inclusion of the photographs also interrupts the temporal flow of the story. Apart from these, Vladek, whose recollections are presented in the book, is also a person suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Cathy Caruth observes:

In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association finally officially acknowledged the long-recognized but frequently ignored phenomenon under the title “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD), which included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes. (3)

On account of the peculiar traumatic neurosis condition, a person suffering from PTSD might find it difficult to recollect traumatic past events in chronological order. Vladek also faces a similar problem and in various instances, Artie intervenes to remind him to narrate events chronologically. Ironically, those interventions also result in the intermingling of the past and the present in the book.

The interspersing of the past and present also results in the integration of adjacent panels. For instance, at one point in the book when Vladek is talking to Artie about his

days when he served in the army, Artie intervenes to clarify some of his doubts. Artie is depicted as lying down on the carpet in front of Vladek. Here, Artie's legs cross one panel and intrude into the adjacent panel. The first panel presents an incident from Vladek's past whereas the second one illustrates the present moment during his interview with his father (fig. 4.1).



Fig. 4.1. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 47.

The linking of the past and present during the narration is sometimes reflected in the visualisation within a panel too. An example is the instance where Vladek is talking about the procedure for “selektions” (218) in the concentration camp. Vladek explains this while he is taking a walk at the Catskills Resort along with his son. At Auschwitz, there were physical evaluations of the prisoners made at regular intervals to check and sort them according to their health condition. Those who have some health left in them are selected for slave labor and those who are too weak are condemned to be murdered in the gas chambers. Dr. Mengele was doing the check-up of each prisoner. To check

whether there were any sores or pimples on their body, he ordered each of the prisoners “Face left!” (218). When Vladek was explaining this, along with narrating the incident, he also demonstrated what each prisoner did by performing a quarter turn himself.

McGlothlin rightly says:

Vladek is now no longer the aged narrator of a past experience, but the naked, emaciated prisoner who is first experiencing the scene of victimization and domination...The comic book format of the scene, with its easily differentiated depictions of two separate temporal levels and two physical manifestations of the same character (young versus old), appears to clarify the disparities between the past and the present and to divide the two temporalities into distinct units in a much more visceral way than narration (177-178).

Another example is when Artie mentions to his father that he heard that some prisoners working in the gas chambers revolted, killed three men of Schutzstaffel (political soldiers of the Nazi Party), and blew up a crematorium. Vladek remembers that these people were killed for what they had done. Four girls who were good friends of Anja were also hanged for sneaking over the ammunition kept for the same. Though this conversation between Vladek and Artie about what took place years ago is happening in the present at Rego Park, inside one of the panels Spiegelman has portrayed the legs of those hanged girls as if their corpses are still left there (Spiegelman 239). The comic format with its spatial and temporal nuances made possible the depiction of this complex visual mixing of the past and the present.

In *Vietnamerica*, the cross-cutting of past and present becomes characteristic of the book. This is also one of the main reasons for the complexity of the memoir. Tran’s

attempt is to piece together a fragmented history through the immense possibilities of the artistic medium of comics. As Groensteen said, the genre of comics is not only an art of fragments, but it is also an art of linking those fragments to present a cohesive story (22). The title of the book itself suggests that it is the story of two nations brought together as Tran weaves a family story across generations and boundaries of nations.

The multiple voices that narrate the numerous stories at various points in the memoir are enough to confuse the reader. It requires great concentration on the part of the reader sometimes even to recognize whose story is narrated at that juncture and by whom. The mix-up of events presented reflects the attempts made by Tran to understand his family history by collecting information in the form of fragments of stories from different people. The peculiarities of Tran's art and the changes in his colour palette act as subtle cues in understanding the same.

*Vietnamerica* does not follow a chronological order of progression. The story jumps back and forth and travels through various generations with a mix of alternating flashbacks and present times. Since Tran has portrayed many characters at their young, middle, and old ages, it becomes difficult for the readers sometimes to recognize them. But since he has given the pictures with the names of the characters of the story in "The Cast" at the beginning of the narrative, it aids in recognizing each of them. He has included more than one picture of some characters portraying their appearance at their different ages.

Tran uses a strange visual fusion of the past and the present in the opening of the memoir itself. Dzung shares her memories of an incident that happened thirty years ago to her son, who was not even born at that time, as they travel to Vietnam. The opening

panel depicts an airplane in a crimson-red sky. The next panel contains the dialogue that Dzung has with GB inside the plane. The conversation happens in the present. In the visual presented, there are black fumes rising into the sky indicating that the author wants to take the readers back to the tumultuous period of 1975, the year of the event about which Dzung is talking to her son in the present time. The following panels depict Dzung and her family inside the plane travelling to the United States thirty years ago (Tran).

The changes that happened over the years in Vietnam are conveyed using the portrayal of the topography of the place during the visit of Tri and Dzung about thirty years after they left Vietnam. The material and spatial contrast between the past and present is made evident through the expression of surprise of the husband and wife. During their first visit, they searched for hours to finally find the small house where they lived years back. Here, in the five rectangular panels used, the verbal narrative is occluded and the readers are left with the visuals alone. This verbal occlusion points to the limits of verbal representation while presenting traumatic or emotionally overwhelming moments.

An example of how Tran makes tactful use of the comic medium to present time spatially inside the panels is seen when he describes an incident in the memoir. During Dzung and her family's second visit to Vietnam, Uncle Vinh came as their guide to show them the city of Langson. The page is divided into two sections (fig. 4.2). On one side, Tran presents an aerial view of Langson. The readers are given a sense of movement as they can see four of them walking down the street at three places simultaneously inside a single frame. First, they are seen as tiny figures, and subsequently, their size gets bigger as they come closer. Tran mentions how every sight, smell, and sound transported Dzung

back to her childhood days. In the six panels on the right side of the same page, Tran depicts Dzung during the various stages of her life – at her present age, during her youth, and as a child. In the two adjacent panels placed at the end of the page, Tran brings a peculiar combination of the past and the present. On one panel Tran draws half of the face of the child Dzung, whereas, on the adjacent panel, he sketches the other half of the face of old Dzung.



Fig. 4.2. G. B. Tran. *Vietnam: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

GB gathers much information regarding their parent's past from her mother's recollections. Many sections of the memoir begin with an illustration of Dzung narrating the past to her son while she is cooking. In this way, the past is embedded in the present. She tells about both her and her husband's childhood days. Dzung's first-person narration slowly gives way to the dialogues of the characters. There is a difference in the font used in the dialogues of Dzung, which happens in the present and, that of other characters while presenting past incidents.

Tran's presentation of time in the space of the panels as he unfolds his story in the memoir is noteworthy. It is in 2006 that the book opens when GB is travelling to Vietnam with his parents for his maternal grandmother Thi-Mot's funeral. That happens to be his second visit to Vietnam. GB finds himself to be a total stranger witnessing the customs and rituals there. He feels like an alien which is evident from the confused look on his face. Much of the emotional dilemma that GB faced is conveyed by Tran to the readers through his facial expressions and body gestures.

The next section suddenly jumps back in time with Dzung's recollection of GB's father Tri's childhood days during the conflict between the French colonizers and Vietminh, a League formed for the independence of Vietnam. This story is interspersed with the story of Dzung's childhood days too. She explains how their childhood days were affected by political conflicts and both had to leave their homes in search of safety. They had to live in jungles and in different cities, never being able to live in peace. Tran's mother Le Nhi was abandoned by her husband, Huu Nghiep, who became a revolutionary. Le Nhi had to live under the protection of a French Colonel with whom she developed a romantic relationship and has a son. Thi-Mot remarries after her

husband's accidental death. The struggles of the common people during political upheavals are revealed through the words of Dzung.

The following section brings the reader back to another time zone when GB comes to Vietnam for the first time with his parents. GB and his parents are amid the busy streets of Vietnam. He is struggling with the language and the hot climate whereas his parents are trying to connect the present Vietnam to that of their childhood days. Tri reunites with his old friend Do and his memories take the readers back again to 1975. Here the page is divided into two sections. The past events are presented in shades of brown and the panels take the form of smoke arising from Tri's lighter. He talks about the pathetic situation of people who were left behind in Vietnam at that time. The American soldiers treated them worse than second-class citizens. Do also shares the memories of the last days of GB's great-grandfather who died protesting in the streets.

The narrative shifts back in time as Dzung begins recounting those days when Tri got arrested for being the son of the Vietminh hero, Huu Nghiep. He was tortured and imprisoned and the memories of those days still haunt him as one can see him getting disturbed when he, along with his wife and son, enters a small hotel room. He cannot stay there as the small room with narrow windows reminds him of his days in prison years back.

The pages describing Tri's days in imprisonment are co-mingled with the story of his student days when he fights with his mother to join a degree course to become a teacher, whereas his mother wanted him to be a doctor. This part is presented as if Tri is dreaming when he is sleeping inside the prison. These two memories are thus compared for their unpleasantness in nature. They are also contrasted by presenting them in two

entirely different styles (fig. 4.3). Tran presents Tri's childhood days as a flashback within a flashback. An entirely different artistic style is used by Tran here. This style is reminiscent of 'ligne claire,' which is "...the graphic style which eschews shading, gradation of colours and hatching in favour of clear outlines, flat colours, and geometrical precision" (Miller 18). The style is popularized by Belgian comics artist Georges Prosper Remi, known by the pen name Hergé, through his famous Tintin series. The use of this style by Tran makes these pages stand out from the rest of the book. The use of 'emanata' and onomatopoeia, which are typical of the form, are used here too. Tran is influenced by Hergé's style which is evidently acknowledged in the book by presenting himself holding *Le Lotus Bleu*, one of the books of the Tintin series.



Fig. 4.3. G. B. Tran. *Vietnam: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

GB hears from Dzung about his parent's courtship days, the story of their marriage, and Dzung's half-brother Vinh's life in the army. The circumstance to reveal stories about many past incidents occurred when Dzung, GB, and Lisa were cleaning the house and started checking some old boxes in their house. Those were boxes that Dzung and Tri brought to the United States when they escaped from Vietnam. From one of those boxes, GB finds photographs of Leonard and Do, friends of Tri. The struggles of people trying to escape from Vietnam and the fate of people forced to live there are all explained by Dzung at this juncture (Tran).

Some of GB's knowledge about his parent's history and immigration stories is gathered from his conversations with Le Nhi, Thi Mot, Do, and Vinh. His question to his grandmother, Le Nhi, about whether she wishes to go back to Vietnam triggers memories of her life there. She sadly comments that Vietnam is not the home she left for or the country young men devoted their lives fighting to unite. Do shares the sacrifices GB's father had made to protect his family. Though he himself had struggled a lot, he considers the difficulties faced by his friend Tri more severe than what he had gone through.

Towards the end of the memoir, Tran presents how in 1975 his family finally flees from Vietnam. GB attempts to know about the circumstances and the efforts that made possible his family's escape from Vietnam to the United States. Their friend, Leonard, helped Tri and his family to board the plane to the United States. The chaos, confusion, and tension of the whole procedure are explained elaborately by Tran towards the end of the book. A wide-angle view or sometimes an ariel view of people crowding the streets and inside the airport is given by Tran. He uses both single as well as two-page bleeds to present the related incidents.

The memoir closes with pages depicting GB's conversation with his mother over the phone. She tries to convince him to go with her to Vietnam which at first, he refuses. But as he was organizing his room, he stumbled accidentally upon the book on the Vietnam War gifted to him by his father which made him rethink his decision. He picks up the phone and asks his mother whether he can still come to Vietnam with her. This incident happened earlier than many other events described in the novel and GB did go to Vietnam along with his parents. But the author chose this incident to conclude the narrative as if a reminder that just like GB's decision to go to Vietnam opened a new chapter in his life, which also later resulted in the birth of this memoir, the book may prove to be a new beginning or revelation to many who are living their lives cut off from their roots.

Tran's memoir presents a mix of events that happened at various points in time at different places. The spatiotemporal aspect of the narrative as well as Tran's artistic techniques alternates between various styles giving the readers new reading experiences. The different sections of the book that do not follow a linear chronological order prove to be challenging for the readers. The readers thus play a significant role in connecting the events to link up the story as well as deciphering the meanings hidden beneath the various events presented. Though the book is a product of an individual's desire to understand his family's history and immigrant experiences, it provides a sketch of twentieth-century Vietnam as well. The fusion of history and memory presented in the memoir gives new insights into a significant period in the history of Vietnam.

### **Multimodal Representation of Traumatic Memory**

The complex fusion of history and memory requires an art form that provides equally effective methods of expression. The skillful combination of words and images, sometimes complementing and at other times contrasting each other, unfold the effects of traumatic memories more poignantly than any other art form. The body language and facial expressions compliment the dialogue and together convey the emotions and feelings of the characters.

The graphic or comic form with its word-image mosaic offers varied methods of expressing painful and traumatic experiences. They can rely on visuals where words fall short of conveying the feelings and vice versa. There is a wider space for etching the experiences in memory like an image in the mind of the authors that they may find difficult to translate into words. Many graphic authors like Satrapi and Spiegelman have expressed this dilemma and quoted this as the reason for their choice of selecting this medium of graphic format.

The visual narrative of *Maus* should be critically analysed to reveal the visual metaphors, metonymies, and other similar visual and graphic techniques employed by Spiegelman. There are several rich and varied visual symbols and metaphors applied by Spiegelman throughout his work. The prime visual metaphor in *Maus* is the depiction of Jews as anthropomorphic mice and Germans as cats. Adolf Hitler's observation, "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 10), which is included as the epigraph of the first volume of the book "... justifies a dehumanizing metaphor" (Ewert 92). Moreover, Spiegelman sketches the Polish as pigs, the Americans as dogs, and the French as frogs. A simple iconic style is employed by Spiegelman while drawing the animal faces.

The depiction of Jews as mice is based on the concept of victimization. This is evident from an incident presented in the book. Inside the camp, the inmates had to stand in line for hours together while the guards counted their numbers. Vladek recalls how one fellow inmate claims that he is a German and protests asking to set him free. He is portrayed with a cat face in one panel whereas, in all other panels, he has a mouse face. He is drawn with a mouse face in the panel depicting how a guard stamps on his neck and kills him (Spiegelman, *Maus* 210).

Spiegelman is aware of the problems of using the animal metaphor. In the book, Artie mentions his confusion related to which animal figure should he use while portraying his wife who is French. When he shares this doubt with Francoise, she says that though she is French she ought to be portrayed as a rat as she has married a Jew (171). Similarly, in another instance when he realises that his Jewish therapist Pavel keeps dogs as pet, he muses whether mentioning that will spoil his use of animal metaphors (203). It is also an irony that Anja, presented as a mouse, is afraid of rats when she comes with Vladek to hide in a cellar (149).

Spiegelman still takes up the animal metaphor and emphasizes it through his use of chapter titles in *Maus* like “Mouse Holes,” “Mouse Trap” and “Mauschwitz” instead of Auschwitz. Even the title of the book, and part of the subtitle of the second volume, namely, “From Mauschwitz to the Catskills and Beyond” all remind the reader of the mouse metaphor. Another complication mentioned by Ewert is that in the instance where Spiegelman presents the artist at his drawing table, one can see a pile of starved corpses at his feet and flies buzzing around his head. Here, Spiegelman portrays the artist as a

human wearing a mouse mask. Ewert justifies this variability in the use of metaphor by Spiegelman:

The inconsistencies in the mouse metaphor serve to remind us of a larger reality outside of the world of mice and cats. However unlikely we might be to identify with small rodents in “real” life (and however we might feel about cats), here in the pages of *Maus*, we will root for the mice, mercilessly pursued by feline predators. The fractures force the reader to read the metaphorical equivalence in only one direction, identifying mice as people, rather than Jews as mice (95).

The cover page of *Maus* contains visual symbols and metonymies. It has the symbol of the Swastika which is widely recognized as used by the Nazi party. Spiegelman deftly uses a cat face in the middle of the Swastika symbol associating the Nazis with the cat metaphor. The Swastika appears inside the book in many places. On the title page of the chapter, “The Honeymoon,” Spiegelman draws a group of mouse faces looking at the symbol. Inside the chapter where Vladek talks to Artie about himself and Anja and how they travelled together by train to Czechoslovakia, he recalls seeing the Swastika symbol for the first time. Everybody on the train was excited and frightened to see the Nazi flag hanging high in the center of a small town. Some of the fellow passengers who were Jews shared the bitter experiences their cousins and relatives in Germany and Brandenburg had from the Nazi police (34-35).

One panel illustrates how the Jews were forcefully removed from many places. The Swastika symbol is seen in the background of the panel. Vladek shares how even before the war, the Nazis started cornering and torturing the Jews. In another instance, a panel presenting an ariel view shows Vladek and Anja walking to find a way to escape

arrest by the Nazis. The different crisscross roads take the shape of the Swastika which indicates a maze from which Vladek and Anja are trying to escape (fig. 4.4). The Star of David is again another visual metonymy used by Spiegelman. It is a generally recognized symbol of Jewish identity. The panel which poses Vladek's confusion and tension after seeing the German soldiers taking away the Jews at a train station takes the shape of a star (82).



Fig. 4.4. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 127.

The cover page also depicts the mouse-faced Vladek and Anja (fig. 4.5). The expression of fear is clear on their faces. The typeface of the title *Maus* is written in red as if smeared with blood which points to the word 'bleeds' in the subtitle of the first

volume, "My Father Bleeds History." Indeed, the incidents laid bare in the pages of the book are smudged with the blood of the Jews.

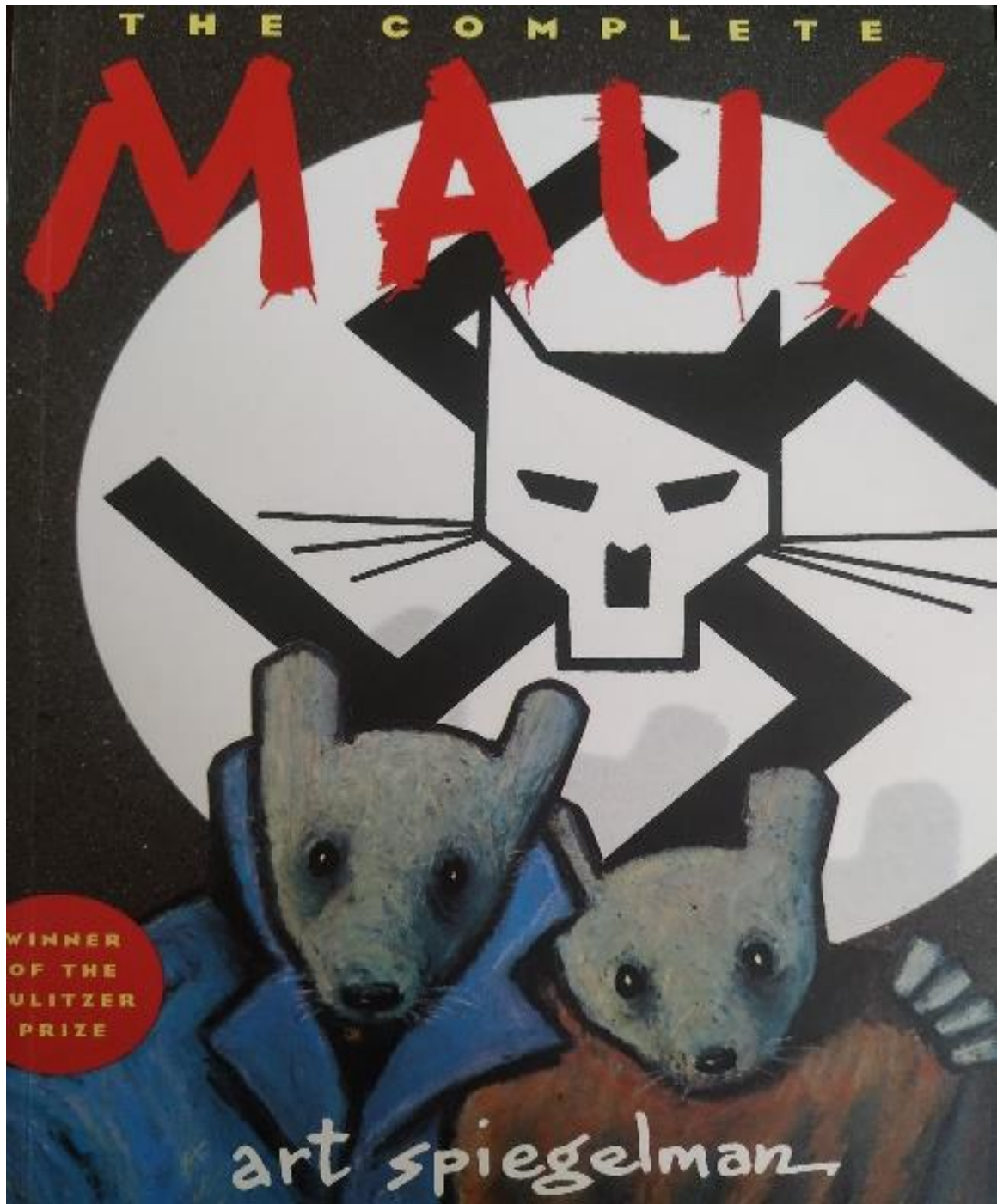


Fig. 4.5. Art Spiegelman. Cover page. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003.

The segment where characters appear as human beings and devoid of animal metaphors is in the comic excerpt, "The Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History." This segment deals with events related to Anja's suicide. Surprisingly, Artie here appears as wearing a concentration camp uniform, one which he has never used in his entire life. This is an indication of the feeling of guilt that he suffers. The guilt that he could not help his parents during their difficult times and that his parents at his age were struggling hard to keep themselves alive. He is aware that he cannot help them as he was not even born at that time. Still, he cannot help himself from feeling guilty. Added to that his mother commits suicide without leaving a note.

Artie feels that he is responsible for his mother's suicide. In the comic-inside-comic, he presents his recollection of how Anja came to his room and asks if he still loves her. He regretfully remembers that he responded to her query with a casual reply and she walked away quietly. He later finds himself guilty for showing an indifferent attitude toward his mother. Artie now feels trapped inside the prison of guilt which is metaphorically depicted by presenting himself in the striped camp uniform.

The comic-inside-comic is also noted for its crude illustrations and exaggerated expressions of emotions. It is an indirect visual indication of the problems in communicating traumatic encounters. This segment stands out with its thick black borders and is presented as a separate book placed inside *Maus*. The fingers of Artie's hand are visible in the left corner of the page as if he is holding the comic book (102). Another instance where Spiegelman depicts human characters is when he expresses his anxieties and confusion regarding the composition of *Maus*. There he portrays himself as human, but with a mouse mask, which is quite apparent (201-2). The depiction of an

anxious messy-haired artist acts as an interruption which is a technique to draw the attention of the readers, who are made to pause and take stock of the situation.

The pages of *Maus* are replete with images of death, torture, and violence. There is no denying that some of these are quite haunting and unsettling. The Jews were hunted down by the Nazis and several such incidents are narrated by Vladek to Artie. He recounts how the Germans apprehended four Jews who did business without coupons. They were executed in public and left hanging on their noose for a whole week as a deterrent. The episode is presented as an inset panel, a smaller panel placed inside a big one. The bigger panel depicts Anja's father having a discussion with Vladek and Anja about the incident. The inset panel portrays the Jews hanging in public (85). The intensity of the grammar of the image is haunting and evokes a feeling of horror and insecurity.

Vladek observes that he was panic-stricken and could not muster the courage to go out for many days. That he felt traumatised by the incident is evident from the following panel which depicts him sitting with his head bowed down (fig. 4.6). In the background of the same panel is a blurred sketch of the distressing scene that he had witnessed.



Fig. 4.6. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 86.

Several haunting images appear in *Maus II* as it details life at Auschwitz. The torture and the punishments that the Jews received, and the pathetic condition of life inside the camp where they had to dwell in filthy and unhygienic surroundings are all explained in the second volume of the book. The panic and anxiety of the prisoners are reflected on their faces as they live in constant fear. These unhealthy figures always move about in utter confusion and their body language reflects their tension and helplessness. The feeling of living each moment of one's life in total uncertainty, not knowing what ruthless punishment he must face the next moment, or not being sure whether he will be

alive the next day or not, is beyond comprehension. Spiegelman's sketches juxtaposed with brief narration succeed in conveying the pathos of the nightmarish existence.

Vladek recollects how inside the camp he was separated from Anja as there were separate places for men and women. The prisoners were given prison uniforms, and most of them were not in the correct size. They registered the prisoners using a number that was tattooed on their arms. In between the panels depicting the process of registering the prisoners in the camp, there is a sudden intrusion of the present into the past. Vladek is presented as showing his arm to Artie pointing to the number tattoo and he says, "They registered us in...They took from us our names. And here they put me my number" (186). Vladek's arm with the number tattoo becomes a visual synecdoche representing his deterioration from identity to a mere number at Auschwitz.

Apart from the information he gathers from his father, Spiegelman has done detailed research before he sketches the places inside the camp. The crowded panels, inset panels, and panels intruding into each other all reflect the suffocation inside the camp. There was hardly any room to move or even stretch. Ironically, they are virtually like the small boxes of panels and people living crammed inside. Even a quick visit to the restroom will deprive you of your bed, either because you cannot distinguish your bed or somebody else had occupied the place. The prisoners were made to work hard and were punished severely for the slightest of mistakes. Some died of hunger and some whom the guards found too weak to work, were killed mercilessly either by beating or the gas chambers.

The appearance of the inmates of the camp speaks volumes. One of the strategies that the Nazis adopted to reduce the number of prisoners was to give them very little

food. Vladek recollects how they had to stand in the long queue to get soup which was provided once a day. They were given a small crunchy bread which was so dry that it tasted like grass as they mixed the flour with sawdust. In the evening, they got rancid cheese or jam. At times, they got a tiny piece of sausage. Vladek said to Artie that he always ate half the things they gave and saved the rest for later. This he did because eating what they got all at once means "... to die more slowly" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 209). He sometimes used the saved food to bribe the guards for some favour.

Spiegelman's sketches of life inside the camp are cruder and more iconic. The mice figures lose their whiskers and they become fragile figures walking listlessly. Living a life of constant fear is reflected in their body language. The Jews in Auschwitz look alike which is technically intended to typecast their image as the most persecuted community in the world. The crude drawings that depict life inside the camp are contrasted with some neat panels portraying Artie's interview with his father.

Spiegelman has made a detailed sketch of the gas chambers and the ovens, marking each place inside it (fig. 4.7). Brief descriptions of how the prisoners were sent inside the shower room and how Zyklon B, a pesticide, was dropped into hollow columns which will take 3 to 30 minutes to kill all of them are combined with graphic illustrations (231). One of the most haunting images is that of Vladek's description of how the gas chambers worked (fig. 4.8). Both the image as well as the words used to describe the massacre inside the gas chambers are terrifyingly distressing.

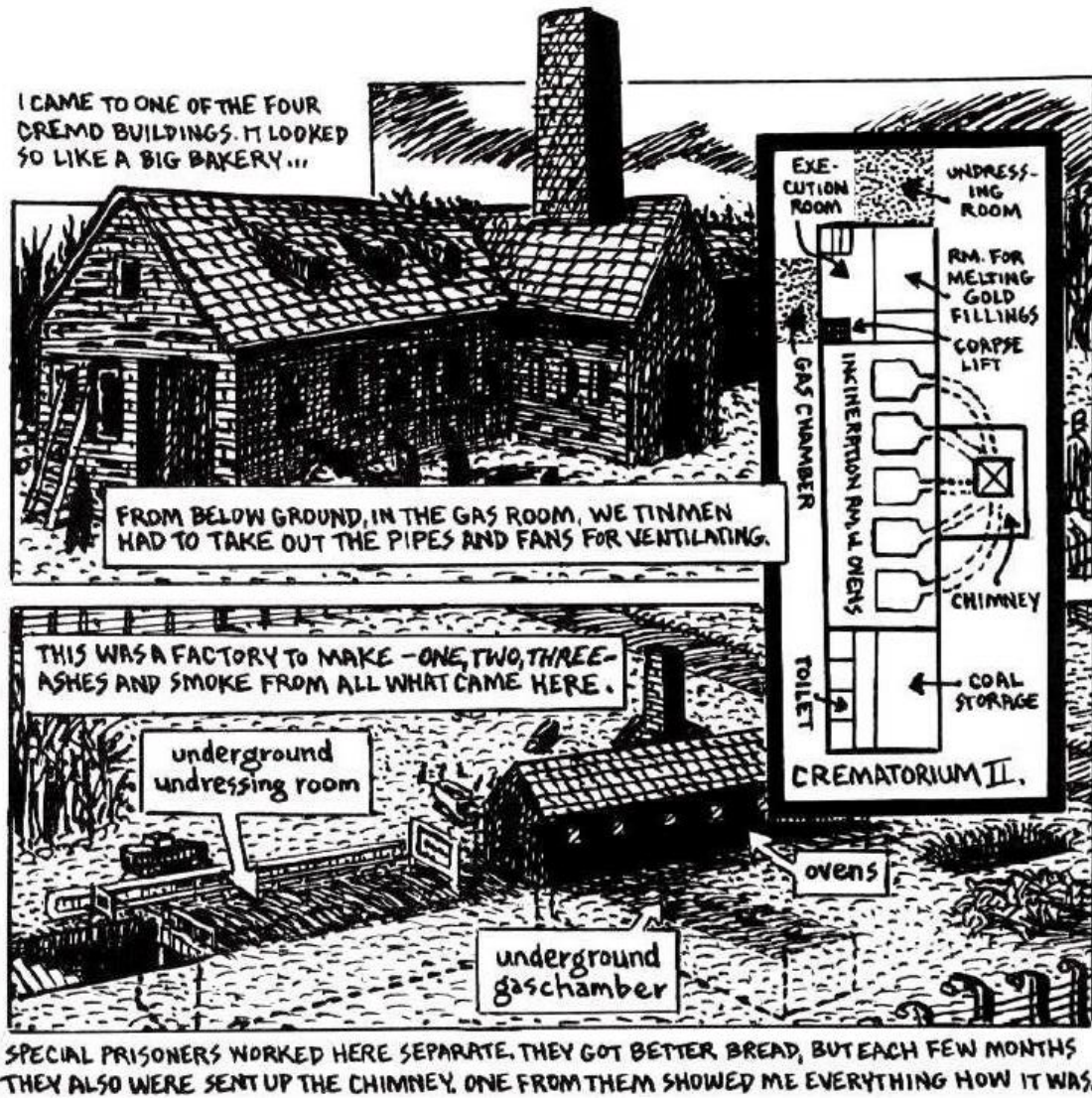


Fig. 4.7. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 230.

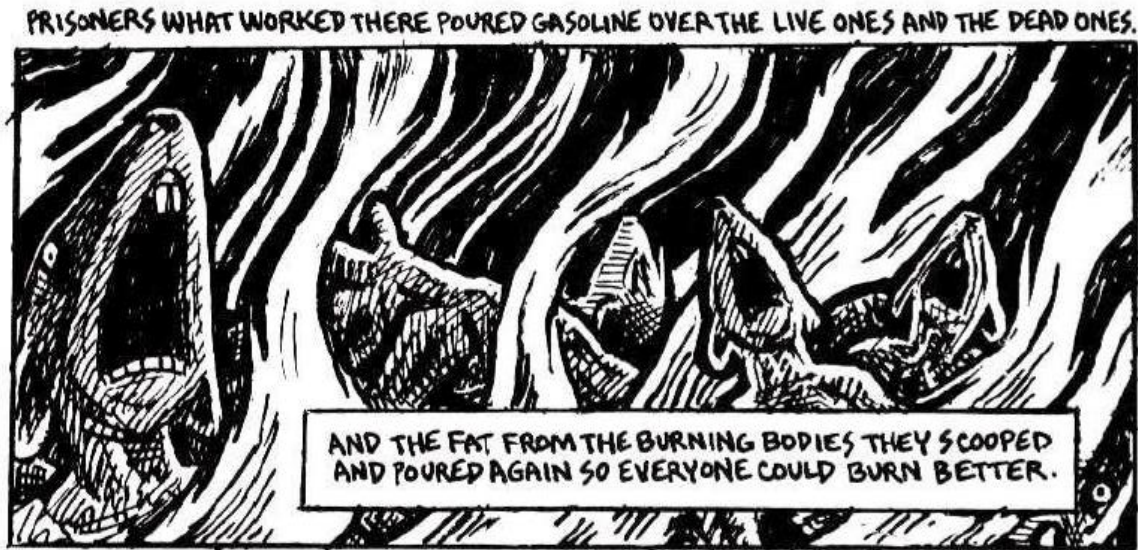


Fig. 4.8. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 232.

At Gross-Rosen camp, the Jews were pushed inside a train for horses and cows. They were crammed inside the train until there was no room left and Vladek says, “We lay on top the other, like matches, like herrings” (Spiegelman, *Maus* 245). The last three panels of the page delineate the situation inside the train (fig. 4.9). The images inside the three panels looked similar despite the slight differences which also indicate the slow passage of time felt by those trapped inside the train waiting to die. Only a handful of them come out alive, but the physical and mental torture that they had undergone are enough to haunt those who survived throughout their lives. The dark and grim atmosphere inside the train has been brilliantly portrayed by the author using black and white.



Fig. 4.9. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 245.

At the Dachau camp, the prisoners got infected by Typhus. The panel depicting the dead bodies piled on top of others lying in the corridor is beyond description (fig. 4.10). The helpless faces looking straight at the readers will make them numb. The image coupled with Vladek's musings, "Now it's my time. Now I will be laying like this ones and somebody will step on me!" (255), is scary. How feeble Vladek had become by that time is evident from his figure portrayed by Spiegelman. By the time he got a chance to escape by becoming a war prisoner to be exchanged at the Swiss border, he had no strength left in him even to stand on his own legs. He was smart enough to bribe two inmates with his share of bread that he managed to save. With their help, he came out of the camp and he could not believe his eyes when he saw a train waiting to take them from Dachau to Switzerland (257).



Fig. 4.10. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 255.

The book closes with the image of the tombstone of Vladek and Anja (296). Both are representatives of thousands of Jews who had to live a life of hell. Most of them did not come out of it alive. Those who survived, like Vladek and Anja, also had to pay their price. They continued with their life carrying with them those horrid memories of their past which kept haunting them. The ghosts of the past kept chasing them which might be one of the reasons that led Anja to commit suicide. Vladek also suffered from PTSD which took its toll on him.

Spiegelman's illustrations reflect the unimaginable mental and physical torture suffered by millions of innocent souls. Most of them did not survive to talk about it and many who survived suffered from PTSD and other serious mental illnesses. In such circumstances, it became the responsibility of the next generation of representatives to throw some light upon those dark pages of history.

While Spiegelman's technique makes pages from the history of the Holocaust visible, the multifariousness of Tran's drawings not only exposes the vicious effects of war but also produces a satirical effect using exaggerated facial expressions of the characters. As Bui says, graphic illustrations can make people aware of the brutalities of war without traumatizing their minds. They can broaden the imagination of the readers "... toward new psychosomatic horizons by depicting human bodies in an elastic manner" (127). Graphic narratives construct a three-dimensional view of the events represented. Illustrations along with dialogues and narratives provide a different reading experience altogether.

*Vietnamerica* is loaded with images offering inner meanings and suggestions. Tran's use of visual techniques is highly commendable and it has multilayers of connotations that require close examination to grasp their significance. The book has scenes from both Vietnam as well as scenes of life in the United States. There is a collage of images in the form of landscapes, photographs, maps, paintings, and the like all contributing to the construction of a personal family history etched in the larger canvas of the history of a nation.

The half-done jigsaw puzzle on the cover page is a visual metaphor for what the book represents (fig. 4.11). It is an apt visual representation of the attempt made by GB in rebuilding his family history from scrap. This process of rebuilding is never easy for a person like him born in the aftermath of the Vietnam War that included the escape of his parents, siblings, and grandmother to the United States. It was like solving a jigsaw puzzle for him.



Fig. 4.11. G. B. Tran. Cover Page. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

*Vietnamerica* delineates GB's endeavours to make sense of the various events that happened in the past by joining together like a jigsaw puzzle the stories of different persons. At one glance the puzzle may appear like the face of a single person, but a closer look reveals that each segment of the puzzle contains parts of the faces of different people who appear at various junctures in *Vietnamerica* like Dzung, Tran, Do, Vinh, Le Nhi, Thi Mot, and others. The puzzle is a visual reminder that *Vietnamerica* is their story too.

Another similar visual metaphor that appears in the book is that of Scrabble. GB presents himself playing Scrabble with Le Nhi and Lisa. It is in the middle of one such game that Le Nhi tells him to ask his parents questions about their life in Vietnam and reminds him that they will not be alive forever to answer his queries. A two-page bleed featuring the Scrabble game with words like foreign, culture, threatening, home, and the like are presented interspersed with images of exile living in America which is another instance of Tran's use of Scrabble as a visual metaphor (fig. 4.12 and fig. 4.13). The peculiarity of words taking the form of pictures happens here when words are presented as part of the Scrabble board. In the spaces between the words are images of Tri and his family members during their difficult times of getting themselves adjusted to life in the United States.

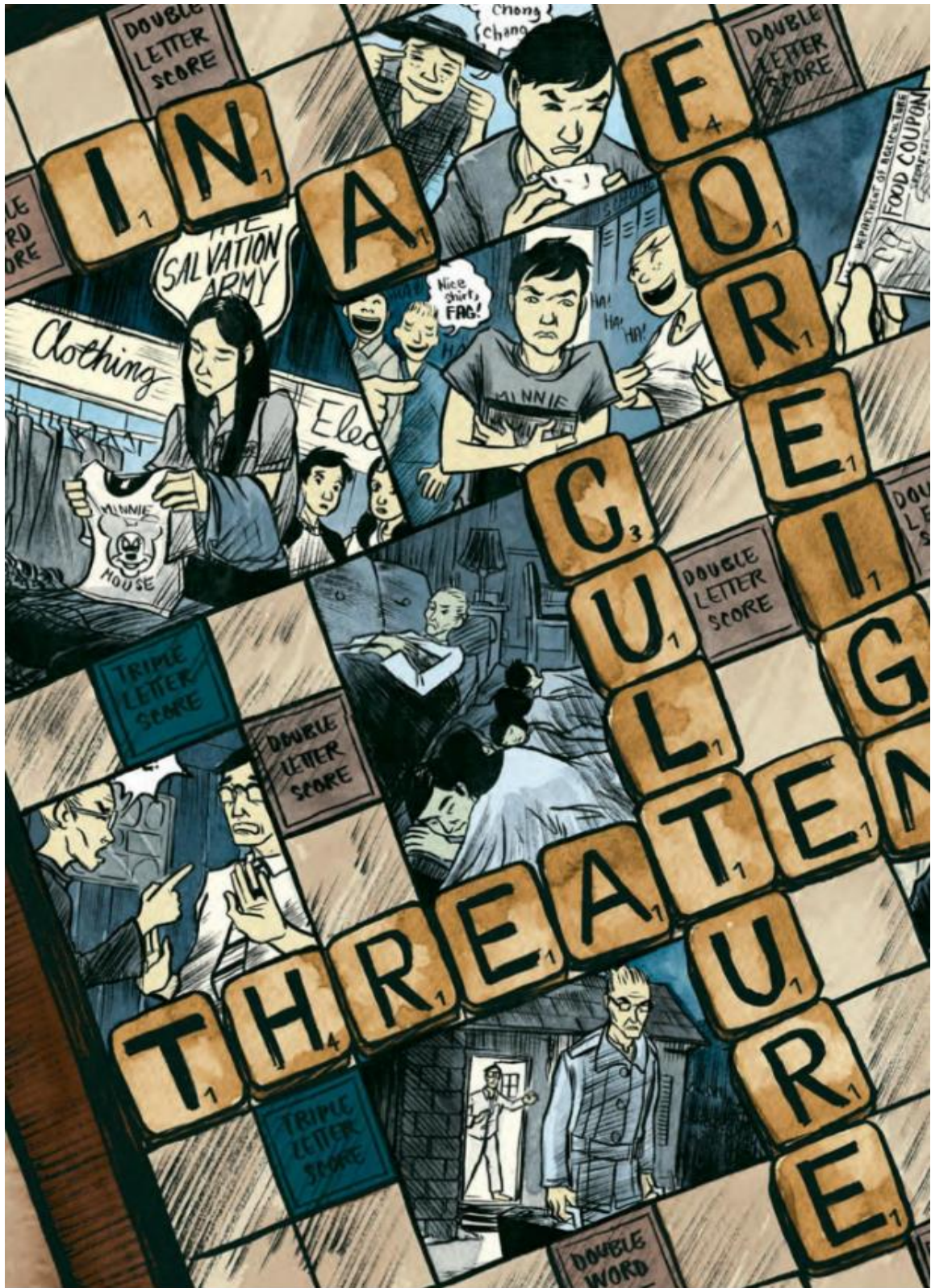


Fig. 4.12. G. B. Tran. *Vietnam: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.



Fig. 4.13. G. B. Tran. *Vietnam: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

A striking visual metaphor used by the author is that of a tree. The relevance of the tree in Vietnamese culture is revealed early in the book through the words of Tran. He talks to his son about the legend of the tree that stands tall in the middle of the Buddhist temple that they visit to pay homage to GB's dead grandmother, Thi Mot. Later, in order to introduce the readers to the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of Thi Mot, the author uses the visual metaphor of a giant tree representing Thi Mot spreading its roots far and wide (fig. 4.14). The tree, in the memoir, represents a giant force that holds the family together. The lines of Confucius, "A man without history is a tree without roots" (Tran) that Tri quotes in the book that he gifts his son accentuate the significance of the tree in the memoir.



Fig. 4.14. G. B. Tran. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

Smoke is yet another interesting metaphor used in the memoir. In most instances, it is the smoke rising from a cigarette of Tri that the author experiments with to form visual collages portraying instances from the past (fig. 4.15). In other words, his memories are mapped on the smoke arising from his cigarette. Just like the fumes from the cigarette surrounds Tri, memories of the past engulf him. Though he says that he came back to Vietnam not to feel nostalgic and that he never cares about what happened in the past, several things that he does prove otherwise. He goes along with his wife to visit all those places where they used to spend time decades ago. He keeps all those old photographs, postcards, and letters from his past life stacked in boxes and never allows his wife to throw them away.



Fig. 4.15. G. B. Tran. *Vietnam: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010.

Smoke from incense is also artistically metaphorised by Tran. The incense in Dzung's hands as she pays homage to her dead mother and prays for her reflects the relationship between children and their parents. Tran talks about a Vietnamese saying that parents take care of their children when they are young, and children should take care of their parents in their old age. The smoke rising from an incense stick represents the relationship between parents and children, and this is manifest in various moments in Tri and Dzung's life portrayed inside the fumes. It acts as a visual reminder of the responsibility of children toward parents during their old age.

Several things from the past including old photographs and postcards are kept inside boxes by Tran and hence these boxes also attain metaphorical significance. Dzung goes through the things inside the boxes years later when cleaning the house to welcome the Vietnamese New Year. GB also joins her and certain old photographs and postcards trigger memories of the past in Dzung which leads to conversations related to it. The conversation closes with Dzung repacking all those photos and postcards inside the box. She remarks that GB might not understand the significance of those photos and postcards because his parents left Vietnam and never spoke to him about their life in times of the Vietnam War. But ironically, they insisted later that GB should come to Vietnam.

Tran portrays GB sitting inside a big box surrounded by other boxes and miniature planes, tanks, trucks, and human figures (fig. 4.16). He is seen gathering some of these which symbolise his attempt to amass information on the history of Vietnam. The toy planes and tanks are indicators of the Vietnam War. Tran uses a page bleed to present this image that gestures the enormity of the task at hand.



Fig. 4.16. G. B. Tran. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010, p. 208.

Tran has made use of exaggerated facial expressions, onomatopoeic words, ironies, colour variations, and even different artistic styles to convey certain significant connotations and information. For example, in one instance, the bewilderment and discomfiture that GB felt during his stay in Vietnam are conveyed using his facial expression where his features are exaggerated depicting his perplexity. The same technique is applied in the case of Tri and Dzung for showing their surprise at seeing how much Vietnam had changed over the years.

Tran also experiments widely with panel shapes and sizes. There are panels with different shapes like squares, and rectangles, panels with zig-zag edges, fume/smoke-shaped panels, and the like. He has also employed various graphic techniques, especially page bleeds and page spreads. The wide landscapes of both Vietnam and America form the background of many page bleeds which denotes the setting of the events described.

An example of the remarkable use of page bleed by Tran is when he portrays Vinh's death (fig. 4.17). He is depicted as lying on the ground bleeding from a gunshot while serving in the army. He is wearing his army uniform and the blood that flows from his body spreads across the page and reaches the edge of the page. The goriness of the incident is completely captured by the page bleed with the colour contrast used. The bright red colour of the blood is contrasted with the black and grey colours of the army uniform and the landscape. It is as if the blood oozing out from his body might even inundate the readers.



Fig. 4.17. G. B. Tran. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010, p. 178.

Vinh's life story is a general reflection of the lives of army men during war. He had to leave his family and join the army. Dzung expresses sadly that as his family was not affluent enough and had no influence or connections, Thi Mot could not bribe the army to let Vinh go. He had to undergo reserve officer training for one year and got posted in a small village named Camau. His family got information about his condition through the letters that he send to his sister, Dzung. The memoir discourses on how soldiers like Vinh were underpaid and underequipped and were exploited by greedy commanders who inflated the needs of the soldiers and pocketed the supplies.

One of the most touching scenes of the memoir is the depiction of the last moments of Vinh. He was portrayed reading the letter he received from his sister. Ironically, the words written by Dzung that she is happy to hear that Vinh is safe, hang amid a bomb blast portrayed. Soldiers can be seen running helter-skelter trying to escape gunshots. The words used in these pages, which are from the letter written by Dzung, stand in sharp contrast with the scenes portrayed. The following page depicts Vinh lying dead on the ground (178).

Tran employs certain images with deep connotative meanings that occupy a whole page of the memoir. Tran sketches the faces of Tri, GB, and Dzung in such a way that their faces overlap one another to create an impression that GB is part Tri and part Dzung. Every individual has some traits of their parents or grandparents. The image might also indicate GB's attempt to see things of the past through the eyes of his parents.

Owing to the problems in Vietnam, people were frantically trying to escape from the country. This situation is portrayed metaphorically using a visual of people struggling to escape from a crevasse that has formed in Vietnam (fig. 4.18). On one side of the

chasm into which people had fallen, one can see places like Cambodia and Thailand marked. Some people are trying to escape to those places, while others are trying to reach out to the other side where ships can be seen moving away from them. The panic and helplessness of these people can be read in the expression on their faces. On another page bleed, Tran portrays people running here and there amid the fumes rising from the ground and an orange sky indicating bomb attacks and the resultant chaos. Similar kind of images appear in other parts of the book too.

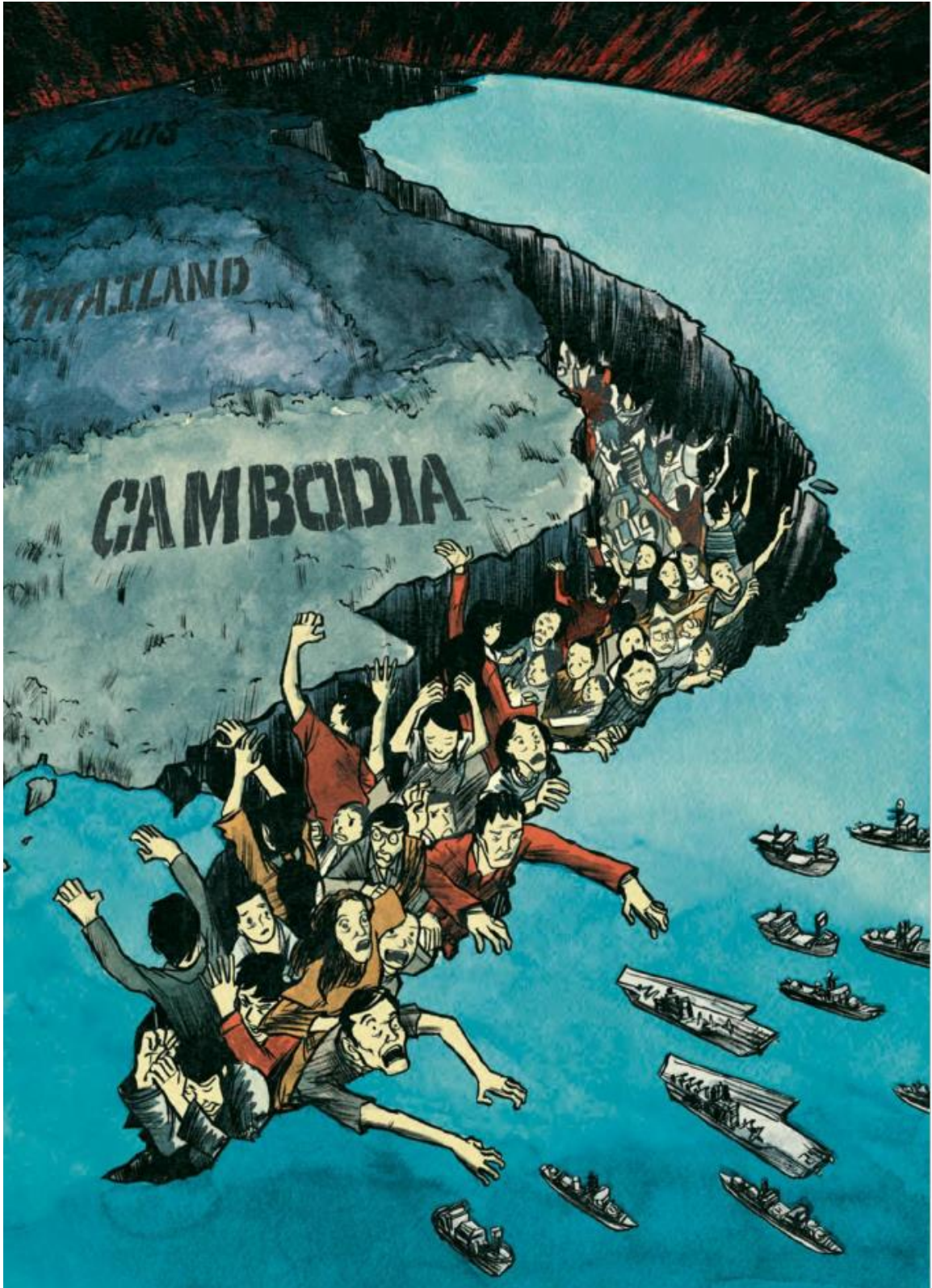


Fig. 4.18. G. B. Tran. *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010, p. 158.

A different page bleed is utilized to sketch an abstract picture of an ariel view showing incidents of past years on one side and of later years on the other with a small image of an airplane in between (fig. 4.19). Interestingly, the blank space in between takes the shape of an hourglass which represents the passage of time.



Fig. 4.19. G. B. Tran. *Vietnam: A Family's Journey*. Villard, 2010, p. 244.

Tran draws the flag of Vietnam on many pages of the memoir. The flag with the golden yellow star on the red background represents revolution and bloodshed. On the last page of the book where he writes his acknowledgment expressing his gratitude to all those who helped him in writing the memoir, the script takes the shape of a star.

Tran's use of colour needs special mention. He uses different shades of colours while dealing with different sections in the memoir. Since the story does not follow a linear path, there is a mix-up of different time periods in the book. The author changes the colours used to indicate to the readers the time periods referred to. For instance, black, white, and shades of grey are used in the sections where he talks about the youthful days of Tri and Dzung. Whereas brown, light blue, and orange tinges are used while depicting later years in their lives. This is not a strictly followed pattern as one can see exceptions too in the memoir. For instance, in one of the pages that portray Leonardo's fight with the airport officials and the final escape of Tri and his family to America, the pages are again presented in shades of grey. Bright colours like red, blue, and yellow are used when he discusses communist protests and revolutions.

### **Photographs and Maps**

Hirsch discourses on the impact of photographs of traumatic events of the past on subsequent generations. She hypothesises that photographs "...enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past, but also try to reanimate it..." (*Generation* 36). She compares photographs to memory and argues that the changes that the image undergoes with the passing of time "... mirror the movement from memory to postmemory" (37). Both *Maus* and *Vietnamerica* include photographs and maps. These also provide authenticity to the events narrated.

The first volume of *Maus* contains one photograph of Artie and his mother. The second volume includes two significant photographs. One that of Artie's dead brother, Richieu, and the other of Vladek in his camp uniform. These photographs are documents of both the memory of Vladek and the post-memory of Artie. According to Hirsch, "Post-memory should reflect back on memory..." ("Family Pictures" 8). She adds that photography is the medium that connects memory and post-memory. By the inclusion of the photographs in *Maus*, Spiegelman raises the question of how different media like comics, photographs, narrative, and testimony can interact with each other to produce a hybrid text (9, 11).

These photographs also remind us of life and death. Richieu's photo appears at the beginning of the second volume. In fact, Spiegelman dedicates the book to Richieu, a brother whom he has never met. Artie has never met his brother Richieu who died during World War II before he was even born. His parents never talk about him to Artie. Nevertheless, he is haunted by Richieu. He is always in a vain struggle with the ghost of Richieu and considers him an "ideal kid" (175).

The photograph of child Artie with his mother, Anja, is another mnemonic device that connects the book with the past. It surely is a nostalgic one for Artie especially because he lost her. She commits suicide and that too without leaving a suicide note. Artie feels devastated when Vladek agrees that he has destroyed Anja's diaries. He considers himself the reason for her suicide as he observes that he did not give her enough time and attention when she wanted it. He feels guilty that his indifference towards his mother might have pushed her to depression and led her to finally take her own life. This photograph, being the only one included in the first volume of *Maus*, "...

solidifies the mother's material presence even as it records her loss and suicide" (Hirsch, *Generation* 43). It is also significant that Spiegelman has dedicated the first volume of *Maus* to Anja.

The third photograph is that of Vladek in a concentration camp uniform (fig. 4.20). This recalls the picture of Artie in camp uniform which is depicted in the comic excerpt included in *Maus*. In *Maus*, it is mentioned that Artie has published a comic book based on an incident in his life. The same is included as a part of *Maus* under the title, "The Prisoner in the Hell Planet." The episode describes the events following Anja's suicide. Artie depicts himself wearing a camp uniform which is an open confession on his part that he feels guilty, and it underlines the fact that trauma is transgenerational. The trauma of his parents has been transferred to him and that is why he is presented as wearing the camp uniform which he has never worn in real life. Therefore, this photograph has the dual purpose of not only reminding the readers of the sufferings faced by Vladek in Auschwitz but also of Artie's guilty feelings. In short, all these three photos indicate the guilt consciousness of Artie.



Fig. 4.20. Art Spiegelman. *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 294.

Many other photographs in the form of drawings are included in the book apart from the three real ones. In them, the characters are portrayed using animal faces. Spiegelman uses them where Vladek is seen describing the family members of Anja and himself to Artie. Along with a short description of these family members, Vladek shows their pictures to his son. The panel arrangement here is asymmetrical. These pictures seem to be scattered everywhere, sometimes lying on top of each other and at other times intruding on some panels. The last panel takes the form of a page bleed as it crosses the boundaries and bleeds into the edge of the page. These pictures also show a connection between the past and the present which is emphasized through Vladek's words, "...**all** what is left, it's the photos" (275).

Spiegelman has done detailed research before presenting the information he gathered from Vladek in *Maus*. All the pains that he has taken including referring to

various documents, maps, previously published data on Auschwitz, and so on are discussed in detail in his *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus. MetaMaus*, published in 2011, which includes interviews with Spiegelman conducted by Chute, "... contains the story of *Maus* along with its histories large and small" (Friedman 276). His desire to present things as accurately as possible is also evident in Artie's conversation with Vladek in *Maus*, "I want to tell **your** story, the way it really happened" (Spiegelman 25). In order to satisfy his desire to be accurate, he has also included maps and sketches of many places in the book. There is a detailed map of Auschwitz with the map of New York presented as an inset panel at the beginning of *Maus II* (fig. 4.21). The blueprints of various parts of the concentration camp appear in several places in *Maus*.

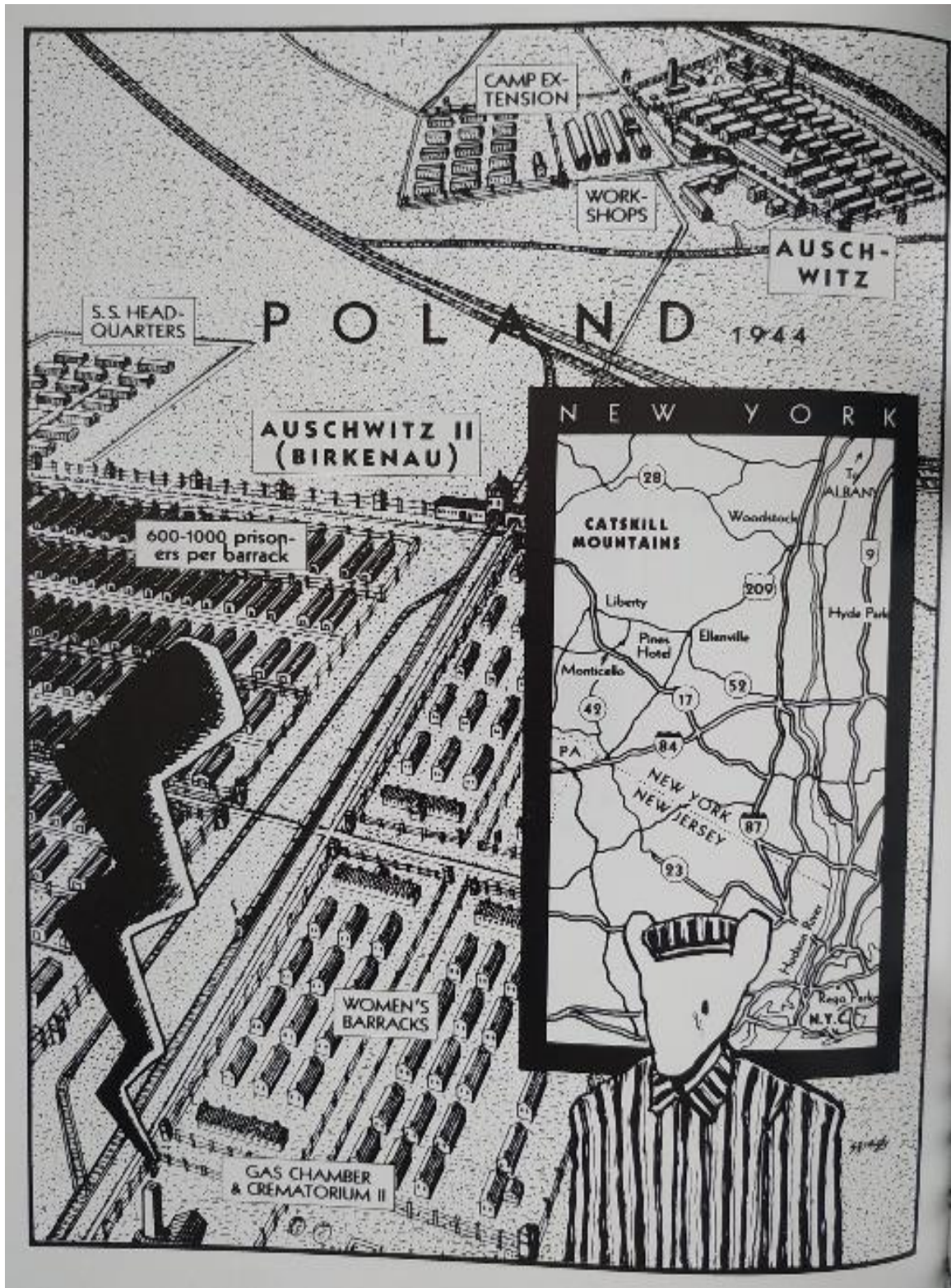


Fig. 4.21. Art Spiegelman. Prologue, *The Complete Maus*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 166.

Tran has also included photographs in *Vietnamerica*, both real ones, and drawings of original photographs. The original photographs appear on a single page, all scattered across the page (fig. 4. 22). Presented as a collage, these photographs act as a window to the past. They present Tran's parents as when they were young. Lisa, Manny, and Le Nhi can also be seen in some of the photos. Since they are included in the middle of the book and appear without any warning, the encounter with the real human figures in the photos comes as a surprise to the readers. They add to the authenticity of the incidents narrated as they connect the characters to real-life ones.



Tran reproduces family photographs as drawings in his book. Two such photos are worth comparing. One depicts a photo taken when Tri and his family just arrived in the United States. It has Tri, Dzung, Lisa, Manny, baby Vy, and Le Nhi in it – all looking pleasant and hopeful about starting a new life in a new country. The next family photo depicts Tri's family five years after their arrival in America. Compared to the first one, here the members have aged and there is an added family member, GB, in the photo, while Le Nhi is missing. Considering the facial expressions, it cannot go unnoticed that only the kids, Vy and GB, are smiling while all others look grim and sad. This reflects the struggles they had in their attempts to adapt themselves to a new country. The comparison between these two photographs is an instance of braiding which happens automatically in comics. The sight of one recalls another one in the mind of the readers and the comparison and conclusions are all a part of the grammar of the narrative.

Tran makes use of maps and visual representations of topography and landscape in his book while charting his family story. A unique feature of *Vietnamerica* is the wide landscapes portrayed by Tran. These landscapes at times become the borders of several panels. Some such visual representations appear as paintings by Tri, who unfortunately had to give up his dreams of becoming an artist due to the Vietnam War and related incidents. Tran's depiction of the topography of New York and Saigon gives the readers an idea of the stark contrast between the two places. The hustle and bustle of the busy streets of Saigon shock GB who is accustomed to living in an apartment in the silent and empty urban street of New York.

The inclusion of maps, landscapes, and photographs in these graphic memoirs offers new possibilities for the authors in life writing while presenting a collage of history

and memory. They unfold historical events and give insights into the changes that came across different places and people owing to war, immigration, resettlement, assimilation, and so on. The photographs are also instances of the technique of braiding as the appearance of one recall the other/s in the reader's mind which gives new insights about people and situations.

### **Quest for Past as a Quest for Self**

The question of why Artie and GB went in search of their past attains significance because both were born after those major incidents, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam War respectively, that turned their parent's lives topsy-turvy. One of the reasons for this is exactly what is reflected in the words that GB's father, Tri, borrows from Confucius and includes in the book that he gifts to his son, "A man without history is a tree without roots" (Tran 8). In the reconstruction of the past, an important role is played by the first-generation representatives or those who have direct, first-hand experience. An equally significant role can be allotted to the second generation too. The transgenerational trauma passed down to them from their parents and the resultant feeling of guilt are among the reasons why they want to know about their parent's struggles and survival. The burden of survival is felt by the children of the survivors and many of them want to understand the way it changed their lives as well as their relationship with their parents.

As a child of Holocaust survivors, Artie must come to terms with a lot of things in his life. He must discern his relationship with his father which in turn is tied up with his understanding of the Holocaust and his parents' struggles for surviving it. He must walk with them along the line of their memory. It is unfortunate that Artie did not get any access to his mother's memory as she had ended her life. He felt devastated to know that

his father had destroyed his mother's diary too. Thus, though Anja's presence is felt throughout the memoir, her voice is unheard. The information about Anja is gathered from the memories of her recollected by Vladek and Artie.

The comic insert, "The Prisoner" provides a glimpse into Artie's sense of guilt and fear. Artie's words that he shouts at his mother are proof that by committing suicide, his mother had in fact trapped him inside the prison of guilt: "Congratulations!... You've committed the perfect crime...you put me here...shorted all my circuits...cut my nerve endings...and crossed my wires!... you **murdered** me, Mommy, and you left me here to take the rap!!!" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 105). Artie admits that he spent three months in a mental hospital which also is an indication that the trauma that he inherited from his parents overwhelmed him to such an extent that it affected his mental health. Artie's attire in the comic insert, the camp uniform, is also a visual metaphor that stands for his sense of guilt.

Spiegelman's attempt to write the memoir based on his parent's past is the result of his endeavour to come to terms with the inherited trauma that he imbibed from his parents. There are many who consider aestheticizing the Holocaust experience in literary form as evil. It is true that any form of art may not be sufficient to present the gravity of an event like the Holocaust. It is not silence that renders coherence to the ruptured past, but remembrance. Spiegelman attempts to present his parent's past through a graphic narrative that also effectively demonstrates that the "Holocaust didn't end when it ended, it damaged the posterity with an equal violence" (Sahar 59).

GB's transformation from a teenager uninterested in the past of his parents, as well as his home country to an adult who sets out to excavate his roots, is proof that the

past has an undeniable influence on the present. He was a person enjoying his life far away in Arizona, not much bothered about his parent's past life till he was thirty years of age. Under certain circumstances, he came to Vietnam and slowly started getting himself involved in matters there. It is then that he gets to know about the difficulties faced by his parents years back and slowly starts taking efforts to know about the past of his family and country.

Spiegelman and Tran present the traumatic pasts of their loved ones in the form of graphic memoirs. Keeping all the differences apart, in both cases, the authors suffered from the traumatic memories which haunted their parents and left traces in their lives too. Coming to terms with the past in such instances is intrinsically connected to self and identity. Hirsch says that postmemory can affect those whose parents readily talked about their traumatic experiences as well as those whose parents remained silent (*Generation* 15). Spiegelman and Tran experienced the pain caused not only by the articulation of the past but they are also weighed down by the silence that surrounded their lives.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the nature of traumatic memories, it might be said that narrating the event leads to the possibility of redressing it. But the belated nature of trauma, which Cathy Caruth talked about in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, makes it an event experienced fully only at a temporal lag (7). This explains the reason behind the psychological problems that the first generation faced at later stages in their lives. Drawing on the studies of Freud, Caruth points out the "...need to rethink the possibility of history, as well as our ethical and political relation to it" (12). Taking into account the far-reaching consequences of such traumatic events, it thus also becomes the

responsibility of the present and future generations to make efforts to know and learn from the history of the painful past.

The memories related to historical events will recede as time passes which emphasises the relevance of archiving them. The victims and perpetrators of historical trauma will also die limiting our access to the past. This alludes to the responsibility of the second-generation representatives, who are the closest to their memories, to preserve them. The writings of the second generation who has "... inherited the legacy of a distant and incomprehensible past" (Hirsch *Generation* 13) must be taken as their attempts to make sense of it "... from a larger historical and generational perspective" (13-14).

"The notion of mnemohistory allows one to move past the otherwise unresolvable questions of 'what really happened' to questions of how particular ways of construing the past enable later communities to constitute and sustain themselves" (Tamm, "History as Cultural" 510). The ontology of narratives dealing with the memory-history interface addresses the question of self and identity which has an intrinsic connection to the past. Such intriguing combinations require nuanced ways and mediums of expression. Graphic memoirs like *Maus* and *Vietnamerica* offer a humane understanding of a troubled and traumatic past.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Comics are not prose. Comics are not movies. They are not a text-driven medium with added pictures; they're not the visual equivalent of prose narrative or a static version of a film. They are their own thing: a medium with its own devices, its own innovators, its own clichés, its own genres and traps and liberties. The first step toward attentively reading and fully appreciating comics is acknowledging that. (Wolk 14)

Graphic narratives continue to evolve across centuries dealing with complex subjects that call for increased proficiency in understanding the nuances of the medium. With the new possibilities open to graphic authors to experiment with the visual-verbal amalgam, the need for serious research into the prospects of the medium has also increased. The intricate relationship between the past and the present, the complexities of memory, and especially the confounding nature of traumatic memories, all pose challenges to memoirists. In short, the author's attempt to rebuild history and understand the past through recollected memories, which are fragmented in nature, can be effectively done by exploiting the possibilities that are unique to the graphic form. Considering the attempt of the writer to comprehend the past and its effects on the present by applying the distinctive stylistics of the comic form, graphic memoirs can effectively be regarded as records of mnemohistory.

The present study has focused on the combination of history and memory, particularly haunting memories, in the realm of comics. The intricate relationship between history and memory needs an equally efficient medium of expression. Drawing

some structural parallels between memory and the comic medium, the thesis attempts to explore the suitability of graphic form in handling this involuted relationship. A better comprehension of the complex association of history and memory is accomplished by looking at it through the prism of the four select graphic war memoirs. The study commences with a detailed analysis of the salient features and exclusive techniques used in graphic narratives which provides a strong base for analysis. Since memories related to the past in the wake of wars and revolutions will be haunting and unsettling, their presentation in any art form will also be equally enigmatic. The comic medium offers a suitable platform for the same. The crucial aspects revealing war-related memories and their far-reaching consequences are analysed by looking at them from two broad categories: a child's perspective and an adult's perspective who is a second-generation representative.

### **Summary of the Analysis**

The thesis is prefaced by an introductory chapter furnishing an elaborate discourse on the evolution of graphic narratives. Looking from the wider perspective of comics as a medium and language, the chapter serves to give insight into the different genres that employ the medium. Considering the difficulty in covering all the genres employing the verbal-visual combination, the survey focused particularly on those arriving from the production context of mass culture. Hence, starting from the editorial cartoons, the chapter spans across topics like comic strips, comic books, and finally graphic narratives.

Graphic memoirs detailing memories of historical events like wars and conflicts turn into sites of mnemohistorical studies. *Maus*, *Persepolis*, *Baddawi*, and *Vietnamerica* are masterpieces of the respective authors that have carved a niche in the realm of graphic

memoirs. The earlier conflicting terms of memory and history began to be discussed conjointly once memory studies became popular. Various concepts from memory studies namely individual and collective memory, cultural memory, postmemory, and mnemohistory are employed while analysing the combination of memory and history. The merging of life writing and comic form offers alternative ways of expressing events from the past confronting the limitations of memory. The multimodality of the comic medium with its ability to effortlessly present the fusion of past, present, and future, assists in the process of recollecting and making sense of the past.

The narratives that employ the comic medium/language need meticulous analysis. These texts have their own grammar, syntax, and structure. They weave stories within the space of panels and gutters. They can both enchant us with their word-image hybridity and bewilder us with the complexities of visual metaphors and the numerous clues and inferences spread across the page in front of us. It is possible to comprehend a graphic narrative without understanding the intricacies of the meaning behind every feature and technique used. However, understanding them will help to recognize and appreciate the numerous advantages and possibilities of using the graphic form. Hence the study devotes a chapter to an exhaustive study of the features and techniques used in the comic medium. The spatial grammar of graphic narratives, including their fragmented structure, provides ample opportunities for reconstructing a traumatic historical past through memory. The chapter elucidates the significance of understanding the multifarious aspects related to a medium that entrusts the readers with a significant role in the meaning-making procedure.

The two analytical chapters draw theoretical reinforcements from the studies made by Maurice Halbwachs, Marianne Hirsch, Marek Tamm, and Jan Assmann. Equally significant assistance is derived from the scrutiny undertaken by critics like Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, Hillary Chute, Charles Forceville, and Karin Kukkonen among others for the cognizance of the comic form. The chapter, “Graphic Mnemohistory on War: A Child’s Perspective” draws attention to the visual-verbal forms of expressions in the universe of graphic memoirs that unravel the experiences of childhood amidst war. The spatial syntax of the comic form attempts to elucidate the intricate concept of war when presented from the perspective of a young adult. Reconstruction of history through the recollection of the young protagonists reveals an uncensored history missing from any official historical documents. The complexities and vicissitudes of war, which are difficult to comprehend, are broken down into fragments of daily life. Such works attain a subversive nature through the presentation of events from the perspective of the universal symbol of the child. The child protagonists with their naivety, inquisitiveness, and curiosity, inspire the author to question the injustices of the adult world. They provide unique insights into otherwise familiar historical events of global wars and revolutions.

Graphic memoirs have opened new possibilities for expressing witness representation. They can be deployed to explicate contemporary issues in an avant-garde manner with their potential to adeptly handle daunting subjects or global issues. Satrapi and Abdelrazaq successfully portray the difficulties of growing up amid turmoil by deploying the expressive language of the visual medium. The novel techniques and characteristic features of the graphic form are exploited by them to discuss the crucial topics of self, identity, exile/refugee life, problems of survival struggles, and acculturation

among others. The visual-verbal combination enhances the depth of the emotions and feelings depicted in these memoirs. These graphic memoirs make visible the personal side of history and by creating space for personal testimonials, they project the innumerable problems faced by the victims and survivors which are neglected in history. In effect, they "... intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking...the risk of representation" (Chute, *Disaster Drawn* 5).

Personal and historical memories are exquisitely interwoven in the pages of graphic memoirs revealing alternative ways of understanding the past. The chapter, "Graphic Mnemohistory on War: A Second-Generation Perspective," probes into the transgenerational nature of traumatic memories and attempts to comprehend the myriad and far-reaching consequences of war, revolution, and political unrest. This invites attention to the concept of postmemory and the role of the second generation in reconstructing and finding alternative ways of understanding history. While the previous chapter dwells upon the struggles for survival while growing up in times of war, this chapter demonstrates how the traumatic memories of the ancestors are inherited by the second generation revealing the emotional and personal anxiety and the feeling of guilt caused by events that they have not traversed.

Graphic memoirs like *Maus* and *Vietnamerica* encapsulate the critical historical events illuminating the intersections of the personal and the political. The chapter further attempts to explicate how graphic memoirs, despite being a static medium, convey the emotions of the characters with an immediate effect. This entails scrutiny of the manifold techniques employed by the graphic authors from the select memoirs revealing the incredible ways in which the comic form engages memory, history, and autobiographical

writing. War-generated historical events portrayed in comic form expand the scope of documentary comics exploring the relevance of the past with reference to the present and future. They represent the struggles and sacrifices of those who were obliterated from the pages of history.

### **Relevance and Scope of Study**

The growing field of visual studies fueled the fascination for visual narratives and the comic medium. Studies on the various aspects of visual language gained momentum only recently. In the “Preface” to *The Visual Narrative Reader*, Cohn laments the inadequate research in visual narratives. He comments that though he is proud of all the research and commendable works in the field, he hopes that in the future more research works be initiated (xxiii-xxiv).

After World War II and the Vietnam War, there has been an overflow of the streaming of related news through televisual mediums. Chute observes that the increased attention on non-fiction comics by contemporary cartoonists like Spiegelman and Joe Sacco is the result of their attempt to respond to a world “... saturated with its constant stream of televisual images” (Chute, *Disaster Drawn* 6). Along with this, the domination of visual culture in every sphere and the shifting focus of attention to novel experiments in literary fields set the stage for the advancement of autobiographical comics. Challenging the dominant modes of storytelling, the multimodality of the comic medium unlocked ways of interpreting events afresh.

The multimodality of graphic narratives should be explored more with the visual culture penetrating both public and private spheres of human life. The world of comics is

expanding with advancements in digital and printing technologies. It resulted in improvements in lettering and colouring, saving time and effort. The expertise with which graphic authors handle diverse subjects with the synchronization of words and images and by experimenting with numerous exclusive graphic techniques must be appreciated. This necessitates more research in the area to explore the myriad possibilities this medium offers.

El Refaie recognised the new opportunities and challenges provided by the genre of autobiographical comics for both comic artists and autobiographers. The interest of the creators of autobiographical comics in inventing new narrative techniques forces us to rethink the preconceived notions about the medium. This also has resulted in the enrichment of life writings by "... drawing on sociocultural traditions and formal features of comics, which offer new possibilities for autobiographical storytelling" (3). These very factors make us go beyond the discussion of the presence of truth in autobiographical writings as well as the reliability of memory. El Refaie observes that "... imagination may sometimes provide a more adequate expression of subjective truths than can be achieved by sticking to the literal facts.... This applies particularly to traumatic memories, which often enter into our conscious life story in oblique ways, through allusions, symbols, or metaphors" (16).

The advancement of the multidisciplinary field of memory studies and a growing national interest in the past led to the pairing of memory and history. This entails the flourishing of documentary and autobiographical writings. Such writings found new avenues in the comic medium, leading to the blossoming of autobiographical comics. Communication and meaning-making have been involved in experimenting with novel

techniques and multimodal approaches. Graphic narratives with their ability to explicate global and complex issues provide alternative ways to comprehend daunting subjects.

In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth points out the belated nature of historical experience. She adds that since a traumatic event is not experienced at the time of its occurrence, it can be understood only in connection with another place and at another time (8). The victims and survivors reach a position to comprehend a traumatic experience only with the passage of time. Hence, historical narratives or historiographical fiction sharing personal experiences at a later stage in the lives of writers are significant records of history. The non-linear narrative structure of historical memories with gaps and omissions fits well in the format of graphic narratives.

A parallel reading of the significance of literature by the second generation is required to unearth the far-reaching effect of traumatic experiences and related memories. The effects of historical events like wars and revolutions and the struggles for survival fought by the victims have not only made their whole life a nightmare but the traumatic memories of these events have also been passed down to the subsequent generations. History appears to be confounding to the second-generation victims as they have grown up among the postmemories of tangled and cluttered stories of the past. The present study endeavours to substantiate that graphic memoirs can be instrumental in providing new insights and understandings of history.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study is not without its own limitations. It sought to highlight the specific features of the comic medium which provide interesting and distinct ways of presenting

the synthesis of memory and history. The analysis is anchored on life writing, specifically graphic memoirs. The episodic nature of memory, as well as the gaps and omissions in history, posed challenges for the memoirists while dealing with the reconstruction of history through recollection which forms the crux of such graphic memoirs. The structure of the medium of comics is scrutinized to draw some parallels with the specific features of memory which makes it one of the suitable forms of expression.

The unstable and sometimes unreliable nature of memory poses challenges for anyone doing research in this area. But this does not in any way belittle the significance of studies based on memory. The gaps and omissions in memory, especially the episodic nature of traumatic memories, raise problems for memoirists while presenting it in any literary form. These limitations of memory are to a great extent confronted with the structural features of the comic medium. However, the unreliability of memory remains a serious and debatable issue in the present study too.

In select memoirs, the reinvention of the past by recollecting historical events is done purely based on a personal perspective. The earlier consideration of history and memory as exact opposites was based on the subjective/objective dichotomy. The presence of subjectivity and imagination in memoirs is often considered to be obstacles in a comparative study between history and memory. However, the advancement of memory studies has taken us beyond the discussion of the presence of fictional and factual elements in such literary works and they beseech us to focus on the contributions made by them in comprehending complex histories. In addition, the study involved limited references to historical documents detailing the events that form the background of the select primary sources.

The study has not delved deep into trauma studies as the focus was mainly on the graphic techniques and advantages of the comic medium while dealing with historical memories and fragmented pasts. It scrutinized the lived experiences of common citizens detailing the incidents and the aftereffects of traumatic histories. Likewise, though the thesis details the struggles faced by refugees, it has not considered these texts from the perspective of refugee literature. Rather, it investigated the nuances of the visual-verbal depiction of the same in graphic format. The emotional turmoil engulfing the characters facing the problems of displacement, diaspora, assimilation, and longing for the homeland is looked at through the lens of graphic dimensions.

### **Platforms for Further Study**

Graphic narratives offer a fertile area to explore diverse subjects. Though there are some completed and ongoing research projects in the area, there is a need for further research exploring and revealing the numerous advantages of the comic medium. Disability studies, spatial studies, refugee theory, and many more can be effectively applied to analyse the subject matter discussed through graphic narratives. Besides, the studies of established comic critics like Chute, Cohn, and Kukkonen among others have started enriching the theoretical scholarship that was lacking previously in the area of comic studies. The following chapter titled “Recommendations” is an attempt to throw some light upon the topic of platforms for further study.

### **Conclusion**

The inventive medium of graphic narratives offers creative ways of handling intricate and complicated subjects. The graphic narrators and artists, with their ability to

creatively present time and space, make their medium a dynamic narrative form of expression. They have been able to present bewildering and confounding subjects, especially those involving extreme emotions, with a juxtaposition of the visual and the verbal. Life writing presented in the comic form is enough to enliven the experiences which in turn provide alternative ways of comprehending complex histories through recollected memories. The select graphic memoirs that portray the life journey of the victims and survivors take the readers on a sojourn among the victims of history witnessing their struggles for survival. The flexible form of comics offers ways to confront the limitations of memory by incorporating the story with its own gaps and omissions.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Recommendations**

The realm of graphic memoirs is a vast and expansive area that offers immense scope for research as it is not a vastly explored area. The current study provides a platform for discussion on different research perspectives like theoretical approaches, multidisciplinary studies, technical innovations, comparisons between different mediums, thematic concerns, and the like. Graphic memoirs are resources for critical studies across various academic disciplines and theoretical perspectives.

Trauma faced by both victims and survivors of unfortunate events like wars that devastated their lives and the consequential psychological and physiological problems is a major topic discussed in graphic memoirs. Theories on trauma like that of Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman among others may be applied to analyse such memoirs. Though the study has investigated the extended effects of such impactful incidents like wars and political conflicts on common citizens, it has emphasized the visual and verbal strategies employed by graphic artists for presenting the same in the comic form. Researchers can inquire into the therapeutic effects of such memoirs by identifying them as healing narratives.

The present study has not delved deep into the cultural and ethnic aspects of the nations depicted. Cultural, traditional, and religious beliefs and practices of the places where the events detailed in the works have occurred can be explored based on cultural studies. Furthermore, a comparative study can also be undertaken based on New Historicism.

The feelings of alienation, dislocation, identity crisis, and struggles for acculturation which are the features of diasporic studies are part and parcel of works of literature on wars and revolutions. Immigration and refugee crises might be an essential outcome of political wars and conflicts. Scrutiny based on diasporic studies or refugee studies can throw light on their global impact and resultant issues delineated in these graphic memoirs.

The events discussed in these war memoirs are pages from history presented from the perspective of first-generation or second-generation representatives. Considering the historical significance of these works, they can be employed as educational tools in classrooms. Their effectiveness in teaching complex histories, cultures, and traditions of different nations and myriad other subjects can be analysed revealing their pedagogical possibilities.

The role entrusted to the readers in the interpretation of meanings in comic books and graphic narratives has been pointed out in the thesis. They are often required to make inferences while reading. The readers need to develop multiple literacy skills that are required to interpret the visual and verbal elements integrated into the work. They must equip themselves with the skills to comprehend the nuances of the medium. How the readers comprehend and respond to graphic memoirs detailing experiences crucial in giving life lessons can be investigated from the perspective of a reader.

The present study explores the advantages of the comic medium while presenting painful memories of a war-torn past. It has not engaged itself in a comparative study between different literary genres dealing with similar themes. Hence, a comparative study of traditional literary works or films and graphic memoirs applying narratological

theories is yet another topic involving numerous questions to debate. Likewise, in-depth semiotic research revealing the world of signs and icons employed in the comic world in general and the oeuvre of memoirists, in particular, may be explored.

Research focusing on the aftermath of wars on ecology can provide insight into environmental issues like the destruction of habitats, depletion of resources, and pollution among others. The emission of toxic chemicals and gases during military operations is bound to have an effect not only on the lives of human beings but also on the flora and fauna. Ecocriticism can be employed to evaluate literary texts by exemplifying the environmental issues portrayed in them. Likewise, research can be carried out on the depiction of violence in these literary works.

The area of graphic memoirs furnishes numerous fascinating and intriguing topics to investigate. They offer new avenues to explore and extend possibilities for interdisciplinary approaches implementing gender studies, disability studies, spatial theory, cultural studies, and translation studies among others. While the present study attempted to explore the mnemohistorical aspect of select graphic memoirs and the myriad techniques of expressions in them, there are unexplored territories that can promote a better understanding of the medium.

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