Recovering the Palestinian History of Dispossession through Graphics in Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*

Arya Priyadarshini[1]; Suman Sigroha[2]

Abstract. Documentation is a significant mechanism to prove one's identity. Palestinians, being robbed of this privilege to document their history, have taken upon other creative means to prove their existence. Being instruments of resistance, graphics and comics have a historical prominence in the Palestinian community. Building on this rich history of resistance through art, the paper contends that the modern graphic novel is used as a tool by the author to reclaim the Palestinian identity by drawing their rootedness in the region, thus resisting their effacement from public memory.
Keywords: Graphic Novel; Resistance; Trauma; Memory; Intifada; Displacement; *Baddawi*.

[es] Recuperando la historia palestina de desposesión a través de gráficos en *Baddawi* de Leila Abdelrazaq

Resumen. La documentación es un mecanismo significativo para probar la identidad de uno. Los palestinos, al ser despojados de este privilegio de documentar su historia, han tomado otros medios creativos para demostrar su existencia. Al ser instrumentos de resistencia, los gráficos y los cómics tienen una importancia histórica en la comunidad palestina. Sobre la base de esta rica historia de resistencia a través del arte, el artículo sostiene que la novela gráfica moderna, que es en sí misma un producto de resistencia a los cómics convencionales, es utilizada por el autor como una herramienta para recuperar la identidad palestina al extraer su arraigo en la región, resistiendo así la narrativa dominante y su borrado de la historia.
Palabras clave: Novela gráfica; Resistencia; trauma; memoria; Intifada; desplazamiento, *Baddawi*.

Summary. 1. Historical-Political Context. 2. Theoretical Framework. 3. Methodology. 4. Analysis. 5. Conclusion. 6. Written Sources and Bibliographical References.

How to cite: Priyadarshini, Arya; Suman Sigroha. "Recovering the Palestinian History of Dispossession through Graphics in Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*". In *Guerra y alteridad. Imágenes del enemigo en la cultura visual de la Edad Media a la actualidad*, edited by Borja Franco Llopis. Monographic Issue, *Eikón Imago* 15 (2020): 395-418.

_____

[1]   Indian Institute of Technology Mandi.
       E-mail: aryapriyadarshini@gmail.com
       ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9568-9098
[2]   Indian Institute of Technology Mandi.
       E-mail: suman.sigroha@gmail.com
       ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3122-881X

"I am seven
it is the day before our departure,
the day my father
gives me a notebook,
and I tell him,
this is where I'll keep my country"[3].

Historical books are rife with details of warfare and battle, and foundation and destruction of regimes from all over the world. Museums, monuments and memorials dedicated to such significant events also preserve these events in the public space for posterity. However, warfare is not merely a public affair; it affects the personal as much with its constant disruption and reconstruction of regimes and political boundaries. The accounts of such disintegration of individual lives, personal experiences of pain, suffering and trauma of survivors of war seldom get representation in the official documents. Thus, they seek an outlet through alternative forms of documenting history –art and literature. By means of oral narratives, autobiographies and memoirs, among others, the personal becomes public and the individual speaks for the collective, making it available for posterity. Due to the similarity of graphic medium with other visual forms of archiving past in public spaces, the medium has gained much attention in popular culture over the past few decades. Through the analysis of the graphic novel in this work, the paper seeks answers to questions such as whether graphic novel is one such tool to address this crisis in representation of memory in public history; and if art is capable of relaying what language fails to convey through the documentation of history. The paper thus addresses questions like, "What does it mean… to be erased by history but still be there? To be in and of a homeland, yet forbidden presence?… What voice, what language could transcribe such a radical schism?"[4].

1. Historical-Political Context

Reclamation of Palestinian memory, the right to narrate their history of exile and to return to their homeland is essential since it is being consistently contested, uprooted and overwritten by the dominant Zionist forces[5]. The latter's practice of overwriting the history of the former Arab population that inhabited these lands with Hebrew names of the villages and streets as if Arabs never lived there is a violent act on their memory[6]. Joe Sacco expresses this persistent effacing of their history enforced by an erasure and replacement by Hebrew names in *Palestine*: "They destroyed everything. There is no sign that we ever lived there"[7]. It becomes

––––––––––

3   Nathalie Handal, "Nathalie Handal Introduced by Katie Lewis Hood", in *This Week in Palestine: Palestinian Poets and Poetry,* ed. Tina Basem, no. 227 (2017), 31.

4   Lisa Suhair Majaj. "Personality of the Month: Mahmoud Darwish", in *This Week in Palestine: Palestinian Poets and Poetry,* ed. Tina Basem, no. 227 (2017), 82, accessed October 20, 2019.

5   Patrick Williams and Anna Ball, "Where is Palestine?", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50, no. 2 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2014.883164

6   Tahrir Hamdi, "Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance", *Race & Class* 52, no. 3 (2011), http://doi.org/10.1177/0306396810390158

7   Joe Sacco, *Palestine: In the Gaza Strip* (Washington: Fantagraphic Books, 1996), 15.

a matter of contestation also because Palestinians have not been granted the "permission to narrate"[8] their colonialized experience as their history has been written in western narratives. The postcolonial history of the land recognises and institutionalises the history of Israel but abandons the Palestinian memory of exile, the events of al-Nakba (1948) and al-Naksa (1967)[9]. Historically, a lot has been written about the region in biblical narratives, but the mention of Arabic presence on the land has been strategically scrapped[10]. The non-existence of literature on the land, its culture, religious sites and economy makes it easier to obliterate their presence and overwrite their history[11]. As Doumani argues, "In the mind of many Europeans, especially Zionist Jews, Palestine was empty before the arrival of the first wave of Jewish settlers in 1881-1894"[12]. In this elimination of one version of history and replacement with another, two memories constantly compete against one another to achieve dominance.

This gradual erasure of the memory of Palestine from the region dates back to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which declared that the British and the French would administer over Palestine post the fall of Ottoman Empire, which later came to be exclusively administered by the British[13]. This marked the beginning of a sense of ambiguity about the region. Further, the Balfour declaration of 1917, considered to be a dark memory in the history of Palestinian existence, sparked and encouraged Zionist intentions as it sanctioned Israel as the "national home for Jews"[14]. Both of these led to a catastrophic crisis of identity among the erstwhile native Arabs. Although the Palestinians claimed their indigenous connection to the territory[15], however, with no official document to claim their rightful place, they became refugees on their own land. El-Shakry maintains, "the use and abuse of both paper and what we might term non-documentary archives have led to 'subjugated knowledge', 'excluded socialities' and 'aporia'"[16]. Following these historical developments, the status of Palestinians in the present world is akin to an oxymoron, "present absentees" –a term given by Edward Said, and which haunts millions of those living in exile, under the constant threat of being erased from history.

The term present absentees implies that Palestinians exist, nevertheless lack a place to practice their sovereignty and freedom of life. After the Camp David Accords signed by the representatives from Israel and Palestine in 1978, the dual regime –democratic state of Israel and the military ruled Occupied Territory of

_____

8   Williams and Ball, "Where is Palestine?", 128.
9   Williams and Ball, "Where is Palestine?".
10   Dawn Chatty, "Palestinian Dispossession and Exodus", in *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
11   Beshara B. Doumani, "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (1992); Dawn Chatty, "Palestinian Displacement", 185.
12   Doumani, "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine", 8.
13   Mayir Verete′, "The Balfour Declaration and Its Makers", *Middle Eastern Studies* 6, no. 1 (1970); Eugene Rogan, "A Century after Sykes-Picot: The Fall of Ottoman, the Rise of the Islamic State, and the Tragedy of Arab Independence", *Cairo Review* 19, (2015).
14   Rogan, "A Century after Sykes-Picot", 105.
15   Elie Rekhess, "The Arab Minority in Israel: Reconsidering the '1948 Paradigm'", *Israel Studies* 19, no. 2, Special Issue: Zionism in the 21st Century (2014).
16   Omnia El-Shakry, "History Without Documents: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization of Middle East", *American Historical Review* Roundtable (2015): 921.

Palestine– was established in the region. Although it ensured sovereignty for Israel, but due to military power of Israeli Defence Forces (IDFs), it kept Palestinians devoid of any political or economic space within the territory[17], and as a result in the1980s, the Palestinians began to resist this suppression. Grinberg argues that popular Palestine rebellion –*Intifada*, which started in 1987, was a result of the economic and political vulnerability created within the occupied territory due to difficult tax regimes and labour policies, besides the strenuous military rule in the refugee settlement areas. Further, it was also directed against the Zionist intentions of expansion in the occupied territories to establish Jewish settlements. At the same time, the rebellion was against the inefficiency of their own leaders, the representatives of Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) who could not fulfil their claims of granting rights to the Palestinians living under occupation, along with the right of the refugees to return[18]. They began with a "low level of violence"[19] in order to make their voice heard by the Israel administration initially. While working through several peace conferences such as Madrid Conference of 1991 and the Washington Conference organised before the Oslo Peace Agreement in 1993, they demanded "evacuation of Jewish settlements [from the Occupied Territory of Palestine], retreat of the IDF, independent control of their own border and economy"[20]. However, the Oslo Accord fell too short of it's perceived promise and any hope for economic prospects, independency, or any scope to raise political voice was squashed. The betrayal felt by the masses against their leaders and Israelis led to the reprise of the rebellion – Second *Intifada* in 1994 – with one difference, its violently aggressive nature. As a consequence, there has been an increased deployment of military force and repression in the Occupied Territory[21]. Several peace conferences have been organised since then in attempt to reach a consensus. However, the popular sentiment among the Palestinians continues to be of betrayal and duplicity in the name of formal peace accords, leading to a consistent resurgence of revolt from the community. The younger generation wants to regain the status quo that existed before the occupation in 1948 and 1967[22]. In addition, they want the recognition of their inherent connection to the territory and claim to the land besides the restoration of their dignity which have been time and again denied to them[23]. It is no wonder then that they seek these by means of violent outbursts such as *Intifada*, and other non-violent acts of creation which this paper talks about, to keep their struggle alive. Palestinian youth have voiced their determination to reclaim their right on the land through violent as well as non-violent means in their generational legacy of rebellion, also called *Intifada*.

---

[17]   Lev Luis Grinberg, "1987-1993 – The Intifada: Palestinian Resistance Mo(ve)ment", in *Mo(ve)ments of Resistance: Politics, Economy and Society in Israel/Palestine 1931-2013* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013).

[18]   Jamal R. Nassar, "The Culture of Resistance: The 1967 War in the Context of the Palestinian Struggle", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1997).

[19]   Grinberg, "1987-1993 – The Intifada", 221.

[20]   *Ibid*., 249.

[21]   *Ibid*.

[22]   Peter C. Valenti, "The Children Internalize the Meaning of the Occupation': Growing Up under the Israeli Occupation and a culture of Resistance in Joe Sacco's *Palestine*", in *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Memory and Trauma,* ed. Tatiana Prorokova and Nimrod Tal (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018).

[23]   Elie Rekhess, "The Arab Minority in Israel".

1.1. Aesthetics of Protest: Comics as Resistance in Palestine

Historically, art and aesthetics have always found a place in revolution against oppressing political regimes[24], and consequently, could not be far away from the era of revolution in the Middle East. In 2011, during the Arab Spring, a plethora of comic artists gave voice to their revolution and resisted oppression through street art. Graffiti artists in the Tunisian Revolution founded a 'culture of resistance' by taking their work to the public sphere on walls and buildings as a political act against the forces of oppression and dominance[25]. Resistance through comic art has also been an old tradition in the Palestinian struggle of reclaiming their identity and their homeland. This non-violent confrontation with the enemy holds a significant place in the Palestinian revolt against the Zionists. It is recognised as "a tool of resistance and a means to call people to remain steadfast"[26]. Scholars recognise the year of 1948 as the turning point in the literature of Palestine owing to the magnitude of disaster, al-Nakba, also translated as 'the tragedy'. The literature borne out of Nakba expresses tragedy as well as hope and the determination to return to their lost land. Then again, the start of Palestinian revolution after their defeat in the war of 1967, and as much due to their disappointment with their resistance leaders and opposition of oppression, the *Intifada* towards the last two decades of the 20th century is considered a milestone in Palestinian poetry and literature. Its representation in literature was used as a political and social cause to unite against the oppressive forces and to inspire, mobilise and recruit youth in their movement[27]. The surge in graphic novels from the Middle East follows this tradition of resistance and resolve to attain liberation. This outburst of the graphic medium in the past few decades from the region has been called a 'Silent *Intifada*' or the 'Third *Intifada*'[28].

Several comic artists from the region have used the visual medium to let out their anguish of being denied the 'right to return'. One among them is the popular artist and activist Naji al-Ali whose figure of Handala is commemorated as the symbol of Palestinian resistance[29]. Naji al-Ali, who was uprooted from his ancestral village during al-Nakba in 1948,[30] produced several caricatures in his early years which expressed his determination for the Palestine revolution[31]. The moment of introduction of Naji al-Ali's caricature, Handala, in 1969 is significant as it takes place soon after the defeat of the Arabs in the six-day war of 1967. It was a symbol of hope to cling on to for the distraught community in order to keep

---

24 Nicholas Korody, "The Revolutionary Art: Street Art Before and After the Tunisian Revolution", *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. 1134* (2011); Holly Eva Ryan, "Political Street Art in Social Mobilization: A Tale of Two Protests in Argentina", in *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication,* ed. Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen and Umut Korkut (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

25 Korody, "The Revolutionary Art".

26 Tarik Hamdan, "The Word that Means Homeland", in *This Week in Palestine: Palestinian Poets and Poetry,* ed. Tina Basem, no. 227 (2017), 5.

27 Hamdan, "The Word that Means Homeland".

28 Valenti, "The Children Internalize the Meaning of the Occupation", 143.

29 Mary Totry and Arnon Medzini, "The Use of the Cartoons in Popular Protests that Focus on Geographic, Social, Economic and Political Issues", *European Journal of Geography* 4, no. 1 (2013).

30 Totry and Medzini, "Cartoons in Popular Protests".

31 *Ibid*.

alive their determination to reclaim their rightful place. Totry and Medzini argue that Naji al-Ali was critical of the "hypocrisy of some of the PLO leaders… and the lack of democracy in the Arab world and the silencing of the opposition"[32]. Therefore, his artwork is directed not only against the oppressing Israeli forces, but also against the failure of their own leadership. The artist vows that his figure, Handala will "reveal his face to the readers again only when Palestinian refugees return to their homeland"[33]. Thus, the figure of the barefoot child becomes a potent signifier of the Palestinian resolve to resist their effacement and regain their lost pride. The child witness of trauma with his back turned against the world is a powerful tool to express the distraught Palestinian lives without uttering a word, as the symbol itself conveys the bitterness of the traumatic memory of their displacement and dispossession. Through the study of the graphic novel, *Baddawi*[34], the paper hypothesises that the author uses the modern graphic novel form, which employs the autobiographical and documentary narrative style, to archive the past. In doing so, the author reclaims the collective memory of forceful displacement and dispossession as well as the Palestinian identity by drawing their rootedness in the Palestine region. It derives its aim from the introduction to the novel, which elucidates that preservation of Palestinian history is an act of resistance.

Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi* is a coming of age graphic novel, based on her father's life that collectively commemorates the lives of thousands of Palestinians in Baddawi, a refugee camp in Lebanon. Abdelrazaq with the help of her father, Ahmad's memories and experiences, who is also the protagonist of the novel, demonstrates a lost childhood in a refugee camp. Poverty, political unrest and lack of resources deny Ahmad the chance to live a normal life. He is forced to take up odd jobs to support his education at an early age and work twice as hard to complete it. As an adolescent, he becomes determined to continue his higher education abroad in order to leave the undignified life of a refugee in Lebanon and bring some normalcy in his life. Through him, the novel exhibits a journey of hopelessness and hope that the community repetitively undergoes. Nevertheless, the community resists defeat in its mourning, reconstructs its sorrows to fuel its motivation to put up a united front, and fights back. Ahmad's unrelenting spirit to secure a better future for himself is representative of the relentless struggle of the Palestinian community to resist their effacement. The novel also becomes a chronicle of Palestinian life and culture via Ahmad's memory and his enumeration of his life in the refugee camp. Thus, it provides an archive of the Palestinian history through alternative means of expression.

2. Theoretical Framework

To write one's memory is to write one's personal history. Astrid Erll conceives memory and history as two exclusive forms of remembering the past. According to her, memory is a subjective account of preservation of the past thus it is

---

32   *Ibid*., 27.
33   *Ibid*., 31.
34   Leila Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi* (Charlottesville: Just World Publishing, 2015).

unquestionable, but history, as it claims objectivity, is testable. Therefore, memory becomes a 'history from below', the 'other' of history or 'counter-history' as it works against the hegemonic powers to recover what has been forgotten or repressed by official accounts of history[35]. The act of writing itself is understood as "a kind of reclamation, a restoration of something lost, a reconstitution that is part and parcel of people's survival"[36]. In fact, resistance is argued to be innate in the very nature of memory: "any power which tries to break, nullify or distort memory, cannot do it without leaving traces"[37]. These traces signify the fact that memory cannot be wiped away despite powerful external forces working against it. The threat of being overwritten is described as an enormous earthquake which "destroys people"[38], and thus destroys memories and a significant part of history. Therefore, in order to prove that something happened, it is important to commemorate, produce testimony and to record memories, the "very key to existence, becoming and belonging"[39]. LaCapra too emphasises on the role of memory in providing an alternate political critique as it enables one to look beyond the historical facts. He argues against the prevalence of any one narrative as the foundation of identity in a society because it leads to sublimation, raising it to a sacred position. Such transferral of a particular account of history, he warns, is dangerous as it could lead to totality, a unified version of events, which is in fact against the nature of life[40]. Thus, there is a common consensus among memory studies scholars about the political value of documenting memory as well as the plurality of history.

However, memory too is not devoid of plurality. Over the years, scholars have consistently debated about the multiple versions of memory and its mediation through familial, social and political factors. It is argued that individual memory is not merely one's own as it is coloured by the individual's perception of the reality and the experiences of the past[41]. Along the same vein, Susannah Radstone further argues that the personal memory is a "complex construction in which present experience melds with images that are associated with past experience"[42]. Moreover, Aleida Assmann posits that memory is inherently corrupt as it is mediated by various external factors such as a family's history, experiences from the past as well as the social frames one inhabits. She maintains that to be a part of a social group from where one derives one's identity is to "participate in the group's history"[43] and hence its memory. Assmann gives four categories of memories ranging from individual, social, political to cultural memory. Individual

_____

[35] Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), DOI: 10.1057/9780230321670.

[36] Hamdi, "Bearing witness in Palestinian resistance literature".

[37] Loiusa Passerini, "Memory", *History Workshop* no. 15 (1983): 196.

[38] Hansen, "Memory Studies and Media Studies", 18.

[39] *Ibid*.

[40] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing Trauma, Writing Disaster* rev. ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014).

[41] Mark Freeman, "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative", in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,* ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

[42] Susannah Radstone, "Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory", *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005):135.

[43] Aleida Assmann, "Reframing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past", in *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe,* ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 38.

memory entails a "subjective experience"[44] within a temporal and spatial continuity, which gives memory its "shape, significance and meaning"[45] whereas social memory is that which is experienced and communicated within a society, where a group of people or a particular generation share the same historical events, "common frame of beliefs, values, habits and attitudes"[46]. Political memory refers to intervened as well as reconstructed form of memory through symbols and cultural memory is a form of memory, which transmits memory through temporal and spatial frames with the use of writings, archives and canons. In fact, individual memory is considered a product and a small branch of collective memory, which constantly changes based on the relationship of an individual to a group[47]. According to Maurice Halbwach, memory is dependent on social structures, a form of reawakening of past images of former experiences by some external stimuli[48]. Thus, collective memory denotes a shared meaning of the past among a group of people, which further takes the form of history of a group or society. Study of collective memory, as a result has become a form of historiography, which seeks to recover and reconstruct the past that is supressed.

Thus, it becomes evident that memory does not exist in isolation or belongs to a single temporality or spatiality, rather it travels through temporal-spatial continuity, lasting generations. This distinctive character of memory to travel across the boundaries of time is commonly known as intergenerational or trans-generational memory. It is a form of communicated family memory[49], biologically inherited or acquired within the process of identity formation[50]. Formulating within the concept of intergenerational memory and the Holocaust experience preserved in the children of survivors, Marianne Hirsch proposes a system of memory, postmemory, that involves transfer of memory from one generation to another. Such a form of memory is intergenerational in the sense that it is actually a "transactive, transferential process... through which past is internalised [by the second generation] without being fully understood"[51] which compels the second generation to recreate the experiences of the past in their contemporary experience. She further goes on to explain that "postmemory is *not* an identity position, but a *generational* structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation"[52]. It works through a figurative and referential network where the generation-after reconstructs the past in the present while preserving the effect of the past experience. Stephen Frosh further distinguishes between postmemory and memory, arguing that postmemory is inherently different from other forms of memory as it is "not formed through a process of recall but through actively constructive processes, and … [it] is first and foremost an 'imaginative' process, an

---

44   Assmann, "Reframing Memory", 41.
45   *Ibid*.
46   *Ibid*.
47   Anne Whitehead, *Memory: A New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
48   Maurice Halbwach, *On Collective Memory,* ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
49   Erll, *Memory in Culture* (2011).
50   Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Geddchtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identitdt in fruheren Hochkulturen. (*Miinchen: Beck, 1997) quoted in Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
51   Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 31, original emphasis.
52   Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 35.

act of identification and creative response"[53]. In other words, postmemory is a reconstruction of the belated remembrance in the second-generation where they attempt to make sense of the inherited memory within the socio-political framework at their disposal in the present. It bears the responsibility of memorialising the past through creative means for posterity without diluting or reducing its effect.

Moreover, besides the theoretical framework of memory as a form of resistance against history, within the scope of individual, collective as well as intergenerational memory, the paper contains its study in the larger framework of resistance through aesthetics using comics or the graphic medium. Foucault's idea of resistance emphasises on the relations of power within a structure, and thus, resistance is inherently an analysis of power[54]. However, the everyday forms of resistance do not directly counter the dominating power structures in question, rather "seek path or detours around those structures, often seeping into the cracks and fissures in the barriers, or inhabiting spaces that have been deemed outside of or irrelevant to the shape of the discourse"[55]. Thus, it implies that the forms of resistance can vary in their material and their application; they can be close to a political structure of power or take place through unheeded systems of power within a culture such as art, literature, forms of entertainment like movies, dance, and music among others. Ledenava et al.'s work draws attention to informal, yet effective methods of resistance. They term it as an "artistic repossession" wherein the artists produce creative strategies of resistance "under the constraints of strict ideological control and censorship"[56]. The political hardships within a community are transformed into a productive channel to create systems of resistance by these artists. By producing their aesthetics of revolt within the structures that generally go unnoticed, they systematically aim to subvert the status quo. Such poststructuralist form of construction attacks the structures of power 'from below'. Popular culture or mass culture thus is a significant tool in this process. Hence, it is not surprising that the resisting voice in the 20th century came through the popular form of comics in literature.

The avant-garde movement in the genre of comics, Underground Comics, was a "reaction to the censorious content code that debilitated the mainstream industry, were an influential cultural vehicle, challenging and arresting because they mediated on the violation of taboos"[57]. The 'alternative comics' that emerged out of this resistance against the censorship of comics and consequently mainstream comics in 1980s and 1990s employed elements that carried testimonial and autobiographical weight, such as reportage, autobiography and historical fiction to

----

[53] Stephen Frosh, *Those Who Come After: Postmemory, Acknowledgement and Forgiveness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 14.

[54] Marta Iniguez De Heredia "The Patterns and Practices of Everyday Resistance: A View from Below", in *Everyday Resistance, Peacebuilding and Statemaking: Insights from 'Africa's World War'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526108784.00010

[55] Alena Ledeneva *et al*. "The Unlocking Power of Non-Conformity: Cultural Resistance vs Political Opposition", in *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality: Understanding Social and Cultural Complexity*, vol. 1 (London: UCL Press, 2018), 336.

[56] Ledeneva *et al*., "Power of Non-Conformity", 339.

[57] Hillary Chute, "Comics as Literature?: Reading Graphic Narratives", *PMLA* 123, no. 2 (2008): 456.

convey sensitive political and social subject matter[58]. Joe Sacco's *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* are examples of the documentary graphic novels, which gather testimonies of survivors of war and trauma. Moreover, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* made it possible for comics to be more than funny. It mixes words and images to produce a story, to convey political and historical sentiments along with a personal tale[59]. According to LaCapra, such collections of personal narratives of suffering are an essential component of oral history as their role is to "supplement [to] more standard documentary sources in history"[60]. Thus, the modern graphic novel in its documentary style of production becomes an effective tool to document the overlooked segments of history. It opens an alternate space for communication of political, social and historical events, and has been considered capable of conveying a variety of subject matter that could not be directly transmitted in the conventional forms.

Spiegelman's idea of the mental language provides a three-dimensional scope to the graphic form, thus keeping it at par with other forms of commemoration of history like museums and memorials and conveys its relevance in the process of documentation of history. Such archival of personal history within the historical-political event is at once a contestation of the dominant narrative of history as well as a complement to the recorded history by providing more sources. In light of these arguments, the paper seeks to explore what makes the graphic medium a fitting medium to document the Palestinian 'enigma of survival' post the occupation of the Palestinian territory in 1948 and 1967.

The paper thus studies the graphic novel within the ambit of such theoretical concepts along with the larger theoretical framework of political resistance through comics and art. It argues that the process of documentation of alternate narratives within history is a political act of resistance with the use of an alternate form of novel, graphic novel. It consequently explores the Palestinian struggle to reclaim their rightful place and identity in the world using elements of resistance employed in the formal as well as contextual construction of the novel.

3. Methodology

Assmann argues that the deconstructionist view, which brought into prominence subjective and objective truth laid out the pathway for acceptance of memory and remembering in academic circles. She posits, "What is called the 'memory boom' is the immediate effect of this loss of the historians' singular and unrivalled authority"[61]. It entails that the prominence of theoretical tool of deconstruction in the last few decades of the 20th century changes the perception of the world by interrogating the fixed structures and the binary positions. What followed is a fluid state, with multiple forms of narrative possibilities and forms of commemoration of history. The paper employs a similar methodological framework to argue that the

---

[58]   Andrés Romero-Jódar, *The Trauma Graphic Novel*, vol. 103 (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2017).
[59]   James E. Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's "Maus" and the Afterimages of History", *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (1998).
[60]   LaCapra, *Writing Trauma, Writing Disaster*, 86.
[61]   Assmann, "Reframing Memory", 39.

documentation of personal memory in the graphic medium resists erasure of history as it provides a space for expression of the marginalised voices. As well as, consequently enables the production of an alternate understanding of history that has been suppressed due to the hegemonic forces. History stands against memory on the grounds of 'proof', which has come under the scanner in the poststructuralist world, questioning its interpretation, claims and objectivity[62]. Thus, there could not be a better methodological apparatus to re-evaluate the claims of the contested Palestinian-Israeli history and resist the threat of effacement of Palestinian land and identity.

The understanding of comics as intermixing of two forms – words and images – given by Spiegelman, erases the notion of boundaries within the graphic medium. With the advent of autobiographical narratives and testimonial work in the graphic form, this avant-garde form of graphic novel dissolves the binaries of political and personal space, and opens scope for a deconstructive reading of the novel. The paper utilises such methodological framework to explore the deconstruction of power by producing an alternate history of the Israel/Palestine region and the Palestinian community through its memory. Further engaging in this deconstructive frame of analysis, it evaluates the systems of resistance within the graphic novel through its structure, form and themes.

4. Analysis

4.1. Handala: Inherited Memory

Baddawi portrays the rite-of-passage of a young boy living in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, through the image of the boy on its cover page. On a closer reading of the image, it reveals Naji al-Ali's character of Handala, which was introduced in 1969[63] and is commemorated as the symbol of collective Palestinian resistance. Abdelrazaq's appropriation of this image on the cover page of *Baddawi,* explicitly suggests that this is a tale about reclaiming the forbidden memory of al-Nakba (1948) and al-Naksa (1967)[64]. Handala is a ten year old, barefoot Palestinian boy who stands with his back against the reader, in protest against the violation of Palestinian rights and their forceful displacement from their homeland. Totry and Medzini argue that Naji al-Ali produced his work with the resolve to "vindicate the Palestinian people's right to all of historical Palestine"[65]. He produced most of his work during the period of *Intifada*, thus signifying that these cartoons are an intrinsic part of the Palestinian rebellion, used to gather and mobilise the people towards one cause, resistance against their oppressor. Therefore, the use of the cartoon entails that the graphic novel too is a similar form

---

[62] Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (2002).

[63] Totry and Medzini, "Cartoons in Popular Protests"; Hyche, Breana. "Hanging on to Home: Representations of Handala and the Home", *The Eagle Feather* 9 (2012), https://doi.org/10.12794/tef.2012.120

[64] Nassar, "Culture of Resistance".

[65] Totry and Medzini, "Cartoons in Popular Protest", 27.

of resistance, as well as a significant contribution towards the cause of *Intifada* that has been going on in the region since past few decades.

By evoking the image of Naji al-Ali's cartoon, Handala, *Baddawi* induces the supressed memory of the expatriation of Palestinians back into public memory. Hamdi captures the significance of the figure of Handala through its linguistic roots maintaining, "Handala… gets his name from an Arabic word for a bitter plant al-handal to represent the bitterness of the Palestinian experience"[66]. In the original picture of Handala, it is shown as a "cactus plant"[67], reiterating the fact that the barefoot boy, with his back turned is the symbol of the piercing memory of the "Palestinian villages destroyed during the Nakba"[68]. Thus, through a reconstitution of the memory of Handala in the public space, *Baddawi* reconstructs the historical trauma through postmemory. It is argued that children of survivors and traumatised parents inherit their memories and consciously or unconsciously transform them into their own contemporary experience to relive the loss and keep the effect of that memory alive, belatedly[69]. With the employment of the figure of a young boy on the cover page and as its protagonist, the author refashions the inherited memory as she mimics the past and presents a memory of the trauma. Although produced belatedly, the artwork does not dilute or reduce the effect of the distressing events of the past, thus confirming that the work is indeed a form of postmemory. By presenting the events of the past in the present through a creative and imagined reworking, the comic medium, here becomes an instrument to fill the purpose of both 'crisis of truth' and 'bearing witness to trauma' as a guardian of the intergenerational memory. The author is burdened by the responsibility to bring out the depth of the event in her biographical narrative of her father's survival as it "can't be simply relayed, repeated or reported by another without thereby losing its function"[70]. Bearing witness to the event, thus, comes with a greater responsibility to be true to the event. In another approach to bearing witness, Hamdi argues, "Bearing witness, then, is writing back to history of what has been deliberately erased"[71]. This act of witnessing (as also of bearing trauma) becomes an act of resistance by the means of repossession of their collective history of displacement from Palestine, representing that their truth could not be buried despite the constraints imposed by strict ideological forces to suppress their memory. As an inheritor of the memory of both individual and collective trauma, through this intergenerational form of work, the author thus becomes a belated witness and performs the responsibility of giving testimony of their survival by depicting the closest possible visuals of their suffering in the graphic narratives[72]. Additionally, the image symbolises the fixation of the traumatic experience in the minds of the victims, which has not healed yet since the cause of their resistance has not been fulfilled till now. No matter however overwhelming, confusing and often

––––––––––

66   Hamdi, "Bearing Witness", 26.
67   Totry and Medzini, "Cartoons in Popular Protest", 28. Refer to footnote 23.
68   *Ibid*.
69   Frosh, *Those Who Come After* (2019).
70   Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 3.
71   Hamdi, "Bearing Witness", 24.
72   Jennie K. Leary, *Representations of War and Trauma in Graphic Novels from the Middle East* (Ann Arbor: West Chester University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 6.

incomprehensible[73] witnessing trauma is, similar to the Palestinian existence, the memory of the suffering continues to survive in the form of inherited memory among the future generations.

Furthermore, it becomes evident from *Baddawi's* use of Naji al-Ali's figure of Handala that it too aims to resist the imposed silence and the erasure of their experience from public memory. By bringing the image back into focus years after the death of the artist, it asserts that memories live on in the minds of the people. This 'persistence of memory' of their displacement, in its transference over several generations implies the act of resistance on behalf of the Palestinian population. Through the strategic use of the image of Handala on the cover page, *Baddawi* conveys that hegemonic forces cannot completely erase the memory of their suffering, even after years of suppression. Naji al-Ali's death is recounted in the novel when Ahmad's mother describes the night raid on the camp, which killed both the leaders of the Palestinian resistance movement and several civilians, "anyone they saw on the street was killed" because "they didn't want any witnesses"[74]. However, the fact that this incident is illustrated here shows that despite efforts to the contrary, the act of collective witnessing, remembering or the memory of the violence could neither be erased nor could it weaken the Palestinian resolve to return. This incident is narrated repeatedly in the novel as Ahmad recalls the killings of resistance leaders in Baddawi and Beirut in order to diminish their movement. The image of the young boy with his back to the public thus, shows that the witness cannot be killed and the memory cannot be wiped away, and successfully counters the silence and recovers the suppressed Palestinian history. Naji al-Ali, by producing cartoons during *Intifada*, too resisted the oppression of freedom that happened through silencing of dissenting voices within the PLO as well as outside by the Israeli forces[75]. Thus, by recounting the collective memories of injustice done to their community and the suppression of their political voice through violence, the novel resists forgetting. In its remembrance of the harrowing experiences of the past –although belatedly– the novel becomes a contemporary voice of resistance in the struggle for freedom of Palestine.

4.2. Place of Memory

It is evident that for memory to survive, it needs some space – temporally as well as spatially. The Palestinian memory is kept alive temporally by reserving a place in the minds of the future generations who carry within them the memory of their generational suffering in the form of postmemory. The trans-generational impact of the Palestinian trauma of deportation and dispossession and the significance of place in the process of remembering is summarised in the fact that it "has taken

---

[73]   Laurike in't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03626-3
[74]   Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi*, 41.
[75]   Totry and Medzini, "Cartoons in Popular Protest".

place but nevertheless lacks a place"[76]. The community bereaves this loss of their ancestral land at the hands of the hegemonic forces. The trauma embodied in their expatriation does not end with the event, rather persists in the memory of the survivors who further transfer their traumatic memory consciously or unconsciously to their children. Thus, the memory survives beyond its temporal location. In *Baddawi*, the author's reconstruction of her father's traumatic experience in the graphic medium is a form of adopted memory, or Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory"[77]. In the character of Ahmad, motivated by incidents in the life of Abdelrazaq's father in the refugee camp, *Baddawi* accesses as well as adopts the experiences of the older generation in the form of postmemory, which helps make a bridge between the survivor and the ones who were not there. In this manner, the postmemorial form of representation of the past enables to keep alive their collective history of violation. In doing so, the novel produces what Pierre Nora refers to as 'sites of memory'. For him, these sites of memory have material – in their preservation and transferral of a memory from the past to the present, are functional – in their ability to serve as literal sites for commemoration of history and have symbolic dimensions – because the object or the 'site' produces a symbolic meaning of the past[78]. These sites of memory, thus recreate the original event of occurrence belatedly similar to the postmemorial ways of rebuilding the past. By extending this reading of Nora's sites of memory, *Baddawi* should be seen as a 'site of memory' "because there are no longer… real environments of memory"[79] to commemorate the history of their exile. Hansen argues that Nora's 'sites of memory' are essential as they produce "a history in multiple voices"[80]. Thus, it presents a plurality of history, which challenges the authoritarian nature of history and its claim to objectivity. The novel embodies the material dimension of the theory as it presents objects from the past by managing to recreate the real events of the past through objects such as flags, keys to the house, street-signs, recipes and everyday rituals. Further, the novel serves a functional dimension as it allows the Palestinian community living in exile as well as in refugee camps to commemorate their expatriation by situating the novel and its character in a refugee camp. In this manner, *Baddawi* becomes a symbolic 'site' of remembrance of the past life. Further, in its efforts to erect a commemoration site figuratively in *Baddawi*, the novel is established as a location of resistance.

Hirsch notes that the children of survivors often seek to return to the site of the adopted memory, to relive and thus recreate the trauma embodied in its memory. It is her contention that "parents (…) transmit to their children aspects of their relationship to places and objects from the past"[81]. Thus, the children return in order to connect to the inherited memory, which is temporally distant by bridging that distance spatially. In doing so, the children of survivors attempt to recover the suppressed history from its burial. Within this line of argument, Abdelrazaq's

---

[76] Carol Bardenstein, "Figures of Diasporic Cultural Production: Some Entries from the Palestinian Lexicon", in *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics,* ed. Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephen Besser and Yolande Jansen, no. 13 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 15.

[77] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory* (2012).

[78] Erll, *Memory in Culture* (2011).

[79] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory* (1996-98) quoted in Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 23.

[80] Garde-Hansen, "Memory Studies and Media Studies", 27.

[81] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 213.

decision to return to the site of her father's traumatic memories in the refugee camp in Baddawi through her novel *Baddawi* is an act of reclamation of the memories that are on the verge of extinction personally as well as publicly. The transferred memory becomes difficult to recall personally due to the temporal distance it has to travel in its intergenerational transmission. Publicly, the adopted memory fears extinction because the Israeli administration is obliterating their connection to the homeland by constructing Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territory of Palestine[82]. Thus, the return to the site of intergenerational as well as collective memory of exile and surviving in a refugee camp embodies the spirit of resistance on the part of the Palestinians since it implies that memory could not be erased even if it is temporally or spatially distant. This act of excavation of the suppressed memory is also an exercise to assert their identity, by resisting the oppressive forces. Moreover, such an act of defiance by the author in the attempt to return figuratively to a place where Palestinian refugees are not legally allowed to return[83] entails that the novel is a postmemorial work of art, as it refashions the generational legacy of refusal to comply with the customary account and strives to possess their history.

Additionally, within the novel, the illustrations in the chapter on Nakba (1948)[84] or the "The Catastrophe" which are specifically caricatured to present the geographical separation, invoke the Palestinian trauma of separation from homeland. In this episode, Ahmad, through postmemory, witnesses the brutality of ethnic cleansing and forced displacement experienced by his ancestors as well as recreates the image of its destruction in his memory. While the depiction of the catastrophic event consumes an entire page, Ahmad's own image occupies a little space in the foreground. The elaborate panel representing broken homes and departing families, moving away from their home and homeland in Palestine implies that the inherited memory of trauma and suffering from his parents overpowers all other aspects of life. The reconstructed image in his memory thus conveys that the memory of their primary violation has not been erased with the passage of time. The rebuilding of the past into the present through Ahamd's contemporary experiences suggests that the novel is a postmemorial form of art as well as re-affirms the spirit of resistance embedded in the novel, and a determination by the community to write the Palestinian history using alternate means on their own terms.

In order to legitimise the memory of their belonging to the land, this memory must have a spatial location. Since the historical-political situation of the territory denies them the rightful connection to the land[85], the author produces that spatial connection to Palestine via the pages of the graphic novel. This struggle to establish a connection and the looming threat of its effacement by the construction of Jewish settlements on the land[86] compels the author to produce a history of their past spatially within the novel. This lack of political space and geographical

––––––––––

[82]   Grinberg, "1987-1993 – The Intifada".
[83]   Israel introduced a Nationality Law in 1952, which restrains the return of Palestinian refugees. Read more in Dawn Chatty, "Palestinian Dispossession" (2010).
[84]   Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi*, 18.
[85]   Chatty, "Palestinian Dispossession".
[86]   Grinberg, "1987-1993 – The Intifada".

location to commemorate the historical exile of millions of Palestinians strengthens the need for an alternate material space to record their history. The graphic novel thus befits this requirement as it provides a place for Palestinians to draw and record their belonging to the land. The author sketches a map of Palestine on page 14 of the novel, which highlights her ancestral village Safsaf near the Lebanon border and the refugee camp, Baddawi, in Lebanon. The fact that the map is sketched and appears before she begins to narrate her story accentuates the resistance to erasure of the collective history and memory, and locates them spatially. The creation of Israeli settlements in Israel occupied territory of Palestine, also observed as an act of putting "facts on the ground"[87], is contested by Palestinians in their effort to give their history and memory a location, a place on the ground, by commemorating their experience using the visual mode. Through this illustration of a proof of belonging to the land similar to a memorial site, *Baddawi* produces an alternate history of the region and thus makes it available for the generations to come.

Moreover, Leila Abdelrazaq strategically locates the traumatic memory of violation through her work by giving the novel a name of the place. The title, *Baddawi*, refers to a Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon, and is an essential part of the process of reclaiming memory and demonstrating (up)rootedness on the part of Palestinians. Translated into English as Bedouin, a nomad[88], it suggests the displacement of millions of Palestinians who have since been forced to live as stateless persons. The name of a place as the title also simultaneously establishes that this is not a personal tale, rather a collective and cultural narrative. Baddawi is also a foundational place for Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Lebanon. Within this context, a re-looking at the title seems to imply that Abdelrazaq wishes to reproduce a representation of Palestine in order to contest its case through her work. Thus, the title of the novel is an adapted symbol of their unbeaten resolve to resist political oppression and silencing of their voice.

4.3. Ahmad: The Spirit of Resistance

Naji al-Ali's personal experiences as well as the collective witnessing of trauma around him motivated the production of the caricature, Handala. He survived the forceful occupation of Palestine in 1948 and lived his life in refugee camps[89]. This reconstitution of the figure of Handala in the novel through the character of Ahmad testifies a similar survival in a refugee camp. It symbolises the "lost childhood"[90] and the bitter memories of political disruption which al-Ali shaped in his artworks. To resist the oppression and to strive to attain their dignity and rightful place in the world is seen as the moral responsibility of the younger generations as belated bearers of the witness to the historical catastrophe. In a manner similar to the figure of Handala, the novel, by using a young boy as the protagonist, asserts the refusal

---

87 Valenti, "The Children Internalize the Meaning of the Occupation".
88 Abdelrazaq. *Baddawi*, 18.
89 Totry and Medzini, "Cartoons in Popular Protest".
90 *Ibid*., 30.

to accept obliteration of their traumatic past through reconstruction of Jewish settlements in the territory[91] as well as discounting their claim to the land through misuse of laws[92].

Moreover, the faceless image of the boy on the cover page as well as the lack of details on the face or any facial expression elsewhere in the novel confirms that the novel is not the tale of an individual. It argues instead that the absence of specificity embodies a collective form of commemoration of history through seemingly distant characters in the novel. Through such a collective remembrance, the novel represents the shared experiences of generations of Palestinians, that travelled as stories of their own as well as someone else's trauma, and which remain vivid in the collective memory of the community. In the chapter on al-Naksa (1967) or "the setback", the crushing of hope and desire to return to their ancestral land as the Arabs lose the six day war replays their trauma of deportation and exile as a postmemory. In the panel, which occupies an entire page, conveying the intensity of their suffering the path to the Palestinian flag, the Arabic road sign and the dome shaped structure signifying the ancestral land are fractured. It reflects the fractured reality, the uncertainty or even almost certain loss of their dream of a return to Palestine, yet the fact that child remembers the traumatic memory that the persistence of the collective memory against constraints to its remembrance[93]. The illustrations of the tragedy of 1948 and 1967 do not reveal the face of the protagonist and thus compel the reader to indulge in a multi-layered narrative of their trauma. The young child with his back towards the reader is a constant reminder of the child witness who bears and communicates the Palestinian trauma, the broken dream of returning to their land and the collective loss of hope. The child resists turning his back and facing the reader because their right to return has once again been denied. The novel constantly mentions how Ahmad, his family, friends and acquaintances lived under the threat of being bombed or shot by the Israeli forces in Baddawi and Beirut. Bus massacres were frequent incidents in their lives[94]. Such incidents are not subjective to Ahmad's experiences; rather they figuratively convey the collective Palestinian struggle to survive amidst political unrest and a constant threat to life. Ahmad's family is thus emblematic of any Palestinian family that faced forceful displacement from Palestine in 1948, and has since lead a life in exile or in refugee camps. Again, in this manner, the novel produces a postmemorial, which embodies the intergenerational collective memories of suffering, but in a reconstructed fashion that does not compromise with the effect that the memory evokes. It concurs with Versluys argument that "cartoon characters account for both distance and resistance"[95]. The reconstituted form of the collective memory in the character of Ahmad, his friends and family entails the overwhelming power of memory, which disrupts temporality and hence resists repression.

---

[91]   Grinberg, "1987-1993 – The Intifada".
[92]   Chatty, "Palestinian Dispossession"; El Shakry, "History without Documents".
[93]   Nassar, "Culture of Resistance".
[94]   Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi*, 80.
[95]   Kristiaan Versluys, "Art Spiegelman's 'In the Shadow of No Towers': 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma", *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 Graphic Narrative Special Issue (2006): 991.

Along the same argument, the particular incident in the novel when Ahmad gets hurt with bullets from the pellet gun during a game of hunting birds requires more than a literal reading of child's play. It figuratively represents the struggle of Palestinians who have lived in the State of Israel under strict military force after the occupation of their territory in 1948 and 1967, being constantly threatened by guns and cluster bombs that do not discriminate between civilians and resistance leaders[96]. Furthermore, the pellet guns here become a metaphor for the use of the armed forces by the hegemonic powers to suppress any dissenting voice. The pellet gunshots in Ahmad's arms were left to fall out on their own as suggested by the doctor, forcing him to live "with lead bullets in his body"[97]. It metaphorically stands for the fate of the Palestinian community, condemned to live with the inherited memory of the harrowing experiences of their exile. The lead bullets become the piercing memories of their displacement from the ancestral land and the denial of their right to return. This episode illustrated on page 52 of the novel effectively demonstrates how several members of the community were traumatised, wounded psychologically if not physically by enduring repeated violence. Moreover, the violence mentioned here does not merely denote the physical act of violence but also the symbolic violence a threat to erase the memory of Palestinian existence by occupying their territory and then creating Jewish settlements in the area. Reading the novel as a collective memory denotes the resisting spirit of the population. This resistance is inherent in the fact that the graphic novel metaphorically produces that, which has been denied public speech.

Additionally, the novel utilises the effect of colours to recreate the effect of mourning and resistance by presenting a monochrome narrative. Dark colours in graphic narratives bring out memories of rebellion, ostracism and the injustice done to community as a whole[98]. However, even though the entire novel is in black and white, certain chapters stand out as they elevate the distress and signify the struggle of living a perpetual life of a refugee. In the chapter, "The Lumber" illustrated from page 93 to 101, the postmemory of the historic Palestinian displacement from the homeland and trauma of being stateless is reconstructed in Ahmad's exploitation at the hands of his employer. Since a postmemorial work seeks to re-present the inherited memory and its embodied experience by recreating similar effect in their contemporary experience[99] in such a manner that the effect of the experience remains undiluted, Ahmad's vulnerability and helplessness in this scene aptly manages to convey the effects of his prior trauma through his present. The despair is elevated through the black background that reflects the communal state of gloom and sadness, which consumes thousands of Palestinians worldwide. However, black not only entails mourning, but also conveys resistance. It communicates the persistence of the dark memory of their violation in the collective memory of Palestine. Another Palestinian memoir, *Tasting the Sky*[100] represents such

----

96 Referring to the counter-attacks on Palestinians by IDFs during the insurgency to further repress the dissenting voices mentioned in Grinberg, "1987-1993 – The Intifada" (2013).
97 Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi*, 54.
98 Harriet Earle, "The Sky is Darkened by Gods", in *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma and Memory* ed. Tatiana Prorokova and Nimrod Tal (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 82.
99 Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012).
100 Ibtisam Barakat, *Tasting the Sky* (Harrisonburg, VA: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007).

resistance in the long black dresses which the women in Beit Iksa wove and wore with flowers etched in the colours of the Palestinian flag –green, red, white and pink– as a symbol of their resistance against the forceful occupation of Palestine[101]. Such intertextual reading testifies that the Palestinian mourning and commemoration of the historical suffering in creative forms of expression is indeed a form of resistance against suppression and eventual erasure of their plight. Moreover, these frames resist the erasure of the memory of trauma by freezing their experiences in large frames, making time stand still and, thus escaping temporality. Therefore, through a reconstruction of the collective memory in these unusual sites of protest, they display their strong desire to revolt against silencing of their speech and their memory.

Furthermore, the rite-of-passage that Ahmad experiences in the novel should be seen as a metaphor for the journey taken by Palestinians post their uprooting from Palestine in 1967. Through Ahmad's constant movement between camps in Baddawi and Beirut, the novel rebuilds the narrative of historical displacement of Palestinians and their unsettled life as a work of postmemory. It is a rebellious attempt to keep the memory of their violated history alive in the eyes of the public and for posterity. In its effort to create a counter-narrative of history through inherited memory, the novel produces a narrative from below, resisting against their presence as a 'history without documents'[102] thus shaking the grounds of facts and objectivity on which the 'official' documented history of Palestine stands. Towards the end of the novel, Ahmad finds a place for himself as he resists the life of invisibility in Lebanon and moves to United States with a Palestinian refugee card. Therefore, by narrating the story of Ahmad's liberation from the refugee camp, giving him a respectable life in the US and a Palestinian identity, however limited, the novel figuratively tries to strengthen the cause of Palestinian liberation by projecting an optimistic image of future. Thereby, it motivates the community members to remain steadfast in their struggle to return to their land, reclaim their connection to the territory, and lead a life of dignity and respect. The projection of such an image is also a form of resistance on behalf of the community living in the Occupied Territory of Palestine by giving them the freedom to imagine life beyond the restraints of occupation.

4.4. Personal Memory: An Alternate History

It is argued that "all historical resistance by subordinate classes begins: close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience"[103]. In other words, the everyday acts of resistance seek to subvert the dominant power through little acts that often go unseen and unnoticed while evaluating cultures of resistance[104]. Thus, their invisibility provides them a power, which the direct forms of rebellion lack, the ability to strike from below. Since these little acts of resistance are often a component of the mass culture perhaps

––––––––––

[101] Barakat, *Tasting the Sky*, 126-127.
[102] El-Shakry, "History without Documents".
[103] De Heredia, "The Patterns and Practices of Everyday Resistance", 54.
[104] Ledeneva *et al*., "Power of Non-Conformity".

through food or clothing, sources of entertainment or art and literature, such cultural forms help to gather people together, evoke a common sentiment within them and mobilise them to resist in a discreet manner. The ancient Arab regions, as studied by Earle, had cultures whose "narrative was not something to be read but something to be watched and engaged with on a deeply personal level through enactment"[105]. The graphic form thus is a fitting medium to represent the deeply personal traumatic journey of exile and the process of reclamation of memory, which is personal to the community as well. This use of the graphic also carries a postcolonial connotation with it; the visual-verbal language, or as Spiegelman puts it – the commix form[106], is used here in opposition to the conventional verbal language or the language of the oppressor. In the introductory pages, Abdelrazaq emphasises the use of geometrical, floral and pixelated patterns, *tatreez,* a form of traditional Palestinian embroidery, to highlight the cultural significance of the book. Such patterns are used on the cover page as well as throughout the content of the novel in frames and panels. By using such cultural patterns and symbols, to narrate personal history and assert Palestinian identity, the novel depicts a form of language native to the community in the sense that it can express their subjective trauma. The reconstruction of the cultural patterns that are on the verge of being forgotten, reinforces the tragedy of their forceful displacement and dispossession from the land. These creative acts of resistance are to be read as the act of "writing back"[107] to the oppressors in a language of their own (of Palestinians). By means of the use of such language, Abdelrazaq draws her rootedness in the region in order to reclaim their suppressed history.

Moreover, since the documentation on Palestine lacks a cultural history, *Baddawi* also takes on the responsibility of presenting a cultural past of the community in order to produce an alternate narrative of history of the contested Israel/Palestine territory. This documentation of their religious practices and customs shows their refusal to forget their past and keep it alive in public memory. It has been argued that everyday objects such as recipes and family traditions become 'sites of memory'[108]. Commemoration through these sites of memory evokes resistance in the sense that they provide alternate voices of history. They embody the rebellious spirit also in the fact that such preservation of memory ruptures the temporality of time in its archival nature. It stores memory in these uncommon sites (sights?) "in order to not forget the past in all stages and levels of the society"[109]. Such unusual sites of memory are represented in the episode illustrated from page 31 to 34 of the novel where Ahmad's mother sends him to collect thyme from the mountain for the *za'atar* and which is used to document Palestinian rituals and their cuisine. Ahmad reminiscences his mother's stories about the different ways thyme could be used in the preparation of *za'atar*, its importance in making *manaqish*, its use as a dip with bread, and as seasoning. Through such informal reminiscences of the cultural and personal life in Palestine before occupation, the novel produces the history of the land "in multiple

_____

[105]   Earle, "The Sky is Darkened by Gods", 82.
[106]   Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past".
[107]   Williams and Ball, "Where is Palestine?", 130.
[108]   Garde-Hansen, "Memory Studies and Media Studies".
[109]   *Ibid*., 22.

voices"[110]. These details are non-existent in the official documents, because the official documents discount the existence of any sort of economic or cultural life in the territory before the settlement of Jews in the region[111]. Thus, by commemorating these practices, the novel resists the violence of memory inflicted on them.

Besides the cultural practices, *Baddawi* also commemorates religious festivities and customary traditions such as the chapter "The Eid" on page 36 where Ahmad recalls his favourite time of the year during Ramadan followed by Eid, symbolically brings back the memory of their culture and tradition in the public sphere. He remembers the rituals and routines of the festivities, waking everyone in the camp for *Suhoor* and sitting for prayer before fasting, and visiting relatives near and far. He recounts the old traditions of his grandfather carried along from Palestine like drinking one raw egg and having a small amount of olive oil. These old rituals and indigenous knowledge, with several health benefits, have been obliterated from common knowledge because of a lack of discourse around the Palestinian culture, practices and beliefs[112]. Ahmad's reminiscences of his mother's and grandparent's memory of Palestine symbolise the inherited memory reconstructed in such a manner as to produce a form of postmemorial work which can convey the trauma of separation without reducing its outcome. By recalling these tales and keeping them alive in his memory, Ahmad and *Baddawi* resist the erasure of their history. Preservation of such information in the novel, hence, resists the elimination of their Palestinian identity by giving their culture a place in the society.

5. Conclusion

The paper engages in a four-part analysis of the novel thematically divided into categories of inherited memory, place of memory, spirit of resistance and personal history. With the intention of resisting the gradual effacement of political voice and historical presence of Palestinians in the Israeli/Palestinian region, the novel utilises the graphic medium to present its spirit of rebellion through non-violent forms. In fact, it simultaneously contributes to the legacy of *Intifada* as well as the rich legacy of artistic resistance that the community has established over the years in the Arab-Israeli conflicts. Through a close reading of the novel, the paper establishes that the graphic medium along with the commemoration of personal history to present an alternate history of the land and the community employed in the novel befits the cause. With the use of the figure of Handala, the novel emphasises that the work of art is a political act of resistance against the established narratives through postmemory. This collective struggle to reclaim the memory of their exile, which the Zionist narratives deny them by refuting their right to return, is carried out in the graphic novel by establishing a narrative 'from below'. It lays out a map of their ancestral land in Palestine along with the refugee camps where Ahmad and his family lived a life in constant flux, asserting their

─────────────

[110]   *Ibid*., 21.
[111]   Chatty, "Palestinian Dispossession".
[112]   *Ibid*., 185.

place in the world by giving it a definite location. Large frames are used in the novel consistently to insist their resistance against their historical, political and physical effacement. Further, it documents various Palestinian customs and traditions through personal as well as inherited memory that have no place in the historical documents, and literally as well as figuratively fights for their place in history by drawing their belongingness to the region. *Baddawi*, the graphic novel, thus, is not only an archival of their violent and violated past, but also a resistance against the violence of memory inflicted by the Zionist account. It becomes, in this sense, a tool to bear witness to the atrocity of the past, bringing it to the present and archiving it in the public memory or as Dawn Chatty contends, "the physical reinforcement of Palestinianness"[113] into the world.

6. Written Sources and Bibliographical References

Abdelrazaq, Leila. *Baddawi*. Charlottesville: Just World Publishing, 2015.

Assmann, Aleida. "Reframing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past". In *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe,* edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter, 35-50. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010.

Barakat, Ibtisam. *Tasting the Sky*. Harrisonburg, VA: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007.

Bardenstein, Carol. "Figures of Diasporic Cultural Production: Some Entries from the Palestinian Lexicon". In *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics,* edited by Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephen Besser and Yolande Jansen, Series: Thamyris/ Intersecting Place Sex and Race, edited by Ernst van Alphen, no. 13, 19-32. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007.

Basem, Tina, ed. *This Week in Palestine: Palestinian Poets and Poetry,* no. 227 (2017).

Chatty, Dawn. "Palestinian Dispossession and Exile". In *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, 180-230. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Chute, Hillary. "Comics as Literature?: Reading Graphic Narratives". *PMLA* 123, no. 2 (2008): 452-465.

De Heredia, Marta Iniguez. "The Patterns and Practices of Everyday Resistance: A View from Below". In *Everyday Resistance, Peacebuilding and Statemaking: Insights from 'Africa's World War'*, 50-74. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526108784.00010

Doumani, Beshara B. "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History". *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (1992): 5-28.

Earle, Harriet. "The Sky is Darkened by Gods". In *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Memory and Trauma*, edited by Tatiana Prorokova and Nimrod Tal, 75-90. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018.

El-Shakry, Omnia. "History Without Documents: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization of Middle East". *American Historical Review* Roundtable (2015): 920-934.

Erll, Astrid. *Memory in Culture.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230321670

Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.* New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

---

113   Chatty, "Palestinian Dispossession", 230.

Freeman, Mark. "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative". In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,* edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 263-277. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Frosh, Stephen. *Those Who Come After: Postmemory, Acknowledgement and Forgiveness.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Garde-Hansen, Joanne. "Memory Studies and Media Studies". In *Media and Memory*, 13-30*.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

Grinberg, Lev Luis. "1987-1993 – The Intifada: Palestinian Resistance Mo(ve)ment". In *Mo(ve)ments of Resistance: Politics, Economy and Society in Israel/Palestine 1931-2013*, 217-250. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013.

Halbwach, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Hamdan, Tarik. "The Word that Means Homeland". In *This Week in Palestine: Palestinian Poets and Poetry,* ed. Tina Basem, no. 227 (2017), 4-7.

Hamdi, Tahrir. "Bearing witness in Palestinian resistance literature". *Race & Class* 52, no. 3 (2011): 21-42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396810390158

Handal, Nathalie. "Nathalie Handal Introduced by Katie Lewis Hood". In *This Week in Palestine: Palestinian Poets and Poetry,* ed. Tina Basem, no. 227 (2017), 28-31.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Hyche, Breana. "Hanging on to Home: Representations of Handala and the Home". *The Eagle Feather* 9 (2012). Accessed December 11, 2019. https://doi.org/10.12794/tef.2012.120

in't Veld, Laurike. *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03626-3

Kansteiner, Wulf. "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies". *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (2002): 179-197.

Korody, Nicholas, "The Revolutionary Art: Street Art Before and After the Tunisian Revolution". *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*, *1134* (2011).

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing Trauma, Writing Disaster.* Rev. ed. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014.

Leary, Jennie K. *Representations of War and Trauma in Graphic Novels from the Middle East*. Ann Arbor: West Chester University of Pennsylvania, 2011.

Ledeneva, Alena, Anna Bailey, Sheelagh Barron, Costanza Curro, and Elizabeth Taegue. "The Unlocking Power of Non-Conformity: Cultural Resistance vs Political Opposition". In *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality: Understanding Social and Cultural Complexity* 1, 336-384. London: UCL Press, 2018.

Majaj, Lisa Suhair. "Personality of the Month: Mahmoud Darwish". In *This Week in Palestine: Palestinian Poets and Poetry,* ed. Tina Basem, no. 227 (2017), 82-83.

Nassar, Jamal R. "The Culture of Resistance: The 1967 War in the Context of the Palestinian Struggle". *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1997): 77-98.

Passerini, Loiusa. "Memory". *History Workshop* 15 (1983): 195-196. Radstone, Susannah. "Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory". *History Workshop Journal* no. 59 (2005):134-150.

Rekhess, Elie. "The Arab Minority in Israel: Reconsidering the "1948 Paradigm". *Israel Studies* 19, no. 2, Special Issue: Zionism in the 21st Century (2014): 187-217.

Rogan, Eugene. "A Century after Sykes-Picot: The Fall of Ottoman, the Rise of the Islamic State, and the Tragedy of Arab Independence". *Cairo Review* 19, (2015).

Romero-Jódar, Andrés. *The Trauma Graphic Novel* 103. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2017.

Ryan, Holly Eva. "Political Street Art in Social Mobilization: A Tale of Two Protests in Argentina". In *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication,* edited by Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen and Umut Korkut, 100-121. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019.

Sacco, Joe. *Palestine: In the Gaza Strip.* Washington: Fantagraphic Books, 1996.

Totry, Mary, and Arnon Medzini. "The Use of the Cartoons in Popular Protests that Focus on Geographic, Social, Economic and Political Issues". *European Journal of Geography* 4, no.1 (2013): 22-35.

Valenti, Peter C. "'The Children Internalize the Meaning of the Occupation': Growing Up under the Israeli Occupation and a culture of Resistance in Joe Sacco's *Palestine*". In *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Memory and Trauma*, edited by Tatiana Prorokova and Nimrod Tal, 138-162. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Verete′, Mayir. "The Balfour Declaration and Its Makers". *Middle Eastern Studies* 6, no. 1 (1970): 48-76.

Versluys, Kristiaan. "Art Spiegelman's 'In the Shadow of No Towers': 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma". *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 Graphic Narrative Special Issue (2006): 980-1003.

Whitehead, Anne. *Memory: A New Critical Idiom.* New York: Routledge, 2009.

Williams, Patrick and Anna Ball. "Where is Palestine?". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50, no. 2, (2014): 127-133. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2014.883164

Young, James E. "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's "Maus" and the Afterimages of History". *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (1998): 666-699.