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The Graphic Novel’s West Asian New Wave

By

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The Graphic Novel’s West Asian New Wave

Mona Majzoub Sabbagh

ABSTRACT

While the graphic novel is becoming a well-established genre in the West with its own definitions, bi-cultural authors develop a new West Asian trajectory, both in form and subject, from their own displacements as well as the region’s historical legacies and conflicts. This thesis, a comparative study of the two graphic novels, Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi and Palestine by Joe Sacco, is an analysis of what distinguishes this regional new wave of the graphic novel. By examining the media and aesthetic strategies that they develop to narrate social and political strife and emergence, this study shows how the graphic novel in West Asia derives as much from regional popular traditions of political cartoons and televised skits (from Iran to Egypt and the Levant) as it does from the western comics tradition. But what are the implications of such a development of the graphic novel in this region?

Keywords: Graphic Novel, West Asia, Political Cartoon, Palestine, Text/Image Interplay
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Chapter One
Introduction

In the last two decades, comic books have evolved into a literary form that is slowly gaining recognition and legitimacy. It increasingly distances itself from imaginative and children’s themes, like superheroes, and tackles “adult” topics of conflict, imperialism and ideology. In consequence, “grown-up” comics or graphic novels have become the nexus of cultures, especially with the success of Marjane Satrapi’s graphic memoir Persepolis (2004) and Joe Sacco’s poignant comic journalism in Palestine (2001). They both depict West Asia, a region that is often masked by labels and ideologies which usually serve certain political agendas. Both graphic novels were created by authors who felt compelled to challenge dominant representations. They were both written either in, or response to, extreme social upheavals in which military and cultural institutions in West Asia were directly involved. Palestine is an account of Palestinian domestic life under military occupation, including that of the prison and refugee camps. Persepolis is an autobiographical graphic novel depicting Marjane’s childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution.

The scholarship to date on graphic novels has aimed at bringing clarity to the often murky debates on the nature of the genre. Much has been made of the role of graphic novels in classrooms and educational institutions, particularly teaching foreign languages or history and helping reluctant readers and learners. Yet surprisingly little has been said on the surprising emergence of graphic novels in West Asia. Very little academic research focuses either on the direct or implicit contribution of West Asian
graphic novels to the genre mainstream, and even less has addressed the inclusion of this new emerging genre as essential contributors to contemporary fiction.

Considering the importance of the subject and the scarcity of academic research pertinent to this area, my thesis aims to look at graphic novel within the context of West Asia and explore how this genre has matured and blossomed as a powerful discursive form in the region, thus demanding a new definition of the graphic novel. In this sense, graphic novels not only emerge as a new literary form that is only now gaining “a newfound respectability” according to a cover story run by the *New York Times Magazine* in July 2004, but also as a high genre, a new wave that followed a new trajectory in West Asia. But what are the implications of such a development of the genre in this region?

Though the graphic novel is becoming a well-established genre in the West with its own definition, Marjane Satrapi and Joe Sacco set up a new track deriving from their own legacies and identities and from the issues of the region they chose to depict in *Persepolis* and *Palestine*. They open a new track that cannot be seen as simply the offspring of the superhero comic book. Their novels are inspired by the region’s long-standing tradition of political cartoons, a genre that was used to provoke people to rebel or to gently persuade them to fall in line. These graphic novelists also use to their benefit their rich cultural backgrounds which give them fresh insight into fraught issues and realities in Western Asia and relations with the West. This work studies the medium that these authors develop to enable the narration of social/political conditions and crisis.
It should be noted however, that the focus given to the region of Western Asia is not due to the origin of the authors (though, as we will see, the genre was wholeheartedly adopted by the authors in the region) yet due to the topics in question. These topics, ranging from the Palestinian issue to the Islamic Revolution, cover a complete range of aspects. Some are exclusive to the region (such as the situation of women in the conservative region) while others are not (such as religious conflicts and trauma). All of the topics approached by both novels were relevant to Western Asia, thus the focus on the region.

This thesis, a comparative study of these two poignant graphic novels, is an analysis of what distinguishes this regional new wave of the graphic novel. By examining the media and aesthetic strategies developed to narrate social and political strife and emergence, this study shows how the graphic novel in West Asia derives as much from regional popular traditions of political cartoons and televised skits as it does from the western comics tradition. This thesis is divided into three comprehensive chapters.

In the first chapter, I will examine the classic definition of graphic novels and will look at how they emerged from comic books in the West. I will then examine *Persepolis* and *Palestine* as potential examples of this genre, only to contest this definition and propose a new one, based on the history of graphic novels in Western Asia and the hybrid identities of the novels and the novelists. If the graphic novel found its roots in the superhero-centered comic books, then one can argue that this new West Asian wave of graphic storytelling found its roots in another form of 'comics', and that is political cartoons. Political cartoons are 'the reproduction of an artistic piece that both characterizes and satirizes the political processes in their respective contexts, as well as
the cultural trends of the moment. At times these cartoons incorporate local and national iconography and written text in order to better communicate their message’ (Gocek). One can argue that Persepolis and Palestine have created a new genre that can be considered a 'new wave' of graphic novels, and that partly develops in these local traditions. It only seems logical that an additional trajectory pertinent to this region was opened up since Western Asia is known for its vibrant and diverse political humor arguably the most powerful weapon for criticism and reform.

After establishing a new definition of the 'high genre' of graphic novels, the purpose of the second chapter is to determine the reasons that allowed both Satrapi and Sacco to publish their respective novels without significant and/or violent backlash despite the overwhelming number of politicians, authors, artists, and cartoonists suffering from censorship and persecution in the region. I argue that it is the specification of the genre that enables them this liberty to express their ideas in this region. According to Marshall McLuhan, it is the medium "that shapes and controls the scale and form of human action". Thus, it was the choice of the genre that shaped the reaction to the novels in the region. My argument is supported with several insights. In fact, firstly, I will argue that the genre remains, in the eyes of regimes, too insignificant to censor compared to other genres such as political cartoons that appeal more to the masses. Another reason for this disregard could be the origin of the genre, i.e. the comic book, which leads most people in the region to categorize it in 'the realm of children and not adults'. Finally, I argue that the skill with which authors decided to manipulate the genre to tackle trauma in the region allowed them to disguise the 'unspeakable' in a satirical language that softens the blow and actively lessens backlash (McLuhan, 9).
The last chapter of the thesis focuses on the aesthetics of *Persepolis* and *Palestine* within a context of representation. In this chapter, I aim to study the different elements of visual/text interplay in both novels and argue that these elements give both authors a power that the author of a traditional memoir lacks. Some may argue that traditional memoirs are more expressive than graphic ones. This chapter aims to dispel this argument by mainly using the example of Joe Sacco who was a journalist before he became a cartoonist. Why, when faced between drawing and writing versus solely writing, did he choose the graphic novel? Moreover, based on McLuhan and McCloud’s “imaginative interactivity”, I will aim to point out the additional powers given to graphic authors by the genre, mainly their ability to smoothly manipulate time and space via the design of the panels, the captions within them, and the gutter.

Graphic novels in West Asia have proved to be influential tool that uses different media applied deliberately or unconsciously by the authors in order to elevate the genre into an elite form. Both Satrapi and Sacco insured their readers the closest thing possible to an equitable and just interplay of text/image in a ‘high genre’. The fused characteristics of the narratives and their authors contribute to the maturation process of this genre into an expansive form.
Chapter Two

Emerging Definition of Graphic Novel from West Asia

In this chapter, I will explore the definition of graphic novels and will look at how they emerged from comic books in the West. I will then examine Persepolis and Palestine as potential examples of this genre, only to contest this definition and propose a new one. This new definition will advance the emergence of a "high genre" of graphic novels in Western Asia as a result of the creative work of bicultural authors inspired by the rich cultural history of Western Asia. This new definition will be based on an account of the history of graphic novels in Western Asia and the hybrid identities of the novels and the novelists behind them.

2.1 Comic Books: The Origin of Graphic novels

Scott McCloud, the author of 'Understanding Comics', defined its form as, “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.” He adds as well that, “film is just a very, very, very slow comic” (McCloud, p.9). But the Graphic novel is more than a simple literary form, it is a genre that was born out of necessity and evolved as a more 'prestigious' format of the comic book. It is often considered that the first graphic novel was Will Eisner's 'A Contract with God' which was published in 1978, a novel that was joined by thousands more to make out a genre that is growing in fame, prestige and sales. This genre is widely understood as deriving from the comic book/
However, we are interested in how this genre and its definition emerged from the novel's ancestor, the comic book.

The origin of the 'comic art' can be traced to Italy in the seventeenth century with the oldest version of 'caricature' before reaching England in the following century and later on, the United States. The genre saw a golden age in the United Kingdom in the 1930s but ended quickly, mainly because of the Second World War. As for the United States, the country's 'comic' scene was taken by the superhero fever in the 1940s with the spread of *Superman* (1938), *Bat-Man* (1939), *Captain Marvel* (1940), and *Wonder Woman* (1941). However, that trend soon began to slow down and make place for 'crime comics'. It is at this point that the attack on the genre started (Round).

### 2.1.1 The War against Comics

In 1940, the first 'anti-comic' article was published by a literary critic named Sterling North. North complained about the large sums of money spent monthly on comic books by children (more than one million dollars). Shortly afterwards, people began to criticize the high “level of violence” in comic books and established a link between violent scenes of the books and the increasing number of “juvenile delinquency arrests”. Whether that was true or not was not established since it was not the last nail in the coffin of comic books. That would come thirteen years later (Round, 5).

In 1953, a psychiatrist named Fredric Wertham published his book *Seduction of the Innocent* which would later prove deadly to the comic industry. In his book, Wertham speaks of the violent behavior depicted in comic books as well as the 'gruesome images' they contain. Wertham openly criticizes the genre by pointing out
hidden sexual themes such as nudity and gay characters as well as the depictions of sex and violence which he claims would inevitably be imitated by children not to mention the dangerous repercussions that the depiction of female characters would have on girl readers. Wertham's book galvanized the U.S. Senate into action. Duncan and Smith describe the hearings that were held to decide the fate of the Comic book where Dr. Wertham 'was called as the star witness' as well as 'William Gaines-the well-known American publisher and co-editor of EC Comics'. Duncan and Smith explain that 'While most of the comics industry professionals who testified admitted that there had been excesses and declared that comic books had to be made more suitable for children, Gaines remained rather defiant'. Gaines went on to defy Senator Estes Kefauver who confronted him 'with a cover that showed a man with a bloody axe in one hand holding the severed head of a woman in the other'. In response to the question, 'Gaines maintained that the cover would only be in bad taste if the man was “holding the head a little higher so that the blood could be seen dripping from it”' (Duncan and Smith, 39).

2.1.2 Limiting the Comic Book

This materialized in 1954 with the elaboration of the 'Comics Code' which forbade certain depictions of violence, horror, torture and evil in comic books. It even called for good to triumph over evil and for all criminal behavior to be adequately punished by the hero in every published comic book. The United Kingdom quickly followed suit in 1955 with the publication of the Children and Young Persons Harmful Publications Act and it seemed that the most dangerous thing these codes accomplished was not limiting the production of comic books but publicly limiting the genre's readership to children despite the adult portion of their audience.
The deadly effects of that Code were quick to appear in the United States. In fact, the comic book industry collapsed and many companies were forced to shut down, not to mention the huge drop in sales because of the negative publicity. However, the industry was far from dead.

2.2 The Comics Industry Survives and the Graphic Novel is Born

In an attempt to survive, publishers were forced to recycle the superhero angle which heralded the Silver Age of Comic Books with the rise in fame of *The Flash, the Incredible Hulk, Spiderman, the X-Men* and much more superhero titles. In 1971, the Comics Code was revised but still made no mention about the adult readership. It wasn't until the second revision in 1989 that things started to change. The new version of the Code introduced a new stamp that needed to be placed on all the comic books that were intended for children to guarantee that their content was suitable for all ages. This event marked the birth of the 'graphic novel' which is a longer, more 'prestigious' format of the comic book. The added description of 'prestigious' can be attributed to several factors. While comic books are often serialized stories that are relatively short and cheap, printed on paper of mediocre quality with advertisements, graphic novels are longer stories (with an end), are more expensive, come with a hard cover and are printed on paper of a better quality.

The graphic novel is best defined “as a semi-permanent comic: it is often longer than the usual 24-page single issue comic and consists of new material published on higher quality paper” (Round, 10). Comic book writer and artist Scott McCloud claims that “in moving from periodicals to books, an implicit claim of permanent worth was
being made” (McCloud, 29). By presenting comics material in a fresh minted, prestigious-looking form and labeling it as a ‘novel’ rather than a ‘comic’, the graphic novel “has had an effect on the way comics are perceived” (Round, 13). Here we can point to McLuhan’s revolutionary study in media theory “The medium is the message” (McLuhan 9). In his book “Understanding Media”, McLuhan proposes that the medium, not the content that they carry, should be the focus of study. By examining media and its effects on society in global terms, he suggests that the medium affects the society in which it plays a role not by the content delivered through it, but by the characteristics of the medium. Hence the quality of the graphic novel (compared with the comic book, i.e. the 'prestigious' factors mentioned above and the adult-oriented topics) and the quantity of the pages have both contributed to spread the message and to reinvent comic books in a new era.

Although Will Eisner was the first to see the potential graphic novels had to become a new art form, Art Spiegelman introduced yet another significant twist to the graphic novel when he introduced biographical elements to his novel 'Maus' that also included socio-political themes. Out of the thousands of novels published, I will focus specifically on two Graphic novels, namely Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi and Palestine by Joe Sacco.
2.3 Persepolis and Palestine: (re) defining the Graphic Novel

After exploring the definition of the graphic novel and how it came to be, we need to ask ourselves whether *Persepolis* and *Palestine* truly 'fit in' the mold. Walking into a bookstore, one would find these books in the Graphic novels section. However, after further literary analysis, one can argue that these books might belong to that genre in a traditional sense but that, in reality, they belong to a new track that they established in the literary world.

Trying to fit these novels into the narrow and fixed label of 'Graphic novel' leads to unsatisfying results. This genre, being what it was and that is an heir and a 'phoenix' rising out of the ashes of comic books in the 1970s implies a certain legacy, that of the superhero-centered comic books and follows a certain path, that of the thousands of novels published since Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* until *Palestine*. However, *Palestine* and *Persepolis* both have additional elements such as the obvious political angle, the satirical language, and social issues. The boundaries of this new direction taken by Satrapi and Sacco need to be traced. One can argue that *Persepolis* and
Palestine have created a new genre that can be considered a 'new wave' of graphic novels. These two novels were born out of the classical graphic genre but later expanded into a new wave that followed a new trajectory. This new trajectory was brought on by two main elements, the legacy upon which these novels were based, namely the legacy of Western Asia, its issues and several literary forms especially political cartoons and the bicultural and hybrid identities of their authors. The additional trajectory is particular to this region known for its political humor which is the most powerful weapon for criticism and reform.

A counter argument to the above may be that this new wave started with Art Spiegelman in Maus. Admittedly, Spiegelman was not only bicultural but holds what is considered to be conflicting identities at the time (the Jewish identity along with the Holocaust legacy on one hand and the American identity on the other). Spiegelman, having lived the effects of the Holocaust in his family, notably in the light of losing his brother and aunt when they were forced to ingest poison in order to avoid the Nazi concentration camps, was well aware of the issues pertaining to these identities and chose to reflect them in his famous novel Maus.

Maus shows Spiegelman interviewing his father about surviving the Holocaust and what it meant to be a Polish Jew in that era. Spiegelman uses postmodern techniques of analogies and symbolism and depicts the different races of humans as different kinds of animals. Thus, Jews become mice, Germans cats and non-Jewish Poles pigs. Spiegelman's choice of animals was not random, when he depicted the Jews as mice, Spiegelman expresses the anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews who were considered to be 'vermin' or 'pests', in short less than human.
Based on the above, we can argue that *Maus* may be a precursor of this ‘high genre’ wave that we defined above, yet does not quite conform to the standards that *Persepolis* and *Palestine* set. Symbolism remains symbolism, and Spiegelman’s novel lacked the bluntness of *Persepolis* and *Palestine* whose authors deliberately refused to be implicit and hide behind analogies, symbolism and masks. As such, it is this lack of added courage and use of satirical language that means *Maus* could not, in good faith, be considered as part of this new wave.

### 2.4 Different Legacies lead to new trajectories

If the classical genre of the Graphic novel found its roots in the superhero-centered comic books, then one can argue that this new wave of Graphic storytelling found its roots in another form of 'comics' and that is political cartoons and audio-visual skits. Political cartoons are ‘the reproduction of an artistic piece that both characterizes and satirizes the political processes in their respective contexts, as well as the cultural trends of the moment. At times these cartoons incorporate local and national iconography and written text in order to better communicate their message’ (Gocek).

#### 2.4.1 Political Cartoons in the Middle East

This genre holds a great importance in the Middle East. In fact, this region was the scene of dramatic events and revolutions that unfolded over a long period of time, under the rule of many leaders and ideologies. That is why the use of cartoons as a cultural source in Western Asia is complex from historical, literary, and graphic standpoints. Additionally, the nature of oral tradition within several Middle Eastern cultures entrusted journalism with a unique role thus helping the cartoon gain power and
significance in a largely illiterate region. Political cartoons are also considered an important factor in the mobilization of the masses. Consequently, the political cartoon genre in the region is particularly interesting seeing “as it melds the visual and literary world” which consequently makes it accessible to a larger number of individuals (Ayalon).

In the Middle East, political cartoons were the main facilitator of the emergence of graphic genre with a political dimension. It offers an unprecedented level of satire that takes hours to perfect in a manner those political articles cannot accomplish. The illustrations find their roots way back in the nineteenth century, during the reign of the Ottoman Empire. It then followed with cartoonists from Palestine with Naji el Ali and Ghassan Kanafani, in Lebanon with Pierre Sadek and Stavro Jabra and in Egypt with Alexander Saroukhan, Salah Jahine, and Bahjat Osman. These artists managed, through their characters, to invade the homes of Arab citizens, help them understand current events and become the volatile topic of everyday conversations through graphic or moving images and text (written or oral).

Out of this art emerged the legacy of Pierre Sadek, a Lebanese cartoonist famous for his ‘political cartoon live sketch’ which was featured six days a week after the evening news on LBC channel in Lebanon. Sadek's depiction of the social, political or economic event of the day helped him reach unprecedented fame. Pierre Sadek was a pioneer of Lebanese journalism; he managed to demonstrate that the political cartoon was not merely a hobby but rather a serious part of journalism. He proved, despite of the ongoing civil war, that images were capable of delivering pure and unbiased messages straight from the artist's imagination to the reader’s eye. Sadek's character was named
Touma and dressed in the authentic Lebanese rural costumes and was always depicting socio-economic distress or political satire. His work was featured in many acclaimed papers like Annahar, and made it to the television on channels like LBC and Future television. However, despite his obvious political affiliation, he rarely spared any politician.

Caption: *In the corner:* Two American journalists disappear in Lebanon only to be found in Syria.

*Touma:* For once, I just want someone to disappear in Syria and surface in Lebanon!!!

(alluding to the thousands of Lebanese who disappeared in Lebanon when the Syrian Army was present in Lebanon and are believed to be in Syrian prisons).
Caption: *In the corner: The Wars of the Second Term.*

B*ush says: Georges War Bush*

Caption: Sayyed Hassan “the good old days” Nasrallah.

The mere fact of depicting Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hizbullah started a campaign of criticism that targeted Sadek. Hizbullah's supporters considered that depicting Nasrallah, a religious figure, in a political cartoon that uses
satire to provoke laughs is an insult to Nasrallah. The campaign included a large number of offensive posts on Sadek's Facebook page as well as the cartoon being 'reported' on Facebook.

Like Pierre Sadek, Naji el Ali, a Palestinian cartoonist famous for his sharp critical commentaries on Palestinian and Arab politics, is best known for his character, Handala. His work appeared for the first time in Al-Siyasa in Kuwait in 1969. Handala is a young witness turning his back against the world, quietly observing the atrocities committed against Palestinians and Arabs in general. His character has since then become an icon of Palestinian defiance. He is portrayed as a ten-year old boy, turning his back to the observer since 1973, and clutching his hands behind his back. The artist explains that the ten-year old represented his age when forced to leave Palestine and would not grow up until he could return to his homeland. His turned back and clasped hands symbolized the character's rejection of “outside solutions”. Handala wears ragged clothes and is barefoot, symbolizing his allegiance to the poor. In later cartoons, he is actively participating in the action depicted not merely observing it.
Caption: *Handala:* I really liked your article today about democracy. What are you preparing for tomorrow?

*Naji El-Ali:* I am writing my will.

This above cartoon reflects how most of the Arab regimes deal with democracy and freedom of expression. Handala informs the journalist of his admiration and satisfaction with the article he wrote on democracy. Handala continues to inquire whether the journalist is writing something of equal importance for tomorrow. The man replies: “I’m writing my will.” Al-Ali is implying that freedom of expression is suppressed in the Arab world, and this single cartoon foreshadows Al-Ali’s fate who was murdered in 1987.

Ali Farzat, named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2012, is a Syrian political cartoonist who suffered from the harassment of the Syrian regime.

(Farzat)

Caption: "When I say dialogue, I mean dialogue!"
In the early morning hours of Aug. 24 2011, Ali Farzat was pulled out of his car, severely and savagely beaten, mainly on his hands, and dumped on the road leading to the airport. According to one of his relatives, the security forces notably targeted his hands with both being broken and then told Farzat it was "just a warning."

Ali Farzat’s portrait, which was reportedly sketched on Aug. 27, contains a subtle message to the Assad regime.

Kanafani’s work differs from the previous three cartoonists in a sense where he was considered the leading novelist of his era. The author uses children as inspiration for his stories, often telling stories, through their eyes, manifesting from his political views. Kanafani was an early advocate of multifaceted chronicle constructions, using flashback effects and a chorus of narrator voices for effect. His writings focused mainly on the themes of Palestinian liberation and struggle, and often touched upon his own experiences as a refugee.
During the Gulf War, political cartoons were the more self-governing and consistent substitute to government-controlled Arab television and even Western television in representing the conflict in the Persian Gulf.

### 2.4.2 Political Cartoons in Iran

Iran has a long-standing history in graphic rhetoric and political cartoons that intensified during and after the Islamic Revolution. This history shows trends both with and against the Revolution and the ruling regime. In their book entitled *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi analyze the visual myths and symbols used by the regime in Iran during the Revolution. Amongst these mediums, we find posters, signs, graffiti and political cartoons. These attempts at persuasion had many targets including Saddam Hussein. Several political cartoons of Saddam portrayed him as a wind-up toy for the Americans or as a soldier-for-hire coming out from Menachem Begin's head on a tank to execute
his will or as a dog leashed by the Americans and the Israelis and fought valiantly by the ‘fist’ of the Revolution. (Chelkowski and Dabashi, 164).

Amongst Iranian political cartoonists, we find Kambiz Derambakhsh who is a highly acclaimed cartoonist, illustrator and graphic designer who only wants his work to ‘refresh the world and… to give people peace of mind’. However, Derambakhsh, who was awarded the Order of Légion d'Honneur (France’s highest decoration), laments that “politicians have become thick skinned and cartoons do not affect them anymore.”

Perhaps the most well-known Iranian political cartoonist was Hossein Tofigh, who started the weekly satirical magazine "Tofigh" in 1922 under the motto: "Truth is bitter, so we say it sweetly". In 1939, the regime of Reza Shah imprisoned Hossein for his work. Soon after his release from prison, he died from a disease he contracted in prison. However, Tofigh was not discontinued since Hossein's son, Hassan, replaced him as chief editor. In total, Tofigh was suspended over ten times in a decade by the government who also arrested its editor several times until the 1953 coup that forced the weekly magazine into hiatus after its office and the house of its editor were ransacked and burned by supporters of the Shah. Four years later, the magazine went back from its
forced pause only to be permanently shut down in 1971 by the government (Mossadegh).

In Tofigh’s cartoon above, we see Ayatollah Khashani and several other politicians begging the Shah not to leave the country in 1953 while a peasant, shown in the background and representing the nation, is telling Khashani to let the Shah go.

Amongst modern political cartoonists, we find the Neyestani brothers, Mana and Touka. Mana is especially famous for his portrayal of a cockroach speaking in Azerbaijani in a comic for children. After that famous cartoon, riots erupted in Iran by Azerbaijanis living there which led Mana to be imprisoned with the editor-in-chief of the newspaper that published the comic. The newspaper was also shut down and Mana was held in solitary confinement in Tehran's Evin prison. Three months later, Mana was released and was forced into exile with his wife.
In the strip, the boy attempts to communicate with the cockroach using several forms of the word roach in Persian until the roach answers in Azerbaijani language saying: "What?" (Spurgeon).

2.4.3 The Influence of Political Cartoons on Sacco and Satrapi

We do not have to go far to explain how Sacco was influenced by political cartoonists in the world and Western Asia specifically. In an interview with Believer Mag, when Sacco was asked about his relation with the tradition of political cartoonists in Palestine and whether he respects them or not, Sacco talks about Naji al Ali saying that on his first trip to Palestine, 'whenever I was not so self-conscious that I couldn’t bring up the fact that I was drawing their stories—because in those days I was a little more reticent—they would say, “Oh, well, we have this cartoonist, he’s a big hero….” People had pendants of his main figure, and even pictures of the cartoonist himself on the wall. He was revered’. Sacco also talks about Naji el Ali’s attack on all the parties involved in the Palestinian conflict such as ‘the Israelis, the P.L.O., Palestinian factions, corrupt Arab regimes—everyone who he felt was putting the boot down or exploiting poor people, refugees, and the poor Arab person, who is always represented by this same
child. He was just really well loved for that. And the child was always looking at some scene, like the cartoon is just sort of recording what’s going on’. As for his opinion on comics, Sacco says that 'they’re very powerful' and draw the Arabs to his work 'mainly because he’s really speaking truth to power' (Chute).

As for his other influences in the world, Sacco speaks in an interview with *Mother Jones* about Robert Crumb, saying that 'Robert Crumb is an influence on how I draw, but not on the subject matter I take or my approach. One thing I do like about Crumb is that he’s chronicled his age, his times, and I think that is what artists should do' (Gilson). Robert Crumb, who is an American cartoonist and whose work displays a satire of contemporary American culture, influenced Satrapi as well. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Satrapi says that her favorite cartoonists were American, from 'Robert Crumb to Chris Ware to *Batman* artists. Dan Clowes. Charles Burns. I like [the Maltese-born] Joe Sacco and Art Spiegelman, and I love the way they make comics. American comics have always been a source of inspiration'. When asked about the superhero angle in comic books, Satrapi said she 'hated *Superman*. I hated the curl and how he was like super-right and so nice. I really didn’t like him at all' (Cavna).

### 2.5 Biculturalism

One cannot help but notice the varied and hybrid cultural identities of both Sacco and Satrapi. Not only are the authors bicultural, but the identities they acquired can even be considered opposing at times. This biculturalism has had an artistic influence, originating from the different cultures, on the authors thus allowing them to navigate the worlds of art and literature in a creative and effortless manner.
2.5.1 Joe Sacco's Bicultural Identity

Joe Sacco was born in Malta in 1960. He then moved with his parents to Australia, when he was a boy and then Los Angeles, and New York before settling in Portland, Oregon. The reason behind this move was that his parents, who were socialists, were worried about the influence of the Catholic Church on Maltese citizens. Sacco believes that his parents’ experience majorly impacted his career. In an interview with the *Guardian*, Sacco talks about his move to Australia: "In Australia, there were a lot of Europeans and they would all meet up and the commonality was the war. You heard a lot about it. I guess I realized conflict was just a part of life."

Perhaps it is this dual identity that Sacco has and his early-on understanding of conflicts that encouraged him to question and doubt the American media's coverage of Western Asia. When asked about it by the *Progressive*, he says: "It’s hard to really dissect what your own country’s doing. It takes a certain amount of bravery. It was probably difficult back in late 2001, 2002, to criticize the American government if you were an American. Those who were the bravest were doing it, but there were very few for the first year. […] I still read *The New York Times*—not that I find its reporting always particularly good. There are some subjects that I know well, and when I read *The New York Times* correspondent writing about it—I can’t tell if it’s the correspondent or the editor who’s played with the story—there’s some stuff that I find really offensive and wrong based on my own personal experience. So it makes me a little suspicious of the rest of it somehow."
Sacco not only managed to form a hybrid identity, though under duress, he also accomplished the hard task of questioning and doubting the actions of his adopted country. This is a feat that could be considered normal by anyone raised in Western Asia since suspicion toward American and European Media is often ingrained since birth. However, for someone who does not originate from the area to be able to question the beliefs and rhetoric that millions around the world absorb without a doubt is undeniably difficult. One cannot help but wonder whether Sacco would have been capable of that feat if he did not possess this unique and hybrid identity whose foundations were laid in war-torn Europe.

2.5.2 Satrapi's Identity and Exile

As for Satrapi, explaining her biculturalism and the hybrid identity she created is easier said than done. On the surface, one could simply say that Satrapi who was born in Iran, had to leave to Austria to study and to escape the conflict in her country. After a brief return to her homeland where she got married and later divorced, she decided to go back to Europe, this time for good. However, this is only a simplistic approach to Satrapi's identity. In order to really understand the intricacies of Satrapi's quest for identity, one can always go back to Persepolis and the major identity struggle that is obvious throughout the novel. This is confirmed by Satrapi in an interview with Bookslut where she says: [When you are young you hate to answer that question. Well, today I just say “I am Iranian,” and they say “You are Iranian?” and I say “Yes, it is a fact, I am Iranian. I was born there, I have black hair. Yes, I am an Iranian person, what can I do?” Since writing the book, nobody can tell me “Give me some explanation.” I think now my explanation is just “Read the book and you’ll see.” This book has
permitted me not to talk so much anymore. People have read the book so they see what my situation is]. In the introduction to an interview of Satrapi with Mother Jones, Vivienne Walt quotes an online reviewer describing Satrapi as "the Persian love child of [Art] Spiegelman and Lynda Barry" (Lynda Barry is renowned American cartoonist). As for her life in France, Satrapi says: "I can live fifty years in France and my affection will always be with Iran. I always say that if I were a man I might say that Iran is my mother and France is my wife. My mother, whether she’s crazy or not, I would die for her, no matter what she is my mother. She is me and I am her. My wife I can cheat on with another woman, I can leave her, I can also love her and make her children, I can do all of that but it’s not like with my mother. But nowhere is my home any more. I will never have any home any more. Having lived what I have lived, I can never see the future. It’s a big difference when someone has to leave their country."

How can these two authors be piled into a shelf in a bookstore with some many others while they both present distinguishing features? Sacco chose to leave the comfort zone that most Americans live in to leave for a truth-seeking adventure in the middle of a major 'hot zone'. And while Sacco left 'home' to find the truth and tell it like it is, Satrapi was losing hers and attempting to find it in the pages of Persepolis.

2.6 Concluding Remarks

We conclude that though the graphic novel is a well-established genre in the West with its own definition, Satrapi and Sacco set up a new track deriving from their own legacies and identities and from the issues of the region they chose to depict, i.e. Western Asia. By doing so, they open a new track that cannot be seen as simply the
offspring of the superhero comic book. Their novels are inspired by a long-standing tradition of political cartoons in the region, a genre that was used to force the masses to rebel or to gently persuade them to fall in line, a true 'soft weapon' wielded by consecutive regimes, governments and opposition forces to extend their powers over the region. They also use to their benefit their rich cultural backgrounds resulting from their biculturalism which gave them fresh insights into the issues of the world in general and Western Asia in particular.
Chapter Three

The Genre is the Message

The previous chapter establishes a new definition of the 'high genre' of graphic novels that originated in West Asia, out of the creativity of bicultural authors who delved into the legacy of political humor in the region. The purpose of this chapter is to determine the reasons that allowed both Satrapi and Sacco to publish their critical novels without significant and/or violent backlash despite the overwhelming number of politicians, authors, artists and cartoonists suffering from censorship and persecution in the region.

I argue that it is the genre that enables them this liberty to express their ideas in this region, a liberty identified by Marshall McLuhan in his paradox, 'The Medium is the Message'. According to McLuhan, it is the medium "that shapes and controls the scale and form of human [...] action". (McLuhan 9). Thus, it was the choice of the genre that shaped the reaction to the novels in the region. I support my argument with several points. First, in the case of Satrapi and Sacco, their modest celebrity in Western Asia allowed them to escape harassment. Second, the genre remains, in the eyes of regimes, too insignificant to censor compared to other genres, such as political cartoons, that have vast popularity. Third, the origin of the genre, i.e., the comic book, would ostensibly lead most people in the region to categorize it in 'the realm of children and not adults'. Above all, I argue that the skill with which authors decided to manipulate the genre to
tackle trauma in the region allowed them to disguise the 'unspeakable' in a satirical language that seemingly softens the blow and actively lessens backlash.

### 3.1 The Medium is the Message

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan revolutionized media studies in his book entitled "Understanding Media." In his book, McLuhan brought forward the theory that the medium used to transmit an idea is highly significant and constitutes the message in itself. According to McLuhan, the 'content' of any medium "blinds us to the character of the medium" and thus he encourages the readers to halt the traditional focus on what the medium is used for (i.e. expressing an idea) and instead attempt to understand the significance of the choice of the medium itself (McLuhan 9). McLuhan also considers that it is the medium itself that decides how the receiver will react to the communication. He also argues that the message of any medium is the "change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (McLuhan 8).

In light of the definition brought forward in the first chapter, how can we understand the significance of the medium (i.e. the high genre of graphic novels in Western Asia) and what is the change of scale that it brought allowing the authors to escape persecution?

### 3.2 Spread of the Genre

The reception of any given novel is normally contingent to several conditions such as the fame of the author, the marketing accompanying the publication of the novel, and the speed with which the novel rises to fame. Both Satrapi and Sacco could
not, in all good faith, be considered famous prior to their publication of *Persepolis* and *Palestine*, and neither of their novels was associated with major marketing efforts. I argue that the speed of the propagation of the novels helped both authors avoid censorship and harassment, even though they dealt with sensitive and traumatic incidents. To advance that argument, I will look closely at Satrapi and Sacco in regards to the spread of their novels.

### 3.2.1 Satrapi’s Experience: Producing *Persepolis* the Movie and exile by choice

Since Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is a memoir, its content - pertaining to Satrapi’s life - can be used to understand Satrapi’s exile just as we would comprehend any interview given by Satrapi herself. In the novel, and after Marjane’s return to Iran from Vienna, it is apparent that she is dealing with an identity crisis that is the eventual reason of her chosen exile. "I was nothing. I was a westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity" (Satrapi 272) (Fig.1). Nowhere in the book is Satrapi persecuted in a way that differentiates her from any open-minded Iranian woman living in that period. Satrapi’s book, though banned by the government, has even found a way to enter Iran via a black-market Persian translation. The book can even be found in Arab countries where hundreds of books are banned for less important reasons. This freedom extended to the point where Satrapi was able to direct a movie based on the novel and that debuted at the 2007 *Cannes Film Festival* and was an all-around commercial success. In fact, over one million people watched the movie in France alone in exchange for 400,000 copies of the book being sold in the same country. Lopamudra Basu, an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin claimed in his article, “*Crossing Cultures/Crossing Genres: The Re-invention of the Graphic Memoir*”, that Satrapi’s
graphic novel generally escaped criticism because of its medium which enables it "to be malleable enough to escape some of the controversial quagmires that more traditional autobiographies can fall into" (Basu).


### 3.2.2 Sacco's Experience: Returning to Gaza, moving on to other regions safely

In 2012, Martin Barker from the University of East Anglia posed an interesting question. Barker was confused as to the reasons why a novel that contained a "clear denunciation of Israel’s role" was overlooked by the Israelis and their lobbies. That is when, Barker decided to conduct a reception study of *Palestine* and published it in the *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*. Barker relies on the several factors to study the reception of *Palestine* since its publication to the time of publication of the study itself (in 2012). Of those factors, we find the number of professional reviews of Sacco’s *Palestine*. Taking in that factor, we can see that *Palestine* was 'flying under the radar' from its publication in 1993 until 2000 when its popularity started increasing only to peak in 2003 with over 60 reviews (as opposed to below 10 reviews before 2000). Thus,
it is clear that *Palestine* spread relatively slowly from its publication date until 2003 when it appears that its fame was not enough to warrant censorship.

In fact, this lack of censorship is quite apparent. Sacco, not only could publish and sell his novel all over the world with no exceptions, he was also able to return to Gaza twice. The first trip was in 2001 with journalist Chris Hedges on an assignment for *Harper's* magazine. The second was in 2003 when he did the research work for his second book about Palestine, *Footnotes in Gaza*. Sacco has even reported for magazines and newspapers from Iraq.

Therefore, it is apparent that the slow spread of the novels and the little fame that Sacco and Satrapi had prior to the publications has enabled their books to be published with no significant censorship and both authors were not persecuted neither abroad nor in the region.

### 3.3 Fame of the Genre in West Asia

Adding to what we established above, not only were the novels slow to spread worldwide, the genre of graphic novels is relatively unknown in Western Asia compared to other graphic genres such as political cartoons and political stand-up comedy. The advantages of these genres to the masses of the region are obvious; they are more accessible, cheaper, and easier to understand.

First, the accessibility to graphic novels of an average citizen of any country in the region is minimal; someone would have to go to specific bookstores that sell not just English books but also 'not-so-classical' genres. On the other hand, accessibility to political cartoons is quite high since most are published in daily newspapers and
accessibility to political stand-up comedy is also easy considering the shows are usually broadcast on TV.

Secondly, one cannot deny the issue of price when discussing the fame of a genre. In fact, daily newspapers can be bought in the region for relatively small prices (a little over a dollar) while national TV channels are usually free to watch and do not require cable subscription. However, English books in general and graphic novels in particular are more expensive (between 24$ and 44$ for Persepolis, depending on the edition and whether it's the complete novel or one volume, and around 25$ for Palestine). These prices are definitely not negligible in a 'third-world' area such as Western Asia.

Third, Palestine was translated into Arabic by a little-known edition called Dar El Tanwir in 2013. However, it is unclear how many copies were sold and the translation is not well-known. As for Persepolis, it was translated into Arabic by La CD-thèque, which was a CD store that closed in 2009. It is unclear whether readers can still purchase the book in Lebanon. While a very little number of graphic novels were translated into Arabic, political cartoons and stand-up comedy remain largely presented in Arabic thus ensuring accessibility to the masses. This makes the latter genres more prone to censorship (as evidenced by the censorship that several cartoonists went through such as Naji El Ali, Ali Ferzat and Hadi Khersandi).
3.3.1 The Fame of other Genres and Censorship in the Region

One does not have to delve deep to realize the fame of political cartoons and political stand-up comedy in the region. In Lebanon, for example, Pierre Sadek was one of the most famous cartoonists in the country and his ‘political cartoon live sketch’ on TV was watched by thousands. Also, the fame of other Arab cartoonists is very obvious especially in the case of Naji El-Ali whose character Handala became a symbol of the Palestinian's resistance against Israel. In fact, millions of Arab and Palestinian youth wear necklaces and bracelets of Handala and the character is drawn on dozens of walls in the Arab world and especially the Wall of Separation in Palestine.

In addition to that, one can always measure the fame of a genre by examining the censorship that it faces. If a genre is not famous and wide-spread, it does not represent a threat to governments and regimes and therefore there is no need for harassment and persecution. Thus, the lack of persecution in Satrapi and Sacco's case is quite telling especially in the light of the persecution that targeted several cartoonists such as Naji El Ali, Ali Farzat and Hadi Khersandi.
Political cartoonists in Western Asia are part of a respected legacy that has given them wide visibility in the region; however, that has led to the persecution of several cartoonists. For example, Naji al-Ali was a Palestinian cartoonist born in 1938, known for his criticism of Arab regimes and Israel in his drawings. He drew over 40,000 political cartoons, which often criticized Palestinian and Arab politics and political leaders. On 22 July 1987, while standing outside the London offices of al-Qabas, a Kuwaiti newspaper which published his political cartoons, Naji was shot in the face and died five weeks later. It is still not known who opened fire on Naji though British authorities suspected a double agent working for the PLO and the Israeli Mossad. After refusing to pass on information about the assassination, the Mossad became the subject of the British's displeasure who evicted three Israeli diplomats and closed down the Mossad's office in London. In addition to Al-Ali, Ali Farzat is a famous Syrian political cartoonist born in 1951. On 25 August 2011, Farzat was taken from his car in central Damascus by masked men at gunpoint. Farzat was assaulted, and the beating was focused mainly on his hands, and was dumped on the side of the airport road where he was found and taken to a hospital. Hadi Khorsandi, a contemporary Iranian satirist, is especially renowned for his focus on Persian socio-political issues, particularly his open criticism of all forms of dictatorship and religious fundamentalism. He has been living in forced exile in London since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, after he criticized the new regime. He also received death threats during the 1980s. Like Khorsandi, Mahmoud Shokraye is an Iranian cartoonist, who is famous for being sentenced to “25 lashes for a cartoon” he drew of a local MP in the city of Arak. Shokraye drew the local politician Ahmad Lotfi Ashtiani in a football stadium, dressed as a footballer. Ashtiani claimed
that Shokraye had insulted him and sued him. The court then ruled in favor of Ashtiani and sentenced Shokraye to “25 lashes” (Dehghan).

“The cartoon that got Shokraye 25 lashes” (Dehghan).

From these many examples, which are simply nothing but a small sample, we understand that regimes and governments in the region perceive certain genres as being more threatening to them than others. Thus, political cartoonists and stand-up comedians have been harassed, beaten, killed and forced into exile by regimes while Satrapi has been living in a chosen exile in Paris and Sacco was welcomed back twice to Gaza and several times to other countries in the region. The little fame of the genre of graphic novels has obviously allowed Satrapi and Sacco to deliver their ideas freely.
3.4 The Origin of the Genre

As stated in the brief historical overview in the previous chapter, graphic novels are the prestigious heirs to the comic book. We argue that the novel has not been able to shake off that stigma which means it is still tagged with the 'for children' stamp by certain people which in turn goes a long way in ensuring the safety of the authors from backlash.

Graphic novels in the region have still not been able to separate themselves from their 'ancestor', the comic book. Most of the region's contact with this type of graphic art comes from the comic books or the French bande dessinée. Their most common loci in the Arab world are “illustrated children’s periodicals” (Douglas 3). Though several forms of graphic art derived from the graphic novel have started to appear, the genre is still associated to children. This is further evidenced by the fact that, even in the United States, Persepolis is used in classrooms to explain the Revolution and Iranian history though a lot of people would argue that Persepolis, being an adult graphic novel, contains messages and ideas that are not suitable for children. In fact, in March 2013, the Chicago Public Schools system ordered copies of Persepolis to be removed from seventh-grade classrooms; they considered that the book "contains graphic language and images that are not appropriate for general use" (Wetli). The fact that the book was used for children of a relatively small age as opposed to high school classes is further proof to the fact that the genre is still considered 'for children'.
3.5 Tackling Trauma

The way an author manipulates the genre he/she uses is a definite contributor to the reception of the novels. When an author uses the genre smoothly without seeking to shock, the novel is less prone to backlashes and heavy criticism. Both authors have done exactly that. Both novels tackle traumatic issues and taboos in the region. The authors' implicit and light way of doing so enabled the books to be accepted in a relatively gentle way by the readers. Another point could go a long way into smoothing the road for the novels and that is humor and satire. In fact, Basu refers to the specificities of the genre itself by saying that Satrapi's adoption of a "cultural form, the graphic novel, can mask the seriousness of its statement under the guise of comic laughter."

When Sacco and Satrapi decided to tackle Palestine and Iran respectively, they knew that the majority of the events they were going to portray were traumatic and are characteristically part of the "unspeakable" realm every culture has. Some authors shy away from depicting such events while others attempt to 'outsmart' their readers by using symbolism when 'the going gets tough'. Satrapi and Sacco clearly decided to tackle that challenge head on. In Sacco's case, the trauma revolves around the human rights violations, prisons, and acts of torture perpetrated by Israel on a daily basis. As for Satrapi, trauma revolves around war, torture, child-soldiers among many others. In her essay entitled "Comics as Literature: Reading Graphic Narratives," Hillary Chute argues that authors like Spiegelman and Sacco 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." Chute mentions the inevitability of a traumatic angle but insists that the authors "refuse to
show it through the lens of unspeakability or invisibility, instead registering its difficulty through inventive (and various) practices” (Chute).

3.5.1 Joe Sacco's Palestine: Exposing Violations, Trauma and Tragedy

Sacco's novel is rich with traumatic events; almost every story told by an interviewee either mentions torture, gunshot wounds, or other physical injuries. Moreover, one of the self-deprecating subjects of Sacco’s is his incessant quest for a 'bloody' or 'gory' or 'sad' story. He looks for action in Gaza and the West Bank and he finds it, in abundance even.

There are several examples of Sacco tackling trauma such as the chapter entitled "Moderate Pressure Part 2." In fact, the chapter starts with two pages of three and four panels respectively. However, when Ghassan is taken into Israeli custody, the page contains six panels, then nine where he is left alone in a cell, twelve where he talks about how cold he was, sixteen where the interrogation continues and the judge extends his custody, twenty panels where he starts having hallucinations and is moved to yet a smaller cell and finally seven where he is released. In this chapter, Sacco eases us into Ghassan's story then starts increasing the pace bit by bit (9 then 12 then 16) after which he reaches the climax in three pages of 20 panels each (a crowded page made of 20 crowded panels and black gutters that could resemble Ghassan's small cell) only to liberate us from the grip of the story in the last page where the last panel depicts a busy street during the day outside of the courtroom. It is that contrast between the light of the street and the darkness (and overwhelming use of grey shades) of the cell that gives a
resemblance of closure to the reader (Fig.2). It is a great example of how Sacco smoothly manipulated the genre to portray trauma without shocking.

"It might have been a corridor."

"The wind was blowing hard down the corridor. It felt like the roof was falling."

"The rain was dripping down, the floor was full of water. My socks and shoes were soaked."

"I lost all feeling."

"At my third court appearance, the judge decided I should be held an additional four days."

"I didn't know then that Mussata Awad had just been killed."

"After four or five hours a policeman asked if I wanted a bath."

"Here's some clothes from your family. Something to shave with."

"It was the first time I'd washed in 15 days."

"I was allowed to sleep in the chair. I was taken to a nice cell to sleep."

"After only two hours in the chair, I was taken to another four or five times, every four or five hours."

"They changed me from one cell to another four or five times, every four or five hours."

"I was in the last cell for two days. It was Saturday, the Sabbath, and they didn't interrogate me."

"On the 19th day I had another court appearance."

"Your honor, we need another ten days to gather evidence in this case.

"Your honor, there is no evidence, there has been no confession. My client should be released today."

**Authenticating the Undocumentable**

In Palestine, Sacco chose to document the lives of Palestinians in Gaza Strip and the West Bank, thus choosing to document 'the undocumentable'. In fact, Palestinians, ever since the Nakba of 1948, have been unable to make any headway regarding the documentation of human rights violations perpetrated by the Israeli army. The Israelis constantly hide behind their well-known mantra: "A land without a people for a people without a land" and use it to justify all human rights’ violations as well as the original dispossession. As for the international community, its efforts (aside from condemning and asking for restraint) are focused on relief work. Sacco’s consciousness of the dilemma led him to simply act as a "middle person" between his interviewees and his readers. In their essay entitled "Kairos and Comics: Reading Human Rights Intercontextually in Joe Sacco’s Graphic Narratives", Rose Brister and Belinda Walzer quote Chute who considers that Sacco uses the graphic genre "to do important archival work that visualizes history based on oral testimonies he solicits from others, in a sense producing an archive from non-archived material" (Brister and Walzer).

**3.5.2 Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis: A Modified Perception**

Satrapi is extremely careful while attempting to describe trauma in regards to the time of its occurrence. In fact, if the traumatic event occurred when Marji was still a child, the portrayal matches that of a child and not that of an adult Satrapi remembering the event.

The first example of this is the burning of a movie theatre by the police who then traps the audience inside and leaves them to burn alive. “The people knew that it was the
Shah’s fault” (Satrapi 15). In figure, we see a panel depicting this scene that takes the third of a page. Marji depicts the dead as white ghosts flying through the movie theatre towards the blocked exit. Their heads are shaped as skulls and their mouths are wide open in the last scream of the dying. It is clearly a child's portrayal of death.

Another example would be from chapter “The Heroes” where Marji comes to learn about torture. In a large panel (fig. 3), she depicts several methods of torture used against a friend of her parents, Ahmadi. Marji shows us the soldiers whipping Ahmadi’s back and urinating on it and burning him with an iron. The absence of the panel's borders may be an indication to the inability of 10-year-old Marji to contain and understand the scope of this conversation that she was never supposed to be listening to. "My parents were so shocked that they forgot to spare me this experience" (Satrapi 51).

In the following page, we see yet another attempt by young Marji to imagine death. In the first panel (fig.4), Marji learns that Ahmadi was later killed; "In the end he was cut to pieces" (Satrapi 52). Marji draws Ahmadi’s corpse as a clean cadaver neatly cut into pieces. His legs are cut at the knees, the torso separated from the lower body, the hands cut from the shoulders and the head neatly severed. The body parts are still in their places as if Marji didn't know where to imagine them and they appear doll-like. And accordingly, we see once more a child's unrealistic depiction of death.

All the traumatic events depicted in the first part (when Marji still lives in Iran) are aligned with the point of view of young Marji. However, when Marjane returns to Iran as an adult, the cadavers are neatly outlined with more details. We no longer see the representations of dead bodies with ambiguous contours resulting from a naive and innocent imagination. For example, in the chapter “The Return”, Marjane walks the
streets upon her arrival to Iran and notices that almost every street has a new name - that of a martyr who died in the war - and she feels as though she "were walking through a cemetary" (Satrapi 251). In figure 5, two panels depict Marjane surrounded by the dead war martyrs’ bodies. Although Satrapi depicts the dead bodies as ghosts, she portrays them with clearly outlined and angular faces as well as moving hands. Also, these 'ghosts' are extremely different from those from the cinema burning; they are not floating but walking, surrounding and even crowding Marjane until she finds it "unbearable" and hurries home in the last panel (Satrapi 251) (fig.5). After Marjane arrived home, her parents update her with all the events she missed during her stay in Vienna. In the first panel of the page (fig.6), Satrapi depicts Tehran getting bombed and clearly shows the bombs exploding and the smoke billowing from the city. In the second panel, Satrapi depicts the Mujahedeen entering the country and again we see obviously outlined soldiers carrying weapons. Satrapi doesn't run away from trauma, but rather describes it all in a combination of text and image.


Satrapi's Legacy and the Importance of Memory

In *Persepolis*, Satrapi's ultimate goal is clearly to "never forget". She embarks us on a journey of her life in Iran during the revolution. Contrary to *Palestine*, the focus in *Persepolis* is not solely on the actual events. The "history" in *Persepolis* shares the spotlight with Marji's life and coming of age as an Iranian woman in both her homeland and in exile. But Satrapi's purpose (or one of them) is the historical representation. In fact, in an introduction to *Persepolis* written in 2002, Satrapi says: "One can forgive but should never forget". In her book entitled “*Constructing Lebanon: A Century of Literary Narratives*”, Elise Salem states that just as war is a condition that many try to understand through narration, the postwar amnesia also needs to be addressed, with postwar narratives about a historical era serving to “disturb rather than entertain” (Salem). The importance of "never forgetting" is reiterated by Marji's uncle, Anoosh, one of the characters who influenced her childhood. Marji's uncle Anoosh tells her the story of his exile, his return and ultimately, imprisonment. Anoosh informs Marji: "I tell you all this because it's important that you know. Our family memory must not be lost. Even if it's not easy for you, even if you don't understand it all" to which Marji answers: "Don't worry, I'll never forget"(Satrapi 60) (Fig.7).
3.6 Satirical Language

As we read both novels, we notice that they are abundant with humor and sarcasm. It would seem as an odd choice at the authors’ part especially since they are tackling traumatic events, wars and conflicts. But man is known to resort to such practices when confronted with the unspeakable; it is the best example of morbid sarcasm. Moreover, the use of sarcasm in situations where one does not expect anything other than respectful seriousness lends power and intensity to the trauma and lessens the ‘unspeakable’ aspect of it.

Literary critic and theorist of humor Alison Ross agrees that the dominant approach of humor is the incongruity theory, which focuses on the element of surprise. Humor is then produced out of a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in humor. “Some jokes have an element of shock because taboo subjects or words are
mentioned or because they attach a target” (Ross 4). “There may be a target for the humor- a person, an institution, or a set of beliefs- where the underlying purpose is deadly serious. Humor can occur in surprisingly serious contexts” (Ross 2). This humor is more like a “soft weapon”; an expression or form of resistance to oppression; a safety valve. It is humor which doesn’t make people laugh out loud, but smile a little and provoke thought since it presents grim reality in a humorous way without presumably exhibiting any direct threat to the status quo. “Laughter… liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power” (Bakhtin 1984:94). In Persepolis and Palestine’s political contexts, humor is perceived as a strategy of nonviolent resistance to oppression and dictatorship- a strategy used by disempowered members of a culture to release their anger subtly and indirectly.

The use of sarcasm in Palestine is of a self-deprecating nature. There are several examples of this throughout the book such as Sacco’s comments after he meets a Palestinian man: "I will alert the world to your suffering! Watch your local comic-book store" (Sacco 10), or when he tells Khaled and the neighbors: "Anyway...It's not like I'm here to mediate... and let's face it, my comics blockbuster depends on conflict; peace won't pay the rent" (Sacco 76). This dark humor also appears towards the end of chapter six where Sacco says: "Yep, another Palestinian room [...] in other words, let the tales of woe begin!"(Sacco 173).

It is thus obvious that the objective of both authors was never to shock or surprise but document and remember. Thus they manipulated the genre in order to do so and managed to escape backlash.
3.7 Concluding Remarks

A lot of factors determine the reception of a certain novel and whether it is censored or not. As seen above, Satrapi and Sacco benefited from several of these factors in order to escape a terrible fate that several artists, cartoonists and journalists in the region could not. Satrapi and Sacco's critiques were delivered in an undisputed and satirical manner derived from their choice of a genre that most people in the region do not have access to, while others underestimate. Thus, it is clear that McLuhan's paradox can be used in this instance to explain this phenomenon. If the medium is the message, then the message is: "This is what I think; please don't kill me."
Chapter Four

Image/Text Interplay

After establishing in the previous chapter the possibilities opened up by the high genre of graphic novels in West Asia, this chapter aims to specifically tackle the graphic tools of the genre and how they enable the authors to reach a realm beyond that of a conventional graphic novelist. In order to do so, I will analyze and study the different elements of visual/text interplay in both novels and argue that these elements give both authors new capacities that the author of mainstream graphic novels does not possess.

These bicultural authors have managed to combine textual and visual elements within their work and it is in the interplay of the two types where a third dimension is created by the authors' ingenuity. In addition to that, both authors build their characters and their novels on an insider/outsider model that stems from their biculturalism. Just like their hybrid identities, they combine and intermingle that which generally does not, and hence their novels exist solely in this third dimension. In this dimension, the use of the textual and the visual is much more intense even though it is based on simple and playful pictures. The use of those simple pictures to tackle difficult subjects as well as trauma is explicit and intense. These visual strategies, originating from their displacement, are used to narrate socio-political strife and trauma.
4.1 The Illusion of Order: Graphic/Verbal Interplay

The idea of interplay between the visual and the textual is a new one as opposed to the old discussion about the supremacy of one over the other. Out of this interplay is born the third dimension mentioned above where both elements interact on a basis of equality.

Throughout history, researchers have scribed a constant battle between image and text. To succinct this struggle, it is claimed that the image in the past was seen as vague and ambiguous deluding the exact meaning of the word. The word was seen as superior to the image due to its ability to deliver a straightforward message to the reader. But since the digital age, the course of things has shifted. The supremacy of word over image no longer prevails in a world based on visual concepts. With the advent of TVs, tablets, smart-phones, and computers everything has become digitalized and visual. Nowadays, people access YouTube to get animated summaries of novels. Even big industries and businesses assert that words alone are failing and are remodeling concepts to include visual aids that get directly to the target audience. That’s where info graphics intervene. Info graphics are a blend of images and text intending to explain while keeping the viewers visually entertained. However, one concludes that it is not a battle of supremacy. Images and texts are no longer in conflict but rather complement each other.

among many others, critically assesses the relationship of images and text. Influenced by William Blake, Mitchell states that in order to understand the work of Blake he had to understand his paintings as well. Mitchell acknowledges the power of visuals in an interview about Blake, “he brought the two sides of his work together in illuminated books, artistic books where images were constantly interacting with one another and with text” (Anfeng). Zoe Sadokierski, in a study on hybrid picture and visual writing, quotes Mitchell. “Images have unique ways of communicating that are not reducible to words” (Sadokierski 60). He also quotes visual scholar Paul Martin,

“The well established intellectual hegemony- that values the verbal (words) over the visual (images) as the primary mode for analyzing and articulating human knowledge- is rooted in the different kinds of meaning the verbal and visual have the capacity to communicate: words are elevated for their capacity to form a structured, unambiguous arguments and analysis. From an early age, reading and writing are promoted as educational necessities for intellectual development, whereas image making and interpretation are considered optional devices” (Sadokierski 61).

Because images were vague and unspecific, text became superior to image. In the 19th century as the word “truth” and science were making their way, people craved accuracy, something text and not image provided. However, this did not last. Going into the Romantic era, the image began to flourish; nevertheless, it did not overshadow text, “almost all images we encounter are, in fact, hybrid texts, pinned like butterflies within a linguistic frame” (Sadokierski 63). Nowadays, with the technology dawning, we are witnessing the supremacy of text over image altering. To learn now one does not go to
history books but rather watches documentaries. One does not buy the newspaper anymore but accesses social media platforms where images of most prominent news take over the timelines. This is why the digital age has helped shift culture from linguistic to pictorial. Mitchell describes in Picture theory (1994) how the, “pictorial turn” triumphs over the “linguistic turn”. He discusses, “the widely shared notion that visual images have replaced words as the dominant mode of expression in our time” (Sadokierski 64). Mitchell interrupts the competition of the image and text and explains that no mode is more important or dominant than the other. What we perceive through images is different than what words deliver. Mitchell states,

“The images we see in the world only make sense, in fact, in relation to the words that circulate through them and that we bring to them…Literature is a structure of words in which pictures, scenes, and images of all kinds (both optical and acoustic) are nested. The important thing in the analysis of culture and the arts, in my view, is the training of the double disciplines — so that we both read and see, hear and behold, as we make sense of the world” (Anfeng, p.140).

In hybrid texts, the junction of both visual and verbal creates something that is unspoken and unseen: the “third meaning”. This third meaning creates a new understanding for the reader and personalizes his reading experience. In Dante’s Inferno, canto 31, when Dante reached Satan, he became speechless for no words can describe the misery and the horror of the place. This is only singular illustration of the text’s inability to illustrate, whereas images can assist text in communicating the meaning. Another example of the elasticity of hybrid texts is Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon’s
adaptation of 9/11 Commission report which was turned into a graphic novel. This illustrated adaptation has a “diagrammatic quality” that makes the Twin Tower events “easier to read about and to understand than might be possible in prose alone” (Tabachnick 28). The argument is no longer about supremacy but about interplay, interaction and equality of both mediums.

4.2 Graphic Novels: An Aesthetic Perception and Intellectual Pursuit

Authors generally use every tool in their arsenal to get their ideas across; they use every tool varying from imagery, symbolism to descriptive or provocative approaches. However, authors of graphic novels have at their disposal tools that authors of literary novels do not possess, like images, typography (fonts), flashbacks, panels, gutters, frames, speech balloons, and visual backgrounds. Will Eisner states that this genre is a “montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills” (Eisner 8). For Eisner, reading a comic book is "an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit”. He considers that, in a graphic novel, “the regimes of art (e.g., perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimes of literature (e.g., grammar, plot, and syntax) become superimposed upon each other" (Einser 8). Referring to Satrapi’s Persepolis and Sacco’s Palestine as examples, I will attempt to explain how the use of such tools gives graphic novels a cachet that mainstream graphic novels lack.

Both graphic novels are said to be “hybrid texts“, conjoining not only text and image, but also the private and the public. These bicultural authors use hybrid texts to constantly move between the insider view and the outsider's one, thus serving multiple
purposes. The medium is shown to offer unique opportunities to an author who wants to convey his or her feelings and experiences without limiting the perspective to solely that of the narrator and his words. Satrapi states in her book introduction, as well as in many interviews, that her writing was a journey of self-discovery and discovery of the other. The self-discovery angle serves her, as a bicultural, to answer questions about her hybrid identity while discovering the other is done in an effort to understand the other (i.e. the westerners, perhaps) and rationalizing the trauma in an effort to 'never forget'. The main intention behind writing *Persepolis* was to help the other cross the border and unveil the issues that have plagued her country for years. In an interview with Pantheon Staff, Satrapi details the first years after her arrival to France when she would be "telling stories about life in Iran to my friends. We’d see pieces about Iran on television, but they didn’t represent my experience at all. I had to keep saying, “No, it’s not like that there.” I’ve been justifying why it isn’t negative to be Iranian for almost twenty years" (randomhouse.com).

In a similar context, *Palestine* was written and illustrated to depict the author’s stay in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the First Intifada. According to the introduction, Sacco felt that the Palestinian experience was not adequately reported in the mainstream US media and his goal was to give an honest look at the suffering of the Palestinian people. By doing so, Sacco virtually breaks the mold and steps out of the comfort zone where the citizens of his adopted country live in by defying the traditional view of U.S. media thus, deliberately stepping out of the insider mold and adopting an outsider status. In the introduction to *Palestine*, Sacco says: “Their land is still expropriated, their dwellings are still bulldozed, and their olive groves are still uprooted. They still
encounter an occupying army, as well as the settlers, who are often the armed adjuncts to the occupying army” (Sacco, vi).

We are often tempted to believe that an autobiographical graphic novel is an accurate representation of reality because it is backed by drawings and graphic. But in fact, just like any autobiography, it is mainly the psychological truth; it is what the author has interiorized from his surrounding perceptions as a child and has chosen to represent in his novel using either text, graphics, or the combination of both. Persepolis is written through the vision of a child growing into a woman in troubled times depicting the metamorphosis of the narrator herself and Palestine is Joe Sacco's own perception of the reality as a tourist in Palestine. Autobiographies can never be completely precise; although they assume the responsibility of getting as close to complete accuracy as possible, (where the facts, dates and places are mainly concerned) it is on that gap between precision and inaccuracy where the author’s creativity lies. Both Satrapi and Sacco have certainly used that creativity to mold the genre into a medium for delivering their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Basically, the things that I said are all true…But it’s not documentary. You always have to arrange things to tell a story. I’m not going to point exactly to where I have changed things. That’s my secret (McLaughlin).

In her paper entitled "Graphic Novels or Novel Graphics? The Evolution of an Iconoclastic Genre", Elaine Martin investigates "the history, evolution and current popularity of the graphic novel, a genre that represents the creative interplay between text and image". In regards to the relation between text and image, she considers that
graphic novels "concretize literary ambiguity" (Martin). We will be focusing on that act of concretization as well as the interplay between text and image in Persepolis and Palestine.

4.3 Frames and Mirrors

Throughout both novels, Satrapi and Sacco both tackle topics of cultural identity and trauma using tools exclusive to the graphic novel such as fonts, frames and mirrors. All of these tools cannot be imitated by the author of a conventional memoir because they rely on the interplay of text and image.

4.3.1 The Case of Persepolis

4.3.1.1 Typography (Fonts)

The graphic nature of the medium that Satrapi and Sacco chose allows them to manipulate the typography aspect to serve their purposes. Since both of these works belong to the high genre of the graphic novel, Satrapi and Sacco manipulate the typography as part of a legacy originating from political cartoonists who use multiple font styles to advance their ideas. Satrapi doesn’t maintain the same font throughout the entire novel. One occurrence when Satrapi changes the font style is shown in one of the panels in chapter, “The Joke” where Marjane has just been prescribed anti-depressants in an attempt to deal with the absence of drive she feels after coming back to Iran. The medication leaves her in a trance (Satrapi 272) (Fig.8). In that panel, we see two people speaking to her. As a result of that trance, the two individuals (it appears later that they are her parents) are shown in the form of white ghosts with no clear features. The conversation in that panel is written in a cursive handwriting but the letters appear
slightly fuzzy. That trance, expressed by the font and Marjane's admission is a precursor to several attempts to commit suicide. But, even in the absolute peak of her identity crisis, Marjane finds herself unable to get ahead with the act.


Another occurrence is in Figure 9 when Marji realizes her grandfather was the son of the emperor that was overthrown. In the panel at the bottom of the page, Marji says: "My grandpa was a prince" (Satrapi 22). The font is distinctly different from the one used previously. In fact, it is similar to the writing of a child in elementary or middle school (cursive handwriting, letters in italic...). In that panel, Marji imagines her grandfather riding on an elephant towards his castle and followed by his enemies who are taking the shape of lions.
After Marji’s parents reveal the truth about her grandfather’s life (confiscated properties, his communist beliefs and subsequent prison sentences) and after having told her about the torture her father endured in prison, Marji is portrayed as shocked in three panels with her eyes wide open and lying down; she even forgets all about the monopoly party with her parents and decides to take a long bath, attempting to understand her grandfather’s agony. (Satrapi 25) (Fig. 10) Through the panel we understand that Marji’s reaction is merely a little girl's imagination running wild after hearing the word "prince". The choice of this genre enables old Marjane to show us Marji's childish outlook at life without having to recur to the use of the words "childish" or "naive". Satrapi uses a child’s perspective (both verbally and visually) to depict a time of Iranian history that was so entrenched in “adult” situations –revolution, war, and cultural upheaval–to provide a universal appeal that is undeniably captivating. Her images (illustrations and typography) appear as though they come directly from the eye of the child, and Satrapi has stated that the most important part of her work is in the memory of her childhood.
4.3.1.2 Mirrors

Given that both *Palestine* and *Persepolis* are written by bicultural authors with hybrid identities, we can detect several instances where these authors use mirrors in order to depict the paradox of the self and the other using visual elements exclusive to the genre.

One of the most obvious examples of the use of mirrors in *Persepolis* occurs after a conversation between Marjane and her grandmother, who can be considered one of the most important characters in the novel. Before her travel to Vienna, Marji is seen spending a night with her grandmother who gives her pieces of advice which ends with: "Always keep your dignity and be true to yourself" (Satrapi 150) (Fig.11). The effect of that advice resounds, in fact, in the following page, where we see Marji in the second panel, standing in front of the mirror, addressing herself: "I will always be true to myself" (Satrapi 151).

![Image of a mirror with text]

This mirror scene is a complete contradiction to another mirror scene shown further in the book after Marjane returns to Iran and gets married. In the chapter entitled “The Makeup”, Marjane tells her grandmother about setting up a random man in the street to evade the guardians of the revolution. Marji's grandmother is furious and accuses her of being a "selfish bitch" and reminds her that her grandpa “spent a third of his life in prison for having defended some innocents” (Satrapi 291). In the following panel, we see Marjane standing in front of the mirror unsmiling with a caption saying: "My grandma had just yelled at me for the first time in my life. I decided that it would also be the last" (Satrapi 291) (Fig. 12).

Throughout the book, Satrapi smoothly shows us the importance of her grandmother in her life. This revelation culminates in the last panel where the last words of the novel are dedicated to Satrapi’s grandmother. In that panel, Marjane says: “Freedom had a price”. Indeed, for Marjane, the heaviest price to pay in return for going into exile was not being able to see her grandmother again.

4.3.1.3 Frames

In addition to creating mirror scenes, Satrapi manipulates the frames of the panels to relay her message. It is a tool exclusive to the graphic medium. In the chapter entitled “The Heroes”, Marji is slowly discovering more and more about all the rivalry occurring in Iran. Two of Satrapi’s friends, the political prisoners Siamak Jari and Mohsen Shakiba, are released from prison after being held captive for six years for speaking out against the new government. When Marji’s family invites both men along with their families over for dinner, the men tell quite detailed stories of being tortured in prison, and this shocks Marji, who comes to learn about torture. In a large panel, she depicts several methods of torture used against their friend Ahmadi, who suffered hell since he was a member of the guerillas. Marji shows us the soldiers whipping Ahmadi’s back and urinating on it and burning him with an iron (Satrapi 51). Satrapi uses the absence of the panel’s borders to indicate the inability of 10-year-old Marji to contain and understand the scope of a conversation she was never supposed to overhear. “My parents were so shocked; they forgot to spare me this experience” (Satrapi 51).
Another example of this frame manipulation can be seen in chapter “The Sheep” when Marji learns that her beloved Uncle Anoosh was falsely executed for being a “Russian spy” (Satrapi 70). As a sign of a grief that young Marji could not comprehend, the newspaper announcing his death is seen in an open panel with no frames and a white background. The white color of the background, coupled with the white pigeons drawn is a tribute to Anoosh's soul. Perhaps Marji is hoping that, by refusing to draw borders on that panel, she is allowing Anoosh's soul to finally be free and fly away.

4.3.2 The Case of Palestine

4.3.2.1 Typography (Font)

Sacco uses the same font throughout the whole book though his touch is clear in instances where he underlines certain words in the text, mostly to highlight sarcasm or for self-deprecation purposes. Interestingly though, Sacco occasionally underlines certain words in the text that a person would normally stress on in an oral conversation. For instance, he underlines the word ‘now’ in his sentence, “Now they’re smiling back” (Sacco 41) to stress the only glimmer of hope after interviewing men who have been arrested, imprisoned, and tortured, many times without a reason.
It's January and I've hooked up with a Japanese photo-journalist named Saburo... We have an arrangement: He takes the pictures; I do the talking... My English is far better than his, after all, and English is the best we can do...

REMIND ME

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

HOW ARE YOU?

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

Not that English always gets you far, but the kids like the practice, and it's a good idea to get the kids on your side. I smile a lot, tell them my name is Joe, that I am fine, and that usually does the trick, though not always. Two or three times, in other places kids have chased me off, calling out to each other that I'm a Jew, or picked up stones and fingered them till I've smiled and beamed my way into their little hearts. Kids can be exhausting...

Adults, too. Not that they run after you, giggling and tugging at your sleeve. In a place like this they hang back, staring, sizing up the kind of trouble you might mean. More smiles and greetings in order here. "Salaam Alekum!" Keep that smile going. "Salaam Alekum!" Now they're smiling back. Someone hands us a bag of tangerines.

This is Balata, the biggest refugee camp in the West Bank, practically across the road from Nabus. Some Palestinians living here were among the three-quarters of a million who fled or were forced out of what is now Israel in 1948...

Do we need to talk about 1948? It's hardly a secret how the Zionists used rumors, threats, and massacres to expel the Arabs and create new demographics that guaranteed the Jewish nature...
4.3.2.2 Self-representation... Or Mirror Perhaps?

Throughout *Palestine*, we are intrigued at first by the manner Sacco chooses to depict himself. This manner could be considered as simply part of self-deprecating humor; however, once we realize the contrast it presents with the painstaking attention to details Sacco exhibits, we notice that it is much better suited to consider it a sort of mirror. Sacco might not be present doubly on the pages, yet we cannot help but feel as if it is a mirror of Joe and the author at the same time.

Though *Palestine* is an autobiographical graphic novel, it does not cover Sacco's life per se but actually follows him in his visit to the West Bank and Gaza and records his interactions with Palestinians and some Israelis. Sacco's style is inspired by his journalistic background. He never leads the individuals he interviews but simply sits back and watches as they tell their stories and only intervenes when in need of clarifications. As such, Sacco is present in almost all the panels. In most panels, we see a side view of Joe, while in other panels, we see the scene from Joe's perspective. In some rare cases, Joe isn't even present in the panel. An example to that is the sequence "Moderate Pressure Part 2" where he only appears in the first panel.

What attracts our attention regarding Sacco's self-representation is the way he draws himself. Indeed, when comparing a real picture of Joe Sacco and the portrayal of Joe in the novel, we only see a basic resemblance.
His lips are exaggeratingly enlarged, his chin is nonexistent, his two front teeth are much larger and his eyes are permanently hidden behind his glasses. Sacco portrays himself as an awkward geek despite his quite normal looks in reality. In fact, we can even say that Sacco 'africanizes' himself in order to look more like an African-American. It is almost as if, in order to break the mold we spoke of earlier, he had to 'go all in' where the American society is concerned. It is the ultimate self-deprecating decision. Sacco acts as if he cannot draw the suffering and horrible conditions of the people he observes while portraying himself as he looks normally. He acts as if he needs to humble himself so that they could shine. This is also evident in the way Sacco draws portraits. His attention to detail is astonishing to the point that describing in words one of the faces that Sacco drew would take pages and he does it for thousands of faces throughout the novel, not just the individuals he interviews. However, this attention to detail does not extend to Sacco himself who always appears in the same way and he doesn't apply the same attention to details to his portrait. In fact, aside from a few lines clarifying his facial features, Joe looks simplistic compared to some of the portraits he drew in the book (such as Yusef, Mohammed and Iyyad in "Ansar 3" to name but a
few). Would the author of a novel or autobiography be able to be that self-effacing? Certainly not.

4.3.2.3 Attention to Details

As mentioned above, the self-effacing way Sacco uses to mirror himself in the novel is a striking contrast to his marvelous attention to details throughout the novel. The first thing the reader is struck with when reading *Palestine* is the shockingly vivid details used by Sacco to portray scenes and characters. He places such a great importance on the visuals to the point where he actually tells us. In the “Pilgrimage” chapter, Sacco draws an extremely detailed view of the street of Jabalia and says in one of the captions on the panel in the bottom: "I want real stories, he knows that, vivid descriptions, the details, man, comics is a visual medium" (Sacoo 219). Sacco promises vivid and he definitely delivers. The following figure is an example to that. No detail is left blurry, not one inch of the muddy road or electricity cables. And thus, Sacco clearly states that his idea of a "real story" is a detailed one and that his way of showing us that "story" is through his focus on drawing the details. In short, it's all about the visual! That corroborates the self-effacing attempts of Sacco throughout the novel. The words aren't his. His portrait is insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Therefore, the only thing he can, and wants to do, is to intervene in the drawing process by adding the most detailed images to the words he hears.
4.4 Time, Space and Gutters

Frames, mirrors and fonts are not the only methods available to authors of graphic novels. In fact, the medium allows both authors and readers to smoothly manipulate time and space via the design of the panels, the captions within them and the gutter. This is one of Marshall McLuhan’s insights which Scott McCloud has reiterated too: “imaginative interactivity.” In Media Hot and Cold, McLuhan identifies comics as a “cool medium of low definition” because so much has to be filled in and completed by the reader (McLuhan 24). McCloud identifies it as “invisible art” where readers are becoming the active participants in creating a story because “modern readers can be expected to have an easy understanding of the image-word mix and the traditional deciphering of text” (Eisner 7).

4.4.1 The Case of Palestine

4.4.1.1 Linear Movement and Flashbacks

It is impossible to determine whether the action in Palestine follows a linear or a non-linear movement. In fact, we move through interviewees and regions at a random pace. It appears as if Joe has a checklist of people and places he wants to visit and he tells us their stories according to that checklist that he does not share with us. However, he very clearly uses several flashbacks. Unlike Satrapi, none of Sacco’s flashbacks are personal; they are all historical and factual flashbacks and most of them are in the beginning of the novel. For example, at the very beginning he explains the Declaration of Balfour and the origin of the famous Israeli saying: ’A land without a people for a people without a land’. Chapter two tells the story of the Nakba. Curiously, all of these flashbacks occur in
pages that are dominated by text and not images. For Sacco, the past is gone and is not an immediate interest of his therefore it is not something he can show with images like the stories of his interviewees.

4.4.1.2 Gutters

As a reader moves from panel to panel in a graphic novel's page, the order of the panels is an indicator of how time is progressing in the narrative. Furthermore, the empty spaces between the panels, i.e. the “gutter”, represent a process where the reader is responsible for filling in the blanks of the narrative. It is up to the reader to understand the progression of time and actions which could or could not be made clear. Scott McCloud compares the act of moving through gutters with “observing the parts but perceiving the whole”. Gutters are considered one of the greatest time manipulation tools at the disposal of authors who can use them to stretch or compress time as they wish.

One of the many examples of the varied uses of the gutters lies in The Boys chapter/Part three where Sacco draws our attention subtly to our position in the narrative. He depicts three groups of three panels each that detail the beating of a teenage boy named Firas at the hands of the Israeli Army (IDF). First, the reader is positioned as a soldier, then as bystander, and finally as a hospital staff. In this case, the gutter not only points out to the progression of time but also the position of the reader in the scene.
In addition to that, Sacco also uses the color of the gutter to relay a message. In *Moderate Pressure Part 2*, Sacco uses exclusively black gutters to increase the claustrophobia of the reader and pull him further into the darkness of the torture cell.

Perhaps another way Sacco uses to manipulate the gutters lies in, well, their absence. Occasionally, we notice that an entire page of the book is made out of one panel, even if there are over ten captions and several drawings. It is perhaps Sacco's way of informing us that the action depicted in that panel is way too fast to be divided by gutters. An example of this can be seen in *The Touch and the Dead* Scene when Sacco relays the story of a Palestinian woman who was interrogated by the Shin Bet. The action in that chapter starts so quickly that the first page is for portrayals of the woman not separated by gutters. It is Sacco's method of making us jump headfirst into the action without allowing us to use the comfort of a gutter where we can fill in the blanks ourselves; instead he wants the woman's story to do it because he wants it to be that compelling for us.

### 4.4.2 The Case of Persepolis

4.4.2.1 Linear Movement and Flashbacks

The story follows a linear path where the action in every panel comes after the action in the preceding one and after the action in the following one with the exception of some "time-jumps" and a few flashbacks like in panels where "the adults" explain a few things to Marji. The first chapter is a perfect example of shifting back and forth through time. The flashback starts in the very first panel of the novel in 1980 ("This was in 1980") where Marji introduces herself to us only to move back to 1979 in the third panel ("In
1979, a revolution took place”) and introduces a cataclysmic event (the Islamic Revolution) only to go back to 1980 in the following panel ("Then came 1980") to introduce yet another influencing event and that is the mandatory veil (Satrapi 3). Marji then takes us back to 1979 in the next page ("The year before, in 1979") where she lays a contradicting relation between that panel and the one before. In fact, in the previous panel, she explains to us that the veil has become mandatory and shows us a depiction of how she and her peers react to the veil. However, in the next page, Marji shows us how things were before the veil and says: "We were in a French non-religious school, where boys and girls were together" only to move back to 1980 ("And then suddenly in 1980") to show us the beginning of segregation of boys and girls in schools (Satrapi 4). Another example lies in pages 19 to 21 and 22 to 25; Marji's father explains to her the putsch that overthrew the emperor and her family's role in that story. The flashback starts with the last panel in page 19 when Marji's father says: "The truth is that 50 years ago..." and continues for 17 panels while Marji's father tells the story of the putsch. In page 22, another flashback starts where Marji's parents explain to her the role played by her grandfather in Iranian history. The flashback lasts for twenty panels and ends with Marji's father leading her mother away while saying: "Come on. That time is past"(Satrapi 25).

4.4.2.2 Gutters

Perhaps the best example of Satrapi's use of the gutter in Persepolis happens in the very first page and sets the tone for the entire novel. In the first panel, we are shown a picture of Marji in a veil with the caption: "This is me" only to move to the second one where Satrapi announces that we can't see her (Satrapi 3) (Fig.16). Satrapi separates
herself from her classmates (and her fellow citizens, even her family) from the start and that barrier is represented in the first panels by the gutter. This gutter truncates Marji and shows us only a part of her elbow. This separation is clarified throughout the novel where Marji is always 'different' be it because of her social class, her parents' political opinions or her identity struggle.


Most of Satrapi's use of gutters indicates a time/space transitions and most of her pages consist of several panels divided by gutters. However, on some occasions, Satrapi has used the one panel per page technique to depict life-changing events. It seems as if transition is impossible in some cases for Marji and thus the absence of a gutter denies the reader this transition and forces him to remain in the same time/space as Marji until he turns the page. An example of this can be seen when Marji feels the stabbing loss of her Uncle Anoosh. She feels herself 'lost' and 'without bearings' and she depicts the
whole scene in one page where the only option for us to move on from that feeling is to turn the page (Satrapi 71).

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Authors have in their arsenal, as shown, much more 'weapons' than the author of a conventional memoir. These weapons include fonts, flashbacks, mirrors and gutters and both authors used them to establish a difference between their style and other authors. This action happens obviously sometimes (such as the change of a font) or in a hidden and smooth way (establishing a barrier through gutters). Regardless of the method, these actions set graphic novelists aside since they allow them to explore themes of identity and trauma in an easier-on-the-reader manner that deliver their ideas without them appearing as if 'they're trying too hard'.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

Graphic novels were originally defined by Scott McCloud as a new form of art, “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate space” with the “intention of conveying information or producing aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud 9). This form of art has facilitated the emergence of new leitmotifs such as socio-political themes which were ignited with Spiegelman’s Maus; however, in West Asia, a new course was trailed in such a way that the genre is a mixture of diverse literary and art forms: the literary novels, the comic books and political cartoons. This new wave differentiates itself by employing traditional angles in an altered manner, showing social and political slants in a satirical language, and carrying the legacy of Western Asia through the hybrid identity and biculturalism of authors like Joe Sacco and Marjane Satrapi, respective authors of Palestine and Persepolis.

The two novels highlight the importance of the inclusion of this new emerging genre in the literary spectrum as essential contributors to contemporary fiction. Sacco’s success lies in aligning documentary journalism with a literary novel, thus succeeding in becoming a true contributor to the genre. Like Palestine, Persepolis offers a social analysis. Satrapi uses black and white, often implying a definitive point of view. These images are often a reflection of an unambiguous reality, that of living in an oppressed society. The mere fact that these two works have tackled sensitive issues, not only political ones, but humanitarian topics has helped expand the readership of the genre.
Nonetheless, both authors have refused to employ symbolism and masks in their work and distanced it from analogy. Satrapi and Sacco both admit to having influences from authors foreign to their cultural roots. Sacco says that his work is greatly influenced by the political cartoonist Naji el Ali, and Satrapi by Robert Crumb, Spiegelman and Sacco as well.

The simplicity of the drawings and the speech makes it easier to attain a larger audience and address stigmatized and marginal subjects in a smoother, softer way that allows the reader to identify more freely with either the main character or the topic. Non-comics readers can enjoy skimming through graphic novels not only because the drawings are flatter but because they address issues that concern every literary fanatic. The use of visuals, humor and sarcastic language is a major contributor to this new wave. Even if the graphic novel does not serve a descriptive purpose, it traces the story of an adventure, like a comic book does, only not in a form that makes one feel childish. Persepolis and Palestine both trace the journey of the main character in a land where he feels estranged (Palestine for Sacco and Europe and even Iran for Satrapi). The search for an identity is a crucial topic.

The use of this new wave genre has enabled the authors to freely express their intents along with the little fame they both have in Western Asia. The fact that the graphic novel genre has been stigmatized and attached to the realm of children’s books has also helped conveying messages related to social and political issues, especially in West Asia. The disguised satire comes as a helpful medium to represent conflict in the Arab world and traumatic events in the region.
While Satrapi deals with all the taboo topics in her society such as the attire and the veil in which the Iranians are obligated to wear, the Islamic schools where boys and girls are separated, the execution of the innocents, the government’s control over alcohol in citizens’ own homes, the forbidden parties and much more, Joe Sacco, in *Palestine*, reveals the historical events of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, illuminating a side that no other mainstream media has dared to show. Sacco uses an imaginative technique that allows the reader to look at the page at first as a whole, tries to let it sink in, and grasp each and every detail in it. The use of non-sequential nonlinear techniques allows the reader to open the page and find that it is all over the place. Unlike *Persepolis*, *Palestine*, the book, is a perfect reflection of the content and the situation in Palestine, the land. Satrapi uses flashbacks more than once, but in a more organized, more subtle way than Sacco’s. Sacco also describes the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as "a historical blur", while Satrapi focuses on preserving memory, on never forgetting. She interconnects her life, that of her family members with Iranian history and that of women in Iran.

Although these two novels have gained more popularity internationally than locally, they both appear to have carved a new path for emerging or seasoned Arab and foreign graphic artists to take. These authors saw the importance and the potential of the genre especially in the light of the recent uprisings in the region. Among these, we find: Zeina Abi Rached, Mazen Kerbaj, Majdi Al Shafi‘i and Emmanuel Guibert.

Zeina Abi Rached, a Lebanese graphic artist, was born in Lebanon in 1981, one year before the start of the 1982 war. In 2007, the author published a graphic novel entitled "Mourir, partir, revenir - Le Jeu des hirondelles" (later published in English under the title "A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return" in 2012), using a
style extremely similar to that of Satrapi (black-white drawings, shape of the characters.). The novel is a depiction of one afternoon of Abi Rached's childhood where her parents leave home (during the war) to visit her grandparents only for communication to be breached between them when the shelling starts.

Mazen Kerbaj is a Lebanese painter, illustrator and musician, renowned for being one of the first Lebanese graphic artists to be recognized outside of Lebanon and for his abstract and experimental style, who published several short and long graphic novels about Lebanon (the war of 1975, the war of 2006, Samir Kassir's death).

Magdee El Shafee, an Egyptian graphic artist, published the first Egyptian graphic novel entitled "Metro". In his novel, El Shafee criticizes Hosni Mubarak's rule and the resulting corruption and poverty. Soon after its publishing, the novel was banned by the Egyptian government on the basis of its ‘offense to public morals'. Magdy was arrested and all the copies of the book were confiscated. It is only until 2013 that Metro was again available in Egypt.

Emmanuel Guibert is a French graphic artist who participated in the elaboration of a collective effort in three parts (published respectively in 2003, 2004 and 2006) under the title "The Photographer". The novel is partly a photojournalistic endeavor and partly a graphic novel. It is based on the photographs taken by a French photojournalist called Didier Lefèvre who accompanied a group of doctors and nurses from Doctors without Borders into Afghanistan in 1986. The book tells the story of LeFèvre's journey using his photographs that are bridged together by Guibert's drawings.
It is quite obvious that there is currently a new track that consists of approaching issues of war, conflict and trauma using graphic narratives as a medium. It is also apparent that all of these relatively new endeavors are benefiting from the success of Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* and Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*. These authors might never achieve a level of fame that can be compared to their 'conventional' counterparts; however, they can rest knowing that they succeeded where others have failed. They managed to tackle a thorny and traumatic subject using a medium that was thought to be "childish" while establishing a new track within the genre. An incredible feat, to say the least!
Works Cited


