



Comics in the Arab world. Birth and spread of a new literary genre

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Abstract. The research focuses on the birth and development of the comics, a new literary genre in the Arab world. The paper takes into account the dynamics of the advent of comics in the first Arab countries until to our days when comics began to appeal to an adult audience, sometimes taking inspiration from material from the West, sometimes referring to traditional elements of Arab culture. With the advent of the Arab revolutions, this genre has become more widespread and has also been used by artists to express dissent and criticism. Following the fall of dictatorial regimes in some Arab countries, the power of censorship has diminished; this has allowed the proliferation of different types of comics, also thanks to the fundamental role of social networks and the Internet.

Through the examination of comics in the Arab world it is possible to shed light on a new literary genre and it is possible to trace the lines of the evolution of its themes and language.

Keywords: Contemporary Arabic literature, new literary genres, comics, language.

[es] Cómicos en el mundo árabe. Nacimiento y desarrollo de un nuevo género literario

Resumen. La investigación se centra en el nacimiento y el desarrollo de los cómicos, un nuevo género literario en el mundo árabe. El documento tiene en cuenta la dinámica del advenimiento de los cómicos en los primeros países árabes hasta nuestros días cuando los cómicos comenzaron a atraer a un público adulto, a veces inspirándose en material de Occidente, a veces refiriéndose a elementos tradicionales de la cultura árabe.

Con el advenimiento de las revoluciones árabes, este género se ha generalizado y los artistas también lo han utilizado para expresar disidencia y crítica. Tras la caída de los regímenes dictatoriales en algunos países árabes, el poder de la censura ha disminuido; esto ha permitido la proliferación de diferentes tipos de cómicos, también gracias al papel fundamental de las redes sociales e Internet.

A través del examen de los cómicos en el mundo árabe, es posible arrojar luz sobre un nuevo género literario y es posible trazar las líneas de la evolución de sus temas y lenguaje.

Palabras clave: literatura árabe contemporánea, nuevos géneros literarios, cómicos, lenguaje.

Summary: Introduction. Goals and Methodology. Overview of the diffusion of comics in the Arab world. The role of comics during the Arab revolutions. Language and style. Conclusion.

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Introduction

Among the new literary genres in the Arab world we can include the appearance of comic-strip narration for adult audience with a more widespread use of the variety of Arabic dialect and mixed linguistic registers.

As regards the literature and comics, we remember the figure of Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846), a Swiss illustrator and writer who had a founding role regarding the evolution of comics. He intuited the narrative potential of comics and conceived a novel form of it, speaking for the first time of *en estampes*² (1836). About the revaluation of this literary genre, De Angelis says:

Often misunderstood and undervalued, comics have acquired greater literary, artistic and expressive dignity with the passing of time, as shown by the expansion of dedicated sections in bookshops, the opening of specialised shops, the organisation of festivals and exhibits and the great number of studies on the topic, among other things³.

This literary genre produced above all by a new generation of artists has spread in the Arab world mainly through the Internet: blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and other social networks, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, through traditional national publishing.

The first comics magazines and collections were initially aimed primarily at children. Only later, in the 1980s, comics began to appeal to an adult audience, sometimes taking inspiration from material from the West, sometimes referring to traditional elements of Arab culture.

With the advent of the Arab revolutions, this genre has spread even more and has also been used by artists to express dissent and criticism.

The language used in the comics has changed over time and in relation to the contexts and the type of message. In the evolution of this genre a link between language and political vision emerges.

Goals and Methodology

The research has as object an overview of the birth and development of the genre of comics in the Arab world, with a particular focus on the Mashreq area.

The study takes into consideration the dynamics of the advent of comics in the Arab countries (first Egypt, then Lebanon) and analyzes the first magazines and collections initially aimed primarily at children. In a second moment the work examines the dynamics that led to a new genre of comics aimed at an adult audience and focused on socio-political issues.

Through the examination of comics in the Arab world from the early twentieth century to the present day, it is possible to shed light on a genre that is not available

² TÖPFFER, Rodolphe, “Réflexion à propos d’un programme” in *Bibliothèque universelle de Genève*, Genève (1836). For further information: GROENSTEEN, T., PEETERS, B., *Töpffer. L’invention de la bande dessinée*, Hermann, Paris, 1994.

³ DE ANGELIS, Francesco, “Graphic Novels and Comic Book in Post-Revolutionary Egypt: Some Remarks” in *La rivista di Arablit*, anno V, n. 9-10, (2015), 27-65, 28.

in many academic studies and it is possible to trace the lines of the evolution of themes and language.

The titles of magazines and comics were reported with the scientific transcription in Latin characters. The names of the artists were reported with the recurring anglophone transcription.

Overview of the diffusion of comics in the Arab world

The Arabic term for the word “comic” is “*qiṣṣa muṣawwara*” (“drawn history”), however in the Arab world the *medium* is rarely indicated in this way, in fact the English transliteration “comics” is preferred.

We must immediately identify the existence of two culturally and geographically different production areas: the Maghreb area which testifies to a French influence from the colonial era⁴ and that of the Mashreq, with its center in Cairo and Beirut, which suffers from the English influence.

Arab cartoonists often consider the origins of comics to be traced back to Egyptian hieroglyphics or illustrated medieval stories of *Maqāmāt* and *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, underlining how this genre dates back to a tradition that has millennial roots, and showing that it is authentic and authoritative⁵.

However, in modernity, the appearance of comics in the Arab world is linked to the printing of children’s magazines. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, some books began to appear containing widely illustrated stories and with educational intentions that were circulated in school environments.

The first of these was the Egyptian *Rawḍat al-Madāris* (“The school garden”), published by the minister of education ‘Alī Mubārak, which dates back to 1870. The concept of comics at the time relegated the drawing to a supporting role and to a simple learning facilitation tool.

Other examples of these magazines are *Samīr aṣ-ṣaġīr* (“Little *Samīr*”, 1877), *al-Madrasa* (“The school”, 1893) and *at-Tilmīd* (“The pupil”, 1893), from whose titles it is clear the didactic and scholastic nature⁶.

We will have to wait until the 1940s to see the spread of a new, but not very dissimilar, kind of comic book, which always appears in already existing children’s magazines, but now with an intent also aimed at entertainment. During this period, the most important magazine was *al-’Awlād* (“The boys”), the first entirely dedicated to comics for children, with educational and entertainment purposes, published in 1923 in Egypt. In this magazine, in addition to didactic games or crossword puzzles, there were eight pages of comics that narrated the adventures of a group of children. The story was told in rhyme under each cartoon, the characters and the context were carefully drawn and had a local characterization: we see that children wear *ġallabīyya* and *ṭarbūs*.

Another important magazine was *al-Katkūt* (“The chick”), also published in Egypt from 1946 to 1948. Among long texts of fantastic, scientific, religious or re-

⁴ VIGNA, Giuseppe, *I fumetti nel Maghreb*, Thapros, Olbia, 2012.

⁵ DOUGLAS, Allen, DOUGLAS, Fedwa Malti, *Arab Comic Strips: Politics o fan Emerging Mass Culture*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington e Indianapolis, 1994.

⁶ GAMEEL, Muhib, 2014, “Egyptian comics: A history with a revolutionary flavour”, *Al-Akhbar English*; September 30, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/21779> [Last Access: October, 29, 2019].

creational nature, it left only a small space of two or three pages to comics that were translations or adaptations of pre-existing European comics. The magazine *al-Katkūt* became famous for the Arabic version of *Tintin*: Arabic was in fact one of the first languages in which the famous French comic was translated, twelve years earlier than in English.

After this magazine other similar journals are created such as *Būlbūl* (“Nightingale”, 1946), and *‘Alī Bābā* (1951)⁷. Their success was enormous, so much so as to induce the preference of the publishing houses in investing on imports rather than on local productions.

The real explosion of the comic book genre occurred in the 1950s with comics always aimed at children. Some examples are the Egyptian magazines *Sindbād* published by the Egyptian publishing house Dār al-Ma‘ārif, (1952) and *Samīr* published by Dār al-Hilāl (1955), whose role was fundamental in the development of the Arab comic. These were the first comics to contain the typical graphic elements of the genre, such as the use of balloons for dialogues. In *Sindbād* the authors used the standard Arabic language, a choice that gave a certain rigidity to the text and reflected the educational intentions of the magazine, inspired by a pan-Arab vision. *Samīr*, on the other hand, was the first magazine to use *‘āmmiyya*, or colloquial Arabic, contributing to a wider reception by the local public.

Also in this period a strong influence came mainly from non-Arab authors⁸, whose works were imported and translated or revisited in an Arab version.

Starting in the 1960s, the main comic production center moved from Egypt to Lebanon. This country had a special role in the printing of material imported from the West. Lebanon was therefore the second country, after Egypt, to publish comics, starting in 1955 with *Dunyā al-‘ahdāī* (“The world of youth”), biweekly journal modeled on the first children’s magazines such as the Egyptian *Sindbād*, continuing with other newspapers until reaching the peak of production in the sixties and seventies.

Political parties exploited the potential of comics by making them a means of propaganda, funding magazines that presented explicit support for their ideologies. Examples are found not only in Egypt, but also in Syria and Iraq, with the respective children’s magazines *Usāma* (1969), *Mağallat-ī* (“My magazine”) and *al-Mizmār* (“The flute”, 1970), which became real propaganda tools of the respective regimes and leaders, often portrayed in heroic or paternalistic attitudes⁹.

This excessive infiltration of serious and important topics led to a progressive decrease in the interest of children in highly politicized and militarized Arab characters. In fact, imported comics were preferred to them; even though foreign comics were extraneous to Arab culture, they were more lively and imaginative.

In the sixties and seventies comics imported from the West and translated into Arabic took over, such as those with American Marvel and DC Comics superheroes and Disney characters; in this period the Arab authors also made adaptations of Japanese materials.

⁷ DAMLOUJI Nadim, 2016, “The Comic Book Heroes of Egypt”, <http://www.culture.com/arts/comic-book-heroes-egypt>. [Last Access: November 3, 2019].

⁸ DOUGLAS, Allen, DOUGLAS, Fedwa Malti, *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington e Indianapolis, 1994, 3.

⁹ GHAIBEH, Lina, 2011, “La propagande dans la bande dessinée arabe: du nationalisme au religieux”, <http://takantikou.bnf.fr/dossiers/dossier-2011-la-bande-dessinee/la-propagande-dans-la-bande-dessinee-arabe-du-nationalisme-a>. [Last Access: December, 3, 2019].

This kind of comics aroused a strong interest in the young audience, which soon preferred them to those of local Arab production because they were more lively and less “weighed down” by didactic or ideological intent.

In the late '70s and '80s the artists turned again to produce a series of comics for children made locally, such as the Pan-Arab magazine *Māğid* (the title is taken from the name of a Yemeni navigator of the XV century, Aḥmad ibn Māğid) of the United Arab Emirates; its diffusion, the vastness of its audience and the frequency of publication (weekly) make it one of the best known children's magazines in the Arab world¹⁰. It belongs to the Emirates only from a formal point of view, while artistically it should be considered Egyptian since it was founded by the Egyptian journalist Ahmad Omar and that its editorial staff included some of the most important Egyptian cartoonists such as Hijazi and El Labbad, who posed *Māğid* on an artistically higher level than other similar publications.

The first small number of adult comics appeared in Lebanon with *Carnaval* (1980) and *Freud* (1983) by George Khoury (called JAD), and the comics collective *JADWorkshop* with the publication *Min Bayrūt* in 1989.

In the 2000s the foundations were laid for the spread of comics with a cautious relaunch of the genre through a series of independent comics for adults: *Le Jeu des Hirondelles* by Zeina Abi Rashed, cartoon depicting the author's childhood during the civil war in Lebanon; the Lebanese comic book series inspired by the superhero *Malak*; *The 99*, a comic book from Kuwait, created by Naif Al-Mutawa and published by Teshkeel Comics, featuring a team of superheroes with special abilities based on the 99 attributes of Allah in Islam and the appearance of the alternative and experimental Lebanese comic book anthology *Samandal* which gained wide following locally and throughout the Mashreq. *Samandal*, born in 2007 from the idea of four publishers Omar Khouri, Lena Merhej, Hatem Imam and Fadi Baki (FDZ), deals with political and religious issues, also addressing the thorny issue of sectarianism in Lebanon. All these publications paved the way to broaden the consensus of an adult public to comic book.

In Egypt, among the ferments that have crossed the cultural circles, we find in 2008 *Mitrū* by Magdy El Shafee; it is the first example, throughout the Arabic area, of graphic novel¹¹ and also a sign of an increasing presence of young voices in a literary landscape open to new formats. Magdy El Shafee, born in Libya and son of Egyptian parents, moved to Cairo as a child, where he was inspired and fascinated by ancient Egyptian culture. El Shafee began to be a professional cartoonist at the age of forty, he began to publish strips in the ad-Duṣṭūr newspaper and launched the first Arab comics site online in 2005. He was influenced from Mickey Mouse to Robert Crumb, Charlie Hebdo and Hugo Pratt. In 2001 attended the Comics Workshop Egypt at the American University in Cairo and in 2003 he published his first series of comics for children, *Yasmīn & 'Amīna*, that narrates the adventures of two girls

¹⁰ DOUGLAS, Allen, DOUGLAS, Fedwa Malti, *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington e Indianapolis, 1994, 151.

¹¹ One of the first comic book stories to call itself a graphic novel was “A Contract with God”, published by Will Eisner in 1978; however this denomination was not coined by Will Eisner, as is commonly believed. In reality, the use of the term graphic novel has already been attested since the early 1960s in other publications. In November 1964 the “fanzine” writer Richard Kyle referred to it about a long comic book format and, later, in 1976, George Metzger used it in “Beyond Time and Again”. The term graphic novel is also found in “Bloodstar” by Richard Corben, 1975.

who secretly travel with their father on a merchant ship, around the world. In 2006 UNESCO recognized the value of his work, evaluating him as the best cartoonist in Africa.

A week after its publication, all copies of the comic *Mitrū* were burned and author and publisher were sentenced to pay a high fine to avoid prison because of the presence of elements considered offensive to public morals, such as the use of too explicit verbal and visual language. The comic tells the story of Šihāb and his friend Muṣṭafā, who have become bank robbers out of necessity. The story takes place, for the most part, in Ma'ādī, a district of Cairo where the striking reality of two opposing parts emerges: one inhabited by the upper-middle class and the other populated by the poor. The story portrays a society trapped in corruption, unemployment, despotism and abuse of the ruling class; the media and their pro-government alignment are also criticized¹². Although the work is of a new genre in the Arab panorama, it is part of a social realism literature in which all the components in content and form, so the graphic representation, the plot of the history and realistic dialogues, critically delineate the image of Egyptian society.

This graphic novel was put back for sale in Egypt in 2012 in the English version by the Metropolitan Books publishing house. The original Arabic version is exclusively available for purchase online. In 2010, the Italian paper version was edited by Il Sirente and translated by Ernesto Pagano, who has been able to render the Egyptian dialect in all its colloquial liveliness and also choosing to keep some onomatopoeias in the original language.

The recognition of the comics as a new form of art was strengthened by the launch of the Comics Festival (FIBDA) in Algeria in 2008, as well as by the success of other initiatives.

Nowadays, the comic production in the Arab world is largely indigenous and original and is an integral part of an emerging mass culture whose forms may appear to be Western-style, but whose content has long since ceased to be so. In fact the recent trend is mostly based on the creation of an alternative model based on the imported one, in which historicized iconographic schemes are revisited to shape a new form of comics that is felt culturally closer. In this regard, we find local initiatives aimed at setting up production companies that focus on the diffusion of an oriental model of making comics, such as Ak Comics, which created the first superheroes in the Middle East¹³.

The role of comics during the Arab revolutions

The Arab revolutions and the fall of governments have strongly influenced the spread of comics which have represented an instrument of criticism and dissent. Before the revolutions, magazines and various types of printed publications were for a long time the only platform for reading comics, whose publication was controlled by the State. Comics have always suffered from a limited publication opportunity due to

¹² AVALLONE, Lucia "Autori Egiziani degli Anni Duemila. Blogosfera, Graphic e Postmoderno: Nuovi Linguaggi nel Panorama Letterario Arabo", in *Kervan- Rivista Internazionale di studi afroasiatici*, n.13/14, (2011), 25-46, 36.

¹³ DI MARCO, Serenella, *Fumetto e animazione in Medio Oriente Persepolis, Valzer con Bashir e gli altri: nuovi immaginari grafici dal Maghreb all'Iran*, Tunué, Latina 2011, 116.

lack of financial support; aside from the state-run periodicals, the comic book albums for adults were self-produced and independently financed.

The fall of governments and therefore of censorship has favored the spread of comic magazines. Comics that dealt with the problems of adults began to emerge, becoming very popular, especially among young people. An example is the magazine *Tūk tūk*, founded by five young artists (al-Shinnawi, Rahma, Andeel, Makhlof, and Tawfiq) from Cairo in January 2011 and published online to escape state censorship. Created by the young cartoonist Muhammad al-Shinnawi, this magazine includes different topics, all united by an irony that makes fun of the customs and habits deeply rooted in Egyptian society. *Tūk tūk* (the name refers to the “*tūk-tūk*”: a three-wheeled taxi very common in Egypt) highlights and ridicules the common defects of Egyptian society, proposing a critical analysis.

In Tunisia the cartoonist Othman Selmi in 2012 documented the revolution in *Spark: when Arab Spring Blossoms in Tunis*. In Morocco, Mohamed Amine Bellaoui, known as Rebel Spirit, published *Le guide Casablancaies 2014*, about his hometown Casablanca, and produced the comic magazine *Skef Kef*, which brought social problems to the surface¹⁴.

Various comic book collections emerged during this period, such as the Syrian *Comic4Syria*, which appeared exclusively online through social media, guaranteeing anonymity for the artists who focused their works on the difficult situation in Syria; in Tunisia we find collection *Bande de BD* which published in 2012 the comic book *BD Koumik* realized by 14 artists, including Nadia Khiari, creator of the popular satirical cat *Willis from Tunis*.

The network and social media have played a fundamental role in evading the censorship, ensuring a widespread diffusion of the comics and implementing the number of readers. Through the Internet many authors, often keeping anonymity, were able to show their works and spread their ideas.

Following the Arab springs with the fall of governments and therefore of the control of the censorship on artistic-literary forms, comics through media attracted international attention. Ghaibeh claims: «The democratisation of the uprisings led to an increased openness to the West, but also to other Arabic experiences; comic artists were introduced to the works of their lesser-known counterparts in the region, discovering and networking with each other»¹⁵.

In Syria art immediately became an essential tool in favor of the Syrian people dragged into the vortex of revolution and civil war. Already in the past the Syrian government, realizing the important role of comics in influencing the younger generations, had prohibited comic magazines in the 70s and 80s, allowing only the diffusion of *Osāma* created in 1972 to favor of the State. Although, for many years, there has been an active scene regarding comics in Syria, so far not many graphic novels have been published. Several attempts to realize comics magazines for adults failed due to a lack of sponsorship¹⁶.

¹⁴ GHAIBEH, Lina, “Telling Graphic Stories of the region: Arabic Comics after Revolution”, in IEMed, Mediterranean Yearbook, (2015), 324-29, 326.

¹⁵ GHAIBEH, Lina, “Telling Graphic Stories of the region: Arabic Comics after Revolution”, in IEMed, Mediterranean Yearbook, (2015), 324-29, 325.

¹⁶ BANK, Charlotte. “Culture, Comic Artists in the Arab World: Swimming against the Tide.” In *Qantara*, 18 July 2012. Available at <http://en.qantara.de/content/comics-artists-in-the-arab-world-swimming-against-the-tide> [Last Access: December, 5, 2019].

Since 2012 a new generation of Syrian illustrators and graphic designers began anonymously posting their comics on the *Comic4Syria* Facebook page, in which comics highlight the terrifying Syrian situation; regarding this, Halasa¹⁷ points out that, contrary to the regime's essentially monolithic propaganda, the anonymous web group *Comic4Syria* led a growing artistic revolutionary movement that encouraged dialogue, debate and free expression. These artists use art to express discontent with dictatorship and try to prevent despotic regimes of power. As Ghaibeh states: «The comics of this collective however brutal, do not exclude humour, with a series about a very unfortunate opposition fighter *Abou Mouss elMadsouss* who is snatched on and continuously gets caught or beaten up by the Shabiha»¹⁸.

In creating the stories of their comics, the young artists refer to real events, press articles, demonstrations and protests: *Comic4Syria* turns its attention to the events that happen daily in the country and to humanitarian, social, economic and political problems. The group of artists also addresses issues such as sectarianism and the repressive actions implemented by the Iranian regime together with the Syrian one.

Inside the FB *Comic4Syria* page is the comic *Kūktīl* (2013) which narrates the friendship between an Alawite boy Ḥussayn and a Sunni Aḥmad. Friends from childhood, the two protagonists find themselves related to the two faces of Syria, one pro Bashar and the other pro revolution. After the childhood spent together, the two boys will move away because of their different origins and political ideas, one loyal to the Alawite government, the other activist within the riots and object of harassment and violence by the military. In the end, however, they will find themselves united by the same feelings and will toast their friendship with a *Kūktīl*.

Language and style

In the import process the comic book texts were translated into standard Arabic with adaptations of names, settings, cultural references in an attempt to make them more familiar and usable to the Arab public.

An example is the case of Mickey Mouse (*Mīkī Māws*) which, introduced already from the magazine *al-Atfāl* ("The children", 1936)¹⁹, underwent a real "Egyptianization": *Mīkī* wears typical Arab clothes and holds a musical instrument similar to the 'ūd, typical string instrument of the Arab tradition.

The Arab revolutions was followed by the collapse of state propaganda and the emergence of a focus on local issues and problems. Although revolutions played an important role in the spread of comics, not all those produced during this period dealt directly with the riots. In their comics, the artists reproduced social issues, life on the streets with a marked sense of localization both in content and in form.

In *Mīrū* the designs offer a metropolis outside the common imagination. Cairo appears as a large city in the globalized world, with features shared by other societies in the modern world: buildings and skyscrapers, street symbols, billboards, streets crowded with cars and subway stations. Elements that connect the story narrated to

¹⁷ HALASA, Malu, OMAREEN, Zaher, MAHFOUD, Nawara, *Syria Speaks*, Saqi Books, 2014.

¹⁸ GHAI BEH, Lina, "Telling Graphic Stories of the region: Arabic Comics after Revolution", in IEMed, Mediterranean Yearbook, (2015), 324-29, 327.

¹⁹ MILLET, Bertrand, 1987, *Samir, Mickey, Sindibad et les autres. Histoire de la presse enfantine en Egypte*, CEDEJ, Egypte/Soudan. <http://books.openedition.org/cedej/503?lang=it> [Last Access: November, 12, 2017].

the local specificities are inserted in the comic strip, for example the old shoe-shineer Wannus and his daily environment; images of characters in traditional clothing (with the *ḥigāb* for the female figures and the *ǧallābiyya* for the male characters); representation of some places that represent points of reference in the Cairo geography the subway and the indications of each station, bridges, elevations, minarets, mosques and monuments.

Similarly street characters and stereotypes appear in other comics, such as the amusing valet in *Tūk Tūk* by al-Shinnawi and the brutal policeman in *Skef Kef* by Bellaoui.

While most of the older comics were written in literary Arabic, evoking the pan-Arab nationalism of the era in which they were created²⁰, since the period of the revolutions the different local varieties have had a strong impulse, in particular Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese and Tunisian Arabic. This brought comics closer to their audience, securing their place as a popular form of art.

In *Mitrū*, in the portrait that the author makes of the Cairo society, the language chosen as the *medium* of expression is generally the vernacular, although there are short parts in standard. The speech is rendered in Egyptian Arabic, both in the protagonist's thoughts and in the dialogues, but sometimes the high linguistic variety is adopted in order to emphasize the depth of reflection²¹.

In the Syrian comic strip *Kūktīl* the content is all about social criticism and the use of the image allows a simplification of the message, accentuated by the adoption of the Arabic dialect which ensures that the message reaches a wider range of readers. The realistic content and the recipients of the message, plausibly young comic readers close to the cultural environment of the author, are relevant factors in the choice of linguistic register for *Kūktīl*. The text does not present linguistic loans apart from the title of the cartoon *Kūktīl* from English term "cocktail". In this regard, the impact of slang terms, new words or common sayings that are inserted in the repertoire of the colloquial language is significant. Because one of the protagonists is Alawite, the authors also occasionally highlight some expressions typical of the Alawite variety that reflects the vernacular of rural areas.

In general the assumption of a sometimes trivial language aims to provide a harsh portrait of urban reality. The use of foul language or slang in writing belongs to a generation of young storytellers who choose to represent the harshness of reality even through a raw and unpleasant language.

Conclusion

Nowadays comics are not only a means of mass communication, but also a narrative form able to express formal values and offer compositions of undoubted aesthetic level²².

Many authors publish their works online, not only for the immediacy, speed and ease that the network implies, but also to potentially reach a worldwide diffusion, an

²⁰ Although many Egyptian comics from before nationalism were in the colloquial dialect, this slowly diminished in favour of the classical language.

²¹ AVALLONE, Lucia "Autori Egiziani degli Anni Duemila. Blogosfera, Graphic e Postmoderno: Nuovi Linguaggi nel Panorama Letterario Arabo", in Kervan- Rivista Internazionale di studi afroasiatici, n.13/14, (2011), 25-46, 37.

²² PELLITTERI, Marco, *Sense of Comics, La grafica dei cinque sensi del fumetto*, Castelvechi, Roma, 1998, 12.

audience as wide as possible and to escape possible state controls, which, in a more or less intense way depending on the countries, limit the freedom of expression.

Starting in the 2000s and even more following the revolutions, the Arab world offers a rich scene in the production of local comics. The current culture of comics in the Arab world is represented by young artists who publish comics aimed at a wider audience and, contrary to what happened in the past, suitable for a mature audience, since they deal with issues as religion, politics and sex in formats such as graphic novels, magazines, anthologies.

The linguistic register used has changed over time in relation to the historical-political contexts: during the years of pan-Arabism the artists, subsidized by the State, used standard Arabic, the language spoken by the whole Arab nation; from the 2000s and then even more during the Arab revolutions, the authors used the local dialectal variety, since it represents an instrument closest to the readers and which best expresses the everyday reality.