

A postmodern analysis: Tracing the elements of politics, war and trauma in graphic narratives in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*.

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3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Abstract

The paper aims to show how graphic novels can be included in the mainstream reading culture. Visual narratives not only glorify a culture or a country, but it also instruments to highlight the intricate and gruesome details of incidents such as violence and other forms of discrimination in a society. I intend to analyze two graphic novels namely Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis I* and *II* (2000, 2003) and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*. The first half of the paper will be based on the history and importance of graphic novel. The paper also discusses the how graphic novels are gradually becoming a product of postmodern invention. The second half is a discussion on the analysis on the two graphic novels mentioned above.

The thesis is theoretically guided by Jean Francois Lyotard's idea of metanarratives and language games to explain the usage of languages in visual narratives, Sigmund Freud's 'Traumatic Theory' to decipher Sacco's *Palestine*. Satrapi's *Persepolis* being an autobiography of a female author, thus the paper also intends to look at the feminine perspective as well as the criticism attached to it. A set of theories based on graphic narratives will also guide the paper to its finality.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Every war comes with a price and women plays an important role in this very trade of war. Irrespective of place and time, the sacrifices made by women and children were often high. A country like Bangladesh that ought for her mother tongue had to rip off her entire self for such a victory. If a country is compared with a woman, both are ripped, torn, divided and defamed before any peace treaties. The trauma of war not only takes place between nations but also within relationships or maybe in an individual. This trauma of war is beyond any human explanation or understanding. Irrespective of numerous books and documentaries, the experience of war remains as an unclear, unimaginative vision. In order to form a clear picture of a country's history, especially when it goes through war and trauma, visuals are very important. Tim O'Brien writes a short story "How to tell a true war story" which says that there is nothing called a war story. Because the experience that a human goes through can never be depicted in mere words, it can either be sketched, drawn or synthesized. He says, "In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen." (O'Brien 176).

In order to understand the experience of war from a far distance or maybe get a glimpse of it, visuals play an essential role in forming a close picture. Thus, graphical interpretations can be brought to perspective. Graphic novels, treading a very successful historical emancipation has been quite capable in dealing and depicting serious issues such as politics, war and trauma. The question can arise, even if an author is writing from real life experience, how much can readers understand through simple texts? Autobiographies accompanied with visual and textual interpretations aid to make the experience of the readers more authentic in this response. Joe Sacco's '*Palestine*' is an autobiographical graphic novel and a 'comic journal' which takes the readers through the narrow lanes of Palestine. The readers experience the traumatic lives of the

Palestinians due to the series of bombings, curfew, raid and uncountable synonyms related to war. The meticulous details that are projected in Sacco's novel enable readers to understand the plight of the Palestinians. Other than sharing their experience, understanding the Palestinian-Israeli political conflict through the eyes of a Western journalist is also an interesting aspect to look into. The perspectives that the Palestinians projected to Sacco during his visit and Sacco's perspective projected to his readers create a triangular route of analysis as a whole. The paper will initially discuss on the narrative style in Sacco's "Palestine", proceeding to a further discussion on the Israeli-Palestine conflict through the lens of the West and lastly an orientalist perspective spun by Sacco in his graphic novel.

Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel "*Persepolis*" is an autobiographical piece which can also be regarded as a bildungsroman, a true story of a girl brought up in an educated family in Iran who had a childhood filled with uncertainties and brash decision to a girl who has become a strong, independent, and emotional and a rebel. The journey depicted in Satrapi's novel serves as a confession of the author's mind and also highlights the scenario before, during and post Iranian Revolution. A war takes away uncountable things from a person or a family in terms of tangible things. In return, a war gives numerous memories which can never be erased from a human mind. A photograph is essential to keep the memory alive. Maybe, a visual depiction is the only form how a story can be told and justified. Satrapi tried to bring in justice by "*Persepolis*". Thus, the paper will discuss how the narrative style of the author portrays, the childhood, the political tension during that time and a family deals with such situation. However, the novel is written from the perspective of Satrapi herself, there can be different sides to it. "*Persepolis*" being an autobiographical novel survives an authentic touch to the information that it provides to the readers.

The paper is mainly divided into six chapters, where the first half out of the total discussion is based on co-relation between postmodernism and graphic novels. It is important to understand

the emergence of this narrative form in the literary world. Thus, the paper intends to initiate its discussion from its inception and eventually move to the main textual analysis. The second portion is divided in three sub portions, where the first part will analyze the narrative style of the two graphic novels proceeding to the Role of Women presented in Satrapi's "*Persepolis*" and later end with an analysis of trauma, war and politics depicted in Sacco's "*Palestine*". However, the main intention of the paper lies in how graphic narrative proves to be essential in constructing pictures or content related to serious issues like revolution, riots, politics and most importantly trauma.

Another interesting fact which brought this paper into reality was a recent introduction to a series of graphical work famously known as 'Global Challenges' idealized and created by Morshed Mishu, cartoonist by profession currently working as Assistant Editor at UNMAD, Bangladesh, a renowned satire magazine running since 1980s . He is also awarded as Forbes under 30 recently for his creative artwork series of 'The Global Happiness Challenges'. His main intention behind creating such work is to let go of the gruesome, violent condition and create an imaginary, happy and safe haven. His slogan for this project is "I only know how to draw, how to cover the gloomy sorrow." His attempt to fight against the brutality of war and trauma sowed the hope of sewing the ideas together in the paper. Just as how postmodernism celebrates and rises above all the ruins of modernism, graphical narratives make it easier for a reader to go through the horrific details of any war story or political turbulence.



Fig.1 A father holding his child and running (left), collage of a happy picture of a father and his child, Morshed Mishu.



Figure,2 A father and son, found dead in the ruins (top), with collage of a father and his child spending peaceful time (bottom), Mishu Morshed.



Figure 3, a child is happily spending his time reading a book, a child sitting still after facing the brutality of bombing (inset), Mishu Morshed

However, the main focus will lie to bring out the importance of including graphic novels in the mainstream academia due to its fluid narrative technique of visual and art.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Several authors wrote about how graphic novels, which can also be understood as a kind of postmodern fiction, has a lot to offer to the critical study of literature. In spite of the confused status of graphic novels as being a part of the mainstream novel, this genre of work has instrumented in depicting serious issues such as war, trauma and politics. Other than this, the authors also discuss about the several perspectives which graphical narratives have to offer in helping a reader to be more imaginative and have a realistic understanding about crucial situations like war.

In an essay, 'Postmodern Narrative, the Marvel Universe and the Reader', Carl Silvio discusses how postmodern fiction debunks the idea of interpretation of experiences and reality through linguistic constructs. This destabilizes the 'traditional metaphor of world as book' (Waugh 3). The traditional framework of fiction as being a textual representation is completely destabilized and a new definition of narrative is discovered by the postmodern authors. Silvio refers to Linda Hutcheon's theories on how the traditional narrative style collapses and how new style of writing such as science fiction has set in. The postmodern theory has indeed blurred the distinction between high and low culture. Thus, in context to this paper, graphic novel is a product of postmodern invention where everyone can be a reader and also participate in the process of imagining the characters which an author has designed. Hutcheon says that 'a further paradox that this kind of fiction (postmodern) enacts is to be found in its bridging of the gap between elite and popular art...' According to Silvio Manfredi the 'Marvel Universe' includes characters which characterize the traits of postmodern fiction. This Marvel universe empowers the readers to have a creative autonomy and expand beyond the horizon of the given context. Silvio's main intention is to merge the interpretive systems of the theorists and showcase

Marvel universe as a part of the critical field. This also supports the idea that how graphics can contribute to literary understanding of situations and enhance the experience of a reader. However, there are problems associated with this form of interpretations as well. The storylines bearing respective titles frequently altered by events which take place in another series. Silvio draws the opening scene of 'Wolverine' #72, "Where walks a Sentinel!" In order to understand the context, the reader have to read the X-Man # 281 issue in which "Pierce and Reavers" were defeated by a squad of giant robots known as Sentinels. The bright side to this interconnected plot is that there are editorial guidelines in form of footnotes prescribed in the series Silvio also draws comparison with the traditional novels of writers such as Dickens and Eliot. The multilinearity lies in both form of texts- novels and comics. However, the question lies how are they different in spite of being multilinear? Silvio continues to explain how two plots or subplots are portrayed in multilinear format and can be told at one time. On the other hand, the traditional novels have a fixed narrative which needs to be unfolded 'in a specific linear order'. The interlinked format of storytelling in the comics is more participatory in drawing the connections between the characters whereas novels leave a reader in an isolated linear plot line. Comics are more like decentered texts which are fluid and non-hierarchical. They "...interact, without any of them being able to surpass the rest..." (Roland Barthes, (11-12)). Thus, Silvio continues to discuss how comics, being products of postmodern fiction, can be regarded as a medium of interpretation just as traditional novels. The graphical narratives therefore do hold a value in the literary field of understanding.

In another essay, "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative", Hillary Chute discusses how comics is a hybrid form of text and pictures and not simply waste of paper. She explains comics as not a low-breed form of work and places this form of work in the same platform as other novels. Graphics, according to her essay, helps to represent or portray the history expanding modes of historical and personal expressions in the field of popular. Chute also

writes about the history and inception of graphic novels. She mentions '*Contract of God*' as the first graphic novel. Graphical novels although being inherently fictional having 'comics grammar'. The essay talks about the differences between comics, cartoons and graphic novel-how the graphic novel has all the qualities of being a standard novel in terms of length and content. Other than this, the essay includes Scott McCloud's reference where he says, "comics as most important icon" and which is a 'general indicator that space and time is being divided'. Hillary Chute also educates her readers on how the term 'yellow journalism' came into existence from Richard Fenton Outcault's 'Yellow Kid' after the Kid and his famous yellow gown.

As the essay proceeds, Art Spegeilman's '*Maus*' came in the picture. The essay also discusses how Spegeilman uses photographs, comics and narrative testimony to produce a multi layered novel. '*Maus*' is an autobiographical novel which talks about the Holocaust. Just like how the experiences are a mix of patience, hope, torture and dreadfulness, the hybridity of the text makes the novel a complete package in itself. *Maus* The articulation of Speigeilman's experience during the Second World War made the novel's grand narrative a resourceful piece for literary scholars. The panel, grid, gutters, full length page composition and tiers bind the visual-verbal projection of history which proves relevant to literary scholars. This form of narrative, in depicting history is so vivid that it helps the history to breathe even today. Chute also talks about how the graphic narratives explore the conflicted boundaries of collective histories and life stories. For instance, Marjane Satrapi's '*Persepolis*' which is also an autobiography, was sold in her own country in black market and was not translated in Farsi which is language of her home country. Graphic narrative portrays the unspeakable side of a person or a country through pictures. Satrapi's life in Iran presents the traumatic side of history which portrays torture and massacre. Therefore, in order to interpret such atrocious situation in a written form, this combination of text and visuals are important to appeal mass readership.

Other than Satrapi's "*Persepolis*", Joe Sacco's '*Palestine*' is an autobiographical graphic novel during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The novel can also be regarded as a work of comic journalism. Comics, contains 'double vision'. This means that the images and the words might project two different meanings, thus producing double coded narratives or language games. Naseer Aruri praises '*Palestine*' and writes, "Each page is equivalent to an essay". This shows how much important a page full of images can be when compared to a printed text. Moreover, the visual effects aid to transmit readers to that particular zone of mind which the author intended to portray through the graphical-textual writing. In response to question of literacy through graphic novels, Art Spiegelman comments, "it seems to me that comics have already shifted from being icon of illiteracy to becoming one of the last bastions of literacy". Chute also later refers to Sacco and says that this form of novels 'can place a great demand on our cognitive skills'(Chute, 640). In the last part of her essay, Chute poses questions to the readers about the mediums required to represent history. Questions such as "What is the texture of narrative forms that are relevant to ethical representations of history? What are the risks of representation?..." may arise. She ends with James Joyce's phrase which is much relevant to the importance of graphic narratives, "ineluctable modality of the visible". (31)

In another essay titled, "Marjane Satrapi and the Graphic Novels from and about the Middle-East" by Chris Reyns Chikuma and Housseem Ben Lazreg, discusses how the narratives from home origin helps to represent the pure essence of a particular sect or region in graphic novels. This particular essay discusses the authors who belong to Middle-East and write graphic novels. Interestingly, almost all the novels are autobiographical, written by female authors and written in colonized languages like English, French and Arabic, such examples are Satrapi's "*Persepolis*" written in French at first and later translated into English. Her novel is sold in her home origin in the black market and not in her native language which is Farsi. As the essay suggests, graphic novels are usually written in two forms, "autobiographical voice or reportage

approach". The essays also states that production of graphic novels are not based on the size or economy of a country but by the historical, political and regional conditions. For instance, Palestine, as a country although being a small country with comparatively less population and low economy rate, is rich in its diaspora, intellectuals and artists. The conflict that is still present till the recent days, explains how much important it is to represent the situation through visual narratives and not simply by written texts. The essay progresses with the description of the various Middle Eastern countries (Lebanon, Egypt-Cairo, Iran, Palestine, Turkey and the Magreb) in terms of their political and economic conditions and how it affected/effected the writings of the authors respectively. The paper discusses about the graphic novels which is created through the experiences of the people belonging to the respective places.

Theresa M. Tensuan in her essay, "Comic Visions and Revisions in the work of Lynda Barry and Marjane Satrapi" initiates with writing about Lynda Barry's work and the acclamations that were received. However, in connection with the thesis it is important to understand the second part of Tensuan's essay where she begins with a brief summary of Satrapi's "*Persepolis*". She later discloses her intention behind writing this paper and says that the paper intends to find how comics' help to see the contribution of "narrative conventions and visual idioms" fuel our "critical perspectives and purviews." (Tensuan, 951). The paper further delves into the transition of Satrapi's life in both Iran and France from her childhood to adulthood. The transition is more like a transformation as per Tensuan's essay. The paper also suggests that Satrapi's 'Persepolis' determines the "gender roles, define class distinctions, articulate racial demarcations, inscribe religious differences and establish parameters around sexual exploration" (952). "Persepolis" also address the hegemonic complexities and class conflicts which the readers experience through the eyes of Satrapi. Her journey from childhood at Iran to adulthood in European land has transformed her perspectives towards cultural practices and life as a whole. In fact, within Iran, Satrapi's family can be regarded as one of the educated

upper middle class who are financially solvent and well aware of the political turbulence that took place during and post Iranian Revolution. The graphic novel deals with concepts like women's roles and condition in the Iranian society, the changes in tide of the political regime, the effect on civilians due to political disruptions and most importantly memories. It is also important to understand how Satrapi's upbringing is influenced due to living in the western world. However, she finds it difficult to call the either side- Iran or Europe as her own. Teresa M. Tensuan at this point beautifully quotes Adrienne Rich from "Notes Towards a Politics of Location", regarding woman's space in the society and in the world. She quotes,

"As a woman I have a country; as a woman I cannot divest myself of that country merely by saying three times. Tribal loyalties aside, and even if nation-states are now just pretexts used by multinational conglomerates to serve their interests, I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create." (212).

'*Persepolis*' speaks for women who are seeking for a change in their respective society. Just like how Satrapi, a rebel in disguise liked punk rock music, western outfit and most importantly smoking which is against Iranian culture as per shown in the novel. Tensuan also talks about the refusal to accept the ruling regime. She does this by going against the fashion trend of Iran during her time- T-shirts emblazoned with the Bee Gees logo, wall sized posters of Iron Maiden, cassette by Kim Wilde. All these were the key method of being outrageous against the ruling power. Tensuan concludes by jotting down the two authors Lynda Barry and Marjane Satrapi's respective works in saying how their visions are vividly depicted in their respective novels. Graphical narratives enable a strong connection between the author and the readers creation a clear vision of what to read and understand. Visuals are very important to understand a society, its prerogatives and drawbacks.

In another essay, “Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi’s ‘Persepolis’ Series”, Amy Malek writes about Satrapi’s exile in the distant land of the Europe and the after effect of such migration. She also explains in details the toll on memory which is affected during her stay in Iran and her adult days at Europe. This migration causes her to remain in-between of two countries, creating hybridity and cross cultural association from within. *Persepolis* instruments in bending and blending the western genres with the Iranian history and culture. Malek has tried to use Hamid Naficy’s essay ‘The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles’ in order explain how ‘the exile state’ helps a person, particularly Satrapi at this context to find a third space in the diaspora between her home Iran and the European land. The shift in places in order for survival has left Satrapi with no place to call her own. The paper proceeds to look more deeply into how memoirs plays a very important role in keeping the essence of belonging intact. It is true that ‘*Persepolis*’ depicts a picture of Iran during and post Revolution. Other than this, for Satrapi, the graphic novel is a revisit to her childhood back in Iran and also her adulthood in the offshores of European land. Her struggle to adapt to every surroundings and situations stimulated to form a visual narrative like ‘*Persepolis*’. However, the paper explains, critics suggests that these memoirs are often written by women (also discussed in the above paper), are more due to the problematic situation as being a woman in a Muslim land. Malek also discusses how it is important for women to write memoirs. She includes Carolyn G. Heilbrun¹ argument in why women should have an account of their experience- a memoir! This is because these female stories might not be told before or being told only in the public sphere by women to women. Ross Smith argues that women stories written by other women ‘ghettorize’ as simply being for women. The paper also

¹ Heilbrun, “Contemporary Memoirs, Or, Who cares who did what to whom?”

refers to Hakanian's poet who always wanted to write about the past of Iranian women and paying homage to the Jewish Iranian background that she belongs to.²

The essay 'Narratives in Pencil: Using Graphic Novels to Teach Israeli-Palestinian Relations' written by Thomas Juneau and Mira Sucharov suggests that graphic novels are tools to portray gruesome situations of war and conflicts. War, as a whole is vibrant, loud, visual and impactful as a whole. The ongoing process during a war creates a vivid picture for a person's mind. It creates a memory that is bombarded with a mix of torture, survival, destruction, hope and finally an unforgettable scar in one's memory forever. The beauty of graphic novel according to the paper is that, it creates a cognitive understanding of these type of political conflicts and ultimately allows to share similar experience through visual- textual interpretations.

The paper brings in example of Art Spiegelman's 'Maus' which is a graphic novel based on Holocaust and also regarded as a 'comics journal'. The experience of a person inside a concentration camp can be analyzed and written through mere words and references. It needs to be coupled with visual explanation as well. Where words fail to express, pictures come to rescue. The visuals activate the imaginary power of the reader and helps a reader to share a similar experience with the author. Each and every page filled with emotions and experiences of the Palestinians who were deprived of their homes, jobs and rights as a citizen. Sacco's trip to the West Bank and Gaza strip was initially a research for him on the Palestinians but ended in a gruesome experience of survival. In his book "Palestine", Sacco's enactment through his visuals of the economic suffocation (172), everyday trauma caused by the Israeli police officers, unaccounted death and many other details. The minute details that Sacco gathered on his daily visits to several places are meticulously discussed in the pictorial formal in his graphic novel. It is rather next to an impossible feat to explain these experience through mere textual

² Hakakian, "Expressing our Immigrant Experiences: Writing Ourselves into History"

discussion or through a traditional novel. In the essay, the readers find how Sacco's 'Palestine' raises number of issues such political debate, construction of identity, behavior of journalism (how a situation is portrayed and what the situation actually is), In 'Narratives in Pencil', the authors mainly discuss how the narrative style of a graphic novel aids to understand or experience an exact idea that the author has intended to project. Sacco's 'Palestine' is designed as per his assumptions which the paper points out to be fundamentally demanded by Western academia. The authors also discuss themes of Sacco's 'Palestine' where the novel looks at the living condition of the Palestinians. Sacco walks around the lanes of Palestines jotting down their experiences and let their stories be known. He includes the poor and difficult conditions of his Palestinian guests, who have no floors (151), and make do with outdoor toilets with no walls and leaky roofs (169). Sacco beautifully portrays the real aspects of Palestine in the form of visual depiction in his graphic novel. Visual according to this comic journalist is a medium to convey much information rather than conventional prose.

In another paper, Rose Brister in "Sounding the Occupation: Joe Sacco's Palestine and the "Uses of Graphic Narrative for (Post) Colonial Critique" discusses how the gaps of the narratives are filled by "the contribution of spatial and sonic record of territorial occupation to the Palestinian narrative." The paper refers to number of scenes and chapters from the novel depicting how the author projects his experience to his readers during his stay at the Western Banks and Gaza. The readers also get aware of the primal purpose of the graphic novel '*Palestine*'. According to the understanding of Brister's paper, Said's 'Question of Palestine' and 'Orientalism' massively influenced him to take up this project of writing a graphic novel. In fact, Said, being a comic enthusiast wrote the Introduction of 'Palestine'.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The paper primarily discusses on the how the graphical narrative aids to construct essential and meaningful content related to politics and bloodshed. Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel "Persepolis" and Joe Sacco's "Palestine" has made an attempt to break stereotypical understanding of the essential or literary reads. In order to make these graphic novels more instrumental in the academia, the paper attempts in tracing essential elements through the lens of few ideas and theories. This not only aids the novel to understand as a great contribution in the field of academia but also proves as a part of salvaging postmodern concepts as well.

3.1: Theory of Metanarratives

Jean Francois Lyotard, in his essay "From the Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge" writes about grand narratives and Meta narratives. According to Lyotard's idea, there are no such element known as one whole narrative in the postmodern era as he writes, "incredulity towards metanarratives". With the wake of several scientific advancements, Meta narratives have stemmed out to have multiple narratives or micro narrative. This delegitimation or decline of narrative initiated from the emergence of 'techniques and technologies' since World War II thus 'shifting its emphasis from the ends of action to its means' (Lyotard, 264).

In connection to the paper, Lyotard's idea of rejecting metanarratives has also paved the way for graphic novels to be part of the mainstream reading. The modernist idea of literature and reading has a lot to do with the classical novels. However, with the advancement of time and horizon of understanding, new fields of knowledge gathering and knowledge sharing has open its doors to both the readers and writers. There seems to be no particular platform to perform but uncountable mediums to achieve. Graphic novels, being regarded as mere entertainment piece due to its comical or text-visual prints have its purpose of knowledge sharing on its own accord. By this I mean, graphic novels now, not only are written and read for mere

entertainment but can also be medium to bring out historical events, political turbulence or even depict a war. Thus, the paper further proceeds to find out the emergence of graphic novels and its importance in the latter chapters. To bring into perspective, Art Spiegelman's "*Maus*", Marjane Satrapi's "*Persepolis*" and Joe Sacco's "*Palestine*" are autobiographical description of holocaust, Iranian/ Post Iranian Revolution and Palestinian-Israeli conflict respectively. The gruesome and detailed look back into the past histories and traumatic experiences enrich the pure purpose of writing a graphic narrative. Other than breaking away from grand narratives or meta narrative, Lyotard's idea of 'language games' fits perfectly for the very notion of graphic or visual narrative. As per the modern understanding literature and academia was all related to 'text'. With the rise of postmodernism, the practice of mainstream reading has changed in recent time. Graphic novel being a 'text-visual' based medium is the new language of narrative. This breaking away from 'metanarrative' idea of reading culture is interestingly by-product of postmodernism.

3.2: Textual Theory

Roland Barthes' concept of literary texts discussed in his book, *S/Z* (1970) classifies literary texts into two categories- 'readerly text' and 'writerly text'. Roger Webster, in his book "*Studying literary theories: An Introduction*" writes and quotes how 'classic text plunges the reader into state of idleness'. Umberto Eco, an Italian theorist has similar idea toward texts as such categorizing texts as – open or closed texts, the former is more like a restricted understanding of text and the latter offers vast array of possibilities of interpretation. Barthes asserts and Roger quotes, "text is *plural*" (*Studying Literary theories, Webster, 98*)

Aligning Barthes' idea with the basic idea of graphic narrative, it can be understood that there is no one particular format of writing a novel. Graphic or visual form of information activates both reading and analyzing power of a reader's mind. Visualizing along with reading,

instruments readers to understand a situation or the content prescribed even better. As per Barthes' idea, it does not 'plunge reader into state of idleness'. As per Barthes' idea, the traditional 'depth' model can be replaced with the 'surface' model of reading. However, Barthes leaves this responsibility solely to the readers' comfort. One of the primal characteristics of postmodernism is 'depthlessness' or 'rhizome'. If a comparison is drawn with the 'classic literature', graphic novel also works an easy going format of visual and text which apparently glides through pages after pages creating interesting yet informative content.

3.3: Trauma Theory

Cathy Caruth in "*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*" writes how a trauma is reflected into literature or any literary work. In the final chapter of her book titled, "Traumatic Awakenings" she brings out the idea of surviving traumatic experience and still carrying it throughout one's existence. Caruth further writes on Freud's idea of trauma and quotes,

"Between what occurs as if by chance, when everybody is asleep- the candle that overturns and the sheets that catch fire, the meaningless event, the accident, the piece of bad luck- and the poignancy, however veiled, in the words *Father, don't you see I am burning*- there is the same relation to what we were dealing its repetition. It is what, for us, is represented in the term neurosis of destiny or neurosis of failure. (69)

In connection with the two texts that the paper analyzes in Chapter 5, Joe Sacco brings out the traumatic experiences of the Palestinian in his graphic novel "Palestine". The traumatic experience of the atrocities perpetrated by the Israeli soldiers exposed the Palestinians to multiple traumatic experience which remains unheard or unattended even today. Sacco, with the help of his journalistic expertise have ventured into the streets of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, heard their traumatic experiences and beautifully forms a graphical narrative of it.

3.4: Thesis Statement

Focusing on the elements of Postmodernism, the paper aims to find out how graphic novels, as a visual narrative form, discusses serious issues such as politics, war and trauma. This gives graphic novels a new platform and importance in the reading culture breaking the stereotypes of the classic form of reading culture. The paper will be guided by theories of Jean Francois Lyotard, textual theory and Freud's trauma theory to validate the argument that graphic narratives too can be a very important part in today's academia.

Chapter 4: History and Importance of Graphic Novel.

Before delving into the main arena of discussion on Satrapi's *'Persepolis'* and Sacco's *'Palestine'*, it is important to understand the history of its inception. Graphic novel was termed in the early 1970s and is understood as the revised edition of comics. The purpose of the evolution of the term from 'comics' to 'graphic novel' was mainly to make it more appropriate in the literary universe. The debate lies whether graphic novels can be regarded or included as academic texts or not. Since it started from the basic amalgamation of comical pictures and texts, serious issues such as war might not suffice via graphical interpretations. Comics are usually a weekly or monthly basis publication of pictures and text designed especially for children. On the contrary, graphic novels are known for serious and crucial content such as war and politics. This particular genre of novel is designed for a more matured audience in hardbound and paperbacks. However, graphic novel still struggles to find space in the academia for its less serious kind due to its addition of pictures to text.

Humans have been telling stories through art and pictures since time immemorial. Art and paintings have been part of human existence for years. Cave paintings show how art and creation have been part of human civilization right from the very beginning. Thus, Modern comics has evolved and grown from Egyptian paintings to woodcut novels creating a rich history in the arena of visual narratives. Now the main question lies, are those comics because these do not meet the modern conception of how comics look like. But the basic structure of using series of images to convey narrative progression is still there. Deciphering any comics or sequential art as the first of its kind is pretty difficult. However, the main motif should be to understand how story telling which a thing in the past was is still alive and kicking through comics and graphics in the very present. Looking back at history shows that the modern comics are simply the most recent chapter in the legacy of storytelling that even our current

understanding of comics will continue to grow and change. The modern understanding of political cartoons of now is nothing but a reflection of the previous eras from cave paintings to the 1800s and U.S. A cartoon is a single drawing often with a caption or text to clarify the message. Cartoons were used as medium to make statements and critiques against public figures and policies. These were done through single panel images, newspapers and periodicals. Towards the 1860s, political and satirical illustrations have been commonly used for over a century but Thomas Nast who was celebrated as political cartoonist popularized the practice of the American newspapers. In fact, around 1870s in order to remove corruption hatched by politicians, Nast led a campaign of cartoons published in Harper's Weekly. This led voters to turn against the ruling power which eventually led to imprisonment for fraudulence and forgery. Cartoons which is similar to comics but requires sequential art or multiple panels that we read as narrative. Cartoons took a gradual transition from a single panel cartoon to comic strips. Some of the pioneer comic strips from around turn of the century includes Carl Schultz's 'Foxy Grandpa' and Jimmy Swinnerton's 'Little Jimmy' which typically tells about short humorous stories.(Wikipedia) On the inception of 1905, 'Little Nemo in Slumberland', the first comics began to expand beyond the comedy genre. These newspapers comic strips created a breeding ground for the creation of comic books. This new form of art is a compilation of the newspaper strips found a new form of earning profits through reprints. Darren McFadden's 'The Yellow Kid' became the first comic book in the year 1897. The book was a compilation of Richard Felton's occults comic strips starring the title character The Yellow Kid. Similar reprints of the comic books have been published for the 'Katzenjammer kids', 'Happy Hooligan' and 'Buster Brown'. In 1993, The first comics books which came out as a standard size was 'Famous Funnies' which was a carnival of comics. In 1935, the national allied publications, the company that actually be the DC Comics published new fun number one and the first comic book with only new original material not just a reprint. The history of American

comic books are divided into eras, trends, ages and practices over the past centuries. These decades of newspaper findings and comic strips are known as the Platinum Age. Almost all the characters which ornamented the Platinum Age have faded in the history with just a few exceptions like 'Popeye', 'Tintin' and 'Little Orphan Annie'. This is due to an abrupt and indecisive end which came in around June 1938 in Action Comics number one, 'Superman' debuted launching the Golden Age of comic books. A year later in May 1939, 'Batman' premiered and 'Detective comics' number 27. Marvel Comics number 1 made its debut from Marvel's predecessor 'Timely Publications' on an auspicious visit on October 1929. By 1941 'Captain Marvel', 'The Flash', 'Green Lantern', 'Captain America' and 'Wonder Woman' had all entered the comic world. America saw a boom in the superhero creations from the flourishing commercial success which drove publishers to go on and on with action. These characters define the medium in that era. This massive publication of the comics and heroic feats acted as soothing agents for audience dealing with Great Depression. During World War II around 1.5 million copies of 'Superman', 'Batman' and 'Captain Marvel' were sold. Nearly thirty percent of reading materials were of comic books that were sent for the deploy troops during the war. After all, comic books made excellent propaganda which projected through the super heroes with their patriotic American motifs and tough beliefs. Many of the villains from that era evolved as fictional renditions of real foes such as Nazi equivalents like the Red Skull or Captain Nazi. During the Golden Age, comic sales were at their peak with eighty to hundred million comic book purchased in America. Every month comics were truly wide read but after the war both society and pop culture began to change. Although 'Superman', 'Batman' and 'Wonder Woman' sales remained fairly strong. Superheroes fell out of fashion and through the early 1950s other genres like crime, romance, western science fiction and horror grew increase in popular. This abrupt shift in tone and content from blind patriotism and heroism to more serious delusional stories follow the same pattern seen in the sudden popularity of Pulp Fiction

and film noir at that time, bringing in grittier and more mature topics. EC Comics was the prime examples that came about the post-world war II time specializing in horror crime fiction and dark fantasy. The sudden popularity of obviously dark and violent story telling became an easy target for comic critics. Comics had already experienced backlash particularly from educators and parents who felt the content was not real literature and damaged students' literacy. In 1954, 'Seduction of the Innocent' a treatise published by psychiatrist Fredrick Wertham wrote about the dangers of youth reading comic books. In this particular book, he concluded that comic books are a platform to create an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit, an invitation to illiteracy, stimulate unwholesome fantasies and suggest criminal or sexually abnormalities. But after his research was published in 2010, library scientist Carol Tilly found that he manipulated, overstated and fabricated evidence using misrepresented examples to make unfounded conclusions. Wertham became a representative figure of censorship crusade against comics in part because it worked as a catalyst for already simmering moral panic at that time sparking an anti- comic campaign. In the wake of this, church and communities organized to protest and collect offensive comic books. This sudden change in reactions towards comic books resulted as a dark period in this form of work. Gradually, three years after World War II, Americans were burning comic books. In 1948, 600 children in West Virginia publicly burned comic books. On a legal basis, the New York Law prohibited a publication of lurid comic and restricted sales to children under the age of 18. In response to comic books and public outcry, the US Senate investigated juvenile delinquency put comics on trial. The hearing were televised to testify against the comic book industry including Wertham himself. No legislation was placed directly after this but the impact was undeniable, 15 publishers went out of business and EC Comics who have been the main target of the hearing only survived by converting their Mad Comic book to a magazine. As a precautionary move, the Comic Magazine Association adopted the Comics code Authority, or the CCA which is a censorship code to sterilize comic

books. The requirements were that crime could not create sympathy for the criminals, that the police and government officials could not be depicted as in a way that creates disrespect, that scenes of excessive violence or profanity were forbidden, that good must triumph over evil and that any suggestive illustration or sex perversion was forbidden. The code even banned the use of the word 'horror' or 'terror' in any of the comic content. It was the same time when the moral panic drives the industry to censor its material in order to protect itself from governmental influence. Over the years the comic code authority went through a couple of revisions the first of which in 1971 relaxed restrictions on crime comics discussed how to introduce drug use, lifted the hoarder ban and liberalized standards of sexual representation and then the dawn of the comic book shop and direct market distribution in the late 1970s gave publishers to bypass the comic code which led to the codes second revision of 1989 shifting to a document as a general guideline but the comic code authority remained for decades with DC and Archies, the last two publishers to drop the seal of approval. Only in 2011, the CCA was certainly not the death of comics. In fact, going into the 1960s the first major comic book conventions began –the Batman television series first aired and Stanley joined Marvel launching superheroes like the Fantastic Four, Spiderman and the Hulk. Gradually, with the number of publishing dropping from 650 to 250 in just two years and perhaps the lasting impact of the code in the industry, the CCA restricted what stories the comic medium could tell. Because of the moral panic of the code, the late 50s and the 60s saw another tone shift in comics. This time containing sillier plots, the kind of childish absurdity that still associated with comics. Just as comics began to stretch its breadth and capabilities, the code forced comics to be first and foremost a medium safe for children. From these circumstances, came the birth of modern graphic novels- a form of comic that attempted to shake the stigma of the dime store, mind polluting comic books. Some say that the first graphic novel can be traced to the 1783 adaptation of 'Leonardo and Blending', a rendition of German ballad told through caption

copper etchings. There is a number of discourse regarding the origin of the term as who coined it first and what comic style works that can be potentially be considered as graphic novel. The term became popularized by Will Eisner who described his work 'Contract with God' as a graphic novel. Eisner was one of the earliest cartoonist lauded as the Orson Welles of comics particularly for his ground breaking work and developing our understanding of visual narratives and comic language. Eisner taught on how to tell stories through sequential art. Arguably, his famous work, 'The Spirit', a comic book published during the 40s made full use of the medium a way few others had including full page compositions, noir shadows and parallel narratives. His work became the foundation for future cartoonists. Eisner's 'Contract of God' was published in 1978 and revolutionized the medium proving that comics could tackle serious literary topic. In 'A Contract of God', Eisner wrote about the struggles of tenement life in New York City. A semi-autobiographical work that drew upon his own experiences and represented lives for poor Jewish immigrants in the 1930s. It portrayed the lives of everyday people realistically depending on the heartbreak and humanity the Bronx tenement. 'A Contract of God' is technically a collection of short stories but come together to craft a singular work which Eisner pitched to publishers as more than just a comic book and instead as a graphic novel. By definition, a graphic novel is simple a novel told through comics and sequential art. But unlike comic strips and comic books which are essentially installments in a larger series. Graphic novels are self-contained and book length and perhaps most importantly bear the name novel. By the calling the work novel, Eisner attempted to distance 'A Contract of God' from a legacy and stigma of comic books emphasizing the difference between the cheap children's entertainment and the literary value of his work. While that connotative distinction is important, it is also important that because going through a book publisher put 'Contract of God' on shelves and bookstores not on newsstands or in a comic book shop on an actual book stores. It's important to note that 'Contract of God' was not widely successful upon its publication, it

was only accepted by smaller company, 'Baronet Press' and it was not the best seller but had a remarkable impact on the creative community paving the way from modern graphic novels and inspiring cartoonists from Neil Gaiman to Art Spiegelman to Allan Moore. In the introduction he wrote on the periodical of 'Contract of God', cartoonist Scout McCloud wrote, "A Contract of God transports me to a very specific time in the comic's history. In the late 70s the art form of comics felt alive with possibilities to me but dead as a doormail to Americans in general, a musty decaying relic of a bygone era. Eisner's book connected with me as a sign of what could be. It existed in its own continuum patiently waiting for its kind to quietly arrive on the shelves of North American bookstores. From its deliberate artistry to its serious subject matter to its prominent claim of being a graphic novel, 'The Contract of God' helped to bridge the gap between comics and books". Since 'The Contract of God' in 1978, there has been a plethora of graphic novels that have made waves in the publishing industries. The Eisner Awards provide a platform to recognize and award the best works in the medium. Then in 1992, 'Maus' by Art Spiegelman made history by winning the Pulitzer prize, the first and only graphic novel to win a Pulitzer. Beginning as an underground comic artist his graphic novel rendition has become an icon for serious graphic novel can be, can look like evidence how artful the medium can be. In 2006, 'American born Chinese', a graphic novel that tackles racial stereotypes immigration and identity and what it means to grow up as Chinese American was nominated for National Book Award. In 2013, the graphic novel, "March" began telling the autobiographical story of Congressman John Lewis in the Civil Rights Movements. By the third in the trilogy 'March' won the National Book Award and just recently in 2018 'Sabrina' became the first graphic novel to make the long list of the Man Booker Prize, the UK's most literary prestigious award.

More and more graphic novels are not only finding their place on bookshelves but also standing beside traditional novels and recognized as worthy literary works. In Art Spiegelman's words,

quoted in a magazine named *The Wall Street Journal* titled *Graphic novels gets new respect*, “If you are a cartoonist, you are not ostracized from club of the real artist but for all the graphic novels that continues to stand out, there remain widely undervalued in the critical literary world”. Despite ‘Maus’ Pulitzer Prize, there is no category for graphic novels. Barnes and Nobles graphic novels best seller list are only available through site by a fantasy blog relegating the medium to popular fiction and in 2009 it seemed like things were changing when New York Times released best seller lists for graphic books announcing the graphic hardcover, softcover and manga in anticipation of the watchman movie boasting that comics finally joined the mainstream only to eliminate the lists few years later claiming The Times was cutting the lists to dedicate efforts to expanding coverage. In 2018, literary agents and 400 other members in the publishing industry signed a petition requesting the return of the list especially because that promised expanded coverage never really happened. In the petition it was stated that the best seller list is not all in all of comics publishing nor is an indicator of literary quality but it does help with the visibility of our medium and thus helps comics as serious literature. The list plays an indispensable role in helping new readers in discover books and making the storytelling that we love visible in the cultural conversation in the literature. The list enables publishers to take chances on new voices. Without those lists and the attention and credibility afforded by a New York Times endorsement, graphic novels would have to work a lot harder to convince readers that they are available and worth reading finding amongst all other novels to earn a place on the regular list. Although it does make impressive impression when graphic novels like ‘March; breaks the stereotypes through proving that they can compete and so despite the ground gain comics fight for a legitimate recognition in the art medium. Graphic novels have a lot to offer in the era of visual narratives. In the array of pictorial depictions, novels as such remains at an iconic level of projecting ideas and serious issues such as war. Although the seriousness flicker due to the graphical representation, the readers can directly commute on a levelled platform.

The evolution of graphics and art right from the era of cave paintings to the present terrain of graphics, a new medium has truly unravelled before the literary world.

Chapter 5: Postmodernism and Graphic Novel

With the emergence of graphic novel in the mass reading culture near the end of the 90s, it was massively accompanied by the virtues of postmodernism with it. By this, I mean graphic novel can be regarded as an offspring of postmodern ideas. The hybridized form of writing bringing in visual and text, highlights one of the prime features of postmodern idea of pastiche and intertextuality.

As postmodern culture approves of all and everything and rejects none, the various narrative styles in creating a novel also fit comfortably among the other well-known reads. As Roland Barthes says in his essay, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”,

“There are countless forms of narratives in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man’s stories... Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies... there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative.” (1975, 237)

An array of medium to narrate stories and ideas merged in and gave birth to this form of narration which is today’s graphic novel. Not all sorts of narratives will be accepted worldwide, thus, due to the coexistence of visuals and texts, graphic narratives are still considered as “hybridized” and “impure”. As Jan Baetens examines and writes in her essay “Story and Storytelling in the era of Graphic Narrative”, about the emergence of visual form of storytelling. She claims that the increase in mobile images affects this new format of storytelling- a ‘combination of words and images in multiple panels and series’. However, this certain type of medium continues to face resistance against the classical form of reading that has been practiced since ages. As postmodernism believes in hybridity, graphic or visual narratives gathered much appreciation in recent times. Baetens further explains that cinema or visual medium can create

an impact on learning and understanding commerce and culture better than literature and that cinema has “remediated” literature (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). Here, it cannot be completely agreed with Baetens because literature had and still continues to have its fair share of importance in human development. With the advancement of time, several avenues might open towards readers but a complete denial of literature might not be appreciated. According to the inclusive characteristic of postmodern practice of celebrating everything that is there, classic literature should be given its due priority besides this new emerging form of narrative.

However, on a further introspection on the connection between postmodernism and graphic novels, the difference of high and low culture seems to take a backseat or maybe dissolve to a great extent. By this, I mean as postmodern ideas advocate to bridge the gap between the high and low culture, graphic narratives being a medium to portray elements such as war, feminist perspective, post-colonial shifts is on its way to make a space amidst essential reads other than classic literature. This idea of including sensitive and serious issues in graphic or visual narratives have enabled readers to participate in the process of understanding and analyzing the changes in history. Other than this, modern novels, or even before that, has to be read with a prior knowledge about the author or the era it was written. Graphic novels, on the other hand, ease the reading process for the readers of having a deep understanding on the background. This form of narrative has also brought back the practice of story-telling. Baetens claims that modern literature nullified this old form of story-telling and thus it vanished within the ‘highbrow forms of literature around 1980’ (Baetens31). Postmodernism recalls the old form of oral tradition and beautifully blends it to the new form of visual storytelling. The presence of several forms of media and motion pictures, narratives have become much easier to accept. Keeping in connection with the medium of story-telling through graphic novels, the problem of the gradual vanishing of story-telling has been solved.

History, especially war-torn past of a country might not be accepted or understood frontally. A war has a lot to offer other than a signing off a peace treaty. Any political action comes with numerous repercussions and consequences. A war not only gives its people victory, but also leaves them with trauma, loss of loved ones and memories which remain trapped in the mind. Thus, not every historical or crucial incident can be read or understood on the basis of written information alone in form of a book or a novel. A visual reference thus aids in comprehending what happened in the past and relates to it. History remains on its place, but years paces with rides, on and on. The distance between the present and the occurred history widens with time. The time lapse is recollected, penned and passed on through literature. Thus, a revised medium of narrative not only adds contents to academia but also allows readers to receive history with ease. Traumatic experiences can be also be emoted through visual or graphic narratives. The addition of text and visuals may help both the author and the reader to express or visualize the actual scenario respectively. For instance, Art Spiegelman's "Maus" is a semi-autobiographical piece written based on the interview of his father who is a Holocaust survivor. The graphic novel is initially written in serialized version during 1980-1991 in several parts. Another example can be Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel "*Persepolis*" which is based on true experiences of the author's life during and post Iranian Revolution.

Experience matters. Thus, postmodernism and graphic novel stride to make an easy path for the readers to acknowledge history and experience them with ease. The features of graphical narratives and postmodern ideas include elements of the past and present methods of narration and enable readers to appreciate the information that comes in the way.

Chapter 6: Analysis of *Persepolis* and *Palestine*

6.1: Narrative techniques in *Persepolis* and *Palestine*.

“Graphic novels are not traditional literature, but that does not mean they are second rate. Images are a way of writing. When you have the talent to be able to write and to draw, it seems a shame to choose one. I think it’s better to do both” - Marjane Satrapi.

It is important to construct a free and comprehensive space in the pages of a book for the readers to understand and connect to the author. A novel, irrespective of its kind, should connect or create a common ground between an author and the reader. The narration is thus essential for a novel to shine in the reader’s mind. Narration can save a reader from falling into the deep pits of confusion in terms of the text or content. This chapter will discuss the narrative techniques and style used in the two graphic novels, Marjane Satrapi’s ‘*Persepolis*’ and Joe Sacco’s ‘*Palestine*’.

Marjane Satrapi’s graphic narrative has three voices in her novel “*Persepolis*”- understandably Marji, a young child of 10 years old protagonist, the young Marji as the narrator and the adult Miss Satrapi as the author of the novel. The entire novel is depicted through the lens of Marjane Satrapi right from her young age observing and enduring every detail of the revolution.

The novel not only simply talks about the life of Marji, it also includes elements such as the country’s history and the relation of it with the narrator. All this form an integral part of the narrative. The adult version of Marji acts as a loyal narrator to her readers in helping them to imagine and fill in the voids that seem to appear to the visual time lapse. It is interesting to notice how Marji’s conversation with her relatives or acquaintances are also sketched in boxed shaped, demarcated by gutters. Gutters are applied in between the sketches in order to

show the time lapse of events or the parallel conversations that take place on several occasions. These gutters aid in helping the readers to imagine and analyze a given situation at any part of the novel. Marjane provides a crucial layer to the narrative, “but as she is not part of the events in Marji’s story, she is never given a speech bubble (Chute 97).

The readers learnt about the Iranian regime and the revolution that took place during and post Shah Regime. This could be possible due to the parallel progress of Marji’s age as the novel proceeded. Along with the author’s narrative, the reader is provided with the historical context of the Iranian bred Marji’s story. The two voices of young Marji and the fully grown Miss Satrapi forms a lineage of narration aiding the readers to visualize the author’s biography in one direction, In her essay on Satrapi’s graphic narrative, feminist scholar Hilary Chute argues that the author uses this “visual voice” (97) to “return to and present the historical events of her childhood”.

Upon analysis of *Persepolis* as per the nuts and bolts of narrative, it is important to discuss how the graphic novel is designed and written. The novel is divided into multiple short chapter titled often in one or two words, the novel unravels incidents chronologically that took place in Satrapi’s life. The first chapter titled ‘The Veil’ right away pinpoints the presiding scenario of Satrapi’s childhood in Iran. The graphic panels show Satrapi and her female classmates are coping with the new law of veiling. The layered dimension that orbits around the concept of veiling will be further discussed in the next part of the chapter along with pictorial evidence from the text. Without further digression, the paper intends to directly delve into the technicalities of the narrative in the text.



Figure 4, The Veil, Satrapi, *Persepolis*. (1)

The panel at the bottom of the first page are split in half occupying the page equally. The book proceeds with the panel occupying sometimes two third of the page or span the entire page and this particular panel shows when Marjane has to wear veil for the first time at school. If we scan from left to right, the misuse of veil is seen. A skip to the next part of the novel where Marjane is forbidden to take part in the demonstration where she explains her parents would go out and she was left alone back at home. The two panels showing the armies and the revolutionaries are also interesting. The armies are in black whereas the revolutionaries are in white, the armies have guns and the revolutionaries are throwing stones, and it is also interesting how the revolutionaries are drawn as carbon copies of each other and as stacks on top of each other building an idea of one big conglomeration against one another but also how they bleed off the panel. We are left to decide how frequently the barrage of bullets witness the revolutionaries, the revolutionaries lobbing stones in return.



Figure 5, Marji sneaking out of her house for demonstration on the streets, Satrapi, Persepolis

Here is a frame that captures the movement in the middle frames where Marjane sneaks out with her neighbor friend and caretaker to demonstrations and her mother finds out, so she was wandering where they were. Upon realizing that they were out for demonstrating, so she has an upswing to smack the caretaker and it can be seen in the following frame that she is bringing her hand down on Marjane's level to slap her face. It can be seen that the caretaker

with the imprint of the smack that she has just delivered. So in this two frames the readers get the motion in two lines, the upswing and back swing.



Figure 6, Marji distributing flyers (left), the protestors are beaten (right), Satrapi, Persepolis.

Towards the middle of the book, we move forward in time where Marjane grew bit older and her parents had finally allowed her to join the demonstrations and the revolution. In this particular panel, we see that she is handing out flyers. Everyone, including the protestors, is in black and she is in white which singles her out from the crowd.

The graphic novel beautifully brings out the minute details of every details in Satrapi's life right from her childhood days to her adult years. The next portion of the chapter further discusses further referring to pictorials on how the role of women is one of the essential element of the novel.

The world has seen narrative in many forms, may it be textual or graphical, but bringing profession into perspective of highlighting the gruesome situation of people can add more sense to the narration as a whole. Joe Sacco, being a journalist by profession, had beautifully illustrated the lives of the numerous Palestinians who were on the other end of receiving the brutality of mass Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Media, being a source of mass exchange of information and communication, had often pictured Palestinians under the wrong light portraying them as the villain. Sacco points out, “Western media, especially the American media, have represented Palestinians largely as terrorists (terrorism is the bread Palestinians get buttered on”) and that such representations have long shaped his understanding of the residents and politics of Israel-Palestine” (Palestine 7).

Palestine, being a complex space to demarcate and portray through comical drawings were much complicated than it looks from the outside. As per Rose Brister advocates in her essay, Sacco’s main intention was to concentrate on the ‘focalization’ of spaces. It is very important for the author to connect to the reader. This particular form of narrative did have challenges to overcome due to its broad landscapes and confined Palestinian territories. Brister further writes that the optical perspective “obliges the reader to inhabit a variety of spaces within the narrative.” (Brister, 107) She further claims that Sacco’s attempt to demonstrate Israel-Palestinian conflict to create tension in understanding largely for western reader. It is interesting to understand how Sacco has used his narrative style and comical expertise to boldly highlight the deafening woes of the Palestinians but also activated the western perspective towards their grief. Sacco’s narrative reached those alleys of Palestinian households where the western media could not venture through. Edward Said’s book “*Questions of Palestine*” suggests how the woes of the Palestinians are overlooked and labelled as nothing but ‘act of terrorism’. Sacco has given tremendous importance and responsibility to his readers in having personal perspectives and opinions. Sacco presents mobility to his reader by placing him at

different angles during his frequent visits at several Palestinians residents. For instance, he places his readers on an Israeli guard tower looking down on prisoners (191). Another example of the readers' direct participation can be the placement on a bird view mode to perch down on the land area beneath. (124, 146-47, 208). The readers are again positioned as soldiers, as a bystander and then a hospital staff. The gutter suggests time progressing and moving ahead in the scene.³



Figure 7, Firas' beating. Sacco, *Palestine*, (200)

³ As a reader moves from panel to panel across the page, the sequential arrangement of the panel suggests time unfolding. The empty spaces in the "gutter" represents a meaning-making process or more like filling the blanks between the narratives. This is the act of "observing the parts but perceiving the whole"

The picture shows how the readers are witnessing the torture of the Palestinians. Sacco portrays Firas, a Palestinian getting bashed and beaten by Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers (200).

Other than keeping the readers' perspective in mind, Sacco includes himself in almost all his sketches where the readers find him wearing a simple sweatshirt and pair of spectacles. His journalist eye followed everywhere and this has been beautifully portrayed in every pages of the novel.



Figure 8, Sacco as an observer, Sacco, Palestine

For instance, in the picture above, Sacco is found looking at the Israeli soldiers marching towards the Palestinian residents.

The idea of time and space is another essential perspective portrayed by Sacco in his graphic narrative. “The action depicted in between the manipulated panel, make time still, overlap and

to and fro of timing, all these offers a “rich temporal map”(Chute, 455). The time lapse and the gutters project anxiety, traumatic experience of the both Sacco observing and the Palestinian bearing the atrocities by the hands of the Israeli soldiers. This gap in space and narrative time also produces a suspension of time not only on the readers’ mind but also on the physical page. This re-thinking of graphically etched time and space also connotes the colonial spaces and control over the spatial-politics.

Sacco’s visit as a journalist into the space of Occupied Palestinian Territories not only aided him to gather knowledge on the actual condition of the Palestinians but also offered him to produce metacommentary on his two month tour. It is important to acknowledge Sacco’s background being Chicano American by origin and from a privileged class. The novel represents Sacco as an Orient and the Palestinians as Occident. This is because, he is presented as an American journalist who walks through the Palestinian ruins and notes down several personal events as an onlooker. His role is simply as a professional journalist who visit the Palestine and the West Bank for gathering authentic information on the lives of the Palestinians. Sacco confesses at one point of the graphical narrative, “We want faces, we want pain” (59)

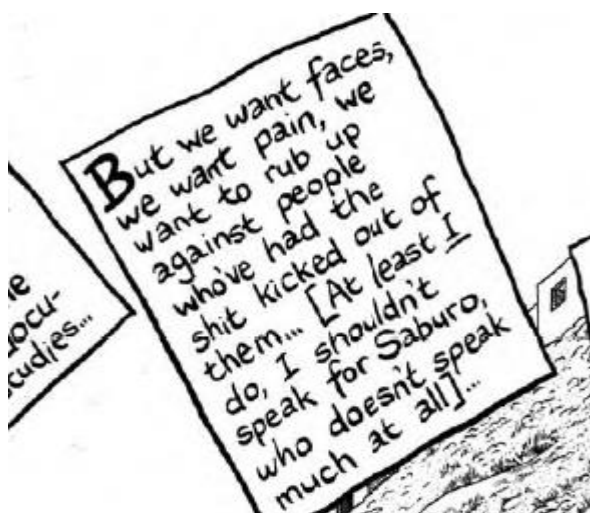


Figure 9, Sacco loitering in the streets of Ramallah and getting footages of the Palestinian protest, Palestine (59)

He finds the protests as his own Intifada along with that of the Palestinians. The struggle of early morning visits at several places, capturing each and every protest and riots and spends his days waiting for more information, all was part of his Intifada. His venture in making comical sketches being amidst the woes and cries of the Palestinians meets with his desire of “being there”. This implies that his act of “being there” in the places of protests and riots makes him a mere bystander, a journalist. Sacco’s life hardly gets affected by the daily problems which the Palestinians have to suffer. However, his attempt of recording all the information not only gave him an opportunity to become a part of their hardships but also helped to project the situation of the Palestinians and voice their conditions.

6.2: Role of Women in Persepolis

“I had learned that you should always shout louder than your aggressor.”

— **Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood**

Women, irrespective of any race, creed or caste, are the first ones who experience changes due to any political turbulence or even a war. A clear comparison can be drawn with the context of the Bangladeshi women and the Iranian women in *Persepolis*. Women living in both Bangladesh and Iran proves to be subjected towards witnessing politics around dressing. Apparels have been politicized both during the military Islamic regime of Zia Ur Rahman and Hossain Mohammad Ershad during their respective ruling period. For instance, Elora Shahbuddin writes in her essay, “Women and Islam in Bangladesh” states that how female news reporters are instructed to keep a specific length of sari in order to ‘protect’ the religious and social values of women. Similarly, Satrapi’s graphical work “*Persepolis*” initiates with the idea of women wearing veil where the readers find out Marjane Satrapi along with her friends wearing veil for the first time at school. It is even more important to detect how these young

girls of Iran adapt to the very idea of veiling. The upsurge of Shah Regime influenced a gender divide and an extreme imposition on dress code of men and women in Iran.

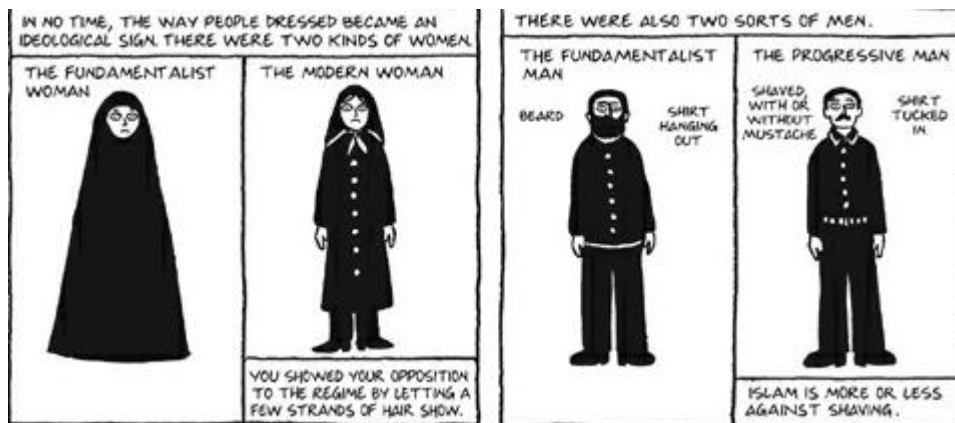


Figure 10, difference in dressing between modern and religious men/women, Satrapi, Persepolis.

Upon looking deeper into the element of veiling, it is important to find out how does the idea of veil help women to survive in the alleys of Iran as a means of empowering them in their won comfort zone. The veil in itself divided the entire sect of women into two major groups- the fundamentalist and the modern woman where the fundamentalist women are seen wearing full robe like veil and the modern women added the western attire of long pants with veil. Compared to this, men are also divided between the fundamentalist and the progressive men as per their dress code and beard. As Marjane Satrapi includes that beard is a statement and shaving is against Islam.

Partha Chatterjee in his essay “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” discusses on the ‘women’s question’, about how the problems that are faced by women are ignored or overshadowed by the greater problems in a society. In fact, how educated middle class women are provided emancipation as a new form of patriarchy. In connection to this discussion, I would like to include Satrapi, her mother and the other Iranian women’s role into perspective.

In comparison with Satrapi's "*Persepolis*", Chatterjee points out into two broadly divided sects the Nabina and the Prabina- the uneducated Bengali women and the women belonging to the new educated middle class. Similarly, the readers experience the lives of women through the eyes of the narrator. Satrapi portrays both the lifestyles as the 'Nabina' herself being the modern educated woman. As the novel being an autobiographical piece of work, it is projected through the eyes the author herself, who belongs to the privileged sect of the society. This can be understood clearly when her parents decide to send her abroad for a safer and better living condition. She soon migrates abroad to Vienna, Austria. At this point of her autobiography, the readers journey with Satrapi along the newly found streets of Vienna, where Satrapi's explores her potential as a modern, rebellious woman. Her change in attire, behavior and choice of people defined her altogether. The series of events starting from getting terminated from the girl's hostel to spending holidays at various places, not only tested Satrapi's adventurous personality but also mapped her existence throughout the land of Iran and Vienna. By this, it means that Satrapi was subconsciously torn apart as a person and most importantly remained as an immigrant almost all her life. Amy Malek in "Memoir as an Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* Series" discusses about Satrapi's 'exile state'. She writes how Satrapi is away from her home, Iran, finding a new home at the western lands of Austria. Malek uses the condition of "inbetweenness" of Hamid Naficy's work "*The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*". This particular book thus proves to be very important for this research due to its expanding discussion on women, migration and exile. Malek's book not only discusses about Satrapi's hybridity and inbetweenness in her personal life from childhood to being an adult, she has also chosen a hybrid medium to write her story just like the ideas reflected from Malek's book. Graphic narrative in itself is a hybridized product of postmodern era. The amalgamation of visual and text secures one of the primal places in the vast array popular culture. In addition, graphical

narratives, in this context, graphic novels secure a much more important place in the reading curriculum other than being a mere medium of entertainment.

At this point, the paper connects Satrapi's psychological situation as per her movement in location with Homi Bhaba's concept of hybridity.

“It is insignificant that the productive capacities of this Third space have a colonial or post-colonial provenance. For the willingness to descend into that territory... may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multi-culturalism or the diversities of culture but on the inscription or articulation of culture's hybridity” (Bhaba, 1994:38)

According to his understanding of hybridity, it basically dwells on the hybrid positioning of culture and practices due to post-colonial emergence. The formation of the 'third space' nestles the cross cultural or multi-cultural practices gives an access to the unattainable situation of staying pure in one particular culture. By this, I mean that keeping in connected to the post-colonial context, a person or a culture may be difficult to be put in one simple bracket of understanding. Now bringing in this particular concept with this paper, it is interesting to analyze Satrapi's positioning in the entire novel as being a 'third space' herself in the entire novel. Her early childhood days in Iran, experiencing the Iranian culture which was greatly politically driven to her migration to Vienna. The new location did not completely change Satrapi into a western version of herself, but she rather turned into a hybridized form. Her existence became an amalgamation of both culture of Iran and the West. However, this particular concept does not fully blend in with the text. This is because the primary idea behind behind Bhaba's concept was based on the post-colonial changes of a culture and people of a particular colonized land. Nevertheless, the idea of hybridity existing in Satrapi, the author remains intact, thus the inclusion of this concept in the paper.

Other than the concept of hybridity and veiling previously discussed, the entire perspective toward Iranian women remains unchanged even today. For instance, the first thing that comes to the mind regarding an Iranian women will be- veil, subjugation and patriarchal society. The novel stresses massively on the freedom of choice in Satrapi's character along with her mother, Mrs. Satrapi. Her inclination towards metal rock bands, smoking and being independent reassure her position of trying to become equal in an unequal land. This means, Marjani Satrapi's autobiography does not represent the entire female society of Iran. Chandra Mohanty Talpade writes in her essay, "Under the Western Eyes" about homogenizing the condition of women through western perspective. This should be included because Marjane Satrapi, in spite of belonging to a Muslim country was massively influenced by the western culture. Her perspective projected in the novel builds an one sided narrative regarding women of Iran. Although, Satrapi does not claim to highlight the rigorous regime against women of Iran, but her suffocation and rebellious behavior towards Iranian regime proved to find solace in the Western land of Austria. Her mind continuously battled to find a clear ground to place her belief in. At one point she finds herself to be a rebel, a westerner by practice and, on the other hand, the Iranian culture in her stops her from performing extreme tasks as drugs, sex and many more. Her deterioration in health during her stay at Vienna proves how she was not fully given into the western culture that she initially decided to step into.

However, Satrapi's hybridity in nature and in location is just like the type of novel in itself. The readers can connect postmodern ideas transformed into a graphic novel of textual and pictures with the character itself. The complexities and hegemonic behavior proved to be an essential element in the novel. The lens through which Satrapi saw Iran and Vienna might be different for readers across the world. Her usage of graphics in narrating her life in a form of a novel is quite an extraordinary task to perform.

6.3: Portrayal of war, trauma and politics in Palestine

'In a world where Photoshop has ousted the photograph as a liar, one can now allow artists to return to their original function - as reporters.' – Art Speigelman.

Sacco's motif to represent and voice Palestinians during the first Intifada in the form of graphic novel not only highlights his expertise on journalism but also gave voice to the voiceless and ears to the unheard. Sacco's initial approach to venture through the shambles of Palestine and document their experiences stemmed from Edward Said's "Questions of Palestine" where Said says in his book's Introduction,

“As a Palestinian myself, I have always tried to be aware of our weakness and failings as a people. By some standards we are perhaps an unexceptional people; by some standards we are perhaps an unexceptional people; our national history testifies to a failing contest with a basically European and ambitious ideology (as well as practice); we have been unable to interest the West very much in the justice of our cause.” (Introduction, Said,ix)

It is interesting to read the visual narratives through Sacco's eyes and discover the other side of the problem. The entire Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains as a confused maze of rivalry even in recent times. Hundreds of lives and households have come to a standstill only for being labelled as “act of terrorism”. Said further writes, “As a Palestinian, I resent and deplore the ways in which the whole grisly matter is stripped of all its resonances and its often morally confusing detail, and compressed simply, comfortably, inevitably under the rubric of ‘Palestinian terror’”. (Introduction, Said, xii)

Thus, it was more of a voluntary occupation which Sacco brought himself into in order to let the world know truth from both ways. In order to prove his work as a productive

medium to reach the mass, he started writing in comic version of twenty to thirty pages on the initial basis which later turned into a proper graphic novel. According to his understanding and also according to Rose Brister's essay suggests that 'a firsthand account of the people and the occupation will help him interrogate these ideas'. (Brister, 105)

Sacco, not only tried to louden the voices of the Palestinian suffering but also tried to make an exemplary attempt in using comic tools to disrupt the normal form of reading. His spanning of places from the Mediterranean to the Jordan and being the witness of the first Intifada allowed him to use an array of combination of panel shape and sequencing, text, and page space. This provided the reader to have their own personal narrative along with what the novel suggest. Graphic novels allow readers to take part in imagining and creating a narrative as per convenience. This may help the readers to feel an essential part of the book that is being read.

The two chapters "Return" (11-15) and "Remind Me" (41-50) discusses about the four sets of historical borders of the state Israel, the post 1967 capture of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula divides and forms the "Administered Territories" (Golan)⁴

⁴ Golan distinguishes four periods of border-writing on the land: post 1949 with the establishment of the Green Line; 1949-67 when the Israelis for the most part lived within these borders; Post 1967 when Israel acquired new territories attempting to erase the Green Line; post 1987 when the Palestinian *Intifada* both emphasized and erased existing borders (1065-57)



Figure 11, Dave thinking about which one is his actual home, *Palestine*, Sacco (14)

The picture above is taken from the earlier chapters of Sacco's "Palestine" where a student during his shift to a hostel pauses and thinks which one is his actual home. The conflict in understanding one's understanding is portrayed in detailed with the pastiche of conversation of both the parties.



The next picture explains how an old Palestinian narrated his experience of his lost property during the Arab invasion. He informs Sacco that he fled in 1948 during the

declaration of the Independence of Israel. He further explains how the Jews have usurped their land and forcibly driven them out. This is one such example out of the numerous interviews which Sacco personally collected throughout his stay at Palestine and Gaza strip. The political invasion which fueled the mass forcible migration of hundreds of Palestians remains unheard. Several camp settlements and fortunate freedom from them gave new life to Sacco's drawn Palestinians. The collection of artwork in 'Palestine' is not only mere imagination but real facts and experiences jotted through Sacco's touristic visit.

One of the main narrative tool Sacco uses in his novel is "focalization". In order to add to the universal narrative of Palestine and map the complex spaces of Palestine which have been interpreted through years of understanding in the form of academic or mass media content. The graphic narrative re-invigorates its engagement with literary representations of Israel and Palestine.⁵ Bringing in discussion of such crucial issue as a form of text and visuals have instrumented in making graphic novels an essential element in the post-colonial studies. Not only does it ease the study of post-colonial but also as Robert Young argues "to locate the hidden rhizomes of colonialism's historical reach, of what remains invisible, unseen, silent or unspoken" (21)

⁵ See also Hassan's extensive history of postcolonial scholars' application of post-colonial theory to Palestine studies (2001) and Massad's assessment of Israel-Palestine as a "post-colonial" colony" (2000)

Conclusion

This paper has started with the discussion of how visual is important and the importance of graphic novel in visualizing unimaginable experiences like war and trauma. There is an array of visual mediums present and still being discovered in the mass digital era. When it comes to literature, the main idea of storytelling is a text based discipline. However, the paper discusses two of the most well-read nonfiction graphic novels *Persepolis* and *Palestine*, extensively written based on political conflict, atrocities and trauma or the after effect of mass conflict. Thus, being present in this postmodern era and the peak of digitalization, graphic novels should be given similar space in the field of academia as a part of the curriculum. Neil Cohn says in his book, *The Visual Narrative Reader*, “There seemed to be several of these types of papers and bodies of literature; significant findings that were very influential, but not widely recognized. Visual narratives have managed its way through the academia in due time. There are number of adaptations already available such as Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale”, Charles Dicken’s “Oliver Twist”, Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mocking Bird” and series like “Goodnight Stories and Rebel Girls” and “Mujib”. However, there are certain limitations attached to this. Bringing in visual narratives in the academia has a long way to be accepted and adapted to. It might also not be able to project the actual essence of an actual text book. Other than this, visual mixing with text might be misleading or misinterpreted in terms of content. Nevertheless, graphic novels can add to the list of all literary readings representing the visual art genre. This new wave of literature has arrived as a boon from the digital era of advancement. It should be our responsibility to embrace it.

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