Beyond the borders: The transversal adventures of graphic novels

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the concept of the border in two contemporary Francophone Middle Eastern graphic novels in which the negotiation of transcultural, transnational and geopolitical issues is addressed. This project shows how Marjane Satrapi in *Persepolis* and Zeina Abirached in *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return* challenge our understanding about the continual instability of geopolitical borders in authoritarian contexts and war zones. These female writers destabilize the arbitrary boundaries of East and West by offering "an inclusive vision of culture/s, one which stresses the power of confluences, overlappings, and interactions rather than of polarities."[1] Indeed, this dissertation asks *how* the graphic novel functions in its visual and narrative structure to loosen the perceived boundaries between individuals, cultures, and geographies. The authors in this study turn the graphic novel into a site to (re)negotiate their identities and re-view the violence of living in revolution and wars in the Middle East. By moving outside their homeland borders, these writers immerse themselves in multiple cultures/geographies and cultivate "transcultural" identities. Their mobility patterns have influenced other writers especially women from the Middle East and call for new configurations.

In our world of interconnectedness, where political borders and cultural edges tend to blur, I suggest that the graphic novel with its text and image format should be seen as a medium that privileges points of contact, the building of bridges, and the construction of networks by which new aesthetic, cultural, and geopolitical imaginaries emerge.

[1]Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural writers and novels in the age of global mobility* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2015), 1.

Introduction

In her essay "How can one be Persian,?"[2] Marjane Satrapi, the author of *Persepolis,* recounts her student years in Strasbourg. It was February when a girl in her class ran to her and said, "Come here, I want to show you something you've never seen before!" When they arrived in the schoolyard, she excitedly said, "Look!" Marjane looked but did not see anything particular. The girl insisted, "Look! It snowed! It's so beautiful—SNOW!" She stressed the word "SNOW," so that Marjane understands what it was. "Have you ever seen SNOW?" Marjane explained to her that Iran was a high-altitude plateau in the western part of Asia and that it snowed there quite often in the winter. "But—Iran's not in Asia! Iran's in the East," the girl said with confidence.

The East. "Where is it, this legendary East of our fantasies and dreams and hatreds?" Satrapi explains that East is not a geographical fact because if it were, according to Greenwich, then Australia and New Zealand would have been part of it too. Her reflection raises more ambiguity between the concept of East and its relation to the West. Is East an abstract concept? Does it refer to Muslim countries? In that case, can we consider Bosnia as an Eastern country? To be more exact, do we mean the Muslim countries in war zones that are located in the so called "Middle East?"

This dissertation analyzes the concept of the border in two contemporary Francophone Middle-Eastern graphic novels in which the negotiation of transcultural, transnational and geopolitical issues is addressed. This project argues how the Iranian Marjane Satrapi in

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[2] Marjane Satrapi, "How one can be Persian," in *My sister, guard your veil; my brother, guard your eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices*, ed. Lila Azam Zanganeh (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 20-22.

Persepolis and the Lebanese Zeina Abirached in *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return* develop transcultural identities through their imposed immigration to France due to wars and revolution. These graphic novels actively encourage a global ethos of critical reading from beyond biased cultural standpoints and challenge the arbitrary divide between the concept of East and West by offering "an inclusive vision of culture/s, one which stresses the power of confluences, overlappings, and interactions rather than of polarities."[3] Indeed, this dissertation asks how the medium of the graphic novel functions in its visual and narrative structure to loosen the perceived boundaries between individuals, cultures, and geographies.

Since 2000, and importantly, in the post 9/11 era, there have been numerous graphic novels from and about the Middle East[4] that combine international politics and traumatic events into their personal stories.[5] Although in today's multimedia age, we are all able to witness of terrible events through for example television and the internet, the re-presentation of traumatic experiences into the graphic novel is a significant way of remediating about what has occurred and why. The "directness of drawn images and small, localized narratives"[6] in the graphic novel feels more accurate compared to how the media describe the other. It allows us to reflect on the conflicts that exacerbate the misunderstandings and miscommunications between East and West.

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[3] Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural writers and novels in the age of global mobility* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2015), 1.

[4] The Middle East is a "flexible geographic term that shifts depending on the user and the era." In the 20th-century and the rise of Arab Nationalism, all of these terms including "Near East," "Middle East and North Africa," "Arab World," "Islamic World" and "Muslim World" are frequently used to define the "Middle East." See Greta Sharnweber, "What and where is the Middle East?" In *Teaching the Middle East: A Resource Guide for American Educators*. Middle East Policy Council, http://teachmideast.org/for-educators/digital- book/#1439390070977-57823c4b-824d.

[5] Besides the works of Marjane Satrapi and Joe Sacco that are universally recognized, there is a new wave of graphic novels coming from or about the Middle-East. One should acknowledge comics artists such as Mana Neyestani, Amir, and Magdy El-Shafee whose work include eyewitness stories of violence and terror.

[6] Jan Baetens, Hugo Frey. *The graphic novel: an introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 96.

The writers of this study do not just bear witness to the violence and geopolitical instabilities in the Middle East, they meditate upon their transcultural experience through the lines of the graphic novel. By moving outside their homeland borders, they have experienced cultural dislocation, immersed themselves in multiple cultures/geographies, and ultimately cultivated, what I contend, transcultural identities. Their mobility patterns have influenced other writers, most notably female across the Middle East: Brigitte Findakly (Franco-Iraqi), Lamia Ziadé (Franco-Lebanese), and Leila Abdelrazaq (Palestinian-American) are some of these writers whose work depicts the issues of the Middle East in the tradition of *Persepolis* and *A Game for Swallows.*

The perspectives of *Persepolis* and *A Game for Swallows* are of note. Each is a personal account of a girl growing up in a chaotic time in the Middle East who ultimately immigrated to France. Their graphic novels were published in a highly political climate of the War on Terror era where media coverage and political discussions became more focused on the Middle East and reinforced the stereotypical representations of the other. In such a political environment full of tension between the Middle East and the West, two Middle Eastern women, who generally are considered as being voiceless and submissive to their patriarchal societies and religion, reveal their private lives in Iran and Lebanon for a Western audience. After many years, Satrapi and Abirached come back to re-view their traumatic experiences in revolution and wars. Their works offer a new image of the determined woman who rebels against fundamentalism, violence and patriarchy at home. They tell their stories in the language of the other, not only by writing them in French, but also by selecting the format of the graphic novel known as a Western style in order to recreate their multifaceted worlds. This project asks how these writers tell their brutal experience in the graphic novel. Indeed, it explores how the graphic novel reconcile the dualities

and differences of cultures and ideologies. Could the graphic novel be considered as a form of cultural "resistance" to politics? Before entering the discussion of the francophone Middle Eastern writers of this study, it is essential to define the graphic novel.

Comics or graphic novel: which term?

In the late 1960s and 1970s, American underground comix artists such as Art Spiegelman, Will Eisner, and Justin Green were working on some materials that later were labeled as the graphic novel. Their works were "lengthier, more serious, reflexive, and sophisticated,"[7] compared to "regularly serialized titles or more generic material(Superheroes, sci-fi, or fantasy)"[8] known as comics. Although many critics were skeptical about the neologism of the graphic novel, long-running debates on the definition and sometimes controversial categorization of the graphic novel in media and scholarly discourses helped the field become more known to comics readers.[9] In the same time in late 1980s, the republishing of French and Francophone comics (works of Tardi, Baru, Hergé) by magazines such as Raw and Heavy Metal[10] in the U.S. and the influences of the European and American comics (for example Moebius) enlarged the new possibilities for comics creation.

In addition to the new brand of graphic novel that emerged, in the 1980s and 1990s a form of sub-literature[11] was developed to teach people how to read and understand adult comics and graphic novels. One thinks for example of Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Arts* (1985), Wiater and Bissette's *Comic Book Rebels: Conversations with the Creators of the New Comics*

[7] Ibid, 5.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid, 86.

[10] It was originally created in France, Launched in the United States in 1977.

[11] Ibid.

(1988), and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993). These important contributions provided artists with a venue to elaborate on their works and gained the graphic novel more legitimacy. In this dissertation, I draw on two more recent theoretical works of graphic novels, Thierry Groensteen's two-volume *Système de la bande dessinée*[12] and Jan Baetens's *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, co-edited by Frey Hugo. While Groensteen focuses more on French and Francophone comics, Baeten's work maps the origin of graphic novels in the United States. Both writers apply medium-specific tools in analyzing the mechanism of graphic novels. Here, it is important to explain why I prefer to call *Persepolis* and *A Game for Swallows* graphic novels rather than comics.

In *The graphic novel: an introduction*, Baetens and Frey consider the graphic novel as a medium distinct from comics, one that emerged from the historical context where more sophisticated, literary comics with social and political subjects such as *Maus* (Spiegelman) and *Batman: The Dark Knight* (Miller) became popular cultural phenomena. These creations seemed to break many of the stereotypes associated with comics. The authors identify four levels of key features that include form, content, publication format, and production and distribution aspects[13] which clarify the distinctions.

At the level of the form, the drawing style of graphic novel writers are more personal and these writers could add individual twists to their works. For example, in terms of page layout in comics, the images are juxtaposed in a grid, which is read in sequential order (horizontal or vertical). Graphic novels could also follow these rules, but they could "also explore each of these

[12] Thierry Groensteen, *Système de la bande dessinée* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999). Twelve years after *Système de la bande dessinée*, Thierry Groensteen published *Comics and narration* (System 2) which is a continuation of his theoretical research on contemporary comics and graphic novels.

[13] Baetens, 8.

rules, trying to push the medium beyond the limits."[14] In both *Persepolis* and *A Game for Swallows*, one can observe irregular page layouts (including single panels, double-page or full-size panels, and etc.) that are compatible with the content of the panels rather than the traditional grid formats. Indeed, in the case of Satrapi and Abirached, both writer and illustrator are the same, which creates a more personalized style. At the level of narrative, the role of the narrator is much more present both verbally and visually than in the case of comics, "where the story seems to tell itself, without any intervention from the narrator."[15] In terms of content, graphic novels tell serious stories and are disposed toward realism (contrary to science-fiction or fantasy) and many of the graphic novels are autobiographies, reportage or documentaries. Regarding the publication format, the graphic novel is published mostly in the book format and avoids the serialization of comics (mostly in the format of the brochure, where there are often advertising). *Persepolis* and *A Game for Swallows* that retell autobiographical accounts of their "visually and verbally" present authors on the page were published in the book format. The last important factor that distinguishes the graphic novel from comics includes the production. One can not ignore the role of independent publishers in the rise of graphic novels that gave a "degree of creative freedom"[16] to the artists. The avant-garde L'Association published *Persepolis* at a time when the graphic novel was striving to find its place in the comics production industry and more specifically, in a market where the works of women graphic novel writers were not very welcomed.[17] Similarly, Abirached's *A Game for Swallows* was published by the small

[14] Ibid., 9.

[15] Ibid., 10.

[16] Ibid., 17.

[17] The role of L'Association in the production of *Persepolis* will be further discussed. See Ann Miller, "Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis: Eluding the Frames." *L'Esprit créateur* 51, no. 1 (2011): 50.

independent publisher Cambourakis in 2006, at a time where the graphic novels by women had already found their place in the comics market.[18]

Marjane Satrapi and Zeina Abirached: From the Middle East to France

The Iranian Marjane Satrapi recounts her child-eyed experience of the Revolution of 1979, her high-school years spent in Austria, and her return to Iran. Feeling displaced in Vienna, she comes back to her homeland where she attends Tehran School of Fine Arts. She marries to reduce the anxiety of living as a young woman under the Islamic regime, and experiences a divorce. Unable to adjust to the post-revolutionary Iran, she is obliged to immigrate to France in 1994.

In France, Satrapi studies in Strasbourg at the École supérieure des arts décoratifs before moving to Paris. It is in Paris that she becomes a part of L'Atelier des Vosges where she is introduced to Franco-Belgian comics tradition, or *bandes dessinées* (BD). Her four-volume work *Persepolis* was initially published in France by L'Association (composed of the colleagues of L'Atelier des Vosges) between 2000-2003. Satrapi, who has described how she had imagined simply distributing a few copies of the finished product among friends did not anticipate that her work would gain such international attention. The first volume sold a record three hundred thousand copies in France. Today, there are over a million copies of *Persepolis* in print, and the it is translated into over 25 languages. Furthermore, after the graphic novel had already been an international bestseller, the reputation of *Persepolis* increased when a black-and-white animated film version of the same name, co-written and co-directed by Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud, was released in 2007 and won the Jury Prize that year at the Cannes Film Festival. Despite this

[18] Hillary Chute, Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life narrative and contemporary comics* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 2010), 1-2.

universal success, the reception of *Persepolis* has been controversial in some countries. The graphic novel and the film were banned in Iran, Lebanon and Tunisia for their islamophobic contents and insulting sacred values. In 2013, Chicago Public Schools removed the graphic novel from the seventh grade because "it contain[ed] graphic language and images that [were] not appropriate for general use in the seventh grade curriculum."[19]

The title of the book, *Persepolis* (Greek name meaning city of Persians) refers to the capital of the ancient Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC) that was once a social, cultural and economic hub and one of the ancient world's largest empires. In *From Ancient Persia to Contemporary Iran*, Reza Ladjevardian writes that *Persepolis* was built to show the "wealth and multicultural dimensions of the Persian Empire"[20] and its tolerance towards different religions. The common fact between the site of Persepolis and the graphic novel *Persepolis* is that they both use the language of image to tell the story of Persians. The title of the graphic novel is a way to illustrate the vast difference on ancient and modern Iran. Satrapi writes in the introduction to the book about the history of Iran, "Iran was often subject to foreign domination. Yet the Persian language and culture withstood these invasions."[21] This becomes a theme throughout the book: Iran, and the protagonist, are "subject to foreign domination," but manage to retain their Persian culture and identity. From a political perspective, the reference to *Persepolis* could also show the opposition to the Islamic regime. In modern Iran, to detach Iranian identity[22] from Islam, many Iranians including Satrapi's work (metonymically) refer to the Achaemenid era and

[19] Alison Flood, "Persepolis battle in Chicago schools provokes outcry,"The Guardian, 19 March 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/mar/19/persepolis-battle-chicago-schools-outcry.

[20] Reza, Ladjevardian, "From Ancient Persia to Contemporary Iran – History of Iran Timeline.", brochure.

[21] Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 5.

[22] Ali Reza Eshraghi, "Iranians under the Islamic regime: more or less religious?" 6 August 2013, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/08/20138512624781648.html

to the ancient Persian culture to indicate that "this old and great civilization [...] should not be judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists."[23] Indeed, to communicate her message, Satrapi creates her story in the hybrid format of graphic novel where the language of French is as important as the language of image.

In Iran, the history of French Language goes back 300 years. It was during the Qajar period that French became popular and was used as the first official language in foreign affairs. Under Reza Shah (1925-1941), sending students to France to study in different disciplines, and the establishment of bilingual schools in the country expanded French more than ever. In upper-class families, knowing French was a necessity and most of the children of these families benefited from private French tutor. In *Persepolis*, Marji's parents belonged to upper-class families and send her to a French school. This francophilia is highlighted at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq when her parents consider moving to safer cities but they end up staying in Tehran so that Marji can continue her French education. In particular, writing *Persepolis* in French allows Satrapi to present her identity in its original version (not translated) and put her work in dialogue with the other to encourage intercultural mediation.

From a geopolitical perspective, Satrapi's exile in France and her story of the Revolution of 1979 is reminiscent of all other Iranian politicians for whom France (especially Paris) becomes a strategic site from where they freely opposed to the regimes and led political movements. Although allied with the King of Iran, France welcomed Ayatollah Khomeini in its territory while he was in exile three months before the revolution. From Neauphle-Le-Château, Khomeini delivered messages to the Iranian people with telephones and cassette tape recorders as well as expressing freely his opinions to the world. Indeed, in the face of political terror after

[23] [23] Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 6.

the revolution, left-wing politicians such as the last Prime Minister of Pahlavi, Bakhtiar and the first president after the Iranian Revolution, Banisadr led the National Movement of Iranian Resistance against Islamic regime from Paris. It is again from Paris that an Iranian woman raises her voice and recounts her experience of the revolution without being censored.

In addition to the history of French language in Iran and the political involvement of France in the Revolution of 1979, the publisher of *Persepolis*, L'Association played an important role in its creation in French. Founded in 1991 by French comics artists as part of a new wave of non-commercial small presses, L'Association was formed as a response to the lack of opportunity for avant-garde comics provided by France's mainstream comics publishers. In those days, the big French publishers focused on 48-page, full-color, hardcover graphic novels with a standard trim size, similar to the format of *Asterix* and *Tintin*. Furthermore, in the male-dominated comics industry of France, one could see a gender imbalance and "misogynistic portrayals of women."[24] Although L'Association was all male, its commitment to avant-garde works and its socially conscious community allowed international female artists such as the Quebecoise Julie Doucet to publish autobiographical graphic novels that invalidated the previous "masculine fantasies"[25] of female characters, instead depicting their real issues. Around 2000 when the comics scene in France was still world-leading, L'Association published three autobiographical comics tied with political undertones: Satrapi's *Persepolis*, David B.'s *L'ascension du haut mal*, a personal story intertwined with Algerian War; and *Cambouis* by Charlie Hebdo's cartoonist Rénald Luzier whose critical work described the presidential elections of 2002 in France. It was in such a multicultural and sociopolitical environment that Satrapi revealed her experience of living in Iran and Europe in French. Five years later after she

[24] Ann Miller, "Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis: Eluding the Frames." *L'Esprit créateur* 51, no. 1 (2011): 50.
[25] Ibid.

had left Iran and when she was less angry about the painful past, Satrapi began to consider writing her story through the medium of the graphic novel: "I realized that comics...is just a way of telling a story where I could feel exactly what was going on. Drawing is much closer to a human being than a photo, because you create the world in your own image: it's very personal, it's an international language. Before humans started talking, they first started drawing."[26] Unlike a photograph, the graphic novel allowed Satrapi to draw and assemble elements deliberately and places them with intent on the graphic novel page. She snaps her drawing at any moment that she chooses. It is this power of choosing that makes her style "very personal."

Among the two dominant styles of European comic book drawing during the twentieth century, Satrapi's work is closer to the *ligne claire* aesthetic characterized by "clear cartoon realism"[27] and the slow drawings of Hergé, than lively, dynamic and flexible pen strokes of the Marcinelle school, "which features agitation and speed lines to illustrate action, slapstick humor, and violence."[28] In an interview, Satrapi explains that she "grew up with American comics– lots of *Dracula* and lots of *Batman*"[29] as a child. As an adult in France she read comics by her colleagues and publishers at L'Association such as Joann Sfar and Emil Bravo, as well as David B. who also helped her "for the first two three chapters of [...] *Persepolis*."[30] Although she

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[26] Jessica Copley, "The New Global Literature? Marjane Satrapi and the Depiction of Conflicts in Comics," October 2011, http://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/the-new-global-literature-marjane-satrapi-and-the-depiction-of-conflict-in-comics/

[27] Beaty, Bart. "A Clear Line to Marcinelle: The Importance of Line in Émile Bravo's Spirou à Bruxelles." European Comic Art4, no. 2 (2011): 201.

[28] Marie Ostby, "Graphics and Global Dissent: Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis, Persian Miniatures, and the Multifaceted Power of Comic Protest." *PMLA* 132, no. 3 (2017): 571.

[29] Chiara Clemente, "Beginnings Marjane Satrapi," March 8, 2012, https://www.nowness.com/story/beginnings-marjane-satrapi

[30] Christian Hill, cited in Marc Singer, *Breaking the Frames: Populism and Prestige in Comics Studies*, (Austin, TX: U of Austin Press, 2019): 156.

disclaims any artistic influence from Spiegelman's *Maus*, she describes it as a "revelation. I told myself. 'There! It is possible to do very serious work with this means of storytelling.' same thing with *Epileptic*, with graphic novels by Joann Sfar, and with many other books."[31] Comics artists such as David B.'s influence on Satrapi's work are undeniable. While insisting on the influences of Satrapi's colleagues on *Persepolis*, the comics scholar Marc Singer shows that most of the scholarship has ignored the comics influence and industry practices by studying Satrapi's work "too selectively."[32] He shows that many of the graphic styles of *Persepolis* could find a resonance with David B.'s comics:

> The flattened perspective, the use of undifferentiated crowds to present mass actions, or violence, the depiction of historical combat and warriors, and the creation of fantastic images to portray real events or emotional states.[33]

Although Satrapi shares stylistic/aesthetic similarities with David B., her drawings are sometimes intertwined with "an ancient and transnational precedent,"[34] Persian Miniature[35]—curved lines depicting mythological and religious themes. Miniature paintings were used in book illustrations for Persian ancient manuscripts such as Shahnameh by Hakim Ferdowsi. This long epic poem (Masnavi) that is composed of couplets recounts the legends and the history of Iranian kings from the creation of the world to the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century. At the level of drawings, Satrapi's balanced, shadeless miniature style resonates with individual moments of Shahnameh's epic stories. Indeed, in one of the most famous couplets of

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[31] Ibid., 157.

[32] Ibid., 153.

[33] Marc Singer, *Breaking the Frames*, 154.

[34] Ostby, 560.

[35] The miniature painting is a fusion of separate tradition from Western and Byzantine traditions to Chinese Art. See Somayeh Ramezan Mahi, Hassan Balkhari, "The influence of the ancient Persian Art on the Shiraz School in the Alinjoo Period," Ketabe mah honar, (2008): 35.

Shahnameh,[36] Ferdowsi explains that he spent thirty years on the composition of Shahnameh to preserve the Persian language and culture from invasions. His poem is reminiscent of Satrapi's statements about how Persian language and culture survived from occupations throughout history. In fact, *Persepolis* does not only aim to keep the Iranian culture alive but its use of Persian miniature combined with Western styles allows the writer to prepare the ground for cultural understanding. Marie Ostby, specialist in Iranian and Middle Eastern Literatures, explores the thematic and formal similarities between Shahnameh and *Persepolis* and suggests that *Persepolis*' multiple modes of perception "is inseparable from its concurrent production of local, national, and global scales in protest against monolithic regimes and ideologies."[37] This multiperspective text does not only serve as a means of "protest" but an encouragement towards cultural tolerance when it bends the western style and blend it with Persian Miniature.

In the tradition of *Persepolis,* the Lebanese artist Zeina Abirached offers readers a memory of her childhood in war-torn Beirut. Abirached was born in Beirut in 1981, six years into Lebanon's civil war. She grew up in half of Beirut (East) since it was cut in two by the demarcation line between Christian East and Muslim West. Since the formation of the Republic of Lebanon in 1943, the country has continued to witness confrontations between its parties, religions, and minorities which led to the 1975–1990 Civil War. The battle exploded by Christian factions and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1975 and turned into a complex conflict sponsored by internal and external powers.[38] Right after the war, the State generated the Taif

[36] بسي رنج بردم بدين سال سي/عجم زنده كردم بدين پارسي: translates to: I struggled for thirty years to keep Persian alive.

[37] Ostby, 559.

[38] Specifically, Israel, Palestine, and Syria. See Lena, Irmgard Merhej, "Analysis of Graphic Narratives: War in Lebanese Comics." Dissertation, Jacobs University, 2015 :177. The war included several phases: "a period of sectarian violence and massacres, the Syrian occupation, the Hundred-Day War, the 1978 South Lebanon conflict, the Day of the Long Knives, the Zahleh campaign, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Israeli siege of Beirut, the

Agreement,[39] a so-called general amnesty to deliberately avoid the painful past. In 2002, when the Lebanese government started rebuilding Beirut and erasing all the traces of the war, Abirached felt the urge to tell her personal story of war-time in Beirut. At the time, she was a student at the ALBA, the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts where she discovered French and American comics artists including Jacques Tardi, David B., Art Spiegelman, and Chris Ware. Although she has never mentioned Satrapi as an inspirational figure, many readers and reviewers have compared her black and white drawings to *Persepolis*.[40] Similar to Satrapi's graphic novel, *A Game for Swallows* recounts a serious story of war from a child's perspective. Indeed, the often dominant black color and flattened images are reminiscent of David B.'s *Epileptic* and may suggest his indirect influence on Abirached's style. In fact, what distinguishes *A Game for Swallows* from Satrapi's graphic novel is the Lebanese artist's Oulipian style. In 2004, Abirached attended the École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs in Paris where she became familiar with the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle group (L'Oulipo). Although she is not an official member of the group, she collaborated with its members (*Agatha de Beyrouthe* co-written by Jacques Jouet). Oulipian writers have set a variety of rules, rituals and games in order to break with habit and stimulate creativity. Their works may also deal with deeply serious subject matter. Anna Kemp, in "Je me souviens Beyrouth: Zeina Abirached's Perecquian practice," explores the influence of L'Oulipo, and especially the writings of Georges Perec, on

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Israeli massacres at Sabra and Shatila, the 'War of the Camps', the 'War of the Mountain', the 'Aoun War', and the infighting in East Beirut."

[39] Known also as the National Reconciliation Accord, agreed and signed in 1989 in Taif, Saudi Arabia; based on the principle of a balanced "mutual coexistence" between Lebanon's different religious parties with regard to their political representation.

[40] Alex Dueben, "I was convinced that Beirut Stopped at the wall: Interview with Zeina Abirached," 25 November 2013. http://www.tcj.com/i-was-convinced-that-beirut-stopped-at-that-wall-an-interview-with-zeina-abirached/

Abirached's graphic novels. Like Perec, she argues, Abirached "finds a degree of security and comfort in a playful attachment to the objects, routines and rituals of everyday life."[41] *A Game for Swallows* recreates geographical places (entryway, building, Beirut) on the graphic novel page by means of playful layouts and framings. In addition to space, the sounds, which Kemp's article neglects to mention, is an essential key in remembering the war. Abirached confirms the influence of the French filmmaker, Jacques Tarti[42] on the role of the sound effects in *A Game for Swallows*. The textualized onomatopoeias are not simply a means of inserting sound into the silent medium of the graphic novel; rather, they are mostly used to reflect the sense of physical space–the city of Beirut at war. In addition to these western influences (in particular French artists), Abirached chooses French Language over Arabic to create her personal story of war.

During the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon (1920-1946) and the idea of Greater Syria, the religiously diverse Lebanon requested an independent State in order to avoid dissolution in its Arab-Muslim surrounding. Arabism seemed to be a danger to other communities including Christians as the religious resonance of the term "Arab" seemed stronger than its national connotation. As a result, other sects, most notably Christians intended to express themselves in French which showed "une hostilité à l'arabité et une allégeance à la France."[43] For them, France was "protectrice des faibles, civilisatrices des peuples, mère de toute les justes libertés."[44] With the change of the political situation after the independence of Lebanon in 1943,

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[41] Anna, Kemp. "Je me souviens de Beyrouth: Zeina Abirached's Perecquian practice," *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 20. no. 3&4 (2017):185.

[42] Alex Dueben, "I was convinced that Beirut Stopped at the wall: Interview with Zeina Abirached," 25 November 2013. http://www.tcj.com/i-was-convinced-that-beirut-stopped-at-that-wall-an-interview-with-zeina-abirached/

[43] Zahida Darwiche Jabbour, *Littératures francophones du Moyen-Orient* (Égypte, Liban, Syrie), (Paris: Édisud, 2007): 87.

[44] Ibid., 87-88.

Arabic became the official language of Lebanon and French was selected as the language of education. The rise of the public schools helped the expansion of French which turned into "une langue de culture, une véhicule de valeurs humanistes et un moyen d'ouverture à l'universel."[45] In *Littératures francophones du Moyen-Orient*, Zahida Darwiche Jabbour explains that during the Lebanese Civil war francophone literature experienced remarkable growth, more importantly, the contribution of female writers was unexampled. These writers including Abirached chose to write in the French language that gave them "la distance nécessaire à une médiation lucide sur les malentendus de l'histoire."[46] Growing up with Arabic and French, Abirached avoided Arabic as it was the language of bad news, fear, anxiety, and war. Indeed, unlike these other francophone novelists, Abirached could not publish her graphic novel in Lebanon due to the lack of comics publishers. She had to wait until 2006 to get published by the small French Cambourakis printing house. Similar to *Persepolis*, *A Game for Swallows*, the story of a Middle Eastern woman, instantly became a bestseller. Both writers found themselves suspended precariously between two cultures while belonging to neither of them. It is this in-betweeness position that allows for new ways of reflecting on the notions of identity and culture.

In *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, Arianna Dagnino argues that the dynamic nature of our "global modernity"[47] is giving birth to growing numbers of transcultural authors. These writers, in her terms, "do not belong in one place or one culture,"[48] and the transculturality happened to them "by moving— physically, virtually, or imaginatively—

[45] Ibid. 88.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Dagnino, *Transcultural writers and novels in the age of global mobility*,1.

[48] Ibid., 14.

outside their cultural and homeland or geographical borders."[49] She studies five writers[50] who migrated "by choice or by life circumstances"[51] based on three criteria: the variegated cultural identities; their lived transcultural experiences across a number of countries; and, for each, a creative transcultural literary work.[52] What she neglects in theorizing transcultural writers is addressing the types of "life circumstances" that may impose migration. Unlike the authors studied by Dagnino, Satrapi and Abirached were forced to leave their countries not as a result of "global modernity," but because of revolution and wars. In fact, re-viewing the traumatic past, and reflecting on the origins of conflicts are the major components in the development of their transcultural perspectives.

Persepolis and *A Game for Swallows* depict wartime-focused testimonies from the candid perspective of a child "whose direct witnessing of adult violence encourages sympathetic readings."[53] One of the major challenges of these graphic novel writers in creating their work is the tension "between what is sayable and what is showable."[54] As Gillian Whitlock, Hillary Chute, and other scholars have claimed, in recent decades the graphic novel has become a privileged medium for representing traumatic content. The page layouts and frames that are a part of the form create "multiple spaces for dialogue between individual narration and its

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[49] Ibid., 2.

[50] These writers are Inez Baranay (Hungarian and Australian), Brian Castro (Chinese, Portuguese, and Australian), Alberto Manguel (Argentine, German, and Canadian), Tim Parks (English and Italian), and Ilija Trojanow (Bulgarian, German, and Kenyan).

[51] Dagnino Arianna. "Transcultural Writers and Transcultural Literature in the Age of Global Modernity." *Transnational Literature*4, no. 2 (May 2012): 1.

[52] Dagnino, *Transcultural writers and novels in the age of global mobility*, 10-11.

[53] Leigh Gilmore, "Witnessing *Persepolis*," In *Graphic subjects: Critical essays on autobiography and graphic novels*, edited by Michael A. Chaney, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011): 157.

[54] Damian Duffy, "Comics on the Wall: Sequential Art Narrative Design in Musicology and Multimodal Education," *Visual Arts Research*35, no. 1 (2009): 5.

context."[55] In other words, the graphic novel writers could express their own feelings while situating them next to the sociopolitical/cultural/historical contexts. One may mention that other forms of literary or artistic creation could do the same. For example, in an autobiographical novel, the authors could convey their feelings through words, but not in such a straightforward, clear, and visual manner.

Persepolis draws both the unrepresentable violence and the challenge of testimony. As Leigh Gilmore argues "*Persepolis* insists that trauma contains within it the possibility of bearing witness, even if that means bearing witness to what was not shared or shareable."[56] Satrapi's game of presence/absence of the traumatic scene shows the failure of the image in the face of violent extremes (executions, death, etc.). To depict the fear, the anger and the trauma she experienced, Satrapi gives different voices to her child, adolescent, and young selves and demonstrates how the self evolves throughout the time. Most of the existing scholarship on the question of trauma in *Persepolis* deal with the scenes of direct violence of childhood and adolescence in Iran. In fact, in the graphic novel, a lot of the direct scenes of violence stop when the adolescent Marjane leaves Iran. In this study, I go beyond the analysis of direct violence scenes to focus on the plurality of trauma representations and also to consider the cultural and gendered violence in the post-revolutionary period. From the opening page of the graphic novel, the protagonist struggles to adjust her body and her worldviews with the "veil." The veil, I argue, should not be limited to its definition as a piece of clothes. In fact, it is the experience of veiling/unveiling/reveiling and the lack of control over her body that come back and catch the adult author. As a veiled woman, her hair (body) is politicized in Iran. To explore the politics of

[55] Baetens and Frey, 96.

[56] Gilmore, 172.

the veil and the notion of black color in the post-revolution period, my analysis focuses on the historical and sociocultural aspects of the veil and its impact on Marjane's life in the public and private spheres.

In addition, in the West, the adolescent Marjane is seen as the inferior (sometimes) dangerous other. It is useful to refer to Edward Said's notion of orientalism to understand how the process of othering happened to her in Austria and how this experience lead to the evolution of her transcultural identity. According to Said, Orientalism is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience"[57] and how the self (Occident) defines the other (Orient) in which the self is privileged and has the upper hand. The central idea of Edward Said's *Orientalism* is that Western knowledge about the East is not generated from facts or reality, but from preconceived stereotypes that envision all Eastern/Muslim societies as very similar to one another, and very different from the West. It is precisely this stereotype that Satrapi aims to negate in *Persepolis*. The graphic novel witnesses the difficulties of integrating into a society where the subject is prejudged by her race. Several failures of assimilating into the host society cause Marjane to re-question her roots and the nature of differences between the Middle-Eastern and western cultures. In fact, the author constantly (re)negotiates her identity between the dualities/oppositions by reviewing the direct (gendered) violence at home and the otherness abroad.

The style of *A Game for Swallows* is very different in witnessing trauma. It shows how Abirached seeks to come to terms with her past and what happened during the Lebanese civil war by means of recreating her fragmented memory through space and everyday life. She belongs to the second generation of post-war authors who lived through the war as children and

[57] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978): 9.

adolescents. These authors "seek[s] to (re)construct a temporal and spatial framework of reference to contain an experience of war"[58] as a response to the State-ordained amnesia.[59] Abirached's entire texts work toward the reconstruction of war's memory in the urban environment of Beirut. An overview of Abirached's texts shows that the urban space of Beirut appears frequently in the titles. The city of Beirut, enclosed in parentheses, occurs timidly in the first graphic novel, *(Beyrouth) Catharsis*[60] to then manifest itself more strongly in the book of memories *Je me souviens: Beyrouth*.[61] The capital also metonymically appears in *38, rue Youssef Semmani*.[62] The reappearance of 38, Rue Youssef Semani in most of Abirached's works can be seen as her attempt to create a monument or a memorial of this place representing metonymically Beirut's history of war. Abirached uses the spatiality on the page to capture the way war is often intertwined with geographical space by exploring the maps of inside (home) and outside. The inside is Abirached's entryway, the place of gatherings and social rituals. The outside is the unknown city beyond 38 rue Youssef Semaani where she lives. Through the transacting black lines—sometimes chaotic— on a white comics page, Abirached conveys the sense of a claustrophobic space wherein she lived. The stability of the panels that maintain mostly the same size and the stability of the representation of the content shows Abirached's effort in organizing her memory of war. Carla Calargé and Alexandra Gueydan-Turek argue that Abirached's drawings often function as semiopaque screens that both cover and obliquely reveal the

[58] Felix Lang, "Ghosts in The Archive—Lebanon's Second-Generation Post-War Novelists and The Limits of Reconstruction," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 18, no. 5 (2014): 488.

[59] Known also as the National Reconciliation Accord, agreed and signed in 1989 in Taif, Saudi Arabia; based on the principle of a balanced "mutual coexistence" between Lebanon's different religious parties with regard to their political representation.

[60] Abirached Zeina,*(Beyrouth) Catharsis*, (Paris : Cambourakis Abirached Zeina, 2006a).

[61] Abirached Zeina, *Je me souviens: Beyrouth*, (Paris: Éditions Cambourakis, 2011b).

[62] Abirached Zeina, *38, Rue Youssef- Semaani*, (Paris: Éditions Cambourakis, 2006).

traumatic aspect of the violence.[63] I argue that the avoidance of violence should not be seen as the inability of showing trauma in the medium of the graphic novel. In fact, it is part of Abirached's project in universalizing her personal experience so that anyone, despite their differences, could engage with a story of the war.[64]

In the preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains that since the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978, nothing has changed in the way Western representations of the Middle East depict "the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights."[65] While confirming Said's point on the continuing misconceptions of the West, Ali Behdad and Julian Juliet Williams introduce the notion of neo-Orientalism, "a mode of representation that [...] engenders new tropes of othering."[66] Although predominantly a North American phenomenon, it is not produced exclusively by Western academics and authors. As Behdad and Williams explain "not only do Middle Eastern writers, scholars, and so-called experts participate in its production, but they play an active and significant role in propagating it."[67] While classical Orientalists were typically European scholars and artists,[68] neo-Orientalists are more likely to be ordinary Middle

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[63] Carla Calargé, Alexandra Gueydan-Turek, "La guerre du Liban à/et l'écran des souvenirs dans: Le Jeu des hirondelles et Je me souviens. Beyrouth de Zeina AbiRached," *French Cultural Studies* 25, no.2 (2014): 209.

[64] "I also wanted my story to have a universal dimension. It takes place in Beirut in one particular apartment in one particular night, but it could be anywhere, anytime." Zeina abirached, "I Was Convinced that Beirut Stopped at that Wall": An interview with Zeina Abirached," Alex Dueben, 25 Nov. 2013, http://www.tcj.com/i-was-convinced-that-beirut-stopped-at-that-wall-an-interview-with-zeina-abirached/

[65] Edward Said, cited in Ali Behdad, Juliet Williams. "Neo-Orientalism." Globalizing American Studies. Ed. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010): 283.

[66] Ali Behdad,Juliet Williams. "Neo-Orientalism." Globalizing American Studies, edited by Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010): 284.

[67] Ibid. 285.

[68] Some of these scholars and literary figures are: Burton, Lane, Lyall, Massignon, among others and literary figures like Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Austin, Flaubert, Kipling, Conrad. See Moosavinia, S. R., N. Niazi, and

Eastern subjects "whose self-proclaimed authenticity sanctions and authorizes their discourses."[69] Behdad and Williams explain that these neo-Orientalists explicitly engage with politics of the region and some times misrepresent important aspects of recent events in the region. They often deny the neo-liberalism of the United-States in the Middle East and promulgate superficial generalizations about Middle Eastern societies. Although Satrapi's personal account deals with politics, I argue that her work does not intend to contribute to the stereotypical images of the Middle East. On the contrary, Satrapi's critical approach to the notions of the veil and otherness ultimately contributes to her larger endeavor of destabilizing the concept of East and West. *A Game for Swallows* is different in presenting the concepts of East and West. In fact, these notions exist within the city of Beirut. While the Christians lived in East of Beirut, the Muslims were in the West. Interestingly, in this particular context, the religions and their geographical associations are displaced. Muslims who are normally associated with the East, during the war lived in the West (of Beirut). Although Abirached never explicitly mentions the polarities that split the people of Lebanon, her work constantly challenges the origins of tensions between cultures, religions, and ideologies. For both of these writers, I contend, the graphic novel becomes a "site of resistance" from which they oppose misconception and violence. The term "site of resistance" was first used in P*opular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa* subtitled "Popular Culture—A Site of Resistance," by Middle Eastern scholars, El Hamamsy and Soliman who consider popular culture (including the graphic novel) as "a form of culture resistance against different forms of global and local domination."[70] A site of resistance

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S. R., Moosavinia, N. Niazi, Ahmad Ghaforian, "Edward Said's Orientalism and the Study of the Self and the Other in Orwell's Burmese Days." *Studies in Literature and Language*2, no. 1 (2011): 103.

[69] Behdad, 285.

[70] Walid El Hamamsy, Mounira Soliman, *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013): 7.

could be the battle of Iranian women against the compulsory veiling by letting a few strands of hair be exposed. In *A Game for Swallows*, it could be seen as the opposition to collective amnesia and the tendency towards war. These Middle Eastern women rebel against their imposed identities in the patriarchal society as well as her stereotypical image as being voiceless and submissive. In addition, one can mention the small acts of resistance of people in Zeina Abirached's building; watering the flowers despite the water scarcity; creative movements to commute between perilous streets in Beirut and still avoid the snipers; having social rituals and family gatherings, despite the outside bombings.

Outside their homeland borders, Satrapi and Abirached find themselves in a liminal position where they oscillate between two modes. Hamid Naficy describes the state of exile as "a process of perpetual becoming, involving separation from home, a period of liminality and in-betweenness that can be temporary or permanent."[71] He considers cultures as being located in place and time. However, the exilic culture, according to him, is created at the intersection of other cultures. Much like Naficy's notion of liminality, in the context of postcolonial discourses, Homi Bhabha's concept of "third space," describes "the new cultural identities that often emerge in the border zones between incommensurably different cultures."[72] While Naficy focuses on the challenges of the individual in exile, Bhabha is more positive about the new possibilities that the in-between position can offer to exilic authors. Both of these concepts are useful in understanding how Satrapi and Abirached become transcultural writers. I call this in-betweenness position theorized by Naficy and Bhabha, a "*trans*-space," that lies beyond the

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[71] Hamid Naficy,*The making of exile cultures: Iranian television in Los Angeles*, (Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 1993):8-9.

[72] Elisabeth El Refaie, "Transnational Identity as Shape-Shifting: Metaphor and Cultural Resonance in Gene Luen Yang's American Born Chinese." in *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Crossroads*, eds. Daniel Stein, Shane Denson, and Christina Meyer (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 40.

divides and the differences of cultures. This is a position from which issues of identity, roots, and violence are negotiated while mixing the Western style of the graphic novel with personal stories from the Middle East. The prefix "trans" which means across, beyond, and is also associated with change, describes well the geographical/cultural displacements of Satrapi and Abirached. "Trans" is suggestive of the change of their worldview towards individuals and cultures. Here, the term space is indicative of two elements: the transcultural position of these writers and the space of the graphic novel page. I consider transculture as "a vision of displacement, of nomadism, the possibility of setting up one's territory anywhere."[73] For Satrapi and Abirached, this "territory" could be seen as the graphic novel. The transcultural vision allows these writers to create new ways of thinking and imagining the notions of identity, home and culture while creating points of contacts between Middle Eastern and French cultures. Indeed, the medium of the graphic novel is transcultural. According to the comics scholar, Mark McKinney, comics depicts "transcultural movement and change through immigration"[74] and also it is "a shared form across cultures worldwide."[75] Satrapi and Abirached "seem to be living in a dimension without any fixed borders or whose geographic, cultural, national or homeland boundaries and allegiances are self-identified, self-chosen."[76] As a result, their literary/artistic productions are innovative as they move beyond ethnic, national, racial, or religious concepts and offer a new perspective on the world and humanity.

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[73] Arianna Dagnino, "Transcultural Writers and Transcultural Literature in the Age of Global Modernity," *Transnational Literature*4, no. 2 (May 2012): 7.

[74] Mark McKinney, "Transculturation in French Comics." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 17, no. 1 (2013): 7.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Arianna Dagnino, "Transcultural Writers and Transcultural Literature,"7.

My first chapter, “Graphic self” demonstrates how *Persepolis* exposes the complex visual dimension of its author narrating her identity in different contexts on the page. To unpack the layers of the self, I identify four types of self appearing on the page: Marji, the child self; Marjane, the adolescent self; Marjane as an Iranian woman; the overarching self of the author, Satrapi. Throughout the graphic novel, there is a dialogue between these versions of self. In addition, I explore how the author of these selves, retraces the violence in both home and host societies and how she communicates it on the comics page. Finally, I argue that the self experiences a transformation, a change of perspective allowing her to blur the boundaries between the inconsistent concepts of East/West.

My second chapter, “Mapping the war” argues how Abirached in *A Game for Swallows* demonstrates the instability of war zones in Beirut and its relation to her identity evolution. Abirached seeks to come to terms with her past and what happened during the Lebanese civil war by means of recreating her fragmented memory through space and everyday life. Indeed, I coin the term “archival device” to argue that Abirached’s uses graphic novel as a tool to itemize the wartime habits (tactics), and daily routines.

In my conclusion, I demonstrate how Satrapi and Abirached have influenced the genre of autobiography in Middle Eastern comics production more generally. In this way, not only do Satrapi and Abirached contribute to encouraging other Middle Eastern writers (especially women) to liberate their voices against local and international dominations but they also promote and engage with a transcultural perspective loosening the perceived boundaries between East and West.

The Rise of comics in the Middle East: the continuation of the *Persepolis* project?

While the focus of this research is on francophone Middle Eastern writers, it is important to recognize their influence on the rising comics in the Middle East. Although comics is known as a Western invention, it was presented in an original way by Satrapi to the Middle East. Over the last two decades, more than twenty-five comics[77] have been published about the Middle East.

Middle Eastern comics emerged especially in the wake of the Arab Spring unprisings in 2011. According to "Swimming Against the Tide"[78] a German website sponsored by various institutions whose goal is to inform the world about foreign social issues, artists in the Middle East and the Arab world have used comics to voice opposition to governments, religious institutions, and corruptions. For example, the Iranian graphic novel *Zahra's Paradise* by Amir (who used only his first name) criticizes the violence and political corruption during the 2009 presidential election protests, known as the Green Movement. It depicts Zahra who is in the search of his lost son in the course of the protests. *Zahra's Paradise* also refers to the largest cemetery in Iran called "Beheshte Zahra." To capture some of torture and executions stories, Amir has cooperated with the online "Omid Memorial Project."[79] The project was launched in the United States by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center (ABC) in 2002. It recorded 24865 victims of state violence and executions since 1979. Certainly, these works use comics medium as a political tool to criticize the social and political conditions under the dictatorial regimes.

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[77] Chris Reyns-Chikuma, Houssem Ben Lazreg, "The Discovery of Marjane Satrapi and the Translation of Works from and about the Middle East," in *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel*, ed. Jan Baetens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 406.

[78] Charlotte Bank, "Swimming Against the Tide," 18 July, 2012, ttps://en.qantara.de/content/comics-artists-in-the-arab-world-swimming-against-the-tide.

[79] "Omid Memorial Project,"https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/about.

In early 2000, graphic novels from Middle Eastern writers were more oriented towards European publishers and the global market, as in the case of Satrapi and Abirached, but since the uprisings of Arab spring, they have established a remarkable presence in the region.[80] Lebanon, Iran and the Maghreb[81] are the main countries producing graphic novels. In Lebanon, a group of friends in Beirut established *Samandal* in 2007, the very first adult comic magazine in the region. Also, in 2011, two graduates from ALBA, Zeina Bassil and Wissam Eid, launched the fanzine *La Furie des Glandeurs* which includes single panel comics and illustrations. In Algeria, the founder of Dalimen Press, Delila Nadjem and a group of Algerian artists, launched the first edition of the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Alger (FIBDA) in 2008 which quickly became a network for artists, publication, and magazines. The reputation of Iranian comics belongs to its exilic authors including, Satrapi, Amir (*Zahra's Paradise*),[82] Mana Neyestani (*An Iranian Metamorphosis*),[83] and Dara Naraghi (Persia Blues, volume 2: *Love and War*,[84]2015). In Iran, each book (or translated book) must be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance before being published. As such, most of the international comics is subject to censorship. The local comics are children's books or have for theme the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war, martyrdom and biographies of religious (Shiite) characters.[85]

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[80] Massimo Ricco, eds. "Drawing for a New Public: Middle-Eastern 9th Art and the Emergence of a Transnational Graphic Mouvement," in *Postcolonial Comics: Texts, Events Identities*. edited by Mehta, Binita, and Pia Mukherji, (London: Routledge, 2015): 187-189.

[81] The connection of the Maghreb with the Middle East through colonialism, languages (Arabic, English, and French), and religions are very strong.

[82] Amir, Khalil, *Zahra's Paradise*. (New York: First second Books, 2011).

[83] Mana Neyestani, *An Iranian Metamorphosis*, (Minneapolis: Uncivilized Books, 2014).

[84] Dara Naraghi, *Persia Blues*, volume 2: *Love and War* (New York: NBM Publishing, 2015).

[85] Anahita Alavi, "Comparative study between Iranian comics and American comics," Honarhaye Ziba, 19 N. 3, (2014): 46-47.

In recent years, the Internet allowed comics creators to publish their work on personal blogs, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms and make it accessible to the public. Interestingly, the medium of comics has become a popular tool among young people who use it to criticize different aspects of their lives in the Middle East. Although many of the realities of the Middle East are not covered in the official media, the medium of comics allows ordinary people of the Middle East to become aware about the unstated events. Indeed, it is important to note that the language of publication is an essential factor in the international recognition of Middle Eastern comics. In Lebanon, comics are published in French, Arabic, and English. In the Maghreb, the dominant language of comics is Arabic. However, Iran is recognized for its comics that were published abroad. In addition to the voice that it offers to the people, Middle Eastern comics could be seen as a privileged instrument to discover realities and experiences through personal testimonies.

Chapter One
The graphic self in *Persepolis*

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* is the most famous coming-of-age story set in revolutionary Iran. Two decades after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, a new wave of autobiographies writing emerged mostly in English by diasporic Iranian women who struggled to understand their past: Roya Hakkakian, Afschineh Latifi, and Azar Nafisi to mention a few. Most of these women experienced the Revolution as a child or an adolescent and emigrated to other countries after the creation of the Islamic regime. These women are the first generation of Iranian memoir writers as the genre of autobiography did not exist prior to the revolution, especially for women because it was seen as "an immodest disclosure of the private."[86] While their memoirs are mostly written in the forms of novels, *Persepolis*[87] stands out for its (Western-style) comics format. All novels written by Iranian writers in diaspora evoke nostalgia, "mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values."[88] The authors are faced with the "fact that [Iran] does not exist anymore but as an "imaginary homeland." Rather than focusing on the loss of home and cultural belonging, in this chapter, I argue that *Persepolis* offers a transcultural perspective by juxtaposing the familiar and the alien. Most of the reviews of *Persepolis* highlight its familiarity. The child's perspective of the narrator, Marji, allows the author to put humanity in the center of her work despite all the differences that may exist between cultures. *Persepolis* invites the reader to the journey of Marji's identity

[86] Cited in Nima Naghibi, "Revolution, trauma, and nostalgia in diasporic Iranian women's autobiographies," 79.

[87] Interestingly, another Iranian female artist, Parsua Bashi published her graphic novel, *Nylon Road*,[87] in English in Switzerland. However, Bashi does not belong to exilic writers. She 'migrated' (her preferred word) to Zurich in 2004 and went back to Iran in 2009.

[88] Ibid., 80.

construction process and whose girlhood in crisis becomes "a site through which to speak about race, gender, ethnicity, and religion."[89] It does not only relate Satrapi's personal story, but the story is compatible with "communal memory of a generation."[90] Although many of the remembered events in *Persepolis* are very personal or relate to smaller communities, this graphic novel shapes the collective memory through the representation of the Revolution's history and Iran-Iraq war.

This chapter examines the four layers of the self: Marji, the child self; Marjane, the adolescent self; Marjane as an Iranian woman; and the overarching self of the author, Satrapi. Each of these selves that recounts a specific part of Satrapi's life is an "experiencing self"[91] (the narrator in the story), and Satrapi becomes the adult "narrating self" who writes/draws and re-views her past. Through Marji's childhood and adolescence in Iran, Satrapi recounts from her child's view the protests against the Shah, the Shah's overthrow, the start of the Revolution, and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war.[92] In this chapter, I study how the experiencing selves depict trauma and I argue that autobiographical graphic novels such as *Persepolis* should be studied as a form of witness and testimony. In addition, the personal experience of trauma is often intertwined with the story of a nation. *Persepolis* also critically addresses the issue of the veil and describes the psychological consequences on Iranian women. While Satrapi's experiencing selves—selves drawn on the comics page— witness violence, otherness, feeling displaced

[89] Leigh Gilmore, Elizabeth Marshall, "Girls in crisis: Rescue and transnational feminist autobiographical resistance" *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 688.

[90] Amy Malek, "Memoir as Iranian exile cultural production: A case study of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* series," *Iranian Studies* 39, no.3 (2006): 375.

[91] The expression "experiencing self" and "narrating self" are proposed by Sandor, Klapcsik, "Acculturation strategies and exile in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 11, no. 1 (2016): 71.

[92] Iran-Iraq war started by Iraq president Saddam Hussein in September 1980 and ended on July 20, 1988. In both sides, more than a million people died, at least half a million became permanently handicapped, some 228 billion dollars were directly expended, and more than 400 billion dollars of damage was inflicted.

between cultures, I argue that, her adult narrating self maintains a transcultural/transnational position between East and West.

Persepolis is about "the boundaries of identity destabilizing the tropes of East and West."[93] I suggest that Satrapi's transcultural position transforms the idea of otherness and establishes a "trans-space" where she negotiates issues of exile, return, and identity. In this respect, it is essential to move beyond the potential meanings of the text and attend to the cultural and generic codes in order to unravel what the text executes within the broader cultural and political contexts. In the case of Satrapi, her use of comics reflects a multi-voiced cultural situation that allows any reader to connect with the book.

Negotiating identity: From child self to transnational self

Persepolis relates Marjane Satrapi's experiences in Iran under the Shah's regime and then the Islamic Republic before she leaves for Austria. In this section, my first focus will be on the process of identity construction of the non-religious immigrant in the home country and then in the host. She is characterized by two imposed identities, the one attributed to the gender in the country of origin as well as the *racialized* identity abroad. On the one hand, Marjane as a migrant has experienced the turmoil of a revolution, the establishment of a new system of governance who imposed a sexual identity on her; on the other hand, like other migrants, she is also confronted with the imposed otherness in the host society.

Many writers adopt increasingly sophisticated ways of understanding and articulating migrant and ethnic identity by choosing a transnational position. In *Persepolis*, privileging the transnational experience through comics illuminates the more challenging strategy of self-

[93] Chute, *Graphic Women*, 138.

representation. When Marji moves between international borders, she settles in Vienna where she faces a variety of new social norms. Caught between East and West, the protagonist of the story is obliged to assimilate to the new culture while feeling displaced. Her dual positioning demonstrates how the transcultural subject is not exposed to one ideology but a plurality of discourses.

From a conceptual and aesthetic point of view, the border could be explored in the graphic novel itself, drawn through variable or imaginary lines which define panels or strips. As we shall see, the graphic novel mobilizes verbal and visual structures to resist and recalibrate boundaries between the verbal and visual dimension and gives a hybrid figure to the narration. In this sense, the form of the graphic novel is precisely what allows *Persepolis* to explore transnational/transcultural identity in a way that is potentially more compelling than other literary/artistic formats.

The opening page of *Persepolis* informs the reader about the beginning of the new Veiling Act under the Islamic regime, which had to be obeyed by religious and nonreligious women. In 1980, when she was only ten years old, the veil became mandatory in schools. Marji compares the schools before and after the Revolution of 1979. Before the Revolution, boys and girls attended the same schools, while after the Revolution they were segregated. Apart from the compulsory veil and sexual separation, bilingual schools were labeled as symbols of "capitalism," and all were shut down. These changes in the education system have been called "the cultural revolution," an attempt by the new regime to impose an "Islamic culture" and prevent the penetration of Western liberal culture.

The first chapter of *Persepolis* "the veil" is announced both visually and verbally in a heavily inked background that reads like a Hijab (Chador) and depicts a single eye. The eye that

both "sees" and "understands" provides a meta-commentary discourse on the notion of the veil throughout the graphic novel. It could indicate the surveillance of the Islamic regime over the female body or be translated as the occidental gaze at the Middle Eastern woman and her limitation in the Islamic society. Indeed, as Pauline Uchmanowicz suggests, the eye plus the emblem of the veil which could stand out for the modesty and religion, "connote mystical or supernatural vision"[94] often seen in Marji's dreams and conversations with God. The image of the black eye visually connects this chapter with the "Kim Wilde" chapter that depicts a strand of blonde hair and an eye with light color. The veiled Eastern woman is redrawn as a secular Western woman to show Marjane's identity evolution as an adolescent who, beyond the veil, shares the same desires with other young people in the West.

In the next strip, Marji's representation of the imposed veil in school in the first panel is ironic. The visual game with the first two panels provides a significant example. The first panel contains an individual photo of the main character in her childhood with the headscarf. In the next panel, four little girls sitting in a row, all unhappy, wear the same costumes, and have a similar pose. They could be distinguished by the slight differences in bangs and facial expressions. There is a fifth character cut by the frame of the panel.

[94]Pauline Uchmanowicz, "Graphic novel decoded: Towards a poetics of comics." *International Journal of Comic Art* 11, no. 1 (2009): 368.

Figure1: Similarity of veiled girls.

The irony of this visual representation lies in the intelligent game that Satrapi plays with the images of the veiled little girls. Here, the reader looks for the main character; certainly, the main character is not in the picture but in the words. The image of the protagonist is removed from the second panel. This, of course, will not be recognized immediately by the reader as all veiled girls are dressed the same way. The appearance of Marji in a single panel and a trace of her body in the next panel could hint at Satrapi family's different political views. It could also suggest Marjane's unique transnational experience of veiling, unveiling and reveiling which makes her stand out among her classmates. Indeed, all of the veiled girls are arms folded across midriffs in exactly the same pose. Their only distinguishing features are the bangs and their eyes suggesting that these individuals have different views (different eyes) towards the veil (different hair strands) despite the efforts of the Islamic regime to impose a collective identity on women. On the other hand, this panel may criticize the Western point of view of veiled women as being submissive followers.

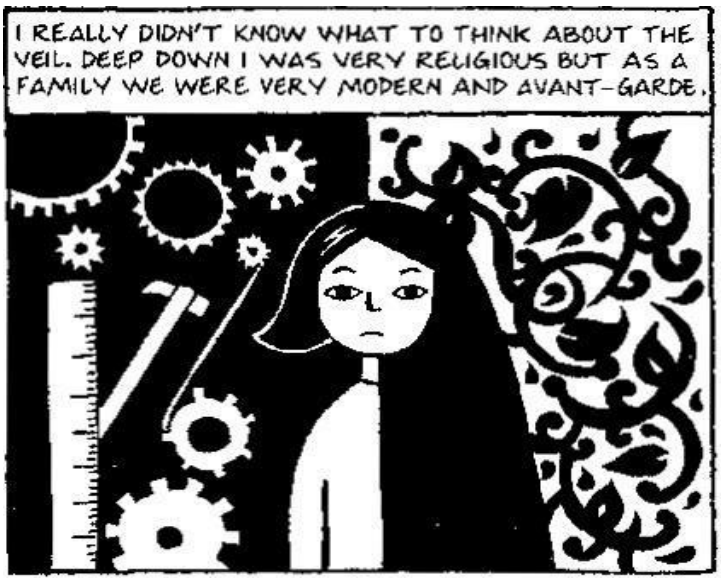

Figure 2: Hybrid identity.

Another revealing panel that perfectly depicts the identity crisis is the split image of the protagonist. The protagonist and the panel itself are cut neatly in two and Marji's existential uncertainty is reinforced by the text-box: "I really didn't know what to think about the veil; deep down I was very religious but as a family we were very modern and avant-garde." The panel reveals the hybrid identity of Marji. In the verbal part, Marji refers to the traditional and Islamic context of the society impacting her, while the "modern and avant-garde" perspective of her family contradicts these ideas. On the one hand, the model of identification according to the ideas of the Islamic post-revolutionary society and, on the other, the presentation of the basic model regarding the views of her family environment. The right side of the panel, which represents the Islamic society, is full of mysterious twisted, intersecting curved lines and can be associated with nature and traditional Islamic Art. Regarding the left part of the panel, the modern representation is very precise and detailed and each piece is separate from the other. The background is filled with artificial mechanical devices. It demonstrates the "Marxist" ideas of Marji's parents announced earlier in the graphic novel. While the ruler represents the predictability and precision of modernity, the disconcerting drawings on the right side show the

traditions. Despite the contradiction between the left and right parts, there is a color exchange between the black background of the left part and the veil as well as the technical tools of the left and the white background. This exchange between the right/left division that also represent the East/West could be seen as a preface to Marjane's telic journey toward transnational/ transcultural personhood. Later on in the graphic novel, she chooses an in-between space to identify herself.

Persepolis is about challenging the opposition between the two concepts. Satrapi frames separately the different worlds of upper- and lower-class Iranians lived in during the war. The upper panel may look unclear at first glance. However, the verbal narration immediately creates the meaning. This panel depicts flying bodies of teenagers martyred during the Iran-Iraq war. They have their keys to paradise around the neck. Then, the reader's gaze is directed to the second panel where Marjane dances with her friends in her very first party. A careful observation on both panels highlights that the flying bodies are faceless shadows going upward at the sky that may suggest the beliefs of poor people going in heaven. However, as the ironic drawing indicates a violent scene rather than a holy scene. While the upper panel looks more abstract, the lower panel, depicts more details and objects (materials). The holes in the flying bodies cast back in a "sweater full of holes." The plastic key (symbol of Islamic belief) echoes in Marjane's necklace made of chain and nail (Western punk). The fact that these two opposite worlds are framed in two separate panels suggest that they are irreconcilable under the Islamic regime. As shown later in the graphic novel, Marjane's attempt to create a mixed outfit of her chosen western attires and imposed scarf is a failure.

Figure 3: The visual gap.

Marjane draws a portrait of herself as a teenager that reflects her sense of transculturality in which she wears the symbols of the position she has selected for herself. At this point, Marjane is no longer a child caught between two world-views. In the "Kim Wilde" chapter, Satrapi frames the moment of sameness between Marjane and Kim Wilde through a mirrored image. Here, the radical other is domesticated through the shared consumption of American pop music.

Figure 4: The transcultural self.

The denim jacket, punk sneakers, and Michael Jackson button identify her as a typical 1980s teenager and her westernized identity. The headscarf, with a few escaping strands of hair, shows "her partial concession to the fundamentalist imposition."[95] Her style is self-chosen and her transcultural path is "highly personalized and inventive/original."[96] Unlike the previous figure (2), where her facial expression shows her indifference towards eastern/western ideologies, here Marjane's smile shows her satisfaction of her new position.

On her way back home from the black market where she bought some western tapes, Marjane is stopped by Guardians of the Revolution. Founded in 1982 to arrest women who were improperly covered, their mission was to "put us back on the straight and narrow by explaining the duties of Muslim women."[97] These guardians scold Marjane for wearing tight jeans, punk shoes and Michael Jackson button as the symbol of "decadence." She is even called a whore when one of the women yanks the scarf over her strands of hair. She comes to realize that her Western attire can get her into trouble in public. When she gets back home, as an act of rebellion, she plays the song "We're the Kids in America" in her private sphere. Her punk style could be read as Marjane's "resistance" against the fundamentalism and totalitarianism of the Islamic regime through Western codes of youth rebellion. Identifying with the punk that was a self-reflexive irony deconstructing the dominant meanings of the social space and promoting the individual freedom, gave Marjane power to negotiate her identity construction. At this point, Marjane's identity in public and private becomes twofold which leaves her in a transcultural state. According to David:

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[95] Rocío G.Davis, "A Graphic Self: Comics as Autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis" *Prose Studies* 27, no. 3 (2005): 273.

[96] Arianna Danigno, "Transcultural Writers and Transcultural Literature," 6.

[97] Satrapi, Persepolis, 133.

> The use of verbal and graphic images signals the tensions inherent to transcultural self-identification, and illustrates the vexed discourses of imposed forms and chosen manners of self-representation.[98]

Unlike the typical image of the Middle Eastern women as oppressed subjects in urgent need of liberation,[99] Marjane claims her own agency throughout the graphic novel.

Marjane leaves her country at the age of 14 to liberate herself from "imposed forms," to seek better education and real independence. As we will see, the identity crisis comes back in a more problematic way when Marjane's parents send her to Austria. To better understand how Marjane is *racilalized* in Europe, it is important to explain the notions of "us" and "them." In the conclusion of *Identity, belonging and migration*, Kamali states that "a short overview of relevant research on discrimination in Europe shows how widespread racism and discrimination against 'the others,' namely non-Western groups living in Europe, has been."[100] He argues that Europe is in need of *othering* to build its modern identity and "the construction of 'we-ness' of the nation goes hand in hand with the construction of the 'others', both other nations and as internal minorities."[101] In other words, "us" is what "they" are not. In the case of *Persepolis,* Satrapi depicts a young middle-eastern woman who faces the issues of a migrant considered as the *other*.

Marjane arrives in Austria in 1984, when she is a teenager. Her different positionality is built through international work of different categories of identity (self) such as gender, age, religion, and nationality. It is important to see how the *self* differs from the *other* studying the notion of *otherness* and its different dimensions—sexism, racism, xenophobia.

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[98] Rocío G.Davis, 273.

[99] See Ali Behdad, Juliet Williams. "Neo-Orientalism." Globalizing American Studies, edited by Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[100] Kamali, "Discrimination as a modern European legacy," 302.

[101] Ibid., 303.

Xenophobia means the fear of foreigners who do not belong to a nation-state. As for racism, it ranges from discrimination associated with skin color to ethnicity and culture. In contemporary Europe, the new version of racism puts more emphasis on the "cultural differences" and "incompetence" of immigrants which prevents them from integration:

> The new racism exploits established xenophobic frames (fear of the other), ethnocentrism, masculinities and 'ordinary' prejudices in subtle ways and often, too, in ways that are unconscious and routinized. For this reason, the new racism has been termed 'xeno-racism' a mixture of racism and xenophobia. While being racist is substance it is xenophobic in form: its outward defensive mode of expression disguised a stronger opposition to migrants and the continuation of racism in a new disguise and widened to exclude different groups of people.[102]

As one can notice in the above text, the primary concern is the discourses of exclusion. In other words, the distinction of the migrant from the rest of the society based on the social construction of race.

In the case of *Persepolis*, the xeno-racism is underscored both textually and graphically. In the chapter entitled "Love Story," Satrapi remembers the first time she goes to her first Austrian boyfriend's place. The mother comes to her screaming and telling her to get out of their house and her son's life. She accuses Marjane of seeking to obtain the Austrian passport by abusing her son.

[102] Gerard Delanty, Ruth Wodak, and Paul Jones, eds. *Identity, belonging and migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.

Figure 5: Xenophobia.

In this panel which illustrates xenophobia, the close-up of the angry profile of the mother all in white and the little figure dressed in black in the black background of Marjane are highlighted. Marjane's face is shocked and, the gesture of her hands in the air shows that she gave herself up to the situation. The scene of xenophobia is repeated when Marjane and her boyfriend decide to meet at her place. The landlady accuses Marjane of being a secret prostitute screaming that her house is not a "brothel."

To understand how and why Marjiane is stereotyped in the West, one should refer to Said's notion of Orientalist knowledge which is produced by the Western lenses. The term orientalism originally referred to the people and societies of the Middle-East, North Africa, and Asia and was developed in the context of European Colonialism in those regions. Said argues that Orientalism is a "cultural and a political fact"[103] and a framework through which the West understands the unfamiliar Orient. It is a way of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, and distorts

[103] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 21.

differences of cultures and people from East as compared to that of West. According to this logic, the stereotype of people coming from the Orient is understood by the West as exotic "others," radically different from and inferior to the civilizations of the West. This is similar to how Marji's boyfriend's mother and the landlady, under the influence of such discourses, see her as an exotic other. Another example of "othering" is when Marjane lives with nuns. Once, she is eating from a pot in the TV room and is blamed for her improper manner of eating. One of the nuns makes a discriminatory statement by saying: "It is true what they say about Iranians; they have no education." This intolerance towards migrants based on stereotypical preconceived ideas creates the Occident/Orient or us/them (the other) position where "the other" is categorized as inferior. This attitude prevents Marjane from integrating to the host society where she hoped to find a new home.

Speaking from a transnational point of view, there are many questions about what "home" means to a migrant. Is "home" the country of origin? Is "home" a place? A person? A concept? According to Nadje Al-Ali, Professor of Gender Studies, "home" is neither a physical place nor simply linked to "family, community or homeland/nation."[104] Home is both. Besides, the home is a place where one locates personal and social meanings; it is associated with a strong sense of belonging and is linked to the feeling of self and identity.[105] Marjane's search for "home" is the quest for emotional support. For example, seeing her boyfriend having sexual relations with another girl devastates her deeply. At this point in her life as a migrant, she has no one closer than him. She becomes a wanderer living on the streets for about two months and her loneliness becomes immense. She loses her only "home," which she thought she had found in

[104] Nadje A-Ali, Khalid Koser, eds. *New approaches to migration: Transnational communities and the transformation of home* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6.

[105] Ibid., 7.

her boyfriend. This abandonment of self on the streets of Vienna causes the first identity crisis that leads to her first near death experience.

Regarding her return to her "home" country, she feels lonely once again as she is not able to communicate with her family and her friends that she has not met for a few years. In Fig. 5 the heavy makeup and stylish hair of Marjane's friend represent her opinion about Western women. However, Marjane's style as a Western woman is simple. The gap between the mentalities leads to a feeling of disconnection from friend's environment.

Figure 6: Disconnection.

According to Benmayor and Skotnes, the process of constructing identity (self) in the context of immigration is bi-directional. As they claim, migrants "actively maintain transnational circuits of kinship, economy, and culture"[106] even though they no longer live in their native country. That being said, transnationalism emphasizes the importance of cultural encounters. In an interview with Dave Weich on NPR's Fresh Air in 2004, Satrapi discusses her desire to forget her homeland in order to further integrate into Austrian culture:

[106] Rina Benmayor, Andor Skotnes. eds. *Migration and identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), viii.

> When I go into exile, my will and wish of being integrated into a new culture is so big that I have to forget about who I am and where I come from. I'm just being honest. If I pretend that I was sitting in a house worrying day and night about my country, that would be a big lie. Plus, when you are a child, you are very much concerned with the same things that your parents are. When you are an adolescent and you have to manage in a new country, you only wish to be integrated and to have friends and to be loved. Also, every time I thought about my country, I thought, if I think about my country, it will be so hard to integrate. Because of course the more I thought about it, the angrier I was about other people and their lack of knowledge, not knowing anything and all their judgments. I had to forget about it.[107]

For Marjane, it is too hard to remember the violence in her home country and to be rejected because of stereotypes about people from the Middle East. While during exile, Marjane was treated as "other," she feels separated from the home society and is unable to fully identify herself with both places. In Vienna, she refuses to watch the news about Iran, and she denies her nationality in order to assimilate to the new culture. The clashes between the cultures of home and host countries are so enormous that the transnational individual feels no sense of belonging to either of them and to attempt suicide once she gets back to her home country. Marjane explains her feelings as follows: "I was a westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity."

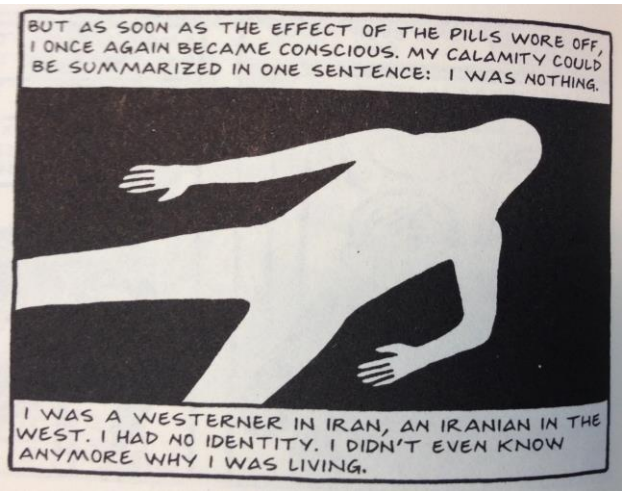

Figure 6: no identity.

[107] Marjane Satrapi, interview with Dave Weich, Powell's City of Books, Portland, OR, 17 September 2004, May 2017, www.powells.com/authors/satrapi/html.

This double positioning between "self" and "other" is so painful that she no longer recognizes her roots (Fig.6).

Marjane is separated from the home society, and at the same time, she experienced intolerable loneliness and discrimination in the host society. The process of otherness happened to her in both places. She no longer recognizes where her roots are, where she belongs; she can not find a source to identify herself. Her identity is a combination of the two cultures and is neither of them at the same time. This "hybridity of cultures" will not propose assimilation in the host culture, nor a return to the culture of origin. The dichotomy of her identities leaves Marjane in a state of transnational/trancultural hybridity. Thus, she is an amalgam of her two distinct identities and develops a new *deterritorialized* identity that loses its borders. On the discussion of postcolonialism, Bhabha talks about the "third-space." This in-between space is intrinsically critical of essentialist positions of identity and a conceptualization of 'original or originary culture':

> For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge.[108]

According to Bhabha, this hybrid "third space" is an *ambivalent* site where cultural meaning and representation have no primordial unity or fixity.[109] In the case of the grown-up narrator, Marjane, she lives in a third space or what I call "trans-space" where she can identify herself with both cultures. Throughout the graphic novel, we observe that after her suicide attempt, she starts living with the reality of the two combined identities and accepts this in-

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[108] Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference,* ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Winhart, 1990), 211.

[109] Homi K., Bhabha, and Jonathan Rutherford. "Third space." *Multitudes* 3, (2007).

between positioning. Living in this trans-space allows Satrapi to criticize both cultures. Satrapi's work is an "intermixture" of Western genres of comics and memoir with Iranian cultural, historical, and social narratives that create a bridge between West and East thanks to its liminal positioning.

The veil

Iranian women's published autobiographies did not emerge until the mid-twentieth century.[110] After the Revolution of 1979, Iranian women in diaspora began to write their life experience in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Iran in the form of memoirs and the Islamic Revolution became the common theme in these memoirs. As Bonnie Gunzenhauser argues, an autobiography is not simply a report of one's life story.[111] One defining feature, she states, is that "autobiography has a psychological and philosophical dimension that requires its writer to balance the deeds of an active public self with the thoughts of a contemplative private one."[112] All these women retell the story of a generation through their personal stories and depict what specifically women of this generation went through. In narrating her generation's memories, Satrapi critically intervenes in the culture and politics of compulsory veiling under the post-revolutionary Islamic regime and describes the psychological consequences on women's identities. A notable number of Paneles contains the image of Iranian woman with new dress codes. As such, throughout *Persepolis,* the Hijab is first imposed and then *culturized*. Like other memoirs by Iranian women on the veil, *Persepolis*, for its part, actively critiques the imposed image of national identity of Iranian woman. I will show how Satrapi's "veiling, unveiling and

[110] Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1992), 220.

[111] Bonnie J Gunzenhauser, "Autobiography: General Survey" *Jolly* 1 (2001): 77.

[112] Ibid.

reveiling" experience in *Persepolis* is an echo of Iranian women's experience through the past 150-year history. I will then discuss how Iranian woman negotiates her identity and how *Persepolis* portrays woman's identity as bifold through the repression and control of the regime over her body.

Veiling, unveiling, and reveiling

The multilayered world of the veil has long been explored and theorized by critics. One of the notable books on the polarizing issue of veiling is *The Veil* by Jennifer Health which gathers twenty-one essays by women to illustrate the significance of veiling, in the past and present, in various countries, religions, and cultures. Among these essays, Ashraf Zahedi's contribution "Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran" is of note as she describes the history of the veil in Iran and demonstrates how women's hair is politicized. Hamideh Sedghi's study *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* bears certain similarities to Ashraf Zahedi's in terms of the political aspect of the veil. Sedghi writes, "women's lives are linked with politics, and in order to understand women's experience, we must consider women and gender as an integral part of the political and economic system that they share and experience."[113] *Persepolis*, as a story of women's experience, enters into the political debate of the veil. Not only does it represent the history of the Hijab in the post-revolution period, but also how the Iranian woman's identity becomes fragmented in public and private. In public, she becomes the most important icon of the Islamic regime to show that Iran is different from the West. In private, she struggles with the imposed identity.

[113] Hamideh Sedghi. *Women and politics in Iran: Veiling, unveiling, and reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

Throughout history, woman's hair has always been a controversial aspect of her identity. Many societies have associated female hair with sexual desire. In terms of the social meaning of female hair, in modern Iran, female hair is a political symbol. Iranian women have been veiled, unveiled, and reveiled in the past 150-year history. The woman has been the first target for presenting the ideologies of each regime- modern or Islamic. Her image is politicized as a form of "control over her identity sexuality, and labor has been central to the consolidation of state power."[114] For this compulsory image, she was the one who paid a huge penalty. The Iranian woman had no right to express herself to choose whether she wanted to veil or not. She was veiled at the turn of the century, unveiled from 1936 to 1979, and then reveiled after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Regarding veiling, there are two historically momentous incidents in modern Iran which had a detrimental impact on the lives of women. The first one happened at the beginning of the modernization process in the late 19th century. The exposure of Iranian reformists to European societies inspired them to remodel the social, economic and political patterns of society. Indeed, the status of European women and their unveiledness in public impressed these reformers who decided to improve the women's conditions such as education, changes in marriage laws and unveiling by "introducing new concepts of leadership, emancipation of women, law, and human rights."[115] Among all reforming acts, Reza Shah Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, authorized the Unveiling Act in 1936, which prohibited women from appearing covered up in public. Under the new law, women had to unveil to represent Iran as a modern country since "the image of veiled

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[114] Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran: Veiling, unveiling, and reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), I.

[115] Ashraf Zahedi"Concealing and revealing female hair: Veiling dynamics in contemporary Iran," in *The veil: Women writers on its history, lore, and politics*, ed., Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 235.

women was synonymous with backwardness."[116] Regardless of some women's support of the Unveiling Act, the imposition of unveiling was extremely offensive to those who believed in the veil. As a consequence of this coercive Unveiling Act, Hoodfar states:

> For many women, it was such an embarrassing situation that they just stayed home. Many independent women became dependent on men, while those who did not have a male present in the household suffered most because they had to beg favors from their neighbors ... (ellipses in original) Women became even more dependent on men since they now had to ask for man's collaboration in order to perform activities they had previously performed independently. This gave men a degree of control over women they had never before possessed. It also reinforced the idea that households without adult men were odd and abnormal.[117]

According to E. Hall's Proxemics theory (1966), humans use personal space and concrete objects to establish their own territory. A veil as a piece of cloth locating in the intimate radius belongs to one's personal territory. Most people value this personal space and feel discomfort, anger, or anxiety when their personal space encroaches. To some women, the veil is a border around the edge of their bodies showing respect, virtue, and pride. In this case, the border is closer to its barrier dimension, and no outsider is allowed to disrespect this territory. As a consequence of the Unveiling Act, forcing women to give up on their veils as their border-barriers, many women had to stay home because their personal space was violated. This act of transgression left nothing for women but a feeling of distress, perturbation, and embarrassment. Despite the violent method adopted by the state to obliterate the veil, the ban was lifted in 1941 when Reza Shah was forced to abdicate and his son Mohammad Reza Shah was enthroned. The Unveiling Act was abolished and women were apparently free to opt to veil or not to veil. The second historical incident happened in 1983 when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic

[116] Ibid., 255.

[117] Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking global sisterhood: western feminism and Iran* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 46.

leader of Iran, reversed the law introduced by Pahlavi and executed the Veiling Act, which banned women from appearing unveiled in public.

As such, women became agents of culture as their bodies became tied to national identities, and as they had to comply with the authorities' strategies of unveiling and veiling. Under the Pahlavi government, the woman had to unveil to show that Iran is a modern country and open to the West. Whereas, under the Islamic regime, she had to veil to exhibit that Iran has a resistance culture to that of the West and follows an Islamic culture. The female's body has been turned into a territory where ideals of westernization and resistance to western powers were delineated. The two Acts of Unveiling and Veiling fractured woman's identity modified her into a political object and left her nothing but bewilderment.

The veil, which is also referred to as "hijab," is both material and conceptual. One of the obligations in Iran's Islamic society is wearing compulsory veils, under the assertion that it is a symbol of both Iranian culture and Islamic religious law. Is the veil a cultural or a religious phenomenon? Is the basis for accepting the hijab among women in a religious community grounded in tradition, contract or coercion? Or based on values, morals, and emotions? Is donning the veil a right or a duty?

Let's take a look at the definition of hijab in Islam society of Iran. According to Iranian cleric Morteza Motahari (2000), the word "hijab" literally means "wearing," and its use has become widespread for the purpose of women covered in the present era. In fact, the common juristic term, the word "Sattar," means "cover" that is used in the case of women's dressing during prayer and other times, the only verse where the word "veil" is used is verse 53 from the Surah al-Azab of Qoran. The provisions of verses 30 and 31 of Surah Nour, which are the main references to the covering, are in fact related to the duties of men and women in relation to each

other, which state the following: Every Muslim, whether male or female, must avoid ogling; Muslims, whether men or women, have to cover up their nakedness; women must not reveal their ornaments and jewelry to others, and they must not seek to attract the attention of men of the world, that is to say, they must not show self-exposure.

Based on Islamic rules, women should cover their body modestly. There is no verse anywhere in the Quran, indisputable word of God for Muslims, which commands the woman to cover her entire body. However, the Iranian authorities after the revolution of 1979 interpreted the veil differently for the sake of their own political aims.

As Motahhari states, the philosophy behind the veil in Islam is that Islam wants all the types of sexual, visual, tactile and other types of sexual desires, to be in a family environment and the legal marriage. The new regime believed that the Veiling Act became a facilitator for a professional workspace, where women could do their job with no fear of sexual harassment.

Persepolis reflects the issue of the veil in Iranian society after the revolution. Far from being objective, the graphic novel criticizes the veil by depicting both severe and ironic scenarios. For example, the control guards kept an eye on women's dressing, and the educational system as a social institution used its power to introduce the hijab as a form of protection of women in public. Different lectures, billboards in the streets and slogans on the wall of schools and colleges propagated the holy culture of the veil. The word "martyr" was a powerful tool that was used to justify the ideologies of the new regime. The clergies preached that "martyrs" lost their lives for the goals of the revolution, and fought for the right of women's freedom from the tyranny of the Pahlavi government.

The next panel depicts Marjane after her return to post-war Iran where she struggles to readjust to the codes of the Islamic regime "[e]specially after four years spent in Austria."[118] She looks at "sixty-five-foot-high murals" honoring martyrs that adorn the streets of Tehran alongside bombed out, that are in contrast with her experience of "Best Sausages for 20 Shillings...." on the walls in Vienna. The painting of along with the symbols of martyrdom, the tulips, shows the effort of the regime in culturalizing martyrdom. Marjane is in the center, surrounded by tall deserted buildings and the painting of a veiled mother who holds his martyred son. The gaze of the veiled woman is not towards the corpse of his son, but at Marjane. One could see the sign of anger and seriousness, but no sign of sadness in her facial expression. The woman's gaze could also create a sense of guilt for the ordinary people, showing that his son has lost his life for the sake of other people in the society.

[118] *Persepolis*, 253.

Figure 7: Encroachment of the image of "martyr."

These sermons were the most effective way to give a feeling of "guilt" to women in case they disobey the new laws against wearing makeup, jewelry and not properly wearing the veil. As such, the hijab was embedded in the very modes of action and structures of cognition of women. This type of invisible submission by which the dominated female perceives the social hierarchy as legitimate and natural leads her to integrate into the same view as dominant. As shown in Fig. 7, *Persepolis* portrays the effort of the Islamic regime to publicize the "martyr" culture through "sixty-five-foot-high murals" and "slogans." Satrapi comes back to the subject of "martyr" in an ironic way. As a requirement to get into the college of art, Marjane had to take a drawing qualification test. She describes the picture she has drawn in Fig. 8:

> copying a photo of Michelangelo's 'la pieta' about twenty times, on that day, [during examination] I reproduced it by putting a black chador on Mary's head, an army uniform

> on Jesus, and then I added two tulips, symbols of the martyrs, on either side so there would be no confusion.

Thus, she *Islamicized* Mary's picture and hypocritically used the martyrdom mechanism of the State in order to please the superiors and get accepted into the art school.

Figure 8: The martyrdom.

Regarding Islamic society in Iran, authorities in the position of power introduced a specific style of hijab, Chador, as superior to all other existing forms in social media being an element of "culture industry"[119] which manipulates the mass society into passivity (Adorno). Chador was a full-length semicircle piece of dark cloth (normally black) that was wrapped around the head and the entire body leaving only the face exposed.

Although this fashion was an extreme interpretation of hijab definition based on Quran, Islamic society seemed to be very supportive of this trend in order to cultivate its own political ideologies. According to A. Kazemi in *The Everyday in the Post-revolutionary*, colors were also

[119] Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Gunzelin Noeri. *Dialectic of enlightenment* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002).

ideologized. The darker colors (brown and black) were symbols of religious society and red represented the blood of martyrs. Any light or happy color was not appreciated in the society as it was attributed to perfidy and disloyalty. The major reason was the relationship between clothing colors in Shiite rites and political-revolutionary rites. The dark colors epitomized submission whereas the light colors incarnated refractory attitudes. The domination of dark colors was not restricted to the public culture, specific rules for the color of clothes and dress codes were legislated which had to be respected in schools, universities and governmental offices.[120] Women were affected the most by the new laws as the government introduced them with particular dressing styles such as Chador. In the black of Chador, all other colors were dissolved and as a result, the border between individual differences became less distinct. Once the differences and diversities were demolished, the power of criticism was taken away from women as well as the entire society, and the subordinate class accepted the "false consciousness" (Adorno) of the veil as it was. As such, the veil and more specifically, the style of Chador became gradually "second nature" for the majority of Iranian women.

[120] Abbas Kazemi, *The Everyday in the Post-revolutionary* (Tehran: Farhang-e Javid Publication, 2016), 134-135.

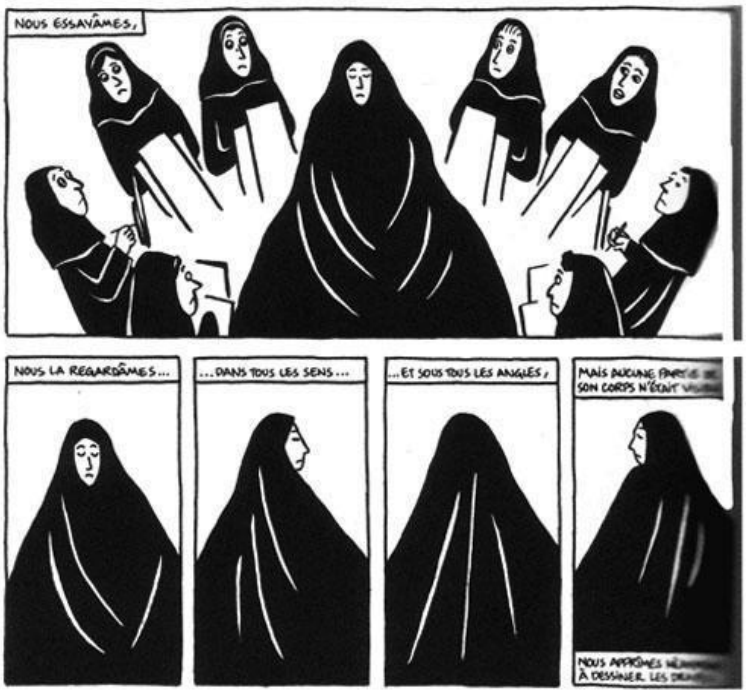

Figure 9: the invisibility of woman's body.

Regarding *Persepolis*, Satrapi criticizes the Chador in several scenes at the university she attends in Tehran. In Marjane's anatomy's class, female students are required to draw a woman covered in the Chador, on which from every angle, the only thing visible to draw is the overflowing black cloth that covers the physics of the human body. The absurdity of this situation is repeated when the art class does not have a distinguishable human body to draw, Marjane declares, "It was preferable to have a model on whom you could at least distinguish the limbs."[121] Later on, Marjane convinces her professor to send a male model to draw in class. One evening, Marjane stays late at class to finish her drawing of the male model. A university supervisor sees her alone with the male model in class. He scolds Marjane for looking directly into the male model's eyes. It is against the moral code to have eye contact with a male as he

[121] Marjane Satrapi, *The complete Persepolis*, 303.

could be lured. Marjane is told to lower her gaze and look at the door while drawing the male model.

The veil was imposed on women by the revolutionary guards and no women could escape the mandatory (black) veil. As such, the diversity amongst women of the society has died down. As shown in Fig. 10, the Islamic government required people (in this case women) to mourn for the martyrs of the war with Iraq. The mourning is a boring, extremely disciplined ritual of chest-beating. Women are portrayed as one single body; in just the way the rules of the government want them to be: a group of repressed mourners unable to show any agency. In the panel, the difference among them is reduced to a minimum. They wear the same dressing style, their round eyes and expressionless face represent their indifference to Islamic rituals and their closed months with the hands on the chest depict their coercive submission to the new regime. The different styles of their hair and the minor changes of their faces show that they are individuals with different worldviews.

Figure 10: Full-size panel: Disappearance of borders between individual identities.

In the immediate post-revolution, *Persepolis* portrays how women were able to show their political ideologies and their resistance to the regime by "letting a few strands of hair show."

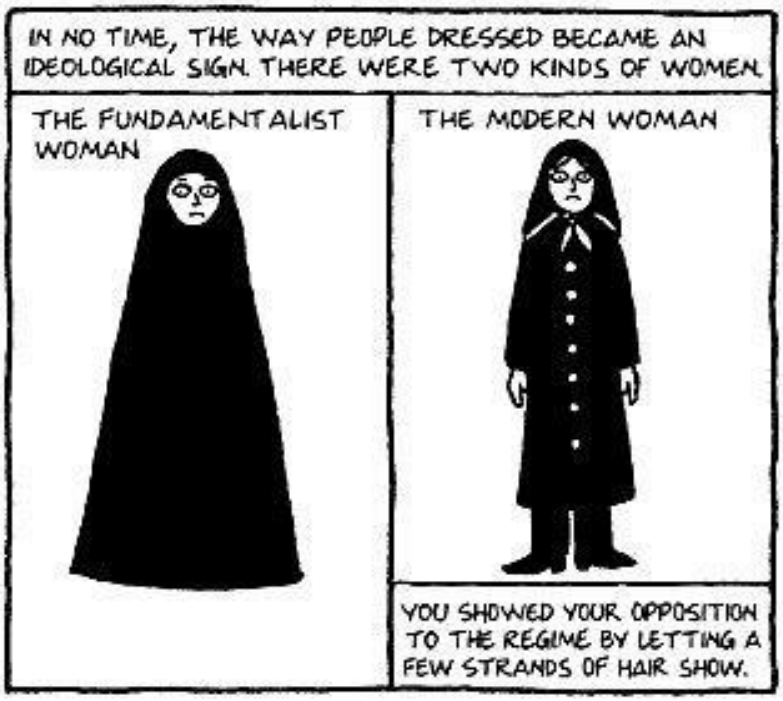

Figure 11: Different veil style shows different political opinions.

As seen in Fig.11, Satrapi ironically divides women into two groups: fundamentalist and modern. The fundamentalist woman is someone who wears the Chador, covered-up and her body is invisible while the modern women have a dress with a scarf, and her general shape of the body is visible. She was left with the choice of showing "a few strands of hair" to show her disagreement and protest against the veil. Later on, Satrapi explains that upon the shape of the body, according to the way women wore their hair, it was possible to guess their political opinions. Satrapi declares: "the more a woman showed, the more progressive and modern she

was."[122] As such, the way women dressed in the public showed their resistance to the new regime. Further, in the post-revolution period, the physical differences between traditional and modern women became less apparent.

The veil became a conspicuous marker of separation between men and women. At the very beginning of *Persepolis*, the boys and girls at school are separated, which in fact fosters the idea that there is a physical and social differentiation between men and women in Iran. Women have to carry out this symbolic distinction, yet it is men's duty to monitor this symbol. *Persepolis* highlights this differentiation of men and women in "a lecture with the theme of moral and religious conduct" held by the administration of the university. The lecturer uses a metaphor to emotionalize people's feeling, he says: "It's the blood of our martyrs which has nourished the flowers of our republic"[123] and he continues that if somebody has a misconducting behavior in society, they "trample on the blood of those who gave their lives for [society's] freedom."[124] He asks the young ladies to wear less-wide trousers and longer head-scarves and not to wear makeup while no comment is made on men's dressing style.

The writer, Fatima Mernissi remarks upon such social boundaries that are built with a specific purpose: the division of borders "between those who hold authority and those who do not."[125] Any intrusions or interference on those social lines constitutes a disruption and an infraction on the "acknowledged allocation of power."[126] Therefore, the veil becomes a site of struggle and division. To Iranian women, veiling and unveiling are similar to two territories that

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[122] Ibid., 297.

[123] Ibid., 300-301.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Fatima Mernissi, "The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York: Routledge, 2003), 490.

[126]. Ibid., 489.

are governed by male rules. Women, the bearers of political orientations are not able to cross the border between veiling and unveiling freely and without limits.

Veiling the self in *Persepolis*

The very first page of *Persepolis* depicts the veil that is introduced through the child's self. As previously discussed, in Satrapi's chapter "The veil," (fig.1) the imposition of the veil and the segregation of schools have a great impact on Marjane's identity as well as on the majority of Iranian women:

> Then came 1980. The year it became obligatory to wear the veil at school. We didn't really like to wear the veil, especially since we didn't understand why we had to. And also because the year before, in 1979, we were in a French non-religious school where boys and girls were together. And then suddenly in 1980, all bilingual schools must be closed down. They are symbols of capitalism, of decadence …(ellipses in original). We found ourselves veiled and separated from our friends.[127]

Thus, the veil, as a national symbol, separates Marji from her friends and the opposite sex. As shown in Figure 2, she struggles between religious self imposed by Islamic society and modern self as a part of her family.

Unveiling the self

It is also significant for understanding that Marjane feels under surveillance whether she is veiled or unveiled. In Iran, she is veiled and monitored by moral police in public, yet in Austria, the act of unveiling in public makes her uncomfortable as her body is put on display. Under the veil, her body is invisible in society, whereas the removal of the veil leads Marjane to a "sexual revolution" in Austria. As her body is seen through the Western lenses, she tries to integrate into western society both mentally and physically.

[127] Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 7.

Figure 12: unveiled self.

In above panel, Satrapi snaps her portraits from one angle several times in an attempt to find a new western look. Marjane's facial expressions are the same in these small panels and suggest her estrangement with the new style. Her mental transformation is followed by her "physical metamorphosis" during puberty. As an act of assimilation, she wears the scarf around her neck (not the head) to normalizes her look in the Western society.

She reads *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir "to educate [her]self as a woman." Julie, one of her friends, calls Marjane "the pure, timid, innocent virgin who does her homework" and reveals her sexual revolution with multiple partners to Marjane. This is a huge cultural shock for Marjane, as in Iran, people would hide their sexual lives. However, she took

the "first big step toward assimilating into the western culture"[128] by having sex with the first boyfriend.

It is worth noting that, Marjane's effort of assimilation is accompanied by a feeling of guilt and betrayal. In Vienna, the memory of war comes back to Marjane despite her attempt to forget the "unbearable" past. The harder she tries to assimilate, the more she felt a distance between her origins and her new self. She feels guilty and betrayed as she distances herself from her culture by her punk style, smoking joints, and partying with her friends while people in her country were bombed everyday.

Reveiling the self

Upon her return to Iran, the transcultural self of Marjane is reveiled. As evidenced throughout the text, different situations in the lives of Marjane as an Iranian woman required different degrees of self-revelation. At home, a woman has the freedom to unveil. In public, however, she may dare to leave only a few tufts of hair to be exposed. An unveiled wrist, a loud laugh, having a Walkman in public are some of the examples that could cause a woman to be arrested by moral police.[129]

[128] Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 191.
[129] Ibid., 305.

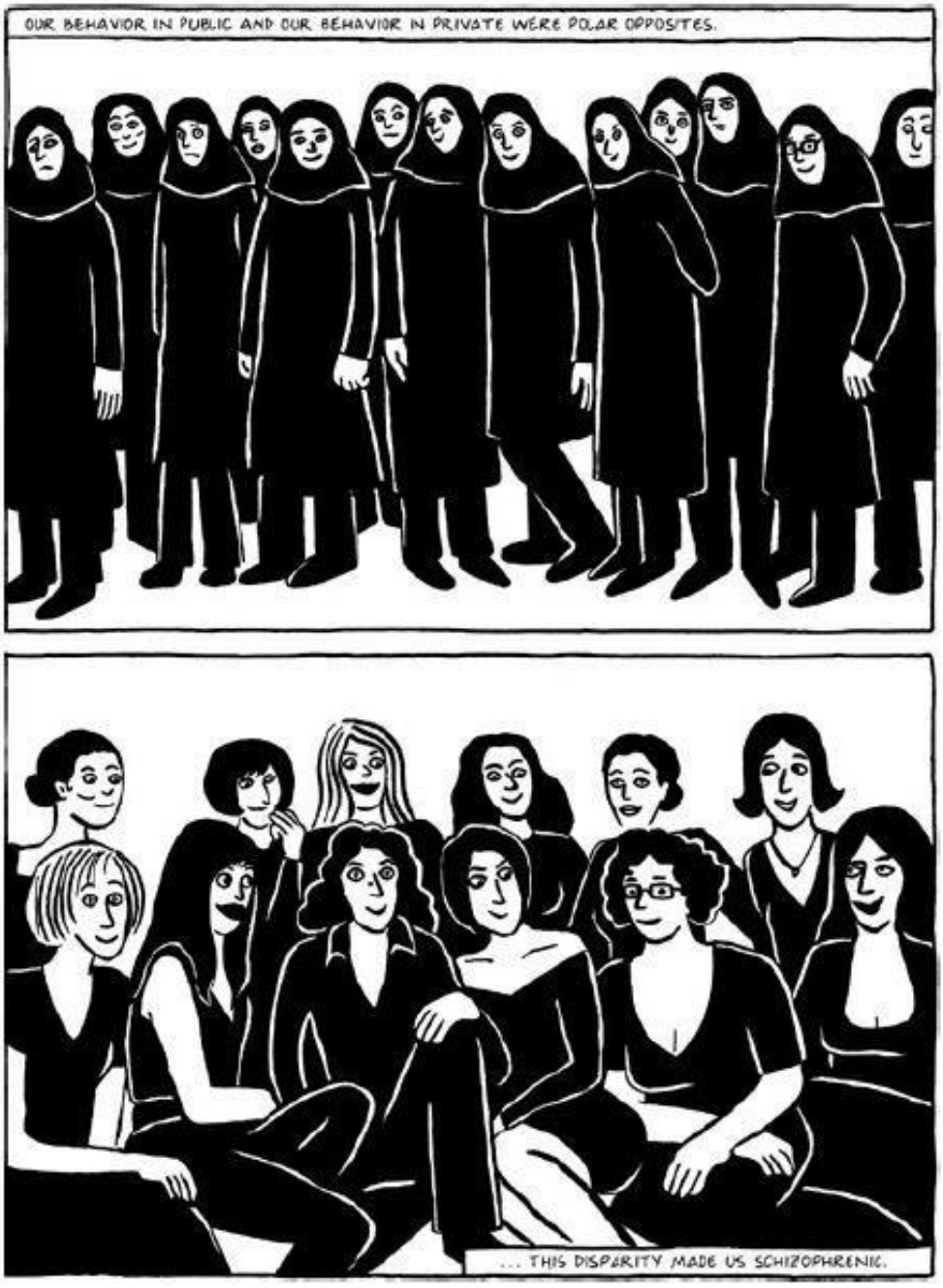

Figure 13: Gap between public and private.

As shown in Fig.13 when women are in their private sphere, far from the public eyes, they liberate themselves from impositions and can speak and act however they want. The upper panel depicts how the outfits omit rooms for individuality. In the lower panel, women are very different from one another. Satrapi declares that the inside/outside dichotomy results in a

"disparity [that] made [women] schizophrenic."[130] This inside/outside paradox intensified when government terrified women who disrespected the moral codes by moral police.

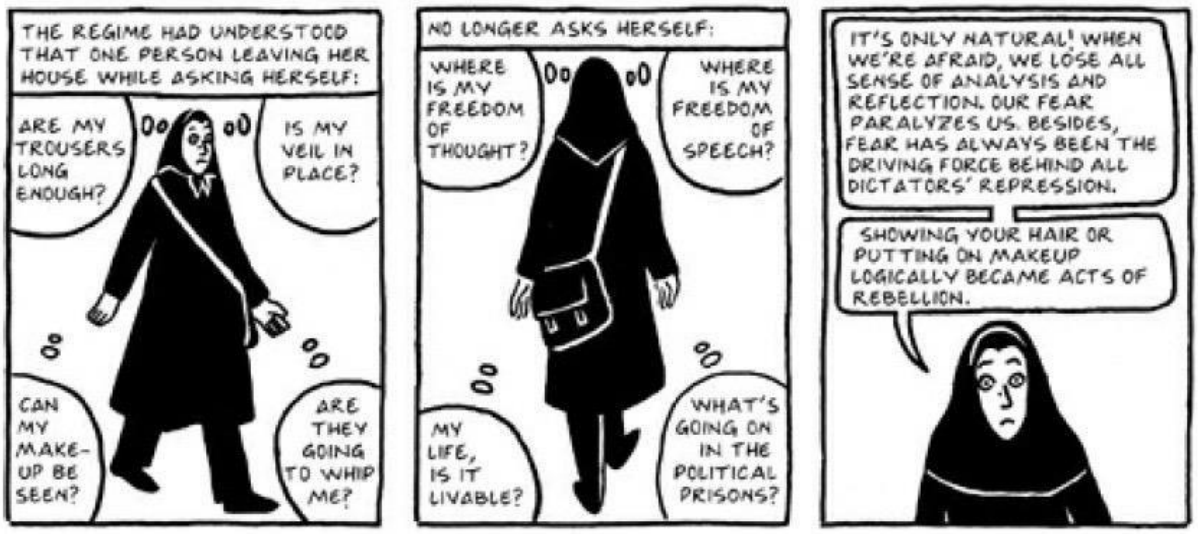

Figure 14: questioning the body in public sphere.

As Satrapi declares, women could not leave their house before double-checking their dressing style to make sure that their makeup was not visible, their pants were long enough and their headscarves covered well their hair. As such, they lost the sense of analysis and reflection as their fear paralyzed them, the new government was making people lose the urge to fight for their ideas through the use of oppression and fear. However, showing the hair and putting on makeup became the only political weapons to oppose the impositions.

The new regime monitored the private lives as well. To find a balance between the private and public sphere, Marjane goes to parties with her friends where they dance, drink and interact freely with the opposite sex. Majane and her friends got caught several times for parties at their homes and released later by paying a fine. However, in one of the parties, one of their friends, Farzad, is chased by the guards and falls from the roof of a building and dies. Satrapi tells Farzad's death through images and not texts in three silent strips in order to show the

[130] Ibid., 312.

unspeakable tragedy.[131] This incident is a reason for Marjane's early marriage with her boyfriend Reza so that they would be able to interact legally in public and private sphere and avoid the troubles caused by control guards. Two years later, the marriage ends up in failure. The acts of veiling, unveiling, and reveiling happened to Marjane and led to a fragmented identity as an Iranian woman who was deprived of the choice about her identity and self-representation in society. The last panel of *Persepolis* depicts Marjane's departure to France "where she needs not worry about being one or the other, or even one and the other."[132]

In an interview in 2007, Satrapi points out to the changes that have been made in Iran since the Revolution and anticipates the future of Iranian women:

> C'est un pays où les femmes ont la moitié des droits des hommes...mais en même temps dans ce pays 70% de nos étudiants sont des filles… ces femmes sont plus cultivées que leur pères… c'est femmes-là ne peuvent plus vivre que leur mère. Ça c'est un vrai changement parce que c'est la culture qui change. Dans une societé où je pense que les femmes, elles font de plus en plus d'études et elles travaillent, cette culture va être de petit à petit combattue.[133]

In current Iranian society, women keep challenging the impositions of the regime by showing more of their hair, heavy makeup, and fashionable dress-ups. Compared to what Satrapi demonstrated in *Persepolis*, many of the strict veiling rules have changed or are being relaxed. Recently, the protests against the Hijab such as the White Wednesdays campaign[134] or unveiling in public and shouting "Ya rusari ya tusari" (Either cover or suffer: meaning women are ready to

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[131] Ibid., 310-12.

[132] Jennifer Worth, "Unveiling: Persepolis* as Embodied Performance," *Theatre Research International* 32 no. 2 (2007): 158.

[133] Interview with Marjane Satrapi, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEQuDfHmr3A.

[134] White Wednesday campaign started in 2017 by Masih Alinejad, an exiled Iranian journalist and activist living in the United States. Masih Alinejad has reached out to Iranian women on Persian-language satellite television and through social media and asked women to post images of themselves without head scarves, demanding an end to the compulsory headscarf law.

suffer from the consequences of unveiling in public) have been noticeably increased. These political activities may force the regime to allow broader reform on issues of the veil. *Persepolis* not only enacts the complex history of the veil in modern Iran, but also predicts new forms of political resistance.

When the self narrates violence

Literature empowers language to display the inner world of the human. There is space for memories, introspection, retrospection, and flashback that are colored by pain, violence, and trauma. Beyond the borders of a humanistic analysis of violence, it is crucial to study the formal representation of violence within the specific format of the graphic novel as "a possible metaphor for memory and recollection."[135] *Persepolis* tracks the visual traces of violence tied to one's personal experience.

Persepolis has been compared to *Maus* (1980) by Art Spiegelman as it retells a traumatic experience in a personal and public/national history. *Maus* depicts the macro-context of the WWII massacre of millions of people to a micro-level in the form of graphic novel retelling the experience of Spiegelman's father as a Polish Jew. As a touchstone in both comics and trauma scholarship, *Maus* "witnesses" the lives and stories of some people who survived the Holocaust. While testimonies in *Maus* belongs to others, *Persepolis* is driven by Satrapi's own experience for the most part where she establishes a "structure in which multiple selves exist graphically."[136] Following *Maus*, the dynamic field of graphic narrative has received increasing critical attention including clusters of essays on *Persepolis*. Satrapi's use of comics as a sequential art

[135] Chris Ware, "Introduction" in *Best American Comics 2007*, ed. Chris Ware (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2007), xxii.

[136] Chute, *Graphic Women*, 148.

allows her to draw past and present in panels alongside each other. Also, the photographic style of each panel, as visual proof of the past allows her not to forget the painful past. It is crucial to understand that the memory of violence is not only embedded in people's' bodies but also inscribed into individual consciousness. This traumatic experience is evoked through one's episodic memory[137] representing specific events in time in a serial form. The entire context surrounding an event (times, places, associated emotions and other contextual knowledge) is usually part of the memory. In fact, *Persepolis* allows the reconstruction of traumatic fragmented memory strewn with absence, pause, and silence. Indeed, because of their fragmented form and use of gutters, comics have the power to mimic visually the experience of recollection and flashbacks of memory. Trauma complicates the burden of memory and narration of traumatic experience in *Persepolis*. While many scholars in trauma studies claim the impossibility of "authentic" representation of violence through language (as Adorno's injunction against poetry after Auschwitz), I argue that the graphic novel format of *Persepolis* suggests new interpretive modes of visual representation regarding violence.

Marji, the protagonist, is the child of educated parents, and details the hardships she faces growing up in a nation torn apart by war and oppression. The graphic novel witnesses violence in a larger sense; more than half of its chapters contain images of dead bodies and collective executions so that the violence appears to be banal. The hybrid format of the graphic novels depicts the multilayered violence by juxtaposing the "familiar" with the "strange."

Illustrating multidimensional violence

[137] See Timothy A. Allen, Norbert J. Fortin. "The evolution of episodic memory," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110. Supplement 2 (2013).
Episodic memory has been defined as the capacity to recall specific experiences as if one were to "mentally time travel" to reexperience individual events.

In *Persepolis*, unpacks various dimensions of violence. One of the types of violence that Satrapi depicts is "cultural violence"[138] to borrow the term from Johan Galtung, the founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies. Galtung has developed theories on structural violence and argues that religion is one of the aspect of culture and a tool to legitimize structural violence.[139] The Islamic regime in Iran understood how to impose its ideology on people through religion. In *Persepolis*, clergy members give lectures in schools to lower-class teenage male audiences about the beauty, the wealth and the accessible sexual pleasure that would exist in heaven in order to encourage them and send them voluntarily to war: "In paradise there will be plenty of food, women, houses made of gold and diamonds."[140] As seen in Fig. 7, the teenage boys are given plastic keys and are told that dying a martyr's death gives them a key to heaven's door: "the key to paradise was for poor people. Thousands of young kids promised a better life, exploded on the mines with their keys around their necks."[141] In fact, "killing" and "to be killed" are considered to be direct violence. However, the Islamic authorities internalized the culture of "martyrdom" within the educational system. The direct violence was legitimized and was rendered acceptable: "to die a martyr is to inject blood into the veins of society" (Fig. 17).

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[138] See Johan Galtung, "Cultural violence." *Journal of peace research* 27 no.3 (1990): 291.
"By 'cultural violence' we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence- exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) - that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence."

[139] Ibid., 292.

[140] Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 104.

[141] Ibid. 106.

Figure 15: Injecting blood into the veins of society.

The veins of the society are interpreted as the new sociopolitical ideologies of the Islamic regime who took away the ability to think independently from individuals through "false cultural consciousness."

Satrapi navigates trauma within the space of visual autobiography by drawing what can and cannot be seen. She draws both the unrepresentable violence and the challenge of witnessing. The child's perspective is a key element in the visual representations of all the violent scenes. The simplistic transparent representational modes of trauma allow Satrapi to depersonalize her personal experience. She reappears graphically on the page to retell the story of a country: "I was born in a country in a certain time, and I was witness to many things. I was witness to a revolution. I was witness to the war. I was witness to a huge emigration."[142]

In *Persepolis*' second chapter, "Bicycle," the act of witnessing happens through "listening" to the stories told by Marji's parents. As a child, her worldview subscribes to that of her parents and her testimonies include the personal stories of her family and her parent's friends.

[142] Sam Leith, "A Writer's Life: Marjane Satrapi." Daily Telegraph, November 27, 2004, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3633695/A-writers-life-Marjane-Satrapi.html.

Here, Marji's father retells a story to his wife about a suspicious fire in the Rex theatre in Abadan on 19 August 1978 where 400 citizens were trapped to death, asphyxiated or burned alive, another historical moment around the revolution.

Figure 16: Naked[143] violence.

The enlarged image of horror invaded the panel. The image's style is very close to Persian miniature (seventh century) which was a combination of illustration and poetry, in other words, image/text. Normally, the old Persian miniature depicted an epic scene where the flat, shadowless figures were symmetrically shown.

[143] By the term "naked" I want to emphasize the wild and unrestricted aspect of violence.

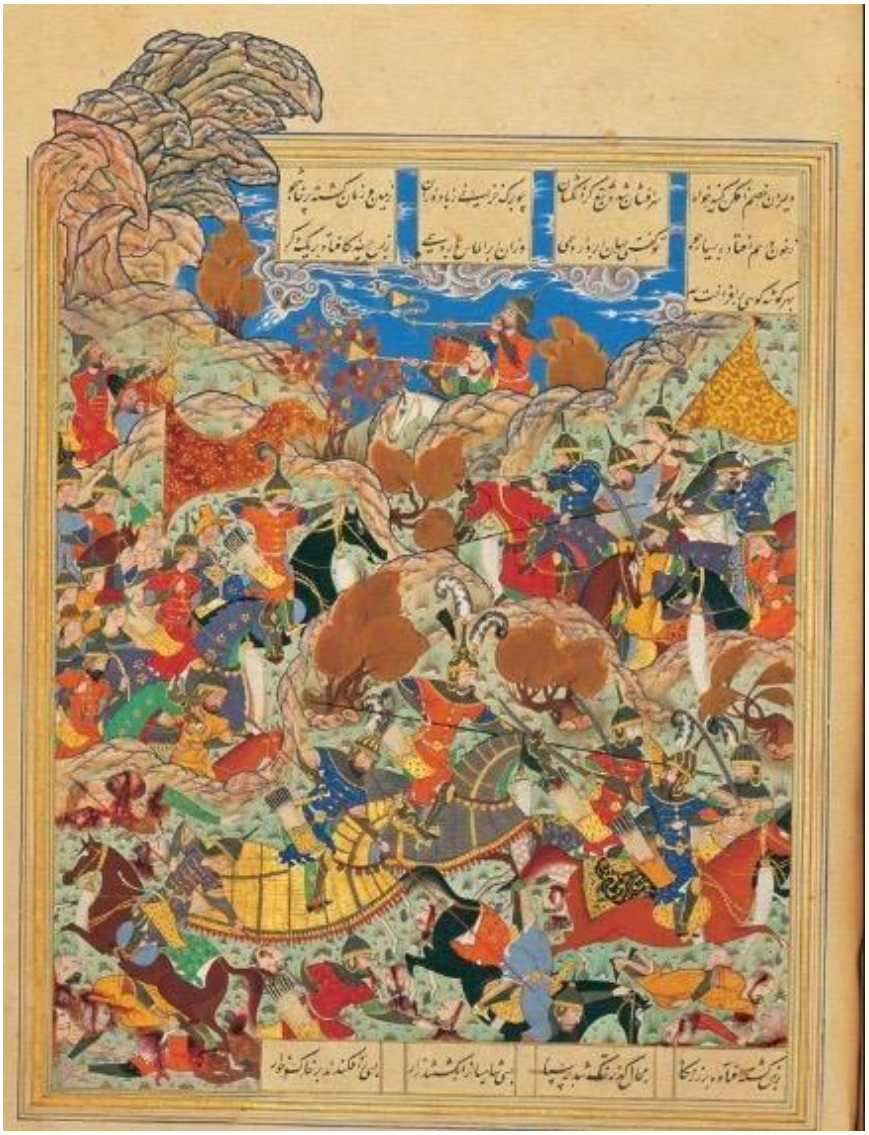

Figure 17: The battleground of Timur and Egyptian King by Kamal ud-Din Behzad XV-XVI century. A story from Shahnameh.[144]

Some panels in *Persepolis,* (Fig.18) are constructed like carefully balanced and full of homogeneous bodies. The scene is drawn with its smallest details by means of fine curved lines and flat black and white. The people in the illustration have no faces or expressions as they run to the locked exit door; the curved lines bend and change direction. The spirits soaring into the air with skulls for faces express the uncontrollable blaze of the fire; the curved lines express the

[144] Manijeh Kankarani, "Ferdowsi in the mirror of Persian miniature," *Honar-e Kimiayi* no.1, (2011): 72. *Shahnameh* or *The Epic of Kings* in English is a long epic poem written between c. 977 and 1010 CE by Ferdowsi. It had been the inspiration source of 10000 Persian miniatures.

dynamic movement of the fire. It goes without saying that the violence is pictured as naked, sharp and repellent from the child's view. As for the particular use of black and white especially in traumatic scenes, Satrapi states, "I write a lot about the Middle East, so I write about violence. Violence today has become something so normal, so banal— that is to say, everybody thinks it's normal. But it's not normal. To draw it and put it in color— the color of flesh and the red of the blood, and so forth— reduces it by making it realistic."[145] As the text[146] implicitly reveals neither Shah government nor Islamic parties took responsibility for the catastrophic incident.

The borders of the panel are unable to seize the entire traumatic scene. Interestingly, this panel has echoes in Fig.3 which offers one of *Persepolis* most abstract pictures where young boys with necklaces of martyr-like keys to the kingdom of salvation are exploding on mines. *Persepolis* expresses the social effects of war with these fragmented, graphic scenes—signs of an uneasy specter of war. These type of "mass" representation of massacre as we observed in Fig.7 and Fig.18 are repeated throughout the novel using a more minimalist style.

Like these other "mass" collective death pictures, the bodies in the following panels are stylized against a black background filling up the panel, reminding us of Persian miniature style. The borders of the panel deliberately cut some of the victims and suggest that the panel is unable to contain the number of prisoners and metaphorically the borderless violence that can not be captured. The dissidents have no identity, and their expressions are inscrutable.

[145] Cited in Hillary L.Chute, *Graphic Women*, 145-146.

[146] "The Shah said that a group of religious fanatics perpetrated the massacre. But the people knew that it was the Shah's fault !!."

Figure 18: Black Friday: Protest of rebellions on 8 September 1978.

In *Persepolis*, most of the time Marji's personal experiences are intertwined with the political events. In the chapter "The Letter," Satrpi's maid, a sixteen-year-old-girl, Mehri, takes Marji to an antigovernment demonstration on the Black Friday, when Shah killed a lot of protesters. When they return home, Marji's mother slaps them both. Satrapi explains, "That day, there were so many killed in one of the neighborhoods that a rumor spread that Israeli solders were were responsible for the slaughter." The next panel depicts Marji and Mehri looking

downwards. The small lozenges on Mehri's dress and the lines of Marji's shirt may reflect the dead bodies. While the former panel shows dead bodies, the latter shows Marji and Mehri with marks of slaps on their faces. The text reads as "But in fact it was our own who had attacked us." The juxtaposition of the two panels and the narratives demonstrates how Marji connects the slap of her mother to the tyranny of the Shah of Iran, in other words, the private to the public.

Figure 19: *The party*: Many massacres happened after Black Friday.

One of the other examples of indirect witnessing happens in the Chapter "The Heroes," where two political friends of Satrapi's family relate the story of another prisoner, Ahmadi, who died under the severe tortures of the regime. A torturer has whipped Ahmadi's back before urinating on the open wound of Ahmadi. The torturer then proceeds to burn him with an iron. The borderless image suggests that the trauma cannot be fully captured. While the text narrates the realities of the world, we must take into account that the images regarding torture are depicted from the child's view. In the last single panel, Marji stares at the household iron while her expression is full of horror: "I never imagined that you could use that appliance for torture." The text suggests that the familiar is being deformed. In essence, the horror is in everyday life.

The image of the iron remains in Marji's memory (Fig.13) as she is stopped by the guardians of revolution for her improper dressing style when she is an adolescent. To save herself from the situation, she lies to the two women that her stepmother will burn her with the iron.

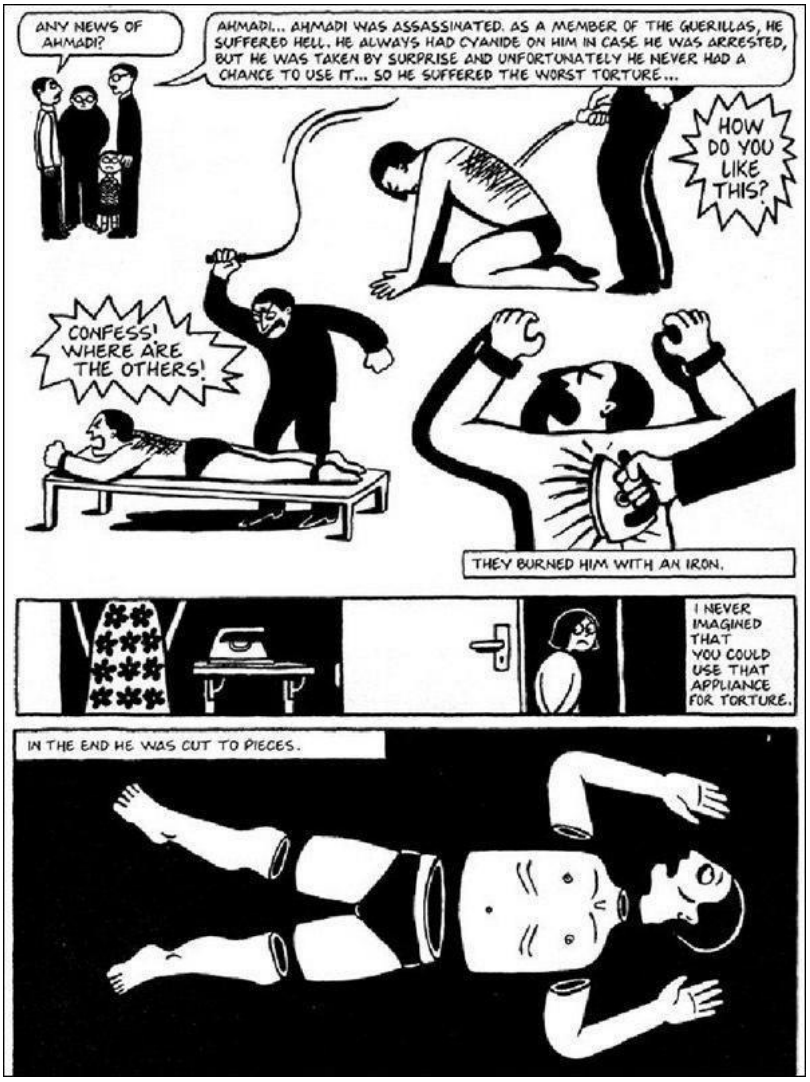

Figure 20: Visual voice of limpid violence.

The next panel shows Ahmadi's body cut into pieces. The imagination of the child depicts a man in seven well-cut pieces, no sign of blood. The hands' gesture limn submission as if Ahmadi gave up his life for the sake of his different ideology. Marji as a child views the

violence in a neat, simple way. The clear imagination of the child on a black and white page does not reduces the "realism" in representing violence, but it also renders the scene more haunting. While the simplistic and redundant style of the text (in the end he was cut to pieces) suggests a level of incapability of relating the horror, the thickness of the black background portrays the layers of unvoiced violence. According to Chute, "the narrative's force and bite come from the radical disjuncture between the often-gorgeous minimalism of Satrapi's drawings and the infinitely complicated traumatic events they depict."[147] However, "while *Persepolis* may show trauma as (unfortunately) ordinary, it rejects the idea that it is—or should ever be—normal."[148] While Chute observes the repetition of certain traumatic scenes as "historical routine,"[149] I argue that the juxtaposition of simplistic panels function as a type of memory work that is a key to working through trauma, in other words, to depict and to catch the traumatic memory from every possible angle rather than showing trauma as "ordinary." While it is true that the everyday life events are narrated mostly from a child view along with devastating war and execution stories as claimed Chute, the simplicity of the images used from a child perspective, along with Satrapi's conscious self demonstrate the disturbing traumatic experience. In fact, the two-tone narration of the panel (narration of the real events of life in the text by the author and the depiction of violence in the image from the child view) shows the duality of the "self" who is narrating the violence.

Another pivotal example of unpresentable violence is the scene of the bombing on Marji's street which killed the Satrapi family's neighbors, the Baba-Levys.

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[147] Chute, "The texture of retracing in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*," 99.

[148] Chute, *Graphic women*,151.

[149] Ibid.

Figure 21: Thickness of violence.

Unlike the previous scenes of violence, the illustration of the bombed house represents an indirect type of violence by pinpointing a shiny bracelet. This is the first direct witnessing of a death. After this particular incident, Marjane's imagination about violence evolves as the drawings become more sophisticated. Marjane and her mother appear in their typical clothes styles, which indicates the consistency of the characters even when the circumstances are changing which adds a degree of contradiction to the scene. The incompatibility is framed by the debris of the bombed house and the brightness of the bracelet and depicts a level of normality of the situation which deceives the reader at first. Drawing the bracelet bold with lines and its differences from the rest of the shadowed destruction makes it discernible. The bracelet becomes the only evidence of human life and death. Indeed, the rich empty spaces of gutters direct the reader's interpretation of the traumatic experience. This type of undercover violence cannot be fully described through text or images. Therefore, there is a sense of loss in the movement from experience to representation. Again, in the level of the text, the tone remains quite steady: "I saw

a turquoise bracelet. It was Neda's. Her aunt had given it to her for her fourteenth birthday . . . The bracelet was still attached to . . . I don't know what . . . No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger (ellipses in original)." There is no dialogue, only introspection, Marjane is shown speechless first with her hand covering her mouth and then her eyes filled with tears, followed by her hands covering her face. In this panel, there is no text, just a white background representing the inability of narrating the brutal violence. Finally, a completely black panel in contrast with the previous one results in the reader being brought into a world of black that implies what cannot be fully communicated visually or textually which intensifies the unspoken, the silence and the invisible. Satrapi chooses not to describe what she has seen. On a broader sense, the minimalist style of text and image in the entire strip creates black humor of war and hidden violence that remained unvoiced.

Another indirect testimony of violence is the tragedy of Niloufar, an eighteen-year-old communist met by Marjane when her family arranges a fake passport for a sick uncle, Taher. Niloufar was on the wanted list of the Islamic government. Satrapi writes: "Two days later, Niloufar, the eighteen-year-old communist, was spotted. Arrested . . . and executed."

Figure 22: the spotted dress.

In the space of three small panels, Niloufar is spotted by the revolutionary guards, arrested, and shot as if Satrapi does not want to dig into her memory to remember the tragic death of Niloufar. The word "spotted" is reflected visually on Niloufar's dress. Regarding the condition of memory, Kate Flint states, "the condition of remembering may be elicited by the depiction of deliberately empty spaces, inviting the projection of that which can only be seen in the mind's eye on to an inviting vacancy."[150] The elliptic style of the text shows us the unspeakable and the thickness of the memory. *Persepolis* makes trauma visible by showing the fragmentation of memory that is associated with such experience, but also by giving voice to "incomplete" narratives that have been left unrepresented because they were unspeakable.

Graphic memoirs such as *Persepolis* have the power to bring into the public realm personal and private experiences. In *Persepolis*, historical and personal events are interwoven. In the chapter "the cigarette," teenage Marjane cuts school to go out and have fun with her friends. Marjane is being punished by her mother, and she calls her "dictator." Marjane goes to the basement of her house to smoke her very first cigarette and rebel against her mother's dictatorship.

[150] Kate Flint, "Painting Memory," *Textual Practice* 17, no.3 (2003): 530.

Figure 23: crossing the war.

While she walks down the stairs, she informs the reader about the Iran-Iraq war, a war that could be avoided. In the full-size panel, the staircase dissolves into the battleground of war. It seems

like she crosses the battlefield of the war or the history of a nation that experienced loss in many ways. In the lower right-hand corner, Marjane opens the door and exits the battleground saying "when I think that we could have avoided it… (ellipses in original) it just makes me sick. A million people would still be alive" (Fig. 23). In fact, Satrapi's use of two-tone narration not only draws Marjane's rebellion against her mother but her disagreement against the wrong commands of the regime who wanted to save its power at any cost. Marjane's act of rebellion and Satrapi's voice are intertwined in both text and image.

As we observed, the panels that represent the unspeakable violence (Figures 20-24) along with the minimalist style of *Persepolis,* pauses, silences and accelerated narration, allow us to understand the unrepreasentable violence that may not be depicted through the language of words. Regarding the motive of the author, the selected personal events of trauma are written to testify the painful and unforgettable past. In an interview Satrapi explains her motive for writing *Persepolis*: "I wrote a book because I wanted there to be a witness account of the history of my country."[151] Like other Iranian women writers, she comes from a country where a woman's power of witness has less legal authority compared to a man:

> We [Iranian women writers in diaspora] came from a situation, all of us, we come from a situation that suddenly the government in our country decided we were worth half of the men—my witness counts half that of a mentally handicapped man just because he's a man.[152]

All these women felt the urge to write about what they underwent in Iran. In the last chapter of *Persepolis*, Satrapi acknowledges the undervalued women's witness: "If a guy kills ten women

[151] Cited in Chute, *Graphic women*, 166.

[152] Robert L. Root, Marjane Satrapi, "Interview with Marjane Satrapi," *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 9 no.2 (2007): 151.

in the presence of fifteen others, no one can condemn him because in a murder case, we women, we can't even testify!"[153]

In particular, to witness the horrors of human destruction, Satrapi depersonalizes herself. By divorcing her personality from absolute autobiographical creation, she immerses her work within history. Before She leaves the country for good, Marjane visits the grave of her grandfather. She also stops by behind the Evin prison wall, the final resting place of her uncle, Anoosh, who was accused of being a Russian spy and finally executed.

Figure 24: lost unidentified generation.

Anoosh was among the thousands of leftist political prisoners executed in 1980 and buried in unmarked graves, an anonymous generation of people who gave their lives for their ideologies. In this panel, Marjane's figure is diminutive compared to the long black wall of Evin prison. The vast white ground is similar to a deserted cemetery especially with Marjane's bouquet of flowers. She is kneeling in front of a lost unidentified generation. The hand that draws this scene acknowledges the memory of a lost generation that she witnessed. As Naghibi observes:

[153] Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 340.

> Marji's sense of responsibility in remembering and narrating her family's past, a personal history that always remains intertwined with a public history, places her in the role of willing witness to private and public memory and to brutal historical events.[154]

On the topic of witness narratives, Leigh Gilmore states that the format of the graphic novel "have found new audiences and challenged them to admit the seriousness with which the form can take up testimony as it draws and draws attention to the act of witnessing."[155] The fragmented style of the graphic novel is similar to that of episodic memory as the panels appear one after the other. Satrapi's fragmented testimonies in the novel do not often show the holes in her memory but rather, the silence and the pause to the trauma that has been occasionally repressed.

As we observed, *Persepolis* is strewn with the black and white background which display the multilayered horror and violence that the hidden levels cannot be deconstructed. *Persepolis* never attempts to demonstrate that Satrapi or any other writer who witnessed violence can fully represent the scene of trauma through the image. However, it suggests that trauma contains within it the possibility of bearing witness, even the unshareable events of one's life. Therefore, *Persepolis* does not just cite memories; it reproduces "the effects of memory – gaps, fragments, positions, layers."[156]

Satrapi's liminality has allowed her to create a trans-space from which to use Western genres of comics and memoir to tell her Iranian cultural, historical, and social narrative. She draws different versions of herself graphically on the page along with her omnipresent

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[154] Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking global sisterhood*, 107.

[155] Gilmore Leigh, "Witnessing Persepolis," ed. Michael A. Chaney, in *Graphic subjects: Critical essays on autobiography and graphic novels* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 160.

[156] Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women*, 173.

consciousness through the text and image. Like other Iranian women writers affected by the Iranian revolution, she feels the need to retell her testimony and to *reorientate* her memory. Her "self-positioning within an intergenerational and familial network"[157] could be extended to all of her works. Satrapi continued her witnessing ethos with stories of her parents' and grandparents' generation collected in *Embroideries* (2005) and *Chicken with Plums* (2006). Borrowing Leigh Gilmore's (1998) term of "serial autobiographer," Satrapi is a writer and artist who understands "the project of self-representation to be open-ended, susceptible to repetition, extendible, even, perhaps, incapable of completion."[158] Interestingly, several Middle-Eastern writers especially women have followed the genre of *Persepolis* to narrate their personal, sociopolitical and cultural issues in the Arab/Muslim world. Over time, the genre of the graphic novel, as a new mode of autobiography may evolve the genre of life writings regarding trauma as it has proven its potential in representing the unspeakable for a larger audience.

[157] Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking global sisterhood: western feminism and Iran*, 106.

[158] Leigh Gilmore, *The limits of autobiography: Trauma and testimony*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 211.

Chapter Two

The Site of Resistance: Mapping the War in *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return*

During her visit on April 2, 2015, to the University of Florida Atlantic, the Beirut-based visual artist, Nada Sehnaoui gave a speech on how she felt the urge to take out her works on the Lebanese civil war from the art galleries and place them in public spaces, such as downtown Beirut. She hoped to generate a dialogue about the periods of war and in an attempt to claim this common space for Beirutians[159] who did not come to terms with their past.

Despite the long devastating war, Lebanon's political elites immediately erased the traces of the civil war right after the official end of the conflict in 1990. The Lebanese government generated the Taif Agreement in order to forget the painful past. However, discarding fifteen years of war in a flash seemed impossible for a generation that experienced violence and constant political instability. The Lebanese civil society started a "war debate," also supported by literary and artistic intellectuals, to challenge the State-ordained amnesia and evoke the memories of the violent past.

In her award-winning graphic novel, *A Game for Swallows*, Zeina Abirached shows the instability of war zones in Beirut and its relation to the evolution of her identity. The story takes place on an afternoon in 1984. Abirached is a little girl whose parents have left to visit her grandmother, who lives a few blocks away. It is just an ordinary family visit. But the city is at war, and a sniper is positioned between the two homes. The bombings begin. Abirached and her brother stay home, anxiously awaiting their parents' return. During the course of an afternoon,

[159] Carla Calargé, *Liban. Mémoires fragmentées d'une guerre obsédante: L'anamnèse dans la production culturelle francophone* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 30.

neighbors gather in their place as it is believed to be the safest place in the building. In an attempt to distract the children, Anhala, Chukri, Ernest, and others tell stories of good times, recite Cyrano de Bergerac, and play games. The last pages of the book depict the departure of the family as a shell landed in one of the rooms destroying the only safe place. This is the beginning of Abirached's deterritorializations.

So far, Abirached has six published works, all of which are autobiographical and deal with the question of territoriality and urban space. Her short film *Mouton* (2006) was shown at the fifth international film festival in Téhéran. Her work can also be classified in the Lebanese women's writing, the war narratives, and, more generally the Francophone comic strip categories. Paris and Beirut, the urban space inhabited return unceasingly in her graphic novels.

Abirached seeks to come to terms with her past and what happened during the Lebanese civil war by means of recreating her fragmented memory through space and everyday life. I show that the author uses the graphic novel as a "site of resistance" against the state-ordained amnesia (Taïf Agreement) and the tendency towards war. I argue that how Abirached conceives of the graphic novel as, what I call an "archival device" to gather wartime habits (tactics) and daily routines.

In the analysis of space in the graphic novel, I explore how Abirached uses the spatiality on a comics page by exploring the maps in the inside and outside space. The title of the book, *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To return*, resonates with the destiny of its protagonist, Zeina,[160] who is territorialized in the inside space of the house, deterritorialized when she loses her safe place after the bombings begin, and reterritorialized when she finds a new home in France.

[160] In this chapter, Zeina is referred as the child narrator, and Abirachid as the author.

Lebanese literature on war

On the official calendar of Lebanon, there is no memorial date of the end of war.[161] The amnesia, however, became transformed when the civil society began to acknowledge the issues of the conflict and created a public discourse on it. The lack of an official narrative of war encouraged the civil society, most notably writers and artists to create a living archive[162] composed of dynamic and varied narratives on war.[163] On the one hand, art organizations including Beirut Theater, Ashkal Alwan archives, and the Arab Image Foundation, among many others created a platform for the public discourse. On the other, literature was transformed into an attempt to archive (preserving a trace of places) the country, piece-by-piece, and place-by-place. According to the writer, Humaydan,[164] it was the fear of loss that made Lebanese literature to turn into an archiving device, where one needed to register the slightest detail as if literature had a mission of salvation.

In the early 2000s, and specifically after the 2005 so-called Cedar Revolution,[165] against Syrian domination, a mobilization towards archiving and research started to become pronounced by writers from across all language sections (Arabic, English, and French) of the Lebanese literary/artistic field. The young generation of authors participated in this attempt to archive the country in a variety of genres including novels, illustrated novels, web page comics, blogs, and

[161] On the back cover of her graphic novel *Je me souviens. Beyrouth*, wherein Abirached recounts the memories of her childhood about the war, she states: "I do not remember the last day of the war."

[162] Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[163] Carol N. Fadda-Conrey, "Writing Memories of the Present: Alternative Narratives about the 2006 Israeli War on Lebanon." College Literature 37, no. 1, (2010): 169.

[164] Iman Humaydan, "Writing and Memory" (Austin, TX: University of Texas, Austin. 24 October 2011), Lecture.

[165] The political engagement of the Lebanese in protests following the assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri.

graphic novels. Felix Lang in his "Ghosts in the Archive: Lebanon's second-generation post-war novelists and the limits of reconstruction" explains this archival project:

> The accumulation of imaginary artefacts in an act of salvage archaeology does not, in itself, constitute a narrative of the past: authors register the shapes and names of streets and houses which have disappeared or are threatened with disappearance by the redrawing of urban space; they register dates of deaths and massacres which are passed over in silence in the hope that they might be of use in a future process of coming to terms with the past.[166]

This special registration of the urban environment and war events can be seen in the works of authors such as Rashid al-Daif, Lamia Ziadé, Hoda Barakat, Ramy Zein and Zeina Abirached to name a few. Each of these artists grew up in a society that prevented them from learning about the war that shaped their childhood. Abirached criticizes the government for "carefully erasing" the evidence of war:

> In 2002, when the rebuilding of Beirut was in full swing, at the moment when they were carefully erasing all the traces of the war and rebuilding the city just as it had been before, without taking the trouble to do any memorial work. Even today we do not have a single memorial, no place that symbolically says 'it happened'. The history books in the high school program end in the 1960s, and we still do not have an official version of the civil war. All of a sudden I felt the need to react. [167]

Abirached's generation "felt the need to react" in a society where the formula of *la ghalib la maghlub* (no victor, no vanquished) had become the official justification for the transition from war into peace.

A critical overview of Lebanese literary/artistic productions on war shows that most of these narratives are told by female characters who were minors when the war started and struggled to understand it. In *Littératures francophones du Moyen-Orient*, Zahida Darwiche

[166] Felix Lang, "Ghosts in The Archive," 491.

[167] Zeina Abirached, "Artist's Statement," *European Comic Art* 8 no.1 (2015): 71.

Jabbour[168] highlights the liberation of francophone female voices after the 1980s, revolting against the war and the patriarchal society who is, in their eyes, responsible for the violence. They choose to write in the French language that gives them "la distance nécessaire à une médiation lucide sur les malentendus de l'histoire."[169] In addition to the war, the urban environment of Beirut is of seminal importance where its past is redrawn to create "memorial works" of war within the literary/artistic productions. Beirut as a site of shared memories include places, whether a historical monument or the demarcation line,[170] that evoke each individual's sense of her or his self within that place.

For example, Yasmine Char's *La Main de Dieu*[171] retells the story of a fifteen-year-old girl crossing the demarcation line every day to go to school on the other side of the city. Also, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*[172] by Darina Al-Joundi, recounts the memories of the protagonist's youth in Beirut during the war. In addition to these war narratives, the graphic novels by Mazen Kerbaj, Lamia Ziadé and Zeina Abirached written in French stand out as unique in not just archiving the civil war, but redrawing though pictures the places that do not exist anymore. The self-publishing[173] of these writers allowed them to reach the international markets and, today, their works can be found in such major cultural centers as L'Institut du

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[168] Darwiche Jabbour Zahida, 123-146.

[169] Ibid., 90.

[170] Known also as the "Green Line" was an uninhabitable space that separated Muslim West Beirut and Christian East Beirut.

[171] Yasmine Char, *La Main de Dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

[172] Mohamed Kacimi, Darina al-Joundi, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*, (Paris: Actes Sud, 2008).

[173] In Lebanon, Samandal is a comics publisher and a comic book magazine established in 2007 with an aim to publish underrepresented comics in the Middle-East and to bring international comics to local audience. It provides a platform for alternative expression of cultural and social issues to youth.

Monde Arabe in Paris. It is important to note that the genre of the graphic novel did not exist in the literary/artistic Lebanese tradition[174] until after the 2000s. Thanks to its hybrid format, the graphic novel allowed these authors to express the events through image when they were unable to verbalize them.

Une Enfance Heureuse[175] by Mazen Kerbej is the graphic memoir of the author's childhood growing up during the civil war. It retells Kerbej's observations as a participant, a negotiator, and a skeptic in the games of war. Kerbaj's later comic book *Beyrouth: Juillet-Août 2006*[176] is a testimony of war[177] that ravaged the Lebanese from July 14 to August 27, 2006. Indeed, Lamia Ziadé's graphic novels that are similar to catalogs of historical events of the Middle-East and the Lebanese civil war, tend to archive the life of historical characters such as political elites, poets, writers, and singers. Her *Bye bye Babylone: Beyrouth 1975-1979*[178] combines historical, military and political references with anecdotes about her family, and night bombings. The child narrator desperately wants to understand the horrific violence and she realizes that there is no innocence or evil. Her *Ô nuit, ô mes yeux: Le Caire / Beyrouth / Damas / Jérusalem*[179] reveals partially "L'Histoire du Moyen-Orient, les guerres, les révolutions, la lutte anticoloniale, la prise du canal de Suez, la chute de l'empire Ottoman"[180] until 1999. All of these texts work towards a framework of the inhabited war. While Ziadé's work is concerned with the

[174] Carla Calargé, Alexandra Gueydan-Turek, "La guerre du Liban à/et l'écran des souvenirs dans," 204.

[175] Kerbej Mazen, "Une Enfance Heureuse" In Ego Comme X N 9. Paris: Ego Comme X (2003).

[176] Kerbaj Mazen, *Beyrouth: Juillet-Aout 2006*, (Paris: L'Association, 2007).

[177] 33 days of war with Israel.

[178] Lamia Ziadé, *Bye bye Babylone. Beyrouth 1975–1979*, (Paris: Denoël Graphic, 2010).

[179] Lamia Ziadé, *Ô nuit, ô mes yeux. Le Caire/Beyrouth/Damas/Jérusalem*, (Paris: POL Editeur, 2015).

[180] "Interview with Lamia Ziadé," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1Ci9vuIyXU/.

historical research of the Middle-East through historical characters and major events, Zeina Abirached's graphic autobiographies deal with territoriality and the memory of civil war. As Abirached explains in an interview, her family "lived for fifteen years in this little street that was separated from the other ones, so that over time a small community formed."[181] Located next to the demarcation line, Youssef Semmani Street was blocked off by a wall of sandbags to protect people from the shots of the snipers on the other side. Abirached felt the urge to evoke the memories of Beirut to a very specific time and place in an actual address, 38, rue Youssef Semmani, in a fast-changing city where visual indicators were used instead of addresses. In Beirut, the postal service was unavailable during the long civil war and "many street names had been lost, forgotten, changed, and re-named during reconstruction."[182] The reappearance of 38, Rue Youssef Semani in most of Abirached's works can be seen as her attempt to create a monument or a memorial of this place representing metonymically Beirut's history of war. The title of her most central graphic memoir, *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Return, To leave* pictures Abirached's trajectory of displacements between Beirut and other places. Abirached was inspired by a graffiti written on a wall in what was once no man's land. It says "To die, to leave, to return, this is a game for swallows. –Florian." To Abirached, the phrase evokes the history of Lebanese, "the destruction of war, the mass immigration out of Lebanon, and her own need both to leave and to return."[183] Her last graphic novel, *Le Piano Oriental*[184] redraws the utopic past of Beirut and imagines a more positive future for its inhabitants. Abirached, whose personal

[181] Abirached, "Artist's Statement," 71.

[182] Sophia Wiedeman, "New York Comics & Picture-Story Symposium: Zeina Abirached," https://therumpus.net/2013/09/the-new-york-comics-and-picture-story-symposium-zeina-abirached/.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Abirached Zeina, *Le Piano oriental*, (Paris: Casterman, 2015).

struggle became an indirect means of exploring the shattered city of Beirut in her books, expresses her concerns about the transformation of the city:

> [A] lot of the old buildings are disappearing […] it feels like we are losing our identity. Now the city is beautiful but I feel like it doesn't belong to the people who are from here […] It's not only about nostalgia, it's also about what is replacing the things that were so particular to the city […] Some people are building this very luxurious, generic city you can find in Dubai or wherever.[185]

Her world of childhood seems to be threatened with disappearance. One of the aims of *A Game for Swallows,* as she explains, is to keep the war-stricken city of her childhood alive by reconstructing her memory around the war events. Indeed, in her *Je me souviens: Beyrouth*, she gathers a collection of memories of war beginning with the phrase 'I remember.'[186] In addition to the memories, Abirached registers the slightest details such as the name of places and wartime habits. For example, her younger brother made a collection of shell fragments of all shapes and sizes. Abirached's texts re-imagine her home city of Beirut by archiving its urban environment and the acts of resistance that its inhabitants performed against the war. Her work also allows her to re-negotiate her identity through the lived spaces.

In the following sections, I will explore the outside and inside space and its relation to the "*trans*-space" as a state where Abirached's transcultural self is formed. My analysis focuses on the ways in which Abirached challenges the domestic and urban space on a black and white comic book page. In the analysis of outside space, I will show that Abirached's personal struggle

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[185] Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Centre-ville de Beyrouth known as Solidere was established in 1994 to rebuild Beirut's downtown. It was supported by the government and erased many of the war memorial places such as La Place des Martyrs.

[186] Abirached uses "Je me souviens" in the manner of Georges Perec in his *Je me Souviens*. The critic has shown the influence of OuLiPo, and especially the writings of Georges Perec, on Abirached's comics. The author confirms her oulipian style and she make an homage to Georges Perec in the last page of I *Remeber Beirut* (82). Please refer to Anna Kemp's article "Je me souviens Beyrouth: Zeina Abirached's Perecquian practice" wherein she argues that Abirached's oulipian practice is used as a means of "managing individual and collective memory." Anna Kemp, "Je me souviens de Beyrouth: Zeina Abirached's Perecquian practice," International Journal of Francophone Studies, 20. no. 3&4 (2017), 186.

in understanding the war becomes an indirect means of exploring the sectarian conflicts that have shattered her city.

The Outside Space

In this section, I will explore Abiached's use of maps[187] and the way they evoke the memories of war. Before drawing our attention to the analysis of outside space in *A Game for Swallows*, it is essential to clarify the relationship between space and place. A place (lieu), according to De Certeau[188] is an instantaneous configuration of positions and implies an indication of stability. However, space is a practiced place. Space is "un croisement de mobiles. Il est en quelques sorte animé par l'ensemble des mouvements qui s'y déploient. Est espace l'effet produit par les opérations qui orientent, le circonstanceint, le temporisent[...].[189] De Certeau sees the city as a text that the inhabitants transform by their actions. De Certeau's theory of space corresponds to how space is formed in *A Game for Swallows*. Before picturing the inside space, the book offers four maps from the outside. As we observe in Fig. 1, the very first map picturing Lebanon[190] and surrounding areas pays a great deal of attention to the strategic geography of the country in the region. Lebanon is crossed from north to south by two large mountain ranges wherein, over the centuries, have inhabited or taken refuge many minorities in the Middle East. It is bordered by Syria to the north and east and Israel to the south. So Lebanese are divided as to their national aspirations including mainly Christians, and more particularly Maronites and Muslims. The strategic location of Lebanon in the region is important

[187] See Emma, Monroy, "Creating Space: Zeina Abirached's Mourir partir revenir: Le jeu des hirondelles." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 20, no. 4-5 (2016): 581-598. Monroy focuses on the spatiality and studies the "intradiegetic space" and the use of maps.

[188] De Certeau Michel, *L'invention du quotidian*, (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980).

[189] Ibid., 173.

[190] This map is repeated in the first page of Abirached's *Je me souviens: Beyrouth.*

in order to understand its diversity and the possible reasons for the complexity of the Lebanese war.

In 1920, France declared that the creation of Greater Lebanon was necessary to protect the Christians with whom it has maintained relations since the reign of Francois I. To do so, many coastal cities with strong Sunni (Tripoli and Saida) and Shiite (Bekaa, Akkar) dominance were attached to Mount Lebanon and Beirut was declared the capital of the country. Six years later, the Lebanese constitution established a parliamentary regime inspired by the spirit of the Third French Republic, that guaranteed to all citizens the freedom of conscience and opinion and affirms the respect of all the religious denominations recognized on the national ground. At Independence, in 1943, a national pact was established and organized the political power and the main public functions between the different communities according to their demographic weight. At the time, this sharing of roles was designed to integrate all communities by encouraging their active participation in the national project and dissuading them from resorting the protection of foreign powers. This was the first step towards a possible repudiation of the denominational system.[191] However, this system stagnated during the war as the functioning of state institutions collapsed and the tensions over confessional affiliations became more pronounced. The complexity of the Lebanese conflict stems, in part, from the fact that its various internal causes overlap with other causes which are regional and sometimes even international. As I detail below, many of these issues can be explained through the failure of nationalism in the Arab world, the triumph of tradition (especially tribalism and confessionalism) over modernity

[191] Calargé, *Liban. Mémoires fragmentées d'une guerre obsédante*, 30.

or the class struggle, different religious sects[192] and unequal development of capitalism in the Arab world.[193] According to Sune Haugbolle it was "a confusing war with an unresolved finish."[194] These tensions are significant over the centuries and show that the different communities have not always evolved in a similar way and therefore they cultivate different collective memories that often lead to resentment towards other communities. Georges Corm, a specialist in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean region explains the situation in his book *Le Liban contemporain*: "aucune communauté n'a eu d'hégémonie suffisante au Liban pour imposer une vision historique sur l'ensemble de la société."[195]

[192] These are not necessarily different religions but religious subgroups. So Sunnis, Shiites, Druze, Ismailis and Alawites claim to be Islam while Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics (Melkites), Copts, Chaldeans, Armenians and Catholics Orthodox, Latin and Protestant claim to be Christianity.

[193] Calargé, *Liban. Mémoires fragmentées d'une guerre obsédante*,

[194] Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, 15.

[195] Georges Corm, *Le Liban contemporain* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 48.

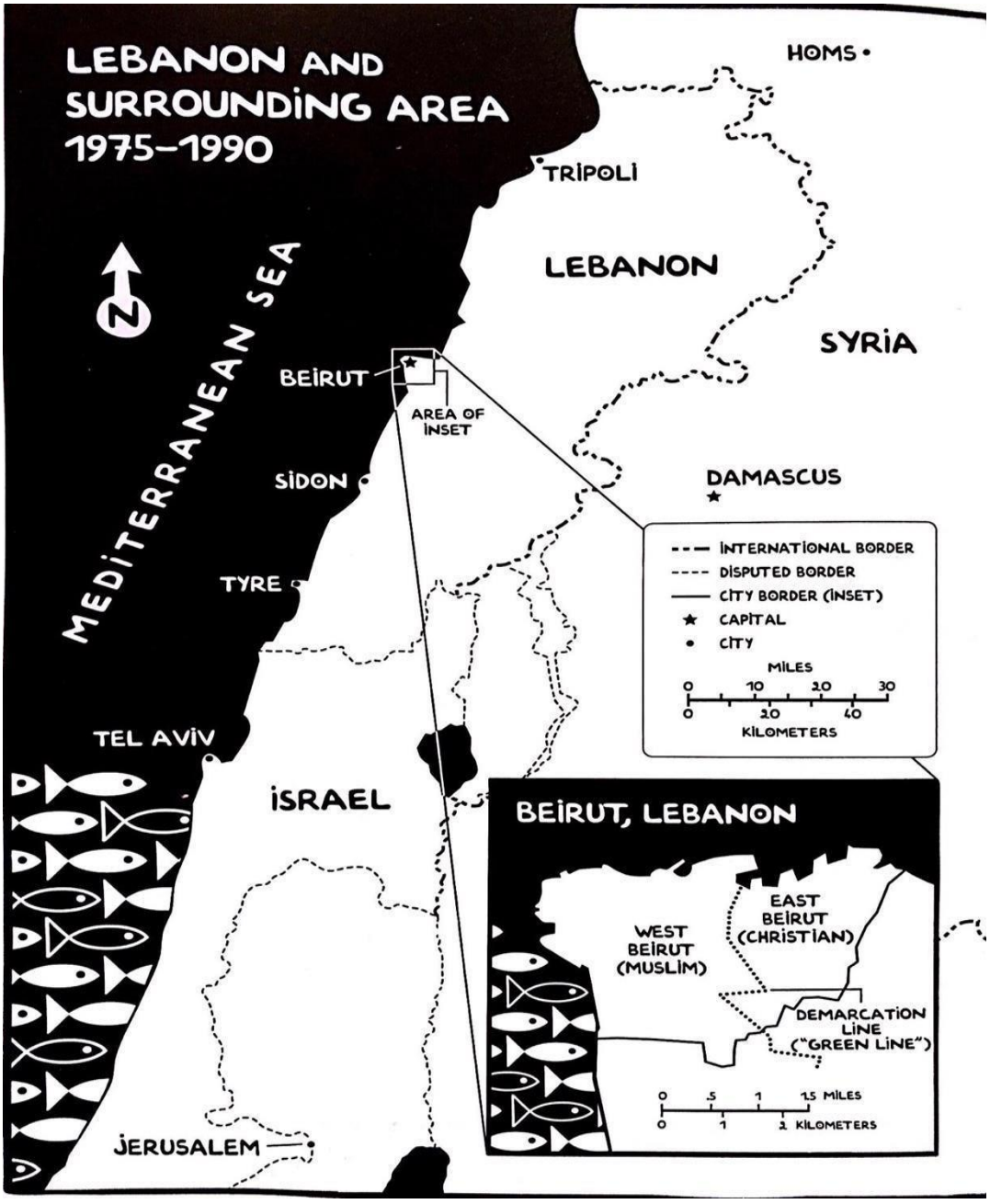

Fig. 1: Location of Lebanon.

Furthermore, the war lasted a long time and it often resembled a series of distinct conflicts developing in a parallel and/or successive way. As the different regions of Lebanon were under the tutelage of different armies or militias, sometimes allied and sometimes enemies, the experience of the Lebanese and the memories they keep, even the reading and the

interpretation they give of these black years, differ enormously from one region to another.[196] In other words, while most Lebanese suffered from the war, their different experiences of it did not allow for a collective narrative. Despite the differences, we will see how Abirached's visual style, works towards the construction of an archive that might contain "many possible voices while striking a delicate balance between what can and cannot (yet) be said about the past."[197]

The next map is an aerial map of Abirached's district, pointing to the locations of Zeina's place and her grandmother's house, which was some blocks away. To visit her grandmother, Abirached's parents had to cross the street where there was a sniper. The right panel, a plain black background, depicts the choreography of the actions that Zeina's parents had to perform to avoid the sniper. To be able to walk alongside the street without being outside, Abirached's parents had to pass through inside of the buildings, courtyards, and bridges made between the buildings, and shops. To cross the street, they had to wait for the right moment. Abirached draws a spatial path of all the movements changing the aerial map to a practiced space and the perilous route to a playground.

[196] Calargé, *Liban. Mémoires fragmentées d'une guerre obsédante*, 35.

[197] Anna Kemp, "Je me souviens de Beyrouth: Zeina Abirached's Perecquian practice," 186.

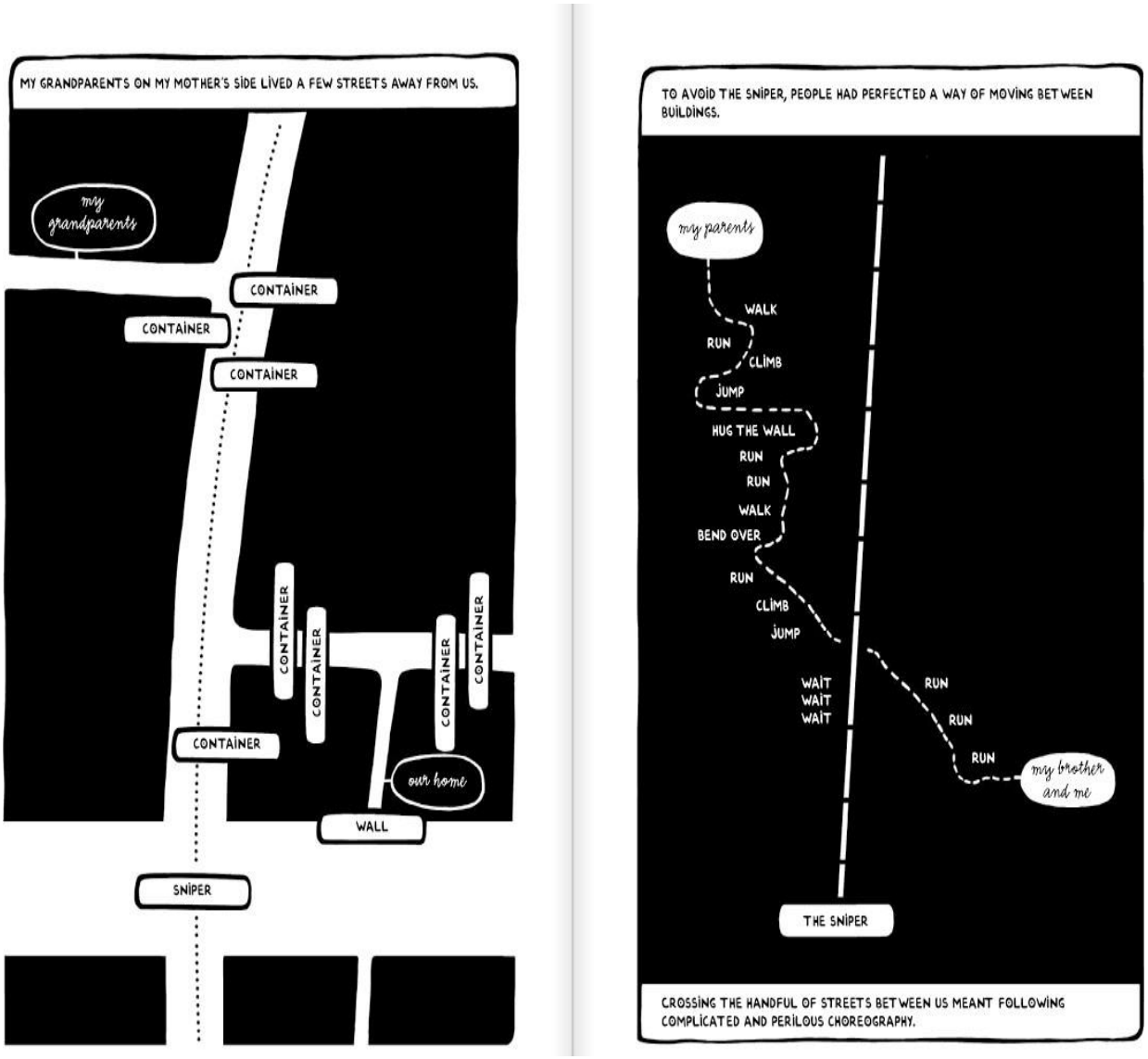

Fig. 2: Practiced place.

The panel on the right, as we can observe, replaces the obstacles previously displayed with the actions to overcome them. The dots, which in the previous panel symbolize the road, are transformed into the menacing segmented target of the sharp and oblique aim of the snipers. The human energy in the perilous space, the silent actions to avoid the imposed danger, seem to correspond to the "tactics" defined by De Certeau as the movement within the enemy's field of

vision, and within the enemy territory.[198] A tactic "operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them [...].[199]

The lettering also contributes to the opposition between private tactics and war strategy: the italic which identifies the intimate space is visually opposed to the rigidity of the uppercase that indicates the obstacles of war. While in the left panel the focus is on the places, the right panel displays the people that live in these places. The grandparents of the first map become simply "my parents," the general "our home" becomes "my brother and I." Here, as elsewhere, the subjective reference to spaces and people is incorporated in a circular outline[200] that contrasts well with the angularity and rigidity of the rectangle that panels the war actants. The round line in the parental embrace could be seen as a sign of affectivity and intimacy that prevents the dispersion of the characters.

The next geometric map of East Beirut is drawn in two full-page panels. The upper left corner, the central corner and the lower right corner of the two full-pages panels that are the most eye-catching sites in the reading protocol of a graphic novel offer no context but an abundance of white lines transecting a black background.[201]

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[198] De Certeau, 1980.

[199] Ibid.

[200] This final chapter of Bachelard's *La poétique de l'espace* (208-214) is about the round's essence of being. Emily Pace summarizes the roundness, "[i]t is that life inside each living being that is isolated within, creating remarkable individuality while also creating coherent unity among all beings. For Bachelard, it is a bird; it is a tree; it is a ball. It is a substance that is more liquid than solid, which moves and breathes and fills a concentrated space that is "la vie gardée de toute part.""
See Emily Pace, "From Shell to Center: Gaston Bachelard and the transformation of domestic space in the nineteenth-century French novel. "PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2013.http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/2605

[201] Groensteen Thierry *Système de la bande dessinée* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, Vol. 1. 1999).

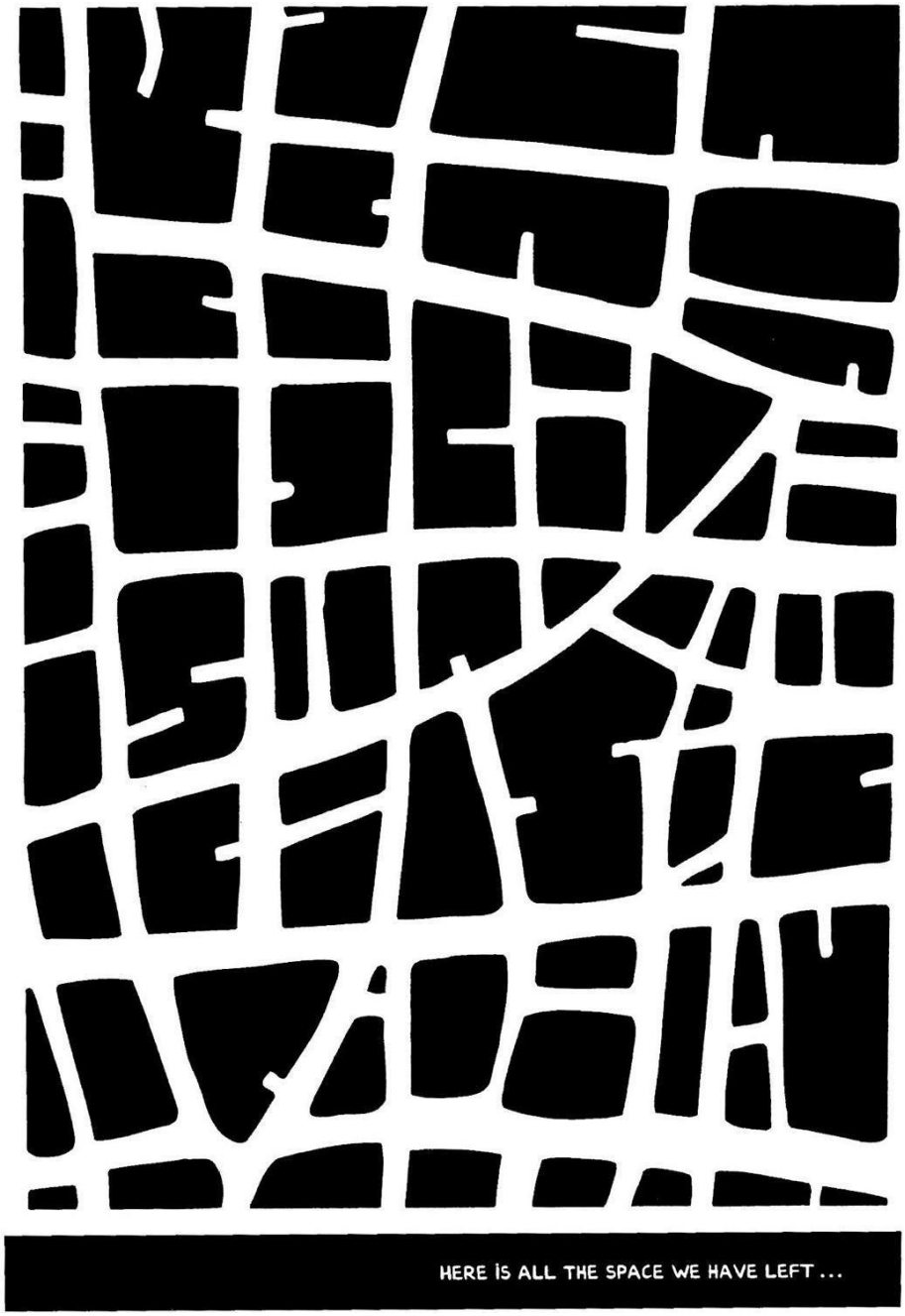

Fig. 3: Chaotic map of East Beirut.

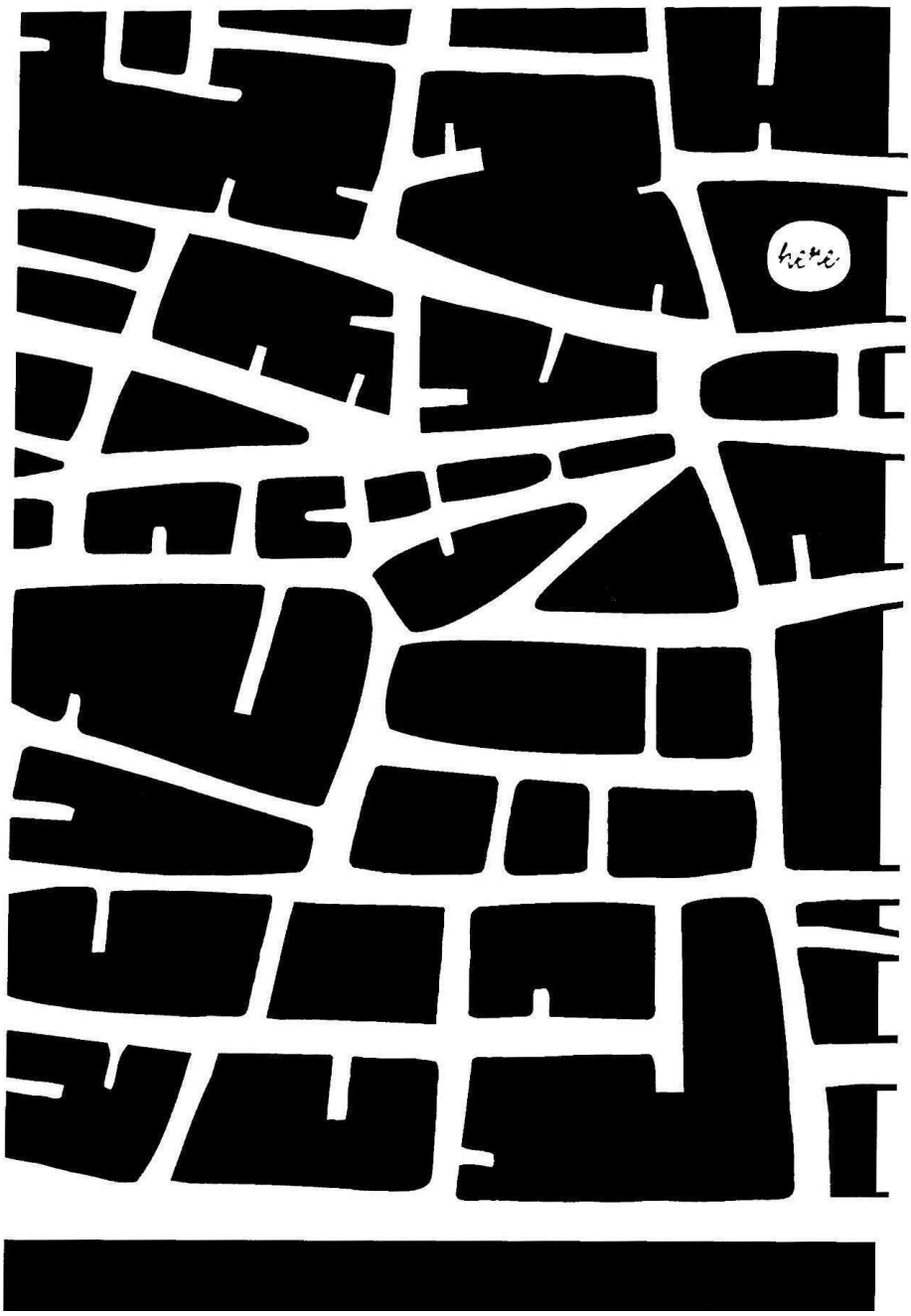

Fig. 4: Here: the entryway.

The eye of the reader is lost in this chaotic setting, suggesting the disturbance of the war drawn on the fragmented panel of comics page. The text at the bottom of the left page reads as “here is all the space we have left” indicating the grid of streets on the map. The word “here” that repeats in an enclosed white circle in the following page is all the space that has remained to Zeina and

her family. To represent this presence in the absence of available space, the author repeats the same matrix image of the road grid two times in two double pages. However, at every reproduction, the image is further shattered.

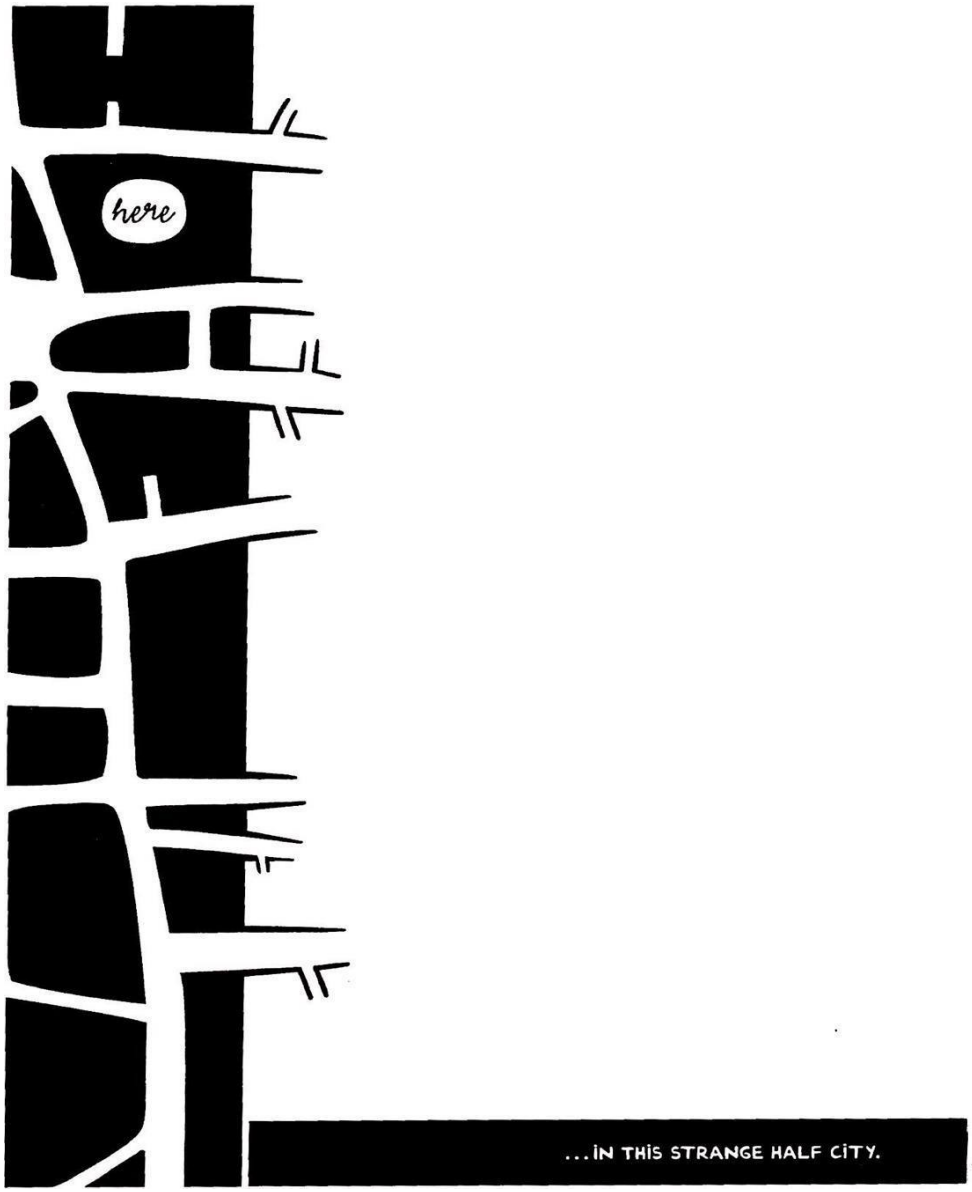

Figure 5: The unknown urban space.

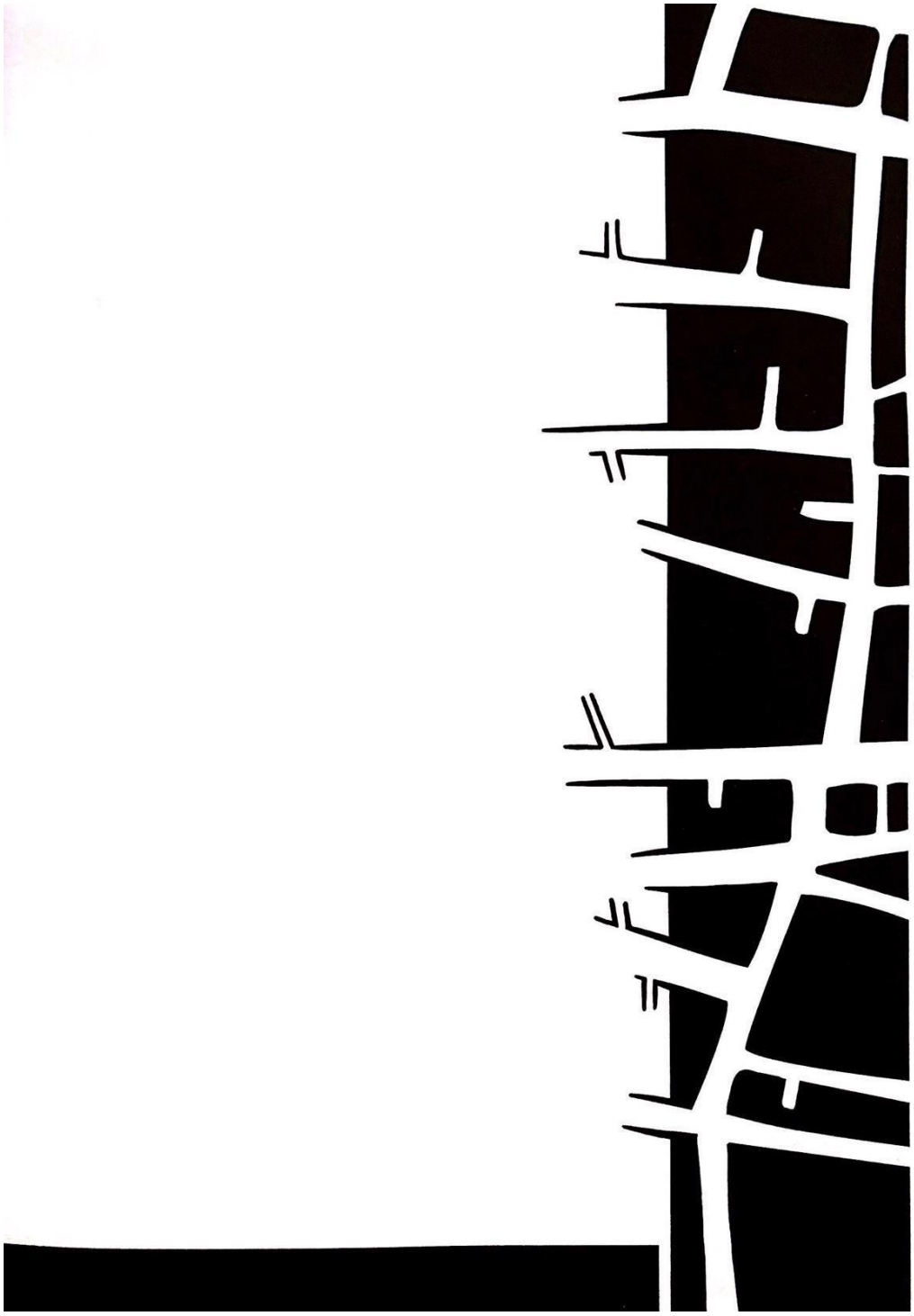

Figure 6: The void of memory.

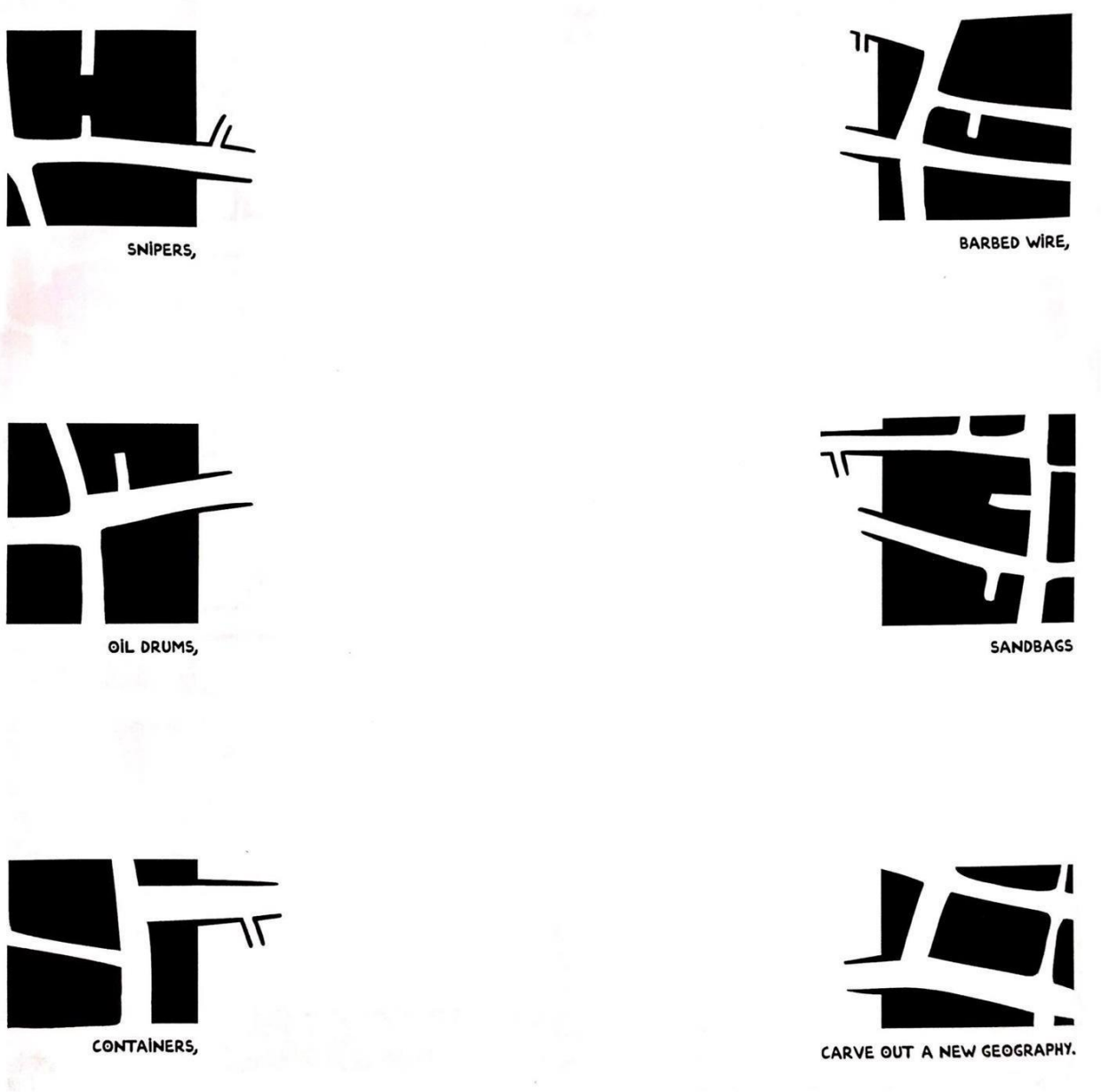

Fig. 7: New geography.

The dominating white in the two full-pages panels, that depict the "strange half of the city," could be read as the unknown space and the void in Abirached's memory. The last two full-page panels represent the fragmented sections of the previous map along with visual barriers (snipers, oil drums, containers, barbed wire, and sandbags). These barriers result in a new

geography which is verbally and visually evident in the last section, on the lower right corner of the page. While the first aerial map is similar to a labyrinth of spaces of the war, the symmetric chalk drawings of the spaces in this figure (fig.7) are used as an attempt of disciplining the traumatic memory.

In *A Game for Swallows*, Abirached as a subjective and intimate geographer redraws the complexity of space by the means of comics to tell what the images alone do not tell and the words alone. The map, as the iconic story of the space, is used as an instrument of visual synthesis and invades the space of the panel most of the time. Abiached's use of maps can be seen as her attempt to "express how the walls and barriers around the city were just as psychological as they were physical."[202] Indeed, most of the maps contain a degree of symmetry suggesting the child's attempts to establish a sense of security in the chaos of the war and the adult author's efforts to manage her memory of the war experience. The memory, tied to and shaped by place, consists of an ongoing dialogue between the spaces lived in the past and keeps unfolding the present. Although the war is long over, Beirut's barriers and its division into East and West remain in the minds of its citizens.

Inside Space

Home has often been pointed out as the place that best represents the calm and security from a hostile outside world. Home as an inside space can be seen as the intimate space of our experience, thus the space more open to elements of subjectivity and memory. Introducing the concept of topoanalysis in his *La Poétique de l'espace,* Gaston Bachelard who undertakes the project of analyzing the centrality of place in the context of human experience, sets out to

[202] Sophia Wiedeman, "New York Comics & Picture-Story Symposium: Zeina Abirached," https://therumpus.net/2013/09/the-new-york-comics-and-picture-story-symposium-zeina-abirached/.

analyze how humans experience intimate spaces and how these spaces become the receptacles of memory, the space that protects.[203] According to Bachelard, memories of the house and its various parts are not something remembered but rather something which is entwined with the present, a part of our ongoing current experience. In addition to Bachelard, Perec, whose work inspires Abirached, sees the inside space as "une des plus grandes puissances d'intégrations pour les pensées, les souvenirs et les rêves de l'homme."[204] Evoking the wartime memories, in *A Game for Swallows*, the home could be seen as a site of both intimacy/comfort and resistance for its inhabitants. I suggest that home (the inside space) is not only protecting its occupants by walls but most notably, by creating the intimacy between its inhabitants who gradually develop daily rituals to resist the war together. In his *The Practice of Everyday life*, De Certeau investigates into this realm of the routine practices such as walking, talking, reading, dwelling, and cooking, and believes that there exists an element of creative resistance to the imposed structures enacted by ordinary people. De Certeau outlines an important critical distinction between strategies and tactics. According to his theory, strategies are used by those within organizational power structures and are deployed against some external entity to institute a set of relations for official or proper ends. Tactics, on the other hand, are employed by those who are subjugated. In the following parts, we will see how people in Abirached's building engage with tactics in the inside space in order to resist the war happening in the outside.

In the very first eight panels, the absence of text and character prepare the image of the desert district leaving the reader to discover the traces of the war. The very first panels that depict the interior from outside with barricades, the containers, the sandbags and bullet marks on

[203] Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, 6-20.

[204] Georges Perec, *Espèces d'espaces* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1974), 6.

the walls contrast with the plants that grow as the only sign of life, suggesting the presence of the inhabitants hidden in their houses. Although the war has impacted people's everyday lives, they applied different tactics such as using the containers as vases to resist the reality of war.

Fig. 8: Resistance.

People in Abirached's building located in 38 Youssef Semmani Street did not have a shelter and believed that the entryway of Abirached's place in the second floor was the most secure place as it was the least exposed to shelling. Therefore, they got into the habit of gathering in Abirached's place when there was bombing. As shown in Fig. 9, the war has restricted the inhabited space of the house, reducing it to a single room that corresponds to the entrance, a place where life is concentrated.

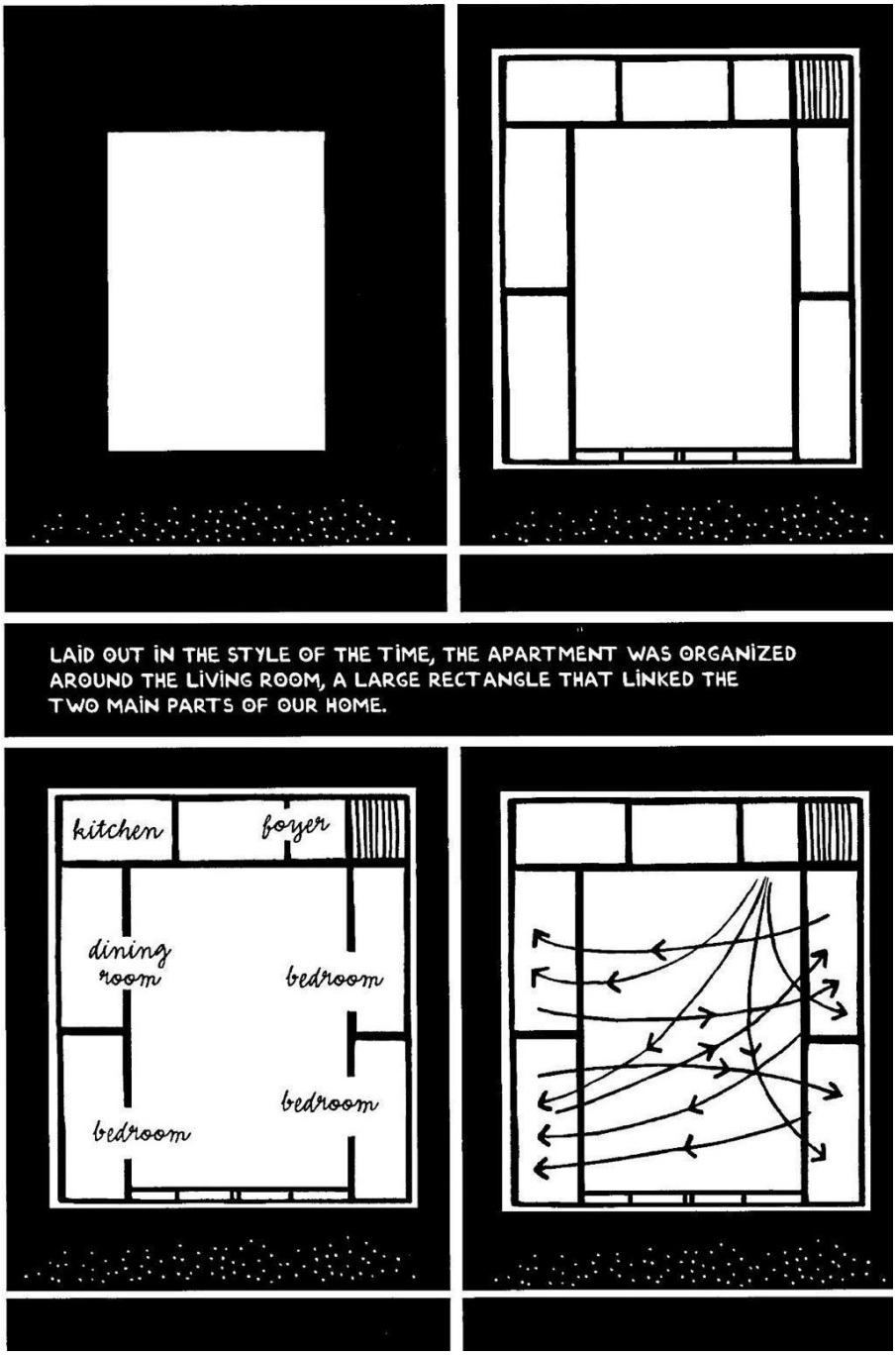

Fig. 9: Floor plan.

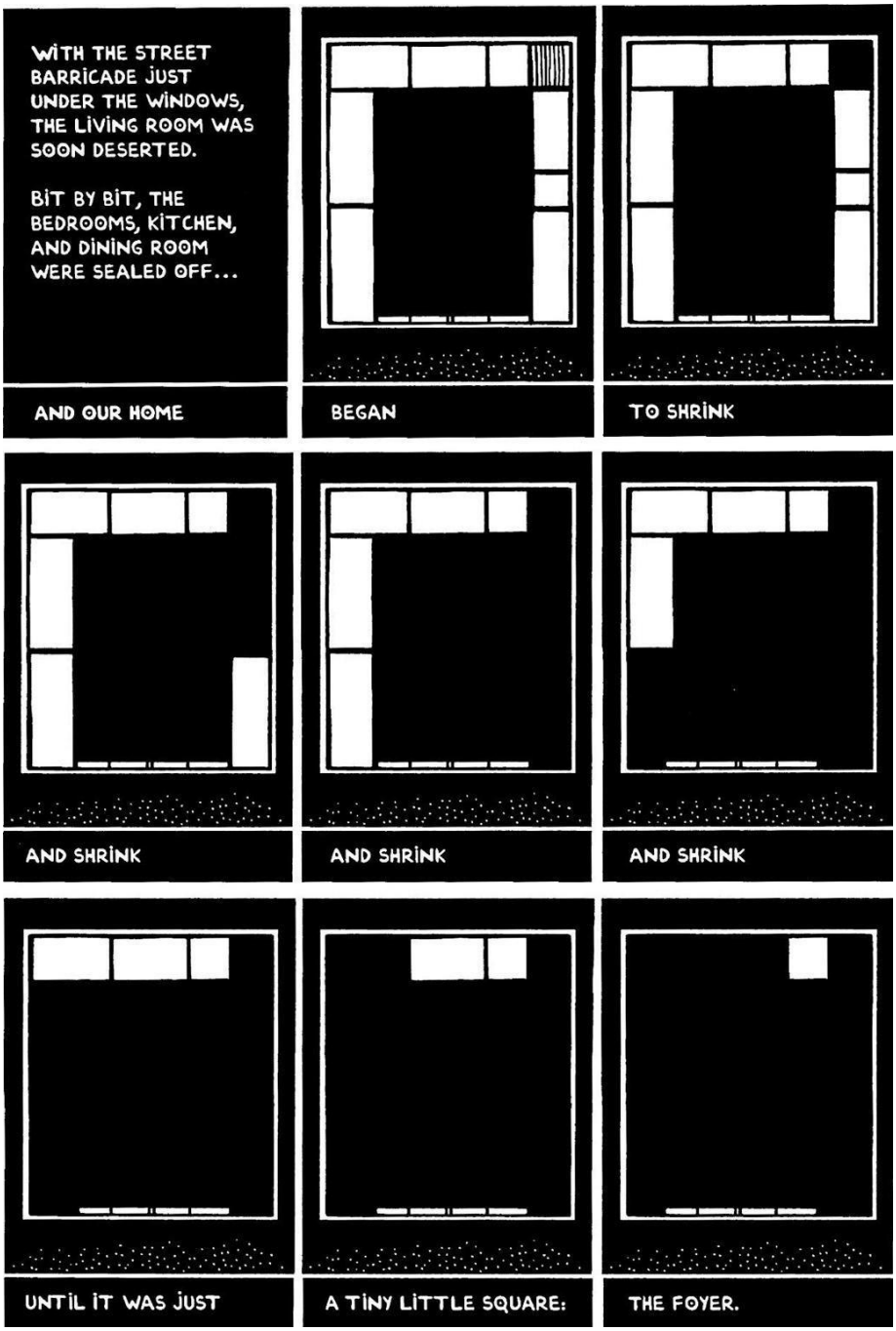

Figure 10: Habitable space starts to shrink.

The “white” that stands for habitable space starts to shrink and is replaced gradually by the “black” uninhabitable. The rooms in danger are evacuated one by one, leaving only the foyer, which is depicted in the opposing panel in the center of the panel(Fig.11). The panel is minimized to display the small size of the space that has left. It also depicts the wall hanging as

the most important object that conveys a sense of security to Zeina. The symbolic dragon as a sign of protection is usually seen in the background layout of the page. The wall hanging belonged to Zeina's grandfather and "depicted the flee of Moses and the Hebrew from Egypt."[205] In this portrayal of the story, Moses throws his staff that becomes a dragon protecting them from the pharaoh. The Jews seem safe in the temple with the dragon standing between these two groups. The little Zeina felt that where the Jews were, was the same "inside space" that she and her family inhabited.

Fig. 11: Dragon, the symbol of protection.

[205] Abirached, *A game for swallows: To die, to leave, to return*, 38.

In addition, Abirached's texts deal frequently with the familiar and the everyday and tie memory to the surrounding space, individuals and objects. This attachment to the everyday spaces, people and objects could be seen as an attempt to establish a reassuring setting in the insecure situation of war. According to Abirached "[w]ar lasted so long, people started organizing their lives with the war in it; they learned to live with it. War became a common thing: it was always there."[206] During the bombing in *A Game for Swallows*, Anhala, Abirached's neighbor, takes care of Zeina and her brother while the parents are unable to come back home. Gradually other neighbors gather in Abiarched's place and use different tactics to reduce the anxiety of the situation. Abirached confirms in an interview that "the adults were reassuring" and "did everything they could to protect the children from the horrors of war."[207] For example, Abirached's mother, to calm her children, would tell them, "when you hear the snipers, it is just hunters killing birds."[208] Zeina and her sibling comfort each other by reciting repetitive rhyming poems.[209] Furthermore, they seek similar forms of comfort from adults, asking their family friend Ernest Challita, the French professor, to recite rhyming lines from Cyrano de Bergerac. The entryway becomes the "espace de partage," and the space of "intimité protégée"[210] and conveys a sense of security to Zeina through the wall hanging, home stories, and protective characters.

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[206] Joe, Gordon, "Child in a time of war: Zeina Abirached about the joys and sorrows of Lebanon," Forbidden Planet International, 11 December, 2008, http://forbiddenplanet.blog/2008/from-our-continental-correspondent-child-in-a-time-of-war-zeina-abirached-about- the-joys-and-sorrows-of-lebanon/.

[207] Zeina Abirached, "Artist's Statement," 71.

[208] Sophia Wiedeman, "New York Comics & Picture-Story Symposium: Zeina Abirached," https://therumpus.net/2013/09/the-new-york-comics-and-picture-story-symposium-zeina-abirached/.

[209] Abirached, A Game for Swallows, 45-46.

[210] Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, 32.

Abirached delineates the distractions and routines they applied to resist various deficiencies such as lack of water, electricity, fresh food, or telephones. In telling Chucri's story, the author uses small square symmetrical panels that represent the past on the left to archive some of the tactics that people in Abiached's building applied to normalize the war. "Pasting clear plastic sheeting on the windows," "plugging up shrapnel holes on the walls"[211] and setting up an electric generator for daily blackouts. Moreover, as small acts of daily resistance, Ernest waters his plants every Wednesday despite the water scarcity and dresses flawlessly. Moreover, fresh vegetables and fruits were hard to find and, as described in *A Game for Swallows,* people would bake a cake called "sfouf" during the wartime, as it did not need fresh ingredients. In addition to these tactics, people had some social routine such as having coffee while listening to Ernest reciting Cyrano de Bergerac, and retelling memories from good times. Most of these reassuring characters reappear in Abirached's other works (*38 rue Youssef Semmani, Beyrouth Catharsis, Je me souviens: Beyrouth*).

[211] Abirached Zeina, *A game for swallows,* 51-53.

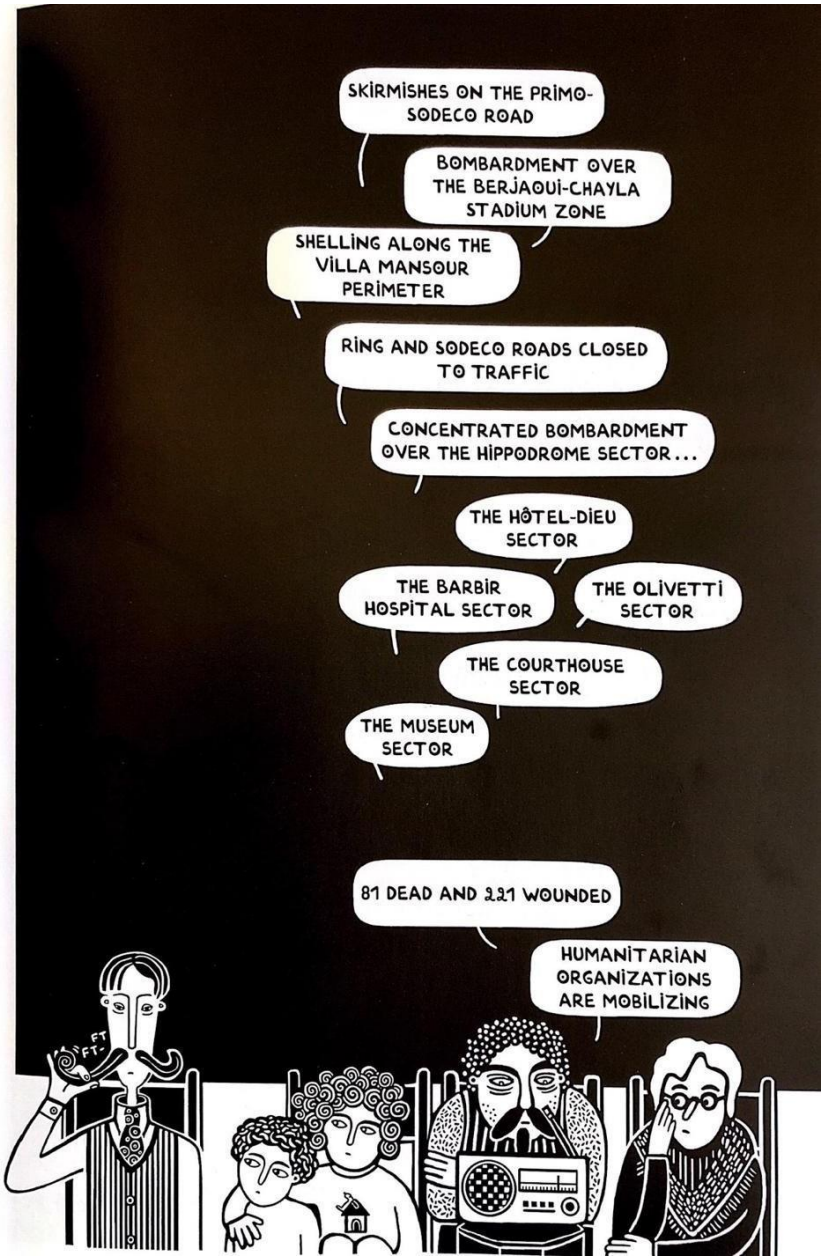

Fig.12: An archive of Street names.

Through numerous anecdotes, the stories endow the characters with a present and a past, an identitarian space, their own history, and stories of exile, represented, in a sort of *mise en abyme*, from the wall hanging in the room. One of the memories consists of Farah's recent marriage. The descriptions of the wedding preparations carry the reader to an alternative time when the guests seemed to forget the war temporarily to celebrate the wedding. Farah describes how she and all

the guests had to run from the ceremony to the reception to avoid the sniper.

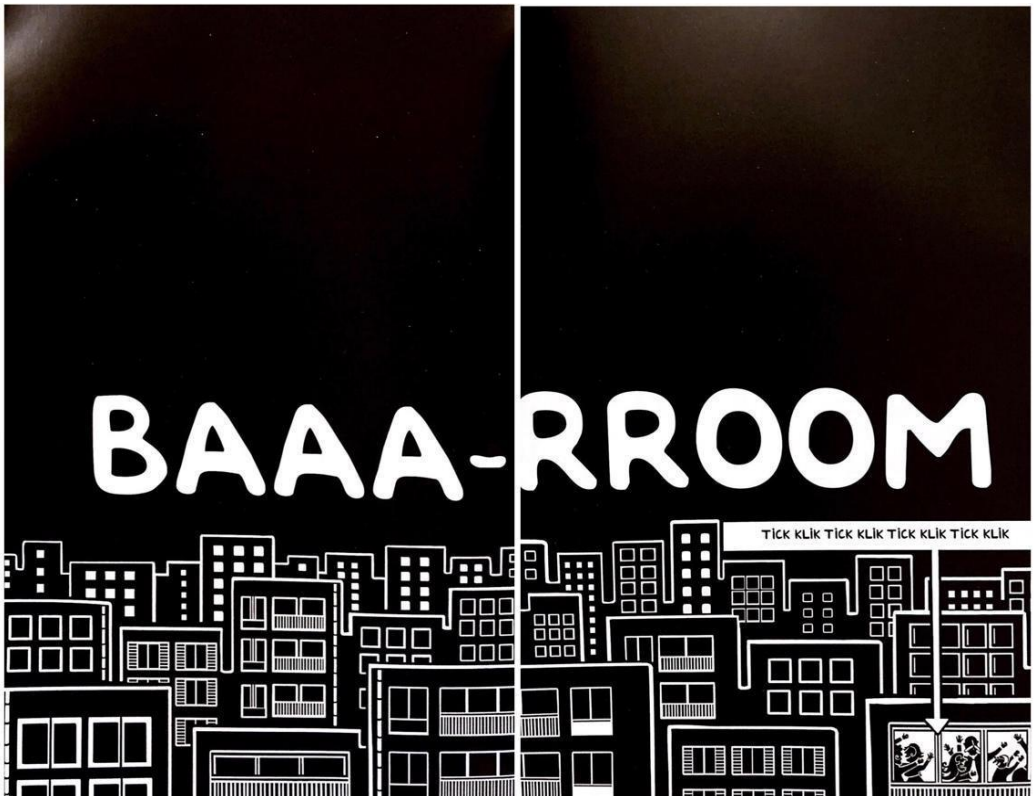

Fig. 13: The sound of bombings.

The panels describing the wedding night have echoes in the wall hanging. Like Moses and his troupe, the bride and her guests had to run to the church and come back quickly. Abirached devotes two complete adjacent pages to represent Beirut's dark sky with the large white letters "BAAAARROOM" written on both pages, and a small window of the building showing wedding guests celebrating despite the striking reality. Although, the bombing is occurring, there is no sign of destruction. Abirached prefers not to visualize or verbalize the bombings, she acknowledges their strong presence using onomatopoeias. She highlights the trauma of the war by comparing it to flashbacks to happier and less painful times.

Creating games is another way of momentarily resistance to the traumatic reality of the war. One of the most playful scenes captured in three pages is where adults transform the

horrifying bombing sounds to a creative game of “incoming” and “outgoing” and teach the children how to recognize them. In addition, the radio (fig.12) that connects the inside to the outside world of war is served to archive some of the names of the streets, and bombings events.

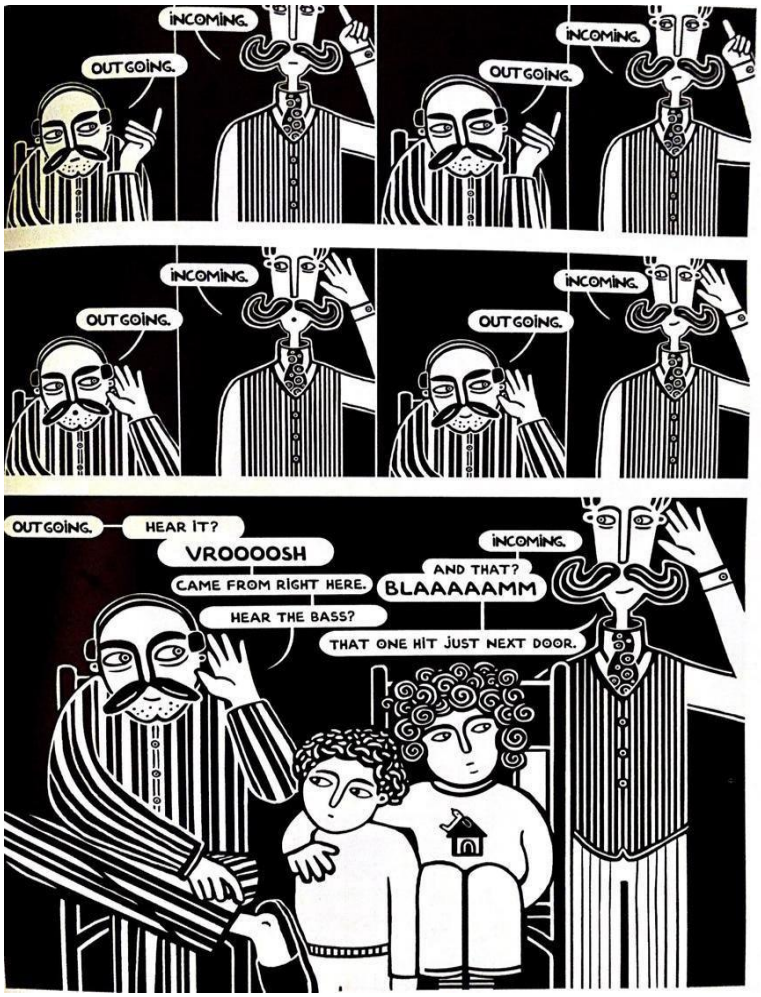

Fig. 14: To play with bombings.

The bored faces of the characters and their fixed repetitive gestures show time passing slowly and the lack of verbal exchange. They listen to the radio that connects them from inside to the outside world of war. The news about the bombings, shelling and the skirmishes along with the name of places (Courthouse, Olivetti, Hotel-Dieu) that are destroyed. Abirached details the distractions and routines they applied to resist various deprivations such as lack of water, electricity, fresh food, or telephones. While Calargé and Gueydan-Turek claim that Abirached’s

"obsessional return"[212] to similar panels suggest that the trauma is not resolved in her memory, I argue that this insistence on some of the memories is part of Abirached's archival project in an attempt to register the details on wartime tactics. Also, I suggest that Abiarched's graphic novel adds another layer to the reality of trauma that rather covers the violence of war and engages with the intimacy of home stories and resistance. The adult narrator seeks to depict the war in an apolitical way and leaves space for any victim, despite their differences, to relate to her story.

As Gillian Whitlock,[213] Hillary Chute,[214] Edward Said,[215] and others have claimed, the graphic novel has become a privileged medium for representing traumatic content. According to Edward Said in his "Homage to Joe Sacco" the author of *Palestine*, comics free him to think and imagine and see differently:

> Comics provided one with a directness of approach (the attractively and literally overstated combination of pictures and words) that seemed unassailably true on the one hand, and marvelously close, impinging, familiar on the other. In ways that I still find fascinating to decode, comics in their relentless foregrounding— far more, say, than film cartoons or funnies, neither of which mattered much to me— seemed to say what couldn't otherwise be said, perhaps what wasn't permitted to be said or imagined, defying the ordinary processes of thought, which are policed, shaped and reshaped by all sorts of pedagogical as well as ideological pressures. I knew nothing of this then, but I felt that comics freed me to think and imagine and see differently.

Abirached's graphic novel engages with Said's interpretation by allowing her to "say what couldn't otherwise be said." According to the artist, "[i]l n'y a pas de représentation possible de la guerre. La guerre est un néant."[216] As a result, she exploits on the spatiality of the graphic

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[212] Carla Calargé, Alexandra Gueydan-Turek, "La guerre du Liban à/et l'écran des souvenirs," 207.

[213] Gillian Whitlock, *Soft weapons: Autobiography in transit* (Chicago, MI: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[214] Chute, *Graphic women: Life narrative and contemporary comics*.

[215] Edward Said, "Homage to Joe Sacco," *Preface. Palestine* (Seattle WA: Fantagraphics 2001), ii.

[216] Bruno Gaultier, Interview with Zeina AbiRached, 20 septembre 2012, systar.hautetfort.com/archive/2006/09/20/entretien-avec-zeina-abirached-1.html.

"faire de la guerre un vide qui mange les cases, voire la page entière"[217] rather than drawing blood or corpses cut in pieces.

The child's perspective Abirached's work is deliberately used to reveal the absurdity of the war because the child's mind is innocent, untouched by the twisted logic of politics and religion. Despite the cultural, political and religious differences among Lebanese, many of Abirached's experiences were universal to others throughout her country. Even those who had grown up in West Beirut could deeply relate to her apolitical stories.[218]

It is Abirached's clear and effective expression of the trauma that allows her to talk about the painful past without picturing the frightful images of the war. By using black and white the author escapes from the realistic dimension of the image. She makes expressive choices that put the war out of the field without denying it, yielding from time to time to the power of the narrative or that of the representation. The comic book as an expressive genre attracts the author precisely for "ce choix qu'on peut faire entre ce qu'on dit et ce qu'on ne montre pas ou ce qu'on montre et qu'on ne dit pas; comment le texte et l'image se répondent, se continuent, sont complémentaires."[219]

As we observed, Abirached turned the graphic novel to an archival device and registered the shapes and names of streets and houses which have disappeared and the habits of wartime. This archival project and attempt to understand the war continues specifically in *Je me souviens: Beyrouth* and *Le Piano Oriental* hoping that these depictions might be of use in a future process of coming to terms with Lebanon's traumatic past. In her work, space is understood as having a

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[217] Ibid.

[218] Sophia Wiedeman, "New York Comics & Picture-Story Symposium: Zeina Abirached," https://therumpus.net/2013/09/the-new-york-comics-and-picture-story-symposium-zeina-abirached/.

[219] Carla Calargé, "Souvenirs d'une enfance dans la guerre: rencontre avec Zeina AbiRached," *French Review* 87 no. 3 (2014): 168.

continued dialogue with the adult narrator who negotiates her place between her past in Beirut and her present in Paris.

***Trans*-space**

The same night, when Zeina's parents came back home, a shell landed in one of their rooms. They had to leave the house the next day and temporarily take refuge in a friend's place. Zeina loses her intimate safe space and will experience constant displacements between Beirut and other places (Bzoummar in Lebanon, Kuwait City, Tabajara in Lebanon, Larnaca in Cyprus, and etc.). She finally finds a new home in Paris.

In the last pages of the book, Zeina shows how she learns to write her name in Arabic a year later knowing that displacements will happen again. The graphic iconography of the last panels depicts the representation of the displacements through the gradual transformation of the protagonist's Arabic name into a boat. This metaphorical image represents Abirached's journey, crossing, and exploration in the unknown space. On the space of the comics page, the adult illustrator zooms in on the transforming name which progressively invades the entire page and cuts the borders. According to the Comic theorist, Thierry Groensteen,[220] to choose, for a figurative image, is not only to decide what will be visible but also what will have to be hidden. These panels offer a *hors-vue*[221] that allows the reader to cross the borders of the page and to imagine the point of arrival of an identity metamorphosis which will be more palpable in Abirached's later works.

Little Zeina, who struggles with war and displacements in Beirut, distanced herself from Arabic as it was "la langue de la violence du monde dans lequel nous vivions, c'était la langue

[220] Thierry Groensteen *Système de la bande dessinée*, 84.

[221] Ibid., 84.

des miliciens, celle des barrages armes, celle de la radio. L'arabe était la langue des mauvaises nouvelles. celle de ce qu'on a envie d'oublier."[222] To forget the violence expressed through the language of her Lebanese identity (Arabic), she communicates in French which becomes the language of "refuge." Later, young Zeina immigrates to Paris and begins to challenge her identity.

One of the most important characteristics of text and image is that both of them are drawn and the words are not only to be read but to be looked as well. The image: a floating boat drawn in an unedged panel redraws Abirached's identity crossing the borders of an imposed space of war and re-negotiates it in a new urban space (Paris). In *Le Piano Oriental*, we see her coming in terms with her cultural and linguistic duality. Abirached describes her first displacement in *A Game for Swallows:*

> The exit from the apartment is also the moment when I grow up. When I understand what was happening outside. It is the end of the age of innocence. I learn to write and my writing becomes a drawing. My name becomes the drawing of a boat heading by itself through its future.[223]

[222] Abirached, "Artist's statement," 72.

[223] Alex Dueben, "I was convinced that Beirut Stopped at the wall: Interview with Zeina Abirached," 25 November 2013. http://www.tcj.com/i-was-convinced-that-beirut-stopped-at-that-wall-an-interview-with-zeina-abirached/

Fig.15: Progressive identity evolution.

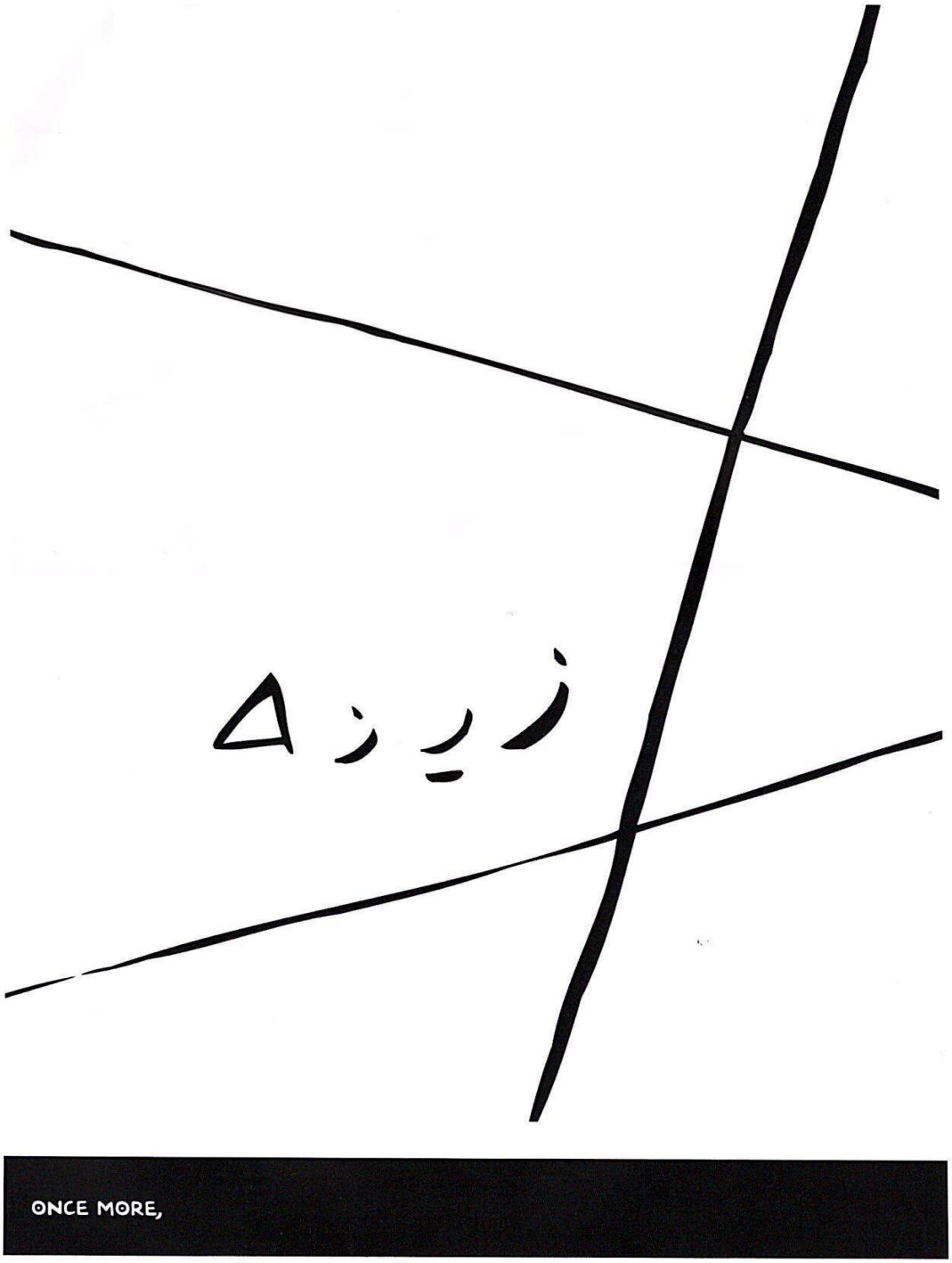

Fig.16: continued.

The pace of the visual transformation of the name is slowed down with the narrative. In each panel, there are only two words in the textbox. The Arabic name is imprisoned between the straight crossed lines and creates a sense of rigidity. The lines could also suggest the borders that

divide. One could link these borders to the ideologies and beliefs that tore apart Lebanese people during the civil war. As shown in figure 16, the number of lines are reduced from five to three and the letters are disconnected. The panel zooms in on the Arabic name that is transfiguring to a shape. In figure 17, in the left panel, the straight lines are transformed to one curve which offers a sense of fluidity. The last letter of the Arabic name, "ـه" (H in English) is transfigured to the sail of the boat and all other letters are replaced by small curves. The right panel depicts a more complete version of the boat. The dominant white of the left panel and the dominant black of the right panel may suggest Abirached's dual cultural state and how she came in terms with the two cultures in the last panel. In the last panel, one can see the final version of the transformed name which could be seen as Abirached's identity. The two sails may show Abirached's Middle Eastern and Arab culture and her journey towards transculturality.

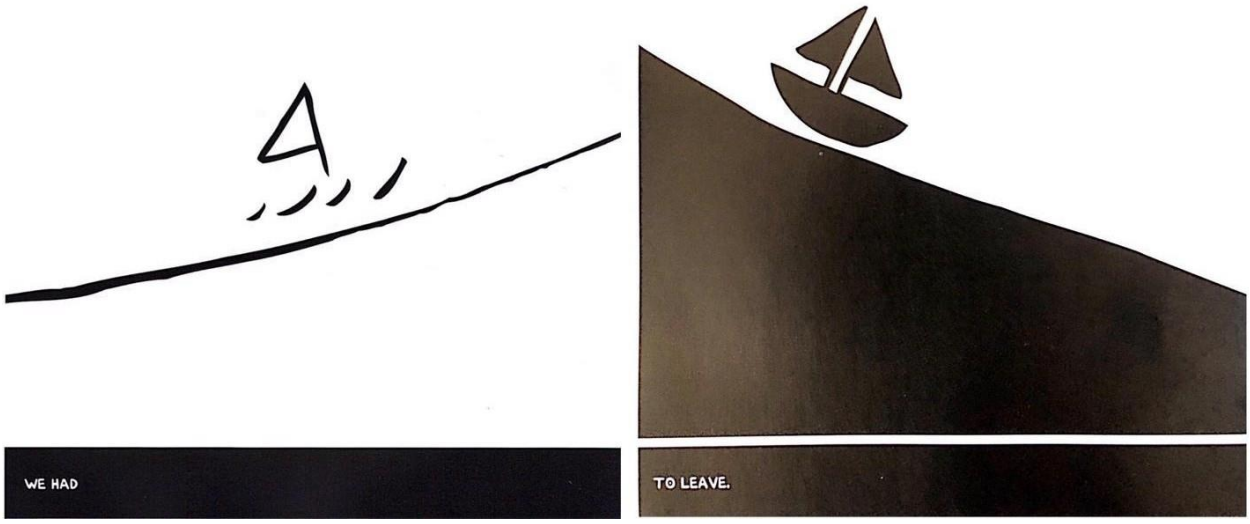

Fig. 17: dual culturality.

In *Le Piano Oriental*, Abirached re-negotiates her identity in two alternative stories. The story of her great-grandfather, Abdellah Kamanja who invented a so-called oriental piano, as well as Abirached's own story, leaving Lebanon for France in 2004, along with her struggle to find her identity between Beirut and Paris. The bilingual piano— one that can shift fluently between oriental and occidental modes at the touch of a pedal— becomes an allegory for Abirached's dual cultural and linguistic heritage. Abirached states that she has this oriental piano in herself:

> Un piano oriental… cette étrange juxtaposition de deux visions du monde que rien ne semble pouvoir lier, sa musique double, le son léger du déhanchement inattendu d'une note au milieu d'une phrase je les porte en moi.[224]

When she became *francaise,* she begins to re-negotiate her dual cultural and linguistic heritage and her Arabic comes back: "J'étais naturalisée Française, et ma langue se rebiffait […] comme si elle voulait me rappeler d'où je venais."[225] It is only after obtaining French naturalization that she realizes her French with an oriental accent will give way to the reception of her Lebanese identity in France. She also notices that she uses unconsciously some of the Arabic words while speaking French (for example, Yaani/يعني instead of c'est-à-dire).

Fig. 18: Transcultural identity.

[224] Abirached Zeina, *Le Piano oriental*, 148.

[225] Ibid., 172.

Fig. 19:
Where is home? بيت or maison? Lebanon or France?

While the little girl in *A Game for Swallows*, wears a T-shirt with the emblem of a house (a home) and finds refuge in the space of home stories, the young Zeina in *Le Piano Oriental* who moved to France and found a new home, wears a T-shirt with a suitcase on it. Her identity becomes a combination of Middle-eastern and French cultures. This transcultural status leaves Zeina in a space, missing from all maps and panels. It is a space (fig.19) that integrates the very different spheres of Beirut and Paris. This is the "third space" theorized in the postcolonial

studies by Homi Bhabha[226] as the hybrid space that disrupts the stories, translating them, reframing them and interpreting them in an original way. I call this in-betweenness position, a "*trans*-space" that lies beyond the divides and the differences of cultures. The *trans*-space allows Abirached to come in terms with a violent past, renegotiate her identity, and create points of contacts between her both Arab and French cultures.

The duality (Black and white, Beirut and Paris, Arabic and French, text and image) in her graphic novels invites the reader to Abirached's *trans*-space representing the most appropriate response to (latent) tensions between individuals, cultures, and East/West. The graphic novel allows building bridges of understanding between cultures and societies in need of reconciliation.

This chapter developed an understanding of the female francophone middle-eastern writer in diaspora whose major concern is the geopolitical instabilities and war in the Middle-East.

Abirached's entire work can be seen as a complex composition of an autobiographical space created in relation to the hometown, represented in its domestic and urban dimension. The physical being of the graphic novel allowed her to challenge the memory of war and map it through the lines on the comics page. Her identity evolves with the discovery and awareness of the complexity of space and the self-recognition of her cultural diversity. The migration to Paris as a new urban space gave her the necessary distance to re-negotiate her cultural duality over time and to reach, the "*trans*-space."

[226] Bhabha Homi K, *The location of culture* (London, Routledge, 2012).

Like Satrapi, Abirached has acquired a transcultural orientation that "stresses the power of confluences,[227] overlappings, and interactions rather than of polarities."[228] Both writers experienced an identity evolution that emerged by border crossings. Both stories written in the format of the graphic novel, known as a Western-style are creative as they retell the complexities of the Middle-East in the language of the *other*. They also exploit the hybrid format of the graphic novel to acknowledge the cultural differences and most importantly to suggest a "cultural confluence"[229] that happens to them in the *trans*-space. Their use of comics as a site of resistance is unique as it empowers them to raise their voices against the tyranny of the patriarchal government and instability of geopolitical borders in Iran and Lebanon.

Today in the Middle-East, the graphic novel (written in any language) has an active role in the awareness and mobilization of the societies which refuse now to accept the dictates of politicians. More importantly, the study of the growing francophone comics[230] written by the middle-eastern writers in diaspora is important as it creates a dialogue with the West and allows us to imagine a tolerant future where the differences are no longer the points of opposition but the points of contacts.

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[227] Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural writers and novels in the age of global mobility*, 202. Arianna Dagnino defines confluence as "the effect of processes of amalgamation, overlapping, and permeation in the ongoing meeting, creation, and re-creation of cultures."

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid, 35.

[230] According to Reyns-Chikum in "Marjane Satrapi and the Graphic Novels from and about the Middle East" (2017 760), the "main countries or cultures producing comics and graphic novels are Egypt, Iran, Lebanon."

Conclusion
Beyond *Persepolis* and *A Game for Swallows*

This dissertation has strived to show how two francophone Middle Eastern writers frame their experiences of living in war and revolution and negotiate their identities beyond the homeland borders using the medium of graphic novel. In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated the identity construction process of female Middle Eastern writers. My research was guided by the question of how Satrapi and Abirached narrate themselves on the page as they are suspended between two cultures. Indeed, I was concerned to show how Satrapi and Abirached's transnational experiences and transcultural attitudes affected their graphic novels. They selected the multimodal graphic novel medium, known as a Western-style, to recount their multidimensional stories. While Satrapi reviewed the violence on the comics pages by multiplying her graphical selves, Abirached mapped the violence through space. Moreover, as I maintained, Satrapi and Abirached made more political use of comics. As a "site of resistance," comics allowed for opposition to state-ordained amnesia (Taïf Agreement), the tendency towards war, and the stereotypical image of Middle Eastern women, to name a few. As Wagenknecht puts it in *Constructing Identity in Iranian-American Self-Narrative*, "autobiographical narratives as a performance of identity are also always fraught with politics and intentions."[231] While Iran, Lebanon, and surrounding countries certainly have their issues, by showing subjective and personal stories, Satrapi and Abirached showed that women are much more than passive victims of society. It is through the comics, as a form of popular culture that now people from different ethnicities, religions, gender find common grounds despite the differences. As such comics in the

[231] Maria Wagenknecht, *Constructing Identity in Iranian-American Self-Narrative*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 7.

Middle East become the "true voice of the people"[232] and "a manifestation of people's responses to what is taking place around them." [233]

Indeed, by highlighting the transcultural aspect of the corpus of this study, I maintained that Satrapi and Abirached belong to the *trans*-space where they "experience the interaction of cultures and languages as they fluidly intermingle."[234] This is the state allowing both writers to come in terms with the violent past, renegotiate their identity, and create bridges between two apparently opposite worlds (West/East). The transcultural works of Satrapi and Abirached invalidate ideologies such as "The Clash of Civilisations" and their works could be the most thoughtful responses to the tensions between individual, languages, and cultures.

There are other comics that tackle some of the same issues as *Persepolis* and *A Game for Swallows*. After Satrapi's *Persepolis*, that explored the Iran of the seventies and eighties, *L'Arabe du futur* is the most famous Francophone graphic novel that depicts another part of the Middle East dealing with violence and dictatorship. Far from being a political comics, it retains particular modes of generating humor and meaning through depictions of the intimate, the personal, and the private. Like Satrapi, Sattouf shows how his protagonist feels displaced between different cultures. *L'Arabe du futur: Une jeunesse au Moyen-Orient (1984-1985)* depicts Riad's struggles with his physical features between different cultures. In Syria, Riad is called a *Yehudi*(Jew) because of his blond hair. In France, Sattouf who is now a teenager feels left out of place in school. His blonde hair is now black and he is called "gay" because of his delicate feminine voice. Sattouf felt displaced in both Syria and France. He ultimately found a

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[232] Walid El Hamamsy, Mounira Soliman, *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 7.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Cited in Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural writers and novels in the age of global mobility*, 152.

nationality in his comic books. He states, "I am the author of comic books and it's my first nationality, I am not proud of being French or Syrian. I have much more in common with a Japanese guy who draws manga rather than my neighbor in France."[235]

Coquelicots d'Irak is another Francophone story of coming-of-age in the Middle East by Brigitte Findakly and illustrated by Lewis Trondheim. It adds a unique storytelling angle to the themes of *Persepolis* and *L'Arabe du futur* by offering a nostalgic picture of good times in Iraq. Following the thread of Franco-Iraqi Findakly's memories, we discover a family life affected by political instabilities, witnessing the slow dissolution of Iraqi society and an inescapable exile towards France. The nonlinear story of Findakly as an adult watching the war news, goes back and forth between present and past to capture Iraq, the place that she once called home. Similar to Marji, Brigitte feels uprooted (the author's word) between cultures. Having grown up in Mosul (Iraq), 14-year old Findakly encapsulates the beauty of home, even amid cultural and religious repressions. Her first uprooting moment happened when she realized that her holidays in France is longer than usual. Four years later, in 1977, the family goes back to Iraq where she believed to be her home. However, Iraqi life had changed in many ways. Besides the regime coups, the moral codes also were dictated to ordinary people. She feels disassociated with the home culture and comes back to France the same year.

Similar to Zeina Abirached, the Franco-Lebanese artist, Lamia Ziadé explores the memories of the first four years of the war from a child's perspective in *Bye Bye Babylone*. Ziad is seven-years-old and lives in East Beirut when the war breaks out. According to the back cover, *Bye Bye Babylone* is a graphic novel but the style does not seem to respect the conventions of the genre. The sketchbook style juxtaposes full-page images with short paragraphs similar to captions and contains no speech bubbles. Ziadé's "pictures" are interesting not only because of

[235] Riad, Sattouf, interviewed on NPR's Fresh Air, 2015, http://thearabofthefuture.com

their stylistic characteristics, but they also transgress the limits of conventional forms of the medium of comics. *Bye Bye Babylone* could be read "like an exhaustive catalog of civil war."[236] Unlike, Satrapi and Abirached, Ziadé puts the violence in bright colors. Ziadé juxtaposes the familiar with scenes of shocking violence suggesting how the war became part of daily life. Rather than offering a political polemic, Ziadé shows how it felt to find the comforts of consumer culture give way to the everyday violence. In the context of state-maintained amnesia, *Bye Bye Babylone* contributes, as discussed in chapter two, to the archival project started by Lebanese writers.

In addition to Francophone writers, other comic artist evoked the conflicts of the Middle East in their works in English. For example, *Baddawi*, written by the Palestinian-American writer Leila Abdelrazaq, recounts the autobiographical story of author's father growing up in a refugee camp called "Baddawi," in Lebanon. This graphic novel contributes to the "never forgetting"/witnessing project of Satrapi, as the writer clearly states in the preface of her graphic novel, "When Israel began ethnically cleansing Palestine in 1947, it was believed that Palestinian people would disappear with time, ...that the old would die and the young would forget. This book is a testament to the fact that we have not forgotten."[237]

Interestigly, a wide range of comics journalism—a subsection within the comics medium covering news and real events—is produced about the Middle East by Western journalists and authors who traveled to conflict zones in Palestine, Israel and Syria and created the comics journalisms about the Middle. Their works include *Palestine* by Joe Sacco, *Escape From Syria* by Samya Kullab, and *Palestine, dans quel État?* by Maximilien Le Roy. Privileging the

[236] Felix Lang, "Ghosts in The Archive," 488.

[237] Leila Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi* (Charlottesville: Just World Books 2015), 12.

individual testimony, Le Roy and Sacco gives a voice to ordinary Palestinians. The common concern of these comics is to show the injustice felt by the people in the region as a result of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Similarly, the Canadian journalist-author Samya Kullab, in her *Escape from Syria,* tells the story of a displaced Syrian family and their experiences of war before arriving in Canada. The story is told from the eyes of a teenage girl, Aminah representing Syrian refugees and their imposed immigration to other countries. It has been written for a Western audience so that they relate to the life of the ordinary people despite the political complexities in Syria. *Palestine* and similar works by western writers might not be able to change the situation in war zones, but they offer a new form of exchange/understanding between the tropes of East and West.

In the Preface to *Multicultural Comics*, Parker Royal states, "[G]iven its reliance on symbols and iconography, comics art speaks in a language that is accessible to a wide audience, transcending many of the national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries imposed by other media and giving it a reach that is as democratic as it is immediate."[238] Royal's statement surely points out to the transnational and transcultural potential of comics as a medium that allows for interaction, blurring the cliché, and "the transcendence of limitations imposed by the nation, by culture, and by language."[239] But Royal's statement addresses the political dimension of comics as "immediately accessible"[240] and "democratic form of storytelling."[241] Is comics the "democratic" storytelling of a Middle Eastern against the dictatorship, and the unwanted conflicts? Is comics a means of freedom of speech and conscious?

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[238] Cited in Daniel Stein, Shane Denson, and Christina Meyer, eds. *Transnational perspectives on graphic narratives: comics at the crossroads* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 4-5.

[239] Ibid., 5.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Ibid.

In the graphic novels, the creation of meaning depends on the interaction, the exchange and the movement between the frames. Indeed, there are a series of transgressions and interactions, from panel to panel, violating the borders of individual images and crossing the expanse of gutter. It is still unclear how this formal aspect will lead to the promotion of transcultural understanding and democracy in large scale as stated by Parker. However, its formal features are compatible with its intercultural exchanges and blurring the limits. As an extension of this study, it will thus be interesting to see what kinds of new storytelling will emerge in Francophone/Middle Eastern graphic novels and how they will continue to mediate transcultural exchange and the complexities of the world.

Appendix

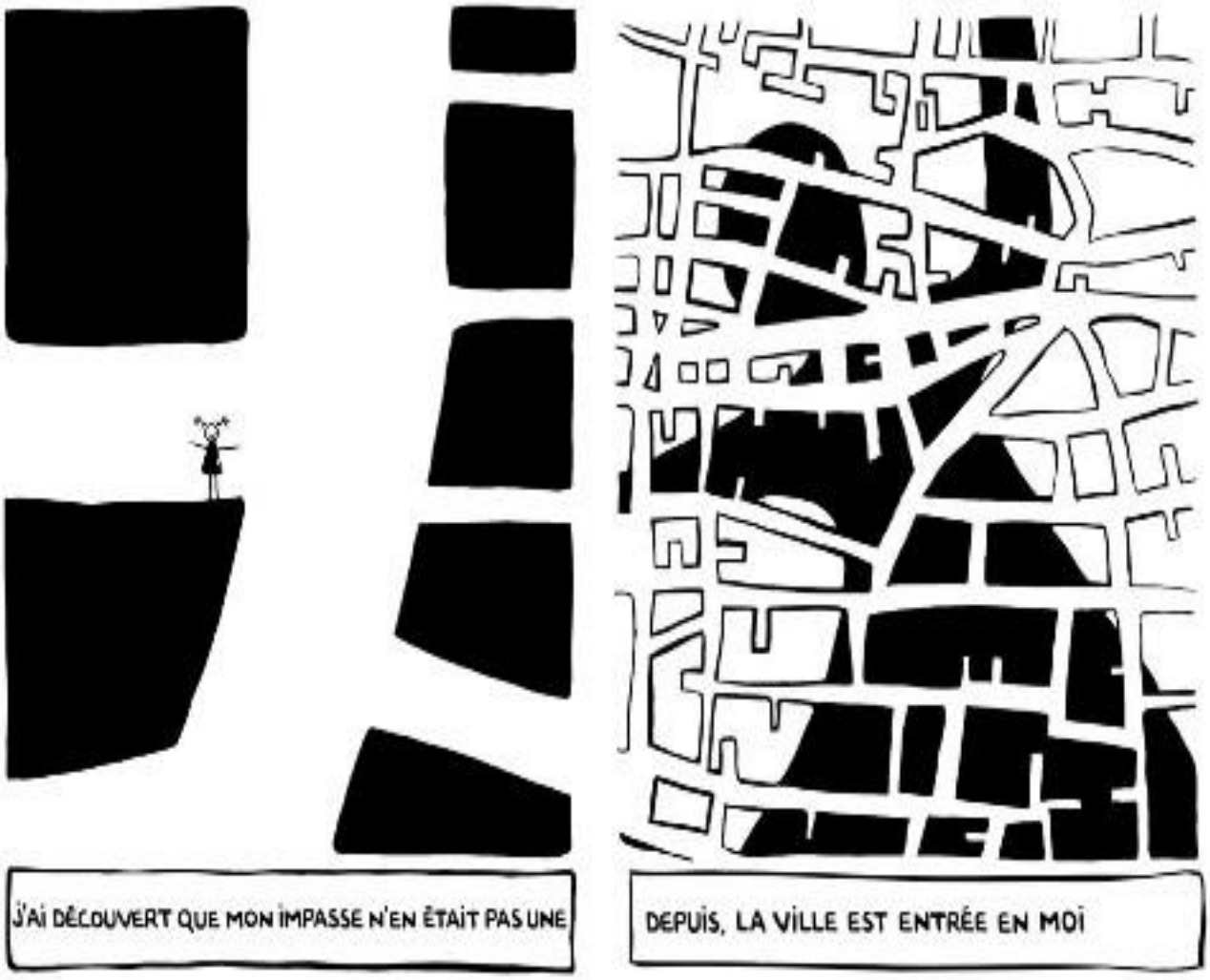


Figure 1: Zeina Abirached, *Beyrouth Catharsis (Beirut Catharsis)*.
Once the wall made of sandbags in Youssef Semmani Street and the demarcation line are removed, Zeina begins to explore the unknown urban space of Beirut.

Figure 2: Zeina Abirached, *Le Piano Oriental*.
When Zeina learns how to read, she decodes every word in her way to school. She begins to question the meaning of some of the graffiti such as “Mourir debout mieux que vivre.”

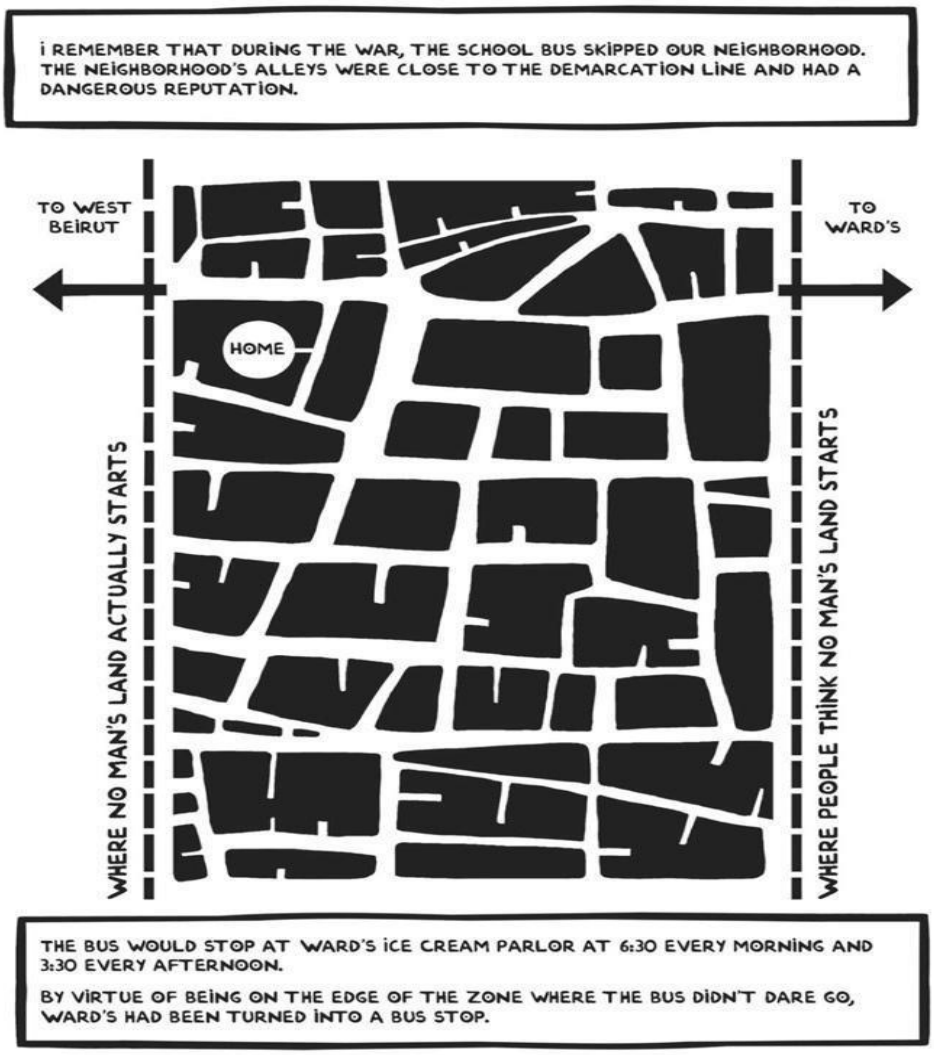


Figure 3: Zeina Abirached, *Je me souviens: Beyrouth*.
The aerial map of Abirached's neighborhood in East Beirut. The school skipped the neighborhood located next to the demarcation line due to its bad reputation.

Figure 4: Riad Sattouf, *L'Arabe du future*. Marginalized women /women as servant in private sphere.

Figure 5: Riad Sattouf, *L'Arabe du futur*. Women shown as being submissive in public sphere.

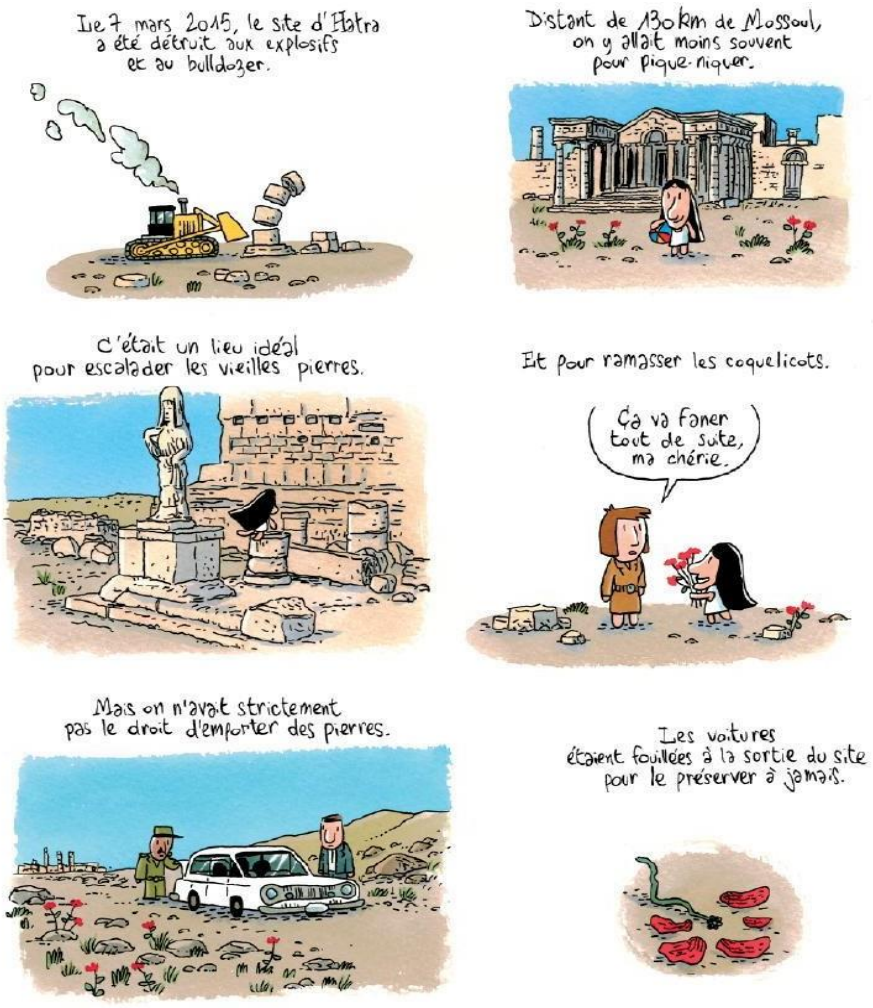
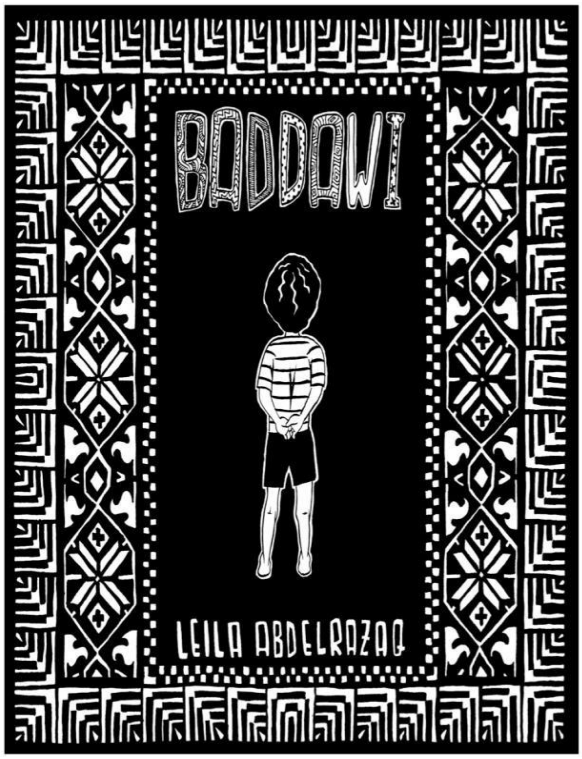


Figure 6: Brigitte Findakly, *Coquelicots d'Irak*. History, Beauty, Violence.
In 2015, Islamic State militants have destroyed ancient remains of the 2,000-year-old city of Hatra because of its "un-Islamic features."

Figure 7: Lamia Ziadé, *Bye Bye Babylone*. Abundance of information.
Lamia on the top corner of the image looks down and struggles to digest the abundance of information lacking comprehensible connection.



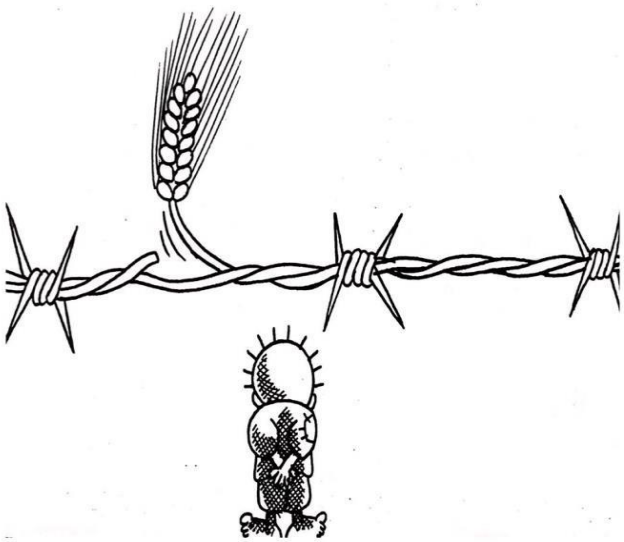


Figure 8 (Left): Leila Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi*. Faceless position of five million Palestinian refugees.
Figure 9 (Right): Symbolic character of Handala representing Palestinians. It was created by the Palestinian cartoonist, Naji Al-Ali.

Figure 10: Leila Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi*. The unreachable.
The sun is transformed to the map of *Palestine* full of *Tatreez*—traditional Palestinian embroidery—and seems out of reach. Whether Abdelrazaq's father goes to the United States or stay in Lebanon, the path would end to Palestine.

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